

COUNCIL MEETING MONDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2018

Table of Adoptions

No	Item	Summary of Adoption
1	Apologies	<i>Councillors Douglas, Hunter, McGlinchey, McKillop MA, McLean and Mulholland K</i>
2	Declaration of Interest	<i>Alderman Finlay – Attended Dinner</i>
3	Request to Video Record the Meeting	<i>Approved</i>
4	Business and Engagement Dinner, Tullyglass Hotel, held in September 2017 Pre-approval Report	<i>Discussed To be brought to CPR Committee</i>

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF
COUNCIL HELD IN CIVIC HEADQUARTERS, COLERAINE ON
MONDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2018 at 7:00 PM**

In the Chair : The Mayor Councillor Chivers

Members Present : Alderman Campbell, Cole, Finlay, Hillis, King,
McKeown and Robinson

Councillors Baird, Beattie, Blair, Clarke, Deighan,
Duddy, Fielding, Harding, Holmes, Knight-McQuillan,
Loftus, McCandless, McCaw, McCorkell, McGurk,
McLaughlin, C McShane, A Mulholland, Nicholl,
Quigley, Watton and Wilson

Officers Present : D Jackson, Chief Executive
R Baker, Director of Leisure & Development
D Hunter, Council Solicitor
E Keenan, Council Solicitor
E McCaul. Committee and Member Services Officer

In attendance Press (1 no.)
Public (3 no.)

OPENING REMARKS

The Mayor – Councillor Chivers opened the meeting by apologising for bringing Members out on a Monday night. She stating that she had called for the Special Meeting after news had broken that Council had purchased a table in what had been reported as a DUP fundraiser. She said some Councillors were unaware that Council had purchased the table and that Elected Members had a responsibility for the ratepayer's money and there were questions to be answered. She asked Members to be respectful of Officers especially as there was an ongoing investigation being carried out.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were recorded for Councillors Douglas, Hunter, McGlinchey, McKillop M A, McLean and Mulholland K.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Alderman Finlay confirmed that he had attended the event being discussed and wished to make it clear, that it was not a DUP event. It was an event being hosted by the MP for the area.

3. RECORDING OF MEETING

The Chief Executive advised that a request had been received to video record the meeting. He said that under Standing Orders 8(5) this was not be allowed except when Council allowed.

The Mayor put the request to a vote and there were no objection to the meeting being video recorded.

4. BUSINESS AND ENGAGEMENT DINNER, TULLYGLASS HOTEL, HELD IN SEPTEMBER 2017

Confidential Associated papers relating to the Business and Engagement Dinner were circulated to Elected Members prior to commencing the meeting.

The Chief Executive advised that Council had been invited to attend a Business and Community Engagement event, with the keynote speaker being Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. He said that the cost for the event was £1,500 and this had been funded from Economic Development budget, with costs paid directly to the Tullyglass Hotel.

Councillor C McShane thanked the Mayor for calling the Special Meeting, which she said deserved focus and attention. She outlined that she had raised this issue of payment for the dinner on several occasions through various committees, including Corporate Policy and Resources and full Council; had escalated this with NIAO in April 2018 and was presumably now referred to as the Whistle Blower.

Councillor McShane stated that given the media attention when it came to light that Mid and East Antrim Council had purchased a table, questions were asked if Causeway Coast and Glens Council had also purchased a table. She pointed out that she had repeatedly requested that a copy of the original invite be forward, as Council had not received this, nor was aware of or included on the invite list. She said that she had eventually been made aware through the Local Government Audit that the invitation had been made through a phone call. She added that it

was frustrating that the only way to obtain the information had been through the Local Government Auditor.

Councillor McShane pointed out that the address for payment for the dinner was to DUP Office in Ballymena and that the Auditors findings (Priority 2) indicated that it was reasonable to suggest that this was a fundraiser. She queried what else might Council be missing in terms of the democratic process and democratic deficit. She also pointed out that the wider issue was delegated authority and that this needed to be reviewed.

Councillor C McShane stressed that to keep hearing that Council had made this decision, when this was untrue, led to the question 'does Council constitute one senior officer' because it was becoming evident that a small number of people were running Causeway Coast and Glens Council and that the 40 Elected Members were becoming more or less like nodding dogs, with powers being taken away.

The Mayor advised that if referring to a particular officer, Council would need to go into committee.

Councillor agreed to refrain and apologised.

