

Causeway Coast and Glens

Borough Council

To: Corporate Policy and Resources Committee

Date: 18th August 2015

For Decision

Northern Ireland Assembly – Committee for Justice Evidence Event on Proposals by the NI Courts and Tribunals Service for the Rationalisation of the Courts Estate

Linkage to Corporate Plan	
Strategic Priority	Leader and Champion
Lead Officer	Director of Performance
Cost (if applicable)	None

1.0 Context and Background

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) consultation on proposals to rationalise the current court estate and close a number of court buildings closed 30th April 2015:

<http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/public-consultations/archive-consultations/consultation-document-rationalisation-of-the-court-estate.pdf>

At the 30th June 2015 Council meeting, members were informed that The Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Justice were considering the proposals which included the closure of a number of courthouses. Given the interest in the proposed court closures the Justice Committee had agreed to hold an evidence event and invite all Councils to attend to discuss the potential court closures and the possible effects on those courthouses that will remain. The event took place on Thursday 2nd July 2015 Parliament Buildings.

At its meeting of Limavady Borough Council on 7 February 2012, its members agreed to write to oppose the proposed closure of the Court House in Limavady, concerned at the potential impact the proposals would have and incorporated the view of members of the Limavady Solicitors Association (Limavady Borough Council Minute extract attached as Appendix A, copy correspondence submitted attached as Appendix B).

2.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council submit a view on the proposed closure of Limavady Court House, endorsing the view of Limavady Borough Council, attached as Appendix B.

**LIMAVADY BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMHAIRLE BHUIRG LÉIM AN MHADAIDH**

SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE

7 FEBRUARY 2012

Minutes of meeting held in the Council Offices, 7 Connell Street, Limavady at 7.00 pm on the above date.

PRESENT:

Aldermen M Coyle, J Rankin and G Robinson. Councillors O Beattie, A Brolly, B Chivers, B Douglas, G Mullan, T McCaul (Chair), J McCorkell, S McGlinchey, C McLaughlin, D Nicholl, A Robinson and E Stevenson.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Committee Clerk, Head of Finance, Head of Human Resources and the Chief Executive.

APOLOGIES: - None.

PRESENTATION ON PROPOSED CLOSURE OF LIMAVADY COURTHOUSE/HEARING CENTRE:

The Chair welcomed Mr Philip Kingston and Mr Peter Jack, members of Limavady Solicitors Association to the meeting.

Mr Jack gave an overview of the response by Limavady Solicitors Association to the consultation on the proposed closure of Limavady Courthouse/Hearing Centre. He said that the proposed closure would not result in cost savings as resources would still have to be spent by other Government Departments. For example costs for the PSNI and witnesses to travel to Coleraine Courthouse; costs by the Court Service to retain the building and that the closure of the Limavady Hearing Centre would be unfair on court users, particularly the economically disadvantaged.

Mr Kingston indicated that the PSNI did not want Limavady Courthouse to be closed for operational reasons as their response time to any emergency would be slower given the travel back from Coleraine Court. He said that the Small Claims Court was a vital part of the Limavady Social fabric and that customers would be less likely and reluctant to issue proceedings for Coleraine Courthouse given the time and money travelling. He added that many people paid their fines at the Courthouse and if closed, deadlines would be missed leading to additional costs on the issue of Bench Warrants.

In addition to the above points, Mr Jack and Mr Kingston also highlighted that if saving money was the main priority, why was money not prudently spent on the structure of Limavady Courthouse over the last few years?

Members made the following points:

- There was a need to get the public on board to the closure and that this could be raised via social media sites such as Facebook or by petitions.

- If the Courthouse closed, the building would be left to rot and ruin. The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service should adopt an 'Invest to Save Policy' with regard to the Courthouse.

It was agreed on the proposal of Alderman Coyle, seconded by Alderman Rankin that Council would respond to the consultation on the proposed Courthouse closure and put forward the same points made by the Limavady Solicitors Association.

The Chair thanked Mr Kingston and Mr Jack for attending the meeting.

MINUTES:

The minutes of meeting held 10 January 2012 were approved on the proposal of Alderman Coyle, seconded by Councillor McLaughlin.

MATTERS ARISING: - None.

SPECIAL SUPPORT SERVICES MEETING:

The minutes of special Support Services meeting held 12 January 2012 was approved on the proposal Alderman Robinson, seconded by Councillor Chivers.

HEAD OF FINANCE MONTHLY REPORT – FEBRUARY 2012:

Payment of Accounts: The Head of Finance presented the payment of accounts for the month of December 2012, which were approved by members.

Summarised Accounts for 9 Months Ending 31 December 2011: The Head of Finance presented summarised accounts for 9 months ending 31 December 2011. The variances relating to salaries & wages, waste disposal gate fees, vehicle costs, energy costs, loan/lease charges and other income were noted by members.

HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES MONTHLY REPORT – FEBRUARY 2012:

IN COMMITTEE on the proposal of Councillor McLaughlin, seconded by Councillor Brolly:

Human Resources Report: The Head of Human Resources presented the Human Resource Report for February 2012, which detailed the total number of employees & temporary workers, recruitment & selection, absenteeism & cause of absence, long term sick details and requests for carry over of annual leave subject to the following:

Leavers/Retirement: It was agreed that best wishes from members would be extended to Mrs Sandra Sufferin, Purchase Ledger Clerk who was retiring at the end of the month after 33 years of service.

Absenteeism: Officers were congratulated on keeping the absenteeism levels below the target of 10 days annualised.

The Diamond Jubilee Bank Holidays: The Head of Human Resources reported that the Government had announced that there would be an additional bank holiday to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee. She said that the 2012 late May bank holiday would be moved to 4 June and that an additional Jubilee bank holiday would be on 5 June 2012. It was noted that in accordance with Part 2, Para 7.1 of the Green Book, employees would be entitled to a normal days pay for the additional bank holiday.

