



Miontuairiscí/Meeting Minutes

Statutory Budget Meeting

November 30, 2020 – 1.30pm. – Solstice Theatre

Presiding

Cathaoirleach, Councillor David Gilroy

Councillors Present:

Councillors Yemi Adenuga (remotely), Tom Behan, Joe Bonner, Mike Bray, Eugene Cassidy (remotely), Francis Deane, Aisling Dempsey (remotely), Seán Drew, Eddie Fennessy (remotely), Brian Fitzgerald, Padraig Fitzsimons, Joe Fox, Noel French, Trevor Golden (remotely), Wayne Harding, Suzanne Jamal (remotely), Geraldine Keogan (remotely), Nick Killian, Alan Lawes, Paul McCabe, Elaine McGinty, Stephen McKee, Paddy Meade, Ronan Moore (remotely), Maria Murphy, Gerry O'Connor, Damien O'Reilly, Sarah Reilly (remotely), Tommy Reilly, Amanda Smith, Niamh Souhan (remotely), Alan Tobin, Emer Tóibín, Sharon Tolan (remotely), Gillian Toole, Conor Tormey (remotely).

Apologies: Michael Gallagher; Deirdre Geraghty-Smith, Aisling O'Neill

Officials in attendance:

Chief Executive: Jackie Maguire

Directors of Service: Des Foley, Fiona Lawless, Barry Lynch

Meetings Administrator: Robert Collins

Senior Executive Officers: Larry Whelan, Dara McGowan

Finance Staff: Paul Timoney, Sheila Harkin, Ger Soady

Other Staff: Caroline Corrigan

In advance of the meeting, the Meetings Administrator outlined the various measures in place to protect the health and wellbeing of the meeting participants, which have been implemented in line with the latest public health guidance and the Standard Operating Guidance agreed by the LGMA, AILG and LAMA. As a result, members were informed that the meeting would be of a maximum duration of 1hr 55mins. The meeting commenced at 1.33pm.

1. To consider the Draft Budget circulated herewith for the Financial Year on 31st December, 2021.

The Cathaoirleach welcomed members and the Chief Executive, Jackie Maguire, addressed the meeting and noted that the Budget for 2021 provides for expenditure of over €154 million, which is an increase of over €15 million on the 2020 budget and over €55 million in the last eight years. She outlined the challenges of presenting a balanced budget in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the uncertainty that it has presented, especially in terms of commercial rates income. She informed the meeting that the priority in approaching the budget was to protect the frontline services and to support the business community and rates base in the county.



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Fiona Lawless, Head of Finance, made a presentation on the Draft Budget for the Financial Year ending 31st December 2021. The presentation included information on:

- Analysis of Income and the various Income Sources
- Overview of Commercial Rates and specific challenges in this income area
- Analysis of Expenditure

The presentation also outlined the Annual Budget 2020 by Service Division, covering Tables A-F, as follows:

- Service Division A – Housing and Building
- Service Division B – Road Transport and Safety
- Service Division C – Water Services
- Service Division D – Development Management
- Service division E – Environmental Services
- Service Division F – Recreation and Amenity
- Service Division G – Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare
- Service Division H – Miscellaneous Services
- Service Division J – Central Management Charges

Following the presentation, the Cathaoirleach thanked the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance for their work in preparing and presenting the budget. The Elected Members were then given an opportunity for questions and comments, with interventions by the following: **Councillors Damien O'Reilly; Brian Fitzgerald; Gerry O'Connor; Paddy Meade; Noel French; Nick Killian; Sean Drew; Joe Fox; Paul McCabe; Ronan Moore; Gillian Toole; Wayne Harding; Sarah Reilly; Emer Tóibín; and Susanne Jamal.**

The main comments and items discussed included:

- The welcome in increases in the budget with no increases in LPT, rents or commercial rates, over the last number of years was noted;
- It was raised that central funding per head of population is the lowest in the country, despite significant increases in grant funding in recent years;
- Call for a meeting with local Oireachtas members on addressing this trend;
- Welcome for the increased provision for homeless services;
- Welcome for the proposal for the Members' Discretionary Funding and its ability to support community groups at this difficult time;
- Some concerns raised on impact on the Winter Gritting programme;
- Questions on the impact of Brexit and its financial implications for the Council;
- The Vacant Sites Register and the possible levies that could be sourced;
- Noted impact on Economic Development budget and need to support 'shop local';
- Call to be proactive in increasing the county's rates base, as some companies look to relocate out of Dublin;
- Call for community development funding to be raised to 6% of the overall budget;
- Nature and composition of the rates base and the level of vulnerable rate payers;



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- Some caution on the nature of the homeless services receiving the increased funding;
- Alternative uses for un-used funding allocated for elected members' conferences;
- Call for more funding for the Housing Adaptation Grants.

Responses and clarifications were provided by the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance.

Councillor Paddy Meade made a proposal to prioritise any significant saving or additional incomes in 2021 for the road gritting programme. This was seconded by **Councillor Noel French**. In response **Councillor Brian Fitzgerald** proposed, seconded by **Councillor Nick Killian** that the Council accept the proposal of the Chief Executive that any excess income over the adopted NPPR budgeted figure would be brought before the Council for further consideration as to how it should be allocated, with priority allocation to the Members' Discretionary Fund. The latter proposal was agreed.

2. That Meath County Council adopts, for the financial year ending 31st December 2021 the Annual Budget set out in Tables A – F

It was proposed to adopt the Annual Budget on the proposal of **Councillor Damien O'Reilly** and seconded by **Councillor Brian Fitzgerald**.

The proposal to adopt the Statutory Budget was agreed. Cllr Alan Lawes was not in agreement.

3. That Meath County Council determines in accordance with the Budget as adopted the rate as set out in Table A and Table C to be the annual rate on valuation to be levied for the financial year ending 31st December 2021 for the purposes set out in Table A and Table C

Unanimously adopted on the proposal of **Councillor Mike Bray** and seconded by **Councillor Gillian Toole**.

4. Formal Determination of the Rates Vacancy Refund Rate

Unanimously adopted on the proposal of **Councillor Francis Deane** and seconded by **Councillor Nick Killian**.

5. That Meath County Council approves of the transfer to capital account of the sums provided for various capital purposes in the Annual Budget for 2021 as adopted.

Unanimously adopted, on the proposal of **Councillor Alan Tobin** and seconded by **Councillor Gerry O'Connor**.

6. That Meath County Council approves the estimated over expenditure for financial year 31st December 2020 as set out in Table A – F and outturn details.

Unanimously adopted on the proposal of **Councillor Alan Tobin** and seconded by **Councillor Brian Fitzgerald**.



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7. To adopt the Business Support Scheme, 2021 in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act 2001

Unanimously adopted on the proposal of **Councillor Joe Fox** and seconded by **Councillor Damien O'Reilly**.

The Chief Executive concluded by thanking the Head of Finance and her staff for their work in compiling the Draft Budget and for their work in efficiently processing the various rates waiver and business Re-start grants during 2020. She also thanked the Communications Team on the preparation of the Budget Book.

This concluded the business of the meeting. The meeting closed at 15.20.