

CHOMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

**MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL
HELD AT ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, PROSPECT HILL ON TUESDAY 30TH
JUNE, 2009.**

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr. T. McHugh

ILATHAIR FREISIN:

Baill: Cllrs. T. Broderick, S. Canney, L. Carroll, P. Connaughton, D. Connolly, M. Connolly, Comh S. Ó Cuaig, Cllrs. J. Cuddy, Comh T. Ó Curraoin, Cllrs. M. Fahy, P. Feeney, G. Finnerty, M. Hoade, P. Hynes, C. Keaveney, S. Kyne, M. Maher, T. Mannion, J. Mc Clearn, M. Mullins, M. Noone, P. Roche, An Comh S. Ó Tuairisg, Cllrs. S. Walsh, T. Walsh, T. Welby, B. Willers.

Oifigigh: Ms. M. Moloney, County Manager; Messrs. J. Cullen, K. Kelly, F. Gilmore, J. Morgan, P. Ridge, Directors of Service; G. Mullarkey, Head of Finance; M. Dolly, Senior Engineer; B. McDermott, County Secretary; M. Owens, Senior Executive Officer; G. Healy, Staff Officer.

Thosnaigh an cruinniú leis an paidir.

The Mayor stated that before proceeding to deal with the items on the agenda, he wished to raise an urgent matter for discussion and referred to the picket placed on Áras an Chontae by SIPTU today. He asked the County Manager to give the background to the dispute.

The County Manager said that it is regrettable that this all-out strike has taken place. There is a significant history to the dispute which has resulted in ongoing industrial action due to cuts in overtime, allowances and laying off of staff on temporary contracts. To date the Councils staff resources has reduced by approximately 100 between indoor and outdoor staff. The Council has already been served with strike notice and as a result a conciliation conference took place with the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) at the end of May; no agreement was reached and it was agreed to refer it to the Labour Court. A date for the Labour Court hearing has been set for the end of July. An earlier date may be possible provided both sides have submissions lodged. Galway County Council has lodged a submission, however, it is understood that SIPTU has not yet lodged a submission. Today's all out strike action is as a consequence of the failure of a number of road workers to allow the roads programme to be carried out in the Portumna area. 15 outdoor workers refused to work with hired

plant and as a consequence the Council was forced to remove them from the payroll. The industrial action taken puts the Council's financial position in jeopardy as there will be difficulty in completing the Road Works Programme and consequently drawing down grant allocations which will impact on the Council's capacity to pay wages. The principal aim of the Council is to maintain the permanent workforce and every week that the industrial action continues puts this in jeopardy.

The Mayor asked what mechanism is available to resolve today's strike and ensure services are restored. Mr. Kelly advised that Galway County Council has a submission lodged with the Labour Court who will facilitate a hearing. He also said that Galway County Council contacted SIPTU and a meeting will take place at 2.30pm today between SIPTU representatives and representatives of Council Management in order to find a resolution to the current impasse.

A discussion then took place and the Members raised the following points:

The Members expressed their concerns regarding the provision of essential services such as water and sewerage services and stated that it is important that an interim solution is found between SIPTU and Management.

The Members asked that they be informed of the outcome of the Meeting as it is important that the public are kept informed regarding the provision of essential services.

The County Manager responded to the Members as follows:

She stated that it is the aim of Management to preserve as far as resources allow the employment of permanent staff but the co-operation and flexibility of staff is required if this is to be achieved as staff may be required to redeploy to areas where funding is available so that works can be carried out.

She said that Management intends to approach this afternoon's meeting with SIPTU with a view to finding a resolution.

Ms. McDermott read out a letter received from the Department of Transport which indicated that the Department regretted the reduction in the roads allocation.

The County Manager concluded by saying that the Members will be informed of the outcome of the Meeting with SIPTU.

FINANCIAL POSITION

32

The County Manager presented her report dated 29th June, 2009 which was circulated to the Members.

