

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on Tuesday 4th November, 2014.

Chair: Cllr. P. Millea

Cllrs: M.H. Cavanagh, M. Shortall, J. Brennan, P. Fitzpatrick, M. McCarthy, B. Gardner, D. Kennedy, A. McGuinness, M. Doran, D. Fitzgerald, K. Funchion, J. Malone, P. McKee, M. Noonan, E. Aylward, T. Breathnach, F. Doherty, P. Dunphy, G. Frisby, P. Cleere, P. O'Neill, M. O'Neill

Officials: J. Mulholland, P. O'Neill, M. Delahunty, B. Tyrrell, S. Walton and A.M Walsh.

Cllr. O. Millea opened the meeting and advised members that he had received a request to convene a special meeting to discuss 'Technological University in the South East'. He stated that he granted the request. He read the Notice of Motion as set out in the agenda for the special meeting.

"That Kilkenny County Council, recognising the importance of the establishment of a Technological University in the South East to Kilkenny and the entire South East region, will hold a Special Meeting on Tuesday the 4th day of November, 2014 at 4.30pm in County Hall, John Street, Kilkenny City, to discuss the current status of the proposed establishment of a Technological University in the South East."

Cllr. D. Fitzgerald expressed his objection to the convening of a special meeting to discuss an issue which the local authority has no statutory role in, neither the members nor executive has any role or power in the establishment of a technological university for the South East. He requested clarification on whether a precedent has now been set that any member can now call a special meeting for any matter.

Mr. J. Mulholland acknowledged that the Local Authority has no statutory power in third level education. The establishment of a Technological University in the South East is included in the programme for government. There is an objective for a multi-campus which could include Kilkenny. The local authority's development objective for the Brewery site is the provision of some form of third level education. It is not unusual for the Council to discuss new initiatives that could impact on the future development of the County.

Cllr. D. Fitzgerald stated that he is not happy that a special meeting was convened and this matter could have been dealt with at the next normal meeting of the council.

Cllr. P. Millea stated that he took the decision to call the meeting. The merger of the I.T in Carlow and Waterford has been discussed for a long number of years and Kilkenny County Council has already supported the establishment of a technological university for the South East.

Mr. J. Mulholland stated that a similar meeting has been convened in two other Local Authorities in order to progress the matter of third level education in the South East. This issue comes under the domain of social and economic development for the County.

Cllr. B. Gardner asked if a special meeting can be held to discuss the Notices of Motion which have been on the Council's agendas for a number of months. These are every bit as important as the notice now before us. She requested that a special meeting be held as soon as possible.

Cllr. M. Doran stated that members don't call special meetings lightly. The concerns of families in Kilkenny must be heard and considered. Members have a right to represent their constituency and as a public representative he must do whatever to progress this issue for the benefit of Kilkenny Citizens and development of the County.

Cllr. P. McKee stated that the merger of the I.T in Carlow and Waterford is included in government policy. The Technological Universities Bill 2014 has not yet been passed into law. The statutory process for both the I.T Carlow and W.I.T to merge and form the Technological University in the South East has commenced. A memorandum of agreement in relation to governance and management structures were signed recently. Difficulties have now arisen and W.I.T has altered its position.

A draft report prepared by Professor Taylor of Liverpool University offered evidence that W.I.T would be in a better position to do it alone than merge with I.T Carlow. This document has now been withdrawn as it contains inaccuracies. Cllr. P. McKee urged W.I.T to come back to the table and have productive discussions with I.T. Carlow for the benefit of the South East.

Cllr. P. McKee stated that the two Boards should merge as a single entity to ensure that there is a clear and unambiguous direction given towards the establishment of a Technological University in the South East. The respective boards are due to expire in March 2015 and this is now the opportunity to take leadership and merge the Boards. One President should lead the new Board and be given the necessary resources to achieve the objective.

There should also be international representation that has experience in establishing large multi-campus educational institutions on the Board.

A university for the regions should be put above the interests of individuals and groups in the education sector.

The success or failure of the university proposal will have serious implications for Kilkenny. There is currently inequality in education. The South East has a lower than average participation rate in higher education. Only 23% of the population have a higher education qualification against 36% in Dublin and 29% nationally. South East has also a higher rate of unemployment i.e 19% compared to the national average of 15%. The higher rate of unemployment is amongst the under 25's.

The delivery of a university in the South East is an essential ingredient to the economic development and enhancement of the human capital capacity of the South East.

Cllr. P. McKee acknowledged the establishment of T.S.S.G in St. Kieran's College which has been supported by Kilkenny Local Authorities. Proposals to establish a new research and enterprise campus at the Smithwick's Brewery site are also under consideration which could also offer opportunities for the expansion of the T.S.S.G. The economic development and establishment of multi-campus university is in the best interests of the region and will benefit Kilkenny. Cllr. P. McKee requested the Acting Chief Executive to call a meeting of the Chief Executives of Wexford, Tipperary, Carlow and Waterford to discuss each of their respective positions and see if common ground can be found and that they would issue a joint statement expressing their position.

Contributions were made by Cllr. E. Aylward, M.H. Cavanagh, P. Dunphy, P. Fitzpatrick, D. Kennedy, T. Breathnach, M. Shortall, M. Noonan, P. O'Neill, J. Brennan, P. Millea, M. O'Neill and J. Malone.

Members voiced their support for the establishment of a Technological University in the South East and the merger of the I.T Carlow and W.I.T for the greater good of the South East. The main issues raised by members included the following:-

- Lack of university is hindering economic development/job creation
- Lack of higher education opportunities
- Higher level of unemployment in the region
- Progress made to date should not be wasted
- Opportunities for Kilkenny if multi-campus university is established
- Presence of T.S.S.G in Kilkenny and possible expansion of this
- Issue discussed at all Regional Authority meetings
- Government committed to the provision of university in the South East, not possible to have two stand alone university campus in South East
- Urge the colleges to agree on proposals for merger

- Lack of investment by IDA – non-availability of third level graduates

Cllr. M.H Cavanagh proposed that the two Presidents be asked to address the Council. She advised that the aim of the W.I.T Board is to have university status established for the South East. She advised that Dr. Ormonde has resigned from the W.I.T Board today.

Cllr. M. Shortall advised members that Minister Jan O’Sullivan has appointed Mr. Michael Kelly to lead a process of consultation with the governing bodies, staff and students in W.I.T and C.I.T. She stated that the progress should be re-invigorated as there are clearly many merits for the region.

Cllr. E. Aylward supported Cllr. P. McKee’s request for the Chief Executives of the South East to meet to discuss this issue. This was supported by all members. Mr. J. Mulholland agreed to convene meeting.

Cllr. O’Neill supported Cllr. M.H Cavanagh’s suggestions that the two Presidents be invited to address the Council.

Cllr. P. Millea thanked all members for their contributions and their unanimous support for the establishment of a Technological University in the South East.

Cllr. P. McKee thanked the Cathaoirleach for convening the special meeting.

Meeting then concluded.

Signed:_____

Cathaoirleach

Date:_____