

Minutes of Meeting of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 25 February 2021 in the Council Offices, Circular Road, Dungannon and by virtual means

Chair Councillor Mallaghan

Members Present Councillors Ashton*, Bell*, Black*, Brown*, Buchanan*, Burton, Clarke*, Colvin*, Corry*, Cuddy*, Cuthbertson*, Doris*, Elattar*, Forde*, Gildernew*, Glasgow*, Graham, Hughes*, Kearney*, Kerr*, N McAleer*, S McAleer*, McFlynn*, B McGuigan*, S McGuigan*, McKinney*, McLean*, McNamee*, D McPeake*, S McPeake*, Milne*, Molloy*, Monteith*, Mullen*, Oneill*, Quinn, Robinson*, Totten* and Wilson*

Officers in Attendance Mr McCreesh, Chief Executive
Ms Canavan**, Director of Organisational Development
Ms Campbell**, Director of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation
Mr Cassells**, Director of Environment & Property
Mr Kelso**, Director of Public Health & Infrastructure
Ms Mezza**, Head of Marketing and Communications
Mr Moffett, Head of Democratic Services
Mr Tohill**, Director of Finance
Miss Thompson, Democratic Services Officer

* Denotes Members present in remote attendance

** Denotes Officers present by remote means

The meeting commenced at 7 pm

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan 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.

C023/21 Apologies

None.

C024/21 Declarations of Interest

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

C025/21 Chair's Business

Councillor Cuddy stated he wanted to take this opportunity to thank the late Bob Mulligan for his work as an Ulster Unionist Councillor representing the Clogher Valley

for 26 years and stated that the last 5 years of Bob's councillor career was in Mid Ulster District Council.

Councillor Cuddy stated that Bob was a great community activist, that he was an elder of Glenhoy Presbyterian Church, a member of the Loyal Orders, a member of Glengeeragh Pipe Band and was a steady voice for the Clogher Valley. Councillor Cuddy stated that Bob worked for the Department of Agriculture and the Livestock and Meat Commission for many years, that he was a gentleman and true friend and expressed sincere sympathy from the Ulster Unionist group on Mid Ulster District Council to his wife Eleanor, his sons and daughters, grandchildren and wider family circle.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated he had received a letter today from David Mulligan which expressed thanks to all from within Council who have taken the time over the past two weeks to offer support on the recent passing of Bob. The letter stated that Bob was a man who, in addition to supporting his family, gave commitment and dedication to everything he undertook in representing the Clogher Valley community for 26 years and the generous words that have been in the press have been a support during this time. The letter also thanked those that kept in contact during recent months regarding Bob's health and that those thoughts and prayers were greatly appreciated at that time.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated he wanted to pass on his own condolences to the Mulligan family and that Bob's contribution at meetings was always very worthwhile. He stated he had good memories of Bob and particularly his fondness of the Clogher Valley area and that he had spent some time at the Round Lake in Fivemiletown today to see the improvement works going on there and that he felt Bob would also have been proud to see these works coming together.

Councillor Burton stated that on behalf of the DUP she would also like to express deepest sympathies to the Mulligan family. Councillor Burton stated that when she was first elected in 2005 Bob made her feel very welcome and always treated her with the greatest respect, that he was a faithful and dedicated servant for the Clogher Valley area and that you could always depend on Bob for his support when pushing forward projects for the Clogher Valley. Councillor Burton stated that Bob had no difficulty in speaking his mind and could challenge officers in a respectful way and that his passing was a sad time for everyone.

Councillor Quinn, on behalf of the SDLP grouping, extended sympathies to Bob's wife Eleanor and his family. Councillor Quinn stated he did not know Bob as well as others knew him but that he had served with him on Committees and was struck by how dedicated he was to the Clogher Valley and its people. The Councillor stated that Bob had been elected for 26 years which was testament to what the Clogher Valley people thought of him and that he will be a big miss to the community and will be fondly remembered. The Councillor also extended sympathies to the Ulster Unionist Party as he stated it was not easy losing a party member.

Councillor McLean stated that Councillor Burton had spoken on behalf of the DUP and that he concurred with all the sentiments made tonight.

Councillor S McAleer also extended sympathies to Bob's wife and children and that when she was first elected in 2014 Bob was very supportive. Councillor McAleer stated that her predecessor Anthony McGonnell and Bob were friendly and that Anthony also had great words on Bob. Councillor McAleer stated he was a great support on cross community issues in Clogher Valley, that he was a gentleman and it was very sad that he had passed away.

Councillor Robinson stated he and Bob had the privilege of serving their neighbours together on Council. Councillor Robinson stated that in all his dealings with Bob he was always a gentleman, who believed in hard work and dedication to any role he took on. The Councillor stated that Bob was a good neighbour and friend who will be missed and for those who knew him he leaves behind a legacy not just of memories but also the fruits of his labours. Councillor Robinson extended his sympathies to Bob's wife Eleanor and his children Gail, David, Andrew and Lesley and the wider Mulligan family and that they could be assured of his prayers in the days ahead.

Councillor S McGuigan stated that on behalf of himself personally and the Sein Féin Party he wanted to extend deepest condolences to the Mulligan family. Councillor McGuigan stated he knew Bob prior to being a Councillor himself from his attendance at community events and that Bob was always plain spoken which is something he appreciated.

Councillor Monteith stated he concurred with the comments already made, that Bob was a dedicated worker on behalf of his community and that he had had plenty of good debates with him. Councillor Monteith stated that whilst Bob was a straight talker he was always respectful of other peoples opinion and extended his sympathies to the Mulligan family and everyone who knew him.

Councillor Graham stated he considered Bob a family friend, that he was someone to look up to and an example to everybody. Councillor Graham extended her sympathies to Eleanor and the rest of the Mulligan family and stated that with Bob being her predecessor on Council she felt she will never be able to fill his shoes.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated that the COVID-19 death toll in Ireland had now surpassed 6,200 people and he wanted to extend condolences on behalf of the Council to every family who has suffered from this terrible health emergency. He stated he was hopeful that with the virus numbers coming down together with the roll out of the vaccine that there is some light at the end of the tunnel but that he would urge citizens across Mid Ulster and Ireland to do everything they can to adhere to health messages and help stop the spread of the virus. He also stated it was concerning to see the amount of misinformation in the public arena. The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated that it was now one year since Covid had reached our shores and that the 19 March 2021 would mark one year since the first person had died from the virus here and that he would propose that Council buildings be lit up on

19 March 2021 in memory of those who have lost their lives to Covid in the last 12 months.

Councillor Quinn seconded the Chair's proposal.

Resolved That Council buildings be lit up on 19 March 2021 in memory of those who have lost their lives to Covid.

