

NEWRY MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on Friday 18 March 2022 at 4.00pm in Downshire Chamber and via Microsoft Teams

Chairperson: Councillor C Mason

**In attendance
via Teams:**

Councillor P Byrne	Councillor C Casey
Councillor W Clarke	Councillor D Curran
Councillor L Devlin	Councillor C Enright
Councillor A Finnegan	Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor V Harte	Councillor R Howell
Councillor M Larkin	Councillor A Lewis
Councillor O Magennis	Councillor G Malone
Councillor D McAteer	Councillor L McEvoy
Councillor H McKee	Councillor A McMurray
Councillor D Murphy	Councillor G Sharvin
Councillor D Taylor	

**Officials in attendance
via Teams:** Mr M Lipsett, Director, Active & Healthy Communities
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting)
Ms P McKeever, Democratic Services Officer

SC/004/2022: APOLOGIES / CHAIRPERSONS REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Andrews, Brown, Owen and Savage.

The Chairperson extended her condolences to Councillor W Clarke on the recent sad passing of his mother Margaret, saying she had been a lifelong resident of Widow's Row, Newcastle and would be greatly missed by her family and community. Councillor McAteer offered his condolences on behalf of SDLP to Councillor Clarke.

The Chairperson congratulated all involved in the very successful St Patrick's Day events held in Newry and Downpatrick and passed her thanks on to Conor Mallon, Andy Patterson and Eoin McCartan and their teams for their hard work in organising both events.

SC/005/2022: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/006/2022: NOTICE OF MOTION

The following Notice of Motion was received from Councillor Ó Muirí

"This Council recognises with deep concern the cost of living crisis that is impacting hundreds of thousands of families across our society, and the rise in home energy and electricity costs which has placed a severe burden on already struggling households and businesses across our Council area. The collapse of the Executive caused by the resignation of DUP First Minister Paul Givan is preventing a budget, or the allocation of £300m available from Treasury from being agreed and is hampering Ministers from using their full spending power to give people relief who rely and depend upon it.

This Council calls for the immediate restoration of the Executive in order to allocate and agree spending to support workers and families.

Furthermore this Council calls upon the Westminster Government to take action, where local Ministers cannot, by scrapping VAT on domestic energy bills and cutting duty on home heating oil, petrol and diesel, for the duration of the energy crisis; introducing a windfall tax on energy generators and redirect money towards supporting families; reverse the planned increase in National Insurance Contributions; and halt the planned change in red diesel entitlement".

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Hanlon

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Ó Muirí spoke of the extreme difficulties being experienced by households across the district as a result of soaring energy prices and the cost of living skyrocketing, all of this having been exacerbated by the war in Ukraine.

Councillor Ó Muirí acknowledged the withdrawal of Paul Givan as First Minister which resulted in the collapse of the Executive may, at the time, in view of the protocol issue, been considered the best option by the DUP, however, he said, although he accepted the protocol question was critically important to Unionism, the harsh reality was that the rise in diesel, petrol, heating oil, soaring energy costs, planned increase in National Insurance Contributions and the red diesel issue were having a detrimental effect to everyone, regardless of political persuasion and it was a grossly unfair situation and smothering people right now.

Councillor Ó Muirí said the quickest way to tackle the cost of living crisis was to restore the Executive and he asked that all parties unite in calling on the DUP to reinstate the First Minister as a matter of urgency.

Councillor Hanlon seconded the proposal saying it was important all parties stand together on this issue. She reiterated the points made by Councillor Ó Muirí and said whilst she recognised the calls made by the SDLP for emergency legislation to be put in place, she said the public needed the restoration of the Executive with its full spending and decision powers.

Councillor McAteer expressed support for the Motion on behalf of the SDLP and asked if an amendment could be added to the last paragraph to read:
'and calls on the Department of Communities to make an immediate payment of £200

energy support payment to all households who have not yet received support and furthermore calls on all parties to support Mark H Durkan's Private Members Bill which, in the absence of a restored Executive, will allow the underspend of £300m to be dispersed immediately to those in further need of direct financial support.'

Additionally, Councillor McAteer said the wording of the Motion did not include gas increases and asked what percentage the energy duty cuts would be.

Councillor Ó Muirí said he would only accept Councillor McAteer's amendment relating to the support of Mark H Durkan's Private Members Bill and said it was the gift of the Executive, not Department for Communities to give an energy support payment and it was not up to Sinn Féin to decide the percentage of the energy duty cuts.

Councillor McAteer said he would prefer to have the full wording of the amendment included and asked for a vote to be taken.

Councillor Taylor said whilst he fully recognised there were genuine concerns regarding the protocol, the cost of living crisis was impacting everyone particularly those on low incomes and he said the people of N. Ireland needed a fully functional Executive to make the decisions required to alleviate the crisis.

Councillor McMurray expressed support for the Motion on behalf of the Alliance Party and said urgent action was needed from both the UK Government and the N. Ireland Assembly to protect the most vulnerable in our society and to prevent lasting social and economic damage.

Councillor McMurray asked if two additions could be added to the Motion to include: to ask that the Assembly roll out a child payment scheme and levy a windfall tax on energy firms that had made substantial profits during the post Covid 19 recovery period.

Councillor Ó Muirí said he would be content to include the roll out of a child payment scheme and to add the word 'profitable' before energy generators in the Motion.

Councillor O'Hanlon, in referring to Councillor McAteer's earlier comments regarding the immediate payment of £200 by Department of Communities to deserving households, said whilst she would fully support such a pay out, it would not be possible without the Executive in place and said it would be pointless to take to a vote on this issue.

Councillor Mason asked Councillor McAteer to clarify his amendment to the Motion. Councillor McAteer said it was around the movement of cash instead of the Executive and he said he understood this could be done. Councillor Byrne seconded the proposal.

Councillor Hanlon read out the wording of a motion that had been passed in Belfast City Council and asked if Councillor McAteer was content with the same wording, both she and Councillor Ó Muirí would be happy to amend the Motion accordingly.

Councillor McAteer said he was content with the same wording as that which had gone through Belfast.

Councillor Enright asked that the wording of 'generators' be amended to 'companies' with regard to energy suppliers.

AGREED:

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor McEvoy seconded by Councillor Murphy that this Council recognises with deep concern the cost of living crisis that is impacting hundreds of thousands of families across our society, and the rise in home energy, electricity and gas costs which has placed a severe burden on already struggling households and businesses across our Council area.

The collapse of the Executive caused by the resignation of DUP First Minister Paul Givan is preventing a budget, or the allocation of £300m available from Treasury from being agreed and is hampering Ministers from using their full spending power to give people relief who rely and depend upon it.

This Council calls for the immediate restoration of the Executive in order to allocate and agree spending to support workers and families, including the roll out of a Child Payment Scheme.

Furthermore this Council calls upon the Westminster Government to take action, where local Ministers cannot, by scrapping VAT on domestic energy bills and cutting duty on home heating oil, petrol and diesel, for the duration of the energy crisis; introducing a windfall tax on profitable energy companies and redirect money towards supporting families; reverse the planned increase in National Insurance Contributions; and halt the planned change in red diesel entitlement.

Council also to ask as part of allocating funding this could include considering an extension of the £200 home energy scheme to those most at need and also that without an executive the potential of emergency legislation could be looked at to allocate funding.

The meeting concluded at 17:42.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 04 April 2022.

Signed: Councillor C Mason

Signed: Mrs M Ward