



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 26 OCTOBER 2016
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Barry McElduff MLA (Chairperson)
Chris Lyttle MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Rosemary Barton MLA
David Hilditch MLA
Carla Lockhart MLA
Phillip Logan MLA
Lord Morrow MLA
Sandra Overend MLA
Catherine Seeley MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Bronagh Irwin (Clerical Supervisor)
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

Jennifer McCann MLA
Colin McGrath MLA

The meeting commenced in closed session at 10:04am.

1. 2017-18 Resource Budget / 2017-21 Capital Budget

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive oral evidence from Departmental officials on the 2017-18 Resource Budget and 2017-21 Capital Budget in open session.

The meeting moved to open session at 10:07am.

Departmental witnesses joined the meeting at 10:09am.

Trevor Connolly, Director of Finance; Gavin Patrick, Deputy Director of Finance; and Philip Irwin, Director of Investment and Infrastructure provided oral evidence to the Committee.

Mr David Hilditch left the meeting at 10:24am.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11:00am.

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

- responses to general budget questions included in a recent Assembly Research paper;
- clarification in respect of the current status of teachers' salary negotiations and the anticipated costs associated with a 1% salary increase for teachers; and
- an update on Early Years Pathway funding.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification as to whether the Department will provide interim finance in order to offset Value Added Tax (VAT) costs associated with childcare provided in the home by Employers for Childcare. Further to this, the Committee agreed to seek oral evidence from Employers for Childcare at the next meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance seeking clarification in respect of the reclassification of capital and resource as apparently indicated in the October Monitoring Round statement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that in order to enhance the Committee's scrutiny process for budgets, Members would endeavour to advise of areas of interest, prior to the Committee meeting.

The Committee moved to closed session at 11:06am.

2. Committee inquiry into educational underachievement

The Committee discussed the terms of reference for its inquiry into educational underachievement.

Mr David Hilditch rejoined the meeting at 11:12am.

Mrs Sandra Overend left the meeting at 11:17am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to the terms of reference for its inquiry into educational underachievement.

Mrs Sandra Overend rejoined the meeting at 11:23am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that in order to maximise participation by stakeholders, further consideration would be given to undertaking a launch event for the inquiry.

The Committee moved to open session at 11.23am.

3. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme.

The Committee noted correspondence from Family Mediation NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Family Mediation NI to attend the Children and Young People's Strategy event on 7 December 2016.

The Committee noted an invitation from Volunteer Now to an informal event on Tuesday 22 November 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would attend the event, diaries permitting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Forward Work Programme, as amended.

4. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

5. Chairperson's Business

5.1 October Monitoring

The Chairperson highlighted allocations to the Department made under the October Monitoring Round.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on the reported reduced requirement for redundancy funding for teachers from £14.2m to £8.2m.

5.2 Major Works Delays

The Chairperson highlighted a query relating to Fresh Start Major Works at a school which had been advanced in planning but which was expected to be subject to some delay.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on its policy in respect of delayed Major Works and the interim provision of reusable mobile classrooms.

6. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 19 October 2016.

7. Matters Arising

The Committee discussed correspondence sent to the Executive Office in respect of the Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation (ILiAD) report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Executive Office seeking sight of the Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation (ILiAD) report.

8. Department of Education / Education Authority / Council for Catholic Maintained Schools – oral evidence – Area Planning

Witnesses joined the meeting at 11:28am.

Jacqui Durkin, Director of Area Planning, Department of Education; Lorraine Finlay, Head of Area Planning and Policy, Department of Education; John Collings, Director of Education, Education Authority; Ray Gilbert, Senior Education Officer, Education Authority; and Jim Clarke, Chief Executive, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools provided oral evidence to the Committee.

Mr Barry McElduff left the meeting at 11:50am

Mr Chris Lyttle assumed the chairpersonship of the meeting at 11:50am.

Mr Barry McElduff rejoined the meeting and resumed the chairpersonship at 12.05pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 12:39pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department / Education Authority, as appropriate seeking:

- the research basis for the assertions made in respect of poor attainment relating to some forms of composite class;
- the research basis for the assertions made in respect of poor or different levels of attainment for children attending smaller, rural schools;

- clarification in respect of the Department's plans (if any) to amend or eliminate the Small Schools Support Factor;
- sight of the communication strategy for the Providing Pathways consultation;
- clarification as to whether there is to be formal consultations on Area Planning Action Plans;
- clarification in respect of plans to standardise Special School provision; and
- an explanation as to how the new Area Planning process will support the Department's obligations in respect of Integrated Education, Irish Medium Education and Shared Education.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted a list of correspondence received.

9.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the draft Improving Pupil Attendance Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Education Authority on the review of the Education Welfare Service.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department suggesting that it should prioritise funding for Extended Schools and counselling support for primary schools.

9.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Childcare Strategy.

9.4 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding Elective Home Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking the Elective Home Education framework and timescale for the production of guidance.

9.5 The Committee noted correspondence from Colaíste Feirste regarding a recent inspection.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its commentary and an update as to how it has enhanced inspections in Irish Medium Education settings.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Combined Area Principals group seeking a meeting to discuss finance and inspection issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the group to an informal meeting.

- 9.7** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding engagement with stakeholders on the draft Programme for Government Departmental Action Plans.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide the Committee for the Executive Office with an update on its planned stakeholder engagement event.

- 9.8** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding the report of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the Together: Building a United Community programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Department of Education officials to provide oral evidence on the relevant aspects of the T:BUC programme.

- 9.9** The Committee noted an invitation to the launch of Anti-Bullying Week 2016 on Monday 14 November 2016.

- 9.10** The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent regarding the treatment by a school of attendance and enrolment issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the correspondent suggesting that they contact the Information Commissioner and the Northern Ireland Ombudsman.

- 9.11** The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent regarding a school placement and a statement of Special Educational Needs.

- 9.12** The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding its review of pre-school provision in Special Schools.

- 9.13** The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding its support for children with autism.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the National Autism Society and Autism NI.

- 9.14** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding previous consultation and the co-design process for the Children and Young People's Strategy

- 9.15** The Committee noted correspondence from an Irish Medium Education school regarding issues relating to a new school build.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on the matters raised.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time, Place of next meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 7 November 2016, at 10.00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:53pm.

Barry McElduff
Chairperson, Committee for Education
7 November 2016