

CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the proceedings of the Special Council Meeting of Castlereagh Borough Council held, in committee, in the Council Chamber, Civic & Administrative Offices, Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Castlereagh, BT8 6RB on Thursday, 8th September 2005 at 7.25 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Alderman M Copeland
Alderman J Norris
Alderman Mrs G Rice

Councillor Ms J Bunting
Councillor Mrs M Chambers
Councillor Mrs J Cochrane
Councillor D Drysdale
Councillor Mrs S Duncan
Councillor C Hall
Councillor M Henderson
Councillor T Jeffers
Councillor M Long
Councillor G Robinson
Councillor J Spratt
Councillor C Tosh
Councillor J White

IN ATTENDANCE:- Chief Executive and Assistant Members' Services Officer

APOLOGIES:- Apologies were recorded on behalf of Aldermen PD & Mrs Iris Robinson, Alderman Copeland and Councillors Ramsey, Hanvey & Hughes

2005/508 : COUNCILLOR BEATTIE'S HOSPITALISATION

Following a proposal from Councillor Ms Bunting, it was

RESOLVED:- That, the Officers should arrange for a basket of fruit to be forwarded to Councillor Beattie, who was currently in hospital awaiting an operation.

2005/509 : RECENT WORLD CUP QUALIFYING MATCH VICTORY BY THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOTBALL TEAM AGAINST ENGLAND

Councillor Drysdale wished to send a letter of congratulations to the Northern Ireland Football Team and Irish Football Association, in particular to Michael Boyd, their Community Relations Officer, for the recent World Cup Qualifying

Match historical victory against the England Football Team and the “family atmosphere” that prevailed on the night.

Alderman Norris was delighted to endorse this proposal.

Councillor Drysdale then referred to the support given by the “Green and White Army” which made a tremendous contribution to the atmosphere of the match and portrayed a positive image of Northern Ireland to the media.

Councillor White then proposed that the Council fund a Civic Reception for the Team Members and Officials of the IFA during the time that the Northern Ireland team will be in the Province to play Wales for the next qualifying match. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Henderson.

Councillor Ms Bunting expressed her disappointment that several supporters had had their cars attacked on the West Link during the course of their journey home, which slightly marred the events of that evening.

The Mayor commented that the Assistant Manager of Northern Ireland Football Team, Gerry Armstrong, would be attending a function at Castlereagh Hills Golf Club, along with George Jones, on Friday 16th September, and he extended an invitation to all Members.

RESOLVED:- That, the Officers be instructed to

- (a) Write to the Northern Ireland Football Team Players, Manager and Irish Football Association Officials, including Michael Boyd, congratulating them on their recent outstanding victory against England.
- (b) A Civic Function be arranged prior to the next World Cup Qualifying Match against Wales when the Northern Ireland Football team and Manager would be in the Province and Team Players, Managers and IFA Officials to be invited.

2005/510 : PRESENTATION BY THE REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION TEAM

The Mayor welcomed Joan Cassells from the Review of Public Administration Team and Tom Frawley, Chairman of the Panel of Independent Experts to the meeting.

Mrs Cassells took Members through the content of her presentation, which had been previously circulated for their attention, and invited questions from the Council.

Councillor Henderson asked if the Team were planning to introduce any parts of the Review prior to 2009.

Mr Frawley responded that, in light of the urgent need for a significant restructure of Health issues, it was possible that this would take place in the shorter term, and Education would be implemented in sequence until 2009.

Alderman Norris expressed his concerns at the number of quangos, and commented that, as a member of the NAC, he felt that Elected Members were being bypassed, even though they were more in touch with the needs of the community.

Mr Frawley concurred at the excessive number of quangos in Northern Ireland, and indicated that under this Review, consideration would be given to the retention or abolition of some.

Councillor Chambers referred to the suspended Assembly, and was anxious that the Government were making decisions which would have been unacceptable to MLA's, should the Assembly have been in session.

Mr Frawley reiterated that this Review had commenced 3 years ago and could not be deferred, especially as this would be a difficult time for staff, and it was necessary to bring some clarity to their future.

