



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 21 November 2018

Session 5



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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

28th Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

*Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

*Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

*Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Councillor Chris Cunningham (Glasgow City Council)

Councillor David Dodds (West Lothian Council)

Councillor Willie Wilson (Perth and Kinross Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 21 November 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Music Tuition in Schools Inquiry

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, and welcome to the 28th meeting in 2018 of the Education and Skills Committee.

The first item of business is the third evidence session in our inquiry on music tuition in schools. We will hear from representatives from three local authorities. Last Thursday, we had an informal session with a number of students and teachers from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, to hear about their experiences. I thank those who took part in that session.

I welcome Councillor Chris Cunningham, who is the convener of education at Glasgow City Council; Councillor David Dodds, who is the executive councillor for education at West Lothian Council; and Councillor Willie Wilson, who is the vice-convener of the lifelong learning committee at Perth and Kinross Council. Please indicate to the clerks or me when you want to come in and answer any of the committee's questions.

I ask each panellist to give an overview of the challenges facing music tuition in schools at this time and to outline their local authority's approach to charging pupils for tuition.

Councillor Chris Cunningham (Glasgow City Council): I am not sure whether it is unique in this regard, but Glasgow City Council does not charge for music tuition. That is an indication of the extent to which we value music tuition in our schools. We believe that we have a very extensive reach. I take slight issue with the figures that appear in the committee's information for this meeting. We believe that, taken together, all our programmes reach more than 44 per cent of primary and secondary pupils in the city.

We have an extensive programme for instrumental music and youth music. In addition to providing tuition to our pupils, that includes an extensive teacher training programme. We operate in more than 100 out of 138 of our primary schools and in all our secondary schools.

I am happy to comment on the issue that, I think, gave rise to the inquiry: namely, the idea that music tuition should be a right that is enshrined in law. In general, that would be a problematic route for the Parliament to go down,

but I will wait for the opportunity—if you wish me to—to comment further on that.

Councillor David Dodds (West Lothian Council): Instrumental music tuition, like many other areas, faces huge problems due to the underfunding of local government, which has left us looking at cutting the funding that we have available.

West Lothian Council's intention was to maintain free tuition in a reduced range of disciplines. However, that option was not possible and, this year, for the first time, we have introduced charging for instrumental music tuition. Prior to this, our service has been highly successful. We have a range of disciplines operating in all our secondary and primary schools, with 13 different bands and ensembles that contribute hugely to the life of their schools and communities. It would be very important to us to see that continue but, with the options that are available to us, that has not proved possible.

I am happy to answer questions about the situation that we now face and, if asked to do so, to comment on whether legislation would be a potential solution to the issues facing us.

Councillor Willie Wilson (Perth and Kinross Council): Thank you very much for the opportunity to come and speak to you on a subject that is close to my heart. Perth and Kinross Council has a long-established and high-quality instrumental music provision that is available to all pupils. In order to maintain that excellent provision, parents are required to pay a fixed contribution for their child to access tuition. We have had charges in place for many years.

We, too, have looked at the budget for the instrumental music service and have tried hard to protect it in a way that ensures that the service is delivered to those who need it. After a six-year freeze, we introduced a 20 per cent increase in fees as part of last year's budget. In some cases, that meant an increase of £50 per year or £1 per week.

We are monitoring closely what happens, and there has been no fall back in the number of applications for the IMS in 2018-19. We understand that some people may be under pressure in making the payments and we have plans to tackle that, which I could elaborate on now or later. As with many other services, youngsters who are studying music for exams get free tuition.

We are engaged with youngsters and parents. It is important to try to meet their aspirations. I would not say that we always keep them all happy, but that is not how life works. We thought long and hard before we put the charges up. We were faced with the traditional rock and a hard place—either

to diminish the service in some way or to maintain the service and increase the charges. At the same time as the increase, we introduced a £35,000 grant for a bursary scheme so that those who are eligible, for a variety of reasons, can apply for financial help. We launched that recently and are getting applications. We work hard with the charitable Perth and Kinross Music Foundation and want to look further at how we might work more closely with it. There is the possibility of buying additional instruments for youngsters who may not have immediate access to them and may not be able to take instruments home. We have a number of initiatives, but I will stop there.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I want to ask Chris Cunningham a couple of questions. I have had direct experience of the wonderful service that Glasgow City Council provides, both from attending concerts and as the parent of a child who went through the process. It has been a fabulous experience.

I am interested in the consequences that the choices that Glasgow has made have had elsewhere. Glasgow's submission indicates that:

"Music is very much regarded as a core subject in Glasgow and funded accordingly."

Not all subjects are regarded as core subjects. For example, a pupil might not be able to access geography in one school, or modern studies in another. What is it about music that has meant that Glasgow has chosen to invest in that way? Presuming that there are the same budgetary pressures on Glasgow as elsewhere, what are the consequences of the choice in terms of provision across our schools?

Councillor Cunningham: All local authority education departments need to make choices. They need to decide whether one area of expenditure is more important than another. They need to balance those judgements within the budgetary constraints that exist. I am happy to quote the Scottish Government's 2016 "Guidance for Instrumental Teaching in Scotland", which talks about the fact that music

"enhances cognitive processes which are shared between music and language, thus supporting language development and literacy".

I could have gone on further in that quote. It is recognised that music has wider benefits in terms of literacy, cognitive development and language development. The additional benefits that arise from it are at the core of why we regard it as important in the curriculum and why it has been so regarded for years.

I understand that about 10 years ago, Glasgow City Council took a decision to introduce charging. As a consequence, the participation levels in music tuition dropped significantly. The decision

was made—I think correctly—that those charges should be withdrawn. I am advised by officials that it took several years to build the participation rates in the programme back up again. Such choices are never easy.

I understand the point that you are making and I can give you detail on the way in which other subjects have been impacted by the various choices that have been made over the years. However, the core issue is that we regard music as important and we fund it accordingly.

Johann Lamont: It would be interesting to know what your view is of the general subject choice and restrictions on choices across councils—but perhaps that is for another inquiry altogether.