Councillor N McAleer stated he wanted to raise the issue of lack of financial support for the fishing industry on Lough Neagh despite numerous commitments from DAERA to open such a scheme. Councillor McAleer stated that schemes have been rolled out in other areas such as sea fishers and it was right that this happens but that the fishing industry on Lough Neagh seems to have been left behind. Councillor McAleer stated that people had been in contact with him on this issue and they wanted DAERA to put support in place urgently so they can plan ahead. Councillor N McAleer proposed that Council write to the DAERA Minister on this issue and to seek clarification on when a scheme will open.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan seconded Councillor N McAleer's proposal.

Resolved To write to the DAERA Minister on the issue of lack of financial support for the fishing industry on Lough Neagh and seeking clarification on when a scheme will open.

Councillor Cuthbertson referred to the arson attack on the derelict building on the Old Eglish Road, Dungannon last weekend and stated that regrettably this is not the first building in the Dungannon area to be set alight and that there had been a number of other fires in derelict buildings last autumn. The Councillor stated that something needed to be done before someone is killed or seriously injured and asked if there is a role for Council in securing these type of properties where an owner cannot be identified and seek recoup of costs at a later stage.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated he was also aware of an arson attack on Georges Street in Dungannon in recent days as well.

The Director of Public Health and Infrastructure advised that he was aware of the issues regarding the derelict building on Old Eglish Road and that officers in Environmental Health were investigating the matter to follow up with the property owners. The Director advised there had been other issues brought to the attention of officers regarding derelict structures and there is a piece of work to be done in relation to these.

Councillor O'Neill spoke in relation to the loss of broadband connection in the Brackaville, Coalisland, Clonoe and Derrylaughan areas last week. The Councillor stated that this is happening too often in these areas and that he was inundated by calls from parents whose children had been cut off from online classes and that homework had also been affected. Councillor O'Neill stated that when BT were contacted a number of different reasons were given as to what the problem was and

he proposed that Council write to BT and other network providers to ask what happened in that area last week. The Councillor also requested that this matter be brought to the attention of Council's Broadband Working Group.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated that good internet access has never been more important.

Councillor Doris seconded Councillor O'Neill's proposal.

Resolved To write to BT and other network providers in relation to loss of broadband connection in Brackaville, Coalisland, Clonoe and Derrylaughan areas last week. This matter to also be raised at next meeting of Broadband Working Group.

Councillor Ashton stated that as Chair of the Broadband Working Group she would raise the issue with officers for their attention.

Councillor Doris referred to the announcement of regional hubs to be introduced to town centres and it was disappointing that there was nowhere within Mid Ulster included on the list. The Councillor stated it was a good opportunity for the revival of town centres across Mid Ulster and asked if there was a reason why nowhere in Mid Ulster had been included.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated that when he saw the list he had asked the Chief Executive if any sites had been identified within Mid Ulster and requested that a site search be undertaken to see what property was available to prepare a paper for the Department of Finance.

The Chief Executive stated that given the strategic geographical position of Mid Ulster he believed this Council area would have been an ideal location. The Chief Executive advised that officers will carry out an analysis of public space across Mid Ulster and the strongest case possible will be submitted for consideration.

Councillor Doris stated she was baffled as to why the Department for Infrastructure Minister failed to submit an application for funding for roads issues. The Councillor stated that she is contacted on a daily basis in relation to roads issues and she was sure all Councillors have to deal with similar issues. Councillor Doris proposed that Council write to the Department for Infrastructure Minister to ask why no application for funding had been made when it is really needed.

Councillor McNamee seconded Councillor Doris's proposal and stated that over the last 6 months he has never seen as many photographs etc of cars being damaged by potholes across Mid Ulster. The Councillor stated he had been contacted by a resident yesterday in relation to a pothole and that on looking at it himself he stated it was more like a sink hole. The Councillor stated that when photographs of this were forwarded to DfI Roads they came out right away to fill the hole temporarily. Councillor McNamee stated that DfI Roads advised they would conduct further investigations and had asked if there were utilities in the area and he referred to

utilities companies going into areas, digging them up and then leaving them like patchwork quilts and that this needs to be addressed.

Councillor Quinn agreed that the roads in the area are in a state but that there had been some good news recently in relation £85,000 resurfacing for Ardboe and £200,000 resurfacing for Dungannon to Coalisland Road. The Councillor stated that the Minister for Infrastructure did ask for £11million from the Finance Minister for resurfacing projects in June 2020 and was not allocated anything and that the Minister has continued to stress the need to invest in road maintenance and for additional funding to be made available in 2021/22. Councillor Quinn stated that the outcome of the budget process will then determine the level of funding available to the Department from which will be determined the roads maintenance budget. Councillor Quinn also referred to Covid and the amount of money the Minister has wanted to spend on roads has been affected and that staff have been furloughed. The Councillor stated that Council seems to be writing to the Minister for Infrastructure every month and some may say this is politically charged and that Council should also be writing to the Minister for Finance stating that he have a meeting with the Minister for Infrastructure to discuss funding allocation for that department.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated that his understanding that Councillor Doris's comment was in relation to why no bid was made for funding at the last monitoring round.

Councillor Burton stated that this was not a political issue and a lot of Councillors around the table represent rural areas. The Councillor stated that most days she is contacted by constituents in relation to roads issues and referred to ongoing problems on the Rehaghy Road and that people in rural areas pay the same rates and have the same pressures as those living in urban areas. Councillor Burton also referred to rural industries which bring heavy goods vehicles onto rural roads and that these roads are as important and should be kept to a good standard. Councillor Burton advised she was contacted following heavy rain last week by a constituent whose home was flooded last year and was distressed that this was going to happen again by water running off from another section of the Rehaghy Road. The Councillor stated she was aware of money which was supposed to be ring fenced solely for rural infrastructure and that she had asked NILGA to investigate this. Councillor Burton stated that with the amount of cars and homes being damaged Council needed to push for immediate help for Mid Ulster.

Councillor Wilson stated that the majority of potholes in the towns were being caused by utility operators who don't return roads and footpaths to a good standard. The Councillor felt that pressure should be put on the utilities by the Minister for Infrastructure to ensure that when works are carried out that roads/footpaths are returned to their original state.

Councillor Kerr also reflected that the work carried out to roads by utilities should be of the same standard as DfI Roads and referred to situation last year were damage

was caused to cars due to inadequate reinstatement of road following work by utilities.

Councillor McLean stated that the concerns raised were genuine and not political and were being encountered on a daily basis. Councillor McLean stated that the MLAs in Mid Ulster were collectively concerned regarding the amount of money given back by the Department for Infrastructure following which no application was made for funding for the last monetary round and that Council needs to make representation on this. Councillor McLean also reflected that during Covid roads construction and maintenance was considered to be construction and was allowed to continue throughout the pandemic. The Councillor felt that there also needed to be some work done on holding utilities to account for a longer period of time as their work does not seem to last.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan said he had been advised by DfI that the normal inspection procedure was that A class roads were inspected monthly, B class roads every 2 months and other roads every 4 months. This policy had however been changed to inspections being on a 1, 3 and 6 month cycle respectively unless there is a pot hole or defect causing danger.

The Chair felt that the policy should revert back to the 1-2-4 monthly model as urgently as possible and referred to previous requests of Council to meet with the Minister for Infrastructure. The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan asked if Councillor Doris would be content to amend her proposal to include seeking a meeting with the Minister for Infrastructure to discuss infrastructure projects within the Mid Ulster area and that policy on inspection of roads be reinstated to the 1-2-4 monthly model.

Councillor Doris stated she would be content with the additions to the proposal and reflected on the comments of Councillor Quinn at the start of the conversation and stated it was not about party politics but that these issues were affecting people locally on a daily basis.

Resolved To write to the Minister for Infrastructure:

- To ask why no bid for funding was made at the last monitoring round for roads maintenance
- To seek a meeting with the Minister to discuss infrastructure projects within Mid Ulster including maintenance of roadways after works by utilities
- To ask that policy in relation to inspection of roads reverts back to the 1-2-4 monthly model

Councillor Corry thanked the Raise Your Voice team on providing two training sessions to Councillors and officers on topics regarding sexual harassment. The Councillor stated that the training was very informative and highlighted that this type of behaviour is unacceptable and should be called out. Councillor Corry thanked the Members who attended the training and stated there had been a lot of engagement and participation and also thanked the Member Support Officer who arranged the

training and other officers who attended. The Councillor stated that both men and women can experience sexual harassment however most of this behaviour is against women and that she was disgusted to learn of threats of sexual violence made to Martina Anderson in the last week which has been condemned. Councillor Corry also referred to death threats made to some female journalists in the past weeks and that she was also aware of friends and colleagues to have experienced sexual harassment. Councillor Corry urged anyone who sees or hears this type of behaviour to stand up to it and call it out wherever it happens and that she would encourage anyone who missed out on the training to contact Raise Your Voice and join in with another online session.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated he had attended the first session and had found it very useful and worthwhile.

Councillor Quinn referred to aid sent to a village on the West Bank by the Irish government which was destroyed by Israeli forces. The Councillor stated that for any humanitarian aid to be destroyed and replacement aid to be refused entry was disgusting and proposed that a letter be sent to the Irish Government asking that this matter be raised at the UN to ensure that aid is resent.

Councillor Quinn also spoke in relation to advertisement for house rental in Moygashel in which the advertisement stated that 'no foreign nationals need apply'. The Councillor stated he had been sent the advertisement by someone who had viewed it and was married to a Lithuanian national and was disgusted over reading it. Councillor Quinn stated that there was no room for discrimination in this day and age and referred to the number of foreign nationals who have worked tirelessly in the health service during the pandemic and that they should not be made to feel unwelcome, particularly in this area where there are communities living from across the world. Councillor Quinn proposed that the Good Relations team within Council pick this matter up and engage with those from a different communities to make sure they know they are welcome in Mid Ulster and that racism has to be opposed at every opportunity.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated that he agreed with the sentiments of Councillor Quinn and that this Council has been good at reaching out to communities and making them feel welcome although this is more difficult with current restrictions. The Chair stated that when officers can get back on the ground they will continue to engage with communities.

Resolved To write to the Irish Government in relation to aid bound for the West Bank being destroyed and asking that this matter be raised at the UN to ensure that replacement aid can be sent.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan referred to the ongoing DEA group meetings with community representatives in relation to future planning. The Chair stated that from last night's meeting he learned that there was a lot of respect for Council officers within the community and that he found this very complimentary. He stated that the meetings were a good initiative and that there was more work to be done in this area.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan also referred to some success in terms of Council's digital accessibility and that after new web accessibility legislation came into effect last September, there has been a considerable amount of work undertaken to ensure that the Council's site improved its ranking. He advised that in a review earlier this month Council's website ranked in 1st place among all 11 Councils here and also ranked 48th out of all councils across England, Scotland and Wales. The Chair stated this was an achievement, particularly given that this Council does not have a dedicated technical web team unlike many other Councils.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated he had received some concerns regarding food banks in the Council area and proposed that a workshop be held on this issue to discuss what the role of a food bank is and how people can access a food bank etc. The Chair stated he felt he did not feel he had enough knowledge on how food banks work and he felt it would be beneficial for all Members to get a better understanding.

Councillor Graham seconded the Chair's proposal.

Resolved That a workshop be arranged in relation to food banks – their role and how people can access them etc.

Councillor Kearney referred to the loss of ERASMUS funding for students as a result of exit from EU. The Councillor stated that the ERASMUS scheme was launched in 1987 allowing students and teachers to spend some time in another EU country and during those year's some 9 million have benefitted. Last year, 649 students from Northern Ireland availed of the programme and from 2014-2018 57 schools from Northern Ireland benefitted from the Scheme, with St Patrick's College in Maghera joining with six other schools across Europe in a three year programme which was a tremendous success. Councillor Kearney stated that on realising the impact of losing such an educational feature the Irish Government has stepped in and offered to continue to fund this flagship exchange programme to Northern Ireland students whether they have an Irish passport or a British one. The Councillor stated that this is a permanent commitment at an annual cost of €2 million and highlighted that the Irish Government sees this as an investment, not a cost. Councillor Kearney stated that the UK government are currently designing a programme which will offer an outward study and will be named the Turing Scheme. Councillor Kearney proposed that a letter be written to Minister Harris thanking him for the Irish government's intervention and ongoing support particularly for the young people of Mid Ulster.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan seconded Councillor Kearney's proposal.

Resolved To write to Minister Harris in relation to the intervention and ongoing support of the Irish Government for the ERASMUS Scheme to students across Ireland and particularly Mid Ulster.

Matters for Decision

C026/21 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” at the Council Meeting held on Thursday 28 January 2021

Councillor Cuthbertson referred to item *C004/21 – Council Minutes* with regard to correspondence with the Department of Finance in relation to rates relief and that there still did not seem to be a response. The Councillor stated that the issues were still there for businesses and that he had been made aware that LPS were still awaiting instruction in relation to the localised business restriction grant and whether payments will be made in March. Councillor Cuthbertson stated that the Minister seemed to have little respect for Council given that he cannot acknowledge correspondence on these pressing issues and proposed that Council write again for a third time expressing disappointment that the Minister of Finance had not responded.

Councillor Buchanan seconded Councillor Cuthbertson's proposal.

