

Minutes of Meeting of Policy and Resources Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 9 March 2017 in the Council Offices, Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt

Members Present

Councillor Gildernew, Chair

Councillors Ashton, Bateson, Buchanan, Cuddy, Elattar (7.16 pm), Forde, Mallaghan (7.06 pm), S McGuigan, McKinney, McLean, McPeake, Molloy, T Quinn, Totten

Officers in Attendance

Mr A Tohill, Chief Executive
Mrs Campbell, Director of Culture and Leisure
Mrs Canavan, Director of Organisational Development
Mr Kelso, Director of Public Health and Infrastructure
Mrs Kerr, Head of Finance
Ms Mezza, Head of Marketing and Communications
Mr Moffett, Head of Democratic Services
Mr O'Hagan, Head of ICT
Mr JJ Tohill, Director of Finance
Miss Thompson, Committee Services Officer

Agenda Item 4 – Derry and Northwest NUJ Branch

Robert Baxter – Chair of Derry and Northwest NUJ Branch

Annamay McNally – Local Journalist

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm.

PR037/17 Apologies

None.

PR038/17 Declaration of Interest

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

PR039/17 Chair's Business

None.

PR040/17 Derry and Northwest NUJ (National Union of Journalists) Branch

The Chair welcomed Mr Baxter and Ms McNally to the meeting and invited them to make their presentation.

Mr Baxter advised Members of the Local News Matters Campaign which will run from 24 March to 1 April 2017, this is a union wide campaign which seeks to galvanise a collective voice to put pressure on media companies and other decision makers who can stop the cuts and increase investment in quality local journalism.

Mr Baxter highlighted the demands of the campaign –

- A parliamentary inquiry into the state of local news
- Local newspapers to be treated as community assets
- New rules to prevent local media outlets from closing overnight – they should be offered to potential new owners, including local co-operatives, with the time available to submit a bid for alternative media ownership in advance of any closure.
- Action by government and employers to stem the relentless job cuts
- Increase investment, from a range of sources, for quality local journalism

Councillor Mallaghan entered the meeting at 7.06 pm

Mr Baxter advised that events will be held in all parts of the UK during the campaign with the keynote event taking place on 28 March at the Houses of Parliament. This event is to launch new research on local news provision in the UK and the impact on democracy.

Mr Baxter advised that local newspaper apps are read by 40 million per week and that this has seen the press gazette lose over 200 titles and journalists halved since 2000. Mr Baxter also felt that mergers and takeovers have restricted choice to the public.

Mr Baxter advised that the NUJ were currently visiting other local Councils to seek support for the following motion –

“This Council notes the campaign of the National Union of Journalists’ Local News Matters Week.

The campaign is aimed at highlighting the importance of properly resourced independent media to the functioning of democracy at local and regional levels.

This council recognises the importance of local media in reporting on local government and informing citizens about the work undertaken on their behalf by elected representatives and local authorities and agencies.

Local media also reflect the concerns of citizens and provide a platform for civic participation in dialogue on all aspects of community life.

Journalists engaged by media organisations: print, broadcasting and online, face many challenges, including increased workloads, reduced resources, and lower staffing levels.

This council urges media organisations to provide journalists with the level of resources necessary to ensure accurate and comprehensive coverage of local democracy.

This Council reaffirms its commitment to make information available to the local media and to providing appropriate facilities for journalists attending council meetings.”

Mr Baxter expressed the need for good journalism and hoped that Members would agree that journalism should provide vital, vigorous press which is at the heart of the community and is owned and operated in the public interest.

Councillor Cuddy recognised that, as a retailer, people would have bought a lot more newspapers in the past to now and that local journalism should be encouraged as far as possible.

Councillor Ashton advised that her past employment was with a media company and that she was well aware of the pressures of the industry. The Councillor stated that the internet had impacted greatly on newspapers but felt that the community still wanted to see photographs of local events and news stories in print.

Mr Baxter and Ms McNally were thanked for their presentation following which they withdrew from the meeting at 7.13 pm.

PR041/17 Receive and confirm minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on Thursday 9 February 2017

Proposed by Councillor T Quinn
Seconded by Councillor McPeake and

Resolved That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on Thursday 9 February 2017 (PR019/17 – PR027/17 and PR036/17) were considered and signed as accurate and correct.

Matters for Decision

PR042/17 Discounted Staff use of Leisure Facilities

The Director of Culture and Leisure presented previously circulated report which sought approval for discounted staff use of leisure facilities.

Councillor Elattar entered the meeting at 7.16 pm.

The Chief Executive asked if Members could avail of discounted use of facilities.

The Director of Culture and Leisure advised that this proposal for discounted access to facilities was only for staff.

Proposed by Councillor Cuddy
Seconded by Councillor Forde and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve staff 50% discount on the individual cost of using leisure facilities for non bookable facilities or activities including swimming, gym, fitness or other exercise programme session (on a pay as you go basis) at the following: Cookstown Leisure Centre, Dungannon Leisure Centre, Maghera Recreation Centre, Mid Ulster Sports Arena and Moneymore Recreation Centre.

