

**LIMAVADY BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMHAIRLE BHUIRG LÉIM AN MHADAIDH**

MONTHLY COUNCIL MEETING

22 JANUARY 2008

Minutes of meeting held in the Council Offices, 7 Connell Street, Limavady at 7 pm on the above date.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Stevenson

Aldermen G Mullan, G Robinson and J Rankin. Councillors A Brolly, P Butcher, M Carten, B Chivers, L Cubitt, M Coyle, M Donaghy, B Douglas, C Ó hOisín, J F McElhinney and A Robinson.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Committee Clerk, Corporate Policy Officer, Director of Development and the Chief Executive.

APOLOGIES: - None.

MINUTES:

The minutes of meeting held 18 December 2007 were approved and signed on the proposal of Councillor Cubitt, seconded by Councillor Ó hOisín.

MATTERS ARISING:

Lead Council – Rural Development Programme: Concern was expressed by some members about the decision to agree to allow Omagh to be the lead council in the administration of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) cluster for the North West. It was stated that some members of Limavady Rural Development might resign as a result of the decision. The Chief Executive confirmed that he would be meeting with the board regarding the decision.

Members were given an update on progress/delivery of the programme by the Chief Executive and Director of Development. They were informed that it was agreed that delivery and ground work of the programme would occur locally and that Consultants would be asked to assist in the consultation process and drawing up of strategy. Members welcomed the fact that the delivery of the programme would be at a local level. Alderman Rankin, Councillor Cubitt and Councillor Douglas requested that their discontent at the decision to cluster with Omagh, Derry and Strabane Council for the programme be noted.

MINUTES OF NEUTRAL PUBLIC SPACE FORUM:

The minutes of the Neutral Public Space Forum meeting held 5 December 2007 were tabled and noted. Clarification was sought regarding changes to the minutes of previous meeting placed for noting.

NEUTRAL PUBLIC SPACE FORUM REPORT:

The Mayor welcomed Mrs Dorothy McKee, Red Hat Consulting to the meeting. He also welcomed members of the public who were seated in the viewing gallery to hear the presentation.

Mrs McKee gave a presentation based upon the Neutral Space Forum Report which had been including in members papers. She explained the background to establishment of the Forum, terms of reference and process that had been followed. She added that an audit was undertaken of all Council owned and managed buildings/surroundings and the criteria applied were:

“to promote a good and harmonious working environment with a policy, meaning in effect that any emblems, pictures or artefacts on display in any part of the buildings would be as such a nature as not to be identified as substantially representative of one of the two main religious or political opinions in Northern Ireland, protestant/roman catholic or unionist/nationalist.’

Mrs McKee informed members that an inventory of items had been prepared which fell outside the criteria and these included:

- Massey statue in Council grounds
- three pictures in hallway
- Royal British Legion Certificate beside lift
- Castle artwork presented by 8th Infantry Brigade
- Union flag in Mayors Parlour
- Charles and Diana mug from Royal Irish Rangers
- 1st Battalion Welsh Guards Dragon
- Royal Engineers Paperweight
- Royal British Legion Pendant
- Kevin Lynch Biography
- 22nd Cheshire Regiment plate

Mrs McKee stated the recommendation of the Forum was that Council take the decision on the following options on items that fell outside the policy:

- are offered to a like-minded organisation
- are offered to a museum
- are returned to the donor
- are put into storage
- are relocated to an appropriate site.

Mrs McKee explained that the Forum recommended that in future that the Chief Executive and Corporate Policy Officer would be notified of items proposed for display within buildings and ground owned and managed by the Council and that they would consult the Neutral Space Forum if it was decided that the item fell outside the policy. She said it was also recommended that the sub committee would step down and meet on ad hoc basis if required and that the final report once considered by Council would be forwarded to the Equality Commission for information.

In the question and answer session that followed Mrs McKee answered a number of queries in relation to her role as independent chair. She confirmed that she was not a decision maker on the Forum.

There followed a heated lengthy discussion in which the following points were highlighted by unionist members.

