



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 6 JANUARY 2016
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Paul Stitt (Assistant Clerk)
Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)
Colin Pidgeon (Public Finance Scrutiny Unit – item 2 only)

Apologies:

Maeve McLaughlin MLA

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

1. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft forward work programme.

The Committee noted that a number of Members would be visiting the BT Young Scientist Exhibition in Dublin on Thursday 7 January 2016.

Jonathan Craig joined the meeting at 10:08am

Agreed: The Committee agreed that owing to its significant legislative workload and the likelihood of additional plenary sittings, it would not undertake any external meetings prior to the end of the mandate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would not seek an extension to the Committee Stage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would endeavour to undertake further evidence sessions on the promotion of STEM in schools and publish a short, related report in early March.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would endeavour to undertake a stakeholder event in February seeking feedback on the Programme for Government (PfG) and suggestions for the next PfG and to publish a short report prior to the end of the mandate.

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

2. Budget 2016-17 - Assembly Research Services – oral briefing

A member of the Public Finance Scrutiny Unit, Assembly Research Services joined the meeting at 10:15am.

The Committee considered a tabled paper and a briefing on the Budget 2016-17.

Sandra Overend joined the meeting at 10:17am

Nelson McCausland joined the meeting at 10:17am

Danny Kennedy joined the meeting at 10:32am

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

The Assembly official left the meeting at 10:43am

The meeting moved into public session at 10:43am.

3. Apologies

Apologies are as indicated above.

4. Chairperson's Business

4.1 New Year wishes

The Chairperson wished Committee Members, staff and stakeholders a happy New Year.

4.2 School Maintenance

The Chairperson noted that the Department had been allocated £5m in the November Monitoring Round for Education and Schools Estate Management.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking an update as to how this money is to be spent and an assurance that complete expenditure will be achieved before the financial year end.

5. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 16 December 2015.

6. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

7. Shared Education Bill – Committee Stage - Review/Rescinding of final decisions/Agreement of Bill Report

The Committee considered Departmental powers and duties and their effect on the Department's Arms Length Bodies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek legal advice – to be considered at the meeting on 13 January 2016 - on the effect of a proposed amendment to the Shared Education Bill which would seek to confer statutory powers on non-statutory bodies to encourage and facilitate Shared Education.

The Committee considered its report on the Committee Stage of the Shared Education Bill.

Agreed: The Committee read and agreed the Contents section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee read and agreed the Remit, Powers and Membership section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee read and agreed the Executive Summary section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee read and agreed the Introduction section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee read and agreed the Consideration of the Bill section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee read and agreed the Clause by Clause Consideration section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee read and agreed the Appendices of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the minutes of the meeting of 6 January 2016 to be included in the Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to order the Report on the Shared Education Bill to be printed as the seventh report of the mandate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the Report on the Committee's website and to advise stakeholders accordingly.

8. Budget 2016-17 – Departmental oral briefing

Officials joined the meeting at 11:00am.

Trevor Connolly, Director of Finance; Philip Irwin, Director of Investment and Infrastructure; La'Verne Montgomery, Director of Education Workforce Development; and Gavin Patrick, Deputy Director of Finance briefed the Committee on the 2016-17 Budget.

The Committee noted a short paper tabled by the Department providing an overview of the 2016-17 Budget.

The Committee also noted correspondence from two concerned individuals regarding the Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme.

Robin Newton joined the meeting at 11:06am

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

Members declared the following interests:

Danny Kennedy's wife is employed as a teacher.

Sean Rogers' wife and daughter are employed as teachers.

Sandra Overend left the meeting at 12:22pm

Chris Hazzard left the meeting at 12:31pm

Officials left the meeting at 12:32pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information on the Investing in the Teaching Workforce scheme including: the anticipated levels of financial savings; Equality Impact Assessment screening details; and relevant data from the Northern Ireland Substitute Teachers' Register on newly qualified teachers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland seeking sight of relevant figures relating to the employment levels of newly qualified teachers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister inviting him to brief the Committee on his final decisions in respect of the 2016-17 Budget including the allocation to the Aggregated Schools Budget and the capital programme.

9. Correspondence

Sandra Overend rejoined the meeting at 12:33pm

9.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted clarification from CCEA in respect of the reported removal of the GCSE History study component 'Northern Ireland and its Neighbours, 1965-85' from the curriculum.

9.3 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education to Moat Primary School on the use of Levels of Progression as assessment criteria for the Delivering Social Change (DSC) Shared Education Signature Programme.

9.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education in respect of the dispute relating to use of Levels of Progression as criteria for the DSC Shared Education Signature Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Department of Education seeking clarity, following the reported resolution of the dispute, as to the number of letters of offer which have been withdrawn or reinstated.

9.5 The Committee noted correspondence from Glengormley Integrated Primary School enclosing a copy of correspondence sent to the Department of Education in respect of a rejected DSC Shared Education application.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the PSNI enclosing information on drug related incidents in schools.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education enclosing information on drug related incidents, expulsions and suspensions in schools.

9.8 The Committee noted correspondence from Translink providing clarity in respect of reported drug related incidents involving school children in Bangor.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence from the PSNI, DE and Translink to relevant schools in Bangor, for their information.

9.9 The Committee noted an invitation from Glenveagh School to undertake a visit and to discuss the Review of Special Education and the associated area plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider an informal Committee visit to the school in March 2016.

9.10 The Committee noted correspondence indicating that the North Eastern, South Eastern and Western Education and Library Board Annual Reports and Accounts 2014-15 have been laid in the Assembly.

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the PTA-NI enclosing a gift bought on behalf of the Committee for Education and given to the Kind Fund Kenya.

9.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Policy Forum NI providing a link to proceedings of the Education in Northern Ireland: raising standards, school accountability and leadership conference.

9.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing further information on Private Finance Initiative projects, legacy costs and community use of PFI schools.

9.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Children's Enterprise on the proposed closure of the Youth Council.

9.15 The Committee noted correspondence regarding employment and remuneration at Woodlands College.

9.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education enclosing a notice of the Complaints Tribunal (Curriculum and Related Matters) Regulations consultation which concludes on 8 February 2016.

9.17 The Committee noted a request from the ICTU for the chairperson to co-sponsor the launch of its position paper on asbestos in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on asbestos in schools, including the number of schools affected; the programme for removal of asbestos; and commentary on ICTU's recommendations.

Nelson McCausland left the meeting at 12:36pm

10. Any Other Business

10.1 Youth Council

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

- confirmation that staff employed by the Youth Council and transferring to the Education Authority will have access to TUPE protections;

- clarity as to the consequences for staff who decline to transfer; and
- confirmation that Youth Council staff who transfer to the Education Authority will be retained within the youth sector.

11. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 13 January 2016, at 9.30am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:43pm.

Peter Weir
Chairperson, Committee for Education
13 January 2016