

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF A SPECIAL BOARD MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 3 MARCH 2005 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  
Mrs S R Brownlee  
Rev J Byrne  
Mr M P Campbell  
Alderman F E Crowe  
Dr P Cunningham  
Mrs M E Donnell  
Councillor J Hanna  
Alderman G A Hatch  
Councillor A B Lewis  
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  
Rev C D McClure  
Councillor P McGinn  
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

**2. IN ATTENDANCE**

Mrs H M McClenaghan, Mrs K C Ryan, Messrs W Burke, T M Heron, J F Curran, B O'Hara and Mrs L Davidson.

**3. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS**

The Chairman advised members that reporters from the BBC and UTV would be present and asked members' approval for the camera crew to enter the Board Room. This was agreed.

She advised members that a presentation would be made on the proposed financial scheme and consequent reductions and they could raise any issues after the presentation when they had an opportunity to have an overall picture. She said that Standing Orders would be invoked and that members would be given one opportunity to speak. It was a difficult day for everyone but they had been placed in the situation because of the shortfall in funding. She thanked members for attending.

**4. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor J Feehan, Councillor I E B Hanna, Councillor W J McIlwrath and Rev Canon W R Twaddell.

**5. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REMARKS**

Mrs McClenaghan referred members to the tabled papers and advised members they were responsible for making decisions within the monies the Department had allocated

to the Board. She said that after Mr Heron's presentation each Head of Department would present the proposed budget as it applied to their services. She referred to the Teachers' Consultative Committees and to correspondence from two Teachers' Unions passed to her by Mr Mackin. She advised members that it was their right to make alterations to the proposals but reduced savings in one area would mean that others would have to be increased if the Scheme was to be submitted to the Department by 11 March 2005.

She reminded members that the proposals had already been submitted to the various Committees. She said that she was very conscious of keeping the community well advised of what was proposed and four meetings had been arranged with Principal Teachers to deal with schools funding and Centre funding for services to schools. A letter had also been sent to the District Councils to seek further meetings and a series of public meetings had been arranged in each District Council and a press advertisement had been drawn up to advise on these. She was in the process of arranging meetings with the Teaching and Non-Teaching Unions.

On the advice of the Boards' Solicitors, and as Accounting Officer, a letter had been drafted to the Minister to outline to him very clearly the situation faced in complying with consultation requirements. She explained that she would stress that because of the delay in the Board receiving the allocation he should assist the Board.

She said that she had asked the Permanent Secretary over a period of time for a meeting and a meeting had been held the previous Monday where various issues had been discussed and clarified. These included:

- Clarification as to the special educational needs sum of £1.46m.
- The absence of information about earmarked funding and the difficulty this caused.  
She reported the receipt of a letter from DE that day showing earmarked funding generally of the same order as the previous year. First analysis suggested that there was not a problem.
- The proposed financial scheme had provision for £1m for potential redundancies. The Permanent Secretary might be willing to entertain a bid to apply to DFP for additional funding to make redundancies possible.
- Poor relationships between the Department and the Minister and Boards.
- An assurance had been sought from the Department that if a Scheme was presented which represented the Board's best efforts the Department would acknowledge it was the Board's best efforts.

The Chairman commended Mrs McClenaghan for getting the meeting in order to clarify certain issues.

*(During the discussion of this item Councillor J F Bell entered the meeting at 2.45 pm.)*

## **6. 2005/06 BOARD RECURRENT EXPENDITURE (DE)**

Mr Heron presented the overall shortfall in funding.

Each Head of Department presented proposed savings for their own areas of responsibility and outlined the implications.

*(During Mr Burke's presentation, Mr W Mayne entered the meeting at 3.24 pm.)*

After the presentation members sought and obtained the following clarification:-

- The main element of the pressures figure is run rate overspends against budget, particularly in relation to special education and transport.
- The food element of a school meal is in the region of 40p.
- Approximately 6 seconded teachers in CASS may be returning to their schools and will not be replaced.
- Under the Common Funding Formula each child counted as a traveller or with English as an additional language will earn £864 for their school in addition to the normal per pupil funding which the school receives.
- Special Education costs had increased at around 15% per annum over the past 5 years and the proposed reductions represented an attempt to dampen down the ongoing increases. Officers were having discussions with schools about the prioritisation of referrals to the Psychology Service.
- There was no proposal to eliminate or significantly change the school meal.
- The main TSN factor for catering is entitlement to free school meals.

