

LISBURN & CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Special Meeting of Council held in the Island Civic Centre, The Island, Lisburn, on Wednesday, 18 March, 2020 at 7:09 pm

PRESENT:

The Right Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor A Givan

Deputy Mayor
Councillor J McCarthy

Aldermen J Baird, W J Dillon MBE, A Grehan, M Henderson
MBE, S Martin, S P Porter and J Tinsley

Councillors N Anderson, R T Beckett, D J Craig, A P Ewing,
O Gawith, A Gowan, M Gregg, D Honeyford, S Hughes,
J Lavery BEM, S Lee, H Legge, S Lowry, G McCleave,
C McCready, A McIntyre, U Mackin, T Mitchell, John Palmer,
S Skillen, A Swan and N Trimble

IN ATTENDANCE:

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council

Chief Executive
Director of Environmental Services
Director of Leisure and Community Wellbeing
Director of Service Transformation
Head of Audit and Risk
Head of Waste Management and Operations
PCSP/Member Services Manager
Member Services Officer
Mayor's Secretary

Commencement of the Meeting

At the commencement of the meeting, The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor A Givan, explained that this special meeting of Council had been convened at very short notice and was in line with Standing Order 3 (1), that the Mayor of the Council may call a meeting of the Council at any time. However, he referred to Standing Order 4 which required that at least 5 days' notice be given. As this required notice had not been given, The Right Worshipful the Mayor asked that Standing Order 4 be suspended. This was proposed by Alderman M Henderson, seconded by Councillor N Anderson and agreed unanimously.

The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor A Givan, welcomed those present to the meeting. He requested that all mobile phones be switched off or put on silent for the duration of the meeting.

The Chief Executive outlined the evacuation procedures in the case of an emergency.

At this point in the meeting, The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor A Givan, referred to the recent death of Mr Ivan Davis, who had been a Member of the former Lisburn Borough Council, in which he had served as both Deputy Mayor and Mayor, and was also a Freeman of the City. The Mayor expressed his condolences to Ivan's wife, Betty, and to his entire family circle at this sad time. As a mark of respect for Mr Davis, those present stood and observed a minute's silence.

1. Apologies

It was agreed to accept apologies for non-attendance at the meeting on behalf of Aldermen D Drysdale and A G Ewart MBE and Councillors R Carlin, S Carson, S Eastwood, J Gallen, M Guy, R McLernon and Jenny Palmer.

2. Declarations of Interest

The following declaration of interest was expressed during the meeting:

- Alderman M Henderson in respect of item 3.1 "Council Response to Coronavirus (COVID19) – Operational Planning" due to him being employed by a company that supplied cleaners, sanitisers and hand soaps.

3. Report from Chief Executive

It was agreed that the report and recommendations of the Chief Executive be adopted, subject to any decisions recorded below.

3.1 Council Response to Coronavirus (COVID19) – Operational Planning

Members were provided with a copy of a report by the Chief Executive setting out the background and key issues in relation to the Council's Response to the current Coronavirus pandemic. During lengthy discussion, the Chief Executive provided reassurances to Members in respect of their concerns and answered a number of queries raised, following which it was proposed by Alderman J Tinsley, seconded by Alderman S Martin and agreed that:

- (a) delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive and Directors, in consultation with the relevant Chairman or Vice-Chairman (or their nominee), or The Right Worshipful the Mayor, to take whatever operational decisions were necessary to ensure continuation of operational services and temporary service alterations during this pandemic. The Chief Executive took note of a request that any such decisions taken be regularly communicated to Members;
- (b) all events arranged by the Council and events hosted in Council premises between now and 30 June be postponed;

3.1 Council Response to Coronavirus (COVID19) – Operational Planning (Contd)

- (c) the matter of a reviewed Planning Protocol and Scheme of Delegation being submitted to the Department of Infrastructure be deferred for further consideration, with Members being kept informed of the outcomes of ongoing discussions with the Council's legal advisors, Director of Service Transformation and Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee. Some Members expressed a preference that meetings of the Planning Committee continue to be held, if possible, with any necessary steps being taken in respect of social distancing, etc. The Chief Executive stated that if the building was closed to the public there should be no deviations from that but agreed that this matter would be kept under review;
- (d) Council resources be redirected as appropriate to support critical functions including support for the NI Executive emergency response;
- (e) Council facilities be temporarily closed to the public, including Lagan Valley LeisurePlex, Dundonald International Ice Bowl, activity centres, caravan park, arts and museum facilities, community centres, pitches and bowling greens (to be reviewed in line with guidance from governing bodies) and Lagan Valley Island, other than for registration services. In relation to the closure of the LeisurePlex, it was agreed that consideration, in consultation with the Health Trust, be given to the possibility of allowing some level of access to the swimming pool for families of children with special needs.

