

# Guidelines for Setting Up Muintir Councils

## Background

When Canon John Hayes founded Muintir Na Tire in 1937, his aim was to break down class antagonisms and conflicts between sectional interests and to replace these with a spirit of neighbourliness and a community unity to solve problems common to the whole community. The framework to achieve this aim is the Muintir representative Council.

## What is a Muintir Council

It is a body of people elected by everyone over the age of 18 in a geographically defined area. Its aim is to involve all the members of the community in identifying their local problems and needs and doing something about them. Something can be done about them either through the efforts of the local people, and when required, in association with other agencies

Everyone has a chance to have a say in a Muintir Council. It is normally elected every three years and is non-party political, interdenominational and non-sectional.

Muintir Councils have involved themselves in many projects such as Community Centres; Small-scale Industrial Development; Care of the Aged; Housing; Children's Playgrounds; Community Information Centres; Youth; Rural Fire-Fighting Equipment; Adult Education; Arts and Drama; Pre-School Playgroups; Energy Conservation; Sports Facilities; Tourism; Group Water Schemes; Local Community Radio; Tidy Towns; Land and River Drainage, etc.

A Muintir Council gives everybody an opportunity to become involved in turning their community into a better place in which to live thereby improving the quality of life.

## How is a Muintir Council Set Up?

A public meeting of all interested people is called. This meeting is well advertised and if possible a representative of Muintir na Tire is present. The advantages of a Muintir Council are discussed at this meeting. If there is agreement to form a Muintir Council a "Steering Committee" is elected at this meeting.

Committees elected at public meetings are not representative Muintir Councils.

## What Is a Steering Committee?

This is a temporary committee of people which presides over and organises the setting up of a Muintir Council.

The Steering Committee has to:

- (1) Outline on a map the area to be covered by the Muintir Council.
- (ii) it may draft a Constitution for adoption by the new Council
- (iii) it carries out the election of the Council
- (iv) The steering committee disbands once the Council is set up.

## **Steering Committee Election Procedure**

1 Decide on the size of the Council. There are usually 30 members - 20 elected directly and 10 elected by local clubs or co-opted. At least two thirds of the members must be elected directly by ballot.

2 The Community has to be divided into constituencies. This is often done on the basis of amalgamating townlands or station areas. The number of seats on the Council for each constituency will depend on the population.

3, Everybody over the age of 18 in the Community is informed by circular of the decision to set up a Muintir Council. They are also informed of the constituency they are in and they receive a list of electors in their constituency only. On an enclosed form, they are asked to nominate people from this list of electors to represent them in the Council. The number of nominations which each elector can make should be equal to the number of seats in his/her constituency. These nomination papers are collected in a sealed box and brought to the counting centre. They are then counted under the supervision of somebody nominated by Muintir na Tire.

4. At least two persons, preferably from a different district should collect all completed nomination papers and ballot papers and bring them to the Count Centre.

5. The people with the highest number of nominations have their names placed on the ballot paper. There are three names put on the ballot paper for each vacant seat. Each person whose name , appears on a ballot paper must sign a form accepting that they will involve themselves in the Council if elected. If an individual fails to do this his/her name is not placed on the ballot paper and the person with the next highest number of nominations is approached.

6. Ballot papers for each constituency are then prepared, printed and delivered. These ballot papers are collected as soon as possible in sealed boxes and brought to the counting centre.

7 An identity of needs survey may be carried out in conjunction with the election.

8. The counting of votes will be supervised by a person(s) nominated by Muintir na Tire. The counting of votes is also open to the public

9. Within 14 days of the election count the steering committee invites all elected members to the first meeting of the new Council. Also within, 14 days the steering committee writes to all clubs seeking nominations for positions in the Council. The Council, at its own discretion, shall have the power to co-opt a person(s) who, because of their expertise or position in the community, would have a positive contribution to make. The total number of persons elected by clubs or co-opted may not exceed one third of the total membership of the Council. If the number of nominations from clubs exceeds the number of seats available. a ballot will have to be held among the clubs.

10. A talk should be given to the newly elected Council members by a Community Development Officer or other representative of Muintir na Tire.

