

**Minutes of Special online meeting of Leitrim County Council held on Monday 25th May
2020 via Zoom online**

Members Present: Councillor Sean McGowan
Councillor Brendan Barry
Councillor Mary Bohan
Councillor Frank Dolan
Councillor Caillian Ellis
Councillor Pdraig Fallon
Councillor Paddy Farrell
Councillor Des Guckian
Councillor Felim Gurn
Councillor Sean McDermott
Councillor Finola Armstrong McGuire
Councillor Paddy O'Rourke
Councillor Ita Reynolds Flynn
Councillor Enda Stenson
Councillor Justin Warnock

Councillor Enda McGloin (Cathaoirleach) presiding

Apologies: Councillor Gerry Dolan
Councillor Thomas Mulligan

Officials Present: Lar Power, Chief Executive
Joseph Gilhooly, Director of Services, Economic Development,
Planning and Infrastructural Services
Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance, Finance, Water, Environment,
Climate Action and Cultural Services
Mary Quinn, Director of Services, Housing, Corporate Services,
Community and Cultural Services
Kieran Brett, Meetings Administrator
Kathleen Ellis, Assistant Staff Officer

At the outset of the meeting Cllr Enda McGloin, Cathaoirleach welcomed the Oireachtas Members, Members of Leitrim County Council, Executive and the Media to the online meeting.

MM.69.20 To receive update from Mr Lar Power, Chief Executive in relation to the current situation regarding the COVID 19 National Emergency.

Mr. Lar Power, Chief Executive presented an update to the Members on the current situation regarding the COVID-19 National Emergency and the measures introduced by Leitrim County Council in response to the National Emergency.

Mr. Power outlined that the restart grant announced recently is aimed at helping micro and small businesses with the costs associated with reopening and reemploying workers

following COVID-19 closures.

Eligible businesses who have stayed open throughout the crisis, as well as those who are reopening under Phase 1 (from 18 May) and Phase 2 (8 June) of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, are encouraged to apply now for the Restart Grant. These applications will be prioritized for payment.

To avail of the Restart Grant, applicants must be a commercial business paying Commercial Rates and:

- have an annual turnover of less than €5m and employ between 1 to 50 people;
- have suffered a projected 25%+ loss in turnover to end June 2020;
- commit to remaining open or to reopen if it was closed;
- declare the intention to retain employees that are on the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme and re-employ staff on the Pandemic Unemployment Payment as business recovers.

The grant will be equivalent to the rates bill of the business in 2019, or a minimum payment of €2,000, whichever is the higher, and will be subject to a maximum payment of €10,000.

Applications for the restart grant can be made online directly. To date there are 62 applications completed and 50 applications in progress.

Mr. Power said the Government really need to assist commercial businesses as this is beyond the capacity of any one local authority and their demise will have a negative impact on the economy. Mr. Power asked Deputy Marian Harkin, Deputy Frank Feighan, Deputy Marc McSharry and Deputy Martin Kenny to highlight the importance that Government have in leading the way on assisting ratepayers.

Cathaoirleach, Councillor Enda McGloin thanked Mr Lar Power for his presentation and invited any questions/comments from the Members.

The Members welcomed and thanked Deputy Marian Harkin, Deputy Frank Feighan, Deputy Marc McSharry and Deputy Martin Kenny for attending the Special meeting of Leitrim County Council.

The following items were raised by the Members of Leitrim County Council:

- Rates waiver period to be extended and the Council to be reimbursed for loss of commercial rates income
- The building of one-off rural houses in Leitrim is significant issue. Neighbouring counties have similar soil condition but don't similar planning issues as in Leitrim
- A new reconstruction grant should to be made available to facilitate reconstruction the large number of old houses that are present in counties such as Leitrim.
- People are unable to purchase Local Authority houses as an anomaly exists in the current scheme

