

MINUTES OF THE BUDGET MEETING OF ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, COURTHOUSE, ROSCOMMON ON WEDNESDAY THE 19TH NOVEMBER, 2014 AT 11.00 A.M.

PRESENT: Councillor John Cummins, Cathaoirleach **PRESIDED**

MEMBERS: V. Byrne I. Connaughton D. Connolly M. Creaton
N. Dineen R. Doherty L. Fallon P. Fitzmaurice
M. Hopkins P. Kilduff J. Keogh
O. Leyden M. Mulligan E. Murphy J. Naughten
K. Shanagher T. Ward.

OFFICIALS: Tommy Ryan, Chief Executive.
Majella Hunt, Director of Services.
Martin Lydon, Head of Finance & Planning.
John O'Rourke, A/ Director of Services.
Pat Murtagh, A/Director of Services.
Fiona ni Chuinn, Meetings Administrator.

149.14. DRAFT BUDGET 2015:

The Cathaoirleach welcomed the members to the Budget Meeting and informed them that the Budget was broken up into eight Divisions plus the 3 year Capital Programme. Each Director of Services would outline the Budget to the members for their respective areas of responsibility. He thanked the members of the Corporate Policy Group for their hard work and assistance in the preparation of the draft Budget.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Councillor . Kilduff
SECONDED by Councillor Ward

It was **AGREED** that the Resolution for adoption of the Budget would be taken at 4.00 p.m.

Tommy Ryan, Chief Executive, addressed the members and stated “that the Local Government Acts 1925 to 2014 as most recently amended by the Local Government (Reform) Act 2014, The Local Government (Financial and Audit Procedures) Regulations 2014 and the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 established a new budgetary process within Local Authorities and gave enabling power to Local Authorities to vary the basic rate of Local Property Tax. The Council has already made a decision in relation to the level of Local Property Tax as required by statute. In accordance with the legislation I have consulted with the Corporate Policy Group in the preparation of the Draft Budget. I have also consulted the Municipal District Members by preparing a draft budgetary plan for each Municipal District setting out proposals for the General Municipal Allocation and have taken account of the Municipal Draft Budgetary Plans as adopted.

He continued that local authorities are required by law to adopt a budget that is sufficient to meet their proposed expenditure – total estimated expenditure must be met with total

estimated income from commercial rates, local property tax, charges for goods and services, and government grants. In addition to adopting the budget for the coming year, Elected Members must also determine the annual rate on the valuation that should be levied on commercial properties. The Draft Budget is based on no increase to the current Annual Rate on Valuation.

Following consideration and adoption of the budget a schedule of proposed works of maintenance and repair to be carried out during the financial year 2015 in each municipal district will be prepared for consideration and adoption by the municipal district members. The oversight and governance roles of Elected Members have also been strengthened by the requirement to adopt an annual service delivery plan, monthly management reports, a strengthened role for the Audit Committee and the establishment of a new independent National Oversight and Audit Committee. Under this new system regular financial updates will issue to the elected members in the year ahead through the monthly management reports.

Local Government and Public Service Reform:

Local Government and Public Service Reform has been a key element of the Government's strategic response to the economic crisis and is a central theme in the Programme for Government. The enactment of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and the issue of subsequent regulations and circular letters have fundamentally changed the strategic direction, structure, governance and role of Local Government in Ireland.

Reform requires leadership at all levels to address the necessary change in culture and a workforce that is aligned to the strategic priorities of the Council and equipped to meet current and future challenges. It is essential that strategies to improve organization effectiveness, enable change and innovation and deliver reform are included in the Corporate Plan for 2014 to 2019 which is currently being developed. The strategies will be then implemented on an annual basis under the Performance Development Management System.

Delivering services efficiently:

Roscommon County Council exerts a significant influence on the local economy as provider, enabler, procurer or regulator relating to infrastructure and services. Strong progress has already been made on reducing costs and enhancing productivity in the Council. Since the embargo on recruitment in 2008 staff numbers have been reduced by the whole time equivalent of 169 which equates to almost a 29% reduction in numbers. A continued emphasis on the achievement of efficiencies and savings in line with the recommendations of the Local Government Efficiency Review is required.

