

Minutes of the January Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council, which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 6.00p.m. on Monday 4th January, 2010.

Attendance:

Mayor: Cllr. M. Cooney

Members: Cllrs. S. Buckley Byrne, J. Henson, P. Hogan, G. McFadden, K. Molloy, K. Moran, A. O'Rourke and A. Shaw.

Officers: Mr. Barry Kehoe, Director of Services
Mr. John Walsh, Town Clerk
Mr. Alan Kelly, Town Engineer
Ms. Edel Martin, Administrative Officer
Ms. Anne McNamara, Assistant Staff Officer

Best Wishes:

All the Members joined with Cllr. Molloy in sending best wishes to Minister Brian Lenihan and his family. They hoped he would have a speedy recovery from his illness. Cllr. O'Rourke thanked everyone for their good wishes. He said they were appreciated and he would pass them on to the Lenihan family.

Vote of Congratulations:

Cllr. Moran congratulated the Athlone Group, Re-Seisuin on winning their heat in the All-Ireland Talent Show on Sunday night and he reminded people that the Golden Girls, also from Athlone, would be taking part next Sunday and urged people to vote for them too. Cllr. Hogan said it was good to see this Athlone talent on the national stage.

Civic Reception:

The Mayor informed Cllr. Hogan that he would liaise with the Town Clerk and select a date within the next two weeks for the reception for the Ravens Marching Band.

Waiver Presentation:

Cllr. Hogan was assured that the presentation on the waiver options would form part of the Budget Meeting.

Christmas Lights:

Cllr. Molloy said that many people had complimented and praised the lighting in the Town this year and he thanked the Council for the provision of them.

Minutes:

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Shaw and resolved,

“That we hereby confirm and adopt the Minutes of the December Monthly Meeting which was held on December 7th 2009 and the Special Meeting which was held on Nov 23rd 2009.”

Draft Litter Management Plan:

Ms. Edel Martin presented the draft plan to the Members. The current Plan expired in 2009 she said and this draft is to cover the next 3 years, 2010 – 2012. The Plan had been circulated and Ms. Martin sought the Members approval to commence the public consultation process.

The Members welcomed the Plan in general but Cllr. Shaw said he would like it to include more specific targets and he thought maybe the Anti-Litter Campaign could be taken over by the Tidy Towns Committee who receive approximately €80,000 from the Council annually. He also felt that Litter Fines are extremely low, generating an income of €5,000 - €6,000, while the Litter Warden costs in the region of €40,000 p.a. He said she should be encouraged to issue more fines. He felt the Council should not place too much emphasis on the I.B.A.L. Reports. He asked that there be a definite policy towards bonfires.

Cllr. Hogan agreed with this but said it was unfair to judge the Litter Warden by the number of fines issued. People responsible for dumping are not leaving any identification documents in their refuse and, therefore, they cannot be fined. He added that the Litter Warden does a mountain of work in the communities and schools.

Cllr. O'Rourke questioned I.B.A.L.'s Report and its accuracy. He felt the litter laws should be enforced with more vigour, sanctions should be better advertised, bins re-located and technology updated. Cllr. Moran agreed with disregarding the I.B.A.L. Report as Athlone was working hard against litter and these results did not reflect this. Cllr. McFadden praised the Litter Warden for her work and welcomed the Plan. She asked if the burned out cars at Baylough could be removed.

The Mayor summed up saying we must continuously strive to improve the town and make property owners aware that they are also responsible for outside their premises, in particular the fast-food property owners. He felt we should name and shame all fined for litter offences.

Ms. Martin thanked the Members for their comments. She said that most of the issues raised are already included in the Plan. It is very difficult to quantify the work which is ongoing behind the scenes fighting litter and difficult to have specific targets. She said bonfires are illegal anyway and it might be better suited to the J.P.C. to tackle this problem, as suggested. The Town Clerk added that the anti-litter campaign was more appropriately managed by the Council rather than the Tidy Towns Committee. He said the I.B.A.L. Report would be on the Agenda for the February Meeting.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,
Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved

“Pursuant to the Litter Pollution Acts, 1997 -2003 we hereby approve of the placing of the Draft Litter Management Plan on public display and the implementation of the process to make the Plan.”

Flooding Update:

The Director informed the Members that the “Clean-Up” had commenced on December 7th and is now almost complete. The Council had provided 14 skips and brought 60 loads of flood damaged goods to the landfill free of charge. The clean up is still ongoing outside the town area in Clonbonny, Carrick-o-Brien and Goldenisland but it is hoped to finish this week. The vermin control is ongoing and the cleaning products were distributed to those in need. The donations of goods and money will be distributed by St. Vincent de Paul and The Relief Centre, more so when the people move back into their houses. As regards Council tenants, all have been spoken to and all are out of B & B’s and Hotels and are in more permanent accommodation, while their houses are being dealt with. When the current weather crises is over, the Council will proceed to examine the flood defence possibilities. He added that an application has been made to the Department of the Environment for funding and €350,000 was received. The application was for €541,000.

