

Minutes of Meeting of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 21 January 2016 in the Council Offices, Circular Road, Dungannon

Members Present: Councillor Dillon, Chair

Councillors Ashton, Buchanan, Clarke, Cuddy (7.25pm), Cuthbertson, Elattar, Gildernew, Gillespie, Glasgow, Kearney, McAleer, McFlynn, McGinley, B McGuigan, McKinney, McNamee, McPeake, Molloy, Mulligan, C O'Neill, M Quinn, Robinson, J Shiels, and Wilson

Officers in Attendance: Mr A Tohill, Chief Executive
Mr Cassells, Director of Environment and Property
Mr McCreesh, Director of Business and Communities
Ms McKeown Head of Economic Development
Mr Philip Moffett, Head of Democratic Services
Mrs Forde, Member Support Officer

In Attendance: Representatives of Northern Regional College

Professor Scott, Chief Executive
Mr Brankin, Principal Business Development & Transformation
Ms O'Neill, Head of Business Development

Representatives of South West Regional College

Mr McAleer, Director
Mr McAlister, Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Dr Jill Cush, Innovation and Development Manager

Representative of South East Education Authority

Mr Butler, Regional Managing Director

The meeting commenced at 7 pm.

SC1/16 Apologies

Councillors Bateson, Bell, Burton, Forde, Mallaghan, McEldowney, S McGuigan McLean, Monteith, Mullen, J O'Neill, T Quinn, Reid, G Shiels and Totten

SC1/16 Declarations of Interest

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

SC2/16 Northern Regional College

The Chair, Councillor Linda Dillon welcomed representatives from Northern Regional College to the meeting. Ms O'Neill, Head of Business Development and Mr Brankin, Principal of Business Development & Transformation extended apologies for Professor Scott who had been delayed and proceeded to deliver a presentation outlining the college profile, its footprint, delivery of education courses and future plans to support Mid Ulster Economic Development.

Professor Scott arrived at 7.22pm

Councillor Cuddy arrived at 7.25 pm

SC3/16 South West Regional College

The Chair, Councillor Linda Dillon welcomed representatives from South West Regional College to the meeting. Mr McAleer Director, introduced the team and Mr McAllister Deputy Chief Executive outlined the profile of the college focusing on performance indicators, extensive curriculum, innovation centres, virtualisation programme and both scholarship and apprenticeship opportunities. Dr Cush delivered a presentation outlining a proposal for a Centre of Excellence for Engineering to be based at the Dungannon Campus of South West College if the funding application was successful.

SC4/16 South East Education Authority

The Chair, Councillor Linda Dillon welcomed representative from South East Education Authority. Mr Butler, Regional Managing Director outlined the Education Authority Investment Plans and Delivery of services within Mid Ulster, details of existing schools, forthcoming changes within the Education Authority and the development of a policy for sustainable schools.

Councillor S McAleer left the meeting at 8.04pm returning at 8.07 pm

Councillor M Quinn left the meeting at 8.09pm.

SC5/16 Question/Answer

The Chair Councillor Dillon thanked the representatives for their presentations and referred to a recent event at South West College which showcased the excellent range of programmes ongoing and the partnerships with schools, businesses and local employers. The Chair, stated that although competition between education establishments may be healthy she would welcome a partnership approach.

Councillor M Quinn returned to the meeting at 8.12pm.

Councillor Gildernew left the meeting at 8.15pm

In response to Councillor McGinley's question Dr Cush advised that the site identified in the presentation for the proposed centre of excellence for engineering was a football pitch at the side of the South West College Dungannon campus.

Councillors Wilson and Cuddy left the meeting at 8.17pm

Councillor McPeake referred to the South West College proposal for an engineering centre of excellence, acknowledged that it was dependent on the success of a funding application but asked if it would meet the needs of the engineering sector and provide the specialism needed in machinery for young people to upskill. In response Mr McAleer stated that South West College had engaged in worldwide consultation in order to ensure that the proposed centre would be fit for purpose. Mr McAleer also made reference to the innovation centre based at the Enniskillen campus and spoke of the increased opportunities for apprenticeships in recent years. It was also noted, that there had been £5m plus investment in the past few years and Mr McAleer stressed that South West College needed to keep up the pace and emphasised the importance of collaboration. Mr McAleer mentioning the recent difficulties in the economy in China stated that such events would have an impact throughout the world.

