



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2020

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Ms Catherine Kelly MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Apologies: Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Bronagh Irwin (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Ian McAdam (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Ed McCann (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 10:06 a.m. in open session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt a revised agenda including an oral briefing from the Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations Network.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Informal meeting with the Education Authority Board

The Chairperson advised Members that he and the Deputy Chairperson had met informally with the Education Authority Board on Thursday 29 January 2020. The Education Authority Board members had raised a number of issues in respect of: post-16 provision; school improvement/inspection problems; Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provision; the Entitlement Framework; the TEO numeracy and literacy Signature Projects; the use of IT in education; the treatment of vulnerable children in the education system; and the implementation of predecessor Education Committee inquiry findings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add briefings on EOTAS, the numeracy and literacy Signature Projects and school improvement/inspection to the Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should provide a list of extant Predecessor Committee inquiry recommendations with a view to the Committee forwarding these to the Department for an update on their implementation.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 29 January 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Education Authority Briefing – Overview and Finance Issues

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.10am

Ms Sara Long, Chief Executive, Education Authority;

Mr Seamus Wade, Director (acting), Finance and ICT, Education Authority;

Ms Clare Duffield, Director Human Resources, Education Authority;

Mr Dale Hanna, Director (acting) Operations and Estates, Education Authority;

Ms Kim Scott, Director (Acting) Education, Education Authority; and

Ms Una Turbitt, Assistant Director, Children and Young People's Services, Education Authority.

Officials provided the Committee with an overview of key issues and priorities for the Education Authority.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority indicating concerns in respect of Area Planning delays and the backlog of school maintenance and seeking:

- sight of the recent internal audit report in relation to the late provision of Special Educational Needs statements;
- further information on the number of current statements of Special Educational Needs that breached the statutory 26-week timeframe;
- the number of statemented students on reduced school timetables;
- an update on the consultation on special schools Early Years provision;

- a timeline for the publication of the Strategic Investment Board's Review on Area Planning;
- an explanation of the current position and way forward for the Area Planning of Special Schools;
- an explanation in relation to the delays in the Area Planning process, including those experienced by Elmgrove Primary School and Glenwood Primary School;

- a breakdown of the £100m of savings achieved by the Education Authority;
- analysis of the savings resulting from the amalgamation of the Education and Library Boards into a single authority and a comparison with the level of savings projected in the Education Authority Full Business Case;

- information on the provision of support to refugees and other newcomers within the education system;

- details of the Education Authority's Customer Service Charter, including associated baseline communication data;

- clarification on recently produced guidelines in relation to the framework for pupil work experience, including an explanation as to how these were developed and the nature of any related consultation;

- a breakdown of the reported £400m maintenance backlog across the school estate;
- the percentage of school buildings that are judged to be not fit for purpose owing to maintenance issues; and
- an update on the current tender process for maintenance services.

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

- an update on all Development Proposals from 2017 until the present; and
- clarity on the direction which is to be given to the Education Authority on what is a strategically important small school.

6. Education Authority Briefing – Youth Provision

The following officials joined the meeting at 11.54am

Arlene Kee, Assistant Director, Children and Young People's Services, Education Authority;

Michael Hogg, Strategic Services Manager, Children and Young People's Services, Education Authority; and

Andrew Bell, Head of Youth Work Policy Team, Department of Education.

Officials provided the Committee with an overview of the Education Authority Youth Service including the 2020 Funding Scheme for Regional and Local Voluntary Youth Organisations.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Robbie Butler declared an interest as a Boys' Brigade Officer, Magheragall Presbyterian Church.

Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 12:52pm.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance.

Proceedings were suspended at 1:00pm

Proceedings resumed at 1.07pm with the following Members in attendance: Mr Lyttle, Ms Mullan; Mr Butler, Ms Kelly, and Mr Newton

7. Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations Network – Funding for Youth Provision – Evidence Session

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 1:09pm.

Chris Quinn, Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations Network; and
Andy Hewitt, Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations Network.

The witnesses provided the Committee with evidence relating to the 2020 Funding Scheme for Regional and Local Voluntary Youth Organisations.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Mr McNulty rejoined the meeting at 1:13pm

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations Network seeking further information on its concerns in respect of the new funding arrangements for youth provision with a view to sharing these with the Education Authority for comment and response.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking:

- sight of research it had undertaken in respect of hard to reach children and young people;
- information on the START Initiative evaluation and the Education Authority's plan to extend the initiative;
- information on the Food for Fuel Initiative and the Education Authority's plans to extend the initiative across all of Northern Ireland;
- sight of benchmarking research undertaken in respect of youth provision;
- a breakdown by council area and funding stream of the available youth provision budget as well as information on the associated funding criteria;
- sight of the Education Authority's / Department's review of regional youth provision; and
- an assurance that the consultation associated with the new funding arrangements was inclusive and that organisations offering criticism of the new proposals would not be subject to funding restrictions as a consequence.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted a copy of the Investing Activity Report for the Department of Education, dated 26 January 2020.

8.3 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department on its consultation on an update to the Nutritional Standards for School Food.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a short oral briefing from the Department on the consultation.

8.4 The Committee noted correspondence from Queen's University, Belfast regarding a private member's motion on Teacher Autism Training.

8.5 The Committee considered correspondence from BookTrust NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing from BookTrust NI as part of its scrutiny of the Department's budget plans.

8.6 The Committee noted an invitation to the Belfast Childcare Partnership Event 'Hear Our Voice: Improving Access and Inclusion for Children with Additional Needs in Childcare' on 27th March 2020.

8.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department inviting the Chairperson to take part in a Gateway Review interview into the Education Transformation Programme. The Committee further noted that owing to diary pressures, the Chairperson was unable to take part in the interview.

8.8. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy agreeing to the Committee's request for a joint meeting in relation to the 14-19 Strategy.

8.9 The Committee considered correspondence from the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) seeking a meeting with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a single informal meeting with all of the sectoral bodies including: CSSC and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; Transferors' Representative Council; Comhairle na Gaelscolaoichta; Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; and Catholic Schools Trustees' Service.

8.10 The Committee noted an invitation from the Ulster Teaching Union inviting the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson to its conference on Friday 27 March 2020.

8.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority in respect of a Joint Consultative Forum meeting

8.12 The Committee noted correspondence including a copy of the Stranmillis University College annual report for 2018-19.

8.13 The Committee noted correspondence regarding Institute for Government Brexit information sessions.

8.14 The Committee considered correspondence from the Children's Law Centre (CLC) seeking a meeting with the Committee Chairperson.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an informal briefing session with the CLC preferably before the scheduled Departmental briefing on Special Educational Needs.

9. Draft Forward Work Programme / Induction Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include visits to Loughshore Educational Resource Centre and Foyle Area Learning Community to its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to include briefings on the Digital Learning in Schools Strategy and the Entitlement Framework to its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that as part of its planning session on 12 February 2020, it would receive a briefing from RalSe on educational underachievement/attainment.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 12 February 2020 at 9.45am in Room 30 Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:38pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
12 February 2020