

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF A BOARD MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 18
DECEMBER 2003 AT 2.30 PM IN THE BOARD ROOM**

1. PRESENT

Mrs M Alexander (Chairman)

Mr P H Aiken
Councillor J F Bell
Councillor P Brannigan
Rev J Byrne
Mr M P Campbell
Dr P Cunningham
Mrs M E Donnell
Mrs E Gill
Councillor I E B Hanna
Mr C Mackin
Councillor W J Martin
Mr W Mayne

Mr P C McAleavey
Councillor P P McAleer
Mrs D A McBride
Mrs C M McCaul
Councillor S McRoberts
Very Rev L M McVeigh
Councillor B Monteith
Very Rev S Rice
Mr J W Saunders
Mr A G Sleator
Rev Canon F D Swann
Rev Canon W R Twaddell

2. IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs H M McClenaghan, Messrs W Burke, T M Heron, P J A McGee, Mrs K C Ryan and W B Weir.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mrs S R Brownlee, Alderman F E Crowe, Councillor J Feehan, Councillor J Hanna, Alderman G A Hatch, Rev C D McClure and Councillor P McGinn.

4. APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS

The report** (B/12/03/2) prepared by the Head of Human Resources was adopted.

5. MINUTES

Mrs McClenaghan drew attention to an error in the record of Councillor Brannigan's departure. He had in fact remained in the meeting until approximately 4.55 pm and not as stated in the minutes. Subject to this amendment the minutes* (B/11/03/3) of the meeting held on 20 November were approved as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

6. REPORT OF SPECIAL BOARD MEETING : 20 NOVEMBER 2003

The report* (B/12/03/4) of the meeting which had failed for want of a quorum on 20 November was noted.

(Mr P C McAleavey entered the meeting at 2.33 pm.)

7. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

7.1 COMMON FUNDING SCHEME FOR SCHOOLS (7.1)

Mrs McClenaghan presented a letter** from the Department of Education dated 16 December explaining the reasons for not having implemented the Common Funding Formula in 2004 and offering the deputation an opportunity to meet the Deputy Secretary of the Department rather than the Minister. She believed that the Board should agree to meet with the Deputy Secretary.

Councillor Bell asked if it was normal for the Department to decline to allow a deputation to meet the Minister or even the Permanent Secretary. The Chairman said that the Board could ask the Permanent Secretary if the deputation could meet both him and the Deputy Secretary. Councillor Bell said that he would accept that suggestion and asked if the deputation could clarify the concerns of schools in relation to potential redundancies and composite classes which appeared likely to be the effect of the non-introduction of the Common Formula. Mrs McClenaghan pointed out that as no one had seen the Common Formula the likely effect was not yet known.

7.2 DEATH OF FORMER CHIEF OFFICER (7.7)

The Chairman read a letter from Mr Dickson's daughter thanking the Board for its expression of sympathy.

7.3 REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (8)

Mrs McCaul referred to the letter** (B/12/03/5) from the Northern Ireland Office, commenting on costings and staffing. She was concerned that the letter made no reference to the rural dimension.

Mrs McClenaghan pointed out that her letter was about the two specific points; the rural factor and other matters listed were for consideration in the final submission to the Department.

Mr Sleator asked that the Board should express concern at the intention not to establish a Staff Commission at this time; he believed that the need to keep staff informed was paramount. Mrs McClenaghan agreed to ask the Northern Ireland Office to give priority to the early establishment of a Staff Commission which would provide the necessary reassurance to staff involved.

7.4 THE MANAGEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE COVER FOR TEACHERS (12.3)

Copies** of the Northern Ireland Department of Finance & Personnel Memorandum on the 27th Report from the Committee of Public Accounts Session 2002/2003 were noted.

8. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

8.1 WARINGSTOWN PRIMARY SCHOOL : SONGS OF PRAISE

Mrs McClenaghan reported that the choir from this school was one of three from the whole of the British Islands which had been selected to take part in the BBC television programme "Songs of Praise". The Board agreed to send its congratulations on this significant achievement.

8.2 ADOPTION OF MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

The Chairman reminded Chairmen of Committees whose minutes required to be adopted that it was their responsibility either to propose that the minutes be taken into consideration or, if they would not be present at the Board meeting, to arrange for some other member to do so. The Vice-Chairman, if present, should second the proposal and, following discussion, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman or other members on their behalf should propose and second the adoption of the minutes. She sought and received confirmation that members were happy with this procedure.

9. CRAIGAVON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (LURGAN CAMPUS) : PURCHASE OF PROPERTY

Mr McGee explained that a former factory used by Upper Bann Institute of Further and Higher Education had become surplus to the Institute's requirements. The Board agreed to purchase it subject to the approval of the Department of Education.

10. PROPOSAL AS TO PRIMARY (INCLUDING NURSERY) AND SECONDARY EDUCATION NO. 189 (LURGAN COLLEGE)

The Board agreed to publish the Proposal* (B/12/03/8).

