

Minutes of Meeting of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 23 November 2023 in the Council Offices, Circular Road, Dungannon and by virtual means

Chair	Councillor Molloy
Members Present	Councillors Bell*, Black, Brown, J Buchanan, W Buchanan, F Burton*, J Burton, Cahoon, Carney, Clarke*, Corry, Cuthbertson, Forde, Gildernew, Graham, Groogan, Johnston, Kelly, Kerr, Mallaghan, McAleer*, McConnell, McElvogue, McFlynn, McGuigan, McLean*, McLernon, McNamee, D McPeake*, S McPeake*, McQuade*, Milne*, Monteith, Quinn, Robinson, Totten*, Varsani and Wilson
Officers in Attendance	Mr McCreesh, Chief Executive Mr Black, Strategic Director Communities and Place (SD:CP) Ms Campbell, Strategic Director of Environment (SD: Env) Mr McGuckin, Head of Strategic Services and Engagement (HoSSE) Mr McKeown, ICT Mr Moffett, Assistant Director of Organisational Development Strategy and Performance (AD: ODSP) Mrs Forde, Committee and Member Services Manager
Others in Attendance	Representatives from NI Water Dr Steve Blockwell Mr David McGrath

* Denotes Members present in remote attendance

** Denotes Officers present by remote means

*** Denotes Others present by remote means

The meeting commenced at 7 pm.

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

C212/23 Notice of Recording

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

C213/23 Apologies

Councillor Martin
Ms Canavan, Strategic Director of Organisational Development Strategy and
Performance (SD: ODSP)

C214/23 Declarations of Interest

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

Councillors Kerr declared an interest in Coalisland Fianna GAC

Councillor Quinn declared an interest in PR184/23 Request to Illuminate Council properties

C215/23 Chair's Business

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said, “the first six months of my term as Chair have gone by so fast and it seems hard to believe that we are on the countdown to Christmas and our seasonal events to come this weekend and next, more of which later. I very much enjoyed the Halloween celebrations which I attended since the last Council meeting. It was wonderful to see our residents sharing the fun and fireworks across the district. I'd like to say a word of thanks to all the staff involved in the delivery of these events. There are months of work involved behind the scenes, and staff come together from across the Council to make sure that everyone safely enjoys everything on the night.

I have also been out and about in the district this month and have been lucky to meet some of our residents, including helping Donaghmore Historical Society to celebrate their 40th anniversary at the Hill of The O'Neill and Ranfurly House. I also met up with the Baltic Together Group, in Dungannon, where I heard about how the group is helping with community integration through social interactions.

Meanwhile, a staggering total of 700 people attended events as part of Enterprise Week, a turnout from local businesses which is the highest since we first launched the week back in 2019. This speaks volumes about how the theme of this year's event – 'Challenge, Adapt, Succeed' – struck a chord with local businesses, and is testament to the Council's commitment to continue to deliver for and support our small business sector.

For anyone who missed any of the events, I'd encourage you to visit the Council's YouTube channel from this Monday - the twenty seventh -, where you can catch up with all the recordings, including seeing my A.I. avatar – a fantastic experience to be involved in. All in all, it was an excellent week which shows that Mid Ulster's enterprising spirit is very strong and is as always, ready to get to work. Our Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership has also been busy at work, and I was delighted to attend a celebration evening for their 2022 to 2023 programme participants just last week. Many of those participants have taken the difficult step of returning to the jobs market and have found the support of the LMP programmes to be invaluable in doing so.

A new suite of programmes, opening in the coming weeks, will be available for both those who may have missed out last year and for first-time applicants. Between them

the five programmes will help increase employment in the district, create a more skilled workforce here and enable some of the most stereotypically disadvantaged groups to enter or re-enter the workplace. Speaking of that enterprising spirit, Christmas is by far one of the busiest times of the year for town centres and as in previous years, we want to make shopping easy, accessible and affordable for those who are supporting our local economy, shops and traders. Once again, our 10p parking promotion will assist with this. Reduced parking will help our residents take time and enjoy what our town centres have to offer this Christmas, without the worry of costly parking while doing their Christmas shopping.

Finally, this weekend sees the start of the Christmas light switch-ons in our five main towns of Cookstown, Dungannon, Magherafelt, Maghera and Coalisland. We know that civic events such as these help family, friends and communities to come together and share in this most special of seasons, so I'm looking forward to seeing everyone on the night."

Councillor Carney highlighted that Brocagh Emmets were celebrating their Centenary year in the coming week and extended congratulations to them and wished them luck for the next 100 years.

Councillor Robinson spoke of the commitment of the undernoted groups in the Clogher Valley area and their dedication to the public during covid. He requested that the Chair write to congratulate them

- Fivemiletown Royal British Legion: Receiving King's Award
- Glenageeragh LOL (loyal Orange Lodge) 908: Celebrating Centenary Glenageeragh Pipe band; and
- Carricklongfield LOL 748: Celebrating Bicentenary

Resolved That the Chair send a letter of congratulations to: Fivemiletown Royal British Legion: Receiving King's Award; Glenageeragh LOL (loyal Orange Lodge) 908: Celebrating Centenary; Glenageeragh Pipe band 75th Anniversary and Carricklongfield LOL 748: Celebrating Bicentenary

Councillor McFlynn extended congratulations to South Derry footballers from local clubs namely Brendan Rodgers, Gareth McKinless, Conor McCluskey and Shane McGuigan on achieving All Star status and said she hoped to nominate them in the forthcoming civic recognition procedure. She also congratulated Aine McAllister on being named the PWC intermediate camogie player of the year which was a huge achievement and to Lavey on winning the Junior Football Championship.

Declaration of Interest

Councillor McFlynn, Burton and Corry declared an interest in Agewell.

Councillor McFlynn spoke of Agewell and how it delivered 700 calls in the Mid Ulster area to vulnerable people. She shared that the group was under pressure due to the reduction in funding but that Council Officers had been working with them and it was hoped to set a meeting up in December for all involved. She concluded that the area could not afford to lose this vital service.

