

Minutes of Meeting of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 28 October 2021 in the Council Offices, Circular Road, Dungannon and by virtual means

Chair Councillor McLean

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

Officers in Attendance Mr McCreesh, Chief Executive
Mr Boomer, Strategic Director of Planning (SDP)
Ms Canavan, Strategic Director of Organisational Development Strategy & Performance (SDODSP)
Ms Campbell, Strategic Director of Environment (SDE)*
Mr Kelso, Director of Public Health & Infrastructure (DPHI)*
Mr Moffett, Assistant Director of Organisational Development, Strategy & Performance (ADODSP)
Mr Tohill, Strategic Director of Corporate Service/Finance (SDCSF)
Ms Ursula Mezza, Head of Marketing & Communications*
Mrs Forde, Member Support Officer

* Denotes Members present in remote attendance

** Denotes Officers present by remote means

The meeting commenced at 7 pm.

The Chair, Councillor McLean 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.

C201/21 Apologies

Councillor Totten

C202/21 Declarations of Interest

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

C203/21 Chair's Business

The Chair, Councillor McLean advised he had ruled out a number of items received to be heard under Chair's business.

The Chair, Councillor McLean expressed sympathy to the family of William Cuddy a gentleman who had served as a Councillor in Cookstown from 1993 to 1997 and had sadly passed away in his 90s.

The Chair, Councillor McLean reminded Members that they had received notification of a webinar by the NSPCC scheduled from 1.00pm on Friday 29 October 2021. He encouraged both Members and staff to join as it would deal with the impact Covid has had on mental health of young people.

Councillor Quinn drew attention to a recent Spotlight programme which had shown areas of Mid Ulster being used in the illegal puppy trade. He said he had spoken with the USPCA and the Animal Welfare as to what he could do as an individual, as an elected Member and also what Council could do to assist in eradicating this illegal practice. Councillor Quinn proposed that Council meet with the Animal Welfare group and the USPCA to discuss further.

The Chair Councillor McLean sought clarity from the Chief Executive as to whether the group should be invited to a committee.

The Chief Executive advised they could be invited to present at future Environment Committee.

Resolved That the Animal Welfare Group (Mid Ulster) and the USPCA be invited to make a presentation to Environment Committee.

The Chair, Councillor McLean highlighted Councillor Doris and himself had a conversation prior to the meeting and reminded Councillor Doris to be diplomatic.

Councillor Doris thanked the Chair for permitting her to speak on a significant issue. She said the previous day a child was allegedly subjected to horrific racist abuse by a council employee in a customer facing role who allegedly took an issue with an Irish mother giving her Irish son an Irish name. Councillor Doris said she accepted that the Chief Executive and Council had launched an investigation into this matter and if it is proven to be a factual account of what happened she wanted to in the strongest possible terms express her condemnation that at the age of just three weeks old, the child's very first experience of racism.

Councillor Doris stated what she felt was worse is that from the incident was highlighted she has had reports of numerous people sharing similar experiences to this whether they were Polish, Lithuanian or a different background. Councillor Doris stated that having an Irish name herself she has received comments on its spelling and difficulty on its pronunciation. She said if people wanted to understand why language is important to some it is because it is part of culture and the uniqueness and presence of one culture does not out do another's.

Councillor Doris said she hoped that all Councillors present would stand up against all racist discrimination and support a full and thorough investigation into the incident. She also requested that a meeting with the Chief Executive be facilitated at the earliest possible convenience. She concluded by expressing deep regret at the incident and

extended apologies to those impacted but assured that it was not reflective of Mid Ulster District Council nor its staff.

In response the Chair, Councillor McLean stated that the aforementioned meeting would be facilitated.

Councillor Corry drew attention to the Planning Advice Note (PAN) on the 'Implementation of Strategic Planning Policy for Development in the Countryside' (DfI 2/8/2021) which had been withdrawn by the Minister for the Department of Infrastructure. She welcomed its withdrawal and spoke of the determination of Councillor S McPeake, the Planning Manager and Council for being the first to raise issue with it. She commended Councillor S McPeake in that his prompt actions had spearheaded the review to its withdrawal.

Councillor Burton requested that the Chair, Councillor McLean forward a letter of congratulations to Fivemiletown Football Club who had received notification that they had attained a Queen's Award.

In response the Chair, Councillor McLean said he would be happy to facilitate.

Resolved That the Chair, Councillor McLean forward a letter of congratulations to Fivemiletown Football Club on attaining the Queen's Award

Councillor Cuthbertson drew attention to the government budget announcements in relation to the Government's Levelling-Up fund. He spoke of the money set aside for electric car charge points and stated that although there was one on the outskirts of Dungannon there was none in either the park or town centre. He also spoke of no other projects in the Mid Ulster area the closest being Omagh and sought clarification from the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive confirmed that the project in the neighbouring Council area was shelf ready and deliverable within the predetermined time frames. He reminded Members that Belfast City Council and Derry City & Strabane Council were further along the journey of City Deal than other Councils and advised that Mid South West projects were in embryo stage but it is hoped some will be ready and meet the criteria for the second tranche of funding in January 2022. The Chief Executive confirmed that current infrastructure applications were only acceptable from the Department itself and assured Members that every effort would be made to secure funding where applicable.

Matters for Decision

C204/21 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in "Open Business" at the Council Meeting held on Thursday 23 September 2021

Councillor Monteith drew attention to C176/21 Council minutes and made reference to the meeting with the BMA and Royal College of General Practitioners in relation to GP services and the Out of Hours Doctors in Dungannon. He also drew attention to the response received from Southern Trust in relation to the Out of Hours Doctors and said the response was both dismissive and did not provide accountability. He proposed that a Member workshop be arranged to agree a list of strategic issues which should be

discussed at the requested meeting with the Southern Trust. He also highlighted issues of health care workers not in receipt of their £500 due to roles not being verified. He stated that it was the duty of members to seek answers and endeavour to address the dismay of the health services crumbling.

