

**Minutes of Budget Meeting of Leitrim County Council held in the Council Chamber,
Áras an Chontae, Carrick on Shannon, Monday, 11th November, 2019.**

Members Present Councillor Armstrong–McGuire, Finola
Councillor Barry, Brendan
Councillor Bohan, Mary
Councillor Dolan, Frank
Councillor Dolan, Gerry
Councillor Ellis, Caillian
Councillor Fallon, Pádraig
Councillor Farrell, Paddy
Councillor Guckian, Des
Councillor Gurn, Felim
Councillor McDermott, Sean
Councillor McGowan, Sean
Councillor Mulligan, Thomas
Councillor O'Rourke, Paddy
Councillor Stenson, Enda
Councillor Warnock, Justin
And Councillor Enda McGloin, Cathaoirleach presiding

Apologies: Councillor Reynolds Flynn, Ita

Officials Present: Mr Lar Power, Chief Executive
Mr. Joseph Gilhooly, Director of Services, Economic
Development, Planning and Transportation
Ms. Mary Quinn, Director of Services, Housing and Community,
Corporate Services, Culture and Emergency Services
Mr. Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance, Water Services &
Environment
Ms Una Wynne, Financial Management Accountant
Mr Michael Hand, A/Financial Management Accountant
Mr. Shay O'Connor, Senior Engineer
Ms Samantha Healy, Senior Executive Officer
Mr Darragh O'Boyle, Senior Executive Engineer
Ms Sinead Flynn, Administrative Officer
Mr. Kieran Brett, Meetings Administrator
Mr Michael Gunning, Administrative Officer
Ms Kathleen Hewitt, Senior Staff Officer, Finance
Ms Carmel Doherty, Staff Officer, Finance
Ms Patricia Holahan, A/Staff Officer, Finance
Ms Aileen Daly, Assistant Staff Officer, Finance
Ms Ann Moran, Assistant Staff Officer, Finance
Ms Anna Moran, Clerical Officer, Finance
Ms. Kathleen McGovern Ellis, Assistant Staff Officer

19/202

11/11/2019 Consideration of Draft Budget for the financial year ending 31st December 2020

The Cathaoirleach, Councillor Enda McGloin invited Mr. Lar Power, Chief Executive to give an overview of the Draft Budget for 2020.

Mr Lar Power referred to the Draft Budget for the financial year ending 31st December, 2020 and to his report dated 1st November, 2019 as circulated to each Member. A copy of the Budget document as circulated to the Members appears as **Appendix 1** to the Minutes of this Meeting in the Minute Book.

Mr Lar Power outlined that Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance, Water, Environment, Climate Action and Emergency Services would give an overview of the Draft Budget for 2020 as circulated to the Members.

Mr. Dwyer gave a detailed overview of the budgetary process and the structure of the Budget document. A copy of the presentation as delivered, and as circulated to the Members, appears as **Appendix 2** to the Minutes of this Meeting in the Minute Book.

It was agreed Mr. Dwyer would proceed to give an overview of Table A to F and that questions arising would be addressed thereafter.

The following items were raised

- Councillor Mary Bohan queried which table income from Rates falls under.
- Councillor Des Guckian referred to the spend on the Fire Services acknowledging the necessity for the level of expenditure.
- Councillor Des Guckian queried the costs associated with the Veterinary Service.

In response to the queries raised Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance, Water, Environment, Climate Action and Emergency Services responded as follows:

- Table A – Calculation of Annual Rate on Valuation is 0.224.
- Costs associated with Fire Service is critical for the provision of the service.
- Veterinary Services is 100% funded by FSAI and the Contract for Dog Warden Service is included in this cost.

Division A – Housing and Building

The following items were raised:

- Councillor Mary Bohan raised a query regarding the Council's house building Programme.

In response to the queries raised Ms. Mary Quinn, Director of Services, Housing, Corporate Services, Community and Cultural Services responded as follows:

The Housing & Building Programme is ongoing with a strong focus on increasing the supply of Local Authority Housing Units. The Housing and Building Programme is based on need which is approximately 185 on the Housing Waiting List. 264 on transfer waiting list which includes 242 in HAP accommodation.

Division B - Road Transport & Safety

The following items were raised:

- Councillor Enda McGloin queried if there is a possibility of a programme or funding becoming available to introduce to LED Lighting in the county. Councillor Justin Warnock said that there are issues with LED Lighting in regard to potential impact on biodiversity.
- Councillor Sean McGowan sought an update in relation to public lighting in Housing Estates that have been taken in charge – Cllr McGowan noted that some of these estates are going into their 4th year without lighting.
- Councillor Mary Bohan queried as to when the Review of the County Development Plan and consultation process is taking place.
- Councillor Mary Bohan proposed that a letter issue to the Minister requesting that the Roads Allocation be notified to the Local Authority earlier than February as it is very difficult for Elected Members to adopt a budget when they don't know the roads allocation.
- Councillor Mary Bohan queried if there are any provisions for public lighting.
- Councillor Felim Gurn sought an update on the LIS Scheme. Councillor Sean McGowan outlined that the LIS Scheme has not been opened up for the last few years and he paid tribute to Minister Ring for the funding received in this area.

Councillor Mary Bohan proposed that a new LIS application form and new scheme be devised.

Councillor Paddy O'Rourke said that he did not agree with the LIS Scheme presented to the Members at the May 2019 meeting in this regard.

Councillor Brendan Barry noted that 37 applications for the LIS were submitted before the scheme closed.

In response to the queries raised Mr. Joseph Gilhooly, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Services, Economic Development, Planning and Infrastructural Services responded as follows:

- No provision has been made for additional Public Lighting

- Public lighting issues in housing estates recently taken in charge are being addressed.
- The review of the County Development Plan will depend on the completion of Regional Spatial Strategic Plan which is scheduled to be adopted before Christmas following which the review of the County Development Plan will commence.
- The Road Works programme provision is based on the 2019 Roads Works Programme and once notification of the Roads allocation is known the programme will be amended to reflect the allocation.
- The position in relation to the LIS has not changed since May 2019. A number of funding allocations have been received for LIS's; 54 schemes have been delivered, 27 applications are no longer interested in the scheme, and 124 are currently on the list to be delivered. There has been no 2nd allocation received to date in 2019 for Local Improvement Schemes. When the SPC is established the LIS will be considered.

Division D - Development Management

The following items were raised:

- Councillor Padraig Fallon proposed that there should be supports available for organisations promoting tourism in the county.
- Councillor Justin Warnock queried if the allocation of €431,068 for Tourism Development and Promotion is shared between the three Municipal Districts.
- Councillor Felim Gurn sought an update on the reduced Library opening hours being proposed.
- Councillor Sean McGowan proposed that Town Twinning should be put in place and asked that the Executive look at this.
- Councillor Justin Warnock proposed that Leitrim be included in the Wild Atlantic Way Passport Book.
- Councillor Des Guckian expressed his concerns about the denial of proper planning especially in rural areas and that the County Development Plan is delayed and that there is not enough of emphasis on Broadband which is very important for Leitrim. Councillor Guckian said he didn't see much for social or economic benefit for Leitrim in the budget as presented and he said he opposed the adoption of the budget book and called on the Executive to withdraw the budget and Councillors to reject it.
- Councillor Enda McGloin proposed that an update on Broadband be available at the January Meeting.

- Councillor Sean McDermott queried if there is a provision for the Sean McDiarmada Summer school and IC BAN Contribution.
- Councillor Enda Stenson said Lough Rynn Rowing Centre has be to enhanced and promoted as a major centre for rowing.
- Councillor Mary Bohan queried if the new council office in Manorhamilton is factored into the budget.

