

Minutes of Special Meeting of Clare County Council held in the Council Chamber, Áras Contae an Chláir, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare on Friday, 8th November, 2019 at 4:00 p.m.

Present:

Councillors M. Nestor, J. Flynn, C. Colleran Molloy, P. Murphy, A. Norton, P. Daly, J. Cooney, P. Hayes, T. O'Brien, C. Crowe, J. Crowe, M. Begley, P.J. Ryan, P. McMahon, G. Flynn, J. Killeen, J. Garrihy, R. Garvey, B. Chambers, G. Keating, C. Murphy, I. Lynch.

- Mr. Pat Dowling, Chief Executive.
- Ms. Colette Costelloe, Administrative Officer, Corporate Services.
- Ms. Margaret O'Rourke, Assistant Staff Officer.
- Mr. Liam Conneally, Director of Economic Development.
- Mr. Leonard Cleary, Director of Rural Development.
- Mr. Jason Murphy, Senior Executive Officer, Human Resources.

Also in attendance:

- Minister Pat Breen
- Deputy Joe Carey
- Senator Martin Conway
- Deputy Timmy Dooley
- Deputy Michael Harty

Apologies:

Mr. Will Corcoran, Regional Business Development Manager, IDA.

Mr. Jerry Moloney, Regional Director Mid West, Enterprise Ireland.

Cllr. M. McKee.

Absent:

Cllrs. M. Howard, P. Burke, A. O'Callaghan, S. Talty, P.J. Kelly.

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Cathal Crowe presided and thanked the Oireachtas Members, his fellow Councillors and Council executive for attending. Cllr. C. Crowe stated that this special meeting was convened following the recent unexpected job loss announcement in Shannon and in view of ongoing concerns about the future risk to employment in County Clare.

Cllr. Crowe stated that the loss of more than 500 jobs in Molex, 240 jobs at Roche Clarecastle, the potential loss of 114 jobs at Avara Pharmaceutical and the ongoing uncertainty at Moneypoint all have potential to have a devastating impact on the County's economy.

Cllr. C. Crowe extended credit to Minister Heather Humphreys for arriving in Shannon within 24 hours of Molex announcing its closure.

Cllr. C. Crowe informed the meeting that he recently wrote to the Minister for Finance, Paschal Donohoe T.D., formally asking that he would apply for European Globalisation Funding to help this region over the coming months. He stated that this fund helped people who had been made redundant at Dell to retrain and re-enter the labour market. Cllr. Crowe requested the County's five Oireachtas members support this proposal for European Globalisation Funding.

Cllr. C. Crowe stated that there needs to be strong leadership, unity and purpose in Clare at this challenging time. He emphasised that Clare has potential for new industry and job creation due to the fact that we have an international airport, we are perfectly positioned between two of Ireland's cities, we have a motorway running through the spine of our county and we have an educated and skilled workforce.

Cllr. C. Crowe stated that this Council stands fully in solidarity with the workers of Molex, Avara, Moneypoint, Roche and the other smaller factories and businesses in our county that face uncertainty and he referred to the very humane side to job losses, families who until recently enjoyed financial stability will face worries in relation to paying their mortgage, repaying car loans and covering the cost of college fees. Their plight must be central to our cause. Cllr. C. Crowe concluded by saying that Clare County Council will work with government and agencies to champion for a better Clare.

P. Dowling, Chief Executive addressed the meeting and stated that it is important that the impact on each of the individual employees following the recent decision by Molex to cease operations in Shannon be recognised. This unexpected announcement will result in a high degree of uncertainty and concern for the more than 500 employees affected.

Mr. Dowling confirmed the full commitment of Clare County Council to work collaboratively and collectively with all state agencies, education providers and representative bodies aimed at finding alternative options for the individual employees and at sourcing replacement industry for the Shannon area.

He welcomed the initiative demonstrated by Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Heather Humphreys along with her Department colleague, Minister for State for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection, Pat Breen to immediately assemble a Regional Task Force of state agencies, education providers and representative bodies in the Mid West to address the potential adverse affect on the Region, and the individual employees. This meeting was convened within 24 hours of the Molex announcement at Enterprise Ireland's office in Shannon on Wednesday, 23rd October 2019.

Mr. Dowling stated that he represented Clare County Council at this meeting together with Liam Conneally, Director of Economic Development and Padraic McElwee, Head of Enterprise.