You say that something like 44 per cent of young people get the opportunity to participate. Given the benefits of music tuition that you have identified, have you done any analysis of the extent to which young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are accessing instrumental tuition? Given that take-up is open to everybody, do you have strategies in place to ensure that young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds, who might need a bit more support, take up the opportunity and that that is monitored closely?

Councillor Cunningham: The department is absolutely clear that music tuition is delivered across the entire education estate. I have made reference to more than 100 primary schools, involving about 25,000 children. The authority has 138 primary schools so members will see that the reach is extensive. One of the most significant programmes is taking place in four primary schools in the east end—based around Eastbank academy in Shettleston—where we are delivering a whole-school music approach.

It would be entirely wrong to categorise the council's music tuition programme as being geographically discrete—it covers the entire estate.

Johann Lamont: I was asking a slightly different question, which was about not geography, but income. I was asking about young people from disadvantaged families, who may need a little more support and encouragement to access music tuition, even if it does not cost anything. Do you monitor that? Even if there is a reach right across the city—I recognise that there is—44 per cent of young people take it up. Do you scrutinise whether, of that 44 per cent, there is a disproportionate number of young people from relatively better-off families?

Councillor Cunningham: I understand the point that you are making. To some extent we might be speaking at slightly cross-purposes. Given the extent to which deprivation applies

across Glasgow—albeit not in some areas—the reality is that if we are providing across the entire city, we are going to be reaching those significant areas of deprivation.

I am not in a position to say right now exactly what those figures are. I am happy to provide them if the committee wishes it. I am confident that we are reaching across the city and throughout all the income groups.

Johann Lamont: My final point is that there is a difference between reach and uptake. Do you have strategies in place to increase uptake among families who might regard music tuition as something that they cannot do or afford, even if the council is not charging for it?

Councillor Cunningham: I fully appreciate your point. The council's principal strategy is to ensure that provision is made across the entire estate and all the areas and income groups in the city.

Johann Lamont: I want to ask the other members of the panel why their authorities made a different choice from Glasgow. Everyone has budget pressures; why did you feel that it was reasonable to select music tuition, rather than another bit of your budget?

Councillor Dodds: There are very few other bits of the budget that are not already under pressure. It was certainly not a choice that we made lightly or that we were keen to make. We looked at all the options available to us. The original proposal from the administration in West Lothian was that we would maintain free tuition, but reduce the number of disciplines in which we offered it. I still regard that as a positive option, because it avoids many of the issues related to charging.

10:15

To address your previous question, even before we introduced charging, access to instrumental music tuition was not taken up equally across the board. Before we started charging, 12.75 per cent of the pupils who accessed such tuition were in the most deprived quintile and 28 per cent were in the least deprived quintile. On occasion, we had officers try to bring up the proportion of young people who took up musical tuition in a particular school in a deprived area, but it proved very difficult. I am not sure how you would do it, unless of course you prioritised putting your tutors into the areas of greatest deprivation, which would in turn have an impact on the areas where people were able to afford tuition.

We were very reluctantly forced to introduce charging. Our option would, of course, also have had consequences. It would have meant that some children would not have been able to

continue taking music tuition, but it would also have meant that any child who wanted to take up musical tuition and had an aptitude for it could have done so without having to consider the cost. We introduced charging very reluctantly and we would not have done so had there been any other option.

The Convener: A number of members want to come in on the back of Johann Lamont's questions. I ask for quick supplementaries at this stage, please.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): My question is about costs and whether not charging for music tuition means cuts elsewhere. I am interested in the difference between the costs in the local authorities that are represented on the panel. As far as I am aware, the cost in Perth and Kinross is more than £800 per pupil. Are there economies of scale that mean that the cost per pupil in Glasgow—where there are fewer logistical challenges such as getting tutors between schools—is lower than in Perth and Kinross?

Councillor Wilson: To a degree, that is correct. I am glad that you raised the rural aspect. Johann Lamont was correct to raise the issue of folk who are disadvantaged, but we have pupils and parents who are disadvantaged because of lack of transport or because of distance. We have been working hard with all the voluntary organisations that support the instrumental music service to explore the community aspect and to get people to help each other out by car sharing, making sure that there is a bus to take the bairns home at night after the lessons or finding other ways to help. We have that additional challenge. We have the challenge of travel, but we provide buses and transport wherever we can—for the central groups, for instance.

We carry out a sensitivity analysis. Our 20 per cent fee increase this year was not popular—that is just a statement of fact—but we reviewed it by looking at the music camp costs to make sure that they were not making a profit. The parents did not want us to make a profit on them, so we made sure that they simply cover their costs; we adapted our policies to take account of that. That is an example of our listening to the community and reacting to it.

You asked why we charge. We have always charged. As I said in my introductory remarks, we think that doing so is really important in order to make sure that the quality of the service is maintained.

Another unique thing about Perth and Kinross—there are many unique things about Perth and Kinross—is that we are a rural area that supports two producing repertory theatres, which not only provide excellent facilities but give youngsters

opportunities to move into that area to work. The link between the instrumental music service and the opportunity to work in theatre is strong. We work with both theatres as part of our overall work to provide opportunities for young people.

The question about charges is difficult to answer, but we are where we are with it.

Councillor Dodds: As the background papers suggest, none of the councils charges full recovery for music tuition. The key figure is the difference between the amount of money that a council puts into music tuition and the amount that it costs to deliver. We had a budget of £993,000, which was cut to £500,000, so the £340-odd charge that we introduced is to ensure that we recover the difference while maintaining the level of music tuition. That is why there is such a patchwork across the country, and previous surveys have shown exactly that.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Before I ask a general question, I want Councillor Cunningham to clarify a couple of things. In your introductory remarks, you said that you take issue with some of the statistics in our papers. Will you say which?

Councillor Cunningham: The committee's papers show that the instrumental music tuition programme reaches 8 per cent of Glasgow's pupils. My officials had some difficulty with that, and gave me figures that suggest that it is actually 44 per cent, as I said. It might depend on what is and is not counted. It is possible that the 8 per cent refers only to secondary schools, but I am not sure. I genuinely do not know where the figure comes from, but my officials are clear that the reach is far greater than that. If we are in more than 100 primary schools and all our secondaries, I struggle to see how the figure can be reduced to 8 per cent.

Liz Smith: Convener, it might be worth checking that discrepancy, because it is considerable.

Councillor Cunningham also mentioned that Glasgow had previously charged for tuition, that that decision was reversed and that it took some time to build the service back up again. How long did that take, roughly?

Councillor Cunningham: My understanding from officials is that charging was introduced around 10 years ago but the decision was quite quickly reversed. I cannot give a timeline for how long it took to build the service back up again, but that message came across to me fairly clearly when I discussed the issue with officials.

The big issue there—it is probably a general point—is the huge step between not charging and charging. It is a far bigger step than, let us say for

argument's sake, increasing the charge from £100 to £110. Incremental increases in charges are one thing, but taking the big step of introducing charges seems to me to be the significant step. That is what caused the problem around 10 years ago, and that is what the council stepped back from.

Liz Smith: West Lothian Council has decided to charge. What are the latest statistics from West Lothian on how many youngsters have had to drop out because of that?

Councillor Dodds: We do not have the final figures yet—we are waiting for some of them—but I can give you a general idea. Since we introduced charging, the number of primary students in tuition has decreased from 1,128 last November to 234 this year—only one in five students at primary level has opted to continue. At secondary level, the number of students has decreased from 1,042 in November 2017 to 514 in November this year, so only half of our secondary school young people have continued. An estimated 264 primary students and 53 secondary students have shown an interest in entering the service, and we hope that up to 49 per cent of them will opt to take up music tuition.

Liz Smith: Obviously, you have to bill people for the fees that you are charging. Is that where that statistical evidence comes from?

Councillor Dodds: The evidence comes from returns from parents who have expressed an interest in their child continuing with tuition, and from our tutors on the ground, who can tell us accurately how many young people are continuing in each of their schools.

Liz Smith: We are concerned about the drop-off in youngsters taking lessons that has resulted from the charges. I am particularly interested in what councils are doing to provide a cost benefit analysis in that regard. Obviously, a large number of youngsters who previously would have been are not now able to take up the offer. What analysis are you doing on getting provision to those who are most in need and on addressing the concerns of those youngsters who have had to drop out?

Councillor Dodds: Our statistics are only now becoming available. We will have to consider the issue in the future. However, I can say that the drop-off follows closely the Scottish index of multiple deprivation profile of the schools—it is much more pronounced in schools in more deprived areas. We will certainly have to think about how we can respond to that.

We have introduced what I think is a common range of discounts: nobody who is doing a Scottish Qualifications Authority music course pays for tuition; there is a sibling discount of 50 per cent; and families who are in receipt of free

school meals do not pay at all. Interestingly, there has been a drop-off even in that latter group, which has gone from around 10 per cent of the total to around 6 per cent.

Liz Smith: Are you looking into why that has happened?

Councillor Dodds: We will do so. At the moment, we can only speculate.

The problem is that although the standard charge that we have introduced might be an equal charge, it is not an equitable charge. Families who have a reasonable amount of disposable income will be able to meet the charge, as well as the sibling charge. However, some families who face that charge are looking for money for it once they have paid for the basics such as heating, food and clothing. Every penny that those families have is accounted for, so any charge that we bring in will present them with a big challenge. We will have to think about how we respond to that.

The figures that are available to us are not complete, but on the basis of the figures that we have, it is clear that we will have to think about a response across the board.

Liz Smith: Why are the figures not complete yet?

Councillor Dodds: Before we introduced charging, we simply asked young people whether they wanted to take up tuition, and if they passed the assessment—we were one of the authorities that had assessments—they just continued to receive tuition. Now that we have introduced charging, there is a four-week period in which children have an option to try out musical tuition and decide whether it is for them before they are charged for it. I think that that period is coming to a close. That is the main reason why the information is not complete.

The figures that I have given you are fairly robust, although there might be some changes based on the new uptake.

Liz Smith: Will you clarify whether those figures will be part of the full analysis of all 32 local authorities that is being done?

Councillor Dodds: They are our figures; they are West Lothian figures that relate to the charges that West Lothian Council has introduced.

Liz Smith: Are they being sent off to become part of the general survey that is being done?

Councillor Dodds: They will be.

Councillor Wilson: As I said earlier, Perth and Kinross has seen no drop-off in applications this year. Because the music tuition year does not coincide with the financial year, there is a time lag in getting the statistics, and we are only now

gathering them in. However, as of this week, there has been no major drop-off.

On the second part of your question about what we would do if there were such a drop-off, one step that is open to us is the bursary scheme, which is an open-ended scheme. We are looking at qualifications, but we are fairly flexible about them, as things stand.

Another step that we will take involves working harder with our parent groups to see how we can help. The examples that I gave about car sharing and so on are relevant in that regard. Furthermore, we are considering purchasing additional instruments. We will get advice from our professionals on whether there are any gaps.

We have concerns about people who are at the margins. Some people will qualify for a variety of reasons, but someone who is just over the line might be disadvantaged. We want to work harder with parent groups to ensure that such people, who might be disincentivised, can participate. They are sometimes the folk who are hit hardest. Rural transport costs can be a big issue.

We are working on those things to try to minimise the effects. I assure you that none of this has been done with any pleasure, convener—the measures have been taken to protect the service to make sure that it is available in the future. If we had taken chunks out of the service, that would have been seriously bad for everybody.

10:30

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The committee is sensitive to the difficult positions that councils have had to take. Perth and Kinross has had to raise its charges by 20 per cent, which is a pretty swingeing increase; West Lothian has gone from not charging to charging, which was difficult; East Lothian, which I represent, has introduced charging for the first time and has suffered quite a lot of public grief because of it; and, more historically, Glasgow tried to introduce charges but had to pull back from that.