In response to the queries raised Mr. Joseph Gilhooly, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Services, Economic Development, Planning and Infrastructural Services responded as follows:

- There is an increased provision for Tourism in the Budget with provision for a range of initiatives including:-
 - Support of the operation of the Carrick-on-Shannon Tourist office and the newly established Discovery Centre at Knock Airport
 - Continue marketing and promotion campaigns in 2020 on the Leitrim Tourism website
 - Promotion of the blueways
 - Market and promote Slow Adventure Tourism
 - Tourism Clinic - Availability of the Tourism Officer in Manorhamilton and Ballinamore one day a month to develop more tourism throughout the county.
 - Increase circulation of Tourism leaflets showing key attractions across the county.
- Failte Ireland will be contacted in regard to including Leitrim in the Wild Atlantic Way Passport.
- The increased provision in the Budget for Broadband with a priority on the 20 hotspots at various rural locations.

In response to the queries raised Ms. Mary Quinn, Director of Services, Housing, Corporate Services, Community and Cultural Services responded as follows:

- The current situation in relation to Library Opening Hours is the same as set out at last meeting of Leitrim County Council on November 4th and a public notice has been published in this regard.
- Town Twinning opportunities will be examined.

Division E - Environmental Services

The following items were raised:

- Councillor Paddy O'Rourke paid tribute to the very successful recycling/green centres and proposed that the civic amenity site at Mohill be opened for an additional day per week.

In response to the queries raised Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance, Water, Environment, Climate Action and Emergency Services responded as follows:

- There is no provision in the budget to increase opening hours

Division F - Recreation & Amenity

The following items were raised:

- Councillor Sean McGowan proposed that a sports bursary grant be made available to help support potential sports and help people who want to excel in a particular field.
- Councillor Sean McDermott called for outdoor leisure facilities be better maintained.

In response to the queries raised Ms. Mary Quinn, Director of Services, Housing, Corporate Services, Community and Cultural Services responded as follows:

- A provision will be made for a sports bursary and a scheme will be developed and this will be brought before the SPC for consideration.

In response to the queries raised Mr. Joseph Gilhooly, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Services, Economic Development, Planning and Infrastructural Services responded as follows:

- There is an increased provision in the budget for upkeep of amenities.

Division H – Miscellaneous Services

- Councillor Thomas Mulligan queried if utility companies are the biggest percentage of ratepayers in the County and how does the largest private business paying commercial rates compare with the rates paid by utility companies.
- Councillor Brendan Barry queried as to what percentage of rates is outstanding from other years.

Mr. Vincent Dwyer responded as follows:-

- Utility companies including Wind Farms and a number larger private rate payers make up 60%+ of the overall rate book.

In response to the queries raised Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance, Water, Environment, Climate Action and Emergency Services responded as follows:

- 2018 Rate Collection figure is 83% and the 2019 Rate collection will be similar come year end.

Mr Lar Power, Chief Executive outlined he has sought a rate increase and is required to present a balanced budget to the Elected Members for consideration and adoption.

Mr Lar Power said that early progress on the Strategic Investment Programme has been made to date, with projects to a value of €48m already secured through Project Ireland 2040 grant funding schemes, involving a commitment by Leitrim County Council to provide local match funding of almost €6m, representing 23% of the overall match funding requirement of €26m that the Council must raise to deliver on the 6 year Strategic Capital Investment programme.

Mr Power said that the new offices of Leitrim County Council are not proceeding at this time and the €5m will be available to finance match funding requirements however there is still an additional borrowing requirement of €21m.

Mr. Power outlined that the 15% Local Property Tax increase for 2020 will raise €320,000. He further outlined that the impact for 99% of households will be less than €1 per week, 60% of households will incur an increase of 26c per week and a further 35% of households will incur an increase of 65c per week.

