

**Minutes of Meeting of Policy and Resources Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 8 September 2016 in the Council Offices, Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt**

<b>Members Present</b>	Councillor Gildernew, Chair  Councillors Ashton, Bateson, Cuddy, Forde, Mallaghan, S McGuigan, McKinney, McLean, McPeake, Molloy, T Quinn, Totten
<b>Officers in Attendance</b>	Mr A Tohill, Chief Executive Mrs Canavan, Director of Organisational Development Mr O'Hagan, Head of ICT Mrs McNally, Council Solicitor Ms Mezza, Head of Marketing and Communications Mr Moffett, Head of Democratic Services Mr JJ Tohill, Director of Finance Miss Thompson, Committee Services Officer
<b>Others in Attendance</b>	<b>Agenda Item 4 - NIPSA</b> Mr Harte Trade Union Official

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm.

**PR153/16 Apologies**

Councillor Buchanan, Elattar and M Quinn.

**PR154/16 Declaration of Interest**

The Chair reminded members of their responsibility with regard to declarations of interest.

**PR155/16 Chair's Business**

None.

**PR156/16 NIPSA – Closure of Electoral Offices**

The Chair, Councillor Gildernew welcomed Mr Harte, Trade Union Official for NIPSA to the meeting. Mr Harte made a powerpoint presentation which provided detail on the proposals to close regional electoral offices.

Mr Harte advised of cuts to electoral office budgets and the effect this will have on capacity and performance. Mr Harte advised that he believed the preferred option to closing regional offices is by centralisation. Mr Harte also advised that NIPSA have sought financial detail to justify closure of regional offices and that this information has been denied.

Mr Harte provided detail on how strongly staff felt about closures and due to lack of engagement strike action took place on 3 and 7 June and advised of significant political support for maintaining regional electoral offices and referred to motion debated and passed at NI Assembly. Mr Harte also advised that meetings have taken place with First and Deputy First Ministers, MPs, MLAs and Councillors and that a meeting has been requested with NI Affairs Committee.

Mr Harte highlighted the activities undertaken by the Electoral Office and advised that all activities could not continue if centralisation takes place.

Mr Harte advised that the Chief Electoral Officer has spoken to Council Chief Executives regarding proposals. Mr Harte also spoke with concern regarding the lack of written detail on the proposed closures and encouraged Councils to engage with the Chief Electoral Officer and respond to the public consultation which is due for release in the coming weeks. Mr Harte also recommended that Council get a fully costed business plan for transfer of electoral services.

Mr Harte advised that a delegation from Mid and East Antrim had met with the Chief Electoral Officer regarding the closure of the Electoral Office in Ballymena and stated that Mid and East Antrim Council offered to pay six months rent on Ballymena offices or would accommodate staff within Council offices rent free for twelve months. Mr Harte advised that the Chief Electoral Officer refused these offers stating that it would prejudice the consultation process. Mr Harte advised that Ballymena Electoral Office will close at the end of October with staff moving to Newtownabbey.

Mr Harte stated that there was a definite need to retain electoral offices and the services they provide as there would be an adverse effect otherwise.

In response to Councillor Mallaghan's question the Chief Executive advised that he had a general conversation with the Chief Electoral Officer regarding reform of the electoral system. The Chief Executive stated he was aware of the consultation and that Council should await its content before forming an opinion but it would be difficult to be party to something which will cost Council money without relevant transfer of funding from central government.

Councillor S McGuigan asked if there was any way of obtaining financial details regarding proposals.

Mr Harte stated there was concern that it appeared no work had been done regarding preparation of financial information. Mr Harte stated that there had been a commitment that figures would be provided as part of the consultation however he did not believe this was going to happen. Mr Harte advised that the current Chief Electoral Officer is due to leave and requests were made to delay the process until a new CEO was in place, this was refused. Mr Harte also advised that a voluntary exit scheme was due to commence before the results of the consultation were known, Mr Harte felt this was a ridiculous situation as staff could not make this decision before it had been decided what the organisation would look like.

In response to Councillor Cuddy's question Mr Harte advised that there was no evidence of any preparation work being done on other options for closure.

Councillor Molloy asked what would happen if centralisation took place. Mr Harte advised that the voluntary exit scheme is looking for a reduction of 10 staff meaning 35 staff would move to Belfast. Mr Harte advised that if regional offices were to remain open it would take more than 35 staff, Mr Harte stated he believed that centralisation was a done deal.

Councillor Mallaghan asked how electoral staff felt about the prospect of moving under Councils.

Mr Harte stated there was some concern regarding the level of experience the Electoral Office staff deliver and that this experience could be lost.

Mr Harte was thanked for his presentation following which he withdrew from the meeting at 7.30 pm.

**PR157/16     Receive and confirm minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on Thursday 7 July 2016**

Councillor Bateson asked that the comment he made under item PR140/16 – Ulster Scots EQIA be amended to read –

“Councillor Bateson stated that cultural development is difficult to assess as opposed to language development which is relatively easy to measure.”

