

2nd February, 2010

TO ALL MEMBERS OF DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL
--

The Adjourned January Meeting of Donegal County Council, will be held on Monday 8th February, 2010 at 10.00am, in the County House, Lifford.

Questions and Motions

Items 3, 5, 7, 13, and 14

Items 16 – 21

Items 22 – 30

Items 32 – 71

Please ensure that you bring the agenda previously distributed to the meeting.

Eunan Sweeney

Meetings Administrator

MINUTES OF ADJOURNED MEETING OF DONEGAL COUNTY
COUNCIL, HELD IN THE COUNTY HOUSE, LIFFORD ON 8th
FEBRUARY 2010

- C/38/10 MEMBERS PRESENT
Clrs. B. Byrne, Mayor, D. Alcorn, L. Blaney, J. Boyle, C. Brogan, G. Crawford, M. Doherty, Padraig Doherty, R. Donaghey, M. Farren, M.T. Gallagher, M. Harley, J. Harte, C. Harvey, D. Larkin, P. Mac Lochlainn, N. McBride, C. McConalogue, S. McEniff, I. McGarvey, P. McGowan, B. McGuinness, S. O'Domhnaill, T. Pringle, M. Quinn, J. Ryan, and T. Slowey.
- C/39/10 APOLOGIES
Apologies were received from Clr. Mc Brearty who was unable to attend the meeting.
- C/40/10 VOTE OF SYMPATHY
Sympathy was extended to Clr. Frank Mc Brearty on the death of his mother-in-law, Mrs Mary Dunne.
- C/41/10 OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE
Mr Michael McLoone, County Manager, Mr John McLaughlin Director of Roads and Transportation, Mr Seamus Neely, Director of Water, Environment and Emergency, Mr Francie Coyle, Director of Service, Planning and Economic Development, Mr Michael Heaney, Director of Community Cultural and Enterprise, Mr Garry Martin, A/ Head of Finance, Mr Liam Ward, A/Director of Corporate and Housing, Mr Joe Peoples, A/Meetings Administrator, Ms Anne Marie Crawford, Staff Officer.
- C/42/10 EXTRA FUNDING TO UPGRADE ROADS IN LETTERKENNY/MILFORD ELECTORAL AREA
On the proposal of Clr. Mc Bride, seconded by Clr. Quinn, the following motion was adopted:-

"That this Council seek extra funding for the upgrade of Roads in the Letterkenny/Milford EA and in particular on the Fanad side of the new Harry Blaney bridge across Mulroy Bay."

Members were informed that:-

“The following information is provided to members to assist them in the consideration of this motion.

Members will be aware that the Department of Transport and the National Roads Authority have in October 2009 requested applications for funding under the restoration/improvement grant to the value of €19.8m for 2010. This funding if received would represent a 30% increase on the January 2009 allocation and a 111% increase on the allocation received after the April 2009 Supplementary Budget.

Members will also be aware that the Department of Transport’s voted expenditure for 2010 on capital expenditure has been reduced by 12.4% overall and 15% in the category Road Improvement/Maintenance (from works such as those described would be funded). The exact levels of grant aid available from the Department to local authorities for the purposes of restoration and improvement of roads is primarily dependant on the level expenditure already committed in 2010 to existing projects, including the major interurban motorways, along with other roads projects that may commence in 2010 and identified with the NRA.

Announcements in relation to the Department’s grant allocations for regional and local roads are usually made in early February following the announcement of the National Network allocations.

The adopted Budget 2010 for the Council assumes a 10% reduction in state road grants and in addition the Council has provided an amount of Own Resources towards road maintenance. Overall, it would appear the road monies will be under further strain due to the recent cold snap and severe weather conditions as reported at the Special Council Meeting last week.

In relation to the access from the Fanad side to the Harry Blaney Bridge, the Council has sought sanction since 2008 for expenditure of approximately €1.5m under the Strategic Road Grant made available for the construction of the Bridge. These monies would facilitate online road widening and creation of localised passing bays for the 6km of the L-

1132 from the junction at Kindrum to the Bridge. In 2009 the Department have only provided sufficient monies for the completion of the bridge contract. The specific roads grant is also funded from the capital expenditure programme of the Department described above.”

Members noted that the Harry Blaney Bridge had won the Best Civil Engineering Project Award at the recent Zurich LAMA Awards ceremony. Congratulations was extended to all who had been involved with the project.

Clr. Mc Bride outlined the necessity of putting together a specific package to deal with the infrastructural needs of the area. This he noted should take into consideration all aspects of economic development and focus specifically on the long-term tourist product.

C/43/10

CO-ORDINATION OF A MEETING OF ALL RELEVANT AGENCIES TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN DONEGAL

On the proposal of Clr. Quinn, seconded by Clr. MacLochlainn, the following motion was adopted:-

"In view of the fact that 1 in 4 of the unemployed in Donegal are under 25, that Donegal County Council co-ordinate a meeting of all the relevant agencies to address this major problem."

Members were informed that:-

“The next Economic Development Workshop will be held with representatives of the County’s economic development agencies on Tuesday February 23rd. The workshop will take place at 10.30am in the Council Chamber, Lifford.

Notification has been sent to the elected members of Donegal County Council in relation to this workshop. Members have been requested to submit any questions they might have for agencies to Barney McLaughlin, Area Manager, Community & Enterprise, Donegal Public Service Centre by the 2nd February. This will enable us to pass questions on to agencies in time to have them addressed on the day.

Donegal County Council is working closely with these agencies in the context of Donegal County Development Board. The agencies involved in the workshop are Udarás na Gaeltachta, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, LYIT, FÁS, Donegal County Enterprise Board.

Donegal County Development Board has agreed its priority goals for the next three years and these goals will be advanced by Donegal County Council and its CDB partners as appropriate. These goals are:

- Enterprise and Skills Development
- Development of the Green Economy
- Development of Natural Resources
- Access to Services
- Development of Culture as a resource
- Development of a Donegal Brand

Members will be updated on progress in relation to these goals.”

A lengthy debate ensued with members calling on all of the agencies involved to work together in a strategic way to address the crisis. It was acknowledged that the forthcoming Economic Development Workshop on the 23rd February would provide a forum for discussing the diverse range of issues involved and allow Members the opportunity to discuss some of the following issues:-

- Promotion of the Green Economy
- Work Incentive Schemes
- Apprenticeship Schemes
- Retraining Initiatives
- Review of the various Education Grant Schemes
- Assessment of minimum wage levels.
- Tackling of Infrastructural Deficits.
- Setting specific targets for development rather than dwelling on past experiences.
- Need for efficiencies within the various Employment Agencies.

- Clarification needed in relation to the situation regarding IDA owned properties outside of the Gateway Towns.
- Effective use of the County's natural resources.
- Promotion of Wind Energy and Cultural Tourism.
- Potential Benefits of the Metropolitan Area Networks and Project Kelvin.
- Benefits if any of amalgamating the various Employment Agencies.
- Promotion of Traditional Industries and the inclusion of the Service Industry in any future initiatives.
- Need to highlight the urgency of the situation.

It was noted that meetings relating to the unemployment crisis tended to be held in workshop format. Thus it was suggested that at least one meeting per year be held in the public arena. Members called on the various agencies to provide a detailed account of their stewardship over the last number of years and queried exactly how many jobs had been created, with the exception of the LYIT.

The County Manager informed Members that he would relay Members views and concerns to the agencies involved in advance of the Workshop on the 23rd February and that the Council would continue to do all it could to support economic development in the County.

Responding to a request from Clr. Harte, he agreed to ask Mr. Michael Tunney, C.E.O, County Enterprise Board to update the Council in relation to the promotion of Micro-Enterprise in the County.

