

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Arklow Municipal District held on Friday 13th June 2014 at 5.30pm.

Members Present:- Cllr. Tommy Annesley, Cllr. Sylvester Bourke, Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, Cllr. Pat Kennedy, Cllr. Mary McDonald, Cllr. Miriam Murphy.

Officials Present:- Mr. Eddie Sheehy, Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Bryan Doyle, Director of Services, Jack Kelly, Senior Executive Engineer, Ms. Helen Purcell, Administrative Officer, Ms. Linda McDonald, District Administrator.

The District Administrator welcomed everyone to the first Annual General Meeting of Arklow Municipal District (AMD) and introduced officials in attendance.

1.Election of Cathaoirleach

The District Administrator sought nominations for the office of Cathaoirleach. Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald was proposed by Cllr. Pat Kennedy and seconded by Cllr. Sylvester Bourke. As there were no other nominations Cllr. Fitzgerald was elected Cathaoirleach of Arklow Municipal District.

Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald took the Chair and thanked the Members for electing him. He stated that he had been the first Mayor of Arklow Town Council and was now the first Cathaoirleach of Arklow Municipal District.

The Cathaoirleach stated that he would be leaving politics outside the door and expected everyone else to do the same. While there is a schedule of meetings set out he would have no difficulty having extra meetings if needed. He highlighted the following issues affecting the AMD:-

- Arklow Town has an unemployment rate of 18% and not 50% as stated at a recent County Council Meeting.
- There is also a huge problem with lack of housing and there are no more plans to build social housing. He also stated that the Minister is to review the Rent Assistance for Arklow area as part of the 2015 budget, it was also noted that persons in receipt of rent assistance would be taken off the housing list. He advised the Members that approval was received from the Department for the purchase of ten houses in Arklow for people on the Arklow Housing List.
- Planning for the Arklow Sewerage Treatment Plant is due to expire in early 2015 this project is now in the control of Irish Water. The lack of a sewerage treatment plant for the town will hold up future development.
- Cllr. Fitzgerald stated that industry was needed in the town. It was noted that construction on the new Arklow Community College is to commence in July and this will be a welcomed boost to the town. He said that the loss of MSD in Rathdrum had been a huge blow to Rathdrum and the whole electoral area. He pointed out that the IDA had made just one visit to Wicklow in 2013, this needs to be progressed by our five TDs. We need to work together for the town and area, things will then turn

around. The green shoots may be showing in Dublin but they haven't been extended down here.

2. Election of Leas Cathaoirleach

The Cathaoirleach sought nominations for the office of Leas Cathaoirleach. Cllr. Tommy Annesley proposed Cllr. Sylvester Bourke and Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald seconded this. As there were no other nominations Cllrs. Sylvester Bourke was elected Leas Cathaoirleach of Arklow Municipal District.

Cllr. Bourke thanked the members for their nomination and stated that he looked forward to working together to deliver projects and to try and solve the problems out there.

3. Appointment of one Member from Arklow Municipal District to the Corporate Policy Group (CPG)

Cllr. Tommy Annesley asked if it was in order for the Cathaoirleach to be nominated for this position. Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald suggested that this position could be rotated annually. This proposal was seconded by Cllr. Sylvester Bourke that Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald would represent Arklow Municipal District on the CPG for the next year. It was agreed to review the matter at next years AGM.

It was noted that it would be beneficial for all members to gain the experience of representing AMD on the CPG and that feedback should be provided.

4. To Consider Draft Standing Orders

Bryan Doyle Director of Services outlined the background to the draft Standing Orders which were circulated with the Agenda. He advised that they had been developed by the Department of the Environment following receipt of feedback from Members. It was noted that all other Municipal Districts in the County had adopted same.

Standing Orders were adopted by the Members of Arklow Municipal District with an amendment to the meeting times of 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm.

5. To agree Schedule of Ordinary Meetings

The circulated Schedule of Meetings was also agreed.

Mr. Bryan Doyle Director of Services addressed the meeting and gave an overview of the new Municipal Districts, the following points were noted:-

The Municipal District is not a Local Authority it is a sub unit of Wicklow County Council. The Municipal District does have decision making powers as referred to in the Schedule 3 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014. It noted that over the next few years more functions may be assigned to the Municipal Districts. The Protocol Committee will be looking at this in due course. Mr. Doyle also referred to the Schedule of Functions Appendix D which had been circulated to the Members.

- Irish Water – It was noted that WCC are now working under a Service Level Agreement with Irish Water.
- A number of functions have been taken from Local Authorities such as Driving Licences, HEGs etc. staff have been reallocated to where the need is. The

moratorium on recruiting staff is still in place. A number of staff have left the LA recently and won't be replaced.

- The Housing and Planning functions have been centralised, similar staff numbers in each of the Municipal Districts. The adoption of the Arklow Town Plan will come back to the Municipal District for discussion.
- In relation to the Joint Policing Committees no revised guidelines received to date as to whether there will be one again in Arklow Town.
- Establishment of Strategic Policy Committees in particular for Community Planning and Economic Planning this will be a big body of work for the Local Authority, along with setting up public participation groups for development plans. Each MD is encouraged to have links with these groups.
- Training day in WCC for all members has been arranged for Monday 30th June 2014, each DOS will give a presentation on their programme of work. Staff structures will be circulated with areas of responsibility highlighted. Mr. Doyle gave contact details for himself, Mr. Helen Purcell and Ms. Christine Flood who are all involved in the changeover process.

Mr. Eddie Sheehy Chief Executive Officer gave a brief outline to the Members in relation to the Finance functions for the Local Authority.

Mr. Sheehy congratulated the Cathaoirleach Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald and the Leas Cathaoirleach Cllr. Sylvester Bourke on their appointments and referred to a good blend of experience. He referred to the new regulations and guidelines in relation to the establishment of Municipal Districts and stated that he was anxious that both Members and Officers will hit the ground running. He made the following points:-

- Regional Training day in Tullamore on the 25th June 2014 for all members.
- Training day in WCC on the Monday 30th June 2014, to receive presentations from all Directors, which will be followed by a bus tour of the County.
- Finance and Budgets will be very complex and training will be provided on these issues in July and September. The approach this year for the budget will be that the overall Council will be making the key decisions. The CPG will make and discuss strategies for the budget. The level of the local property tax can be increased or decreased by 15%. Revenue Commissioners have to be notified by 30th September of the Councils decision in this regard and this will be a reserved function. If Councillors decide to increase or decrease the property tax it will affect local services. The Members need to strike a balance between the level of services provided and the rate of property tax.
- Rate waivers on vacant properties – Members now have power to decide if it will be 0 – 100% refund.
- Commercial Rates in Arklow are currently 20% lower than other towns in the county and rates convergence has to take place within the County over a ten year period.
- There will be an element of local allocation for each of the MDs that the Members will have discretion over.
- These are just some of the issues that the Members will have to consider. The overall budget has to be adopted by the end of November. It is very complex and we don't have all the answers yet.

- Mr. Sheehy referred to the new Library building for Arklow Town, the improvements in the water situation in recent years and the playground/skateboard facilities provided. He informed the Members of his frustration with the delays in the provision of the Arklow Sewerage Treatment Plant. He also referred to a number of areas needing attention such as housing, unemployment and the number of vacant buildings in the Arklow area. There is a big body of work to be done and he acknowledged the experience of the staff appointed to the AMD – Linda McDonald District Administrator and Jack Kelly Senior Executive Engineer. Mr. Sheehy concluded by saying that there would be a lot of challenges and changes over the coming months and that he would support the elected Members as best he could.

6. Any Other Business

The Cathaoirleach Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald welcomed Linda McDonald and Jack Kelly to Arklow Municipal District.

Water Mains Rehabilitation Works for Arklow – A discussion took place in relation to the proposed rehabilitation of water mains in Arklow and Cllr. Fitzgerald advised that he met with the Project Team for these works and that he had been advised that only trial holes would take place in June. He acknowledged that the work was badly needed to be done in the town and welcomed the works. However, they need to be done in a manner that doesn't impact on trade. It was also noted that the Department wanted the works done while the schools were closed during the summer months. It was noted that similar works have taken place in Laragh / Glendalough which have worked out well.

The Members requested that signage advising motorists to divert would not be erected and agreed that signs should be on local roads where the works are being carried out. Contact numbers for the project team will be circulated to the Members. The Members expressed their concern at the lack of communication from the Council while the last works were going on.

Following a lengthy discussion on the issue it was agreed that the District Administrator would arrange a meeting with the representatives from the Traders and the Councillors at which the Project Team would give a presentation and answer any questions. It was also agreed to give a further update at the next Municipal District Meeting.

Housing – Members expressed their concern that the Housing function is to be administrated centrally. Vulnerable people will now have to travel to Wicklow for assistance and asked why Bray MD was allowed to retain its housing function. Bryan Doyle advised that it was not possible for one staff member to advise people on the vast range of housing options available. There is a much bigger housing stock in the Bray area and different type problems there. He stated that housing applications can still be accepted in Arklow and that Housing Repairs will also remain local. The Cathaoirleach asked if arrangements could be put in place to have a staff member from WCC in Arklow one day each week to meet people as the local knowledge was needed. Bryan Doyle reminded the Members that AMD is made up of a number of areas not just Arklow Town. The Members asked if the tenants are to be informed of the changes. It was noted that AMD would have the remainder of the Area and Town Council budget for rest of the 2014.

Cllr. Kennedy asked for a list of all vacant social houses in the AMD area, Linda McDonald agreed to get this information from the Housing Section of WCC and to circulate it to all Members.

Budgets / Property Tax – The Chief Executive Officer was asked if he knew the number of houses in the Municipal District which would be liable for property tax. Mr. Sheehy explained that if all the property tax due in County Wicklow was collected it would be less than the grant received last year from the Department. The Minister has stated that Local Authorities will be allocated 80% of the tax collected however there may be some level of top up available for the first year. The Dublin Authorities will benefit from this. Non-discretionary funding would be taken into account first. After this exercise last year 13% of funding was left for discretionary expenditure. A programme will be prepared for each Municipal District and it will be up to the Members of each area to forward reasons why there area should get extra funding.

When information comes to hand on the whole budget process it will be circulated to the Members. By the time the Members have to make that decision we will have that information along with the value of property tax payable in County Wicklow. He also pointed out that a number of functions such as HEGs are now being administered centrally, the objective is to drive down the cost, which will result in less of a burden on the tax payer. It was noted that Payroll services to Local Authority employees will be provided by Laois County Council in the coming months.

Bryan Doyle advised members that one stream of funding for next year would be income from paid parking. Cllr. Bourke asked if this item could be put on an Agenda for discussion.

Library Staff – Cllr. Bourke stated that he hoped the new Library would benefit in the recent staffing restructure and that the opening hours would be increased. Bryan Doyle referred to recent retirements of staff and that there would be no replacements. It was envisaged that a separate work force plan would be prepared for the Library. This would also be a financial matter. Eddie Sheehy stated that a large amount of money has been committed to the new Library in Arklow and hopefully there would be more staff. WCC are anxious to improve the Library service in Arklow which will require an increase in staff numbers.

Irish Water – Members expressed their concerns in relation to contact details for Irish Water and asked if this item could be put on the Agenda for the next meeting. The Members also requested an update from Irish Water on the status of the Arklow Sewerage Treatment Plant. The Members were informed that the Tender will be awarded shortly for the South Green Harbour Road Works

This concluded the business of the Meeting

Minutes confirmed at Meeting held on Wednesday 9th July 2014.

Signed: Pat Fitzgerald

Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, Cathaoirleah of Arklow Municipal District

Signed Linda McDonald

Linda McDonald, District Administrator