Proposed by Councillor McPeake  
Seconded by Councillor S McGuigan and

**Resolved**     That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on Thursday 7 July 2016 (PR136/16 – PR146/16 and PR152/16) were considered and, subject to the above amendment, signed as accurate and correct.

**Matters for Decision**

**PR158/16     Request to Illuminate Council Property**

The Head of Democratic Services presented previously circulated report which advised of request from Help 4 Noel (on behalf of Pancreatic Cancer Action) and Pancreatic Cancer UK to light up Council buildings to mark World Pancreatic Cancer Day. The month of November is Pancreatic Cancer Awareness month.

The Head of Democratic Services advised he was aware of a further request that may be made to Council to illuminate Ranfurly Arts and Visitor Centre for Childhood Cancer Awareness month which is September. Permission was sought for approval of this additional request, if received and found to meet the conditions of council policy.

In response to Councillor Cuddy’s question the Head of Democratic Services advised that illuminating colour for Childhood Cancer Awareness month is gold and that purple is the illuminating colour for Pancreatic Cancer Awareness month.

Proposed by Councillor McPeake  
Seconded by Councillor Cuddy and

- Resolved** That it be recommended to Council to –
- I. Light up the Bridewell, Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre and Ranfurly Arts and Visitor Centre on the evenings of week commencing Monday 14 November to Friday 18 November 2016 as part of Pancreatic Cancer Awareness month.
  - II. Light up Ranfurly Arts and Visitor Centre to mark Childhood Cancer Awareness month in September, subject to receipt of valid request.

Councillor McPeake referred to refurbishments to Chamber in Dungannon offices and that logo appeared without the wording. Councillor McPeake asked if there were differences in how the Council logo was being applied.

The Chief Executive advised that a number of options were considered for siting the Council logo within the Chamber in Dungannon and the decision to display the crest part of the Council logo without the wording was due to aesthetics and the shape of the wall panelling which was in sections. The Chief Executive noted that the signage on the front of the Dungannon offices contained the full branding. The Chief Executive advised that work remained to be done in the Magherafelt and Cookstown office chambers.

Councillor Mallaghan referred to the illumination of council buildings and felt that it was a good opportunity for some PR on why Council was doing this.

Councillor Mallaghan also stated that there needed to be management of Council branding and that Councillors should see options available and then make a decision. The Councillor referred to new bins being put in place as part of Magherafelt Public Realm Scheme and noted that the bins have the logo without the wording and that communities were often putting out flyers with incorrect branding. Councillor Mallaghan felt that Council needed to ensure the correct use of its branding.

Councillor Bateson stated that Council have been through the process of creating a brand and he would have liked to have seen a faster rollout ie. livery on Council vehicles.

Councillor Cuddy felt that there may now be an opportunity to re-evaluate the Council brand to incorporate Ulster Scots.

The Head of Marketing and Communications provided Members with an update on the rollout of Council branding and advised that vehicle branding had gone out to tender and that council logo would be visible on vehicles in the near future.

Members were also advised that signage for Cookstown and Magherafelt offices was also being considered. The Head of Marketing and Communications took Members point in relation to the use of council branding by community groups and advised that officers monitored this issue as best possible.

*Councillor Cuddy left the meeting at 7.45 pm.*

Councillor Bateson felt that the definitive council brand should be used in public and by community groups.

Councillor McLean stated that because Irish had been placed onto Council branding it made it difficult to sell to some members of the community and felt that the use of the logo is a further attempt to ostracise Unionism. Councillor McLean stated that he acknowledged that Sinn Féin had the electoral power within Council to pass decisions but felt that the party needed to reconsider the use of the logo, the Councillor also referred to it creating a cold house for Unionism.

Councillor S McGuigan stated that the Council logo was not an attempt to ostracise anyone but that there was a feeling that the delivery of the Council brand should have happened more quickly.

Councillor McLean reiterated that some communities have difficulty in displaying the Council logo and asked if some sensitivity could be applied in this respect as was the case for staff uniforms.

Councillor McPeake advised that the reason wording was not included on staff uniform was due to the size of stitching. The Councillor stated that if Council provides funding to an event or initiative it is entitled to have its logo displayed correctly. Councillor McPeake asked Councillor McLean what he was doing to break down barriers in relation to the use of the Council logo.

The Chair, Councillor Gildernew stated that he did not want the Council to be a cold house for Unionism as in the past some Councils had been a cold house for Nationalism and he would not wish that on anyone.

Councillor McLean advised that it was difficult to break down barriers within the community in relation to the use of the Council logo as he had some difficulty with it himself. The Councillor again stated that the use of the council logo needed to be reconsidered and that he would be happy to come to the table for any discussions.

Councillor McKinney reflected on the discussion and stated that there were some people within the community who did not support the Council brand and did not want to be part of it. The Councillor asked if the Council logo will be applied to vehicles that are coming near the end of their life.