In response the Chair, Councillor McLean advised he had met with the Community Planning Officer who had attended the meeting and was working on compiling a list of issues raised which would be circulated to Members. He assured Members that he was not dismissive of the workshop but its intent was already in place.

Councillor Clarke drew attention to C184/21 and advised of the correct spelling of Lachlan.

Councillor S McAleer advised as part of the Local Commissioning Group she would advise that GP surgeries were open and that there was telephone consultations but much of the situation was a result of lack of funding which was brought to a head during Covid. She emphasised that GPs were working hard under extreme pressure and did see people when necessary.

The Chair, Councillor McLean said that all issues would be addressed in the meeting.

Councillor Burton drew attention to D151/12 in relation to birthing pools at Craigavon Area Hospital and spoke of a response received which had only highlighted what had been known but the issue was having the birthing pool in the midwifery led unit reinstated. She said that the space was being used for Covid positive patients and a bereavement room and clarity was required as to whether the pool removed was still there together with the time frame and cost of reinstating it. She concluded by speaking of the number of mothers giving birth to babies in baths due to the lack of birthing pools.

In response the Chair, Councillor McLean said the matter would be included on the aforementioned list for discussion with the Trust.

Councillor Colvin concurred with the comments of Councillor S McAleer and said that the situation with GP's did not occur overnight, that the problems had been known and there was not the political will to do what was required to rectify the situation.

Resolved That the SHCST Birthing Pool AT Craigavon Area Hospital to be put on agenda for meeting scheduled to take place between the Trust and Council

Proposed by Councillor Monteith
Seconded by Councillor McNamee and

Resolved That the Minutes of the Council held on Thursday 23 September 2021 (C170/21 – C186/21 and C200/21) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated, were considered and adopted.

C205/21 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” Planning Committee Minutes of Meeting held on 5 October 2021

Councillor Kerr drew attention to P135/21 Correspondence from Dalradian Gold and spoke of a recent Spotlight programme which had featured the company and had highlighted detail a journalist had revealed in relation to research which had uncovered details of pollution both medium and severe at previous sites in Brazil. He further highlighted that in Brazil a trail of misery and destruction and false promises had been left. Councillor Kerr proposed that the Save the Sperrins Activist group be invited to meet with Members so that both sides of the story could be heard.

In response the Chair, Councillor McLean said he was not sure this would be the appropriate way forward but that the Councillor's comments would be noted and could be further addressed at planning. He stated that Councillor Kerr had the opportunity to bring a motion before Council if he did not agree with the approach.

Councillor Kerr said he had made a proposal and it was clear to see the side the Chair was on.

In response the Chair Councillor McLean stated that such remarks were disrespectful and that a process had been outlined.

Proposed by Councillor Black
Seconded by Councillor Mallaghan and

Resolved That the Minutes of the Planning Committee held on Tuesday 5 October (P130/21 – P138/21 and P143/21) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated, were considered and adopted.

C206/21 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in “Open Business” Policy and Resources Committee Minutes of Meeting held on Thursday 7 October 2021

Councillor Monteith drew attention to PR186/21 Non Domestic Rating Revaluation 2023 and spoke of the announcements made in the budget in relation to discounts for business rates in England. He said that there was no proposals to alleviate the impact of local businesses. He highlighted the impact of rates previous to COVID and the more recent impact of energy bills tripling in recent months. Councillor Monteith stated that an emergency support system given cognisance to current situation was needed or many small businesses would close.

The Chair, Councillor McLean said that the points were well made and referred to the motion to be moved by Councillor Graham. He stated that there was only so much Council could do but they would lobby and take every opportunity to do so.

Councillor Wilson referred to the issue Councillor Cuthbertson had raised with regard to ongoing road closures in Dungannon due to work carried out by utility bodies. He stated that similar situations had arisen in both Cookstown and Magherafelt and whilst the department appeared to be informed Council and local Members were the last to know. Councillor Wilson proposed that Council write to the Department seeking a meeting with regards to Utility Bodies carrying out works and forcing road closures throughout the district without any notification to Council or Members of the District Electoral Areas. He said that the current situation paid little respect to both Council and Members.

The Chair, Councillor McLean indicated that Members were in agreement.

Resolved Council write to the Department for Infrastructure (Roads) seeking a meeting with regard to Utility Bodies carrying out works and forcing road closures throughout the district without any notification to Council or Members of DEAs.

Councillor Ashton concurred with Councillor Monteith's comments on the non-domestic rating valuation, the impact of the budget and lack of clarity as to support systems for Northern Ireland businesses. She confirmed that she had spoken with the SD: Corporate Services and Finance who had advised he would bring forward a report.

The Chair Councillor McLean said that the points were noted and Members should await the aforementioned report.

Proposed by Councillor S McPeake
Seconded by Councillor S McGuigan and

Resolved That the Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held on Thursday 7 October 2021 (PR176/21 – PR187/21 and PR199/21) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated, were considered and adopted.

C207/21 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in "Open Business" Environment Committee Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 12 October 2021

Councillor Milne drew attention to E228/21 Street Naming and Property Numbering and proposed that the site off Mullaghboy Road, Bellaghy should be known as Folly Brae View

Proposed by Councillor Milne
Seconded by Councillor B McGuigan and

Resolved That site off Mullaghboy Road, Bellaghy should be known as Folly Brae View

Proposed by Councillor S McAleer
Seconded by Councillor Graham

Resolved That the Minute of the Environment Committee held on Tuesday 12 October 2021 (E222/21 – E242/21 and E251/21) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated, were considered and adopted.

C208/21 Receive and Consider Minutes of matters transacted in "Open Business" Development Committee Minutes of Meeting held on Thursday 14 October 2021

Councillor Kerr drew attention to D184/21 and the discussion in relation to lack of haulage drivers and expressed hope that the issues highlighted would be brought up at the Labour Market Partnership. He also highlighted that in speaking to people issues also included insurance costs for under 25s, the rising cost of fuel the back log in licensing and

suggested that if possible schemes to alleviate difficulties, where possible, should be brought forward.

Proposed by Councillor Kerr
Seconded by Councillor McNamee and

Resolved That the Minutes of the Development Committee held on Thursday 14 October 2021 (D171/21 – D187/21 and D190/21) transacted in Open Business having been printed and circulated, were considered and adopted.

C209/21 Conference Report

The AD: ODSP sought approval for the previously circulated report on conferences, training and seminars and highlighted the regional programme for NILGA courses for members who wish to avail

Proposed by Councillor Mallaghan
Seconded by Councillor McNamee and

Resolved That approval be given to submitted requests for conferences, seminars and training as outlined in the appendix to the report.

C210/21 Civic Recognition Nominations

The AD: ODSP sought approval for the previously circulated report on civic recognition requests from Members, in line with the stated Council Policy, and as detailed within the report at appendix A.

Proposed by Councillor Kerr
Seconded by Councillor B McGuigan and

Resolved That approval be given to submitted requests for civic recognition as outlined in the report.

Matters for Information

C211/21 Correspondence

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

Councillor Kerr drew attention to the correspondence from Fermanagh & Omagh District Council on the motion carried in relation to 'Syringes for Cuba Campaign/End the Blockade' and proposed that Council should support the motion and invite the Ambassador to Mid Ulster.

Councillor Kerr also drew attention to the Public Health Agency response and highlighted that the detail did not reflect what teachers were reporting what was happening on the ground.

Councillor Colvin referred to the proposal to support Syringes for Cuba Campaign/End the Blockade' and stated that Council should not be issuing invitations to ambassadors to discuss issues in their country especially when it was only selective issues being raised. He spoke of the huge issue of the persecution of Christians throughout the world who were facing death, being tortured and ostracized from their families but the matter was brushed under the carpet. He said that people often lifted information from social media and Councillor Kerr looked at some issues through the lens of a certain perspective.

The Chair, Councillor McLean said he had heard comments from both.

Councillor Monteith seconded Councillor Kerr's proposal and clarified that he did not receive his information from social media. He said there were Cuban citizens living in Mid Ulster who have expressed concern on the situation with vaccines and the ability for Cuba to sustain itself. Councillor Monteith said there should be no difficulty to hear from the Cuban Ambassador as any councillor would be entitled to join but if you did not wish to do so you weren't compelled.

Councillor Mallaghan said it was important to have a view on the international affairs especially when the district has a global population and Council was a channel to raise concerns. He said he was not against the issue but just did not know enough about it. Councillor Mallaghan proposed that a report be brought back to committee to enable Members to learn more.

Councillor Quinn concurred with Councillors Mallaghan and Monteith and seconded Councillor Mallaghan's proposal as he felt he did not know enough about the situation. He said he may not share Councillor Kerr's passion for the situation but felt many across the world reached out to this country and in turn the country should do likewise.

The Chair, Councillor McLean said there were a variety of views and as Councillor Colvin had said many across the world are facing persecution. He said in reading the letter again he did not see an issue but the point of a report which could perhaps include points made by Councillor Colvin should he wish.

Proposed by Councillor Mallaghan
Seconded by Councillor Quinn and

Resolved That a report be brought to Committee to provide background on the Syringes for Cuba/End the Blockade as outlined in the motion moved by Fermanagh & Omagh District Council.

Councillor McFlynn drew attention to the letter from Home Office and said she had raised the issue of Afghanistan last month and she looked forward to learning of the outcome.

Councillor Corry drew attention to the letter from Minister for Health with regard to the Organ Donation Bill: Introduction of Soft Opt-Out Organ Donation Consultation Analysis Report. She said it had been one of the first motions she had brought to Council and the pleasure of meeting the little boy who had inspired so many. She urged all to sign up to this gift of life stating that she hoped the Bill would be completed in the current mandate

but there was concern that some health related bills would not be completed in the current mandate and proposed that the Minister for Health be invited to discuss these issues.

Declaration of Interest

Councillor Glasgow declared an interest as he worked in transporting organs for donations.

The Chair, Councillor McLean said there was a consensus

Resolved That Council write to the Minister for Health to request a meeting to discuss outstanding health related bills which may not see completion in the current mandate

C212/21 Consultations Notified to Mid Ulster District Council

Members considered previously circulated report on consultations notified to Mid Ulster District Council for comment.

Councillor Monteith proposed that Council forward a response to Department for Communities: Intermediate Rent Development of Policy and Model consultation.

Councillor Kerr seconded the proposal

Councillor S McPeake concurred with Councillor Monteith but said that the response should be considered by the Mid Ulster Housing Forum.

Resolved That Department for Communities: Intermediate Rent Development of Policy and Model consultation be considered by Mid Ulster Housing Forum and response submitted by Council.

Councillor S McPeake also proposed that the Department for the Economy: Mineral Prospecting Licence Applications MPLA1/19 and MPLA2/19 Consultation be referred to Planning Committee for response.