Other participating entities/agencies were all Oireachtas members from Clare, Chairperson of the Mid-West Regional Enterprise Action Plan Steering Committee, IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Shannon Chamber, Shannon Group, Mid-West Regional Skills Forum, University of Limerick, Limerick Institute of Technology, Limerick Clare Education Training Board and IBEC.

Mr. Dowling informed the meeting that all participants affirmed their commitment to working together in a focused and cohesive manner to maximise the impact on addressing the negative impact this announcement may have on the Region.

The initial actions agreed at the meeting were:

- An implementation steering group to be set up under an be lead by the Chairperson of Mid West Regional Enterprise Action Plan Steering Committee
- IDA to undertake a skills audit of each of the employees which will enable an appropriate focused action plan to be developed.
- IDA to immediately market the site to potential inward investor companies.

Mr. Dowling stated that Clare County Council will be represented on this implementation steering group which will be convened in the near future.

Mr. Dowling noted apologies received from the IDA and stated that Will Corcoran, Regional Business Development Manager, IDA has agreed to attend a future meeting of Clare County Council.

Minister Pat Breen addressed the meeting and thanked the Cathaoirleach for inviting him to attend. Minister Breen outlined the situation regarding employment in County Clare and empathised with the plight of the workers in Molex. He referred to the taskforce established by Minister Humphries which is headed by Barry O’Sullivan. He commended the proposed audit to assess the skills of the workers in Molex. Minister Breen stated that Molex will leave a global team in Shannon.

Minister Breen stated that he has met with the President of UL who will ensure that anybody who requires skills and training will be assisted.

Minister Breen stated that he will lead a trade mission to the US in the new year and this will attract investment into the region. He stated that Enterprise Ireland, the IDA and Clare’s Local Enterprise Office have created 3,000 jobs in County Clare in the last three years and that there is more than a 50% reduction in unemployment in the mid west during this period.

Minister Breen paid tribute to the Council executive in relation to work on the Strategic Development Zone and for their future vision in relation to County Clare.

Minister Breen stated that Moneypoint will not close, he acknowledged that there are obligations in relation to climate change and that Moneypoint will have a role as a strategic electricity provider into the future.

In relation to Molex, Minister Breen stated that an alternative buyer can be sourced. He referred to the 4% increase in visitors at the Cliffs of Moher last year, the three new routes announced from Shannon Airport and requested that the Elected Members help promote and support these new routes. He stated that Shannon Airport is critical for Clare in attracting industry into the region and that he will collaborate and continue to work closely with the Oireachtas Members and Local Enterprise Office to make County Clare an attractive place to work and visit.

Deputy Joe Carey addressed the meeting and complimented the Cathaoirleach for convening this special meeting. Deputy Carey complimented Liam Conneally, Director of Economic Development and Clare County Council for work on the SDZ, UL complex, Ennis 2040 Strategy, proposed new Data Centre and for their vision for County Clare. Deputy Carey stated that the recent announcement in relation to Molex is a huge blow for the County and the region and is a replication of Roche, Clarecastle. He stated that the Taskforce established in relation to Roche have worked hard in trying to find a replacement and are committed to addressing issues arising. Deputy Carey stated that a broader strategy is required to ensure economic recovery. He assured the meeting that he will work with the members of Clare County Council to deliver for the region and the County.

Senator Martin Conway addressed the meeting and thanked the Cathaoirleach for the invitation. Senator Conway referred to the uncertainty posed by the recent job losses announcement and

assured the meeting that he will work to come up with solutions in order to try to reduce this uncertainty. Senator Conway complimented Clare County Council on the work being undertaken on a number of key developments.

Deputy Timmy Dooley then addressed the meeting and stated that this is an issue of great concern and referred to the impact on the County. He stated that the Oireachtas Members need to take a strategic approach to work collectively to ensure every action is taken to help the people who have lost jobs. Deputy Dooley stated that he attended the meeting in Shannon the day after the closure of Molex was announced and that the Government is serious about addressing the issues. Deputy Dooley stated that Barry O'Sullivan is widely respected and that with his leadership the taskforce has the capacity to find a resolution to the problem. He referred to efforts being made to retain Roche in Clarecastle. Deputy Dooley stated that there is a requirement to put a taskforce together to address the issues in Moneypoint. Deputy Dooley stated that there is a will and a willingness with Councillors, Oireachtas Members and Council Executive to work collectively to establish solutions to these serious issues.

Deputy Michael Harty addressed the meeting and referred to the impact the job losses will have on the area. Deputy Harty outlined potential initiatives that need to be pursued and managed in relation to off shore wind and maximizing the use of the deep waters at the Shannon Estuary, long term investment in Shannon Airport and the need for active promotion by Tourism Ireland to focus on selling the Mid West.

