



LONGFORD COUNTY COUNCIL

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LONGFOIRT

**Minutes of May Monthly Meeting of Longford County Council
held in the Community Library, Ballymahon, Co. Longford on Wednesday
18th May 2011 at 4.00 p.m.**

PRESIDING: Councillor Paul Connell, Mayor.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillors – Larry Bannon, Paddy Belton,
Gearoid O Bradaigh, Mick Cahill, Micheál Carrigy,
Mark Casey, John Duffy, Sean O Fearghaile,
Donncha Mac Gleannáin, Victor Kiernan, Frank Kilbride,
Luie McEntire, Alan Mitchell, Martin Mulleady,
Peggy Nolan, P.J Reilly, Mae Sexton and Thomas Victory.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr. Tim Caffrey, County Manager.
Mr. Frank Sheridan, Director of Services.
Mr. Jack Kilgallen, Director of Services.
Mr. Barry Lynch, Head of Finance.
Mr. Ciaran Murphy, A/Director of Services.

A/MEETINGS
ADMINISTRATOR: Ms. Mary Cooney.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES.

On the proposal of Councillor L. Bannon seconded by Councillor P.J. Reilly, the Minutes of Special Emergency Joint Meeting of Longford County Council and Longford Town Council held on 13th April 2011 were confirmed and adopted.

On the proposal of Councillor F. Kilbride seconded by Mayor P. Connell, the Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Longford County Council held on 20th April 2011 were confirmed and adopted.

MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES.

Councillor L. McEntire conveyed his apologies at being unable to attend the April meeting of the Council and stated that due to major changes taking place in Irish Public Bodies, his term of office as a Board Member has ended. He thanked the members for their kind words and expressed his gratitude to everyone who canvassed on his behalf for his election onto the Board of Irish Public Bodies.

Mayor P. Connell acknowledged the great service Councillor McEntire gave on behalf of Longford County Council and Longford Town Council.

CORPORATE POLICY GROUP MINUTES.

The adopted Minutes of Corporate Policy Group Meeting held on 21st March 2011, which had been circulated, were noted.

MANAGER'S ORDERS

The County Manager's Orders, which had been circulated, were noted.

VOTES OF SYMPATHY.

On the proposal of Councillor M. Sexton seconded by Councillor M. Casey, it was unanimously agreed that a vote of sympathy be extended to the Smith family, Teffia Park, Longford on the death of the late Colm Smith.

On the proposal of Councillor S. Farrell seconded by Councillor P. Belton, it was unanimously agreed that a vote of sympathy be extended to the Farrell family, Ballina, Newtowncashel, Co. Longford, on the death of the late Joseph Farrell.

VOTES OF CONGRATULATIONS

Councillor P. Belton welcomed the councillors to Ballymahon Library where the May monthly meeting was held and Councillors S. Farrell, L. Bannon, M. Casey and M. Cahill and said it was a great honour to host the inaugural council meeting in the newly refurbished building. Tributes were paid by the members to Councillor B. Steele in his absence, former Minister Dick Roche, the County Librarian, Sean Harrington Architects and all involved in the restoration of the old courthouse premises, in retaining the historic features of the building and enhancing it to make it a wonderful library and facility for the people of Ballymahon.

Mr. F. Sheridan, Director of Services, thanked the members for their kind words and compliments on the restoration works carried out on the old courthouse premises to create the new Ballymahon Library. He informed the meeting that membership has increased to over 1,200 members and that the building has been nominated for the RIAI (Irish Architects) Awards, reflecting the quality of the workmanship undertaken on refurbishing the building.

The members also joined in congratulating Mayor P. Connell on his invitation to attend a function in Dublin's Convention Centre, to celebrate the State Visit to Ireland of the Queen of England. It was recognised that the Queen's State Visit is hugely significant in Ireland's history and will leave a different legacy for young Ireland to inherit. The members paid tribute to all involved in organising the State Visit, the Defence Forces, the Gardai, the GAA and all those who fought in the First World War.

The Mayor thanked the members for their good wishes and support.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, CORPORATE AND CULTURAL SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES.

Update from IT Sub-Committee

Ms. Christine Collins, Analyst Developer informed the meeting that it was proposed by the ICT Sub-Committee that a presentation be made to the Members on the ongoing development of the Extranet, which allows Elected Members controlled external access to information and meeting documentation for confidential business purposes. Training on the Extranet is scheduled each Monday, from 4pm to 5pm.

