

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Ceantar Bardasach Bhaile Locha Riach *Municipal District of LOUGHREA*

Minutes of Special Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held in Council Chamber, 1st March 2021 @ 11.00 am.

I LATHAIR:

Cathaoirleach

Cllr. M Maher

Baill:

Cllr's. G. Donohue, PJ Murphy,
J. Byrne, M. Kinane, I. Canning, J. McClearn,
P Hynes, G. Finnerty, P. Hynes, S. Curley

Oifigh:

Ms. E. Ruane, Director of Services;
Mr. J. Cullen, Director of Services
Mr. D. Mitchell, Senior Engineer;
Mr. G. Haugh, Senior Executive Engineer;
Mr. F. McGillicuddy, Area Engineer;
Mr. B. Sheehy, Assistant Engineer;
Ms. M. Finn, Administrative Officer;
Ms. E. Curran, Administrative officer
Mr. D. O'Loughlin, Assistant Engineer
Mr. A. Cunningham; Staff Officer;

The first item for discussion was the reallocation of €180,000 as part of the €1 million funding to each Municipal Authority – €200,000 in total had come to each Municipal District with €20,000 taken from each district to go into a separate fund, leaving a balance of €180,000. Cllr Maher asked the members for proposals as to how these monies could be used in the Loughrea Municipal District.

Cllr Byrne raised the issue of the under resourcing of technical staff in the municipal district area and to put it in context pointed to the Tuam Municipal District having the same level of technical support as the Loughrea Municipal district despite it being a smaller area with 7 councillors to the Loughrea municipal district's 10. He felt that this was a deficiency that needed to be addressed. He added that the level of outdoor is staff is inadequate and as a consequence it was hard to get work done on the ground. He felt it was an opportunity with this allocation to send a signal to the executive of GCC and to the department that the Loughrea MD is under resourced and that there is difficulty in getting necessary work done to meet the demands of their constituents.

Cllr Byrne made the following proposal for the €180,000 allocation which was seconded by Cllr Donohoe;

1. To allocate €60,000 for the purpose of employing an additional Technical member of staff, to the current MD Engineering structure, whose role will supplement and support current technical team, under the supervision of the Senior Executive Engineer for the MD.
2. The sum of €120,000 be allocated to provision of additional outdoor staff.

Cllr Kinane expressed her disappointment that there was not a discussion on the allocation of the €200,000 to the Municipal District and that this proposal was only introduced this morning and had not been placed on the agenda. While she welcomed the element of the proposal for the provision of outdoor staff, she felt that it was vital that all councillors voices needed to be heard. She added that the original proposal that was outlined to her was slightly different with an allocation of €60,000 toward a technician with the remaining €120,000 to be allocated to each of the 10 members for the purpose of NOM discretionary spending. She asked that any additional staff appointed as a result of the allocation of these monies be equally distributed across the Municipal District.

Cllr Gerry Finnerty said he was not certain that this proposal was the best use of the allocation of the monies and that he would have liked to have seen monies allocated toward designated capital projects in each area of the municipal district. He welcomed the allocation of €120,000 for outdoor staff which was needed in the Municipal District. He pointed to four frontline workers in his own area that were over 60 years age and asked if there was an active panel in place to address a situation in the event of a forthcoming retirement. He asked for clarification that the additional outdoor staff proposed would be right across the constituency.

Cllr McClearn stated that the fact that the proposal was being made highlighted the difficult situation that exists in the Loughrea Municipal District. He referred to the expanded Loughrea Municipal District Area area and that the staffing of outdoor and technical personnel does not reflect the fact over 26% of the roads in the county are in the Loughrea Municipal district. He felt that the proposal reflects an attempt to address the issues that exist in relation to staffing but does not resolve it by any means. He added that the proposal could bring real tangible benefits to the area and help to get vital work done in the area. He asked aside from the proposal, that an outdoor staff in Portumna be appointed from within the existing structure following a recent retirement in advance of roads programme.

