

## **CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Minutes of the proceedings of the Special Council Meeting held, in committee, in the Council Chamber, Civic & Administrative Offices, Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Castlereagh, BT8 6RB, on Thursday, 17 November 2005, at 7.00 p.m.

**PRESENT:-** Councillor T Jeffers (in the chair)

Alderman J Norris MBE  
Alderman Mrs G Rice  
Alderman Mrs I Robinson MP MLA  
Alderman P D Robinson MP MLA

Councillor Mrs A Beattie  
Councillor J Beattie  
Councillor Ms J Bunting  
Councillor Mrs Chambers  
Councillor Mrs J Cochrane (until 10.00 p.m.)  
Councillor D Drysdale (until 10.00 p.m.)  
Councillor Mrs Duncan  
Councillor C Hall  
Councillor Mrs R Hughes MBE  
Councillor T Jeffers  
Councillor M Long  
Councillor A Ramsey  
Councillor G Robinson  
Councillor J Spratt  
Councillor C Tosh

**IN ATTENDANCE:-** Chief Executive and Assistant Members' Services Officer

**APOLOGIES:-** Apologies were received on behalf of Alderman M Copeland, Councillors M Henderson, B Hanvey and J White

### **2005/636: OPENING OF MEETING**

Alderman Norris opened the meeting with a prayer.

Noted.

**2005/637: PRESENTATION BY REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD**

The Chief Executive welcomed Ms Irene Knox, Chief Executive, Ms Beth Porter, Chief Librarian, Mr Stanton Sloan, Senior Education Officer and Mr Tom Walsh, Assistant Senior Education Officer to the meeting.

The Chief Executive commenced her presentation by indicating that the SEELB were keen to liaise with Councillors in order to ensure that service provisions were put in place, and she outlined the three key issues for consideration, namely the Board's budgetary situation, local schools and libraries in the area.

Ms Knox referred to the well-documented difficulties experienced by the SEELB over recent months and admitted that although mistakes had been made, systems had subsequently been reviewed.

She continued by saying that a deficit in funding for education of £30 million had been identified in 2004, and it was anticipated that next year's educational budget would be severely cut even further. A meeting, which would include representatives from Councils, had been arranged for 24th November 2005 in order to discuss the implications for 2006-2007.

With regard to schools, the SEELB had devised a strategic development plan for the period 2004-2009 and strategic reviews, taking into account demographic trends etc, particularly in schools along the carriageway in the Borough had been carried out. A review document issued some time ago showed 767 surplus places in the primary school sector and 400 surplus places in the post-primary sector in the Castlereagh area, and highlighted the fact that the demand for school places would decrease by 25% by 2017. Consequentially, this would have an effect on funding, which was allocated according to the number of pupils in each school.

The Chief Executive further pointed out that resources were primarily used for the maintenance of buildings, and many schools, especially those built in the 1960s, were in poor condition. With regard to the Borough, she indicated that Castlereagh currently received £2 million in funding, although the existing deficit was £5 million.

The Chief Executive then outlined that a new curriculum would necessitate major changes in the delivery of education, and responses to a consultation document were now ready for discussion with Councils, before any further steps would be taken.

At this point in the proceedings, the Chief Librarian spoke, informing Members that her responsibilities included advising the Board how best to meet statutory requirements within the budget, including the provision of library services.

She informed Members that library services had undergone a review in order to determine the best service provision, taking into account current and predicted budget provision and Government policy, as well as customer preferences.

She continued that the Board was responsible for 24 branch libraries, of which 8 libraries and 1 sizeable mobile library provision were located in the Castlereagh Borough, and the Board's proposal was to merge library services in Belvoir, Newtownbreda and Cregagh to create one large library near Forestside, which would provide improved services. She added that the proposals also included the merger of libraries in Gilnahirk and Braniel with the more modern Tullycarnet and Dundonald libraries, and predicted a reduced budget that would not involve compulsory redundancies.

She informed Members that, apart from Newtownbreda and Dundonald libraries, the Board had felt that the remaining libraries were currently under-used.

