

Derry City and Strabane District Council

Minutes of Meeting of a Special Meeting of Derry City and Strabane District Council held in the Guildhall, Derry on Monday 21 May 2018 at 4.00 pm

Present:- Alderman Bresland and Hussey; Councillors Boyle, Campbell, Carlin, Donnelly, Duffy, Fleming, Gallagher, Gardiner, Hastings, Jackson, C Kelly, P Kelly, Logue, McCauley, McGinley, M McHugh, J McKeever, McKnight, McMahon, O'Reilly, Reilly and Tierney.

In Attendance:- Mr J Kelpie (Chief Executive) and Mr P Kingston (Lead Legal Services Officer); Mrs T Johnstone (Committee Services Assistant)

SC24/18 Notice and Summons of Meeting

The Chief Executive read the Notice and Summons for the Meeting.

SC25/18 Members Attendance and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Logue.

SC26/18 Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no Declarations of Interest.

SC27/18 To Discuss the Ongoing Situation in Palestine

The Mayor welcomed Members, Officers and those representing the various Statutory Agencies to the Meeting to provide Members with an update on the flooding incident response.

The Chief Executive then invited the representatives from the statutory agencies in attendance to update Members on the position to date. Members received Mr J McKee (Rivers Agency) Department for Infrastructure who provided the following update:

- Referred to the high water levels resulting from the recent flooding incident which had caused considerable damage to the infrastructure.
- Advised that all surveys and inspections had now been completed as a result of which 2900 metres of damaged infrastructure had been identified throughout a wide range of locations. Repairs had been carried out to 2100 metres to date and progress was being made in terms of completing repair works to the remaining 800 metres.
- The Rivers Agency were involved in carrying out repair works to 80 rivers across the North West which included works to river banks and the removal of fallen trees and large items of debris.
- Referred to damage caused to previously installed water level monitoring equipment particularly in the River Faughan and advised that repair works were currently being carried out to this piece of equipment which was vital in terms of acquiring information to share with local communities regarding possible flooding.
- Advised that feasibility studies had been carried out in Drumahoe and Eglinton to determine why the flooding had occurred and the necessary repair works which were required.
- Stated that in recent years community engagement had been an important aspect of the services provided by Rivers Agency in terms of providing local communities with facilities/resources should flooding occur e.g. sandbags and hoped to establish links with communities to assist them in being more resilient in the future should a similar incident occur.

Members received Mr D McKinley (Roads) Department for Infrastructure who provided the following update:

- Stated that in terms of the overview of the impact of the flooding incident on carriageways 140 roads had been closed throughout the Council area. Of these 60 had been referred to ensure repairs as road surfaces had been washed away.
- Pointed out that to date four roads remained closed. In terms of repairs to the Claudy Bridge, advised that given the scale of the damage caused an open tender process would take place and it was anticipated that the works would be completed by June/July 2018.

- Advised that consultation was ongoing with local community groups.
- Advised that Glenrandel Road would require a new bridge and it was not anticipated that this would be completed during the current year however every effort would be made to have these works completed without delay.
- It was anticipated that repair works to Ballybogie Road would be completed and it would reopen within the current year.
- A number of bus laybys had been repaired and reopened.
- To date a sum of £2.5M had been spent on repair works to damage caused by the flooding.
- Following the flooding incident it had been necessary to undertake unscheduled inspections of 160 bridges throughout the areas affected which had all been completed within a six week period.
- Had identified that 89 bridges were in need of repair works or required replacing 63 of which were located within the Council area.
- Advised that four bridges remained closed 2 of which were located within the Council area.
- Advised that works to the Claudy Bridge would be processed through an open tender process. The total cost of repair works was £700,000.
- Advised that the Glenrandel Bridge required a new design and works were ongoing through the in-house design team and would cost £500,000.
- Advised that of the 63 bridges identified, 13 had been repaired including the provision of a temporary bridge at Claudy including damage to the wall at Cumber Road.
- The Department continued to work on a multi-agency approach basis to identify how such an incident could be responded to more effectively in the future.

Members then received Mr B Doherty, Chief Executive, DAERA who provided Members with the following update:

- Referred to the loss of/damage to field boundaries caused by the flooding and the subsequent damage to land caused by debris and aggregate deposition.

