

**MINUTES OF STATUTORY BUDGET MEETING HELD IN ARAS AN CHONTAE,
PORTLAOISE, ON THE 14th OF NOVEMBER 2016**

<u>PRESENT:</u>	Councillor	Tom Mulhall	In the Chair
	Councillors	William Aird Ben Brennan John Joe Fennelly Padraig Fleming John King Seamus McDonald John Moran Brendan Phelan Noel Tuohy	Paddy Bracken Caroline Dwane Stanley Catherine Fitzgerald David Goodwin Jerry Lodge Paschal McEvoy Aidan Mullins Mary Sweeney James Kelly

IN ATTENDANCE:

Messers John Mulholland, Chief Executive, Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance, Kieran Kehoe, Director of Services, Mr. Donal Brennan, Director of Services, Ms. Irene Delaney, Administrative Officer & Ms. Michelle McCormack, Executive Secretary.

133. DRAFT BUDGET 2016

The Chief Executive, Mr. John Mulholland referred the Members to his report of November 4th 2016 which contained the Draft Budget 2017. He outlined the process that had been undertaken in relation to the preparation of the budget. Mr. Mulholland emphasised the very challenging budgetary environment that has existed for nine successive years following the economic collapse in 2008 which resulted in significant decreases in income available to the Council. Each year the Council had adopted balanced budgets, overseen the re-organisation of Council services with resultant efficiency gains and had made decisions so that prudential oversight of the revenue account had not given rise to any new deficits.

The Chief Executive advised the Members that a 3% increase in the commercial rate for 2017 was being recommended which would yield an additional income of €370,000 for 2017. It was noted that as a measure to support small businesses and the small retail and hospitality sectors that the following measures were recommended:-

- the continuation and amendment of the Incentive Scheme introduced in 2016 to include rate payers liable for rates of less than €6,000 (up from €5,000) per annum, wherein those who pay in full and on time would receive the benefit of a 4% rebate in 2017 and a 3% rebate in 2018;
- the retention of the incentive scheme for business start ups in vacant properties introduced in 2015 and;
- the retention of the 'Shop Front' Scheme

The main factors that shaped the drafting of the 2017 Budget were outlined to the Members as follows:-

- Limitations on funding from the Local Property Tax and the Equalisation Fund
- A requirement to consider increased income from local Commercial Rates
- An increase in population of County Laois of nearly 4,200 people since the last census in 2011, equivalent to a town the size of Mountmellick & 17,700 since 2006.
- A significant increase (€119,000) in the amount of insurance premium payable by Laois County Council in 2017 to cover its liability across its main areas of work.
- An increased provision to cover the costs associated with the Public Service Obligation in respect of energy for public lighting (€61,000)
- A requirement to provide a sinking fund to provide for planned replacement or refurbishment of assets at Portlaoise and Portarlington Leisure Centres, the Dunamais Arts Centre and Treo Nua Family Resource Centre
- Increased regulatory requirements in relation to areas such as health and safety, environmental protection, building control, inspection of private rented accommodation and energy efficiency management
- Preparedness for the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme and improving housing customer facilities at County Hall
- A requirement to provide for the taking in charge of private and unfinished housing estates
- Responsibility for managing under a service level agreement the Local Enterprise Office and supporting the Local Community Development Committee
- Supporting and promoting inward investment (including a new marketing strategy), local enterprise and tourism in County Laois as set out in the approved Local Economic and Community Plan and the Action Plan for Jobs, Midlands Region, 2015 to 2017

It was noted that all aspects of the draft budget were discussed in great detail at the information meeting held on the 10th of November 2016. Mr. Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance then proceeded to advise the members on a division by division basis of the Council's Expenditure & Income proposals for 2017. The Members were advised that the draft budget for 2017 provided for revenue spending of €59.241 million, an increase of 4% on 2016 and that provision was being made for the following:-

- Additional funding of €70,000 for housing repair and maintenance and for homelessness
- Increased funding of €80,000 towards local road maintenance and repair
- Additional support for strategic economic planning, increased economic activity and business development in the County including marketing the attractiveness of Laois to a global and national audience

- The provision of €30,000 in respect of this Council's contribution for flood relief/drainage schemes to be considered under the non coastal minor works programme in collaboration with the Office of Public Works
- Further support for small and vulnerable business through the amendment and broadening of the rates incentive scheme for small and medium enterprises introduced in 2016
- Additional funding of €35,000 for maintenance of urban spaces, parks and green areas
- The provision of €20,000 to address energy conservation in the Council's public buildings
- Additional support of €5,000 for local communities and tidy towns groups
- Funding of €40,000 to support the next phase of the Rural Economic Development Zone programme
- Funding of €76,000 as this Council's contribution towards Urban and Village Renewal Programme

The Members collectively and individually complemented Mr. Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance and all the staff involved in the preparation of the budget.

The Chief Executive, Head of Finance & Directors of Services responded to the various queries raised by the Members.

Councillor Paschal McEvoy proposed that the ceiling for the Rates Incentive Scheme be raised from €6,000 to €8,500 and that it would also apply to staged payments over the year. This proposal was seconded by Councillor John Moran.

Councillor John Moran proposed that the budget for 2017 as presented and including the rates incentive ceiling increase to €8,500 be adopted. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Paschal McEvoy.

Councillor Brendan Phelan proposed a deferral of any increase in the commercial rates for 2017. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The meeting was advised that as the proposal would result in the adoption of an unbalanced budget, it was, therefore, invalid. Clarification was also sought in relation to the net cost to the Council of the increase in the ceiling for the incentivised rent scheme. Mr. Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance clarified the position in relation to same.

A Roll Call Vote was taken on Councillor John Moran's proposal which resulted as follows:

COUNCILLOR		FOR	AGAINST
FIRST NAME	SURNAME		
William	AIRD	✓	
Paddy	BRACKEN	✓	
Ben	BRENNAN		✓
Caroline	DWANE STANLEY		✓
John Joe	FENNELLY	✓	
Catherine	FITZGERALD	✓	
Padraig	FLEMING	Absent	
David	GOODWIN	Absent	
James	KELLY		✓
John	KING	✓	
Jerry	LODGE	✓	
Seamus	MCDONALD	✓	
Paschal	MCEVOY	✓	
John Robert	MORAN	✓	
Tom	MULHALL	✓	
Aidan	MULLINS		✓
Brendan	PHELAN		✓
Mary	SWEENEY	✓	
Noel	TUOHY		✓

Total Number of Votes - 11 votes in favour of Councillor John Moran's proposal and 6 votes against the proposal. Therefore, the Budget for 2017 including the amendments to the incentivised rate scheme was adopted.

The Chief Executive extended his appreciation to Mr. Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance and staff in the Finance & Human Resources Section for their work in the preparation of the budget. He also recorded his appreciation to the Directors of Services and their staff members for their commitment and hard work over the past year. The Chief Executive thanked the Cathaoirleach, Councillor Tom Mulhall and his predecessor, Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald, the Corporate Policy Group, the Chairs of the Municipal Districts & the Elected Members for their assistance during the year.

141. PROGRAMME OF CAPITAL WORKS FOR 2017 - 2019

The members were circulated with the indicative list of the likely capital projects to be undertaken over the next three years. Councillor Aidan Mullins proposed that additional funding be provided for Portarlinton and this proposal was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that the Development Contribution Scheme would be brought to Members for consideration in early 2017.

The programme of capital works was unanimously agreed on the proposal of Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald seconded by Councillor Mary Sweeney.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

SIGNED: _____
CATHAOIRLEACH

CERTIFIED: _____
DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
CORPORATE AFFAIRS