

**Minutes of December Monthly Meeting of  
Westmeath County Council held at 3.00 p.m. Monday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2016  
in Council Chambers, Áras an Chontae, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath**

**Presiding:** Cllr F. McDermott, Cathaoirleach

**Members present:** Cllr. F. Keena, Cllr. A. McManus, Cllr. P. Hogan, Cllr. T. Farrell, Cllr. J. Dolan, Cllr. A. O'Rourke, Cllr. E Wallace, Cllr. M. Dollard, Cllr. L. McDaniel, Cllr. J. Penrose, Cllr. K. Glynn, Cllr A Duncan , Cllr A Whitney, Cllr S Clarke, Cllr J Shaw, Cllr. B. Collentine, Cllr P. Hill

**Officers present:** Pat Gallagher, Chief Executive.  
Barry Kehoe, Director of Service.  
David Hogan, Director of Service.  
Martin Murray, Director of Service  
Jimmy Dalton, Head of Finance.  
Ciaron Martin, Admin. Officer  
Conor O'Reilly, IS Analyst Developer, ICT.  
Billy Coughlan, Meetings Administrator.  
Martina Slevin, Corporate Services.

**Apologies:** Cllr M. O'Brien, Cllr U. Darcy

An Cathaoirleach Cllr. Frank McDermott opened the meeting and welcomed the Members. A video was played for the Members entitled "Remembering the Rising showcase, held in the County Buildings on the evening of November 3<sup>rd</sup>, which celebrated the range of community led events that took place across the county for the centenary celebrations".

An Cathaoirleach Cllr Frank McDermott advised the Members that the 3 paintings that are on display this afternoon outside the Council Chamber have been donated to Westmeath County Council, by the Artist Tom Byrne, who exhibited paintings in the Luan Gallery in Athlone as part of the 2016 celebrations. Mr. Byrne was invited to the Meeting this afternoon. An Cathaoirleach expressed his appreciation to Mr. Byrne for this generous donation of the 3 paintings and called on him to say a few words. Mr. Byrne thanked Westmeath County Council for the opportunity to showcase his work, and gave the Member background information on the 3 paintings.

To conclude, An Cathaoirleach, Cllr Frank McDermott, formally proposed a motion of appreciation to Mr. Tom Byrne, and this was unanimously supported by the Members.

### **Matters Arising**

Cllr M. Dollard expressed his concerns with regard to the use of social media by Councillors, particularly at in-committee meetings. He stated that this has led to County Council business being released to the public before Members have had a chance to consider and discuss and resolve the various issues tabled. Cllr Dollard's concerns were echoed by Cllrs Dolan, Hogan, McDermott and Shaw. In reply, the Chief Executive, Pat Gallagher, advised that while there is a policy in place for the use of social media by the staff of Westmeath County Council, such a policy is not in place for Members. Following further discussion, and on the proposal of Cllr M. Dollard, and seconded by Cllr P. Hogan, it was agreed that a code of ethics be put in place for the use of social media by the Members of Westmeath County Council. This code of ethics to be brought forward by the CPG.

## **CLÁR**

### **1. Miontuairiscí.**

- (i) On the proposal of Cllr. K. Glynn, seconded by Cllr. J. Dolan, the Members approved the minutes of November Monthly Meeting of Westmeath County Council held in Áras an Chontae, Mullingar at 3.00p.m. on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2016.
- (ii) On the proposal of Cllr. J. Shaw, seconded by Cllr. J. Dolan, the Members approved the minutes of the Statutory Budget Meeting of Westmeath County Council held in Áras an Chontae, Mullingar at 10.00 a.m. on Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2016.
- (iii) The Members noted the minutes of CPG Meeting of Westmeath County Council held in Áras an Chontae, Mullingar at 8.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2016.
- (iv) The Members noted the minutes of the Athlone Municipal District Meeting held in Civic Offices, Church Street, Athlone on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2016 at 2.00 p.m.

### **2. Management Report.**

The Members noted the Management Report as circulated.

### **3. Chief Executive Orders.**

The Members noted the Chief Executive Orders as circulated

#### 4. Disposal of Land/Property

- i. Proposed disposal by way of a 3 year Lease of Unit 1 of Council factory units at Blyry Business Park, Athlone, to Athlone Optical Manufacturing Company Ltd., in accordance with the terms of Section 183 Notice of the Local Government Act 2001 circulated within the specified period.

