

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS AT SPECIAL MEETING OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DOORADOYLE, LIMERICK, ON WEDNESDAY, 13TH JANUARY, 2016, AT 2.30 P.M.

PRESENT IN THE CHAIR:

Councillor L. Galvin, Mayor.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors Butler, Byrne, Collins (J), Collins (M), Crowley, Daly, Donegan, Foley, Gilligan, Gleeson, Hourigan, Hurley, Keary, Keller, Loftus, Lynch, McCreech, McMahon, Mitchell, Neville, O'Brien, Ó Ceallaigh, O'Donoghue, O'Hanlon, Prendiville, Quinlivan, Ryan, Secas, Sheahan (K), Sheahan (M), Teefy.

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive (Mr. C. Murray), Director, Service Operations/Change Management (Mr. G. Daly), Director, Regional Services (Ms. C. Curley), Director, Transportation & Travel/Environment (Mr. K. Lehane), A/Director, Customer Services (Mr. M. Bilauca), Senior Engineer, Service Operations (Mr. V. Murray), Meetings Administrator (Mr. C. O'Connor), Administrative Officer, Corporate Services (Ms. T. Knox).

The Mayor stated that the Special Meeting had been convened to discuss the issues as set out in the Requisition signed by a number of Members as follows:

"We, the Fianna Fáil Councillors, call on the Mayor of Limerick City and County Council to convene a Special Meeting to (i) discuss recent flooding and what plans are to be put in place to alleviate hardship and financial loss for affected land and property owners; and (ii) call on the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to make emergency funding available to this Local Authority for immediate repairs to our roads that have been damaged by recent flooding."

Signed: Councillors Collins (J), Collins (M), Donegan, Foley, Gleeson, Ryan, Sheahan (K).

The Director, Service Operations/Change Management opened the Meeting and gave an overview of the presentation that was to follow.

The Director introduced *“The Severe Weather Event Limerick December 2015/January 2016.”* As part of the presentation, he firstly outlined the events of the December 2015 flooding as follows:

- Overview and Council Response.
- Causes.
- Impact:
 - Castleconnell.
 - Montpellier.
 - Mountshannon.
 - Blocked Local Roads.
 - Corbally / City Centre.
 - County-Wide Impact.
- Damaged Infrastructure and Costs.

The Director then gave an overview of the Council’s response to events in December as follows:

- Council initiated initial response in advance of Storm Desmond on 4th December 2015.
- On 7th December, the Council activated its severe weather protocols with first Severe Weather Team Meeting.
- 15 meetings were held in Merchant’s Quay for key Council personnel.
- Construction of Flood Defences and Pumping Stations in Castleconnell and Montpellier commenced 4th December.
- Additional High Capacity Pumps Sourced.
- Part of response involved building flood defences in known ‘at risk’ areas.

The following measures were implemented:

- In excess of 20,000 small sandbags and 500 one-ton sandbags.
- At peak, 20 high capacity pumps operated on a 24 hour basis.
- Operated a 24 hour service in regard to monitoring and maintaining pumps since 4th December, 2015. That service was provided through Christmas and New Year.
- Temporary welfare facilities established.
- 5000 plus gallons of fuel.
- Several km of water discharge pipes.
- 100 plus road signs.
- Machinery – Excavators x 3, Lorries x 3, pickups x 6, Tractors/trailers x 2.

- Hire of Flood Boom for Castleconnell.
- Use of latest technology – drone photography.
- Ongoing monitoring of high tides.

He stated that, at peak, 70 staff were involved. Rapid response was provided to incidents that occurred at Annacotty and Corbally on 12th December in conjunction with the Fire Service. Staff had been deployed as necessary from non-affected areas and support was provided by the Civil Defence personnel and resources. The Council worked with other agencies, particularly the Defence Forces/Army.

There had been in excess of 30 media releases and Radio/TV interviews. There were regular communications with Councillors. The Council was in daily contact with the ESB and reported daily to the National Emergency Coordination Centre (NECC). The Council had maintained regular contact with the Local Coordination Group (Gardaí/Health Service Executive/Local Authorities) and liaised with other response groups like the Army.

The Director highlighted the following in the course of the presentation:

- Accommodation and Welfare Team established by Council in consultation with the HSE and Department of Social Protection.
- Contact and visits with those affected.
- Health concerns/elderly concerns were referred to the HSE.
- Those affected had been offered a range of supports and assistance including dehumidifiers, skips, etc.
- Contact and coordination with the Department of Social Protection in relation to the Red Cross Humanitarian Assistance Scheme.
- Contact made with the IFA in relation to any welfare issues for the farming community.

