

Minutes of Municipal District of Stranorlar Meeting held on Tuesday 13th October 2015 in the Regional Training Centre, Stranorlar commencing at 11.00am.

Members Present:

Cllr Frank McBrearty. (Cathaoirleach)

Cllr Gary Doherty

Cllr Patrick McGowan

Cllr Gerry Crawford

Cllr Liam Doherty

Officials Present:

Joe Peoples, Director of Service, Senior Management Team

Patrick Mc Laughlin, Senior Ex. Officer, Housing Services.

Denis Kelly, Sen. Executive Planner, Central Planning Unit,

Sinead Harkin, Executive Planner, Central Planning Unit.

Margaret Fitzgerald, Clerical Officer, Central Planning Unit.

Ruth Diver, Executive Planner, Planning Services.

Adrian Mc Cool, Assistant Engineer, Roads & Transportation.

Paddy Doherty, Divisional Manager, Community & Enterprise.

Martina Morris, Senior Staff Officer, Corporate Services.

Apologies: Cllr. Martin Harley.

Paul Christy, Sen. Executive Planner, Planning Services.

Garrett Doherty, A/Senior Executive Engineer, Roads.

72.00 Corporate Services.

72.01. The Members observed a minutes silence in respect of the following bereavements;

- **Gda. Tony Golden** - killed in the line of duty on Sunday 11th October 2015 in Omeath, Co. Louth.
- **10 members of the Travelling Community** - who died tragically as a result of a fire at a Halting Site at Carrickmines, Co. Dublin on 10th October 2015.

72:02. Confirmation of Minutes of Municipal District of Stranorlar Meeting held on 8th September 2015

On the proposal of Cllr. Gerry Crawford and seconded by Cllr. Liam Doherty the Minutes of the Meeting held on 8th September 2015 were confirmed.

72:03. Confirmation of Minutes of Municipal District of Stranorlar Workshop Meeting held on 8th September 2015.

On the proposal of Cllr. Gary Doherty and seconded by Cllr. Patrick Mc Gowan the Minutes of the Workshop Meeting held on 8th September 2015 were confirmed.

72:04. Confirmation of date and venue for next meeting.

Members confirmed that the next meeting of Stranorlar Municipal District would be held on *Tuesday 1st December 2015 @11.00am in the Council Chamber, Lifford.*

It was also agreed that a Workshop meeting would take place that day at 10.00 am prior to the Municipal District Meeting.

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| 73.00 Housing Services. |
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73.01. Social Housing Reports.

Members noted the contents of the reports circulated with the Agenda, and, the revised Vacant House report presented by Mr. Patrick Mc Laughlin, Senior Executive Officer, Housing.

Mr. Mc Laughlin explained that he had revised the Vacant House Report to reflect the fact that, the Dept have indicated recently they would consider extending the scope of the Long Term Void scheme (repairing vacant houses) to houses where the works may cost in excess of €30,000 and had invited the Council to submit proposals.

The Council was now seeking funding for 6 no. houses in the Stranorlar Municipal Area, under the Long Term Void scheme.

Members sought clarification in relation to the 'difficulty re-letting' of a vacant **SI at Gortgranagh, Lifford.**

Members also sought clarification on the proposal contained in the Vacant House report to 'explore options to dispose to Housing Association' in relation to **4 no. vacant, 1 - bed, houses at Meadowhill, Raphoe,** and, pointed out that an alternative may be to demolish the existing houses and use the site for the

construction of more family friendly (2 or 3 bed houses) social houses in Raphoe, as there was a need for this type of social housing in Raphoe.

In response, Mr. Mc Laughlin indicated that the proposal to dispose of the houses to a Voluntary Housing Body was only at an early stage. It was being considered as an option, because, Voluntary Housing Bodies had access to various types of funding that was not available to the Council. However, the viability of demolishing the houses and building an infill Social Housing Scheme on the site could be assessed, if this was the Members preference.