The Director of Culture and Leisure left the meeting at 7.17 pm.

PR043/17 Meeting Schedule June 2017 – June 2018

The Head of Democratic Services presented previously circulated report which sought approval of Council and Committee Meeting Schedule for the period 2017-18.

Proposed by Councillor Buchanan
Seconded by Councillor Cuddy and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve the Council and Committee Meeting Schedule for the period July 2017 to June 2018.

PR044/17 Arrangements for Minutes and Reports to Meetings

The Head of Democratic Services presented previously circulated report which set out existing and proposed arrangements for the bringing forward and recording of confidential business at Council and Committee meetings.

In response to Councillor McLean's query the Chief Executive clarified that the proposed arrangements would help to increase Council's transparency. If agreed, confidential items of business will be listed on the open business minute, however it would not include confidential discussion or resolutions. The Chief Executive also advised that in future, minutes would only come back to committee as an item for information as they will have been adopted at Council.

Councillor McKinney felt that to agree the proposed arrangements there may be a danger of promoting expectation to the public.

The Chief Executive advised that, going forward, an item can only be put in confidential business if there is a reason for doing so. The Chief Executive felt that the proposals will aid Council's transparency and that any press queries arising from minutes can be dealt with accordingly.

Proposed by Councillor S McGuigan
Seconded by Councillor Bateson and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve the practice on processing confidential business within agendas, minutes and reports as detailed below -

- (i) Meeting Reports (template)**
Template to be amended to include the 7 exempt information categories from Sch. 6 of the 2014 Local Government Act. Report authors/council officers will be required to select at least one of the 7 permitted exempt information categories to confirm why the report is being taken in confidential business.
- (ii) Agendas**
Public facing agendas to detail matters being taken in confidential business. The agenda will also include (immediately before the list);

“Items restricted in accordance with Section 42, Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. The public will be asked to withdraw from the meeting at this point”

(iii) Minutes

Confidential business items discussed in confidential business will be listed in the open business minute.

(iv) Minutes of previous committee meetings

Minutes will continue to remain on committee meeting agendas and be included in meeting packs as a point of reference for members. They will however only appear for information/note with no requirement for them to be proposed, seconded and adopted.

(v) Confidential Items in Open Business

Items taken in confidential business will remain in confidential business until such times as it may be resolved by committee/council to bring it into open business.

PR045/17 Proposed Draft Improvement Objectives – 2017-18 and 2018-19

The Head of Democratic Services presented previously circulated report which sought approval for the Corporate Performance Improvement Objectives for period 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Councillor Cuddy referred to objective 4 within report – “To support people to adopt healthier lifestyles by increasing usage of Council recreational facilities”. Councillor Cuddy stated that there were now numerous private fitness facilities in towns with which Council had to compete and that as Council had limited resources he felt that Council should seek to work in partnership with these other fitness suites to create a network.

Councillor McLean agreed with Councillor Cuddy’s comments and stated that there was partnership working happening to a certain degree at the moment but that more could be done in this regard and that Council should make this a matter of further consideration.

Councillor McLean declared in interest at this point as his son runs a private gym facility.

The Chief Executive advised that leisure is the biggest area of spend for Council and stated that Council differs from the private sector in that it has a legal responsibility to provide leisure facilities. The Chief Executive advised that officers can look at working opportunities with other facilities and also referred to the leisure provision strategy which will come before Members in due course.

Councillor Cuddy asked if all sports facilities have defibrillators.

The Director of Public Health and Infrastructure advised that there was a rollout programme underway, he stated that provision of defibrillators was not a statutory responsibility of Council but that it was a target to have as many in place as possible.

Proposed by Councillor McLean
Seconded by Councillor Bateson and

- Resolved** That it be recommended to Council to approve the following Performance Improvement Objectives for 2017-18 and 2018-19, for consultation, as follows –
- (i) To assist in the growth of the local economy by increasing the number of visitors to our district.
 - (ii) To help manage our waste and environment by reducing the amount of waste going to landfill.
 - (iii) To improve the accessibility of our services by increasing the number available online.
 - (iv) To support people to adopt healthier lifestyles by increasing usage of Council recreational facilities.

PR046/17 Removable and USB Media Policy

The Head of ICT presented previously circulated report which sought approval for Mid Ulster Council Removable and USB Media Policy.

Councillor Ashton asked how this policy would affect Councillors.

The Head of ICT provided clarification on the policy and how Members' equipment can be managed to ensure use of removable media is controlled.

Proposed by Councillor McLean
Seconded by Councillor S McGuigan and

- Resolved** That it be recommended to Council to approve the adoption of Mid Ulster Council Removable and USB Media Policy.

PR047/17 Mobile and portable device provision

The Head of ICT presented previously circulated report which provided update on mobile and portable device choice and provision and to agree options for Member provision.

Councillor Mallaghan felt that the current phone device was inadequate for Members' needs.

The Head of ICT advised that the report included options for Members which should cater for differing needs.

Councillor McLean agreed that individual Members would have differing needs and asked if there was an option of a Councillor purchasing their own equipment and Council then providing reimbursement.