Clr. Quinn in conclusion thanked all who had supported the motion. The aim now he advised was to move forward a specific manner:-

1. Donegal County Council taking a co-ordinating role.
2. Elected Members focusing on the plight of those under 25 facing the prospect of long-term unemployment.
3. A co-ordinated effort from all the agencies involved with the aim of producing a dedicated plan of action.

C/44/10

SETTING UP OF DEDICATED CALL CENTRE FOR
DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL OVER THE
CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS

On the proposal of Clr. Alcorn, seconded by Clr. P. Doherty, the following motion was adopted:-

"That Donegal County Council discuss the possibility of setting up of our own call centre managed by our own staff over the yearly Christmas Holidays to replace the call centre located outside the County over the last few years and for which we have received a lot of complaints."

Members were informed that:-

“The Elected Members were presented with a comprehensive report at the Special Meeting held on 15th January, 2010 in relation to the Council's response during the recent severe weather period. As part of this report, it was acknowledged that there were difficulties with the Call Centre arrangements that were in place over part of that period. The report confirmed the Council plans to fully review all aspects of our response to the severe weather including the arrangements available to the public for lodging queries and complaints. A meeting has been set up with the current Call Centre to take place on February 2nd 2010. Other options for providing these services will also be considered as part of this review.”

Clr. Donaghey took the chair for a brief period in the absence of the Mayor, Clr. Byrne.

Clr. Alcorn commended all who had worked above and beyond the call of duty over the Christmas period to ensure the effective delivery of Council services. Whilst the recent cold spell had been of an exceptional nature it was noted that the one major drawback had been the failure of the communications system.

It was suggested that the use of a Local Call Centre would be more practical.

Clr. Donaghey vacated the Chair on the return of the Mayor.

Members asked that they be provided with a costing for and External Call Centre vis a vis an Internal System. They asked also that they be kept informed of any changes to the On-Call Roster System, particularly those relating to Roads and Water & Environment Staff. The need to plan for a similar type scenario was highlighted and a request made that Members be kept updated in relation to any further developments or changes in the service.. The A/Director of Housing and Corporate Services advised that a review meeting with the relevant staff had taken place on the 2nd February. A meeting with the Service Provider concerned was he noted scheduled for early March. The current arrangements were he advised cost effective with cover arrangements in place 365 days per year.

C/45/10

INCLUSION OF BACK OF ERRIGAL ROAD AND RANNAFAST MAIN ROAD IN FUTURE GRITTING PROGRAMMES

On the proposal of Clr. Gallagher, seconded by Clr. Alcorn, the following motion was adopted:-

"That this Council include the back of Errigal Road and Rannafast Main Road in all future gritting programmes."

Members were informed that:-

"The back of Errigal Road is presently part of the existing gritting programme. It was added as a special route about six or seven years ago. However in extreme conditions, as has been experienced in recent times, it is present Council policy not to continue gritting in these extreme circumstances. The Rannafast main road is not part of the normal winter maintenance routes. It is intended to review existing routes and policies with the Roads Strategic Policy Committee."

Clr. Gallagher in stressing the importance of gritting these routes advised that as the Renal Dialysis Transporter was based in Rannafast there was an obvious need to keep Rannafast Main Road adequately gritted at all times. A number of Members advised that the Back of Errigal Road was in effect the main link into West Donegal and therefore warranted inclusion on the gritting programme.

The Director of Roads and Transportation noted Members concerns and advised that the matter would be considered under the Policy Review to be carried out by the Roads and Transportation S.P.C

C/46/10

PLANNING REGULATIONS AND WIND
FARM/RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

It was agreed given the similar content of the motions to take items 16 & 17 together.

On the proposal of Clr. Mac Lochlainn, seconded by Clr. Mc Conalogue, the following motion was adopted:-

"That Donegal County Council amends or varies the County Development Plan to permit a more flexible approach to applications for wind farms on land designated as "Especially High Scenic Amenities" and encourages and facilitates the promotion of community owned and not for profit wind farms within the county to give more financial benefit to local communities from this natural resource, referred to as "Donegal's Gold".

Members were informed that:-

“In the current County Donegal Development Plan 2006-2012, policy BN5 (page 89) states that areas identified as EHSA (Especially High Scenic Amenity) are those of the highest landscape quality in the County, characterised by wilderness and few if any, man-made structures. The core principles underlying the planning policies for landscape conservation are to give the highest degree of protection to the areas of the highest scenic landscape quality and to adopt a positive attitude to development proposals in relatively lower scenic areas. The EHSA policy indicates that there may be small pockets which do not fully meet the definition of the designation. Such anomalies in landscape designation can be considered individually against a specific proposal. The onus however is on the applicant to demonstrate that the site does not meet the characteristics of an EHSA, and that any proposal would not adversely affect the landscape value of the wider EHSA within which the site is located. There is therefore an inherent flexibility built into this policy.

It is proposed to review the County Development Plan in July, the review will be carried out in a comprehensive manner and as regards windfarms. The assessment will take full account of the Government's published Guidance on wind energy for planning authorities. A detailed assessment of the whole County, will have to be carried out using a step by step GIS approach, examining a number of factors such as the wind energy potential, sensitivity of the landscape, visual amenity, impact on biodiversity and access issues. This will prove to be a very time consuming task.

The Council endorses community owned wind energy proposals, and arrangements which provide share options and or other community gain benefits.

In the County Development Plan, Policy NRD36 indicates that, the promotion of widespread local community benefit through mechanisms such as, a contribution towards a local community levy or development charge as well as arrangements for local community investment, be encouraged. All these elements will be further comprehensively considered in the forthcoming review of the County Development Plan.

Pending the review of the County Development Plan I will ask the Central Planning Unit to consider if there is scope to vary the existing Plan by way of textual change to the policy adopted.”

On the proposal of Clr. Mc Conalogue, seconded by Clr. MacLochlainn, the following motion was adopted:-

"That this Council discuss the county's current planning regulations in relation to wind and renewable energy and resolve on how best to address any regulations members believe require amendment in order to encourage appropriate development of the wind and renewable energy potential of our county."

Members were informed that:-

“The current County Development Plan is the main policy document relating to windfarm development in the County. The Background policy context is as follows: County Donegal’s exposed location on the north western seaboard of Ireland and its mountainous terrain ensures an abundant

wind energy supply. The Council recognises that this, and other renewable resources, can and should play a major role in fulfilling the future energy and employment needs of the County.

Furthermore it recognises the vital role which wind energy has to play in reducing dependency on fossil fuels and in achieving reductions in Green House Gas Emissions at a national level.

Pressure for wind energy development is likely to occur in upland coastal and offshore locations particularly where access to grid connections can be easily attained.

The environmental and economic benefits of Wind Energy on a National and Global Level are well recognised. The development of wind energy has a number of localised benefits for the County including employment during the construction, operational and maintenance phases and in terms of rural diversification.

Wind Energy developments may have the following impacts: noise, shadow flicker, electromagnetic interference, impacts on visual amenity, natural and built heritage, flora and fauna etc. In order to minimise these impacts the siting, design, layout, construction and maintenance of wind farms all require careful consideration.

In policy ND+RD32, wind energy proposals are considered subject to the specific criteria and policies contained within Chapter 7 Natural Resource Development (Page 75 refers), within Appendix A, Development Guidelines and Technical Standards, 5.3 and to accord with the Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities published by the Government.

It is proposed to review the County Development Plan in July, this will be carried out in a comprehensive manner. As far as in general and windfarms in particular, any assessment will take full account of the governments published guidance, especially the wind energy guidance mentioned above. This detailed body of work will assess the potential for renewable energy development, alongside environmental

constraints, however, a balanced approach between both elements will be employed. Public consultation is an integral part of the planning process, and in devising the policy base, the views of all stakeholders, developers / operators and local communities will all be taken into account”.

Clr. MacLochlainn advised that it would be beneficial in the long run to sacrifice some of our landscape designation for an effective community based wind farm scheme.