Following further discussion, the Members agreed that the preferred option was the demolition of these houses and using the vacant plots to construct a Social Housing Scheme.

Members indicated that residents has expressed an interest in maintaining a small plot of land at the top of Coneyburrow Estate and requested that this be followed up with the residents.

The content of the report (circulated with the Agenda) on the **Housing Land Bank** available in the Stranorlar Municipal Area, was noted by the Members.

73.02. Best Kept Council Housing Schemes 2015.

The Member's, extended their congratulations to the residents of St. Eunans Tce, Raphoe and Deele View Park Convoy, as both estates were winners of their respective categories in the above competition.

It was suggested that, the residents of all the Council housing estates in the Municipal Area should be written to, and informed of, this competition. It was felt that every estate should be encouraged to enter the competition, as it has proven to be beneficial for all parties who take part.

73.03. Disposal of Vacant Housing Stock.

The Members considered the details of the Report submitted by Mr. P Mc Laughlin, S.E.O. Housing, in relation to the proposed sale of 4 no. Houses as follows:

- SI @ Drumdoit, Castlefin - offer of € 32,500 received.
- SI@ Roundknowes, Cloghan - offer of € 56,000 received.
- SI @ Glentown, St. Johnston - offer of €31,000 received.
- Bungalow at Dromore, Raphoe - offer of €12,000 received.

Following a brief discussion, it was agreed by the Members to **dispose of all 3no. SI properties** for the offers received, but, in view of the low offer received for the house at **Dromore, Raphoe** it was agreed that the Council should retain possession of this house and **not dispose of same at this time.**

74.00 Community, Enterprise & Cultural Services.

Members noted the content of the report circulated and presented by Mr. Paddy Doherty.

74.01. Drumboe Walkway.

Mr. P. Doherty outlined that a Draft Deed of Dedication had been submitted by E.T.B to the Councils solicitors - this document is currently being reviewed by our solicitors and a response is expected shortly.

74.02. Ballybofey/Stranorlar Development HUB.

Mr. Doherty confirmed that, following discussions with An Comhairle Uladh, organisers of the Ulster Dancing Championships, it has been agreed to bring the Oireachtas Rine Uladh 2016 and 2017 to Ballybofey.

He pointed out that co-funding would be required for the staging of this event.

He also indicated that Mr Alastair Brownlee (triathlete), current Gold Olympic European and Commonwealth Champion, would be the guest star of the first Sport 4 Life Sports Conference & Expo taking place in the Finn Valley Centre, Stranorlar, from 13th -15th November 2015.

74.03. Peace IV.

In response to queries raised by the Members, Mr. Doherty stated that, the Council are expecting that Peace IV programme will be launched in November and, it is proposed to have a meeting with the Members of each Municipal District before the end of the year, as part of the process in developing the Peace IV Action Plan.

It is also proposed to meet with the Members of Derry City and Strabane District Council, in the near future, to discuss projects of mutual interest such as the Riverine Project.

75.00. Environmental Services.

75.01. Tidy Towns Competition.

The Members praised the efforts of all the various tidy towns committees for their great work this year in the towns and villages throughout the County.

In view of Letterkenny's success in winning the National award for tidiest town in 2015, it was agreed that a letter of congratulations be sent to Letterkenny Tidy Towns Committee on behalf of Stranorlar Municipal District.

It was proposed that an invitation be extended to members of Letterkenny Tidy Towns committee to attend a workshop with the Members, and members of the various tidy towns committees in the Stranorlar Municipal Area, to advise of how Letterkenny had set about winning the award, and, advise on the process of making a submission to the Tidy Towns competition.

Members noted that there were some towns/villages in the Area who failed to make any submissions to the competition and they wanted to encourage these towns and villages to take part.

In response, Mr. Peoples indicated that perhaps the invitation should be extended to include all 36 groups in Donegal, who had entered the Tidy Towns Competition, Council staff and any other group interested in the process - not just those in the Stranorlar Municipal District.

