

Minutes of Meeting of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 18 January 2018 in the Council Offices, Circular Road, Dungannon

Members Present: Councillor Ashton, Chair

Councillors Bell, Buchanan, Burton, Clarke, Cuddy, Cuthbertson, Gildernew, Gillespie (7.07pm) Glasgow (7.04pm), Kearney, McAleer, McGinley, McKinney, Milne, Molloy, Mulligan, M Quinn, Reid (7.04pm), Robinson, J Shiels, G Shiels and Wilson (7.04pm)

Officers in Attendance: Mr McCreesh, Director of Business and Communities
Mrs Forde, Member Support Officer

In Attendance: **Representatives of Northern Regional College**

Mr Brankin, Vice Principal, Business Development & Transformation
Mr Taggart, Vice Principal & Chief Information Officer

Representatives of South West Regional College

Mr Michael McAlister Chief Executive
Dr Jill Cush, Innovation and Development Manager
Mr Ciaran McManus, Head of Department Industry and Training

Representative of Education Authority

Mr John Collings, Director of Education
Ms Kim Scott, Assistant Director of Regional Development

The meeting commenced at 7 pm.

SC1/18 Apologies

Councillors Bateson, Doris, Elattar, Forde, Mallaghan, McEldowney, McFlynn, B McGuigan, S McGuigan, McLean, McNamee, McPeake, Monteith, Mullen, J O'Neill, and Totten

SC2/18 Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of their responsibility with regard to declarations of interest

SC3/18 Chair's Business

None

SC4/18 South West Regional College

The Chair Councillor Ashton welcomed representatives from South West Regional College to the meeting.

Mr McAlister and Mr McManus delivered a presentation (appendix 1) outlining the vision, priorities, employer engagement, social inclusion and enterprise and international. Members were advised of the Careers Fair planned for Saturday 24 February 2018.

*Councillors Glasgow, Reid and Wilson arrived at 7.04pm during presentation
Councillor Gillespie arrived at 7.07pm during presentation*

The Chair, Councillor Ashton invited Dr Cush to respond to Members questions.

Councillor McKinney referred to the percentage of people completing courses on SUSE programmes and asked about the level of young people who drop out. Mr McManus advised that in excess of 50% have a positive outcome, that some on courses have significant barriers to overcome, some return back to complete courses but that 90% have a positive development of soft skill development.

In response to Councillor McKinney's question regarding how many students progress onto higher education Mr McManus advised that in excess of 1,250 people per annum achieve qualifications. He also made reference to apprenticeship partnerships and the fact that there is as many and more jobs as there was people for.

Councillor Clarke thanked the representatives for the presentation and made reference to a proposed project in the Coalisland area which would encompass an engineering training facility and a tourism aspect. He spoke of the need for skilled people in the field of engineering and tourism and the aim for tourism to be doubled across Ireland. Councillor Clarke highlighted the need for education providers to work collaboratively with such projects in order that collectively linkages can be made to address the needs of the area.

In response, Mr McManus stated that the South West College was collaborative by nature and meetings had taken place with the local MP Francie Molloy in relation to the proposed project in Coalisland.

Councillor McGinley sought an update in relation to the proposed centre of excellence for engineering.

In response Dr Cush advised that the engineering centre of excellence is strategically very significant, that South West College were leading training to shape the needs of the local industry. Dr Cush advised that the project business case had been submitted to the Department of the Economy a number of changes and enhancements had been recommended and that progress was being achieved. It was also noted that the College were leaders in research, innovation and skills. In

relation to Councillor McGinley's enquiry regarding artificial intelligence Dr Cush advised that the current focus of the college was technical and practical skills but that they were conscious that artificial intelligence was coming very quickly and it was anticipated within five years it would be here.

The Director of Business and Communities stated that Council was working in partnership with the College in relation to the proposed centre of excellence and had engaged in relation to the design concept and it was anticipated that a paper would be presented in the near future.

Councillor Cuthbertson sought an update in relation to the uptake of courses for trades such as bricklaying, painting and decorating. In response Mr McManus advised that there was an increase in recruitment of joinery with almost 100 students across the three campuses but that bricklaying, painting and decorating remained in single figures

In response to Councillor G Shiels question on encouraging young people who display practical skills Mr McManus advised that the College worked closely with the community highlighting the opportunities to develop professional and technical training with Year 11 and 12 pupils and more recently primary schools.

