



Miontuairiscí/Meeting Minutes

Special Finance Meeting 19th. October 2009, Council Chamber

An Cathaoirleach, Councillor William Carey, presided.

Members Present:

Councillors Joseph Bonner, Sirena Campbell, Shane Cassells, Eugene Cassidy, Jimmy Cudden, Francis Deane, Anne Dillon Gallagher, Regina Doherty, Jimmy Fegan, Brian Fitzgerald, Oliver Fox, Wayne Harding, Suzanne Jamal, Nick Killian, Noel Leonard, Tracy McElhinney, Niamh McGowan, Jenny McHugh, Maria Murphy, Bryan Reilly, Tommy Reilly.

Officials in Attendance:

County Manager: Tom Dowling

Directors of Service: Eugene Cummins, Liam Henry, Fiona Lawless, Larry Whelan (Acting)

Meetings Administrator Bill Sweeney

Financial Accountant: Barry Lynch

Senior Planners:

Senior Executive Officers: Michael Griffin, Martin Rogers, Larry Whelan.

Administrative Officer: Olive Falsey

Apologies:

Councillors Sirena Campbell

1. Independent Investigation – Planning Department.

Co. Manager, Tom Dowling addressed the Council and read the terms of reference regarding the independent investigation, which will be conducted in the Planning Department. It was agreed that the document would be e-mailed to the Members.

The terms of reference are as follows:

1. To meet with Cllr. Campbell to expand and probe the allegation above.
2. Assess and review all the information held by the planning department which formed the basis for the reply to the above notice of question.
3. To investigate if there is any evidence of a systematic delay in cashing payments for development contributions and planning fees and if so the reason for such delays.
4. Having regard to the outcome of the review above, propose an extended examination which will ensure that the notice of question can be answered satisfactorily.

In arriving at outcome to items 1 to 4 above the consultants should review and assess the internal control process's which inform the receipting and lodgement of planning fees and development contributions.

As a result of the investigation make recommendations where necessary to improve the internal controls in the functions investigated.

The statutory audit committee of Meath County Council has been briefed and they are satisfied with the terms of reference. It is expected that the investigation will take 3 weeks and the audit committee



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will be informed of the outcome prior to a report being presented to the Council. I can confirm that the preliminary part of the investigation has commenced. It would obviously be inappropriate for me to comment any further at this stage other than to advise any member who has any knowledge of inappropriate actions specifically in relation to this investigation to contact Mazars.

2. Budget Meetings

The Meetings' Administrator informed the Councillors of the proposal to hold the preliminary Budget Meeting on 23rd. November and the Budget Meeting on 7th. December.

3. Presentation 1. – Fiona Lawless, Head of Finance

The presentation focused on Meath County Council's funding position and the main issues of concern in managing the financial situation from both the revenue and capital perspectives.

4. Presentation 2. - Liam Henry, Director of Services, Planning

The presentation focused on the legislative context regarding development contributions, the current schedule of charges re the DCS 2004, the process involved and the progress to date.

5. Presentation 3 - Tadhg McDonnell, Director of Services, CS & HR

The presentation focused on the Farrell Grant Sparks Report 2007, DOEHLG Circulars 2008/9, the measures taken to date by Meath County Council in implementing the Circulars and the implications for the organisation.

A question and answer session followed the presentations and the following is a summary of the main issues and responses.

Issues	Responses
Outstanding levies and plan for collection.	Liam Henry, DOS, Planning, responded and outlined that 80% of levies were collected. The objective is to recover all debt using all methods i.e. letters, site visits, 'phone calls. Enforcement will be used if no progress is made. Outstanding levies are index linked.
Use of consultants.	Eugene Cummins, DOS, Infrastructure, responded and explained that Meath County Council will continue to use consultants when it does not have staff to conduct works. He also pointed out that it is often the case whereby the DOEHLG will only pay grant assistance if consultants are used to complete works.
Central management charges.	Fiona Lawless, Head of Finance, explained that this term, central management charges, refers to everything that is not assigned to a programme group e.g. Human Resources, IT.
Meath County Council's IT infrastructure.	Tom Dowling, Co. Manager, responded and outlined that Meath County Council developed much needed IT infrastructure, which delivers significant benefits for the County. The quality of the IT infrastructure enables the development and piloting of national and local IT projects.
Development deposits from developers.	Fiona Lawless, Head of Finance, responded and informed the Council that there is a figure of €14.2m on deposit from



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	Developers.
Timescale regarding repair and re-letting of vacant houses.	Brendan McGrath, DOS, responded and informed the Council that Meath County Council is not allowed borrow for this purpose and that there are insufficient funds in the Revenue Budget to carry out the necessary repairs. Meath County Council will have to source funding from other areas. He also explained other issues such as the timeframe re taking action on vacant houses, and the requirement (re insurance cover) to use metal shutters to board up houses.
The present and future status of Civic Offices.	Tom Dowling, Co. Manager, responded and informed the Council that there will be proposals for the Civic Offices in the Budget.
The effect of staff reductions on services.	Tadhg McDonnell, DOS, HR & CS, responded and acknowledged that, while it is the objective to deliver quality services, it may be necessary to prioritise the needs of the public. Staff numbers in each Department will be examined as part of the budget preparation.
Capital account - Projected figures for 2009.	Fiona Lawless, Head of Finance, explained in detail the process with regard to allocations in the Capital Account, and informed that the allocation figure was not a collection figure.
Second home levies	Fiona Lawless, Head of Finance, responded and informed the meeting that, to date, €579,000 had been collected for 2895 homes. The Local Government Computer Services Board is collecting this money on behalf of Meath County Council and all other Local Authorities, as a shared service.
Tom Dowling, Co. Manager, reiterated that Meath County Council has been pro-active in attracting investment to Co. Meath, particularly in setting up a dedicated Economic Development Unit, and that communities are encouraged to do work for the council and are supported and recognised for their efforts.	

6. Notice of Question – submitted by Cllr. Nick Killian

“Can the Manager give a full and detailed breakdown of the amount of funding allocated to payments for consultants across all Departments, since January 2009 to June 30th 2009”.

Response circulated at the meeting.

7. Notice of Question – submitted by Cllr. Brian Fitzgerald.

To ask the County Manager to present the following details at the Finance meeting on 24th July 09, a complete breakdown of all employees by grade and category in each Section at year ended 30th June 2009 as compared with same period in 2008.

Response: circulated at meeting with following details:

1. A breakdown of employees by grade and category in each Section as at 9th October 2009



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2. List of posts where there have been resignations, retirements, or contracts not renewed in the 12 month period from October 2008 to September 2009.

8. Notice of Question – submitted by Cllr. Brian Fitzgerald.

“The list of buildings currently rented by Meath County Council and the total cost per annum for same”.

Response:

Meath co. Council has a lease of 9 yrs. 11 months on the Planning Offices in Abbey Road.

Costs per annum as follows:

Rent - €53,000

Service – €4,000

Fit-out – €3,000

This concluded the business of the meeting.