

11th January, 2010

To: Each Member of Donegal County Council

I hereby give notice under Paragraph 7 of Schedule 10 of the Local Government Act 2001, having received a requisition from the Mayor pursuant to Paragraph 6 (1) (a) of said schedule, that a Special Meeting of Donegal County Council shall be held at 11 AM on Friday 15th January 2010 in the Council Chamber, County House, Lifford, County Donegal to transact the following business, as set out in agenda contained within the aforementioned requisition. A copy of the requisition is attached.

AGENDA

1. To present the Council with a comprehensive report on all the services provided by the Council since the start of the severe weather conditions;
2. To review the full costs of the services provided and the consequential impacts on the 2010 Budget;
3. To discuss plans for dealing with any possible further periods of severe weather as well as dealing with all infrastructural damage arising from the severe weather conditions.

E Sweeney
Meetings Administrator

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF DONEGAL COUNTY
COUNCIL, HELD IN THE COUNTY HOUSE, LIFFORD ON 15th
JANUARY, 2010

C/01/10 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, D. Larkin, P. Mac Lochlainn, F. Mc Brearty, N. McBride, C. Mc Conalogue, I. McGarvey, P. McGowan, B. McGuinness, B. O'Neill, T. Pringle, J. Ryan, and T. Slowey.

C/02/10 OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr. Michael McLoone, County Manager, Mr. John Mc Laughlin, Director Roads and Transportation, Mr. S. Neely, Director Water, Environment and Emergency Services. Mr. Garry Martin, A/Head of Finance, Mr. Liam Ward, A/Director Housing & Corporate, Mr. Michael Heaney, Director Community, Culture and Enterprise, Mr. James Boyle, Senior Engineer, Mr. Michael Mc Garvey, Senior Engineer, Mr. Vincent Lynn, Senior Engineer, Mr. Peadar MacRory, Senior Engineer, Mr. Pat Gillespie, Senior Executive Engineer, Mr. Michael Breslin, Senior Executive Engineer, Mr. Peadar Thomas, Senior Executive Engineer, Mr. Brendan Mc Fadden, Senior Executive Engineer, Mr. Stephen Flynn, Senior Executive Engineer, Mr. Charlie Kerr, A/Senior Executive Engineer, Mr. Eunan Sweeney, Meetings Administrator, Ms. Anne Marie Crawford, Staff Officer, Corporate Services.

C/03/10 REPORT ON SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE
COUNCIL SINCE THE START OF THE SEVERE
WEATHER CONDITIONS.

The Mayor advised that he had received numerous requests to debate the service implications associated with the ongoing severe weather conditions and on that basis, he had, forwarded a requisition to the Meetings Administrator requesting that the following business be transacted: -

1. To present the Council with a comprehensive report on all the services provided by the Council since the start of the severe weather conditions.
2. To review the full costs of the services provided and the consequential impacts on the 2010 Budget.
3. To discuss plans for dealing with any possible further periods of severe weather as well as dealing with all infrastructural damage arising from the severe weather conditions.”

In response to a query from Clr. Mc Brearty the Mayor confirmed that under Part 6 (c), Schedule 10 of the Local Government Act, 2001 he was obliged to consider a request presented to him from at least five number Members. It was, therefore not possible to proceed with Clr. Mc Brearty’s request for a Special Meeting, given that the request was on behalf of two members only.

Tributes were paid to the Roads, Water Services and Housing Staff who had worked above and beyond the call of duty over the prolonged cold spell to ensure the delivery of essential services.

A detailed report on the Severe Weather Conditions 2009/2010 was circulated at this juncture.

The County Manager informed Members that the report detailed the Council’s response to the severe weather conditions, provided information on known extra costs and the ensuing service and budgetary implications, whilst also examining the Council’s communication policy. A brief outline of the arctic type conditions was provided.

The overall strategy for dealing with emergencies was, he confirmed, dealt with through the Corporate and Service Planning Procedures, which were presented periodically to the Members and reviewed in the context of the Annual Budget.

It was noted that between 230 and 240 staff were called back from annual leave to deal with the emergency and that a monitoring service had been established in the Letterkenny Public Services Centre.

Thanks was extended to all who had returned voluntarily from annual leave to ensure that an effective communications network was in place.

The A/Director Housing and Corporate, Director Roads and Transportation, and the Director Water, Environment and Emergency Services, each provided a detailed account of the emergency service cover provided by their respective directorates, outlining the service implications involved, together with a comprehensive analysis of the work carried out and the ensuing budgetary implications.

The County Manager gave an overview of the Council's response and thanked the Members for affording the Executive an opportunity to respond in a comprehensive and structured way to the emergency. He stated that there were now wide ranging implications for all aspects of service delivery, namely:-

1. Does the Council plan and budget for an event that may occur once every forty years.
2. Whether the Council's Emergency Response Systems were adequate to deal with the frequency of such events.
3. Whilst various strategies had worked well there was an obligation on the Manager and the Directors of Service to ensure that there were enough adequately trained staff to provide relief in such emergencies.
4. There was a need to review, through the respective Strategic Policy Committees, policies surrounding the delivery of essential services and to look at the options available under the current staffing moratorium.

He advised that there were significant additional costs and budgetary implications with preliminary estimates predicting a cost to the Council of between €1.1m and €1.5m even before detailed estimates had been received with regard to the repair of consequential damage to roads, water infrastructure and housing.

The issue now, he confirmed was whether the Council tries to find €1.1m to €1.5m in savings or go back and review budgets that have already been reduced to a minimum, and it would be necessary to bring these major issues back to the

full Council and review spending priorities in the context of Budget 2010.

