

Minutes of Meeting of Policy and Resources Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 3 November 2022 in the Council Offices, Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt and by Virtual Means

Members Present

Councillor S McAleer, Chair

Councillors Ashton (7.15 pm), Buchanan, Cuddy, Doris*, Elattar*, Forde, Gildernew*, S McGuigan*, McKinney, McLean, S McPeake*, Molloy*, Quinn*, Totten*

Officers in Attendance

Mr McCreesh, Chief Executive
Mr Black, Strategic Director of Communities & Place (SD: C&P)**
Mrs Campbell, Strategic Director of Environment (SD: Env)
Mrs Canavan, Strategic Director of Organisation Development, Strategy and Performance (SD: ODSP)
Mrs Dyson, Head of Human Resources (HoHR)**
Mr Lowry, Head of Technical Services (HoTS)**
Mr McGuckin, Head of Strategic Services and Engagement (HoSS&E)
Ms McKeown, Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism & Strategic Programmes (AD: EDT&SP)**
Mr O'Hagan, Head of ICT (HoICT)
Mr Tohill, Strategic Director of Corporate Service and Finance (SD: CSF)
Mrs Grogan, Democratic Services Officer

Others in Attendance

Councillor Kerr

* 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 S McAleer welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the meeting through the Live Broadcast. Councillor S McAleer 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.

PR204/22 Notice of Recording

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

PR205/22 Apologies

Councillor Kearney.

PR206/22 Declarations of Interest

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

PR207/22 Chairs Business

None.

Matters for Decision

PR208/22 Festive Lights Funding

The Strategic Director of Communities & Place (SD: C&P) presented previously circulated report which sought approval for the use of capital funding and reminded the committee that they had delegated authority from the Council to deal with this matter.

Chair declared an interest in Ballygawley Community Initiative.

Councillor Forde declared an interest in Festive Lights Funding.

The SD: C&P in response to Councillor Gildernew's query regarding funding for Clogher village advised that costings were included in previously circulated development committee report but would confirm with member tomorrow.

Councillor Doris referred to new festive lighting for Coalisland and said that it would be important to consider redistributing the old lighting to other areas like Stewartstown where there was need.

Councillor McLean said that discussions within his party had taken place regarding this issue as it was a sizable amount and asked what happens if people come forward looking financial assistance for something more beneficial. He stated that the six main towns within our district were being afforded new festive lighting and no financial burden put upon them which seemed unfair to other small villages and settlements. He said that small villages look forward to this year on year and they have raised funding themselves to bring some festivities to their areas and felt that this was something we should be helping with and would propose to make this happen.

The Strategic Director of Corporate Services and Finance (SD: CSF) stated that he would be very comfortable supporting this as there was money in the reserves. He advised that some other Councils had made definitive decisions to cut funding towards these type of things, but it was his opinion that this was not going to impact on us.

The Chair advised that in Ballygawley most of the lights and those on the tree was not functioning and was unthinkable to go out and ask people to contribute due to the cost of living crisis, but would agree that any amount of money offered would go some small way of helping.

Councillor Quinn seconded Councillor Doris' proposal of looking at ways to recycle preowned lighting to other areas. He said that he had been approached by some residents from Stewartstown asking if it would be possible for preowned lights to be redistributed to other areas like theirs.

The SD: C&P advised that most of the festive lighting was owned by the groups themselves, but would liaise with them to see if they would be willing to redistribute any access stock they may have to other villages.

The Chair advised that within Ballygawley village, it would take approximately £12,000 to fund lighting for small area on the Christmas tree.

Councillor Gildernew said that he would be happy to second Councillor McLean's proposal.

Councillor S McPeake referred to the process and enquired if this was a one-off payment.

The SD: Communities and Place advised that the allocation of funding would be made towards the 60 current recipients across the villages and settlements.

Proposed by Councillor McLean
Seconded by Councillor Gildernew and

Resolved To approve, under delegated authority, the allocation of up to £108,250 from the Council Capital fund as a one off capital allocation to current recipients of the Festive Lights Fund. Engage with groups to explore redistributing excess preowned lighting to other areas of need.

PR209/22 Report of Corporate Good Relations Working Group Meeting: October 2022

The Head of Strategic Services & Engagement (HoSS&E) presented previously circulated report which provided the outworking's of the most recent Corporate Good Relations Working Group meeting held on Monday 10 October 2022 for approval.

He advised that there was an invitation circulated to all Members for a training session on "What is Good Relations?" due to take place on Monday 7th November and would encourage all members to attend to gain a better understanding of Councils commitments under the Equality scheme.

Councillor McKinney said he would be recommending to disapprove the report as it was his understanding that there was no quorum at the meeting. He recommended to not approve the report as only 2 members out of 10 were in attendance on the day and felt that this was only a tick box exercise. He referred to section 4.2 under Equality and said that the proportion of the working group and those which attended do not add up and that he understood this Council had to go through this protocol.