Enhanced Economic and Community Development and Enterprise Support Role:

The most significant change in the reform programme gives local government the primary responsibility for leading economic, social and community development locally. The programme provides for the realignment of local government and local development and Roscommon County Council has commenced work on the preparation of a Local Economic and Community Plan. A Strategic Policy Committee with responsibility for Economic Development and Enterprise has been approved and this committee has responsibility for the economic element of the plan. The Council has also established the Local Community

Development Committee which is responsible for the development and implementation of the Community element of the Plan, management of the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme and is the local action group for the management of the LEADER Local Development Strategy.

Local Economic and Community Plan:

Work on the development of the Local Economic and Community Plan has commenced and the purpose of the plan is to set out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic, local and community development of County Roscommon for the next six years.

Business, Enterprise and Innovation Fund:

The Council must develop a new sense of focus and direction to deliver its economic role. Apart from formulating the Local Economic and Community Plan the Council must look to mobilise other powers and functions to promote and embed economic development in all functions. The Council has been working in collaboration with the Roscommon Leader Partnership Company, WestBIC, the business sector and key agencies in the preparation of an Enterprise and Innovation Strategy for the County. This strategy has identified actions to be taken to enable and maximise the economic competitiveness of Roscommon.

The Council must take specific actions to promote increased economic activity beyond “mainstream/traditional” functions by working with the business community and key economic development agencies. I am proposing the establishment of an annual €200K Business, Enterprise and Innovation Fund to enable the Council to provide leadership, resources and financial support to facilitate and deliver economic actions. This fund will be ring fenced for specific actions to promote increased economic, retail, leisure and tourism activity through creating attractive urban areas, business and retail promotion events, marketing activities and “place” branding, a targeted rates incentive scheme, digital strategies, a focus on particular advantages or strengths of the county, promotion of innovation through support for networking and a collective voice for business, engaging with research and third level institutions as well as leveraging public and EU funding and resources. The establishment of this fund on an annual basis will result in a €1m investment in business and economic development over the life time of this Council.

Local Enterprise Office:

In May this year the Local Enterprise Office was opened in the Council offices and is the first stop shop for entrepreneurs, micro enterprises, start ups and businesses interested in exploring expansion opportunities and it merges the resources and strengths of the former County Enterprise Boards and the Council’s Business Support Unit.

Citizen Engagement:

The participation of citizens in public life and their right to influence decisions that affect their lives and communities are at the centre of democracy. Open and inclusive policy making increases public participation, enhances transparency and accountability, builds civic capacity and leads to increased buy in and better decision making. Under the reform programme the Council has established a Public Participation Network (PPN) and new structures for participation are being established in the environmental, social inclusion and community pillars at Municipal District and Plenary level.

Budget 2015:

The challenge of balancing the Council's Budget requires a balance between raising income from households and business and making reductions in spending programmes. As a Council we have made significant progress in reducing our cost base, securing efficiencies and maintaining services. We have, despite the challenges, adopted a sustainable financial strategy and have recognised for many years now that spending budgets must be matched to available income. The Draft Budget for the year ending 31st December 2015 provides for revenue expenditure of €53.4M and income of €32.M. The balance of €21.4M is funded by a combination of the Local Government Fund, notified to us as €9.1M (including retained Local Property Tax of €3.3M), Commercial Rates of €11.2m and Pension Related Deductions from staff remuneration, estimated at €1.1m.

The revenue expenditure of over €53.4M represents a massive ongoing injection of funds into the local economy by Roscommon County Council, which is one of the largest employers in the County. In line with previous approaches, the Draft Budget includes a figure for road grants based on previous allocations but the final figures will be based on actual allocations.

Local Government Fund, Rates and Local Charges:

The Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government has informed us that the General Purpose Grant allocation from the Local Government Fund for County Roscommon for the year 2015 is €9.1M which is the same as the 2014 allocation. This allocation includes €3.3M from Local Property Tax retained locally (80%) which is supplemented by €5.8m. from the Equalisation Fund.

The Local Government Fund has reduced significantly and this has had a significant impact on the Council's ability to deliver services such as verge trimming and roadside maintenance. The Country is beginning to enter a period of economic recovery and it is essential that services be maintained and that funding is available to promote economic development so that the County will be in a position to avail of the opportunities presented by the recovery.