Councillor J Shiels referred to the SUSE programme and asked what the outcome was for the 50% of people who did not progress to full time education or employment. In response, Mr McManus advised they engage with the students where they currently are and some are enhanced to avail of required support, for example counselling. He confirmed that follow up mentoring takes place.

In response to Councillor J Shiels question on increasing numbers of females in STEM courses Dr Cush advised that there was an ongoing piece of work taking place, Miss STEM Europe, and that the College was working with 30 young women under the age of 30 working in STEM fields. Dr Cush advised that the College engaged with Council, the NI Assembly and this year were visiting Brussels as part of the project highlighting workshops which also incorporated a gender focus.

The Chair, Councillor Ashton advised she had visited the Miss STEM Europe project and that they would be making a presentation in February.

In response to Councillor Kearney's question on international links, Mr McManus stated that nothing happened without hard work and advised that the college had strong links with Canada and France and brought student teams to the countries to embrace the language and culture and work in a new environment. He highlighted the benefits of the project advising that the international focus extended to the social inclusion programmes. He highlighted visits to Flanders, Belgium.

The Chair, Councillor Ashton thanked the representatives for their presentation.

Cllrs Cuthbertson, Reid and Wilson left the meeting at 7.37pm

The Chair, Councillor Ashton welcomed representatives from Northern Regional College to the meeting. Messrs Taggart and Brankin made a presentation (appendix 2) giving an overview of the college focussing on Magherafelt campus in Council area. During the presentation Members were made aware of the planned Open Days at the Magherafelt Campus scheduled to take place on Saturday 3 February and Tuesday 6th February 2018.

Councillor Glasgow left the meeting at 7.45 pm and returned at 7.48pm

The Chair, Councillor Ashton thanked the representatives for their presentation and invited Members questions.

Councillor McGinley made reference to the Big Lottery Funding project and expressed his interest in the programme of work with people with autism he made mention of ADHD stating that there appeared to be a spike in diagnosis.

In response, Mr Brankin stated that College statistics had shown a flat rate of growth in the current year but that previous growth in cases had been surprising but stated that more people were being diagnosed in schools.

Councillor McGinley asked if the students involved were statemented. In response, Mr Taggart advised he would report back to the Member on the exact statistics.

Councillor J Shiels expressed appreciation regarding the investment in equipment at the Magherafelt campus but asked when there would be real investment in the building itself making reference to the capital spend of £85 million budgeted for Northern Regional College other campus' in Ballymena and Coleraine.

In response Mr Taggart stated that the £85m capital investment was specifically for a new build in Ballymena and Coleraine, he advised that the college were moving to a three model site and Magherafelt would be ultimately treated the same as it was the Boards intention to have them all of similar standard. He highlighted that there was a focus on cuts which would impact on all colleges in relation to new builds. He stated he embarked on his teaching career in 1984 and the new builds in Ballymena and Coleraine had been on the agenda for over two decades.

Councillors Cuddy, G Shiels and McAleer left the meeting at 7.57pm

Mr Brankin advised that Ballymoney was losing its complex, Newtownabbey had a planned refit and that Magherafelt would come under the refit category but there were no plans for a new build.

Councillor Kearney asked if the college provided any courses/programmes in agriculture or was this left to establishments such as Greenmount. Mr Taggart in response advised that they did not offer agricultural courses but did support students through essential skills courses.

Councillor Milne left the meeting at 8.05pm

Councillor McKinney stated that it was good to keep students local and asked how the courses were being facilitated making reference to staffing. In response, Mr Taggart stated that staff recruitment had taken place across the province and that

there had been an increase in uptake of courses across the province in electrical installation, plumbing and other crafts.

SC6/18 Education Authority

The Chair, Councillor Ashton welcomed representatives from the Education Authority to the meeting. Mr Collings and Ms Scott made a presentation (appendix 3) outlining the pathways plan together with strategic linkages and services operating in Mid Ulster area and the pathways plan.

Councillor Clarke left at 8.10pm

It was highlighted that in the coming weeks there would be a new school governor recruitment drive across the sector and Members were encouraged to apply as a wide selection of people were required.

The Chair, Councillor Ashton thanked the representatives for the presentation and opened the question/answer session making reference to the annual action plan which had gone into the public domain and caused major concerns for Aughnacloy Primary School. The Chair emphasised that it was her understanding that the school was thriving but the school name appearing on the action plan had caused major angst amongst parents and indeed the other schools named on the plan.