It was noted that:

- (i) parks and play areas would remain open at present, but this would be kept under review, subject to Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance and staffing availability to carry out standard equipment checks, etc. The Chief Executive took note of comments regarding the need for regular cleaning of play areas. He confirmed that parks and play areas would only close as a last resort and agreed that Members would be notified before such steps would be taken;
- (ii) allotments would remain open at present to support mental wellbeing;
- (iii) golf courses would remain open to members at present with no pay and play. Social areas of clubhouses would be closed to the public and members. The Chief Executive agreed to investigate comments regarding payments by club members, given that they were not getting use of the full golf club facilities, with social areas being closed. He also agreed to investigate comments regarding the fact that, due to the age profile of many golfers, there may not be a high usage of the golf course and it would be preferable if steps could be taken to ensure this facility was used as much as possible;
- (iv) public toilets would remain open with an enhanced cleaning regime;
- (v) household recycling centres would remain open and, subject to sufficient staff, opportunities for increased hours would be explored.

3.1 Council Response to Coronavirus (COVID19) – Operational Planning (Contd)

In relation to staff employed in the facilities that were to close, the Chief Executive advised that, where possible, staff could play a significant role in community co-ordination activity or, where practicable, would be redeployed to assist in other services. Advice Services staff in the Bridge Community Centre were working from home;

- (f) all Committee meetings be postponed for the month of April, but that full Council continue to meet that month, if possible, with consideration being given to holding the meeting remotely if necessary and if practicable and receiving only verbal reports from Officers if necessary. Meetings planned for May and June would be reviewed by The Right Worshipful the Mayor and the Chief Executive in line with social distancing guidance at that time;
- (g) authority be granted for operational decisions to be taken, as required, to ensure continuity of essential Council Services, as per the draft Corporate Business Continuity Plan;
- (h) a DEA focused Community Support Initiative be developed and implemented to co-ordinate the input of statutory agencies, volunteers and local groups to mitigate the impacts of social distancing and social isolation;
- (i) an additional contribution be made to the repairs and renewals fund for work not being able to be completed by March, including work in the conference suite;
- (j) reserves be earmarked to fund items not being received before the end of March due to the current situation;
- (k) an amount be earmarked to cover the potential loss of income, both in relation to the leisure facilities and the potential loss of rates income;
- (l) any other remaining underspend be transferred to the capital fund to allow the fund to steadily increase as planned;
- (m) Vitality membership payments and direct debits be suspended with immediate effect until 30 May, with this being kept under review;
- (n) a freeze be put on Community Festivals Fund and VE Day Celebrations grant applications with consultation then taking place around rescheduling of events with relevant community groups;
- (o) the Council's planned expenditure be reviewed, including earmarking of in-year resources to be carried forward for use in 2020/21;
- (p) planned financial payments to satellite community facilities be altered to improve short-term cash flow and to explore options to mitigate financial losses due to loss of bookings in such facilities;

3.1 Council Response to Coronavirus (COVID19) – Operational Planning (Contd)

- (q) consideration be given to how payments for bin collections were managed for businesses that had to close;
- (r) Members be provided with a monthly update on the Council's financial position;
- (s) as a report was to have been brought to the April meeting of the Leisure and Community Development Committee regarding Community Support Grant Applications 2020-21, which had been oversubscribed, this matter continue to be progressed by the Director of Leisure and Community Wellbeing; and
- (t) a link be provided on the Council's website signposting small businesses to where benefits were available.

It was proposed by Alderman S P Porter, seconded by Councillor D J Craig and agreed that The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor A Givan, write to the Health Minister commending him for how he had handled the Coronavirus situation over the last number of weeks and also write to both the PHA and the Department of Health conveying the Council's thanks and appreciation to all their staff members for the work they had done to date and would continue to do as the current situation progressed.

In relation to communications:

- (1) the Chief Executive agreed to convey to Council staff that they were supported, valued and appreciated by the Council and should not have any fears about their employment moving forward through this worrying time;
- (2) it was stressed by an Elected Member that all 40 Members should come together to show leadership to local communities and that Members in each District Electoral Area should take a co-ordinated approach moving forward;
- (3) it was suggested that the audio recording from this special meeting be uploaded to the front page of the Council's website;
- (4) it was suggested that it was important for communication to be made with all community groups, whether registered or not, informing them of steps being taken by the Council to move forward during the current situation; and
- (5) it was important to send out a clear message that, in relation to children who got free school meals, the Education Authority and the Department of Education were working closely to consider how that service could be continued. The Chief Executive advised that this would also be considered through the Council's community planning process.

At the end of discussions, a number of tributes were paid, namely to the Chief Executive for the leadership he had shown in dealing efficiently with the current situation; Directors and all staff members for their hard work and efforts during

3.1 Council Response to Coronavirus (COVID19) – Operational Planning
(Contd)

this challenging time; The Right Worshipful the Mayor and Deputy Mayor for their civic leadership; community groups and all in local communities who had come together to offer help and assistance at this time; and all NHS staff for their hard work in dealing with those affected by Coronavirus to date and for their continued efforts in the months ahead.

Conclusion of the Meeting

At the conclusion of the meeting, The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor A Givan, invited anyone wishing to do so to say a few words in respect of the recent passing of Mr Ivan Davis. A number of Elected Members paid heartfelt tributes to Mr Davis and conveyed their condolences to his wife, Betty, and his wider family circle.

The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor A Givan, thanked those present for their attendance and wished everyone well in the coming weeks and months.

There being no further business for consideration, the meeting was terminated at 9.05 pm.

Mayor