

MINUTES OF ANNUAL BUDGET MEETING OF DONEGAL COUNTY
COUNCIL, HELD IN THE COUNTY HOUSE, LIFFORD ON 20TH
NOVEMBER, 2017

C/395/17 MEMBERS PRESENT

Cllrs Gerry Mc Monagle, Cathaoirleach, L Blaney, E Bonner, C Brogan, J Campbell, P Canning, T Conaghan, G Crawford, N Crossan, A Doherty, G Doherty, L Doherty, R Donaghey, M Farren, M T Gallagher, A Glackin, M Harley, N Jordan, J Kavanagh, N Kennedy, M C Mac Giolla Easbuig, F Mc Brearty, M Mc Bride, J P Mc Daid, M McDermott, I Mc Garvey, P McGowan, B McGuinness, J Murray, M Naughton, S O'Domhnaill, J O'Donnell, J S O'Fearraigh, B O'Neill, J Ryan and T Slowey.

C/396/17 OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE

Seamus Neely, Chief Executive, Joe Peoples, Director of Housing, Corporate and Cultural Services / Meetings Administrator, John McLaughlin, Director of Roads & Transportation, Liam Ward, Director of Community, Enterprise & Planning Services, Michael Mc Garvey, Director of Water & Environment, Garry Martin, Director of Finance, Information Systems & Emergency Services, Richard Gibson, Management Accountant, Anne Marie Quinn, Administrative Officer, Anne Marie Conlon, Communications Officer, Sean O' Daimhin, Oifigeach na Gailge, Anne Marie Crawford, Staff Officer.

C/397/16 CONSIDERATION OF THE 2018 DRAFT REVENUE
BUDGET- CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S ADDRESS AND ADDRESS
BY THE HEAD OF FINANCE

The Cathaoirleach welcomed Members to the meeting and said that consideration of the 2018 Draft Budget would commence with an introduction and presentation from the Chief Executive, Mr Seamus Neely. This, he added, would be followed by presentations from the Directors of Service.

Addressing the meeting the Chief Executive said that cognisance had been taken of the following issues when drafting the 2018 Budget:-

- Corporate Plan 2015-2019
- Members Priorities
- Delivering on Core Activities
- Anticipating Demand

- Impact of UK exit from EU
- Supporting Growth and Opportunity
- Regional and Cross Border Development
- Community and Economic Planning
- Organisational Affordability.

The priorities of the Elected Members including the need to resource core activities and provide for economic/ development opportunities going forward had been taken into consideration, he added. There was recognition also of the need to sustain and develop the Municipal District capability. Infrastructural needs, he advised, had been taken on board including the necessity of securing adequate funding for roads and housing services, whilst also facilitating economic and community development together with tourism development and marketing.

Members were informed that the main sources of income for 2018 would be as follows:-

Local Property Tax at €25,119,850

Rates Income at €34.195 (Inclusive of PEL)

NPPR receipts at €1.0 million

He proceeded to outline for members the various affordability issues involved and the options available for balancing the 2018 Draft Budget.

Going forward, he said that cognisance had to be taken in relation to the authority's workforce planning obligations, its capacity to take leadership and deliver on core responsibilities whilst also controlling the cost base and expanding affordability options.

Mr Garry Martin, Head of Finance, updated Members in relation to the legislation governing the preparation of the Draft Budget and the Three Year Capital Budget.

An overview of the financial issues for Income & Expenditure relating to balancing the 2018 requirement was provided including details of how the 2018 figures compared with 2017 figures.

An overview of the Draft Revenue Expenditure for 2018 by service was provided.

The Draft Budget, Mr Martin confirmed provided for expenditure in the sum of €148,795,554 for the year ending 31st December, 2018.

He thus called on the Elected Members to endorse the following:-

- A harmonised rate of €68.39 as adopted in 2015 for the former town Council areas of Letterkenny and Bundoran.
- The establishment of a rate of €52.29 for the former town Council area of Buncrana for 2018.
- Increase the harmonised rate by 5%.
- The retention of the existing policy in relation to the Vacancy Rate on Commercial Properties for 2018.
- The continuation of the Small Business Grant Scheme at a cost of €250,000 in 2018.

Members were updated also in relation to the various budgetary strategies and associated operational targets in the short, medium and long-term

C/398/17

PRESENTATIONS BY DIRECTORS OF SERVICE

The Directors of Service outlined in detail the 2018 budgetary provisions as applicable to their respective Directorates.

C/399/17

ADJOURNMENT FOR LUNCH

On the proposal of Cllr Harley, seconded by Cllr Gallagher it was resolved to adjourn the meeting until 2.00pm.

C/400/17

CONSIDERATION OF THE 2018 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET

On resumption Cllr Mc Brearty was informed that the budget had to be adopted within a period of 14 days commencing on the date of the Statutory Revenue Budget Meeting. The final date for adoption it was noted was the 3rd December 2017 with the last available working day being Friday 1st December.

The Cathaoirleach asked the party whips to comment on behalf of their respective groupings.

