

Minutes of Leitrim County Council meeting held in the Bush Hotel, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co Leitrim on Monday, 8 November 2021

Members Present: Councillor Mary Bohan
Councillor Finola Armstrong McGuire
Councillor Enda McGloin
Councillor Sean McGowan
Councillor Brendan Barry
Councillor Frank Dolan
Councillor Pdraig Fallon
Councillor Paddy Farrell
Councillor Des Guckian
Councillor Felim Gurn
Councillor Thomas Mulligan
Councillor Sean McDermott
Councillor Ita Reynolds Flynn
Councillor Enda Stenson
Councillor Justin Warnock

Councillor Paddy O'Rourke (Cathaoirleach) presiding

Apologies: Councillor Gerry Dolan
Councillor Caillian Ellis

Officials Present: Lar Power, Chief Executive
Joseph Gilhooly, Director of Services, Economic Development, Planning and Infrastructural Services
Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance, Water, Environment, Climate Action and Emergency Services
Mary Quinn, Director of Services, Housing, Corporate Services, Community and Cultural Services
Samantha Healy, Senior Executive Officer Corporate Services and Housing
Shay O`Connor, Senior Engineer
Terry McGovern, Senior Engineer
Gillian Tilson, Financial Management Accountant
Sinead Flynn, Meetings Administrator Ballinamore Municipal District
Laurence Kennedy, Senior Staff Officer
Kieran Brett, Meetings Administrator
Kathleen Ellis, Assistant Staff Officer

MM.166.21 Consider the Draft Budget for the financial year ending 31st December, 2022

The Cathaoirleach, Councillor Paddy O'Rourke opened the meeting and invited Mr. Lar Power, Chief Executive to give an overview of the Draft Budget for 2022.

In presenting the draft Budget, Mr Lar Power, Chief Executive referred to the setting of the local adjustment factor of the LPT at the July meeting and to the determination of General Municipal Allocations for each Municipal District agreed at the October MD meetings. He stated that the Draft Budget for the financial year ending 31st December 2022, as circulated (**Appendix 1**) enables the expansion of services by the Council, the deployment of resources as required, an increase of 7% on local roads and housing maintenance, continued investment in the Council's extensive capital programme while achieving prudent fiscal management.

He proposed that Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance, Water, Environment, Climate Action and Emergency Services proceed to give an overview of each Division with questions arising to be addressed after each Division, following which he would address members again. The Chief Executive referred to his report of 28th October 2021 as circulated to each member and outlined the difficult process of compiling the budget in the current operating environment. It was agreed that the Head of Finance would make a presentation on the budget to the members and that the budget would then be considered by the members programme by programme

Division A – Housing and Building

Mr. Vincent Dwyer gave an overview of the budgetary provisions in Division A – Housing & Building.

The following items were raised:

- Councillor Des Guckian proposed that Leitrim County Council provide proper emergency accommodation for the homeless and follow up with more permanent accommodation. Councillor Des Guckian stated that at least 4 people are living rough in Carrick-on-Shannon and an emergency hostel must be provided to accommodate homeless cases that arise. Councillor Mary Bohan outlined that the provision of temporary emergency hostel accommodation is very complex. She acknowledged Leitrim County Council have dealt sympathetically with situations where people needed temporary emergency accommodation for various reasons. She outlined that if the Council consider that a special allocation for such accommodation is needed in Leitrim, the Government should be called upon to provide funding.
- Councillor Justin Warnock welcomed the purchase of houses in Kinlough by Leitrim County Council and queried if there are plans to purchase land for housing development in Kinlough, as the need in the area has increased dramatically.
- Councillor Sean McDermott welcomed the 7% increase in the housing maintenance

