

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCIL HELD IN THE Council Chamber - Áras an Chontae, ON Monday, 11th November, 2019 AT 2.30PM.

PRESENT: Councillor Paschal Fitzmaurice, Cathaoirleach **PRESIDED**

MEMBERS: Cllr V. Byrne, Cllr L. Callaghan, Cllr I. Connaughton, Cllr T. Crosby, Cllr J. Cummins, Cllr N. Dineen, Cllr L. Fallon, Cllr J. Keogh, Cllr D. Kilduff, Cllr O. Leyden, Cllr M. McDermott, Cllr M. Mulligan, Cllr J. Murphy, Cllr J. Naughten, Cllr K. Shanagher, Cllr T. Ward and Cllr A. Waldron.

OFFICIALS: Eugene Cummins, Chief Executive
Liam Bergin, Director of Services
Patricia Bohan, Meetings Administrator
Michelle Carney, Staff Officer

Apologies: .

46.19 PROPOSED CLOSURE OF CUISLE HOLIDAY CENTRE, DONAMON BY IRISH WHEELCHAIR ASSOCIATION ON 29TH NOVEMBER, 2019

An Cathaoirleach Cllr. Fitzmaurice thanked the Members for their request to hold a special meeting to discuss the recently announced proposed closure of the Cuisle Accessibility Holiday and Respite Care Centre by the Irish Wheelchair Association.

He welcomed Mr. Tony Cunningham, Director of Volunteering and Housing for the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) to the meeting and invited him to speak to the members:

Mr. Cunningham outlined the position of the IWA with regard to the centre:

- IWA are promoting equal choice and equal access policy for people with disabilities as promoted by HSE and Slainte Care i.e. move on from congregated settings
- Want to move to an alternative model of provision of holiday facilities in hotels - this has been piloted in a Kilkenny hotel where they can provide the necessary facilities for clients with the assistance of integrated services
- The Cuisle facility has delivered excellent care throughout the years since it came into use in 1997 however it needs substantial upgrade works in the order of €1.5million for primarily rewiring electrical works This was made known to the IWA after an inspection two years ago . The building was leased for the sum of €125k in 1997 for a 25 year period and this sum was paid up front at the time – the lease will expire in 5 years time.
- For the past two years, the IWA has sought capital funding from the HSE and having failed to secure this and therefore a decision was taken by the IWA Board to close the centre effective from 29th November 2019 on health and safety grounds. This will result in redundancies but redeployments will be considered first
- The IWA are sourcing alternative facilities in hotels in Ballinasloe, Birr and Galway and intend to provide the same level of service.
- The IWA have deferred LEADER funding that is available for other works because they must first secure capital funding to do the electrical works and this is not forthcoming. Municipal District funding from the Council was also allocated by the Athlone Area but cannot be taken up because

of the situation. Some remedial works have taken place to address fire hazards.

- The biggest regret in this decision is the staff who have been the centre's greatest asset in the service they provide to all the visitor throughout the years that the IWA has been using it. There has also always been a good relationship with the Divine Word Missionaries – the landlords.
- The IWA have invested in Cuisle throughout the years and had intended to develop it more and have recently rebranded but the surveys that showed the works that are required to make it safe have led the IWA to make the decision it has.
- Representations were made to the Ministers Office and they were referred to seek funding from the HSE as the appropriate body to grant this type of funding.
- The IWA had no plans to close the facility until this problem became apparent that there must be substantial investment to continue its use and the IWA do not have the funds itself to carry out the works.

The members expressed their anger and disappointment at the proposed closure of the centre and had a number of questions for Mr. Cunningham:

- This meeting should have been a platform for the members to speak on behalf of the people and not a platform for IWA
- Not every user wants a hotel but wants the unique facilities that Cuisle provides to the people who look forward to meeting their friends there and the great care that the staff provide.
- The money required is not an unsurmountable amount and there has to be a way to secure this.
- This is an easy option to close the facility and we will be asking that the IWA defer the decision for 12 months to allow an opportunity to secure the necessary funding from whatever source.
- The IWA has glorified the staff and facilities in Cuisle at the same time making contradictory decision to close the place.
- The IWA is depriving some wheelchair users who have unique needs that can be met by Cuisle and not by a hotel and this is not equality
- The IWA are blaming the HSE for lack of funding but how much is the IWA able to put into the facility as they received €40m in funding in 2019.
- How much does it cost to facilitate a person in Cuisle in comparison to a hotel?
- A motion in regard to this matter will be brought to the HSE West forum later this month.
- Will the IWA reverse its decision if the funding is secured?
- The IWA must reverse their decision for the sake of their clients as taking them out of an environment they are used to will seriously upset them. They enjoy not just the facilities but the company of the staff who take the best care of them as if they were family members.
- A holiday centre such as the facility Cuisle provides is not a congregated setting – is there an issue with management and staff?
- The IWA needs a plan to run parallel services make more sense to really test what is required and to assess if it can cater for the needs of people with the full spectrum of disabilities
- This plan to close is contradictory to the IWA stated vision of equal choice and equal rights
- Have the IWA consulted with the members with regard to this decision and if not it is ignoring its own charter in this matter
- The policy the IWA refers to has nothing to do with specialist holiday centre but residential care
- The hotel model that the IWA wants to use has not been tested
- What happens to the bookings that have been made with Cuisle in the coming months/year?
- The Chair of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health Dr. Michael Harty has been requested to

