



Introduction



For many months now, the new Parental Involvement Act has been at the forefront of our minds. Research has shown time and again that parental involvement in children's education is vital if they are to do well in school and achieve more. The Parental Involvement Team are supporting parents in any way they can to encourage them to get involved.

Work has now begun on the Parental Involvement Strategy, which will lay out how we will support parents and take into account how we communicate, how we deal with complaints and how parents can contribute to the life of the school. We will consult widely on this strategy and parents are helping us to write it.

Work is ongoing in individual schools, most often led by parents themselves, supported by the headteacher and members of the Parental Involvement Team, to set up the new Parent Councils. Eight roadshows were held during October / November to introduce the Act. A member of the senior management team attended each roadshow and many parents showed enthusiasm at being given the opportunity to shape their own Parent Council. There were many questions asked at these roadshows. This edition of Partnership is the result and gives a summary of these questions and the answers to them.

Inside this issue:

Parental Involvement 2-6 Act - Frequently Asked Questions

Parental Involvement Roadshow - Frequently Asked Questions

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Any parents who were not at the roadshows but who would like to receive regular e-mail updates please contact

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A Parental Involvement page has been created on the Falkirk Council website -
www.falkirk.gov.uk - which outlines details of

the Act, has downloadable versions of all 12 'Making the Difference' leaflets, and has links to other useful websites such as ParentZone where the toolkit and guidance supporting the Act can be downloaded.

GENERAL

How will School Boards carry out their duties in the transition year?

As normal - School Boards should carry on with all their work during the transition period and up until 1 August 2007.

How do parents know about Parent Councils and that they are members of the Parents Forum?

We have included that information in 'In the Know' magazine which is delivered to all parents.

Also, most schools have given out 'Making the difference' leaflets and included the information in their own school newsletters. In addition, as well as the series of 8 'roadshows', Falkirk Council Education Services staff are attending many school based meetings which are open to all parents to tell them more about the Act and new Parent Councils. All parents will be consulted about the suggested constitution for their Parent Council.

What if School Board members do not want to be involved in the new Parent Council?

They don't have to! The Parent Council is new and is meant to be open and flexible to encourage parental involvement. Their hard work and involvement with the School Board is much appreciated and they may wish to continue to serve on the Parent Council but that is their decision.

Who takes the first step?

The local authority has already taken the first step in holding 8 Council-wide Roadshows to tell parent representatives about the new Act and the introduction of Parent Councils. We are also contacting schools and groups of parents to support them in any way we can. Parents in each school can take this forward with the help and support of the Headteacher and local authority. The duty lies with the local authority, including the Headteacher to promote this new Act. It is up to the parents, with support from the Headteacher, to make it happen.

Can we keep the system working the way it is at present?

Yes, until 31 July 2007. After that School Boards will no longer exist. All parents must decide what they want from their new Parent Council. This is a great opportunity to come up with something new and flexible.

INVOLVING ALL PARENTS

Have you any ideas about involving all parents?

The whole toolkit, which has been issued by the

Scottish Executive to all schools, School Boards and PTAs / PAs, in particular Section 2, contains ideas on involving all parents. You can contact Anne in the Parental Involvement Team (tel. no. 01324 503810) for more ideas and opportunities. It may also be helpful to share your ideas with other parents at meetings and through Education Services Partnership Magazine.

What happens if we can't set up a Parents Council because there is not enough interest?

The local authority will keep promoting the establishment of a Parent Council even if there is no interest initially. Every parent wants what is best for their child but might find it difficult being involved. The toolkit can help you explore the reasons why parents are not involved and try to change that.

What do I have to do to ensure that it is not just the same parents who turn up?

Have you asked other parents? Many people will respond if they feel they are being invited personally. Some parents may not be able to commit to attending regular meetings due, for example, to work or family reasons, but may be able to help on a one-off basis. The less formal processes may make involvement in the Parents' Councils more appealing.

NEW PARENT COUNCILS

How is Falkirk Council going to engage with a whole range of different styles and formats of Parent Councils?

We will keep a database showing how all the different Parent Councils are set up and who is the chair, vice-chair, treasurer and clerk (if they have these office bearers). We also get copies of the constitutions (legal requirement) and minutes (if meetings are minuted).

Can we ask all the parents to come to a meeting to set up a working party?

Yes. This is one of the recommendations in the guidance. If you need help in facilitating these meetings ask your headteacher or the Parent

Involvement team.

Will the School Improvement Plan still be an important part of the Parent Council agenda?

Yes. This is an important part of the planning for the school so headteachers will still want to discuss this with the Parent Council.

If the Parent Council does not have an election process - what will happen?

It is advisable to have some form of election process for the post holders and a way of keeping track of who is a member of the Parent Council. The election process could simply be pulling names from a hat - this is something that the parents at each school can decide for themselves.

Does the consultation process currently being carried out with respect to the appointment of senior staff mean that Parent Councils will not be represented at senior staff interviews?

No. Parent Councils will be represented in the senior staff selection process and they are likely to be even more involved than before. Consultation is ongoing.

Will Parent Councils be given guidelines and training on the appointments of senior staff?

Yes.

Can schools set up collective links to share their ideas on setting up a Parent Council in their school?

Yes. It is a very good idea to contact other schools and share ideas with them.

Once we have our Parents' Council can the meetings be the same as the School Board ones? Do they have to be informal?

This is a decision to be made by the Parent Forum at each school. Many parents would welcome less formal meetings and settings which many find off-putting. The Working Party which will be set up in each school to discuss the new Parent Council can make some suggestions about how and where the meetings should be held. The

Parent Forum will choose the option they want for their school.

Do you think there is enough time? What happens if we don't have a Parents Council set up by the 1st of August 2007?

Take your time. Not all schools will meet the deadline but as long as they are moving through the process of setting up a Parent Council that is fine.

WORKING PARTY TO SET UP PARENT COUNCIL

How can the working party meetings be run?

The chair of the School Board or PTA, the headteacher, or one of the Parental Involvement Team can help to facilitate discussions. There are also community support workers who can help with this. Contact the Parental Involvement Team if you need any help.

How soon can we start this process?

You can start now! The discussions and consultations on the new Parent Councils will take a few months but the more discussion at this stage will mean that more and better options are identified for each individual school.

Will the headteacher be involved in the consultation process?

Yes. The headteacher is the principal professional adviser and should be involved.

Is there anything the local authority can do to support teachers who want to attend these meetings?

Teachers can attend meetings on a voluntary basis. Teachers can also volunteer to be co-opted members of the Parent Council in the same way as with School Boards.

Does a School Board have to take this new Act forward?

No, but many are helping with the process. The PTA, headteacher or other parents may also take a lead.

Can we have copies of the guidance notes and

toolkit for each School Board member?

You can download these from the Parentzone website - www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk. The toolkits are costly to produce so you are encouraged to share copies and/or view online.

How do we take this forward as quickly as possible? Should we wait until new intake of parents in August?

You may want to wait for the election/selection of members until August / September but discussions on how the group will look/constitutions can be done now.

How will we get information to present to the Parents Forum e.g. leaflets, presentations, questionnaires?

Ask us! If you need help in copying or distributing leaflets or letters we will do our best to sort this out for you.

How many parents should be on the working party for the Parent Council?

It is up to you. A suggestion is that one third of the working party membership could come from the School Board, one third from the Parent Association and one third could be parents not currently involved. Getting representation across a range from Nursery, P1 - P7, S1 - S6 is also a good idea.

What if we don't set up a working party - will the local authority have to step in and do it?

We will help schools in any way we can but decisions must be made by parents themselves. We can offer ideas and help run meetings but parents must be involved. Parent may also decide to ask someone outwith the local authority to help them through this process.

CONSTITUTIONS

Will Parent Council duties be detailed in the constitution? What will the new parent council actually do?

There are four main areas highlighted in the act as duties of the new Parent Council as follows -

- Supporting the school in its work with pupils
- Representing the views of parents
- Promoting contact between the school, parents, pupils, providers of nursery education and the community
- Reporting to the Parent Forum

Will they be able to make recommendations about the school to the headteacher / local authority?

Yes. They will represent the interests and opinions of parents at that school when decisions are to be made by the headteacher or local authority about that school. They can expect to influence decisions, to be listened to and taken seriously.

Does the Act give some advice on the minimum / maximum number of members for the composition of a Parents' Council?

This is not prescribed - it can be as large or small as parents think it needs to be in order to fulfil the Parent Council role. The size may vary according to the size and nature of the school.

Is it ok to choose members of a Parent Council by pulling names out of a hat?

Yes. Overly formal elections may put people off.

Why do we have to give the constitution to the local authority?

We need to know what is in it so we can support you (and it is the law!)

Will the local authority send the constitution to each parent?

Yes. Each parent will be consulted on its contents before it is finalised. They can have a finalised copy if they wish from the school or the local authority.

Will consultation letters go to each adult in a household and absent parents?

When the local authority sends out consultations on the possible Parent Council we will send the information to each household and parents who

live with their children according to the information provided by the school database.

Is Falkirk Council going to devise pro-forma constitutions?

No. There is an outline constitution in section 8 of the toolkit which gives sample wording and focuses on issues to be decided. Every Parent Council needs to have a constitution that is right for them and not 'one size fits all'.

What set periods are there for post holders?

You can set these yourself. It may be best if post holders serve for at least 2 years so the Parent Council does not have to start from scratch every year.

How should Parent Council's deal with sensitive issues?

Parent Council meetings are generally open meetings but, where something confidential or a named individual is being discussed, the chair can call a meeting of Parent Council members only to discuss that issue.

Can we appoint co-opted / community members who do not have children at the school?

Yes. You can allow for co-opted/community/staff members in your constitutions.

Can we still invite local members?

Yes. Parent Councils can issue a standing invite to local members and this is good way to link with the community.

What will happen to the teacher reps?

If you want teacher reps on your Parent Council, this should be written into the constitution.

Can nursery parents be on the Parent Council for the Primary School and Primary parents be on the Council at the Secondary school?

Yes. You can allow for this in your constitution and it will help transition of pupils and parents.

Will minutes still be required?

The Act does not say the Parent Council must take minutes. However they are very valuable to

the local authority in supporting the Parent Council and helping to address any issues they may have. They also provide you with a record of meetings and detail the important decisions made.

Does the chair have to be a parent?

Yes. However, the definition of a parent is 'a person with parental responsibility for a child' - this may be a grandparent or foster carer etc.

Does our Parent Council have to have a church representative?

Only, if your Parent Council represents a denominational school. Other schools can choose whether they wish to have a church representative.

Can we change the constitution if there is something we don't like?

Yes. It can be changed whenever you want as long as the Parent Forum is consulted. It could be automatically reviewed every 2 years for example.

FINANCE

What funding will the new Parent Councils have?

They will get the same funding the same way as School Boards.

How do Working Parties access funding to send out all the literature, letters etc?

They simply contact one of the Parental Involvement Team (**Beverley Ferguson, Anne Stewart or Diane Cherry**) and ask for what they need. There is a limited budget but we will help Working Parties and shadow Parent Councils as much as we can.

What happens to the School Board funds and bank accounts? Can we keep the same account and just change the name?

School Boards will be responsible for submitting accounts up to 31 July 2007, thereafter the Parent Council will assume responsibility for this. Some banks, on completion of an appropriate

mandate may simply change the name on the bank account from the School Board to the Parent Council, once it has been established. Other banks may ask that a new account be opened and the old account closed.

Who pays for Disclosure checks?

Currently Education Services pays for PTA/PA Disclosures and this will continue for Parent Council members.

How feasible would it be for the local authority to pay for a crèche at whole school meetings to set up a Working Party these meetings?

The local authority will pay for this as it is a legitimate expense to ensure all parents can attend these meetings.

Is there funding available to finance the clerk of a working party or shadow parents council?

Yes, if this is required. The majority of Parent Councils will not have their first meeting until after they are legally set up in August 2007 but clerk fees for any meetings prior to that can be paid by the local authority.

Does the parent elected as treasurer have to prove they are of sound financial standing i.e. not bankrupt?

It is up to the Parent Council to elect the Treasurer, as being a person they think appropriate to carry out the task. To protect Parent Councils all fund withdrawals (e.g. cheques) should require the signature of two of the elected office bearers.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

What will be in the strategy that the local authority is doing?

The strategy will contain information such as, how we consult and communicate with parents, how we involve parents taking account of equal opportunities, etc. The strategy can only be finalised when the Parent Councils are set up so we can consult with them on its contents.

OTHER COMMENTS

Why do I get the feeling that everyone is sceptical that it isn't going to work?

The Parent Council will not be of interest to every parent and some parents simply do not have the time for this type of formal representation. There are other ways for parents to get involved in their child's learning that may suit them better. However, this new law is more flexible and should make it easier for all parents to get involved in the way they prefer.

A Parental Involvement page has been created on the Falkirk Council website - www.falkirk.gov.uk - which outlines details of the Act, has downloadable versions of all 12 'Making the Difference' leaflets, and has links to other useful websites such as ParentZone where the toolkit and guidance supporting the Act can be downloaded.

The Making the Difference leaflets (also available in community languages) that have been issued by the Scottish Executive are -

A new law to support parents
Enterprise in Education
Getting involved in your child's school
Healthy choices
Homework
New technology in learning
Out of school learning
Parents' evenings
Personal learning planning
School holidays
Sharing information
Starting a new school year