

**MINUTES OF STATUTORY BUDGET MEETING HELD IN ARAS AN CHONTAE,
PORTLAOISE, ON THE 12th OF NOVEMBER 2018**

PRESENT:

Councillor	John King	In the Chair
Councillors	William Aird	Paddy Bracken
	Ben Brennan	James Kelly
	John Joe Fennelly	Catherine Fitzgerald
	Tom Mulhall	David Goodwin
	Pauline Madigan	Padraig Fleming
	Seamus McDonald	Paschal McEvoy
	Noel Tuohy	Aidan Mullins
	Brendan Phelan	Mary Sweeney
	Caroline Dwane Stanley	

APOLOGIES: Councillors John Moran

IN ATTENDANCE:

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.

196. DRAFT BUDGET 2019

The Chief Executive, Mr. John Mulholland referred the Members to his report of November 6th 2018. He outlined the process that had been undertaken in relation to the preparation of the budget.

Mr. Mulholland indicated that following a long period of austerity and from a low point in 2014 at which time the Laois County Council budget stood at €53.9 million, the last five years has witnessed a steady increase in revenue expenditure and investment back into services in the County. This trend is continued in 2019 and the draft revenue Budget for members' consideration now stands at €72.05 million, an increase of €18 million over the period. The decision of the members over the last number of years have resulted in Laois County Council exercising prudent budgetary oversight and sound financial management to the extent that the anticipated deficit going into 2019 will stand at approximately €100,000.

There is effectively no change to the commercial rate but 2019 will be the first year to which the new valuation method will apply and individual commercial property owners and entities may see variations in their future rates bills in comparison to previous years.

In an effort to support small business, the small retail and hospitality sectors that together employ roughly 5,000 people, and in order to incentivise the revitalisation of town centres, the Chief Executive recommended:

- The continuation and expansion of the rates payment incentive scheme introduced in 2016 so that all rate payers liable for an annual rate payment of €10,000 or less will receive a benefit of a 4% rebate in 2019 where rate bills are paid promptly and in full. The ceiling for the incentive scheme was previously agreed by members at €8,500 per annum.
- The retention of the incentive scheme for business start ups in vacant properties introduced in 2014 where vacant units lie idle for six months or more and whereby the owner can avail of a rate rebate of 75% down to 25% over three years.
- The retention of the “Shop Front” scheme whereby property owners can avail of a €750 grant.

He advised that the expansion of the 4% incentive scheme to ratepayers paying less than €10,000 can be seen as easing the burden on approximately 1,476 smaller businesses and rate payers in the county and is in line with this Council’s policy to support small business through difficult trading years and to mitigate against the ever increasing impact of on line purchasing. He, also, advised that there was no proposal for any increase in parking charges in the Portlaoise, Portarlington or Mountmellick urban areas.

The main factors shaping the drafting of the 2019 budget included:

1. Buoyancy in income from commercial rates of €400,000.
2. Retention of increased income from the Local Property Tax, as in 2018, in the amount of €493,916.
3. An increase of €200,000 from rents on Council owned houses.
4. Increased allocations under the non-national roads programme.
5. A requirement to provide matched funding, €188,000, to support a number of projects and initiatives including, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Rural Regeneration Development Fund applications for Portarlington, Mountrath and Durrow, the Urban Regeneration Fund Application for Portlaoise and the Council’s application for EI Regional Enterprise Development Fund.
6. The continuing requirement to address housing maintenance matters and regeneration at O Moore Place and Hepburn Court/Knockmay, Portlaoise.
7. The requirement to meet targets and develop actions to comply with public sector energy efficiency requirements (including replacement LED lamps), climate adaptation, mitigation measures and decarbonisation measures.
8. Taking in charge of private and unfinished housing estates.
9. The requirement to ensure resilience in the Council’s IT System.

It was noted that all aspects of the draft budget were discussed in great detail at the information meeting held on the 8th of November 2018. 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 2019.

The gross revenue expenditure required to run public services in the County in 2019 is €72.051 million representing an increase of 12.7% in comparison with 2018.

The following areas of increased expenditure are of particular note:

- An additional sum of €218,000 towards the provision of window replacements, window restrictors, fire blankets and carbon monoxide alarms in the Council's housing stock in order to comply with the Rental Standard Regulations.
- An increased provision of €50,000 for maintenance and repairs to Council housing.
- An additional sum of €115,000 to assist in the provision of emergency accommodation.
- €180,000 in additional funding for local roads maintenance and €817,000 extra by comparison to 2018 in respect of Local Improvement Schemes and Community Involvement in Road works.
- Increased support for tourism in the County in the amount of €7,000.
- An increase in the library book fund of €5,000.
- Provision of an additional €7,000 in respect of the maintenance/ replacement requirements in the County's playgrounds
- Provision of an additional sum of €89,500 for the maintenance of parks and open spaces.
- Continued and expanded support for small businesses through the rates incentive scheme, paint the shops scheme and vacant property incentives.
- Funding of an additional €90,000 for music tuition and performance.
- Provision of €60,000 in respect of repairs to cemeteries (*with additional funding in the capital programme of €180,000*)
- An additional €84,000 towards river drainage maintenance programme on the Barrow and Nore bringing the total budget for 2019 to €367,000
- Provision of an additional €71,000 for street cleaning

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 the draft Budget for 2019 as presented and this proposal was seconded by Councillor Tom Mulhall.

The Chief Executive extended his appreciation to Mr. Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance and staff in the Finance 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 John King and his predecessor, Councillor Padraig Fleming, the Corporate Policy Group, the Chairs of the Municipal Districts and the Elected Members for their assistance during the year.

197. DRAFT INDICATIVE CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2019-2021

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

On the proposition of Councillor Brendan Phelan, it was unanimously agreed that the draft indicative capital programme 2019-2021 be deferred to the November meeting of the Council.

198. APPROVAL OF OVERDRAFT ACCOMMODATION IN THE SUM OF €8,000,000 FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2019 TO FINANCE WORKING CAPITAL

On the proposition of Councillor Paddy Bracken seconded by Councillor Paschal McEvoy, the Members unanimously agreed to the approval of overdraft accommodation in the sum of €8,000,000 for the year ending 31st of December 2019 to finance working capital.

199. APPROVAL OF €15,000,000 FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2019 TO FACILITATE ANY TIMING ISSUES REGARDING THE PAYMENT OF PAYROLL AND PENSIONS FOR MYPAY

On the proposition of Councillor Paddy Bracken seconded by Councillor Paschal McEvoy, the Members unanimously agreed to the approval of €15,000,000 for the year ending 31st December 2019 to facilitate any timing issues regarding the payment of payroll and pensions for MyPay.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

SIGNED: _____
CATHAOIRLEACH

CERTIFIED: _____
**DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
CORPORATE AFFAIRS**