

**Minutes of Meeting of Monaghan County Council held in the Garage Theatre, Armagh Road, Monaghan, on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2020 at 11.00 a.m.**

**Chair:** Cllr C. Carthy, Cathaoirleach

**Present:** Cllrs. Aughey, Bennett, Campbell, Conlon, Connolly, Coyle, Gilliland, Keelan, Kerr-Conlon, Maxwell, McCooey, McElvaney, McKenna, O'Hanlon, P. Treanor, S. Treanor, R. Truell.

Mr. E. O'Sullivan, Chief Executive, Mr. J. Murray, Head of Finance, Mr. A. King, Ms. P. Monahan, Directors of Services, Mr. Cathal Flynn, A/Director of Services, Mr. A. Hughes, Senior Planner, Ms. M. McGarvey, Senior Staff Officer and Ms. C. Thornton, Meetings Administrator.

**Apology:** Cllr Kerr-Conlon, Mr. P. Clifford and Ms. P. Monahan, Directors of Service.

At the outset, the Cathaoirleach informed the members that he had submitted a motion of urgent business at the previous meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, but it hadn't been dealt at the start of that meeting.

*On the proposal of Cllr Coyle, seconded by Cllr P. Treanor, it was agreed to go 'Into Committee' to discuss whether to accept the motion submitted as urgent business.*

The motion of urgent business was as follows:

*The closure of Ulster Bank could potentially lead to more than 3,000 job losses, the loss of 88 branches and the shutting down of over a hundred ATM machines all over the country. It would be bad for the economy, competition, and sustainability in the Irish market. We call on NatWest to commit to the future of Ulster Bank for customers, staff, and competition.*

*Cllr McKenna proposed, Cllr Bennett seconded that the motion of urgent business be taken at the end of the meeting.*

The Cathaoirleach put the proposal to the meeting – a vote by show of hands resulted in 9 for 4 against and 1 abstention. The Cathaoirleach declared the proposal carried as it had achieved the support of one half of the members of the Council.

*On the proposal of Cllr Maxwell, seconded by Cllr P. Treanor, it was agreed that the Council revert to public session.*

The Cathaoirleach informed the members that he was resuming consideration of the agenda which had been adjourned from the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020.

**7. To consider recommendations and minutes from Corporate Policy Group meeting**

The members noted the minutes of the Corporate Policy Group meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 which had been circulated.

*On the proposal of Cllr McElvaney, seconded by Cllr Coyle, it was agreed that the minutes of the Corporate Policy Group meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 and the recommendations contained therein be approved.*

## **8. To receive the Management Report – October 2020:**

The members noted the Management Report for the month of October which had been circulated with the agenda.

The Chief Executive and Directors of Services responded to queries from the elected members.

*On the proposal of Cllr Conlon, seconded by Cllr McElvaney, it was agreed that this Council writes to TII requesting them to advance the implementation of the long delayed N54 Tullybryan Scheme as a matter of urgency.*

*Cllr Conlon proposed, Cllr Bennett seconded, that this Council writes to the Department of Transport seeking them to address the highly inequitable allocation of €43,000, out of a national allocation of €33 million, to the Monaghan Municipal District under the Active Travel Measures Scheme.*

Following a brief discussion, Cllr Conlon agreed to withdraw the motion pending a report from the Executive.

Cllr McElvaney declared an interest and left the meeting whilst the Chief Executive was responding to a query in relation to the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF). He later returned to the meeting when the matter had been dealt with.