Cathaoirleach, Cllr. C. Crowe thanked the Oireachtas Members for their continued support. Cllr. C. Crowe expressed his disappointment at the lack of engagement by Minister Shane Ross when he visited Clare recently. Cllr. C. Crowe committed to arranging a cross party, cross directorate meeting with Minister Ross in the near future.

The elected members of Clare County Council thanked the Oireachtas members for their attendance at the Special Meeting and welcomed their support and commitment to work collaboratively to ensure a better and brighter future for the county. They outlined concerns expressed by their constituents in relation to upskilling older employees and the statutory rights of employees in relation to redundancy entitlements. The need to promote Shannon was emphasised together with the need to attract more Irish and European companies. The elected members stated that Clare County Council needs representation on the Board of Shannon Group. It was also noted that Irish Aviation legislation needs to be reviewed. The risk for Clare County Council was emphasised due to the loss of rates and future local government funding. Reference was made to the recent loss of 25 jobs in Feakle as a result of Clare Bus contract being awarded to a Limerick company.

It was noted that there is a regional imbalance within County Clare as West Clare is more marginalised. Moneypoint has been the counterbalance to this and it was felt that it has the capacity to be an economic driver for future years as it is the last zoned industrial site on the River Shannon and we should be making the most of that opportunity. R&D is something that should be explored which would have potential of being economic generator for the next 20-30 years.

The elected members expressed disappointment that the members of Clare County Council and the executive were not informed of the recent visit by Minister Shane Ross to Shannon and the members supported the commitment of An Cathaoirleach in relation to a cross party delegation meeting Minister Ross in the near future.

Reference was made to EI electronics company in Shannon as an example as to how a company can be redeemed and demonstrates how an Irish owned company can produce a low cost product and continue to grow.

The Elected Members acknowledged the impact this unexpected announcement has had on the employees affected and were unanimous in their willingness to work together in an effort to support them.

Cathaoirleach, Cllr. C. Crowe thanked the Oireachtas Members and the Councillors present for taking the time to attend this meeting.

P. Dowling, Chief Executive stated that Clare County Council will continue to engage with Moneypoint, Roche, Molex and Shannon Group. He referred to a range of major capital and economic projects that are ongoing and stated that he will be arranging a detailed briefing for the Oireachtas Members early in the New Year.

Minister Pat Breen echoed the words of the Chief Executive. He emphasised the importance of balanced regional development and outlined how 65% of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in 2018 were outside of Dublin. He didn't feel we were at the stage where we should apply for European Globalisation Funding. He informed the meeting that a wide bodied hanger is being built in Shannon. He stated that he is confident a replacement can be sourced for Molex. In relation to Roche, Minister Breen stated that the Roche site is a significant strategic site zoned for development which the IDA will market. Minister Breen expressed confidence that the ESB will make significant changes in Moneypoint to ensure a viable future and all options including biomass will be reviewed. He emphasised the importance of upskilling the workforce and referred to the 3,000 jobs created by agencies in Clare in the last three years. Minister Breen re-iterated that balanced regional development is a priority for Government.

Deputy Joe Carey thanked all present for participating in a very constructive meeting and offered his support to establishing a taskforce in relation to Moneypoint.

Senator Martin Conway acknowledged the ongoing important engagement between the agencies involved. Senator Conway expressed disappointment at the lack of a taskforce for Moneypoint and undertook to amend legislation in relation to the membership on the Board of Shannon Group.

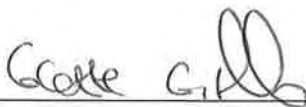
Deputy Timmy Dooley committed to working with the executive and Councillors on the strategies identified. Deputy Dooley agreed to instigate an amendment to the States Airport Act, as it needs to be written into legislation that Clare County Councils Chief Executive of the day hold an ex-officio position on the Board of Shannon Airport. It was agreed that Deputy Timmy Dooley would work with Senator Martin Conway on this action.

Deputy Michael Harty agreed that the Moneypoint taskforce needs to be activated and that the elected members should work collaboratively to get behind Clare Bus Company. Deputy Harty also noted that Clare County Council could be a driver in developing health services in the region.

Cathaoirleach, Cllr. C. Crowe again expressed appreciation to the Oireachtas Members, the Elected Members and executive of Clare County Council for attending the meeting.

The meeting then concluded at 18:25 p.m.

Signed:


Riarthóir Cruinnithe

Signed: _____
Cathairleach

Date: _____