

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS AT ONLINE SPECIAL MEETING OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON MONDAY, 24TH MAY, 2021, AT 5PM.

PRESENT IN THE CHAIR:

Councillor M. Collins, Mayor.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

An apology for his inability to attend the Meeting was received from Councillor Ryan (M).

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive (Mr. P. Daly), Deputy Chief Executive and Director, Support Services (Mr. S. Coughlan), Director, National and Regional Shared Services (Ms. C. Curley), Director, Community Development (Mr. G. Daly), Director, Housing Development (Ms. A. Duke), A/Director, Capital Investment (Mr. S. Hanrahan), Director, Physical Development (Mr. B. Kennedy), Director, Service Operations (Mr. K. Lehane), A/Director, Economic Development (Mr. V. Murray), Head of Enterprise, Limerick Enterprise Office (Mr. M. Cantwell), Meetings Administrator (Ms. L. Flannery), Administrative Officer, Corporate Services and Governance (Ms. F. McCormack), Staff Officer, Corporate Services and Governance (Ms. C. Sheehy).

Suspension of Standing Orders:

The Mayor formally commenced the Special Meeting at the appointed time of 5pm. He noted that the business of the Ordinary Meeting had been suspended to allow for the formal commencement of the Special Meeting.

The Mayor then asked for the suspension of Standing Orders to allow the business of the Ordinary Meeting to continue to its conclusion, with the Special Meeting to resume subsequently.

On the proposal of Councillor Sheahan (J) seconded by Councillor O'Hanlon Standing Orders were suspended in order to allow for this.

RESUMPTION OF MEETING:

Following the conclusion of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council, the Special Meeting resumed with Item No. 1 on the agenda.

1. CLOSURE OF AER LINGUS CABIN CREW BASE AT SHANNON AIRPORT:

The Mayor said that it was an incredibly sad day for Limerick and the Mid-West when the news was announced the previous week that Aer Lingus would permanently close its Shannon base. He mentioned in particular the 126 staff and their families at Shannon Airport who were now facing redundancy at the end of a long and very successful era for Aer Lingus at Shannon.

While he understood that the aviation industry had been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, clarification was now needed from Aer Lingus about what this would mean for the retention of services, particularly for international connectivity on key routes into Heathrow and North America, and a timeline for when these were expected to resume.

He was aware that the business community was extremely concerned at reports that Aer Lingus was considering moving some aircraft used to fly to Boston, New York and Heathrow, from Shannon, to the UK. It was known how much transatlantic routes supported multinational investment and tourism in the Region; but there was now a very real question mark over the future of Aer Lingus transatlantic services from Shannon and this question needed to be urgently answered.

The Government had made clear the importance of regional growth and the regional economy and the extremely important role Shannon played in that. Stakeholders in the Region, the Government and the Airport needed to come together to ensure that the best possible sustainable solution for everyone was found.

He was calling on the Government to implement the recommendations of the Taskforce on Aviation to assist the sector to recover from the COVID crisis and to introduce policies to protect Shannon and other regional airports outside of Dublin.

The Mayor went on to say that since Shannon was separated from the Dublin Airport Authority, it was the second fastest growing airport pre-COVID. It had grown its passenger numbers by just over 300,000, while Cork grew by almost 250,000. Dublin, however, grew passenger numbers by 13.8 million, winning 96% of all new passengers into Ireland. That was not sustainable for airports outside of the capital and policy needed to be introduced to ensure this market monopoly did not continue in recovery or other airports would struggle to survive. A plan was urgently needed to ensure that Shannon Airport and the Mid-West were ready for the recovery in global aviation.

The Mayor added that he supported the calls that any Government subsidies or support to airlines would be contingent upon commitments from airlines to increase regional route connectivity.

He was also calling for the fast-tracking of the appointment of a new Chairperson for the Shannon Group as it had been without one now for nine months in the biggest crisis for aviation ever in Ireland and this appointment needed to be in place as a matter of urgency.

The Members then spoke in turn and the following additional points were made by them in the ensuing discussion:

- Effect on the aviation sector as a result of the global pandemic.
- Allocation of slots in Heathrow Airport.
- Investment required in order to compete with Dublin Airport.
- Competitive costs and ability to provide lower fares within the EU.
- Protection of jobs at Shannon Airport.
- Significance of Shannon Airport as a strategic asset and the need for balanced regional development.
- Requirement for connectivity to major hubs from Shannon Airport.
- The urgent need for an Aviation Policy specifically for Shannon Airport.
- Ease of access to the Mid-West for FDI's and for the hosting of the Ryder Cup.
- Deputation of Mayor, Chief Executive and relevant stakeholders to meet with the Minister for Transport, Mr. Eamon Ryan, TD.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the comments made by the Mayor and Members and stated that the Economic Development Directorate would pursue the issue regarding the slots at Heathrow. He confirmed that a Deputation could be arranged as requested by the Members.

The Mayor summarised the discussion, stating that there was unanimous support for the Motion and that the Council would now write on the issue to An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, TD, and to the Minister for Transport, Mr. Eamon Ryan, TD, asking that the Minister would meet with a Deputation comprising the Mayor, Chief Executive and relevant stakeholders to discuss the closure of the Aer Lingus base at Shannon, the retention of the Shannon/Heathrow slots, and the appointment of a Chair to the Shannon Group.

This concluded the Meeting.

Signed: _____
Mayor

Date: _____