

**Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group Meeting held
on Wednesday 25th January 2017 in the Board Room, Áras an Chontae, Mullingar at 8.30am**

Present

Cllr Frank McDermott (Cathaoirleach)

Cllr Ken Glynn

Cllr Tom Farrell

Cllr Aengus O'Rourke

In Attendance

Mr. Pat Gallagher, Chief Executive

Mr. Billy Coughlan, Meetings Administrator

Ms. Martina Slevin, Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies

Cllr Paul Hogan

Minutes of Previous Meetings

The minutes of previous meeting held on Wednesday 7th December 2016 at 8.30am were approved as proposed by Cllr Tom Farrell, and seconded by Cllr Ken Glynn.

Matters arising:

No matters arising.

Update on Calendar of Official Openings / Sod Turnings

The following events were noted:

- **Tourism Seminar, 29th and 30th March 2017**

Pat Gallagher advised that this is a national seminar and each county is to present their Tourism Plan, and see what further works can be done to promote the Plans. He further advised that the Westmeath Tourism Plan is complete, and that it is hoped that the new Tourism Officer post will be filled before the Tourism Seminar is held.

- **Local Enterprise Awards, and Launch of Enterprise Week, 6th March**

Finance Committee Meeting

Finance Committee Meeting will be held at 2pm on Monday 30th January 2017, ahead of the January Monthly Meeting.

Motions

Notice of Motion raised at January 2017 Meeting of Mullingar Municipal District

That Westmeath County Council would write to Dr. Eamonn Martin, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland and request that he formally invites His Holiness, Pope Francis, to visit Mullingar during his proposed visit to Ireland in 2018".

Billy Coughlan advised the Members that motions pertinent to Westmeath County Council should be directed to that authority, and not to the Municipal District, and that any such motions should be ruled out of order by the Municipal District. Following a brief discussion, and in view of the fact that the above motion was inadvertently directed to the Municipal District by one of the Members, it was agreed to allow the above resolution to go forward to the January Agenda, for consideration. Further to above, it was also agreed that Billy Coughlan will advise the two Municipal District Administrators of the correct procedure going forward.

The Members of the CPG approved this approach as a recommendation to go forward to the January monthly meeting of Westmeath County Council for approval

To discuss Athlone Boundary Review

A copy of the Report of the Athlone Boundary Committee, together with follow up letter of 30th December 2016 from the Department of Housing Planning Community and Local Government were circulated to the Members of the CPG. The CE advised that the Department letter of 30th December 2016 requests Westmeath County Council and Roscommon County Council to review the Boundary Report and jointly consider what steps need to be taken to undertake the specific measures recommended by the Boundary Review Committee. This report is to be submitted to the Department before 31st March 2017. This report will be incorporated into the Local Government Review being conducted by the Department by mid-2017.

The CE further advised that he sought clarification from the Dept with regard to the contents of their letter of 30th December, and was advised that a scoping report will be required, to set out the steps involved in the event of the Councils being requested to draw up an Implementation Plan. He further advised that this is feasible exercise, and that he has discussed the matter with Eugene Cummins, CE, Roscommon County Council, as to how this would be done. The CE also advised that Westmeath County Council and Roscommon County Council are currently co-operating in terms of the Retail Strategy and Destination Athlone. It was also noted that the Minister has not yet made an official announcement with regard to the Report of the Boundary Committee, other than to have the report published.

It was agreed by the Members to forward the Report of the Boundary Committee, and the Department letter of 30th December 2016 to the January Meeting for consideration.

It was also noted that the Members will be advised of the joint Roscommon and Westmeath County Council report prior to its submission to the Department.

To consider request from Cllr Paul Hogan re Properties offered by NAMA to Westmeath County Council.

The CE referred to letter sent to the Members on 12th January 2017 by DOS Housing, in response to concerns raised by Members over an article that appeared in the Irish Times on 4th January, titled '*Local authorities reject more than 1000 NAMA Homes*', and this article tabulated the number of houses which individual local authorities either acquired or rejected. It was subsequently clarified by the Housing Agency that the actual number of units made available to local authorities in the period from December 2011 to March 2016 was in fact 4,990. The CE clarified the position with regard to the number of houses originally offered to Westmeath County Council during the period in question, the number that were acquired, the number withdrawn by NAMA, and the number not considered suitable for various reasons.

The CE also advised the CPG that subsequent to above, Cllr Paul Hogan requested specific information with regard to the properties offered to Westmeath County Council by NAMA, i.e. location of each unit, type of accommodation etc. Billy Coughlan advised the Members that under Data Protection legislation, the Council is not permitted to provide this information as it may identify the owners / former owners of these properties.

Following a brief discussion on the above matter, it was agreed that Billy Coughlan will make contact with Cllr Paul Hogan to advise him that the Council is not in a position to provide him with the information he has requested.

To consider request from the Northern and Western Regional Assembly re presentation to the Members on Regional Assembly and National Planning Framework

Billy Coughlan advised that this request has been withdrawn as it was sent to Westmeath County Council in error.

