

MINUTES OF BUDGET MEETING OF DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL
HELD IN THE COUNTY HOUSE LIFFORD ON 23RD NOVEMBER 2016

C/320/16 MEMBERS PRESENT

Cllrs T Slowey (Cathaoirleach), L Blaney, E Bonner, C Brogan, J Campbell, P Canning, T Conaghan, G Crawford, N Crossan, A Doherty, L Doherty, R Donaghey, M Farren, M T Gallagher, M Harley, N Jordan, N Kennedy, M C Mac Giolla Easbuig, M Mc Bride, J P McDaid, M McDermott, I Mc Garvey, P McGowan, B McGuinness, G McMonagle, J Murray, S O'Domhnaill, J S O'Fearraigh, B O'Neill, M Quinn, and J Ryan.

C/321/16 OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE

Seamus Neely, Chief Executive, Joe Peoples, Director of Housing, Corporate & Cultural Services, Meetings Administrator, Liam Ward, Director of Community, Enterprise and Planning Services, Garry Martin, Director of Finance, Information Systems & Emergency Services, Michael Mc Garvey, A/Director of Water and Environment, John Mc Laughlin, Director Roads & Transportation, Richard Gibson, Senior Executive Officer, Eileen Burgess, Divisional Manager, Cultural Services, Anne Marie Quinn, Administrative Officer, Sean Reid, Staff Officer, Mary Frances Doherty, A/Staff Officer, Shauna Carlin A/Staff Officer, Sean O'Daimhin, Oifigeach na Gaeilge, Anne Marie Conlon, Communications Officer, Anne Marie Crawford, Staff Officer, Corporate Services.

C/322/16 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs Gary Doherty, Frank Mc Brearty and Jimmy Kavanagh who were unable to attend the meeting.

C/323/16 Cllr Mc Eniff

Members extended their best wishes to Cllr Mc Eniff who was unable to attend the meeting for health reasons.

C/324/16 CONSIDERATION OF THE 2017 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 2017 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 2017 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 Draft Budget, he confirmed, had taken into account the views of the Elected Members with continuing emphasis on a number of key areas of service delivery and activity.

It was acknowledged that the strategic objectives set out in the Corporate Plan 2015-2019 were central to the Budget deliberations.

Going forward into 2017, he confirmed, that the key emphasis would be on resourcing core activities and maximising all potential opportunities for the benefit of the County. It was intended also, he added, to further develop the Municipal Districts and proceed where possible with infrastructural development. The need to enhance development in a number of service areas was also outlined including roads and housing , together with the facilitation of economic and community development and tourism development and marketing.

Alluding to the Council's improved financial position, he said that it was intended to proceed with full loan repayments as provided for in Budget 2016 again in 2017. The figure of €5.893m provided for under exceptional measures in 2017, it was noted, represented a €1.169 reduction on that provided for in the 2015 Budget.

Members acknowledged the fact that cash and budgetary management initiatives undertaken in 2010 and in subsequent years had proved to be of considerable benefit in terms of maximising income potential and managing the costs.

The 2017 Draft Budget as presented Mr Neely, confirmed was within the anticipated targets.

Cllr O' Neill took the chair for a brief period in the absence of the Cathaoirleach

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 2017 requirement was provided including details of how the 2017 figures related to 2016.

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

The Draft Budget, Mr Martin confirmed was prepared in consultation with the Corporate Policy Group, and provided for expenditure in the sum of €135,063,846 for the year ending 31st December, 2017.

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

- A harmonised rate of €68.39 in 2017.
- The retention of the existing policy in relation to the Vacancy Rate on Commercial Properties.
- The continuation of the Small Business Grant Scheme at a cost of €250,000 in 2017.

Cllr Slowey returned to the chair at this juncture.

C/325/16 PRESENTATIONS BY DIRECTORS OF SERVICE

The Directors of Service outlined in detail the 2017 budgetary provisions as applicable to their respective Directorates.

C/326/16 ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING

It was unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting for lunch until 2.30pm.

- C/327/16 ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING
On resumption of the meeting, it was proposed by Cllr Mc Guinness, and seconded by Cllr Ryan to further adjourn proceedings to 3pm.
- C/328/16 ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING
A further adjournment until 3.30pm was proposed by Cllr Ryan, seconded by Cllr Murray.
- C/329/16 ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING
Cllr Gallagher proposed, seconded by Cllr Quinn that the meeting be adjourned until 3.45pm.
- C/330/16 ADOPTION OF 2017 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET
The Cathaoirleach opened the floor to the Members and contributions were taken from representatives of the various groupings.

Cllr Brogan acknowledged the efforts of all involved in the production of the 2017 Budget. He outlined in detail a number of issues that, he contended, required careful consideration and attention going forward. These included;

- Ongoing challenges in relation to the renegotiation of loans and bank debt. He asked that a comprehensive list of Donegal County Council's assets be prepared and presented to each Municipal District so as to ensure the best possible use of same.
- Additional resources needed for the maintenance of Housing Stock and the provision of SI Housing.
- That the "Buy Out Scheme" for Council Tenants was not working and thus a review was warranted.
- Measures needed to be put in place to assist those who found themselves unable to get a loan from any financial institution.
- The DCC Infrastructure Document needed to be presented to central Government thus highlighting the urgent needed to fund projects such as the A5, Bonagee Link Road etc. This, he added, needed to be progressed with the Oireachtas Members and the importance of same highlighted to the Minister for Transport and the local Minister of State.

