

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF A COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2020 AT 10.30 AM IN ANTRIM BOARD CENTRE**1. PRESENT** Mrs M Culbert (Chair)

Mrs P Carville	Sir Gerry Loughran
Dr M Dynan	Mr N McCausland
Mr E Jardine	Mr O McMullan

2. IN ATTENDANCE

Ms S Long, Mrs K Scott, Mr M McConkey, Mr J Dunbar, Ms D Hasson and Mr C McNickle.

3. APOLOGY

An apology had been received from Ms S O'Connor.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were reminded of the requirement to declare interests where appropriate during the course of the meeting.

5. MINUTES OF MEETINGS HELD ON 17 OCTOBER 2019

The minutes* (CUOS/2/20/3) of the meeting held on 17 October 2019 were agreed on the proposal of Dr Dynan and seconded by Mr McMullan.

6. MATTER ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**GUIDANCE ON THE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL OF PRIVATE SCHOOL FUNDS (6.1)**

Mr Dunbar informed Members that Guidance on the Management and Control of Private School Funds had been issued to all schools. Six information sessions had been scheduled across the three EA localities, one of which had taken place. The five remaining sessions had been fully booked. Members welcomed the strong interest from schools on this matter.

Ms Hasson provided Members with an update on the information session which had taken place at the North West Teachers' Centre on 10 February. The session had been attended by principals, school governors and school bursars. Ms Hasson said that the session had been well received and bursars had welcomed the clarity provided. She provided an update on some of the issues raised by schools. These included matters relating to engagement with councils and Inland Revenue.

7. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS**COMMUNITY PLANNING**

The Chair said that the Committee had previously agreed to invite NILGA to attend a future Committee meeting to discuss opportunities to maximise the use of school facilities for the benefit of the community. She informed Members that the consideration of a new Delivery Model for Community Planning would be progressed through the Education Committee.

8. REVIEW OF COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

8.1 COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS SCHEDULE OF WORK - PROMOTING COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

Mr Dunbar provided an update on the Community Use of Schools Schedule of Work* (CUOS/2/20/6.1). He said that, at the October Committee meeting, officers had been asked to identify a focus for the development of community use of schools (CUOS). This had been considered by the CUOS cross directorate team and it was agreed that the theme “Promoting Community Use of Schools” would be adopted for this work.

Mr Dunbar outlined the objectives for the “Promoting Community Use of School” initiative which included:

- Improved connection between schools and CUOS and improved outcomes for pupils, parents and the wider community;
- Improved awareness of the potential opportunities offered by CUOS for external organisations (including councils) and communities;
- Improved engagement between EA, schools and external organisations on the future development of CUOS; and
- Improved awareness of the benefits of CUOS for EA staff and other education organisations.

Mr Dunbar said that a dissemination and engagement event would be scheduled for November 2020. This would draw together a number of strands contained within the current action plan underpinning the “Unlocking Potential” CUOS Strategy. An action plan for the delivery of this event was noted. A proposal would be submitted to the next cross directorate team meeting in May 2020, including costings, and an update would be provided at the next Committee meeting.

Following a Member’s query, Mr Dunbar reiterated the need to demonstrate improved outcomes for pupils, parents and the wider community. Mr McConkey highlighted EA’s statutory responsibility in respect of promoting CUOS and the need to provide support to communities. The Chair welcomed the coherence provided by the CUOS cross directorate team. Positive working relationships between the Education Directorate, the Operations and Estates Directorate and the Youth Service, amongst others, were noted.

A wider discussion ensued on the relationship between the Youth Service and school settings. A Member expressed the view that the Youth Service could effectively utilise existing school settings to deliver services. Mr Dunbar undertook to liaise with the Youth Service to ascertain the current level of Youth Service provision at school premises. Mrs Scott said that historically youth wings had been attached to schools and she clarified that these were separate buildings from the school. Members agreed that the use of existing premises should be maximised. A Member said that the idea of a school building needed to be reconceptualised.

Discussion ensued on various initiatives that could potentially make use of school premises including active aging centres. Mr McConkey referred to the Greater Shankill and Belfast City Council Community Planning Partnership as an example of joined up services to the community through the full-service schooling concept. A Member expressed the view that potentially unsustainable schools could benefit from the development of school settings as community resources. A Member expressed concern that this might have adverse impacts on school budgets. Concerns were also raised in terms of insurance liabilities. A Member said that relevant external organisations should be required to fund community activity at school premises.

The Committee noted the report.

