

Minutes of the Athlone Municipal District Meeting which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 2.00 p.m. on Monday, January 11th 2016

Attendance:

Mayor: Cllr. T. Farrell

Members: Cllrs. J. Dolan, P. Hogan, F. Keena, K. Moran, M. O'Brien and A. O'Rourke

Officers: Barry Kehoe, Director of Services
Pat Keating, District Manager
Pat Nally, District Engineer
Anne McNamara, Assistant Staff Officer

Votes of Sympathy:

All the Members wished to be associated with expressions of sympathy to the families of Dr. Paddy Kelly, Ballymore, Ambrose Fogarty and Christy O'Connor Jnr. who died recently.

Minutes:

It was proposed by Cllr. Dolan,
Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,
"That we hereby adopt and confirm the Minutes of the December Monthly Meeting which was on December 7th 2015"

Matters arising:

In response to Cllr. Hogan's query the District Manager advised that as it is not a statutory process involved with submissions for the proposed one way system on the west side, receipt of submissions could be extended until Friday 23rd January, but to date, no submissions have been received.

Presentation from the HSE:

The Mayor welcomed Joe Ruane, Pat Bennett, Joe Wheelan and Anne Naughton from the HSE to the Meeting. Mr. Bennett gave the presentation in which he outlined new structures and developments since their last presentation in 2012. He assured the Members that the future of the 4 palliative care beds in Athlone is safe and because of the relaxation in HIQA regulations, 4 bed units will be acceptable until 2021/2022, thus allowing the continuing provision of 36 long stay beds in St. Vincent's Hospital. This still leaves the need to look for changes in the long stay beds unit, either by the refurbishment of the existing Hospital or by building a completely new unit. He told the Members that he would return later in the year to advise them of the next Five Year Plan. The Members thanked him and acknowledged the great facilities which have been provided at the Resource Centre, Clonbrusk, Loughloe House and the Primary Care Centre. All agreed that access from public transport at the Centre is essential and Mr. Bennett agreed to follow up the matter immediately. Again the Members thanked the group and said they looked forward to the update later in the year.

The Flood Response:

The District Engineer showed graphs of the effects on the levels of Lough Ree and the Shannon, of the 6 storms which hit the region since 12th November 2015. He gave the various measurements over the weeks and said that the pumps are holding back 600/700mls of water at the moment. However the ESB predict a

drop of 30mls per day over the next few days but it will take a long period without rain to get back to normal.

The Director outlined the response since December 4th when Storm Desmond struck. The Emergency Flood Response Coordination Group met almost daily and the various agencies had their representatives on it. This allowed a very co-ordinated response and meant that 9 houses were flooded, unlike 2009 when levels were a little less and 120 houses were flooded. Access was a big problem though and 79 family units had to be evacuated. Substantial costs have been incurred. €241,000 has already been recouped from the Department and another claim is being submitted for €303,000. If permanent defences were in place, this money would be saved. There will be further expenditure on the clean up and repair of public infrastructure. The 9 families flooded will need further assistance. Roads will have to be assessed and hopefully structures put in place that will not break up, with permanent demarcation and overtaking areas provided. This will mean land acquisition, but it is critical. CFRAMS has to be finished and hopefully that will finalise the defences required for the Town itself. The sewerage system has to be addressed to and the Main Drainage Scheme is progressing.

He acknowledged and thanked all the various agencies: the Army, Gardaí, Civil Defence, H.S.E., Inland Waterways, Teagasc, Department of Environment, Irish Water, Department Of Social Protection, the Red Cross the Council staff, the public representatives and the massive business, community and voluntary efforts that were made too. Due to the enormous response, the impact was lessened.

The following matters were discussed in detail: there should be one authority to deal with the Shannon; it should be dredged; CFRAMS should be completed urgently; the Main Drainage scheme should be proceeded with as soon as possible; there should be a Press Officer for the Council; the Red Cross scheme should be extended; a relocation package should be devised; there should be grants for farmers to provide their own defences and insurance should be provided for vulnerable properties for set amounts. All acknowledged the extent of the massive response and thanked all concerned. They said a lot has now been learned which will help combating floods in the future.

Cllr. Moran requested that the Council write to the Minister for Environment to review the criteria for grant assistance to people affected by the flooding and it was agreed to do so.

Having responded to the various issues, the Director advised the Members that he would have a full written Report on the Flooding and the Response at a future meeting, following the completion of the clean up too.

Correspondence:

The District Manager informed the Members that the following correspondence had been received:

- Minister for Defence - Acknowledgement of letter concerning the proposed military museum at Custume Barracks.

A.O.B.

The District Manager informed the Members of the next exhibition at the Luan Gallery, “Beyond the Beyonds” celebrating the work of John Kingerlee from 1962 to the present day. He reminded them of the opening reception on Saturday, January 16th 2016 at 6pm.

The Members were advised that the Review of the Speed Limits 2016 will be on the February Agenda.

Thursday 28th January 2016 was put forward as the day for a small group to visit Kilkenny City to speak with Council Officials, Tidy Towns people and the Chamber of Commerce regarding street enhancement.

Cllr. Farrell requested that the post box at the front of the Civic Centre which was removed to facilitate the statue of John Count McCormack, be returned to facilitate people outside of office hours.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

MAYOR

DATE