- All afforestation, including planting and felling, to come under Planning Laws .
- All rural issues need to be included in Government Plan
- Concerns about the COVID-19 2 metre rule on social distancing in local and rural schools, on school transport, staff rooms in schools where space may be limited in existing school buildings
- Town regeneration
- Banks need to provide greater help to businesses affected by the current crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic
- The Business Restart Grants are welcomed
- Opportunity now to extend an invitation to people to relocate to the West
- Tourism promotion
- Infrastructure improvements needed on the N4, a ring road or by-pass for Carrick-on-Shannon is needed as Carrick-on-Shannon is choked with traffic. A new design should be considered.
- Western Railway Corridor needs to be delivered
- SLNCR Greenway from Sligo to Fermanagh urgently needs to be delivered.
- Grant for retrofitting of existing houses is needed. Very little outlay required and would be very viable for families
- Further enhancement of broadband which is very problematic for a number of people. Improved Broadband would help people to work from home and cut down travel. Fibre Optic Broadband to be delivered to every house
- Opinions of the residents of Summerhill in relation to the public consultation on the Carrick-on-Shannon Public Realm Works was ignored.
- The Local Authority needs to apply for a €20 million overdraft and more Government Funding is required
- Devise a National Plan which promotes more balanced development and investment across all parts of Ireland.
- Young drivers unable to get Driving licences
- Reform to the rip off insurance premiums
- Land reclamation scheme for County Leitrim that would help farmers to increase production thereby improving income and profits
- Time to look after young people in the county
- Continuance of Town and Villages Schemes
- Tribute was paid to Minister Michael Ring for funding of the Local Improvement Scheme and it is hoped funding for these projects would come in future from the Department of Transportation.
- A number of water schemes in the County need funding from Irish Water
- Exiting timelines on the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) need to be extended to end of year.
- More needs to be done regarding the funding of North West Stop.
- Increased funding needed from National Government for services.
- Tributes to the great work of frontline staff during the current pandemic
- Leitrim County Council to have more regular meetings with Oireachtas members
- The facilitation of pre planning meetings on the site of proposed development. By having the Planner, Architect and applicant onsite everyone should have a clearer understanding of outcome each person wants to achieve at the end of the meeting.

This could help streamline planning applications and make the process less costly on the applicant.

- AOS contracts should be extended to 2 years until next CAP formed.
- Cervical Screening has not been happening due to COVID-19. This service needs to be restored
- Capacity in private hospitals not being used to work on long waiting lists
- Designated Special Status for County Leitrim under the 2020 - 2040 National Planning Framework. Leitrim is Ireland's most rural county and our uniqueness as a sparsely populated county made up of small villages, rural communities and small farms is what defines us as a people
- A structured Tax Incentive scheme to include the redevelopment of commercial buildings with living accommodation (overhead) in our towns and villages. This would encourage owners and potential developers to invest in our towns and villages. It has the potential to be cost neutral in the long run and provide the basis for town and village renewal within our County
- Changing 2 metre rule to 1 metre for social distancing which might provide assistance for businesses opening up again and schools preparing for the next the school term in September

Deputy Marian Harkin, Deputy Frank Feighan, Deputy Marc McSharry and Deputy Martin Kenny thanked the elected members for giving them the opportunity to join the meeting and welcomed the prospect of regular meetings with the members and where members questions can feed into Government Policies.

Deputy Marian Harkin responded to the above items as follows;

- With reference to overdraft of €20 million, she would like to get further details in this regard.
- Need to work on bill to amend the provisions of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977 to provide for the granting of discharge licences by a water services authority for the development of single houses in Leitrim
- Recognised the importance of reconstruction and retrofitting of buildings in terms of energy.
- Acknowledged the need to enhance Broadband
- Fair Share to regions simply has to be done
- Great hope for Tourism and SLNCR greenway
- CAP very important – whole area of convergence needs to be looked at
- Importance of Non Covid-19 Health care
- Promote the Agri Forestry part of enterprises
- Importance of EU Funding through the North Western Regional Assembly

Deputy Frank Feighan responded to the above as follows

- Paid tribute to the CEO and Staff of Leitrim County Council as it has been a difficult year to date, from flooding through to COVID 19
- Welcomed the Business Restart Grant
- Noted the importance of one-off housing in Leitrim
- Funding for the N4 is badly needed and has to be a priority – 2011 was a missed opportunity for Leitrim County Council as they did not get funding at that time.
- Planning Permission for Forestry necessary
- Acknowledged that Banks need to help businesses affected by the current pandemic
- Huge potential for Greenway from Enniskillen to Sligo
- North West and the West need further development
- Acknowledged the advice from Chief Medical Officer, from the Department of Health in relation to the 2 metre rule on physical social distancing in light of COVID 19. Over the next few weeks further discussions will take place in bringing down the 2 metre rule to 1 metre.