Proposed by Councillor S McPeake
Seconded by Councillor B McGuigan and

Resolved That the Dept for the Economy: Mineral Prospecting Licence Applications MPLA1/19 and MPLA2/19 Consultation be referred to Planning Committee for response.

Councillor B McGuigan proposed that Council submit a response to Council prepare a response to Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs: Consultation for the Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers.

Councillor Corry seconded the aforementioned and also requested that the Climate Action Working Group resume meetings.

Resolved That

- (i) Council prepare a response to DAERA: Consultation for the Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers;
- (ii) Climate Change Working Group recommence meetings.

C213/21 Notice of Motion

Councillor Doris moved the motion as undernoted:

“This Council recognises that a lack of work life balance contributes to work related stress, low productivity and burnout amongst workers; accepts that there is a growing body of International evidence that shows that moving to a four day working week, without a reduction in income, enhances productivity and happiness amongst workers; acknowledges that many companies have trialled the concept of a four day working week and found it had positive impacts both for business and workers; calls on the Council and Department for Economy to establish working groups and pilot programmes that support employers to trial the concept of a four day working week amongst their employees”

Commenting on the motion Councillor Doris stated,

“This motion I have put forward is about time and how we spend it. It is about our employees health and their wellbeing and selfishly it is also about our staff’s productivity. Trials ran in Iceland from 2015 to 2019 by Reykjavik City Council across a variety of different work sectors including private offices, schools and public services was proven to be an outstanding success for both employee and the employer, workers and employees reported deduction in staff sickness and burnout. And unsurprisingly over all happiness. And this increase in staff happiness has proven to be the key component of productivity. Further evidence comes from Oxford University who carried out a study in 2019 with BT Communications over a 6 month period were they had staff rate their levels of happiness daily and they found happier staff are 13% more productive than unhappy staff. Therefore I recommend that this Council take this motion back to the Policy and Resources Committee to explore a pilot of a four day work week for our employees with full pay.

I realise that it would be impractical and unfair for our staff to manage our huge work force without exploring the mechanisms of how this would work in reality or a smaller scale first. I also feel it would be beneficial for us to invite Edge Innovation who moved to a 4 day week with no loss of pay in August this year to come and tell us what their experience of the scheme has been so far. I do feel that this is a win-win situation for all. People are happier and therefore better able to work as a team and provide better customer service. Loss of sick days or long periods of illness due to tension and anxiety. People are motivated to earn their day off and will therefore me more productive while in work. And people are the most valuable asset to any organisation so retaining our staff with their knowledge, experience and skills ensures we offer a better service to our constituents here in Mid Ulster.

So I hope that all Councillors here can support this motion that I have put forward tonight because it is the quality of time that you put into your job that matters but the quantity of time you have at home with your loved ones that really matters most.”

Councillor Mallaghan seconded the motion saying that it had always been said if you want to earn more work in the private sector but if you wanted a secure job with good terms and conditions work in the public sector yet on the issue of a ‘4 day week’ the private sector was leading the way. He said over the past few years companies throughout the island had looked at this and Council should consider the opportunity and explore the options to see if it would work. He concluded that Council deliver services seven days a week, morning, noon and night and this was a good opportunity to open up the discussion.

Councillor McKinney said he was totally against this as if people wanted to work 4 days they could. He said there was 168 hours in a week, 37 of which was spent working and 56 sleeping but this still left plenty of hours to do what you wanted to do. He quoted that scripture said ‘six days shalt thou labour but on the seventh day you may rest’. He said it was sad the motion coming from Sinn Féin at a time of economic problems, when companies cannot get workers. He said there had been debate regarding rates, the cost of fuel, electricity and gas and he would not want to explain to any business to add 20% onto their costs for a 4 day week. He concluded it did not add up.

Councillor S McAleer said she could see the potential outcome if you reduce employees to a 4 day week but that a pilot project was the way to go. She suggested there would be both advantages and disadvantages but it would only work if hours were reduced. She drew on the experience of nursing in the 1980s when nurses went onto 12 hour shifts and only worked three days but it was hard to maintain. Councillor S McAleer concluded that the concept was worth exploring and spoke of how Japan and other countries had successfully introduced such projects.

Councillor Ashton stated she could appreciate Councillor Doris’ comments as the concept was great on paper but thought the matter was travelling too quickly as Council had just embarked on a Labour Market Partnership which had met for the first time. She said this concept would drive a bus through it and the partnership is where such discussion should be. Councillor Ashton concurred with Councillor McKinney with regard to the lack of workforce and asked did it mean 12 hour shifts, 5 days’ work accomplished in 4 days or what. She said as someone with responsibility for 50 employees she would not want to ask people to work 12 hour shifts as after 7 hours people were ready for home. Councillor Ashton said the district had the lowest unemployment rate, businesses were struggling and reiterated that the discussion should be with the Labour Market Partnership let them hear the suggestions and lead the way.

Councillor Ashton concluded that the motion was aimed at the Department of the Economy yet it was the Department of Communities who were funding the Labour Market Partnership. She asked where the Council was with the MEGA survey in Mid Ulster, stated she would not support the motion but that she would welcome the discussion being referred to the Labour Market Partnership.

Councillor Quinn said he would have a few issues but would support the motion as there was merit behind it. He said that many companies in Mid Ulster in particular engineering companies were already working a four day week and were using it as a recruiting agent.

Councillor Quinn also said when he had proposed the living wage it had been adopted and Council had moved forward with it but he did not think it was for Council to tell other companies how to conduct their business. He said that he did not know how it would pan out but would be interested and conversations should be had with government departments and agencies. He said these things did not happen overnight but he would like to see a paper on it and would be support the motion.

