

## **CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Minutes of the proceedings of the Special Council meeting held in the Council Chamber, Civic & Administrative Offices, Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Castlereagh, BT8 6RB on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2007 at 4.15 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Councillor J Spratt  
(in the Chair)

**ALDERMEN:** M Copeland MLA  
Mrs I Robinson MP MLA (until 5.23 p.m.)  
P D Robinson MP MLA

**COUNCILLORS:** Mrs A Beattie  
J Beattie  
Ms J Bunting  
Mrs M Chambers  
Mrs J Cochrane  
Mrs S Duncan  
D Drysdale  
C Hall  
B Hanvey  
M Henderson  
M Long  
G Robinson  
C Tosh  
J White

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Executive, Director of Finance & Leisure Services, Director of Administration and Community Services, Director of Technical & Environmental Services, Economic Development Manager and Assistant Members' Services Officer

**APOLOGIES:-** Apologies were received on behalf of Alderman Rice, Councillors Hughes and Robinson

### **2007/62 : STRIKING OF THE DISTRICT RATES FOR THE 2007/2008 FINANCIAL YEAR**

Councillor Beattie outlined that although Members understood that the district rate was the funding required to run the Council in the next financial year, the other part of the bill was the regional rate which was imposed by Central Government. He added that it was natural for ratepayers to look at the bottom line when the bill came through the door and automatically blame the Council for the rate being levied. He added that he could assure the public that Councillors

and Officers had spent many hours scrutinizing costs and seeking savings in all departments in an effort to keep the district rate as low as possible without jeopardizing the smooth running of the service delivery.

He continued by stating that this year saw the introduction of the new domestic rating system based on specific capital value as opposed to rental value. He added that this new system had the effect in many instances of raising the base rate and automatically increase costs to the ratepayers. He outlined that this system also affected the amount to be paid in water charges introduced by government this year, and in striking the new rate, the Committee had paid particular attention to the concerns expressed by our ratepayers in relation to rising costs and the ability to pay. He stated that these increases, which were not attributed to Castlereagh Council, were the thin edge of the wedge and were set to increase in the incoming years.

Councillor Beattie then referred to the Council's commitment to the environment, and in particular, the installation of a combined heat and power plant at the Ice Bowl and another soon to be installed at the Robinson Centre. He outlined that solar panels had been installed at Belvoir Activity Centre, and the Council was proposing to install a wind turbine at the Lough Moss Centre. He added that these facilities had been provided at little or no cost as the Council actively sought grant aid.

He outlined a number of provisions contained in the estimates over which the Council had no control including payroll, single status, etc. He then referred to a number of new projects being developed this year such as Moneyreagh Community Centre, Carryduff Playground, Lock Keeper's Cottage, and he further explained that an application had been made to the Sports Council for a significant grant to construct a 50 metre pool at the Dundonald Leisure Park site.

He passed on his sincere thanks to the other Members of the Estimates Working Group and to the Directors, particularly the Director of Finance & Leisure Services for the many hours of work he had put into the estimates process. He added that he had also noted comments made by Councillor Chambers at a previous meeting in respect of clarifying for ratepayers how the rates bill was made up, but that consideration would have to be given as to how best to convey the information.

Councillor Beattie concluded by stating that it gave him great pleasure to propose the following rates for the 2007/2008 financial year:

Non-Domestic Rate	15.5642p
Domestic Rate	0.1871p

Councillor Henderson outlined that in seconding the proposal, he would like to pay tribute for all the efforts of the Members on the Estimates Working Group,

Council Officers, and in particular, the Director of Finance & Leisure Services. He added that during the estimates process, he had replaced Councillor Drysdale on the Estimates Working Group. He apologised for not attending the meetings and explained that due to an administrative error he had not received notification of the meetings.

Councillor Duncan also thanked the Members and Directors, and in particular the Director of Administration & Community Services for the savings she had identified in the Council's insurance premium this year and to the Director of Finance & Leisure Services for his significant input.

Councillor Spratt also passed on his appreciation to the Directors and Officers. He commented that Councillor Beattie deserved a great deal of credit for the phenomenal number of hours he had devoted to the estimates process.

RESOLVED (unanimously) That the Council agrees to set the following rates in respect of the 2007/2008 financial year:

Non-Domestic Rate	15.5642p
Domestic Rate	0.1871p

#### **2007/63 : AGENDA ITEMS**

Councillor Spratt advised Members that Item 4 on the Agenda in relation to a land issue at the Dundonald Leisure Park site had been dealt with at a Special Leisure Park Board meeting which had taken place prior to the Special Council meeting, and was therefore being taken off the Agenda. He further outlined that as the representatives from Dundonald High School had not arrived yet, that he would move onto Item 5 on the Agenda.

Noted.

#### **2007/64 : LOCK KEEPER'S COTTAGE TENDER REPORT**

The Economic Development Manager reported that at the last Economic Development Sub Committee meeting, Members had considered seven tenders received in relation to the renovation of the Lock Keeper's Cottage and the construction of the Visitors' Centre comprising tea/coffee and office accommodation in the grounds.

She outlined that the lowest tender received had been from QMAC Construction Ltd in the sum of £468,000.00, which considerably exceeded the preliminary estimated budget. She added that the Architect had presented a list of possible savings and had advised that a realistic budget for the construction of the current scheme would fall in the region of £425,000.00 plus VAT plus professional fees.

The Officer then drew Members' attention to the fact that to proceed with this project, the Council would have to make a much greater financial commitment than previously anticipated.

The Economic Development Manager outlined that to enable the builders to commence work on the site at the earliest possible opportunity, it had been agreed to table the revised tender report at today's Special Council meeting for consideration.

Following discussion, it was

**RESOLVED** : That the revised tender from QMAC Construction Ltd in the sum of £425,000.00 be accepted for the renovation of the Lock Keeper's Cottage and the construction of the Visitors' Centre comprising tea/coffee and office accommodation.

At this point the meeting adjourned and reconvened when Mrs Cushnahan from Dundonald High School arrived.

#### **2007/65 : PRESENTATION BY MRS J CUSHNAHAN RE FUTURE OF DUNDONALD HIGH SCHOOL**

Councillors Tosh and Spratt declared an interest.

Mrs Cushnahan thanked the Council for giving her the opportunity to address the Council, and outlined that since the boys' and girls' high schools had amalgamated in 1991, the school building had deteriorated due to the lack of money to carry out repair work. She added that despite the Board previously placing the school on the list of new build, she had been very disappointed by an announcement made last year that the school was no longer included on the list.

She outlined that two of the reasons given by the Department for removing the school from the list were concerns about the long term enrolment of the school and problems associated with the state of the exterior of the building. She added that due to the efforts of the school, they had managed to maintain the interior of the school quite well

She referred to an article in the press on school closures and despite there being no mention of Dundonald High School within the text, the newspaper included a number of photographs of schools, one of which was Dundonald High School. She added that unfortunately this may raise concern amongst parents and could contribute to a downturn in enrolment numbers. She outlined that due to a significant amount of promotional work carried out by the school within the local community and in primary schools within the various catchment areas, the school had managed to maintain pupil numbers.

Discussion then ensued on the following issues:

- possible implications on pupil numbers as a result of bad press
- clarification as to the PR work carried out within the local community
- implications on pupils with learning difficulties as a result of the loss of the Special Learning department within the school
- clarification on the damage caused within the new Technology Department, and in particular, the computer room due to the lack of roof repairs

Following a query from Alderman Mrs Robinson as to why the school had previously not approached the Council, Mrs Cushnahan explained that when the school had been placed on the list of new build, the Board carried out repairs to the windows at the back of the school and refurbished the Technology Department, but there was no money left to carry out repairs to the roof. She added, given that the school was on the new build list, the Board did not want to waste money and had postponed painting the outside of the school. She explained that at the beginning of the summer last year, they had learned of the school's removal from the new build list, and requested a meeting with the SEELB. She added that she did not mean any disrespect to the Elected Representatives, but she had to then clear it with the Board of Governors before addressing Council.

Alderman Mrs Robinson apologised that due to a previous commitment she would have to leave the meeting, but stated that as MP and MLA, she would seek an urgent meeting with the Minister. She added that, given the demise of Lisnasharragh High School, she would do all she could to retain Dundonald High School. She outlined that she was sure that the Council as a whole would wish to support the school, and proposed that the Members also seek a meeting with the Minister on a cross party basis.

She asked Mrs Cushnahan to forward to her a briefing paper detailing all the relevant points raised, including dates, etc.

Councillor White seconded the proposal and expressed the view that the loss of this school would be a disaster for Dundonald.

Alderman Mrs Robinson left the meeting at this point at 5.23 p.m.

Councillor Spratt stated that consideration had previously been given to the amalgamation of Lisnasharragh and Dundonald High Schools, and he asked Mrs Cushnahan if she had any insight as to why this had been vetoed by the Department.

Mrs Cushnahan advised that this had not been considered by the Department as a viable option as the schools were geographically not close enough.

Councillor Tosh outlined that as Lisnasharragh High School was already earmarked for closure, he applauded Alderman Mrs Robinson's efforts in attempting to save Dundonald High School.

Councillor Bunting referred to the significant reduction in opening hours in libraries across the Borough and schools being allowed to run down beyond repair, and expressed the view that this was a worrying trend the Board appeared to be following. She added that, apart from Lagan College which was an integrated school, the proposal to amalgamate Newtownbreda and Knockbreda High Schools would result in there being only one High School within the entire Borough. She added that she was therefore delighted that the MP for the area was taking up the challenge with the Minister to save Dundonald High School.

Councillor Hanvey asked if the school had considered projected pupil intake, given the increase in housing developments within the general Dundonald area.

Mrs Cushnahan confirmed that the school could have significantly increased intake.

Councillor Spratt thanked Mrs Cushnahan for giving the presentation and stated that, as MP for the area, he was sure that Alderman Mrs Robinson would do all she could for the school, and that he would be happy to lead a delegation of Council to meet with the Minister.

RESOLVED : That

- (a) as MP for the area, Alderman Mrs Robinson to request a meeting with the Minister to discuss the future of Dundonald High School
- (b) the Council writes to the Minister requesting that he meet with a cross party delegation of Council to discuss the future of Dundonald High School, given the Department's decision to remove the school from the new build list
- (c) Mrs Cushnahan forward a briefing paper to Members detailing all the relevant points raised, including dates, etc to assist in the discussions with the Minister

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 5.35 p.m.

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**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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**MAYOR**