

**MINUTES OF MONTHLY MEETING OF ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCIL
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, ROSCOMMON
ON MONDAY, 25TH FEBRUARY, 2019 AT 2.15 PM.**

PRESENT: Councillor Ivan Connaughton **PRESIDED**

MEMBERS: Cllr O. Leyden, Cllr R. Doherty, Cllr T. Ward, Cllr N. Dineen, Cllr V. Byrne, Cllr D. Connolly, Cllr J. Cummins, Cllr M. Creaton, Cllr L. Fallon, Cllr P. Fitzmaurice, Cllr J. Keogh, Cllr P. Kilduff, Cllr M. Mulligan, Cllr J. Murphy, Cllr J. Naughten, Cllr K. Shanagher and Cllr L. Callaghan.

OFFICIALS: Eugene Cummins, Chief Executive
Majella Hunt, Director of Services
Martin Lydon, Director of Services
Shane Tiernan, Director of Services
Patricia Bohan, Meetings Administrator
Michelle Carney, Staff Officer
Patricia Bohan, Meetings Administrator

Apologies:

14.19 ADOPTION OF MINUTES

On the **PROPOSAL** of Councillor Cummins

SECONDED by Councillor Dineen

It was **AGREED** to adopt the Minutes of the Plenary Meeting held on 28.01.2019

15.19 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

16.19 MANAGEMENT REPORT

- The contents of the Management Report for January 2019 were noted.

Rural and Urban Regeneration Funding:

Cllr. Shanagher enquired if there was any progress on funding for the proposed Innovation Hub in Monksland.

Director of Services, Majella Hunt confirmed that under the Rural Regeneration Fund, four applications were submitted and two received approvals but not the innovation centre. Feedback will be received from the Department shortly on the applications submitted as to why they were successful or unsuccessful and a second call for applications is expected in the coming months.

The members discussed the Urban and Rural Regeneration as follows:

- Can the application for Monksland not be submitted under Urban Funding? It has a population of 5,000 to 6,000 and is a new town and there is concern it will be omitted. There is an issue as to whether Monksland is Rural or Urban. The Council have heavily invested in infrastructure here but works to Cloonakilla National School need to be ready for the next round of funding.
- Welcome the recent announcement of funding under the regeneration schemes. Enterprise Castlerea is delighted with the €1.54m to be invested in The Hub and thankful for the foresight of the members of Roscommon County Council for the matching funding and the executive for the quality for the submissions.
- Welcome the recent significant funding announcements for projects in Boyle, Castlerea, Ballaghaderreen and Tulsk.
- Are all towns and villages eligible to apply for funding for projects in 2019?
- Funding in the Boyle area including the Lough key to Boyle Greenway is very welcome while the Royal Hotel project is very significant for the area.
- Has the loan for matched funding been sanctioned by the Department?
- Thanks to the Members for commitment regarding the Municipal funding to be used for the matched funding

Majella Hunt responded as follows:

Roscommon is the only named town in County Roscommon under the Urban Regeneration Funding category and therefore any Monksland project must be included under the Rural category. A population of 6,000 is also defined as Rural under the guidelines. Following an assessment of the feedback received, the Monksland project will be resubmitted with others in the next call.

Under the Rural category, all other towns will be examined for projects and the projects have to be resubmitted each time if not previously successful. The application for the loan has been sent to the Department and clarifications sought with feedback expected for the members for the next meeting.

17.19 PRESENTATION ON ELECTORAL REGISTER 2019/2020

Mr. Shane Tiernan, Director of Services gave the members a presentation on the Register of Electors and the key dates in relation to the forthcoming Local Election due to take place on 24th May:

- Live Register published and in effect since 15th February
- Changes, additions and deletions facilitated through a Supplement to be notified no later than 7th April at 5pm
- Postal Voters and Special Voters deadline of 5pm on 28th April

18.19 SECTION 26(1) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (FINANCIAL PROCEDURES AND AUDIT) REGULATIONS

Mr. Martin Lydon, Head of Finance presented the members with a Schedule of Uncollected Rates at 31st December 2018:

- Arrears of Rates at 31st December 2018 amounted to €1.906m – this is a decrease of €522k from 2017
- Total rate demand for 2018 was €11.724m with €10.216 collected – an increase of €1.681m on

2017

- Adjustments for vacant premises, business closures, exemptions, uncollectable amounts and liquidated companies equated to €2.031m
- The collection rate for 2018 was 86%

Members discussed the report as follows:

- How does the 86% collection rate compare to 2017?
- How many appeals have been made to the valuation office and judgments made on these appeals. Is the Valuation Office not informing the Council of changes as it appears some incorrect demands are issuing?