Members agreed to this proposal.

75.02. Misc

Flooding.

Members queried if there was any progress on the issue regarding the refusal of the OPW to attend a meeting with the Members to discuss the issue of flooding in the Area.

The Members were informed that a letter had been sent to the Minister with responsibility for the OPW (Mr. Simon Harris, T.D.) but to date no reply has been received.

Irish Water.

Members again requested details of the full Capital Investment Programme by **Irish Water**, for the Stranorlar Municipal District.

76.00. Roads & Transportation.

Members noted the contents of the report circulated, and presented by, Mr. Adrain Mc Cool and requested that the '*Follow Up*' items, as listed on the report, be carried forward as ongoing items to be included in future Area - Road reports for update/review.

The following issues were highlighted by Members:

- The need for a 'Yield' sign, or some other sort of signage, at the Lismullaghduff side of the junction at Milltown Bridge in the Crossroads, in addition to the proposed STOP sign already proposed for this junction.
- Ard Mc Carron - seek to ensure that section of roadway is completed
- Problem of signs being defaced in the Area by graffiti and lewd or vulgar messages - request policy to be put in place that such signs are removed or cleaned as part of general road maintenance.
- Reports on some local radio stations and local media that the road is already closed at Ballindrait, for the proposed bridge works which are not scheduled to start until Monday 2nd November - requested that the media concerned be contacted and advised of the correct dates for the road closure.

76.01 Road Maintenance / Funding.

Members again requested that the Director of Services, Roads and the Chief Executive of the Council, be invited to attend a special meeting with the Members, to discuss their concerns about the steadily worsening conditions of the Roads in the Area, and, the lack of adequate funding being provided to the Area to deal with this growing problem.

Members felt that this meeting should, take place before the adoption of the Councils Budget for 2016, and, the subsequent allocation of the Roads Budget to each of the Municipal Districts.

Members pointed out that a road Patching machine is currently in use in the Area, and, proving to be a useful, efficient method of dealing with pot-hole repairs.

In response to the Members proposal that such a machine should be available in the Area on a year-round basis, Mr. Mc Cool stated that the use of the machine was dependant on the weather, and, also as it was only suitable for use on

certain types of road surfaces, it could not be used all year round, even if it was available for use.

76.02: Back Laneways in Council Housing Estates.

Members queried which section of the Council is responsible for the maintenance etc of the back laneways in Council Housing Estates. They indicated that in some estates there had been nothing done on these laneways for over 60 years and many were now in a very poor state of repair. As a result, tenants now have to bring their bins etc through the house to the front roadway for collection, as bin men are refusing to use the back laneways, and the same is happening with coal deliveries etc.

In reply it was stated that , within Council Housing estates, the back lanes are generally not listed on the Schedule of Public Roads maintained by the Roads Dept and therefore the Roads Dept do not take responsibility for maintenance of these back lanes, paths etc.

It was also pointed out that existing Housing Maintenance funding does not provide for the maintenance or repair of back lanes in these estates.

Furthermore, the Roads Dept has no responsibility for the maintenance of any roads or back lanes in privately constructed housing estates (even if the Council has acquired individual houses or groups of houses within a private estate) until such times as the private estate is taken over by the Council.

While acknowledging this response, the Members felt that these laneways should fall under the responsibility of the Roads section as they are owned by the Council and are therefore 'Council Roads'

It was proposed that a survey be carried out of these back laneways in the various Council estates in the Area to identify the scale of the problem.

It was proposed that two such back lane should be entered onto the Roads Schedule on an annual basis and this would hopefully generate some extra funding which could be used for repair /maintenance of these laneways, or, that a special fund could be put in place to tackle this issue.

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| 77.00. Planning & Economic Development. |
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Members noted the content of the report circulated with the Agenda.