The Council will adopt an approach to collection that maximises cash receipts but at the same time acknowledges the financial difficulties that many businesses are encountering. 80% of the Council's rate payers pay an Annual Rate of €5K or less and a 1% reduction would save their business €50 annually on average. Accordingly, the establishment of a business, enterprise and innovation fund which would help to generate business and economic activity would be much more beneficial than a rates reduction to the vast majority of ratepayers.

Roscommon County Council is committed to working with the Departments of the Environment, Community and Local Government and Public Expenditure and Reform in ensuring that our sector continues to be managed in balance over the medium term and, in particular, that General Government Balance (GGB) neutrality is achieved in 2015. We will continue to strive towards balanced revenue and capital accounts in 2015.

Conclusion:

During 2014 the Elected Members and staff have continued to provide a full range of services that are vital to the functioning of the County. The cumulative effect of the continuous budget reductions in recent years is putting pressure on the Council's ability to continue delivering basic services and community supports. These services and supports play a very important role in promoting and enabling the development of County Roscommon and it is essential that they are not eroded any further. The business, enterprise and innovation fund can be a catalyst for business generation within the County, and help communities improve the economic outlook for their area.

The Corporate Plan will set out the new strategic direction for Roscommon County Council. The challenge is to put plans, policies and services in place to enable the generation of business and jobs in the local economy, to engage with our citizens and improve their quality of life and to work in collaboration with other bodies and agencies. These challenges can be met by developing a well led competent organization with a common sense of purpose among Elected Members, staff and the community.

The Chief Executive thanked the Elected Members and staff of the Council for their support during 2014 and he recorded his appreciation to the current Cathaoirleach, Cllr John Cummins and his predecessor Cllr Martin Connaughton for their commitment, leadership, courtesy and co-operation. He also thanked the previous Council along with the current and former Corporate Policy Group for their application in doing the business of the Council.

The Chief Executive thanked the staff of all the Council Directorates for their loyalty and dedication to the improvement, delivery and development of services. Staff numbers have reduced by almost 30% in recent years, and staff have shown great flexibility, in adapting to unprecedented changes in the work environment during 2014 and will continue to face further significant change during 2015. Given the current employment control framework in the local government sector, national workforce planning guidelines and budget provision it is unlikely that the Council will be in a position to recruit additional staff next year. The Council is expected to deliver more with less and is committed to supporting staff in the continuous development of their skills and competencies to enable them to meet the ever changing demands placed upon them.

He acknowledged and thanked members of staff who retired in 2013, particularly former County Manager Frank Dawson and also to remember all associated with the Council who have passed away during the year.

He thanked the members of the Management Team, Majella Hunt, Martin Lydon Kathleen Martin, John O Rourke and Pat Murtagh for their commitment and support during 2014.

Finally, he thanked, especially, Martin Lydon, Head of Finance and Planning and the staff of the Finance Unit and indeed each and every Unit for their work and support in the preparation of this Budget.

The Chief Executive recommended the Budget for adoption.

Directors of Service, Majella Hunt, Martin Lydon, John O'Rourke and Pat Murtagh introduced the services under Division A,B,C,D,E,F,G & H namely Housing and Building; Roads Transportation and Safety; Water Services; Development Management; Environmental Services; Recreation and Amenity; Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare and Miscellaneous Services .

