

Minutes of Meeting of Policy and Resources Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 4 March 2021 in the Council Offices, Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt and by Virtual Means

Members Present

Councillor Quinn, Chair

Councillors , Buchanan*, Cuddy*, Doris*, Elattar*, Forde*, Gildernew*, Hughes*, McFlynn*, S McGuigan*, McKinney, McLean*, S McPeake*, Molloy*, Totten*

Officers in Attendance

Mr McCreesh, Chief Executive
Mrs Canavan**, Director of Organisational Development
Mr Cassells, Director of Environment & Property Services
Mr Kelso**, Director of Public Health & Infrastructure
Ms Mezza**, Head of Marketing
Mr Moffett**, Head of Democratic Services
Mr O'Hagan, Head of ICT
Mr JJ Tohill**, Director of Finance
Mrs Grogan, Democratic Services Officer

Others in Attendance

Ms Ellen Fearon, NUS-USI President

* Denotes members present in remote attendance

** Denotes Officers present by remote means

*** Denotes Others present by remote means

The meeting commenced at 7 pm.

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Quinn, the Deputy Chair, Councillor McKinney took the Chair.

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

Councillor Quinn entered meeting at 7.01 pm and took the Chair.

PR043/21 Apologies

Councillor Ashton.

PR044/21 Declarations of Interest

None.

PR045/21 Chair's Business

The Chair advised that Updated Branding Guidelines would now be taken in Matters for Information.

PR046/21 Deputation – NUS - USI

The Chair welcomed the Ms Elle Fearon, President of National Students Union (NSU) – USI to the meeting and invited her to make their presentation. (Appendix 1).

Ms Fearon thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak to them tonight and provided update on the work carried out by NUS-USI. She advised that the membership had over 200,000 students; 4 Higher Education (HE) – QUBSU, UUSU, St. Mary's SU, Stranmillis SU; 6 Further Education (FE) – SRC, NWRC, SWC, SERC, NRC & Belfast Met; 1 Agricultural College (CAFRE); National Society of Apprentices; with 100% affiliation.

She stated that the NUS-USI "Students Deserve Better" campaigns for:

Fully funded education; The Right to Defer to End Course; Rent Rebate; The Right to Leave Accommodation; Food Necessities & Wellbeing Support and Accessible Online Teaching and was glad to say that 85 Politicians have signed the pledge. She concluded by saying that it would be beneficial to extend the £500 Covid Disruption Grant and would appreciate any Council support going forward.

The Chair thanked Ms Fearon for her impressive presentation and said that he had very fond memories of being a student. He enquired about the £500 payment that students had now received but it was his understanding that this wasn't to be paid through Student Finance, but this is now not the case which was causing some confusion for those students who were not availing of a student loan or getting a scholarship and asked how this would work out if students hadn't got a student loan.

Ms Fearon advised that this would be up to Universities to issue the payment to students and although it was originally to be processed through Student Finance there had been confusion as it was also stated that Student Finance wouldn't issue the payment to students studying in England, Scotland and Wales which NUS-USI were still campaigning on. She said that her organisation were working closely with Universities to make sure that the payment was distributed to all eligible students.

The Chair said that this put a lot of pressure back on the Economy Minister and hoped that students studying in the UK could avail of the funding.

Councillor S McPeake commended the work that Ms Fearon and her team were doing as it was very important at this time as students seemed to be left behind during this pandemic, a forgotten sector which still had to pay bills and hoped that the students across the water and down South were able to avail of the £500 as their costs were even more substantial than the ones in the North and was pleased to say that he had signed the petition a few weeks ago. He advised that his party colleague Councillor Niall McAleer recently had brought a successful motion through Council to

ask for support towards the Students Union to plug gaps and to write to the Department of the Economy in helping students during these unprecedented times.

Councillor Doris stated that it was great to get some background on what the organisation does as she also had fond memories of Uni and had to say that her heart really went out to the students this year as they had missed out on so many memories. She said that there had been a real failure on behalf of the landlords on how they treated students and also the government as they have been seen as an after-thought. She wished to reaffirm Sinn Féins commitment on behalf of the students and was glad to see £500 payment being made, but felt that it took too long to come forward.

The Chair asked Ms Fearon what the Council could do to support the campaign going forward. He said that he was aware of two motions being brought forward by Sinn Féin and also his party had been trying hard with the petition to try and get things moving.

Ms Fearon thanked members for their support and asked that the Council make parents and students aware of the campaign and the Union as there would be a lot of students who were angry and feeling incredibly hopeless right now and just don't know where to go and this was a worry due to mental health. She said that support would be given to these students and possibly getting them involved in active campaigning. She said that it would be beneficial for Council to encourage others to sign the campaign and share links from the NUS-USI and for political parties who have any power within the assembly to try and get them on board.

Councillor McFlynn commended Ms Fearon on her detailed presentation and was magnificent to see over 200,000 students coming under the NUS-USI umbrella and passed on her congratulations on the group's sterling work. She said that the SDLP would continue to support the students and all young people and the SDLP's spokesperson Daniel McCrossan along with Sinn Féin had been fighting the fight with the Economy Minister to try and get financial help for students. She said that she was aware of a lot of students being affected mentally as they cannot get into the social aspect and cannot experience the true Uni life and asked Ms Fearon and her team to continue on the fight and keep getting communications out in the public domain.

The Chair thanked Ms Fearon for attending meeting tonight and asked her to keep up the good work at which she left the meeting at 7.26 pm.

Matters for Decision

PR047/21 Revised Equality Scheme, Draft Disability Action Plan (2021-2026) and Equality Action Plan (2021-2026)

The Head of Democratic Services presented previously circulated report to make members aware of the outcome of the public consultation held on Mid Ulster District Council Revised Equality Scheme, Draft Disability Action Plan (2021-2026) and Equality Action Plan (2021-2026).

Councillor Doris said that she would be happy to propose the report and added that at the last meeting of the Coalisland Town Centre Forum a representative from the Disability Forum commended the Council on tying the Forum in from the start of the project, which was good on the part of the Council.

Proposed by Councillor Doris
Seconded by Councillor McFlynn and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council that the feedback from respondents be incorporated into the Scheme and associated action plans.

PR048/21 Improvement Objectives 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 (Proposed) and Consultation

The Head of Democratic Services presented previously circulated report to consider the proposed objectives for 2021/22 and 2022/23 as set in compliance with the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 (the Act) and subsequent guidance as issued by the Department for Communities (LG21/2016 onwards) and establish timelines for a public consultation exercise relating to the proposed improvement objectives.

Proposed by Councillor Molloy
Seconded by Councillor McLean and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve the four draft improvement objectives for 2021/22 and 2022/23 and the initiation of consultation together with associated timeline.

PR049/21 Revised Code of Conduct for Local Government

The Director of Organisational Development presented previously circulated report and sought approval of adoption of a Revised Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees for Mid Ulster District Council as approved by the Local Government Staff Commission at its meeting on 19 January 2021.

Proposed by Councillor S McPeake
Seconded by Councillor S McGuigan and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to adopt the Revised Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees for Mid Ulster District Council from 1 April 2021.

PR050/20 Revision of Data Protection Policy

The Head of ICT presented previously circulated report and sought approval for a Revised Protection Policy (Appendix 1).

Proposed by Councillor McKinney
Seconded by Councillor McFlynn and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve the adoption and revision of the updated Data Protection Policy version 2.0.

PR051/20 Video Conferencing Options for Council and Committee Meetings

The Head of ICT presented previously circulated report to advise members of the software options for Video Conferencing facilities for Council and Committee meetings remotely attending meetings.

Options being:

- Microsoft Teams
- Cisco WebEx
- Zoom

Councillor Molloy stated that even with fibre to his premises he still had issues with Webex but was aware of whatever platforms there were that this could be the case regardless. In terms of committee meetings there may be an anticipation that members may be able to actually conduct business in person from the Chamber in that not so distant future, but in terms of committee and confidential business enquired if these could be facilitated within the options mentioned tonight as well as broadcasting.

The Head of ICT advised that security features for the paid for options for Zoom and Teams facilitate sufficient controls for the Council to control the security of the Zoom and Teams meetings.

Councillor McLean advised that he experienced both and used both every day and was really much of a muchness as far as he was concerned due to the functionalities. He said that it was down to what worked best for everyone in trying to be as wide catching as possible and whichever facility works better for the majority of Council should be the preferred option. He suggested trialing the options for a month to see what the feedback and people's experiences was as this was what was going to test the water.

Councillor McFlynn advised that she was the current Chair of PCSP and all the meetings were carried out by Microsoft Team and although she found it difficult to operate at the start, she said that it now works well and agreed with the suggestion of seeing which facility works the best.

Councillor McKinney said that he was content with Webex as the system had worked fairly well for the 40 Councillors. He did agree however that there had been some issues at the beginning but had worked relatively well these last few months and felt that issues may relate to members bandwidth and didn't matter how good a system was unless you had good broadband. He stated that if something was working relatively well, why change it.

The Chair concurred with Councillor McKinney and said there could be problems with any platform if there was inadequate broadband. He said that he would be concerned as it may cause some confusion but would not be against trialing other methods if this could be accommodated.

The Head of ICT agreed that this could be trailed and would be happy to take away and implement and report back on feedback received.

Councillor Gildernew said that he would be happy to propose trailing Zoom as a preferred option as he had nothing but problems with Webex. He stated that he had been on zoom meeting with 88 participants with no issues and was not all down to broadband issues.

Proposed by Councillor Gildernew
Seconded by Councillor Molloy and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to proceed with Zoom trial as a preferred approach.

PR052/21 Member Services

No issues.

Matters for Information

PR053/21 Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on 4 February 2021

Members noted Policy and Resources Committee Minutes of Meeting held on 4 February 2021.

PR054/21 Processing and Transacting Confidential Business

Members noted report on Processing and Transacting Confidential Business.

PR055/21 NILGA Draft Response – Programme for Government

Members noted copy of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) draft response to the Northern Ireland Executive's consultation on a Draft Outcomes Framework for the forthcoming Programme for Government.

PR056/21 Updated Branding Guidelines (continued)

Members noted report on Updated Branding Guidelines.

Live broadcast ended at 7.50 pm.

Local Government (NI) Act 2014 – Confidential Business

Proposed by Councillor S McGuigan
Seconded by Councillor McFlynn 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 Member consider items PR057/21 to PR066/21.

Matters for Decision

PR057/21 Full Fibre Project Update
PR058/21 ICT Software Contract Extensions March 2021
PR059/21 Land Acquisitions and Disposals
PR060/21 Cookstown Town Centre

Matters for Information

PR061/21 Confidential Minutes of Policy & Resources Committee
Meeting held on 4 February 2021
PR062/21 Staff Matters for Information
PR063/21 Prudential Code for Capital Finance Indicators and
Authorised & Operational Borrowing Limits
PR064/21 Insurance Arrangements for 2021/22
PR065/21 Financial Report for 10 Months ended 31 January 2021
PR066/21 Contracts and DAC

PR067/21 Duration of Meeting

The meeting commenced at 7 pm and concluded at 8.40 pm.

Chair _____

Date _____