He informed Members that the Minister had met with local politicians during the summer, which would ensure that the political voices of Northern Ireland were heard during this process.

Councillor Long welcomed the Review of Public Administration but had a number of concerns. He referred to the number of overlapping bodies and felt that it would be more appropriate to cut the number of Governmental Departments and Boards, and reduce administrative positions, using the funding to improve local and frontline services and, cross community relations.

He concurred that he would like to see a return to the Assembly and a single tiered government structure, but expressed his concern that any great reduction in the number of Councils would create a lack of local accountability and ownership. He welcomed an increase in the role of Councils to include areas such as planning, and libraries etc.

Councillor Ms Bunting stated that, in her opinion, the most important part of the Public Administration Review was to ensure that democracy was enshrined. She asked if the Team Members could clarify their priorities in the Review process and agreed with Alderman Norris's earlier comments with regard to Appointees on Boards who were not held accountable for their decisions and this had subsequently led to the problems faced with Education & Library Boards, for

instance. She was unhappy that the same individuals were being appointed in rotation around Departmental Boards, thereby creating a “closed shop” scenario. These people, unlike Elected Members, were making decisions whilst unaware of the demographic and social needs of the areas they were servicing. In some instances, she stated that Elected Members were totally opposed to the decisions being made by the various Boards/Trusts representing their constituency, yet were being held accountable by the ratepayers for the actions taken.

She felt that the solution to this problem would be to make Boards representative of the local community to ensure that local knowledge was present when decisions were being made. In her opinion, many of the Board and Trusts were appointing Members on the basis that they would not challenge their recommendations and they acted, not necessarily, in the best interests of those communities they were purporting to represent. It was imperative, she felt, that the Board appointment process was transparent and open to all.

Mr Frawley responded that he shared a lot of Councillor Bunting’s concerns and welcomed her comments with regard to the introduction of fixed terms of Office, a need for specialised knowledge, and the requirement for training for Board Members.

He added that the current Minister for Public Appointments had already highlighted the lack of female Chief Executives and under-representation of women in Elected Appointments.

Councillor Drysdale referred to those employees affected by the Review and asked how much the Government had estimated to cover redundancy costs.

He also expressed concern that chaos would ensue during the transition process once the number of Boards and Trusts began to be dramatically reduced. In addition, he feared that any great reduction in the number of Councils would isolate Councillors from their constituents.

At this point of the meeting, the Mayor thanked Mrs Cassells and Mr Tom Frawley for their presentation.

Noted.

2005/511 : PRESENTATION BY NILGA ON THEIR RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The Manager welcomed Councillor Arnold Hatch and Heather Moorehead, Chief Executive of NILGA to the meeting.

Councillor Hatch informed Members that the aim of this presentation was to present NILGA's view on the Public Administration Review as NILGA had to reach a consensus with regard to an acceptable reduction in the number of Councils.

He indicated that NILGA had put together a draft response, which outlined a number of principles and would be presented to the NILGA Executive Meeting on 23rd September 2005.

He referred to the number of Quangos, and stated that although he had no difficulty with Advisory Quangos, he felt that those which involved the allocation of expenditure required more accountability from their Members.

Heather Moorehead outlined NILGA's view to date and gave an overview to their response. She informed Members that, at present, NILGA had been lobbying for 15 Councils, although some Councils had expressed an interest in reducing this number even further to 7.

She then went through her presentation outlining the visions and models proposed.

Several of the Members expressed their concerns with regard to housing concerns and, in particular, the allocation of social housing, shortage of disabled and sheltered accommodation and lack of integration.

The Mayor then thanked the NILGA representatives for their presentation and they left the meeting.

Members discussed the content of the two presentations and agreed that it was important that the Council respond with one voice and suggested ways whereby this measure could be taken.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED:- That,

- (a) Consideration of the Review of Public Administration/NILGA responses be deferred to enable each Party to consider them in detail. However, the Council was unanimous that it would be suggesting that the number of Councils be reduced to 15.
- (b) Following consideration of the above responses, each Party Whip to appoint 2 Members to meet with the Chief Executive with their Party's recommendations and if necessary, a Special Council Meeting to be called to ratify the report before it is forwarded to the Review of Public Administration Team.

- (c) In the interim, the Chief Executive be instructed to write to NILGA outlining that the Members unanimously agree that the number of Councils should be reduced to 15.
- (d) The Council's NILGA Representatives to make the Council's position clear at the NILGA Executive Meeting on the 23rd September 2005 with regard to the reduction to 15 Councils.

2005/512 : BETTING, GAMING, LOTTERIES & AMUSEMENTS (NI) ORDER 1985 – LEGAL OPINION RE: PREMISES AT 1 CHURCH ROAD, DUNDONALD

Tabled:- Report from the Environmental Health Manager (copy previously circulated)

The Chief Executive referred to the Environmental Health Manager's report and referred to the legal opinion contained therein.

He informed Members that he had written to the Minister to request an amendment to the legislation with regard to the publications in which such advertisements were displayed, as part of the neighbourhood notification process.

Councillor Jeffers expressed his anger that the applicant was being granted his permit irrespective of the fact that he had breached Planning regulations by having no prior planning consent.

Councillor Henderson referred to this item, which had been discussed at the recent Technical & Environmental Services meeting and informed Members that certain caveats had been placed on the gaming licence which the applicant had to comply with.

Following discussion on the circumstances leading to this licence application and a proposal from Councillor White, the Chief Executive stated that he would inform Officers to ensure that future applications come before Council with the complete documentation in place. He added, however, that this would cause delays to the granting of the application and that it had been custom and practice for the Council to approve applications, subject to the receipt of fire certificates, etc.

Councillor Drysdale reiterated that, at that time, the Members had been unhappy at the proposal, especially in light of its proximity to nearby schools, churches and residential areas and had aired their concerns, as such.

At this point, Councillor Spratt asked that it be recorded in the minutes that this Amusement Arcade would be a den of iniquity and a magnet for antisocial behaviour, and that the Council, despite every effort, had no alternative but to reluctantly approve the licence.

Noted.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED:- That,

- (a) That, the Council reluctantly accepts the content of the legal opinion and that the provisional grant of the Permit is declared final, with those caveats agreed by Members at the Technical & Environmental Services meeting held on 6th September 2005.

However, the Members remain opposed to the Amusement Arcade at this location because of the breach of planning legislation and its location, which is totally unsuitable for a business of this nature, and will exacerbate antisocial behaviour at this location.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

2005/513 : ST. IGNATIUS CHURCH – 40TH ANNIVERSARY SERVICE ON SUNDAY, 2ND OCTOBER 2005 AT 6.30 P.M.

Councillor Henderson informed Members that the Reverend Auchmuty had been extremely grateful to the Council for their support in the past and numbers were required for the above Anniversary Service to enable the appropriate seating arrangements to be made.

RESOLVED:- That, anyone wishing to attend the 40th Anniversary Service on 2nd October 2005 at St Ignatius Church should inform Members' Services and they would pass on the names. Any Members wishing to attend should note that robes were to be worn during the service.

2005/514 : COUNCILLOR HENDERSON – EXPRESSION OF THANKS

Councillor Henderson wished to pass on his thanks to the Members for the cards and expressions of sympathy received, following the recent bereavement of his father.

He also thanked Members and Officers for their best wishes on the birth of his first grandchild.

Noted.

2005/515 : LASER PRINTERS

Following a request for clarification from Councillor Drysdale, the Chief Executive informed Members that the printers selected had been agreed by the IT Working Group and approved by the Council.

Noted.

2005/516 : INVITATION TO CHURCH EVENT - ODYSSEY ARENA

Councillor Robinson referred to the above event and invited Members to attend, as the monies raised would be distributed to orphanages around the world.

Noted.

As there was no further business, the meeting concluded at 9.50 p.m.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

MAYOR