

**Minutes of Special Meeting of Clare County Council held via MS Teams on
Monday, 24th May, 2021 at 11:30 a.m.**

Present via MS Teams:

Present:

Councillors M. Howard, M. Nestor, J. Flynn, C. Colleran Molloy, P. Murphy, A. Norton, P. Daly, J. Cooney, P. Hayes, P. Burke, A. O'Callaghan, T. O'Brien, J. Crowe, M. Begley, P.J. Ryan, P. McMahon, G. Flynn, D. McGettigan, P. O'Gorman, S. Talty, J. Killeen, J. Garrihy, P.J. Kelly, B. Chambers, G. Keating, C. Murphy.

- Mr. Pat Dowling, Chief Executive.
- Ms. Ann Reynolds, Meetings Administrator.
- Ms. Margaret O'Rourke, Assistant Staff Officer.
- Ms. Anne Haugh, Director of Social Development.
- Mr. Liam Conneally, Director of Economic Development.
- Mr. Leonard Cleary, Director of Rural Development.
- Ms. Carmel Kirby, Director of Physical Development.
- Ms. Noeleen Fitzgerald, Director of Finance and Support Services.

Oireachtas Members present.

Deputy Joe Carey
Deputy Violet Anne Wynne
Deputy Cathal Crowe
Deputy Michael McNamara
Senator Timmy Dooley
Senator Martin Conway
Senator Róisín Garvey

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Mary Howard presided and welcomed Councillors, Oireachtas Members, Council Executive and media to the meeting. Cathaoirleach, Cllr. M. Howard stated that the special meeting had been convened to discuss the Aer Lingus decision to permanently close its cabin crew base in Shannon Airport and outlined the impact this decision will have on the Aer Lingus staff and their families, as well as the significant impact on the supply chain services provided to Aer Lingus at Shannon. Cllr. Howard stated that connectivity is important and felt that Aer Lingus should provide a guarantee to ensure the Shannon to Heathrow slots are safe as well as ensuring transatlantic routes are safe in order to maintain foreign direct investment.

The elected members thanked Cathaoirleach, Cllr. M. Howard for calling the meeting and stated that it is important that local authorities, Councillors and Oireachtas Members work together for the benefit of Shannon Airport as this announcement will

have serious implications for Shannon, County Clare and the entire mid-west region. The members expressed disappointment in relation to the manner which Aer Lingus notified staff of their decision to permanently close its cabin base in Shannon Airport, many of whom have contributed years of service to Aer Lingus. The members noted that Aer Lingus has benefitted from government financial supports and concern was expressed that Covid-19 is being used by Aer Lingus to downgrade Shannon Airport. It was felt that the decision to permanently close the Aer Lingus cabin base in Shannon Airport will not be reversed and that Shannon Airport needs more flights, destinations, airlines and to maintain the Heathrow connectivity beyond 2022 so as to ensure a viable future for the airport. The members also agreed that a percentage of tourist trade needs to be redirected from Dublin Airport to Shannon Airport as many tourists who arrive at Dublin Airport travel to the West of Ireland. The elected members referred to the recent Rural Regeneration Strategy and felt that Shannon Airport requires strategic investment to deliver on balanced regional development and growth of the mid-west region. Questions were raised in relation to the Governments commitment to rural regeneration.

The absence of a National Aviation Policy was noted and the members expressed disappointment at the delay in appointing a Chief Executive Officer to Shannon Airport Authority as well as the absence of a local authority representative on the Board of Shannon Group. The members agreed that an enhanced marketing initiative is required to promote Shannon Airport internationally. The members appealed to policy makers to put positive discriminatory measures in place in order to help Shannon Airport to survive.

The elected members called for the implementation of the recently launched National Aviation Policy and the establishment of a National Aviation Development Forum so that all sectors of the industry can have an input into ongoing developments.

The Oireachtas Members then addressed the meeting and agreed that this decision by Aer Lingus is hugely disappointing and will have a huge impact for Shannon and the entire mid-west region from a tourism and business perspective. The Oireachtas members also agreed that Aer Lingus has treated its staff very poorly, many of whom have given years of loyal service to the company. The Oireachtas Members outlined details of meetings that have been convened with cabin crew staff as well as meetings with An Taoiseach and the Tánaiste in recent days requesting that this decision be reversed. It was noted that Aer Lingus is an independent commercial company currently in financial distress which has sought financial assistance from Government. It was agreed that conditions should be built in to future Government funding allocated to Aer Lingus which would require that Aer Lingus commit to (a) ensure that the Shannon Heathrow connectivity remains for at least ten years (b) continue transatlantic connection to the United States and (c) reverse the decision to close its base at Shannon Airport.

The Oireachtas Members were in agreement that a return to aviation roadmap is needed and that it is imperative that the government embrace the EU policy on the EU Digital Covid Certificate when it is signed off by the European Parliament. The members also stressed the importance of US and UK travel for Ireland and the necessity to signal to the US, European and UK markets that Ireland is open for

business post covid. The members felt that rapid antigen testing needs to be deployed for the Irish state to facilitate safe re-opening for international aviation.

The members requested that the concerns outlined in relation to Shannon Airport be raised with An Taoiseach, An Tánaiste and the Minister for Transport.

The Oireachtas Members undertook to take the concerns of the Councillors to national Government.

Cathaoirleach, Cllr. M. Howard informed the meeting that the Mayors/Cathaoirligh from the region are meeting on Tuesday, 25th May to discuss the matter also.

The meeting then concluded.

Signed: _____
Riarthóir Cruinnithe

Signed: _____
Cathaoirleach

Date: _____