

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/SC/

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on Monday 9 November at 6pm in the Mourne Room, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

In the Chair: Councillor N Bailie

In attendance:

(Councillors)

Councillor S Burns	Councillor C Casey
Councillor G Craig	Councillor D Curran
Councillor C Enright	Councillor G Hanna
Councillor T Hearty	Councillor D Hyland
Councillor D McAteer	Councillor K McAteer
Councillor C McGrath	Councillor H McKee
Councillor R Mulgrew	Councillor M Murnin
Councillor B Ó'Muirí	Councillor H Reilly
Councillor M Ruane	Councillor JJ Tinnelly
Councillor W Walker	

(Officials)

Mr E Curtis, Deputy Chief Executive
Mrs E McParland, Democratic Services Manager
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Officer
Mrs C Taylor, Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance: Mr R Ballentine, Network Operations Manager, NIE
Ms C Kelly, NIE

SC/16/2015

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Andrews, Burgess, Brown, P Clarke, W Clarke, Fitzpatrick, Harte, Harvey, Loughran, Stokes and Taylor. Apologies were also received from the Chief Executive, Liam Hannaway.

The Chairperson extended condolences to the family of Mr Hannaway following a recent bereavement.

The Chairperson advised she had visited an elderly woman who had been the victim of a horrendous attack in her home in Downpatrick and presented her with a bunch of flowers on behalf of the Council and the District.

SC/17/2015

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/18/2015

PRESENTATION BY NI ELECTRICITY

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Rodney Ballentine and Ms Christine Kelly from NIE and invited them to make their presentation.

Mr Ballentine thanked the Chairperson for the opportunity to present to the Council. He stated there had been some confusion in recent times as the organisation has been rebranded to NIE Networks with responsibility for looking after the physical assets of the organisation such as pylons and powerlines. (Copy of the presentation is appended to these minutes).

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their presentation and invited questions from the Members.

Members asked the following questions:

- The South East of Northern Ireland was not getting enough electricity supplied for large scale factories, were there any plans to upgrade in this area?
- Was the meter replacement scheme anything to do with smart meters?
- How active was the interconnector with Scotland?
- How far has the work progressed on the interconnector with the South of Ireland?
- Rural diversification is suffering due to the lack of capacity on the grid. With the South East of Northern Ireland having the best renewable energy resources, why are farmers being forced to use diesel generators instead of being able to connect to the electricity supply?
- The electricity network has not been well maintained over the years and people in the rural areas were having to pay colossal amounts of money to get connected, how are people supposed to be able to afford this?
- Were NIE working with any other bodies to try to assist with the grid infrastructure problems?
- Due to the high costs of connection, would NI Electricity Networks consider a phased payment system?
- Was the connection provided to the customer on the cheapest quote?
- Which other providers could provide a quote for a connection?
- As there was a deficit of 3 phase connections in the rural areas, which small businesses would benefit from, would NI Electricity Networks consider voluntarily identifying the areas which would benefit from transformers?
- Had the general public been informed of the Utility Regulators decision to charge domestic customers 100% for a connection instead of 40%?
- Would NI Networks consider it advantageous to voluntarily identify the areas in which transformers would be required?
- Could the customer pay for a connection on a phased basis?
- What happened if a customer did not pay their electricity bill?
- Could representatives from NI Networks come out on site prior to a planning application being submitted to provide the customer with an idea of cost?
- Had there been a reduction in fossil fuels which supplied the big generators in Belfast?

- What were the reasons for Northern Ireland having so much overhead cable?
- Did NI Networks have any plans for other metering systems in the built up areas where there was congestion of meters?
- Were there any opportunities to retro-fit smart meters?

Mr Ballantine, Networks Operations Manager, NI Electricity Networks, responded to queries as follows:

- There was a sub-station in Ballynahinch and one in Newry and if there was potential for large scale industry to come into the District, the increase in demand would require building the infrastructure.
- Smart meters are separate from the meter replacement scheme. There currently were no plans to have smart meter trails within Northern Ireland.
- The interconnector with Scotland was currently working at ½ capacity due to a fault in the line which maybe repaired in 2016/17.
- The North/South interconnector was required urgently however there were significant challenges and the underground option would cost 5 times more which NIE customers may have to pay for.
- NIE Networks were happy to speak with any farmer or organisation who would like to improve, increase or expand their business, however, the issue was money and where would this money be found.
- Hundreds of millions of pounds were spent maintaining the Network however in the rural areas the need has increased significantly compared to 20-30 years ago and this was now causing difficulties for customers in the rural areas to get connected.
- NIE were working with contractors and technical providers on a connection pilot in order to get more generation onto the District network, however NIE Network have a responsibility to maintain and operate the network safely.
- The connection was provided to the customer by the least cost solution.
- If the Planning department within NI Electricity Networks would identify areas which would benefit from 3 phase transformers.
- Historically 3 phase power had not been required in the rural areas of Northern Ireland, although single phase could be upgraded to 3 phase power.
- The general public had been notified of the Utility Regulators decision for domestic customer to pay 100% rather than 60% for a connection.
- NI Electricity Networks were a commercial organisation and had to treat all customers the same.
- Domestic customers could not be cut off for non-payment.
- The Utility Regulator had said there would be competition regarding new connections coming to Northern Ireland in 2016. Quotes could also be obtained from other suitably qualified organisations.
- An onsite assessment of customer applications was undertaken by NI Networks for a number of jobs, but for simple jobs, desk top quotations were provided using geographical systems, maps and knowledge of infrastructure. If the way-leaves which had been initially assumed by NI Networks could not be achieved, the costs could be significantly increased.
- There were existing coal fired power stations in the East and North of Northern Ireland which fed into the transmission network. Other feeds went into rural lines which had been built in the 1960s based on load. The capacity had been used

up in some areas and therefore the distribution was not able to reach the East of Northern Ireland. Coal fired thermal plants had the generation feeding out into the network across Northern Ireland but there were capacity problems.

- If the network had little or no capacity, NI Electricity Networks would contact the customer to inform them the connection may cost more money.
- Northern Ireland had 3.5 times the overhead cables of Great Britain, the main reason for which, being the large number of single dwellings in Northern Ireland.
- If a fault occurred, it was easier and quicker to locate in overhead cables, than if they were underground. Also, to put the cables under-ground, could be up to 5 times more expensive.
- Smart metering pilots had been completed, but the opinion of the Utility Regulator was that Northern Ireland was too small to have its own smart metering pilot. Findings from Great Britain and southern Ireland would be used to talk to the Utility Regulator regarding Northern Ireland.
- Some meters could be retro-fitted and a small number of pilots had been done.

Mr Ballantine, Networks Operations Manager, NI Electricity Networks, undertook to come back to Members with answers to the following questions:

- Was the transformer sited at the Mourne Presbyterian Church, Kilkeel, going to be moved?
- Why had south Armagh and south Down not had a grid upgrade, when areas such as Tyrone, Derry and south Antrim had recently been upgraded?
- Were there any opportunities to retro-fit meters in the District?

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their presentation.

Councillor McGrath asked officers to identify those businesses within the District that may require large scale electricity supply.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.10pm

For adoption at Meeting of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to be held on Monday 7 December 2015.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive