

# **RETIRED TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION NORTHERN IRELAND**

## **Minutes of 74<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown, Co. Tyrone Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2016 at 11.00am**

*Welcome* Chairperson, Sandra Savage welcomed guests and members and read apologies.

Platinum Financial Planning Ltd., Belfast was thanked for sponsoring the tea/coffee & scones on arrival and the Ulster Tatler magazine for the photographs and publicity which would appear in the November 2016 edition.

Sandra particularly welcomed Eddie Lynch, Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland; Mark Creelman, President, Ulster Teachers' Union; Gerry Murphy, Northern Secretary, Irish National Teachers' Organisation; Sandra E. Douglas, Association of Teachers and Lecturers, and Jayne Grimason and Alan Tolson both representing Platinum Financial Planning Ltd., Belfast.

Sandra informed members that Vice-Chair Colm Lambe would be absent as he is recovering from a bout of illness and that Past Chairperson Robina Atkinson had a fall recently which has left her incapacitated for a while.

*Guests Present* Eddie Lynch, Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland  
Mark Creelman, President, Ulster Teachers' Union  
Gerry Murphy, Northern Secretary, Irish National Teachers' Organisation;  
Sandra E. Douglas, Association of Teachers and Lecturers  
Jayne Grimason, Platinum Financial Planning Ltd.  
Alan Tolson, Platinum Financial Planning Ltd.

<i>Apologies</i>	Dr. Carmel Gallagher	Registrar, General Teaching Council
	Jim Clarke, CEO	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
	Colm Lambe	Vice-Chair Executive Committee
	Robina Atkinson	Executive Committee
	Renée McClelland	North-East
	Sr. Anne McWilliams	North-East
	Robin McCully	Belfast
	Peggy Pinkerton	Mid-Antrim
	Marie Cameron	Tyrone
	Albert Nixon	Fermanagh
	Isobel Nixon	Fermanagh
	Rosemary Rainey	Belfast
	Mike Andrews	North-Down
	Jennifer Wilson	Tyrone
	Elizabeth Whiteside	North-West
	James Bell	North-West
	Joan Little	North-West
	Harriet Little	North-West
	Stephana Young	North-West
	Rosemary Butler	North-East
	Joyce Allen	North-East
	Josef Hoeritzauer	Belfast
	Bridie McPeake	Mid-Ulster
	Freda Davison	Mid-Ulster

*2015 Minutes*

The Minutes of the 73<sup>rd</sup> AGM, held on Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015, already tabled, were taken as read. No matters were arising.

The Executive Committee Report, Financial Report and Hon. Secretary's Report, already tabled, were taken as read. No matters were arising.

Hon. Secretary clarified Executive Committee plans to extend the successful initiative which has resulted in the regeneration of Craigavon and South-Down to the North-West, Mid-Antrim and East-Down Branches.

He also informed members that he intended to discuss the matter of our not having the annual list of newly-retired teachers from DENI with the new Minister of Education Peter Weir and DENI.

Eugene Magill proposed and Wendy Spratt seconded the adoption of all reports. All reports were adopted.

*Chairperson*

Sandra informed the meeting that there would be no elections this year.

Iris Clarke was then presented, by the Chairperson, with her Presidential Chain of Office.

Sandra praised Iris for her dedication, commitment and enthusiasm to her official responsibilities and thanked her for ensuring that the work of the Executive Committee and its officers was always within the spirit and in the best interests of the Retired Teachers' Association adding that it was only fit that the President should, at last, have a suitable Chain of Office.

Chair also thanked Past Chair Mary Marley for procuring the chain.

*Eddie Lynch*

Chairperson, Sandra Savage welcomed the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, stating that she had first met him while attending the People's Parliament and that she had joined Age Sector Platform and was amazed at the numerous opportunities to participate in events supporting the welfare of older people in Northern Ireland.

Eddie began by thanking RTA for the invitation to address the members at this year's Annual Conference, adding, ironically, that he received the invitation long before he was aware that he actually had been appointed!

The following points were addressed and discussed in his presentation:

- The Commissioner's office was established through devolved Northern Ireland Assembly legislation passed in 2011, that is, *The Commissioner for Older People Act (Northern Ireland) 2011*;
- It followed extensive lobbying and campaigning by older people and organisations representing them;
- Its principal aim is to be an independent champion who safeguards and promotes the interests of older people
- Appointed by The Executive Office, funded by Department for Communities, he has a staff of 14 and is based in Equality House, Belfast
- In Northern Ireland there are about 200,000 older people;
- His office consists of a small team which includes two solicitors and which is very busy dealing with a wide range of issues from car-insurance, through to audiology administration, to health-care in general;
- His office does carry legal power which is a helpful instrument in getting things done;
- Essentially he deals with cases which fall out of the remit of other statutory organisations;
- The recent 120-page Draft Programme for local government contains no reference whatsoever to older people specifically, save to include them in other generalised reports;
- Despite this, he is committed to monitor and improve services to older people and will work towards key outcomes which respect, value and protect older people.

The Commissioner outlined his legal duties which are to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards, and encourage participation by, older people
- Review services and legislation that affect the interests of older people
- Promote an end to discrimination against older people
- Encourage best practice in the treatment of older people
- Advise the Assembly, Secretary of State and relevant authorities on matters concerning the interests of older people.

He detailed that he envisaged doing this by breaking the work into three areas;

**Respect:**

- Social inclusion: Ensuring older people remain connected to where they want to be and to their families and friends;
- Quality of Care: Examine the arrangements for older people in nursing care and residential settings;
- Age Discrimination: Press for introduction of legislation to end age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services;
- Health Reforms: Monitor and review emerging policy proposals from government to ensure older people receive the health and social care services and support they need.

**Value:**

- Ongoing Contribution to the workforce: Encourage employment and entrepreneurship for those over 60;
- Digital Inclusion: Highlight the benefits of older people getting online and encourage digital inclusion;
- Programme for Government: Advocate with government on behalf of older people to be a priority in the Programme for Government;
- Active Ageing Society: Monitor implementation of actions outlined in the Active Ageing Strategy;
- Age Related Health Conditions: Advocate on behalf of, and support those living with age-related health conditions;
- Early Conversations: Help and support older people to make plans and communicate their choices for their end of life.

**Protect:**

- Dementia: Strategic approach to the provision of services and support for dementia in Northern Ireland;
- Health and social care regulator: Review legislation and make recommendations to improve its effectiveness;
- Financial Abuse: Identify the scale of financial abuse, raise awareness of the issue and challenge relevant organisations to make required changes;
- Criminal Justice: Work with criminal justice agencies to better support older people who are victims of crime;
- Safeguarding: Press government for the introduction of an Adult Safeguarding Bill for Northern Ireland.

The Commissioner concluded by stating that he intended using his legal powers which are to:

- Conduct formal and informal investigations;
- Issue guidance on best practice;
- Carry out research;
- Publish information;
- Provide advice to government

...in order to establish priorities for his four-year term of office, which are to:

- Propose priorities based on engagement with older people and cases that older people have brought to his office;
- Manage difficult choices which have had to be made based on areas where his legal powers and duties can be most effective in creating positive change;
- Avoid duplication of work being carried out by other organisations.

At the end of Eddie's address, several members with both personal and general questions sought advice from him including one member who requested that the Commissioner examine the situation where it is, for most people, obligatory to sell their homes in order to provide residential care.

Hon. Sec. stated that he would organise a brand new page on the association's website specifically dedicated to the work of the Commissioner in the hope that it may lead to a strong link between his office and ourselves.

Chair, Sandra Savage, thanked Eddie for his magnificent contribution to the annual conference and on being able to throw much-needed light on many of the issues about which members had concerns.

Sandra then presented him with an engraved Belfast Crystal plaque.

*Mark Creelman* President, Ulster Teachers' Union, Mark Creelman, thanked the association for the invitation and stated that he found the advice and material from the Commissioner's address and the presentation packs very useful.

He compared how the conditions within the teaching profession might have been changing, not for the better, since the members of the Retired Teachers' Association were serving teachers.

Now, he claimed, the Education & Training Inspectorate were essentially data-driven and coupled with an excessive workload, many teachers are working more than 60 hours per week. He also noted that benefits for serving teachers were worse now than ever and were actually the worst when compared to all public sector workers.

Added to the fact that teachers have suffered a 15% shortfall in salary he reinforced this by stating that, of the 236 principals surveyed about staff welfare, 40% were of the opinion that staff morale had deteriorated.

He further lamented the tendency to teach to the transfer test especially in rural areas in order, seemingly, to retain numbers.

Mark concluded his address by expressing the hope that he too would become a member of RTANI on his own eventual retirement.

*AOB* Hon. Sec. mentioned a letter from a member in Ballymena, who requested that the AGM be moved to Belfast, claiming that it could result in better attendance and also that it would be easier to avail of public transport.

The contents of the letter were read by Hon. Sec., questions were invited and some discussion ensued.

Members were then given the opportunity to respond to suggestions before a show of hands was requested to show those in favour and those against.

First of all, Chair asked for those in favour of relocating the AGM to Belfast to raise their hands. There was no-one in favour.

Then, Chair asked those against relocating the AGM to Belfast to raise their hands. The result was categorically unanimous. There were no abstentions.

Subsequently, it was resolved that for the foreseeable future anyway, the AGM would continue at its current central location in Cookstown.

*Announcements* The next Annual Conference was set for Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017, at the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown when it is hoped that an ex-teacher who now was in the public arena would be our principal guest and there would again be a platform for Questions & Answers.

There being no further business, Chairperson Sandra Savage duly closed the meeting for lunch at 12.45pm.