- Referred to the impact of the flooding on farmer's ability to harvest crops, including second cut silage which could result in winter fodder shortages in the affected areas.
- Stated that it could take some time to return all of the land to a productive state so it might not be available well in to the next production season.
- DAERA continued to provide practical assistance to the farming community impacted and had delivered workshops in the affected areas covering land restoration, flood recovery, winter feeding of livestock and farm management issues.
- The Department had also issued two Technical Bulletins which provided practical guidance on land restoration and flood recovery and also watercourse management.
- Advised that representatives from NIEA and CAFRE had met with Rivers Agency and the Loughs Agency on watercourse management issues. NIEA had issued a waterway management advisory bulletin to all farm business in the catchment area. The Loughs Agency continued to liaise with landowners in the affected areas regarding remedial works that might be achievable.
- DAERA obtained permission from the European Commission to raise the level of advanced CAP payment made in October from 50% to 70% of claim value to assist cash flow.
- The Department made a particular effort to issue advanced payments to farm businesses affected by the flooding, with 92% of the affected businesses receiving advance payment by 31 October.
- DAERA would be making full/balance payments to farm businesses from 1 December 2017 and would endeavour to pay as many businesses as possible which had been affected by the flooding.
- DAERA continued to explore options on how to further assist farm businesses affected. However, in the absence of a Minister and Executive, the Department's ability to progress any option was limited.
- DAERA had been closely monitoring the impact of persistent wet weather on farm businesses during August. September and October, which included substantial disruption to silage harvesting, slurry spreading, the harvesting of arable crops, particularly potatoes, the sowing of winter cereals, necessitated the earlier housing of cattle and resulted in reductions to fodder

stocks. Whilst these difficulties had been faced by farmers across NI, the West and North West regions had been worst affected.

- Fodder shortages were currently being positively managed by affected farmers through a combination of measures designed to reduce the risk of later difficulties during the winter housing period. These actions included targeted destocking, the tailoring of livestock rations to extend available fodder stocks and the purchase of fodder (silage, forage, maize, fodder beet, straw and hay) locally and from further afield, including the South of Ireland and Great Britain. Given these actions, there would appear at this stage to be sufficient supplies of fodder to address foreseeable demand.
- To assist farmers and growers respond to the impacts of persistent wet weather, CAFRE had been providing knowledge transfer support and practical advice through a programme of technical press articles over the past several weeks, as well as online Fodder and Relative Feed Value Calculator resources. Three Winter Farm Management workshop events were delivered on 20, 23 and 28 November at Omagh, Enniskillen and Coleraine respectively to help farmers take early action.
- It was recognised that this would be a difficult winter for farmers. Therefore, DAERA would continue to monitor closely the position of farm businesses and review the Department's practical support provision as necessary.

Members raised the following issues:

- Welcomed the updates provided by the representatives from (Rivers) and (Roads) Department for Infrastructure and DAERA.
- Welcomed advanced CAP payment to farmers but expressed concern at the difficult situation facing farmers in terms of loss of crops and damage to land by debris and aggregate deposition and the fact that it could take some time to return all of the lands to a productive state.
- Enquired if the Rivers Agency were content that there was sufficient monies within the system to carry out the necessary repair works and where river banks had burst to examine the cause of the flooding and provide systems to deal with a similar incident. Where the statutory agencies reassured that a similar situation would not arise in the future.

- Expressed disappointment that no response had been received to a complaint submitted to the Rivers Agency regarding two fallen trees at Cumber Road.
- Acknowledged repair works which had already been carried out to the extensive damage caused to the roads network however expressed concern that repair works to Claudy Bridge had not been completed.
- Referred to a commitment given that these works would be started and the type of funding required would not have had to be made available through procurement. Expressed concern however that the previous week the local business community were advised of problems which had arisen when it had been discovered that the damage had been more severe than originally estimated therefore resulting in the cost of the repair works being outside the necessary threshold and would have been carried out through the procurement process.
- Expressed concern that the local community were expecting that the bridge would have been reopened by March 2018. However, given the process involved it was likely that the works would not be completed until June/July 2018.
- Anticipated that the proposed works would begin in March 2018 and welcomed the expectation to have the works completed within the given timeframes.
- Referred to diversions on the Craig Road Bridge given the increased traffic flow. Expressed concern that although this was structurally sound there had been suggestions to introduce a seven and a half metre height restriction and the potential access for gritters. If such a restriction were introduced some local businesses would be adversely in terms of making deliveries to the City.
- Commended the work carried out by Council and the various statutory agencies following the flooding incident and acknowledged the tremendous resilience shown by those communities affected.
- Welcomed the update in terms of works which had been carried out and were ongoing and looked forward to the outcome of the review.
- Referred to the need to communicate to the public that works were ongoing as was the support from Council and the other statutory agencies involved.