provision and the increase in funding for the homeless service

- Councillor Pdraig Fallon noted the homeless provision is based on the previous years expenditure and welcomed the additional expenditure provision.
- Councillor Brendan Barry outlined his preference for the provision of permanent housing accommodation rather than hostel type accommodation. He welcomed the increased provision in housing maintenance. Councillor Barry queried if money from the Housing Maintenance Budget would be used to fund the proposed pilot scheme of willow based systems at Local Authority houses which is part of the EPA/Trinity College research project to find a solution to the zero discharge issue.
- Councillor Gurn sought clarification on how long supports remain in place when a person finds themselves in a homeless situation.
- Councillor Paddy Farrell welcomed the increased budget provision and outlined his view that homelessness isn't as big an issue in Leitrim relative to other Counties.
- Councillor Des Guckian outlined his view that the provision of €60,000 is insufficient and that some hostel must be provided. He stated if anything happens to the homeless Leitrim County Council will be responsible and it is not good enough to be relying on the Simon Community to deal with this issue.

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

- Sligo, Leitrim, and Donegal local authorities constitute the North West Regional Homelessness Forum. All department funding is channelled through Sligo County Council as the Lead Authority. A provision of €25,000 was made for homelessness in 2021 and €50,000 was spent exceeded the provision made. On this basis and having regard to increased activity in relation to provision of temporary emergency accommodation, the budgetary provision for 2022 has been increased to €60,000. Temporary emergency accommodation in Leitrim is provided through B&B's, hotels, when available. Leitrim County Council are also able to access temporary emergency accommodation in Sligo.
- In relation to hostel provision, there are no hostel services for the provision of temporary emergency accommodation in Leitrim. There is a hostel in Sligo which also offers support services and is managed through the voluntary sector. Ms Quinn outlined that Leitrim County Council would not have the capacity or resources to provide a hostel for temporary emergency accommodation.
- Leitrim County Council are not aware of 4 homelessness cases as referred to by Cllr. Guckian and presently there is one person sleeping rough on the streets in Carrick on Shannon.

- Any person who presents themselves as homeless will be assessed and will be offered temporary emergency accommodation as appropriate. It is a matter for an individual to choose to accept the offer of accommodation. Expenditure incurred in the provision of temporary emergency accommodation is recouped through the regional homelessness structures.
- Supports remain in place for a homeless person until such time as permanent housing solution is identified.
- Leitrim County Council is required to prepare a Housing Action Plan for delivery of target of 139 housing units over the next 5 years. The issue of land will be addressed as part of this plan which will be funded under Capital expenditure.

In response to the query raised on the EPA/Trinity College research project on willow based waste water treatment solutions, Mr Joseph Gilhooly clarified the costs would be funded under the capital programme.

Councillor Enda McGloin stated all the issues raised in relation to homelessness have been clearly addressed by the Director of Services and there is an appropriate level of funding provided for under the homeless provision.

Mr Lar Power, Chief Executive outlined that he had an issue with Cllr. Guckian's use of language in describing the provision of homeless services by Leitrim County Council. He outlined that the issue of homelessness is a very complex one and that Leitrim County Council working within the regional homelessness framework have a very robust system in place to deal with homelessness presentations. He reiterated that what a person chooses to do with an offer of temporary emergency accommodation is a matter for them.

Division B & C - Road Transport & Safety & Water Services

Mr. Vincent Dwyer gave an overview of the budgetary provisions in Division B and Division C— Road Transport, Safety and Water Services.

The following items were raised:

- Councillor Des Guckian outlined his view that the roads allocations should be notified well in advance of February stating that the current coalition in the Chamber should ensure this.
- Councillor Sean McGowan welcomed the 7% increase in road maintenance.
- Councillor Sean McDermott welcomed the increase in the road maintenance provision and said it is good to see the realignment of the N16 continue as this is very important for cross border trade.
- Councillor Justin Warnock sought clarification if the increase in the cost of materials have been factored in.

- Councillor Felim Gurn asked that Leitrim County Council contact Sligo County Council regarding commencing work on the N16 in Sligo.
- Councillor Mulligan noted there are a number of Water Schemes in private ownership, and he asked if the provision is sufficient to deal with the issues that are arising in regard to water services.
- Councillor Brendan Barry paid tribute to the Water Services staff in Leitrim County Council, and stating they are very capable of managing water networks and plants in Leitrim and he expressed his disappointment that the Local Authority is seen as the contractor to carry out the day-to-day services for Irish Water. Councillor Barry said better value for money could be achieved if Leitrim County Council were managing Water Services rather than Irish Water.
- Councillor Mary Bohan referred to the astronomical charges being applied by Irish Water to its customers for connections.
- Councillor Des Guckian outlined that he has received replies from Irish Water which are better than those received from Leitrim County Council.

In response to the queries raised Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance responded as follows:

- The timing of the announcement of the Roads Allocation is a national issue. Discussions have taken place with the Department in relation to the announcement of Roads funding aligned with the Local Authority budgetary process.
- The provision of €3 million shows the actual income received from Irish Water which is reflected in the Service Level Agreement. The Local Authority is seen as a contractor for Irish Water and this income covers the costs of day-to-day operations in maintaining the water network and plants. This provision does not reflect the Capital Programme which is a budget managed by Irish Water. Mr Dwyer outlined if members have issues with the operation of Water Services, they should make them known to himself or Francis Gaffney, A/Senior Engineer and they will raise them with Irish Water at their monthly SLA meetings.
- This issue of charges has been referred to Irish Water and the issue will continue to be highlighted.
- The replies Irish Water issue in response to members queries in Leitrim, have been provided by the staff of Leitrim County Council.

Mr Terry McGovern, A/Senior Engineer, Infrastructure responded in relation to the roads queries. He outlined that Sligo County Council are progressing with works on the N16 to

the County boundary. He acknowledged the issue of the timing of the roads allocation and stated that until the actual allocations are received, the exact amount of expenditure to be spent on roads can't be determined. He outlined that increased costs are certainly a factor and will impact on programme delivery.

Division D - Development Management

Mr. Vincent Dwyer gave an overview of the budgetary provisions in Division D – Development Management

The following items were raised:

- Councillor Felim Gurn raised the issue of funding for Town Twinning, Heritage Town Signage, Hill Walking Brochures and support of the WRAP fund.
- Councillor Padraig Fallon supported the comments in relation to the WRAP fund.
- Councillor Sean McGowan expressed disappointment that there was no funding available for Town Twinning outlining that Leitrim County Council needs to encourage communities to keep in contact with their twinned town as it is good for tourism and promotion of the county.
- Councillor Sean McGowan sought clarification on the number of unfinished estates that are yet to be completed.
- Councillor Sean McDermott supported the comments regarding town twinning and called for additional funding for Tourism centres and venues.
- Councillor Justin Warnock outlined that an emergency plan should be available to support businesses along the border which may be impacted in the event of a trade war arising due to Brexit.

Mr. Joseph Gilhooly, Director of Services responded as follows:

- Brochures and other online material has recently been developed for walking trails.
- New strategies for the recreational forum and tourism will be developed in 2022.
- Heritage Town funding has not been renewed by the Department. Heritage initiatives have been included in the Love Leitrim awards.
- Town twinning can be considered as part of the tourism strategy. Leitrim County

Council will work with any towns associations who wants to engage in town twinning.

- A number of housing estates are undergoing significant works and discussions are ongoing with Irish Water in this regard.
- Funding for the WRAP programme has been included.

Division E - Environmental Services

Mr. Vincent Dwyer gave an overview of the budgetary provisions in Division E – Environmental Services

The following items were raised:

- Councillor Des Guckian commended the Fire Services and the Civil Defence, and he asked that Fire Service be given a greater role in the emergency planning regarding the N4.
- Councillor Sean McDermott sought clarification if household waste is segregated in the waste lorry upon pick up or is segregated at the waste depot.
- Councillor Enda Stenson paid tribute to the Leitrim Fire Service and the BfireSafe@School programme which has been delivered to schools. This was supported by Councillor Mary Bohan.
- Councillor Enda McGloin sought clarification on the provision in the Budget for the Enforcement of Waste Regulations. He also highlighted the amount of litter that builds up along the roads leading into our towns and queried if that can be addressed.
- Councillor Warnock paid tribute to the communities for their help in litter picks. He asked how we can inform people to have respect for their countryside. Councillor Warnock paid tribute to the GAA who have supported litter picks and acknowledged that this is a good initiative.

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

- Upon waste pickups, the waste is segregated, and it is further segregated at the waste plant. Mr Dwyer commended Barna Waste for their very impressive waste depot in Galway.
- The provision for the Enforcement of Waste Regulations includes funding of the

Connacht Ulster WERLA office of approximately €800,000, which is funded in turn by the Department.

- Through the Anti-Dumping Initiatives fund, Leitrim County Council will run a targeted anti-litter campaign in the coming months on social media.
- The Chief Fire Officer and his team have been involved in an Erasmus programme in Schools. The Presentation given to schools on “BfireSafe@School” will be presented to the Members in the future.
- The Fire Service have responsibility for Major Emergency Management.

Division F - Recreation & Amenity

Mr. Vincent Dwyer gave an overview of the budgetary provisions in Division F – Recreation & Amenity

The following items were raised:

- Councillor Paddy O’Rourke sought clarification regarding the provision of €25,000 for playgrounds.
- Councillor Justin Warnock highlighted the need for funding for the library service in Kinlough.
- Councillor Brendan Barry expressed his disappointment that no more funding has been provided for land drainage and queried if there was a way that would enable a greater length of waterway to be cleaned each year.
- Councillor Paddy O’Rourke highlighted the savings on road maintenance if more money was spent on land drainage.
- Councillor Des Guckian outlined his dissatisfaction with funding for agriculture and stated the funding provided for the Dog Warden and the Veterinary Services seems to be excessive.
- Councillor Justin Warnock queried if funding was available for piers at inland waterways.
- Councillor Sean McGowan expressed his disappointment with the provision of land drainage, and he acknowledged that Leitrim County Council would want €500,000 every year to maintain waterways in the County.
- Councillor Mary Bohan supported Cllr Barry and Cllr McGowan in regard to the land drainage. She also paid tribute to the service provided by the dog warden in Leitrim
- Councillor Paddy Farrell expressed his disappointment that the provision for land

drainage has not been increased.

- Councillor Thomas Mulligan outlined that Members of Leitrim County Council will not be happy with this level of funding for land drainage next year. This was supported by Councillor Enda Stenson.

In response to the query raised Ms. Mary Quinn, Director of Services responded as follows:

- The provision of €25,000 for playgrounds provides for weekly inspections and maintenance and where a playground requires upgrades replacement of equipment, applications are made under national funding schemes e.g Clar.

In response to the queries raised Mr Joseph Gilhooly, Director of Services responded as follows:

- The issue of funding for land drainage has been discussed on several occasions and was reviewed by the SPC. A national funding scheme is required. Leitrim County Council's revenue budget would not be able to sustain the level of funding required to deal with all the drainage issues. The €20,000 provided towards land drainage is to deal with issues in the former joint drainage scheme areas. Other agencies have responsibility for maintenance of other waterways in the County.
- There is an obligation on the Local Authority to provide a Dog Warden Service.
- Piers are managed and maintained under amenity Budgets.
- Land drainage works must be sourced through the public procurement process.

In response to the queries raised Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance responded as follows:

- The costs of Leitrim Dog Warden Service are very competitive in comparison to other counties.
- The provision of the Veterinary Service is 100% funded by the Department.

Division H – Miscellaneous Services

Mr. Vincent Dwyer gave an overview of the budgetary provisions in Division H – Miscellaneous Services

No queries were raised by Members.

Presentation of budget by Chief Executive

Mr Lar Power, Chief Executive, referred to the Strategic Investment Programme and the need for match funding for projects funded through state funds provided under Project Ireland 2040 and supported by the National Development Plan 2021-2030.

He referred to the Capital Investment Programme originally presented in preparation for Budget 2020, and stated the programme has accelerated in the interim period, notwithstanding the Covid 19 Pandemic. The updated programme provides for expenditure of €345m with a local funding requirement of €25.7m and includes significant projects across Regeneration and development of town centres, Infrastructural, Community and Tourism development. The programme contains large projects under construction and further projects with national funding approved and construction to commence in 2022, while other projects are at application or design stage. The ultimate objective of the Capital Investment Programme is to assist local businesses, job creation, population growth and visitor appeal to flourish in the years ahead along with enhancement of public realm and amenity infrastructure within the County for the benefit of all residents.

Mr Power outlined that in 2020, the Members increased Commercial Rates as a first step to fund borrowings needed to match fund the Capital Investment Programme. The Members were informed at that time, that further increases would be necessary to fund this ambitious Programme. He advised Members that Budget 2022 now includes a 3% increase in Commercial Rates which will be ringfenced, together with the local property tax adjustment for 2022, specifically to fund the Capital Investment Programme.

Mr Power acknowledged that Covid 19 has presented a significant challenge to the business community in County Leitrim and across the country and he said he is acutely aware of the impacts and challenges faced locally in this regard. He outlined that Government have waived Commercial Rates for the last 24 months and this waiver funded by Government amounted to €1.7m in 2020, while the 2021 waiver to date amounts to €1.1m, with a quarter four waiver yet to be administered. In addition, significant supports were provided nationally and through the Local Government Sector, with Leitrim County Council administering the overall restart grant process, which resulted in grant payments to local business, to a value in excess of €4.2m. Mr Power said he has proposed a 3% rate increase, taking into account the forecasted economic environment for 2022. He referred to the Governments growth forecasts which have been endorsed by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council which provide solid projections of 6.5% growth in Modified Domestic Demand for 2022 and is also encouraged by the longer-term national growth projections through to 2024. The 6-year capital investment programme is the vehicle by which the growth and development of the County can be achieved and sustained, and its viability and achievement is directly related to the continued local funding requirement which is secured for 2022 through this proposed budgetary strategy.

Mr Power said this budget enables the delivery and expansion of the services of the Council as required by the residents of the county, visitors to the county and all other service users. In this regard, the resources available are being deployed in the areas where they are required most.

He stated that in accordance with Section 102 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, this Draft Budget is presented to meet the expenses and provide for the liabilities and requirements of Leitrim County Council for the financial year ending 31st December 2022. He outlined that in accordance with Section 102 (4) of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, the Corporate Policy Group has been consulted and has endorsed the budgetary strategy. He further outlined that the Council will continue to work in

collaboration with all state agencies, local development organisations, business community's and the local community and voluntary sectors to maximise all available opportunities to address local needs and support the economic, social and community development of the county.

In conclusion, Mr Power thanked Cathaoirligh, Cllr Mary Bohan, Cllr Paddy O'Rourke, the Corporate Policy Group, the Members of Leitrim County Council for their contribution and support over the past financial year. He also thanked the Head of Finance, the Directors of Services, the Financial Accountant and all the staff involved in the preparation of this budget, and he formally recommended the draft Budget 2022 for adoption.

MM.167.21 Adoption of Draft Budget for the financial year ending 31st December 2022

Councillor Paddy O'Rourke proposed that the Budget as presented be adopted. The proposal was seconded by Enda McGloin seconded.

Councillor Des Guckian stated he was opposing the adoption of the Budget as presented stating the budget was inadequate due to the provisions for Homelessness Services, Agriculture, Land drainage and lanes. Councillor Des Guckian stated he was opposing the the 3% rate increase stating town centres are being run down and he referred to the number of local businesses that are closing down.

