

MINUTES OF BALLINASLOE AREA COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT ÁRAS AN CHONTAE ON MONDAY 23RD NOVEMBER, 2009.

I Lathair

Baill: Cllr. P. Connaughton, Chairman,
Cllr. D. Connolly,
Cllr. M. Mullins,
Cllr. T. Broderick,
Cllr. T. Mannion.

Oifigigh: Mr. K. Kelly, Director of Services, Corporate & Cultural Affairs Unit,
Mr. E. Mulryan, Executive Engineer, Ballinasloe Electoral Area,
Ms. G. Healy, Staff Officer.

The Chairman welcomed those present stating that the Meeting was called in order to discuss the present flooding crisis in Ballinasloe.

A discussion took place and Mr. Kelly stated that the amount of rainfall during the previous week was unprecedented and has resulted in major flooding in Ballinasloe Town and hinterland. He outlined the situation as follows;

- Ballinasloe has not seen such a flooding crisis since 1924.
- The Ballinasloe Water Supply Scheme was contaminated on the previous Friday and therefore the Council put in place a “boil water notice” and this will be in place for some time.
- Production of quality water is not an issue at present, eventhough discolouration of the water is evident and the boil notice is still in place.
- Flushing out of the water supply scheme will be done as soon as possible
- At least 90 houses have been flooded in the Ballinasloe area and practically all of these houses have been evacuated. The vast majority of those evacuated are staying with family or friends or in hotels. Two families have been accommodated in St. Bridget’s Hospital, Ballinasloe and there is capacity there for more if required.
- Auctioneers in Ballinasloe have been asked to put together a list of houses which are available for rent in the area
- The Town Council assisted the E.S.B. to examine the area and the E.S.B. decided to cut the power to areas of Ballinasloe Town which were at risk, i.e. where there was over a foot of water, and power will not be restored until risk abates.

- The Council staff, the Army, the Civil Defence, the Gardaí, the Fire Service and the people of Ballinasloe are working together in order to deal with the crisis by providing sandbags where necessary and helping people to evacuate houses which have been flooded or are at risk of flooding.

In reply to a query by Cllr. Broderick, Mr. Kelly stated that the majority of the 90 plus houses which were evacuated due to flooding were privately owned. He also stated that pumping out of water is continuing and the Council is monitoring the situation continually and traffic management measures are also in place. He said that the next hurdle will be the clean-up operation which will be a significant task as a lot of goods will have to be disposed of.

Cllr. Mullins complimented the front-line staff, technical staff and officials of Ballinasloe Town Council and Galway County Council for their work in dealing with the flooding crisis over the past number of days and he stated that the Gardaí, the Army, the Civil Defence and the local community in conjunction with the Council staff are working together tirelessly and showed a great team spirit.

He hopes that the Government will make the Army available for the clean-up operation and that they will provide funding for those affected by the floods.

Cllr. Mannion stated that the pressure is off for the moment but the situation will have to be monitored. He said that the full impact on roads, bridges, houses etc. will not be known until the flooding subsides. He welcomed the fact that the M6 Motorway which is not yet completed was opened on a temporary basis in order to allow traffic through from the Dublin side of Ballinasloe to Galway.

Cllr. Connolly thanked the Council staff stating that the staff on the ground did magnificent work and he also welcomed the fact that the Council set up a help-line to take calls from the public and answer queries regarding impassable roads etc.

He said that an Assessment of Need will need to be carried out and that resources will be required from Central Government in order to help those affected to get back on their feet. He said that the figure of €50m has been mentioned as a relief fund from the Government for the whole country and this amount would be very thinly spread.

He also said that measures need to be put in place in order that the problems encountered over the past number of days where houses and businesses in Ballinasloe were flooded does not recur. He said that local knowledge should be sought in order to come up with a remedy, i.e. locals will know if certain pipes need to be replaced, they will know where drains need to be cleared etc. He also asked that local representatives be included in any deliberations which take place in this regard.

He said there is an urgent need for remediation works to small subsidiaries and streams of the River Suck and a plan of action needs to be put in place in order to do this.

He said that the Ballinasloe Electoral Area is the worst affected area by the flooding crisis and this needs to be acknowledged.

In reply to a query from Cllr. Mannion regarding staff shortage due to the embargo on staff recruitment, Mr. Kelly stated that no matter how many staff were available, they would have been stretched as so many houses were affected but he said that the local volunteers worked tirelessly in order to help their community in the crisis and there were significant numbers assisting from the Councils, Civil Defence and the Army.

In reply to a query from Cllr. Broderick regarding the cause of the flooding, Mr. Mulryan said that the amount of rainfall which fell during the week was unprecedented and given that the ground was already saturated due to prolonged rainfall during the year, the ground and rivers were not able to take the rain and this caused the flooding. He also said that the water level in the River Suck has been high for some years and this was a contributing factor.

Cllr. Broderick asked if there was any way that the risk of future flooding in Ballinasloe could be averted and Mr. Kelly replied that the Council will ask the O.P.W. to examine the Ballinasloe Area in order to assist the Council to come up with a solution to the flooding problem.

In reply to a point raised by Cllr. Connaughton regarding the division of the boundaries between the Ballinasloe Area and the Tuam Area, Mr. Mulryan stated that the engineering areas are being changed at present and the boundaries will be delineated as soon as possible.

In reply to a query from Cllr. Mannion regarding the maintenance of gullies, Mr. Mulryan stated that the winter maintenance programme runs from November to January and while gullies are being cleaned at present, it is very difficult to ensure that no gullies are blocked as leaves can build up overnight causing ongoing blockages.

Cllr. Mullins stated that despite all of the problems caused by the flooding, people are very thankful that there was no fatality as a result but he said that pressure needs to be put on the Government in order to ensure that adequate funding is provided to those affected by the flooding.

The Chairman concluded by stating that a plan needs to be put in place in order to ensure that the current flooding crisis is not repeated and he said that the community spirit shown over the past week is to be commended.

Chriochnaigh an Cruinniú Ansin.