Martin Lydon confirmed that the 86% collection rate has increased from 83% in 2017. There are ninety appeals with thirty decided on resulting in a loss of income of €70,000. The sixty appeals outstanding represent a total of €2.4m in rates and a 20% reduction in the original valuation could lead to a further €500k reduction in rates. When this information is available a report will be brought to members as it is impossible to know the impact at this point.

Provision has been made in the accounts for a shortfall of this order and this will be part of the 2020 Budget with options available to be considered of a rates increase or property tax increase.

In response to concerns regarding communications from the Valuation Office, Mr. Lydon confirmed that the Valuation Office are only writing to the rate payers regarding the outcome of appeals. Many local authorities including Roscommon have already contacted the V.O. to express their dissatisfaction at this arrangement.

19.19 PRESENTATION ON DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION - CUSTOMER SERVICES

Frank Guckian, Head of I.S. gave a presentation to the members on the progress of Digital Transformation in the Council:

- Digital Transformation is the use of technology to change how the Council provides services. This is a cultural change that requires the organisation to embrace these new technologies
- To date meetings management software, webcasting and mobile apps have been introduced
- The next phase involves the rollout of a case management system for Municipal Districts, develop a service catalogue and digitise services.
- The case management system is in pilot phase in the Roscommon MD whereby all queries from customers are logged on a new database, where previously they were manually logged.
- Up to 2,000 cases are referred from Roads Department to MD and area offices annually while area staff can take up to 4,000 calls in addition to emails and personal callers.
- There will be electronic forms for use by customers and automatic email response to queries. A customer can view progress of query online when they have account set up.
- The pilot will finish in the Roscommon Area Office on 1st March and roll out to the Castlerea AO in Q2 and the remaining offices by end of Q2.

In welcoming the project the members had the following queries:

- What is the options available for this with no email facilities?
- Will customers be able to assess progress on their query and receive an ongoing update?
- Important to keep track of representations as it allows jobs to be completed more quickly.
- Need to move one step further with use of app locations as this system in its current format does not allow for this. Members need technology and hardware to be able to take photos and upload this information. GPS location apps are essential; internet access is not always available.
- Data Protection and GDPR restrictions in having forms signed is hampering councillors in their day to day queries for constituents
- Important not to lose the relationship with the MD Coordinator as this is how more complex issues are resolved.
- Will it be possible to have a workshop for councillors on new technology requirements and digital transformation for the incoming Council.

Frank Guckian confirmed that when a call is logged, a pin can be dropped on a map highlighting location.

Shane Tiernan, Director of Services confirmed to members that requirements regarding permission signatures will apply to sensitive data only as confirmed by revised guidelines from the Data Commissioner. These guidelines will be revised and rolled out to members. The new iteration of technology to be provided to Council members will be capable of dealing with these requirements in a safe and secure environment.

Concern was expressed with regard to ability to map exact locations e.g. mapping an exact location in a park to report an issue. It is important to ensure that mapping or eircodes can be used accurately.

Members welcomed changes to the GDPR guidelines for members.

Frank Guckian urged the members to wait until the system can be viewed from end to end to see the extent of its capabilities as it is currently in pilot mode

20.19 NOTICE OF MOTION 03/2019: ELECTRIC IRELAND AND EIR (EIRCOM) CHARGES - CLLR. CONNAUGHTON

Cllr. Connaughton outlined his reasons for bringing this motion to the Council for discussion. It was brought to his attention after recent works in Athleague village where services had to be changed and the costs associated with moving or relocating services that are charged by Eir and Electric Ireland. These costs can in the future negatively impact on the ability of Roscommon County Council to carry out enhancement works that are of benefit to the county where moving and relocating services are required as part of the works. These charges also impact on community groups that need to carry out projects.

