

## **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 Thursday 29 November 2007 at 7.00 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Councillor Mrs M Chambers  
(in the Chair)

**ALDERMEN:** J Norris MBE  
Mrs G Rice MBE  
Mrs I Robinson MP MLA  
J White

**COUNCILLORS:** Mrs A M Beattie  
J Beattie  
Ms J Bunting  
Mrs J Cochran  
Mrs S Duncan  
M Henderson  
Miss R Hughes MBE  
T Jeffers  
Mrs V McCoy  
G Robinson  
J Spratt MLA  
L Walker

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

**APOLOGIES:** Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Drysdale, Hanvey, Hall, Long and Tosh

### **2007/673 : OPENING OF THE MEETING**

Alderman Norris opened the meeting with a prayer.

Noted.

### **2007/674 : SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING TO HONOUR THE RIGHT HONOURABLE PETER ROBINSON MP MLA**

Councillor Chambers outlined that as Mayor of Castlereagh it gave her particular pleasure to call this Special Council meeting to honour the Right Honourable Peter Robinson MP MLA. She added that the Members were delighted to have this opportunity to recognise Peter Robinson's dedication

and commitment in making Castlereagh Borough Council the premier Borough in the Province.

She stated that having served thirty years on Council it was strange to see Peter here as a guest and not in the role of Councillor. She outlined that the legacy he had left would live on in the work of his DUP colleagues on the Council as they endeavoured to retain the place as the premier Borough in Northern Ireland.

Councillor Spratt stated that it was with a degree of sadness but also as a celebration that we gather this evening in honour of an esteemed colleague and friend, the Right Honourable Peter Robinson MP MLA. He added that Peter had been elected to Council in 1977 and this Borough had benefited greatly from his enthusiasm, drive and determination within local government. He outlined that his record was second to none across the Province, and he was sure that in the course of those 30 years, many Councils would wish that they had their own Peter Robinson to drive forward good government and policy within their own areas.

He commented that Peter became Deputy Mayor in 1978, Mayor in 1986 and had served as an Alderman since 1988. He added that Peter received the due recognition from his colleagues that he wholly deserved, yet despite this, he always remained the same Peter Robinson, modest, approachable and amicable.

He continued by stating that as we gather to recognise Peter's service to Castlereagh and ask what was the legacy of Peter Robinson within local government, and he would guess that the people of this Borough would reply top class facilities and low rates. He added that, as Minister for Finance & Personnel, Peter had already brought forward innovative and wide ranging ideas in the area of rates and he had brought forward proposals for the introduction of a derelict land tax.

Councillor Spratt outlined that as a Member of the Democratic Unionist Party, Peter was held in the highest regard, both within the Council and Province-wide, and as an MP for East Belfast since 1979, constituency work and acting as an articulate Unionist voice at Westminster were his trademarks.

He concluded by stating that he wished Peter well as Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly, as an MP, as a husband to Iris, as a father and grandfather, and as a friend. He added that he was sure that not only Peter's DUP colleagues would echo these sentiments, but also his other colleagues on the Council and the Officers who had served with him for many years.

Councillor Henderson outlined that it was hard to find the words to describe Peter Robinson, but words that spring to mind were mentor, forward thinker, leader, working together and Peter was someone whom you would like to aspire to as a politician. He recalled a mayoral event some ten years previously when Peter Robinson predicted then what had come to fruition now in politics, proving that he was definitely a forward thinker. He outlined that he

would like to say that he had a friend in Peter Robinson, and there was no better person to have as a friend.

He proposed that as a gesture of thanks to Peter he be presented with the Alderman's robe that he had worn throughout his many years on the Council, and this was seconded by Councillor J Beattie.

Alderman Rice stated that when she first joined the Council in 1989, it was a hard place to be with many late meetings involving spirited debates. She added that as far as Peter was concerned it was all political and there was no personal agenda, and when Members left the Council Chamber it was forgotten and no grudges held.

She outlined that in 1995 a cross-party delegation went to Brazil in an effort to attract to Castlereagh, the World Ten Pin Bowling Championships. She added that this was a time when people did not readily come to Northern Ireland, and she was pleased to say that they were successful in their bid and Castlereagh played host to 71 countries with 350 delegates. She stated that the following year, the Council won the British Tourism Award, but the most important aspect was that the visitors all had a great time and thoroughly enjoyed their stay in Northern Ireland.

Alderman Rice outlined that the Council delegation had witnessed terrible poverty in the streets of Brazil, and it was then that I had witnessed a very caring side of Peter Robinson. She then recalled happy memories when the Councillors used to come back to her house after the switching on of the Christmas Tree lights in Carryduff each year.

She added that on a personal level, she would like to thank Peter for his caring attitude when she was seriously ill and she knew that he had been the first Councillor on his feet in the Chamber to ask for her to be allowed a dispensation from Council duties until she was well enough.

She concluded by passing on her personal thanks to Peter Robinson and wished him all the very best in his new career as Finance Minister.

Councillor Hughes outlined that it was in 1997 when she was first elected to Castlereagh Borough Council and at that time as now, there was only one other SDLP Member on the Council. She added that taking her place in the Council Chamber was daunting to her but she soon found out that she had nothing to fear, as it was clear from the start that all Members of Castlereagh Borough Council were focused on providing the best service they could for the ratepayers.

She added that Peter Robinson in particular had worked tirelessly to develop and improve the Borough of Castlereagh. She commented that her personal memories of working with Peter Robinson had many highlights, and one of his achievements that she looked back on with pride was his efforts in promoting free fares for senior citizens on public transport. She stated that this has had a huge impact on the quality of life of many of our older residents.

She outlined that it was with great interest to know that Peter's concern for senior citizens has continued with his announcement on rates concessions for the elderly.

Councillors Hughes concluded by wishing Peter every success in his new position as Minister for Finance, and she added that she was sure that if he served the people of Northern Ireland as effectively as he had the ratepayers of Castlereagh, the future for the Province was looking very good indeed.

Councillor J Beattie provided some background history on his involvement in the rating system since he first joined the Council. He recalled the many hours that he and the Director of Finance had spent on the proposed rate and at virtually the last moment, Peter would announce to them that the rate could be reduced even further. He added that he was happy to say that the savings were always found.

He outlined that the point he was making was that when dealing with Peter Robinson, you were always kept on your toes and this was something that those in the Assembly would have to cope with.

Councillor Beattie stated that Peter had the most difficult job in the Executive, but it was a job that he was best suited to, and he was sure that he was speaking for both the Elected Members and Staff that there was no better man to head up the Department of Finance & Personnel.

He concluded by stating that this Council misses Peter, but the standard that he had set would enable the Members to continue successfully to operate until the Council's demise, and the Members thank you for all your influence in this Council's affairs over the years.

The Right Honourable Peter Robinson began by thanking everyone for marking his departure after 30 years as a Castlereagh Councillor. He added that when he looked back on his political career, his time in Castlereagh had been his happiest time in politics.

He outlined that Castlereagh Borough Council had given him a sound grounding in politics and when he was flying back from Westminster to a Council meeting, Ian Paisley always remarked to him that Castlereagh was his first love. He added that many of the issues he was now taking forward had come from issues discussed in Castlereagh, not least the rates issue. He stated that no local Councillor could do anything without excellent people behind them, not just Party colleagues, but the Chief Executive, Directors and staff. He remarked that the post he now held took him round a lot of Councils and he was in no doubt that the people of Castlereagh were very well served, both in terms of the services provided and the calibre of their local representatives.

He commented that when you compare the quality of Castlereagh Councillors with other Council areas, the ratepayers were well represented despite any

differences the Members might have. He added that this was due to the fact that Castlereagh Councillors recognised what the priorities were and they worked together to get the best deal for ratepayers.

The Right Honourable Peter Robinson stated that the economy in Northern Ireland had been badly affected by violence over the past number of years, but he believed that the Province now had an opportunity to move forward.

He continued by stating that that he hoped that the friends he had made during his time on Castlereagh Council were not just from the ranks of his own party. He referred to dinner parties he and Iris had attended outside of the Council with Geraldine Rice and her husband, John.

He concluded by thanking everyone for the fond and happy memories during his 30 years on Council, and he hoped to retain these friendships for the rest of his life.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7.55 pm

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**MAYOR**

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**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**