

Minutes of Adjourned Meeting of Monaghan County Council held in the Mtek Building, Knockaconny, Monaghan on Monday 21st September, 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

Chair: Cllr H. Humphreys, Mayor.

Present: Cllrs. Bannigan, Carthy, Carville, Connolly, Coyle, Crowe, Gallagher, Keelan, Maxwell, McElvaney, B. McKenna, S. McKenna, McNally, Murray, O'Brien, O'Hanlon, P. Treanor and S. Treanor.

Mr. D. Nelson, County Manager, Mr. M. Fitzpatrick, Mr. P. Clifford, Mr. A. King, Mr. D. Fallon, Directors of Service, Mr. J. Murray, Head of Finance and Ms. C. Thornton, Meetings Administrator.

Apology: Cllr Conlon.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Council's financial situation and to complete the items which had not been dealt with at the normal monthly meeting.

3. Financial Report to year end 31st August 2009:

The Manager referred to the report prepared by the Head of Finance and which had been circulated with the agenda outlining the Council's financial position at the end of August, 2009. The Manager stated that the Council faced a difficult challenge in maintaining service delivery in light of a potential deficit of circa €500,000, if the Non Principal Private Residence charge (NPPR) fails to yield the estimated return. The biggest issue for 2010 will be the Local Government Fund allocation which is expected to experience a 10% cut on the current allocation. In 2008 the Council had received €16.6 million from the fund – this was reduced to €15.596 million in 2009, and was followed by a further cut of €501,000. If the Council experience a further 10% cut next year that would be circa €1.5m on top of what we are dealing with in the current year. He said there would be drastic changes in the way the Council delivered its services and there may be some services which they would not be delivering at all.

He referred to staff whose salaries heretofore were funded through capital schemes and stated that this funding would not be available to the Council next year. It will be a major challenge to make up the funding which had previously come from the NRA on the by-pass projects and the Housing Capital Programme. The Council is continually monitoring its cash flow to ensure funding is available to meet its commitments.

Mr. John Murray, Finance Officer stated that the Council were facing a shortfall of €2.6m in what it had budgeted for in 2009. This arose from the following estimated reductions in income –

Landfill	940,000
Planning fees	282,000
Water charges	200,000
Commercial Rates	370,000
Local Government Fund	501,919

Diesel wash recoupment	100,000
Miscellaneous income	100,000

Mr. Murray explained that in order to address the situation a complete financial review of all the Council's activities was undertaken in order to identify potential cost savings. The outcome of this financial review identified a potential reduction in expenditure amounting to €1,996,936. The report circulated to the members detailed the projected savings. The net result is a projected deficit for the year amounting to €96,983. The reduction in the LGF is based on a 3.22% reduction on the 2009 allocation. Income from the NPPR charge introduced in July is intended to compensate for the LGF reduction. Based on the most recent details available there are 2,781 houses liable to the charge in County Monaghan with potential income of €56,200. The actual level of income that will be generated by the charge is unclear at present as there are no details available yet of collection rates.

A lengthy debate followed to which a number of members contributed. They expressed shock at the current financial situation. Members stated that the role of local government is being eroded and local authorities are becoming more of a conduit for the distribution of government grants as opposed to real local democracy as is known in most other European countries. Local Government has become the poor relation in comparison to Government Departments and there is a need for a root and branch review of the way that local government is funded as there will be a serious decrease in rates income over the next few years as a result of the economic downturn. The future payment of road grants was raised as another area of concern given the recent correspondence from the National Roads Authority. Members queried the €1.6m paid to consultants and stated that this work should, as far as possible, be done 'in house' by Council staff.

Responding to the issue of consultants fees paid by the Council, the County Manager stated that of the €1.6m paid in consultant's fees, over €1m was paid to consultants engaged on major capital projects, eg Castleblayney bypass scheme, Carrickmacross Sewerage Scheme, Library HQ Clones, Cloughvalley social housing and the Carrickmacross Civic Amenity site. Consultants payments on the revenue side include legal costs, water sampling costs, medical expenses, coroners fees, land valuations etc. Payments to consultants are subject to an annual audit by the Local Government Auditor. In relation to the correspondence from the NRA he stated that there is some confusion over the letter that issued to local authorities. He explained that the NRA are not taking over responsibility for local and regional roads they are taking over the role of the Department of Transport at national level but it remains to be seen what effect this will have on local authorities.

Members also referred to a proposed reduction in the allocation for the Housing Adaptation Grants Scheme of €100,000.

Mr. P. Clifford, Director stated that the Council has approved all eligible grant applications to date and paid grants totalling €1.2m in respect of all approved applications completed to date. He anticipates that expenditure will not meet the level allocated by the DoEHLG and that savings of €100,000 in local funding will be achieved.

On the proposal of Cllr Humphreys, seconded by Cllr P. Treanor it was agreed that the Council do not cut the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme allocation for 2009.

On the proposal of Cllr O'Hanlon, seconded by Cllr McNally, it was agreed that the Council write to the Department of Education & Science expressing its concern at the significant increase in school transport fees and the resultant increase in traffic volumes as many parents now use their own vehicles to bring children to school.

9. To receive report on Carrickmacross Civic Offices project.

The Members considered the report dated 3rd September, 2009 from Mr. M. Fitzpatrick, Director in relation to the proposed Civic Offices in Carrickmacross. Mr. Fitzpatrick explained that the Convent Lands, comprising 112 acres of land, had been purchased in 1978 for £194,000. Following a number of reports commissioned by the Council the site had been divided into five projects, viz

- Social & Affordable housing
- Private Housing
- Industrial sites
- Recreation facilities
- Town Centre

To date 171 units of social and affordable housing have been completed; 130 units of private housing are under construction; all industrial sites have been sold although no construction has taken place to date; Carrick Aces Athletic Club is currently developing an athletic facility with the support of the County Council and Carrickmacross Town Council. A previous project to develop ten acres of land under a public private partnership had not been proceeded with by the developer. Subsequently the County Council had decided to proceed with the development of the Civic Offices as a "stand alone" project on a "Design and Build" arrangement. A preferred bidder was selected earlier this year following a public procurement process. The proposed civic offices and library consist of approximately 1950 sq metres floor area at an estimated cost of €4.7m. The estimated completion time for the project is 69 weeks.

In 2004, the Council received approval in principle to proceed with the new library with grant aid of €22,500. The Department has recently advised that the 2009 allocations have been issued and due to the pressure on public finances at this time, it is not possible to indicate the availability of financial assistance for library projects beyond 2009.

Arising from the sale of lands for the various projects referred to above, there is currently a credit balance of €2.5 million on the Convent Land capital account. In addition, Carrickmacross Town Council is in a position to contribute €2 million towards the project. Funding the scheme from these sources will have no impact on the rate payers of County Monaghan or Carrickmacross Town Council.

Mr. Kevin McNally then showed the members a virtual walk-through of the proposed project design prepared by the preferred bidder.

Mr. Fitzpatrick stated that it is now necessary for the Council make a decision as to whether the project should proceed or not.

Following a discussion on the matter, during which queries raised by the Members were responded to by Mr. Fitzpatrick, the following proposal was made –

Cllr McNally proposed, Cllr Murray seconded – that the Council proceed with Carrickmacross Civic Offices and Branch Library project.

The Mayor put the proposal to the meeting and it was agreed unanimously.

11. To consider recommendations from Corporate Policy Group meeting held on 31st August, 2009

Preparation of Corporate Plan 2009 – 2014:

Mr. P. Clifford, Director advised the members that in accordance with the Local Government Act 2001 the Council is required to adopt a Corporate Plan within six month of the election of the new Council. He stated that work would shortly commence on the preparation of the new plan which must outline the principal activities of the local authority; the objectives for the next five years and the strategies for achieving those objectives together with proposals for assessment of performance in achieving the objectives. Council Members will be consulted during the preparation of the plan.

4. Community Development Fund 2009 – Allocation of funds under Measure 3

Mr. Aidge King, Director, referred to the allocation of funds totalling €76,450 which had been approved by the Council at the July meeting under Measure 1 and Measure 2 of the Community Development Fund 2009. A sum of €23,550 remains to be allocated under Measure 3 of the fund. Details of the applications received from local groups for funding under this measure were considered by the Corporate Policy Group and the following grant allocations were recommended to the full Council for approval.

Name of applicant	Description of project	Recommended
Tullycorbett DA	Extension to existing centre & fitness suite	800
Tyholland sports complex	Construct tennis and bball courts improve access	10,000
Monaghan United football club	Install all weather floodlit pitch in gortakeegan	10,000
Rockcorry Dev Association	To purchase equipment to install broadband to the area	2,000
Doohamlet Dev Association	Upgrade & install signage in Doohamlet village	750

Cllr Maxwell proposed, Cllr B. McKenna seconded that the Council accept the recommendations of the Corporate Policy Group.

Cllr Bannigan proposed, Cllr O'Brien seconded that the €20,800 be divided equally between Tullycorbett, Tyholland and Monaghan United.

A recorded vote on Cllr Bannigan's amendment resulted as follows:

For: Cllrs Bannigan, Coyle, Crowe, Keelan, McElvaney, McNally, O'Brien, O'Hanlon. **Total 8**

Against: Cllrs Connolly, Gallagher, Humphreys, Maxwell, B. McKenna, S. McKenna, Murray, P. Treanor and S. Treanor. **Total 9**

Abstentions: Cllr Carthy

The Mayor declared the amendment defeated. Cllr Maxwell's proposal was put to the meeting and agreed by the Council.

On the proposal of Cllr Bannigan, seconded by Cllr Humphreys it was agreed that the Council write to the Minister for Communications asking him to expedite the roll out of broadband to all areas of County Monaghan.

Future roll out of Per Cent for Arts Scheme:

Mr. Somhairle MacConghail, Arts Officer advised the meeting that the Per Cent for Arts Scheme (in particular the commissioning of two art pieces for the Monaghan and Castleblayney bypasses) had come before the Council earlier this year and a decision on the matter had been deferred. It is now necessary to make a decision as to whether to progress with the commissioning of the art pieces or not. The Council had written to the NRA requesting that the funding allocated for the art works could be re-allocated towards road maintenance. However the NRA had advised the Council that the money provided for the art works on the Castleblayney and Monaghan bypasses could not be used for any other element of these projects. He stated should the Council approve the commissioning there will be substantial benefits to the local economy.

Cllr Crowe proposed, Cllr Connolly seconded that the Council approve the roll out of the Per Cent for Arts Scheme and proceed with the commissioning of the artworks for the Castleblayney ("St. Maeldoid's Pig") and Monaghan bypass ("Streetch").

A recorded vote on Cllr Crowe's proposal resulted as follows:

For: Cllrs Bannigan, Carthy, Connolly, Coyle, Crowe, Gallagher, Humphreys, Keelan, Maxwell, B. McKenna, S. McKenna, McNally, Murray, O'Brien, O'Hanlon, P. Treanor and S. Treanor. **Total 17**
Against: Cllr McElvaney **Total 1**

The Mayor declared Cllr Crowe's proposal carried.

The meeting then concluded.

Signed: _____
Meara Meetings Administrator

Date: _____