

## **Education and Culture Committee**

### **Notes from Round Table event on 8 September 2015**

**Chair: Gordon MacDonald MSP**

**Present: Five officials representing Scottish local authorities, a mixture of Finance and Education Departments.**

#### **Pupil Teacher Ratios**

The discussion opened with a focus on the policy of maintaining teacher numbers:

- Biggest pressure to increase spend is on maintaining teacher numbers – there is no flexibility
- Ring fencing should be removed to give flexibility and allow Local Authorities to deviate from maintaining the PTR
- Without flexibility, education will be protected to the detriment of other services
- Ring-fencing can be ok if the context is narrow – e.g. ring-fencing the NHS. Having to maintain teacher numbers is broader and has bigger implications for other services
- ‘Soft’ services are restricted – e.g. admin staff – which in turn increases pressure on teachers
- In many ways there is less flexibility now than there was when the education budget was not ring-fenced
- Non-discretionary activities are hit the hardest
- The quality of the teachers is more important than the quantity

#### **Relationship between government and Local Authorities**

- There has to be a change in the relationship between Local Authorities and government – to allow for broader change in outcomes for children
- There are big structural challenges right now – the education budget is managed, whereas the rest of the Local Authority is struggling with cuts
- Should the Children and Families Unit have a Chief Education Officer?
- Fairness Commission in Dundee – isn’t just focussed on educational attainment. Child’s background/circumstances impact on their attainment and development too. This needs to be brought into consideration
- Nationalisation is not the way forward – this encourages working in silos
- Parents and politicians want more information regarding outcomes and attainment. Right now we focus on input methods like teacher numbers – success cannot be measured against these
- With the introduction of Education Scotland, Local Authorities feel like centralised government is now controlling education
- Education Scotland has a lot of resources that would be better invested by devolving into the Local Authorities

- There needs to be a better dialogue between government and Local Authorities. There is a feeling that announcements are being made with no consultation
- Discussion around Attainment Advisors – almost pseudo – inspectors, that offer no real value to the Local Authority
- Education Scotland is a move towards central government taking responsibility of areas the Local Authority should be controlling
- Accredited qualifications (e.g. Modern Apprenticeships) are side-lined in order to meet targets relating to 5 Highers. There needs to be a partnership with the government to make sure this doesn't happen
- Consultation with Local Authorities – when this is done in isolation of other services it ends in disaster

### **Structural Issues in Local Government**

- Local Government is constrained by limited financial accountability. There is no capacity to raise additional revenue. In many cases, the public are happy to pay for better services
- It may be more efficient to share services across councils – however different political administrations might make this difficult. However, strong leadership can encourage elected members to come on board
- Local Authorities share the same problems, yet they don't work together on solutions. If central government bought into this with a strong message of support it could increase efficiency
- Individuals are still 'protecting' their positions inside silos – not wanting to change the way things are done. There needs to be a fundamental change in the whole system

### **Other**

- Other effective ring-fencing includes things like free school meals
- Discretionary spend is minimal, but still spent on most vulnerable children – e.g. lowest paid workers like support workers. Most vulnerable children are at risk, and this poses a significant budget problem in the future
- There could be a shift towards closing schools, but investing in the children as they move to new schools – hopefully closing the education/attainment gaps

**Tess Schmigylski**  
**September 2015**