



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

### ***Ratoath Municipal District***

#### ***Special Meeting***

***2:00 p.m., 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020, Solstice***

An Cathaoirleach, **Councillor Damien O'Reilly**, presided.

**Councillors Present:** Brian Fitzgerald, Nick Killian, Maria Murphy, Gerry O'Connor, Gillian Toole.

**Apologies:** Councillor Deirdre Geraghty-Smith.

**Officials in Attendance:**

**Chief Executive:** Jackie Maguire

**Head of Finance:** Fiona Lawless

**Director of Service:** Des Foley

**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 Ratoath 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, the budget for economic development has been reduced. The funding for the Municipal District Allocation Scheme was increased in 2020 but a reduction in this funding is required 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 Chief Executive and Head of Finance on the constant financial updates and accuracy of predictions.
- Commended the executive on managing to maintain front facing services and acknowledged the difficulty in achieving a balanced budget.
- Expressed unanimous opposition to the proposal to reduce the MD Allocation Scheme by such an extent, due to its importance to community groups, particularly now as they are unable to fund raise, and the value it adds within the community. Not all recipient groups are eligible to source funding from other community grant sources. It was requested that all budget lines be examined to source the necessary funding to maintain the current allocation or increase it to €10,000 per councillor. It was underlined that this fund presents tangible evidence to communities of the LPT.
- The possibility of increasing funding for environmental initiatives which will allow increased litter management activity, including emptying of bins – the funding allocated to street cleaning in the municipal district was outlined, including the provision of compacting bins, which results in the need for a reduced collection schedule. There is no capacity to increase overtime costs and the capital funding to purchase additional bins is limited.
- Queried whether the increase in Members costs had been taken into account – no reduction has been made to Members expenses and account has also been taken of the recommendations of the Moorehead report, if it is to be enacted.
- Referred to the need to extend the winter gritting programme to include additional roads – the programme has been extended in so far as possible.
- Acknowledged the increased costs that would apply in 2021.
- Underlined the need for the national authorities, including government departments and NPHT, to understand the reality of local authorities trying to balance service provision and related budgets against public health advice, e.g. business closures – quarterly reports are provided to the department and regular questionnaires on COVID related expenditure are submitted. At the December full council meeting, a review of the year will be provided. Any additional income received will be released into the revenue account and a claim has been made in relation to COVID costs.
- Requested information on the number of properties that require valuation but have not been valued due to the Valuation Office not being considered as an essential service.

It was unanimously agreed on the proposal of **Councillor Gerry O'Connor** and seconded by **Councillor Nick Killian**, that having considered the Draft Budgetary Plan for Ratoath Municipal District, to note the plan with a view to reconsidering the overall budgetary position at the



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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.**

It was unanimously agreed, on the proposal of **Councillor Brian Fitzgerald** and seconded by **Councillor Gillian Toole**, that given the current uncertainty around rates income, to leave the rate at 100%.

### **3 Other**

Councillor Damien O'Reilly requested that email and text reminders issue to councillors in advance of the forthcoming planning meetings.

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

**Signed:**

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**Cathaoirleach**