Council Agenda

Billy Coughlan outlined the contents of the January Council Meeting Agenda, and the following items were highlighted.

Section 85 Agreements with Meath, Louth and Monaghan County Councils

The CE advised that Transportation Infrastructure Ireland (TII) have requested Westmeath County Council to act as lead local authority for Westmeath, Meath, Louth and Monaghan County Councils to deliver a programme for the management of Invasive Alien Plant Species on national roads. Section 85 Agreements, which is a Reserved Function of the Members, are required to give authority to Westmeath County Council to carry out this function on behalf of the above mentioned County Councils.

To approve Part VIII for Housing Development at Arcadia, Athlone

The CE advised that the Chief Executive's Report for above development will be finalised today and issued with the agenda for the January Council meeting. The Members of Athlone Municipal District will be briefed on the matter at 12 noon ahead of the January Monthly Meeting on Monday 30th January 2017. The CE further advised that this is the first Part VIII for a new housing development in a number of years, and will consist of 33 units approx. He also advised that all submissions received have been considered. It was noted that the proposal has been discussed with the AMD Members, and their views have been noted.

To receive update on National Broadband Plan

Billy Coughlan advised that this presentation will be given by Kevin Monaghan, Head of ICT, and Gerry McCormack, Broadband Officer. Billy Coughlan also advised that Midlands 103 have requested an interview regarding Broadband, and it was agreed that this will take place after the Council Meeting.

Assessment of upcoming Conferences

	Date	Conf Length	Conference	Location	Conf Cost	Overnight Cost	Travel	Total Est Cost	Distance x return Mgr .5907	Approved yes/no
1	20 th -21 st January 2017	2 days	ESPERANZA ENTERPRISES: Supporting Safer Communities	Connacht Hotel, Galway	€ 100.00	€ 125.00	€ 166.57	€ 391.57	292km/1 hour 35 minutes	
2	25 to 26th January 2017	2 days	ACE - 2 days Social Media Training for Councillors	Clonakilty, Cork	€ 150.00	€ 125.00	€ 343.79	€ 618.79	584km/3 hours 22 minutes	
3	27 to 29 January 2017	3 days	CELTIC CONFERENCES: Tackling Japanese Knotweed	Clonakilty, Cork	€ 100.00	€ 250.00	€ 343.79	€ 693.79	584km/3 hours 22 minutes	
4	27 to 29 January 2017	3 days	The Institute of Professional Training - The Housing Assistance Payment	Letterkenny, Co. Donegal	€ 145.00	€ 250.00	€ 226.83	€ 621.83	384km/ 3 hours 3 minutes	
5	4th February 2017	1 day	2017 Community and Council Awards presented by IPB insurance and LAMA	Crown Plaza Hotel, Dublin	€ 215.25		€ 93.33	€ 308.58	158km/1 hour 2 minutes	
6	10 to 12 February 2017	3 days	Celtic Conferences - Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness	Carlingford, Co. Louth	€ 100.00	€ 250.00	€ 147.68	€ 497.68	250km/ 1 hours 48 minutes	
7	22 to 23 February 2017	2 days	ACE - 2 days Social Media Training for Councillors	Clonakilty, Cork	€ 150.00	€ 125.00	€ 343.79	€ 618.79	584km/3 hours 22 minutes	
8	24 to 25 February 2017	2 days	Colmcille Winter School - IRELAND AND EUROPEAN UNION POST BRITISH WITHDRAWAL	Letterkenny, Co. Donegal	€ 150.00	€ 250.00	€ 226.83	€ 626.83	384km/ 3 hours 3 minutes	
9	24 to 26 February 2017	3 days	Celtic Conferences - Constituents Tax Entitlements and Reliefs	Clonakilty, Cork	€ 100.00	€ 250.00	€ 343.79	€ 693.79	584km/3 hours 22 minutes	
10	24 to 26 February 2017	3 days	The Institute of Professional Training - Civic Leadership and the Councillor	Clayton Whites Hotel, Wexford	€ 145.00	€ 250.00	€ 246.91	€ 641.91	418km/ 2 hours 23 minutes	
11			AILG Training Dates for Elected Members 2017							

Following an assessment of the conference schedule above, the following conferences were approved by the CPG for the Members of Westmeath County Council to attend:

5	4th February 2017	1 day	2017 Community and Council Awards presented by IPB insurance and LAMA	Crown Plaza Hotel, Dublin	€ 215.25		€ 93.33	€ 308.58	158km/1 hour 2 minutes	
8	24 to 25 February 2017	2 days	Colmcille Winter School - IRELAND AND EUROPEAN UNION POST BRITISH WITHDRAWAL	Letterkenny, Co. Donegal	€ 150.00	€ 250.00	€ 226.83	€ 626.83	384km/ 3 hours 3 minutes	
11			AILG Training Dates for Elected Members 2017							

Billy Coughlan to advise the Members accordingly requesting that they confirm if they wish to attend in order that their attendance may be approved by the full Council at the January 2017 Meeting. Details of above approved conferences to be forwarded to the Members.