Resolved That Council write to the Minister of Finance expressing disappointment that previous correspondence has not been acknowledged and to again seek clarification in relation to rates relief for businesses.

Proposed by Councillor Doris
Seconded by Councillor B McGuigan and

Resolved That the Minutes of the Council held on Thursday 28 January 2021 (C001/21 – C016/21 and C022/21) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated, were considered and adopted.

Councillor Monteith stated that whilst the grant scheme has been helpful those that have an appeal are having difficulty getting answers and would reiterate that there needs to be a line of communication within the Department for the Economy and Department of Finance for Council officers at least so that they can then go on to help people.

Councillor Monteith referred to item *C003/21 – Chair's Business* with regard to the Workhouse in Dungannon and the potential of it being involved in the Mother and Baby Investigations. The Councillor stated that with the investigation there will be an issue regarding the records for the Workhouses and that these records are under a 100 year seal, this is because those who were in the Workhouses were classed as patients under the Department of Health and therefore their records are classed as medical records and put under this seal. The Councillor stated this will be a vital issue going forward and needs to be challenged in order to fully investigate what went on in the various institutions. Councillor Monteith also thanked officers for their ongoing work in relation to the marking of the unmarked graves at the Workhouse site at South Tyrone Hospital. Councillor Monteith proposed that officers investigate the seal issue on behalf of those campaigning as this is a vital issue.

Councillor Kerr seconded Councillor Monteith's proposal.

Resolved To investigate the issue of the 100yr seal on Workhouse records as part of the Mother and Baby investigations

Councillor Elattar referred to item *C012/21 – Consultations* in regard to the Draft Mental Health Strategy and people being signposted to smaller groups for help during the pandemic and are not receiving a proper referral. The Councillor stated that the point she was making was people are being signposted to smaller groups in rural areas from bigger groups which are receiving funding for providing help to these people and that the smaller groups are not receiving funding for such referrals.

C027/21 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” Planning Committee Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 2 February 2021

Councillor Cuthbertson referred to discussion on planning application LA09/2020/0695/F and stated that on the night he had proposed that a site meeting be held in relation to this application. The Councillor stated that the Chair did not deal with his proposal but asked that his proposal be included in the minutes.

Councillor S McPeake stated it was not his recollection that there had been agreement for a site meeting in relation to that application.

Councillor Cuthbertson stated he had not said that a site meeting was agreed but that he had proposed that a site meeting be held and that the Chair had not dealt with his proposal.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan asked if Councillor Cuthbertson had received a seconder for his proposal.

Councillor Cuthbertson stated that the Chair moved on and went straight to the vote on the recommendation.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated that unless a proposal has a seconder it cannot be moved and that it appeared in this case that the Chair of the Planning Committee made the correct decision to move to a vote to make a decision on the application.

Councillor Cuthbertson stated that the point he was raising tonight was that his proposal was not in the minutes.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan clarified that Councillor Cuthbertson wanted the minute amended to reflect that he had made a proposal for a site meeting on planning application LA09/2020/0695/F.

Proposed by Councillor Bell
Seconded by Councillor Brown and

Resolved That the Minutes of Planning Committee held on Tuesday 2 February 2021 (P016/21 – P021/21 and P027/21) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated, subject to the foregoing amendment, were considered and adopted.

C028/21 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” Policy and Resources Committee Minutes of Meeting held on Thursday 4 February 2021

Proposed by Councillor Molloy
Seconded by Councillor Quinn and

Resolved That the minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on Thursday 4 February 2021 (PR025/21 – PR033/21 and PR042/21) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated, were considered and adopted.

Councillor Burton referred to item *PR030/21 – Sperrins Sculpture Trail* and proposed that officers investigate placing a sculpture at Queen Aine’s grave at the top of Knockmany which she felt would add to the area.

Councillor Graham seconded Councillor Burton’s proposal.

Resolved That officers investigate placing a sculpture at Queen Aine’s grave at Knockmany.

C029/21 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” Environment Committee Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 9 February 2021

Proposed by Councillor McNamee
Seconded by Councillor B McGuigan and

Resolved That the Minutes of Environment Committee held on Tuesday 9 February 2021 (E032/21 – E048/21 and E059/21) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated, were considered and adopted.

Councillor Doris referred to item *E040/21 – Bus Shelters* in relation to Stewartstown bus shelter and referred to site meeting which took place before Christmas with DfI Roads at which it was proposed that tarmac finish would take place at the site for the bus shelter. Councillor Doris stated that she has since followed the matter up with Roads Service who responded to say because there was not support for the work to be done the money had been allocated elsewhere. Councillor Doris stated this was not the feeling of the people who met on site that day and would like officers to follow up on this issue.

Councillor Kerr stated he had spoken with Roads Service on this issue and that they plan to carry out the works in the next financial year.

Councillor Quinn stated he was aware of opposition from some traders and that although monies were committed these were then diverted. Councillor Quinn stated that a lot of residents want this work done as the path is dangerous.

Councillor Doris stated that the position essentially now was that a bus shelter was going to be installed only to have to be taken out for tarmac to be laid. The Councillor stated she had been contacted by multiple residents and business owners who would like to see the work done and proposed that officers follow this matter up with Roads.

Councillor Kerr stated that Roads have no issue with the bus shelter being installed and that the tarmac works would take place at a different location.

Resolved That officers follow up on issues regarding Stewartstown Bus Shelter.

C030/21 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” Development Committee Minutes of Meeting held on Thursday 11 February 2021

Councillor Quinn referred to item *D022/21 – Chair’s Business* and advised he had been contacted by a number of residents living on the Lisnastraine Road, Stewartstown with regard to an ambulance callout going to a wrong address. The Councillor stated this is a long road which is rural in parts and that he was not sure where responsibility lies with this issue – whether it is that the Ambulance Service do not have up to date maps or whether it is Council not naming roads correctly. Councillor Quinn proposed that officers meet with the Ambulance Service and Councillors in relation to this matter as he felt it is only a matter of time before someone could die due to an ambulance not reaching an address in time.

Councillor McFlynn stated she agreed with Councillor Quinn’s comments and stated the situation was not acceptable as she was aware of another family to have to go out to the road junction to direct the ambulance to their home.

Councillor McFlynn referred to item *D034/21 – Master Plans/Scoping Studies* and stated she was disappointed to see Iniscarn was not included. The Councillor stated she had been made aware that Council were undertaking a piece of work at Iniscarn and she would like to be kept up to date with what is happening there as it is a valuable resource and would not want it missed out.

Councillor McFlynn referred to item *D037/21 – Outdoor Recreation Strategy* and referred to Ballyronan Marina and a group of swimmers who use this location for swimming and stated that she was of the understanding that the legacy Council did not permit swimming at Ballyronan Marina. The Councillor also spoke in relation to a pipe which goes through the forest at Ballyronan which required attention due to a

leak. The Councillor stated she had requested that this matter be investigated and asked if this had happened yet.