The original budget adopted by the Council for 2009 had assumed that the income available to the Council would amount to €155,590,662 and the proposed expenditure programme reflected this position. The contribution from the local government fund included in this income amounted to €38,114,833 which was a reduction of €2,517,234 on our 2008 allocation of €40,632,067. The adopted budget also included

an estimated allocation (based on prior year allocations) from the Department of Transport / NRA towards the cost of running the roads programme of €31.6M. Following the supplementary budget introduced in April 2009, both of the above income sources, which account for almost 45% of the Councils income, were substantially reduced. In the case of the local government fund, the Council was notified on the 24th June 2009 that it has been further reduced to €36,888,227, a reduction of €1,226,606 (3.2%). Our roads grant allocation has been reduced to €23.3M a reduction of €8.4M (27%) with additional reductions of €1.6M in capital funding.

The Members expressed their concerns regarding the financial position of the Council and stated that the report issued to them makes very depressing reading.

The Members stated that the fundamental problem regarding the Council's financial position is the shortfall in funding received from central Government and they stated that it is imperative that the Council focus on the collection of income owing to the Council.

The Members stated that progress on a host of projects will be curtailed due to lack of funding and they expressed concern that vulnerable people such as the elderly would not get grants which are necessary in order to allow them reside in their homes. They expressed the view that group water supply schemes should be advanced and that the provision of grants towards the upkeep of houses should be maintained.

The new Members expressed their disappointment at the level of funding available to them in relation to Notice of Motion money.

In reply to a query by the Members regarding the Non-Principal Private Residences Charge, the County Manager stated that a national system is being put in place to administer the scheme. She said that the obligation will be on the owner to pay the charge and therefore self-declaration will be necessary. She said that although the intention is that the scheme will be dealt with nationally, it will have to be followed up by the local authority. She said that monies collected in this regard will be retained by the local authority and she indicated that it is hoped that an income of approximately €1.8m could be realized from this levy.

In reply to the query regarding outstanding recoupments from central government, she stated that this is being actively pursued by the Council.

She indicated that the capacity of Galway County Council to deliver on the Water Services Investment Programme based on the current resourcing model is questionable. The National Water Pricing Policy approach is in urgent need of review in light of the changed economic climate.

The County Manager indicated a series of Revenue expenditure reductions which will be implemented in 2009 in an effort to minimise the deterioration in the Council's financial position.

Difficulties are being encountered in the Library service due to the moratorium on recruitment, which is impacting negatively, particularly on remote rural branches.

In relation to rented properties, she said that the Council has incorporated the Community & Enterprise Unit into existing buildings and therefore this has reduced rental costs.

In reply to queries regarding Disabled Persons Grants and Essential Repairs Grants, Mr. Gilmore stated that the Council has a priority system in place to deal with applicants for these grants. In reply to the query regarding the sale of local authority houses under the Tenant Purchase Scheme, he stated that the Council has an active programme in place in this regard in order to maximize participation in the Scheme.

In reply to a query regarding the level of recoupments outstanding from Central Government, Mr. Mullarkey stated that at present an amount of €24m is outstanding in this regard.

In reply to a query regarding hedge trimming, Mr. Morgan stated that the landowner is responsible for cutting hedges on their land and the Council cuts verges for safety reasons. However, he stated that the Council has no funds available for grass cutting.

In reply to queries regarding the collection of water charges by Celtic Anglian, Mr. Cullen stated that the meter installation commenced in 2006. He said that at the time of installation and afterwards there were many queries from the public, Councillors and interest groups such as the IFA and these had to be attended to before the bills could issue. This together with the outbreak of cryptosporidium meant that it was late in 2007 before the water bills were sent out thus causing delays in the initial stage of the project, however he said that collection has improved and there are regular meetings with Celtic Anglian in relation to the water charges collection.

In reply to queries regarding progress on water and sewerage schemes, he stated that the Council will continue to progress proposed schemes through the planning process. However, he stated that contracts cannot be signed unless the Council is satisfied that funding will be available to carry out the works.

In relation to the Gort Water Supply he said that the Council has forwarded tenders to the Department of the Environment for approval, which is awaited.

It was agreed that the Information Meeting for the Councillors which is due to be held at 2.30 p.m. in the afternoon will be deferred to a later date.

It was agreed that the item regarding Roads be deferred to the July Monthly Meeting.

Criochnaigh and Cruinniú Ansin.