The Chief Librarian also stated that in this way, available capital funding could be used more efficiently, and she added that, together with the assistance of the Council, schools, youth service and other providers, the Board hoped to increase services offered to include a specially commissioned mobile library fitted with computers and learning programmes.

Alderman P D Robinson thanked the Chief Executive and the Chief Librarian for their comments. He indicated that much had been said about finance, resources and structures, but there had been very little mention about children. Alderman Robinson expressed his concern that from the comments made, service provision in schools appeared to be decided on by accountants, rather than frontline service providers.

He added that, despite finite resources, the Board had a requirement to ensure that needs were met without any element of discrimination, which, Alderman Robinson believed, had not been achieved. In light of the forthcoming Review of Public Administration, it was possible that Education & Library Boards would be reduced to one body under the authority of local government, and he felt that this may perhaps have been one of the reasons why educational and library services in Castlereagh had been allowed to deteriorate to such an extent.

Alderman P D Robinson felt that it was very likely that those schools, which may have to close through lack of funding, would not be able to re-open again once funding became available. He went on to comment that, despite attempts made to raise funding in deprived Unionist areas for schools and libraries, they had been hindered by the Board's decision to reduce services in those areas.

Alderman Robinson stated that people in some areas of the Borough faced difficulties if schools and libraries were closed, as the distance to the nearest school or library would be increased, rendering them inaccessible. Therefore, one large library, although it provided better services, would not be advantageous, and in this respect, local needs needed to be determined and services provided accordingly.

Alderman P D Robinson added that a false economy existed if the massive maintenance backlog was increased by more than £2 million per year. Poor management by the SEELB in the past had resulted in significant overspends, which meant that consumers were missing out, whilst other Boards had managed to make adequate provision of services within their designated budgets. He referred to the former Chief Executive of the SEELB who had tried to blame those responsible for exposing the mistakes of the Board, however it had soon become evident that this situation had arisen through mismanagement within the SEELB.

He sympathised with the Chief Executive that insufficient funding was being made available, but stated that those within the Board had a responsibility, as custodians, to serve the people in their area, otherwise they should resign from their posts. He referred to the public's lack of trust and confidence in the Board's ability to manage their funding, and stated that this had to be regained.

Alderman P D Robinson felt that proposals to merge or close libraries were not well thought out. He was convinced that, if libraries in the area remained open, they would benefit from significant investment once they fell under the auspices of local government.

Alderman Robinson, at this point, expressed his deep concern that rumours had come to light that libraries within the Borough had closed their doors to the public whilst library staff had been inside the building, and sought an explanation from the Officers present why this situation had arisen.

The Chief Executive commented that she wished to respond to the Alderman's comments.

She commenced by stating that children would always be the Board's prime concern and as they were endeavouring to offer the best provision of services, a strategic development plan had been devised and a consultation exercise was being carried out. She pointed out that, although children needed excellent schools that were fit for their purpose, many schools in the Borough were old and required a high level of planned maintenance, with very limited funds available to carry out all necessary works.

The Chief Executive felt that it was inappropriate for her to comment on decisions made by her predecessor.

She stated that the Board's main objectives were to provide schools that were situated in the right locality, and to ensure an excellent provision of services. The Board was determined to achieve these results within the available budget and would continue to make a case for further investment. In addition, the Board intended to reduce the existing deficit by £3.5 million during the current year.

The Chief Librarian stated that, unless unlimited funding was available, the best way forward would be to provide one large library offering appropriate services and facilities with arts and cultural experiences that could not be accommodated in existing smaller libraries. She continued to say that although the provision of computers in libraries had attracted more people, the main interest was still the provision of books, and current stock levels were totally inadequate to meet the needs of the users.

The Chief Librarian expressed concern about the Alderman's comments relating to staff in attendance at libraries despite the doors being closed to the public, but indicated that opening hours had been reduced for one month during the summer in order to make savings. She continued by saying that steps had been taken to try and reduce the staffing budget, which used up 70% of the budget, and savings were being allocated to increase book stocks.

The Chief Librarian welcomed Alderman P Robinson's comments and confirmed that she would investigate the issues raised, but added that policy dictated that at least 2 members of staff were required to be in attendance before a library could open to the public.

The Senior Education Officer referred to his own past experience as a qualified teacher for 16 years and gave Members an assurance that the needs of children would be at the centre of all Board decisions. He added that one major area of financial pressure was the provision of special educational needs, which required 50% of a budget of £66 million.

He informed Members that a pilot exercise in Newtownbreda to provide a single-service school would be extended and assured Members there were no plans for school closures at present, although discussions were taking place with some schools and their Governors regarding a rationalisation of services.

The Senior Education Officer stated that, once there was an announcement in respect of funding, it was hoped to move forward, and he wished to place on record that there was no school within the Borough that he would not feel proud to be associated with.

Alderman I Robinson raised concerns about funding for integrated schools, which appeared to be readily available, whilst other schools were facing financial struggles and found it difficult to carry out necessary maintenance within their given budget. She continued to say that, whilst she was not against integration, there was no evidence that Catholic schools had made any effort in this direction, whereas state-controlled schools were under pressure to agree. She referred to the fact that Carryduff Primary School had been approached with a view to extending its integration services, despite disapproval from parents.

Alderman Robinson then drew Members' attention to the fact that a large amount of funding had been allocated to open the Millennium Integrated School, despite Council opposition that the road infrastructure was totally unsuitable for a school at this location and posed a danger to pupils and parents alike. However, the school had been opened regardless and the necessary roadworks had since been carried out at considerable cost.

Alderman I Robinson indicated that the Council had also been opposed to Lagan College, again because of the unsuitability of the infrastructure at that location. She referred to public outcry at that time, which had been shared by the Alliance Party, in which the Council had been accused of discrimination, which had not been the case. Alderman Robinson felt that the Alliance Party's views were entirely politically motivated, and felt that more should be done to improve services in the existing schools instead.

Alderman Robinson pointed out that, although sufficient integrated schools existed in the Saintfield area, there were proposals to open another integrated school in September 2006. In Alderman Robinson's view, there was no need for another school in the face of falling pupil numbers, as the area was already well serviced with established integrated education. Indeed, she expressed concern that in her view, there was a political agenda to get rid of the state-controlled school system in Northern Ireland.

Alderman Robinson then informed Members that she had raised the issue of the sub-standard conditions in Torbank School for special-needs children in Parliament. She expressed her anger that profoundly disabled children were being housed in mobile classrooms, and having to negotiate uneven gradients in school grounds despite the fact that there had been plans to build a purpose-built new school, which had not materialised to date.

Alderman Robinson felt concern that integrated schools received 40% of all available funding, Catholic schools received a further 40%, which left 20% for state-controlled schools. This, in turn, meant that unionist teachers were being made redundant due to diminishing job opportunities.

The Chief Executive agreed that there were sufficient places for school children in the area and that the provision of new schools would dissipate resources, but

she added that the decision for further integrated schooling had not rested with the SEELB.

With regard to Torbank School, the Chief Executive was conscious of the difficulties experienced by pupils and teachers, as she had worked in the Special Needs field for many years. She reported that plans were in place to rebuild the school as a PPP project, with the support of the Board, and she welcomed any input from Elected Members, which would expedite its progress.

Councillor Duncan raised a number of questions on behalf of the headmaster of a local primary school in the Borough, namely that:-

- In the case of amalgamation or closure of schools in the area, how would the Board ensure the continuity of efficient teaching and learning, given falling rolls and subsequent redundancies of staff?
- How would the Board engage with the local community, including the Council, regarding the rationalisation process?
- Could schools with falling rolls be used as libraries or youth clubs?
- How would the Board ensure equality with other areas, where the library is not under threat?

Councillor Duncan stated that she felt strongly about the future of libraries in the area, particularly Newtownbreda and Belvoir, and she could not see any reason for closures, especially as Newtownbreda Library was being used so extensively by local residents. She referred to aims published by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in March 2004, which included the promotion of learning, the provision of access to digital and electronic services etc. The closure of libraries meant that there was doubt as to how these aims could be met.

