

- ✚ The continuation and retention of the Incentive Scheme introduced in 2016 aimed at the 1,400 or so rate payers liable for rates of less than €8,500 per annum, wherein by those who pay in full and on time would receive a benefit of 4% rebate in 2018 and a 3% rebate in 2019
- ✚ The retention of the Incentive Scheme for business start ups in vacant properties introduced in 2014 and
- ✚ The retention of the 'Shop Front' Scheme

The main factors that shaped the drafting of the 2018 Budget were outlined to the Members as follows:-

- ✚ An increased income from the Local Property Tax in the amount of €492,822
- ✚ An increase of €200,000 from rents on Council owned houses
- ✚ Increased allocations to the Council under the non-national roads programme
- ✚ Buoyancy in income from commercial rates
- ✚ A significant increase of €99,000 in the amount of public and employers insurance premium payable by the Council in 2018 to cover its liability across its main area of work
- ✚ A continuing up-ward trend in the population of the County and the town of Portlaoise which at almost 22,500 is now the most populated town in the midland region
- ✚ The continuing requirement to address housing maintenance matters
- ✚ A requirement to provide funding towards asset and equipment replacement at Portlaoise and Portarlinton Leisure Centres
- ✚ The requirement to meet targets and develop actions to comply with Public Sector Energy Efficiency requirements, Climate Adaptation and Mitigation measures and decarbonisation measures
- ✚ Taking in charge of private and unfinished housing estates
- ✚ The requirement to protect the Council's IT system from attack from malware and viruses

It was noted that all aspects of the draft budget were discussed in great detail at the information meeting held on the 9th of November 2017. 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 2018. The Members were advised that the gross revenue expenditure required to run public services in Laois on a day to day basis is €63.9 million representing an increase of 7.86% in comparison with 2017. The following areas of increased investment are of particular note:-

- An additional sum of €211,000 towards the provision of window restrictors, fire blankets and carbon monoxide alarms in the Council's housing stock in order to comply with new Rental Standard Regulations
- An increased provision of €97,700 for repairs to Council housing

- An additional sum of €110,000 to assist in homelessness, bringing the total amount for 2018 to €210,000. In addition, the Council proposed to raise its homeless service expenditure by €34,000 bringing the total support to €59,000 for 2018
- An increased sum of €52,000 for County road maintenance, footpath improvements, new public lighting and environmental works
- Approximately €660,000 in additional funding for local roads maintenance and improvement including the provision of €285,000 for Local Improvement Schemes
- Increased support for tourism and heritage in the County in the amount of €106,000
- An additional €25,000 towards improvement works in Fire Stations
- An increase of €80,000 for leisure facilities at Portarlinton and Portlaoise
- An increase in the library book fund of €10,000
- An increase of €1.393 million in respect of increased activity in the MyPay shared service centre accounting for on-boarding local authorities and the public pension scheme
- Provision of an additional €24,600 in respect of the maintenance/replacement requirements in the County's playgrounds
- Continued support for small businesses through the rates incentive scheme, paint the shop scheme and vacant property incentives
- Funding of €240,000 in respect of the Rural Economic Development Zone Programme
- Provision of €750,000 as Financial Partner to Laois Partnership Company in respect of the 2018 Leader 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 John Joe Fennelly proposed that the budget for 2018 as presented be adopted. This proposal was seconded by Councillor John King.

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 extended 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 Pádraig Fleming and his predecessor, Councillor Tom Mulhall, 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 2018 - 2020

The Members were circulated with the indicative list of the likely capital projects to be undertaken over the next three years.

Councillor Jerry Lodge proposed that the capital improvements in Lyster Square would also include improvements at the public toilets. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald.

The programme of capital works 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