

Minutes of Leitrim County Council Budget meeting held in the Council Chamber, Áras an Chontae, Carrick on Shannon, Co. Leitrim on Monday, 13 November 2023

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 Ita Reynolds Flynn
Councillor Enda Stenson

Councillor Justin Warnock (Cathaoirleach) presiding

Officials Present: Joseph Gilhooly, Chief Executive (interim)
Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance, Water, Environment, Climate Action and Emergency Services
Mary Quinn, Director of Services, Housing, Corporate Services, Community and Cultural Services
Justin Fannon, Director of Services, Economic Development, Planning and Infrastructural Services
Terry McGovern, Senior Engineer
Johanna Daly, Senior Executive Officer Economic Development
Sinead Flynn, A/Senior Executive Officer
Laura Sharkey, Meetings Administrator, Ballinamore MD
Gillian Tilson, Financial Management Accountant
Kieran Brett, Meetings Administrator
Sinead Ni Thiarnain, Senior Staff Officer

Kathleen Ellis, Assistant Staff Officer
Kareva Tatyana, Assistant Staff Officer
Clare Sharpley, Clerical Officer

MM.165.23 Consider and adopt by resolution, the Draft Budget for the financial year

ending 31st December 2024

Cathaoirleach, Cllr Justin Warnock called on Mr Joseph Gilhooly, Chief Executive to introduce the Draft Budget.

In introducing the Draft Budget to the members, the Chief Executive, Mr Joseph Gilhooly, advised the members that a baseline review has been completed by the Government on the Local Government LPT allocation. This has resulted in an additional allocation of €1.5 m to Leitrim County Council for 2024.

The draft budget for 2024 has been prepared with the following considerations:

- Increasing discretionary spend within targeted service delivery areas,
- Strengthening corporate governance in the face of increasing regulatory and statutory requirements and demands,
- Meeting the increasing cost of energy, inflation, and ICT security,
- Supporting the preparation of statutory development plans and economic, tourism and community initiatives
- Strengthening the resources available to the Town Regeneration Team
- Includes a 36% increase in the General Municipal Allocation
- Increases in Local Roads Allocation and Housing Maintenance Expenditure in the region of 10%
- Includes a further increase in Drainage Maintenance, similar to last year's increase,
- Additional allocations for upkeep of amenities,
- The reducing income from NPPR is recognised.
- Provision is made for the 2024 Local Election Process
- The Budget book commentary outlines the key deliverables for 2024,
- 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 a detailed overview of the budget detailing the expenditure provisions under each Service Division heading. He advised the members the Government have provided additional funding for costs associated with incremental pay increases, but there will be no additional funding towards energy costs. In September 2023, Water Services functions in Leitrim transitioned to Úisce Éireann. In this context, the budget is prepared on the basis that the cost of Local Authority staff (under the direction and control of Úisce Éireann) will be recouped directly from Úisce Éireann.

Salaries in the Draft Budget include costs arising from the WRC agreement regarding the Retained Fire Service and will be funded nationally.

Housing & Building

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

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

- Recruitment of additional administrative staff and outdoor staff required to reduce processing bottlenecks and quickly address maintenance issues/refurbishments,
- Is there capacity to temporarily backfill a staff member/craftsman that is off sick from work.
- Turnaround time of vacant social housing units needs to be much quicker,
- Often tenants experience maintenance issues within 6 months of being allocated a house,
- Contractors based in Dublin have expressed an interest in carrying out refurbishment works on Leitrim housing stock, and this should be considered.
- Availability of land banks in Leitrim
- Housing Adaptation Grant schemes funding
- Adequacy of the Choice Based Letting process.
- Importance of funds being available for Housing mobility grants as there is always significant interest in this scheme,