Councillor Cuthbertson said some of the factories worked 4 days on 3 days off but that was not to help staff but to make Saturday and Sunday normal working days, thus cutting out weekend overtime. He said when it comes to deciding the rates he would not like to tell hard pressed businesses in Dungannon there was a need to take on more staff and said the system would be a bused drawing comparisons to furlough when staff took off and worked somewhere else and if this were to happen it would defeat the purpose.

Councillor Glasgow concurred with Councillor McKinney and said that yes people would like to work 4 days a week but the cows needed milked 7 days a week. He said in his full time employment they worked four on and three off but this would be a big cost for independent retailers and that Council depended on the High street to bring in the rates. He posed the question who would support the scheme once the pilot ended and whilst he understood work life balance people had to get on with it. he reiterated that small businesses such as grocers, butchers and bakers would be hardest hit.

Councillor Monteith commended Councillor Doris on the motion and said it was an excellent initiative and it would be no surprise he would support it. He said he could not see anything in it that would hurt anyone and that modern life required flexibility which would create a resilient economy. He said in the past it was thought paid holidays, sick pay, equal pay, maternity pay and anything that would benefit the worker would be the ruination of the economy and that the argument was always used if something was going to benefit the worker. Councillor Monteith said every sector was not being asked to bring this in, that he would support the initiative but stressed it was maybe more pertinent to ensure there was sick pay for all workers. He highlighted that during the pandemic many identified as close contacts were left impoverished. He concluded that in many instances the introduction of a four day week had improved productivity and he would support the motion.

Councillor Cuddy said the debate was interesting that the private sector would introduce it if it was beneficial and asked if Council was talking about reducing hours or doing the 37 hours in four days but that ultimately the market would dictate and that he was there to represent the rate payers.

Councillor Kerr fully supported the motion and said ultimately a major overhaul was needed in workers' rights in all industries and they should have access to trade unions. He said he would encourage workers to join trade union and work towards establishing good employment schemes.

The Chair thanked everyone for their input stating there was a variety of opinions.

Councillor McKinney clarified he had no problem if people wanted to work four days but they should not be paid for five stating that if you are buying four loaves you would not want to pay for five.

The Chair, Councillor McLean put the motion to vote

For	23
Against	15

Councillor Doris thanked everyone for the debate and said the data she had worked from was taken from 2500 people over a five year period and the clear evidence was that productivity had increased. She said the private sector were not being asked to change overnight but a paper to committee was required and the 'nuts and bolts' would have to be worked out with trade unions on board. She concluded that many businesses on the Labour Market Partnership were already working a four day week and that Council owed it to all to explore the evidence base and no doubt there would be more debate in the future.

C214/21 Notice of Motion

Councillor Quinn moved the motion:

"This Council recognises that the £20 Universal Credit uplift has provided a lifeline to many families and recognises the devastating impact that its removal will have at this critical juncture of the recovery period with workers dealing with the end of the furlough scheme and massive increases in energy bills. The Council also recognises that the removal of the £20 per week payment will be devastating for those living here, will push more people into poverty, increase reliance on foodbanks, and increase homelessness, as well as having dire consequences for our local economy. The Council calls on the Communities Minister, in the absence of any further action from the Westminster government, to liaise with her colleague Finance Minister Conor Murphy, to reverse this cut for the remainder of the financial year and commit to expediting a long term strategy to tackle the shameful levels of poverty and social deprivation across Mid Ulster".

Councillor Quinn commenting on the motion said,

"Councillors this motion that I am bringing forward tonight highlights an issue affecting thousands of people across our council area. The British Government's weekly £20 cut to Universal Credit has taken £1,040 a year from the people who need it most. That's money taken from people that would be spent on groceries, heating and electricity bills and clothes for children. This cut will affect a vast array of people, from families and single people to people who are in work and single parents.

It could not have come at a worse time, many have incurred large costs as a result of their children returning to school something myself and other councillors here have highlighted in recent months, and Christmas is fast approaching. We have also seen an increase in the cost of living with the cost of food and many essential household items on the rise and utility companies increasing the price of gas and electricity. We have another motion tonight trying to tackle the rising cost of fuel, which we know is getting higher with every passing day.

The reality is this cut will leave many people with difficult decisions to make on how to heat their homes and put food on the table. They will have to make a decision, do they and their children go to bed hungry, or go to bed cold? People need much more than an extra £20 to get by – the British Government should be focusing on increasing support to help people rather than making punitive cuts. The whole Universal Credit system is unjust and was designed to save money rather than help our people. It has allowed our charity and foodbanks under pressure to help those most in need.

Over the past few months we have heard directly from Universal Credit claimants and reports from charities and research groups about the impact this cut will have. Knowing that this cut was coming has created great anxiety in people. Many are worrying how they are going to get by and it is already affecting their physical and mental health.

The figures we are told are that 134,000 people will lose out on £20 a week, with only a quarter of them in work, 44,000 of them have children. In local terms this means 1800 claimants in Cookstown, 2910 in Magherafelt and 3,880 in Dungannon. This cut will remove thousands if not millions from the local economy at a time when businesses are struggling coming out of a global pandemic.

The SDLP has consistently fought for welfare powers to be devolved. When others wanted to hand these powers to the British Government we rallied against it to ensure that our people would not be subject to the whims of the Tories. Boris Johnson's cut is unspeakably cruel and have a real impact on the most vulnerable here but we have the power to act.

The reason why we have devolved Government is so that people here in the North and make decisions for themselves, so that political reps can take decisions on issues that affect people living her. The Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey can use her welfare powers to intervene and reverse these cuts. The Department for Communities has estimated that it would cost £55m to retain the £20 a week for people here for the rest of the financial year. That's less than 0.5% of the Executive's block grant.