Ms. Collins demonstrated the newest developments added to the Extranet Site.

The members thanked Ms. Collins for her informative presentation and demonstration of the Extranet and in response to Councillor L. Bannon's request, Ms. Collins confirmed that Minutes of Area Meetings will also be uploaded to the Extranet.

As a member of the IT Sub-Committee, Councillor D. Glennon thanked the Council and IT staff on the substantial progress made on behalf of the members in the IT area. Mayor P. Connell also thanked Mr. M. Jordan, Project Leader for his leadership in this area.

Nominations to Tourism Strategy Sub-Committee

It was agreed by the members that the nominations to the Tourism Strategy Sub-Committee should consist of two Fine Gael members, two Fianna Fail members and one independent member.

On the proposal of Councillor A. Mitchell, seconded by Councillor J. Duffy it was unanimously agreed that Councillor P. Nolan and Councillor M. Carrigy be nominated to the Tourism Strategy Sub-Committee.

On the proposal of Councillor M. Mulleady, seconded by Councillor L. McEntire, it was unanimously agreed that Councillor D. Glennon and Councillor B. Steele be nominated to the Tourism Strategy Sub-Committee.

On the proposal of Councillor M. Sexton, seconded by Mayor P. Connell, it was unanimously agreed that Councillor M. Casey be nominated to the Tourism Strategy Sub-Committee.

Mayor P. Connell also requested that the Mayor in office should also be a member of the Committee.

In response to Councillor P. Nolan's query, Mr. F. Sheridan, Director of Services, advised that the Committee was initially established to include the Gateway regions and later expanded to incorporate surrounding counties. Mr. F. Sheridan was subsequently nominated to the Committee by Fáilte Ireland and will attend future meetings. As to whether a Flagship project has been identified to draw down funds from the allocation of €24 million, the Director of Service advised that no request for drawdown of funds had yet been made, but that an application for funding from the Tourism Committee would be made.

Update on Public Service Agreement

Mr. F. Sheridan, Director of Services informed the meeting that the Public Services Agreement 2010 – 2014 between Government and Public Sector employees seeks to restore public finances and reduce the deficit to less than 3% of G.D.P. This is to be achieved by a substantial reduction in Public Sector numbers, efficiencies and revised work practices. The Government intends to restructure and reorganise the Public Sector. Fewer organisations, working closer together to deliver cost effective public services. An independent implementation body was established to drive the agreement, review implementation, verify savings and provide a forum for resolution. Reporting through the Local Action Plan savings consists of gross cash remuneration savings, non pay saving, expenditure avoided and operational efficiencies with the first review in Spring 2011 and every year thereafter.

The Director of Services informed the members that the first return from Longford Local Authorities was submitted on 3rd May 2011 in respect of the reporting period Jan 2010 to April 2011, with a saving of €2.6 million in the reporting period, broken down into €1.6 million in payroll savings (net of pensions), €750,000 savings on leave and allowances and €350,000 in ICT. Since the reduction in Local Government Fund in 2008, overall employee numbers have reduced by 88, or over 20% of staff across all disciplines and grades. Further impact on Longford Local Authorities will be payroll cycles and issues at national level, such as annual leave.

In response to Councillor F. Kilbride's query on possible redundancies, the Director of Services stated that the Croke Park Agreement seeks to achieve savings without redundancies.

INFRASTRUCTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES.

ROADS.

Minutes of Meetings

The adopted Minutes of the following Meetings, which had been circulated to the members, were noted.

- Transportation, Road Development & Maintenance and Road Safety Policies SPC held on 26th November 2010.
- Ballymahon Local Electoral Area Committee meetings held on 3rd June 2010, 21st October 2010 and 11th February 2011.
- Longford Local Electoral Area Committee meetings held on 13th October 2010, 11th February 2011 and 16th February 2011.
- Granard/Drumlisk Local Electoral Area Committee meetings held on 13th October 2010, 14th February 2011.

Speed Limits on old N4 Dublin to Sligo

On the proposal of Councillor S. Farrell, seconded by Councillor F. Kilbride, it was agreed that Longford County Council will write to Meath and Kildare County Councils to recommend that the speed limits on the old N4 Dublin to Sligo road, be increased to 100 km per hour.

The issue of signposts were also discussed and it was noted that the advanced signage on the M4 Motorway from Dublin does not include a listing for Longford. It was agreed to request the National Roads Authority to amend its policy in relation to this matter to allow the inclusion of Longford on this signage. Councillor P. Nolan also requested that this issue be listed on the Agenda when next meeting with the NRA.

“Taking in Charge” Public Lighting in estates

Councillor A. Mitchell, Chairperson of the Roads Strategic Policy Committee advised the members in relation to the recommendation of the SPC that consideration be given to “taking in charge” of public lighting in estates in exceptional circumstances if a Health and Safety issue exists and where public lighting had been provided to the appropriate standard. The issue of lack of lighting and other infrastructural difficulties in many unfinished housing estates in the county was discussed at length.

Mr. C. Murphy, A/ Director of Services stated that the Council may have to get legal advice in the context of partially taking in charge some of the services in housing estates, as well as taking over developers’ responsibilities.

Following further discussion, the members agreed that the “Taking in Charge” policy be reviewed by the Housing & Planning Strategic Policy.

In response to a query from Councillor P.J.Reilly, the County Manager stated that there are a number of unfinished estates in the county at different stages of completion. Inspections have been carried out and necessary works identified. Some estates, while close, have not

yet reached the Taking in Charge standard and a review of the “Taking in Charge” Policy is timely and may assist in this regard. He informed the meeting of the dangers of piecemeal “Taking in Charge” and that legal advice would be necessary. For unfinished estates identified as Category 4, funding of €5 million has been set aside by the DoEHLG and submissions have been invited. However, the County Manager has called for estates grouped as Category 3 to also be eligible for funding.

On the proposal of Councillor D. Glennon, seconded by Councillor P. Nolan it was agreed that a Quarterly Progress Report on Unfinished Housing Estates be presented to the members.

ENVIRONMENT.

Erection of Election Posters

The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor T. Victory and Councillor M. Casey, seconded by Councillor A. Mitchell and unanimously agreed -

"We propose that in the course of future political campaigns candidates and political parties voluntarily agree to either not erect election posters or to greatly restrict the number of posters that are erected. In order to assist the efforts that are made by Tidy Towns Committees the sitting Councillors in individual Electoral Areas will agree to voluntarily restrict the number of locations around villages and towns in the areas which they represent at which posters will be erected."

The Notice of Motion was discussed at length and it was generally felt that, as an individual choice, a voluntary code may be difficult to enforce and that either Bye Laws be introduced or a national directive be implemented. Councillor J. Duffy stated that there was merit in the exclusion of posters from 50km speed limits and Councillor P. Belton stated that as a national directive, the Local Authority would have more power in restricting the number of posters erected. Councillor A. Mitchell stated that as Election Posters are already covered under Litter Legislation, the introduction of Bye Laws may not be possible and it may be more appropriate if the Department of Environment were to give Local Authorities control over where posters can be erected or prohibit them from being erected. Councillor M. Mulleady stated that neighbouring counties may need to be considered in the case of General Elections and Councillor F. Kilbride put forward the view that the restrictions should apply to all posters.

On the proposal of Councillor A. Mitchell seconded by Councillor T. Victory, it was agreed to write to the Minister to recommend that the Litter Pollution Act 1997 be amended to give each local authority the power to make a bye-law to prohibit or restrict the use of election posters..

Graveyards

Following the adoption of the 3-Point Recommendation on Cemetery Provision and Maintenance adopted at the April 2011 meeting of the Council, Councillor M. Cahill voiced his concerns in relation to Carrickedmond Graveyard, which is now full and for which additional land needs to be purchased.

The matter of purchasing additional land was discussed and Mr. C. Murphy, A/Director of Services responded to Councillor M. Sexton's query by confirming that the Council can provide some financial assistance to Graveyard Committees, as outlined in the 3-Point Recommendation i.e. it was envisaged that annual grants in the region of €400 would be provided by the Council towards running costs. He also advised that while the Council would no longer make any contribution towards the purchase of land, a contribution equivalent to 25% of the cost of developing an agreed number of cemetery plots could be made subject to funding availability.

HOUSING, PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL POLICY AND EMERGENCY SERVICES.

Planning Applications

The list of Planning Applications which had been received since the April meeting of the Council was submitted and noted.

FINANCE DIRECTORATE

Water Rates

Mr. B. Lynch, Head of Finance clarified Councillor P. Belton's query regarding the Disconnection of Water Supply Orders for four customers in that the Disconnection Notices had been withdrawn as those customers had entered into a payment schedule with the Council.

Public Liability Claims received during April 2011.

It was noted that three public liability claims were received during April 2011.

Quarterly Financial Update.