The Director of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation stated she was not aware of the issue with the pipe at Ballyronan but would follow up on this and come back to the Councillor. In relation to Iniscarn, the Director advised that the reason why the scoping studies came forward for the other three forests is because Council does not have a Licence with the Forest Service for these and with Iniscarn it does. The Director advised that Council are working with Forest Service in relation to parking and other issues at Iniscarn and that a report will be brought forward when some progress has been made on these issues.

Councillor Wilson referred to the difficulty ambulance crews have in ascertaining house numbers along roads and that he had suggested previously the need for people to put their house numbers at the bottom of their lanes and that this will assist all emergency services and delivery drivers.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan requested that the council's Communications Team look at a campaign highlighting the need for visible house numbers in order to assist emergency services.

Councillor Molloy referred to item *D032/21 – Poverty Plan* and that he had stated that if Council do not deliver on addressed poverty and deprivation then Council has failed as a corporate body and was not a reflection on officers.

Councillor S McAleer agreed with the point raised by Councillor Wilson in relation to displaying house numbers.

Councillor Burton referred to item *D031/21 – Economic Development* and stated that she had spoken in relation to the lack of click and collect which was causing problems.

Councillor Burton referred to item *D022/21 – Chair's Business* and asked if there was an update in relation to the issues at Granville Industrial Estate.

The Chief Executive advised that the matter is progressing and that Members will be kept up to date on this issue.

Councillor Kerr seconded Councillor Quinn's proposal.

Resolved That a meeting be arranged with Ambulance Service in relation to issues navigating to addresses.

Councillor Kerr referred to item *D035/21 – Parks and Play* and asked that officers consider installing seats or picnic benches to facilitate parents at play park locations.

Councillor S McGuigan advised that himself and Colm Gildernew MLA and Michelle Gildernew MP had met with the Acting Chief Executive of NIEA last week in relation

to issues at Granville Industrial Estate. The Councillor advised that there was a commitment in relation to dealing with the businesses collectively and that notices will be delivered to each individual business at the same time. On this basis there was also a commitment to come back within a month in relation to the information NIEA have on file on the issues which will hopefully provide residents with some reassurance that environmental issues are being addressed.

Councillor Kearney referred to item *D038/21 – Lower Bann Blueway* and highlighted the significance of the Blueway Feasibility Study. The Councillor stated that the former Magherafelt District Council had developed phase 1 of the Blueway which has 89 fishing stands at Molloy's Fort and that Mid Ulster Council then developed a further 25 stands. Councillor Kearney also referred to the 25th European Coarse Angling Competition held there which generated tens of thousands of pounds to the local economy. The Councillor stated that the report sets out the intention to develop a Blueway along the Bann from Lough Neagh to Coleraine and that he was proud that this Council had taken a lead in this matter. Councillor Kearney felt that the area has much to offer in tourism potential and outdoor recreation for future staycations. Councillor Kearney invited the Chair to formally launch phase 2 of the Lower Bann Blueway in conjunction with Waterways Ireland when COVID restrictions are lifted and complimented officers on the work done to date.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated this is a significantly important piece of work and he would be happy to do something.

Councillor Monteith referred to item *D032/21 – Poverty Plan* and proposed that SMT take this document on board and set out how each service can mainstream some of the poverty work so as not to become a preserve of just Community Development, with a report coming back as to how SMT see the Plan being rolled out.

Councillor Monteith referred to item *D036/21 – Ballysaggart Lough* and referred to the recent wall and footpath collapse at this location. The Councillor stated he was aware that investigations were ongoing and proposed that a report be made available at the earliest opportunity as to what remedial action is needed as there is a lot of work to be done in this area.

Councillor Kerr seconded Councillor Monteith's proposals.

Resolved That a report be brought forward in relation to the roll out of the Poverty Plan through all Council departments.

Resolved That a report on remedial works needed at Ballysaggart Lough be made available at the earliest opportunity.

Proposed by Councillor Kerr
Seconded by Councillor Doris and

Resolved That the Minutes of Development Committee held on Thursday 11 February 2021 (D020/21 – D039/21 and D043/21) transacted in Open

Business having been printed and circulated, were considered and adopted.

C031/21 Requests for Civic Recognition

The Head of Democratic Services sought approval for the previously circulated report on civic recognition requests from Members, in line with the stated Council Policy, as detailed within the report at appendix A.

Proposed by Councillor Kerr
Seconded by Councillor Doris and

Resolved That approval be given to submitted requests for civic recognition as outlined in the report and be dealt with as previously resolved by April Council in that recipients receive a letter together with an award, where appropriate.

Matters for Information

C032/21 Correspondence

Members noted previously circulated report providing correspondence received for the attention of Council.

Councillor Cuthbertson stated he welcomed the correspondence from the NI Veterans Commissioner and proposed that the Commissioner's contact details be added to the Support Services page of the Council website.

Councillor Black seconded Councillor Cuthbertson's proposal.

Resolved That the contact details of the NI Veterans Commissioner be added to the Support Services page of the Council website.

Councillor Kerr referred to the correspondence received from Southern Health and Social Care Trust and stated he was disappointed with the response received. The Councillor stated he appreciated COVID had put extra pressures on the health service but that red flag appointments needed to be up and running again as lives were being put at risk and that he proposed that Council use its influence with the Health Trust to ensure that red flag appointments recommence.

Councillor Monteith seconded Councillor Kerr's proposal.

Resolved That Council lobby the Southern Health Trust in relation to restarting red flag appointments and access to urgent acute care.

Councillor Corry referred to correspondence from Department for Communities in relation to the Child Poverty Task Force and proposed that Council take part in the forthcoming focus sessions in this regard.

Councillor Doris referred to correspondence from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council in relation to a Motion it has carried in relation to Universal Credit payments. Councillor Doris proposed that Council write a letter of support in relation to the extension of the £20 top up scheme on Universal Credit which is due to end in March and that there was no guarantee that it would continue.

Councillor Bell referred to the correspondence from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council in relation to a Motion carried regarding a Nearly Zero Energy Building Code. He proposed that Council write to Newry, Mourne and Down District Council expressing this Council's support for the Motion.

Councillor B McGuigan seconded Councillor Bell's proposal.

Resolved To write to Newry, Mourne and Down District Council expressing this Council's support of the Motion in relation to Nearly Zero Energy Building Code.

Councillor Monteith seconded Councillor Doris's proposal and stated that Council should be pushing to make the increased payment permanent.

Resolved To write to the Prime Minister/Chancellor of the Exchequer outlining Council's support for an extension/making permanent of the existing top up to Universal Credit.