## **9. To consider proposed amendments to MCC Standing Orders to facilitate remote Council meetings.**

The Chief Executive referred to the recent signing of the Ministerial Order enabling the holding of remote Council meetings. The Ministerial Order permits virtual attendance and voting at Council, MD meetings and other meetings. He also referred to the draft Supplementary Standing Orders regulating the proceedings of Monaghan County Council for holding remote meetings, which had been circulated. The draft Supplementary Standing Orders were largely in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Department of Local Government, with some minor amendments to reflect local arrangements. He stated that the Standing Orders and Procedures Committee had met on the 5<sup>th</sup> November, considered the draft document. The Committee had recommended that the draft Supplementary Standing Orders regulating the holding of remote meetings, be recommended to the full Council for adoption, subject to the following minor amendment:

- Supplementary Standing Order No. 15 – second paragraph/third sentence- add the word *'first'* before the word vote to read as follows:

*Where a member loses connectivity during a statutory vote, every effort will be made to re-establish a connection. If a connection cannot be restored within a reasonable timeframe the Meetings Administrator will contact the elected member by phone to allow the member to vote. Where contact with the elected member cannot be established within five minutes of the first vote being taken, the Meetings Administrator will record the member as not being present for the vote.*

- It was further recommended that a review of the Draft Supplementary Standing Orders be undertaken in February 2021, by the Standing Orders and Procedures Committee.

*On the proposal of Cllr Maxwell, seconded by Cllr McKenna it was agreed that the existing Monaghan County Council Standing Orders be amended to incorporate, as Appendix 1, the Supplementary Standing Orders Regulating the Proceedings of Monaghan County Council for holding remote meetings.*

*It was agreed that the Council would continue to hold physical meetings in the Garage Theatre and that any member who wished to attend remotely could do so, subject to informing the Meetings Administrator in advance of the meeting.*

**Presentations at Council meetings:**

The members agreed that as Council meetings were limited to two hours any future presentations may be held separately, where appropriate, in advance, via Microsoft Teams.

**10. To note the Framework of Regional Priorities for the Central Border Region 2021-2027**

The members noted the Framework of Regional Priorities for the Central Border Region 2021-2027.

Cllr P. Treanor outlined to the members that the Framework was developed by ICBAN to respond to three key challenges of these times that are impacting on the border region –

1. The challenges, potential opportunities and obligations associated with the Covid 19 pandemic, which are likely to impact for many years;
2. The consequences of Brexit and its impact on the economy and trading patterns, stability and cross border cooperation, including the work of local government and
3. The need to mitigate the threats of climate change, and to therefore embrace and promote sustainable development and care for the environment.

The Framework will provide a steer to the region in terms of dealing with current realities, anticipating future strains and ensuring effective local and regional responses. The key ambitions of the Framework of Regional Priorities reflect these current and evolving challenges and opportunities at local, regional, national and international levels. These are:

- To develop as a sustainable region, characterised by increased employment, improved economic activity, social progress and ecological sustainability;
- To redress economic and social inequalities between the Central Border Region and other areas of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the inequalities which persist within the region itself;
- To influence and work with the Government's of Ireland and Northern Ireland on their investment priorities for the region, by providing an evidence base to justify investments; and
- To identify opportunities for local authorities and other stakeholders to work together to realise opportunities and to respond to the challenges facing the region.

*On the proposal of Cllr P. Treanor, seconded by Cllr Maxwell, it was agreed that the Council welcome the Framework of Regional Priorities for the Central Border Region of Ireland/ Northern Ireland 2021-2027, and support its implementation by ICBAN.*

*On the proposal of Cllr O'Hanlon, seconded by Cllrs Coyle, Aughey and McCooley, it was agreed that a meeting take place between the two Ministers of Health, North and South, and representatives of Councils, North and South, along the border in relation to having an integrated approach to tackle the Covid 19 virus.*

*It was further agreed that the motion would be forwarded to both Ministers for Health and also to ICBAN, East Border Region and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly.*

**11. To receive reports from Members attending Conferences/Training events**

The members noted the report from Cllr. Connolly in relation to his attendance at the following conference/training event:

- AILG – Finance & Working Conditions – Co. Wexford – 25<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

**12. Business submitted by the Chief Executive.**

The Chief Executive referred to the Statutory Budget meeting which was scheduled for Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November. He stated that the Budget Report had been circulated to members and if any member required clarification on any aspect of the Report that they would make contact with the Head of Finance in advance of the meeting.

**13. Matters arising out of the minutes of Council meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2020**

Matters arising out of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 were responded to by the relevant officials.

**14. To receive update on N2 National Primary Road Schemes**

There was no discussion on this item.

**15. To receive update on North South Interconnector project**

The members noted the following correspondence which had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting:

- Letter from the Office of An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, T.D. regarding the North South Interconnector.

*On the proposal of Cllr Keelan, seconded by Cllr P. Treanor, it was agreed that Monaghan County Council writes to the Oireachtas Members for this constituency seeking an update on*

*what they have done since their Election and what they hope to do in the time ahead to ensure that the Interconnector is placed underground.*

*On the proposal of Cllr Keelan, seconded by Cllr P. Treanor, it was agreed as follows:  
RE: North-South Interconnector, RE: Fianna Fail motion tabled 16<sup>th</sup> February 2017, which was supported by Sinn Fein (and received majority support).*

- 1) That this Council writes to our Oireachtas Members requesting that they revisit / reintroduce the motion calling for an independent analysis of the North-South Interconnector and full consultation.*
- 2) That the Oireachtas Members revert back to this Council.*

*On the proposal of Cllr Coyle, seconded by Cllr Keelan, it was agreed that Monaghan County Council demands of An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin T.D., the Tanaiste, Leo Varadkar T.D., the Minister for Climate Change, Communications, Networks and Transport, Eamon Ryan T.D., all Government Ministers, the Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Green Party Oireachtas Members to have issued an immediate government directive to Eirgrid to stop all works on the North-South 400kV Interconnector as it is currently proposed, this includes the procurement or signing of contracts for pylons or construction, until an independent report, incorporating international industry expertise to examine the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding the North-South Interconnector reports as in line with the Private Members Business adopted by Dail Eireann on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2017 and subsequently by Seanad Eireann.*

*(This motion, attaching a copy of the Private Members' motion of 16<sup>th</sup> February 2017 to be circulated to all Oireachtas Members for Cavan-Monaghan, the three party leaders as above and Meath and Cavan County Councils. Also Mid Ulster District Council and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council.)*

## **16. To receive update on the Ulster Canal project**

There was no discussion on this item.

## **17. Notice of Motion**

**Cllr C. Bennett proposed, Cllr Keelan seconded**

- 1. That this Council writes to Minister Eamonn Ryan and An Post to ask that a post box is installed in the village of Annyalla. The Post Office in this village was closed one year ago and now residents are forced to travel to Clontibret or Castleblaney.*

Following a short discussion on the motion, the Cathaoirleach put it to the meeting and it was agreed unanimously.

18. Questions:

Cllr P.J. O'Hanlon asked:

1. What are the Council's plans for affordable housing sites as recommended by the Government?

**Reply:** Budget 2021 allocated €75 million nationally for the proposed Affordable Housing Scheme which is reported to be a shared equity scheme. It is understood that the required legislation for the proposed affordable housing scheme, which will allow low and middle-income workers to buy State subsidised homes, is currently being drafted and agreed at Government level. Details of the proposed scheme, announced as part of Budget 2021, are not yet available. Monaghan County Council is awaiting further information and the commencement of the proposed affordable housing scheme before making definitive plans. The average cost in County Monaghan of a second-hand home is currently less than the cost of building a new home.

The previous Affordable Housing Scheme was discontinued in 2011 and another new Affordable Housing Scheme was announced five years ago in Budget 2016 but was never enacted.

Under the newly proposed scheme it is reported that there is an expectation that the main lending institutions and the Department of Housing will put money into a special purpose entity under the auspices of the Department, which will then put up some of the equity to help finance the purchase of new homes.

It is understood it will be possible for the homeowner to buy out the equity stake held by the special purpose entity in the future, based on market value at the time.

Reports suggest that this form of affordable housing may rely on State subsidies for the purchase of houses built by the private sector.

Monaghan County Council owns land in Monaghan town which could potentially be used for the provision of affordable housing. Monaghan County Council has advertised for land to purchase throughout County Monaghan, in anticipation of the need to purchase additional land for the provision of affordable and social housing. Definitive plans for the provision of affordable housing will be made when the details of the proposed affordable housing scheme are available.

Cllr C. Carthy asked:

2. Has the HSE made any further comments or commitments on the opening of the Carrickmacross Group Home and, if so, when is it envisaged the facility will be opened?

**Reply:** The most recent correspondence from the HSE received on 27 October 2020 is as follows:

**"The HSE provides supports and services within the context of the National Service Plan and within a defined budget allocation. The funding required to operate this Group Home is not within our current budget allocation. Carrickmacross Group Home has been included in the HSE Estimates process for 2021. A letter of determination leads to the standard process around agreeing what will be included in the National Service Plan for 2021 and this process takes place between the Department of Health and the HSE".**

3. Can the Housing Section confirm the numbers of houses/apartments they are in a position to buy from the private sector, following public advertising in September, and where selected units are based, by Municipal District?

**Reply: Monaghan County Council advertises regularly for Expressions of Interest in the sale of land and/or houses from Property Owners and Developers. This process has yielded significant results in the main towns and has also benefited the villages and rural areas such as Smithborough and Tydavnet.**

**Monaghan County Council has received a good response to the recent public advertisement and is proceeding with assessment and inspection of properties offered for sale and has agreed the purchase of a number of properties. Exact details of the numbers and responses to date are not provided at present as some assessments and negotiations have not concluded.**

**This process has led to Monaghan County Council discussing and working with Developers in relation to potential social housing developments in Inishkeen, Ballinode, Castleblayney and Monaghan Town.**

**The initial closing date of 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020 was for properties that will potentially be substantially completed before year end and, in line with the Government’s “Call for Housing 2020”, these properties are being prioritized. The houses sourced through this process include small groups of houses; 6 single-storey houses suitable for older people at Folly Court in Ballybay and 6 houses under construction at Tydavnet that will be completed by year end of 2020.**

**The Purchases and current offers made to the Private Sector (Turnkey Developers and single acquisitions) to date in 2020 is detailed in Table A below;**

<b>Table A - Private Sector Purchases 2020</b>		
<i>(To date 28-10-2020)</i>		
Municipal District	<i>Number of Properties</i>	
	Purchased Agreed	Offer made to Owner
Ballybay-Clones	12	5
Carrickmacross-Castleblayney	11	1
Monaghan	5	2
	28	8

**Monaghan County Council will continue to seek every opportunity to increase social housing provision in all areas of housing need; to reverse rural decline, increase the sustainability of small towns and villages and strengthen the viability of local services for the community.**

4. Can the executive confirm what land parcels they have available for the purpose of building houses (per MD) and what are the current projects being considered for funding applications?

**Reply: The table below lists land in the ownership of Monaghan County Council that is potentially suitable for the development of housing. In addition to provision of social housing on Monaghan County Council owned land at Latlorcan in Monaghan town and Luí na Gréine in Scotstown; Monaghan County Council addresses the housing need by alternative means through Turnkey construction projects, involving the development of social housing on privately owned land, one-off House Purchases and through the provision of new homes under Part V etc.**

**Detailed below in Table B is the land in the possession of Monaghan County Council suitable for housing in five locations, totaling 7.43Hectares.**

<b>Table B - MCC Social Housing Land Bank</b> (To date 28-10-2020)			
Location	Municipal District	Site Area	
Old Weather Station, O'Neill Park, Clones	Ballybay-Clones	0.14	Hectares
Ballybay Courtyard, Ballybay	Ballybay-Clones	0.25	Hectares
Castleblayney Firestation & Machinery Yard, Castleblayney	Carrickmacross-Castleblayney	0.19	Hectares
Latlorcan, Monaghan	Monaghan	5.36	Hectares
Lui na Greine, Scotstown	Monaghan	1.49	Hectares

**43 social houses were provided in a new social housing development at Latlorcan which was completed in 2019. Development has commenced at Luí na Gréine in Scotstown which consists of 32 properties including 4 two-bedroom single storey houses, 12 two-bedroom two-storey houses, 12 three-bedroom two-storey houses, and 4 four-bedroom two-storey houses. The homes have been designed to the highest quality for modern living and providing a Building Energy Rating of A3 and above. The project is advancing well with the first houses estimated to be available for occupation in 2021 in a phased approach.**

**A design team has been appointed for the Ballybay Courtyard site and a funding application for the development of social housing at this location just off main street Ballybay has been discussed with the Department. The funding application will be submitted in early 2021.**

**A feasibility study is being carried out on the potential of the old Fire Station and Council yard in Castleblayney and the possibility of providing sheltered housing at this location has been discussed with the Department. The proposed development of this town centre brownfield site may be considered to provide sheltered housing at this location.**

**Monaghan County Council advertises regularly for Expressions of Interest in the sale of land and/or houses from Property Owners and Developers and this process has yielded significant results in the main towns and has also benefited the villages and rural areas such as Smithborough and Tydavnet. All opportunities to purchase land for housing purposes are examined. However recently most of the proposals received by Monaghan County Council are from Property Owners and Developers who are interested in developing the land and providing social houses for Monaghan County Council.**

**Monaghan County Council will continue to seek every opportunity to increase social housing provision in all areas of housing need; to reverse rural decline, increase the sustainability of small towns and villages and strengthen the viability of local services for the community.**

5. When are works expected to begin on the Market House, Castleblayney, to bring it to a safe and weather proof condition

**Reply: Monaghan County Council spent in excess of €400,000 in 2019 to make the structure of the Market House safe following the partial collapse of roof and internal walls that year. Funding for the next stage of the restoration, consultation and design, was allocated under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in June 2020. A tender**

**competition is underway to procure consultants for the first stage of the process – consultation on potential end use of the building.**

**CLlr S. Conlon asked:**

6. Further to my series of questions dating back to September 2019, has an agricultural contractor been selected, and commencement date indicated, for the overdue harvesting of the Council initiated Willow Crop Plantation at Clontibret and Knockatallon? Previous commitments given for harvesting have not yet occurred.

**Reply: A harvesting contractor was appointed following a public procurement competition in 2019. Works commenced in July 2020, when a partial felling was carried out under high voltage power lines as preparatory works for harvesting of the main crop. Approximately one acre of the crop was harvested in September in Knockatallon but due to a combination of mechanical breakdowns, inclement weather and resultant saturated/poor ground conditions harvesting has been suspended.**

**It is envisaged that the main crop harvesting will re-commence in March 2021.**

7. Regarding my previous queries in creating a MasterPlan for the extensive Council owned lands at Latlorcan, what plans are in place to make available private sites for purchase for those seeking to build their own dwelling? Will this Council provide the water, sewerage and civil infrastructure to facilitate this type of development as per Department funding provided through the Affordable Housing Scheme?

**Reply: In January 2020 the Elected Members of Monaghan County Council agreed the sale of six sites at Latlorcan to individuals seeking to build their own homes. Before investing further in the provision of sites Monaghan County Council will await the outcome of the current sales process.**

**County Monaghan is an affordable place to live as the average cost in County Monaghan of a secondhand home is currently less than the cost of building a new home.**

**The current Affordable Housing Scheme is dependent on a scheme called the Serviced Sites Fund whereby funding is made available to provide necessary infrastructure to facilitate development and reduce the cost of houses to a minimum of 10% below the realisable open market value. At present the current Affordable Housing Scheme does not apply to County Monaghan as houses are currently affordable on the open market and applying a further discount to newly constructed houses would reduce their selling price to below the cost of construction.**

**Monaghan County Council is awaiting details of a newly proposed affordable housing scheme announced by the Government in October 2020, which might be applicable in County Monaghan depending on the way the scheme is framed and the criteria applied.**

**Land in the ownership of Monaghan County Council in Monaghan town at Latlorcan could potentially be used for the provision of affordable housing and/or private housing.**

8. I ask Council Executive to provide clarification on details provided of a social housing investment prospectus that indicates a partnership with all Local Authorities including Monaghan County Council for a product that is not licensed or regulated by the Central Bank.

**Reply: The prospectus relates to Arena Property Housing Bond Series 3 - that is a bond issue by Arena Property Acquisitions Ltd to raise finance to purchase properties by way of a loan note. The brochure indicates that investors will have the first legal charge on the properties. All properties will be leased on long term government leases to Local Authorities with no rental voids, internal maintenance or refurbishment responsibilities, as these are dealt with by the local authority.**

The brochure claims to have a have a number of partners as set out in the in the sales brochure, including Monaghan County Council.

Monaghan County Council have had no dealings with this company and have made no commitments in relation to leasing properties from this company.

In the event of any properties been proposed for leasing by this company Monaghan County Council will assess them in the same manner as any other individual property owner making submissions of this nature.

9. In relation to the Heritage Cluster Co-Operation Project that aims to identify a number of key heritage sites for development and improving accessibility, along with access to LEADER funding, what progress has been made with sites selected in County Monaghan?

**Reply: The Tourism Unit is currently progressing a Phase II application to LEADER for funding to deliver recommendations from the Phase I report. Eligible elements include signage and interpretation and Conservation Management Plans. An Expression of Interest has been submitted to LEADER and the procurement process (which has to be undertaken prior to full application) has commenced with the tenders currently on the E-tenders website.**

10. What response has been received from Transport Infrastructure Ireland regarding the Roads Section application to fund major road work projects including the 4.6 km N12 Silverstream to Armagh border realignment and the Monaghan Town Outer Route N54 within the N2?

**Reply: In September 2019 MCC identified to TII, a list of future potential Minor projects which included the 'Realignment of N12 Silverstream to Armagh Border' and also the 'N54 to N2 Monaghan Town Outer Route'. These projects have been added to a significant list of other National projects which have been submitted by other Local Authorities. To date these two projects have not been prioritised by TII for development. MCC will continue to promote the need for these projects with TII and submit all relevant reports in order to progress these necessary projects. MCC are currently preparing a Strategic Assessment Report for each of these projects.**

**CLlr A. Campbell asked:**

11. Monaghan County Council have recently carried out road safety traffic/Camera surveys at the junctions which come off the 2 plus 1 Castleblayney by-pass to assess the turning movements on these very busy junctions.

- a) What is the results of these surveys?

**Reply: The Traffic video surveys was undertaken by Nationwide Data Collection at six no. junctions on 15th & 16th October, 2020. The videos and survey data have to be processed and the report prepared by the survey company. The draft report is expected to be received by the end of October/ November.**

- b) With the results in hand now what plans are in place to upgrade these junctions to Improve the safety for all users?

**Reply: Following receipt of the Final report, MCC to review and consider the findings. If the survey/ report identifies that there are issues at the junctions and that improvements are needed, MCC will prepare a submission to TII with recommendations.**

12. With the country going back into a higher level on the living with Covid-19 National Framework and in particular sports clubs being in essence shut down again after only getting back to some sort of activities and following the announcement in June of financial supports for the sports in our community. In a time when we need these local sports Clubs to help us all but in particular our young people to get through these difficult times. In relation to the small grant schemes which is being administered by Monaghan Sports Partnership.

- a) What clubs have been successful?
- b) How much will each club be receiving under this support scheme?
- c) When will these grants be paid out to the successful clubs?

**Reply: All applications have been reviewed by the Sports Partnership and forwarded to Sport Ireland. Sport Ireland will select applications to be funded and as part of that assessment, it will be ensuring that no duplication with National funding schemes covering back to play, will occur.**

13. How much has been paid out by Monaghan County Council under the Re-start grant?

**Reply: Please refer to monthly management report under the Finance Department.**

14. When is work due to commence on the new Enterprise Hub in Castleblayney?

**Reply: Monaghan County Council, in partnership with Castleblayney Enterprise Centre CLG and Enterprising Monaghan awarded the contract to design and build a new Enterprise & Technology Centre in Castleblayney to PJ Tracey and Sons Ltd, Co. Fermanagh on 16 Oct 2020. The contract requires the completion of the building within 16 months.**

15. With the focus of the Local Enterprise Office at this time on delivery Brexit and Covid initiatives to support business.

- a) Has the numbers contacting the office gone up as Brexit looms ever closer with businesses getting Brexit ready and the No-deal scenario being talked up by the UK government?

**Reply: There has been a marked increase (250%) between Sep 2020 and October 2020 in the number of businesses contacting the office in regard to Brexit. Those businesses have been signposted to the relevant supports available online including; LEO website; Customs Mentoring; Intertrade Ireland; Brexit Voucher Scheme; Skillsnet; Clear Customs - certified training, Enterprise Ireland Brexit Ready Staff Grant and Bord Bia for all Agri-Food related queried.**

- b) Has all business who should be engaging with this process being contacted and a plan put in place with all the necessary supports available to these businesses put in place?

**Reply: The Local Enterprise Office communicates the supports available to its target clients, small businesses, on a regular and ongoing basis. Available supports from both the Local Enterprise Office itself and other agencies are communicated via regular newsletters. Similar content is also shared across our social media platforms and we have also placed a number of adverts in the local paper, Northern Standard. Any business that contacts our office in relation to Brexit is made aware of all the supports available to them. Businesses were contacted in the last 3 weeks by email to reinforce the threat of Brexit and signposted to relevant supports.**

- c) With Christmas looming and with the uncertainty for retail business being open or not due to Covid-19. What is the update on the initiative for business around the Search Engine Optimization strategy for business who have an online presence and how can

this be expanded to get more business to buy into having a presence online which in today's world is vital and necessary?

**Reply: The Trading Online Voucher scheme has been extended until further notice. This scheme offers 90% funding up to a maximum of €2,500 towards the cost of building a new or updating an existing ecommerce website. To date we have approved 105 applications with a value of just over €233,000. In addition to this scheme we have delivered 25 courses relating to social media, digital marketing, online sales and Covid-19 specific matters. A further course on social media is scheduled to take place next week.**

**We have also launched a social media campaign where we share the ecommerce websites of Trading Online Voucher recipients to help promote their new websites and show people that it is still possible to shop local, even if the retailers are closed because of current restrictions. We plan to continue this campaign through the coming weeks leading up to the Christmas period. Those involved have welcomed the campaign and are grateful for any extra publicity to their website.**

#### **19. Votes of sympathy/congratulations**

*It was agreed that a vote of sympathy would be extended to the following:*

- *Patrick McDermott Council employee, on the death of his father Joe McDermott, RIP.*
- *The wife and family of the late Paddy Reilly RIP, former Assistant Civil Defence Officer*
- *The family of the late Paddy Johnson, RIP, former Senior Engineer*
- *Jim Gartlan, Council employee on the death of his father Gerry Gartlan, RIP*
- *Patricia Flynn, Council employee on the death of her brother in law Fergal Flynn, RIP*

#### **20. Conferences**

There were no conferences approved at the meeting in view of Covid 19 travel restrictions.

#### **Urgent Business:**

Cllr Carthy proposed, Cllr Conlon seconded

*The closure of Ulster Bank could potentially lead to more than 3,000 job losses, the loss of 88 branches and the shutting down of over a hundred ATM machines all over the country. It would be bad for the economy, competition, and sustainability in the Irish market. We call on NatWest to commit to the future of Ulster Bank for customers, staff, and competition.*

Following a discussion on the motion, the Cathaoirleach put it to the members and it was agreed.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cathaoirleach

\_\_\_\_\_  
Meetings Administrator

Date: \_\_\_\_\_