

**Minutes of Leitrim County Council meeting held in the Council Chamber, Áras an Chontae,
Carrick on Shannon, Co. Leitrim on Monday, 14 November 2022**

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

Councillor Ita Reynolds Flynn (Cathaoirleach) presiding

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
Kieran Brett, Meetings Administrator
Ray Flynn, Assistant Staff Officer
Sinead Flynn, Meetings Administrator Ballinamore Municipal
District

MM.158.22 Consider and adopt by resolution, the Draft Budget for the financial year ending 31st December, 2023

Cathaoirleach, Cllr Ita Reynolds Flynn, proposed that agenda item no. 1 (consider Draft Budget) and agenda item no. 2 (consider ARV) be taken as one item as both are mutually dependant on each other.

This was agreed to by the members.

In calling on the CE, Mr. Lar Power to introduce the Draft Budget, the Cathaoirleach

congratulated the Executive on recently securing €10 million of investment for two projects, Carrick Business Campus and Drumshanbo Food Hub, through the Rural Regeneration and Development fund administered by the Dept. Rural and Community Development.

In introducing the Draft Budget to the members, the Chief Executive, Mr Lar Power, outlined the following:

- Inflation poses a significant challenge to the current operating environment
- There is a degree of uncertainty due to increasing energy costs
- The Local Authority has secured additional support from Government to assist with inflationary costs
- The Government has recently provided an €11 billion support package for households and business to stem cost of living crisis
- The draft Budget has been prepared in the context of these supports
- The 2023 Draft Budget shows 5% increase on Local Roads expenditure
- An additional allocation of €25,000 has been included towards river drainage on foot of members representations
- The Capital Programme is ambitious and promotes the growth of the County with a local contribution required of in excess of €25 million
- The Budget book outlines the key deliverables for 2023
- In keeping with the Section 102 of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended), the budget has been presented to the Corporate Policy Group, who have considered and endorsed it.

Mr Vincent Dwyer presented an overview of the budget detailing the expenditure provisions under each programme group heading. In the overall context he advised the members that the Government have provided additional funding to cover the costs associated with incremental pay increases and energy cost increases.

Housing & Building

- Expenditure on Housing Maintenance will increase by 5%
- Grant Works on Housing and Energy Efficiency works are projected to increase in 2023
- The Budget shows a projected increase in Housing Grants which are 90% funded by Government.
- Current and projected building schemes are reflected in the Capital Works Programme. Government have provided additional funding to support the *Housing for All* Programme.

The members raised the following queries in relation to the Housing & Building service division.

- More money should be spent on homelessness as there is “quite a lot of

homelessness in the county”

- More money needs to be made available for Service A06 – Support to the Capital Programme
- What grants are available in the county for persons that buy homes in need of refurbishment
- Can the needs of persons with disabilities be considered as new builds are being designed
- Does the council expect an increase in Housing Loan applications
- Is the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) funding sufficient.
- What was the level of activity regarding Housing Grants in 2022.

Ms Mary Quinn, Director of Services replied to the queries as follows:

- The Local Authority received 107 Housing Grant applications, with expenditure of approximately €681,000
- An additional €141,000 of funding has been received, which enables the Council to continue processing Housing Grant applications.
- Increase in Housing Maintenance will be funded by increased rental income with new units coming on stream.
- The Croí Cónaithe scheme provides grants up to a maximum of €30,000 for the refurbishment of a vacant dwelling purchased for occupation. Additional top-up grants of up to €20,000 will be available where the property is derelict.
- The Homelessness costs shown in the Draft Budget primarily relate to staff costs. Funding is allocated based on the amount of activity that takes place. The level of funding shown in the Draft Budget is reflective of the level of activity in 2022. Additional funding can be sought if the activity increases.
- Under the Housing for All 2022-2026 programme, Leitrim has a target to deliver 139 homes. This figure is set nationally. The targets are currently being reviewed at a national level.
- Leitrim has a strong supply of housing coming on stream over the next number of years
- New houses are designed to a universal standard that will suit all ages and abilities.
- There are currently 267 HAP clients in Leitrim
- The net number in need of housing on the list is currently 189.

Roads and Transportation

Mr Vincent Dwyer took the members through the main items of income and expenditure in relation to Roads & Transportation.

- The Annual Road Works programme will be announced in February or March at which point the exact level of funding will be known. The Budget has been prepared based on the level of funding income received in 2022.
- In Service B04, an additional 5% of funding for maintenance of local roads has been allocated.