In response, Ms Scott advised that just because a school is on the list does not mean it is being considered for closure it could be earmarked for amalgamation or increased enrolment. Ms Scott emphasised that schools can be named because they are part of the area solution and that they endeavour to discuss this with them before the action plan is released. Mr Collings concurred emphasising that the current action plan had named schools which were increasing.

Councillor McGinley declared an interest in that he was currently a school governor.

Councillor McGinley expressed concern in relation to pre-school enrolment, in that, in areas of deprivation some were trying to evidence criteria and universal credit was one but to date it had not been introduced here. In response, Ms Scott advised that she had been aware of 'teething problems' but that it was her understanding that the matter had been resolved.

Councillor Burton made reference to Aughnacloy Primary School and Lisferty Primary School named on the action plan and emphasised that it sends a negative message especially in rural areas. The Councillor stated that when a rural school is named people would not send their children to the school and stressed the need to have the area solutions well on track before the action plan reaches the media.

Councillor Glasgow in relation to the action plan raised Churchtown Primary School who had taken students from neighbouring primary schools which had been closed yet now they were being named in the action plan and emphasising that he was being blunt that the school was on it for closure. Councillor Glasgow stressed that the Churchtown Primary school was a community hub.

Councillor Glasgow also referred to funding for nursery schools highlighting in particular Orritor Primary School which had been built in his later years of primary school. He stated that funding was an issue and that people were reluctant to send

their children to nurseries which were not up to standard and asked when the Education Authority would 'open the wallet wider' and invest in the nursery.

In response, Ms Scott advised that the recommendations for Churchtown Primary School was built on subjective data and that if it does not meet the sustainable criteria it is difficult. Ms Scott stated that Education Authority Officers endeavour to turn schools around and improve them she also advised that sometimes when schools appear on area plans it can encourage the community to support the school and there are times when decisions are turned around. Ms Scott stressed that the community needs to understand their role and further advised that they do not make the ultimate decision as it is made by the Minister for Education following consultation. She stated that the Education Authority wanted to retain schools but that they needed to thrive to ensure children got the best education they could get.

Mr Collings in referring to comments regarding funding stated that he wished the Education Authority wallet was 'fatter' but gave an assurance that officers were striving to both keep and attract more resources but that Members were aware of the stresses and strains on public sector funding especially for capital investment.

Councillor Kearney declared an interest as a board of governor

Councillor Kearney asked how psychology services were coping in the current situation. In response, Mr Collings advised that the service was part of the children and young people directorate and although going through a period of transition the service was doing remarkably well. He advised that there was still some way to go as the demand for special education needs continued to rise rapidly. Mr Collings referred to the earlier comments in relation to children with ADHD and advised that children were presenting with additional needs at a younger age. Mr Collings advised that the Education Authority were challenged to shift from reacting to intervention and made reference to proposals for establishing ADHD units in main stream schools so that intervention can take place earlier.

Councillor Kearney expressed concern in the area of special needs stating that in budget cuts it is always classroom assistants who are left vulnerable and the children left with-out them.

Councillor Molloy referred to the earlier comments in relation to the area plans and stated that it did galvanise communities as he had personal experiences of this with Clinty Clay Primary School just outside the District. He also stated that sometimes the CCEA ignore critical considerations such as generation gaps. He asked where the shared campus in the Moy was currently sitting. In response, Ms Scott stated that she did not know at this stage.

The Director of Business and Communities stated that within the Community Plan Members had engaged significantly with regard to nursery provisions which was a major issue given that Mid Ulster had the largest growing population and asked if allocation of nursery places reflected the growth.

The Director made reference to the area plan within which schools play a role especially with 70% of people in the district residing in rural areas. He highlighted the Rural Needs Act which had been passed recently and asked how it had impacted on schools in the district.

In response, Ms Scott stated that in terms of pre-school provision to allow for fluctuations the policy currently permitted the use of private providers to make up the shortfall if statutory provision was not adequate. She advised that the private providers were granted a minimum of seven places but emphasised that it was a balancing act given the demographics.

In relation to the Rural Needs Act Mr Collings highlighted that one of the six criteria for consideration in the school area plan is the role of the school in the local community and stressed it was not just the financial liability of the school which was considered. He also advised that a rural needs impact assessment takes place to ensure that any decision is rural proofed, and he stressed that mortality issues were considered.

The Chair, Councillor Ashton thanked the representatives for attending.

SC7/18 Duration of Meeting

The meeting was called for 7.00pm and ended at 8.42pm

CHAIR _____

DATE _____