The HoSS&E advised that the working group wasn't a decision-making body and the matters were now before committee for approval. He reaffirmed that the P&R

Committee is the decision-making body and the Working Group. He added that the Group was an outworking of Councils Equality Scheme.

The Chair said that she took on board concerns raised, but felt that it would be important for all Members to attend the meeting on Monday as this would give them an understanding of the workings of the Corporate Good Relations Working and Good Relations generally.

Councillor Quinn advised the committee that he had deputised for Councillor Kearney at the meeting and found it to be very constructive. He said that discussions had taken place on the importance of having Unionist colleagues becoming involved in the working group as they were not engaging with the group. He concurred with comment made regarding the working group not being a decision-making body and that any avoidance of the meeting does not make the issue go away and said he was very happy to approve the report.

Councillor Cuddy advised he used to sit on a similar grouping in the legacy Dungannon Council and said that now the Council has to deal with two main issues as he sees it; equality and different minorities. People need representatives and-working groups to try and help minorities, though he expressed a view that when he sat on a working group to develop a way forward for bonfires, there appeared to be no help for the minority community. The Travelling Community appeared to receive thousands of pounds to bring their matters forward, but when the bonfire issue arose, the majority parties within Council do not put financial assistance on the table to move this forward. He stated that there were 4 parties within this Council and the largest party appeared to run it and felt that Ireland's Future should not be considered. He said that this was a difficult area and would have an issue with good relations and equality within this Council as nothing is being done for minority groups. He felt that this wasn't working and that was why Unionists do not attend these meetings as the largest party within this Council use it to better their position.

The Chair said that even by listening to this discussion, there appears to be many interpretations of good relations and felt that it would be useful for all members to attend the meeting on Monday night to gain further understanding.

Councillor McKinney said that it would be good to go to the meeting as he along with his party colleagues had a previous party meeting with the Council's appointed facilitator on Good Relations, though felt that it would be important for the Chief Executive and Officers to attend the meeting, as he said there was discrimination taking place.

Councillor Molloy advised that some of the comments made tonight were outrageous and ridiculous and felt that Members needed to be very careful on what they were saying and should not be accepted. He said that he would be happy to second the recommendation to accept the Good Relations Working Group report.

Councillor McLean said that it was his understanding that two members attended the meeting and only one was in attendance here tonight and asked how it was possible to propose and second the report if you weren't there.

The Chief Executive in referring to comments made advised that this was a Corporate Good Relations Working Group where discussions took place only and recommendations brought back to this committee to make a decision. He was satisfied that legitimate measures were in place. He felt that some of the comments were inaccurate as it was assumed that Officers managed the meeting, which was not the case and could assure members that equality was adhered to, at all times. He added that the role of council officers was to implement decisions agreed upon by members.

Councillor McKinney stated that he did not make any accusations against officers and felt that his remarks had been misinterpreted by the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive said that he was happy to accept the Member's comments. He felt that it was very important to have good relations and would advise that Council Officers were not politicians and are here to deliver what was agreed by Members. He said he appreciated there was very sensitive issues involved and would encourage all Members to attend the forthcoming meeting.

Councillor McLean advised there were a number of issues raised tonight. Firstly, he felt that good relations should be continually implemented rather than just being a tick box exercise and is the responsibility of the entire community. He also felt that it was his understanding that this issue had been talked about for some time now, there are two sections of this community with different aspirations and how things should be implemented. He felt that there was now an onus on everyone to sit down and reflect on what it would be like to be in another person's shoes. He said, he understood that democracy has to be at the centre but there also has to be a process of equality and good relations where everyone felt welcome. He felt there was a piece of work which had to be done and unfortunately this was now out in the public arena with everyone going into trench mode with the impact being that good relations suffers. He advised that he had already provided his undertaking to Mr Moffett (AD: ODSP) and has spoken to Councillor Glasgow, UUP Group Leader and that both parties would be represented at Monday night's Good relations meeting to provide a wider perspective within Council as there was a belief that there is better work to be done to make good relations work.

The Chair said she hoped to be in attendance and would welcome all the issues which may be brought.

Proposed by Councillor Quinn
Seconded by Councillor Molloy and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council that Members review, comment as appropriate and approve the report of the Corporate Good Relations Working Group meeting held on Monday 10 October 2022.

PR210/22 Requests to Illuminate Council Properties

The 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:

- NSPCC: Walk for Children
- Oesophago-Gastric (OG) Cancer NI: Less Survivable Cancers Awareness

Councillor Ashton entered the meeting at 7.15 pm

Councillor McLean stated that he had no issue with the proposal but wished to raise a matter as a point of issue. He said that on a regular basis Council light up our three main buildings and unless he goes back to the Council website, he doesn't have a clue what the colour represents. He felt that Council was ticking a box and lighting up a building which are all very worthy things, but wonder's if you asked a member of the public if they knew what the colour represented, they wouldn't know. It was his understanding that this was not doing what it was set out to achieve initially and asked that for something to be considered.