Action: *Officers to liaise with the Youth Service to ascertain the current level of Youth Service provision at school settings.*

8.2 HIGHLIGHT PROGRESS REPORT

Mr Dunbar presented a highlight progress report* (CUOS/2/20/6.2) that summarised the progress of the EA Community Use of Schools Review. He outlined ongoing work on individual CUOS cases including requests for lease/licence arrangements across a range of schools. Members noted that 43 schools were currently being supported by the Community and Schools Team, representing an increase of 29 from the previous report.

Mr Dunbar reported other developments including a checklist for the Community and Schools Team to support individual schools, the development of a CUOS webpage, attendance at Locality Leadership Forum meetings, and the joint delivery of private schools funds information sessions for schools. Updates were also provided on ongoing partnership working with DE and local councils.

The Committee noted the report.

Mr Jardine entered the meeting at 10.58 am.

8.3 COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS CROSS DIRECTORATE TEAM

Mr Dunbar presented a verbal update on the EA Community Use of Schools Cross Directorate Team. He reiterated how the team had supported the development of the 'Promoting Community Use of Schools' initiative and work in connection with legal agreements for use of school premises. The next team meeting had been planned for May 2020.

9. LEGAL AGREEMENTS FOR USE OF SCHOOL PREMISES

Mr McCausland entered the meeting at 11.04 pm.

Mr Dunbar presented a draft policy for agreeing appropriate rental charges for commercial and non-commercial long term agreements * (CUOS/2/20/7). He said that the Community and Schools Team had progressed a strategy to promote, encourage and facilitate CUOS and a key action of this strategy was to review and update EA's policies, systems and procedures in this area.

Mr Dunbar highlighted that the DE Toolkit on CUOS made reference to long term agreements, however there was no written policy or guidance with regard to how EA responded to such requests. Likewise, there was no guidance on how rental charges were set. He said that EA was required to ensure that the necessary checks were in place so that arrangements were appropriate and did not incur costs to the school or EA. The draft policy provided clarity on:

- the nature of long term agreements;
- the procedures for implementing such agreements within EA;
- the process for determining charges associated with such arrangements; and
- how arrangements should be reviewed and evaluated.

The Chair queried whether schools with existing informal arrangements for the use of school premises would be required to adhere to the draft policy. Mr Dunbar said that schools should be encouraged to formalise legal agreements as per the draft policy. However, this policy would only be applied to current cases which came to the attention of EA, for example when a school contacted EA with a concern about an arrangement with a tenant or where there was a change in circumstances within the school.

A Member queried whether there would be an easy read version of the draft policy for schools. Mr Dunbar said that a step by step guide for the leasing of school premises would be made available on the EA website.

A discussion ensued on the application of tenancy agreements for long term lease agreements. Mr Dunbar said that EA solicitors had advised that tenancy agreements would include break clauses. This would enable the tenancy agreement to be reviewed and, if necessary, to end an agreement.

A Member said that schools should be supported with guidance on making decisions in respect of applications for the use of school premises. The Member was mindful that some applications for school use might not be suitable. Mr Dunbar said that ultimately the decision for agreeing the use of school premises lay with a Board of Governors, however EA would provide guidance on this matter. He said that officers would present a framework at the next Committee meeting to inform the decision making process. In response to a query from a Member Mr Dunbar confirmed that Boards of Governors could not temporarily delegate decision making powers on community use.

On the proposal of Mr McMullan, seconded by Mrs Carville, the Committee approved the draft policy for the approval of legal agreements for the use of school premises.

Action: *Officers to present a framework at the next Committee meeting to support schools and inform the decision making process when considering applications for use of school premises.*

10. PROJECTS FOR NOTING: YOUR SCHOOL YOUR CLUB 2019/20

Mr Dunbar presented a report* (CUOS/2/20/8) on the 'Your School Your Club' Programme summarising projects funded in 2019/20 which incorporated EA involvement. Mr Dunbar said that funding for 2020/21 had not been confirmed and therefore Sport NI had not yet issued a call for applications from councils. Details of projects that might progress in 2020/21 were noted.

Following a query from a Member, Mr Dunbar informed Members that the purpose of the Sport NI programme was to encourage schools to open school sports facilities for community use and he outlined the role of councils and EA in the decision making process. Mr Dunbar confirmed that the use of school premises by councils after school hours was governed by legal agreements. A Member expressed concern that schools might incur extra costs due to extended opening hours of the school grounds. The role of the school caretaker was highlighted.

Mr McCausland left the meeting at 11.24.

A Member expressed the view that engagement with councils was required to ascertain strategic priorities for the provision of sports facilities. Mr McConkey said that EA continued to build constructive working relationships with councils.

A Member expressed concern in relation to funding opportunities following the UK's exit from the European Union. The Committee noted the report.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on 21 May 2020.

The meeting ended at 11.27 am.

Chair

*Paper issued with agenda

Date

** Papertabled