Councillor Duncan noted that children in areas of social exclusion and deprivation, as well as the elderly, would suffer from the closure of libraries, due to lack of transport or the costs involved in travelling to other libraries. Furthermore, the libraries in Newtownbreda and Belvoir acted as a community focus in the absence of designated Community Centres, and this was a service that could never be replaced by Cregagh library.

The Chief Librarian replied that the Board provided more equality of provision in Castlereagh than in other areas. However, small libraries could not offer all the services envisaged by the Board. The Chief Librarian then highlighted the expertise of staffing as the best resource available, the amount of training that had been invested and urged the need to refocus and retain its employees within the Board.

The Chief Librarian referred to school visits and informed Members that the SEELB led the field in this respect, but admitted that some schools benefited more than others.

The Chief Librarian accepted that Cregagh Library was not the best-used library in the area and that there was a higher demand for library services in Newtownbreda, although it would not be possible to increase services there due to lack of space. However, she indicated that Forestside may be an excellent site for a large library in light of the volumes of people accessing it already for retail and commercial use.

The Chief Librarian did not feel that there was much deprivation in the Castlereagh Borough, except possibly in Enler and Tullycarnet, and she felt that the infrastructure in the Borough was better than in other areas. Libraries needed to be accessible, and she welcomed the opportunity to work with the Council to address public transport issues.

At this point, Alderman Robinson refuted the Chief Librarian's comments and pointed out that Tullycarnet held the record for the province's third worst percentages in educational standards.

Councillor Duncan enquired as to the benefits for areas like Belvoir, if the library services were moved to Cregagh, as she felt that there was a danger of degeneration of communities.

The Chief Librarian replied that a satisfactory solution would have to be found in co-operation with schools, the Council and youth services. As Belvoir and Braniel libraries were primarily used by local residents, and taking the cost of relocation into consideration, the Chief Librarian thought that these services would continue as they were, with the potential for Belvoir and Braniel to merge with other libraries in the future. She also suggested that services to schools should continue.

At this point in the meeting, the Chairman asked Members' consent for the filming of two minutes of the proceedings by UTV. Members agreed to this request.

The Senior Education Officer confirmed the Board's commitment to the use of schools as community centres, and he felt that, in order to achieve the best benefit, needs had to be established. At present, he felt, schools were unused resources that could be explored. However, regarding rationalisation, to date no decisions had been made. There would initially have to be informal consultation involving parents, teachers and transferors in conjunction with local community groups, residents and the Council. Then a formal consultation exercise would be carried out which would be well documented and very detailed as the process involved was extremely complex to ensure that children would not lose their identity when moving from one school to another.

Councillor Bunting took exception to the Officers' comments and felt that there was misconception about the level of deprivation in the Castlereagh area. She stated that, deprived communities such as Braniel and Clonduff, were surrounded by more affluent areas, and this impacted on the TSN level statistics. Another point to consider was that lower standards of education resulted in lower levels of employability and social deprivation; therefore Councillor Bunting was concerned that the closure of libraries would be detrimental to the long-term economic status of the community.

However, there were many people who would be adversely affected by the closure of library services, for example, children would not be able to travel unaccompanied, and the elderly would equally face problems due to inadequate transport.

Councillor Bunting then referred to the Framework for Change document, which, in her view, did not concur with the Board's recommendations for a way forward and it also did not list whom the Board had consulted with.

She expressed concern that whilst Protestant working class residents had attained poorer educational standards than their Catholic counterparts, they were losing out on services.

Councillor Bunting moved to the SEELB's budget, and cited the example of Lisburn Library, whereby £5 million had been spent on improvement of services, and duplication of book stocks whereas other libraries were unable to buy any books at all etc.

She went on to question that although the closure of libraries in Belvoir, Braniel and Gilnahirk would only produce meagre savings of £26,455, the Board proposed to retain existing levels of staff.

Councillor Bunting was of the view that the Board and the Council had different priorities. She stated that a balance had to be struck in order to provide a satisfactory solution. She reiterated the view that the closure of libraries would not benefit the community and asked if the Board had considered extending Braniel Library into the Clinic beside it to increase its capacity, rather than closing it down.

In response to Councillor Bunting's comment, the Chief Librarian reported that to carry out such refurbishment and renovations in Braniel and Belvoir libraries would cost approximately £500,000 each. She stated that the cost of heating and rates would also increase as a result of these refurbishments. The Chief Librarian informed Members that early indications estimated the cost of a new-build library to be approximately £2 million including fees, plus approximately £600,000 for the site but this would be a one-off capital cost.

The Chief Librarian informed Members that the Framework for Change report had been produced by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. She further stated that there was a necessity to rationalise services in order to remain within the available budget, but added that she appreciated the Council's offer of assistance.

The Chief Librarian moved on to address allocated funding to libraries. She informed Members that, in the case of Lisburn Library and other new libraries, initial funding for new libraries had been provided by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, although it had not been as much as had been anticipated. She continued to say that the way forward lay in a change in the provision of library services, for example, books could be handed in to any library. The Chief Librarian added that Staff costs amounted to nearly £3 million, and approximately 5% of the budget was used for the purchase of books. As the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure had set a target of £5 million, this had resulted in a reduction in the staffing budget and the removal of senior management tiers, therefore the Board had decided on library closures as the way forward. However, the Chief Librarian assured Members that Castlereagh had received larger funding than other areas.

The Chief Librarian stated that the Board had decided to bring forward proposals and open up discussions in order to avoid rumours. She continued to say that the Board were mindful of the fact that budgets would be reduced in the future, making it more difficult to meet needs, and she advised that changes would be unavoidable.

Councillor Bunting concluded that the vast majority of residents in her constituency contended that they would prefer to retain smaller libraries, albeit with lesser facilities, than one "all-singing, all-dancing" library, which they cannot access.

Councillor Long now entered the discussion. He refuted Alderman I Robinson's comments regarding integrated education, as 75% of people in Northern Ireland wanted integrated education. He supported integrated schools, as they offered an excellent way to make savings, as only one school would be required to meet the educational needs of all communities, and he referred to the fact that the Millennium Integrated School was now oversubscribed, which highlighted the importance of parental choice.

Councillor Long stated that the Alliance Party had initially proposed the creation of one education board in Northern Ireland to avoid a duplication of services.

He welcomed the fact that funding saved in administration costs could be used to provide improved provision of frontline services. Councillor Long was of the view that the closure of schools in the area was unfortunate, and he felt that the

decisions regarding funding for schools should be broadened to consider the needs in Northern Ireland as a whole instead.

Councillor Long reiterated that the Board's proposals for 2 libraries in the Borough, was totally unacceptable. He had received many complaints regarding library closures and it was obvious that the Board were not fully aware of the extent of the problems with the transport system in Castlereagh. In his view, local communities wanted access to a local library and not centres of excellence relocated elsewhere, and the proposal to close Braniel Library would add to the already low educational attainments in the area.

Councillor Long then raised concerns regarding the safety of children on their way to and from schools. He stated that bus passes had been withdrawn for pupils attending Lagan College, and many school crossing patrol positions had been unfilled for long periods. He expressed his concern at the unacceptably lengthy vacancy for a school crossing patrol person at St Bernard's Primary School. Furthermore, he asked for an assurance that the post at Braniel Primary School would be maintained and he sought clarification in relation to the Board's policy with regard to its selection of school crossing positions.

The Chief Executive pointed out that priority had to be given to the best cost provision within a finite budget. She added that although parents had the right to choose which school they wanted their children to go to, it was important to look at filling surplus places instead of opening new schools.

The Chief Executive responded to earlier comments in relation to Castlereagh's schools, which were located along the boundary with Belfast City Council and informed Members that the SEELB were trying to liaise with BELB, but reiterated that they were 2 separate Boards.

The Chief Executive referred to the current surplus of 757 primary and approximately 400 post-primary places. Estimates showed that by 2016 the school age population would be reduced by 25%, therefore this had to be taken into consideration when planning for educational needs in the future and the possible relocation of schools may be pursued. She referred to the Strategic Capital Plan and indicated that although the Board could make proposals, ultimately the final decision would rest with the Minister for Education.

In the case of library services, the Chief Librarian informed Members that the Board intended to make their decision following consultation with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure as well as local communities etc.

