

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

**Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 25 January 2021 at 6.00pm via
Microsoft Teams**

In the Chair: Councillor L Devlin

In attendance:

(Councillors)

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|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Councillor T Andrews | Councillor P Brown |
| Councillor R Burgess | Councillor P Byrne |
| Councillor C Casey | Councillor W Clarke |
| Councillor D Curran | Councillor A Finnegan |
| Councillor M Gibbons | Councillor O Hanlon |
| Councillor G Hanna | Councillor V Harte |
| Councillor R Howell | Councillor M Larkin |
| Councillor A Lewis | Councillor O Magennis |
| Councillor D McAteer | Councillor H McKee |
| Councillor K McKeivitt | Councillor A McMurray |
| Councillor D Murphy | Councillor G O'Hare |
| Councillor B Ó Muirí | Councillor K Owen |
| Councillor H Reilly | Councillor M Ruane |
| Councillor M Savage | Councillor G Stokes |
| Councillor D Taylor | Councillor J Tinnelly |
| Councillor W Walker | |

(Officials)

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr C Mallon, Director of Enterprise Regeneration and
Tourism
Mr J McBride, Director of Neighbourhood Services (Acting)
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Ms L O'Hare, Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance:

NI Water

Mr R Larkin, Finance & Regulation Director
Dr S Blockwell Head of Investment Management

Firmus Energy

Mr M Scott, Managing Director
Mr P Stanfield, Director of Sales, Marketing & Customer
Operations

SC/001/2021

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors McEvoy and Trainor.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr R Larkin and Dr S Blockwell from NI Water to the meeting, outlining the procedure for the evening advising that once NI Water had presented the report, there would be an opportunity for Members to ask any questions related to the report. Members had already received a response to any questions raised in advance of the meeting and thanked Democratic Services for facilitating this.

SC/002/2021 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/003/2021 PRESENTATION FROM NI WATER

Mr R Larkin thanked Members for the opportunity to present the report and introduced his colleagues, Dr S Blockwell, he then proceeded to make his presentation. (copy appended to these minutes).

Following the presentation there was a question and answer session and the following points were raised:

- Members took the opportunity to thank the staff in NI Water especially on the switchboard for the efficient work and communication updates they provided and welcomed the PC21 Business Plan.
- Downpatrick Road, Killyleagh – There was a reoccurring smell in that area possibly from vents and filters needed replaced.
- Could an update be provided on whether Saintfield was one of the other towns to be included as mentioned in the PC21 report, as there had been ongoing problems especially in the Old Grand Jury Road area.
- Was there a moratorium still in place with regards to planning applications in the Saintfield area and where did the area appear on the list of priorities?
- 28 million investment to water treatment works to Greenbank – what element of this related to the capacity issues, especially in the Meadow, Armagh Road Newry and would this investment meet the chronic social and private housing need in Newry? What contribution was sought from developers in addressing issues?
- There had been a decade of underfunding and in the current situation with Covid this was going to have further serious impact especially in the Newcastle area which recently had another incident of major flooding.
- Members passed on thanks for recent effort and quick response with regards to the Downpatrick factory which recently opened and produced jobs in the local area.
- Would small towns be reviewed in the business plans to meet increasing demands?
- There was a big increase in water being used in the Cranfield area with existing homes and caravan resulting in a loss of pressure?
- What was the process for farmers to report problems with water meters?
- A serious amount of investment was required in the infrastructure to bring it up to standard to meet capacity.

The delegation responded to the queries as follows:

- Councillors play a key role and urged Parties to speak to their party leaders and Ministers to back their areas for investment to ensure funding could be accessed to start addressing some of the under investment in NI.
- Filter systems in Killyleagh were classed as basic maintenance which was part of the Capital Programme. If funding for this was cut basic maintenance could be completed to the standard required.
- NI Water as a Statutory Consultee cannot produce moratoriums, they provide evidence based responses, if there wasn't sufficient capacity on the network then they would look for solutions which become part of the business plan subject to funding and consultation with other agencies.
- Old Grand Jury Road – a lot of investigation had been carried out, issues had been addressed and repaired – no further complaints had been received since.
- Agreed to bring back an update and provide clarity with regards to Saintfield and Darragh Cross.
- Any new development would add additional capacity to the network, infrastructure should be in place in advance, however if further investment was not be secured this would have an impact. There was a new drainage model being implemented in the Greenbank area, however there were more and more issues being identified which would need addressed and further significant investment had been made to address these issues to bring it through to the next stage. If developers can look at storm water separation this allows NI Water to bring more of the foul water to treatment without spilling.

Councillor Owen left the meeting at this point - 18.55pm

- Would revert back to Members with further detail on the Killeavy Road, The Meadow Newry and Newcastle areas.

Councillor Walker left the meeting at this point - 19.01pm

- Small towns would be reviewed to try and get ahead of investment needed and capacity required depending on priorities.

Councillor Finnegan left the meeting at this point – 19.08pm

- With regard to caravan parks, NI Water operate a pressurised system and in areas where there was high demand puts significant pressure on the end of the line, the team work extremely hard when this happens to ensure clean water is still available.
- Due to Covid, NI Water's income dropped significantly however, a package was put in place by the Finance Minister and NI water use this money carefully.

Mr Larkin thanked members for their support and the opportunity to meet with Council taking note of additional areas raised at the meeting with responses to follow.

Councillor McKevitt left the meeting at this point - 19.25pm

SC/004/2021 PRESENTATION FROM FIRMUS ENERGY

The Chairperson welcomed Mr M Scott and Mr P Stanfield to the meeting and invited them to deliver a presentation. (copy appended to these minutes).

Mr Scott presented an over view of Firmus Energy and their plans for the Newry Mourne and Down area.

Councillor Casey left the meeting at this point – 19.39pm

Following the presentation there was a question and answer session and the following points were raised:

- What was the possibility of extending gas to those areas that had previously been excluded?
- What was the long term goals of Firmus Energy and timescale with regards to greener energy?

The delegation responded to the queries as follows:

- Firmus Energy were constantly extending the areas they could reach and would look at all opportunities. If a project was viable they would proceed, if certain areas were not viable they would be honest and explain the reasons for this.
- Currently looking at conversion programme to turn oil into gas, working with the utility register on how to get blended gas into the system. In the next 2 years the company envisage they would be able to reproduce Biomethane into the system and 7-10 years hopefully Hydrogen using the existing networks and meters.

Representatives from Firmus Energy thanked members for the opportunity to meet with Council.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 19.54pm.

For adoption at Meeting of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to be held on Monday 1st March 2021.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive