

BALLYMONEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

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852.1 Job Losses in Revenue and Customs, Coleraine – agreed

- (1) that Council write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland stating its opposition to the closure of H M Revenue & Customs Offices in Coleraine, the loss of jobs and the economic impact.*
- (2) that Council consider and response to the equality impact assessment on HM Revenue & Customs proposed approach to relocation and restructuring, issued for consultation.*

BALLYMONEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of Council Meeting No. 852 held in the Borough Offices on Monday 11th December 2006 at 1.30 p.m.

In the Chair: The Mayor, Councillor J Finlay

Present: Aldermen:
F Campbell H Connolly
C Cousley (Deputy Mayor)

Councillors
A Patterson I Stevenson
R Wilson

In Attendance Head of Corporate & Development Services

Ms Angela Greene, Secretary,
Public & Commercial Service Union.
Other representatives of the Union in attendance

852.1 JOB LOSSES IN REVENUE AND CUSTOMS, COLERAINE

The Mayor advised that he had convened this special meeting of Council to receive representations in relation to the job losses at Revenue and Customs, Coleraine, proposed by H M Revenue & Customs as a result of a relocation and restructuring exercise.

The Mayor welcomed the representatives from the Public and Commercial Service Union and invited Ms Greene, Union Secretary, to address Council on the subject.

Ms Greene made a presentation to the meeting highlighting the impact in the local community of the H M Revenue & Customs relocation and restructuring proposals and sought Council's support for their case to safeguard jobs and public services in the area by making representations to the Secretary of State and responding to the equality impact assessment on the proposal.

A copy of the full presentation is attached to these minutes.

Following discussion, when Ms Greene, responded to members questions, she retired from the meeting having been thanked by the Mayor.

Members considered the case presented and expressed concern at the loss of jobs, some of the employees residing in the borough, and the resultant impact in the local economy.

It was proposed by Councillor Stevenson seconded by Alderman Connolly and
AGREED:

- (1) – that Council write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland stating its opposition to the closure of H M Revenue & Customs Offices in Coleraine, the loss of jobs and the economic impact.***
(2) – that Council consider and response to the equality impact assessment on HM Revenue & Customs proposed approach to relocation and restructuring, issued for consultation.

This concluded the business of the meeting the time being 2.00 p.m.

INTRODUCTION

Mr Mayor, Aldermen and Members of the Public I would like to thank The Mayor and Chief Executive for readily agreeing to our Union addressing Council on the issue of job losses in Revenue & Customs in Coleraine.

You may be aware that on Thursday 16 November an announcement was made by Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs regarding job cuts throughout the UK. We find that Coleraine is one of the offices to be hardest hit with closure proposed before April 2010.

The announcement effectively means the end of the presence of Revenue & Customs in Coleraine and I would suggest that it is also the beginning of the end of a Civil Service presence in a town that can ill afford to lose any more jobs in the public sector (a time when Coleraine has already lost 380 local jobs the second highest only after Belfast).

When this announcement was made to our staff shortly before the press release, we were devastated, (staff were in tears) it is just not about money or losing jobs, it is about our lives and the years that we have invested in our profession and serving the public.

BACKGROUND

The background to this is that 18 months ago the Inland Revenue and Customs merged to become one department. At that time there was talk of streamlining the department and therefore job cuts. The announcement of these cuts means that in Coleraine both Mill House formerly a Customs site and Fern House formerly a Revenue site are both earmarked for closing. However, 50% of these 84 jobs will be gone by April 2008. This means that between £1½m-£2m will be lost to the local economy. The make up of the workforce in these two offices is mainly women including single parents, some may also be main breadwinners, ethnic minorities and disabled persons. Women who mainly have a caring family role and work flexible work patterns to sustain this. Even if transfer to another office was offered most of these women would not be able to travel.

IMPACT

The impact of this on our local community is far reaching.

Services to the Community

1. Tax Credits/Child Benefit/Income Tax/VAT/National Insurance/national Minimum Wage

We provide advice and assistance for people in receipt of Tax Credits and Child Benefit, by definition, low income families and also offer an emergency payment service.

2. We provide a service for the many migrant workers that have come to our area in the last two years. Many of them when they arrive have no knowledge of our taxation system and their first point of call for advice is the HMRC offices in Coleraine. We also have a responsibility to the local business community to try and ensure that their trade is not undercut by those people operating a black economy.

If Coleraine closes, the nearest offices for people to seek assistance will be more than a 30 mile journey away, this is not a very practical alternative for the most vulnerable members of the community who in most cases have no means to transport.

The Tax Credit callers alone were 1,838, a great number of them getting emergency payments in times of hardship.

The total number of migrant workers calling in the Coleraine area for the same six month period was 964.

STAFF

There are 84 staff with no prospect of getting another job in the public sector. At least 10% of these staff are from the Ballymoney area. We have no system of transferring from the UK Civil Service to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (unlike the remainder of GB). There are very few private sector jobs available in this area.

The workforce in these two offices have given many years of service to his department and now may find that we are to become part of the local unemployment statistics. Of the 574 proposed job losses in Northern Ireland, 220 of them are concentrated in the North West area. In fact approximately half of the work in Coleraine is to be transferred to Newry. This is to replace work that is being transferred from Newry to England, again taking more work out of Northern Ireland. This is continuing the trend to centralist jobs in and around Belfast to the detriment of our local community. There is no prospect for school leavers to obtain jobs in this area and the children tend to leave and move further afield in search of employment, leaving us only with a glut of holiday homes and no residents. The Civil Service should represent all of the community in Northern Ireland not just the Belfast area.

CONCLUSION

What we want you as elected representatives to do for us is to support us in our fight to save jobs in the area and to safeguard the public services we provide by writing to the Secretary of State voicing your opposition to these closures. Also by replying to the impact assessment document before the 13th February 2007.

We have already addressed Coleraine Borough Council and we will be going to Moyle and Limavady councils next week. Coleraine Council has set up a cross party working group to help fight these proposed job cuts. We have also spoken to many representatives of local community groups and we were pleased that we have received unanimous support.

I would like to thank you once again for taking the time to listen to us and hope that through your intervention we will get some answers and hopefully to be able to save jobs. If you require any further information or clarification on any of the points in this briefing please feel free to contact:

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**HM Revenue
& Customs****Formal Consultation on Equality Impact Assessment
HMRC's Approach to Relocation and Restructure
Department**

Closing date for receipt of comments is 13 February 2007

In accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) is seeking comments on its approach to relocation and restructure of the Department with regard to the potential impact on the nine Section 75 categories.

Copies of the document are available to any member of the public and will be made available in accessible formats on request. It can be obtained by contacting HMRC. It can be downloaded from www.hmrc.gov.uk

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in subject title box)