Members expressed their disappointment that Mr. Sweeney was not present at the meeting, and that, no update on the take over of the various estates was available for discussion.

It was proposed that, in view of the importance of this issue, Mr. Sweeney would attend the Municipal District meetings as a matter of course, to provide regular updates etc to the members.

Members also requested that a detailed report on an estate by estate basis be provided at the next meeting.

77.01: Request for Workshop - Local Area Plan (Tier 2 Towns) & Casual Trading.

Members agreed to the request from staff of the Central Planning Unit to hold a Workshop on the above items. The date agreed for the proposed workshop was Wednesday 28th October 2015 at 2.00 p.m. in Lifford.

77.02. L.E.C.P. (Local Economic & Community Plan) 2015-2021.

Members noted the contents of the Draft LECP Plan circulated with the Agenda and presented by Ms. Sinead Harkin, Executive Planner, Central Planning Unit.

Ms. Harkin gave a brief presentation on the contents and purpose of the LECP.

She explained that, the County Donegal Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) is a partnership plan prepared by the County Donegal Local Community Development Committee & the Economic Development Committee.

The purpose of the Plan is to identify and implement actions to strengthen and develop the economic and community dimensions of the County and to reflect and support the implementation of existing and proposed National and Regional spatial, community and economic strategies.

She outlined that, working in partnership, 7 Priority Goals of the Donegal LECP have been identified:

1. To Develop Donegal as a **Connected Place**
2. To Harness Donegal's **Natural and Human Capital**
3. To Value, Sustain and Develop Our **Culture and Creative resource**
4. To Promote **Sustainable, Inclusive and Healthy Communities**
5. To Develop Donegal as a **Lead Region for Learning, Research and Innovation**
6. To Develop the '**Donegal**' Brand
7. To Promote **Entrepreneurship, Investment and Enterprise**

She pointed out that the Plan itself was not a funding programme but would act as a reference point for various bodies/organisations seeking to source funding.

The Draft Plan was now being presented to the Members of each Municipal District for consideration and to examine its consistency with -

- The core strategy and objectives of the County Development Plan.

- The Border Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022.
- And that the community elements and economic elements are consistent with each other.

The next step would then be for the LCDC and EDC to consider the submissions of the Municipal Districts and the Regional Assembly before seeking endorsement by the Plenary meeting of Donegal County Council.

The Members thanked Ms. Harkin for her presentation and complimented the body of work done by the Central Planning Unit in preparing and presenting this Draft Plan.

However, the Members were unhappy with various elements of the Plan and highlighted their disappointment that once again the Stranorlar Municipal Area seems to have been basically ignored in the overall Plan.

Some of the concerns raised by the Members were as follows:

- There is an over-emphasis on Letterkenny -more consultation should take place with organisations based outside of Letterkenny, and in particular with each Municipal District Council.
- Each Municipality should be identified in the Plan and recognised and treated as a unit, in the same way as Letterkenny Town is identified and treated as a unit.
- Donegal is a rural County and more emphasis needs to be placed on Agriculture and Farming and development of agri- businesses etc outside of Letterkenny. The Finn & Lagan Valleys are areas of intense farming activity which generates its own unique problems in the Area, as well as, presenting a unique opportunity for development in the Area.
- 'The Border' does not feature in any significant manner in the Plan despite the fact that any change in the Euro/Stg exchange rate has a major impact on the economy of the County. The Plan also fails to recognise the challenges and opportunities in agriculture, education etc presented by the Border, particularly for the Stranorlar Municipal Area .
- Strategic roads in the Area such as the N13, N14, N15 and A5 link Rd to Letterkenny, are not given due recognition for their importance to the Area and provision needs to be made for the proper development of infrastructure in the Area as a whole.
- The plan should highlight the importance of the development of Ballybofey / Stranorlar as a sports hub.
- Some of the maps included in the Plan document eg; those showing population, tourism areas etc - the towns of Ballybofey and Stranorlar are missing.

- The development of Lifford as a Gateway Town should be included with the associated need for investment in Lifford Hospital and Lifford bridge.
- The plan should highlight the need for investment in facilities for education at all levels from Primary to Third Level.
- Poor quality of Broadband in the Area and County as a whole - in fact approx 34% of households have no access to broadband at all, and the quality of broadband available to the remaining 64% is poor and not up to a suitable standard. This is a major issue for the County and not just the Stranorlar Municipal District.

Members felt that they were not in a position to approve of the Draft Plan, as presented, and proposed to hold a Workshop meeting to discuss the contents of the document.

It was agreed that the matters raised would be taken on board and that the Draft Plan would be included in the Planning Workshop meeting to be held on Wednesday 28th October @ 2.00 p.m in Lifford for further discussion.

78.00. Notices of Motion.

78.01- Allocation of Single Bedroom Houses.

The following motion was submitted and proposed by Cllr. Liam Doherty and seconded by Cllr. Gary Doherty.

‘That this Council would change their policy on the age requirement of 65 for the allocation of their single bedroom houses to leave it open to all applicants on the housing list’

The Members were informed that, having determined that an applicant is qualified for social housing support, one of the key considerations thereafter is the identification of the most appropriate form of support to meet that need. In general, it is Council policy that a one bedroom dwelling should be reserved for single adults over 65 or a couple over 65 with no dependants.

Notwithstanding this approach, in the interests of effective stock management or for reasons of good estate management, an Area Manager may decide to allocate a property outside of these guidelines.

Examples of this would be where single applicants under the age of 65 indicate their preference to be considered solely for a one bedroom dwelling and in such circumstances, they are approved for a one bedroom dwelling and considered for any vacancies that arise in that category.

Furthermore, in considering an allocation of a one bedroom dwelling, where

there is a low demand from approved applicants in that category, other applicants approved for two beds are considered with regard being had to their particular circumstances.

Cllr. L. Doherty welcomed the reply but, stated that he was unaware that such discretion existed in the allocation of these houses and requested that applicants for housing be made aware of this option.

The Members agreed in principle with the Motion but suggested that it be passed on to SPC for discussion

78.02. Footpath on N13 Letterkenny Road.

The following motion was submitted by Cllr Martin Harley.

'That this municipal district put in place the footpath on the N-13 Letterkenny road past Admiran Park out as far as the 50km signs as was indicated in planning permission no 01/8074 in accordance with planning permission T93/1479 and draw down any bonds that are in place to assist with the works'.

This Motion was deferred to the next meeting of Stranorlar Municipal District on Tuesday 1st December 2015.

78.03. Broadband.

The following motion was submitted and proposed by Cllr. Gary Doherty and seconded by Cllr. Liam Doherty.

'That this Municipal District demands a meeting with Eir (formerly Eircom) to discuss the lack of a sufficient broadband facility in areas of the District that is stifling prospects of economic growth'.

The Members were informed that, it is intended to invite Eir (Eircom) to address a future meeting of Donegal County Council in relation to the provision of broadband in the County.

Cllr. G. Doherty expressed frustration at this response, as he had raised this issue previously on a number of occasions and had received the same reply.

78.00. Members Written Questions.

78.01. The following question was submitted by Cllr. Liam Doherty.

'Can this Council provide me with a list of housing estates in the Stranorlar M.D. of which the Roads Department and which estates the Housing Department are responsible for the upkeep of the back lanes in these estates'.

Cllr. Doherty was informed that, Donegal County Council owns 744 units of social housing stock located in 64 different estates in the Stranorlar Municipal District.

In a number of the estates, the Council only owns a very limited number of dwellings which is primarily down to the fact that in these instances, individual dwellings were bought in private estates whereas in other instances, most of the houses as originally constructed or acquired by the Council are now bought out.

Under the Roads Act, the roads department of Donegal County Council is responsible for the maintenance of 'Public Roads'. A Public Road is defined as 'a road over which a public right of way exists and the responsibility for the maintenance of which lies on a road authority'. In this regard Donegal County Council maintains a Roads Schedule detailing all of the Public Roads for which the Roads Dept. has responsibility for maintenance.

An examination of this Schedule indicates that while the main roads within a council housing estate, providing access to the front door of each house will generally be on the Schedule, there are no back lanes between and through council housing estates providing access to the rear or side of each house registered and therefore the Roads Dept. do not take responsibility for maintenance of these access roads/paths/back lanes.

Until such times as privately constructed housing estates are taken over by the council the Roads Dept. has no responsibility for maintenance of any roads or back lanes within these estates even if the council has acquired individual houses or groups of houses within a private estate.

In relation to the maintenance of the "non public" back lanes, existing funding does not provide for the maintenance or repair of back lanes in estates. The current annual housing maintenance budget at Municipal District level of €273,052 is prioritised to cover routine maintenance works to the actual housing stock with funds being retained and managed centrally for the repair of casual vacancies as they arise. The funding for repair of casual vacancies is

supplemented by allocations from the Department in accordance with the Return of Vacant Stock to Productive Use Programme.

78.02. The following question was submitted by Cllr. Gary Doherty.

'What estates in this Municipal District have yet to receive insulation under the insulating programme thus far?'

Cllr. Doherty was informed that the estates listed below have received Energy Efficient Retrofit Works in 2014 and 2015:

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| St Eunans Terrace, Raphoe - | 2014 |
| The Curragh, Killygordon - | 2014 |
| Ard Baithin, St Johnston - | 2014 |
| Croaghan Heights, Lifford - | 2015 |
| Emmett Park, Lifford - | 2015 |

All other properties are still to receive EERW works and the inspection works are ongoing in these properties at present. The prioritisation of older stock will form the basis of the continuation of the programme from now to the end of the EERW Programme.

78.03. The following question was submitted by Cllr. Gary Doherty.

'How many of our Council housing tenants are in arrears on their rent.'

Cllr. Doherty was informed that, as at the 5th October 2015, housing rent arrears amount to €1,331,997. The Council has currently 5,590 customer rent accounts which includes a number of arrears only accounts, i.e. customers have moved from a Council property but have arrears on their account which are still being pursued.

The majority of customer pay their rent on a weekly basis either by Household budget (the payment is deducted at source from their social welfare payment); in the post office or other designated payment points; by standing order; by direct debit or in cash at our Public Service Centres and Lifford Headquarters.

The breakdown of the accounts in arrears as at the 5th October 2015 is as follows:

| Category | Number (%) |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| More than €100 in arrears* | 1591 (28%) |
| More than €200 in arrears* | 1199 (21%) |
| More than €300 in arrears | 991 (18%) |
| More than €400 in arrears | 866 (15%) |
| More than €500 in arrears | 773 (14%) |
| More than €1,000 in arrears | 426 (7%) |

*The customers showing arrears of more than €100.00 and €200.00 could be due to a timing issue between the raising of the accrual on the system and payment being met, especially if customers are paying on a monthly basis.

All outstanding rent balances are pursued with the overall view to maximise income and reduce arrears. In 2014 a total amount of €10,949,297 was collected from housing rents which represents an overall collection rate of 89%.

78.04. The following question was submitted by Cllr. Martin Harley.

'Could a survey be done on Drumboe Avenue from Stranorlar Main Street up to the Cemetary with a view to installing a footpath in conjunction with Coillte and land owners in the future capital programmes'.

Cllr. Harley was informed that, the Stranorlar Roads Office will arrange for a survey to be carried out at this location to determine the feasibility of constructing a footpath at some time in the future if a source of funding becomes available.

This concluded the business of the Meeting.

Area Manager,
Municipal District of Stranorlar.

Cathaoirleach,
Municipal District of Stranorlar.