Cllr Hynes stated that he wished to complement the effort of the engineering staff and were doing their best to make do with the deficiency in funding,

Cllr Canning felt that the members were caught between a rock and a hard place and that funding allocated was never enough to meet the demand. He proposed that €5,000 be put toward planting trees on council land. In regard to staffing he pointed out that there had been 8 staff in Portumna area previously, but the complement was now down to 6. In regard to the allocation of €120,000 toward outdoor staff he asked how many staff could be appointed with these monies.

Cllr Curley outlined that he agreed in principle with proposal put forward. He added that the need for a technician to be appointed was crucial. He reiterated that the municipal district had 26% of the roads and that a well-resourced staff is needed to reflect that. He asked that

in relation to part B of the proposal made, for a breakdown of how many outdoor staff the area expected to get and for clarity around whether the additional staff appointed would be kept on beyond the terms of the allocation granted.

Cllr Byrne confirmed that the controlling group had sought to go about making the proposal in a collaborative way with the members but had decided to not run with the NOM option but with the provision of the €120,000 allocation for provision of outdoor staff. The group had sought to make a proposal that would try and effect positive change on the level of technical support that is in the region which they believed are not in line with other municipal districts.

Cllr Maher clarified that no member of the Municipal District had asked him to put the matter of allocation of monies towards the Municipal authorities on the agenda. He thought it was a good proposal and was positive news for the Loughrea Municipal District. He felt that the additional staff should be shared between Gort and Loughrea offices. The monies toward additional staff highlighted that the area was under resourced in this regard and the proposal was an attempt to address that issue.

Ms. Ruane outlined to the members that in normal circumstances that HR and staff matters are an executive function. She added that additional resources were required in the Municipal District and welcomed the proposal put forward by the members to try and address that. She also stated that it was important that there was understanding that the detail regarding assignment for the staff is a matter for the director and team in the MD area.

Cllr Kinane qualified her earlier comments by saying that her disappointment was at the process and not the proposal brought forward. She re-iterated that the original proposal put forward was slightly different but wished to support the motion as additional staff were needed but there needed to be a fair spread across the district.

Mr. Cullen referred to the earlier comments by Ms. Ruane that in the normal course of events there is no function for the elected members in relation to staffing of the organisation, it is exclusively an executive function provided for in the Local Government Act. He added that the Chief Executive has to take accounts of all the work across the organisation and because of the need to balance all these requirements, the CE has the function of determining what the appropriate staffing level is for the organisation.

He added that in this case, a very specific once off allocation was notified by the Minister of €200,000 and as a result of a decision at full council became €180,000 per municipal district. One of the key conditions on the allocation that it demonstrates additionality and he felt that the proposal put forward by the members fulfilled that, and if agreed would send a signal to the minister and to the government that from a staffing point of view that the organisation as a whole is under resourced. He said that he could not confirm if the allocation would be repeated next year but the proposal as put forward in so far as it relates to staff on this particular occasion would be implemented.

Further to queries raised by the members, he clarified that the maximum number of outdoor resources that could be employed with the proposal would be three. As to whether they would be paid through GCC funds after the year, Mr. Cullen could not confirm and would be dictated by the what level of funding is available in the budget.

In response to Cllr McClearn's concerns for the need to replace an outdoor staff member in Portumna, Mr. Cullen responded by saying that all existing vacancies are in the process of being filled and he would check specifically in regard to the vacancy at Portumna.

The proposal made by Cllr Byrne and Seconded by Cllr Murphy was agreed by all.

To consider and adopt the 2021 Annual Schedule of proposed Works of maintenance and repair to be carried out in the Loughrea Municipal District

Cllr Maher thanked all the roads staff for all their work over the last weeks and months on compiling the road programme for 2021.

Cllr G Donohoe thanked all the staff involved for the work done on the programme. She raised the question as to why there was portions of the same road listed under both the Restoration Maintenance Grant and Restoration Improvement grants which would result in one stretch of road being of better quality than another.

She also queried members spending time compiling roads that they wished to put forward for inclusion in the programme which were then subsequently not included. She felt that some of the roads she had put forward were in very poor condition, referencing a road at Gilroe which she had received numerous representations on. In response Mr. Haugh said that roads are addressed under the relevant grant heading be it restoration maintenance or restoration improvement. He said they had tried to take the opportunity in the Gort area to address smaller sections of road through the RMG budget. He added that costs listed in the detail before the members are estimated costs which would have to go through the tender process and the scope of the work proposed may ultimately change.

Cllr Kinane welcomed the programme presented before the members and felt it was fair and balanced. She was pleased to see that roads in Clarinbridge, Killeeneen and Maree were on the programme due to the condition of the roads and the volume of traffic on them. She added that there was one road that she felt should have been on the programme, known locally as the Cannon Concrete road at Tonroe, due to ongoing flooding issues.

Mr. Haugh responded by saying that the road quality was quite good at this location but there was a drainage issue that needs to be resolved. He added that they hoped to advance the drainage issue through the Local Road Drainage grant in the coming year.

Cllr J McClearn outlined that there was a lot of good news in the programme and added that with every roads programme there would be people disappointed that some roads were not included. He queried the €953,000 allocation for the Community Involvement Scheme and that there had been no discussion on it. He asked for clarification on whether the department indicated that more money would come available during the year.

Mr. Mitchell in response stated that the CIS was usually an 18-month programme. 85 projects were submitted to the Department and 45 were completed during 2020. The allocation of €953,000 would be allocated to the remainder of those projects. In regard to future funding, he stated there will be a call later this year for a multi Annual roads programme.

Cllr Finnerty thanked all the staff for the work on the programme and stated it was a very thorough document. However he referred to a road at Ballyturin that was not on the

programme and was in a poor state due to consistent rain, gullies getting blocked etc. He also expressed his disappointment that the road at Chessy, L4510 was not on the programme. He added that two roads on the road programme, Lisbrien and Inchamore in which significant funding had to be allocated to, were in poor condition due to forestry work done by Coillte.

Cllr Curley thanked then engineering staff for their time and assistance afforded to him when selecting roads for the programme. He asked about strategic CIS schemes that he put in for that he believed would have long term benefits for the area and asked why they were not included in the year's schemes of works.

Cllr Murphy asked for clarification on the colour coding on the map and queried if the blue and brown coding related to quality of job done on a particular stretch of road. He added that he was very happy overall with what roads had been included in the plan, however he did expect to see the road at Chessy and Caherglissaun which he had proposed before on it.

Mr. Haugh in response to the queries raised stated that the inclusion or exclusion of a road, was a difficult decision and that the funding provided was always the limiting factor. Submissions had been requested and were subsequently reviewed and considered, however, there was a significant number of submissions made, far more than could be considered for inclusion. Once the tender programme was done and a true cost of the works formulated, if there were monies still available then extensions of the proposed sections or indeed other roads could be considered.

In regard to Cllr Finnerty's query, he stated that they had spoken to Coillte previously and found them to be very co-operative. If there are specific areas of concern, they should be brought to the attention of the area office and dealt with from there.

In regard to the Colour coding, on the RMG Maps, the additional highlights indicate that supplementary restoration maintenance grant funding is being used in part at this location.

Cllr Joe Byrne thanked all involved in the process and acknowledged that it is a difficult process to balance the demands considering the number of roads within the MD area.

He outlined that as part of submission that he sent in on 24th January he had raised a couple of points. He raised the point that there were roads in the municipal district where 50 metres were of poor standard and then as a consequence there was a perception that the whole road is bad. He added that doing a small section of road makes a huge difference to perception of people driving it. He concurred with Cllr Murphy's comments regarding the road at Caherglissaun.