Councillor Cuddy returned to the meeting at 8.24pm

Councillor Clarke stated that he represented a remote area of the district and had a particular interest in education. Commending the College on the innovation centres the Councillor stated that the global economy impacted everyone but stressed that the need for more innovation and increased opportunities especially in manufacturing was paramount. With regard to recycling, Councillor Clarke stated that whilst the region was excellent at collecting materials there was a need to use this vital source within the region and thus further investment would improve everyone's future. Councillor Clarke stated that the vast area of the Sperrin's which bordered the Western area was now down to two of three small schools, that the provision of road systems and transport was poor and emphasised the need for collaborative working to maintain what was already there noting that from Draperstown to Strabane there was no post primary school. Councillor Clarke concluded stating that the aforementioned factors were extremely important to the area he represented.

In response Councillor McAleer stated that the rural areas needed better broadband provision which would enable colleges to reach outlying communities through virtualisation programmes.

Councillors McPeake and M Quinn left the meeting at 8.28pm

The Chair, Councillor Dillon emphasised that Council were constantly lobbying for improved broadband coverage and expressed Council's interest in the data collected by South West College regarding rural isolation.

In response to comments regarding small rural primary schools Mr Butler spoke of two schools in Ballycastle as far back as 1960 who had worked in partnership to maintain a sixth form education provision. Speaking with regard to small rural schools Mr Butler stated that some were so small that even to merge they would still fall short of sustainable numbers.

Councillor Clarke and the Director of Business and Communities left the meeting at 8.32pm

Councillor Ashton welcomed the positives highlighted in the presentation such as the community outreach programmes and the proposed engineering centre of excellence. With regard to the schools which are under subscribed Councillor Ashton stated that in the short to medium term they need investment as they may be lacking in for example sports provision and would soon be competing for funding with the whole of Northern Ireland. In response Mr Butler stated there had been a large proportion of investment within the Mid Ulster region and stressed that the challenging question was 'does the Education Authority invest in areas where there is growth or lose it were it is doomed'?

Councillor Molloy made reference to the presentations and commended the honours degree course programmes stating that it was fabulous for local students to be able to gain higher education qualifications locally as it minimised the end debt. Speaking regarding the Education Authority's required number of 105 pupils for primary schools Councillor Molloy stated that the district was a large rural area with many small schools who, if they were to amalgamate, would not have the room required to accommodate all schools and that although it is known that all schools cannot remain functional would there be opportunity to share facilities. Councillor Molloy also stated that many of the strongest leaders in the community had attended primary schools with 40 to 50 students. In response, Mr Butler stated that the 105 is considered and that he himself had defended a small school within the region. Mr Butler made reference to the 'Moy' model and also the 'Omagh' model when facilities had been maximised, continuing he stated that many factors contribute that sometimes smaller schools are kept as they deliver in rural areas.

Councillor Clarke and the Director of Business and Communities returned to the meeting at 8.47pm

Councillor McFlynn spoke of the difficulties of 'statemented' children who don't always achieve GSCE maths and English but who can undertake essential skills and emphasised the need for apprenticeships, practical experience and work placements for those who do not have an academic mind emphasising in particular the importance of opportunity and continuity of same.

Professor Scott stated that whilst there is a focus on higher education, cost was a major factor and often individuals stage their training and development and acknowledged that many students were mature learners. Referring to the vast estate of public facilities, Professor Scott emphasised the challenge of maximising use of these speaking with regard to European countries whose colleges facilitated for example the local library and concert hall. Professor Scott continued stating that when forward planning such options are considered as resources will only get tougher and when getting projects across the line sustainability needs to be a major factor. Professor Scott invited Members and Officers to forthcoming open days at the colleges requesting that they also encourage friends, neighbours, parents and customers to attend the open days and visit the website.

The Chair Councillor Dillon emphasised the need for maximising use of the public estate especially with regard to local schools within community planning. The Chair further stated that the Minister for Education should make it a rule that schools have to be available for community use and such decisions should not be at the discretion of the Board of Governors.

Mr Butler stated that one of the proposed committees for the Education Authority had community for schools on the agenda.

The Chair Councillor Dillon welcomed the opportunities for degree courses as reflecting on her own education stated that if she had had the opportunity to study locally she could have attained a degree but as her family had been unable to support her she had to seek employment as was the case for many. In conclusion, the Chair stated that a small version of community planning was the Council, College and Neighbourhood Renewal working together which had been advantageous. In the future, the Chair stated that community planning was the way ahead.

Mr McAleer on behalf of the College expressed thanks to the Council for continued support and to Members for attendance at events.

SC6/16 Duration of Meeting

The meeting was called for 7.00pm and ended at 8.50pm.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____