**An Cathaoirleach called for a vote by a show of hands and declared the disposal approved.**

- ii. Proposed disposal by way of a 3 year Licence of Unit 2 of Council factory units at Blyry Business Park, Athlone, to Athlone Optical Manufacturing Company Ltd., in accordance with the terms of Section 183 Notice of the Local Government Act 2001 circulated within the specified period.

**An Cathaoirleach called for a vote by a show of hands and declared the disposal approved.**

#### 5. To receive presentation by Comhairle na nÓg

Students, Keith Gough, Josh Griffin and Tricia Flaherty Jordan gave a presentation to the Members on Westmeath Comhairle na nÓg. This group is designed to enable young people to have a voice on the services, policies and issues that affect them in their local area. The students briefed the Members on the ethos and core foundation of the group, and outlined the initiatives and events undertaken in the past couple of years.

Members congratulated the students on a very informative presentation, and complimented them on their work , and in particular on their campaign on Mental Health.

In response to Members questions, the group advised that the Youth Cafe in Mullingar has been a great success. In relation to Cyber Bullying, they advised that they are aware of this issue and that more work needs to be done in this area. They also advised that awareness needs to be created among young people with regard to getting involved in politics. They further advised that all secondary schools in the county are involved in Comhairle na nÓg and they are currently making contact with National Schools.

The Chief Executive, Pat Gallagher thanked the students for their presentation and advised that the Council have supported Comhairle na nÓg since its inception, and are happy to continue to do so into the future.

An Cathaoirleach paid tribute to Annette Barr Jordan and Edwina Dully for their work in supporting Comhairle na nÓg.

To conclude the 3 students presented An Cathaoirleach with a copy of the 1916 proclamation which was re-written by Comhairle na nÓg to make it youth friendly and understandable.

**6. To note NOAC Performance Indicator Report 2015**

Mr. David Hogan, DOS, gave a presentation to the Members on the NOAC Performance Indicator Report 2015. He advised that the report contains data in respect of 31 indicators across all of the services provided by a local authority, and he provided Members with a spreadsheet comparing Westmeath County Council's performance across 16 of these indicators. He also provided Members with a list of 16 indicators that Westmeath County Council will be setting targets for.

In response to Members questions, David Hogan advised that grant aid is not dependent on the outcome of the indicators, but it is a measure against other local authorities to see how we compare. He also stated that facilitating the payment of traffic fines on-line can be looked at. He also advised that Westmeath County Council is under the national average in respect of days lost through certified sick days. He further advised that it is difficult to establish the impact on service delivery in the case of long term sickness, as this can not be planned for. In response to Cllr Tom Farrell, who advised that some community organisations have Post Office accounts rather than Bank Accounts which causes difficulty with electronic transfer of grant money, David Hogan undertook to examine this issue.

**7. Launch of new Westmeath County Council Website.**

Mr. Conor O'Reilly, ICT Dept gave a presentation to the Members on the new Westmeath County Council Website, which is proposed to go live this evening. He advised the Members that the website has been updated to make it compatible with mobile phones, i-pads etc. He further advised the Members that the new look website is structured better, with more descriptive headings enabling the user to find the information they require more efficiently. The Members thanked Mr O'Reilly for a very informative presentation.

In response to Members questions, Mr O'Reilly advised that extreme weather alerts and other urgent news items will appear under "Latest News" on the home page, and will automatically be sent to Twitter and SMS. He advised that departments are trained to manage the content on the website and to ensure it is kept up to date. He also advised that tariffs for the public car parks are listed on the website. He also advised that links to Belvedere House and Athlone Castle can be provided.

8. **Presentation on Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)**

Mr. David Hogan, DOS, gave a presentation to the Members on the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), and outlined the main provisions of the scheme, which replaces Rent Supplement for households with long term need. Household sources their own accommodation on the basis of the HAP rent limits and once housed through HAP, their housing need is deemed to be met and they will no longer be on the Housing List. Currently, 16,000 households are housed by HAP and 300+ households added per week. The Scheme will be centrally managed by Limerick County Council, and all payments to Landlords will be made by Limerick.