The following issues were raised by Members:-

- Disappointed at the ongoing battle with Irish Water.
- Need to address the illegal dumping issue in the county.
- Welcomed the allocation for community, amenity and cemetery grants.
- Disappointed that the Revitalisation Fund is cut by 50%.
- Loss of funding is a reduction in services.
- The Local Property Tax was introduced as a way to enhance local authority funding, however, it has been of no assistance.
- Being forced to adopt a budget under time constraints without knowledge of the Irish Water budget allocation.
- No allocation in the budget for road works south of Roscommon Town.
- Compliment the staff on the ground for all the work done during the year.
- Compliment all the community groups for their work.
- Contract with Irish Water should cover the cost of staff.
- Queried the cost to the Council of unfinished housing estates.
- Town Revitalisation Fund very positive move and a major boost to the economy.
- Queried the cost of markets and Casual Trading of €108,000.
- Need to review the implementation of the Town Revitalisation Fund every 12 months.
- Has there been any correspondence from the IDA on a visit to the county.
- Disappointed to see 626 people on the application list for rehousing.
- Need for an allocation of funding for housing the homeless.
- Need for a fund for emergency accommodation in the major towns in the county.
- Does the transfer of assets to Irish Water also mean a transfer of Group Water Schemes?
- Welcomed the funding for the public lighting initiative.
- Need to allocate funding for playgrounds.
- What is the SLA to Irish Water costing us per annum and how many staff are now working for Irish Water from Roscommon County Council.
- Proposals for the Town Revitalisation Scheme is too vague and too rushed.
- Need for funding for Oran By pass.
- Will Roscommon County Council be quoting for shared services when we move to our new offices?
- Roscommon has the third highest rates in the country and this needs to be addressed.
- Need to address the issue of lack of broadband in certain parts of the county.
- Queried the work carried out by our Vets – could it be done by local people?
- Need to put insurance in place for all playgrounds.
- Compliment the Litter Wardens on all their work throughout the year.
- Requested clarification on item on pages 94 and 96 of the Budget Book – i.e. Economic & Enterprise Development and Promotion and Recreation and Amenities.
- Welcomed the current developments on the Shannon Valley Estate.

- Call on the three Fine Gael Councillors to contact the CER so that the €500,000 shortfall in the Irish Water budget is passed back to Roscommon County Council.
- Like to see the use of the Gateway Scheme on the River Suck.
- Request works for the Bridge in Athleague and Derrycahill Bridge.
- Welcomed funding for Roscommon Leisure Centre.
- Queried when the review will take place on the opening hours at the Civic Amenity sites.
- Allocation of €4.5K for the provision of emergency accommodation for homeless persons is inadequate.
- Need for increased investment in the Arts Programme.
- Request that Roscommon County Council look at re-employing an Arts Officer – would like to see this addressed through the SPC and LDC.
- Compliment Roscommon County Council on their policy in dealing with rate payers in difficulties.
- Would like Roscommon County Council to address the issue of flooding at Clogher River in Kilmore.
- Need to get agreement with farmers, the Department and Roscommon County Council on road flooding.
- Queried why there is a difference of €250,000 in the housing programme and why there is a surplus in income and expenditure.
- Queried the figure for stray horses.

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Kilduff

SECONDED by Councillor Ward

That there would be a 1% reduction in the rates.

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Connolly

SECONDED by Councillor Byrne

That there would be a 2% reduction in the rates.

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Murphy

SECONDED by Councillor Doherty

That should the Town Revitalisation Scheme not be a success the monies would revert back to provide a reduction in the rates.

The Directors of Services responded to all queries raised as follows:-

- Confirmed that there are 696 people on the housing list, however the reality is that not all of these are looking for Council housing.
- Capital budget for housing has not been notified yet and the Government has indicated that there will be significant funding going forward.
- Roscommon County Council have a “50 house shovel ready scheme” ready to go ahead.
- It is not entirely clear whether the new rent framework will mean a decrease in rent for everyone.
- The figure for stray horses is provided as a contingency figure.
- There will be a change in the provision of the Dog Warden service going forward.
- Confirmed that Roscommon County Council will be touting for shared services.

- The temporary Veterinary Inspectors are employed locally by Roscommon Co. Co.
- Roscommon County Council are aware of the new filtrating system required in the Swimming Pool and it is hoped to address this matter in the near future.
- While the homeless budget appears small it is considered adequate for 2015.
- Approval has been sought from the NRA for the overlay work necessary around Ballymurray, Knockcroghery and St. John's and is hopeful of receiving funding.
- Town Revitalisation Scheme is not all about capital works but there may be complimentary elements.
- With regard to the River Suck it is hoped to have adequate funding to complete the walkway and other commitments.
- It is intended to meet Galway County Council before the year end with regard to Derrycahill bridge.
- Discussions are currently ongoing with Irish Water with regard to the budget which is made up of payroll, goods and services and a central management charge.
- The Service Level Agreement must be paid for by Irish Water or Roscommon County Council will not be providing the service to Irish Water.
- Four staff members have been seconded to Irish Water.
- Private G.W. Schemes will remain private and have no interaction with Irish Water.
- Semi Private Group Water Schemes using the public water supply will be chargeable.
- Signage policy currently in place and it has been implemented on a phased basis.
- An update will be provided on the Civic Amenity sites at the January Meeting.
- Service support costs as shown in the Budget equals the central management charge.
- The overall central management charge has come down from €10.6m to €10.2m.
- The distribution of the Central Management Charge is based on statistical data.
- Confirmed that there are over 200 payment plans in place with Roscommon County Council for NPPR.

Tommy Ryan confirmed that a lot of comment has been made on the Business Innovation Fund and that some Councillors have stated that not enough information has been provided. He confirmed that information relating to the fund had been given to the Councillors at previous Council Meetings. He confirmed that the final decisions on how the Fund and policies will be implemented will be with the Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee but there is no question that the €100,000 will not be spent on business, enterprise and innovation.

As all members had spoken on the Budget the Cathaoirleach called for Motions on the adoption of the Budget.

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Kilduff
SECONDED by Councillor Ward
 That there would be a 1% reduction in the rates.

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Ward
SECONDED by Councillor Dineen
 That should the €100,000 allocated to the Business Innovation Fund not be spent in 2015 that this money would roll over into 2016.

Councillor Kilduff put forward an amendment to his previous proposal as follows:-

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Kilduff

SECONDED by Councillor Ward

That there would be a 1% reduction in the rates and that the €100,000 Business Innovation Fund if not spent would roll over into 2016.

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Connolly That there would be a 2% reduction in the rates and that the shortfall of €24,000 in giving such a cut would come from the Cathaoirleach's salary.

As no member was willing to second this proposal the Cathaoirleach put Councillor Kilduff's motion to the floor.

The Meetings Administrator called a Vote which resulted as follows:

VOTING FOR COUNCILLOR KILDUFF'S MOTION:

Councillors Connaughton, Creaton, Cummins, Dineen, Doherty, Fallon, Fitzmaurice, Hopkins, Keogh, Kilduff, Leyden, Mulligan, Murphy, Naughten, Shanagher and Ward (16)

VOTING AGAINST COUNCILLOR KILDUFF'S MOTION:

Councillors Byrne and Connolly (2)

The Cathaoirleach declared Councillor Kilduff's Motion carried.

150.14. AN CATHAOIRLEACH AGUS AN LEAS-CATHAOIRLEACH:

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Kilduff

SECONDED by Councillor Ward

And **AGREED** that pursuant to Section 143(a) & 143(b) of the Local Government Act, 2001, "That Roscommon County Council pay an Annual Allowance of €20,000 and €4,000 in 2015 to the Cathaoirleach and Leas-Cathaoirleach of the County Council respectively to cover the reasonable expenses incurred in respect of attendance at functions".

151.14. SECTION 76 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2001

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Kilduff

SECONDED by Councillor Murphy

And **AGREED** that Roscommon County Council authorise the incurring of reasonable expenditure in connection with receptions, entertainment and the making of presentations to distinguished persons and in connection with the holding of special events relevant to its functions during 2015.

152.14. ADOPTION OF THE BUDGET 2015

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Ward

SECONDED by Councillor Connaughton

And **AGREED** that Roscommon County Council by resolution adopt for the financial year ending 31st December, 2015, the Budget as set out in Tables A, B, C, D, E & F. as amended.

153.14. ADOPTION OF ANNUAL RATE ON VALUATION

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Keogh

SECONDED by Councillor Dineen

And **AGREED** that Roscommon County Council determine in accordance with the Budget, as adopted and amended by Councillors Kilduff and Ward's motion (i.e. reduce rates by 1%) , the rates set out in Tables A and C to be the annual rate on valuation to be levied for the financial year ending 31st December, 2015, for the purposes set out in those tables.

154.14. SECTION 135 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2001

It was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Ward

SECONDED by Councillor Fallon.

And **AGREED** that Roscommon County Council by resolution adopt the Three Year Capital Programme (2015-2017) as per Section 135 of the Local Government Act.

155.14. VOTES OF CONGRATULATIONS were extended to:

Maresa Fagan, a Journalist with the Roscommon Herald, on achieving the Regional Print Media Award at the GSK Irish Healthcare Media Awards .
Shannonside Radio on celebrating 25 years in broadcasting.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

**The foregoing Minutes are
Confirmed and Signed:**

Meetings Administrator

Cathaoirleach

Countersigned