Resolved That Council Officers continue to work with Agewell in relation to funding reductions.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said the comments would be taken on board.

Councillor Kerr spoke of the recent heavy rain and the floods in his own area of Torrent such as Reenaderry Road, Derryvale and Kings Row where some homes had been left unlivable. He said many families and businesses had been impacted and that those impacted the same way in Newry were receiving additional monies. Councillor Kerr proposed that Council lobby for better compensation for those in the district impacted.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said that Council officers had taken this on board as it had been discussed at the environment committee.

Councillor Burton supported Councillor McFlynn and said that Agewell do a fantastic job. She said if the organisation did not receive funding it would be disastrous. Councillor Burton also supported Councillor Robinson's remarks about the Fivemiletown groups and said that the Royal British Legion Fivemiletown receiving the Kings Award was well deserved especially for their work during covid. She concluded that it would be good to have the awards up and running again.

Councillor Corry reiterated comments in relation to Agewell she said it would be a serious detriment to the community if the service was lost and stated that Council should do all in its power as sometimes Agewell was the only contact people had with the world outside their homes.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy concurred.

C216/23 Deputation: Northern Ireland Water

The Chair, Councillor Molloy welcomed Dr S Blockwell and Mr D McGrath to the meeting.

The representatives delivered presentation at appendix one detailing NI Water investment, challenges and development constraints in Mid Ulster together with an update on mast at Hill of The O'Neill.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy thanked the representatives for their presentation and welcomed the news that some restrictions may soon be lifted in towns and villages to allow more development. He reminded Members that an email had been sent regarding the raising of issues. The Chair in relation to the Hill of The O'Neill asked how long the process would take to the appointment was made. In response Dr Blockwell said it was hoped to make the appointment prior to Christmas and that it would take six months to complete the works.

Councillor Wilson apologised stating that he had submitted an email but had not realised it had bounced back, thus he sought an update on the proposed sewage pipes for Cookstown that were scheduled to commence in 2024. He also spoke of major problems at a housing development at Coolreaghs Road, Cookstown and

requested clarity on Article 161. Councillor Wilson said he was happy to receive a follow up response.

Councillor Cuthbertson agreed that major investment was required over a number of years to bring infrastructure to an acceptable level but said that until Northern Ireland stopped wasting money for example on levelling up and growth deals the money would not be available. He acknowledged that the Mid South West Growth deal had made provision for some infrastructure. He said infrastructure was crucial and as money was being wasted houses could not be built, businesses could not expand and the country would crumble. He welcomed works in Dungannon and said he had submitted an email to NI Water regarding same. In relation to the proposed 'sludge station' he asked would waste water come from other parts to Dungannon and sought clarity with the references made during the presentation in relation to planning applications regarding same.

In response Dr Blockwell said that it was the NIEA who had determined the requirement to improve sludge management as it uses a lot of chemicals and there had to be a management centre. He said it was an enforcement action and NI Water must carry out the works and if the planning application did not go through in December it would have a potential knock on effect. He said the sooner planning permission was granted NI Water could expand the treatment process. He concluded it was a fundamental step in the area of which there are many challenges and said there was also a 6 year plan for drainage in Dungannon.

Mr McGrath said that better management of sludge would ease constraints in Dungannon but said it would need £20m investment and it was imperative that the planning application aforementioned goes through in December.

Councillor Kerr requested a contact for someone in the estate management team of NI Water as he had submitted questions that had not been followed up. He also asked if NI Water carry out audit on repair works. He said that in the Torrent area compensation claims regarding recent flooding had been deferred from Department for Infrastructure to NI Water but ultimately any successful claims would be rate payers' money and it would have been better if the problems had been fixed.

In response Mr McGrath said that within a two-year period any claims goes to the contractor as they are liable but with NISRAN system there is a failure as they have a maintenance responsibility of either two or three years.

Councillor Burton raised ongoing concern in relation to Bohatton Lane in Fivemiletown where there is raw sewage lying in drains which comes from Willow Crescent direction. She said she had photographic evidence and asked what could be done in the long-term suggesting a multiagency approach as residents are totally fed up with the situation. Councillor Burton also referred to a housing development in Aughnacloy, near the police station, which had been left half completed due to sewage difficulties.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy stated that any further DEA issues should be emailed to Member Services.

Councillor McConnell welcomed the treatment works but asked if there was scope for Augher to be included as the sewers there were at maximum capacity and sought an update on Augher 'waste water' treatment.

Dr Blockwell said there was certain allocations in PC21 and some to PC27 and the aforementioned could be considered then. He said that investment is driven by compliance to the NIEA and some works would be part of the PC27 business plan. He said that NI Water works in 6 year cycles and the current funding does not begin to address the need.

Councillor Johnston said as the second largest contributor to pollution on Lough Neagh what actions are NI Water taking to reduce the pollution.

Dr Blockwell said that all actions of NI Water are approved by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, he also stated that they look at catchments in terms of standards and some may be tightened by the Environment Act if it is brought to Northern Ireland. He stated that there are a few measures NI Water can use but there were other contributors to the matter such as agricultural input and that of business.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy extended thanks to colleagues of Dr Blockwell who had engaged with Council recently in meetings regarding Lough Neagh.

Councillor McFlynn sought an update on her submitted query regarding the Loup outlining planning permission had been granted for 60 homes in a rural location but the treatment plant needed refurbishment. She sought clarity as to whether there were plans to upgrade and if they were short or long term.

In response Dr Blockwell said there would be some basement plans but it was quite a small works with no electricity source but that NI Water were working towards an appraisal study.

Mr McGrath said that NI Water had six sites under consideration but emphasised there was a serious limit to treatment works and if all the planning was granted for the six sites the works currently operate for 255 people and this would rise to 850. He said if the size of the works was increased it would impact Lough Neagh and to allow the Loup to grow significant continuous investment was required. He concluded that at the moment there were no viable options other than that for major capital investment.

Councillor Robinson welcomed the investment and improvements in his DEA of Clogher Valley.

Councillor McLean spoke of the issue in relation to the process to offset developments especially within towns. He stated the cost of doing the offsetting is significant and puts a huge burden on the developer but there was a greater pain and that was reaching that point. Councillor McLean stated he had opportunity on three occasions to speak with consultants and the time frame for responses to get through the process was simply unacceptable. He said in speaking to five consultants they said the responses are poor, NI Water people on the ground are

hard to make contact with and sometimes it could be up to a month to get a response.

Mr McGrath welcomed the feedback and said there was some good news on response times in that there was now a dedicated member contact line and all calls would go through to developer services. He said they were dealing with a complex situation. He drew attention to comments about the Lough and said that NI Water has to work to allow growth but not make the situation at the Lough any worse. He said the alternative for developers is for NI Water to say no to more homes but that the offsetting work in many areas had been successful. He concluded by emphasising that it is essential for developers to approach NI Water first, even before they purchase sites, as sometimes the issues are complex and there is no answer other than to await capital funding.

Councillor McLean asked for a one-to-one meeting with Mr McGrath to outline an email chain he referred to, he said the follow up times were abysmal and if Mr McGrath could tell him different, he would apologise. He said that there were constraints on town centres and Council was working hard to bring about economic growth but in relation to NI Water issues it can be 2-3 years to find a solution. He said he could bring the consultants referred to, to the meeting. Mr McGrath said he would welcome the meeting.

Dr Blockwell said it is a difficult situation and he understood Members frustration but NI Water simply did not have the money to invest.

Councillor McLean said he worked in construction and understood the lack of investment but the lack of response from NI Water was simply frustrating.

Councillor Clarke in relation to Loup said that he too found it difficult to get a response, but he would make contact with NI Water again. He said issues with the Loup were historical that developments there were approved but investment in Loup had been left to one side for 30-40 years.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy thanked NI Water representatives for the presentation, and they withdrew from the meeting at 8.04pm.

Councillor Mallaghan referred to Councillor Cuthbertson's comments about levelling up funding and Mid South West growth deal being a waste of money and sought clarity on same.

Councillor Cuthbertson said he was talking about various projects across Northern Ireland and some would question if they are worthwhile. He said he was aware money was marked for the A29 but unless there was investment into wastewater every town and village are suffering and would suffer more as a lack of housing was pushing up rents.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said there is infrastructure projects within the schemes and the cause of the problems NI Water highlighted had been a significant lack of investment for many years.

Matters for Decision

C217/23 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” at the Council Meeting held on 26 October 2023

Proposed by Councillor Kerr
Seconded by Councillor Mallaghan and

Resolved That the Minutes of the Council held on Thursday 26 October 2023 (C186/23 – C202/23 and C211/23 transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated were considered and adopted.

C218/23 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” at the Planning Committee Meeting held on 7 November 2023

Proposed by Councillor Varsani
Seconded by Councillor Mallaghan and

Resolved That the Minutes of the Planning Committee held on Tuesday 7 November 2023 (P114/23 – P122/23 and P127/23) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated, subject to the foregoing were considered and adopted.

C219/23 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” at the Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on 9 November 2023

Declaration of Interest

Councillor Quinn declared an interest in PR184/23 Request to Illuminate Council properties

Councillor Quinn drew attention to PR184/23 Request to Illuminate Council properties and said, “While we do get a lot of requests to light up Council buildings, we usually don’t talk much about the causes but I would like the chance to highlight the request for Kawasaki Disease, as it’s something that I sadly know all too well. Back in May, just the Tuesday before election day, all elected representatives in the room were out knocking doors and talking to voters trying to get those last ‘1s and 2s’, I however was not. I was in the Childrens A&E with my 2-year-old daughter who had been running a high temperature all day and had a swollen lymph node. It wasn’t until around 10am on the Wednesday morning before the doctors finally told me that she just had a bad viral infection and gave her some anti-biotics to take and sent us home.

On Thursday as we set about getting ready for voters, I got a call from my wife to tell me that Ellie had started developing a rash and that she was rushing her back over to Children’s A&E. There she met the consultant who had seen her on Tuesday and he ordered her to the ward right away.

We both went with Ellie to the ward on Thursday night where they started her on a new anti-biotic drip as her condition started to get worse. Ellie went from being a lively, active and very cheeky 2-year-old to a limp, bed ridden, dozy 2-year-old who if she wasn't sleeping was crying out in pain to both mummy and daddy just to take her home to her blanky and bed.

On Friday while we were counting votes and looking at transfers, I was getting messages to say that they may have to transfer her from Craigavon to the Royal but she was too sick to move, on Sunday, with her condition getting worse, she stopped eating, stopped drinking, her temperature continued to spike and despite a shot of morphine there was no sign that she was going to recover and it was now looking like we were facing the worse possible outcome.

On Tuesday the tops of her fingers and toes started to turn purple and her skin started to peel. It wasn't until Wednesday that the doctors where finally able to give us an explanation, and that explanation was something we had never heard off, Kawasaki disease. Kawasaki Disease effects about 8 children under 5 in 100,000 in the UK. It causes the blood vessels in the body to swell and it can cause serious heart conditions up to and including death if not caught early.

It was that Wednesday that the doctors had no choice but to give her an immunoglobulin transfusion, which meant replacing all her white blood cells because her wee body could no longer fight the infection. That marked the lowest point for us all. On the Thursday a special team from the Royal arrived to look at her heart to access the damage done. It wasn't until the Saturday that Ellie started to show signs of recovery but it was slow... and it was a few days later, and a slice of hamburger cheese sneaked into the ward by her Granda Quinn that she started eating something. Don't ask... I don't understand it either.

