

MINUTES OF ANNUAL BUDGET MEETING OF DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL,  
HELD IN THE COUNTY HOUSE, LIFFORD ON 22<sup>nd</sup> NOVEMBER, 2019

C/328/19 MEMBERS PRESENT

Cllrs N Crossan, Cathaoirleach, L Blaney, K Bradley, C Brogan, P Canning, T Conaghan, D Coyle, A Doherty, G Doherty, L Doherty, R Donaghey, M Farren, M T Gallagher, M Harley, N Jordan, J Kavanagh, N Kennedy, M C Mac Giolla Easbuig, F Mc Brearty Jnr, M Mc Bride, M Mc Clafferty, M McDermott, I Mc Garvey, N Mc Garvey, B McGuinness, M Mc Mahon, A Molloy, J Murray, M Naughton, J S Ó'Fearraigh, and B Sweeny.

C/329/19 OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE

Seamus Neely, Chief Executive, Joe Peoples, Director of Housing, Corporate and Cultural Services / Meetings Administrator, R Gibson, A/Head of Finance, John McLaughlin, Director of Roads & Transportation, Liam Ward, Director of Community & Planning Services, Michael Mc Garvey, Director of Water & Environment, Garry Martin, Director of Economic Development, Information Systems & Emergency Services, Tanya Kee, Management Accountant, Anne Marie Quinn, Administrative Officer, Anne Marie Conlon, Communications Officer, Sean O' Daimhin, Oifigeach na Gaeilge, Róise Ní Laifeartaigh, Rannóg na Gaeilge, Mary Frances Doherty, Assistant Staff Officer, Management Accounts, Anne Marie Crawford, Staff Officer.

C/330/19 VOTE OF SYMPATHY

Members extended sympathy to Cllr Gerry Mc Monagle on the death of his mother Mary. The Chief Executive offered condolences on behalf of the management and staff of Donegal County Council. On the proposal of Cllr Gallagher, seconded by Cllr Brogan it was resolved to adjourn the meeting until 11.30am as a mark of respect.

C/331/19 CONSIDERATION OF THE 2020 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET- CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S ADDRESS, ADDRESS BY THE HEAD OF FINANCE AND DIRECTORS OF SERVICE

The Cathaoirleach welcomed Members to the meeting and said that that consideration of the 2020 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 Head of Finance and the Directors of Service, after which members would have an opportunity to debate and discuss the provisions in the 2020 Draft Budget Book.

The Chief Executive said that the budgetary process provided an opportunity to reflect on where the organisation stood at this particular point in time and set the scale of ambition with regards to the overall financial management and capacity of the Council going forward. This was timely, he said, in that a broad strategy was being presented for a new Council with the aim of balancing current and future needs. Issues such as Brexit, he noted, were particularly relevant for Donegal as

were overall resource implications and the need for prudent financial management. Budgetary considerations would also, he added, provide the basis for the Corporate Plan to 2024.

The budget strategy, he said, was to continue to provide for core services and priorities whilst supporting economic development and growth. This it was acknowledged would involve assessing spatial planning considerations and looking at possible interventions to deal with issues such as dereliction, vacant properties etc.

It was noted that the Draft Revenue Budget for 2020 was €154.4 million and that a spend of €524.3 million would be presented to members at the next Council meeting in respect of the Capital Budget for the period 2020-2022.

Concluding, the Chief Executive said that the whole area of organisation development was dependent on comprehensive workforce planning and the completion of the Corporate Plan. Delivering these core responsibilities, it was noted, would entail supporting development, controlling the cost base and expanding the revenue base as an integral part of the forward planning process.

Mr Richard Gibson, A/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 2020 requirement was provided including details of how the 2020 figures compared with the 2019 figures.

This was presented on a service by service basis.

The Draft Budget, Mr Gibson confirmed provided for expenditure in the sum of €154,410,629 for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2020.

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

- A harmonised rate of €71.81 for County and former Town Council areas of Letterkenny and Bundoran for 2020 with no general increase in rates for 2020.
- Establishment of a rate of €56.29 for the former town Council area of Buncrana for 2020.
- The retention of the existing policy in relation to the Vacancy Rate on Commercial Properties for 2020.
- The continuation of the Small Business Grant Scheme at a cost of €375,000 in 2020.(7.5% to a maximum of €375 in each case)

Members were updated also in relation to the various income and expenditure movements for 2019-2020 together with an overview of the draft revenue expenditure proposed for each of the service divisions.

