

FINAL MEETING

WESTERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCIL

**Minutes of One Hundred and Sixty-seventh (Final) meeting of the
Western Health and Social Services Council
held on Friday 6 March 2009
in the Central Hall, Southwest College, Omagh Campus
2 Mountjoy Road, Omagh, Co Tyrone, BT79 7AH
at 10.00am**

Present:

Mrs F Robson (Chair)	Councillor R Hussey
Mrs V Brown	Councillor B Johnston
Mr J Campbell	Mr I Maguire
Councillor M Carten	Mr E McGrade
Councillor G Foley	Mr M McIvor
Councillor M Hamilton	Mrs M McKeague
Mrs S Hogg	Mr V McKelvey

Apologies:

Councillor M H Durkan	Mr R McIntyre
Councillor R Lynch	Ms M Trimble

In Attendance:

Ms M Reilly	Mrs K Loughran
Mrs M Gormley	

2 Members of the Press were in attendance

Chair's Business:

Mrs Robson welcomed everyone to the 167th and final meeting of the Western Health and Social Services Council.

Mrs Robson said she was very sorry she had missed the Joint Council Forum in the Slieve Donard Hotel on 26th and 27th February due to the birth of her grandson. She said she hoped that all those who attended had a very worthwhile experience and she was aware the Department had expressed their gratitude to the members of the HSS Councils at the joint event.

Mrs Robson said as it was the final meeting of the WHSS Council and in her role as Chairperson she wished to thank all of the members for their involvement, dedication and the sacrifices they sometimes had to make. She said she had thoroughly enjoyed her time on the Council allowing her to meet

people from the many different areas of the Health Service. She said representing patients in this community particularly over the last few years had been a very worthwhile task. Mrs Robson said she sincerely hoped the new PCC would have a group of people as dedicated as the members of the WHSS Council. She said she hoped the new committee would have the energy and commitment it takes to challenge Government on the very serious issues that affect people on a day to day basis. Mrs Robson said she thoroughly enjoyed getting to know each and every one of the members and she wished them all the best for the future.

Mrs Robson paid tribute to the Chief Officer Ms Maggie Reilly, Business Support Manager Mrs Maureen Gormley, Personal Secretary Mrs Kitty Loughran and the other members of the secretarial team. She praised their dedication to the members and their service to the community.

Minutes of Previous WHSS Council Meeting:

The Minutes of the previous WHSS Council meeting held on 5 December 2008 were adopted on the proposal of Mrs Valerie Brown and seconded by Mr Michael McIvor.

Matters Arising from Previous Meetings:

Members were provided with a written update on Action Points carried forward from the previous Council meeting.

Action Point AP: a/12/08 - Chief Officer to investigate system of communication with members regarding meeting between WHSSC and District Councils and report back to members.

Members were provided with a summary of communication with members prior to the meeting between WHSS Council and District Councils on 4 December 2008. Ms Reilly said following her investigation she was satisfied that there had not been a breach of communication with the two members involved.

Mrs Hogg said she wished to apologise for putting the Chief Officer through all of the work involved in investigating this issue. She said she had entered the meeting in her diary with a query mark and didn't remember saying she wouldn't be there.

Mr McKelvey said he wished to concur with Mrs Hogg's remarks and also apologised.

Action Point AP: b/12/08 - Chief Officer to contact 3 District Councils to let them know that WHSS Council will co-sign letter to Minister.

Ms Reilly said she had drafted the letter and it was sent to each of the three

Councils for sign off. All four Chairs i.e. WHSS Council, Omagh District Council, Fermanagh District Council and Strabane District Council co-signed the letter. The letter was sent to the Minister on 23 December 2008 and a response received from him on 20 January 2009. Members were provided with copies of both letters.

Action Point AP: c/12/08 - Chief Officer to inform Chairs of Committees that members of the Council will be withdrawing from 31 March 2009.

Ms Reilly said she had informed the Chairs of Groups/Committees that members of the WHSS Council would be withdrawing from the various committees from the 31st March 2009. A similar letter was sent to the relevant members who sit on such committees.

Ms Reilly said it was her understanding that for some of the groups the input of the members is so valued that the same members are being invited to stay on but recognising that they are lay members and not representing the Council. Ms Reilly said this was testament to the commitment and input the WHSS Council members have given to a number of very important committees. An example of this she said was the Pharmacy Practices Committee where the WHSS Council members have been representing the needs of local communities in relation to pharmacies and where they should be located.

Joint Council event 26/27 February 2009:

Ms Reilly said unfortunately she was unable to attend the Joint Council event on 26/27th February 2009. She said the value of the event was to mark the occasion of the demise of the four Health Councils. The primary purpose she said was to identify the important issues it was hoped the PCC would take forward. The four Councils throughout Northern Ireland had worked jointly together to act more strategically and push forward issues of common concern. It was also an opportunity for members of the four Councils to meet together for the last time.

Mr Johnston said it was a very interesting two day event and it was a great opportunity to meet people that they don't normally get to meet.

Mrs Brown said it was sad to listen to some of the people she had met who had applied for the new roles in the PCC and who did not even get an interview. She said she did not like to think of all of that experience and dedication being lost to the PCC. She said the members of the new PCC are going to get paid whilst the members of the four HSS Councils worked voluntarily and did not get paid except for travelling expenses and she hopes the new PCC members are as committed as the HSS Council members were. She said the joint event was very useful and members had met the new Chief Executive of the PCC.

Ms Reilly referring to Mrs Brown's comments said members did not get paid for their work on the Councils but had often said to her they did the work because they wanted to give something back to their community.

Mr Carten said he agreed with Mrs Brown's remarks and that it was very nice to meet the members of the other three Councils. He said he enjoyed the two day event very much but it was also a sad occasion.

Consultation response – WHSC Trust's CSR proposals:

Ms Reilly said she had an opportunity to attend one of the public meetings about the Trusts CSR proposals. She said there were over 100 people at the Lisnaskea meeting some of whom were residents of the local residential home. She said there is something inherently wrong when elderly people have to go to a public meeting and are reduced to tears because they are frightened about the loss of their home and not knowing where they might have to go.

Ms Reilly said the Council understands the pressures the Trust is under - 3% year on year is a huge saving to have to make, particularly when you have a service that was under resourced to start with. However she said it is wrong to target the elderly and the most vulnerable. She said it is up to the Council to protect the most vulnerable and speak up for them when they cannot. The frustration and fear she said is that there is no real indication of what will happen to residents if the proposals go through. The residents simply do not know where they might end up although clearly, she said, the Trust is not going to turn people out on the street. Older people have roots in their own community and these connections have continued and been strengthened whilst living in these residential homes.

Ms Reilly said one of the things the Trust is saying to support the change is that when they did a review a couple of years ago with the Western Board over 40% of the people who were in residential homes were there because they were lonely and isolated. This she said is being put forward as not being a suitable reason for people going in to residential care. Ms Reilly said if people are lonely and isolated and there is no one to provide them with comfort and support they ought to be able to live in a small community of older people if that is their choice. Ms Reilly said she was aware Fermanagh District Council has submitted a very comprehensive response to the CSR proposals and she expects so too will Omagh Council and Strabane District Council and there is quite a groundswell of public opinion that the proposals are inherently wrong. She said it will be very interesting to see whether people are listened to now that they have actually involved themselves in contributing to major policy decisions.

Mr McKelvey said the people in Strabane are in uproar about Greenfield home and it has attracted major headlines. He said it was reported that the Trust

officials at the meeting in Strabane were not able to say what is going to happen, they did not seem to have a resolution to the problem other than the fact that the home was closing.

Mr Hussey said the sad reality is that regardless of whatever consultation process is used people believe that it will not work; they believe that the decisions are made and the consultation and the feedback that is given is disregarded. He said when people have responded in their thousands to various public consultations whether it be the Trust, the Department or the Board they move ahead anyway. Mr Hussey said this was brought up at a recent WHSS Council meeting in Strabane and he did not think anyone left that meeting believing that there was any way forward other than that the Trust were going to do what they were going to do.

