

**Minutes of Meeting of Policy & Resources Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Tuesday 2 September 2014 in Magherafelt District Council Offices**

**Members Present:** In the Chair, Councillor McPeake (Chair)  
  
Councillors Ashton, Bateson, Buchanan, Elattar, Forde, Glasgow, Mallaghan, McFlynn, McGinley, S McGuigan, Molloy, M Quinn, Reid and Totten,

**Officers in Attendance:** Mr A Tohill, Chief Executive  
Mrs Cavanan, Lead HR Officer  
Mrs Mezza, Marketing Communications Manager  
Mr O'Hagan, ICT Manager  
Mr JJ Tohill, Lead Finance Officer  
Mrs Smith, Council Business Manager (DSTBC)

The meeting commenced at 8.05 pm

**PR17/14 Apologies**

Councillor McLean

**PR18/14 Declarations of Interest**

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

**PR19/14 Receive and confirm minutes of the Policy & Resources Committee held on Wednesday 9 July 2014**

Proposed by Councillor Mallaghan  
Seconded by Councillor S McGuigan and

**Resolved** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on Wednesday 9 July 2014 having been printed and circulated be confirmed.

**Matters for Decision**

**PR20/14 Off Street Car Parking**

The Chief Executive presented a report seeking members' approval for Mid Ulster District Council to participate in the existing DRD arrangements in respect of Off Street Parking for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 October 2016. He stated that DRD currently operate with the aid of two key contracts; an enforcement contract and an electronic processing contract. The logistics of the provision of car parking services include a wide range of activities and presents a considerable administrative challenge. To participate in existing

arrangement will mean a seamless transfer from 1 April and will give the Council an opportunity to learn from the operation and prepare alternative arrangement if required.

SF Members asked if the Council can use this opportunity for further negotiation with DRD in relation to anomalies, the proposal was worthy and allowed the Council time to consider the way forward. Current pilot scheme in Dungannon should be monitored as maybe something that the Council would be considering in the future.

An UUP Member stated that proposal gives the Council breathing space to consider all issues and to put in place a fair process across the borough but it was important that updated figures are obtained from the DRD. He also asked if the Council would own the car parks.

DUP Members spoke in relation to the need for a fair policy across all three areas and asked if the £333k included all maintenance costs.

The Chief Executive responded to members stating that assets will transfer to Council, onus on the Council to continually point out deficiencies in funding to DRD and DSD and that figures include an element of minor maintenance but would not cover any resurfacing that was required. The DRD in budget monitoring round received additional monies for major works. Once the Council begins to build budgets and see emerging financial picture some tough decisions will have to be made.

Proposed by Councillor Reid  
Seconded by Councillor McGuigan and

**Resolved** That it be recommended to the Council that the Council participate in the existing DRD arrangements in respect of Off Street Car Parking for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 October 2016 based on a service level agreement and that update report on funding issue to come back to Committee.

#### **RP21/14 Procurement Thresholds**

The Lead Finance Officer presented a report on the proposed procurement approach and requested authorisation to develop a procurement policy on the basis of the report. The procurement practices within the three councils have been reviewed and it is recommended that the Council adopt option 3 within the report. In broad terms this would result in:

- Up to £1,000 – no quotation required but must demonstrate that costs are reasonable
- £1,000 to £5,000 – 2 written price checks required and must demonstrate that costs are reasonable – approved by authorised officer

- £5,000 to £30,000 – a minimum of 4 written quotations – approved by Director
- £30,000 to EU threshold – advertised in regional press – approved by Council
- Single tender actions – request via Director to Chief Executive – up to £30,000 approved by Chief Executive, otherwise approved by Council
- All single tender actions above £1,000 reported to Council or Committee as agreed
- All procurement in excess of £1,000 notified to procurement team.

A SF Member asked where the procurement of consultants would fit in.