Mr Power said the draft budget proposed a 6.5% rates increase. He acknowledged that he is conscious of the impact of the increase on commercial businesses however noted that there has been no rates increase since 2008 and over 70% of rates payers had a reduction through the 2017 Revaluation process. In particular he made the following points

- 72% received a reduction In Retail (55% greater than 20%)
- In Hospitality 59% received a decrease
- Rate increases sought pre 2008 ranged from 5% to 9% with an average of 5% approved from 1999-2008

Mr Power outlined that a 6.5% rate increase for the Retail sector will cost €2.42 per week, and €5.67 per week of an increase in the hospitality sector. Mr Power outlined that in approving the budget Leitrim County Council will take a major step in securing investment of €276m for the County over the next 6 years. This investment programme when delivered will see the focused and targeted delivery of projects right across the County in areas such as regeneration and development of town centres, infrastructure development, tourism development, job creation, community development, environment protection. Mr Lar Power described the investment programme as 'unprecedented and a significant opportunity to leverage substantial funds from Project Ireland 2040 and he acknowledged the challenge presented to the Elected Members in approving the budget. However, the implementation of this ambitious investment plan for County Leitrim requires the Council to invest €26m of locally raised funds.

Mr Lar Power recommended the presented budget for adoption.

Councillor Brendan Barry noted that the rates figure for outstanding rates at September 2019 is 9% behind 2018. Councillor Barry said he was not happy with the way the budget was being discussed and queried why Item No 3 on the Agenda and Item No 4 on the Agenda for the meeting today are to be dealt with after the budget item.

Mr Power accepted that Item 3 & Item 4 on the Agenda should be dealt with before the Budget is adopted.

Mr Power advised the Members to firstly consider the application of a 75% Commercial Rates Vacancy Refund for 2020 in respect of rateable vacant properties, in the administrative area of Leitrim County Council.

Councillor Des Guckian said this matter has already been decided on. Mr Lar Power said it is a requirement of the budget process that the application of a 75% Commercial Rates Vacancy Refund for 2020 in respect of rateable vacant properties be considered each year.

Councillor Enda McGloin outlined that in considering what has been presented in the budget and recent funding announcements there is an obligation on Leitrim County Council to provide match funding. He acknowledged that this will have a burden on ratepayers and proposed a 5% rates increase. This was seconded by Councillor Sean McGowan.

Councillor Mary Bohan supported the proposal acknowledging the impact on ratepayers. Councillor Mary Bohan referred to the low rates base in County Leitrim and reiterated that Leitrim County Council should get an additional allocation from Government.

Councillor Mary Bohan sought assurances that there is not going to be an increase in rates every year as she would have a difficulty in supporting an increase in rates next year.

Councillor Pdraig Fallon acknowledged that some ratepayers cannot afford an increase but some can afford this increase. Councillor Fallon expressed his concerns about the accumulative effect this will have on rural pubs as some pubs.

Councillor Fallon paid tribute to staff and community groups for sourcing funding for projects and said that the current rates system needs to be reviewed and he questioned if this is this going to increase arrears.

Councillor Finola Armstrong McGuire said she would like to see the money ring fenced and for this to be labelled as such. Cllr Armstrong McGuire called on ratepayers to contact the Valuation Office to assess the valuation of their properties.

Councillor Gerry Dolan said he would not support an increase in rates.

Councillor Felim Gurn said he would support the increase and acknowledged that the Council needs resources.

Councillor Des Guckian concurred with Cllr Fallon and said people cannot afford to pay anymore.

Councillor Brendan Barry outlined that while he understood the reasons behind the proposal he was opposing to the increase.

Councillor Frank Dolan welcomed the Strategic Investment Programme. Cllr Dolan noted that the proposed 5% is a big increase and he said that there is a difference in the volume of footfall in our towns. Councillor Dolan said that a number of businesses are already considering closing. He outlined that evidence would be required to show benefits of attracting additional funding.

Mr Vincent Dwyer said that there is buoyancy every year with new listings etc and the rate book is very fluid.

19/203

11/11/2019 Adoption of Draft Budget for the financial year ending 31st December 2020

Councillor Enda McGloin proposed a 5% rates increase and seconded by Councillor Sean McGowan.

Councillor Padraig Fallon made a counter proposal proposing not to increase the rates and seconded by Councillor Des Guckian.