Mr. B. Lynch, Head of Finance informed the members that under the terms of the EU/IMF agreement, all Local Authorities including rating town councils are required to produce a quarterly financial statement in an agreed format.

The Council was operating at a breakeven level for the three months to 31st March 2011. However a number of issues are causing concern and will require constant monitoring:

Energy Costs – due to instability on world markets there has been a significant spike in oil prices. While this has brought about significant increases in the price of road diesel and heating oil it has not yet fed through to electricity prices. A national tender is being undertaken to source the best price for local authority electricity requirements.

Interest Rates – the ECB increased rates on 13th April 2011 for the first time in almost two years. It is expected that the trend on loan interest rates is likely to be upward over the rest of 2011. The amount of pressure on the revenue budget will be determined by the speed at which the increases are announced.

Water Services Costs – Sludge transportation costs are set to increase significantly. This is being driven in part by the increase in oil prices. The Council's processes are under review to try and reduce the amount of sludge being produced.

Insurance Claims – The Council is insured on a retro basis which means that additional premiums can arise depending on the claims experience in a given year up to a capped amount. There has been a significant increase in the level of provisions made in recent years. The Council is working closely with Irish public Bodies to minimise exposure in this area.

Cash Collections – Percentage Collected

Category	March 2011	March 2011
Rates	19%	4%
Rents	62%	58%
Water	18%	13%
Loans	55%	62%

Amounts Outstanding

Category	March 2011	March 2011	Variance
Rates	€1,354,641	€1,798,185	€443,544
Rents	€658,520	€759,198	€100,678
Water	€1,524,899	€1,609,134	€84,235
Loans	€221,746	€174,600	(€47,146)

The Head of Finance stated that all areas have improved from the same stage in 2010, with the exception of loans were shared ownership and reconstruction loans are a particular issue. He concluded by stating that while the Council has broken even for the first quarter of the year, the risk factors must be kept under review and corrective action taken where possible.

In relation to sludge transportation costs, Councillor D. Glennon asked if it were possible to recycle rather than dispose of sludge, he would support it. This was seconded by Councillor M. Sexton.

Councillor D. Glennon also welcomed a universal charge for the supply of treated water, stating that both a Water Rates Charge and a Free Supply off a single Network was unsustainable.

GENERAL ITEMS.

Notice of Motion - Review of Rural two-teacher schools

The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Mark Casey -

"I propose a motion that in light of the recent announcement that the Department of Education is carrying out the 'value-for-money' review of rural two-teacher schools in a bid

to save on the education budget, that this Council should send a letter to the Minister of Education stating that it is entirely opposed to this, as it would rip the heart out of rural Longford (Ireland)."

In opposing the Motion, Councillor S. Farrell stated that while there are excellent two-teacher schools, he emphasised that the educational needs of the students must be a priority, and while it may not be preferable that the review is being carried out under a "value for money" banner, it is timely as there may be certain schools that may not be maintained into the future.

The motion was deferred until the June meeting of the Council, to allow for further consideration by the members.

Notice of Motion – Music Generation

The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Alan Mitchell and seconded by Councillor P. Nolan.

"I propose that a Presentation be made to the Members on Music Generation – Music Generation is Ireland's National Education Programme funded by U2 and The Irelands Funds"

Councillor A. Mitchell informed the Council that funding of €5 million had been reserved and he would like a presentation to be made to the Council as to what the proposals are to avail of funding.

Notice of Motion – Local Post Office Network

The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor M. Carrigy and seconded by Councillor P. Nolan and unanimously supported by the members.

"I call on Longford County Council to support the future of the Local Post Office network throughout Longford and rural Ireland".

It was agreed to write to the Minister and Councillor M. Sexton also requested that a copy of the letter be forwarded to her.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Letter dated 21st April 2011 received from Minister for Justice regarding legislation on banking was noted and welcomed by Councillor M. Sexton.

Letter dated 20th April 2011 received from Minister of State for Housing and Planning regarding a deputation of the Council to discuss housing issues was noted.

Letter dated 21st April 2011 received from Minister for Social Protection regarding a deputation of the Council to discuss the Rent Supplement Scheme was noted.

Correspondence dated 21st April 2011 received from the Office of Public Works regarding Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Assessment Study was noted.

CONFERENCES.

Report from Corporate Policy Group was noted.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____
Mary Cooney,
A/ Meetings Administrator.

Confirmed and adopted at Monthly Meeting of Longford County Council held on the 20th June 2011.

Signed: _____
Mayor.