Minister Hargey to her credit has submitted a bid for this money but sadly its seem that our First Minister has already dismissed this bid. The Minister needs to go to her Sinn Féin colleague, Finance Minister Conor Murphy, and implore him to find this relatively small amount of money to protect the most vulnerable people within our society.

We cannot rely on the British Government to look after the best interests of people in Mid Ulster and across the North, Ministers Hargey and Murphy have the powers to reverse this cut and they have to use it. The message from the SDLP is clear – If the British Government is forcing this cut on our people and if they don't see sense and reverse the move the onus then falls on the Sinn Féin ministers to give it back.

Our people cannot be expected to take this cut, we need to see immediate action to protect this money and a strategy to address the shocking levels of poverty in our council area and across Northern Ireland, which shamefully rank among some of the highest in Europe”

Councillor Hughes seconded the motion saying that it was very important the £20 was retained as it was needed more than ever furlough had ended and there were job losses,

food and fuel price increases and that she had been inundated with requests for benefit checks.

Councillor S McPeake said the £20 increase to universal credit in March 2020 had been required long before it had been granted and the removal of it was demonstrative of the Tory government's determination to impose disparity on those who have the least in society. He highlighted that national insurance payments were set to increase at the end of furlough and the boorish behaviour needed to end and the Exchequer needed to wake up to the difficulties people were facing whilst £20 may not be much in the pocket to people in Westminster it made a big difference to many here. The increase back in 2020 highlighted that the amount was not adequate for people to live on but what had changed? he said it was imperative that the Tory government reverse their decision as there was no doubt increase poverty levels for families already struggling and in turn would impact the economy. Councillor S McPeake commended the work and efforts of the Minister for Communities Déirdre Hargey. He spoke of the attempts of the Tory government to deflect from their decision but said that if all wanted to genuinely stand up for people all must work together to halt the Tory cuts. He said that what was needed was control of fiscal destiny and highlighted that Minister Hargey had put in a bid for funding. He said some may wish to score political points all must take cognisance of the fact there is no additional money in the block grant and other ministers will not want to relinquish budget. He said there would be no quick or easy solution to the situation as suggested in the motion but the Minister was committed to deliver long term solutions. He spoke of bedroom tax, antipoverty strategy and how the Minister was prioritising the issues impacting people.

Councillor Brown thanked Councillor Quinn for bringing the motion to the Chamber saying that 130k people would waken up poorer and it was a moral stain on the government removing this money. He said Christmas was only around the corner and people were in despair and could either put the heat on or eat and posed the question how could anyone stand over the decision. He said he knew that party colleagues had called on the Minister for Communities to initiate a fuel payment but noted that it was very evident that Sinn Féin MPs were not in the house when the matter was discussed. He commended the £100 High Street Voucher initiated by the Economy Minister and reiterated that the reduction in universal credit would put further strain on hard pressed households and his party would support this motion.

Councillor Colvin said the UUP had every sympathy with the intent of the motion and the negative impact the reduction would have. He quoted that his father often said £100 was not a lot of money but it was if you didn't have it and stated he would support the motion. He reminded Sinn Féin that although they do not attend Westminster the money ultimately comes from there and the people they complain about provide the cash saying that the Brit bashing was becoming too much and that the Chancellor was very aware of the hardship and was trying to make a difference.

Councillor Monteith said he would support any initiative to alleviate poverty and he would support anyone to get this done as what was happening was both wrong and immoral. He said Universal Credit itself impoverished people and welfare reform had been born out of London. He said that dismantling the safety net decision was made by people who would never have to decide whether to put the heat on or eat. He said they had no concept as to what it was like to live hand to mouth. He stated that after the crash the bankers got

bailed out and the poor people were punished and this was a Victorian workhouse attitude.

Councillor Kerr fully supported the motion and would support any call for financial help. He said the actions of the Tory party were to be condemned especially in dealing with the pandemic. He said poverty existed before the pandemic and the Tory party was made up of the elite and concurred with Councillor Monteith in saying they did not understand what it was like for people. He said some single mothers were not eating so their children could and highlighted that it was daunting and challenging times which would get worse with the cost of living rising and wages stagnating. He said the Tory party claimed the victory of raising the minimum wage but it was still nowhere near enough for working class families to live comfortably.

Councillor Cuddy said a lot of the aforementioned was right but said that some said this was Tory responsibility but Northern Ireland received £1500 per person whilst England received £800 and the problem was that the NI Executive had wasted much of the funding he concluded that Northern Ireland needed to look at itself and how they were utilising the funding.

The Chair, Councillor McLean said there had been politically sniping and point scoring but all were in support of the motion.

The Chair, Councillor McLean declared the motion carried.

In conclusion Councillor Quinn said he had endeavoured to stay away from point scoring as the focus needed to be on people and irrespective of individual parties each member was there for the people they represented.

C215/21 Notice of Motion

Councillor Graham speaking on the motion said, “we are all only too well aware of rising prices across all energy spectrums but what some of you may know is that in Northern Ireland one in five households struggle with fuel poverty. The definition of fuel poverty is someone who spends more than 10% of their household income on fuel. There are three main factors to take into consideration, income, energy costs and the energy efficiency of the house. With the ‘perfect storm’ of rising energy prices, low incomes and inefficient housing many people are very concerned that more households are at increased risk this coming winter. With estimates of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland ranging between 22% and 42% and wholesale energy prices continuing to rise we are all facing further price hikes in the coming months. So I propose the motion:”

“That this Council notes with concern the significant increase in the cost of energy; recognises this will adversely affect many households across Northern Ireland and calls on the Minister for Communities to establish a departmental led fuel poverty task force to assist the department in developing solutions to support those impacted and prevent many more people from falling into fuel poverty”.

Councillor Colvin seconded the motion sharing the personal experience of his daughter who received a letter from the gas company to advise that the gas would increase 23% in

cost. He said he thought it was a misprint but it was going to increase by almost a quarter and said that the working poor did not have income to support this thus he welcomed the motion.

Councillor Mallaghan said that the crisis would require a significant response and the conversation would need to widen going forward. He spoke of the private Members bill raised by John O'Dowd MLA and said whilst the motion would go a long way it needed to be widened out and proposed the undernoted amendment

'That this Council notes with concern the significant increase in the cost of energy; recognises this will adversely affect many households across Northern Ireland and calls on the Utility Regulator and the Executive to establish a fuel poverty task force to assist the relevant departments in developing solutions to support those impacted and prevent many more people from falling into fuel poverty. '

Councillor McNamee seconded the amendment.

Councillor McFlynn shared statistics from 2016 when 22% had been in fuel poverty and also of the plan from 2016-2020 to address fuel poverty for vulnerable groups but how now the situation had escalated and people were relying on handouts and foodbanks. She said the Minister for Communities had introduced programmes to deliver food to people during the pandemic and many had been thankful for it. She spoke of people installing wood burning stoves and how the now rising cost of fuel would further impact families. She said salaries were not rising and the winter was approaching when heat and light would be needed in the homes. She said instead of moving forward society was going back 70 years. Councillor McFlynn concluded that the SDLP would support the motion and hoped the Minister would do all in her power to help.

Councillor Ashton said that the price of fuel had made a huge impact on prices and the real impact was felt especially for people on lower incomes who were coming under more pressure and Council should put as much pressure on central government to help to alleviate the problems.

The Chair, Councillor McLean asked Councillor Graham if she accepted the amendment. She agreed with the proviso that the Minister for Communities and the Utility Regulator was retained as follows.

That this Council notes with concern the significant increase in the cost of energy; recognises this will adversely affect many households across Northern Ireland and calls on the Minister for Communities, the Executive and the Utility Regulator to establish a fuel poverty task force to assist the relevant departments in developing solutions to support those impacted and prevent many more people from falling into fuel poverty.

The Chair Councillor McLean declared the motion as undernoted carried.

Councillor Graham thanked Members for their support.

That this Council notes with concern the significant increase in the cost of energy; recognises this will adversely affect many households across Northern Ireland and calls on the Minister for Communities, the Executive and the Utility Regulator to establish a fuel

poverty task force to assist the relevant departments in developing solutions to support those impacted and prevent many more people from falling into fuel poverty.

C216/21 Notice of Motion

Councillor Black moved the motion:

“This Council expresses their deepest sympathy to the family, friends and colleagues of Sir David Amess MP, following his horrific murder on 15th October. This tragedy again highlights the unacceptable risks faced by elected representatives and other public servants. Further, it must be recognised that toxic elements of social media continue to be a breeding ground for vile, threatening and hate filled posts, which may raise the rhetoric, and be a contributing factor in violent attacks in wider society. I call on this Council to write to the Northern Ireland Executive Office, highlighting our concerns, and ask that a review be carried out of all possible steps that can be taken to protect public servants in their roles here in Northern Ireland”.

Councillor Black speaking on the motions stated,

“I am sure all in this chamber were horrified and disgusted at the brutal attack on Sir David Amess MP on the 15th October, which tragically led to the loss of his life. As a Council, I wish to put on record and express our deepest sympathies to Sir David’s family, friends and colleagues as they grieve their loss. On a personal level, my thoughts are also very much with them at this devastating time.

As well as a great personal loss to so many, as this was an attack on a Member of Parliament, a public servant serving their community, it was also an attack at the heart of democracy itself. Sadly, this is not the first attack on public servants over the years, whether in Great Britain or closer to home here in Northern Ireland. This most recent tragedy again brings into sharp focus the unacceptable risks faced by elected representatives and other public servants as they carry out their duties.

It must also be recognised that toxic and sinister elements of social media continue to be a breeding ground for vile, threatening and hate filled posts, which has the potential to raise the rhetoric and be a contributing factor in such attacks carried out in wider society.

Here locally there have been reports in relation to the vile abuse and threatening messages directed at elected representatives. Carla Lockhart, Michelle O’Neill Nicola Mallon, Robin Swann, Naomi Long amongst others have all spoken of threats and abuse which has been directed towards them. The sinister nature of many of these puts a huge burden on those targeted, their families and colleagues. All public servants should be able to go about their job and carry out their duties free from fear of harm. As a society, we may not always agree, however such threatening behaviour and violent attacks can never be the answer. This spans right across the political parties, and is therefore an issue that I trust we can stand united against. Enough is enough. Every effort must be made to clamp down on this totally unacceptable behaviour, protect those at risk and hold those responsible to account.

I call upon this council to write to the Northern Ireland Executive Office, highlighting our concerns, and ask that a review be carried of all possible steps that can be taken to protect public servants in their roles here in Northern Ireland.

Councillor Wilson has submitted an amendment, which I believe adds value. I am therefore happy to accept it as part of this motion.”

Councillor Ashton seconding the motion expressed her sympathy to the family and colleagues of David Amess MP whose death had sent shockwaves throughout the country. She said that all should be united against such action against it.

Councillor Wilson spoke of the major problem on line hate crime was now posing to society and how many public figures including politicians, sports people and others had been targeted for online abuse. Councillor Wilson drew attention to the fact that many accounts were anonymous and stressed that social media platforms needed to take steps to ensure identities could be verified to ensure that those responsible for online abuse could be traced and brought to justice. Speaking of the tragic murder of David Amess Councillor Wilson said it was a sad reminder of the price that some in the public eye have had to pay speaking of other MPs and public representatives have been targeted by those who follow violent ideologies which justify political murder – Jo Cox, Robert Bradford, Airey Neave, Sir Norman Strong, Edgar Graham and Charles Armstrong. He concluded that Council should send a strong message out to social media and tabled the amendment.

‘This Council expresses their deepest sympathy to the family, friends and colleagues of Sir David Amess MP, following his horrific murder on 15th October. This tragedy again highlights the unacceptable risks faced by elected representatives and other public servants. Further, it must be recognised that toxic elements of social media continue to be a breeding ground for vile, threatening and hate filled posts, which may raise the rhetoric, and be a contributing factor in violent attacks in wider society. I call on this Council to write to

- (i) the Northern Ireland Executive Office, highlighting our concerns, and ask that a review be carried out of all possible steps that can be taken to protect public servants in their roles here in Northern Ireland; and
- (ii) to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, to urge them to end anonymity on social media so that account owners can be easily traced and held accountable for sectarianism, racism, misogyny and other forms of hate speech and ensure anonymity cannot be used to peddle hate of any kind.’

Councillor Glasgow seconded the amendment.

Councillor Kearney commended Councillor Black on bringing the motion before Council and spoke of how the death of someone who had been held in such high esteem had impacted everyone. Councillor Kearney spoke of how Northern Ireland Local Government Agency had committed to promoting Civility in Public Life, positive debate and resultantly supporting the wellbeing of elected members. He suggested that these rules should be shared across Members, MLAs and MPS and spoke of how constituency office staff of Minister Mallon had been left shaken following an incident. He said if people were to be attracted to political leadership it was key that they were kept safe. In conclusion Councillor Kearney said the SDLP would support the motion.

Councillor Black accepted the amendment.

Councillor McNamee said that Sinn Féin would support the original motion over recent months and years we have seen political parties and staff receiving threats either at home, at their offices or on social media. He said it was essential that safety issues were addressed and they would support writing to the Executive.

Councillor Quinn said that his colleague Councillor Kearney had outlined the SDLP position but that he wanted to share a comment he had made when they discussed the matter in their grouping. He shared that Councillor Kearney had posed the question how many would be happy to share their Whatsapp groups to the open public and said that 'respect starts with ourselves' and each person has a role to play. He concluded that there needs to be accountability with social media.

Councillor Mallaghan said that Sinn Féin would support the original motion as he felt the amendment would pose difficulties for whistle blowers and there was occasions when anonymity was required for protection. He said that Sinn Féin wanted to support the motion but could not support the blanket approach to anonymity and sought a form of words all could agree on.

Councillor Colvin said that Councillor Wilson had developed the theme of what was an important motion and whilst he could understand Councillor Mallaghan's reservations the thrust of the motion was to stop 'trolls' who use social media platforms to spread hate which is very different to a whistle blower.

The Chair Councillor McLean said that it was close to agreement and sought comments.

Councillor Wilson said that the wording focused on 'ending anonymity on social media so that account owners can be easily traced and held accountable for sectarianism, racism, misogyny and other forms of hate speech and ensure anonymity cannot be used to peddle hate of any kind.'

Councillor Black said his reading of the motion would not create problems for whistle blowers and sought agreement.

Councillor Wilson suggested "anonymity on social media, with the exception of whistle blowers

Councillor Black suggested "with the exception of whistle blowers and those who need to retain anonymity for valid reasons"

All agreed.

The Chair Councillor McLean declared the motion as undernoted carried.

"This Council expresses their deepest sympathy to the family, friends and colleagues of Sir David Amess MP, following his horrific murder on 15th October. This tragedy again highlights the unacceptable risks faced by elected representatives and other public servants. Further, it must be recognised that toxic elements of social media continue to be

a breeding ground for vile, threatening and hate filled posts, which may raise the rhetoric, and be a contributing factor in violent attacks in wider society. I call on this Council to write to

- (iii) the Northern Ireland Executive Office, highlighting our concerns, and ask that a review be carried out of all possible steps that can be taken to protect public servants in their roles here in Northern Ireland; and
- (iv) to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, to urge them to end anonymity on social media, with the exception of whistle blowers and those who need to retain anonymity for valid reasons, so that account owners can be easily traced and held accountable for sectarianism, racism, misogyny and other forms of hate speech and ensure anonymity cannot be used to peddle hate of any kind.

Councillor Black thanked Members for the consensus.

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 9.18pm

Proposed by Councillor Black
Seconded by Councillor M Quinn

Resolved That items C217/21 to C223/21 be taken as confidential business.

Matters for Decision

- (i) Council Confidential minutes of meeting held on 23 September 2021
- (ii) Planning Committee confidential minutes of meeting held on 5 October 2021
- (iii) Policy and Resources Committee confidential minutes of meeting held on 7 October 2021
- (iv) Environment Committee confidential minutes of meeting held on 12 October 2021
- (v) Special Planning Committee confidential minutes of meeting held on 13 October 2021
- (vi) Development Committee confidential minutes of meeting held on 14 October 2021
- (vii) Audit Committee confidential minutes of meeting held on 19 October 2021

C224/21 Duration of Meeting

The meeting was called for 7.00 pm and ended at 9.25 pm

Chair _____

Date _____

Annex A - Introductory Remarks from Chairperson

Good evening and welcome to our meeting of Mid Ulster District Council in the Chamber, Dungannon whether you have joined us remotely or in the Chamber.

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 a roll call of members in attendance.