

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF DONEGAL COUNTY
COUNCIL HELD ON WEDNESDAY 30TH JUNE, 2021 IN THE AURA LEISURE
CENTRE, LETTERKENNY**

C/176/21 MEMBERS PRESENT

Cllrs J Murray (Cathaoirleach), L Blaney, K Bradley, C Brogan, P Canning, T Conaghan, D Coyle, N Crossan, T Crossan, G Doherty, L Doherty, R Donaghey, M T Gallagher, M Harley, N Jordan, D M Kelly, M C Mac Giolla Easbuig, F Mc Brearty Jnr, M Mc Bride, M McDermott, I Mc Garvey, P Mc Gowan, M McMahon, G Mc Monagle, M Naughton, J S Ó Fearraigh, and B Sweeny.

Online

Cllrs G Crawford, A Doherty, M Farren, J Kavanagh, N Kennedy, N Mc Garvey, B Mc Guinness, and A Molloy.

C/177/21 OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE

John McLaughlin, Chief Executive, Joe Peoples, Director of Housing, Corporate and Cultural Services / Meetings Administrator, Liam Ward, Director Community Development & Planning Services, Brendan O'Donnell, A/Director of Roads & Transportation, Seán O'Daimhin, Rannóg na Gaeilge, Frances Friel, Communications Officer, Anne Marie Crawford, Staff Officer, Corporate Services.

Online

Richard Gibson, Head of Finance, Michael Mc Garvey, A/Director of Water & Environment, Eunan Quinn, Senior Planner.

C/178/21 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Michael Mc Clafferty and Mr Garry Martin, Director Economic Development, Information Systems and Emergency Services

C/179/21 ELECTION OF CATHAOIRLEACH

Cllr Donaghey welcomed members to the meeting including a number who had opted to participate online.

Cllr Mc Brearty on a point of order queried as to why the meeting was being held in a building that clearly had mica and pyrrhotite and for which, he contended, the Council were paying €5000.

He said that he wanted evidence and proof that the building was safe and that as matter of principle he would be wearing a hard hat and high-visibility vest when attending meetings. There was, he said, an element of danger for the public who used this facility.

He asked that a response be provided by the executive.

The Cathaoirleach said that she intended to proceed with the meeting and that Cllr Mc Brearty would receive a response prior to the closure of the meeting.

Reflecting on the past year, she said that it had been dominated by Covid-19 and the associated social and economic consequences of same. She paid tribute to all frontline workers, many of whom, it was noted, had gone beyond the call of duty to ensure service delivery and the provision of the relevant community supports.

In Donegal, she said, the challenges were not helped by the difficult public health regime and the fact that case numbers had remained acutely high in the Northwest. She cited the need for cross-border co-operation and alluded to the fact that the virus respected no boundaries. She thanked the former Mayor of Derry City & Strabane District Council Cllr Brian Tierney and his team who had worked in unison with Donegal County Council to ensure that the relevant public health messages were conveyed to all citizens.

Condolences were extended to all those families who had lost loved ones as a result of the virus.

She said she hoped that the worst was behind us and that the vaccination programme currently underway would allow people gain some sense of normality. Going forward, she said, that she would be advocating and supporting some form of national acknowledgment for frontline workers.

She thanked Minister Charlie Mc Conalogue, who, she said, had been a proactive voice for the county

There was acknowledgement of the excellent level of cross-border co-operation that had taken place in 2020/2021 and in particular the work of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership, which, she said, was bringing real and positive change to the NW region. This, she said, had been further augmented by the recent funding announcement under the Shared Island Initiative.

It was clear that all political energies would be consumed by mica and that nothing less than 100% redress was required so as to provide justice for all mica affected families. She welcomed the commitments given by the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin T.D and the Minister for Housing, Local Government & Heritage, Darragh O' Brien, T.D to resolve the scheme issues and to look at the plight of the many families across the county whose lives were at a standstill because of the problem.

Cllr Donaghey said that that there had been many other highlights and alluded to the following;-

- Implementation of the Commercial Rates Waiver and the Start-Up Grant Scheme.
- Expansion of Digital Hubs throughout the county.
- Launch of the Donegal Place Branding.
- Supports put in place to assist victims of domestic violence.
- Funding secured for a range of projects under the Rural Regeneration & Development Fund.

She alluded to the many projects that had been given the go ahead in 2020/2021 and said that these clearly demonstrated that the work of the Council was real and tangible. The Council she advised, had spent €1m per day in 2020 on service delivery. This she said aligned with good leadership and the assistance of a dedicated staffing structure had ensured that quality of life was maintained and improved.

She said that she had been privileged to represent Donegal County Council over the past year and thanked the Chief Executive, the staff of Donegal County Council and the Elected Members for their support and assistance.

Tribute was paid to the IS team who had assisted with the rollout of the digital meeting process, to the sound staff and those in the Aura Leisure Centre who had facilitated the holding of Council Meetings.

She acknowledged the role played by the Leas-Chathaoirleach, Cllr Noel Jordan, whom she advised, had been excellent support during her term in office.

Cllr Donaghey thanked her husband Patrick and extended family circle for their unwavering support.

She paid tribute to her party colleagues and the Party Whip, Cllr Brogan who had ably supported her and thanked the members of the media for their attendance and coverage of council meetings.

Concluding she thanked the people of Donegal for their support and encouragement and said that it had been an honour to serve as the third woman Cathaoirleach of Donegal County Council. Her only regret, she said, had been that many face to face engagements had been sidelined due to Covid-19.

She extended congratulations to the incoming Cathaoirleach and Leas-Chathaoirleach both of whom, she said, would bring passion and energy to their respective positions.

Members from the various groupings paid tribute to the outgoing Cathaoirleach whom it was acknowledged had been a steadying hand in one of the most difficult and challenging years in the Council's history and who had excelled in her role as first citizen.

The Chief Executive on behalf of the Senior Management Team and the staff of Donegal County Council thanked Cllr Donaghey and Cllr Jordan for their work and alluded to the many notable achievements that had marked their terms in office.

Cllr Donaghey proceeded to invite nominations for the office of Cathaoirleach.

Cllr Mc Monagle proposed Cllr Murray for the position of Cathaoirleach.

He welcomed Cllr Murray's wife Sabrina , his daughter Bláithín and his parents Domnick and Bernie to the meeting.

He said that he would be an excellent candidate for the position and had over 10 years experience representing the people of Inishowen. It was noted that he had previously held the position of Cathaoirleach in the Inishowen Municipal District and had been actively involved in progressing the refurbishment of Swan Park in Bunrana after the devastating floods in 2017. His role in promoting the development of the Grianan of Aileach as an iconic tourist destination was also noted.

Cllr O' Fearraigh seconded the proposal and said that he was an excellent councillor who would represent the people of Donegal to the best of his ability. It was, he said, a proud day for Jack and Sinn Fein.

As there were no other proposals Cllr Murray was elected Cathaoirleach for 2021-2022.

Cllr Murray took the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

The newly elected Cathaoirleach said that he was looking forward to representing the people of Donegal over the coming year. He thanked Cllr Donaghey for carrying out her role with dignity and aplomb in what had been a challenging and difficult year and applauded her handling of the transition to online meetings. He said he had been delighted to support her nomination in 2020 and welcomed her assistance with his own preparations for the role. He wished her every success in the future.

It was his intention, he said, to be freely available for all members and to deal with all queries from a position of mutual respect. The power sharing arrangement agreed in 2019, he said, ensured that the mandate of all councillors was respected and that differences could be put aside for the betterment of all. He was, he confirmed, committed to working with and on behalf of all members.

He said that his vision for the year was one where all views would be respected within the Council Chamber and that on this basis it was hoped to deliver a range of key priorities across the county.

He acknowledged the presence of Dinah Fullerton and her daughter Amanda at the meeting and said that it was a great honour for him to hold the seat that Eddie Fullerton had secured for Sinn Fein back in 1979. The struggle for the truth, he said, continued and he referred to the recent motion passed at Council supporting the Fullerton family in their campaign for justice

He thanked Pádraig Mac Lochlainn, T.D for attending and said that his support and assistance over the years had been very much appreciated.

He confirmed that he was looking forward to working with the Chief Executive, an honest and hard working official who at all times strived to secure the best for the county.

The following were identified as key priorities for his term in office:-

- Local economic recovery from the pandemic
- The need to secure 100% redress for all families affected by mica
The mica issue, he contended, was an emotive and devastating one for many people, and said that he had been honoured to attend the recent rally in Dublin highlighting the plight of many Donegal families. This event it was noted had shown that the people of Donegal were a force to be reckoned with and that it was important that the good work done to date was capitalised on. He said that, he intended, over the coming year to bestow civic honours on the organisers of the event which had brought the mica issue to national prominence. All available opportunities, he added, would be availed of to help secure 100% redress
- To work with the Council and all relevant agencies to ensure that the reopening of society is progressed with all relevant supports put in place to assist the business community.
- Support and assist in the development of the tourism industry and continue with the work initiated by previous cathaoirleach so as to facilitate the expansion of tourism across the county.
- To assist and work with all those involved in securing the recent multi-million euro funding for projects in Ballybofey/Stranorlar and Carndonagh.
- Securing of funding and additional investment for research, innovation and development so that smaller digital hubs are able to flourish in Donegal.
- That Donegal County Council continue to work towards playing a key role, and engage proactively with the Shared Island Unit initiative.
- Enhancement of the concept of the North West City Region to include continued co-operation with Derry City and Strabane District Council and greater collaboration with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. This to include contact with the Mayors of both jurisdictions so as to establish a working relationship that will be mutually beneficial for the North West as a whole.
- Engagement with Leitrim and Sligo County Council on matters of common interest.
- The initiation of accelerated housing programmes and the case made for additional capital funding to facilitate same given that current waiting lists will be further exacerbated by the mica issue.
- N2/A5 and the Donegal TEN-T roads projects to be vigorously pursued.
- Delivery of the National Broadband Plan a key element for the development of the county.
- Completion of the twinning process with the town of Beni Zeid in Palestine.

The Cathaoirleach said that he would proudly represent all the people of Donegal and that he would like to see projects such as the restoration of Swan Park and works on the refurbishment of the Bunrana Leisure Centre progress at a much quicker pace. He welcomed the fact that an application was being made for RRDF funding for the development of the Shore Front at Bunrana. Concluding, he said, that he hoped to promote the work of the Council through the publication of a Mayor's diary with a number of media outlets already on board to progress this initiative.

He thanked his proposer and seconder, and all who had supported his nomination. None of this, he confirmed, would have been possible without the support and encouragement shown by his family over the years. He paid particular tribute to his wife Sabrina.

C/180/21 ELECTION OF LEAS-CHATHAOIRLEACH

The Cathaoirleach invited nominations for the office of Leas-Chathaoirleach.

Cllr Brogan proposed Cllr Martin Mc Dermott for the position. He said that he was an energetic and hard working councillor who had worked tirelessly on behalf of the people of Inishowen and was well deserving of the honour.

Cllr Canning seconded the proposal and noted that Cllr Mc Dermott was a man of integrity who would embrace the position with great enthusiasm. He welcomed his wife Sheila and children Alisha and Sophie to the meeting.

As there were no other proposals Cllr Mc Dermott was elected Leas-Chathaoirleach for 2021-2022.

Cllr Mc Dermott thanked all who had supported his nomination and outlined his intention to assist the Cathaoirleach to the best of his ability. He paid tribute to the former Cathaoirleach Cllr Donaghey whom, he contended, had done the county proud. He said that the year would be dominated by mica issues and that he would work with all concerned to help those affected. He acknowledged the support provided by his wife Sheila and daughters Alisha and Sophie. He paid tribute to his late father John whom, he said would have been very proud of this achievement.

Members paid tribute to the newly elected Cathaoirleach and Leas-Chathaoirleach and assured them of their support during their terms in office.

There was acknowledgement also of the fact that Dinah and Amanda Fullerton, the wife and daughter of the late Cllr Eddie Fullerton were in attendance together with Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.

The Chief Executive offered his congratulations and said that the executive and staff would work with Cllr Murray in the pursuit of the objectives outlined above. He also extended congratulations to Cllr Mc Dermott, and noted that the newly elected Cathaoirleach and Leas-Chathaoirleach were an excellent combination and that both of were more than capable of dealing with the challenges that lay ahead.

Cllr Mc Brearty asked for a reply in relation to his mica query raised at the beginning of the meeting.

The Chief Executive said that he would undertake to have a report prepared on the building and provide same to the members.

Cllr Mc Brearty said he was not satisfied with this reply as it was well known that there were structural problems with the building, which he contended was built on a flood plain and should not have received planning permission in the first place. He said that an investigation should have been carried out before now and noted repair works had already been done at the back of the building. Just because there were no cracks showing, he said, it did not mean that the building was free from mica, pyrite or pyrrhotite. He said that he accepted what the Chief Executive said but that he was not going to be fobbed off and expected answers to his questions.

This concluded the business of the meeting.