

Minutes of Meeting of Policy and Resources Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Tuesday 13 June 2023 in the Council Offices, Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt and by Virtual Means

Members Present

Councillor Corry, Chair

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

Officers in Attendance

Mr McCreesh, Chief Executive**
Mrs Canavan, Strategic Director of Organisation Development, Strategy and Performance (SD: ODSP)
Mrs Dyson, Head of Human Resources (HoHR)**
Mr McGuckin, Head of Strategic Services and Engagement (HoSS&E)
Ms McNally, Assistant Director of Corporate Service and Finance (AD: CS&F)**
Mr Moffett, Assistant Director of Organisation Development, Strategy and Performance (AD: ODSP)**
Mr O'Hagan, Head of ICT (HoICT)
Mr Tohill, Strategic Director of Corporate Service and Finance (SD: CS&F)
Miss Thompson, Committee and Member Services Officer

* Denotes members present in remote attendance

** Denotes Officers present by remote means

*** Denotes others present by remote means

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm

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

PR089/23 Notice of Recording

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

PR090/23 Apologies

Councillor Burton.

PR091/23 Declarations of Interest

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

PR092/23 Chairs Business

The Chair, Councillor Corry requested that agenda item 21 – 2023-24 Rate Support Grant Update be moved into open business.

Proposed by Councillor S McPeake
Seconded by Councillor Bell and

Resolved That agenda item 21 – 2023-24 Rate Support Grant Update be moved into open business.

Matters for Decision

PR093/23 Requests to Illuminate Council Properties

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

- Global Motor Neurone Disease Awareness Day
- CDH UK: Awareness Day
- DoH: National Health 75th Anniversary
- ASCERT NI: 25th Anniversary

Proposed by Councillor McLean
Seconded by Councillor Brown and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to illuminate the three designated Council properties as follows –

- Global Motor Neurone Awareness Day, 22 June 2023 – Colour Blue
- CDH UK: Awareness Day, 28 June 2023 – Colour Pink and Blue
- DoH: National Health 75th Anniversary, 5 July 2023 – Colour Blue
- ASCERT NI 25th Anniversary, 20 November 2023 – Colour Blue

PR094/23 Member Services

None.

Matters for Information

PR095/23 Minutes of Policy & Resources Committee held on 6 April 2023

Members noted Minutes of Policy & Resources Committee held on 6 April 2023.

PR096/23 Somme Association: 2023-2024 Membership Subscription

Members noted previously circulated report which outlined correspondence received from the Somme Association on annual membership contributions payable for period 2023-2024.

PR097/23 Updated Policy on Consultation

Members noted previously circulated report which advised on the updated policy on Consultation.

PR098/23 Working Groups of Committees: Update

Members noted previously circulated report which outlined the Working Groups established by committees of Council.

PR099/23 Performance Improvement Plan and Consultation Update

Members noted previously circulated report which provided updated on the revised timeframe for publication of Council's Performance Improvement Plan (PIP plan) 2023/24 to 2024/25 as per Department for Communities (DfC) guidance, and the outcome of the consultation undertaken on the Council's proposed improvement objectives 2023 – 2024.

PR100/23 2023-24 Rate Support Grant Update

The Strategic Director of Corporate Services and Finance (SD: CS&F) presented previously circulated report which provided update in relation to the amount of Rate Support Grant that may be received for the financial year 2023/24.

Councillor McLernon stated she had some concerns which she felt Council should reflect in the consultation response regarding the serious implications of the proposed budget. The Councillor raised the following issues –

- The cuts to Discretionary Support Fund, will impact on people with the lowest incomes and those most impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.
- The missed opportunity to lift many individuals and families out of poverty and to address a number of inequalities within society.
- The ending of the European Social Funding as a result of Brexit, and without a replacement.
- That the cuts to arm's length bodies budgets, given the breadth of work under the remit of DfC. Many have already streamlined their services due to austerity measures - this proposal could therefore result in cuts to services, loss of employment, and potentially a loss of expertise and knowledge that could take many years to regain.
- The impact that the cuts to the Rates Support Grant, which was established to support more financially constrained councils, protecting rate payers from unfair rates hikes;

- The reduction in funding to the Supporting People Fund which provides essential supports and services to some of the most vulnerable in the community.
- Concerns at the reduction in social housing units from 2000 to 1400 at a time when more, not less, social housing is needed;
- The potential pausing of the Affordable Warmth Scheme, which is the Executive's main intervention to support people on a low income who rent their home from a private landlord and who are most at risk of fuel poverty;
- The reduction in the number of Disabled Facilities Grants available which could see many families having to wait years before they can get the physical adaptations needed to care for their loved ones at home.