Members supported the motion and added the following :

- Now that Eir is a private company this could be a difficulty and when it was in state ownership it was carried out for free
- Poles left exposed when boundary fences removed and liability involved. Removing or replacing a pole is now prohibitive cost.
- Standing Charges should cover these type of costs

- There should be no charge and service providers should be written to, to tell them that their pole is a Health and safety risk and to move it.
- Which Minister is responsible for these service providers?
- This issue is causing huge frustration around the county. It is extraordinary the powers have to install poles but no liability to remove them and the payments charged bears no relationship to the cost involved.
- The utilities were facilitated to install poles but this is not reciprocated.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Connaughton

SECONDED by Cllr. Ward

It was **AGREED** to write to both Eir and Electric Ireland asking them to review their costs in the interest of tourism development and the interests of safety. These costs will make these enhancement jobs prohibitive.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Naughten

SECONDED by Cllr. Fallon

It was **AGREED** to write to the Minister of Communications regarding the charges imposed by Services providers such as Electric Ireland and Eir and to seek the Commission for Regulation of Utilities to put a cap on these charges.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Fitzmaurice

SECONDED by Cllr. Dineen

It was **AGREED** to write to Comreg (the Commission for Communications Regulation) regarding the charges imposed by Services providers such as Electric Ireland and Eir for relocation of existing services.

21.19 CHIEF EXECUTIVE BUSINESS - ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCIL SUBMISSION ON THE DRAFT RSES FOR THE NWRA

The Chief Executive, Mr. Cummins informed the members that a submission on the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region was made on 8th February and there is a significant issue to be brought to the Members' attention.

Mr. Martin Lydon highlighted the issues raised in the submission and invited members to seek any clarifications required from him and to bring issues to the Planning SPC that will discuss the matter on 8th March.

- The current draft RSES does not provide a practical and credible framework for the development of the North West Region and is not consistent with the NPF
- It does not provide a sufficiently clear vision to set it apart from the other two Regions
- There is a disproportionate bias in favour of some areas especially regional growth areas – there needs to be more balance so Athlone is on a par with Sligo, Letterkenny
- In the Council's original submission to NRWA and EMRA there is a need for the same type of language to be used in both Regional documents for consistency
- The document brings a lot of localised detail that is not required for this level of strategy – this is more relevant to a county development plan

- It is not addressing infrastructural constraints, the generic nature of renewable energy, and excessive replication of National Policy documents
- As a stands it is inconsistent with the National Planning Framework and not treating Athlone fairly.
- The Bealnamullia/Monksland area also known as West Athlone is an integral part of the future development the growth centre
- The downgrading of the N61 Athlone to Sligo is not acceptable. There is lack of reference to N6/M6
- There is a need for the NWRA to deliver regional specific energy renewal strategy

The Chief Executive stated that in his submission he wanted to highlight that the RSES must recognise and respect the National Planning Framework as the overarching legislative framework and governing policy and wholly reflects this National Strategy. The document currently is inconsistent with the NPF and in particular its treatment of Athlone Regional Centre. He has called on the NWRA to give serious reconsideration to the content and strategy in the document and make all necessary amendments. It is very important that having defined Athlone as regional growth centre, we demand that this is implements in the strategy. He asked that the two Members of the Council on the Assembly be aware of the concerns highlighted in the submission.