The Members thanked the Director but asked if tenants from Iona Villas would be rehoused if they did not want to go back there and if a committee to investigate the possibilities for defence, could be set up now. Cllr. Moran asked if assistance could be given to the residents of Brick Island to repair the road, badly damaged by the floods and if there would be a report for the February meeting on the interim measures for Leinster Tce. Cllr. O’Rourke said we should document what was learned from the crisis to help formulate a plan for the future. Cllr. Shaw asked if we had applied to the European Solidarity Fund for assistance. Cllr. Buckley Byrne asked that the Committee include the broader issue of the Shannon flooding, not just defences for the town.

The Director said that the tenants of Iona Villas will be spoken to individually. They might have a choice of accommodation, but he could not say as yet. He agreed the Members could set up a committee if they wished. He said the Council could not fund the repair of private roads and it is up to the Government to make an application to the European Solidarity Fund. The Council has an Emergency Plan but will now make one specifically for flooding. He said that the Council will examine possibilities for flood defences for the town, but the Shannon flooding was different and involved many outside agencies so he felt it could not be included in the Town’s plan.

It was agreed unanimously that the Flood Defences Committee would be made up of the Mayor, Cllr. Cooney and Cllrs. McFadden, Henson and Moran. They would agree a date to meet and would report back to the February Council Meeting.

Presentations:

The Town Clerk reminded the Members that representatives from A.C.T. were going to give a presentation to them at 5.30 p.m. on Tuesday 5th January, 2010, prior to the Preliminary Budget Meeting.

It had been agreed that the Midlands Drug Task Force would give a presentation to the February Meeting and that the Midland Regional Authority would give their presentation at a later Meeting.

Acknowledgements:

The Members noted an acknowledgement from the office of the Minister for Finance regarding their request to lower V.A.T. and it said it would be considered in the forthcoming budget. They also noted an acknowledgement from the office of the Minister for Health & Children regarding the residual funds in the patient private property account and from the Minister for Social & Family Affairs regarding the National Carers Strategy.

Athlone Town Bus Service:

The Members noted a letter from Mr. Hugh McGuire, representing the National Board of People with Disabilities Ireland to Bus Eireann requesting them not to discontinue the bus service in Athlone Town, as many people with disabilities rely on it for shopping. He suggested the service run every second hour instead of hourly and this would still save money for Bus Eireann. The Members supported his views and it was agreed to request again a meeting with Bus Eireann.

Conferences:

The Members noted the location and cost of the following conference:

Tralee

Ratoo Heritage Society

4th to 7th May, 2010

Reductions in Allowances:

Cllr. Buckley Byrne requested that the Deputy Mayors allowance be abolished, the Mayor's allowance be halved and that the budget for conferences be reduced to reflect the average actual spend. The Town Clerk responded saying that the determination of allowances is a reserved function and a matter for the Members to decide by resolution at the Budget Meeting. Cllr. Buckley Byrne said she felt it would be appropriate in the current economic conditions to make these changes, as the representational allowance should be sufficient to cover expenses. She also felt that the budget for conferences was too high and the Council should show restraint in spending tax-payers money. She added that she did not expect to be paid for her public service. Cllr. Moran disagreed with these motions and said they undermined the functions of the Mayor. He added that Cllr. Buckley Byrne was merely seeking publicity. He said that those Members like himself who are self-employed, needed the allowance to compensate for loss of wages. He also said that attending conferences was informative and helpful for Councillors.

Cllr. O'Rourke said these motions were not constructive and served no purpose at this meeting, except to gain publicity. He said the money involved was small and reducing it would save very little. Cllr. Molloy agreed with this and said such motions were insulting and just provided "fodder" to abolish Town Councils. Cllr. Shaw shared their views on the importance of the roles of the Mayor & Deputy Mayor, but said we must keep costs in mind and that a cut in expenses would not be inappropriate.

Cllr. Buckley Byrne responded saying that the Members are in a position to make changes and the public want changes. The "allowances" are not salaries but expenses and we should be cutting back on them. Doing this was not diminishing the roles of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. The Public Service and Social Welfare recipients had taken cuts and we the Members should do the same. She concluded by saying that she had returned the Deputy Mayor's allowance.

This concluded the business of the meeting.
