Local Authorities—

- What are your views on the issues raised in the petition and the Committee’s subsequent discussion?

The aspiration is not contentious and reflects the aspiration of East Renfrewshire Council. As well as this, the Act albeit implicit, compels education authorities to ensure that those providing support to children and young people are equipped and able to do so.

The issue raised in the petition call for all school staff to be ‘fully trained’ and whilst this is our aim in practice this can be challenging to achieve. Also it is difficult to evidence this at any given point in time due to the transient nature of some staff, particularly support staff, and due to the increasingly changing landscape of ASN. We believe that education authorities should augment the initial work done by universities through initial training programmes; however, there may be some improvement needed in this area.

Given the inevitable variability across schools and importantly in the needs of the children and young people in the school, it is important that training is localised. There would be important disadvantages too, for example, one organisation offering general training to a number of education authorities/schools. The authority continues to support members of its staff to achieve high level qualifications in aspects of support for learning with the understanding that they use this expertise for the benefit of other staff in their own establishment and across the authority.

In East Renfrewshire, there has been a concerted effort made to raise awareness among the teaching and support staff of learning disabilities such as autistic spectrum disorders and there is good evidence to indicate that such approaches have improved the extent to which children and young people are included fully in our schools. There are limitations however to the impact of continual centralised courses and for this reason East Renfrewshire has a tradition in supporting staff more fully in a range of ways. Recently, our Education Psychological Service has promoted the notion of coaching in context in order to support staff in situ, during the learning and teaching process. This is an important development and one which we are keen to pursue.

In mounting a petition of this kind there is an assumption that training of this nature has not been and is not currently a focus for the work of education authorities. In fact, the issue of training staff is one which has dominated the work of education officers in East Renfrewshire and consequently a number of improvements have been made in this area.
This petition seems to single out training for staff on autistic spectrum disorders. Again with the publication of the Scottish Strategy for Autism, education authorities, together with partners, are compelled to offer training to staff; it is questionable as to what this petition will add.

- Does your local authority provide continuous professional development (CPD) for teaching staff in additional support needs? If not, what are the reasons for this and are there any plans to look at this again?

  Yes. We deliver a catalogue of CPD available centrally and bespoke particular input for individual schools as requested. Each is delivered by the Quality Improvement Service or Education Psychological Service or a combination of both.

- What support or training does your authority provide to non-teaching staff (for example, janitors, caretakers or catering staff) to help them deal with pupils who have additional support needs?

  In East Renfrewshire there is a comprehensive CPD programme for Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs). This programme is delivered centrally by education officers.

  Schools, in knowing the needs of their children and young people, ensure that non-teaching staff are included in any training opportunities which may be appropriate.

  As intimated earlier, this issue of training for teaching and non-teaching staff continues to dominate the work of this education authority. There is currently a CPD steering group that is considering all aspects of training for inclusion.