11. LIBRARY COMMITTEE : MINUTES

The Chairman said that she had decided to take this item out of sequence to facilitate Mr Campbell. Mr Campbell proposed and Mr Aiken seconded that the minutes should be taken into consideration.

11.1 CHRISTMAS : HOURS OF OPENING (5.1)

Mr Campbell drew attention to the Committee's recommendation, made after full consultation, that Branch Libraries should remain closed on Saturday 27 December.

11.2 FUNDING 2003-2004 (7)

Mr Campbell drew attention to the financial position facing the Library Service in future years.

11.3 CHIEF LIBRARIAN'S REPORT (9)

Mr Aiken drew attention to the last line of this minute which referred to the proposed new structure.

It was proposed by Mr Campbell, seconded by Mr Aiken and agreed that the minutes* (L/11/03/15) of the meeting held on 25 November be adopted.

(Mrs E Gill left the meeting at 3.05 pm.)

12. PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION EXPANSION PROGRAMME : ANNUAL PROGRESS REVIEW AND PLANNED PROVISION FOR 2004/2005

Mrs McClenaghan said that the Programme* (B/12/03/9) had been considered carefully by the Pre-School Education Advisory Group and by the Sub-Committee for Pre-School Education.

Mr Mackin said that the Programme did not address the concern of Primary Schools. Pre-school groups had been given equal status with Nursery Schools but the quality of pre-school education varied considerably. Councillor Bell said that the zero-rating of some reception classes would end a tradition of pre-school provision in some Primary Schools which had existed for more than 20 years. He said that many people found particularly disappointing the view of the Inspectorate that two and a half hours provided sufficient education for pre-school pupils.

Mrs Donnell said that the Programme stated that of 46 schools listed, seven would be zero-rated. She referred to Augher Central Primary School, of which her daughter was Principal. No pre-school facilities were available in the village and while there was a good facility in a neighbouring village the two were not well served by public transport and the Board could not provide transport. The second point she wished to make was to stress the value of reception classes taught by trained and qualified teachers. It appeared to her that the Pre-School Education Advisory Group's aim was to take facilities away from controlled schools in order to transfer them to the voluntary sector. She believed that zero-rating was likely to lead to an increasing number of school budget deficits.

Mrs McCaul said that it was regrettable that the Pre-School Education Advisory Group's report did not adequately reflect the discussion at the Sub-Committee. She was particularly concerned with the Dungannon area where many part-time nursery places were unfilled because parents did not want part-time provision and where whole reception classes were about to be zero-rated. It seemed to her that members of the Advisory Group were unaware of the distances some children were expected to walk in rural areas. Mr Mayne and Councillor McRoberts said that the same considerations applied in Cookstown and Armagh. The chairman commented that there was no equivalent of the statutory walking distance which existed in primary and secondary education.

Mrs McClenaghan explained that facilitating parental choice between statutory and non-statutory pre-school provision was the policy of the government and that the Pre-School Education Advisory Group's report reflected that policy. She also pointed out that zero-rating had taken effect already in all other boards' areas. Dr Cunningham said

that he was associated with a pre-school group which co-existed peacefully with controlled and maintained schools and assured members that the quality of the provision was monitored carefully. Mr Campbell believed that the Department should be made aware of the strength of feeling among Board members. It was a matter of concern that provision in many rural areas was inadequate while a voluntary or commercial group could set up a play group in a town where nursery provision already existed.

Mr Burke explained that the Department of Education required to have the Programme before the end of December which meant that the Board must approve it, with or without comment, at the present meeting. Failure to do so would leave open the possibility that the Department might use such failure as an opportunity to zero-rate all reception classes. He pointed out that the Southern area had more reception classes than any of the other areas which had made the Advisory Group's task more difficult.

Councillor Monteith said that he could not support the adoption of the Programme as it stood. He believed that to do so would amount to co-operating with a policy which did not enjoy the support of members of the Board. He proposed that the Board should reject the Programme. Councillor Bell said that the dilemma for the Board was whether to accept the Programme under protest or to allow the Department to zero-rate all the classes. When he asked if this was a realistic possibility, Mrs McClenaghan said that this was the case and that it would affect not only the schools listed in the Programme but also schools not listed. This would have very severe consequences for the schools and she said that the officers could not consider recommending the Board to follow this course of action.

Councillor McRoberts said that the Department's insistence on receiving a submission before the end of December amounted to unacceptable pressure and proposed that consideration be deferred until January, when the Board could give adequate time to debating the matter. When she asked if this was an option for the Board Mr Burke pointed out that schools had to prepare their budgets during January and could not do so if there remained a doubt about whether or not they would be affected by zero-rating. Mr Aiken seconded the proposal that the Board should take no decision at the present meeting. Mrs McClenaghan said that she must remind the Board that it had accepted a recommendation to form a Sub-Committee to consider pre-school education and that having done so it would be improper for it to take such functions back to itself.

Councillor Monteith said that he wished to withdraw his proposal and Mr Mackin proposed that the matter be deferred for one month. When Rev Canon Swann asked what that course of action would achieve the Chairman said that it would allow time for the Advisory Group to re-convene. In her opinion however its recommendations would differ only slightly from those now before the Board. Mr Aiken asked if the Board should nevertheless make the point by asking the Advisory Group to re-consider its decisions.

Mr McClenaghan suggested that the point would be equally well made if the Board submitted the Programme to the Department with its own comments whereas the alternative would delay the process by a month which would cause damage to schools and possibly gain almost nothing in return. She said that she could ask the Department to arrange to take delivery of the Board's views at a meeting with an appropriately senior officer.

Mr Aiken proposed that the Board should not approve the Programme and Plan for 2004/05 at present, that it should resolve to give the matter further consideration before submitting it and that in the meantime it should mandate the Chief Executive to meet the Department of Education to discuss the proposed suggestions in the light of the Board's needs and report back. This proposal was seconded by Councillor McRoberts and agreed.

Mrs McClenaghan said that Mr Burke and she would arrange to meet the Department at an early date but stressed that she could not guarantee the outcome of the discussion in relation to any school.

(During the discussion of this item Mr M P Campbell and Dr P Cunningham left the meeting at 3.45 pm, Rev Canon W R Twaddell left at 3.50 pm, Councillor W J Martin left at 4.10 pm and Councillor J F Bell, Councillor P P McAleer, Councillor B Monteith, Very Rev S Rice and Mr A G Sleator left at 4.31 pm.)

13. EDUCATION COMMITTEE : MINUTES

It was proposed by Mrs McBride and seconded by Mr Mackin that the Education Committee minutes should be taken into consideration.

13.1 SCHOOL MAGAZINE COMPETITION : NEWRY HIGH SCHOOL (4)

Mrs McBride drew attention to this minute which reflected a very pleasant occasion when prizes had been distributed to the various schools listed. Mrs McClenaghan said the Board of Governors of Newry High School had expressed disappointment at an apparent lack of respect for the school due to a delay in presenting its certificate. This had occurred because the certificate had been mislaid at the meeting. She had apologised to the Principal of the school and had assured him that there had been no intention whatsoever to show disrespect to any group of pupils or teachers. She undertook to have the arrangements for the competition reviewed.

13.2 CREATIVE YOUTH PARTNERSHIPS (13)

Mrs McBride drew attention to the contents of this minute.

On the proposal of Mrs McBride, seconded by Mr Mackin, the minutes* (E/12/03/10) of the meeting held on 2 December 2003 were adopted.

14. MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE : MINUTES

The minutes* (M/11/03/11) of the meeting held on 20 November were noted.

15. TEACHING APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE : MINUTES

The minutes* (TAC/11/03/12.1 and TAC/11/03/12.2) of the meetings held on 19 and 24 November were noted.

16. COMMITTEE FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF PERIPATETIC TEACHERS : MINUTES

The minutes* (PT/10/03/13.1 and PT/11/03/13.2) of the meetings held on 23 October and 17 November were noted.

17. SPECIAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE : MINUTES

It was proposed by Mrs McCaul and seconded by Mrs McBride that the minutes of the Special Education Committee be taken into consideration.

17.1 FUNDING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (8.1)

Mrs McCaul drew attention to the final paragraph of this minute and repeated the Committee's concern at the high cost of specialist education in England.

17.2 PRE-SCHOOL ISSUES (8.2)

Mrs McCaul drew attention to this minute.

On the proposal of Mrs McCaul, seconded by Mrs McBride, the minutes* (SE/11/03/14) of the meeting held on 20 November were adopted.

18. SERVICES COMMITTEE : MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Brannigan and seconded by Mrs McBride that the minutes of the Services Committee should be taken into consideration.

18.1 SCHOOL BUDGETS : OUR LADY'S (CARRICKADUFF) AND TOBERLANE (FORMER) PRIMARY SCHOOLS (5)

Councillor Brannigan drew attention to this minute and to the recommendation that a letter should be sent to the Department of Education.

18.2 PROPERTY SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES : MOYALLON PRIMARY SCHOOL (10.2)

Councillor Brannigan drew attention to the recommendation contained in this minute and to the fact that by adopting it the Board would be resolving to apply for a compulsory purchase order.

On the proposal of Councillor Brannigan, seconded by Mrs McBride, the minutes* (S/11/03/16) of the meeting held on 27 November were adopted.

(Councillor P Brannigan left the meeting at 4.38 pm.)

19. ASSOCIATION OF NORTHERN IRELAND EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARDS : EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MINUTES

The minutes* (B/12/03/17) of the meeting held on 5 November were noted.

20. SEASON'S GREETINGS

The Chairman wished members and officers a Happy Christmas. Mrs McCaul asked Mrs McClenaghan to thank the catering staff for the meal provided for members earlier in the day.

The meeting ended at 4.39 pm.

CHAIRMAN

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

DATE

* Paper circulated

** Paper tabled

WBW/AE
19 December 2003