



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 4 June 2014
Lanyon Building, Queens University Belfast

Present:

Mervyn Storey MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Jonathan Craig MLA
Jo-Anne Dobson MLA
Chris Hazzard MLA
Seán Rogers MLA
Pat Sheehan MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Paula Best (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Nathan McVeigh (Clerical Supervisor)
Alicia Muldoon (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

Trevor Lunn MLA
Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Stephen Moutray MLA
Robin Newton MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 9.33am.

1. Apologies:

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 School Leaver Qualifications

The Committee noted the publication of the statistical press release on Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers 2012-13.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask that as part of the next update on the Programme for Government, officials provide comparisons with other parts of the UK in regard to school leaver attainment and destinations.

2.2 Irish Medium Post-Primary Group Report

The Chairperson reminded Members that during Topical Questions, the Minister of Education made reference to the report of the Irish Medium Post-Primary Group and a possible related statement in the autumn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of the Irish Medium Post-Primary Group report.

2.3 Teachers' Pay

The Committee noted that the business case for the teachers' pay increase (1% to be applied from September 2013) had not yet been approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel and that therefore back-dated payments would not be made to teachers in June.

2.4 Seagoe Primary School

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting an update on the reported proposed change of designation of Seagoe Primary School. The Committee further agreed to seek information on the relevant legal advice obtained by the Department and clarity as to the implications for schools designated as 'Other Maintained'.

2.5 Teachers' Voluntary Redundancy Arrangements 2014-15

Agreed: In response to reported delays, the Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on arrangements for voluntary redundancy for teachers in 2014-15.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting of 28 May 2014.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Development Proposal Guidance – Departmental Briefing

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 9.39am.

Diarmuid McLean, Director of Area Planning, Department of Education; and Lorraine Finlay, Head of Area Planning Policy, Department of Education briefed the Committee on Development Proposal Guidance.

The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the announcement of the closure of Ballee High School.

The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Clintyclay Primary School.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

9.49am Jo-Anne Dobson joined the meeting.

10.22am Chris Hazzard joined the meeting.

10.28am Pat Sheehan left the meeting.

Departmental officials left the meeting at 10.28am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking sight of the draft revised Development Proposal Guidance prior to its adoption.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department to express its concerns in respect of the Development Proposal (DP) process highlighting particularly:

- the need for clarity and better explanation of the stages of the DP process;
- the need for clarity in respect of the use of multiple rather than single school proposals;
- the inadequacy of the consultation timeframe for controversial DPs;
- the lack of consistency in respect of the application of transition periods for the implementation of DPs by Managing Authorities;
- the need for proper exploration of options and therefore for a robust Area Planning process before DPs are submitted;
- the need for the DP process to properly consider the views of pupils; and
- the absence of acknowledgement of the importance of parental engagement in the DP process.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed to write to the Department in order to seek:

- details on the timescales for the processing of DPs;
- information on the number of DPs processed/pending; and
- an updated list of DPs.

6. Capital/School Enhancement Programme – Departmental Briefing

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10.30am.

10.30am Pat Sheehan returned to the meeting.

Philip Irwin, Director of Investment and Infrastructure, Department of Education;
Stephen Creagh, Deputy Director of Investment and Infrastructure, Department of

Education; and Anne Conaty, Head of Major Capital Implementation Team, Department of Education briefed the Committee on the Capital/School Enhancement Programme.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

10.46am The Chairperson left the meeting and the Deputy Chairperson assumed the chair.

10.49am Jo-Anne Dobson left the meeting.

10.54am Sean Rogers left the meeting. The Committee consequently lost its decision-making quorum but, under the provisions of Standing Order 49(5), continued to hear evidence.

10.55am Jo-Anne Dobson and Sean Rogers returned to the meeting and the Committee regained its decision-making quorum.

The witnesses left the meeting at 10.58am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek further information in respect of:

- the timescales for the Major Capital Works and School Enhancement Programmes;
- the 50/50 (pupil numbers and floor space) allocation method for Minor Works; and
- a reference in the briefing paper to “NICIE income of £642k for DE which had no associated spending power”.

7. Correspondence

7.1 The Committee noted correspondence from Translink indicating that seatbelts are fitted to 94% of the Ulster Bus fleet - described as primarily used for school transport - and 64% of other buses.

7.2 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent relating to poor home tuition provision for an individual child with special needs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the policy in respect of home tuition support for children with special needs.

7.3 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the Common Funding Scheme – Final Allocations 2014/15. Members noted that the Department had again declined to provide the necessary information to allow the Committee to determine how the additional £15.8m was allocated to individual schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department again seeking an explanation as to how it allocated the additional money - £13m to primary schools and £2.8m to post-primary schools – to individual schools.

7.4 The Committee noted two responses from the Department of Education and responses from the Belfast Education and Library Board and the Western Education and Library Board in respect of services relating to Visually Impaired school children and school children suffering from vision stress.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this correspondence pending further responses.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed that the Clerk should produce a position paper regarding Visual Impairment and vision stress issues for school children for consideration in the next Assembly session.

7.5 The Committee noted correspondence from St. Mary's University College, Belfast thanking the Chairperson for attending a SEN student conference on 14 May 2014.

7.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the exclusion of Drumragh Integrated College from the Lisanelly Campus.

7.7 The Committee noted the Minister of Education's response to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's consultation on the availability of asthma inhalers in schools.

7.8 The Committee noted an invitation for Members to attend the SciFest and Big Bang Event in the North West on Friday 6 June 2014, in St Mary's College, Creggan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for Maeve McLaughlin to attend this event on behalf of the Committee.

7.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel enclosing a briefing paper on the Main Estimates and Budget No 2 Bill 2014.

7.10 The Committee noted responses from the Department of Education regarding funded Early Years places and an extract from a Children and Young Persons' Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking:

- an explanation of the CYPSP figures which seemed to show a reduction in parental engagement with funded Early Years provision;
- an explanation as to whether patterns of attendance are indeed to be standardised as part of wider Area Planning considerations and the consequent implications for the Area Planning of Early Years provision; and
- an estimate of the cost per pupil of Early Years provision in each District Council area.

7.11 The Committee noted an invitation from CBI requesting a meeting with the Chairperson to discuss its report entitled 'First Steps'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of this invitation until 11 June 2014.

7.12 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education regarding St Mary's High School, Brollagh and a cross-border education survey.

7.13 The Committee noted correspondence from PlayBoard NI regarding their 'Let us Play' campaign.

7.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the European Atlantic Movement.

7.15 The Committee noted correspondence from PTA-NI regarding the PTA-NI Gold Awards 2014.

7.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister highlighting proposed funding cuts for 2015-16 for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

7.17 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure enclosing the Tapestry of Colours Education Brochure.

7.18 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the Underachievement – Taking Boys Seriously Report.

8. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme.

The Committee noted a request from the Fermanagh Trust to formally brief Members regarding Shared Education on 18 June 2014.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add a formal briefing from the Fermanagh Trusts to its agenda for 18 June 2014.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme as amended.

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 11 June 2014 at 9.30am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.04am.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
11 June 2014