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

- Housing Maintenance staff - there is currently a short-term absence, there is no panel in place for temporary replacements
- Over the past year there has been a high level of staff turnover due to increased opportunities and movement in the LA Sector regionally
- The turnaround time for vacant properties is currently 27 weeks, it is hoped to reduce this to 25 weeks
- The number of vacant social houses has reduced significantly
- The Land Bank available to the Local Authority is quite limited. This is being reviewed, initially in Carrick-on-Shannon with the rest of the county to be reviewed in 2024
- The staffing vacancy that existed in the assessment of Housing applicants has recently been filled.
- Increasing the Housing Capital Programme has resulted in an increase in staff
- Through the procurement process, a panel of contractors has been formed that are used to carry out refurbishment works on vacant units.
- Prior to a house being allocated to a tenant, the maximum upgrade works possible, within funding models, are carried out. This can impact on the timeframe for turnaround of houses
- The costs associated with Housing Estate Management are payroll and allocations for grants to community groups/residents' associations.
- RAS & HAP are funded through a national scheme, with Leitrim County Council administering these schemes locally
- Figures for all housing grant schemes such as Housing Adaptation Grant are included in Other Housing Grants allocation totalling €815,00
- The Local Authority has been in communication with the Department concerning the

funding levels that are required to adequately deliver the Housing service.

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 2024 at which point the exact level of funding will be known. The Budget has been prepared based on the level of funding received in 2023.
- There has been a 10% increase in Local Roads expenditure,
- There is an allocation of €25,000 for hedge cutting,
- Reduction in insurance costs due to rebates received from IPB.

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

- Very few CIS applications recently
- Extensive funding required for footpaths in towns and villages especially footpaths built in the 70's & 80's.
- Ash die back is a serious issue in roadside hedgerows
- Expressed concerns regarding LIS, public lightening and taking in charge of estates – substantial funding required from the Department of Rural and Community Development to address LIS list.
- Has planning commenced for walkway between Dromod and Rooskey?
- Roads allocation should be known now when the LA budget is being prepared. Roads funding should be double what it currently is.
- Members welcomed the emergency fund for hedge cutting and highlighted the importance of an equitable system to use this fund,
- Members said it is important that responsibility for hedge cutting remains with landowners. The emergency fund should be there to assist when required. Landowners should be pursued for costs when the emergency fund is used.
- Installation of solar lighting systems

Mr Justin Fannon, Director of Services responded to the queries as follows:

- Hedge cutting emergency fund will be put in place with a Hedge Cutting Policy listed on the SPC Agenda for consideration.
- A letter has been issued to the Department for funding to address the Ash Die Back issue,
- 166 applications remaining on the LIS list,
- Footpath issues will be addressed at Municipal District level,
- Delays in taking in charge of estates is due to issues with Úisce Éireann,
- Dromod Rooskey footpath is being progressed by the Capital Office in conjunction with Roscommon County Council

- 243 kms of hedge cutting has been completed in 2023,

Mr Vincent Dwyer responded as follows:

- Installation of new public lights is included in the capital investment programme.

Mr Terry McGovern, Senior Engineer responded as follows:

- A new hedge cutting policy will be drafted for consider by SPC,
- €1.3 m has been spent on LIS's under the 2023 scheme. Under new criteria, schemes with the most beneficiaries are considered first.
- Tender for upgrading public lighting energy efficiency has been received; all works will be completed within the next 2 years.
- €700,000 additional funding for LIS was received this year and the Department is aware of the number of applications on the Leitrim LIS list.
- CIS's have been reduced. It is more beneficial to fund RIG's,
- Some solar lights have been erected but problems have been encountered. The technology is not fully compatible for this kind of lighting yet.

Water Services

Mr Vincent Dwyer advised the members that from September 2023, Water Services functions in Leitrim transitioned to Úisce Éireann. In this context, the budget is prepared on the basis that the cost of Local Authority staff (under the direction and control of Úisce Éireann) will be recouped directly from Úisce Éireann.

The budget has been prepared on the same basis as 2023. This is in line with Government policy that local authorities will be no worse off by the transition of services 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.