He added that he wished to understand the philosophy behind the tertiary roads programme. He stated that the members were asked to submit their two preferences but pointed out that despite there being 5 councillors in the Kinvara/Gort area there was only 4 roads on the list and 9 in the Loughrea electoral area. In response, Mr Haugh stated that the budget is the limiting factor and that specifically in the Gort/Kinvara area the PSCI ratings on certain submissions were higher than those for other submissions received. A decision was taken to include those roads which had a significantly lower PSCI rating and this precluded other roads from the programme.

Cllr Canning asked was there a mechanism to deal with issue with a farmer letting water out on a road which was resulting in multiple call outs by council staff. He added that he had

allocated €2,000 through NOM to get the road risen to stop water coming out. He asked could the Council write a letter to bill the farmer or landowner for these actions. In response Mr Mitchell said there was provision under the Roads Act to deal with matter and that it could be investigated through the area office.

Pat Hynes summarised that some members and constituents would be disappointed that roads put forward may not have been included but overall the programme presented was fair.

In response to the some of the issues raised by the members, Mr. Mitchell clarified that allocations for the roads programme are indicative and that when works go to tender a true indication of what costs are involved will then be clear. If a short section of a road needed to be done, then it would be considered within the funding available.

Emergency works needed on roads will be looked by the area at on an individual basis.

In regard to the Tertiary road programme there is a finite amount of money allowed and a lot of things are taken into consideration such as the age of road, PSCI and the state of the road. A decision then is taken of what the priority is on each of the roads and then to address worst case scenarios. He understood the frustration of some councillors of some roads not being included but that the Council is doing the best with the funding that comes available.

G Finnerty stated that he put down an NOM for action on Hollywood Bridge in 2019 and asked for clarity on what action had been taken as the situation there had not been addressed. Mr. Mitchell asked that he bring it to his attention and he would look into it

G Donohoe acknowledged the good work that had been done on bridges in the area but raised an issue in regard to work done recently on Gilroe bridge. She said there was a significant drop the far side of the bridge and asked that it could be looked at. In response Mr. Haugh requested that any specific concerns in relation to bridge repairs should be directed to Fergal Fahy to respond to.

Cllr Kinane asked for clarity on the L81052 at Prospect Hill and whether that would be getting additional funding.

In response Mr. Haugh stated that the road was on the RMG programme.

Mr. Mitchell stated that in regard to the reclassification of roads that GCC got a considerable volume of funding especially for the Loughrea MD. He added that they now had to make an application similar to other councils and the department would review same and decide on funding to be allocated.

Cllr Maher read out a number of motions submitted by the members;

Cllr Finnerty proposed the following motion which was seconded by Cllr Kinane.

'I propose that the Road Section of Galway County Council contact the claims department reference damage to cars and motor vehicle on the L4516 at Ballyturin and to ask to treat all claims with merit that are genuinely been made as this road as fell apart from December 2020.'

Mr. Cullen responded by saying that while he understood the sentiment of the proposal, every claim has to be adjudicated on individually and the Council's claims handling department would do so in line with the insurance companies' guidelines.

Cllr G. Finnerty proposed the following motion which was seconded by Cllr Kinane.

I propose to transfer funding for bridge at L45141 Tubber, Gort to deal with bridge known as Hollywood at Gilroe, Tubber Co. Galway.

Mr. Mitchell responded by saying that the allocation of funding for that bridge at Tubber would have been as a result of an inspection that was carried out. He was unsure whether an inspection was carried out on the bridge at Gilroe but stated that they would have it investigated.

Cllr Byrne proposed the following motion which was seconded by Cllr Murphy.

I propose that 150m of funding allocated to L4507(New Line) be re-allocated to LS8587(Trellick) to complete part of the work done in 2019.

Mr. McGillicuddy confirmed that this was not in the roads programme as a section but would be considered further subject to funding becoming available once the tender process was completed.

Cllr Byrne proposed the following motion which was seconded by Cllr Murphy

I request that the necessary remedial work be carried out on the following roads not included in our Roads Programme, short sections which require immediate addressing – LS 8583 Cloosh (100m not completed in 2020), L85511 Cahermore/Caherplassaun

In response Mr. Haugh stated that allocations are indicative and once they go through the tender process they would then have clarity on what funding is available and they may then be in a position to consider this request further.

Cllr Kinane propose the roads programme and Cllr McClearn seconded it and was agreed by all.

A discussion commenced on the Schedule of Works in the Municipal for 2021.

Cllr Finnerty queried the figure of €5,000 for Bringbank maintenance and asked how committees applied could apply for the funding. Ms Ruane clarified it was the allocation for the MD area for a grant provided to communities to maintain the bringbank network. She added should communities express in interest in looking after bringbanks in their area should contact the Environment section.

Cllr Maher referred to the allocation for outdoor Swimming facilities in Loughrea and that following anti-social behaviour the buildings were spray painted and ropes taken out of the lifebuoys. He asked that the issues with the lifebuoys be looked at.

Cllr Byrne queried the allocation of €349,000 for local road drainage works and asked for clarification on how the monies are being spent. He felt that the monies should be spent on alleviating flooding outside houses caused by water flowing from the public road.

In response, Mr. Haugh said the allocation is used to maintain water cuts and to resolve localised drainage and surface water issues. In the specific case of surface water lodging in front of a private property, generally the grant of planning permission is looked at initially as the responsibility for these type of issues frequently falls back to the householder. The majority of planning permissions granted require that surface water generated must remain within the curtilage of the developed site and furthermore should not impaired the existing drainage regime from the public road. However, if there are specific areas of concern then these should be brought to the attention of the area office for review.

Cllr Curley questioned the cost of works in general on the roads programme and queried when estimates are given on projects that members give NOM towards, that there is a figure given for the cost of labour on a project even if the work has been subcontracted out.

In response Mr. Mitchell stated that the function of the NOM is what the fundamental cost is to the organisation to carry out a project. He added there is no separate allocation anywhere else within the organisation that will pay for staff costs.

Cllr Murphy queried if planning permission was required for the local community development association in Ardrahan to paint a mural on a wall depicting agricultural activities in the parish. Consent of landowner the landowner had been granted to the activity.

Ms Ruane in response stated that there are instances where planning is required for such activity and asked if he could send on the details of the works so it could be looked at.

Cllr Kinane proposed that Coillte be invited to attend the next meeting due to traffic congestion issues arising at Kilcornan Woods.

Cllr PJ Murphy expressed his thanks to the engineering staff for contacting Coillte to arrange hedge cutting on in the Castledaly, Kilchreest and Peterswell areas.

Cllr Canning raised the matter of speeding in estates and safety issues arising from it. While he acknowledged that speed checks had been used in some estates, he asked about the possibility of investing in temporary speed ramps for a period of time to see if they have any effect on the issue.

In response to Cllr Canning's query, Mr. Mitchell stated that they are trying to move away from a speed ramp system as issues can arise with claims following damage to vehicles. He believed that carrying out interventions to slow down traffic in certain estates is more beneficial such as operating a yield system. He added that they would look at the Active Travel scheme as a potential funding mechanism for safety solutions for speeding in estates once an announcement on funding for the scheme was made.

Ms. Ruane thanked all members for participation and engagement this morning and thanked the Roads team for all the work that had gone into the preparation of the Roads programme.

Cllr Maher stated that the next meeting of the Loughrea MD would take place on the 8th March 2021 at 10am. through Microsoft Teams.

CHRIOGHNAIGH AN CHRUINNIU ANSIN



CLLR MICHAEL MAHER
CATHAOIRLEACH, LOUGHREA MD