The committee has looked at models elsewhere. In Wales, it is recommended that music services be delivered nationally through an arm's-length body. Would that be a simpler solution, to prevent your authorities having to take those difficult decisions?

Councillor Cunningham: That approach would relieve the local authority of having to make those decisions, but it would simply place that decision—difficult or otherwise—in somebody else's hands. It would create a situation in which some would be happy and some would be unhappy with the decision, whatever it was. It would not resolve the issue of whether tuition should be free or can be

free in its delivery—it would just shift the decision making. Local authorities might say, “That’s absolutely fine; you make the decision”—whoever the “you” may be at the national body—but it would not alter the nature and character of the decision.

Councillor Wilson: That approach would be worse. It would be a one-size-fits-all solution. Scotland is a diverse country, as we all know, so answers for Shetland, Perth and Kinross and Glasgow are different. It would remove any local control or influence and would diminish parental involvement substantially, which is crucial for our IMS; it would be a major disadvantage. A national approach would shift the problem and increase it. Signing up to IMS would be likely to fall off a cliff, to be blunt.

Councillor Dodds: I tend to agree. I do not think that making the decision at a local level is the issue. The question is about competition for funding; if the service were to be moved to national level, it might compete with other funds.

At the local level, instrumental music tuition reflects the musical heritage of the area. West Lothian has a strong mining and brass band traditions—brass is our biggest discipline. In other areas, it might be piping, strings or Scottish traditional music. Local authorities are perfectly placed to reflect musical heritage and to provide a service that responds to it. That would be lost if the service was to become national.

Iain Gray: I am generally in favour of local decision making on local services, but the result of the current approach is that instrumental music tuition is provided free in Glasgow, whereas the cost to parents is more than £500 a year—I do not have the exact figure in front of me—in another local authority. Is Councillor Wilson suggesting that that is because parents in Clackmannanshire want to pay £500 a year but parents in Glasgow do not? Can we sustain such a huge disparity in provision?

Councillor Wilson: I am not sure if I can answer for Clackmannanshire or Glasgow—

Iain Gray: Your council charges about £300.

Councillor Wilson: I understand the point fully. It is not such a big problem for us because there have always been charges and folk have got used to them over time. There are ways in which we can budget for certain things.

Iain Gray: My point is that you are saying that parents have always wanted to pay for instrumental tuition, and you are responding to that local desire.

Councillor Wilson: I do not know that I would accuse them of always having wanted to pay. We have developed a partnership arrangement in

which that has become the norm. As I said, the 20 per cent increase—you used the word “swingeing”; I say that it was substantial—was not popular, and we are working on looking closely at its detailed effects. It would have been even worse if we had not increased the fee and had cut the service.

There is a disparity because there always will be. Why would we worry about having a variety of solutions? That is what democracy is about, it is what local government is about and it is what the variety of Scotland is about.

I agree that it seems strange that some places are different, but councils make decisions and choices. Glasgow has made a choice. That is fine, and I do not criticise it. It is important that councils work with communities to sustain and maintain what we have.

Iain Gray: That is a fair point, but the disparity is very wide. Councillor Dodds, in your opening remarks, you made it fairly clear that you introduced charging not because you felt that it was the right thing for your local area or because parents wanted to make that contribution; you did it because you absolutely had to.

Councillor Dodds: That is a fair reflection.

Iain Gray: You were not really responding to local needs and desires; it was a response to the budget.

Councillor Dodds: It was budget driven. You could say that we were also responding to local desire because there was an active campaign for us to introduce charging.

At the end of the day, for reasons that we have already discussed, there will always be disparities because councillors have to make decisions based on different factors. The only equitable solution is that, if a child has the desire and aptitude, provision is made available free of charge. Unless that happens, things will never be equitable; there will always be differences. Even if you introduced a standard national charge, it would mean different things for different families and make it difficult for some families to allow their children to take up music if that is what they want to do.

Councillor Cunningham: There are two issues: whether there is an entitlement in law, and whether there is charging. If you say that there is an entitlement in law, that raises significant issues, such as the question of how it is funded. If you say that it will be funded—that it will be free—but that there is no entitlement in law, budgets will get squeezed around the extent of the provision, albeit that it is free. That is, the extent of the provision gets squeezed rather than the pricing being increased.

I do not have a simple answer to those points, but it strikes me that the choice is between one or the other.

Iain Gray: During a recent debate about national testing, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills made the point that there is no statutory requirement for local authorities to teach literacy and numeracy in schools, yet those subjects are taught in every school. The idea that a local authority would decide that its schools were not going to teach them, or that it was going to charge for teaching them, is ludicrous. Why is music different?

Councillor Cunningham: I do not have an answer to that question because we do not treat it as different. However, you are absolutely right that very little about what must be taught in our schools is enshrined in law. Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, religious education is the only prescribed subject.

The problem is that, if you put music on that standing, you create difficulty with all the other subjects that are in our curriculum through guidance but not through statute. To an extent, I would say that there be demons down the road of putting one subject in law but not others. However, that is your decision.

Councillor Dodds: I think that the place of music in the school curriculum is secure. In West Lothian—and, I am sure, in the other local authority areas—it is a core part of curriculum for excellence and is delivered in schools by music staff. The children in the schools have the opportunity to learn music and access to musical instruments both in the classroom and through the youth music initiative in primary school. However, that is slightly different from instrumental music provision, which is discretionary and is something that councils look to provide in the best way that they possibly can. There is a slight difference, but music is still very much part of the curriculum. Access to musical instruments is part of what we do in our schools, and that will continue. I do not think that there is any threat to the place of music in education.

The Convener: A number of members have indicated that they want to ask supplementary questions about what they have heard. Mr Scott, if your question is a supplementary, you can go first.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Thank you, convener.

Councillor Dodds, if you do not support the Wales model, which Iain Gray asked about—you made some notable comments on the matter in your introductory remarks—is your argument that the Scottish Government should ring fence money for music? If there is not to be a central service, one of the alternatives that could be considered is

a central fund that local government would seek to access on a formula-based or bid system. Would that be any better?