The Director of Finance advised there may be difficulty with the Councillor's suggestion in relation to Council effectively contributing to a Councillor's cost of ownership of a device. The Director advised that guidance from the Department states that Council may provide the items of equipment to Members as opposed to

reimbursing Members in whole or in part. However, he stated that he would clarify this matter with the Department. An alternative to the Councillor's suggestion would be for Council to purchase devices of the Members' choice and charge Member(s) for any additional cost over and above the agreed limit.

The Head of ICT also advised that it was unlikely that individuals would be able to secure as competitive pricing for items as Council.

Councillor Molloy suggested that ICT officers engage with Members to identify their individual needs.

Councillor S McGuigan asked if the total value of the proposed devices could be pooled to purchase one item of equipment i.e. laptop.

The Head of ICT advised that this could be considered.

Councillor Cuddy suggested that ICT officers meet with parties prior to Council/Committee meetings to identify needs of Members.

The Head of ICT advised that meetings could be arranged.

Proposed by Councillor McLean
Seconded by Councillor S McGuigan and

- Resolved** That it be recommended to Council that –
- (i) Clarification be sought from Department in relation to who (Council or Councillor) purchases equipment.
 - (ii) ICT Officers meet with Members to identify individual needs.
 - (iii) Council provide one mobile computing device (IPAD or an alternative Windows based/Android device as listed in appendix) up to a maximum £500 or other agreed figure per term of the Council for each member wishing to avail of same. Council would provide support, maintenance, repair and replacement of that device to members for the term of the Council i.e. every 4 years.
 - (iv) Council provide a sim free smart phone device for each Member seeking a mobile device every 24months up to the value of £250 or other agreed figure. Support and configuration would be provided but any costs in relation to its replacement/loss and damage would be incurred by the Member.
 - (v) Council provide a Multi- Function printer (MFD) device for each Member seeking same every 4 years up to the value of £150 or other agreed figure. Consumables to be incurred by the member. The machine will be maintained and supported in accordance with its warranty

PR048/17 External Signage: Cookstown and Magherafelt Offices

The Head of Marketing and Communications presented previously circulated report which sought approval for new external building signage at Council offices in Cookstown and Magherafelt.

Councillor McLean advised that the DUP Party would not be supporting this proposal.

Councillor Cuddy referred to including of Ulster Scots within logo.

Proposed by Councillor Elattar
Seconded by Councillor Bateson and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve the proposed external building signage for Council offices in Cookstown and Magherafelt as depicted in report.

PR049/17 Mid Ulster Business Awards Sponsorship

The Head of Marketing and Communications presented previously circulated report which gave consideration to Council becoming a principal sponsor of the Mid Ulster Business Awards.

Councillor McLean asked if Council officers were happy with the categories of Business Awards. The Councillor referred to entrepreneurship and number of new start businesses within the District and stated he would like the awards event to be as inclusive as possible.

The Head of Marketing and Communications advised that the list of Business Awards categories could be circulated to Members and that consideration could be given to any additional categories if it was felt required.

Councillor McLean stated he was happy with the feedback from previous events and that costs had been negotiated and reduced for this year.

Councillor Cuddy also stated it was good to see that costs were being monitored.

The Chief Executive highlighted that the Awards launch event would be held at a Council facility.

Proposed by Councillor McLean
Seconded by Councillor Cuddy and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to become a principal sponsor of the 2017 Mid Ulster Business Awards at a cost of £5,500 and that Awards categories be circulated to Members.

PR050/17 Amendment to policy on tender advertisements

The Head of Marketing and Communications presented previously circulated report which gave consideration to amendments to the policy on the advertisement of tenders.

Councillor McLean reflected on tonight's presentation and felt that advertising is a lucrative element to the success of newspapers.

The Head of Marketing and Communications stated that she felt tonight's presentation related primarily to local weekly newspapers which would be unaffected by the proposed change in policy as it related only to one of the daily papers and the policy of advertising public notices in 7 local papers would continue.

Councillor McPeake asked who the e-tendering workshops would be targeted at.

The Head of Marketing and Communications advised that there would be a public notice in next week's press which would advertise the workshops, she advised that further advertisement would also be placed on Council website and via an ezine which is sent to those businesses who are included on Council's business directory. It was further advised that Procurement staff would also be highlighting the move to an e-tendering process via their email signature.

The Director of Finance advised that most other councils were already using the e-tendering system and that most businesses engaging with councils would be aware of it. He stated that once a business is registered to e-tendering they are automatically made aware of new tendering opportunities relevant to their business.

Proposed by Councillor S McGuigan
Seconded by Councillor Bateson and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to amend the Tender Advertising Policy to remove the requirement to advertise in the Belfast Telegraph from 1 July 2017 and that newspaper advertising is only used when it is a requirement of funding or in other special circumstances.

McClean left the meeting at 8.03 pm

Matters for Information

PR051/17 Members Services

No items.

Confidential Business

Proposed by Councillor S McGuigan
Seconded by Councillor Forde and

Resolved That items PR052/17 to PR063/17 be taken as confidential business.

PR064/17 Duration of Meeting

The meeting was called for 7 pm and ended at 8.43 pm.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____