

CONTROLLED SCHOOLS' SUPPORT COUNCIL (CSSC)

Fourth Annual General Meeting

The fourth Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC), held remotely via Zoom webinar on Thursday, 19 November 2020 at 4pm.

1. Introduction, welcome and apologies.

Dr Andrew Brown (Vice-Chairperson) introduced himself as host and facilitator to begin proceedings. Following an introduction, Mr Mark Orr (Chairperson) welcomed attendees and staff. Apologies were noted and full list is included at appendix 1.

2. Ms Sara Long-, Chief Executive of the Education Authority, followed by short Q&A, facilitated by Dr Andrew Brown, CSSC Vice-chairperson

Ms S Long addressed the meeting.

She acknowledged the strength of the collaboration that exists between the Education Authority (EA) and CSSC, and how this collaboration allows EA to be better informed in improving and informing services provided to controlled schools. She referenced developing this co-operation to further strengthen this relationship.

She took the opportunity to thank school Principals for their exceptional leadership throughout this challenging period, from opening schools to support key workers, to education restart and delivering education through Covid; acknowledging the difficulty they have faced, and their commitment throughout.

She reiterated EA's focus on effective service delivery in the context of challenges that Covid has presented, and its commitment to building collective leadership with Principals through growing these relationships for the benefit of children and young people.

Questions:

How will the Chief Executive make EA more relevant to its core purpose of supporting schools in the education and welfare of our children and young people?

Ms Long reiterated her strong belief that EA's role is to provide relevant services to schools to benefit children and young people. She stated that to address this, EA has involved school leaders in the design and the reform of services. This engagement will continue as services are reformed. Furthermore, EA will seek to build relationships with all its stakeholders, and particularly with Principals so that it is school facing in all that it does. She referenced the Locality Leadership networks which were designed to reconnect school leaders and EA officers at a more local

level, so that Principals are aware of their key contacts, to support them through Covid and beyond.

Principals have expressed concerns around accessibility of EA services and key contacts, as well as the timeliness of responses. How will the Chief Executive address this?

Ms Long referenced again the Locality Leadership model and how this is designed to grow and build relationships. She recommitted to recirculating a key contact list to school leaders. She talked about work that had begun through the Northern Ireland Principals Forum, where practical steps had been agreed to improve communications and develop clear signposts to services. She referred to a helpline that is available to Principals.

Dr A Brown thanked Ms Long for her time and for addressing the meeting.

3. AGM business

i. Minutes

The Chairperson referred to the minutes of the AGM in 2019, which had been shared electronically with members seeking views on accuracy. No issues were raised.

Decision: On the proposal of Ms S Isherwood, seconded by Mr M Kilgore OBE, the minutes of the AGM in 2019 were approved.

ii. 2019-20 Annual Report and accounts presented by Barry Mulholland, Chief Executive, CSSC and Shane McCurdy, Head of Corporate Services, CSSC

The Vice-Chairperson invited Mr Barry Mulholland, Chief Executive to address the meeting.

Mr Mulholland acknowledged the challenging times faced by all in the education system.

It was noted that the annual report had been shared with members electronically seeking views on the same. No issues were raised.

Decision: On the proposal of Ms R Harkness, seconded by Mr R McLoughlin, the Annual Report and accounts 2019-20 were adopted.

Due to unprecedented events of the last number of months, Mr Mulholland was not minded to outline elements of the report, but rather he focused his address on thanking Principals and Governors on their sterling leadership and outstanding work over an extremely difficult period. He stated the support provided to their pupils and staff had been inspirational.

He spoke of the pride CSSC staff have in representing the controlled sector. He acknowledged the dedication and commitment of school leaders and their staff, and highlighted their unrelenting efforts, and sometimes personal risk within the current environment. He referred to the innovative and creative ways in which Principals

and teachers have supported continuity of teaching and learning. He emphasized that the well-being of pupils was at the centre of all decisions by school leaders.

He highlighted the importance of collaborative working between all education partners to provide effective support to schools, for the best possible outcomes for children and young people. He expanded on CSSC's participation in the cross-organisational link support to schools, workforce planning and cross-sectoral communications.

He stressed the importance of partnership working between all education organisations, school leaders and policy makers to find frontline workable solutions to the daily challenges of Covid-19. He thanked the outgoing Permanent Secretary, Mr Derek Baker, and Department of Education (DE) officers for their support. He went on to wish Mr Baker well in his retirement.

He thanked Ms Sara Long for attending and addressing the meeting and for reiterating the key relationship that exists between EA and CSSC.

He concluded by acknowledging that challenges continue to be extensive and complex, but reinforced CSSC's commitment to supporting controlled schools through this uncertain and stressful time.

iii. CSSC accounts 2019/20

Mr S McCurdy, Head of Corporate Services was invited to summarise the business in relation to the accounts for 2019/20.

Mr McCurdy confirmed that the external auditors had indicated that the accounts provided a true and fair view of the financial affairs of CSSC and there were no qualifications or points of concern to report.

He summarised that salary costs accounted for just over 80% of CSSC's spend for the year. During 2019-20, CSSC had drawn down 98% of the grant available with a modest underspend at the end of the year.

He highlighted that although the accounts show the organisation operating at a loss, this is due to the impact of having to report the pension liability within CSSC accounts. He explained that CSSC is an employer member of NILGOSC, a fund which is in deficit. This deficit is required to be reflected in the accounts of all its employer members. From an accounting perspective this is an indicative position which would only be realised if the fund itself wound up or if CSSC withdrew from the fund. At which stage CSSC would be required to provide the level of funding identified. CSSC's membership of the NILGOSC scheme is underwritten by DE and therefore the financial consequences would be a matter for that body.

Mr McCurdy also mentioned the format of the accounts. Accounts had been prepared in a charitable format due to CSSC's pending application for registration with the Charity Commission NI. This identified any external funding separate to that received by DE.

He concluded that the draft accounts were presented to CSSC Audit, Governance and Risk Committee in July 2020, with the final accounts being presented to Council in September 2020.

No questions were recorded or issues raised with regard to the 2019-20 accounts.

4. Mr Peter Weir MLA, Minister for Education, followed by short Q&A, facilitated by Dr Andrew Brown, CSSC Vice-chairperson

Mr Peter Weir paid tribute to Mr Derek Baker, stating the regard for Mr Baker across the education system was testament to his expertise and dedication.

He commended the ongoing work and dedication of Principals, Boards of Governors and staff during the pandemic. He referred to the particular work of the Cross-Organisational Link Officers in supporting this work.

He affirmed that his priority was to keep children in school, referring to the potential impact on their mental health and the safe environment that schools present for some more vulnerable pupils. He asserted his commitment to meet with Principals to hear first hand what is happening on the ground.

He focused his address on four priorities namely area planning, expert panel on underachievement, capital build and equality within the education system.

In terms of area planning he reiterated that structures support efficient and effective outcomes, that solutions must be area-based and sector specific and that collaboration must be a feature. He acknowledged that delivery had been delayed due to Covid-19. To address pressures he outlined that the current plan had been extended to 31 August 2022 and the next plan would cover a five year period. He maintained that focus must be given to inefficiencies of composite classes, small sixth forms and small unsustainable schools. To support these decisions DE will develop guidance to facilitate shorter consultations using information technology.

With regard to educational underachievement, Mr Weir referred to the expert panel convened to examine persistent educational underachievement linked to social disadvantage. He affirmed that every child deserves a chance in life regardless of background, and that opportunities should not be limited to traditional pathways of particular groups. He emphasised the critical role of schools, families and communities to encourage and grow the aspirations of our young people. To address this, the expert panel will work collectively to bring forward a panel to produce an action plan which is focused and time bound.

In reference to major capital works, he mentioned that priority in the past has been given to condition of accommodation, sustainability and the level of reliance on temporary accommodation. He acknowledged concerns raised in relation to the

priority of schools with poor infrastructure facing pressures in terms of numbers. He stated that in moving forward there would be a greater level of focus on the condition of buildings.

Finally in relation to equality within the education system, he highlighted the major role that CSSC has played in representing the controlled sector, but acknowledged the historical inequality of the structures of support in place. He affirmed his dedication to address this deficit by way of procedural or legislative change so that a greater level of equality of support exists across all sectors.

He concluded by asserting the need to work together with a common goal to deliver for young people to ensure their brighter future.

Questions:

Would the Minister commit to ensuring in future that EA DE provide more timely and more appropriate support to those on the front line of education especially those in smaller schools such as nurseries?

Mr Weir commented that DE has tried to consult as much as possible in terms of the guidance that it issues, but reinforced the importance of stronger and more collegiate relationships with schools. He committed to working with school Principals on the ground to identify and remove overly burdensome administrative procedures.

In terms of planning for exams, for equity's sake if Northern Ireland follows suit with the rest of the UK, what is the Minister's best case scenario for summer 2021?

The Minister responded that the best case scenario is that exams take place. He did however outline that DE is working with CCEA to develop mitigation and contingency plans in the event that exams do not proceed.

Dr Brown thanked the Minister, and asserted that school staff need to be seen as front line workers and therefore as a priority in terms of vaccination. The Minister took on board this point.

The Minister left the meeting.

8. Closing remarks

The Chairperson concluded by thanking participants, speakers, CSSC Council members, the Senior Management Team and staff. He thanked delegates for their attendance and urged all to 'stay safe'.

| The meeting ended at 5pm.

Chairperson _____

Date _____

Appendix 1

AGM 2020 Apologies

Member schools

Paula Jordan, Sperrinview Special School

Emily McCaffrey, Kirkinriola Primary School

Stakeholders

Derek Baker, Department of Education

Archbishop McDowell, Church of Ireland

Rosemary Rainey, Transferor Representatives' Council