Councillor Dodds: No. The general funding level for local authorities needs to be increased, because that is where the problem comes from. If you ring fence music tuition and say that a sum of money will be set aside for instrumental tuition without there being a general increase in funding, you will actually be taking money away from another area and diverting it to instrumental music tuition. You may solve that problem, but it will be at the expense of the finance that is available to other areas of education or to other local authority functions. I do not think that that would solve the problem.

Tavish Scott: Your argument is that music is part of what you deliver in schools, and you are asking why it should be financially separate.

Councillor Dodds: Yes. What we need is adequate funding to provide the services that we would like to fund for our local communities.

Tavish Scott: Sure.

Councillor Wilson: Ring fencing might be a worse solution than what we have at present. Again, the centralisation versus delegation or devolution argument applies. I repeat the point about parental involvement in the process. If there is centralised funding or control, that could vanish overnight, yet we are talking about something of great value, although it is difficult to put a price tag on it.

It would also mean that some other part of the national budget would be affected, and it would remove local democratic control because, if people had to apply and they got X amount, there would be no flexibility in that. It would simply be decided centrally according to a formula, and local authorities sometimes have enough problems with the formulas that we already have. We need adequate funding for our core services, and we look at music as a core service.

Tavish Scott: Okay. That is entirely fair and straightforward. As a consequence of that, is there a greater onus on local authorities, which you are representing today, to take into account the points that Johann Lamont raised about children who come from families where there is no money and who therefore cannot access music tuition? No matter what you do, they will find it much more difficult. I always worry about SIMD, to be honest, because it is very broad, and we need to get down to an individual family level to understand that. Do you need to do more on your analysis, which you helpfully illustrated earlier, of how to identify children who could and should have opportunities to take up music but who have no money at home

and whose mums and dads cannot afford to put them anywhere near it?

Councillor Wilson: Poverty is interesting, because sometimes it is not about money but about time, access or transport. I have made that point before. It is really important that we help families. If we look at all aspects of education and what we are trying to do with children, young people, families and school pupils, this is part of the whole process of how we support the family. If we do not do that holistically, there is a danger of siloisation, if I can use that dreadful word.

Johann Lamont was spot on with her question about how we can include people. I mentioned the people who are at the margins. In some ways, I worry about them more than others, because they fall outwith the support mechanisms. In Perth and Kinross, through our bursary scheme and the work we are doing with parents that I mentioned, we are trying to dig a bit deeper into that problem and see how we can help.

10:45

Councillor Cunningham: I do not want to introduce a discordant note, but the reality is that poverty is always about money; the rest of the issues—travel, distance from a particular destination or whatever—are consequences. Those issues become barriers where there is a lack of resources. Poverty is always about money.

Councillor Dodds: I endorse that. It is exactly right. Poverty is always about money, and the other issues are consequences.

Different areas have different demographics. In West Lothian, we are not talking about the margins. There is a danger in conceptualising the issue in such a way that you assume that only people who are in the most deprived SIMD areas—those who are in quintile 1—are struggling. The ability to find additional money for anything, including instrumental music tuition, is something that affects families well up the income scale. Things can become difficult.

As I said, in families in which only one parent is in employment or in which both parents are in low-paid employment, every penny is a prisoner, as they say—everything is accounted for. We can help only if we approach the matter from that point of view. As has been suggested, bursaries can help only at the margins; they are not a solution to the problem that is facing us in West Lothian.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Councillor Dodds made a point about the commitment that pupils who are on an SQA music course do not pay fees. I think that most local authorities have made a commitment to ensure that fees do not prevent people from being able to

take SQA exam courses. However, last week, we met music students from the Royal Conservatoire who raised a question about the assumption that there is no charge for tuition leading up to SQA exams. They asked how “leading up to” is defined and what disadvantages people have if they have not had early access to music tuition when it comes to doing SQA exams in music.

Councillor Cunningham: It is inevitable that, if you have not had some relevant background before you reach the formal music subject, you will struggle. I realise that presentation at SQA level requires competence in instruments, but you are not going to choose the subject unless you already have an interest. To some extent, it is the responsibility of people further down the school ladder to foster that interest. It is inevitable that, if that interest has not been developed, that will impact on the number of pupils who choose music as an SQA subject.

Councillor Wilson: You make a perfectly fair point, Dr Allan, and it is a difficult one to answer, to be honest. Obviously, in Perth and Kinross, the pupils who are studying full SQA courses in secondaries 4 to 6 are offered free tuition. However, the point that you are making is about the lead-up to that and how people get to the required level by S4.

The fact that budgets have been squeezed so tight in recent years has made local authorities, including my own, draw back from the provision of tuition before that point. Personally, I would like to reverse that trend, but I do not have a pot of gold to pay for it. Going down that route gets us into the difficult situation of deciding where in the education budget we can start to find savings. Approximately two thirds of the budget is ring fenced, so any savings have to come from the remaining third, which makes it even harder. What we would like to do and what we can do are two different things. We have to live in the real world and try to do our best. Through a variety of means, we try to support as many people as possible, but we can only do what we can do.

Councillor Dodds: We have the same concession—we begin at the beginning of S4 and we continue until S6. My colleagues have clearly outlined the issues with that. Before we introduced charging, the correlation between pupils doing SQA qualifications and musical tuition was not very high. Some pupils, but not a huge number, used their instrument in curricular music. Now that we have introduced charging, 19 per cent of our secondary pupils qualify for the discount. It would not surprise me at all if, certainly this year, pupils in our schools choose to do curricular music as a way of preserving their instrumental music, because that is the only way that they can afford it.

The Convener: Members have a couple more supplementary questions.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): My question is on a point about charging that Councillor Dodds raised in response to Iain Gray's questions. I understand that West Lothian Council carried out a survey of the 1,800 parents who had children who were receiving music tuition, giving them four options. What was the outcome of that survey?

Councillor Dodds: We offered four options, which included options where tuition would remain free but on different models, such as removing or reducing string tuition, and one option of charging. We received responses to less than 50 per cent of the surveys that we sent out. Although a small majority of those who responded—just over 50 per cent—were in favour of introducing charging, that was slightly over 19 per cent of the total number of families who were in receipt of instrumental music tuition at the time.

Gordon MacDonald: But in every single one of the 11 secondary school catchment areas, those who responded voted in favour of introducing some form of charging.

Councillor Dodds: I would need to come back to you on that. There was a clear preference for charging in one particular school area—

Gordon MacDonald: The numbers that I have in front of me show that, quite substantially, in every single school area, there was a majority in favour of charging.

Councillor Dodds: Right—if that is what you have in front of you. I cannot find the figures at the moment.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): My question is also on budgets. Councillor Dodds, your council started charging this year for the first time. Do you see that as the future trajectory? Will charging be part of your budget discussions in coming years?

Councillor Dodds: Given the levels of drop-off, we will have to address that. We are now at the margins of being able to continue to provide a viable instrumental music tuition service. For example, we have gone down from 13 bands and ensembles to a total of five, and we are looking at ways of delivering ensemble provision in other forms for some disciplines. I think that the council will have to address the issue again. Perhaps our experience will have to reflect the Glasgow experience.

Rona Mackay: The point that I am getting at is that the charging is not set in stone. You will consider whether you can return to free tuition in future budget discussions.

Councillor Dodds: That is inevitable. When we set the level of charging, we assumed a maximum drop-off of 30 per cent, but in fact the retention level is closer to 30 per cent. On that basis, what we are offering does not achieve what we set out to achieve, so we will need to look at that, and that will need to include considering a return to some form of free provision.

Rona Mackay: Councillor Wilson, will you clarify how your bursary scheme works?

Councillor Wilson: We are in year 1 of that scheme, so we are in a learning phase. We have asked for applications from any parents who feel that they are under financial pressure, and we have not had a huge flood of applications so far, but the scheme was launched only early in October, so we are fairly early doors with it. Once we look at the applications, we will find out who would qualify, for instance, under any of the normal headings for free tuition.

Those are some of the benchmarks, but there may well be other people whom we would want to try to help. When we see the analysis of the applications, which I hope to get by the end of this month, we will have a look at how we might go on to help people in other ways. That is subject to some fairly delicate discussions with a variety of players at the moment. I do not mean to be secretive about it, but—

Rona Mackay: Are you setting the parameters in terms of income thresholds and so on?

Councillor Wilson: We will set certain basic parameters, but it may be that we will look at some of the parental support groups to see how that might be enhanced.

The Convener: That leads on to a supplementary question that I want to ask. The graduate year students from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland whom we met last week are studying for BEd degrees so that they can be music teachers. I have a question about the sustainability of the service. All the students said that they had to seek outside support to achieve the grades to get into the Royal Conservatoire. However, two of the young people in the group had come through the Glasgow system and they said that they had not only received support from Glasgow City Council, but been given grants to attend the Conservatoire juniors as well as additional support.

I want to dig a little bit deeper in relation to Ms Mackay's questions about the purpose of the grants. Is it to help people financially or to support the talent of young people so that they can achieve their full potential in the area?

Councillor Cunningham: I have to say that that is an area where I am not on firm ground. Is it

about the financial circumstances of the individuals or their aptitude and talent? I do not want to make a mistake in trying to answer the question. I can find out, but I cannot answer that now.

The Convener: Okay. If you could provide us with that information afterwards, that would be helpful.

Councillor Wilson: We have a variety of opportunities for young people in a similar situation—whether they are at the Royal Conservatoire in Glasgow or elsewhere—to apply to the council for assistance. That can be done in a number of ways. There are straightforward financial assistance programmes, we have common good funds that can sometimes help people and we have a variety of other local funding arrangements that might apply. We also have an education trust. It is one of those old-fashioned trusts where somebody left money X number of years ago, and we are trying to modernise the process to make it worth while for people to get help from the trust.

There are a variety of different methods, but those are some examples. I can give you a more detailed answer in writing afterwards.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I have a brief supplementary question about fee exemptions. Perth and Kinross Council offers fee exemptions, income-based concessions and a sibling discount, and West Lothian Council offers fee exemptions for pupils who are in receipt of free school meals, looked-after children and those who are studying towards an SQA qualification. How do you communicate those fee exemption opportunities to parents, carers and pupils throughout the pupils' educational journeys? Are they told at a certain point that they might be able to apply? How does it happen?

Councillor Wilson: We regularly publicise that information on the council website and so on, and we are proactive in writing to parents to outline the opportunities that are available. We work through school parent councils and headteachers to communicate with parents as well as using other methods, so that information is widely available.

Councillor Dodds: We have only one year's worth of experience. We wrote to every family that was in receipt of instrumental music tuition to outline all the available options. We also offer a sibling discount.

Jenny Gilruth: What about families that were not in receipt of music tuition?

Councillor Dodds: The information was communicated at the point when young people said that they wanted to take up an instrument.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I have a separate question, convener, so if others have main questions, I am happy to wait.

The Convener: We were about to move on anyway, so on you go.

Oliver Mundell: My question is on a slightly different topic. Last week, we heard from a couple of panellists that instrumental music teachers are treated differently from other teaching staff, which limits the effectiveness of the roles that they can play. They said that there are also issues to do with retaining their skills and talents in our schools. Have you come across that in your local authorities? Has there been difficulty in finding and keeping the right people?

11:00

Councillor Wilson: Thank you for the question. I am not sure what was meant by "differently". We treat our instrumental music staff according to the conditions of service, which apply to all members of staff within the council.

Oliver Mundell: I mean that they are treated differently from other teaching staff. We heard that people who routinely take part in classroom and curriculum teaching are valued differently and have different roles in their schools. Instrumental teachers are seen as add-ons or are not given the same status or importance.

Councillor Wilson: They are certainly not add-ons. We do not treat our instrumental music staff in that way at all. We recognise their contribution and value it very much. I would be astonished if I discovered that any member of staff had been treated differently.