Councillor Quinn referred to correspondence from Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council in relation to a Motion it agreed regarding animal cruelty and the need for a register for those convicted of offences. The Councillor stated that this motion was similar to the one he put forward last year but felt that it was missing some fundamental parts and should include an all-Ireland and UK Act, however, he stated it was good to note that other Councils were taking these issues on board. Councillor Quinn encouraged all parties to support an Animal Cruelty Act.

Councillor Doris seconded Councillor Corry's proposal.

Resolved That Council take part in forthcoming focus session in relation to the Child Poverty Task Force.

C033/21 Consultations Notified to Mid Ulster District Council

Members considered the previously circulated report.

C034/21 Notice of Motion

Councillor McLean stated that no one needed to be reminded as to what Covid had done to towns and the hardship and stress which will follow on from the closure of shops. Councillor McLean stated he had chosen his words carefully for the motion and wanted to give some background – that Mid Ulster is the amalgamation of three Councils and the one shoe does not fit all scenarios with Dungannon being different from Cookstown and Cookstown being different from Magherafelt. Councillor McLean stated he was aware that the former Magherafelt Council proposed free car parking for its car parks and that this was met with robustness as all day parkers then took the prime parking locations. Councillor McLean stated that the former Dungannon Council also done something similar but also had to withdraw after being bombarded by traders and what was thought to have been beneficial was actually being counter productive.

Councillor McLean moved the undernoted motion -

“That this council as soon as practically possible enters into meaningful discussions with the traders of the MUDC area, to agree and implement suitable reduced car parking charges as soon as the Covid restrictions are lifted, whereby re-engaging and encouraging footfall to our local towns and in so doing assisting to sustain our business’s, shops & restaurants etc.”

Councillor McLean stated that the reason he put the motion forward was because there is a piece of work which needs to be done and after this Council officers can come back to Council with some recommendations and at that stage Members will know what the impact is and whether to lobby departments or other agencies to offset the costs of whatever reductions are agreed to.

Councillor Brown seconded the motion and stated that as Covid numbers continue to come down town centres will hopefully start to re-open and that Council should consider measures which will support this re-opening.

Councillor Colvin stated that the Ulster Unionist Councillors have no difficulty in supporting the motion. Councillor Colvin stated that the motion being put forward at agenda item 14 was similar and if there had been a communication break down between the DUP as he felt amalgamating both motions would have presented a stronger case.

Councillor Molloy stated that whilst he agreed with the sentiments of Councillor McLean’s motion he would be proposing an amendment and the reasons for this were two fold. Firstly to broaden the scope to include both off street and on street parking and secondly to include those departments which may provide a funding stream to support the proposals. Councillor Molloy stated that the motion as it stands only seeks to reduce off street car parking charges which he is in favour of but that there has been no discussion in relation to how such costings could be featured into the rates. Councillor Molloy stated that such discussions were needed and asked Councillor McLean to accept the amendment being put forward.

Councillor Molloy proposed the following amendment -

“That this council as soon as practically possible enters into meaningful discussions with the traders of the MUDC area along with engagement with other relevant bodies such as the Departments of Economy, Infrastructure and Finance, to agree and implement suitable reduced car parking charges and restrictions as soon as Covid restrictions are lifted, developing a multi-agency approach whereby re-engaging and encouraging footfall to our local towns and in so doing assisting to sustain our businesses, shops & restaurants etc.”

Councillor Brian McGuigan seconded Councillor Molloy’s amendment.

Councillor Wilson stated this is a bigger piece of work than just car parking and referred to the similarities between the two motions at agenda items 12 and 14 and whilst one is about car parking the other is in relation to improving town centres with high vacancy rates. Councillor Wilson paid tribute to Council staff who have worked diligently to try to get support to local businesses. He stated he had also spoken in relation to traffic wardens last month and that consideration be given to only issuing tickets for unsafe parking.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan asked if Councillor McLean was willing to accept the amendment.

Councillor McLean stated he had no issues with the amendment.

Councillor Monteith stated he did not have a difficulty with Councillor Molloy’s amendment but that his own amendment sought to implement free car parking.

Councillor Monteith proposed the following amendment -

“That this council as soon as practically possible enters into meaningful discussions with the traders of the MUDC area, to agree and implement free car parking as soon as the Covid restrictions are lifted, whereby re-engaging and encouraging footfall to our local towns and in so doing assisting to sustain our business’s, shops & restaurants etc.”

Councillor Monteith stated that this Council previously carried out a consultation in relation to car parking and referred to pilot schemes. Councillor Monteith stated that in Dungannon there was an issue with one car park in the town and no issues with the other three car parks and that the default position should have been free car parking with steps taken to deal with the issues in the one car park. The Councillor stated that there is free car parking at the Oaks Centre, Tesco, the Enterprise Centre and Newell Stores in Dungannon but yet you cannot park for free in the town centre. Councillor Monteith referred to Councillor Wilson’s comments and agreed that there is a massive piece of work to be done in relation to town centres but that he has always stated there should be free car parking as it was not fair there is free car parking in some town centres and not in others.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated he had some concern with Councillor Monteith's amendment in that car parking is of a value of £400k to Council each year and that this amendment would handcuff the ability to have negotiations in terms of arriving at the best outcome for car parking. The Chair stated that the financial outcome of Councillor Monteith's amendment is not in keeping with the budgetary considerations of Council. The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated that the motion and amendment is the beginning of a process which would likely move to the Policy and Resources Committee for further consideration and asked Councillor Monteith if he would consider not moving his amendment given the fact that no financial consideration has been given to no car parking charges.

Councillor Monteith stated that whilst he respected what the Chair was saying his amendment did not mean there would be free car parking tomorrow. The Councillor stated that there needs to be an end game and there should be an aim towards free car parking and whilst car parking is an income stream for Council the traders in Dungannon and Magherafelt should not have this held against them and that there should be equality across all towns. Councillor Monteith stated that there did not necessarily need to be all day free car parking but there should be a concept of free parking. Councillor Monteith stated he did not feel that the amendment tied Council and that the amendment should be moved.

Councillor Quinn stated he did not have a difficulty with the motion and agreed with Councillor Molloy's amendment and that there is a big piece of work to be done.

Councillor Kerr seconded Councillor Monteith's amendment.

Councillor McFlynn stated she agreed with the sentiments of the motion and that Council should be supporting traders as best it can but that the difficulty with having no charges is that Council will still have to maintain its car parks and this will be at cost.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated that he felt the amendment could tie the council's hands and limit options on free parking but that is not to say there could not be a conversation in relation to future free car parking. The Chair stated he could not support this amendment as he did not have any financial information on it to substantiate the impact to Council.