- Referred to the fact that essential lessons had been learned from the recent flooding incident which would inform and improve a similar recurrence.
- Acknowledged the workshops which had been organised for farmers affected by the flooding.
- Queried what provision, if any, had been made for those individuals indirectly affected by the flooding?
- Expressed concern at the lack of public presence at meetings arranged to discuss ongoing flooding issues and suggested that these should have been targeted at those most affected.
- Referred to the psychological impact of the flooding on those communities affected and acknowledged involvement by the Red Cross in this regard. Referred to the possibility of counselling being made available to those suffering mental stress as a result of the flooding.
- Referred to the need for reassurance to be given to those at greatest risk.
- Concern expressed at recent comments by the Head of the Rivers Agency that works would be carried out if economically viable and referred to the need for assurances to be given that works would definitely be carried out.
- Praised the work carried out by all of the statutory agencies involved in particular Council, Housing Executive, Red Cross and NI Fire and Rescue Service.
- Looked forward to the completion of the review currently being carried out.
- Acknowledged the response from the statutory agencies involved and queried how long it was anticipated that this would continue. Suggested that any potential for improvement would be welcome.

The representative from DAERA responded as follows:

- Reaffirmed that DAERA was continuing to explore options on how to further assist farm businesses affected.
- Advised that all farm businesses affected were entitled to claim. Any farmers who had not yet received payment could be due to the fact that their claim was subject to an inspection however this should be resolved in the near future.

The representative from the DfI Rivers Agency responded as follows:-

- In relation to queries regarding if there were sufficient monies to take works forward, advised that DfI had allocated £10M to Road and Rivers in respect of carrying out repair works.
- Undertook to investigate the two fallen trees at Cumber Road and apologised for the lack of response in relation thereto.
- Welcomed Members support for the review currently being carried out into the flooding incident the outcome of which would be published by late February 2018.
- Assured that the Rivers Agency were keen to engage with local communities and had established links in this regard and as part of the process involved would be addressing issues such as mental health.
- In relation to comments by the Head of the Rivers Agency stated that it was vital that economic viability was considered in relation to all proposed works. This should not however be confused with delegated funding. Conformed that works would be carried out on a priority basis.

The representative from DfI Roads responded as follows:-

- Confirmed that £1.25M had been made available for necessary repair works, £490,000 of which had been spent to date.
- Expressed concern at disappointment expressed by local communities regarding the completion of works but reassured that the Department was endeavouring to complete all works without delay.
- Advised that an overall debriefing had taken place in November and acknowledged that significant improvements had been achieved and put in place.
- Advised that a meeting had taken place earlier that week to discuss their views which would inform the overall response.

In response to a query from Alderman Hussey, the Chief Executive referred to Council's response in the immediate aftermath of the flooding incident. It was anticipated that the outcome of the review would inform and improve future responses which as previously indicated would be available at the end of February.

Councillor O'Reilly expressed concern at the reduction in stockpiles of grit and sandbags and referred to the possibility of having supplies increased and made available for public use throughout the Council area.

Councillor Cooper advised that Elisha McCallion MP had written to the Department requesting a greater stockpile of grit and a more structured approach to the allocation of grit. He referred to examples where community organisations had assisted in the distribution of grit to areas which had not been provided with grit boxes.

Members received Mr E Doherty, Area Manager, West Area NIHE who provided the following update:

Initial Response to Flooding Incident

- An immediate Emergency situation was declared in response to the flooding incident within NIHE.
- The NIHE flood response was supported by Senior Officials within NIHE including the Chairman, The Board, The Chief Executive, The Director and the Regional Manager who had visited the site on a number of occasions
- Additional staffing resources were distributed from within NIHE
- Staff was also deployed to the rest centres to deal with housing queries at these points.
- NIHE's contractor brought in additional resources to attend to the emerging incident.
- Initially 55 emergency orders were issued to NIHE contractor.
- The contractor also attended private owners as an initial response to clear out flood waters and power wash.
- The contractor remained onsite and a dedicated workforce had been assigned to this response.
- An internal review of NIHE's response and emergency plan was ongoing looking at lessons learnt from this emergency.