Policing and Community Safety Partnership: The Head of Human Resources reminded members that at the 17 January 2012 Development Committee meeting Council had agreed a staffing structure to support the establishment of the new Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) to ensure that the statutory functions of the PCSP could be carried out. She said that in progressing this, Council must adhere to the Local Government Staff Commissions Guidance on the Staffing Implications of Organisation Development and Change and to Councils Redundancy Policy. She added that formal consultation had commenced with staff & trade union representatives and that work was also progressing across the Cluster Councils to agree Job Descriptions for the post of PCSP Manager and PCSP Officer. It was noted that once in place, these would be evaluated in accordance with the GLPC job evaluation scheme and then considered under the LGSC Guidance document.

The Human Resources Report was adopted on the proposal of Councillor Chivers, seconded by Councillor Brolly.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS: - None.

Funding – Ferry Service: The following points were raised during the discussion on the ferry service:

- The level of funding set aside by Donegal County Council.
- Feedback from the Ferry Working Group meeting held 2 February 2012.
- Contract duration.
- Council's position on revenue deficit funding.
- The possibility of funding from other Councils and both Governments.

Following discussion Council confirmed that there would be no increase in the level of revenue deficit funding set aside within the draft budgets for 2012/13.

OUT OF COMMITTEE on the proposal of Alderman Robinson, seconded by Councillor Chivers.

NEXT MEETING: - 6 March 2012.

THE BUSINESS CONCLUDED AT 7.55 PM.

Chair: _____

**LIMAVADY BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMHAIRLE BHUIRG LÉIM AN MHADAIDH**

SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE

6 MARCH 2012

Minutes of meeting held in the Council Offices, 7 Connell Street, Limavady at 7.00 pm on the above date.

PRESENT:

Aldermen M Coyle, J Rankin and G Robinson. Councillors O Beattie, A Brolly, B Chivers, B Douglas, G Mullan, T McCaul (Chair), J McCorkell, S McGlinchey, C McLaughlin, D Nicholl, A Robinson and E Stevenson.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Committee Clerk, Head of Finance, Head of Human Resources and the Chief Executive.

APOLOGIES: - None.

MINUTES:

The minutes of meeting held 7 February 2012 were approved on the proposal of Alderman Coyle, seconded by Councillor Chivers.

MATTERS ARISING:

Closure of Limavady Courthouse/Hearing Centre: The Chief Executive confirmed that comments made by Limavady Solicitors Association had been included in Council's response to the consultation on the proposed closure of Limavady Courthouse/Hearing Centre.

Funding – Ferry Service: In response to a member, the Chief Executive said that the latest communication received from the Ferry Company would be discussed at the March 2012 Development Services Committee.

HEAD OF FINANCE MONTHLY REPORT – MARCH 2012:

Payment of Accounts: The Head of Finance presented the payment of accounts for the month of January 2012 which was subsequently approved by Council.

The Head of Human Resources clarified that a payment had been made during the month for advice on employment law. It was agreed that queries made on payment towards the Green Shed Project and for vehicle hire & maintenance would be forwarded to the Director of Environmental Services.

The Chief Executive confirmed that a payment of £20k had been received from the Department towards costs associated with the closure of Drumaduff Landfill Site.

A member referred to the payment for Podcast Development and requested that a presentation be held on the project.

9 February 2012

Consultation Co-Ordinator
Closure of Court Hearing Centres
Consultation
NI Courts and Tribunals Service
Communications Group
Laganside House
23-27 Oxford Street
BELFAST
BT1 3LA

Dear Sir/Madam

**CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO CLOSE HEARING CENTRES AT
BANGOR, LARNE, LIMAVADY, MAGHERAFELT AND STRABANE
COURTHOUSES**

I write on behalf of Limavady Borough Council who recently considered the above consultation document. Members are particularly concerned at the potential impact the proposals to close Limavady Courthouse would have on the people of this area and have asked me to respond as follows:

- Council are concerned that vulnerable sections of our community will be disproportionately disadvantaged by the proposal to move hearings to Coleraine Courthouse, particularly those without access to a car.
- There are concerns that bus times between Limavady and Coleraine would not be very convenient and that the distance between Coleraine Bus Station and Coleraine Courthouse (a 20 minute walk) could be an issue particularly for people with mobility problems who will have to take another bus or get a taxi.
- Members would point to the extra financial costs that will have to be met by members of the public in order to travel to Coleraine and would envisage that older people, those with a disability, single parents, those on benefits, etc., will find it more difficult as a result to access the court service and therefore access the justice system.

- Members also expressed concern at the extra costs all members of the public will have to face not just financially but also in the time needed to travel back and forwards to Coleraine Courthouse.
- There will also potentially be an impact on the costs charged to clients by solicitors as local solicitors would have to try and recoup their time and travel costs. Members were concerned that increased solicitors costs could also have the effect of deterring local people from issuing proceedings and therefore accessing justice.
- In addition the proposals will have an impact on the PSNI in relation to time and mileage costs for police officers and, also possibly, their response times to an emergency if they would have to travel back from Coleraine Courthouse.
- Council notes that the current Courthouse in Limavady is not fit for purpose and would require significant investment in order to bring it up to standard. Council would suggest, however, that serious consideration be given to the potential for holding hearings in other public buildings in Limavady in order to maintain this service locally. Council would point to Planning Tribunals, for example, which are currently heard in the Council Offices.

The Council appreciates that the current economic climate and the need for efficiency savings imposes an obligation on the Court Service to review how services and functions operate but Members would ask that all possible avenues be explored to help retain a Hearing Centre within the Limavady Borough.

Yours faithfully

LIAM FLANIGAN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE