



Agenda Item 6

**Report of the Scrutiny
Panel – Pupil Equity Fund**

Falkirk Council

Title: Report of the Scrutiny Panel – Pupil Equity Fund
Meeting: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 28 January 2021
Submitted by: Director of Corporate and Housing Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the report by the Scrutiny Panel – Pupil Equity Funding and to invite committee to consider the panel’s recommendations.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The committee is asked to:-
- 1) consider the report on the Scrutiny Panel review of Pupil Equity Funding; and
 - 2) request an update report, in late 2022, on the arrangements and also on the outcomes of PEF in closing the attainment gap in Falkirk Schools.

3. Background

- 3.1 Council agreed its Scrutiny Plan for 2020 on 4 December 2019. Council agreed that the first area for review would be the management of Pupil Equity Fund. A scrutiny panel was established on 30 January 2020. The panel membership was Councillors Blackwood, Flynn and Garner.
- 3.2 At the first meeting of the Panel on 27 February 2020 Councillor Flynn was appointed convener. The panel also agreed the scope of its work at this meeting - *Review the Council’s systems and processes which had been established to monitor and support schools’ use of PEF.*
- 3.3 The panel did not meet next until September 2020 due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.4 The panel met on 22 September and 8 October to continue its review. The Panel’s report is appended for consideration.

4. Considerations

- 4.1 The conclusions of the panel are set out below. There are no recommendations in regard to the arrangements put in place by Children's Services to support schools and to monitor the outcomes. However the panel did consider that it would be worthwhile for an update report to be submitted to the committee at the end of the 21/22 school year. This would allow the Service time to reflect on learning from the Covid-19 pandemic. The report should also include an analysis of the outcomes of PEF.
- 4.2 The Scrutiny Panel concluded, following its review of the Council's systems and processes to monitor and support schools' use of Pupil Equity Funding, that there are robust mechanisms in place to both support schools use of PEF and to monitor the outcomes to ensure that schools were able to use the funding in the most effective and efficient manner. The panel commended the positive approach taken by Children's Services to support individual schools. The panel was particularly impressed with the monitoring arrangements which had been developed to provide robust oversight of the use of PEF.

The panel recognised the link between free school meals and clothing grant entitlement and the level of funding available to individual schools and urged Children's Services to continue to promote eligibility to parents and carers, welcoming the proactive initiatives employed by the Service to inform parents of their rights. This, the panel considered, would not only be beneficial in regard to the PEF available but more broadly would support the Council's poverty agenda.

Being satisfied with the processes in place to monitor and support schools' use of PEF the Panel recognised that the landscape may change as a consequence of the impacts of Covid-19 and recommends that Committee notes its report and asks the Director of Children's Services to provide an update report on the arrangements and also on the outcomes of PEF in closing the attainment gap in Falkirk Schools, in late 2022.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The panel consulted with stakeholders as part of its review. The panel's report has not been the subject of consultation.

6. Implications

Financial

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Resources

6.2 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

Legal

6.3 No legal implications are envisaged.

Risk

6.4 None.

Equalities

6.5 No equality and poverty impact assessment was required.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

6.6 No sustainability assessment was required as part of compiling this report and the main findings.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The panel has now completed its review of the oversight arrangements for Pupil Equity Funding and has made its recommendations to the committee.

Director of Corporate and Housing Services

Author – Brian Pirie – Democratic Services Manager –tel 01324 506110
brian.pirie@falkirk.gov.uk

Date: 18 January 2021

Appendices:

1. Report by the Scrutiny Panel

List of Background Papers: None

Pupil Equity Funding Policy Review
Final Report
Scrutiny Panel
January 2021

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the recommendations of the scrutiny panel on Pupil Equity Funding (PEF).