The Chair said that Councillor McLean raised a very valid point.

Councillor McKinney concurred with comments made and asked that consideration be given to implementing a small LED sign at the three main sites to inform members of the public what the lighting colour represented. He said that he was also asked what the colours represented and felt that a small LED sign for the three main buildings should be investigated.

The Chair asked that officers take on board suggestions as this was a very valid point.

The Head of ICT (HoICT) advised members that LED lighting on signs can be a bit more complicated due to planning issues and public safety concerns for road users.

Councillor Cuddy said he had raised this issue in the past and would be worth considering utilising the LED sign at the Cenotaph in Dungannon as it is lying idle and planning permission not required.

Proposed by Councillor Buchanan
Seconded by Councillor McLean and

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

- Wednesday 21 December 2022: NSPCC Walk for Children – Green
- Wednesday 11 January 2023: Less Survivable Cancers Awareness – Green

Proposed by Councillor McKinney
Seconded by Councillor McLean and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to investigate options to better inform the public of what the colour of lighting on the three main Council buildings represent.

PR211/22 December Council Meeting – NI Assembly Election

The Chair advised that this paper had now been withdrawn due to NI Assembly Election no longer going ahead in December.

PR212/22 Member Services

None.

Matters for Information

PR213/22 Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on 6 October 2022

Members noted Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on 6 October 2022.

Councillor Doris referred to PR183/22 and advised that she was not in attendance at last month's meeting as she was in South Africa.

She said that she was made aware of statements in which other Councillors had posted on social media indicating that funding had been withdrawn from the Gortgonis Health and Wellbeing hub which also put the Gaelscoil in jeopardy. She refuted those statements and said that they were lies. DfC through Neighbourhood Renewal (NR) never commit money more than a year ahead of time which Councillors who sit on the NR meeting would be aware of. There is doubt that the project is taking too long to be sorted but constituents should be aware that this is due to projects having to be shovel ready. For example the pitches at Brackaville & Dungannon United Youth, the building at the Fianna and more recently the works at Thomas Clarkes have all been funded through NR because they were in a shovel ready state. A large hold up with the Gortgonis project was to do with a right hand turning lane which despite consistent lobbying to the then DfI minister Nichola Mallon, she failed to get it sorted out. The message that went out to the community by some of the Councillors on their social media pages caused unnecessary panic for the service users, some of which have special needs, the local residents and of course the Gaelscoil.

She said that these statements had real life impacts. There is no threat to the Gaelscoil as it will happen and found it funny that there was a big movement on it today. She would encourage the Councillors who did not act with honesty (as outlined in the Councillor Code of Conduct) to apologise for their social media statements.

Councillor Doris said that she took serious offence at the comment about Councillors not being bothered to turn up to a meeting about Gortgonis when she was in a country that has power cuts for hours each day meaning that she had no access to the internet and was out meeting her boyfriend's family who he hadn't seen in 3 years and his young sister was in hospital. She took offence especially when she missed so few Neighbourhood Renewal and Coalisland Town Centre Forums (which others do not) which is where the real work happens on these projects. She said that she had asked if Council Officers had the money from DfC tomorrow morning in their bank account, would the Health and Wellbeing be done and said that she would cut off here.

She felt that it was important for community confidence in the Council that Councillors who made false accusations apologise for them so they can be open and honest with the public.

The Strategic Director of Communities & Place (SD: C&P) advised that a report was brought to tonight's meeting on options for members consideration and would be raised in confidential business.

Live broadcast ended at 7.36 pm.

Local Government (NI) Act 2014 - Confidential Business

Proposed by Councillor McKinney
Seconded by Councillor Buchanan 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 PR192/22 to PR202/22.

Matters for Decision

PR214/22	Staffing Matters for Decision
PR215/22	Gortgonis Health and Wellbeing Hub
PR216/22	IST Awards - Connecting Pomeroy, Derrynoyd Forest, Drumcairn Forest
PR217/22	Treasury Management
PR218/22	Staffing Matters - Apprenticeship Opportunity Update
PR219/22	Mid South West (MSW) Region Growth Deal Update
PR220/22	Capital Expenditure Reallocation

Matters for Information

PR221/22	Confidential Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on 6 October 2022
PR222/22	Staff Matters for Information
PR223/22	Financial report for 6 months ending 30 September 2022
PR224/22	Contracts & DAC Update

PR225/22 Duration of Meeting

The meeting was called for 7.00 pm and ended at 9.10 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.