I know most people in this chamber will never have heard about this disease, but it is an important message that we need to get out to the public. The symptoms I have mentioned, high temperature, sore throat, swollen glands, red/purple fingers, rash. This is a disease that is not well known, but it can cause massive damage to a child who catches it. We were lucky that CAH have seen cases like this before and once the diagnoses was clear, they worked around the clock to try and cure Ellie. In total she spent over 3 weeks in hospital. We are so thankful to all the hospital staff who treated Ellie so well in that time.

I don't tell this story for sympathy, I don't tell it scare people, I tell it because it's a condition that the public as a whole should know more about. Our GP didn't know anything about it and its only been in the last few months that people have talked to us that it was something their sister, their brother, their cousin, their friend had suffered from. I am glad to say that Ellie is now back to be a lively, overly cheeky 3-year-old, but she has had to go over regular checks on her heart, which have all come back positive, I also have to thank her for letting me again borrow her "pink iPad" for the council meeting. I am delighted we are highlighting this issue for World Kawaskai Disease Awareness Day. I hope that this short message can go out to help at least 1 other parent who can get their child to hospital."

The Chair, Councillor Molloy thanked Councillor Quinn for sharing and said that often Members don't understand the reasoning for lighting up but there is always a personal story behind it and Council should endeavour to support.

Proposed by Councillor McLernon
Seconded by Councillor Corry and

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Policy & Resources Committee held on Thursday 9 November (PR179/23 – PR188/23 and PR200/23) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated were considered and adopted.

C220/23 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” at the Environment Committee Meeting held on 14 November 2023

Councillor Kerr drew attention to E248/22 Town Centre Footpath snow/ice clearance agreement: He requested that in relation to Coalisland the areas listed for inclusion be revisited as some key areas had been missed for example pathway at Barrack Street including Chapel area, Platers Hill, Main Street.

Resolved E248/22 Town Centre Footpath snow/ice clearance agreement: That in relation to Coalisland the areas listed for inclusion be revisited as some key areas had been missed for example pathway at Barrack Street including Chapel area, Platers Hill, Main Street.

Councillor Kerr also concurred with Councillor Cuthbertson's comments regarding the modernisation of waste recycling and grass cutting services working group and stated that upon completion of the groups task list in December 2023 the minutes and reports of the working group should be brought into the public domain.

The Chief Executive stated that within the practice of working groups the reports go back to the parent committee for agreement following which when the task is completed at which time, they can be made public when appropriate.

Councillor Cuthbertson said he made the proposal to lift the item out of confidential business as the focus was on three areas and the work regarding recycling centres was done, it was going to the parent committee, and it was the committee who would make the decision. He stated in relation to the next two pieces of work, one being in relation to public conveniences, that they listened to current pressures, and it was decided to have DEA meetings but to date there was no word of same. In relation to grass cutting Councillor Cuthbertson said he had requested maps regarding the grass cutting over two weeks ago and still had not received a response. He concluded that every Member in the room should be consulted regarding the issues outlined.

Proposed by Councillor Varsani
Seconded by Councillor McGuigan and

Resolved That the Minutes of the Environment Committee held on Tuesday 14 November 2023 (E236/23 – E255/23 and E265/23) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated were considered and adopted.

C221/23 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” at the Development Committee Meeting held on 16 November 2023

Councillor Cuthbertson drew attention to D171/23 Partnership Proposal and said that costs and income are always discussed when it comes to the rates setting and in his opinion this proposal would lead to a drop in income. He cautioned that it may set a precedent and that although he was not overly familiar with Maghera, he was familiar with for example if a charity was to book a gymnasium it was expensive and posed the question was this value for money.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy stated that as a Member of the Development Committee he would advise there was much debate and concluded it was a good opportunity to develop working relationships.

Proposed by Councillor Corry
Seconded by Councillor McLernon and

Resolved That the Minutes of the Development Committee held on Thursday 16 November 2023 (D164/23 – D181/23 and D190/23) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated were considered and adopted.

C222/23 Conferences, Seminars and Training

The HoSS&E sought approval for the previously circulated report on conferences, seminars and training as outlined in Appendix A and B of the report.

Proposed by Councillor Kerr
Seconded by Councillor McNamee and

Resolved That approval be given to submitted requests for conferences, seminars and training as outlined at Appendix A and B to the report.

Matters for Information

C223/23 Consultations

Members noted consultations received for attention of Council.

Councillor Mallaghan stated that Council should make response to SONI (System Operator for Northern Ireland) Transmission Development Plan 2023-2032: to include that where possible any cabling should be underground. Members concurred.

Resolved That Council make a response to SONI (System Operator for Northern Ireland) Transmission Development Plan 2023-2032: Closing Date 22 December 2023. (The response to include that where possible any cabling be underground)

C224/23 Correspondence

Members noted update on correspondence received for attention of Council.

Councillor McLernon drew attention to letter from Derry and Strabane District Council and proposed that council accept the offer to engage in meetings in relation to exploring the potential of legally recognised Rights of Nature for Lough Neagh and/or if there are any other existing forums that are dealing with Lough Neagh at which this matter could be explored.

Proposed by Councillor McLernon
Seconded by Councillor Mallaghan and

Resolved That Council write to Derry & Strabane District Council accepting the invitation to participate in meeting in relation to exploring the potential of legally recognised Rights of Nature for Lough Neagh and/or if there are any other existing forums that are dealing with Lough Neagh at which this matter could be explored.

C225/23 Notice of Motion

Councillor Quinn moving the motion stated, "Once again we find ourselves in a position where we must talk about cuts to the Arts. While we continue to suffer in many ways from the lack of a Stormont government and we are at the mercy of a discredited Tory party in London, the arts remain the first port of call for any money to be cut. I know members here are sick and tired of me going on about the arts, but I make no apology for bringing this motion forward tonight. When we think about the arts, people talk about films, and Ireland of course led the way at the Oscars last year with *The Banshees of Inisherin*, written and directed by Martin McDonagh. Many of you may not know, that McDonagh started his career in a local theatre writing admitted some of the finest plays in the modern era. Plays that our local theatre here, The Bardic have performed now just on their stage but in Russia. When we talk about the arts, we think of poetry, no better example of our own Seamus Heaney, Nobel winner born in Bellaghy who's talent was nurtured here because of those people who knew his talent and love of the arts.

