

Minutes of Meeting of Policy and Resources Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 7 March 2024 in the Council Offices, Burn Road, Cookstown

Members Present

Councillor Corry, Chair

Councillors Bell, F Burton, J Burton, Cahoon, Gildernew, Johnston, McAleer, McFlynn, McLean, McLernon, S McPeake, Molloy, Wilson

Officers in Attendance

Mrs Canavan, Strategic Director of Organisation Development, Strategy and Performance (SD: ODSP)
Ms McCartney, Strategic Programme Development Manager (SPDM)
Mr McGuckin, Head of Strategic Services and Engagement (HoSS&E)
Mrs McNally, Assistant Director of Corporate Services and Finance (AD: CS&F)
Mr Moffett, Assistant Director of Organisational Development, Strategy & Performance (AD: ODSP)
Mr O'Hagan, Head of IT (HoIT)
Mr Scullion, Assistant Director of Property Services (AD: PS)
Mr Tohill, Strategic Director of Corporate Services & Finance (SD: CS&F)
Miss Thompson, Committee and Member Services Officer

The meeting commenced at 7.01 pm.

The Chair, Councillor Corry welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the meeting through the Live Broadcast. Councillor Corry in introducing the meeting detailed the operational arrangements for transacting the business of the committee by referring to Annex A to this minute.

PR052/24 Notice of Recording

Members noted that the meeting would be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast on the Council's You Tube site.

PR053/24 Apologies

Councillor Totten and Ms Dyson, Head of Human Resources.

PR054/24 Declarations of Interest

The Chair, Councillor Corry reminded Members of their responsibility with regard to declarations of interest.

PR055/24 Chairs Business

Councillor McLernon spoke in relation to recent correspondence from the Minister for Communities regarding ending the provision for hybrid meetings from 6 March. The

Councillor stated that Councillor Mallaghan on behalf of Sinn Féin has tabled a motion for the forthcoming Council meeting and called on all parties to support the motion with a unified voice so that Council can call on the Minister for Communities to urgently progress regulations to enable hybrid meetings for Councillors. Councillor McLernon stated that having the provision in place makes political life more accessible to Councillors and staff and to those who have other demands on their life such as caring responsibilities, parenting, university, disability and illness. The Councillor stated that money has been invested into providing these provisions within Councils and that everyone recognises and appreciates the positive impact hybrid participation has had. Councillor McLernon stated that 8 March is International Women's Day and that everyone should identify the importance of making political office more accessible to women and highlighted that the recent correspondence from the Minister only goes to create another barrier to making it less accessible.

The Chair, Councillor Corry echoed Councillor McLernon's sentiments and stated that the correspondence was very disappointing particularly when considering climate change and reducing our carbon footprint and is something that needs to be reconsidered.

Councillor McLean stated he recognised that there is a need for hybrid meetings and that he had also made representation in that regard. Councillor McLean assured Councillors that conversations have been had with the Minister and explained that the situation has arisen because the legislation which was brought in was emergency legislation due to Covid and that this legislation has lapsed before there has been opportunity to have discussions with all parties. The Councillor advised that he had received assurance from the Minister that there will be consultation and future provision for hybrid meetings.

Councillor Burton stated she agreed with the previous speakers and that the matter is also an item for discussion at the NILGA meeting tomorrow and that it would be a real concern if the hybrid option was not available going forward. The Councillor referred to her recent illness and that the option to join meetings remotely during that time had been a great support to her. Councillor Burton recognised the fact that the legislation was brought in during Covid and that emergency legislation cannot be worked under forever but reiterated the importance of the hybrid option and that hopefully the legislation could be renewed in the near future.

The Chair, Councillor Corry stated that Councillor McLean's comments were positive and that she looked forward to the matter coming back for the reasons outlined by Members. Councillor Corry stated that the hybrid option widens participation and highlighted that the deputation tonight was for parent alienation and that the representative had planned to join remotely but was now unable to.

Councillor Wilson asked how the law covers presentations made to Committee where no decisions will be taken. The Councillor stated that it could be up to three months before legislation comes back and that this would be a long time to hold up groups who want to present and felt it would be worthwhile to seek clarification on this element.

The Chair, Councillor Corry stated that officers would seek advice on the matter raised by Councillor Wilson.

Councillor S McPeake agreed with the Members comments and the importance of the hybrid option and stated that the matter was discussed at PCSP and that those Members were also concerned at the impact of the removal of this option and that clarification is being sought.

PR056/24 Deputation – Parent Alienation

The Chair, Councillor Corry advised that the representative was unable to attend tonight's meeting and that the presentation would be rescheduled.

Matters for Decision

PR057/24 Draft Consultation Response on the DFI Water and Sewerage Charges - Options for Revenue Raising Consultation

The Head of Strategic Services and Engagement (HoSS&E) presented previously circulated report which outlined Council's response to the DFI Water and Sewerage Charges - Options for Revenue Raising Consultation.

The Chair, Councillor Corry thanked the officer for the response and agreed that provision is already made for water services within rates.