- the inequality of the Forum due to its make up of 3 nationalists and no unionists.
- SDLP advised to put politics aside if it came to a vote on removal of the items.
- items to be removed were of historical importance, advised to think of those killed in Ballykelly and how this would look to tourists who came to the Borough from New Zealand.
- Union Jack the flag of Northern Ireland.
- Unionists' members were being lobbied by Roman Catholics who were appalled at the removal of the items.
- it was suggested that the recommendations of the Equality Commission had been ignored.
- queried costs relating to the report to date, including consultants fees.
- Republicans should take into consideration that the Kevin Lynch memorial in Dungiven was offensive to unionists.
- queried how many had answered the survey on removal of the items and had the suggested items been highlighted to staff.
- copy of Irish 'Declaration of Independence' had been displayed in the Mayors Parlour for nearly 2 years and no unionists had complaints at this nor had any complaints been received from the public or staff on list of items for removal.
- Catholics served in British Legion and some of the items identified were cross community.

The following points were raised by nationalist members:

- Unionist members had been invited on several occasions to join the Forum.
- SDLP had difficulty in agreeing list of items for removal given that some nationalists might have no concerns about any of the items.
- Massey Statue had been misused when the Sash or other garments were draped over it.
- there was no desire to take away culture/history of anyone but leave the public building where people work and visit offensive to no one persuasion.
- need to make those visiting or working feel comfortable and deal with matters in a neutral environment.
- items would be viewed in a better light in a museum where all artefacts could be displayed in an agreed environment.
- a consultation process via public meetings had been carried out with residents of the Borough but no one had attended.
- membership of the Forum was composed to be reflective of Council as per Local Government elections.
- ideal situation would be to 'include' rather than 'exclude' with both traditions being fairly represented.

- acknowledged that there were strong feelings by some members of the public in the viewing gallery.

The meeting adjourned at 8.40 pm resuming at 8.50 pm.

Councillor Butcher proposed that Council employ the mechanism already in place in that complaints highlighted here tonight regarding the report be brought to a further meeting of the Forum and that the sub committee meet to address these complaints. He also proposed that unionist members fill the two vacant seats on the Forum. Councillor Brolly seconded the proposal.

The Mayor and Alderman Robinson indicated that they did not want to be part of a committee that was unfair to unionists and Councillor Cubitt said he would be happy to sit on the Forum if the membership was balanced.

Councillor Cubitt proposed that to be on an equal footing that the Forum consists of 3 unionists and 3 nationalists. He also suggested that members go through the list of items to be removed one at a time. Alderman Robinson seconded the proposal.

Councillor Butcher outlined that it was irrelevant how many nationalists or unionists sat on the Forum as the final decision would be brought back for decision by the full Council. At this point, it was highlighted by unionist's members that when decisions were being made, the vote usually fell 9 to 6.

After further debate Councillor Coyle requested that Councillor Cubitts' proposal and adoption of the report be put on hold in an attempt to find a common ground. He indicated that there room for manoeuvre and proposed that the Forum meet to look at the terms of reference before going into the whole complaints procedure as a way to getting over the standoff that existed amongst members. Councillor Butcher seconded the proposal and withdrew his proposal made earlier in the evening.

A recorded vote was requested and the proposal was put to the meeting and declared lost, with 6, namely Aldermen J Rankin & G Robinson, Councillors B Douglas, E Stevenson, L Cubitt and A Robinson voting for and 9, Alderman Mullan, Councillors M Carten, M Coyle, P Butcher, B Chivers, M Donaghy, C Ó hOisín, A Brolly and J F McElhinney voting against.

Councillor Coyles proposal regarding reviewing terms of reference was put to the meeting and declared carried, with 9 voting for and 6 against.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm and members of the public left the viewing gallery.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

The meeting resumed at 9.40 pm when a quorum of members took their seats but adjourned 5 minutes later when the Chief Executive left the chamber to investigate a disturbance at the front of building. He returned to the meeting at 9.50 and informed members that the PSNI had been called to disperse a group of protesters following the assault of two Councillors by the group and said that

Councillors outside the chamber had requested that the meeting be abandoned due to the circumstances.

Before the meeting was closed it was agreed that a Special Monthly Meeting would be held to consider the options available to Council regarding development of a Civic Centre and to discuss the remainder of the Monthly agenda.

NEXT MEETING:

26 February 2008.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
(The meeting ended at 9.55 pm)

Signed: _____
Chair of Meeting