DUP Members asked if there will be any built in mechanism to prevent small orders on a consistent basis to keep within threshold and negate the need to go to quotations. They stated that would like to see lower thresholds so the process remains transparent and open.

A UUP Member asked if this approach would leave the process faster and who would be monitoring purchases. He also questioned the need for controls regarding declarations of staff interest.

The Lead Finance Officer responded to Members' questions:

- consultants are usually associated with larger projects and will come under same parameters with guidance in the finer details of the policy
- responsibility of Director to monitor procurement practices making sure no bending of the rules to try to circumvent limits. Directors form part of the governance assurance framework that will come into the council which will motivate directors to closely monitor budgets
- the limits are those recommended by the NI Local Government Procurement Group and in line with local government and central sector
- on a contract of £15,000 could spend up to 10 per cent advertising
- decentralising and increasing thresholds should expedite the process
- declaration of staff interests will be part of governance arrangements

Proposed by Councillor Mallaghan

Seconded by Councillor Bateson and

**Resolved** That it be recommended to the Council that the report is adopted and that appropriate policy is developed in line with the recommendations in the report.

**RP22/14 Apportionment of Costs for Services Provided by NI Commissioner of Complaints**

The Lead Finance Officer presented a report informing members of the DoE consultation exercise on the Apportionment of Costs associated with the Ethical Standards Framework between Councils (the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints) and seeking members' agreement upon a

preferred option for the apportionment of costs. He stated that it is estimated that cost for 2015/16 will be £380,000 with four options on apportioning costs being presented for consultation; number of councils, number of councillors, population and tax base (gross penny product) with the latter being the most economically acceptable to the Council.

Proposed by Councillor S McGuigan  
Seconded by Councillor McFlynn and

**Resolved** That it be recommended to the Council that the preferred option for the apportionment of costs for the Commissioner's Office would be Tax Base (Gross Penny Product).

### **R23/14 ICT Business Analysis**

The ICT Manager presented a report which provided update to the Council on the findings and recommendations of the business analysis carried out by Kelway Consultants in respect of converging systems and ICT requirements and sought approval to procure goods and services towards building the new ICT service for Mid Ulster.

SF Members stated that this was a comprehensive report, was always going to be an expensive item that would not have been required if RPA had not been forced upon local government and asked if the Council can avail of money for this project from the Executive. It was stated that the project was necessary and the three Councils need to be looking at what money could be diverted to this project.

DUP Members referred to shortfall of £63k in budget and this would be added to the shortfall in budget for the communications system previously reported and felt that recommendations need to be coming from officers on how these projects are going to be financed. It was asked if the three Councils had been approached and given any commitment. It was also asked if officer confident that any tender process would come in at the costs stated.

SDLP Members stated that there is a need for a fully functional ICT system and report highlighted that current three systems lacking in a number of areas. It was asked what software brand would be used.

An UUP Member express concern at another deficit in budget and the potential for further when project tendered. He stated that his party could not at the moment support the project, that it should be revisited and asked that this be noted in the minutes. He asked about the longevity of the project. He felt that effect on rates would be tremendous and this should be explained to the DoE.

The Chair stated that this was a complex issue so that is why Consultants were employed, he spoke in relation to the time pressures and asked the Member to outline what he thought the alternative was.

A UUP Member stated that it is a must that the three Council be approached and asked to put down on paper what financial contribution would be given to support these costs and that there should be a strong lobby to the DoE to release funds.

The ICT Manager in response to questions stated:

- the approach as outlined would leave a system fit for purpose with at least back office requirements for five years
- if adopt all recommendations will have a reasonable structure which will be responsive to members, staff and the needs of the public
- Consultants have given us suggestions on what required and process will be built around Microsoft software
- Costs based on indicative pricing following research

The Lead Finance Officer stated that the matter of finance from the Executive continues to be under discussion, that the Finance Officers within the existing three Council are aware of the situation, that current Councils operating under expenditure controls and the three existing Council will effectively fund the cost of the Shadow Council.