Members made the following comments:-

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| Alderman Hatch   | - The review of crossing patrols should focus on whether there was a need for these at post-primary schools.   |
| Dr Cunningham    | - Special schools supported the criteria being proposed for admissions and the proposals around transport, but hoped that special school funding would not be adversely impacted by the deficit at Centre.   |
| Mr Mackin        | - Looked at from the perspective of a 7 year old child in a school, all the proposals would have an adverse impact and could not be supported.<br>- There had been no negotiation with Teachers' Unions in relation to the changes being proposed to teacher terms and conditions of employment, as evidenced by the two Union letters tabled. |
| Councillor Lewis | - The Board should defy the Minister because cuts of this magnitude could not be done and should not be attempted.<br>- Proper consultation had not been carried out.<br>- The cuts and redundancies explained in the Committee papers had not been mentioned in the presentation.   |
| Mrs McCall       | - The Psychology Service had been less than satisfactory during the previous Board but this had been resolved and should be maintained.<br>- The move from 4 year to 2 year support needs careful consideration.<br>- The ability to pay should be taken into consideration when increasing music charges by up to 50%.                        |
| Councillor Hanna | - The transport pressures could be eased by a 'get on your bike' campaign.<br>- Savings could be achieved through hot desking and use of alternative energy sources.   |

- Deferral of planned maintenance for a second year does not deliver good value for money in the long run.
- Councillor Bell - With great reluctance and recognising the impact the cuts will have on Education, the vast majority of the cuts may have to be accepted, with three exceptions: a difficulty with EOTAS cuts and a need to see the detail; he could not accept road safety cuts without independent professional analysis; he could not accept Educational Psychology cuts.
- Mr Campbell - Savings which the Transport Section may achieve through withdrawal of the early afternoon service may result in additional supervisory costs in schools.
  - A reduction in Psychology may increase the statementing times.
- Councillor Monteith - The Board has consistently failed to take account of TSN factors, especially in relation to catering, transport and road safety.
  - He objected to the letter from Mrs McClenaghan to the Minister seeking approval not to consult. The Board does not understand the real meaning of consultation.
- Alderman Crowe - It will be disappointing if the increased music charges have an adverse impact on the excellent SELB Music Service.
- Councillor McGinn - The proposals will have a detrimental impact on local people and the community. There is lack of clarity on how the savings will be achieved and the impact this will have on jobs and services. There has been no consultation and the proposals should be rejected in total.

*(During the discussion Councillor P McGinn left the meeting at 4.30 pm, Mr P C McAleavey entered the meeting at 4.32 pm, Dr P Cunningham and Councillor W J Martin left the meeting at 4.34 pm, Councillor P McGinn re-entered the meeting at 4.35 pm, Very Rev S Rice and Rev J Byrne left the meeting at 4.44 pm, Mrs S R Brownlee left the meeting at 4.49 pm and Councillor P McGinn left the meeting at 5.11 pm and re-entered at 5.14 pm.)*

In reply to a question from Councillor Bell, the Chairman confirmed that the deadline for the submission of the Scheme was 11 March 2005. She asked members to realise the position the Board was in and said that difficulties had arisen because of the late allocation.

Councillor Bell said that there was approximately £0.5m savings which the Board would not be able to reverse and on the proposal of Councillor Bell, seconded by Mr Aiken, a meeting between the Minister and the Chairman and officers within the timeframe should take place.

Councillor Hanna thought that there should be a proviso that if money became available then changes could be made, especially in terms of the maintenance budget and road crossing issues, which would be putting the lives of children in jeopardy. Mrs McClenaghan said that the process required a Scheme for expenditure to be put forward.

Councillor Bell suggested convening another Board meeting.

The Chairman did not think there was opportunity to decrease the overall savings figure; if a Scheme was to be presented it had to cover the full shortfall.

Councillor Bell said the Board should put the pressure back on the Minister or his boss, the Secretary of State. He acknowledged the necessity of £6.75m cut but believed that the additional £0.5m approximately would have an immediate and clear danger for children and said that the Minister should have met with the Policy Committee. If necessary the Board should be reconvened before 11 March 2005. This was seconded by Mr Aiken.

Mr Sleator said that he had concerns about particular areas but that the Accounting Officer had the responsibility to put forward a Scheme within the budget. On the proposal of Mr Sleator, seconded by Alderman Crowe, it was proposed to accept the Scheme.

Councillor Lewis asked for clarification of the original proposal.

