CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the proceedings of the special meeting of Castlereagh Borough Council, held in the Council Chamber, Castlereagh Borough Council, Civic & Administrative Offices, Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Castlereagh, BT8 6RB, on Thursday, 11 February 2010, at 7.00 p.m.

PRESENT:	Councillor M Copeland (in the Chair)
ALDERMEN:	M Henderson J Norris MBE Mrs G Rice MBE J White
COUNCILLORS:	Mrs A Beattie J Beattie Ms J Bunting Mrs M Chambers Mrs J Cochrane Mrs S Duncan C Hall B Hanvey Miss R Hughes MBE T Jeffers Mrs V McCoy G Robinson J Spratt MLA C Tosh
IN ATTENDANCE:	Acting Chief Executive (Director of Administration & Community Services), Director of Leisure Services, Director of Technical & Environmental Services, Senior Accountant and Members' Services Officer
APOLOGIES:	An apology was received on behalf of Councillors Drysdale and Walker

2010/61 : STRIKING OF THE DISTRICT RATES FOR THE 2010/2011 FINANCIAL YEAR

Councillor Beattie stated that the District Rates that had been achieved by the Estimates Working Group had, undoubtedly, been the most difficult exercise the Council had encountered for many years. Due to the current economic recession, the Estimates Working Group had agreed to strike rates that would support the ratepayers in Castlereagh and help them through this difficult time.

Originally, in October 2009, the draft proposed increase in the rates had been approximately 30%, and it had been decided to set a target of 2%, which meant that the Estimates Working Group had the task of finding £3.5 million in savings. Officers prepared a financial forecast of cash reserves for the next year, which had revealed approximately £2.2 million in the Council's District Fund as at 31 March 2009 while at the same time carrying a working capital balance and resulted in 6%

of the required 28%. A further 4% were identified through a transfer of £0.5 million to the Renewals & Repairs Fund. The Estimates Working Group also recommended placing a moratorium on non-essential Council expenditure with effect from 1 February 2010.

Various cost drivers had also been considered. During debates in respect of these costs/overheads, the Estimates Working Group had exercised due diligence and risk management in order to find a very fine balance in arriving at the level of resources required to maintain service delivery while minimising the increase on the district rates. It also became evident that, not only had the Estimates Working Group to deal with the normal inflationary costs but also a number of additional factors beyond its control. The main cost drivers could be summarised as:

- Capital expenditure 1.96%
- Landfill tax 0.90%
- Recycling costs 0.64%
- Water charges 0.39%
- Leisure salaries 0.39%

Councillor Beattie went on to comment on the major capital expenditure plans contained in the Estimates. A three-year Capital expenditure plan had been compiled and reviewed, with the major additions as follows:

Leisure Services

- Dundonald Ice Bowl refrigeration plant replacement
- Dundonald Ice Bowl Samboni replacement
- Castlereagh Golf Club entrance improvements

Technical & Environmental Services

- Tullycarnet Park development
- Breda and Colby playground
- Clonduff playground
- Carryduff Household Recycling Centre improvements
- Recycling investment

Councillor Beattie then advised that, with the full endorsement of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, the Estimates Working Group had agreed to recommend to Council an increase of 3.47% in the district domestic rate and the district non-domestic rate for the 2010-2011 financial year, which equated to an increase of £9.81 for each average domestic property owner in Castlereagh.

Councillor Beattie commented that the achievement of striking a rate increase of 3.47% had only been possible by combining the skills and experience of Council Members and Officers and he offered his sincere thanks to all those who faithfully attended and contributed to the Estimates debate during the past three months. Furthermore, he thanked all Directors, Managers and staff for their devotion during the process and in particular the Senior Accountant and the Management Accountant.

Councillor Robinson echoed Councillor Beattie's comments and thanked him for his work in bringing the Estimates Working Group together and for presenting a rate increase that each party agreed to. He also thanked all Officers for their work.

Councillor Robinson enquired in respect of a sum of £32,000, whether this had been set aside for election expenses and whether any residual balance could be set aside to fund any possible further investigations. The Senior Accountant replied that £4,500 had been set aside for annual registration and the balance for potential by-election costs. Should the by-election not take place, the balance would be transferred into the District Fund Reserve for Council to determine how it could be used.

Alderman Rice thanked the Estimates Working Group and Officers for all their hard work.

Alderman Henderson, Councillor Copeland and Councillor Hanvey also offered their thanks to the Estimates Working Group and Officers.

RESOLVED (unanimously): That approval be granted for an increase in the District Domestic rate and the District Non-Domestic Rate of 3.47% for the financial year 2010/2011.

Councillor Robinson left the room at this point at 7.15 pm.

IN COMMITTEE

2010/62 : UPDATE ON THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE LOCK KEEPER'S INN

The Acting Chief Executive provided Members with an update in respect of the investigation into the Lock Keeper's Inn. She took Members through a report which outlined the various aspects and legal implications. She advised of legal costs to date and of the co-operation thus far with the PSNI. The Local Government Auditor had also been updated.

Noted.

Councillor Robinson returned to the meeting.

2010/63 : CONSIDERATION OF THE DATE FOR THE SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING TO CONSIDER THE FILLING OF A CASUAL VACANCY UNDER SECTION 11 OF THE ELECTORAL LAW ACT (NI) 1962

The Acting Chief Executive stated that she had been in discussions with the Northern Ireland Electoral Office regarding the statutory provisions of the above Act, and she stipulated the timeframe within which a special meeting must be called to consider the filling of the casual vacancy. She referred to the January full Council meeting, when 25 February 2010 had been proposed for a special meeting of Council. However, she went on to say that, as this date was falling on the 43rd day after the occurrence of the vacancy, ie 13 January 2010 being the effective date of resignation, this date would be considered to be outside the stipulated timeframe of no more than 42 days.

Members had also considered 24 February 2010 as a possible alternative date for the special meeting, and the Acting Chief Executive sought confirmation before issuing notice in this regard.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED: That the date for the Special Council meeting to consider the filling of a Casual Vacancy under Section 11 of the Electoral Law Act (NI) 1962 be set as 22 February 2010, at 7.00 pm.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

2010/64 : LOCAL ACTION GROUP MEETINGS

Alderman Henderson advised that, due to work commitments, it would be difficult to attend Local Action Group meetings, therefore Councillor Hall would attend these meetings.

Noted.

2010/65 : STANDING ORDERS

Alderman Henderson requested that all Councillors be furnished with an up-to-date copy of the Council's Standing Orders.

RESOLVED: That all Members be furnished with an up-to-date copy of the Council's Standing Orders.

2010/66 : VACANT POST OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Councillor Hanvey requested an update on the legal advice regarding the vacant post of Chief Executive. Councillor Robinson stated, on a Point of Order, that discussion could not take place while Directors were present. The Acting Chief Executive offered that all Directors and staff leave, and it was

RESOLVED: That consideration of the vacant post of Chief Executive take place at the February meeting of full Council.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7.30 pm

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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MAYOR