

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 14th February 2008 at 3.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor M Chambers
(in the Chair)

ALDERMEN: M Copeland MLA
J Norris MBE
G Rice MBE
J White

COUNCILLORS: Mrs A Beattie
J Beattie
Ms J Bunting
Mrs J Cochrane
Mrs S Duncan
D Drysdale
C Hall
B Hanvey
M Henderson
R Hughes MBE
T Jeffers
G Robinson
J Spratt MLA
C Tosh
L Walker

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Administration and Community Services, Director of Technical & Environmental Services, General Manager Leisure & Marketing, Budgetary Control Officer, Assistant Member Services Officer

APOLOGIES:- Apologies were received on behalf of Alderman Robinson, Councillors Long and McCoy

2008/09 : STRIKING OF THE DISTRICT RATES FOR THE 2008/2009 FINANCIAL YEAR

Councillor Beattie looked back on a year of increasing financial uncertainty with a down turn in the housing market, higher fuel and food costs and inflation

beginning to rise. He stated that the domestic rate was an added tax on the ratepayer but reflected on Castlereagh Borough Council's history of tight fiscal policies rigorously applied and reported that the Council's tight control of income and expenditure over the past financial year had resulted in an underspend. He stated that for 7 of the last 10 years the Council had maintained the lowest position in the District Domestic Rate table and that in the current year not only was it in bottom place but it was over 8% below the next lowest Council and 81% below the Council with the highest district domestic rate.

Councillor Beattie outlined the difficulties faced by Council in maintaining a low rate level and referred to those increased costs which were totally outside the Council's control. These included payroll costs where the Council was facing a possible 3% cost of living increase plus a further 2% increase in employer's pension costs. He also referred to the substantial increase in landfill tax with the current rate going up from £24 per ton to £32 per ton. Spiralling fuel costs together with increased journeys for transportation of Council waste would mean that garage costs would increase by 0.40%. Finally Councillor Beattie advised that natural inflation of 2.5% on purchases would increase total expenditure by approximately £200K or 1.56%. These factors combined meant that the Council faced 8.18% of an increase in its net operating expenditure over the next year over which it had little or no control.

Councillor Beattie went on to report on the measures taken by the Council to maintain the low rate. He explained that the Council had taken action 3 years ago to refinance a number of loans in its portfolio and this had resulted in a loan of £1.5 million dropping out of the system in this financial year resulting in a major reduction in loan charges. Councillor Beattie also reported that the Council's Estimated Penny Product had increased by about 16K, largely due to the new Tesco store at Newtownbreda, and the Council was now reaping the benefits of this.

Before introducing the district rate, Councillor Beattie commented on the Council's capital provision. He referred to the new astro pitch surface at Lough Moss, the refurbishment of the Dundonald Ice Bowl, the ongoing improvement works to the Castlereagh Hills Golf Club, the official opening in the Spring of the Lock Keeper's Cottage, and the proposed development of 25 enterprise units in partnership with the Hanwood Trust. He also spoke of the Council's successful partnership arrangements with DETI, IFI, DSD and NIHE.

Councillor Beattie referred to the new Moneyreagh Community Centre which was nearing completion. He also spoke of financial provision for proposed works to be progressed by the Technical & Environmental Services Department including a new playground at Belvoir, improvement works at Tullycarnet Park and provision for repairs at the Council's cemetery.

Finally Councillor Beattie reported that the Council had just completed a major IT strategy which would greatly improve the efficiency of operations across all departments.

Councillor Beattie concluded by stating that it gave him great pleasure to propose the following rates for the 2008/2009 financial year:

Non-Domestic Rate	15.8224p
Domestic Rate	0.1902p

Councillor Beattie explained that these rates were an increase of 1.66% on the previous year's rates.

Councillor Beattie thanked the Council Members for their input into the five month process of financial analysis and estimates. He also thanked the Chief Executive and Council staff for their endeavours and he paid particular tribute to the Director of Finance and his officers.

Councillor Spratt seconded the proposal. He thanked Councillor Beattie and members of the Estimates Committee for their hard work in putting the rate together. He also thanked the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and the Finance Department for the many hours of hard work required of them. He also thanked the Director of other Departments for their input into the process and also for playing their part over the past year in delivering services for the ratepayers.

He stated that the Council should be proud of the services provided for its ratepayers and the tight fiscal policy that had been so effective. He concluded by saying that the low rate struck by the Council and an announcement by the Minister of Finance that the Regional Rate was being frozen for 3 years augured well for the ratepayers of Castlereagh.

Councillor Henderson referred to the quality of the Council's services and facilities and mentioned in particular the Ice Bowl, the Billy Neill Soccer Centre of Excellence, the many improvements to the golf course and the arts programme including a very successful Ulster Scots event held the previous evening. He thanked the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and all the Council staff for their efforts.

Alderman Rice thanked the Director of Finance for his hard work and commitment. She also thanked the Chief Executive and all the officers of the Council and the Chairperson of the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

Alderman Copeland congratulated the Council on the production of the rate and paid particular tributes to the Director of Finance and the Chairperson of the Finance & General Purposes Committee. He referred to the heavy responsibility

that the Council had to its ratepayers and he felt that the rate proposed by the Council was the best balance attainable between the provision of services and facilities and a level of rates that people could afford.

Councillor Robinson spoke in support of the proposed rate and thanked the Director of Finance and his Department as well as the Chairperson of the Finance and General Purposes Committee. He pointed out that the Council did not receive any resources element of the General Grant and was at a greater disadvantage than some other Councils in efforts to strike a low rate. He stated that Castlereagh led the way in parties working together in the interests of the ratepayers.

Councillor Hanvey echoed the words of thanks of previous speakers. He also agreed with Councillor Robinson that Council Members overcame their political differences and had one overriding aim which was to serve the ratepayers of the Borough.

(Alderman White left at 3.40 pm)

Councillor Drysdale paid tribute to the Council officers. He stated that Castlereagh was leading the way in leisure provision and mentioned in particular the Billy Neill Soccer Centre of Excellence, which was a template for other Councils to follow, the Icebowl and the Robinson Centre.

Finally the Mayor thanked the Chief Executive, Directors, staff and Members of the F&GP under the leadership of its Chairperson for their endeavours.

The Mayor then put the proposal to the meeting and it was

RESOLVED (unanimously) That the Council agree to set the following rates in respect of the 2008/2009 financial year:

Non-Domestic Rate	15.8224p
Domestic Rate	0.1902p

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 3.45 p.m.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

MAYOR