When we talk about the arts we might talk about local success like Francis Fee, born just a stone's throw from here in Killyman and who has went on to share the screen with the likes of Russell Crowe, Eddie Redmayne, Jeremy Renner and my personal favourite Vincent D'Onofrio. Where did he get his start? Down the road in Bardic theatre and their youth groups, encouraged by his father Frank who is an acclaimed local actor in his own right.

What we don't talk about when it comes to the arts is the 100s of children that take part in Craic Theatres youth theatre every weekend. We don't talk about the 1000s of children right across the north who are in youth theatres every night. We don't talk that because of this for these children the theatre is the only safe place for them during the night, it may also be the only warm place they have outside of school. We don't talk about those children with disabilities that find it hard to fit in at school or in society, yet when the stage light is shining on them, they find they have skills that many of us here could only dream about. For some of those children, and adults the arts are their only form of communication. In the words of Edward Hopper "If I could say in words there would be no reason to paint"

We don't talk about the hours and hours that facilitators give to teach those children, many times outside their paid hours because local theatres are struggling to pay them due to the uncertainty of funding. We also forget about the many people, young and old who take part in musical groups, comhlta groups, pipe bands from both traditions such as Clonoe Pipe Band who became All-Ireland champions this year, who find that this is their only outlet in life where they feel truly alive.

During the troubles, the one thing that brought our communities together was the arts, the theatre and music halls but instead of recognising this, we have cut the funding. This motion talks about the 5% cut, which easily could have been 10 as previously proposed earlier in the year. It's about the 5% now, the 5% last year, the 2% the year before, the 30% over the last decade and God knows what it will be next year. The arts here are dying, and you can be forgiven for saying it's been a death from 1000 cuts. Our government simply doesn't count the arts as something worth investing in, our youth not worth investing in. I can point to the fact that when it comes to musical theatre our two local theatres in Craic and Bardic regularly compete against and beat the biggest theatres not just in the north but right across the Island of Ireland.

Our one saving grace in Mid-Ulster has been our council. The Council have always supported the arts, and indeed have put 'their money where their mouth is' with investment, even as we have found it tough over the last few years. I think our officers need to be commended for this effort and long may it continue but it's simple not sustainable without help from either Stormont or Westminster. We have seen today about the 57 million being withheld because of Stormont being done, some of that money would be going to the arts. One of those great Irish Artists once said, "I regard theatre as the greatest of all the art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being."

All the worlds a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts, well it's time for government to start playing there's and reverse these cuts and start to invest."

Councillor Quinn moved the motion –

That this Council -

- Is alarmed at proposed 5% cut in funding to arts organisations funded by the Department for Communities through the Arts Council NI;
- Commends Equity NI, the arts community, its supporters, and the community at large for resisting these proposed cuts, including over 12,500

individuals signing Equity's petition which asked for more investment in the arts, not less.

- Notes that Arts Council NI funding has decreased, in real terms, by 30% over the last decade, despite evidence that investment in the arts has a real terms economic benefit for the city and the North as a whole.
- Further notes that the Department for Communities has indicated that it may implement further cuts in arts funding in FY '24-'25.
- Recognises that Stormont Permanent Secretaries are being forced to take, without mandate, difficult decisions that should be taken by locally elected Ministers and a devolved Executive and Assembly.
- Further recognises that too often the Council is forced to step in and financially support arts and cultural organisations who have lost funding from Stormont Departments, putting pressure on our ability to deliver existing arts and cultural schemes.
- Calls for a reversal in cuts to the arts and agrees to join as a signatory to Equity NI's latest open letter to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities.
- Further calls for the restoration of a reformed Executive and Assembly to take decisions which can future proof the arts sector and protect funding in the future.

Councillor Johnston seconded the motion.

Councillor Gildernew added her support for the motion and stated that funding was essential to protect the arts. She stated that many groups were in danger due to lack of funding and highlighted in her own constituency the Brantry Bard would not survive without funding. Councillor Gildernew concluded that the cuts to the arts should be resisted and where possible should be reversed.

Councillor McNamee said that any cuts to the arts would have a detrimental impact on the community. He stated that the arts were cross community bringing people of different religious backgrounds together and was often the glue that keeps communities together. He stated that it was not right that non-elected civil servants were taking decisions that was the remit of MLA's. He concluded that the NI Assembly needed to reconvene.

Councillor Monteith supported the motion and said whilst he did not agree with all its points the Arts needed to be both protected and promoted. He said he did not share the confidence of others that either the Westminster government or the NI Executive would alleviate the current cuts.

Councillor Forde said that it was good to see a motion impacting local groups and asked the question as to how much the Council contributed to the Arts, sought clarity as to where the city was at point three of the motion and suggested that the motion was simply a 'cut and paste'. She stated that comments in relation to pressures on budget and the NI Executive not sitting were well rehearsed and that the DUP had no issue with funding of the arts. Councillor Forde speaking on the Council's budget for the arts said a significant portion was allocated to the Irish Language yet Council was struggling to cut the grass and keep toilets open. She concluded posing the question as to where the money would come from?

Councillor Wilson said he too could agree with the thrust of the motion and was personally a great supporter of the arts. He said that the 5% cut would have a devastating impact and more and more artists were forced to seek new careers. He said that the arts nurture theatres, céili bands, marching bands, it's in schools, pubs etc he said that the arts were not a luxury as there was no substitution to the contribution it gives to society and it should be recognised. He outlined the contribution per head of population in Scotland £15, Wales £16, Ireland £21.90 and Northern Ireland £5.21 and it was time the arts received better.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said that without the arts society doesn't exist as it is all around. He said famous actors, musicians, artists do not appear out of nowhere, they have grass roots in local communities. He said should it be the stage, creativity, festivals or young farmers clubs all of these things feed into the arts.