- Request that the Community and Enterprise Section engage with Solas and that this is led out through the Local Enterprise Office.
- Concern expressed in relation to the inadequate level of funding provided by central Government.

The Fianna Fail grouping, he confirmed were happy to support the budget in the event that the overall provision for Tidy Towns was increased to €15, 000 per Municipal District.

Cllr Mc Monagle fully supported the strategic objectives as set out by the Council in its Corporate Plan 2015-2019 and thanked the Executive for their efforts in maximising services within such a tight budget allocation. He seconded the proposal to increase Tidy Towns funding to €15,000 per Municipal District.

He noted the following;

- That the present system for funding Local Government was inadequate and unfair to Counties such as Donegal who for decades had been underfunded and under resourced.
- Funding urgently needed for National Primary, Secondary, Regional and local Roads so as to bring them up to a standard with the rest of the Country.
- Adequate funding needed to reduce the risk of flooding in the County and cross-border collaboration to be actively pursued so as to develop joined up plans to reduce the risk of flooding in border areas.
- Need for the reintroduction of the LIS Schemes.
- Call for the reinstatement of the €400m funding for the N2/A5.
- Development of Killybegs Port a major requirement going forward and needed to be progressed in tandem with the upgrading of the N56.
- Expressed concern that the purchase scheme for council tenants was discriminatory and not open to all tenants.
- A comprehensive housing building programme was needed.
- Additional funding needed for further housing projects.
- Need to continue with the excellent work done to date under the “Unfinished Estates” initiative.

- Further investment needed in the County’s Flagship Tourism Attractions particularly in relation to the provision of basic facilities at these locations.
- Call for the Government to review the decision in relation to Town Councils given that they had been economic generators in their own right.

Cllr Barry O’ Neill

- Department to be contacted and asked to revisit issues raised in relation to rate valuations in the County.
- Business incentives needed to allow the County to advance.
- Need to make a special case to the Department in relation to Brexit.
- Requested that the promised review in relation to car-parking charges take place immediately.
- Call for street cleaning services to be reviewed and that a workshop is held in each municipal district early in the new year to consider same.
- Outlined the need for a Business and Tourism Awards Initiative which would promote the “Donegal Brand”.

Cllr Michael Mc Bride

- The need to deal with infrastructure deficits and the traffic congestion problem in Letterkenny.
- Concern regarding the housing waiting list and the anticipated arrival of refugees in the County in 2017
- Query as to the plans going forward for the new Council Chamber and the associated budgetary requirement.

Cllr Martin Farren

- Cited the need to maximise all available grants and allocations.
- Fully supportive of the proposed increased allocation for Tidy Towns.

Cllr Micheál Choilm Mac Giolla Easbuig said that he was unable to support the budget on a point of principle, and felt that a strong message needed to be sent to central government that not enough funding was being provided to the Council to assist with important work in the areas of the islands, housing provision, the roads, and tourism development. He was also opposed to the property tax on

houses, and this being one of the methods for funding Council operations.

Cllr Ian Mc Garvey

- Highlighted the necessity of maintaining and further developing cross-border links.
- Asked that every effort be made to facilitate those living in small towns and villages particularly with regard to planning matters.
- Need to tackle the issue of rural depopulation in Donegal.
- Asked that every effort be made to provide a library service in Ramelton.

Mr Garry Martin, Director of Finance informed Members that they needed to consider the proposal agreed earlier in the meeting to amend the Draft Budget Book by €50,000 to allow for a €10,000 increase per Municipal District in the provision for Tidy Towns initiatives. He outlined the adjustments that needed to be made to provide for the additional €50,000 and to maintain the 2017 Revenue Budget total at €135,063,846.

Members were informed that in order to increase the total expenditure budget provision for tidy towns grants to €50,000 the following adjustments would have to be made:-

1. The expenditure budget provision in Sub-Service E0502 'Litter Control Initiatives' would have to be increased by €50,000.
2. The expenditure budget provision in Sub-Service J0201 'Corporate General Policy' would have to be decreased by €23,370.
3. The expenditure budget provision in Sub-Service D0601 'General Community & Enterprise' would have to be decreased by €26,630.

On the proposal of Cllr Brogan, seconded by Cllr Mc Monagle it was resolved "That Donegal County Council adopt for the financial year ending 31st December 2017, the Budget set out in Tables A & B including the amendment outlined above and resulting in an Annual Rate in Valuation of €68.39 as shown in Table A and subject to Section 10 of the Local Government (Financial Provisions) Act 1978, having regard to the Base Year Adjustment, as set out in Table C, and determined in accordance with Section 29 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014

On the proposal of Cllr O' Neill, seconded by Cllr Murray it was resolved "That Donegal County Council hereby determine, in accordance with the Budget now adopted, that the rate set out in Table A, of €68.39, to be the Annual Rate in Valuation to be levied for the year ending 31st December 2017 for the purpose set out in Table A"

On the proposal of Cllr Mc Bride, seconded by Cllr Farren, it was resolved " That Donegal County Council consider a report on the 3 Year Capital Programme in respect of the period 2017-2019 at its monthly meeting on 28th November 2016, and in future years at the November Council Meeting, in accordance with Section 135 of the local Government Act 2001, as amended."

The Chief Executive thanked Members for their co-operation and ongoing engagement with the budget process.

The Cathaoirleach acknowledged the commitment shown by Members and thanked all involved in the Budget preparations for their assistance and contribution.

This concluded the business of the meeting.