Ms McKeague said the consultation for daycare was out and she is involved in that in her working life. Part of the consultation is that they are going to close one day of daycare and referring to what the Chief Officer had said she also is observing people crying and very distressed; they are asking which day will it be, will it be my day and what will happen to me? Ms McKeague said she had met with the Trust and asked what happens to those people who are allocated three days of daycare and are now going to lose a day; where will they go on the third day? She said the Trust's reply was that they would try and take them somewhere else. Ms McKeague made the Trust aware that some of these people are unable to travel more than an hour on the bus and many of them already live more than an hour away. Again she said they had no answer or solution for them and they can't tell them what is happening. The consultation closes on Tuesday and the Trust officers are only coming out to meet with the older people today Friday. She said they were very distressed about it.

Mr Hussey said that it is the same for the rural areas of Tyrone and Fermanagh where unfortunately, for example, people from the Gortin area are apparently going to be brought into a Home in Omagh. He said these people have no affiliation with Omagh; they are a rural community in Gortin and Omagh means nothing to them. The same will apply to the Castlederg area where they relate to the rural area that they come from and they do not want to be dragged away somewhere that means nothing to them. Unfortunately he said people seem to be very low on the list of priorities; it is all down to finance.

Mrs Hamilton said these people are in their home, they feel safe and secure and the residents in the home are their family.

Mr Johnston said it is not an institution; it is their home. He added that some relatives could not give the support that the Home can give to them and they rely very much on this.

Mrs Hogg said she would concur with everything that has been said. She

wondered if they had really done their sums because to move these people to other places she believes would cost more than what it is costing at the moment and there seems to be this thing where they are changing everything to save money but it is not actually going to save money. She wondered if they had actually carried out a proper assessment of the financial savings that they are going to make; quite apart from the hardship they are going to cause to a lot of people. Mrs Hogg said if these people are expected to go back and live in the back of beyond and have an isolated existence they are going to be a greater drain on the financial resources of the Government than where they are at the moment.

Mr Carten said people are now living longer and there is going to be more need for support in the community and there is going to be more need for Homes.

Ms Reilly said this particular consultation will prove to be a real test of the new Trust as to whether they are willing to listen to the response of the public. In reflecting the mood of the public, she said it was her personal view that if it is found that the Trust does not listen, then communities may stop engaging with them and will not get involved in consultation exercises again.

On the issue of the review of daycare Ms Reilly said the WHSS Council would know from the advocacy work it does that the care provided in the community is actually being decreased. She said if daycare places are reduced further people may remain in their homes becoming even more isolated and they risk becoming lonely, depressed and not able to look after themselves and before you know it they will be in hospital. A hospital bed is a very expensive commodity in comparison to day care provision, she said.

Mr McKelvey said the lay person just cannot understand why you have to save a certain amount to hold on to it. The savings of £35 million have got to be secured and then the Trust gets it back; people do not understand that. The Trust is caught between the Department, the Minister, the Executive and the community and the trouble about all this is the anxiety it causes to the community. People he said are really disorientated and that is just the wrong way to go about business. He said there must be a better way to encourage each operational manager to effect some sort of savings so that there is a cumulative effect. He said we need to get back to a realistic way of being prudent with public spending.

Ms Reilly referring to Mr McKelvey's point said that the new money comes ring-fenced around projects that have been agreed at a regional level but which may not be the best way to spend that money at a local level.

Patient Client Council (PCC)Update:

Ms Reilly said as members are aware the new Chief Executive of the PCC Ms

Maeve Hully has been appointed. Ms Hully has been working for Marie Curie Cancer Care since 1993. The Chair of the PCC Mr John Keanie has also been appointed; he is a former Town Clerk and Chief Executive of Derry City Council.

Ms Reilly said Mr Sean Brown who previously worked in the EHSS Council and more recently with the Regulation, Quality and Improvement Authority has been appointed as Head of Development and Corporate Services. Ms Louise Skelly, who worked with the Belfast Trust, has been appointed as Head of Operations for the PCC.

