

**MINUTES OF STATUTORY BUDGET MEETING HELD IN ARAS AN CHONTAE,  
PORTLAOISE, ON THE 16<sup>th</sup> OF NOVEMBER 2015**

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Messers John Mulholland, Chief Executive, Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance, Kieran Kehoe, Director of Services, Ms. Anna Marie Delaney, Director of Services, Ms. Julie Bergin, Financial Management Accountant, Mr. Michael Rainey, Senior Executive Officer, Housing, Ms. Irene Delaney, Administrative Officer & Ms. Michelle McCormack, Executive Secretary.

**141. BOOK OF CONDOLESCENCES**

The Cathaoirleach requested that a book of condolences be put on display in the foyer of Áras an Chontae in remembrance of the victims killed in the Paris Tragedy over the weekend. A minutes silence was observed as a mark of respect to the deceased.

**142. DRAFT BUDGET 2016**

The Chief Executive referred the Members to his report of November 6<sup>th</sup> 2015 which contained the Draft Budget 2016. 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 seven successive years following the economic collapse in 2008 which resulted in significant decreases in income available to the Council from all sources. On each year over the past eight years, however, this 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 give rise to any new deficits.

**The main factors that shaped the drafting of the 2016 Budget were as follows:-**

- Limitations on funding from the Local Property Tax and the Equalization Fund.
- The cumulative effect of a reduction of 60% in receipts from the historical Local Government Fund, now substituted by the Local Property tax combined with the Equalization Fund, over the period 2008 to 2016.
- The decision of the Elected Members of Laois County Council not to increase rates on commercial premises since 2008.
- Increased regulatory requirements in relation to areas such as health and safety, environmental protection, building control and energy efficiency management.
- The provision of a General Municipal Allocation to each Municipal District.
- Responsibility for managing under a service level agreement the recently established Local Enterprise Office and supporting the Local Community Development Committee.
- Supporting and promoting inward investment, local enterprise and tourism in Co Laois as set out in the draft Local Economic and Community Plan and the Action Plan for Jobs, Midland 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 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2015. 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 2016. The Members were advised that the draft budget for 2016 provided for revenue spending of €56.79 million, an increase of €1.69 million on 2015 and that provision was being made for the following:-

- Additional funding of €70,000 for housing repair and maintenance
- Increased funding of €70,000 towards local road maintenance and repair
- Additional support for economic activity and business development in the County including the setting up of a business support unit internally, strengthening the role of the Local Enterprise Office and reinforcing existing efforts to market the attractiveness of Laois to a global and national audience.
- Further support for small and vulnerable business through the introduction of an innovative rates incentive scheme for small commercial rate payers (a 5% rebate in 2016 for those paying rates less than €5,000)
- Additional funding of €60,000 for street cleaning and maintenance of urban spaces including provision for temporary employment of students for summer season street cleaning.
- The establishment of a Parks & Urban Landscape department within Laois County Council
- Funding of €5,000 to support, on a collaborative basis with other agencies, measures to combat crime in rural areas
- The provision of €40,000 to address energy conservation in the Councils public buildings
- Additional support of €5,000 for local communities and tidy towns groups
- Funding of €17,000 to support the Rural Economic Development Zone pilot scheme in Rathdowney

- Funding of €50,000 for Portarlington Leisure Centre
- A fee of €150 for chimney fees, rising to €200, where payment is not made within 30 days
- The hire of a plumber in the Housing Department
- Funding of €60,000 towards events marking the commemorations of 1916 throughout the County

The Members collectively and individually complemented the staff involved in the preparation of the budget and the Chief Executive, Head of Finance & Directors of Services responded to the various queries raised.

It was agreed to examine the possibility of providing stoves in some Council houses in 2016.

Councillor Aidan Mullins indicated that he would not be supporting the 2016 budget.

*“On the proposition of Councillor John Joe Fennelly seconded by Councillor John King, the Members unanimously adopted the budget for 2016 as presented and agreed to retain the General Rate on Valuation of €64.63.*

The Cathaoirleach asked if there were any other proposals. There were no other proposals, therefore, the Cathaoirleach confirmed that the 2016 budget was passed unanimously.

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 unstinting commitment and hard work over the past year. The Chief Executive thanked the Cathaoirleach, Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald and her predecessor, Councillor John Joe Fennelly 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 2016, 2017 and 2018**

The members were circulated with the indicative list of the likely capital projects to be undertaken over the next three years and this was unanimously agreed on the proposal of Councillor John Joe Fennelly seconded by Councillor John King.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

**SIGNED:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**CATHAOIRLEACH**

**CERTIFIED:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**DIRECTOR OF SERVICES  
CORPORATE AFFAIRS**

