

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS AT ONLINE SPECIAL MEETING OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON MONDAY, 8TH MARCH, 2021, AT 4PM.

PRESENT IN THE CHAIR:

Councillor M. Collins, Mayor.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors Benson, Butler, Collins (B), Collins (J), Costeloe, Daly, Donegan, Foley, Galvin, Hartigan, Keary, Kiely, Kilcoyne, Leddin, McSweeney, Mitchell, Murphy, Novak Uí Chonchúir, O'Brien, O'Dea, O'Donoghue, O'Hanlon, O'Sullivan, Ruddle, Ryan (E), Scanlan, Secas, Sheahan (J), Sheahan (K), Sheahan (M), Sheahan (C), Slattery, Talukder, Teefy.

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive (Mr. P. Daly), Director, Housing Development (Ms. A. Duke), A/Director, Capital Investment (Mr. S. Hanrahan), A/Director, Economic Development (Mr. V. Murray), Director, Physical Development (Mr. B. Kennedy), Meetings Administrator (Mr. J. Clune), A/Administrative Officer, Corporate Services and Governance (Mr. P. Williams).

The Mayor commenced the Meeting by welcoming the Members and members of the press who were present. He stated that the Special Meeting had been convened to discuss the issue as set out in the Special Meeting Requisition received on 17th February, 2021, and signed by a number of Members as follows:

“We, the undersigned Members move that Limerick City and County Council request Iconic Newspapers Ltd. to recognise the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and engage with the NUJ worker representatives to address concerns of their employees working in the Limerick Leader newspaper. We therefore request a Special Meeting to discuss this Motion.”

Signed: Councillors J. Leddin, E. Secas, C. Sheahan, F. Kilcoyne, E. Ryan.

The Mayor then gave his full support to the Motion. He said the Council had convened to show solidarity with the Limerick Leader journalists, that Councillors and Limerick Leader journalists had always shared a mutual respect and that the Limerick Leader and, indeed, all Limerick journalists played a crucial role in democracy.

Councillor Leddin, in proposing the Motion on behalf of those who signed the Requisition calling for a Special Meeting, said that the matter at hand was not just about an industrial relations issue, the decision by the Iconic Newspaper Group not to engage with the NUJ to discuss and resolve the concerns of employees and journalists was in itself wrong. He said that Iconic Newspapers' unwillingness to enter dialogue with their workers struck at the very heart of what news media was there to protect and enshrine – namely, accountability and transparency.

He went on to say that the Limerick Leader was part of Limerick's culture and heritage since the first paper rolled off the printing press in 1889; and that, despite the rapid pace of change in how news was delivered and received on various digital platforms, the Limerick Leader and its employees had adapted to change so as to continue to deliver news to the people of Limerick and the Limerick diaspora worldwide. He further made the point that a transparent democratic process required a strong media - the watchdogs of democracy who set the agenda on issues of the day and provided for informed debate and discussion; and while there was no legislative requirement for employers to recognise Trade Unions, there was a moral obligation on behalf of employers to show respect by at least listening to the concerns expressed by their employees.

Councillor Secas seconded the Motion and said that it was very disappointing to learn that the NUJ had made huge efforts to engage with Iconic Newspapers in vain, and that, as a former journalist, it was important to address this issue as a matter of urgency to ensure that democracy was not undermined by the actions taken by Iconic Newspapers. She said she fully supported the NUJ's calls for Iconic Newspapers to recognise and collectively negotiate with the NUJ, which was representing the Limerick Leader journalists.

There was unanimous support from the Members for the Motion put forward to the Special Meeting. The Members then spoke in turn and the following additional points were made by them in the ensuing discussion:

- The Limerick Leader and its journalists held all Councillors and, by extension, democracy, to account. Through its Journalism, the Limerick Leader ensured that Limerick Councillors were accountable and held to the highest standards.
- The Limerick Leader had a long legacy and was part of the fabric of Limerick. The Limerick Leader had shown long and loyal support to Limerick and was an institution that should now be supported and protected.
- All politics were local and Councillors depended on the local Limerick print media for fair and balanced coverage of topics of interest to the public. The Limerick public received accurate reporting from print media, and not reporting on a whim that could be seen on social media.
- Limerick City and County Council, as a longstanding customer of the Limerick Leader, had a vested interest in supporting the newspaper.
- Iconic Newspapers should explore all revenue streams so as to ensure that the Limerick Leader journalists were kept in employment.

The Mayor then summarised the discussion by stating that there was unanimous support for the Motion and that the Council would now write to the CEO of the Iconic Newspaper Group to request that the Group recognise the National Union of Journalists and engage with the NUJ worker representatives to address concerns of their employees working in the Limerick Leader newspaper.

It was proposed by Councillor C. Sheehan that the resolution of the Council should also be sent to each Local Authority as the Iconic Newspaper Group had publications in numerous counties. This was seconded by Councillor Secas, and unanimously agreed.

This concluded the Meeting.

Signed: _____
Mayor

Date: _____