Ms Reilly reported that there will be five local offices and a new headquarters office. Preparations are underway for the recruitment of the area managers. Ms Reilly said it will be business as usual after the 1st April 2009 with for example support continuing to people who wish to make a complaint about any aspect of Health or Social care. She said the WHSS Council has written to the people they are currently working with to let them know that although there is a name change, the officers who have been involved in supporting them will still be there and will continue to work with them. Ms Reilly said it is expected that the Board of Non-executive Directors will be in place for the 1st April 2009.

Mrs Hogg said she hopes the West will be represented properly with the new PCC Board. She said the West does have problems and issues that are not replicated anywhere else in Northern Ireland.

Provision of Health Services in the Omagh area:

Mr Campbell referred to the current position regarding the provision of Health Services in the Omagh area and proposed that the WHSS Council write to the Chief Executive and Chair of the PCC advising them of the WHSS Council members' concerns about the provision of services in Omagh and ask them as a matter of urgency if they would continue to monitor the situation.

Mr Ross Hussey seconded Mr Campbell's proposal.

Action Point: AP a/03/09

WHSS Council to write to Chief Executive and Chair of PCC to ask them to continue to monitor the provision of Health services in the Omagh area.

Road Infrastructure in the West:

Mr Johnston referred to the road infrastructure in the West. He proposed that the WHSS Council write to the Divisional Roads Manager expressing the Council's concerns about the A32 road from Omagh to Enniskillen. He said it has become almost impassable as it is breaking up and there is very little sign of any major work being done. He said people cannot be expected to travel

from Omagh to the new hospital in Enniskillen with the roads in the condition they are in. He said it is completely unacceptable and there is no point building two new hospitals and having no road between the two.

Mr Hussey said he would fully support Mr Johnston's comments. He said it is a nightmare to travel on the road between Omagh and Enniskillen in normal circumstances and he has often asked at Trust Board meetings have any of the Executive Directors been strapped into the back of an ambulance and actually driven along that road? Mr Hussey added that the road from Omagh to Londonderry is a disgrace as well. He said that a patient's journey recently to Altnagelvin from Omagh took 55 minutes. He said there are assurances from Roads Services that they are going to tar that road but that is no good; a proper infrastructure is needed. He said it has been accepted there is going to be a new hospital in Enniskillen but to move as quickly as the Trust has in removing services from Omagh and force acutely ill patients to travel along that road is wrong. A lot of infrastructural defects have to be repaired before we move forward and that is a major concern and always has been; nobody can go from Omagh to Enniskillen in less than an hour because of the state of the roads.

Mrs McKeague reported an incident as told to her by the husband of a lady who had a brain tumour and was transferring by ambulance to Altnagelvin Hospital from the Erne hospital in Enniskillen. He said he was with his wife in the back of the ambulance and although she had been quite peaceful during the journey every time the ambulance went over a bump she would moan in pain. Mrs McKeague was told that the ambulance then hit a bump outside the Mellon Country Inn, a short distance outside of Omagh, which caused his wife to scream out. She died a few moments later.

Mr Campbell said the Trust and the Board are putting money before people's lives.

Mr McKelvey said he agreed with Mr Johnston's remarks about the roads which are not up to standard at the moment.

Ms Reilly said the WHSS Council had written to the Roads Services previously but will write again stating members' concerns.

Mr Carten said there has been no money spent on rural roads in the past 40 years and it was a disgrace.

Action Point: AP b/03/09

from Omagh to Enniskillen and from Omagh to Londonderry.

Issues to be passed to the PCC:

Ms Reilly assured members that she would go back through previous minutes of the WHSS Council meetings and highlight the areas that need to be passed on to the PCC.

Members' contact details:

Ms Reilly asked members if they would be happy for the WHSS Council when it moves to the PCC on 1st April 2009 to hold on to their contact details. It was agreed a form will be sent out to all members seeking their consent.

Action Point: AP c/03/09

Consent form to be sent to members to retain their contact details which will be held by the PCC.

Chief Officer's thanks:

Ms Reilly said she wished to thank members and staff, saying it has been a pleasure and an honour to have worked with all of them over the past six years. She said she was particularly proud of the WHSS Council because of the input and contribution made by the members. She said it was difficult for the public to understand the level of commitment members have made on behalf of the community. The only problem she said was the frustration felt by members and the public that quite often the Council did not have the power to do some of the things as effectively as it might have wanted to do.