The Chief Executive agreed that the safety of children was a priority. She informed Members that the Board's policy was to survey a location whenever a vacancy in school crossing patrols arose, and if the location met the criteria adopted in Northern Ireland, the post would be filled. However, where necessary,

posts would be filled on a temporary basis until then, as was the case in Braniel Primary School.

The Chief Executive then referred to the requirements laid down by the Department of Education regarding the provision of free transport to schools, which stated that pupils in post-primary school education who resided outside a three-mile radius, would not be entitled to free transport. Exceptional circumstances in Lagan College meant that free transport had been provided, but had been withdrawn once the road improvements at that location had been carried out.

Councillor Long wished to draw the Officer's attention to the fact that the Roads Service had only made provisions for a footpath from Garland Hill to Lagan College and there was no footpath provision on the Manse Road side of the college, which continued to pose a danger to students.

Alderman PD Robinson welcomed the temporary reinstatement of a school crossing patrolman at Braniel Primary School and indicated that this had demonstrated the absolute requirement for this post to be maintained permanently.

He then queried the Chief Executive's comments in relation to "mergers", reporting that this actually meant that one school would have to close down. He enquired about the threat of closure to Lisnasharragh High School and asked if there were factors involved in requesting the Board to look in another direction.

The Chief Education Officer responded that although he appreciated that one school would be closed through a merge or amalgamation, the new school created would be able to take on a new identity.

With regard to Lisnasharragh High School, he responded that it had made considerable progress since drawing down initial funding. He informed Members that 50% of the school's pupils came from the Belfast area and highlighted the fact that the school also provided for a particular type of education, and the number of pupils determined the size of the budget for the school. At the end of its financial year, Lisnasharragh High School carried a deficit, therefore a merger was being considered, and there were a possible number of options, including a potential merge with Orangefield High School.

Councillor AM Beattie cited Belvoir Park Post Office, which had been closed, and she felt that the area would suffer if library services were also withdrawn. She reported that 1,000 signatures had been collected in a petition to keep services in place. Councillor Beattie felt that, as the number of school-age children in the area was increasing, and taking into account the proportion of elderly people in Belvoir who did not have access to cars, the Board should review proposals to

create one large library as the local community wanted to retain a library with basic service provision.

With regard to integrated schools, Councillor Beattie advised that Catholic schools had not felt the need to transform, and in her view, Protestants were losing out because of a shortfall of funding. Integrated schools, she continued, were attended by children mainly from mixed backgrounds.

Councillor Spratt wished to thank the Officers of the Board for their presentation and stated that as a member of the Board, he was speaking tonight in his capacity as an Elected Member on behalf of his constituents, and the Castlereagh Borough as a whole.

He disagreed with Councillor Long and the Alliance Party's support of the establishment of integrated schools, as, in his view, they took pupils away from state-controlled schools and, in turn, created an unnecessary third tier in the educational system.

Councillor Spratt felt saddened that the SEELB were being expected to make a £3.5 million payback when they were already experiencing financial difficulties and they had only a £1.3million budget to maintain crumbling schools and provide services. Despite this fact, the Minister for Education was supporting funding for capital work projects such as new schools or libraries.

He congratulated parents from Brooklands Primary School, who had fought for a replacement school crossing patrolman after carrying out the work themselves for a period of two weeks, and he approved the Board's decision to employ a school crossing patrolman on a temporary basis until a permanent solution could be found. However, he warned the Board that the parents of Brooklands would not settle for less than a permanent school crossing patrolman and had sought legal advice. He commented that, if the Board were not careful, they could be placed in the position of facing a judicial review, which would receive the full support of the Council.

Councillor Spratt stated that it was ironic that a video produced by the Department of Education showed kitchen staff and a patrolman bringing to the Principal's attention the fact that a child appeared to be in distress. This, in Councillor Spratt's view, demonstrated the importance of frontline schooling staff at all levels.

Councillor Spratt was of the view that the Board had failed to keep the public adequately informed of their intentions and this had led to the countless rumours currently circulating in relation to proposed cuts and closures.

With regard to libraries, Councillor Spratt pointed out that for many organisations, such as the DPP, they played a vital role in respect of hosting community

facilities for meetings, etc, and this should be taken into consideration when making any decision on the provision of services. Councillor Spratt urged that Politicians, Board Members and Officials needed to make a concerted effort to urge the Minister to allocate greater funding to the Board and cease the practice of funding provision for a third tier of integrated schools.

The Chief Librarian replied that it was not the Board's intention to withhold information. In response to earlier comments in relation to staffing levels, she outlined that the Board presently employed 12 members of staff who were employed in relatively junior positions to plan and programme arts and cultural programmes in the area. With regard to the use of library facilities by the various agencies and services, she informed Members that these were being provided without charge, and consideration may be given to this issue in the future.

Councillor Tosh added his congratulations to the parents from Brooklands Primary School on their achievement in obtaining the reinstatement of a temporary school crossing patrolman. He was very angry that the Board seemed to ignore the price of a child's life and demanded that the views of Elected Members and their constituents be taken into account when decisions regarding the future of libraries and schools were made.

Councillor Drysdale asked the Chief Executive to clarify the position in relation to school budgets. He commented that parent/teacher associations should be congratulated for the service they provide, as without them, many schools would be facing a bigger financial struggle.

In addition, he drew Members' attention to the issue of Classroom Assistants, especially those working with designated special needs pupils and asked if the level of expertise and training they had accrued would be lost once the special needs pupil no longer required their services.

The Chief Executive replied that Principals were in control of their allocated budgets. These budgets were awarded by the Department of Education, and every school was assessed using a common formula of funding, which identified a number of elements including TSN and special needs. She reiterated that the allocation of funding depended on the number of pupils.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the SEELB was aware of the contribution from parent/teacher associations, although the extent of their work had not been specified.

The Senior Education Officer informed Members that schools for pupils with special needs employed classroom assistants who, in many instances, were assigned to one pupil and would, quite often, move to post-primary school education along with the pupil. However, once the Classroom assistant was not

required, the Board would usually try to redeploy the employee to retain their expertise but sometimes this was not possible and they would face redundancy.

Councillor Drysdale also raised the issue of school breakfasts, which were supplied in many nationalist schools at very competitive costs despite the service losing money and referred to the amount of subsidies that were made payable to retain the service.

Councillor Hall was of the view that, as long as direct rule continued, funding for education would be in short supply.

Councillor G Robinson stated that local libraries were an important and pivotal part of local community and he was of the view that the best way forward would be the modernisation of existing libraries and schools, as any reduction in services would mean a change in community spirit. He was perturbed at the Chief Librarian's earlier comments with regard to the staffing levels required for the operation of libraries, and he posed a scenario regarding 3 libraries. He asked the Chief Librarian to clarify that if only one member of staff from each of the 3 libraries turned up for work, what would be the outcome and would each of the libraries be opened to the public with only one employee in attendance.

The Chief Librarian replied that, in response to the Councillor's scenario, the Officers would most likely have to enforce at least two emergency closures and redeploy resources to the remaining library as she reiterated that it was a statutory requirement that 2 employees should be in attendance before a library could open to the public.

Councillor Robinson then disputed the statistics reported by the Chief Librarian and indicated that they would be inaccurate if users of the library were unable to gain access as a result of emergency closures. In his view, it would be more cost effective to modernise, renew and repair existing libraries than to build one large library. He then went on to ask if the Chief Librarian could clarify how many people would be unable to travel to libraries if there would be only one large library instead of the existing smaller ones. He also asked for the Board's view with regard to children not being able to visit their library unaccompanied, if the planned closures went ahead.

With regard to the situation at Brooklands Primary School, Councillor Robinson asked if the Officers could confirm how many surveys had taken place before a temporary school crossing patrolman had been reinstated at the school, as the original survey had already identified a need for a school crossing patrolman at that junction.

Councillor Robinson finally asked if the Officers could clarify how much independent Members of the Board had claimed in respect of their costs and attendances etc.

The Chief Executive went on to answer Councillor G Robinson's questions.

With regard to Brooklands, she could not tell Members how many surveys would be carried out in the future, and reiterated that a policy decision in relation to all school crossing patrol employees had yet to be taken.

As she did not have details regarding the number of people who would be unable to visit their library due to lack of transport, the Chief Executive offered to provide Councillor Robinson with these statistics, along with the reimbursement of expenses information for Members of the Board.

The Chief Librarian went on to say that new talks were planned for January 2006 in respect of school closures. She then went on to outline that the Board carried out quarterly reviews of library usage, and she informed Members that emergency closures were kept to a minimum and, indeed, the library opening hours had actually been increased.

Councillor G Robinson felt that, compared to the costs required to build a new library in Lisburn, refurbishment of existing facilities in the Borough was a relatively more cost-effective measure.

However, the Chief Librarian informed Members that a visit to the new library in Lisburn could be arranged if they wished, as they could see at firsthand the upgraded facilities that were now being offered.

Councillor Ramsey entered the discussion by saying that, in his view, the increase of integrated schools represented a kind of ethnic cleansing of the Protestant community. He also informed Members that his son had attended Torbank School in the past, and during that time his education had been on a one-to-one basis, which, sadly, did not exist anymore today.

With regard to the situation relating to the withdrawal of bus passes for students of Lagan College, Councillor Ramsey felt that this had been a disgraceful move from the Board, as the provision of a footpath on only one side of the road meant that those students accessing the college from the east side of the Borough were had not been safeguarded from dangerous traffic impacts.

Councillor Spratt referred to a recent conference in Limavady and asked for information relating to:-

- How many Officials and Staff were in attendance
- Mileage costs that were paid to staff in attendance
- Expenses that were reimbursed for Board members in attendance.

The Chief Executive replied that she had attended that same conference together with the Chief Librarian and although she had not claimed expenses, she would provide Councillor Spratt, and any other member who requested it, with a ballpark figure of the costs.

Councillor Bunting asked that the Board ensure that the same privileges and consideration be given to local communities in the Castlereagh area as had been offered to residents in Poleglass, whereby following consultation, residents had taken over responsibility for the running of the local library.

The Chief Librarian gave Members an assurance that this would be the case.

At this point in the proceedings, Alderman Norris asked that it be recorded that he and Alderman Ennis from Ards Borough Council had voted against the closure of school crossing patrols, despite its unanimous support elsewhere and he refuted comments that had been made which had stated that the DUP had been in support of this measure.

His comments were confirmed by the Chief Executive.

Councillor Tosh requested clarification regarding the maintenance backlog, which amounted to £28 million.

The Assistant Senior Education Officer replied that it was estimated that this amount would rise. He continued to say that the Board carried out regular surveys in respect of maintenance to schools, and each survey revealed an increase in essential work that needed to be carried out. Presently, this amounted to £4 million in the Castlereagh area, and there was a danger that, due to lack of funding, the work could not be carried out. He outlined that 70% of the available funding ought to be spent on a planned maintenance programme with 30% of the budget being set aside for response work. Unfortunately, there were other pressing expenses, therefore this target could not be met and the Board's maintenance budget was solely used to cover response maintenance.

At this point the Chairman, on behalf of the Members, thanked the representatives from the SEELB for attending tonight's meeting and looked forward to receiving the information relating to expenses and costs requested during the course of discussion.

Noted.

**2005/638 : CORRESPONDENCE FROM BELVOIR COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION RE BELVOIR LIBRARY**

Noted.

**2005/639 : CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED FROM BELVOIR PARK  
PRIMARY SCHOOL RE LIBRARY FACILITY IN BELVOIR**

Noted.

**2005/640 : CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED FROM THE SOUTH  
EASTERN EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD RE PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE  
AND POTENTIAL FUTURE SCHOOL AMALGAMATIONS IN CASTLEREAGH**

Noted.

**2005/641 : DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS & LEISURE – NORTHERN  
IRELAND'S LIBRARIES, A FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE**

RESOLVED: That Councillor Bunting liaise with Members of the Board regarding the content of the document.

As there was no further business, the meeting ended at 10.30 pm

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**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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**MAYOR**