Instrumental music staff have a different role. Because of rurality and the distances that are involved, they have a peripatetic role and they may spend more time in cars going from A to B than we would want them to. However, that is life in a big rural area. They are certainly not treated differently in any way, as far as I know. We spend a lot of time speaking to our leader in the instrumental music service through the senior officers, and we get fairly vigorous feedback from them regularly, which is good.

I do not know of any reason to treat those staff any differently, and they are certainly not treated differently, as far as Perth and Kinross Council is concerned.

Councillor Dodds: I do not think that we treat our staff differently in the sense that you suggest. They are certainly managed, because they have a different role. They work in close collaboration with the music departments in the schools in which they work. They are highly valued in those departments and their contribution is seen as

being very important. Instrumental music teachers do a different job, so there are differences in how they are managed. Other than that, they are not treated differently.

Councillor Cunningham: I echo that. Our music tutors are as valued as any other staff. Their role and the character of what they do is inevitably different, but are they less valued? No.

Oliver Mundell: Do you find it easy to retain people with the right skills to provide the right range of instrumental music provision, or is it getting more difficult to attract people to provide that?

Councillor Cunningham: I would not say that we have any experience of it becoming more difficult.

Oliver Mundell: Is it the same for the other two authorities?

Councillor Dodds: I am not sure that I can answer that with any authority. I am not aware of any difficulty in recruiting or retaining music instructors. That has certainly not been reported to me.

Councillor Wilson: We have no major difficulties in that regard. In fact, a number of our teachers and instrumental music specialists have been with us for many years.

Johann Lamont: I am interested in your responses to that question. It may be worth looking at last week's evidence, because there was a very strong feeling in the other direction. We heard that the role of instrumental music teachers is not regarded as core business and that they are therefore, perhaps, seen to be expendable in some ways, or that they have to be flexible in a way that other staff do not.

The numbers that we have for all local authorities show that music tutors are down by about 50 per cent. We have a graph, and there has been a significant reduction. Does that mean that, even where local authorities are not charging for tuition, the number of tutors that are available is reducing? Some of the evidence that we have received suggests that a tipping point has been reached in the service. Are we anywhere near that?

Councillor Cunningham: The figures that we provided indicate that, in relation to our youth music initiative, there has been a drop in the number of tutors. It is not a dramatic drop, but there has been a drop. That reflects budgetary pressures. Local authorities have to make those decisions based on their budgetary constraints.

Johann Lamont: Do you agree with your colleagues on the panel that there is an issue about the resourcing of local government? Does

Glasgow City Council require a larger budget in order to not have to make those choices?

Councillor Cunningham: I am never going to turn money away.

Johann Lamont: Would you ask for it, though, which is a separate matter?

Councillor Cunningham: Yes. Local government has experienced a higher level of budget cuts than many other areas. I would be very pleased if more resources came to the city that we could spend on the programmes that we think are important. Absolutely.

Johann Lamont: Does anyone have any comments on the tipping point issue?

Councillor Dodds: For us, the game changer has been the introduction of charging. Our intention is to retain the service, but with the reductions in numbers, we would certainly not be able to retain the full range of instructors that we currently employ. We will have to address that. I think that the economic situation and the need to charge have a negative impact on tutors.

Johann Lamont: Following on from Rona Mackay's point, I note that the logic of the drop is that you reduce the number of tutors. Have you given yourselves the space to make a different decision so that you do not get rid of tutors until you are absolutely sure that you are going to address the consequence of charging, which has been a reduced service? The worry is that a vicious circle will start. If you have to get rid of tutors because there is a reduction in demand, that process will be difficult to stop.

Councillor Dodds: The Glasgow experience reflects that, as was described earlier. Having decided to introduce charging and then reversed that, it took the council many years to get music tuition back to its previous level.

We built into our decision in May that a report on the situation would be brought to the education executive at the beginning of next year. That is when we will need to look at the actual consequences of charging, rather than the anticipated consequences, and consider how to address the issue. That will involve looking at how we deal with our instrumental music tutors.

Councillor Wilson: Perth and Kinross Council is nowhere near a tipping point. One of the main reasons why we increased the fees was to keep up the quality and the amount of IMS that we provide.

In the previous council term, savings were made in the IMS budget. There were staff efficiencies of nearly £20,000 over that five-year period. I lost the vote on that one. If I had won it, there might have been a different result. However, that was the

council decision at the time. I was in a different role then. There have been small efficiency savings, but that was not all about staffing, I might add—travel and other costs were included in the figure.

I look to the future with great hope and excitement, because we are full steam ahead and we want to keep going.

Johann Lamont: There has been a reduction in one-to-one tuition. Do you include definitions of quality relating to the size of the group that is being taught? We heard earlier about access to instruments and the length of lessons. Are those things closely monitored?

Councillor Wilson: That is a good point. Sometimes choices have to be made. It depends on how many youngsters want to pursue a particular instrument. One-to-one tuition is great, but it is not always deliverable. For instance, it depends on the number of people who want to participate. If six youngsters want to do one instrument, they can get a certain amount of time to do that, and the small-group work is good. As you have heard, there is a lot of evidence on the benefits of working in a team, and practising in a small team has benefits, too. I do not think that there is any major diminution in the quality as a result of the small-group work. Sometimes, that is what we need to provide.

There is more demand for instrumental music tuition than we can supply. We have a filtering system, which you are probably aware of, that involves testing youngsters to see whether they have the basic abilities, but more people apply than we can take on. That means that we have to consider a number of solutions to ensure that we can deliver the service, and small-group work is one of them.

Johann Lamont: Would you ever be in a situation in which a young person would find it cheaper to go to a private tutor, where they would get one-to-one tuition, rather than being charged for being part of a group?

Councillor Wilson: I have anecdotal evidence that one or two people have said that they could go to a private tutor, but I have no formal evidence to that effect. I think that what we charge at the moment is still quite competitive.

Jenny Gilruth: Councillor Wilson, did you say that there had been no issues with recruitment?

Councillor Wilson: I am unaware of any difficulty in recruiting staff to the instrumental music service.