A lengthy debate ensued with Members citing the need to move forward with the issue given the scarcity of fossil fuels and the need to create alternative forms of employment. Every effort they affirmed should be made to make the best use of our abundant natural resources, whilst remaining sensitive to environmental considerations.

It was suggested that consideration be given to Indicative Corridors of Development, carefully balanced between High Amenity Areas and Areas of Conservation.

The need to encourage community participation was widely welcomed.

Members acknowledged the need for innovative thinking and collaboration among the various parties involved together with the possible use of Public/Private Partnerships.

Clr. Mc Guinness stated that he was of the opinion that a cautious approach should be taken and that it would be a good exercise to establish firstly the benefits that had accrued from existing wind farms. Accessibility and connection to the grid was often a problem he noted in remote areas. It was acknowledged that in some cases it took up to 10 years to facilitate such connections.

Facilitation of wind farms in the County Development Plan should he noted be geared towards generating some form of financial income for the County.

Mr. Francie Coyle, Director of Planning and Economic Development responding to Members queries advised that the proposals for EHSA Areas had been thoroughly discussed with all Elected Members and signed off on an Electoral Area basis. Referring to the 2004 Development Contribution Scheme he confirmed that it had been decided

at the time not to introduce a general charge for wind turbines.

The protection of the natural landscape was the main priority he noted.

He advised that careful consideration together with a balanced approach was needed given the sensitivity of the matter.

Clr. Mac Lochlainn in conclusion stated that each area needed to be considered on a case-by-case basis with some degree of flexibility available.

Clr. Mc Conalogue advised that there were a number of inconsistencies relating to EHSA designations and that a review of specific policies and regulations was warranted at this stage.

On the proposal of Clr. Mac Lochlainn, seconded by Clr. Gallagher it was resolved that correspondence be forwarded to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr. John Gormley outlining:-

- The need for a flexible approach to Wind Farm Development.
- The necessity of introducing a Scheme in Donegal to avail of some of the most optimum wind speeds in Europe.
- The necessity of making central government funding available for community based wind farm schemes.

C/47/10

FUNDING FOR THE COMPLETION OF WORKS AT GREENCASTLE HARBOUR

Given the urgency of the matter it was agreed to continue with the debate initiated on the 25th January and give all Members an opportunity to express their opinion in relation to the following motion, which had been proposed by Clr. Farren and seconded by Clr. Mac Lochlainn.

"That funding be made available by Government to complete works at Greencastle harbour from the 2010 Piers and Harbour Budget."

Members were informed that:-

“The Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food is undertaking the construction of the Greencastle Harbour Project on behalf of Donegal County Council. The total estimated project cost is roughly €35 million. The project is to be funded as follows:

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1) Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food | 75% |
| 2) Department of Gaelteacht (CLAR) | 12.5% |
| 3) Donegal County Council | 12.5% |

To date, approximately €8 million has been spent on Phase I (Breakwater). The Council share of the 12.5% matching monies is approximately €900,000 of which €300,000 is already paid and it is hoped to put a plan in place shortly with the Department to pay the remainder. This will be further presented to Council in the Capital Budget.

It has been reported that the Department will make €104,000 available for this project in 2010. The Council has not been formally notified of this. However, based on Department meetings with our Marine Section, it is understood that the Department wishes to make the project safe, disengage from it and hand back control of the site to Donegal County Council.”

Members outlined the need for a united approach with a clear message being sent to Minister Tony Killeen, Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with special responsibility for Forestry, Fisheries and Marine that the Greencastle Harbour Project needed to progress urgently.

Mr. John Mc Laughlin, Director of Roads and Transportation advised that his department had not been formally notified of the monies available for the project in 2010. It had he noted been verbally confirmed that the Department were disengaging from the project, with site staff finishing up on the 25th February, 2010.

Clr. Farren in conclusion raised a number of issues:-

1. That Donegal County Council refuse to accept the project in its current state.
2. That Council Engineers conduct a safety assessment.