Councillor Brown said that as his party colleague had indicated the DUP would broadly support the motion and had sought clarity as to whether the motion was a cut and paste. He said however, they had had enough of the constant sniping in relation to the NI Executive and that there were other things that needed money also. He concluded the DUP would abstain from the motion.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy called for a vote

For	27
Against	0
Abstain	11

Councillor Totten was not present for the vote.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy declared the motion carried.

Councillor Qunn thanked Members for their support and said it was a 'cut and paste' and that he was sad to see the DUP abstaining on a motion that impacts all especially when their colleagues in Belfast had supported it. He said people needed to realise how fundamental the arts were, he spoke of how it helped those struggling with many issues and commended Councillor Wilson in how eloquently he had supported the motion. Councillor Quinn said that Councils strategic partners were going from strength to strength, but more funding was needed. Regarding comments in relation to the NI Executive he said it was not sniping but frustration. In response to Councillor Monteith's comments he concurred the motion would not solve all, but he hoped it would help.

C226/23 Notice of Motion

Councillor Kerr moving the motion said, "I decided to bring this motion tonight due to the extreme amount of innocent Palestinian civilians murdered by the Israeli Forces. It now stands at approximately 13,000 people having been massacred from the recent escalation of violence from October. What is unfolding is a modern-day holocaust where one state who has superior weapons, technology, navy and air

force has had a free reign of murdering innocent civilians including many women and children. The Zionist rogue state known as Israel has carried out many war crimes and breached many rules in its conduct in this recent phase of violence and has created a humanitarian issue by restricting substantial amounts of aid getting into the country together with restriction of fuel and cutting water into the Gaza strip.

We have the South African government along with Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cumar and Djibouti have submitted the referral to the International Criminal Court to investigate the levels of ferocious violence against the people of Gaza. The 26-county government has recently referred other nations to the International Criminal Court and its equally important they be seen as the first nation of the so-called western democracies to do so. There can be no double standard Benjamin Netanyahu should face justice just like the Nazi leaders did during the Nuremberg trials.

I also ask for unequivocal support for the council to contact the United Nations body the Responsibility to Protect and request they open an immediate investigation to the crimes we are witnessing in Gaza and Palestine. These two bodies have previously provided evidence against atrocities committed in Rwanda and the Balkans. A part of their mandate and both offices work together to advance national and international efforts to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity as well as their incitement. The two offices also collect information, conducts assessments of situations worldwide and alerts the general secretary and relevant actors to the risk of atrocity crimes as well as their incitement.

Councillor Kerr moved the motion –

That this Council resolves to contact the 26 County government and request they refer Israel to the International Criminal Court due to its recent genocidal violence against the people of Gaza and Palestine as we note the growing concerns domestically and internationally.
We also request the Council contacts the UN office of Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and request they open an investigation immediately.

Councillor Kerr concluded it was strictly a humanitarian issue.

Councillor McElvogue seconded the motion.

Councillor Brown said it was sad to see Councillor Kerr once again spouting the usual 'diet of tripe.'

The Chair, Councillor Molloy stated that Councillor Brown should be respectful when speaking about other Members.

Councillor Brown stated the DUP would not support the motion.

Councillor Corry welcomed the news of the ceasefire and release of hostages but emphasised that a longer-term solution was required. She stated that under international law all should exercise the right to call for investigations into war crimes

and genocide and Council must take a stand against this. Councillor Corry said it was horrific to watch the bombing of schools and said that Palestine had stopped counting the dead. Councillor Corry concluded that today it is Palestine but it could be somewhere else tomorrow and that Sinn Féin would support the motion.

Councillor Wilson said that once again this was a motion for publicity and in Northern Ireland people would take sides. He said that HAMAS was a terrorist organisation, and it must be dismantled by Israel or Gaza. He said that both Israel and HAMAS are bound by the same rules and that HAMAS had embedded themselves with no regard for their own people. Councillor Wilson said that no one could be but moved by the suffering and welcomed the ceasefire. He concluded that the Member moving the motion had not called out Russia nor sought support to have them referred to the International Criminal Court.

Councillor Quinn said he had brought a similar motion last month that the Unionists would not support and stated no one could be but moved when you see a man saying goodbye to his child. He said he condemned death on both sides and that Israel is murdering indiscriminately and dropping bombs on people as they flee. He said looking at the mass graves reminds you of what happened to the Jewish population during the second world war, and something needed to be done. He said that Councillor Wilson was right that it may not make a difference but said that the Dunnes Stores workers who took a stand against apartheid were appreciated by the South African people. Councillor Quinn said Council had called for the release of hostages and a cease fire which was happening all be it on a temporary basis, but he said there was most definitely war crimes.

Councillor Quinn proposed an amendment in that Council contact both the Irish and British governments.

Councillor Quinn said he had attended a rally at Anne Street in Dungannon when all had spoken from a humanitarian perspective and that Council needed to support.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy asked Councillor Kerr if he accepted the amendment.

Councillor Kerr said no.

Councillor Varsani said that in international law self-defence cannot be claimed by someone entering another country. She said the current situation in Gaza had been compared to the killing fields in Cambodia. Councillor Varsani said that as elected representatives they should use whatever voice they had to speak up.

Councillor Monteith said he had attended events in solidarity of Palestinian people and had been humbled when marching the streets of Dublin but tonight O'Connell Street is being used for hateful activity on the news screens this evening. He said countries that are carrying out atrocities want the world to look and not to speak. He said that collective punishment is wrong there is always a choice and in this instance, Israel do not have to blanket bomb. Councillor Monteith said that the impact of every life lost on all sides matters and is of value and quoted statistics that in Ukraine 6% of those killed during the war have been children whilst in Gaza it is 50%. He posed the question as to how you can go to war against people who have

no army, navy, airforce and 50% of the population is under 16. He said if the issues are not discussed why is any Member in the chamber. He said the motion doesn't mention HAMA's nor does it mention how Israel has slaughtered people long before HAMA's. Councillor Monteith urged everyone to support the motion.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said that on a humanitarian basis watching reports of the ongoing conflict and genocide within Palestine and Gaza you could not fail to be moved. He spoke of people fleeing to find refuge and then being bombed in tented cities highlighting that there had been some 300 indiscriminate attacks and bombs dropped on highly populated areas. He said it could not be termed as self-defence by a highly weaponed modernised army from a nuclear state. The Chair concluded that Members must raise their voices as in the past no one spoke up for example for the Jews and communists.

