



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2015
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)
Sandra Overend MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Jonathan Craig MLA
Danny Kennedy MLA
Trevor Lunn MLA
Nelson McCausland MLA
Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Robin Newton MLA
Seán Rogers MLA
Pat Sheehan MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Paul Stitt (Assistant Clerk)
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)
Alicia Muldoon (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

Chris Hazzard MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:01am.

1. Apologies

Apologies are as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 OECD Review of Public Sector Reform

The Chairperson advised Members that as part of the strategic review of public sector reform in Northern Ireland, it is understood that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) had undertaken a case study on improving educational outcomes for Looked After Children.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance and Personnel seeking the Terms of Reference for the case study and the timescale for reporting.

2.2 Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill

The Chairperson advised Members that the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill is to be introduced to the Assembly on 30 November 2015 and that oral evidence-taking for the Committee Stage will take place in January 2016.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 18 November 2015.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Future of the Youth Council: Consultation Feedback – Departmental briefing

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10:03am.

Linda Wilson, Director of Families and Communities, Department of Education; and Brenda Shearer, Head of Youth and Schools in the Community, Department of Education briefed on the consultation feedback on the future of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI).

The Committee noted a tabled briefing paper from the Department.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

Maeve McLaughlin joined the meeting at 10:09am

Nelson McCausland joined the meeting at 10:14am

Danny Kennedy joined the meeting at 10:38am

Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 11:00am

The officials left the meeting at 11:24am

The Committee recorded its appreciation of excellent and efficiently delivered youth services throughout Northern Ireland, very often provided by volunteers and voluntary organisations.

Members expressed concerns that the dissolution of YCNI may lead to the undermining of local youth sector infrastructure and front-line youth services which are vital in supporting provision and the current high level of leveraged funding secured by voluntary youth organisations.

The Committee noted with concern that the consultation provided a very limited number of options for consideration – none of which were accompanied by a cost-benefit analysis.

Agreed: The Committee noted with disappointment that unlike previous Departmental consultations, full details of responses had not been provided to the Committee and agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of the detailed summary of responses, at its earliest convenience.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking: information on the ongoing review of youth service funding mechanisms; a breakdown of the administrative and other costs associated with the current operation of YCNI; clarity on the expected savings and improved efficiency associated with the proposed transfer of functions from YCNI to the Education Authority; and details of the analysis of the impact on outcomes of the dissolution of YCNI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it did not accept the Department's justification for the dissolution of the YCNI on the basis of excessive administrative costs compared to limited funds distributed. The Committee therefore unanimously agreed that it could not support the proposed dissolution of YCNI. Some Members also indicated that they would likely oppose the passage of any related primary legislation. The Committee further agreed that reform and cost-savings in the youth sector should be pursued and that the Department should rethink its position and bring forward enhanced proposals which better reflect the needs and utilise the strengths of youth organisations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond to the Department as indicated above and issue a related press release – the content of both to be agreed by email.

6. Shared Education Bill – Committee Stage - Background Information – written briefing

The Committee noted a written briefing including background information on the Shared Education Bill.

The Committee noted that all responses received to the Committee's Call for Evidence on the Shared Education Bill had been uploaded and were available to view on their SkydrivePro account.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that all submissions could be shared with the Department of Education and published on the Committee's webpage.

Committee proceedings were suspended at 11:29am

Committee proceedings resumed at 11:40am with the following Members: Peter Weir, Sandra Overend, Seán Rogers, Robin Newton, Danny Kennedy, Maeve McLaughlin and Trevor Lunn.

7. Shared Education Bill – Committee Stage - Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and Integrated Education Fund

Witnesses joined the meeting at 11:40am.

Tina Merron, Chief Executive, Integrated Education Fund; Sam Fitzsimmons, Communications Director, Integrated Education Fund; Lorna McAlpine, Senior Development Officer, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; and Bernie Kells, Senior Development Officer, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Shared Education Bill.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

Nelson McCausland rejoined the meeting at 11:55am

The witnesses left the meeting at 12:22pm.

8. Shared Education Bill – Committee Stage - Centre for Shared Education, Queen's University, Belfast

The witnesses joined the meeting at 12:23pm.

Professor Joanne Hughes, Centre for Shared Education, Queen's University Belfast; Michael Arlow, Lecturer in Shared Education, Queen's University Belfast; and Dr Danielle Blaylock, Research Fellow, Centre for Shared Education, Queen's University Belfast briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Shared Education Bill.

Nelson McCausland left the meeting at 12:35pm

Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting at 12:36pm

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

The witnesses left the meeting at 12:49pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification as to how it intends to define and measure socio-economic deprivation in the context of the Shared Education Bill. The Committee also agreed to seek further clarification on the wording of the Shared Education definition.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education in respect of Levels of Progression and the Delivering Social Change (DSC) Shared Education Signature Programme.

The Committee also noted correspondence from Moat Primary School highlighting dissatisfaction with the use of Levels of Progression as part of the qualifying criteria for the DSC Shared Education Signature Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to suggest that in line with the findings of its recent inquiry report, schools be encouraged to use robust and appropriate measures of pupil attainment progress in order to assess the impact of the DSC Shared Education Signature Programme and that the Committee strongly believed that such measures should not be limited to the Levels of Progression.

9.3 The Committee noted clarification from the Education Authority in respect of terminology in its Teaching Appointments guidance to school and its advice to schools regarding disbarred directors becoming school governors.

9.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education in relation to the management of school surpluses and deficits by the Education Authority.

9.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding its support for Northern Ireland schools' participation in the BT Young Scientists and Technology Exhibition 2016.

9.6 The Committee noted an invitation from the Department of Education to the Aim Higher Project 100 event on Thursday 3 December 2015 in the RADAR Unit, Belfast.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel regarding the Legislative Consent Motion (LCM): Enterprise Bill (Public sector employment: restrictions on exit payments).

9.8 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding the restrictions on public sector exit payments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response from the Education Authority to the Committee for Finance and Personnel, for its information.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to NILGOSC seeking confirmation on the salary levels which will be affected by the anticipated restrictions on public sector exit payments.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the Rural Centre for Shared Education to provide oral evidence as part of the Committee Stage of the Shared Education Bill on 2 December 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to meet at the earlier time of 9:30am on 2 December 2015 in order to facilitate the oral evidence-taking sessions on the Shared Education Bill.

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

11. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed the issue of over-subscription in pre-school education settings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information as to how it is dealing with the issue of over-subscription in pre-school education, with particular reference to the situation in the East Belfast constituency.

12. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 2 December 2015, at 9.30am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:58pm.

Peter Weir
Chairperson, Committee for Education
2 December 2015