

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 27 February 2023 at 6.00pm in Downshire Chamber and via Microsoft Teams

In the Chair: Councillor M Savage

In attendance in Chamber: (Councillors)
Councillor T Andrews Councillor P Byrne
Councillor D Curran Councillor C Enright
Councillor H Gallagher Councillor A Lewis
Councillor G Sharvin Councillor D Taylor

In Attendance via Teams: Councillor C Bowsie Councillor R Burgess
Councillor W Clarke Councillor L Devlin
Councillor A Finnegan Councillor H Gallagher
Councillor V Harte Councillor R Howell
Councillor G Kearns Councillor D Lee-Surginor
Councillor L McEvoy Councillor H McKee
Councillor D Murphy Councillor H Reilly

In attendance in Chamber: (Officials)
Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Mrs L Cummins, Democratic Services Officer

In Attendance via Teams: EDUCATION AUTHORITY NORTHERN IRELAND
Esther Millar, Deputy Head of Local Youth Services
Donna Weir, Senior Youth Officer

SC/005/2023 APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Jackson, Magennis, McMurray, Reilly and Stokes.

SC/006/2023 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/007/2023 PRESENTATION FROM EDUCATION AUTHORITY NORTHERN IRELAND

The Chairperson welcomed the delegation from Education Authority Northern Ireland and invited them to make their presentation.

Ms Millar thanked Council for the opportunity to meet representatives and proceeded to deliver the presentation on the Education Authority Youth Funding Scheme (copy of which is

attached to these minutes).

Following the presentation, the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members as follows:

Councillor Byrne stated that he had been working very closely with one of the clubs in Crossmaglen area that was funded by the Education Authority, highlighting the funding process was beyond diabolical and the stress and anger that had been caused by gaslighting to those working in the youth club was a disgrace. He stated that engagement with the Education Authority had been poor and queries raised had taken weeks to get a response. There was zero support given during the process while applications were open and as a result a much needed service in the Crossmaglen area was having to close its doors at the end of March due to no funding.

Councillor Byrne went on to say that there was confusing and conflicting information being given from the Department who were stating that budgets had been ringfenced and the Education Authority countered that by stating there was no budget confirmed. He asked for clarity on figures from funding and money allocated in the statutory sector compared to voluntary sector as core work was key which had been reduced. He further stated the whole process was confusing and needed drastically changed, certain clubs were not eligible for any of the extra strands of funding and requested clarity on the plans put in place for those clubs who were unsuccessful.

Councillor Byrne urged representatives to attend in person a public meeting being held on 8 March 2023 in the Crossmaglen area to try and come to some sort of solution to the problem and outline a way forward and to have a crisis meeting with members as soon as possible to address these issues.

Councillor Byrne raised the following queries;

- Plans in place to support those groups were not definite and were anticipated plans, would the application process reopen to unsuccessful bids and if so would it be March or May for the full amount of £96,823 and what do unsuccessful clubs do in the meantime?
- None of funding 2 was available in South Armagh, why?
- Would the services that had been removed that were being delivered by a voluntary capacity be replaced by statutory agencies or were they removed all together from the Crossmaglen area?

Councillor Finnegan agreed with Councillor Byrnes comment's stating Crossmaglen was a rural and isolated area and the Youth Club was a lifeline to many children.

Councillor Harte stated that some of the clubs in the Newry area were full to capacity and the cuts to summer activities would have a huge impact in socially deprived areas.

The delegation responded to queries as follows:

- Would share allocation between Voluntary and Statutory sector which would show that the voluntary sector does get a significant proportion more.
- It was agreed that schoolwork would be delivered by statutory staff only, and although voluntary staff could deliver it, it would not fall within the terms of the Service Level Agreement.

- Next Steps - This was a very dynamic process and officers were currently looking at unsuccessful applications along with groups who did not submit an application and putting forward proposals, if there was capacity there, and if groups could make changes to submit a successful bid. There was no time frame as to how quickly this could be turned around.
- Apologised at the length of response time, and sorry to hear the frustration and difficulty groups had been having.
- Officials had reached out to groups to get feedback on key issues and opened a consultation process.
- The funding overall going into the area was more than in previous years, but focus was around core services, keeping centres open and safe spaces for young people. There had been cuts in some areas but an increase in others which was already having an impact on some groups.
- Happy to sit down and meet with Crossmaglen group and see what support could be provided and take feedback to funding officers.
- Support had been offered, over and above, to the particular group in Crossmaglen and continue to encourage all groups to seek support of the Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations they are aligned to and if there was a breakdown in that support, Education Authority need to be informed.
- Plenty of money available for planned intervention and summer funding and encourage groups to access that fund.
- Round 2 – Letter issued by Director indicating more targeted and additional programmes would be released on a NI wide basis, in some areas there wasn't anything released. More core funding offers released were local area based there was no thematic based work. There was only one target area identified due to a particular need. It was not anticipated that any one unit would not be successful at this stage.
- No voluntary partners were expected to do school based work, funding offers were for evening work. No centres were being funded to do outreach work at present.

The Chairperson stated that diversionary programmes had been transformational and without them there would have been more antisocial behaviour. He stated the Education Authority had to invest in the future of young people. It was agreed that a crisis meeting was urgently needed to discuss the matters in detail that pertain to the Crossmaglen club, as there was a difference in opinion in what was needed and what was delivered.

The Chairperson requested representatives from EANI go back to Councillors Byrne and Finnegan along with the management committee of youth club with a date and time for a solution-based crisis meeting and engage further with what additional advice was available with regards interim funding.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.04pm.

For adoption at Meeting of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to be held on Monday 3 April 2023.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive