

**HOUSING,
SOCIAL
&
BUILDING
SERVICES
DIRECTORATE**

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**HOUSING, SOCIAL & BUILDING SERVICES DIRECTORATE
STIÚRTHÓIREACT NA SEIRBHÍSÍ TITHÍOCHTA, SÓISIALTA AGUS
FOIRGNÍOCHTA**

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €15,473,702

Draft Budgeted Income: €13,585,093

The following pages set out the above as per each Relevant Division.

Division A

HOUSING AND BUILDING TITHÍOCHT AGUS FOIRGNÍOCHT

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: € €10,642,474

Draft Budgeted Income: € €12,835,074

(Pages 10 - 12 of Blue Pages)

REVENUE ACCOUNT - OPERATIONS

2008 again witnessed a high level of activity with direct housing assistance provided to over one thousand (1,100) individuals/families which represents a significant contribution to the accommodation and well being of the people of Donegal.

The types of assistance provided again ranged from a combination of allocation of tenancies under the Council's own Social Housing Programme, Voluntary Housing Programme and RAS (Rental Accommodation Scheme), the provision of assistance in the form of loans under the reconstruction loans scheme, the purchase/erection, shared ownership, tenant purchase, caravan and affordable housing loans schemes and the provision of assistance under the Housing Adaption Grant for people with a disability, the Mobility Aids Grant Scheme and the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme.

During the year, a comprehensive housing needs assessment was carried out which will guide the capital construction programme over the coming three years. Other activities during the year included the completion of the Central Heating Installation Programme in local authority houses, continuation of the refurbishment programmes in a number of local authority housing estates and the completion of the revitalisation/regeneration of Local Authority Housing Estates under the Peace II Programme.

The Budget now sought will enable the Council to meet the 2009 component of an overall programme of works as set out in the 3 Year Action Plan for Social & Affordable Housing 2008- 2011.

ANNUAL MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

Donegal County Council has 2,677 rented houses in over 195 individual Housing Estates. There are in addition 657 individual houses provided as specific instance/rural cottages or in some cases individual houses purchased within Estates. The age of the stock ranges from 1953 to the present day with many of the Estates being constructed in a number of separate phases.

Provision of €1,601,100 is made in the Draft Revenue Budget for Housing Maintenance, which is an increase of €19,100 over the 2008 adopted Budget of €1,582,000. The Council will be funding an additional €300,000 for the repair/improvement of vacant houses from its capital account, making a total sum available in 2009 of €1,901,100.

The 2009 Housing Maintenance provision will be utilised primarily for emergency/routine repairs. The various Refurbishment programmes, funded through capital, also greatly assist in the upkeep of the Council stock.

The table below sets out, by Electoral Area and category, the current housing stock which the Council maintains.

ELECTORAL AREA	SCHEME HOUSES	S.I. HOUSES
INISHOWEN	524	117
DONEGAL	479	116
GLENTIES	415	206
LETTERKENNY	541	64
MILFORD	292	87
STRANORLAR	426	67
TOTAL	2677	657

CENTRAL HEATING PROGRAMME 2004 - 2008

2008 saw the completion of the Central Heating Programme with heating being installed in 148 dwellings at a cost of €744,279. Over the 5 years of the programme, central heating and related energy efficiency measures have been carried out in all of the Local Authority stock, which lacked central heating facilities. A total of 806 units were improved under the programme at an overall cost of €4.9m.

E.U. PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION 2000 - 2006: PEACE II PROGRAMME - REVITALISATION OF PUBLIC HOUSING SCHEMES - PHASE III:

In 2006 the Council secured additional funding of €228,000 under Measure 3.3 of the Peace II E.U. Programme (Revitalisation of Public Housing Schemes - Phase III). During 2008 works were completed at Ard na Rí, Letterkenny (Letterkenny EA) and Drimaghy Park, Ardara, Birch Hill, Creeslough and Cois Cuain, Derrybeg (Glenties EA). This programme is now complete and the following is a list of all schemes where works were carried out:

Inishowen E.A.: Craig Pk., Muff & Convent Rd., Carndonagh.

Donegal E.A.: St.Patrick's Tce., Pettigo & Termon Villas, Pettigo.

Letterkenny E.A.: Ard Baithin, St. Johnston, Glendale Drive & Ard Na Ri, Letterkenny

Milford E.A.: Skeog Cottages, Churchill & Chestnut Grove, Ramelton.

Stranorlar E.A.: Ard McCool, Stranorlar.

