

RETIRED TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION NORTHERN IRELAND

Minutes of 75th Annual General Meeting Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown, Co. Tyrone Wednesday, 11th October 2017 at 11.00am

- Welcome* Chairperson, Sandra Savage welcomed guests and members and read apologies. Platinum Financial Planning Ltd., and Cornmarket Insurance for Teachers were 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 2017 edition. Sandra particularly welcomed Eamonn Donaghy, CEO Age Sector Platform; Barry Mulholland, CEO Controlled Schools' Support Council; David Thompson, President, Ulster Teachers' Union; Dorothy McGinley Irish National Teachers' Organisation; Sandra E. Douglas, National Education Union, and Aoiffe McConaghy & Alan Tolson both representing Platinum Financial Planning Ltd., Belfast. Sandra informed members that Vice-Chair, Colm Lambe would be absent.
- Guests Present* Eamonn Donaghy, CEO Age Sector Platform;
Barry Mulholland, CEO Controlled Schools' Support Council;
David Thompson, President, Ulster Teachers' Union;
Dorothy McGinley Irish National Teachers' Organisation;
Sandra E. Douglas, National Education Union;
Aoiffe McConaghy & Alan Tolson, Platinum Financial Planning Ltd. sponsor tea/coffee & scones.
- Apologies* Linda Robinson, Chief Executive Officer, Age N.I.
Sam Geddis, Cornmarket Insurance for Teachers, Belfast, sponsor tea/coffee & scones
Susan Parlour, National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers
Colm Lambe, Vice-Chair, Executive Committee
Renée McClelland, North-East
Sr. Anne McWilliams, North-East
Chris Wilson, North-West
James Bell, North-West
Ann Flanagan, Tyrone
Joan Little, North-West
Harriet Little, North-West
Stephana Young, North-West
Elizabeth Whiteside, North-West
Marion O'Hanlon, South-Down
- 2016 Minutes* The Minutes of the 74th AGM, held on Wednesday, 19th October 2016, 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. Mary Sands proposed and Dorothy McIlmoyle seconded the adoption of all reports. All reports were adopted.
- Elections* President, Iris Clarke declared the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair vacant and open for nomination since both had completed their three-year terms of office. Mary Marley proposed Sandra Savage for a further term of office. This was seconded by Winifred Thompson and unanimously agreed by meeting. Iris advised members that, in deference to Colm Lambe's recent demise, Executive Committee had recommended that Past Chair, Mary Marley might stand in for a period of one year. This was unanimously agreed.
- Eamonn Donaghy* Chairperson, Sandra Savage welcomed the CEO of Age Sector Platform, Eamonn Donaghy and touched on our involvement with ASP. Eamonn thanked RTA for the invitation to address the members. The following points were addressed in his presentation:

- Age Sector Platform was established in 2008 and has over 100 Individual Members all over 65;
- 34 Member Groups are under its umbrella and it is connected to over 200,000 older people in N Ireland.
- Four words sum up its mission: Rights; Dignity; Equality and Participation.

Eamonn outlined the work of the Northern Ireland People's Parliament adding that it;

- is supported by over 2,000 older people who have taken part and over 5,000 in follow up campaigns;
- is an inclusive, cross community forum of older people from all backgrounds & communities across NI;
- enjoys strong cross-party acknowledgement & endorsement.

He explained that the Campaign Committees comprise over 70 older people leading and directing six Committees:

- Health;
- Fear of Crime / Abuse;
- Transport;
- Westminster;
- Northern Ireland People's Parliament;
- Energy.

He emphasised that these committees reflect the ethos of Age Sector Platform which would be that...“older people are valued and supported to live actively to their fullest potential, with their rights respected and dignity protected” (NI Assembly – Active Ageing Strategy, Jan 2016).

The sad reality for older people living in Northern Ireland is that:

- 1 in 5 older people in N.I. live in poverty;
- 3 in 5 households are in fuel poverty with N.I. having the highest level of fuel poverty in UK (42%);
- Fear of crime and abuse is still a major concern with over 7,000 crimes each year against older people;
- 1 in 5 older people have been victims of financial abuse/scamming;
- Many older people in N.I. experience loneliness and isolation;
- Health & Social Care savings are more likely to have greatest impact on oldest and most vulnerable;
- Age discrimination is commonplace regarding goods, facilities & services in N.I.

A recent practical outcome, however, has been the removal of the threat to Triple Lock on Pensions and Winter Fuel Payment which have been successfully challenged and subsequently retained.

Older people have been so successfully encouraged by the work of Age Sector Platform that they are now:

- More knowledgeable about their rights;
- More aware of issues and challenges facing them;
- More comfortable in expressing and sharing their views;
- More willing to be involved in their local communities.

The current situation at Stormont has had damaging consequences for older people in 4 ways particularly:

- There has been a noticeable lack of decision-making procedures;
- Events have been postponed;
- There has been great difficulty actually engaging with decision makers;
- The impact on funding is proving almost irrecoverable.

In addition, because of this situation, the financial landscape for Age Sector Platform has changed due to:

- Loss of principal funder;
- Attempts to change our financial model
- Cutting back on expenditure.

Eamonn stated that the impact of local parliaments and engaging with ‘hard-to-reach’ older people were:

- 25% of attendees were not members of any local older peoples group;
- 47% were from geographically rural / isolated areas;
- 33% were aged 75 and over;
- 40% presented as having a disability;
- 48% of attendees had never attended a pensioners parliament before;
- After attending a local parliament, 60 older people participated in the annual parliament in Belfast for the first time.

In summary, Eamonn concluded that:

- Age Sector Platform and Northern Ireland People's Parliament were inspired, driven and directed by older people;
- It was totally inclusive, cross-community and empowering;
- It was acknowledged and respected across the political spectrum;
- It focused on rights and respect for older people;
- It was delivering inclusion, self-esteem and dignity for older people who are amongst the most vulnerable in society.

Several questions were then answered by Eamonn. These largely were concerns about:

- The Programme for Government document which failed to mention older people;
- Fuel poverty in Northern Ireland;
- Financial abuse and scamming;
- Isolation and loneliness particularly in rural areas;
- Inter-generational fairness gossip which could permeate into policy;
- Voluntary and Residential Care;
- The retention of the Triple-Lock guarantee.

Sandra thanked Eamonn and presented him with an engraved Belfast Crystal plaque.

Barry Mulholland Chairperson, Sandra Savage welcomed the CEO of the Controlled Schools' Support Council, Barry Mullholland. Barry thanked RTA for the invitation.

The following points were addressed in his presentation:

- The Education Act (NI) 1947 legislated for the transfer of church managed schools to the local Education Authorities, later replaced by the Education and Libraries Order 1972;
- In 2012 a working group convened to discuss the functionality of a controlled schools' support body;
- The Education Act (NI) 2014 provided for a body to represent the controlled sector;
- In September 2016 the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) was formally established.

Barry detailed the four departments of CSSC:

- Corporate Services;
- Marketing, Research and Communications;
- Education Support;
- Executive Assistance.

He then outlined their key functions:

- Advocacy; On behalf of individual schools and the wider sector;
- Ethos; Developing and maintaining the ethos of the sector;
- Governance; Supporting the Education Authority in the appointment and training of governors;
- Raising standards; Assisting schools to further raise levels of achievement;
- Area planning; Looking at development plans for changes to school provision.

These key functions, he explained, were progressed through listening events which highlighted the need for:

- Recognition and endorsement of CSSC;
- A more robust definition of the controlled ethos;
- Effective, timely and relevant communication with schools;
- Affirmation of pupil-centred approach;
- Need for governor support.

An analysis of the Controlled Sector by the Department of Education showed that it was:

- Large...with 560 schools, comprising 48% of NI schools containing 140,600 pupils and 8,500 teachers;
- Diverse...embracing Nursery Schools, Primary Schools, Post-Primary Schools (Secondary & Grammar), Special Schools, Integrated Schools and Irish-Medium Schools;
- Inclusive...comprising 66% Protestant, 10% Catholic, 18% No Religion and 6% Other plus it provided for 31% of pupils who were entitled to free school meals and had over 28,700 pupils with SEN.

Following a Q&A Session, Sandra thanked Barry and presented him with an engraved Belfast Crystal plaque.

David Thompson

President, Ulster Teachers' Union, David Thompson, thanked the association for the invitation and stated that he began teaching in 1993 and was currently Principal of a Primary School in Dungannon which taught 256 children from 12 different nationalities.

The following points were addressed in his presentation:

- How slowly the wheels turn in the field of education;
- Children are generally less-prepared nowadays and lack many learning skills;
- Many children present behavioural difficulties;
- School budgets are continually being squeezed;
- Teachers are stressed with the increasing workload;
- Northern Ireland is the only European country without foreign language provision at primary level.

David explained the steps that the various teaching unions are taking to address these issues for the betterment of everyone, including children, teachers, parents and community etc. and hoped that, rather than relying on the goodwill of teachers, the N.I. Assembly would work together in everyone's interest to finally secure and maintain proper professional working conditions for teachers.

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

Sandra thanked David and presented him with an engraved Belfast Crystal plaque.

Announcements

There being no further business, the date for the 76th Annual Conference was set for Wednesday, 17th October 2018, at the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown.

Chairperson Sandra Savage duly closed the meeting for lunch at 12.45pm.