3. Query as to whether the County Manager had received any correspondence in relation to the closure of the project.
4. Had the County Manager consulted with An Bord Pleanála in the event that the project was closed down.
5. Danger that the excellent work carried out to maintain and develop the Ferry Service and the breakwater would now amount to nothing.
6. Concern that Donegal County Council would become liable for damages after the Department withdraws from the project.

The County Manager advised that he had been in contact with the Department specifically in relation to the payment of the Council's contribution. Donegal County Council had to date he confirmed reasonably discharged its obligations.

The Director of Roads and Transportation noted that as of today the Department were in control of the site, however if they proceeded to disengage on the 26th February it was open to interpretation based on the means of handover as to who was actually responsible for the project thereafter.

On the proposal of Clr. Farren, seconded by Clr. Mc Guinness it was resolved that a deputation consisting of the Inishowen Electoral Area Members, the Oireachtas Members in the County and the Director of Service or Senior Engineer as appropriate should meet with the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with special responsibility for Forestry, Fisheries and Marine to discuss the completion of works at Greencastle Harbour.

C/48/10

PROPOSAL TO UPGRADE THE PRESENT MAINS NETWORK IN EAST INISHOWEN

On the proposal of Clr. M. Doherty, seconded by Clr. Mc Guinness, the following motion was adopted:-

"That Donegal County Council Water and Environment management sit down with supervisors and overseers within the Department and put together proposals to upgrade the present mains network in East Inishowen."

Members were informed that:-

“Inishowen Regional Water Supply Scheme was included on the Departments Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009. This programme is effectively being replaced with a new WSIP which is expected to be published by the Department early in 2010. The Council has included Inishowen Regional Water Supply Scheme on its Needs Assessment which was returned to the Department in October 2009. While there is no indication at this stage as to which schemes will be included on the new WSIP the Council is hopeful of this schemes inclusion.”

Clr. Mc Conalogue took the Chair for a brief period in the absence of the Mayor who had to attend to other business.

It was generally agreed that there were significant funding issues to be addressed also.

Clr. Ryan proposed, seconded by Clr. Donaghey that the Members of the Inishowen Electoral Area meet with the Director of Water, Environment and Emergency Services and all relevant staff to discuss and assess the ongoing situation in East Inishowen.

Mr. Seamus Neely, Director of Water, Environment and Emergency Services noted that a number of the short-term problems could be addressed through the workshop format. It was acknowledged that there was a need for an additional water supply to the area and that the long-term solution lay in sourcing water from the Pollan Dam.

C/49/10

TO REQUEST THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT TO REVIEW THE FUNDING AND OPERATION OF THE CORONERS SERVICE

On the proposal of Clr. Donaghey, seconded by Clr. Mc Conalogue, the following motion was adopted:-

"That the Minister for Environment Heritage and Local Government be requested to review and revise current arrangements for the funding and operation of the Coroner's Service. Currently Donegal County Council contribute over €200,000 per annum to this service for which we have no management, input or responsibility. (To be distributed to all other County Councils in Republic of Ireland)."

Members were informed that:-

“While overall responsibility for the Coroners Service rest with the Department of Justice, under the terms of the Coroner’s Act, 1962 the legal obligation to fund the Coroners Service rests with the relevant Local Authority and consequently Donegal County Council is currently responsible for the payment of all fees and expenses relating to post-mortems and inquests within the county.

The Council has very serious concerns in relation to the level of expenditure required for the operation of the Coroners Service in Donegal. The level of expenditure has been increasing on a year-to-year basis but Donegal County Council does not receive any direct funding from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in this regard. It should be noted however that these concerns should not be taken that the Council has any concerns with the manner in which the Coroners in Donegal are discharging their duties and responsibilities.

In December 2009 the Council wrote to the Coroners Service Implementation Team in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform seeking an update in relation to proposals with regard to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform taking direct responsibility for this function and as a consequence removing the Local Authorities from any responsibility in this area. In their response on 5th January 2010, the Coroners Service Implementation Team confirmed that under the terms of the Coroner’s Act, 1962 the legal obligation to fund the Coroners Service still rests with the relevant Local Authority and that there are no plans to change this responsibility in the near future.

As it appears that Donegal County Council will continue to have responsibility for facilitating payments associated with the operation of the Coroners Service for some time, it is intended to carry out a review of all expenses areas with a view to substantially reducing these costs in 2010. This review is underway and some initial changes have already been made with a view to reducing overall costs in this area.”

Members expressed concern at the level of expenditure incurred and noted that it was increasing on a yearly basis with no direct funding from the Department.

Clr. Mc Guinness urged caution noting that a centralised service might not be adequate for areas such as Donegal.

Mr. Liam Ward, Director Housing and Corporate Services alluded to his reply and advised that the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform had no immediate plans to reassess the situation.

It was agreed that the motion be circulated to all Local Authorities, the Local Authority Members Association, and the Association of City and County Councils.

C/50/10 ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

On the proposal of Clr. Mc Eniff, seconded by Clr. Byrne, it was resolved to adjourn the remainder of the business to 10am on Monday 22nd, February, 2010.

C/51/10 REORGANISATION OF OUR PUBLIC SERVICE CENTRES AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS FOR THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES

On the proposal of Clr. Mc Guinness, seconded by Clr. M. Doherty, the following motion was adopted:-

"That this Council discuss the reorganisation of our Public Service Centres and the implications of this for the delivery of services."

Members were informed that:-

“The Manager in his report to the Council meeting in July 2009 set out proposals to reorganise the management of Council services to deal with reductions in staff numbers, reductions in budgets and the change in the number of electoral areas from six to five. The proposal included the reconfiguration of directorates from seven to five and described in broad outline what services would be delivered from the electoral areas and the management and staffing structure to deliver the services (having regard to the reduction in the budget and the reductions in staff numbers). The proposal included, inter alia, for the continuation of the Area Management structure with three Area Managers based

in each electoral area with each Manager responsible for one of the following services;

- Housing/Corporate Services,
- Roads, Transportation and Housing (capital)Services and
- Water, Environment and Emergency Services.

The proposal provided for Community, Culture and Enterprise and Planning Services to be managed centrally to achieve economies of scale but with some field staff available in the electoral areas. The Manager sought and obtained "the endorsement of Donegal County Council at its meeting on July 20th, 2009 to the policy and service framework "within which the proposals were made for consultation with the Unions on staffing/management issues".

Work is ongoing preparing proposals in relation to the restructuring of Central Services management and staffing including an analysis of the links between the reorganisation of this work and the proposed reorganisation at the electoral areas.

In his budget report presented to the Council on December 22nd, the Manager stated "It is proposed to have more detailed plans prepared by mid-January for consultation with Staff, the Unions and Members on how various services will be reconfigured as between headquarters and areas e.g. Planning.....". However since the Budget meeting notification has been received (dated January 13th, 2010) that Industrial Action is to be taken with effect from Monday, January 25th, arising "from the Government decision to cut the rates of pay of Public Servants and their threats to make further cuts in pay, pension, benefits and jobs". The Industrial Action includes a refusal to cooperate with the National Transformation of Public Services agenda or with redeployment and reassignment of staff without Union agreement, etc. As a result of this notice the implementation of the policy and service framework endorsed by the Council on July 20th (within which the staffing and management changes were being proposed) has been put on hold until meetings are held with the Unions to

clarify the full implications of the notice of Industrial Action.”

Clr. Mc Guinness advised that Members needed to be consulted in relation to any proposed changes to Electoral Area Services. Staff re-organisation could be implemented without any reduction in services at local level.

The County Manager affirmed that consideration had been given to achieving economies of scale possibly in relation to the provision of Planning and Community and Enterprise Services. The objective had been to strengthen decentralised services and assess the possibility of doing back office processes in one location. At no time he noted was there any suggestion that the Public Service Centres would be closed. Any Member of staff who had concerns in relation to same could be confirmed speak to himself or any senior member of staff.

This concluded the business of the meeting.