### **Repeat of Elections**

Full elections must be repeated every three years and constitutions should be amended to make this obligatory. The procedure for these elections should be the same as the steering committee election procedure.

An AGM. should be held each year at which an election to all positions will take place. No Officer may retain the same position for more than three consecutive years.

Only elections supervised by a nominee of the County Federation or National Council will be accepted as valid.

An identity of needs survey may be carried out in conjunction with all elections. It is recommended that a representative from the County Federation or the National Council be present at each A.G.M.

Note - The following sample documentation is available through National HO. or the Community Development Officers: Constitution; Ballot Paper; Nomination Paper", Identity of Needs Survey Sheet; etc.

### **Alternative Election Procedure for Muintir Council**

In situations of large centres of population (cities and towns) where it may be difficult to hold full Council elections every three years. a Council may opt to retire a third of its membership every three years. In this way, it will ensure that the democratic method of electing the Council is maintained.

## **Draft Constitution for A Muintir Community Council**

### 1. Name

The Council shall be known as ..... Muintir Council hereinafter referred to as the COUNCIL and shall cover the area of ..... as defined on the Ordnance Survey map as held by the COUNCIL.

### 2. Aims

The aims of the COUNCIL shall be:

- (a) The involvement of all the people in ..... in the promotion of the Social, Educational, Cultural and Economic welfare of the whole community, regardless of class or political persuasion,
- (b) To represent each and every member of the community and the community as a whole, in dealings with local governmental, statutory bodies, and other agencies in seeking when considered necessary, technical, financial or other assistance in the promotion of the common good, and to advise and assist where possible the local authority in the exercise of its office in the locality.
- (c) To acquire and hold by rental, lease, purchase donation or otherwise, such property and effects as shall be necessary or expedient to attain these ends.
- (d) To affiliate with and function as a constituent council of the organisation known as " Muintir na Tire".

### 3. Membership

All persons in the locality are deemed to be members of the community and providing they have reached voting age, which shall be EIGHTEEN YEARS, are entitled to nominate candidates for, and to take part in the election of the COUNCIL. No membership fee shall be payable by any member of the community.

### 4. Organisation

1. The COUNCIL shall be elected for a period of three years. No particular office shall be held for more than three consecutive years. No member may seek the same office again for a period of one year.

2 The COUNCIL shall consist of

- (a) Elected representative or representatives from each district as defined by the COUNCIL and approved by a General Meeting of the community, such representative to be elected by ballot by the members at the community as defined in Rule 3 above.
- (b) Elected representative from voluntary organisations as defined by the COUNCIL
- (c) A maximum of four members may be co-opted by the COUNCIL as representing an aspect of the community not otherwise adequately represented or as being of particular value to the COUNCIL by reason of personal achievements or expertise. Two of the co-options may be from the people under voting age.
- (d) A member being co-opted has to be proposed and seconded and accepted by two-thirds or more of the members present

3 A vacancy arising in the number of the elected representatives of the districts shall be filled by the candidate from the same district having polled the next largest number of votes at the last election. In the event of there being no such candidate able and willing to act, the COUNCIL shall have the power to appoint a member of the community to fill the vacancy. The filling of the vacancy shall be effective until the next election.

4 The COUNCIL, by Nomination and secret ballot shall elect annually from amongst its members an Executive Committee namely; Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Asst. Secretary, Treasurer, Public

Relations Officer it shall be permissible for the position of Public Relations Officer to be held by one of the other Officers.

5. in the event of the COUNCIL embarking on a major project involving property, legal advice shall be sought regarding a system which would limit liability.

6. The COUNCIL shall meet as often as may be necessary but at least once in each of any ten months of the year.

7. Unexplained absence from three successive meetings of the COUNCIL may be understood and taken as implicit resignation from the COUNCIL by the member concerned.

8. That one more than a third of the number of members of the COUNCIL shall constitute a quorum for the purpose of any meeting of the COUNCIL. properly convened.

9 The COUNCIL may, from time to time, appoint such sub-committees as it may consider necessary or expedient for the purpose of carrying out specific projects and such sub-committees shall conduct their business in accordance with directions of the COUNCIL. It shall, where appropriate, appoint one of its members as Chairman of each subcommittee and he shall submit a progress report of the sub-committee at each meeting of the COUNCIL unless otherwise directed by the COUNCIL.