Jenny Gilruth: Why does Perth and Kinross have one of the lowest music tutor to pupil ratios? I think that there is one full-time equivalent tutor for

every 578 students, which is less than half the national average.

Councillor Wilson: It is what it is. That figure does not mean that that is the relationship between the number of tutors and the number of people who are participating in the instrumental music service. I cannot give you that figure off the top of my head. We provide a quality service, and I do not think that quoting that figure is terribly helpful because, to be honest, it does not add anything to the discussion.

Jenny Gilruth: It is worth noting, because the fact that you are employing fewer staff presumably means that you have more money in the budget to spend. Glasgow has double the number of music tutors per pupil of Perth and Kinross, and it is able to provide the service for free.

Councillor Wilson: Again, we are back to local decision making and budgets and how all that pans out. There is a mixed economy in that regard; we have all made that quite clear. However, I do not think that our instrumental music service is diminished in any way by the number of tutors that we have. We could always have more, but we work with the budget constraints that we have, and we have tried to ensure that the quality is maintained.

The Convener: As no one else has further questions at this point, I will ask some of my own. Councillor Wilson said that Perth and Kinross has always charged a fee. If we go right back to the creation of the unitary authorities, we can see that, in a way, music tuition has always sat outside the core education curriculum. We have heard that some councils have taken different decisions; we have also talked about mechanisms that can be used to protect the service, including the use of arm's-length external organisations. If it was concluded—and this is not a given—that there should be a statutory requirement for instrumental music, how could that best be achieved? Could it be done through an expansion of the youth music initiative, through clearer guidelines for councils about the curriculum or through work being done by Education Scotland in that area?

Councillor Wilson: To be quite blunt, I hope that we do not get to that point. To be candid, we have enough central control already in local government and piling more on us would not help. Losing local control and participation would be a major issue. I do not want to contemplate that model but, if that came to pass, we would have to look at the options, some of which you have outlined.

Councillor Cunningham: It does not seem to me that this is a binary question of something being done either by central Government or by local government. My understanding is that the

curriculum is devolved to the school level, and almost down to the teacher level.

How our schools deal with the curriculum varies across Glasgow. That variation and flexibility are regarded as a strength in our system—and by “our system”, I mean the system across Scotland. I do not read the issue as being about central Government versus local government. We will have either a situation in which we set something down in law and everybody from local authorities down to schools has to apply it, or a situation in which we have flexibility, which can be within a local authority and between local authorities and central Government.

11:15

Councillor Dodds: I am not sure that there is a dichotomy between the national and the local. You could make the provision statutory and still have it administered locally, but there are real dangers in doing that. One of those dangers is that, if that approach is not accompanied by an increase in funding, you would reduce provision to the lowest possible level. Everybody would have to work to the statutory level because, financially, there would be no other option, and in many cases that would be a lower level than current provision. There are dangers in going in that direction. As I said, I think that the service is best delivered locally.

The Convener: Do councils value initiatives such as the youth music initiative, which we have heard only good things about and which is an example of how an objective can be achieved by working in partnership with Government?

Councillor Dodds: We very much value the youth music initiative. Again, it is delivered very differently across the country, because of circumstances and simply what is available. We contract out the service—we do not deliver it in house—and that is probably the pattern across the country. Although that model has succeeded, and it allows an introduction to musical instruments, its sustainability on an individual basis is questionable.

Councillor Wilson: Of course we value and welcome that initiative, but it should be mainstreamed and fully funded.

Iain Gray: Councillor Cunningham said that there should not be a binary choice. One driver for considering centralisation or a national scheme is the breadth of disparity in provision and charging across local authorities. Is it beyond the wit of local authorities, through COSLA or otherwise, to collaborate in some way to provide perhaps not identical but more consistent provision without national Government stepping in?

Councillor Cunningham: I do not disagree. That is a perfectly fair question, but it raises issues about the extent to which we would be levelling up or levelling down. Do we want equality of misery or equality of aspiration? That choice would have to be made.

I did not say that it should not be a binary choice; I said that it is not actually a binary choice between local government and central Government. There is often a lot of variation in local authorities, because of the flexibility of curriculum provision.

I do not see why music is dramatically different from a lot of the other issues on which local government makes choices. However, central Government can say to local government in general, “Can you please come up with a better model?” That is a perfectly fair question, but local government might turn round and say, “Actually, you’re the guys who make the law, so perhaps you should do that.” I would be very reluctant to suggest that one subject should become enshrined in statute in a way that no other subject is. That would open the floodgates, and we could have every other subject advocate charging through the door.

Liz Smith: I entirely agree with Councillor Cunningham’s last point.

To help the funding situation, would you have regard to the international experience in places where the provision of musical instrument tuition has been undertaken by bodies outwith Government altogether? By that, I mean private trusts or, in some cases in America, the music industry. Is it worth looking at that to get round what is obviously a difficult problem for local authorities?

Councillor Cunningham: I do not know the detail of what happens in those other places, but I would tread carefully when the example is the United States, where I suspect that private institutions feel that they need to make up the gap in public provision. I would not like us to be beholden to external or private organisations because our system is so impoverished; I would be very uncomfortable with that.

Councillor Dodds: Local music groups and bands could have a role. If organisations can offer tuition to young people, that is all to the good, but it does not get to the heart of the problem. I am not aware of any national institution that would be able to undertake that. It would be fraught with difficulties; it would not resolve the core problems.

Councillor Wilson: Like the man with the red flag in front of the train, we should proceed with great caution on some of those suggestions. Our minds have to be open to various models. We are discussing the issue at COSLA on Friday morning,

when we will deliberate on a number of issues. However, I am always cautious about the private sector.

The Convener: As we have no more questions, I thank Councillor Wilson, Councillor Dodds and Councillor Cunningham very much for giving us their time. The session has been helpful to the committee. We will continue with our inquiry on 5 December, when we will hear from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, which will conclude the formal inquiry sessions.

I remind members that, next week, we will hear evidence from Government statisticians on school census information and school staff.

11:22

Meeting continued in private until 11:45.

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