Councillor McLean felt that more could be added to the response and referred to recent meetings he had had with NI Water. The Councillor highlighted that one of the issues he is aware of and that is becoming more prevalent is that NI Water are putting severe charges on developers in the process of what they call offsetting. Councillor McLean referred to town centres where capacity has been reached for sewerage and stated that if a developer wants to put additional sewerage into the system they have to offset the storm water by 12 times. The Councillor stated that Council is trying to encourage development in town centres in order to enhance them and make them more accessible etc but that if a developer wants to renovate a derelict building in a town centre then the biggest stumbling block for that development is NI Water. Councillor McLean stated that the cost of the offsetting is where the charges come in as developers have to collect rain water from adjacent properties, that this has to be calculated with consultants being paid to carry out the work and that the time taken to do this work can be in excess of a year. Councillor McLean stated that when a developer does get permission to go ahead with the work they then have to use a NI Water contractor and that all those charges have to be paid for. The Councillor stated he was aware that the cost of all this work for one development came to almost £1 million and that the reality of this is that the cost then has to be passed on to a future buyer. Councillor McLean stated that he would be happy to work with officers to add to the response as outlined.

The Chair, Councillor Corry thanked Councillor McLean for the contribution which she stated is important to include in the response.

Proposed by Councillor Molloy
Seconded by Councillor J Burton and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve the draft response as set out at Appendix A of report for submission and to include commentary in relation to costs being imposed on developers by NI Water.

PR058/24 Request(s) to Illuminate Council Property

The Head of Strategic Services and Engagement (HoSS&E) presented previously circulated report which sought approval to illuminate and light up the Council's three designated properties to raise awareness for the following:

- Linking Generations NI: Global Intergenerational Week 2024: 24 April: Colour Pink
- Sarcoidosis UK: Global Sarcoidosis Awareness Month: 26 April: Colour Blue

The HoSS&E advised of an additional request which had been received since the report was published to mark World Parkinson's Day on 11 April. Councillor Wilso proposed the additional request saying it was particularly appropriate as former councillor Mr George Shiels who suffered from Parkinson's had recently passed away.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor F Burton and

- Resolved** That it be recommended to Council to illuminate the three designated Council properties as follows –
- Linking Generations NI: Global Intergenerational Week 2024: 24 April: Colour Pink
 - Sarcoidosis UK: Global Sarcoidosis Awareness Month: 26 April: Colour Blue
 - World Parkinson's Day: 11 April Colour Blue

PR059/24 Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers

The Assistant Director of Corporate Services and Finance (AD: CS&F) presented previously circulated report which provided update and sought approval on amendments to the Council's Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers.

The AD: CS&F highlighted that the job titles of officers within planning going forward are Planning Lead for Strategic Planning and Planning Lead for Local Planning instead of current Head of in both cases at present. The AD: CS&F stated that the proposed changes are set out at 3.2 of the report and clarified that the changes in terms of planning do not change what is being delegated to the Planning Committee but makes clear which of the planning leads will take on the various aspects of planning delegation going forward.

Proposed by Councillor McLean
Seconded by Councillor S McPeake and

- Resolved** That it be recommended to Council to approve the amended Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers as included in Appendix to report and that it takes effect on 1st April 2024.

PR060/24 Member Services

No issues.

Matters for Information

PR061/24 Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on 8 February 2024

Members noted Minutes of Policy & Resources Committee held on 8 February 2024.

Councillor Gildernew referred to her question in relation to the Good Employment Charter and whether trade unions had been involved in the development of the Charter and that she had not received a response on this to date.

The Strategic Director of Organisation Development, Strategy and Performance (SD: ODSP) agreed to get back to Councillor Gildernew on the matter.

PR062/24 Performance Improvement: Local Government Auditor's Audit and Assessment (Section 95) Report 2023-24

Members noted previously circulated report which provided update on the key findings of the Local Government Auditor's Audit and Assessment (Section 95) Report 2023-24.

Live broadcast ended at 7.19 pm.

Local Government (NI) Act 2014 - Confidential Business

Proposed by Councillor Bell
Seconded by Councillor McLernon and

Resolved In accordance with Section 42, Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 that Members of the public be asked to withdraw from the meeting whilst Members consider items PR063/24 to PR072/24.

Matters for Decision

PR063/24 SHHP Bellaghy Bawn Writers Residency Project
PR064/24 Insurances – 2024/25
PR065/24 Members Allowances Update
PR066/24 Land and Property Matters
PR067/24 Capital Programme Budget Priorities

Matters for Information

PR068/24 Confidential Minutes of Policy & Resources Committee held on 8 February 2024
PR069/24 Staff Matters for Information
PR070/24 Financial Report 10 Months to 31 January 2024
PR071/24 Treasury Management – Update
PR072/24 Contracts and DAC Registers - Update

P073/24 Duration of Meeting

The meeting was called for 7.00 pm and ended at 7.52 pm.

Chair _____

Date _____

Annex A – Introductory Remarks from the Chairperson

Good evening and welcome to the Council's [Policy & Resources/Environment/Development] Committee in the Chamber, [Cookstown/Dungannon/Magherafelt].

I specifically welcome the public watching us through the Live Broadcast. The Live Broadcast as aforesaid, will run for the period of our Open Business but will end just before we move into Confidential Business. I will let you know before this happens.

I would remind the public and press that taking photographs of proceedings or using any means to enable anyone not present to see or hear proceedings, or making a simultaneous oral report of the proceedings are not permitted.

Thank you and we will now move to the agenda.