Councillor Mary Bohan outlined that it is a difficult position for the members to be in. She stated that all members are looking for funding for their communities and she acknowledged the investment in projects throughout the County. She stated that it is important to have match funding in order to enable these projects which improve the County. Councillor Bohan queried what the average increase in rates would be for a shop or pub.

Mr Vincent Dwyer outlined that the vast majority of commercial rate payers are paying less than €3,000 per annum, with the average being approximately €2,000 per annum. A one percent increase on a rates bill of €2,000 is €20.00 per year.

Councillor Mary Bohan outlined that there are many other factors which contribute to businesses closing down including people not supporting their local businesses.

Councillor Justin Warnock outlined that he could not support the 3% rate increase given that the country is still in a pandemic and the impact of that is not yet known. He also referred to the possibility of a trade war between Europe and the UK, and he outlined his view that the rate increase should be deferred for a year.

Councillor Thomas Mulligan acknowledged that the members are concerned for smaller businesses. He stated that some larger businesses have done very well during the pandemic and will be able to meet the increase and he said an increase of €30 on €1,000 will not impact most businesses.

Councillor Finola Armstrong McGuire said that her representations to Leitrim County Council are appeals from communities for more funding for projects. She noted that the Council has

been very supportive of Tourism projects. She also expressed thanks for the Business Supports and Rates Waivers schemes that were provided over the past two years. In supporting the rates increase, Councillor Armstrong McGuire said if businesses and town want supports from the Council then they must be prepared to contribute when asked by the Council. Councillor Finola Armstrong McGuire asked people to buy local and support their local businesses.

Councillor Felim Gurn said the timing is wrong and he outlined that a lot of people have left the hospitality sector. Councillor Gurn referred to his own situation and stated that it is unfortunate that there has been no correspondence with businesses regarding this rate increase.

Councillor Pdraig Fallon said he has engaged with a number of small indigenous family run businesses who are impacted by costs such as rising inflation, carbon tax, and increased energy prices and many of these businesses now open just 3 or 4 days a week. Cllr Fallon said he is concerned about the timing of this rate increase, and he acknowledged many businesses have outstanding bills and are fearful about remaining open. He acknowledged some businesses can absorb the increase and highlighted the need for businesses to be listened to.

Councillor Des Guckian said he agreed with Councillor Gurn and Councillor Warnock and this will be the “straw that breaks the camel’s back.”

Councillor Ita Reynolds Flynn outlined that as the owner of a small business, she was grateful to have received the recent rates waiver and other business supports. She outlined that it is difficult to agree with the 3% increase in rates, however when she looks at projects in Ballinamore that have been completed and at projects yet to be completed in the area, she has to support her community and support the rates increase.

Councillor Brendan Barry outlined that he understands Leitrim County Council is attempting to generate income in order to attract capital investment funding. He outlined he was in support of calls for a deferral this year. He also referred to the manner in which rates are calculated and stated it is not reflective of what is happening in businesses.

Councillor Enda McGloin said he decided to contest the Local Elections in 2019 because of his ambition for his “town and county”. Councillor Enda McGloin asked what can Leitrim County Council do to enhance the infrastructure to bring more people into the county. Councillor McGloin referred to the 20% match funding that is necessary for projects to happen in the County and he noted that the Government give 80% to drive investment into the county.

Councillor Enda McGloin acknowledged the challenges businesses are facing as he had previously been in business. However, he highlighted the need for the Council to drive investment in the towns and villages in Leitrim. He stated that if the rates increase is deferred to next year, no further applications for projects will come from the Executive and there is a level of expectation for investment. He further outlined that the proposed 3% increase is below the level of inflation and it will allow the investment programme to

continue as planned.

Councillor Mary Bohan outlined that valuations are set by the Valuation Office, not the Local Authority.

Councillor Felim Gurn outlined that he had no issue with the need to drive investment in the county, however the timing is wrong and queried if there is an option to consider in six months.