The Chairman said that not one person had wanted to make these cuts but they were being forced into it because the Board's spending power had been reduced. She reminded members to take account of this when voting. She thought there was no point in coming back another day.

Alderman Hatch thought the time left should be used to urge the Minister to meet the Board.

Councillor Lewis proposed that faced with a shortfall of £7.2m in the allocated budget and the necessity to make a 10% cut this budget be rejected. This was seconded by Councillor Monteith.

When the Chairman called for a vote on Councillor Lewis' proposal the following votes were cast:

For	4	Against	11	Abstention	3
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Councillor Bell proposed that having looked at the proposals, the Board would reluctantly be willing to accept cuts of £6.75m and would now seek a meeting with the Minister or the Secretary of State. The meeting involving the Chairman and officers would provide opportunity to explain the financial crisis and the need to find a further £0.5m.

When the Chairman called for a vote on Councillor Bell's proposal the following votes were cast:

For	9	Against	6	Abstention	2
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The Chairman confirmed that the majority vote had indicated that cuts of £6.75m would reluctantly be accepted and a meeting should be arranged with the Minister or the Secretary of State to find the other £0.5m.

*(Councillor B Monteith and Councillor P P McAleer left the meeting at 5.34 pm.)*

The Chairman suggested that the Board reconvene on Thursday 10 March 2005 at 2.00 pm to finalise the Scheme. This was agreed.

*(Mr A G Sleator left the meeting at 5.35 pm.)*

## **7. 2005/06 BOARD RECURRENT EXPENDITURE (DCAL)**

Mrs Ryan said that the Library Committee had met on Tuesday and had looked at proposals for budget savings which hinged around the loss of 6 posts.

*(Mr J W Saunders and Councillor A B Lewis left the meeting at 5.36 pm.)*

She explained that there were proposals to save £104,000 in 2005/06 but that another £111,000 needed to be saved. She reminded members that mobile library services and Branch Library services were continuing to be looked at and referred to a recent letter from DCAL which showed no change in the budget figures. She said that further proposals would be brought to the Library Committee for savings. She said that it was proposed to change the Information Service in Portadown to a telephone or on-line service.

In reply to a question from Mr Aiken, Mrs Ryan said that the Board had not as yet been officially told that it was a requirement for approval of the Scheme that a certain amount of money had to be spent on books in a financial year. She referred to the letter from DCAL which indicated that £500k had to be spent on books and £100k on maintenance but the Board had not received a final allocation letter.

Mr Aiken asked if DCAL wanted the Board to make a decision in advance of knowing final funding.

Mr Campbell said that the advice from DCAL was there was no additional funding.

*(Councillor J Hanna left the meeting at 5.40 pm.)*

The Chairman confirmed that the original letter had specified the amount and said that the Library Committee had spent a lot of time looking at areas which Mrs Ryan had identified.

In reply to a question from Alderman Hatch about the Information Service, Portadown, Mrs Ryan replied that with the reduction of staff to one person, if back-up support was required this could be carried out within Headquarters if the service was relocated to Armagh.

In reply to a further question from Alderman Hatch, Mrs Ryan said that there were staff at Headquarters who dealt with requests for stocks etc, Branch Library staff do not usually deal with these issues.

*(Mr C Mackin left the meeting at 5.44 pm.)*

Councillor McRoberts expressed concern at the cut in the Irish and Local Studies Library and said that negotiations were ongoing between the Library and the Council about the possibility of extending services within the Library.

*(Alderman F E Crowe left the meeting at 5.45 pm.)*

Rev Canon Swann proposed that the tabled proposals be accepted. This was seconded by Mrs McBride.

Councillor McGinn proposed that they should not to accepted.

Mrs Ryan said that further proposals would be brought back to the Library Committee in relation to the additional savings required.

Alderman Hatch proposed that a decision be deferred until clarification from the Minister or DCAL had been received, when a decision could also be made with regard to the £500k for books. This was seconded by Councillor Mrs McRoberts.

Rev Canon Swann reiterated his proposal to accept the savings.

When the Chairman called for a vote on Alderman Hatch's proposal the following votes were cast:

For	6	Against	8	Abstention	1
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When the Chairman called for a vote on Rev Canon Swann's proposal the following votes were cast:

For	11	Against	5	Abstention	1
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The Chairman confirmed that the majority vote had indicated that the Board would accept the proposed savings.

The meeting ended at 5.50 pm.

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**CHAIRMAN**

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**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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**DATE**