Properties impacted by the flood

A total of 94 properties were initially affected by the flooding. A breakdown is as follows

- Waterloo Place – 13 Properties (mainly minor damage)
- Collon Terrace – 40 properties

- Waterside – 15 properties (excluding flooded properties.)
- Flooded properties – 26 properties. (19 severely flooded and 7 minor flood damage.)

Housing Management Response/Actions

- Originally 58 households approached NIHE seeking assistance
- Update – 65 households had now contacted NIHE requiring accommodation. Of that number 41 had been accommodated to an extent.
- 26 households were placed in emergency accommodation who required more permanent accommodation
- Of the 26 placements, 20 of those households had again to be relocated due to commitments of hotels and B&B's
- This was the equivalent of 46 family placements made in less than one week.
- NIHE had been able to secure 12 no (5 bed) apartments in the Magee Campus and placed families immediately in this accommodation
- The private rental sector was thoroughly examined but many of the properties did not match household size/location
- Offers and allocations of NIHE current stock were suspended and I secured 11 properties including 2 from other Housing associations
- These properties have now been furnished including carpeted by NIHE furnishings include
- White goods - Fridges/washing machines/cookers etc
- Beds and bedding for each properties
- Sofas and other tables and chairs where required
- 29 Homeless packs have also been distributed including kettles, beddings etc. **This has been very favourable received**
- 3 of these were now back in general needs allocation for people on the waiting list and the rest remain occupied by flood victim
- 23 families remained out of their home due to the flood damage
- 13 families remained in permanent furnished accommodation – a breakdown of these families are as follows
- 6 families NIHE tenants
- 4 families Owner Occupiers
- 1 family Apex tenant
- 2 families private rent

- A fully serviced mobile home site containing 11 quality mobile homes had been developed in St Canice's Park Eglington
- Currently there were 10 families in the mobile homes as one household had been moved back into his property as reinstatement work was completed.

A breakdown of these families was as follows:

- 3 families NIHE tenants
- 4 families owner occupiers
- 3 families Private Rented
- NIHE had revisited these families during the current cold spell and offered alternative accommodation and additional heating. All families were happy to remain

Current Housing Situation

- 13 NIHE properties in St Canice's Park Eglington were flood damaged
- 6 families had returned to their property in St Canice's Park as work is complete
- 3 families had requested to remain until after the Christmas period
- NIHE were hoping to have the remainder of families of St Canice's Park back in their properties by end January but were being hampered by the speed of the drying out process
- 2 properties at Glenshane Road were still ongoing. 1 occupant had stayed in the property and 1 remained in furnished accommodation.
- 2 properties in Plumbridge – 1 resident had returned after work had been completed and 1 remained in property

Cost of NIHE response to the North West Flooding Emergency

- Approximately £0.5 Million

Members received Ms J Campbell, Emergency Response, Western Health and Social Care Trust who provided the following update:

- In the immediate aftermath of the flooding, family and childcare staff were dispatched to the two help centres which were established in order to meet people arriving, give advice and signposting at the point of crisis. A helpline was also established which was available for approximately two weeks, this was then removed as it was no longer needed. Two families were provided with targeted support through the Trust's Family and Childcare Gateway service in the days after the flooding, which included financial and practical assistance.
- Following this, representatives from the Trust attended the local community meeting in Drumahoe and made contact with the community representative in Eglinton as there was a request for follow up support from the Trust to assist and advise people who continued to live outside their own homes or whose emotional well-being had been affected as a direct result of the flooding.
- Assisted by the Red Cross the Trust held drop in sessions in the Eglinton area to allow for individuals or families to come and discuss their circumstances and allow for an individualised assessment of need, this resulted in a number of referrals being made in relation to older people and a number of families, assessed to be in need of additional support or further assessment, to Services by Trust staff. There were also a number of families who were signposted to counselling services for young people, benefits advice/insurance issues etc.
- The Red Cross assisted the Trust by visiting a number of families in the Eglinton area who continued to live in caravan accommodation whilst waiting for their houses to be repaired. They provided a listening ear service in the area which continued to be available, food parcels were also provided to at least one family and there was the ongoing option at this time for befriending services through the Red Cross. A representative from the Trust would be available as a point of contact in the interim period should the Red Cross staff wish to discuss a concern or query that they may need social work assistance with.
- Sessions were also offered in the Drumahoe area although this was not progressed at that time, a representative from the Trust remained available at this point and had left contact details with the YMCA.
- There has also been an 'invisible' response by the Trust in the form of services which were already involved with people in the

area who responded to reassess individual needs and ensure packages of support were appropriate. This included services such as our older people team, families and childcare services, mental health services etc.

Councillor Gardiner referred to comments by Ms Campbell, Western Health and Social Care Trust that contact details for social workers having been left at the YMCA. She said the public would not have been aware of this and requested that the details be forwarded to elected Member for distribution to those in greatest need. She acknowledged the commitment and support forthcoming from the various agencies for those affected by the flooding. She referred to the need for provision of easily accessible information.

Members received Ms J McKenna, Red Cross ER Operations Manager for Northern Ireland who provided the following update:

- Commended Council on its efforts following the floods and its ongoing engagement with those communities most affected.
- Commended the compassion and courage shown by front line Officers and Councillors in organising community meetings recently in Eglinton, Drumahoe, and, in not forgetting rural communities affected at the meeting organised in Donemana.
- Advised that the Red Cross had a lot of interest and experience in supporting people after major flooding incidents – in Northern Ireland, across the UK and internationally.
- The Red Cross in Northern Ireland had published 2 research reports that examined the impacts of flooding on people's lives: "Living in fear of the rain" (2010) and "Cut off by the floods" (2013).
- Advised that there was a lot of resonance in what people shared with us at the recent NW community meetings and some of the personal stories and experiences contained in the Red Cross reports.

Ms McKenna made a few observations based on the Red Cross work experience on flooding. She stated that unfortunately this was not over for the people affected by the trauma and devastating consequences of what happened on 22 August 2017. She stated that from her experience people would continue to need support in the recovery phase for a 12-18 month period.

Ms McKenna said insurance was one of the major problems for people after a flooding. She stated that in Cumbria following Storm Desmond the Local Authority organised a series of information meetings with experts to help people to navigate insurance claims. She referred to the fact that people were often exhausted by the sheer effort of navigating all the processes in rebuilding their homes and their lives: insurers, building contractors, legal teams, drying out of houses, refurbishment & repairs. She said this could be exacerbated for people living in temporary accommodation and could be very stressful trying to organise all necessary meetings and form filling while trying to rebuild normal family routine

Ms McKenna said it was vital that community hubs continued to provide a point of contact and support for people who would need support, information and help in the weeks and months ahead. She stated that in the experience of Red Cross would show that while the numbers needing help would drastically reduce there would be people – including most vulnerable – who would still require help and assistance.

Ms McKenna stated that in an ideal world each individual and family affected should be assigned a caseworker to help them navigate the complexity of needs and processes - and bearing in mind that people would have good days but also experience set-backs.

In response to previous comments regarding low numbers of people attending drop in sessions organised by WHSCT the previous week in Eglinton, she undertook to share some of Red Cross experience. She said there were many reasons why people may not feel comfortable coming into a public place – people were often selfless and felt that others were more in need than themselves; people may not want to share private feelings and circumstances. However it was important to maintain a presence as this offered reassurance which people avail of in the future.

She pointed out that representatives from the Red Cross had visited the temporary caravan site at Eglinton the previous week which reinforced some of the issues but people were aware that support was available at the Community Centre. She said she felt it was important to reach out to people when they were least able to help themselves and would suggest that an outreach presence in affected communities was organised especially over Christmas. She said the Red Cross would be happy to support this.

Ms McKenna stated that from experience gained by the Red Cross the most important thing was that people did not feel they had been forgotten and Council's Lead Assurance Officer and Emergency Planning Officer must be commended for their unstinting concern and hard work in responding to affected communities in the North West since the flooding incident.

Ms McKenna referred to the address given by the representative from the Rivers Agency. She stated that Mr McKee leads the multi-agency Regional Community Resilience Group and over the last two years this group had engaged and rolled out a resilience programme with a number of communities vulnerable to flooding across Northern Ireland. She pointed out that these communities were now better prepared for any future flooding events. This multi-agency group would now work with Council Officers and affected communities to help people gain more control of their lives in the North West.

Members thanked the representative from the statutory agencies for their updates.

The meeting terminated at 4.45 pm