The County Manager stated that there had been a number of issues surrounding the general communications policy, and in particular the inability of the Call Centre Service to deal with the huge number of enquiries, and these would be specifically reviewed as part of the debriefing process.

C/04/10

MEMBERS RESPONSE

The Mayor informed the meeting that he had received a request from an RTE and a TG4 Camera Crew to film briefly in the Council Chamber.

On the proposal of Clr. Larkin, seconded by Clr. Brogan it was resolved to allow the camera crews in question to obtain brief footage of the Chamber.

Members welcomed the excellent presentations and proceeded to raise a range of issues namely:-

Staffing

There was an appreciation of the excellent work carried out by Council Staff over the period. Members thanked individually staff within their respective Electoral Areas who had shown enormous dedication and efficiency in dealing with the many problems that had arisen. Concern was expressed in relation to the impact of recent government cutbacks and their impact on service provision over the Christmas break.

On the proposal of Clr. Brogan, seconded by Clr. Blaney, it was resolved that correspondence should issue to all staff involved commending them for their actions during the prolonged cold spell.

Communications

It was generally agreed that there had been problems on the communications front with a number of Members outlining their concerns in relation to the service provided by the designated Call Centre.

Whilst recognising that the level of calls were unprecedented, it was agreed that an appraisal of the system would take place as part of the debriefing process.

A number of queries were raised including whether it was necessary to outsource calls in the first place and the cost associated with this operation.

It was suggested that there should be one emergency number for the benefit of the general public and elderly clients in particular. The benefits of a communal texting system as a means of updating staff and members was also mooted, together with the provision of a comprehensive list of contact numbers for senior staff.

In response to a query on the confusing nature of the information being provided, the County Manager confirmed that this was simply due to the unpredictability of the weather and the constant changing situation.

Compliments were paid to the local media in respect of their excellent coverage particularly in relation to roads and water updates.

Funding

There was general consensus that additional funding was required both in the short and long term based on a co-ordinated response from the relevant Strategic Policy Committees.

Clr. Mc Bride proposed, seconded by Clr. O' Neill, and it was resolved that a meeting be arranged with the Oireachtas Members in the County and contact be made with both the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Minister for Transport with the aim of sourcing adequate funding for repair works across the county.

Members asked that they be informed as soon as possible of the full budgetary implications.

Policy Review

Members were in agreement that a review of the gritting policy was required. This was deemed essential if vital transport arteries were to be kept open. Consideration, they advised, should also be given to providing adequate coverage in populated areas and housing estates.

The provision of grit at designated locations for use by the general public was essential for such emergencies together with a specific policy to enlist the help of the armed services and the farming community, where appropriate.

It was acknowledged that there was a need also to review the sourcing of salt supplies and examine the viability of making

containers of salt available at a subsidised rate to individual communities.

A review of the patching policy was also deemed necessary given the obvious long-term effects of the freezing conditions on road surfaces.

General Issues Raised

A number of suggestions for dealing with similar type emergencies were put forward, namely:

- The setting up of a designated Emergency Committee and the more effective use of services such as the Fire Brigade. It was widely agreed that every effort should be made to learn from mistakes made over the period and, as part of the assessment process, to consult with those who had been on the frontline of service delivery.
- The possibility of using local contractors and farmers to assist with future emergencies was also debated.
- It was suggested that consideration be given in the future to using tankers from local creameries to transport water to areas experiencing shortages.
- Concern was expressed that Local Authorities had not been represented on the National Response Committee.
- The delegation of a number of roads services to the NRA was highlighted as another problematic issue with all in general agreement that an assessment of the entire road network was required at this stage.

Members called for clarification in relation to liability issues given that the failure to clear footpaths and walkways had caused considerable problems over the past few weeks. It was suggested that Council tenants be provided with contact details for IPBMI and made aware of the fact that their personal belongings were not covered under this policy.

The support provided by the Home Help Service, the Postal Service and a range of voluntary organisations was commended with Members in agreement that this should be formally acknowledged.

- C/05/10 ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING
On the proposal of Clr. M. Doherty, seconded by Clr. Ryan, it was resolved to break for lunch and reconvene the meeting at 3.00pm.
- C/06/10 FURTHER ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING
On resumption of the meeting, Clr. Mac Lochlainn, proposed, seconded by Clr. Mc Brearty to further adjourn proceedings until 3.10pm.
- C/07/10 GENERAL ISSUES CONTINUED
It was noted that wide-ranging difficulties were being experienced within the water services area.
Supply issues in the Croagh and Killycreen areas of Ramelton were highlighted, with Members requesting an update at the next appropriate Electoral Area Meeting.

Concern was expressed in relation to the problems being experienced by areas serviced by Northern Ireland water.
- C/08/10 ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING
On the proposal of Clr. Mc Brearty, seconded by Clr. Mac Lochlainn it was resolved to take a ten minute recess to allow Members consider correspondence circulated on behalf of the Mayor.
- C/09/10 CONCLUSION
The County Manager advised that he had taken on board Members comments and that the policy issues highlighted would need to be reviewed by the Corporate Policy Group before coming back to the Council.
The overall impact, he noted, was that there would be severe implications for the revenue budget with preliminary costs estimated at anything from €3m to €4m. It was, therefore, essential at this juncture to make the various government departments aware of our current financial position. All options would be considered even to the extent of moving monies from planned services.

Communications issues, the Manager advised would be reviewed through the debriefing process and cognisance taken of Members deliberations. There was clearly, he

added, a need to review how the message had been delivered.

The importance of inter-agency working was deemed essential in dealing with any future emergency situations. It was essential, he affirmed, that all aspects of service delivery were examined and every effort made to learn from the experience.

This concluded the business of the meeting.