The Chief Executive advised that the Council logo would appear on new council vehicles and will continue to be rolled out as vehicles are replaced. It is not intended to re-paint legacy council vehicles.

Councillor Mallaghan stated that tonight's discussion was an example of what happens when you deviate from something. The Councillor stated that when something is put in place, that is, the Council brand, it should be followed.

*Councillor T Quinn left the meeting at 7.55 pm.*

#### **PR159/16 Council Publication Scheme Amendment**

The Head of Democratic Services presented previously circulated report which considered an amendment to Mid Ulster District Council's Publication Scheme to include the availability of Freedom of Information (Fol) and Environmental Information (EIR) requests submitted with council and responses made.

Councillor McPeake referred to periodic list of Freedom of Information requests and asked if this list goes out to all Councillors.

Councillor McLean advised that the list mentioned goes to Party Leader meetings.

Proposed by Councillor S McGuigan  
Seconded by Councillor Bateson and

**Resolved** That it be recommended to Council to include Freedom of Information and Environmental Information requests and Council responses within the Council Publication Scheme, subject to feedback from the Information Commissioner's Office.

#### **PR160/16 Lease of Lands at Gulladuff Road, Bellaghy for Car Parking**

The Council Solicitor presented previously circulated report which sought approval for the Council to enter into a lease for further car parking facilities at Seamus Heaney HomePlace. The Councillor Solicitor further advised that the map previously issued showing area of land to be transferred may be subject to some slight amendment.

Proposed by Councillor McPeake  
Seconded by Councillor Bateson and

**Resolved** That, under delegated authority, the contents of the Lease circulated be approved and that Council enters into same on the terms therein.

Councillor Bateson referred to item raised at previous meeting in relation to boundary issues at Traad and asked if there was any update in relation to this.

The Council Solicitor advised she would liaise with the Director of Environment and Property and that a report will be brought back to committee.

#### **PR161/16 Proposal to tender for Chamber Microphone Conferencing Equipment**

The Head of ICT presented previously circulated report which sought approval to proceed with the formal tender and procurement of a new microphone sound system for chamber in Dungannon offices. It was advised that indicative quotes have indicated replacement will cost in the region of £30-50,000.

Councillor McLean advised he had some experience of sound systems and felt it would take the maximum cost to have a good system in place. The Councillor felt that a loop system should also be considered at this time.

Councillor Mallaghan stated the cost a new sound system seemed expensive but felt it would be worth it in the long run.

Proposed by Councillor McLean  
Seconded by Councillor Mallaghan and

**Resolved** That it be recommended to Council to proceed with procurement of a replacement sound system for chamber in Dungannon offices through a formal tender process.

## **Matters for Information**

### **PR162/16 Corporate Improvement Plan 2015-16 Annual Report**

The Chief Executive presented previously circulated report which advised Members on the implementation of Council's 2015-16 Corporate Improvement Plan. The Chief Executive highlighted achievements and improvements made in the first year of Mid Ulster District Council and stated that performance during the first year had been strong and was a good basis for the future.

Councillor Molloy stated that there were a number of good news stories within the report which was down to the effort of officers and staff. The Councillor stated there was still a lot of work to be done and new targets to be achieved. Councillor Molloy also referred to planning clinics and asked what availability there was for these clinics outside of Magherafelt.

The Chief Executive advised that the current arrangements for planning clinics would be issued to Members.

The Chair, Councillor Gildernew stated that members of the public from Fivemiletown who needed to attend Magherafelt for a planning meeting were not happy with this arrangement.

Councillor Mallaghan felt it was right to acknowledge the fantastic work achieved over the past year. The Councillor requested that a presentation be given on the use of social media by the Council.

The Chief Executive agreed that a presentation on social media could be made to a future committee meeting.

Councillor McLean agreed with other Members comments regarding the achievements of Mid Ulster District Council in its first year and felt that the public should also be made aware of these achievements. Councillor McLean advised that he understood that there had been agreement that planning officers would be available to meet outside of Magherafelt offices.

The Chair, Councillor Gildernew concurred with Members comments regarding Council achievements and advised that a number of other Councils are looking towards where Mid Ulster Council is at.

## **PR163/16 Corporate Improvement Plan 2016-17 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Progress Report**

The Head of Democratic Services presented previously circulated report which updated Members on Council's progress on delivery of the Improvement Objectives set within the Corporate Improvement Plan 2016-17.

Members noted the content of the report.

### **Confidential Business**

Proposed by Councillor Mallaghan  
Seconded by Councillor S McGuigan and

**Resolved** That items PR164/16 to PR171/16 be taken as confidential business.

*Councillor McKinney left the meeting at 8.25 pm.*

### **PR172/16 Duration of Meeting**

The meeting was called for 7 pm and ended at 8.44 pm.

CHAIR \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_