



Miontuairiscí / Meeting Minutes

Ashbourne Municipal District

Special Meeting

9:00 a.m., 12th November 2020, Solstice

Councillor Alan Tobin, presided.

Councillors Present: Joe Bonner, Suzanne Jamal, Darren O'Rourke, Amanda Smith, Conor Tormey.

Officials in Attendance:

Chief Executive: Jackie Maguire

Head of Finance: Fiona Lawless

Meetings Administrator: Claire King

Staff Officer: Triona Keating

As the Cathaoirleach was participating remotely, it was agreed on the proposal of **Councillor Conor Tormey** and seconded by **Councillor Amanda Smith** that Councillor Alan Tobin would chair the meeting.

Councillors were reminded of fire safety issues in the venue, including the fire exits, and also of the need to comply with public health guidance.

- 1 To consider and adopt the Draft Budgetary Plan of Ashbourne Municipal District issued under Section 102 (4A) of the Local Government Act, 2001 as amended by the Local Government Reform Act, 2014.**

The Report on the 2021 Draft Budgetary Plan of Navan, Kells, Trim, Laytown-Bettystown, Ashbourne and Ratoath Municipal Districts had been circulated to Councillors in advance of the meeting. This report provided the background to the Draft Budgetary Plan, the approach to its preparation, general statistics and the proposed General Municipal Allocation for each of the six Municipal Districts, as follows:



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Description of Service	GMA - Ashbourne MD	GMA – Kells MD	GMA – Laytown-Bettystown MD	GMA – Navan MD	GMA– Trim MD	GMA – Ratoath MD	Total GMA 2021
Members Discretionary Fund	30,000	35,000	35,000	35,000	30,000	35,000	200,000
Housing Estates / Footpaths	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	300,000
Litter Control Initiatives	6,500	6,500	6,500	6,500	6,500	6,500	39,000
Environmental Initiatives	4,500	4,500	4,500	4,500	4,500	4,500	27,000
Community Grants	12,500	12,500	12,500	23,000	12,500	12,500	85,500
Community Facilities (Pride of Place)	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	30,000
Arts, Festivals, Festive Decoration & MD Renewal	10,000	10,000	10,000	20,000	10,000	10,000	70,000
Total	118,500	123,500	123,500	144,000	118,500	123,500	751,500

The challenges posed by the budget process were underlined, particularly in the current year, and these challenges were referenced in the cover letter that was circulated with the draft budgetary plan. As it stands, the budget is not yet balanced and an amount of uncertainty still surrounds the level and stability of income for 2021.

Whilst it is currently assumed that the rates income will remain the same in 2021 as for 2020, the rates waiver scheme provided by central government this year was outlined. Whilst some rates are still due, the collection of this remains a challenge as many businesses remain closed. The level of vacancies will increase, as will the bad debt provision, and this will present a cost to the council in 2021. The main budget, to be presented on 30th November, includes no reduction in funding for front facing services. A number of small additional provisions have been made for areas such as housing and transportation. The cuts to the budget have focused on corporate areas, such as corporate buildings, finance, HR, print and stationary, etc. Uncertainty remains as to whether central government funding will be made available to cover reduced income arising from goods & services and COVID related costs. If additional supports for 2021 become available, these will be fed into the overall budget.

With regard to discretionary expenditure, it is proposed that the funding for the Municipal District Allocation Scheme, which was increased in 2020, be reduced to contribute towards a balanced budget.

It was suggested that the draft budgetary plan be noted today and reconsidered at the main budget meeting on 30th November, when greater clarity might be available in terms of additional supports available in 2021.

Matters raised by councillors included:



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- Queried whether the level of LPT income will remain the same and whether the LPT is the source for the MD Allocation Scheme – the LPT is slightly reduced. All services are funded by income, whether LPT, rates or goods & services, and it is difficult to segregate income against spend. There is an obligation to meet fixed costs in the first instance, which represents a significant percentage of the budget.
- Commended the executive on managing to maintain front facing services and acknowledged the difficulty in achieving a balanced budget.
- Requested that consideration be given, if possible, to increase the proposed allocation for the Municipal District Allocation Scheme, particularly if additional income is received or other savings are identified. The importance of the scheme to community groups was underlined.
- Acknowledged the increased costs that would apply in 2021, including energy costs and queried if other suppliers could be identified.
- Queried whether the capital fund for municipal districts will be maintained – that forms part of the capital programme and will be determined by the amount of levies received.

It was unanimously agreed that, having considered the Draft Budgetary Plan for Ashbourne Municipal District, to note the plan with a view to reconsidering the overall budgetary position at the main council meeting on 30th November, when further information on available supports may have become available.

2 To discuss the rate of refund to owners of vacant premises.

The current situation was outlined and it was recommended that the rate of refund for vacant premises not be amended for the coming year.

Matters raised by councillors included:

- Whether the same rate of refund applied to retail or commercial premises owned by financial institutions, e.g. where premises are deliberately left vacant – it was pointed out that any decision taken would apply to the municipal district in its entirety and the legislation would need to be changed to allow for targeting of specific towns or streets.
- Requested that a retail plan for Ashbourne be prepared – it was agreed that the Economic Development Unit would be requested to participate in a future municipal district meeting to discuss economic development in the Ashbourne area.



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It was agreed, on the proposal of **Councillor Conor Tormey** and seconded by **Councillor Suzanne Jamal**, that given the current uncertainty around rates income, to leave the rate at 100%.

3 Other

3.1 Councillor Suzanne Jamal raised the following issue:

3.1.1 Referred to the virtual oral hearing being arranged by An Bord Pleanála in respect of the Knockharley application to extend waste activities, which has caused concern for the local community, many of whom will not be able to participate – the legislation is in place to allow for this approach and the council has no role to play in this decision.

3.2 Councillor Alan Tobin raised the following issue:

3.2.1 Referred to a burst main in Ashbourne, which occurred last Friday, with no action having since been taken by Irish Water. Whilst it did not result in water outages, it did result in a pothole forming on a new road surface and cycle lane.

The Cathaoirleach and councillors thanked the Chief Executive and Head of Finance/Director of Service.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed:

Cathaoirleach