10 Sub-committees shall be encouraged to co-opt members of the community considered suitable for the particular work on hand or because of their leadership and interest.

11 The Executive Committee shall be responsible for all external negotiations on behalf of the COUNCIL and sub-committees. It may, however, delegate this authority to members of the COUNCIL or of the sub-committees.

12 The Executive Committee shall have the right to meet in private from time to time.

13 The Executive Committee shall have the power to convene COUNCIL meetings.

14 The Chairman at any meeting shall. in the event of a tie. have a second or casting vote.

15 The COUNCIL may, from time to time, make bye-laws not inconsistent with this Constitution. as it may consider necessary or desirable for the management and well-being of any subsidiary activities.

16 The COUNCIL may not rescind any decision already taken or repeal any bye-laws without prior notice of motion and passed by two-thirds majority of members present.

## **General Meetings**

- 1 The Annual General Meeting of the COUNCIL shall be held on a date in October each year.
- 2 Special general meetings may be called by resolution of the COUNCIL or shall be called upon written request of at least fifty members of the community, stating in writing the reason for such a meeting. The special meeting must be held within fourteen days of the written request being handed to the Secretary.
- 3 All eligible voters shall be notified of the date, time and place of the A.G.M. or special meeting.
- 4 All members of the community are entitled to attend and to take part in the business of the general meeting but may only vote if over eighteen years.
- 5 Twenty members of the community shall constitute a quorum on any General Meeting.
- 6 The annual General Meeting shall include reports from Officers, each sub-committee and general discussion.

## **Finance**

- 1 All monies and funds of the COUNCIL shall be deposited as soon as: (a) possible after receipt in such Bank as the COUNCIL may by resolution designate. All shall be held in the name of the Treasurer, Chairman, Secretary for and on behalf of the COUNCIL. The name of COUNCIL shall be designated for the Bank Account Purposes. All cheques and other withdrawal of funds, monies or cash on behalf of the COUNCIL shall be signed by the Treasurer and Chairman or Secretary. (b) Money and funds in the Bank belonging to the COUNCIL may be put on deposit in the same manner to gain interest if sufficient monies are available any time.
- 2 Insofar as the assets of the COUNCIL may be deficient, the COUNCIL shall be indemnified against any liability or expense legitimately incurred by them, by reason of position of members of the COUNCIL. Provided always that in the event of the cash assets becoming deficient to the extent of £500 for a period of not more than two months, the COUNCIL shall call a special general meeting to consider the financial position.
- 3 The Treasurer shall only be chargeable for such monies as he/she may actually receive.
- 4 The financial year of the COUNCIL shall end on the thirtieth day of September in each year, to which date the accounts shall be balanced and a statement shall be presented to the next Annual General Meeting.
- 5 The accounts of the COUNCIL shall be audited before the date of each A.G.M. by two members of the community appointed by the COUNCIL.
- 6 Proper books of accounts of the COUNCIL should be kept written up to date at all times.

## 7 Insurance

The Council must indemnify themselves and /or any Trustee and/or any Agent of the COUNCIL against all or any claims, damages or demands. actions, costs or proceedings arising from. or in any way connected with the employment of any person or persons or company or any person or persons who may at any time render voluntary assistance or help in any manner whatever to the COUNCIL.

## 8 Communications

The COUNCIL shall endeavour to maintain continuous contact with the community which it represents. and to keep people informed of all plans, activities and progress.

## 9 Interpretation of Constitution

The COUNCIL IS THE SOLE AUTHORITY for the interpretation of this Constitution and of any rules or bye-laws made thereunder.

## 10 Amendment of Constitution

Only a General Meeting shall have the power to alter or amend this Constitution. Written notice of any proposed alteration or amendment shall be submitted to the Secretary not later than thirty days before the date of such a meeting. Any such amendment or alteration must be carried by a two-thirds majority of all present and entitled to vote. All members of the community must be notified of any proposed amendment not less than seven days before the meeting.

For Further Information please write to:

Secretary, Muintir na Tire H.O.

Canon Hayes House,

Tipperary. Phone 062-5 1 1 63.