



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 5 OCTOBER 2016
MEETING ROOM 3B, WATERFRONT HALL

Present:

Barry McElduff MLA (Chairperson)
Chris Lyttle MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Rosemary Barton MLA
David Hilditch MLA
Carla Lockhart MLA
Jennifer McCann MLA
Colin McGrath MLA
Lord Morrow MLA
Sandra Overend MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Bronagh Irwin (Clerical Supervisor)
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)
Colin Pidgeon (Assembly Public Finance Scrutiny Unit) - item 1 only

Apologies:

Phillip Logan MLA
Catherine Seeley MLA

The meeting commenced in closed session at 10:39am.

1. Budget Scrutiny – Assembly Public Finance Scrutiny Unit

Assembly Public Finance Scrutiny Unit joined the meeting at 10:39am.

Colin Pidgeon from the Assembly Public Finance Scrutiny Unit briefed the Committee on budget scrutiny.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing a revised timetable for the budget process from the Department of Finance.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department stating that its budget submissions to the Department of Finance would not be provided to the Committee.

Mr Chris Lyttle joined the meeting at 11:04am.

Assembly Public Finance Scrutiny Unit left the meeting at 11:37am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an explanation as to why its budget submissions were not to be provided to the Committee prior to the budget being laid in the Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking further information on its spending and saving budget priorities for 2017-18, including: the Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme; the backlog of maintenance and minor works in the schools' estate and early intervention programmes including early years provision.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission a briefing note from the Assembly Public Finance Scrutiny Unit on governmental budget processes in other jurisdictions.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek legal advice in respect of its powers to compel the Department to provide witnesses and documents generally and particularly in respect of the Department's draft budget.

The meeting moved to public session at 11:52am.

2. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Business in the Community

The Chairperson recorded the Committee's thanks to Business in the Community for hosting the meeting and inviting Members to attend the Tomorrow's World Big Education Debate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Business in the Community expressing its gratitude.

3.2 Autism Issues

The Chairperson advised Members of a recent informal meeting with Autism NI and the National Autistic Society.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a response on the recommendations made and issues raised in the Broken Promises Report, in respect of:

- autism-based early interventions;
- mandatory autism training for teachers and classroom assistants;
- improved post-school transition arrangements for children and young people with autism; and
- the development of a range of school settings appropriate to the different levels of severity of autism.

3.3. ETI Report on Relationship and Sexuality Education

The Chairperson highlighted the findings of the Education and Training Inspectorate's recent report on Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in primary schools and Special Schools.

The Chairperson noted that the report found that: one in four schools does not have an RSE policy; school RSE policies are often developed without reference to parents; lessons generally did not focus on sensitive issues including e.g. child protection and LGBT+ concerns; and primary schools were not obliged to instruct children on puberty or the conception or birth of babies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a briefing from the Department on RSE in schools.

3.4 OECD Governance Report

The Chairperson highlighted the OECD report on Joined-up Governance in Northern Ireland noting particularly the case study on the educational provision for Looked After Children.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority in order to determine if variations in Looked After Children support services, as set out in the report, have been eliminated.

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

- an update on the development of the Looked After Children policy;
- clarification as to whether the lessons learned from the OECD study (and the Scottish Getting It Right For Every Child policy) will be incorporated in a new child-centred approach;
- a response in respect of the OECD report's criticism that care issues for Looked After Children are to be wrongly split by the Executive into 2 strategies; and
- clarification, in terms of DE's legal obligation to provide an education for children in detention.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 28 September 2016.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Department of Education – oral evidence - Children and Young People’s Strategy Overview

Departmental witnesses joined the meeting at 11:58am.

Margaret Rose McNaughton, Director of Children and Young People’s Services; June Wilkinson, Head of Children and Young People’s Strategy Team; and Pauline Donnan, Head of Analytical Services Unit briefed the Committee.

Witnesses left the meeting at 12:41pm.

The Committee noted the revised timelines for the publication of the strategy and the absence of information in respect of the related development process and pre-consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a summary document setting out the pre-consultation responses including particularly the feedback provided by Parenting NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule its stakeholder event on the Children and Young People’s Strategy, previously planned for 16 November 2016.

7. Department of Education – oral brief – 2016-21 Programme for Government Departmental Action Plan

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department advising that a briefing would not be provided as the draft PfG Delivery Plans had not been approved by the Executive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Department asking when the draft PfG Delivery Plans were expected to receive Executive approval and be issued for consultation.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority in respect of the Educational Psychology Service's views on Conductive Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Buddy Bear Trust.

8.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding measures used to monitor the delivery of Shared Education in the 2011-16 Programme for Government.

8.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Department seeking clarification on the abandonment of planned residential provision at MCA and sight of the MCA audit of autism services.

8.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Elective Home Education.

Mr David Hilditch left the meeting at 12:45pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking sight of the Elective Home Education framework and the timescale for the development of Elective Home Education guidance.

8.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding pension arrangements for tutors employed under the Primary Modern Language Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Irish National Teachers' Organisation who raised this issue with the Committee.

8.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding policy in respect of the gender balance in composite classes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the parent who raised this issue with the Committee.

8.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Computer Based Assessment.

8.9 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Report on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this matter, at a future meeting.

8.10 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Early Years Pathway Fund.

8.11 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding access to Sure Start and other Early Intervention programmes.

8.12 The Committee noted the NI Screen's Second Value Report.

8.13 The Committee noted correspondence regarding a post-primary school.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a briefing on the Childcare Strategy and clarification in respect of recent reported Departmental advice to the All Party Group on Children and Young People.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule a Departmental briefing on the Programme for Government.

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

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time, Place of next meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 12 October 2016, at 10.00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:50pm.

Barry McElduff
Chairperson, Committee for Education
12 October 2016