Cllr Brogan said that the Fianna Fáil grouping could not support a budget which proposed a 5% increase in commercial rates at this time, given the ongoing economic uncertainty and the impending Brexit scenario. This Council, he said, had engaged with and had been particularly supportive of rate payers over the past number of

years. The lack of resources available to the Council was, he said, a major source of concern. There were, he advised, a number of issues that warranted attention including:-

- The need for additional staff and resources in the area of Housing Maintenance.
- Tourism needs to be promoted further in light of the success of the “Wild Atlantic Way”.
- The whole area of asset management and how assets are utilised needs to be looked at. He called for a report to be issued to each Municipal District in relation to same.
- Outlined the fact that there was scope within the book to revisit and look at the Council’s own cost base.

His grouping, he said, had submitted a number of questions to the executive in relation to the Draft Budget and awaited a response on same.

Despite all the challenges, he said, it was imperative that Council sent out a message of confidence to the community as a whole.

Cllr Gallagher thanked all who had been involved in the preparation of the Draft Revenue Budget and thanked the Head of Finance and his staff for the engagement to date.

She welcomed the various tourism development initiatives, and the increased provision for housing grants together with the monies provided for the Ferry Service.

She paid tribute to the excellent level of volunteerism that existed throughout the County advising that this contributed in a meaningful way to all aspects of community development.

It was noted that there were no specific community grants available to the Island communities.

It was imperative, she said, that there was a line in the Budget Book detailing the Council’s support for the development of Buncrana Leisure Centre.

She alluded to the fact that there were still considerable infrastructural deficiencies throughout the County. These coupled with a high unemployment rate and deficiencies in the public transport system together with Brexit highlighted the need for investment in the County.

She highlighted also the necessity of addressing the homelessness issue which, she contended, required dedicated capital funding at central level. Sinn Fein, she said, were willing to sit down and speak to all party groupings.

Cllr O' Neill said that a better deal was needed for ratepayers and that now was not the time to increase rates given the uncertainty surrounding Brexit and the rate of sterling.

He welcomed developments in community based services and in tourism activity including the fact that the tourism vat rate had been retained. There was acknowledgement also of the funding provided for the ferry services.

Cllr O'Neill stressed the importance of supporting and aiding entrepreneurship including the development of small shared business spaces.

Cllr Farren welcomed the ongoing initiatives and development in the tourism sector together with the provision of monies for the ferry services which, he contended, were an integral part of the tourism infrastructure in Donegal. He welcomed the fact that there had been no increase in the Local Property Tax but said it was important that it was retained at its current level given the fact that Donegal did quite well out of the Equalisation Fund.

He said that a 5% increase in commercial rates would send out the wrong signal particularly for small and fledgling businesses. It was imperative, he said, that all members worked together to ensure that an effective solution was found.

Cllr Mc Garvey advised of the need to prioritise and support small industries and businesses. He outlined also the necessity of looking at the planning and development of the County as a whole in order to create viable income sources.

Greater impetus, he said, needed to be placed on seeking funding at national and EU level. Concluding he called for the restoration of Library services in Ramelton.

Cllr Mc Brearty thanked the Chief Executive, Head of Finance and all staff involved in the budget process for their efforts.

He asked for further clarification in relation to the community housing grants and queried how the funding for works at Rathmullan Abbey would be availed of.

Cllr Crossan said that before he could support the 2018 Budget additional clarification was needed in relation to the following:-

- Status of and plans for Buncrana Leisure Centre.
- Value of payments to consultants.
- €170,000 increase in waste collection costs.
- €780,000 for Strategic Plans and Policy.
- €400,000 under Planning Control
- €180,000 for Tourism Projects.

C/401/17 ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING

On the proposal of Cllr Mc Garvey, seconded by Cllr Slowey it was resolved to adjourn the meeting until 4pm to allow for further deliberation on the Budget 2018 proposals.

C/402/17 ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING

A further adjournment was proposed by Cllr Mc Brearty and seconded by Cllr Mc Bride until 5pm.

C/403/17 EXTENSION OF THE MEETING

On the proposal of Cllr A Doherty, seconded by Cllr Harley it was resolved in accordance with Standing Order No 28 to suspend Standing Order No 3 to allow the meeting continue beyond 6pm.

C/404/17 ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING

On the proposal of Cllr A Doherty, seconded by Cllr Harley the meeting was adjourned until 7pm.

C/405/17 ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING

A further adjournment until 8pm was proposed by Cllr G Doherty and seconded by Cllr Murray.

C/406/17 ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING

On resumption Cllr Mc Monagle proposed, seconded by Cllr Jordan a further adjournment until 8.30pm to allow for further deliberation on the 2018 Draft Budget.

C/407/17 CONSIDERATION OF THE 2018 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET
The Cathaoirleach informed members that the various groupings had been unable to reach an agreement and thus it was proposed by Cllr Gallagher, seconded by Cllr Glackin that the Annual Budget Meeting be adjourned until 12 noon on the 1st December, 2017.