While Members welcomed the scheme, concerns were expressed regarding those opting for HAP having their names removed from the housing list. Concerns were also expressed with regard to the lack of private rental property, and that the Council will not be able to compete for properties. Some members were also of the view that HAP is only a temporary measure and does not come close to solving the housing problem. Others expressed concerns with regard to the rights of the tenants in the event of a landlord deciding to sell a property in the middle of a contract period. Others Members asked about benefits for the landlords who opt for the scheme, and also expressed concerns with regard to rent control. Members did however welcome the fact that tenants are allowed to work and stay on the HAP scheme.

In response to Members questions, David Hogan advised that tenants may apply for a transfer if they are dissatisfied with HAP. He further advised that there are benefits for the Landlords in terms of tax relief, and the security of guaranteed payment. He advised that tenants will be protected by the Residential Tenancy Act in the case of a tenancy broken by the Landlord.

David Hogan advised that HAP will be managed by the housing team in Mullingar, but applications may be made through the Athlone Municipal District Office. He also advised that HAP is another option available to Westmeath County Council. Housing Needs Assessment will still be carried out and information will be given to the applicant on HAP and they can avail of it if they wish.

Ciaron Martin, Admin Officer Housing, also addressed Members concerns and advised that the scheme is still on pilot, and that issues will need to be addressed as they arise going forward.

To conclude, An Cathaoirleach, Cllr Frank McDermott thanked David Hogan for the presentation, and requested that a further update be given in the New Year.

9. **Motions:**

There were no motions for the December Meeting

10. **Recommendation(s) from Corporate Policy Group**

There were no recommendation from CPG for December

11. **To receive reports and recommendations from SPC Chairpersons.**

➤ **To approve amended Housing Allocation Scheme for Westmeath County Council**

Cllr Ken Glynn, Chair of the Housing SPC, briefed the members on the contents of the above document and advised that it replaces the 2011 Scheme, and allows for Choice Based Letting.

On the proposal of Cllr K. Glynn, and seconded by Cllr P. Hogan the Members unanimously approved the above recommendation.

12. **Correspondence**

**Votes of Congratulations:**

Mr Coughlan informed the Members of the following:

- On the proposal of Cllr. B. Collentine, and seconded by Cllr E. Wallace, it was unanimously agreed to extend a vote of congratulations to the organisers of Mullingar Christmas Market.
- On the proposal of Cllr. E. Wallace, it was unanimously agreed to extend a vote of congratulations to Westmeath Hurlers, who tonight are providing meals to the homeless in Dublin.
- On the proposal of Cllr. E. Wallace, it was unanimously agreed to extend a vote of congratulations to Mullingar Harriers, on their success in winning 5 National Cross Country titles this year.
- On the proposal of Cllr. E. Wallace, it was unanimously agreed to extend a vote of congratulations to Mullingar Harriers, on its Members representing Ireland in Sardinia on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2016.
- On the proposal of Cllr. E. Wallace, it was unanimously agreed to extend a vote of congratulations to Mark Christie, on winning the Men's Senior National Cross Country Title
- On the proposal of Cllr. E. Wallace, it was unanimously agreed to extend a vote of congratulations to Jack O'Leary, on winning the Junior National Cross Country Title

- On the proposal of Cllr. E. Wallace, it was unanimously agreed to extend a vote of congratulations to Elizabeth Carr on coming third in the U23 National Cross Country Championship

**13. Aon Gnó Eile.**

Cllr A. McManus welcomed the announcement from the Minister that works are to commence on the River Shannon in Athlone, and expressed her gratitude to Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran for all his hard work in this regard.

Cllr J. Dolan advised of a recent publication on the Architectural History of Athlone Castle by Dr. Rory Sherlock, available for purchase in Athlone Castle.

Cllr J. Dolan requested a further update on Customer Services in Athlone. This was noted.

Martin Murray, Director of Services gave an update on tenders for the two Civic Amenity Sites and advised that it was hoped to award the contracts as soon as possible.

Cllr T. Farrell's request for an update on a request for a deputation to meet with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) was noted. The Executive to revert to the Members in this regard.

*This concluded the business of the meeting*

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**Cathaoirleach**

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**Date**