Details in relation to the continuation of a number of exceptional measures were outlined and the short to medium term plans to reduce same were provided.

- C/332/19     PRESENTATIONS BY DIRECTORS OF SERVICE  
The Directors of Service outlined in detail the 2020 budgetary provisions as applicable to their respective Directorates.
- C/333/19     ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING  
It was unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting until 3pm
- C/334/19     ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING  
On the proposal of Cllr N Crossan, seconded by Cllr T Crossan it was resolved to further adjourn the meeting until 3.30pm.
- C/335/19     CONSIDERATION OF THE 2020 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET  
On resumption of the meeting the Cathaoirleach proposed, seconded by Cllr Brogan that an additional sum of €5000 be allocated in each Municipal District as a support to Tidy Towns committees (total €25,000).

Cllr Gallagher proposed, seconded by Cllr Kennedy that a Town Revitalisation Scheme (Rates Incentive Scheme) be introduced, on a revenue neutral basis, to encourage new businesses to locate in vacant premises that have been vacant for more than two years. The scheme, she said, should be limited to specific business entities only.

Cllr Mac Giolla Easbuig proposed, seconded by Cllr Mc Brearty that additional funding of €3500 be provided for Rannóg na Gaeilge to assist with the promotion and development of the Irish language and that further monies be set aside in the budget for 2020 to support cultural and community facilities in the Gaeltacht, including Amharclann GhaothDobhair.

Cllr Mc Clafferty said that he could not support such an objective and that the monies in question would be better utilised replacing damaged signage in and around the Rosses area. He proposed, seconded by Cllr Harley that consideration be given to using any additional monies for the replacement of signage in Gaeltacht areas.

A lengthy debate ensued with members raising the following issues:-

- Funding needed for Amharclann Ghaoth Dobhair.
- Promotion of archaeological sites a priority for tourism development.
- Contact should be made with the Causeway and Glens Borough Council with regard to a funding contribution for the Foyle Ferry.
- The issue of homelessness and the supply of vacant properties needs to be urgently reviewed.
- Toilet facilities a priority at a number of beach locations.

- Operational aspect of casual trading needs to be reviewed. Outlined the need for a workshop to deal with ongoing issues.
- Continued promotion of Digital Innovation Hubs a priority in 2020.
- TEN-T variations should be completed as soon as possible.
- Concern expressed that Donegal County Council by increasing the Local Property tax had impacted on those most vulnerable in society.
- Query as to why a request from the Lifford-Stranorlar MD members for an increase in DFI and Member's Development Funds was not included in the draft budget for 2020.
- Update requested in relation to the income generated to date by the Whole System of Work project.
- Legal fees not clearly itemised with overall costing of €20,000 per week not sustainable in the long run.
- Strategic Policy Committees and other Council Committees established at the 2019 AGM need to meet as soon as possible.
- Clarity sought on the level of budget provision provided for the Donegal Film Office given the potential for expansion in this area.
- Needs to be a continual focus on Municipal District issues.
- Suggestion that Inishowen Tourism and Donegal Tourism become one tourism entity.
- Additional staffing resources needed in water services.

Cllr Mac Giolla Easbuig said that he was extremely disappointed at the stance taken in relation to the Irish language and thus would not be able to support the 2020 budgetary proposals.

The Chief Executive said that there was a proposal to adopt the budget subject to (a) the provision of €5000 per Municipal District for Tidy Towns Committees and (b) the introduction of a Town Revitalisation Scheme (Rates Incentive Scheme) to combat vacant premises and offering incentives to new businesses to locate in properties vacant for more than two years.

It was possible, he said, to accommodate both proposals.

Members were informed that whilst there was no particular provision in the budget for architectural heritage sites, monies were in place to accommodate the development of same.

He said that Donegal County Council had stepped up significantly to the challenges and would work diligently to promote and progress all development opportunities.

