



## Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Transitional Governance Arrangements for the Education Sector
Date:	Friday, 21st May, 2010
Reporting Officer:	Mr. Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services (extension 6325)
Contact Officer:	Mr. Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services (extension 6325)

### **Purpose of Report**

To advise the Committee of the receipt of correspondence from the Minister for Education regarding the nomination of Members to the interim Belfast Education and Library Board.

### **Background**

It is intended that the five Education and Library Boards should be replaced with an Education and Skills Authority. However this requires legislative agreement between the parties and in the period prior to the establishment of the new body streamlined Education and Library Boards are being put in place.

At its meeting on 11th December, 2009 the Committee had considered a request from the Minister for Education to put forward, in line with the guidelines published by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, at least eight Councillors who would be willing to sit on the transitional Board. The Committee had agreed to nominate only four Members with the representatives being selected using a one-off d'Hondt process. This resulted in the nominations falling to the SF, DUP, UUP and SDLP groupings, with Councillors Convery, Hartley, Rodgers and Rodway being put forward for selection.

However, further correspondence was received from the Minister on 17th February reiterating the need for the Council to nominate at least two persons for each vacancy and requesting that an additional four names be forwarded to her.

This was drawn to the Committee's attention at its meeting on 19th February, when it was decided to affirm the decision of 11th December to nominate only four Members to the four places to which the Council was entitled under the legislation.

### **Key Issues**

The Minister for Education has now written again asking the Council to review its position with a view to providing a total of eight nominees in order to comply with the guidelines of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. In her letter, the Minister explains that she is required to follow the procedures laid down by the Commissioner for Public Appointments and that 24 out of the 26 other Councils in Northern Ireland have complied with the request to provide multiple nominees.

While this request is essentially no different from that which the Minister made in February, there is little doubt that the impasse which has arisen is doing nothing to progress and enhance the administration, oversight and management of education in Belfast. Accordingly, the Committee may take the view that, in the interests of ensuring that the Council has the opportunity to play a positive and constructive role in overseeing and contributing to educational decisions and policy in the City, it would be better to find a way to accommodate the Minister's wishes while at the same time preserving and protecting the basis upon which the Committee makes appointments to outside bodies, that is, through the use of the d'Hondt process.

The Committee could do so by simply giving each of the Party Groupings two nominees under each choice rather than the normal one. This would preserve the principle of proportionality yet satisfy the Minister's wish to be able to make choices from a pool of eight nominees. The one rider which would have to be added would be that, in the interests of fairness, equality and justice, the final selections made by the Minister would have to entail one selection from each of the four largest Party Groupings on the Council, that is, SF, the DUP, the UUP and the SDLP.

### **Recommendation**

To agree to an additional four nominees, to be provided by the SF, DUP, UUP and SDLP Party Groupings, being forwarded to the Minister for Education for consideration for appointment to the interim Belfast Education and Library Board.

### **Decision Tracking**

The Committee's decision will be forwarded to the Minister after ratification by the Council on 1st June.

### **Key to Abbreviations**

N/A

### **Documents Attached**

N/A