



## ***Miontuairiscí / Meeting Minutes***

### ***Special Meeting***

### ***Laytown-Bettystown Municipal District***

### ***Special Meeting***

***11:00 a.m., 13<sup>th</sup> November 2020, Solstice***

An Cathaoirleach, **Councillor Tom Behan**, presided.

**Councillors Present:** Wayne Harding, Geraldine Keogan, Paddy Meade, Elaine McGinty, Stephen McKee, Sharon Tolan.

**Officials in Attendance:**

**Chief Executive:** Jackie Maguire

**Head of Finance:** Fiona Lawless

**Meetings Administrator:** Claire King

**Staff Officer:** Triona Keating

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 Laytown-Bettystown 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>118,500</b>	<b>123,500</b>	<b>123,500</b>	<b>144,000</b>	<b>118,500</b>	<b>123,500</b>	<b>751,500</b>

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 30<sup>th</sup> 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 30<sup>th</sup> November, when greater clarity might be available in terms of additional supports available in 2021.

Matters raised by councillors included:



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- Commended the executive on managing to maintain front facing services and acknowledged the difficulty in achieving a balanced budget.
- Acknowledged the significant central and local government support given to businesses, including those in the hospitality sector.
- 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.
- Expressed concern regarding the proposal to reduce the MD Allocation Scheme by such an extent, due to its importance to community groups who cannot fund raise and its role in delivering projects that have wide benefits to the entire community. The range of projects that have benefitted to date were underlined.
- Suggested that the other GMA budget lines should be split based on population – this is a matter for councillors to decide as part of the main budget discussion.
- Suggested that, given the fundamental changes to the rate base, that the local government funding model should be reviewed.

It was unanimously agreed on the proposal of **Councillor Paddy Meade** and seconded by **Councillor Wayne Harding** that, having considered the Draft Budgetary Plan for Laytown-Bettystown Municipal District, to note the plan with a view to reconsidering the overall budgetary position at the main council meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> 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 to retain the rate of refund for 2021.

Matters raised by councillors included:

- Suggested that a tiered reduction be implemented to encourage premises owners to consider the conversion of premises to residential units – it was agreed to keep this under review.
- The possibility of targeting a reduced rate in areas where premises are unlikely to become occupied – 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.



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- The need to highlight and promote the grant schemes available for the conversion of commercial units to residential units.

It was unanimously agreed, on the proposal of **Councillor Sharon Tolan** and seconded by **Councillor Paddy Meade**, that given the current uncertainty around rates income, to leave the rate at 100%.

### **3 Other**

Councillor Sharon Tolan raised the following issue:

Queried whether councillors and local authority staff would receive the COVID vaccine when it becomes available as they are deemed essential workers and pointed out that councillors are not offered the annual flu vaccine – the rollout of the COVID vaccine will be a national programme. The flu vaccine, which is offered to staff, is primarily a health & safety matter, e.g. outdoor staff and those in public facing roles.

Councillor Tom Behan raised the following issue:

Acknowledged that Meath County Council had taken every necessary step to continue providing services in as normal a way as possible throughout the pandemic.

The Cathaoirleach and Councillors thanked the Chief Executive and Head of Finance.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

**Signed:**

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**Cathaoirleach**