The Council it was acknowledged had a requirement to defend a number of issues legally and that this involved a significant level of work. As advised previously work was ongoing in relation to looking at more effective ways of tackling same. Payment was made, he advised,

on the basis of the bills presented and checked by staff involved in procuring the advice.

The Chief Executive said that the nomination of PPN representatives to the various Strategic Policy Committees had not yet been completed, but that as soon as this process was finalised the SPC s would be up and running.

The Cathaoirleach asked members to consider the proposals before them. He said that these were clear and substantiative proposals to adopt the 2020 Budget with amendments as proposed by himself and Cllr Gallagher. Cllr Mac Giolla Easbuig, he noted, had requested additional monies for Rannóg na Gaeilge, Amharclann Ghaoth Dobhair and Aislann Ghaoth Dobhair.

Cllr Gallagher noted that there were mechanisms in place for both organisations to apply for funding and that the matter was not a voting issue at this juncture.

The Head of Finance in response to a query from Cllr Mc Brearty confirmed that there had been a request from the Lifford-Stranorlar Municipal District members to increase the D.F.I and Member's Development Funds. In his response, the Head of Finance referenced the inclusion of a "Public Lights and Minor Infrastructure Fund" in the draft budget for 2020.

Members were informed that they should now consider whether or not to adopt the 2020 Revenue subject to the amendments as proposed by Cllrs Crossan and Gallagher.

On the proposal of Cllr Crossan, seconded by Cllr Brogan it was resolved in accordance with Section 29(8) of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 that the rate multiplier for the former Bunrana Town Council area be set at 56.29 for 2020 and that an appropriate Base Year Adjustment be applied to effect this.

On the proposal of Cllr Crossan, seconded by Cllr Brogan it was resolved that Donegal County Council adopt for the financial year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, the Budget set out in Tables A and B including the amendment outlined below and resulting in an Annual Rate in Valuation of €71.81 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:-

Expenditure  
Increases/(Reductions)

<b>Sub-Service</b>	<b>Sub Service Title</b>	<b>Amount</b>
EO503	Environmental Awareness Services	€25,000
HO303	Refunds and Irrecoverable Rates	(€25,000)
HO301	Administration of Rates Office	€50,000
HO303	Refunds and Irrecoverable Rates	(€50,000)
<b>Net Total</b>		<b>€0</b>

Total Gross Income & Expenditure

	<b>Draft</b>	<b>Adopted</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Expenditure	€154,410,629	€154,410,629	€0
Income	€154,410,629	€154,410,629	€0

*The total gross income and expenditure budget in the sum of €154,410,629 remains unchanged.*

Cllr Crossan proposed, seconded by Cllr Crossan that the 2020 Budget as presented be adopted subject to the inclusion of the following:-

- 1) That a sum of €5000 be allocated to each Municipal District as a support for to Tidy Towns committees.
- 2) A Town Revitalisation Scheme (Rates Incentive Scheme) to be introduced to combat issues relating to vacant premises and offering an incentive for new businesses to set up in properties that have been vacant for more than two years. This to include a Commercial Rates rebate of 75% in year 1, 50% in year 2 and 25% in year 3.

A recorded vote was then taken by the Meetings Administrator which resulted in 27 voting for with 2 against.

Those voting for included:-

Cllrs Blaney, Brogan, Canning, Conaghan, Coyle, N Crossan, A Doherty, G Doherty, L Doherty, Donaghey, Farren, Gallagher, Harley, Jordan, Kavanagh, Kennedy, Mc Bride, Mc Clafferty, Mc Dermott, N Mc Garvey, Mc Guinness, Mc Mahon, Molloy, Murray, Naughton, O, Fearraigh, and Sweeny (27)

Those voting against included:-

Cllrs Mac Giolla Easbuig and Mc Brearty.

Thus it was resolved to adopt the budget for the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2020 as presented together with the amendments as outlined above.

Members thanked the Chief Executive, the A/Head of Finance and all associated with the budgetary process.

They highlighted a number of issues which they said needed to be progressed in 2020 acknowledging that a team effort was required in order to progress same.

The Chief Executive thanked all who had engaged with the process and the members for their assistance and co-operation. He said that whilst there were challenges ahead tough decisions taken over the past 9-10 years had put the Council in a strong position going forward.

This concluded the business of the meeting.