Ms Reilly said the staff would transfer to the new PCC on 1st April 2009.

Chairman's closing remarks:

Mrs Robson on behalf of the WHSS Council wished Ms Maeve Hully, Chief Executive and her team the very best in their work of bringing the new PCC into being and continuing the work of supporting the public voice in Health and Social care.

Mrs Robson said she was aware the staff of the WHSS Council were going to have an extremely busy time in moving forward in handing over to the PCC. She wished the staff all the best during this difficult time and into the future. Mrs Robson said she again wished to thank members for all the work, time and effort they have put in.

Members' closing remarks:

Mr McKelvey said he had found the experience of being a member interesting and for him personally it was a great education. He said he believed the Council did reduce complacency by challenging the health service and indeed a number of issues were resolved to our satisfaction. He said he felt the Council had power when sitting on the Pharmacy Practices Committee and National Appeals Panel because there the members' vote meant something.

Mr McKelvey said he personally wanted to thank all the staff as they were always very positive and helpful. The other big benefit he said was that he now had over 20 people whom he regards as friends. He wished everyone every success in the future and hoped the staff were appointed to good key permanent jobs. He said talking to anyone he would be able to say he had worked with dedicated, professional staff in the West for the West.

Mr McKelvey referred to Mrs Hogg's point earlier regarding good representation for the West and said it is important to keep pressing for equality of treatment.

Mrs Hamilton said it was the end of an era and she thanked the staff at Hilltop for all their help in the past. She said she hoped the Council had made a difference to some people's lives.

Mr Hussey said he wished to pay tribute to the staff at Hilltop and to his colleagues on the Council. He said health provision means a lot to him in his role as a public representative in Omagh. He said he is aware of the work of the Council and he knows that throughout the West members of the WHSS Council worked very well together. He said he enjoyed his experience as a member of the Health Council and wished everyone well.

Mr Carten said he had enjoyed his time on the Council very much. He thanked the staff for all their help over the years.

Mr McGrade said he wished to be associated with all the positive comments and he agreed entirely with them. He said he felt the value system in our society is under threat, the good work that the members and others do is often not recognised and that is sad and you worry about the future. He wished the staff well and said they were a delight to work with.

Mrs Hogg also expressed her thanks. She said it is the people that you meet along the way who make the work interesting and important. She said she was particularly interested in getting involved in health because of her involvement in education and she still believes that health and education need to work side by side. She said she has real concerns that in the future that relationship will be lost and she would propose that this is one of the things that goes forward from this Council to the PCC. She thanked the staff and also the Chair and former Chair for all the work they had put into the Council.

Mrs Hogg said there is a saying that 'volunteering is the cement that holds society together'. She said if you volunteer for something you do it because you believe in it and you are doing it for the right reasons. She said she also had real concerns about moving forward to a society where every job is paid and she does not think there will be the heart in it. She said she had enjoyed working with lots of new people and hoped they would not lose touch with each other.

Mr Johnston said he agreed with all that had been said. He said he enjoyed his time with the Council and thanked the staff for their work. He said he does not enjoy being part of a talking shop but he could say this Council was no talking shop; it was active and things happened. He wished the members all the best for the future.

Mrs McKeague said she wished to add her thanks to the staff because they had worked tremendously hard. She said she was very grateful for the support and all the friendships she had made.

Approval of March minutes

Ms Reilly suggested that the minute of today's meeting might be approved and signed off by the Chair and Vice-chair on behalf of WHSS Council members; given that this is the final meeting of the Council. Members agreed that this was an acceptable proposal.

Mrs Hogg asked if the business of this meeting will be carried forward into the new Patient Client Council (PCC)?

Ms Reilly said if there are any outcomes from this meeting she will hand them over to the PCC. She said she cannot say at this stage what the priorities will be for the PCC but she will ensure that they are made aware of any issues which members had wanted taken forward.

The meeting ended at 11.45am