

CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the proceedings of the Special Council Meeting held, in committee, in the Council Chamber, Civic & Administrative Offices, Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Castlereagh, BT8 6RB on Tuesday, 13th November 2007 at 7.30 p.m.

PRESENT:- Councillor Mrs M Chambers (Mayor)
Councillor D Drysdale (Deputy Mayor)

Alderman M Copeland
Alderman J Norris MBE
Alderman Mrs I Robinson MP MLA
Alderman J White
Councillor Mrs A Beattie
Councillor J Beattie
Councillor Mrs J Cochrane
Councillor Mrs S Duncan
Councillor C Hall
Councillor M Henderson
Councillor Miss R Hughes MBE
Councillor T Jeffers
Councillor G Robinson
Councillor C Tosh
Councillor L Walker

IN ATTENDANCE:- Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Administration & Community Services, Director of Technical & Environmental Services, General Manager of Marketing & Leisure and Assistant Members' Services Officer

APOLOGIES:- Apologies were recorded on behalf of Alderman Rice, Councillors Spratt and Long and the Director of Leisure Services

2007/618 : OPENING OF THE MEETING

Alderman Norris opened the meeting with a prayer and extended the prayers and sincere wishes of the Members and Officers of the Council to the Director of

Leisure Services and her family, as her father was gravely ill in hospital.

Noted.

2007/619 : SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

At this point in the meeting, Councillors Beattie and Robinson requested that Members agree to a suspension of standing orders to enable four items to be discussed, as they required the urgent support of the Council.

Following agreement, it was

RESOLVED:- That, the Council agrees to a suspension of standing orders to bring four items forward for discussion by Councillors Beattie and Robinson, due to the urgent nature of the matters to be considered.

2007/620 : HANWOOD DEVELOPMENT PHASE II - ENTERPRISE UNITS

Councillors Drysdale, Robinson, Tosh and Alderman White wished to declare an interest in this matter and vacated the Council Chamber.

The Director of Finance circulated a report on Phase II of the Hanwood Development, with an accompanying letter from the Chairman of the Hanwood Trust, and Members took several minutes to peruse the content of the documentation.

The Director then outlined that the financial planning of this project was at a critical stage and the Council was being asked to finance a shortfall on Phase II of the Enterprise Units of £480,126 to ensure that funding for the development was secured.

He stated that the Council's contribution of £480,126 could be financed over two financial years.

Councillor Henderson proposed that the Council agree to the contribution of £480,126 to make up the shortfall in funding for the project, and this proposal was seconded by Alderman Norris.

Alderman Mrs Robinson commented that she was keen to see the Hanwood Development come to completion in view of the amount of time and energy spent by Council Officers and Members in getting the project to this stage. Furthermore, she stated that the completed facility would make a major contribution to the Tullycarnet area, in light of its TSN status.

Councillor Duncan concurred that it would be a shame if a deprived area such as Tullycarnet would lose out and she supported the Council's financial contribution to make up the shortfall and retain the facility. She referred to the forthcoming RPA and hoped that in future, Councils would be given the power to spend monies wisely on areas of deprivation and she offered the Alliance Party's wholehearted support for this proposal.

Councillor Beattie thanked Members for their cross party support and highlighted that the Hanwood Development would be a fully sustainable project, in addition to being an asset to the Council and putting Castlereagh firmly on the map.

Councillor Miss Hughes wished to fully endorse her support for the Council funding.

RESOLVED:- That, the Council unanimously agrees to finance the Hanwood Development's shortfall of £480,126 in order that funding is secured for the project. Furthermore, that this contribution would be financed over two financial years with £280k from the current underspend in the 2007/2008 year and the balance charged to the following year.

In the interim, the Chief Executive writes to the Chairman of Hanwood Trust Company Limited informing him of the Council's decision to approve the shortfall in funding.

At this point in the proceedings the four Members re-entered the meeting.

2007/621 : SEVEN FATALITIES – FIRE IN OMAGH

Councillor Beattie referred to the recent fire in which a family of seven perished in a fire in Omagh and proposed that a letter from the Council be sent to the Chief Executive of Omagh District Council extending the Members' condolences and sympathy to the family affected by the tragedy.

Following unanimous agreement, it was

RESOLVED:- That, the Mayor, on behalf of the Council, be authorised to write to the Chief Executive of Omagh District Council offering the Members' sympathy and condolences to the family affected by the recent fire in which seven family members perished.

2007/622 : SHOOTING OF TWO POLICEMEN – LONDONDERRY & DUNGANNON

Following a proposal from Councillor Beattie, Members unanimously agreed that it be

RESOLVED:- That, the Mayor, on behalf of the Council, be authorised to write to the Chief Constable of the PSNI offering the Members' condolences to the two policemen who had been shot in two separate incidents in Londonderry and Dungannon and wishing them a speedy recovery. Furthermore, that the letter includes the sentiment that the Council unanimously condemns such acts of violence towards members of the PSNI.

2007/623 : DUNDONALD HIGH SCHOOL

Councillor Gareth Robinson referred to a meeting he had attended the previous night at Dundonald High School including representatives from the Board of Governors. This meeting had highlighted the dilapidated state of the school building and the fact that structural repairs were urgently required, therefore he hoped that he would receive cross-party political support in relation to the matter.

He went on to state that, despite many attempts, the Minister for Education had not made any attempts to meet with local elected members and senior members, and there were concerns raised that the school was being deliberately run down and targeted for decommissioning. He subsequently sought Members' support to write a letter from the Council to be addressed to the Minister urging a meeting to be expeditiously arranged with Elected Members and representatives from Dundonald High School.

Councillor Drysdale wholeheartedly supported Councillor Robinson's proposal and was appalled that the school infrastructure was falling apart and Dundonald schoolchildren were having to carry out their studies in such poor conditions.

Alderman Mrs Robinson stated that she had already written to the Minister for Education some time ago seeking a meeting, in her capacity as MP, MLA and Elected Member, and she too had received no response to date. She concurred that this issue needed to be pursued from all levels of Government.

She further outlined her disappointment at the fact that the Board had previously given a commitment to carry out improvement works to the school building in 2003, but this funding had been shelved in order that the expenditure could be earmarked for works to two other schools. In addition, she stated that the new build developments at Quarry Lane and Carrowreagh merited the importance to retain Dundonald High School as there was no other High School within relative proximity.

Councillor Henderson referred to a presentation, which the Principal of Dundonald High School had made to Council 3 years ago and also expressed his

disappointment that the responses from the South Eastern Trust promising repairs had not materialised.

Councillor Chambers referred to the impacts and concerns for parents in the Dundonald area in relation to potential threats of closures to schools when choosing schools for their children and the subsequent transport costs, which were a financial burden to the Trust, as a result of those parents wishing to send their children to schools further afield.

Councillor Jeffers added that the Principal of Dundonald High School had been heavily involved in integrating members of the community into the School and agreed that the Council should support Councillor Robinson's proposal.

Following unanimous agreement, it was

RESOLVED:- That, the Chief Executive be authorised to write to the Minister for Education requesting that the Minister meets with a delegation of Elected Members from the Council to discuss the urgent need for investment in the infrastructure of Dundonald High School.

2007/624 : ENLER PROJECT

Councillor Gareth Robinson outlined that at the November Central Services Committee meeting he had highlighted concerns that the long awaited Enler Project, which included an Elderly Day Care Centre, and the involvement of the Trust had now been held back due to the withdrawal of funding by the Health Minister. He added that despite extensive efforts on the part of Landmark East, the MP for the area, local Councillors and Community representatives, he was disappointed to note that the moratorium was still in place, and that the Trust could not proceed with the Day Centre.

He noted that Landmark East intended to re-design the plans to enable the Housing Executive, Retail Units and Community Facility to go ahead, however, he was disappointed that this announcement should come at such a late hour, given that the other bodies had been holding back waiting on the Trust to secure funding.

Councillor Gareth Robinson reminded Members that the project had been ongoing for several years and it was extremely unsatisfactory that the Trust should pull out at this late stage.

The Director of Administration & Community Services commented that this matter had been raised at last night's Central Services Committee and deferred for further consideration to this meeting. She asked Councillor Robinson if he could forward her a copy of the response from the Minister, which states that funding for healthcare provision for the project was being withdrawn, to which

Councillor Robinson responded that he would forward her a copy of the correspondence.

Councillor Jeffers referred to the initial closure of the Enler House Residential Home in 1993 and the Department's assurances, at that time, that healthcare provision in Ballybeen would be retained. He was angry that the Healthcare Board had failed to demonstrate their commitment, and the building had subsequently been burned as a result of their delay. He fully supported Councillor Robinson's proposal to write to the Minister and asked that the Council reiterate that the Trust had let the Members and residents of Ballybeen down on more than one occasion in the past.

Alderman Mrs Robinson commented that she had been actively involved in discussions in relation to Enler House and she pointed out that every resident in Ballybeen had been fully supportive of the retention of Enler House. She concurred that, following the closure of the residential home, the South & East Belfast Trust had given a commitment to provide funding and support as a partner in the Enler Project partnership.

She added that initially, the residents of Ballybeen had been involved in discussions to determine their needs, and they had identified that healthcare facilities to complement the facility was a priority.

She therefore concurred that the letter should ask the Minister to revisit this decision to ensure that the 10,000 residents of Ballybeen had access to proper healthcare provision.

Councillor Henderson referred to other Trusts in Northern Ireland who had identified the importance of these types of healthcare facilities and urged that the South & East Belfast Trust review its decision on the Enler Project as it merited healthcare provision of this nature.

He further expressed anger that the Trust, however, had agreed in the interim to finance an Arts sculpture to site in the grounds of the Ulster Hospital at considerable expenditure, to the detriment of the residents of Ballybeen.

Councillor Duncan, although fully supportive of the Arts, concurred that the healthcare of ratepayers was paramount and felt that the letter from the Council should include facts and figures to support the Council's case.

Councillor Drysdale stated that this refusal for funding would have a knock-on effect on the Enler Project and feared that the residents of Ballybeen would again miss out. Furthermore, there would be a subsequent impact on the number of community groups who were looking to move into the Enler site because of its proposed healthcare provision.

Following Councillor Gareth Robinson's proposal, which was seconded by Councillor Henderson, it was unanimously agreed that it be

RESOLVED:- That, the Chief Executive be authorised to write to the Minister for Health, as well as the Chairman of the South & East Belfast Trust, urging them to review their decision not to fund the Elderly Day Care Centre aspect of the Enler Trust Project on the basis that the Department had initially agreed to commit funding for this facility and that the impacts of their decision would detrimentally affect healthcare provision for the residents of Ballybeen.

2007/625 : CONSIDERATION OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE EMERGING FINDINGS ON THE REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Tabled:- Copy correspondence from the Department of Environment together with a copy of the NILGA response document (copy previously circulated)

The Chief Executive referred to Councillor Bunting's previous comments at the last NILGA meeting, in her capacity as a Council NILGA representative, and felt that the Council should fully support the NILGA response to ensure that each of the 26 Councils were united in their approach.

Councillor Chambers referred to the importance of the response in relation to its future impacts on the staff, Directors and ratepayers in each of the 26 Councils and their designated areas.

Councillor Beattie stated that, as a NILGA representative, he had been concerned at the Review of Public Administration proposals in relation to staffing and elected members issues and in particular, its subsequent financial impacts on ratepayers in the Borough.

He had also particular misgivings in relation to the proposed decentralisation of the Fire & Rescue Service, Planning and Roads Service, amongst other agencies, in light of the huge expense to Councils in carrying out deliveries of these services, therefore he recommended support of the NILGA response.

Councillor Duncan referred to an Alliance Party document, and quoted that "A world class system of Local Government requires a world class system of Local Government finance" and she highlighted the importance that sufficient funding and personnel was required to back these powers.

Councillor Beattie reiterated that NILGA had already emphasised that substantial finance was required to match the function, but Councillor Chambers concurred with Councillor Duncan in that adequate staff provision to carry out the service was also an essential factor.

Councillor Henderson referred to the need for a training budget for the training of new and existing Councillors when the new Super Councils were in place and expressed concern that there was no mention of this funding provision in the response. However, Councillor Chambers stated that provision for this training would be carried out by the Department of the Environment under their modernising programme.

The Chief Executive then referred to the SOLACE reaction to the NILGA response and informed Members that they were fully supportive of the Elected Members and NILGA.

He informed Members that he had been involved with reorganisation meetings since 2002 and despite much time and expense, he felt that it had been a worthless exercise to date. He concurred with Members' concerns in relation to the possibility that Central Government could hand the responsibility to Councils for their most expensive projects and these costs would ultimately be relayed to the ratepayer.

He also concurred with Councillor Beattie's earlier comments and, in particular, disagreed with the proposal to centralise Youth & Libraries and stated that, in his view, Councils should retain control of this provision.

Following a proposal from Councillor Beattie, which was seconded by Alderman White, it was unanimously agreed that it be

RESOLVED:- That, the Council fully supports the NILGA response and agrees to accept NILGA's response to the emerging findings on the Review of Public Administration.

Furthermore, that the Chief Executive be instructed to contact the Minister for Environment, the RPA Review Team and NILGA to inform them that the Council has unanimously agreed to support NILGA's response.

As there was no other business, the meeting concluded at 8.30 p.m.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

MAYOR