The Chief Executive stated that the DoE sitting with £2m to assist local government to get systems set up and officers have tried with officials in DoE to have money released. It would appear that the only recourse is to the Minister.

Proposed by Councillor McFlynn  
Seconded by Councillor McGugian and

**Resolved** That it be recommended to the Council that the report and recommendations are adopted and that officers are authorised to develop an appropriate policy and documentation etc in line with the report's recommendations. That the three Councils be approached and a strong lobby to be made to DoE to have money released.

## **Matters for Information**

### **PR24/14 Branding of Mid Ulster**

Mrs Mezza submitted a report on the progress of work to develop a new branding strategy for Mid Ulster District Council. Consultants had been appointed to undertake work associated with the development of a brand. The first phase of the project centres on consultation, work began in early July and should be completed by 12 September. Outcome of all research will be formed into one stake holders report and inform phase 2, the development of concept and design which will take up to 5 weeks to complete.

SF Members stated that the cultural make-up of the Mid Ulster District Council is similar to Magherafelt and will be of a similar cultural aspiration therefore branding should be bilingual. The Irish Language Policy within Magherafelt has been consulted on, went through all assessments and has been endorsed by the people. This is something that should be given consideration as part of branding.

Proposed by Councillor Bateson  
Seconded by Councillor Mallaghan

That it be recommended to the Council that to short circuit part of the work towards developing bilingual branding for the Mid Ulster District Council that the Council adopt the existing Magherafelt District Council Irish language policy.

DUP Members stated that they could not support the proposal, putting two or three languages into branding is not cost effective, the committee cannot agree policy that it has not seen, which has not been consulted on throughout the whole area or which has not been placed as an item on the agenda. Members will oppose any proposal at this stage.

A SDLP Member stated that she has not seen the policy and therefore it needs to be circulated to all members.

UUP Members asked if the policy takes account of the diverse population of the borough and if it was inclusive of all languages. It was suggested that there was a need for a discussion or workshop to properly discuss this issue.

The Chair asked if the proposer would be prepared to amend proposal to take account of what had been discussed.

Councillor Bateson amended proposal to read

That it be recommended to the Council that policy be put forward as discussion document to be considered as part of branding proposals and that workshop to discuss policy be arranged.

The proposal as amended was put to the meeting 10 (ten) members voting in favour and 5 (five) against.

The Chair declared the proposal carried.

The Chair stated that workshop should be held as soon as possible so that outcome can be fed into corporate branding exercise.

**PR25/14 Mid Ulster District Council Interim Website.**

Paper noted.

**PR26/14 Draft Employee Code of Conduct and Employee Member Protocol**

Paper noted.

**PR27/14 Estimated Penny Product for Mid Ulster District Council**

Paper noted.

**PR28/14 Guidance on the Financial Operation of New Councils during the Shadow Period**

The Lead Finance Officer presented a report which considered the contents and implications of circular LG 34/2014.

He discussed with members the implications of capitalisation, capital expenditure, loans and reserves and how all these issues are currently being managed within the three Councils. It was noted that capital expenditure above £250k and any borrowing has to be approved by the Shadow Council.

The Chief Executive stated that more work needs to be completed around the financial position of Councils and a paper would be brought to a future meeting.

**PR29/14 Open Consultation List**

Draft PPS22 on Affordable Housing; closes 23 September 2014  
Developer Contributions for Affordable Housing; closes 23 September 2014.

**PR30/14 Hospitality**

A DUP Member stated that the Council should be striving to keep costs to a minimum.

Proposed by Councillor Ashton  
Seconded by Councillor Buchanan and

**Resolved** That it be recommended to the Council that hospitality at Council and Committee meetings should be tea, coffee, biscuits and jugs of tap water.

**PR31/14 Duration of Meeting**

The meeting was called for 8.00 pm and ended at 9.54 pm.

CHAIR \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_