The Senior Engineer, Service Operations, then gave an overview on the events at the Mulcair River pointing out the following:

- Exceptional rainfall overnight Friday 11th and Saturday 12th December.
- River Mulcair was in High Flow for most of the afternoon.
- Flowing into a Full Shannon.
- Started to overflow its Banks from around 5.30 p.m.
- Council deployed sandbags to houses on Mulcair Drive that were at risk.
- Flow peaked at about 9.30 p.m. approximately 180m³/sec.
- 1 house was extensively flooded, minor damage to another.
- Mulcair Drive and Mountshannon Road flooded.

The Senior Engineer moved on to outline events that had occurred in Corbally on Saturday, 12th December:

- Council got report circa 8.30 p.m. that Canal was overtopping and the Engineer responded immediately.
- Found Canal overtopping near College Park.
- Exceptional high flow in rivers and canal.
- Investigated Lock gates and found that they were holding back water in canal.
- Proceeded to open gates and attempt failed and called Waterways Ireland. Waterways Ireland Lock-Keeper responded, he failed to open gates.
- Fire Service attempted to open gates (called away).
- Council opened gates with assistance of excavator.
- One low-lying cottage badly flooded.
- Approximately 12 other houses different levels of flooding.
- Clean-up – Saturday night/Sunday/Monday.
- Rainfall, exceptional river and canal flow, gate setting.
- Solution, remote monitoring and automation/additional gates.

The other issue that he highlighted in his presentation was that of vandalism:

- Damage to sandbags.
- Moving road warning signs and throwing them in river.
- Moving safety fencing.
- Turning off pumps.
- Hoax calls.
- People not following instructions.

The Senior Engineer gave some data in relation to the discharge of water into the Shannon:

- Powerstation through headrace 400m³/sec.
- Parteen Weir – 470 m³/sec (Max this Flood event).
- Combined ESB in excess of 850 m³/sec.
- River Mulcair – up to 180 m³/sec.
- River Blackwater – up to 50 m³/sec.
- Other Small Rivers & Streams.
- River Shannon in Limerick City greater 1000 m³/sec at peak.
- 1m³water = 1 tonne Water.
- 1000 tonnes water per second.

He added that there had been significant damage to infrastructure and to roads. He estimated that the damage due to flooding alone in Limerick was in excess of €10,000,000 and that it was on the back of years of under-investment in roads maintenance.

He concluded by pointing out that Limerick had many areas built at a level that put them at risk of either fluvial or tidal flooding. He stated that flooding was not a new problem and that heavy rainfall and storms were becoming more frequent and that global warming and rising sea levels were a reality. He added that Limerick was at risk from fluvial and tidal flooding but that the greatest risk was probably tidal. The Council needed to be more selective when deciding where to locate developments. Improved flood infrastructure was required which would take time and would be costly.

The Mayor and Members complimented the Director and the Senior Engineer for their very comprehensive presentation. They expressed their appreciation for the whole organisation of the flood relief response in what were very difficult circumstances. They thanked all members of staff and other organisations who had been involved in the endeavours to minimise the impact of flooding.

It was stated that the Special Meeting had been called to discuss recent flooding and the plans that should be put in place to alleviate hardship and financial loss for affected land and property owners. Solidarity with those affected nationally and locally needed to be demonstrated.

It was proposed by Councillor Collins (M) that the Council call on the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to make emergency funding available to Limerick City and County Council for immediate repairs to the Council's roads that had been damaged by recent flooding. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Foley and agreed.

The Mayor, with the Members' consent, moved the following Motion:

"That, the Council call on the Government to amalgamate all the agencies involved in waterways in the country into one agency and to allow farmers, landowners, property owners to undertake dredging of their rivers at appropriate times of the year."

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Hourigan and agreed.

The Mayor also requested that information be provided in relation to number of State Agencies with responsibility for *rivers, lakes, streams (waterways) in the City and County of Limerick*.

The Chief Executive, in response to queries raised by Members, stated that there had been serious underfunding of the roads programme nationally over the previous number of years. An estimate of the recent damage to the roads infrastructure would be prepared and submitted to the Department.

Signed:

Mayor

Date:
