

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE UÍBH FHAILÍ

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD WITH MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT FOR IRELAND EAST AND MEMBERS OF OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL

HELD IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, TULLAMORE
ON MONDAY, 21ST JUNE 2010 AT 12.00 NOON

PRESENT:

Cllr. N. Bourke (Presiding), Cllrs. M. Buckley, J. Butterfield, J. Carroll, P. Clendennen, B. Cowen, D. Dolan, E. Dooley, S. Dooley E. Fitzpatrick, J. Foley, C. Hanniffy, N. Hogan, T. McKeigue, J. Leahy, T. McLoughlin, S. Moylan Ryan, Cllr. P. Ormond, D. Owens, G. Plunkett and L. Quinn

**MEMBERS OF THE
EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT:**

Mr. L. Aylward. Ms. N. Childers, Ms. M. McGuinness

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr. P. Gallagher, County Manager, Mr. S. Murray, D.O.S., Mr. F. Heslin, D.O.S., Mr. D. Kirrane, D.O.S., Mr. D. Conlon, H.O.F., Mr. A. Murray, S.P., Ms. E. Boyd, S.O., Ms. N. Dowler and Ms. M. Cleary, Meetings Administrator.

Cllr. N. Bourke, Cathaoirleach, welcomed Mr. L. Aylward, Ms. N. Childers and Ms. M. McGuinness, Members of the European Parliament (MEP), to Áras an Chontae and thanked them for meeting with the members of Offaly County Council. The Cathaoirleach invited each MEP to make an opening address to the Council.

The MEPs complemented the members on their initiative in organising the meeting. They hoped the meeting would lead to a greater dialogue between Councillors and Members of the European Parliament and a greater understanding of the role of the European Parliament. They outlined the various committees that they are involved with within the European Parliament and noted the issues that they are currently addressing.

The Cathaoirleach then invited each MEP to address the queries raised by Councillors and circulated in advance of the meeting.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

- A country must spend 6% of Gross Domestic Product on restorative works to qualify for the European Union Solidarity Fund, which was set up to respond to national disasters. The restorative costs for Ireland, arising from the severe weather conditions over the winter period, had not reached that level. Accordingly, the Councillors were advised that the costs involved in restoration works must be borne from local and national resources.
- The state can apply for support from the Globalisation Adjustment Fund where the closure of a business, as a result of globalisation, results in the loss of more than 500 jobs. It was suggested that more than 500 redundancies had happened in Offaly following the closure of Tyco, Boston Scientific and the winding down of Bord na Mona operations. Cllr. T. McKeigue suggested that support under the Globalisation Adjustment Fund be applied for on the basis. Mr. L. Aylward advised that the Council could consider making an application on that basis. However, he was not optimistic that such a submission would

be successful.

- The importance of agriculture and the single farm payment for Ireland was acknowledged. Ms. M. McGuinness noted the sums of money received in Ireland to date for agriculture and advised that Irish MEPs are negotiating to retain the budget for CAP in the future. She advised that the majority of member states wished to move towards an area based payment system post 2013 and that negotiations on this matter are on-going.
- Offaly County Council members sought the MEPs assistance in preventing the Mercosur group of countries from entering the EU in order to protect the farming community and Irish exports.
- The restrictive nature imposed by the EU with regard to the cleaning of rivers and drains, spreading fertiliser and the cutting of turf was discussed.
- The MEPs clarified the process with regard to the implementation of EU regulations and their transposition into Irish law.
- Ms. N. Childers noted that Ireland's EU membership has allowed Ireland to avail of fiscal stimulus packages and advised that Ireland received significant resources from Europe towards education.
- It was acknowledged that some of the environmental legislation is onerous. However, the MEPs suggested that strict adherence to the legislation has helped Ireland to continue to be a major exporter of Irish products.
- Frustration was expressed by some Councillors with regard to the EU's control on the county's bogs. It was also suggested that the small farmer should be protected to a greater extent. The Councillors called for greater local consultation and dialogue with people in advance of the EU making decisions that affect a community.
- The MEPs suggested that tourism, in particular walking tourism, and Offaly's cultural heritage are areas that can be further exploited on the international market.
- The MEPs outlined the changed structures arising from the Lisbon Treaty.

In summing up, the MEPs advised that the downturn in the economy will impact on all policy areas. They thanked the Councillors for the discussion and noted their concerns on the various matters that arose.

Mr. P. Gallagher, County Manager, joined with the Cathaoirleach and members in welcoming the Members of the European Parliament to the Council. He acknowledged the councillors initiative in inviting the MEPs and thanked them for submitting their questions. The Manager suggested that the meeting provided an opportunity to explore what is happening in Europe and hoped that the meeting may forge links between local, national and European issues.

The Cathaoirleach again thanked the members for submitting their questions, thanked the MEPs for attending and presented each with a small token to recognise their visit to Offaly County Council.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

MINUTES CONFIRMED:

_____ **CATHAOIRLEACH**

_____ **RUNAÍ**

19th JULY 2010