Councillor Monteith stated he had not been aware of Councillor Molloy's amendment before the meeting and that he did not feel his own amendment was contradictory to Councillor Molloy's amendment. Councillor Monteith stated that his amendment did not rule out discussions with other agencies.

Councillor Quinn stated that previously when amendments were brought it was his recollection that they were to be submitted by 6 pm and were available before for group meetings, the Councillor stated this was useful.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated that the requirement for moving amendments is that it is provided in paper to the meeting and there is no timescale prior to the meeting.

Councillor Monteith's amendment was shown via Webex to the meeting and the Chair reiterated his concerns on same.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan took a vote on the amendment put forward by Councillor Monteith:

For - 2
Against - 31
Abstained - 7

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated that the amendment fell.

Members voted on the substantive motion:

For - 40
Against - 0
Abstained - 0

Councillor McLean thanked everyone and stated he appreciated the amendment put forward and that Council needed to work towards improving footfall in town centres when restrictions are lifted.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated there is a desire across the Chamber for Council to do all it can, along with others, to support traders in town centres.

C035/21 Notice of Motion

Speaking on the motion, Councillor N McAleer stated that the recent announcement that students would be able to access a £500 payment was very much a welcome step in the right direction for students and their families to help offset some of their costs in a very difficult year.

Councillor N McAleer stated he had been contacted by several students and parents of students from the Mid Ulster area who are studying in places such as Liverpool, London and Dublin and as it stands, those students are excluded from the proposed Covid Disruption payment. The Councillor stated that last week in the Assembly John O'Dowd asked the Economy Minister Diane Dodds to explain what the barriers are that are stopping her extending the payment to students in Britain and the South and he is still waiting on an answer or explanation on this.

Councillor N McAleer stated there are also a large number of part time students studying in the north, as well as those studying in our Further Regional Colleges in Magherafelt, Dungannon or Cookstown who will be excluded.

In light of this, Councillor N McAleer moved the undernoted motion -

“That this Council welcomes the recent announcement of a £500 Covid Disruption payment for students studying full-time Higher Education courses; notes the exclusion of full-time students studying Further Education courses and students studying Higher Education courses in the south of Ireland or in Britain is unfair; acknowledges the difficulty of part time students facing financial hardship also needs to be addressed; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to address the inequalities and ensure that all students who are currently excluded from the Covid Disruption Payment receive the £500 payment.”

Councillor Doris seconded the motion.

Councillor McLean stated he did not have a problem with the sentiments of the motion though had made some queries and that his understanding is that the Minister has to work within legal constraints and therefore enquired how making payment to the individuals mentioned could be done. Councillor McLean stated time was of the essence and to do all that is contained within the motion would disenfranchise the speedy payment of £500. Councillor McLean reiterated that whilst the DUP grouping did not disagree with sentiments of the motion it would be abstaining as a party on this motion.

Councillor McNamee stated there should be no barriers to students from the north of Ireland who are studying in the south of Ireland or the UK from receiving the Covid disruption payment of £500. The Councillor stated that the Economy Minister should make a bid for the finance and find a solution as to how the payment can be made for students that are currently left behind.

Councillor Kearney stated that the SDLP grouping will be supporting this motion as it had, along with other parties, been active on these issues.

Councillor Wilson stated that the issue of legal constraints needed to be looked at however he would welcome the motion. Councillor Wilson proposed an amendment to the motion to include, “.... *Notes the exclusion of fulltime students studying Further Education Courses and those at Bible Colleges.....*”

Councillor N McAleer stated he had no issue with the amendment and accepted same.

Councillor Cuddy seconded Councillor Wilson’s amendment.

Councillor Kerr stated he had no issue with the motion and advised that he had been contacted by students who were affected by the pandemic last year. The Councillor spoke in relation to one student who had graduated in 2020 and had lost 12 weeks of teaching and resource time and got no financial support. The Councillor stated that all students past and present needed to be eligible for this payment.

Councillor Kerr also advised he had been contacted by a local medical student who outlined that those applying for medicine in the north of Ireland as a second degree are not eligible for financial support. This means that throughout the duration of their course the student is responsible for fees and has to work full or part time in order to pay for food, rent etc and this is on top of working unpaid shifts on wards. Councillor Kerr referred to the current pressures on the NHS and stated that he felt these pressures were solvable if studying medicine was available to all. The Councillor referred to medical students in England who can avail of non-means tested funding whilst similar students from the north have to pay all fees up front. Councillor Kerr stated he wanted to bring these issues to the attention of Council, that he was aware that a campaign will be launched by medical students from the north of Ireland in the future and that he asked that Council support this.

Councillor Monteith stated he would support the motion and felt it is the least Council should be doing. The Councillor stated that Council have committed to look at the wider issue of student poverty and highlighted that students were forgotten about at the start of the pandemic. Councillor Monteith stated there also needed to be a conversation regarding access to third level education as there has been a systematic erosion of support for students making it harder and harder for those from less well off backgrounds to go to university and that this needed to stop.

Councillor Colvin declared an interest as a Member of Southern Commissioning Group.

Councillor Colvin stated he agreed with the comments of Councillors Kerr and Monteith but that it was expanding the motion out beyond what the initial intent was. The Councillor stated that students do need help and that there is a shortage of medical staff due to underfunding over the years and there should be discussion on this. Councillor Colvin stated he was supportive of the motion and the amendment to include a wider range of students.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan stated there would be an opportunity for a wider discussion when Council received presentation from student representatives at the next Policy and Resources Committee.

Councillor McLean stated the DUP were not against the motion in principle and if abstentions were recorded against the party members then the motion could proceed as carried. Councillor McLean highlighted that this disruption payment is one of the most generous schemes in the UK.

On ascertaining that all DUP grouping members wished to abstain from voting on the motion the Chair, Councillor Mallaghan declared the motion carried.

For - 31
Abstain - 9

Councillor N McAleer thanked everyone for their contributions and supporting the motion.

C036/21 Notice of Motion

Councillor Cuthbertson stated his motion was separate to the previous motion brought tonight in relation to town centres, that the earlier motion put financial pressures on Council whereas this motion does not to the same extent.

Councillor Cuthbertson stated he believed his motion was straight forward and required little introduction as everyone knows the crisis situation town centres are facing and that time after time valuable retail units are lost to residential accommodation.

Councillor Cuthbertson stated there are numerous vacant units in Dungannon and he was sure that all towns in Mid Ulster are the same. The Councillor stated that all must be done to help landlords find new tenants but equally as important assist them in preserving valuable retail spaces in our town centres for future businesses.

Councillor Cuthbertson moved the undernoted motion –

“That Mid Ulster District Council acknowledges the grave situation our Town Centres are enduring, resulting in many small retail units having lost and others facing losing tenants in the coming months. That Council writes to the Minister of Finance in relation to vacant rates on retail premises in Town Centres, urging him to provide further assistance on top of the current 50% vacant rates for the next financial year, in order to help stop the trend of converting small retail units into domestic accommodation. This will help preserve retail space for future businesses.”

Councillor Buchanan seconded the motion.

Councillor Glasgow stated that communication in relation to issues regarding town centres was key, that discussion was required within Council for the previous motion at agenda item 12 and that communication was required with the Minister of Finance for this motion. Councillor Glasgow stated the UUP would be supporting the motion.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan asked if anyone was against the motion.

On there being no dissent to the motion, the Chair Councillor Mallaghan declared the motion passed.

Councillor Cuthbertson stated he was glad his motion had received support.

C037/21 Notice of Motion

Councillor Quinn stated that his motion was in two parts but that its sole purpose is to rally around local press. The Councillor stated that over the past week there have been death threats issued against two leading journalists, Patricia Devlin and Alison Morris and those making the threats are doing so because these two journalists are

investigating the murky world of drugs and paramilitaries and are close to exposing those worlds. Councillor Quinn stated that a free press is fundamental to a free society and that it is essential that politicians demonstrate their solidarity with journalists especially when those journalists are exposing the evils of society. The Councillor stated that those threatening may think that because Alison and Patricia are female they will be scared which will deter them from what they are doing however he felt it will have the opposite effect and that the death threats go to prove how important their work is.

Councillor Quinn stated that the COVID crisis has led to a collapse in advertising revenue for news media in both print and online and that social distancing has also hampered the ability of newspapers to maintain print sales. This crisis has come on top of the two decades of structural challenges for newspapers with print sales falling and digital giants increasingly monopolising advertising revenue online. Councillor Quinn stated that in Mid Ulster two major publications have ceased trading while others through the pandemic are barely hanging on, the Councillor referred to the importance of local media to Members and the benefits that it brings, that local and regional newspapers are not only sources of information but also a meeting point for people and places, that these publications help to bind communities together, mitigate against isolation and are close to an essential service. Councillor Quinn stated that the pandemic has also highlighted the importance of local and regional media in providing accurate and professionally sourced information and whatever the scepticism about some aspects of the national or international media people have a high levels of trust for local and regional media and that they understand that these papers exist to serve and give a voice to communities.

Councillor Quinn stated that with many local titles already furloughing staff and making them redundant there is a high risk that a significant chunk of our news media could be wiped out and have grave implications not only for owners and staff but also local communities. The Councillor stated that in order to protect local media and allow it to thrive in the future the NUJ have come up with significant proposals to protect media which will require commitment from the UK government, NI Executive and from all stakeholders in the media industry. Councillor Quinn stated that he also believed this Council should recognise public interest journalism and that it should be supported and protected. Councillor Quinn extended support for the proposal to increase government investment in public interest news, through arms length funding mechanisms with the condition that no funding is given to any company making redundancies, paying dividends or resisting trade union recognition. Tax breaks for new subscriptions and support for new media start ups should also be introduced by government alongside a wide scale literacy campaign to tackle fake news. Support should also be extended to the public service broadcasting in Northern Ireland and the principle of independent oversight free from government interference. Councillor Quinn stated that the global health crisis has shown the vital role of quality journalism within the spectrum of essential public services. Councillor Quinn asked Council to endorse the News Recovery Plan as it set out a number of practical measures which will help secure a sustainable future for Northern Ireland's local news media.

Councillor Quinn moved the undernoted motion –

“This council condemns the recent threats made against local Journalists and recognises the importance of trustworthy, relevant, impartial news as an important bulwark of democracy, particularly during a health crisis. This council notes with alarm the unprecedented strain placed on the News industry following the lockdown period, with wide scale cuts and redundancies proposed across the sector. This council supports the NUJ’s News Recovery Plan aims at tackling the existing fault-lines in the sector with a series of measures intended to reconfigure the news industry and ensure it is firmly rooted in the public good. That we support the proposal to increase government investment in public interest news; through arms-length funding mechanisms, with the condition that no public funding is given to any company making redundancies, paying out dividends or resisting trade union recognition. Other measures include:

- *Tax breaks for news subscriptions*
- *Support for new media start-ups*
- *A wide scale media literacy campaign to tackle disinformation and fake news*

We also extend our support to public service broadcasting in UK/Ireland and the principle of independent oversight, free from government interference.”

Councillor Kearney seconded the motion.

Councillor Kearney stated that the media is a vital means of communication which everyone depends on and reflected on the journalists lives lost over the years namely the murder of Veronica Guerin, Martin O’Hagan and Lyra McKee. The Councillor also stated that in the past few weeks we have been reminded that five BBC staff were blown up 50 years ago while carrying out repairs to a transmitter. Councillor Kearney stated that tonight’s motion and discussion was timely given the current threat level and the many other issues as outlined.

Councillor McNamee stated he would condemn the threats to journalists in particular Patricia Devlin who previously worked for the Mid Ulster Mail.

The Chair, Councillor Mallaghan also added his support to the motion and stated that journalism was a difficult job which takes guts and determination. The Chair advised that he had spoken to Ms Devlin and offered her support on behalf of his party.

On seeking clarification that there was unanimous support for the motion the Chair, Councillor Mallaghan declared the motion carried.

Councillor Quinn thanked Members for their support and highlighted that the media is there to hold us to account.

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.

The live broadcast concluded at 9.24 pm

Proposed by Councillor Kerr
Seconded by Councillor Molloy and

Resolved That items C038/21 to C047/21 be taken as confidential business.

Matters for Decision

- (i) Council Confidential minutes of meeting held on 28 January 2021
- (ii) Planning Committee confidential minutes of meeting held on 2 February 2021
- (iii) Policy and Resources Confidential minutes of meeting held on 4 February 2021
- (iv) Environment Committee confidential minutes of meeting held on 9 February 2021
- (v) Development Committee confidential minutes of meeting held on 11 February 2021
- (vi) Document for Sealing: Lease Agreement relating to lands at Ballydermot Road, Bellaghy, Magherafelt
- (vii) Document for Sealing: Lease Agreement relating to lands situated at Blackrock Road, Beaghmore, Cookstown, in connection with the Davagh Solar Walk (1)
- (viii) Document for Sealing: Lease Agreement relating to lands situated at Blackrock Road, Beaghmore, Cookstown, in connection with the Davagh Solar Walk (2)
- (ix) Document for Sealing: Conveyance and Transfer Deed in relation to lands situated at Loughbeg Wood at Longpoint between DAERA and Mid Ulster District Council in connection with the OpenGround Project
- (x) Any Other Business

C048/21 Duration of Meeting

The meeting was called for 7.00 pm and ended at 9.35 pm

Chair _____

Date _____