

WEXFORD COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of Special Meeting of Wexford County Council
held on Monday 19th June, 2017 – 11.30 a.m.
in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Wexford.**

Attendance:

In the Chair: Cllr. P. Kavanagh, Cathaoirleach.

Councillors:

P. Breen;	M. Byrne;	G. Carthy;	K. Codd Nolan
T. Dempsey;	A. Donohoe,	K. Doyle,	M. Farrell;
J. Fleming	J. Hegarty,	D. Hynes;	R. Ireton;
W. Kavanagh;	A. Kelly;	G. Lawlor;	L. McDonald;
J. Moore;	BA Murphy,	M. Murphy;	J. Mythen;
L. O'Brien;	O. O'Connell;	J. O'Rourke	F. Ó Súilleabháin;
M. Roche;	M. Sheehan;	F. Staples	J. Sullivan;
D. Wadding;	M. Whelan.		

Officials:

Mr. T. Enright, Chief Executive;
M. T. Larkin, Director of Services;
Mr. E. Hore, Director of Services;
Mr. J. Carley, Director of Services;
Mr. S. Begley, A/Head of Finance;
Mr. P. O'Gorman, Senior Executive Officer;
Mr. P. Collins, County Secretary;

Apologies: Councillors A. Connick, O. Walsh

On the proposal of Cllr. G. Lawlor seconded by Cllr. M. Byrne it was agreed to hold the meeting In-Committee given the sensitive nature of the matters to be discussed.

1. Refugee Settlement Programme:

The Chief Executive addressed the Council to update them on two issues:

- a. Syrian Families Settlement
- b. Recent contact from the Department of Justice re Refugee Reception Centres. Members would be aware that the National Task Force on Refugee Reception Centres had agreed that Elected Members would be informed in advance of proposals to open refugee reception centres in their county.

He further advised that an ad had appeared in the national media from the Department of Justice seeking suitable premises throughout Ireland to deal with families coming into Ireland from Syria; examples of such refugee centre's are Clonea Strand Hotel in Dungarvan and also the Centre in Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon.

The Reception Centre's are used to provide English language training, education, health and other supports over a few months from the arrival of the refugees who are then re-housed by various Local Authorities throughout the country.

The Cedars Hotel in Rosslare Strand has been selected for use as a Refugee Reception Centre. It is envisaged that the building will be refurbished and ready for occupation by September 2017. The building has 33/34 bedrooms which will house approximately 60-90 people.

The Refugee Reception Centre's are different from the Direct Provision centre's which are used for asylum seekers awaiting the processing of applications for refugee status. The Department of Justice has leased Cedars Hotel for a period of 2 years. The Chief Executive advised that he had spoken to both the Council's in Roscommon and Waterford and was advised that there had been no issues regarding the Reception Centres.

Furthermore, he asked the Department of Justice about the support locally for the local community and the Department is currently checking the building to ensure that it is covered for planning and fire safety. It was noted that a thorough fire inspection had been done by a qualified engineer for the Department of Justice. He also noted that the opening of the Reception Centre would provide some employment in the local area.

The Chief Executive has also been in contact with Bill Kelly from the Local Rosslare Development Association who would welcome families and give as much support and help to the resettlement as possible. The Department of Justice will attend the Borough District of Wexford meeting on Monday 26th June, 2017 to answer questions and give further information to Councillors.

The Chief Executive then circulated a document to the Members. He clarified that families would be using the centre; he also noted that the prior advance notice to Councillors regarding the project is important to allay the fears and concerns of the public.

The Cathaoirleach agreed with the Chief Executive's sentiments and advised that he would hate to see any negative response to this initiative. Rosslare is a jewel in the crown of Wexford tourism and the reputation of Rosslare Strand is very high in a national context.

The proposed Centre was then discussed by the members of the Council, all of whom welcomed the initiative. A number of issues were raised and dealt with by the Chief Executive. He advised that the families coming to Wexford have been vetted by the Garda team prior to entering the country.

It was also highlighted by Members that services and facilities should be put in place to ensure that the refugees would be made welcome and would have all of the facilities available to them. In particular, that children would be integrated into the local community and it was noted that the local buy-in from the community in Rosslare is extremely important. Concerns about the work being done in Cedars Hotel to a high standard were

also raised. It was agreed that the communication of the resettlement centre and the housing of the Syrian refugees would need to be communicated properly to the general public.

It was noted that the ETB will attend the Borough District Council Meeting - they have dealt with similar issues in Clonea and have experience in dealing with refugees coming into the country. The Chief Executive advised that the families coming to the Resettlement Centre will be dispersed all over the country after a number of months.

He also noted that extra funding is being made available to provide housing for these refugees which will not be impacting on the social housing budgets. It was noted the importance of having amenities such as playgrounds designed so that the community can use the facilities in the future.

A number of suggestions were made about how to deal with the communications of this initiative and in particular dealing with local papers and the holding of public meetings. It was noted that the Council had an important leadership role with regard to the Refugee Settlement Centre.

At 12.20 p.m. Cllr. A. Connick arrived.

The Chief Executive advised that proper support will be put in place and that the Department of Justice will be working with the education, health and social welfare to provide those services. He also advised that money for community facilities will be made available and that Wexford County Council will give support to the project.

At 12.30 p.m. Cllr. O. Walsh arrived.

The Chief Executive thanked the meeting for their unanimous support and advised that a press release will be prepared for the local newspapers and radio.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

County Secretary

Daingithe ar an la de , 2017.

Cathaoirleach