The Members commented on the submission as follows:

- Cllr. Murphy and Dineen as members of the NWRA confirmed they have highlighted the upgrade of the N61 and the status of Athlone as issues to be addressed in the strategy. They will express these concerns again at the next meeting of the Western Counties of the Assembly on 10th March.
- Athlone was designated as a regional centre without any definition and not a growth centre when the National Planning Framework was agreed and this has now led to this situation with Athlone. Roscommon and Westmeath must do everything to ensure that Athlone area does not suffer.
- The councillors from Athlone in Roscommon and Westmeath have met recently as part of the Boundary process. Concern to leave Athlone, the centre of Ireland out on a limb and need to aim high. There needs to be a new N61 developed – a motorway.
- It is positive that both Westmeath and Roscommon county councils are working together and Athlone can benefit the two regions of NWRA and EMRA.
- It is very worrying that Athlone is not included in this plan as it should be as we have come a long way. There is adequate opportunity to grow Athlone for the next 20 – 30 years and we need to take whatever steps are necessary to achieve this.
- There were calls previously to have Athlone designated city status and this is still a realistic consideration.
- Politicians who have power do not want Athlone to succeed and Mullingar and Tullamore get priority.
- The Board of Governors of Athlone IT are seeking University status for the college and want Athlone to succeed
- Acknowledge the work of the CE and Executive have undertaken in relation to the matter

The Cathaoirleach acknowledged the work done to date by the Athlone Councillors in both Westmeath and Roscommon. In agreeing with the upgrade of the N61, he also suggested that the dangerous junctions on the road between Athlone and Roscommon be considered for upgrade in the short term.

The Chief Executive confirmed that he has also made a joint submission with the Chief Executive of Westmeath and it is consistent with this submission. There is complete unity with regard to the approach

being taken on this matter and the importance of the status of Athlone being recognised in the RSES.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Fallon

SECONDED by Cllr. Keogh

It was **AGREED** to write to the North and West Regional Assembly that Roscommon County Council and formally reject the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Ward

SECONDED by Cllr. Keogh

It was **AGREED** that the N61 be upgraded to motorway status at least from Athlone to Boyle and that the NWRA be informed of this proposal.

22.19 CORRESPONDENCE

- Email dated 18th February, 2019 from Minister Simon Harris, T.D. in response to Notice of Motion 10.18 from Cllr. Ward – Home Help Hours and Home Care Packages;
- Email dated 18th February, 2019 from Deputy Eugene Murphy in response to Notice of Motion 10.18 from Cllr. Ward – Home Help Hours and Home Care Packages;
- Acknowledgement email dated 31st January, 2019 from Minister Paschal Donohoe, T.D in response to Notice of Motion from Cllr. Connaughton – Public Sector Workers working on Christmas Day;
- Acknowledgement letter dated 31st January, 2019 from Anthony McCarthy, Private Secretary to Minister Michael Ring, T.D. in response to Notice of Motion from Cllr. Naughten – Local Improvement Scheme
- Letter dated 28th January, 2019 from TII in response to Resolution by Cllr. Fitzmaurice – N60 between Ballymoe and Harristown, Co. Roscommon

23.19 COUNCILLORS CONFERENCES - PAYMENT/ATTENDANCE

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Ward

SECONDED by Cllr. Shanagher

It was **AGREED** to adopt the list of payments for training and conferences as circulated.

24.19 VOTES OF CONGRATULATIONS AND SYMPATHY

- The Cathaoirleach and Cllr. Ward congratulated Jack Carty from South Roscommon, formerly a player with St. Bridgets GAA club and the county Roscommon minor team, on winning his first Rugby cap with Ireland against Italy in the Six Nations match yesterday and perhaps he would be

- considered for a civic reception later in the year.
- Vote of Sympathy to the Fitzmaurice family on the death of the late John Joe Fitzmaurice, Carrowbehy, Castlerea.

25.19 AOB

The Cathaoirleach said that members have an opportunity to raise items in a Notice of Motion or Question. As discussed at the CPG, urgent matters should be brought to the attention of the Cathaoirleach no later than 12 noon on the Friday before the meeting. Should an important issue arise after this timeframe that that merits discussion at the meeting he will allow it.

Cllr. Kilduff enquired about the installation of the Cathaoirleach's photographs in Aras an Chontae.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be on Monday, 25th March, 2019.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

The foregoing Minutes are
Confirmed and Signed:

Petrizio Bohan

Meetings Administrator

Paul Connaughton
Cathaoirleach

Petrizio Bohan

Countersigned