2 Background

- 2.1 The First Minister launched the Scottish Attainment Challenge in February 2015. The challenge had been introduced to focus on and accelerate targeted improvement activity in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The Scottish Attainment Challenge is about achieving equity in education. This can be achieved by ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed, with a particular focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap.
- 2.2 The Scottish Attainment Challenge is underpinned by The National Improvement Framework, Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child. It focuses on improvement activity in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in specific areas of Scotland. It will also support and complement the broader range of initiatives and programmes to ensure that all of Scotland's children and young people reach their full potential.
- 2.3 The £750 million Attainment Scotland Fund is a targeted initiative focused on supporting pupils in the local authorities of Scotland with the highest concentrations of deprivation.
- 2.4 The Pupil Equity Funding was provided as part of this £750 million Attainment Scotland Fund which was invested over the current parliamentary term (2016 to 2021).
- 2.5 Council agreed in December 2019 that its scrutiny workplan would include a scrutiny review of PEF. The panel was established in January 2020 but after an initial meeting in February its workplan was postponed due to the Covid pandemic.
- 2.6 The Panel that undertook the review consisted of:
- Cllr J Blackwood
 - Cllr J Flynn (Convener)
 - Cllr P Garner
- 2.7 At its initial scoping meeting, on 27 February 2020, the panel agreed that the scope of its work would be to:-

Review the Council's systems and processes which had been established to monitor and support schools' use of PEF.

- 2.8 The panel was supported in its work by David Mackay, Head of Education, Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager and Stuart Irwin, Democratic Services Graduate.
- 2.9 The panel subsequently met twice, on 22 September 2020 and 8 October 2020 and heard evidence on the following
- Meeting One – Introduction to Pupil Equity Funding
 - Meeting Two – Case Studies of Good Practice in Falkirk
- 2.10 There was no opportunity to hear direct evidence from the Scottish Government or from other local authorities. However the panel did hear evidence on the procedures adopted by a number of other Local Authorities.

3 Scrutiny Panel Recommendations

- 3.1 The panel heard evidence from Mr Mackay on the Council's oversight and support arrangements over the course of its review. Having considered the information presented and having satisfied itself through rigorous questioning the panel agreed to make the following recommendation to committee:

The Scrutiny Panel concluded, following its review of the Council's systems and processes to monitor and support schools' use of Pupil Equity Funding, that there are robust mechanisms in place to both support schools use of PEF and to monitor the outcomes to ensure that schools were able to use the funding in the most effective and efficient manner. The panel commended the positive, approach taken by Children's Services to support individual schools. The panel was particularly impressed with the monitoring arrangements which had been developed to provide robust oversight of the use of PEF.

The panel recognised the link between free school meal and clothing grant entitlement and the level of funding available to individual schools and urged Children's Services to continue to promote eligibility to parents and carers, welcoming the proactive initiatives employed by the Service to inform parents of their rights. This the panel considered would not only be beneficial in regard to the PEF available but more broadly would support the Council's poverty agenda.

Being satisfied with the processes in place to monitor and support schools' use of PEF the Panel recognised that the landscape may change as a consequence of the impacts of Covid-19 and recommends that Committee notes its report and asks the Director of Children's Services to provide an update report on the arrangements and also on the outcomes of PEF inclosing the attainment gap in Falkirk Schools, in late 2022.

4 Meeting One – Introduction to Pupil Equity Funding

- 4.1 The Panel was given an overview of the purpose of PEF, how it operates, and the relationship between the Council and schools in its rollout and monitoring.
- 4.2 Background: The First Minister launched the Scottish Attainment Challenge in February 2015. The challenge had been introduced to focus on and accelerate targeted improvement activity in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.
- 4.3 PEF was allocated based on the numbers of children and young people from P1 to S3 in each primary, secondary, and additional support needs school in Scotland who are registered for free school meals (FSM) under national eligibility criteria. However, the funding was not simply targeted at those on FSM. The direct link between the level of funding received by Councils and those children registered for free school meals highlighted the importance of ensuring that the Council promoted eligibility to parents and carers. Mr Mackay explained in detail the means by which Children's Services reached out to parents and carers to ensure that those who are eligible are able to apply are aware and encouraged to do so.
- 4.4 The funding was placed directly under the control of headteachers. The Council, however, continued to have overall accountability for attainment, achievement and progress of our children and young people.
- 4.5 Local Authority – continuums of control: In the early days of its rollout, the management of PEF across the country could be best understood on a spectrum: from headteachers having full, unregulated control versus local authorities setting out a rigid criteria and having centralised control over any and all PEF spend.
- 4.6 Some Councils, for example, allowed schools to spend money and initiate projects as soon as the money had been made available in February 2015. In contrast, some Councils wanted full control and to dictate the strategic direction and main areas of work that they thought schools should be focusing on (in the latter case, such Councils fell afoul of the Scottish Govt as the money was supposed to be school-led).
- 4.7 In Falkirk, the Service sought to introduce a model that was somewhere in the middle: whilst headteachers were in control of how money was spent, the Council sought to give them support in ensuring that clear and comprehensive processes and controls were in place. Overall scrutiny for schools lay with Children's Services. Furthermore, whilst PEF was supposed to be bureaucracy-light, officers were also aware that Audit Scotland would ultimately want to know how the £3.5m funding per year was spent.
- 4.8 As such, systems in place were to support headteachers and schools to account for, and report on, its activities. Officers developed a process of