- Public lighting costs are expected to increase slightly.
- There has been a slight reduction in insurance costs for 2023.

The members raised the following questions in relation to the Roads & Transportation service division;

- Has any consideration been given to using solar powered public lighting
- Given cost increases and inflation will the 5% increase in Local Road expenditure be sufficient to enable the same amount of work to be carried out in 2023 as completed this year.
- Is it anticipated that it will not be possible to complete the full Road Works Programme due to the increased costs of materials
- Has any provision been made for the development of Car Parking.

Mr Joseph Gilhooly, Director of Services responded to these items as follows:

- Car Parking costs shown in the Budget are administrative costs associated with operating the service. Land acquisition costs for new car parks would be reflected in the Capital Works Programme.
- Of the €8 million shown in the Draft Budget, the vast majority is funded through the Roads Works Programme. Funding from own resources for discretionary spend on Local Roads has increased from €780K to €820K.
- A public lighting retrofit programme is underway which will see the original lightening replaced with LED lighting.
- The Allocation from the TII towards the Road Work Program is as yet unknown. This will be announced in February/March at which point it will be possible to plan the road work programme for the year.

Water Services

Mr Vincent Dwyer advised the members that it is intended that Water Services will transition fully to Irish Water in 2023. The budget has been prepared on the same basis as 2022. This is in line with Government policy that local authorities will be no worse off by the transition of services to Irish Water.

The members raised the following queries

- How will the transition of services affect estates that are to be taken in charge.
- What impact will the transition have on Group Water Schemes that are waiting to be taken in charge?
- Water outages have a significant impact on small business in the hospitality and service sectors such as café and hairdressers.
- More Services appear to be moving away from the Local Authority and towards a central national service. A local or regional response should be available for customer call handling.

- Elected members should be notified of water outages, especially those that occur at weekends.
- Members should highlight the problems they experience in dealing with Irish Water with their Oireachtas members.
- Leitrim County Council staff working in the Water Services are to be complimented for the excellent service they have provided over the years. How will staff be affected by the transition to Irish Water?

Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance responded as follows:

- The Taking in charge process is set out in legislation
- A Memorandum of Understanding is in place with Irish Water that sets out the requirements to be met by Local Authorities for water and wastewater infrastructure to be taken in charge by Irish Water works and pumping stations. These requirements are challenging, especially where requirements relate to title ownership of land. Irish Water has been able to stipulate the requirements and in stipulating these, they have significantly delayed the process of taking in charge. Leitrim County Council are doing as much as possible to highlight this issue. A streamlined process needs to be put in place by Irish Water, that mirrors the Local Authority's taking in charge process. Similar issues regarding taking in charge apply to housing estates and group water schemes.
- The transition of services to Irish Water will impact Water and Wastewater Services. Once transition occurs, staff working in the service, such as caretakers and engineers will transfer to Irish Water. Currently there are 44 staff fully funded by Irish Water.
- Payment of grants and subsidies to Group Water Schemes will remain with the Local Authority.
- Businesses can register as vulnerable customers and will be notified by Irish Water of outages.

The members expressed their dissatisfaction that Leitrim County Council will have no involvement in the provision of Water Services following the transition to Irish Water.

Development Management

Mr Vincent Dwyer took the members through the main items of income and expenditure in relation to Development Management and Planning.

- Increases in expenditure in Service D01 & D02 relate to additional staff employed in these services
- Increase in Service D06 relate to additional staff resources and costs associated with the Ukrainian Crisis Response
- Costs associated with the Ukrainian Crises response are recouped from the Department
- Increase in costs in Economic Development relate to additional staff – Town Regeneration Officer - and a greater level of activity in the LEO programme.

The members raised the following queries in relation to the Development Management division.

- What are the costs and income associated with the Planning Enforcement service?
- What is the role of the Town Regeneration Officer
- Vacant and derelict properties are impacting the towns in the county and need to be addressed. Important that Town Regeneration Officer works with property owners and brings a degree of sensitivity to the role when dealing with property owners.
- What work is being done on unfinished estates.
- Communication needs to be issued on what grants are available to combat dereliction.
- Town Regeneration Officer role is welcome and will be welcome to assist in the development of Kinlough.

Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance replied as follows:

- The planning enforcement costs are staff costs
- The income in planning enforcement relates to a proportion of superannuation income, which is Central Management Charge income that is reallocated on a pro rata basis to all services.
- Income and expenditure in relation to unfinished estates is recorded in the draft budget in service D07. Income and Expenditure is recorded as part of the overall cost to complete an estate.

Mr Joseph Gilhooly, Director of Services replied as follows:

- Work is underway to create a register of vacant or derelict properties in the county
- Town Regeneration Officer (TGO) will have a focus on town centre rejuvenation and regeneration and will focus on dereliction and property use. The Town Regeneration Officer will augment the existing work being done through the Economic Development Unit and will work with Town Teams and other agencies as well as the Vacant Homes Officer and other internal sections, to combat dereliction to restore vibrancy to our towns and villages.
- Priority of Leitrim County Council is always to work with all stakeholders and progress issues
- The council actively publicises funding calls and opportunities as they become available.

Environmental Services

Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance advised the members as follows:

- Engagement with Amenity Collection and Bring Banks services has increased
- Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authority (WERLA) is showing increased costs due to the rollout of an enhanced WERLA programme which will be implemented in early

2023.

- Fire Service costs include a provision for a major emergency exercise in early 2023.
- Leitrim County Council have been allocated 2 staff resources for the Climate Change service. These will be appointed in 2023. Costs associated will be claimed from the Department.

The members raised the following queries in relation to Environmental Services.

- How many burial grounds does Leitrim County Council maintain
- What is the status of the new Fire Station in Manorhamilton
- Who is responsible for maintaining the demonstration stretches of new greenways
- Will one of the staff allocated to the Climate Change service be a Biodiversity Officer.

Councillor Des Guckian informed the meeting that he had another engagement to attend, and he left the meeting at 12:15.

Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance replied as follows:

- A planning application will be made to An Bord Pleanála by year end for Manorhamilton Fire Station
- The initial priority of the staff allocated to the Climate Action Service will be to prepare a Climate Action Plan that is consistent with national guidelines and then to progress and implement the plan.

Mr Joseph Gilhooly replied as follows:

- Leitrim County Council made a funding application for a Biodiversity Officer in 2022 but was unsuccessful. If a further funding opportunity arises, an application will be submitted.
- Leitrim County Council work with the local communities to assist with the maintenance and expansion of graveyards.
- Leitrim County Council engage caretakers in a limited number of graveyards across the county.
- The Local Authority works with local Community Employment Schemes to maintain greenway demonstration stretches.

Recreation & Amenity

Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance advised the members that this service division shows the following:

- Increased costs associated with the loan for Aura Leisure
- Additional funding allocated to the Library Service
- An additional €30,000 has been allocated for upkeep of amenities and amenity sites

The members queried the following matters:

- Has a contract been signed for the new library in Dromahair.
- Can an progress update be provided on the Regional Sports Campus
- Can the closure of the library in Kinlough be reviewed.
- Access to the Genealogy Service in Ballinamore is limited; can this be reviewed as it is a great service
- The work carried out on the library in Kiltyclogher is to be complimented.
- Can a presentation be made to the members on outlining all the services that are available now through the Library.

Ms Mary Quinn, Director of Services, responded to the members queries as follows:

- Signing of the contracts for the new library in Dromahair is expected to take place in the coming weeks.
- Development of libraries will be addressed through the Library Plan.
- All funding opportunities are being examined for the Regional Sports Campus. Preparatory work on a future funding application is underway. As funding opportunities are a competitive process, it is important that when an application is submitted that it is of high quality.
- Any specific issue with the genealogy Service should be directed to the County Librarian and the matter can be reviewed.
- A presentation for the members on the Library service can be arranged.

Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare

Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance advised the members as follows:

- An additional allocation has been made for drainage, increasing the spend in 2023 from €20,000 to €45,000
- An allocation of €12,500 has been made for a contribution towards Leitrim Sustainable Agriculture Group.

Miscellaneous Services

- Additional costs and income associated with energy costs across all work areas have been accounted for in this service division.

The members raised the following issues:

- The additional funding of €25,000 toward land drainage is welcome

- This Council has previously sought considerable funding from the OPW to drain waterways in Leitrim. It was proposed that a follow-up letter be issued to the OPW as no response has been received.
- How can we ensure that forestry operators comply with weight restrictions if the Council don't have a weighbridge.
- Can funding be maintained to support animal welfare in the county. The issue of feral cats was raised as a problem in some areas of the county.

Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance replied as follows:

- Animal welfare is carried out by Leitrim Animal Welfare for Leitrim County Council on contract following a tendering process last year.
- The issue of feral cats can be explored by the County Vet.

Mr Joseph Gilhooly, Director of Services replied as follows:

- Additional funding allocated for land drainage is for the upkeep of waterways that were formerly under the control of Joint Drainage Bodies.
- A follow up letter will be issued to OPW in respect of previous call for funding.
- Control of carrying/load capacity of haulage vehicles is a matter for the gardai, who are aware of the locations of weighbridges, and they can also avail of private weighbridges if necessary.

Mr Terry McGovern advised the members that weight restrictions are applied based on the condition of the infrastructure, such as a road or a bridge. Leitrim County Council reach an agreement with forestry companies surrounding the extraction of timber, usually through contribution towards an LIS Scheme on the road once extraction of timber is complete. If the Council can prove that a forestry company has damaged a road, there are provisions in the Roads Act to enable the Council to seek the cost of repair of the road from the forestry company.

Mr. Lar Power advised the members that the funding for the ambitious 6 year Capital Programme can only be achieved by Leitrim County Council providing the necessary match funding element. He informed the members that the 3.5% increase in commercial rates that is being sought in 2023, will be ring fenced for the Capital Programme. Without the continued support and commitment of the members, it would not be possible to have such an extensive and ambitious capital programme that will bring benefit to every area of the County.

In conclusion, Mr Lar Power, thanked the Directors of Service, Mr Vincent Dwyer and the Finance team for their efforts in the preparation of the draft budget and he recommended the adoption of the budget to the members.

Proposed by Councillor Ita Reynolds Flynn seconded by Councillor Justin Warnock AND AGREED

“That Leitrim County Council adopts for the financial year ending 31st December 2023, 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.159.22 Determine, by resolution, the Annual Rate on Valuation to be levied for the financial year ending 31st December 2023 for the several purposes specified in the Adopted Budget

Proposed by Councillor Ita Reynolds Flynn seconded by Councillor Justin Warnock 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 2023. The Annual Rate on Valuation determined was 0.2354”.

MM.160.22 Receive report on the Programme of Capital Works

Mr. Lar Power referred to the Capital Works Programme 2023-2028, as circulated to the Members.

- Councillor Justin Warnock sought an update on the delivery date for Lennox bridge
- Councillor Justin Warnock praised the Tullaghan Access to the Sea project that has been completed in the past year.
- Councillor Justin Warnock queried the possibility of capital works in Kinlough.
- Councillor Sean McDermott highlighted that North Leitrim is included in the Failte Ireland Hidden Heartlands promotional area and asked that a greater promotional focus be given to this area of the county.
- Cllr Mary Bohan paid tribute to the amount of work carried out by community groups and highlighted that community groups working with the staff of Leitrim County Council have made it possible to draw down significant amounts of government funding. These comments were supported by Cllr Frank Dolan
- Cllr Sean McGowan welcomed the significant €10 million investment of RRDF funding that was announced for the Carrick Business Campus and the Drumshanbo Food Hub last week. He congratulated the CE, Mr. Lar Power and the Executive on securing this investment. These comments were supported by Cllrs Armstrong McGuire and Stenson.
- Cllr Enda McGloin welcomed the funding investment of €2.8 million for the expansion of the Food Hub in Drumshanbo.

Mr. Terry McGovern advised that a public consultation is currently underway in respect of the Lennox Bridge project. The project is being progressed as quickly as possible.

Mr Joseph Gilhooly advised that the Capital Works Programme shows provision for a €2m capital investment in Kinlough. The Local Authority will work with the community to develop, design, plan and complete a project that has the support of the community.

Mr Joseph Gilhooly advised that in terms of Tourism, all of the county is promoted on an equal basis. The Council are engaging with stakeholders including representatives from North Leitrim in the creation of the Destination Experience Plan that is being prepared in conjunction with Failte Ireland. Mr Gilhooly acknowledged the contribution made by community groups.

The Capital Works programme was noted by the members.

MM.161.22 AOB

The Members extended a vote of sympathy to the following:

- Cllr Gerry Dolan, Cornashamsogue, Drumshanbo, Co Leitrim on the death of his sister.

This concluded the business of the meeting at 1.45 pm

Signed:

Councillor Ita Reynolds Flynn
Cathaoirleach

Kieran Brett
Meetings Administrator

Dated: Monday, 9 January 2023