Glenties E.A.: Drimaghy Park, Ardara, Birch Hill, Creeslough & Cois Cuain Housing Estate, Derrybeg

The Works carried out under the Revitalisation Programme have contributed to the upgrading of the selected estates by the improvement of their amenities and physical appearances. Specific works carried out have included the provision of picnic areas, sand pits, hard surface play/kick about areas, level tarmac areas with kerb surrounds, boundary fences and gates, the tidying-up of schemes including removal of weeds and rubbish, clearing of overgrown areas and landscaping.

ESTATE MANAGEMENT

The role of the Tenant Liaison Officer has been expanded to include the role of Housing Assessment Officer. Estate Management forms an important part in the overall context of Housing Management. The Council presently has three Housing Assessment Officers engaged in this role. In addition to salary provision, a further €103,700 is provided in the Draft Revenue Budget for 2009 for estate management initiatives.

HOMELESSNESS

Provision of €190,000 is again provided in the Draft Revenue Budget for 2009 under this heading - 90% of which is recoupable from the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government.

REGISTRATION OF PRIVATE RENTED DWELLINGS

Under the Residential Tenancies Act, 2004, the registration of Private Rented Accommodation function including payment of registration fees was transferred to the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) with effect from 1st September 2004 rather than with the local authority who had been the registration authority up to then.

Arrangements were also made under the Act, to provide funding to local authorities to take account of registration fee income foregone due to the introduction of the new system of registration with the PRTB under the Act. From 2006 onwards, the PRTB makes an annual contribution to the local authority based on the number of private rented tenancies registered with them and the number of inspections carried out by the local authority.

A first tranche of the 2008 payment of €46,209 was received earlier this year and the balance will be paid in 2009. Income provision of €72,000 has been made in the Draft Revenue Budget 2009.

While the Council is mindful of the need to enforce the Standards and Rent Books Regulations, it is felt that this can best be achieved through the implementation of the Rental Accommodation Scheme and housing assessments carried out by the Housing Assessment/Tenant Liaison Officers.

RENTAL ACCOMMODATION SCHEME

The Rental Accommodation Scheme is an initiative which was introduced to cater for the accommodation needs of persons who are in receipt of Rent Supplement, normally for more than 18 months, and who have a long term housing need. The Scheme is being administered by Local Authorities and is intended to provide an additional source of good quality rented accommodation for eligible persons to enhance the response of Local Authorities to meet the long term housing need.

In February of this year a RAS Implementation Unit was set up by the Council to implement the scheme in the county and to-date some 97 persons in voluntary accommodation and 35 persons in private rented accommodation have transferred to RAS. A further 133 persons in receipt of Rent Supplement have been re-housed in Council housing during 2008, bringing the total number of such persons housed since the Rental Accommodation Scheme commenced in 2004/05 to 800.

In the current year progress on the transfer of private rented tenants to the scheme has been hampered by a combination of factors including the high percentage of non-resident landlords (i.e. resident outside the State), the high number of tenancies controlled by Letting Agents and difficulties/delays experienced with landlords in submitting the necessary documentation.

A strategy is being developed to minimize delays in these areas and a target of 20 voluntary and 100 private rented transfers has been set for 2009.

In the current economic climate, it is recognized that the Rental Accommodation Scheme is an important option in meeting medium/long-term housing need.

Expenditure/Income in the sum of €1,049,200 is provided for the Rental Accommodation Scheme in the Draft Revenue Budget for 2009, with the scheme overall being cost neutral to Donegal County Council.

RENTAL INCOME

The budget for rental income for 2008 was €6,966,700. Rents are reviewed annually and in conjunction with buoyancy from this source as well as new lettings in 2008, will result in an additional €322,000 being accrued. This increased income is being targeted towards the maintenance of the existing stock as outlined elsewhere in this report. The project rental income for 2009 in the Draft Revenue Budget for 2009 is €7,815,442.

Since 2003 there has been a continued reduction in rent/tenant purchase net arrears with the amount outstanding falling from €1.2m to €0.833m to end of 2007. 2008 has been a much more difficult year in the current economic climate, it is envisaged that while the level of arrears may show a marginal decrease at the end of 2008, the challenge for 2009 will be to hold them at current levels given the current economic climate.

TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION

The Council's current Traveller Accommodation Programme 2005 - 2008 expires on 31st December 2008. Following direction by the Minister for Housing, Urban Renewal and Developing Areas, Donegal County Council has begun its preparation of the incoming Traveller Accommodation Programme for the five-year period 2009 - 2013. A Draft Programme has been completed and published on 22nd October 2008. Persons/agencies can make a submission on the said Draft Programme on or before 22nd December 2008.

During the present Traveller Accommodation Programme 2005 - 2008, 36 families were provided with permanent housing accommodation, 2 permanent halting sites were also provided and 4 families refused offers of accommodation. Under the Draft Programme for 2009 - 2013, it is envisaged that permanent accommodation will be provided for 5 families in 2009.

The Council has also outlined its intentions to provide at least three permanent Transient sites in the County over the lifetime of the new Traveller Accommodation Programme and it is envisaged that one of these permanent sites will be developed and completed in 2009.

In relation to the emergency sites, which came about as a result of the County Manager invoking his emergency powers in 2001 (17 emergency sites provided in total), the present situation is that only two temporary emergency indigenous sites and one temporary emergency transient site are occupied at present.

Provision of €171,500 has been made in the Draft Revenue Budget for 2009 for Management and Maintenance programmes for Traveller specific accommodation. This provision also includes salary for a Traveller Accommodation Caretaker who has responsibility for implementing such programmes on sites. 75% of the Caretaker's salary is recoupable from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. A percentage of Management & Maintenance costs are also recoupable.

EMERGENCY REPLACEMENT OF CARAVANS FOR TRAVELLERS

Provision of €42,000 is being made in the Draft Revenue Budget for 2009 for the emergency replacement of caravans for Travellers, of which 50% is recoupable from the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government. Caravans are replaced following emergency situations such as fire, storm damage etc.

LOANS FOR THE PURCHASE OF CARAVANS BY TRAVELLERS

The Council has been able to reduce this provision as a large majority of indigenous Travellers have availed of this scheme to date, and also due to the large number of Traveller families accommodated in standard scheme housing. 10% of the purchase price of the caravan is funded by the Council as a first time buyer's grant, the applicant also pays 10% and a loan of 80% of the purchase price is then provided. The 10% Council contribution is recoupable from the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government.

REVENUE COLLECTORS

Draft Budget Expenditure for 2009: €1,177,165

This group of staff are to be found charged to Divisions A, C and H. They are line managed through the Housing Directorate.

MAINTENANCE OF COURTHOUSES

Provision of €59,000 is being made under this heading in the Draft Revenue Budget for 2009 - an increase of €2,000 compared to Budget 2008. There are 5 Courthouses being used in the county at present located at Letterkenny, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Donegal and Glenties while court sittings are also held at a rented venue at Dungloe and at the Courts Service's new courthouse in Ballyshannon.

Although responsibility for the maintenance of Buncrana and Donegal Courthouses has been transferred to the Office of Public Works, the Council is still responsible for payment of Caretakers wages at these locations. Responsibility for the maintenance of Carndonagh and Glenties Courthouses remains with the Council. The only costs incurred by the Council in relation to Letterkenny Courthouse relate to the provision of annual/sick leave cover for the Caretaker.

All expenditure incurred under this heading - maintenance costs, caretakers' wages and rental etc is 100% recoupable.

Division C

WATER SERVICES SEIRBHÍŚÍ UISCE

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €216,393

Draft Budgeted Income: Nil

(Pages 16 - 17 of Blue Pages)

REVENUE COLLECTORS

The Draft Revenue Budget for 2009 includes provision of €216,393 for the cost of Revenue Collectors involved in the collection of Water Charges.

Division D

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT BAINISTIÚ FORBRAÍOCHTA

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €294,846

Draft Budgeted Income: €100,000

(Pages 18 - 20 of Blue Pages)

BUILDING CONTROL

The opportunity to receive submission of Commencement Notices is available at each Public Service Centres. The administration of Building Control register is centrally located in Letterkenny PSC allowing for the registration of valid commencement notices. Information is readily available through the computerised system for telephone and counter queries.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government recommended targets for inspections are being reached through inspections by engineering staff. To date this year 1609 valid Commencement Notices have been registered and the annual fees received are estimated to be approximately €100,000. This is a reduction on last year's fees due to the economic downturn and lower levels of construction activity. It is estimated that the expenditure outturn under this heading will be €140,000. Included in the Draft Revenue Budget for 2009 is an amount of €174,280.

The number of valid Commencement Notices for previous years is listed below:

Year	Valid Notices
2007	2262
2006	2360
2005	2230
2004	2374
2003	1979

Enforcement of the Building Control regulations is being advanced. The new Building Control Bill, now enacted, will allow a more effective method of enforcement once regulations under the Bill are put in place.

Division E

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES SEIRBHÍSIÍ COMHSHAOIL

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €26,700
Draft Budgeted Income: Nil
(Pages 21 - 24 of Blue Pages)

COMPETITION FOR BEST-KEPT HOUSING SCHEMES

The Draft Revenue Budget for 2009 includes provision of €14,700 for the competition for the best kept Housing Schemes.

DERELICT SITES/BUILDINGS

Provision of €12,000 in Division E is again provided in the Draft Revenue Budget for 2009 to deal with the issue of Derelict Buildings/Derelict Sites in line with decisions by the Council to address this issue. A data bank of derelict sites has been assembled and some premises have been registered. In addition some derelict sites/buildings have been acquired and redeveloped for housing e.g. Lifford, Killygordon, Ramelton, Milford etc.

When properties are placed on the Derelict Sites Register, the owners of same are served with statutory notices requiring them to carry out specific works to remove the dereliction. Should the works fail to be carried out then the Local Authority may acquire the property by a compulsory purchase process or impose a levy on the property/site of a percentage of its market value (currently 3%) recouped annually until such time as the required works are carried out. The option of using the compulsory purchase process is quite limited as the bulk of the properties on the register would be of limited use to the local authority for redevelopment as infill housing or providing access to backlands etc. The purpose of the annual levy is to put an onus on the owner to remove the dereliction in a timely manner.

Under the terms of the Derelict Sites Act, 1990, before a levy can be charged on a property/site the lands in question must be in a prescribed 'Urban area'. In order for an area to be designated as an urban area the local authority are required to submit details of the area/town to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government requesting that same be prescribed as an urban area. If approved the Department then makes a Statutory Instrument, signed off by the Minister, prescribing the area as an urban area.

A consultation process with the Elected Members was initiated in 2008 through the Electoral Area Committees, where Members were requested to nominate areas/towns in each electoral area to be prescribed as urban areas for the purposes of introducing a Derelict Sites levy. To date no such areas have been nominated and the process is continuing and it is hoped to bring it to a conclusion in 2009. It is not intended that the levy will merely be an income stream but rather that it will encourage owners of Derelict Sites to carry out the required works to remove the dereliction in a timely manner and by so doing enhance the local environment for the benefit of everyone.

Division H

MISCELLANEOUS ÉAGSÚIL

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €1,130,499
Draft Budgeted Income: €650,019
(Pages 31 - 33 of Blue Pages)

SUPPORT SERVICES/CENTRAL MANAGEMENT CHARGES

Draft Budgeted Expenditure €3,162,900
Draft Budgeted Income Nil
(Page 35 of Blue Pages)

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE

The facilities maintenance operation continues to strive to maintain a clean, attractive, healthy, and safe environment for all staff, and customers. Facilities Management is designed to support the Donegal Local Authorities public service mission statement by providing quality and cost effective maintenance services in all buildings. Facilities Maintenance provides response and planned maintenance to maintain the effective operation of all services.

The Facilities Maintenance team comprises of a Senior Executive Engineer, a Clerical Officer, a Senior Supervisor and 6 Building Facility Supervisors.

Experienced maintenance personnel back this up. The commitment to problem solving is evident through the varied issues and concerns dealt with successfully throughout the year. The operation of Facilities Maintenance protects physical Council assets within financial constraints.

Facilities Maintenance co-ordinates the resources necessary to purchase, maintain, and protect the systems, equipment and infrastructure of our buildings.

The Public Service Centres at Donegal Town, Dungloe, Milford, Carndonagh and Letterkenny are included in addition to the portfolio of existing buildings in Lifford. Progress is continuing in relation to Fire Safety with the provision of on-site fire safety training and fire drills at all locations.

The improvement of access for people with disabilities is continuing throughout our offices. A new temporary car-park has been constructed at Letterkenny PSC which aims to reduce congestion and improve ease of general parking and circulation. A number of projects are ongoing which include prioritisation from an audit on accessibility for our Public Service Centres. Induction loops have been provided at counters and chambers for sensory impaired persons.

OFFICE ACCOMMODATION - LOAN CHARGES

The Draft Revenue Budget for 2009 includes a provision of €1,680,700 in Expenditure under this heading.

DISPOSAL OF ASSETS

The Council has completed the disposal of the following properties:

- Lands at Finner/Bundoran
- Former Area Office/Depot, Pearse Road, Letterkenny

The Council had agreed to the disposal of lands at Kilty, Letterkenny, however the sale was not completed and this property has been put back on the open market.

The following lands/property are currently on the market:

- Lands at Kilty, Letterkenny
- Land at Lifford Common
- Lands at Glencrow, Moville
- Former Presbyterian Church, Bundoran

In disposing of the Council's property at the Pearse Road, it was necessary to relocate various services, which had been operating out of this holding. As such, a new depot containing salt barn, storage facilities, chip bays, town gardener facility, and staff welfare facilities have been provided at Ballyraine, Letterkenny. Construction of a new Civil Defence Headquarters at Stranorlar has also been completed and the facility is now operational.