Councillor C McShane questioned what was the delegated budget referred to in the correspondence circulated. She queried that other expenses were incurred by the ratepayer for the event, such as taxis or drinks. She also queried what steps were in place to prevent this type of incident occurring in the future and suggested that there were other ways to get Council's voice heard rather than through costly business events.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the budget for delegated authority was £30,000 limit and that going forward, he would clear any payments for subsequent events. A protocol would be brought through the Corporate Policy & Resources Committee, so that Council could agree on how to deal with such events. He also confirmed that the only additional expense incurred for the event was an £18 travel claim.

The Director of Leisure and Development referred to the allegation that he had not responded to requests for information. He said that in his opinion he had responded to all requests for information and following the Leisure and Development meeting in October 2017, he had verbally responded to a request for information via Party Lead. He confirmed that the invitation for the event had been given via a telephone call.

Alderman Hillis indicated that an invitation being received via a telephone call was haphazard and unprofessional by the organisers. He said that Officers had asked for more information about the event but in the letter of response it had been detailed that this was confirming attendance. He added that this was billed as a networking event, although the letter stipulated 'sponsor' a table, which was the key word and the price of the table should have highlighted to Officers that this event was in aid of something. He added further that envelopes for donations being on the table would indicate that this was not a networking event.

Alderman Hillis queried cost of the tickets and if not a fundraiser, where the money went. He said this had caused widespread damage to the Council and if this was a fundraiser, particularly a political fundraiser, Council should be seeking a refund.

Councillor Clarke questioned the Mayor on having called for the Special Council Meeting and to the cost, given that Council was having a full Council meeting the next day and said the topic could have been discussed at that meeting.

The Chief Executive outlined that the cost for holding a typical meeting was in region of £990.

In response, the Mayor said that the Agenda for the full Council meeting included several Notice of Motions and that she was reluctant to add another topic to an already filled Agenda.

Councillor Homes queried if attendance at business events were value for money. The Director of Leisure and Development outlined that business engagement events were speculative and that attendance at an event in 2012 had led to Causeway having £7 million data centre within the Enterprise Zone.

Councillor McCaw enquired about the procedure on how the decision to attend business event was made and what due diligence was carried out about the dinner. He indicated that Invest NI had in place an auditable pre-approval process, whereby anyone wanting to spend money from their budget had to provide information on aims of event, expected outcomes and any alternatives. He queried if it was feasible for Council to introduce this procedure as this would also be open to Freedom of Information.

Councillor McCaw queried anticipated outcomes of attending the dinner and what measurable outcomes were achieved. He also queried why the correspondence with regard to the event had not been listed in

Council correspondence and if it was possible going forward for Leisure and Development Committee or full Council to have an update on attendance at events under delegated authority. Finally, he queried if the topics debated at the dinner were neutral rather than party orientated as this would be a firm indicator that it was a political event.

The Chief Executive indicated that he was aware of Invest NI pre-approval process and said this would bring a higher level of scrutiny, not just for attendance at business events or any event. He agreed to bring a report through Corporate Policy and Resources for consideration by Members.

It was noted that Council had declined attending a similar event and that checks and balances had been put in place immediately.

The Director of Leisure and Development clarified that the topics discussed at the dinner included Brexit, cross border trade, passenger air tariff and impact upon tourism and business travel, the ongoing process to reduce corporation tax and the effect of public sector cuts on rural services. He said that in his opinion, the discussion was neutral and in terms of outcomes, it was the conversations and discussions held after the formalities of the event that lead to business and this was ongoing.

Councillor Deighan stated that this was yet another embarrassing moment for the DUP who effectively had hoodwinked Officers. He queried when the news first broke about Mid and East Antrim taking a table at the dinner, why Officers had not issued a press release or made Councillors aware that Causeway Coast and Glens had also taken a table.

The Chief Executive advised that the topic had been aired several times within the chamber and was of the opinion that Officers were questioned quickly about the invitation. He said he was very embarrassed by reputational damage this has done to Council.

Councillor Deighan welcomed that a protocol for dealing with similar invitations would be put in place and that it was good to learn from mistakes to prevent this happening again.

In response to Councillor Nicholl, the Director of Leisure and Development confirmed that even though the invite referred to 'annual constituency dinner' this was the first year Council had been invited to attend.

Councillor Harding pointed out the Conservative Party had rules on attendance at events. He said that Michael Gove MP had apologised and that if he had known it was a fundraiser, he would not have attended the event. He added that Mr Paisley's credibility had been damaged by this.

Alderman Cole stated that Mr Paisley was a facilitator for the Business and Community networking event. He said there were lots of innuendos and aspersions cast within the chamber but there was no evidence that the event was a party fundraiser. He confirmed that it was a fundraiser for the local business community and for the benefit of Causeway area who was in need of funds.

The cost of holding the Special Council was raised by Alderman Cole, which in his opinion had not been made in the best interest of the ratepayer. He was also of the opinion that the matter should be left to the Electoral Commission to investigate, who had a lot more clout than Council.

The Mayor pointed out that there were questions still to be asked around where the money from the fundraiser went and that if this had gone to a charity or the local business community that would not have been a problem.

Councillor Wilson was of the opinion that Council neither had the evidence, nor the capacity to carry out an investigation into the matter and should await the outcome from the Electoral Commission. He praised Senior Officers on their business engagement work over the past four years and said this was clearly evidenced on the ground. He said that if Members wanted to see every invitation that was sent to the Chief Executive or Directors, this showed an extreme lack of faith in Council staff. He added that there was no need to feel embarrassed by what had happened, Elected Members and staff should hold their heads high as in his opinion, nothing had been done wrong.

Councillor McCandless indicated that holding the Special Council meeting had been worthwhile, as this was in interest of good auditing, clarity and probity. He stated that the ratepayers had been asking him where did the money go and to have a breakdown of the £150 costs; should that be for the meal, speaker costs, flights, hotel accommodation or other associated travel costs. He said that the ratepayer also wanted to know 'what was the charity' as there were envelopes on the table and queried if the chair of the dinner had announced what the charity was.

Councillor McCandless agreed with his colleague Councillor Wilson that Council had good Officers and had seen deliverables over past four years. In summing up, he like Councillor McShane would have liked to have seen a copy of the initial invitation as part of the audit trail.

Councillor Baird referred to attendance at Business Engagement event in the Guildhall, London, which was hosted by the Honourable, the Irish Society, in which afterwards the Lord Mayor had contacted her to praise Council staff on their presentation and who had said Council had top of the range officers. She voiced her disappointment that Alderman Finlay had left the meeting as he was only Elected Member who had attended the dinner and would have been able to enlighten Members on concerns raised.

Councillor Holmes commented that something did not add up as Members were being told this was not a fundraiser, then this was a prestigious fundraiser. He said he would like to know what businesses benefited from the event.

Councillor McShane remarked that this was a huge public interest story and that the ratepayers of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council should not be undermined. She said that transparency and accountability across council was required. She requested details of the Economic Budget which had been used to pay for the dinner.

Councillor Duddy referred to a number of allegations made during the meeting and queried if these were prejudicial to the Electoral Commissions investigation. He also queried where did this leave Council if the allegations made would not be substantiated by those who had made the remarks.

In response to Councillor Duddy, the Mayor said she had let Members have freedom of speech during the meeting.

Referring to the TV character Arthur Daly, Councillor Blair said the fundraiser *'was a nice wee earner'*.

Councillor Watton highlighted that this was trailed as a DUP fundraiser and people were not surprised that Mr Paisley was involved in this, with him being recently suspended.

Councillor Watton said he had listened all weekend to remarks made about honesty, integrity and respect. He requested that it be put on record that there was evidence that Sinn Féin Elected Members and activists were working with drug dealers in Coleraine and Limavady.

Councillor Quigley outlined that she could not recall the dinner being discussed at any of the committees she sat on and was shocked when this had come to light.

Council McShane pointed out that Members should not feel threatened about asking questions around decision making and that a healthy discussion and learning from mistakes was a good thing.

The Mayor concurred with remarks made about staff and to good work being carried out by Council.

MOTION TO PROCEED 'IN COMMITTEE'

Proposed by Councillor Quigley
Seconded by Councillor McGurk and

AGREED – that Council receive legal opinion 'In Committee'.

Council solicitor provided legal opinion around remarks made by Members at the meeting.

MOTION TO PROCEED 'IN PUBLIC'

Proposed by Councillor Loftus
Seconded by Councillor McGurk and

AGREED – that Council conduct the remainder of the business 'In Public'.

Before leaving the Chamber, Councillor Knight-McQuillan said that the meeting had been of little benefit.

* Alderman Cole and Councillor Knight-McQuillan left the meeting at 8:33 pm.

In response to Alderman Hillis, the Mayor said that once the results of the investigation were available, the topic would be discussed again by Council.

There being no further business, the Mayor thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 8:35 pm.

Mayor