Councillor McLernon stated she believed that, if implemented, this budget would adversely impact individuals and families across all the Section 75 groups. The Councillor stated that the people who are in need of the most support are to be the collateral damage as a result of an unadulterated Tory budget facilitated by the absence of an Executive. In addition, Councillor McLernon stated that the Rural Needs Act 2016 places a responsibility on all public authorities to give due regard to the social and economic needs of rural people and that it is essential that all budgetary proposals are developed within the statutory obligations placed upon public authorities through this Rural Needs Act. Councillor McLernon felt it is imperative that Council reflects the issues raised above in their consultation response.

The SD: CS&F stated he was more than happy to submit a supplementary response. The SD: CS&F stated that some of the points raised were included in the response already submitted but had not been made in as much depth and that he was comfortable with adding a supplementary response.

Councillor Bell proposed that a supplementary response be submitted.

Councillor Molloy seconded Councillor Bell's proposal.

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to submit a supplementary response to the Department for Communities consultation on 2023-24 budget allocation addressing the points outlined.

Councillor Wilson asked if the proposed cuts go ahead as outlined how much would be added to the rates before taking into consideration any other budget pressures. The Councillor stated that the majority of Council voted through the highest rates rise of any Council so there was a need to be careful.

The SD: CS&F stated that officers are still hopeful that prior to the end of this financial year additional funding will be made available so that Council won't feel the impact as extremely as it might based on where we are now. The SD: CS&F stated that if the Grant is cut, every £400k (approx.) of a cut is approximately 1% on the rate. The SD: CS&F stated that Council has budgeted to receive £2.5 million Rate Support Grant and if this is reduced to the proposed £800k then there is the potential for a 4% pressure on the rates. The SD: CS&F advised that if this should be the case then officers would bring forward proposals for consideration which may include

looking at reserves to allow time to address the situation. The SD: CS&F stated that having had informal discussions with DfC officials there is still some hope that additional funding may become available and whilst not the way to run an organisation was the best he could offer at the moment.

Councillor Molloy stated he welcomed the item being taken out of confidential business tonight as the conversations around rates setting and the potential impacts needs to be in the open.

Councillor McLean stated that the potential cuts needed to be kept in context and that there were some issues raised tonight that he had difficulty with. The Councillor referred to comments regarding Tory austerity and cuts and stated that whilst Sinn Féin does not support Britishness they are happy to take the money and then criticise the cuts. Councillor McLean stated that it was also wrong to say that the cuts were due to the Assembly not running. The Councillor stated that he felt the consultation response is accurate and that cuts will affect rate payers however he did not feel that some of the comments made tonight were beneficial. Councillor McLean stated that he would like the response to the consultation to be made as forcibly as possible in order to retain funding.

Councillor McFlynn stated that Members were aware that cuts were coming but did not know the extent which if made, will have an obvious effect on ratepayers and the most vulnerable. The Councillor stated that any cuts will affect the rates going forward but she knew that officers will work hard in trying to reduce cuts as much as possible.

The Chair, Councillor Corry stated that it will be the most vulnerable who will be impacted by cuts and reiterated that the comments raised tonight should be submitted as a supplementary response.

Live broadcast ended at 7.20 pm.

Local Government (NI) Act 2014 - Confidential Business

Proposed by Councillor Molloy
Seconded by Councillor S McPeake and

Resolved In accordance with Section 42, Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 that Members of the public be asked to withdraw from the meeting whilst Members consider items PR101/23 to PR109/23

Matters for Decision

PR101/23 Staffing Matters for Decision
PR102/23 Scheme of Allowances Update
PR103/23 Closure of dormant bank accounts with AIB
PR104/23 Financial Update – Year Ended 31 March 2023

Matters for Information

- PR105/23 Confidential Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on 6 April 2023
- PR106/23 Staff Matters for Information
- PR107/23 Equality
- PR108/23 Contracts and DAC Registers – Update
- PR109/23 Treasury Management - Update

PR110/23 Duration of Meeting

The meeting was called for 7.00 pm and ended at 7.42 pm.

Chair _____

Date _____

Annex A – Introductory Remarks from the Chairperson

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

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 roll call of all other Members in attendance.