Cathaoirleach, Councillor Paddy O'Rourke outlined that it is a statutory requirement that the Annual Rate on Valuation is decided at the Budget meeting. Councillor Paddy O'Rourke outlined that it did not give him any comfort to see an increase in the rates, but the match funding has to be found and a very progressive list of capital projects have been brought before the members. He noted that 14% of our income comes from rates and it is unfortunate that this increase falls on a small number of businesses. Councillor Paddy O'Rourke raised the question as to how it will be determined which projects will be abandoned if the funding is not made available.

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

"That Leitrim County Council adopts for the financial year ending 31st December 2022, the Budget set out in Tables A and B as amended, and further resolves to determine in accordance with the said Budget the rates set out in Table B to be the Annual Rate on Valuation to be levied for that year for the purposes set out in those Tables."

MM.168.21 **Determine, by resolution, the Annual Rate on Valuation to be levied for the financial year ending 31st December 2022 for the several purposes specified in the Adopted Budget**

Proposed by Councillor Paddy O'Rourke **seconded** by Councillor Enda McGloin **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 2022. The Annual Rate on Valuation determined was 0.2274".

MM.169.21 **Approve, by resolution, the application of a 75% Commercial Rates Vacancy Refund for 2022 in respect of vacant rateable properties in Leitrim**

Mr Lar Power, Chief Executive referred to the 75% vacancy write off on vacant commercial properties and outlined that it was introduced as a means to nurture a change in behaviour of the owners of vacant properties, that will result in an action to get business premises back into use and restore vibrancy to our towns. Mr Power advised Members that the Minister has proposed that 100% of commercial rates charge be applied to vacant premises in future years and this will be implemented at national level and will apply to all Local Authorities.

Councillor Enda McGloin proposed that this scheme be discussed at a Strategic Policy Committee meeting or at a workshop for members to get an update on the benefits accrued since the introduction of scheme.

Councillor Mary Bohan outlined that she would not agree with the introduction of 100% and said there should be some flexibility e.g., a property in Dublin may find it easier to secure a tenant than a property in North Leitrim.

Councillor Enda Stenson outlined he would like to see what the benefits of the current scheme are and if it is achieving the objective of returning vacant premises to use.

Cathaoirleach, Councillor Paddy O'Rourke stated vacant properties on a street impacts existing business that are trading.

Councillor Des Guckian outlined he would not support the surcharge of 25% on businesses that have failed.

Councillor Felim Gurn said every town has business premises lying idle and people are doing their best.

Mr Vincent Dwyer outlined that the liability for rates remains and property owners do have the choice to delist their property. He stated that Leitrim County Council continue to engage with the owners of vacant premises on an ongoing basis.

Mr Power informed Members that a number of property owners have come forward and put forward proposals which have had a positive outcome.

Proposed by Councillor Paddy O'Rourke **seconded** by Councillor Sean McDermott **AND RESOLVED**

"That Leitrim County Council hereby adopts the application of a 75% Commercial Rates Vacancy Refund for 2022 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 2022".

MM.170.21 Certification

The Cathaoirleach and the Chief Executive signed the Statutory Certificate to the effect that at the Budget Meeting of Leitrim County Council held this 8th November 2021, the Council by resolution adopted for the financial year ending 31st December 2022 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.

Cathaoirleach, Councillor Paddy O'Rourke thanked the Chief Executive, Mr. Lar Power, Management Team, Mr. Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance, and the staff of the Finance Team for the preparation of the Budget Book.

MM.171.21 AOB

Councillor Paddy O'Rourke advised the members that the January Council meeting will take place on Monday, 10th January 2022.

Councillor Paddy O'Rourke advised the members that a County Development Plan Workshop for the members will take place on Friday, 26th November 2021 at 11 am with the venue to be decided.

This concluded the business of the meeting at 1.45 pm

Signed:

Councillor Paddy O'Rourke
Cathaoirleach

Kieran Brett
Meetings Administrator

Dated: Monday, 10 January 2022