Councillor Cuthbertson said he had read an article regarding the civil war in Syria and said if Members had a duty to speak this had never been mentioned. He said that some 350k people had been killed in Syria, but the President is backed by Iran and Russia and that Council was picking and choosing who to make mention of. He said Council could not fix the situation and should concentrate on local issues.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy called for a vote on the motion.

For	26
Against	13
Abstained	0

The Chair, Councillor Molloy declared the motion carried.

Councillor Kerr thanked Members for supporting the motion and said if other Members want to bring motions in relation to other areas such as Syria they should do so. He said he would have hated to be a Councillor and ignored fascist Germany during World War two. He said that hear and see no evil is no good.

Councillor Cuthbertson left the meeting.

C227/23 Notice of Motion –

Councillor Carney moving the motion said, "When it comes to the provision of childcare and early education, Sinn Fein demands a great deal. We demand quality provision that puts the best interests of the child at its core. For our children, we want care that enhances early years development, addresses disadvantage, promotes wellbeing, and improves the life chances of the next generation. But as well as quality, parents need childcare to be affordable and that's the focus of this motion.

At a time when household bills are rising, hikes in interest rates for those with mortgages, and income falling due to inflation. The cost-of-living crisis has now made childcare a luxury.

We live in a society where, for most families, running a household requires both parents to be working but we don't have the infrastructure to support that. We urgently need a childcare strategy that addresses that anomaly. Here, in this council area, families are now paying up to £1000 of their monthly income for childcare, many now asking the question is it worth their while working full time.

The provision of childcare underpins parents access to employment and supports their professional advancement throughout parenthood. For those who simply cannot obtain affordable childcare, this often means they cannot work in the way that they want or need to, and ultimately, cannot progress their careers.

Childcare providers are now struggling to meet demand while maintaining good quality care. There's no point developing a strategy that reduces costs for parents but puts providers at risk of closure. That's what the Tories did in England. Government underfunding of childcare places resulted in thousands of nurseries closing, leaving parents struggling to find places.

Sustainable childcare is about recruiting and retaining sufficient staff and that means improving terms and conditions as well as providing training.

The development of a childcare strategy by the Department of Education is long overdue. The restoration of the NI Executive is an imperative to make change happen.

I urge support for this motion.

Councillor Carney moved the motion –

This Council recognises that -

- The costs of childcare in the North of Ireland are unaffordable for many and hard-working families are struggling every month to meet these costs;
- Access to childcare in this district is an issue, with providers struggling to meet demands whilst remaining sustainable and maintaining high standards of care;
- Parents, particularly women are being forced out of the workforce leading to a negative impact on the labour market, skills and wider economic output;
- An Executive must be re-established urgently so that parties can work together to make childcare a priority;

And that this Council will:

1. Write to the Education Department urging them to progress a comprehensive childcare strategy without delay; and
2. Commit to delivering new fully registered childminders in the area through their labour market partnership scheme.

Councillor Gildernew seconded the motion and said that for many parents' childcare costs were simply unaffordable with women being the most impacted. She said that as a working mother she knew only too well the pressures parents were under and the pressures of childcare workers and providers struggling to deliver a service. Councillor Gildernew concluded that the NI Assembly needed to be restored.

Councillor Johnston speaking on the motion said, "Stormont's failure to function is an impediment to solving one of the biggest issues facing families in Northern Ireland. The cost of childcare is currently one of the most pressing issues in Northern Ireland. In recent years costs have skyrocketed to the point where many parents, especially women, are leaving or considering leaving the workforce to care for their child, because they do not make enough to justify their childcare costs. All the time we are speaking to talented people who feel forced to abandon careers they are passionate about and have invested years into through education and training. For too long the situation with childcare has been allowed to spiral out of control. The cost-of-living crisis has brought matters to a head with added pressures for both parents and childcare providers, but we cannot simply stand by and do nothing about it, even if the failure of Stormont to function has made meaningful change all the more difficult.

The SDLP has for many years been campaigning on this issue, we are currently supporting the call from Melted Parents NI for a childcare strategy to be placed on the agenda of the first meeting of any incoming Executive, along with a commitment that a timeframe for delivery will be published in the first 100 days of a new government here.

"The families driving the Melted Parents campaign have been tireless advocates for affordable and accessible childcare in Northern Ireland and their tenacity and sheer hard work in consistently raising this issue with those in power is inspirational. A survey they carried out laid bare the crisis facing parents, over 80% of respondents saying that their childcare costs were higher than their mortgages. That the immense costs of childcare are pushing huge numbers of hard-pressed parents - especially women - out of the workforce and acting as a handbrake on our economy. We in SDLP believe that when Stormont returns it must be ready to make the necessary changes so that childcare is affordable for every family and that providers can offer their services while making ends meet.

In Westminster Claire Hanna is determined to use the NI Affairs Committee as a meaningful driver of policy change and has proposed it hold an inquiry into childcare which will give us the chance to hear from campaigners and providers about what will make a real difference to the lives of people here. If the Executive is not in place, it will commence this inquiry early next year and the SDLP Opposition team will use its findings to help inform childcare proposals for when the institutions return." In the meantime, and at local level, and in the absence of an executive we owe it to our hard pressed parents to use whatever mechanisms available to carry out the preparatory work so that we can hit the road running when eventually the DUP end this obstinate and senseless obstruction of governance.

Councillor Cahoon said, "In Northern Ireland our childcare costs are significantly above the UK average and on a par with central London as identified in a recent Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2021 by Employers for childcare.

Whether people work in policing, education, healthcare, or industry once there is more than one child in the house, serious discussions take place about the affordability of work.

It is essential that work pays. Northern Ireland, like elsewhere in the UK requires significant investment in childcare infrastructure. Childcare governance falls between the Department of Health and Education in Northern Ireland but with a budget shortfall, the seismic assistance needed in this sector is well beyond the firepower of a devolved Assembly.

The DUP is the only party pushing the Government for reform of how the NI Assembly is funded.

The final bullet point in this motion calls for the Executive to be re-established urgently. Let's be clear, this again is little more than political point scoring. Unless funded properly, the Assembly could be back in the morning and there would be little change as there are many competing priorities.

We broadly agree with the rest of the motion, however will abstain on the basis of the final bullet point.”

Councillor Graham said, “childcare costs for many working families are out of reach and so many, mostly women are forced to stay at home to take over childcare. In very basic terms we need to find a way to make childcare affordable for those that work. Another point which needs addressed is time slots for working parents should be more accessible. It is hard enough for two parent families and single parent families just don't have a chance. The Ulster Unionist Party have and are, consistently working with all relevant departments, agencies, and others to find a solution that works for everyone. Children are our future, and we all want the best start for them that they can have, so we need to make childcare and the issues surrounding it a priority and not just talk about it. We need a functioning executive who can progress this and so we in the UUP are happy to support the motion.

Councillor Monteith said that anything Council could do to support this should be done. He said that he did not share that the NI Executive or Westminster would make much difference but with the situation at Stormont the childcare issue had become much work. He said it was deliberate as it suited the British government as they were trying to make families smaller the main evidence of which was two child limits on universal credit which was social engineering. He said there was hidden powers who wanted the situation to continue. Councillor Monteith said he was happy to support the motion.

Councillor McFlynn said she was happy to support the issue that families were struggling and whilst food was plentiful families had to use food banks. She spoke of people getting married wanting to buy a house, taking on a mortgage and then with the childcare costs akin to a second mortgage and in some cases more expensive. Councillor McFlynn said parents were having to give up paid work, but they were entitled to dignity to have a family and work to provide for them. She spoke of Kilronan Special School which was now operating at double its capacity and when the Board had met a Permanent Secretary, he had advised that children in Northern Ireland per head of population are underfunded in education.

Councillor McFlynn said this is discrimination and proposed an amendment that the third bullet point of the motion include that Council 'write to the Secretary of State and ask that the 30 hours free childcare be implemented in Northern Ireland.'

Councillor McFlynn concluded that children and families in Northern Ireland should not be discriminated against.

Councillor Carney accepted the amendment.

Councillor Quinn said that the speakers had mainly been female, but this impacts all parents and said he had friends in Dublin whose childcare costs outstripped their mortgage. He said he was fortunate in that grandparents mind his children as they simply could not afford to pay five days childcare. Councillor Quinn concurred with Councillor McFlynn on the call for 30 hours free childcare and with Councillor Monteith in that it was not a crime to have a family. He referred to earlier comments by the DUP in that motions should focus on local people yet two of the motions had and they had abstained on both because they impact the Stormont issue.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said that the narrative ‘women stay at home to look after children’ must be challenged and it was the duty of all to change it. He concluded that the matter of affordable childcare needed to be addressed.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy put the motion with the amendment to the vote.

For	28
Against	0
Abstained	10

The Chair Councillor Molloy declared the motion carried.

This Council recognises that -

- The costs of childcare in the North of Ireland are unaffordable for many and hard-working families are struggling every month to meet these costs;
- Access to childcare in this district is an issue, with providers struggling to meet demands whilst remaining sustainable and maintaining high standards of care;
- Parents, particularly women are being forced out of the workforce leading to a negative impact on the labour market, skills and wider economic output;
- An Executive must be re-established urgently so that parties can work together to make childcare a priority;

And that this Council will:

1. Write to the Education Department urging them to progress a comprehensive childcare strategy without delay; and
2. Commit to delivering new fully registered childminders in the area through their labour market partnership scheme.
3. Write to the Secretary of State and ask that the 30 hours free childcare be implemented in Northern Ireland.

Councillor Carney thanked all those who supported the motion and supported the restoration of the NI Executive.

The live broadcast concluded at 9.20 pm.

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.

Proposed by Councillor Kerr
Seconded by Councillor Quinn and

Resolved That items C228/23 to C232/23 be taken as confidential business.

Matters for Decision

- (i) Council Confidential minutes of meeting held on 26 October 2023
- (ii) Planning Confidential minutes of meeting held on 7 November 2023
- (iii) Policy & Resources Confidential minutes of meeting held on 9 November 2023
- (iv) Environment Confidential minutes of meeting held on 14 November 2023
- (v) Development Confidential minutes of meeting held on 16 November 2023

C233/23 Duration of Meeting

The meeting was called for 7.00 pm and ended at 9.23 pm

Chair _____

Date _____

Annex A - Introductory Remarks from Chairperson

Good evening and welcome to our meeting of Mid Ulster District Council in the Chamber, Dungannon whether you have joined us remotely or in the Chamber.

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

Just some housekeeping before we commence. Can I remind you:-

- If you have joined the meeting remotely please keep your audio on mute unless invited to speak and then turn it off when finished speaking
- Keep your video on at all times, unless you have bandwidth or internet connection issues, where you are advised to try turning your video off
- If you wish to speak please raise your hand in the meeting or on screen and keep raised until observed by an Officer or myself
- Should we need to take a vote this evening I will ask each member to confirm whether they are for or against the proposal or abstaining
- When invited to speak please introduce yourself by name to the meeting
- For any member attending remotely, if you declare an interest in an item, please turn off your video and keep your audio on mute for the duration of the item
- If referring to a specific report please reference the report, page or slide being referred to
- Lastly, I 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 first item on the agenda – apologies and then a roll call of members in attendance.