



## *Miontuairiscí/Meeting Minutes*

### *29<sup>th</sup> November, 2010 Council Chamber*

An Cathaoirleach, Councillor Ann Dillon-Gallagher, presided.

#### **Members Present:**

Councillors Joseph Bonner, Ray Butler, Willie Carey, Shane Cassells, Jimmy Cudden, Francis Deane, Regina Doherty, John V Farrelly, Brian Fitzgerald, Oliver Fox, Wayne Harding, Jim Holloway, Eoin Holmes, Suzanne Jamal, Nick Killian, Noel Leonard, Tracy McElhinney, Niamh McGowan, Jenny McHugh, Maria Murphy, Seamus O'Neill, Bryan Reilly, Joe Reilly, Tommy Reilly, Catherine Yore.

#### **Officials in Attendance:**

**County Manager:** Tom Dowling

**Directors of Service:** Eugene Cummins, Kevin Stewart, Fiona Lawless, Brendan McGrath

**Meetings Administrator** Martin Rogers

**Senior Executive Officers:** Michael Griffin, Larry Whelan, Ger Murphy(A)

**Finance Staff:** Paul Timoney, Sheila Harkin, Ger Soady.

**Administrative Officer:** Olive Falsey

#### **Apologies:**

Councillors Sirena Campbell, Eugene Cassidy, Jimmy Fegan

The Cathaoirleach opened the meeting and before proceeding to the Budget presentation it was agreed to receive an update on the severe weather. Brendan McGrath and Eugene Cummins informed the Meeting of the following:

- The Council's approach to the salting of agreed designated routes is continuing in response to local weather conditions and national weather forecasts.
- Update on salt stocks and delivery schedules.
- No deviation from the agreed winter maintenance programme unless in the event of exceptional circumstances or an emergency.
- The severe weather group is monitoring the situation and conference calls took place over the weekend.
- An active communications strategy is in place.
- No major issues regarding water supply but usage is being monitored.
- Civil Defence will be deployed to provide assistance to vulnerable people as necessary.

With the severe weather warning, it was agreed to postpone the Housing Estate Awards due to take place on the 30<sup>th</sup> November.

The Cathaoirleach also reminded Members of the proposed briefing by Iarnróid Éireann on the proposed Navan rail project in Solstice Arts Centre from 4.00p.m. this evening.

1. To receive the Section 135 3 Year Draft Capital Programme.

Paul Timoney made a presentation on the Draft Capital Investment Programme 2011 - 2013 and this was noted by the Members.

2. To discuss Draft Budget for **Financial Year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011**

Fiona Lawless made a presentation to the Members on the draft budget for the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011.



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The main points put forward were:

- There will be no increase in rents proposed and the adjustments will be made accordingly regarding assessment forms that have been returned.
- There is no proposed increase in commercial rates.
- Following discussions with the Department the likely cut in the Local Government Fund could be up to 15% which would amount to the need for an €1.3m. cut to the budget.
- The National Recovery 4-Year Plan could have significant impacts on budgets going forward.
- 70% of budget is non-discretionary with payroll being the single biggest cost at 40%
- Debt collection is a significant challenge but no proposed increase in water services charges.
- Efforts continue to enhance and increase economic development measures and activities.

The Co. Manager confirmed everything and reiterated the Council's commitment to fulfilling its responsibility to the people of Co. Meath. He acknowledged the difficult decisions made by the Members in 2004 and 2005, which resulted in Meath being one of the few Local Authorities able to deliver a balanced budget. He outlined that the prudent financial management adopted has enabled the Council to continue to grow the economy in Meath.

The following issues were raised and responded to as follows:

- Legal services and examining costs of external versus an in-house legal structure  
*8% reduction on legal services already in place. The existing service providers cover a range of expertise e.g. Planning, Housing, Infrastructure*
- Cost regarding hire of plant – would having our own fleet be more cost effective?  
*Eugene Cummins Director of Services informed that three new lorries had been purchased to augment the gritting fleet and it is intended to build up the Council's own fleet by replacing outdated machinery/plant.. However, some plant like JCB's will continue to be hired as this approach is better value.*
- Could there be a reduction in rates for new businesses?  
*The Council cannot vary its own rate or have different categories of rates as this process is covered by legislation.*
- Where are the cuts likely to be?  
*There is likely to be a 15% cut in Local Government Fund. There may be an increase in NPPR. It is likely that the 'big-spend' areas such as roads and water services will be targeted.*
- What options have the Council to present case to the Minister? More negotiations needed.  
*Co. Manager responded and explained that the Minister is very aware of the situation in Meath. The case has been presented on a number of occasions.*
- Council has a balanced budget now but we don't really know where we stand until Local Government fund is announced.  
*This was noted and the Local Government figure is awaited.*
- Is there anything that can be done by the Council to assist businesses?  
*It was explained that under the four-year recovery plan, Local Authorities will be responsible for raising funds locally. There is no structure, as yet, in place for implementation. The Council acknowledges the situation that's facing hotels and other businesses but cannot legally treat one sector differently from another.*
- How does Meath Co. Council compare with other local authorities in terms of its own resources provision in the roadworks programme.



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*Eugene Cummins, Director of Services informed that the reason for Meath securing good grant funding for Roads is that the Council has invested a substantial amount of its own funding in roads and this is viewed favourably by the Department.*

- The issue of late valuations on properties in Ratoath  
*Fiona Lawless, Head of Finance explained that several meetings had been held with the Valuation Office and the Council had made a concerted effort to get those properties valued, which would generate the highest return to the Council. It was noted that there is a back log due to staffing resources at the Valuation Office.*
- Why did rates not drop accordingly?  
*It was explained that this is the second year that rates have not been increased.*

This concluded the business of the meeting.