An Cathaoirleach referred to the LAMA Awards, and advised that there were two projects nominated from Westmeath, but the cost of attending is very expensive. He requested that the LAMA Awards be included as a conference expense for any Members who wish to attend, and this was agreed by the CPG.

In addition to the list of conferences, Billy Coughlan also brought the Members attention to the **Diploma in Community Development Practice**, which is a once year part-time programme delivered by NUI Galway and taking place in Mullingar. Billy Coughlan advised that a number of Members have expressed an interest in this course, and the cost may be supported by the Training Budget. The CPG agreed to approve this training course for forwarding to the January 2017 Council Meeting. Full details to be circulated to the Members by Billy Coughlan.

CPG Recommendations

To write to the two Municipal District Administrators advising them of the correct procedure with regard to Motions pertinent to Westmeath County Council.

Correspondence

Billy Coughlan advised of the following items of correspondence:

1. Circular Letter LG01/2017 – Expenses incurred by Elected Members – **Agreed to circulate to the Members of the Council as correspondence on the January Council Meeting Agenda**
2. Letter to Cllr Dollard from Minister Simon Coveney's office re income thresholds for social housing – **Agreed to circulate to the Members of the Council as correspondence on the January Council Meeting Agenda.**
3. E-mail from Jillian McNulty, Cystic Fibrosis Campaigner, seeking to address the Members on Orkambi, the new Cystic Fibrosis drug not approved in Ireland due to cost.
Billy Coughlan advised that as this lady does not represent or chair any group, it would not be appropriate to allow this presentation to proceed, as it would set a precedent for other individuals to make a similar approach for presentation to the Council. This was agreed by the CPG. It was noted that Ms. McNulty recently addressed the Members of Longford County Council, and a resolution was passed in support of Ms McNulty's request. **Following a brief discussion, the CPG agreed to place Longford County Council's resolution in this regard on the January Agenda under correspondence for the Members consideration. Ms. McNulty to be written to following the Council Meeting.**
4. E-mail of 17th January 2017 from a Falun Gong practitioner seeking the support of Westmeath County Council in ending the forced live organ harvesting of Falun Gong practitioners in China. – **noted by CPG.**

5. Resolution passed by the Members of Waterford City and County Council re implementation of recommendations of the Post Office Business Development Group and the new model of Community Banking - **Agreed to circulate to the Members of the Council as correspondence for the Members consideration at the January Council Meeting.**
6. Resolution passed by the Members of Donegal County Council re support of no confidence in the HSE – **noted by the CPG.**
7. Resolution passed by the Members of Sligo County Council re progressing the Coroner’s Bill – **noted by the CPG**
8. Resolution passed by the Members of Sligo County Council re legislation for the control of overgrown trees in Housing Estates and built up areas – **noted by the CPG**
9. Resolution passed by the Members of Sligo County Council calling on the Minister to return all water charges collected to the people who paid - **noted by the CPG**
10. Resolution passed by the Members of Leitrim County Council re selling broadcasting rights of Gaelic Games - **noted by the CPG**
11. Resolution passed by the Members of Leitrim County Council re citizens assembly - **noted by the CPG**
12. Resolution passed by the Members of South Dublin County Council re permitting Disabled Drivers to use the Bus Lanes - **noted by the CPG**

AOB

Valuation Office

Billy Coughlan advised that staff from the Valuation Office will be present in Westmeath County Council offices in Mullingar and Athlone on Monday 30th and Tuesday 31st of January from 9.30am - 4.30pm to assist ratepayers with any queries they may have. The Members have been notified in this regard.

Further to above, Cllr Tom Farrell expressed his gratitude to Jimmy Dalton, Head of Finance, and the staff in the Finance Department for their assistance over the last couple of weeks in providing information to the Members with regard to the revaluation process. The CE agreed to convey this message to the Head of Finance.

Visit of Austrian Ambassador to Ireland

Billy Coughlan advised that he received a request for a visit to Westmeath from the office of the Austrian Ambassador to Ireland, and that he is awaiting further information in this regard.

It was also noted that the Ambassador’s office has also made direct contact with Athlone Municipal District with regard to a proposed visit to Athlone.

St. Patrick’s Day

In response to request from An Cathaoirleach, the CPG agreed to consider invitations in respect of St. Patrick’s Day, if any are received.

Ethics Register and Political Donations

Billy Coughlan reminded the members of their obligations to complete returns in respect of the Ethics Register and Political Donations. It was noted that political donation returns must be signed by a Peace Commissioner or Solicitor. It was noted that there are penalties for non-compliance.

Athlone Regeneration

Cllr Aengus O’Rourke advised of the activities of a small local protest Group in Athlone, made up of Church Street Traders, who are opposed to the proposed regeneration and one-way system. The Members of Athlone Municipal District have agreed to meet the protest group on Friday next.

Further to above, it was noted that due to an error in administrative procedures with regard to the Part VIII Planning Process for the Regeneration Scheme, the process will have to recommence.

This concluded the business of the Meeting

Cllr Frank McDermott
Cathaoirleach

Date