Mr Kieran Brett, Meetings Administrator outlined that as there were two proposals a vote would have to be taken. He advised that the vote would be taken in relation to the counter proposal. The result of the poll taken was as follows:

No increase in Commercial Rates for 2020			
Against	For	Abstain	Absent
Armstrong-McGuire, Finola	Barry, Brendan		Reynolds, Flynn, Ita
Bohan, Mary	Dolan, Gerry		
Dolan, Frank	Fallon, Padraig		
Ellis, Caillian	Guckian, Des		
Farrell, Paddy			
Gurn, Felim			
McDermott, Sean			
McGloin, Enda			
McGowan, Sean			
Mulligan, Thomas			
O'Rourke, Paddy			
Stenson, Enda			
Warnock, Justin			
13	4	0	1

Mr Brett outlined that as there was one member absent there was a total of 17 votes; with 13 votes against and 4 votes in favour of the counter-proposal. He outlined accordingly, that the counter-proposal was defeated and the original proposal is carried:

Proposed by Councillor Enda McGloin seconded by Councillor Sean McGowan AND AGREED

“That the commercial rates be increased by 5%”

Mr Lar Power said that with a 5% increase in the General Rate on Valuation it paves the way for the Council to secure a scale of investment going forward and provides a ring fenced fund to match fund the strategic investment programme.

Proposed by Councillor Enda McGloin seconded by Councillor Sean McGowan AND AGREED

“That Leitrim County Council adopts for the financial year ending 31st December 2020, the Budget set out in Tables A - F, and further resolves to determine in accordance with the said Budget the rates set out in Table A to be the annual rate on valuation to be levied for 2020 for the purposes set out in those Tables.”

19/204

11/11/2019 Determination of Annual Rate on Valuation

Proposed by Councillor Enda McGloin seconded by Councillor Felim Gurn AND RESOLVED

“That Leitrim County Council hereby determines in accordance with the Budget as proposed and adopted by the Members, the Annual Rate on Valuation to be levied for the several purposes specified in the Budget for the financial year ending 31st December, 2020.”

Mr Power outlined that he had proposed a 6.5% Commercial Rates increase, this is now reduced by 1.5% and the new rates increase is 5% with a new Annual Rate of Valuation of 0.2208.

19/205

11/11/2019 Application of a 75% Commercial Rates Vacancy Refund

Councillor Pdraig Fallon queried how much revenue this has generated to date.

Mr Lar Power said that there were 174 vacant properties last year and this accrued €12,907 in total.

**Proposed by Councillor Enda McGloin seconded by Councillor Paddy O'Rourke
AND RESOLVED**

“That Leitrim County Council hereby approves the application of a 75% Commercial Rates Vacancy Refund for 2020 in respect of rateable vacant properties in the administrative area of Leitrim County Council specified in the Budget for the Financial year ending 31st December 2020”.

Councillor Des Guckian made a counter-proposal not to approve the application of a 75% Commercial Rates Vacancy Refund for 2020 in respect of rateable vacant properties in the administrative area of Leitrim County Council as presented to the Members. There was no support for Councillor Des Guckian's counter-proposal.

19/206

11/11/2019

Certification

The Cathaoirleach and the Chief Executive then signed the Statutory Certificate to the effect that at the Budget Meeting of Leitrim County Council held this 11th November 2019, the Council by resolution adopted for the financial year ending 31st December 2020 the Budget set out in Tables (A to F) and by resolution determined in accordance with the said budget the Rates set out in Tables (B and C) to be the annual rate on valuation to be levied and the Application of a 75% Commercial Rates Vacancy Refund for that year for the purposes set out in those tables.

The Cathaoirleach, Councillor Enda McGloin thanked the Chief Executive, Mr. Lar Power, Management Team, Mr. Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance and the Members of the Finance Team for the Budget Book as presented. He also thanked the Members for the manner in which the meeting was conducted. Councillor Enda McGloin also thanked the Media. AS this was the last meeting before Christmas, Councillor McGloin, Cathaoirleach extended festive greetings to the Members, staff of Leitrim County Council and the public.

Mr Lar Power, Chief Executive thanked Members also extended festive greetings to everyone.

This concluded the business of the meeting at 1.15p.m.

SIGNED:

**Councillor Enda McGloin
Cathaoirleach**

**Kieran Brett
Meetings Administrator**

DATE: 6th January 2020