

**Minutes of Meeting of Policy and Resources Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 11 April 2024 in the Council Offices, Burn Road, Cookstown**

**Members Present**

Councillor F Burton, Chair

Councillors Bell, Brown, J Burton, Cahoon, Johnston, McAleer, McFlynn, McLernon, Molloy, Wilson

**Officers in Attendance**

Ms Dyson, Head of Human Resources (HoHR)  
Mr McGuckin, Head of Strategic Services and Engagement (HoSS&E)  
Mrs McNally, Assistant Director of Corporate Services and Finance (AD: CS&F)  
Mr Moffett, Assistant Director of Organisation Development, Strategy & Performance (AD: ODSP)  
Mr O'Hagan, Head of IT (HoIT)  
Mr Tohill, Strategic Director of Corporate Services and Finance (SD: CS&F)  
Miss Thompson, Committee and Member Services Officer

**Others in Attendance**

Councillor Kerr

**Deputation - Childcare Provision: Children with Additional Needs**

Ms Hanna and Ms Toner

The meeting commenced at 7.02 pm.

*The Chair, Councillor F Burton welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the meeting through the Live Broadcast. Councillor F Burton in introducing the meeting detailed the operational arrangements for transacting the business of the committee by referring to Annex A to this minute.*

**PR074/24 Notice of Recording**

Members noted that the meeting would be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast on the Council's You Tube site.

**PR075/24 Apologies**

Councillors Corry, Gildernew, McLean, S McPeake and Totten.

Mrs Canavan, Strategic Director of Organisation Development, Strategy and Performance (SD: ODSP)

**PR076/24 Declarations of Interest**

The Chair, Councillor F Burton reminded Members of their responsibility with regard to declarations of interest.

## **PR077/24 Chairs Business**

None.

## **PR078/24 Deputation – Childcare Provision: Children with Additional Needs**

The Chair, Councillor F Burton welcomed Ms Hanna and Ms Toner to the meeting and invited them to make their presentation.

Ms Hanna and Ms Toner thanked Members for the opportunity to present to Committee and made presentation (Appendix 1) which focused on the lack of childcare provision for children with additional needs/disabilities and their own experiences of this. The presentation also outlined their suggestions for the future in seeking equal childcare rights for all.

The Chair, Councillor F Burton stated it was sad to hear the struggles being experienced on a day to day basis and the impact this is having on family life. Councillor F Burton asked what Council could do to lobby on their behalf.

Ms Toner felt that there should be a system that ensures that there are places available in creches and childcare settings for children with additional needs. Ms Toner stated that a child going into school can get one to one or can go to a special education needs schools or specialist provision classes so they felt childcare should be the same.

The Chair, Councillor F Burton referred to the Childcare Act 2006 in England mentioned in the presentation which requires all local authorities there to ensure that there is enough registered childcare places for children aged 0-14 and that there is no similar legislation in NI and that this is something Council could write to the Minister about.

Ms Hanna stated that in England they are obliged to provide childcare for all children including those with disabilities to ensure there are enough childcare places. Ms Hanna advised that she had spoken to numerous creches and when she had informed them of her child's needs they said they would need extra funding and that no one knew where to get this extra funding in order to provide the additional support. Ms Hanna advised that she had been told that if her child went to a creche then the creche bill would be increased.

The Chair, Councillor F Burton stated that the situation is discriminating against a child who has additional needs.

Councillor McLernon stated she could completely understand and relate to everything that had been said in the presentation as she had a nephew who came through children services into adult services and knew the obstacles Ms Hanna and Ms Toner were facing. Councillor McLernon stated that Sinn Féin see children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) as a priority and have consistently called for an overhaul of the SEN system to ensure it meets the needs of children and families. The Councillor stated that Sinn Féin have asked the Education Authority and Department of Education to work with the Health Minister to transform SEN services to ensure the needs of children and young people are properly met and that if Ms Hanna and Ms Toner felt there is anything can be done to lobby on their behalf to get in touch.

Councillor Kerr stated that the presentation highlighted the discrimination in childcare for children with additional needs. The Councillor also referred to previous discussions he had had with Ms Toner and how she has had to sacrifice her career which she is passionate about due to childcare not being available for her child. Councillor Kerr stated he did not sit on this committee and could not make a proposal but would recommend as a follow up that officers meet with Ms Hanna and Ms Toner to discuss how as a local authority it could lobby the trust.

Councillor Bell asked if Ms Hanna and Ms Toner had met with the Education or Health Ministers.

Ms Toner advised that they had both met with local MLAs and that there were to be follow up meetings with Ministers but that since the meetings with the MLAs they had heard nothing.

Councillor Bell proposed that Council write to both the Education Minister and Health Minister highlighting the issues regarding childcare for children with additional needs.

Councillor McLernon seconded Councillor Bell's proposal.

Councillor Molloy stated that all Councillors are aware of the cost of childcare alone nevermind the cost of childcare for children with special needs and suggested that contact is also made with the Chair and members of the Education and Health Committees at the Assembly.

Ms Hanna stated that herself and Ms Toner really wanted to drive this issue forward to see some change in childcare availability for children with additional needs.

The Chair, Councillor F Burton asked Councillor Bell if he wanted to add what Councillor Molloy had suggested to his proposal.

Councillor Bell stated he would be happy to include the additional comments.

**Resolved** That it be recommended to Council to write to the Education and Health Minister and also the Chair and members of the Education and Health Committees highlighting the issues raised regarding childcare for children with additional needs.

Councillor Wilson stated that no child or family should be discriminated against and that as the Health Minister was a member of his party he asked that the presentation made tonight be forwarded to him so that he could send it to the Health Minister to make him aware.

Councillor Johnston asked if the introduction of the Childcare Act in England had been a success in terms of making sure every child is provided for.

Ms Hanna stated that it was her understanding that there have been issues with getting staff for creches.

Councillor Johnston asked if there is an expectation within creches that there is one specially trained member.

Ms Toner stated that there is funding available that creches can apply for in order to provide one to one support but that staff are unknowledgeable about this and from her experience she felt that staff find seeking the funding more hassle than it is worth. Ms Toner felt that there should be a pool of staff within a childcare setting that can provide the additional support when required similar to education so that if a child needs one to one support it can be accessed as her child has been constantly declined childcare places and that she has had to significantly reduce her working hours as a result.

Councillor Johnston stated that lessons could be learned from mistakes made in England when seeking similar legislation for Northern Ireland and she did not envisage any party not being supportive of such legislation.

The Chair, Councillor F Burton thanked Ms Hanna and Ms Toner for the presentation following which they left the meeting at 7.23 pm.

## **Matters for Decision**

### **PR079/24 Request(s) to Illuminate Council Property**

Members considered previously circulated report which sought approval to illuminate and light up the Council's three designated properties to raise awareness for the following:

- Hope4mefibro: ME & Fibromyalgia – International Awareness Day: 12 May 2024: Colour: Blue
- Alzheimer's Society: Dementia Action Week: 13 May 2024: Colour: Blue
- British Porphyria Association: Porphyria Awareness Week: 18 May 2024: Colour: Purple
- HSC NI Foster Care: Foster Care Fortnight - Fostering Moments: 20 May 2024: Colour: Turquoise & Yellow (or Turquoise)
- Tourettes Action: Awareness Day: 7 June 2024: Colour: Green
- Hope4mefibro: Severe ME Awareness Day: 8 August 2024: Colour Blue
- 1<sup>st</sup> Tyrone Scout Group Dungannon: 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: 18 October 2024: Colour: Purple & Blue (or Blue)

Proposed by Councillor McFlynn  
Seconded by Councillor J Burton and

**Resolved** That it be recommended to Council to illuminate the three designated Council properties as follows –

- Hope4mefibro: ME & Fibromyalgia –International Awareness Day: 12 May 2024: Colour: Blue
- Alzheimer's Society: Dementia Action Week: 13 May 2024: Colour: Blue
- British Porphyria Association: Porphyria Awareness Week: 18 May 2024: Colour: Purple
- HSC NI Foster Care: Foster Care Fortnight - Fostering Moments: 20 May 2024: Colour: Turquoise & Yellow (or Turquoise)
- Tourettes Action: Awareness Day: 7 June 2024: Colour: Green

- Hope4mefibro: Severe ME Awareness Day: 8 August 2024: Colour Blue
- 1<sup>st</sup> Tyrone Scout Group Dungannon: 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: 18 October 2024: Colour: Purple & Blue (or Blue)

#### **PR080/24 Committee and Council Meetings 2024-2025**

The Head of Strategic Services and Engagement (HoSS&E) presented previously circulated report which considered the 2024-2025 Committee and Council Meeting Schedule for approval.

Councillor McFlynn referred to discussion at Planning Committee earlier in the week and that it had been agreed that a review of the start time would be undertaken.

Proposed by Councillor Bell  
Seconded by Councillor McFlynn and

**Resolved** That it be recommended to Council to approve the Council & Committee Meeting Schedule for the period June 2024 to May 2025 as set out at appendix A of report.

#### **PR081/24 Member Services**

No issues.

#### **Matters for Information**

#### **PR082/24 Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on 7 March 2024**

Members noted Minutes of Policy & Resources Committee held on 7 March 2024.

*Live broadcast ended at 7.26 pm.*

#### **Local Government (NI) Act 2014 - Confidential Business**

Proposed by Councillor Brown  
Seconded by Councillor Bell and

**Resolved** In accordance with Section 42, Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 that Members of the public be asked to withdraw from the meeting whilst Members consider items PR083/24 to PR087/24.

#### **Matters for Decision**

PR083/24 Staffing Matters for Decision

#### **Matters for Information**

PR084/24 Confidential Minutes of Policy & Resources Committee held on 7 March 2024

PR085/24 Staff Matters for Information

PR086/24 Financial report for 11 months ended 29 February 2024  
PR087/24 Contracts and DAC

**P088/24 Duration of Meeting**

The meeting was called for 7.00 pm and ended at 7.30 pm.

Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Annex A – Introductory Remarks from the Chairperson**

Good evening and welcome to the Council's [Policy & Resources/Environment/Development] Committee in the Chamber, [Cookstown/Dungannon/Magherafelt].

I specifically welcome the public watching us through the Live Broadcast. The Live Broadcast as aforesaid, will run for the period of our Open Business but will end just before we move into Confidential Business. I will let you know before this happens.

I would remind the public and press that taking photographs of proceedings or using any means to enable anyone not present to see or hear proceedings, or making a simultaneous oral report of the proceedings are not permitted.

Thank you and we will now move to the agenda.



Equal childcare  
rights for all

# Background

- ▶ NHS nurses for over 10 years. Both have children who have additional needs/disabilities.
- ▶ Struggled to get appropriate childcare in order to be able to go out to work. Experiences include a creche contract for a 3 year old, being terminated with no notice given.
- ▶ Told by a creche they couldn't accommodate the child who was disabled.
- ▶ Career breaks/ reduced hours taken as no other options available.

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- ▶ In England the childcare Act 2006 requires all local authorities to ensure there is enough registered childcare places for children aged 0-14, and reduce inequalities.
  - ▶ There is no childcare sufficiency duty in NI requiring the government to ensure there are sufficient childcare places to appropriately meets the needs of all families, including those who have a child with a disability. Families in Northern Ireland can face a range of barriers to accessing quality early learning and childcare (Employers for childcare).

# Creches

- ▶ Untrained staff for children with additional needs.
- ▶ Poor ratios e.g. 1 staff member for 8 children in the 3-5 room. This is unsafe for a child with additional needs.
- ▶ Creches unwilling to change ratios /accommodate 1:1's/ make reasonable adjustments.
- ▶ Appears to be extreme lack of or no funding available for children in creches that require extra support.
- ▶ Refused creche place due to disability.
- ▶ Contract terminated as unable to facilitate needs of the child.
- ▶ Told prices would be increased for all children if additional funding was not provided by us as parents.

# Registered childminders

- ▶ Previous experience of registered childminders stating they would have to reduce overall numbers of children to ensure a safe ratio, so therefore refused a place.

# Private Childcare

- ▶ No Government supplement assistance, therefore more expensive.
- ▶ No obligation to give notice and can terminate at any given time.

# Social Work support

- ▶ Spent weeks contacting social workers to seek assistance with help for childcare. No social worker able to provide support.
- ▶ Health visitor had submitted a unocini (Professional report to highlight an issue) but again this was declined.
- ▶ Social worker in creche setting providing inappropriate and unprofessional advice.
- ▶ No response from complaints lodged to early years team within southern trust.

# Parents

- ▶ Unable to access safe and appropriate childcare due to child having a disability.
- ▶ Relying heavily on family support which isn't always available.
- ▶ No advice/support given
- ▶ Having to stop work/reduce hours despite increased cost of living therefore causing financial strain.

# Discrimination

- ▶ Able to access childcare for siblings but Child with additional needs left out and unable to be provided for.
- ▶ Children with disabilities are being isolated and left behind.
- ▶ Entitled to same opportunities as any other child.

# Suggestions for the future

- ▶ Despite disability legislation there appears to be no legal obligation for creches to accommodate a child with additional needs.
- ▶ Safe childcare facilities to include children with disabilities.
- ▶ Local government funding for creches to facilitate children with disabilities.
- ▶ Childcare costs currently highlighted on a daily basis in the media. What about children with additional needs?
- ▶ Highlight awareness of these issues
- ▶ Policies/procedures implemented in childcare facilities.
- ▶ Social work support
- ▶ Stop discrimination against children with additional needs.