Deputy Marc McSharry responded to the above as follows

- Leitrim County Council having to borrow is not acceptable. Full replenishment of financial resources will have to be picked up by the Government in light of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Welcomed the restart grant but insisted that more will be needed for tourism and agricultural businesses
- SLNCR Greenway has such a potential for up to 4 counties
- Leitrim has done more than its fair share in relation to forestry
- Local Government (Water Pollution) (Amendment) Bill 2018 – This needs to be dealt with as soon as possible
- Road Infrastructure has being neglected namely Lennox Bridge between Donegal and Leitrim and also the N4
- Enhancement of Broadband is needed
- Young Drivers need their driving licences – could easily be done as an online test
- Cost of Insurance needs to be looked at
- Agricultural Schemes - timelines should be extended
- Cervical Screening – service should be restored
- Keep private hospitals in public system
- Hoped new Government to be in place by middle of June

Deputy Martin Kenny responded to the above as follows

- Welcomed Restart Grant – More funding needed
- Rates break needed – lost finances should be recouped back from Government
- Grant should be put in place for older houses – careful consideration has also to be taken into account for people who want to build more modern houses for themselves
- Bill on Planning Permission for Forestry coming forward

- Acknowledged 2 metre rule on physical social distancing due to COVID-19 is going to be difficult for schools and businesses to adhere to
- 70 to 80% businesses in Carrick-on-Shannon would welcome a ring road
- Development of SLNCR Greenway needs to be developed as soon as possible as it is important for Tourism
- Have proper broadband in place. A scheme needs to be in place that deals with all issues
- Local Government (Water Pollution) (Amendment) Bill 2018 – Much discussion has taken place with the Department on this
- Building of social housing necessary
- Drainage of lands – grants need to be made available
- LIS, CLAR, Towns & Villages need additional funding
- Irish Water - Freeze on funding at the moment
- TAMS/GLAS/AOS schemes – Need to be reviewed
- Beds in private hospitals need to be utilised to deal with waiting lists
- Fortunate in Leitrim to have a small number of deaths due to COVID-19
- Important to put investment in place to ensure more people can live and work in Leitrim and make sure adequate services are available for these people.

Mr. Lar Power, Chief Executive thanked Deputy Marian Harkin, Deputy Frank Feighan, Deputy Marc McSharry and Deputy Martin Kenny and the Elected Members for all the issues raised and acknowledged the heartfelt issues highlighted by the Members in County Leitrim and welcomed any action the Oireachtas Members can do in regard to these issues. Mr. Power welcomed the proposal of having quarterly meetings with Oireachtas Members going forward for the benefit of Leitrim. Mr. Power advised that fiscally this county is very prudent and if the funds due are received, Leitrim County Council will not be borrowing. Mr. Power outlined Leitrim County Council have to provide local match funding of €26m which must be raised to deliver on the 6 year Strategic Capital Investment programme to enable economic development.

Mr. Power said he would like to see the issue of Planning Permission for forestry addressed by Government.

Mr. Power said the N4 is a high priority and welcomed any help from Oireachtas Members in this regard.

Mr. Power outlined the SLNCR Greenway from Sligo to Enniskillen is ready for development once funding is available.

Mr. Power advised that percolation tests that currently comply with the T value will get Planning Permission and if they fail they will not get planning Permission. He acknowledged that zero discharge is a huge issue and having a major impact on this county and would like to see this issue addressed and he outlined Leitrim County Council have to implement the law.

Councillor Enda McGloin, Cathaoirleach, wished Deputy Marian Harkin, Deputy Frank Feighan, Deputy Marc McSharry and Deputy Martin Kenny well in new Government

formation discussions. He acknowledged the wide range of issues facing the new Government and hoped the 4 Deputies present are part of the new Government formation. Councillor Enda McGloin, Cathaoirleach thanked the Members for inputting their views and opinions, and also thanked Mr Lar Power, Chief Executive, the Management Team, Staff and Press for their participation in the meeting.

Signed: **Cllr Mary Bohan**
 Cathaoirleach

Kieran Brett
Meetings Administrator

Dated: **Friday, 26th June 2020**