contextual analysis for schools to complete before the money was released and they could start spending.

4.9 Contextual analysis: Schools were asked to complete a contextual analysis, which involved the following:

- Rather than rushing to spend the money (in the past, in some cases there had been a temptation to buy 'stuff' – e.g. new shiny programmes, IT, whiteboards etc.), they should take time to understand the needs of their pupils and the wider school community.
- Ultimately the outcome of the analysis could have been the same – i.e. that they needed to purchase equipment, which was perfectly fine; but first there needed to be a clear evidence trail about the decision-making process that led schools to decide what was needed, and how the money should be spent.
- Robust self-evaluation – hard data, stats, test results, scores, soft data, knowledge of children, families, communities, where vulnerable and barriers that arose to prevent them from attaining in that environment.
- Identifying the characteristics and needs of a target group of children or young people with whom you want to close the gap.
- Setting a baseline and being clear about how they were are going to measure progress in addressing the attainment gap.

4.10 Where does the contextual analysis sit in the overall process?

- What was the presenting issue (the contextual analysis – pulling together a picture of the school and its learning environment?) How do we accurately identify the needs of pupils (and their families?)
- What actions did the school intend to take (improvement planning?) In short, now schools had completed some research and looked at the data, what did they do next? It's important to highlight that some of the solutions would not cost money, and that was ok. If schools had an idea for improving attainment, put it down on paper and test it out. This tied into a broader point about changing the mindset that funding needs to be spent buying resources. For example, schools could decide to recruit additional staff to run a project or deliver extra/specialised training. How do you build increased capacity, and empower teachers in their learning environments?
- How do you work collaboratively with partners in the community to create packages of support?
- What's the impact of the funding (ongoing evaluation and standards & quality reporting)?
- How much has been spent (the audit trail)?

- 4.11 It was pointed out that PEF should be seen in the long term. In short, nurseries and primary schools were laying the foundation stones for secondary years. The work of the former would be harvested down the line.
- 4.12 Schools did not start to spend the funding until August 2015, approximately 6 months after the funding was available. At the time there was some resistance/frustration from headteachers, but officers were keen that schools took time to plan and carefully consider how the money would be spent. Interestingly, in retrospect many headteachers agreed that this was the right thing to do. In some instances, those local authorities that allowed schools to spend from day one later had to recalibrate and readjust when things went wrong.

Range of funding available:

Primary schools (year 1): £6,000–13,6000
Secondary schools (year 1): £54,000–152,000

- 4.13 Strategic oversight: The Council had created several processes and means by which to ensure strategic oversight in how PEF was managed and spent:
- 4.14 PEF guidance was issued annually.
- 4.15 The PEF Steering Group met each term, with representatives from HR, Finance, Procurement, Senior officers, headteachers and third sector orgs. This steering group had high level oversight of activities and had informed conversations on how PEF was being spent at school, cluster and Council level. They tracked and monitored spend across the year and provided strategic advice and support where required.
- 4.16 Headteacher events to share best practice – now held virtually. Also engaging with the Regional Improvement Collaborative. It was important to remember that every school, every class, and every child had a different attainment gap, so such forums supported schools to focus in on their own needs.
- 4.17 PEF mini conferences for colleagues – incl. events and roundtables to engage with colleagues; leading academics and educational innovators come along to support and develop thinking.
- 4.18 Case studies shared to promote best practice - strong evidence of gaps being closed.
- 4.19 PEF thematic review – before Christmas quality improvement officers had spent the day in 20 schools where they undertook a deep dive into their arrangements. This included looking at the data, contextual analysis, financial information, and resources. What did the schools think? What did they want to achieve through PEF? How successful had they been? This approach allowed for bespoke conversations with individual schools. Broadly schools were in the good to very good bracket in terms of spending PEF. Significantly,

additional support had been provided to schools that were less confident in their ability to engage with data and direct resources.

- 4.20 Schools provided annual reports to the Council, with a section focusing on PEF. In turn, the Council reported annually on its Standards and Quality Report.

5 Meeting Two – Case studies: reviewing examples of good practice from across Falkirk Council

- 5.1 The panel heard again from Mr Mackay who provided a number of examples of good practice.
- 5.2 Grangemouth High School was given £69,600 in 2019. Through a contextual analysis, the school landed on a number of projects, which included:
- Targeting literacy and numeracy and wider engagement.
 - Removing funding requests to parents and carers for delivery of all subjects across the curriculum, such as in Home Economics.
- 5.3 The school has recorded a significant increase in its tracked attainment and attendance rates. Moreover, its exclusion rate is one of the lowest in Falkirk; in the last two years no pupil has been excluded.
- 5.4 Bantaskin Primary School has explored different approaches to learning and teaching the more hard to reach children and families.
- 5.5 The Kitchen Project, for example, allows pupils to use a kitchen classroom and participate in a variety of activities which they help to plan in discussions with their class teacher. This has included family cooking groups and enterprise projects led by pupils, working with a variety of partners (incl. RHET, Torwood Garden Centre and Quality Meat Scotland) to enhance learning experiences.
- 5.6 The Kitchen Project has allowed pupils to develop their skills, improve communication and build relationships. Moreover, it has proven hugely successful in encouraging families to engage with schooling at a higher level than they have done so before. Much of the data is softer and harder to measure, but there is evidence of an improvement in social skills, relationship-building with families and supporting pupils in their transition to high schools.
- 5.7 Family Liaison Officers - Across Year three 24 schools have used part of their funding to create Family Liaison Posts either purchased through organisations such as Barnardo's or created posts within their school.
- 5.8 Family Liaison Officers play a vital role in bridging the gap between the school and families. The pastoral role played by these officers impacts on the health and wellbeing of pupils, with improved attendance.

- 5.9 The total cost for this is £371,394, which is 10% of the overall PEF Falkirk budget.
- 5.10 This intervention has increased throughout the three years of PEF, from schools sharing the success and the impact it is making to children and families. Schools have commented that this is one of the areas they would prioritise as a sustainable intervention if PEF does not continue.
- 5.11 Beancross Nursery has used funding to bring in an expert to support babies in their development and focused on speech and language therapy.
- 5.12 Carrongrange High School – In what was a major change to curriculum provision at the school, a ‘hub’ approach was developed, leading to individual learning pathways for pupils in S1 and S2 with the most complex needs. Subject specialists worked with small groups of pupils in an interdisciplinary manner and then a commissioned piece of work looked at developing increased access to wider subject areas for pupils with the most complex needs. The collected data shows a reduction in number of behavioural incidents for those who are benefitting from a sensory curriculum that is better suited to their individual needs.

6 Final Recommendations

- 6.1 The Panel was satisfied with the processes in place to monitor and support schools’ use of PEF. It recognised that the landscape may change as a consequence of the impacts of Covid-19 and recommends that Committee notes its report and asks the Director of Children’s Services to provide an update report on the arrangements and also on the outcomes of PEF inclosing the attainment gap in Falkirk Schools, in late 2022.

Cllr Jim Flynn, Convener of the Scrutiny Panel on Pupil Equity Funding