

Minutes of Special Meeting of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 31 July 2014 in the Council Offices, Circular Road, Dungannon

Members Present: Councillor Mallaghan, Chair (Presiding Councillor)

Councillors Ashton, Bell, Burton, Clarke, Cuddy, Cuthbertson, Dillon, Elattar, Forde, Gildernew, Gillespie, Glasgow, Kearney, McEldowney, McFlynn, McGinley, B McGuigan, S McGuigan, McKinney, McLean, McPeake, Molloy, Monteith, Mulligan, C O'Neill, J O'Neill, M Quinn, J Shiels, G Shiels, Totten and Wilson

Officers in Attendance: Mr Tohill, Chief Executive
Mr Moffett, Change Management Officer
Mrs Smith, Council Business Manager (D&STBC)

The meeting commenced at 7 pm

SC1/14 Apologies

Councillors Bateson, Buchanan, Mullen, McAleer, McNamee, T Quinn, Reid and Robinson

SC2/14 Declarations of Interest

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

SC3/14 Notice of Motion

The Chair stated that everyone is aware of the conflict and humanitarian situation in Gaza and with the public support for rallies across Mid Ulster he had accepted the notice of motion as within standing orders and granted the meeting.

Councillor Molloy arrived at 7.03 pm.

Councillor McGinley in proposing the undernoted notice of motion stated that the situation in Gaza is a universal shame, called for an immediate end to the slaughter, a lifting of the blockade and an immediate deployment of humanitarian aid. He stated that given the protest rallies and demonstrations in the Mid Ulster area he felt it fitting that the motion should be brought before the Council.

'That Mid Ulster Council unequivocally condemns the appalling loss of life in Gaza and calls on the International Community, including the Irish and British Governments, the EU and the UN, to intensify its efforts to resolve the situation in Gaza. Every effort should be made to help bring about an immediate ceasefire and implement mechanisms to monitor such a ceasefire agreement, to lift the blockade of Gaza including the immediate deployment of humanitarian aid, and work towards a just and lasting resolution for the peoples of Palestine and Israel.'

Councillor C O'Neill seconded the motion. Councillor O'Neill concurred with the comments expressed by Councillor McGinley and stated that in the comfort of our homes it is hard to imagine what it is like for the residents of Gaza who had to flee their homes, some of which took sanctuary in schools which had subsequently been bombed with the slaughter of innocent men, women and children.

SF Members concurred with the comments expressed. They stated this was a humanitarian issue and there is nothing in the motion that anyone present could not support.

An SDLP Member read a statement supporting the motion. He spoke of the humanitarian issues, the thousands of families mourning, the bombing of refugee camps and stated there can be no justification for the murder of hundreds of civilians. He referred to the need for a ceasefire, for blockades to be lifted and a peaceful solution to be found to the Middle East conflict.

A DUP Member in commenting on the motion stated he did not believe any law abiding person could support the loss of life in the Middle East or anywhere in the world. He added the timing of the motion clearly demonstrated that it was an afterthought as there was ample opportunity to include it in the meeting held on Thursday 24 July. He expressed the view that the motion demonstrated the hypocrisy of SF; has no relation whatsoever to the Council; should not have been accepted; and was a waste of money calling Councillors and officers to a special meeting.

It was proposed and seconded that the motion therefore be withdrawn.

Proposed by Councillor McLean
Seconded by Councillor Cuthbertson

That the motion be withdrawn

The Chair stated that in terms of timing 7 days are required to place any notice of motion on the agenda for Council meetings. He added that the worst atrocities happened in Gaza after the last Council meeting.

UUP Members condemned the loss of life in the Middle East stating that there was a need for an immediate resolution. They expressed the view that Council is dealing with foreign policy before we have dealt with our own local policies and the considerable amount of business to be organised by the new Council. UUP Members queried under what part of Standing Orders was this motion and meeting granted. They expressed concern that acceptance of this motion was setting a precedent for single item agenda meetings with a cost to ratepayers, following which an amendment to the motion was proposed and seconded.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Cuddy

'That this Council condemns in the strongest possible terms the appalling loss of lives in Gaza and Israel.

It calls on the Israel Government to end its military offensive and on Hamas to end its indiscriminate attacks on Israel.

It further calls on the UN and wider international community to work towards an immediate ceasefire, leading to a just and lasting peace for the people of Gaza and Israel.'

The Chair stated that he was satisfied that the motion sat within Standing Orders as significant effect on the diverse population of Mid Ulster who had shown their opposition to what was happening by attending rallies held throughout the area. He asked Councillor Wilson, mover of the amendment, to point out the significant differences between the motion under discussion and the amendment.

Councillor Wilson stated that the UN covered the British and Irish Governments and there was no need to list them. He added it was not only Israel but also Egypt which had placed blockades, the lifting of which will be part of the peace settlement that is hoped will happen sooner rather than later.

The Independent Member spoke in support of the motion and stated that it would be important to let the Irish Government know the feelings within the community, it therefore being important that the governments are mentioned in the motion. He added that the Irish Government abstained on a UN call for an enquiry which was a cowardly act. It is most important that we send a message of international solidarity. There are families living and working in the Mid Ulster area who have been affected by the events in Gaza.

A SF member stated that it was counterproductive to continue to reflect back to the past. The new Mid Ulster District Council should be showing

strong leadership and thinking of going forward together against these kinds of acts of violence and war against an oppressed people.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 7.33 pm to give the proposer an opportunity to consider the amendment.

The meeting resumed at 7.37 pm.

The Chair, in addressing comments raised through discussion, stated that only the proposer of a motion can withdraw the motion and therefore cannot accept the proposal calling for the withdrawal of the same.

The proposer of the motion stated that following consideration of the amendment it is felt that pressure needed to be kept on the Irish and British Governments and that the original motion referred to lifting the blockade of Gaza, therefore not necessitating any amendments to the motion as proposed and seconded.

Amendment

The Chair put the amendment to the meeting.

A DUP Member stated party Members would be abstaining from the vote.

On a vote, 6 (six) members voted in favour and 19 (nineteen) members voted against.

The amendment fell

Original Motion

The proposal was put to the meeting and 19 (nineteen) members voted in favour and 6 (six) members voted against.

The Chair declared the original motion carried.

SC4/14 Duration of Meeting

The meeting was called for 7 pm and ended at 8.45 pm

CHAIR (Presiding Councillor) _____