invite representatives from the IWA to address the committee as soon as can be arranged to justify this decision.

- There is a real sense of anger from the local community and throughout County Roscommon at this decision and the four weeks notice is not acceptable
- Were local politicians not lobbied on this matter including Oireachtas members?
- The IWA must outline how it intends to satisfy needs of all its users by moving away from Cuisle including wet rooms etc.
- The €1.5m needed is a small amount in the context of such decisions
- The equipment etc. that has been provided by the local community through many years for fundraising cannot be removed from the centre
- An EGM of the members of the IWA must be held to discuss the situation
- Have contracts been signed with the hotels?
- Is there a contingency plan in place?
- Has a tender been sought for the electrical works required?
- Why was this matter not made public 12 months ago when it was known there was a difficulty in securing funding.
- Is the centre safe now?
- If funding is found shortly will the IWA keep the centre open?

Mr. Cunningham replied as follows:

- There was no long term plan to close Cuisle and this decision was taken solely because of the substantial capital funding required as previously outlined.
- The IWA do not have the funding to do this work, they have a staff of 2,500 and had a deficit of €700k from 2008 funded from its own reserves. Its current reserve is €4.6m equivalent to three weeks costs. All the funding received from is for a restricted purpose.
- Reviewing the situation is a decision for the Board of the IWA
- The IWA believe they can make the hotel model work
- TDs were lobbied by the IWA and not locally lobbied. The IWA met Ministers Finian McGrath and Regina Doherty and Deputy Denis Naughten and Michael Fitzmaurice in 2017
- No contracts have been formally signed with hotels yet but discussions are ongoing. Tenders have not been sought for the works as funding has not been secured – this is a Q.S. estimate of costs.
- A meeting is taking place with the landlord this week
The facilities can be provided in hotels and mobile hoists can be used if required.

The Cathaoirleach read a letter from the Duty Manager of Cuisle with regard to the closure.

The Chief Executive conveyed his disappointment at the news as Roscommon is very proud of the Cuisle facility in Donamon and the service provided by the very dedicated staff to its visitors. He noted that there are many stakeholders involved in having an input into the decision that the Board made. In accepting all of the issues of costs, risk assessments and regulations of compliance and building control, the Elected Members have raised many relevant point that Mr. Cunningham should bring back to the Board of the IWA for consideration.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. John Naughten
SECONDED by Cllr. John Keogh

It was **AGREED** that the Irish Wheelchair Association review their position in relation to the closure of the Cushla facility in Donamon and take a step back for a 12 month period to give an opportunity to raise the necessary funds to bring the centre to the required standard and to request that the HSE provide the necessary capital funding.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. John Leyden

SECONDED by Cllr. John Keogh

It was **AGREED** that the Irish Wheelchair Association should facilitate an E.G.M. Association to discuss the proposed closure.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Anthony Waldron

SECONDED by Cllr. Tony Ward

It was **AGREED** to request that the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health meet to discuss the proposed closure of Cuisle Centre in Donamon, Co. Roscommon as a National Holiday Centre and that the Irish Wheelchair Association be invited to this meeting to explain their decision.

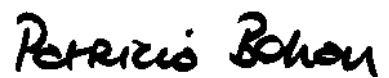
On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Orla Leyden

SECONDED by Cllr. Valerie Byrne

It was **AGREED** to write to Minister Finian McGrath, Minister Simon Harris and an Taoiseach to provide the necessary capital funding to upgrade the Cuisle Facility in order to keep it open on a long term basis.

This concluded the business of the Special Meeting.

The foregoing Minutes are Confirmed and Signed:



Meetings Administrator

Cathaoirleach

Countersigned