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

- The expenditure estimated for Urban and Village Renewal for 2024 does not seem adequate.
- The increase in funding in the Arts was welcomed and it is important our Heritage in Leitrim is preserved.
- There is a lack of accommodation for tourists in the county. This issue needs to be addressed and new accommodation providers encouraged to enter the market.
- Members welcomed that Leitrim is part of the WRAP film region alongside other counties in the West and North West,

- Members sought a representative from Irish Water to attend a meeting to discuss issues with taking in charge of estates
- North American and Scandinavian flights would be welcome in Ireland West Airport.
- Supports are needed for Sean Mac Diarmada homestead. Significant numbers are visiting this homestead and Leitrim County Council needs to do more in this regard.
- Members said it is not good enough that the public are paying LPT and are not getting public lighting in some of their housing estates, which is the case in Kinlough.
- Can Leitrim County Council take in charge particular services within housing estates e.g. lighting and roads

Mr Vincent Dwyer, Head of Finance replied as follows:

- The revenue Budget does not include expenditure for the completion of unfinished housing estates, this is addressed through the Capital Investment Plan.
- Acknowledged that Úisce Éireann has a veto over the taking in charge of estates. The Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage are currently in discussions with Úisce Éireann in relation to stranded costs,
- Úisce Éireann will hold a workshop with the elected members on Monday 4th December.
- Service Level Agreement is in place with Úisce Éireann and each Local Authority for the next 3 years.

Mr Justin Fannon, Director of Services replied as follows:

- The figure in the budget for Urban and Village Renewal relates to salaries,
- Tourism accommodation is being monitored and efforts are being undertaken to get it addressed.
- Sean MacDiarmada homestead is under the auspices of the OPW.

Mr Joesph Gilhooly replied as follows:

- Individual services in housing estates cannot be taken in charge. Outstanding issues with underground services need to be addressed before the estate is taken in charge by the Local Authority.
- Leitrim County Council contribute to Ireland West Airport. The staff of Ireland West Airport constantly strive to get additional routes and traffic into the airport. The routes mentioned by the members will be highlighted with the management of the Ireland West Airport.

Mr Shay O'Connor, Senior Engineer replied as follows:

- 7 Estates in North Leitrim and 6 Estates in South Leitrim are currently being considered for taking in charge,
- A list of the estates that are being considered will be forwarded to the members.

Environmental Services

Mr Vincent Dwyer advised that the WRC agreement regarding the Retained Fire Service will be funded by the Government.

- A Community Climate Action Officer and a Climate Action Co-Ordinator have been recruited. A Climate Action Plan is currently being prepared and this is being funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage

The members raised the following queries in regard to Environmental Services:

- Street cleaning services should be further enhanced in towns and villages,
- Fly tipping is on the increase, is there anything that can be done to stop this issue from destroying our county?
- Maintenance of gullies should be carried out two or three times a year in housing estates. This work needs to be carried out when leaves are falling in Autumn.
- Will a third Litter Warden be employed?
- There should be greater enforcement regarding derelict sites,
- Do all households have to do show how they dispose of their refuse.

Mr Vincent Dwyer, responded to the members queries as follows:

- There are currently 2 Community Wardens, and this will increase to 3.
- In relation to waste management, changing the behaviour of people can be difficult and a litter campaign is run every year. Mr Dwyer acknowledged fly tipping is an issue, but the Local Authority will continue to campaign to change this behaviour.
- People have a responsibility to dispose of their own waste properly. Waste Presentation Bylaws are in place. If members have any particular concern with dumping or fly tipping in an area, they should contact Mr Dwyer directly in this regard.

Mr Terry McGovern confirmed that he will review the maintenance of the gullies.

Recreation & Amenity

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

The members raised the following queries in relation to Recreation and Amenities:

- Have the Library Service enough of staff in the event of protests at a branch?
- Increase in funding for Tidy Towns and Community Groups is welcomed,
- Clarification of what the €80,885 covers under Media, Tourism, Art, Culture, Sport & the Gaeltacht
- What is the completion date for the Library in Dromahair.

- Are there many mini sweepers in the county? The service provided through the use of this equipment in Carrick-on-Shannon was commended.
- Important that every house in each housing estate pay to their Residents Association who look after the upkeep of their green areas.
- SEUPB income funding was queried.

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

- The income figure of €80,85 represents a grant from the Arts Council
- Dromahair Library is due to be completed by April 2024
- Health & Safety procedures are in place in regard to protests at libraries.
- Payments by the Housing Department to Residents Associations in respect of Local Authority housing units in estates is under review,
- A specific application has been submitted to SEUPB through the PEACEPLUS programme for the Carrick Sports Campus Building

Mr Terry McGovern responded to the members queries as follows:

- There is one mini sweeper in the county. Mini Sweepers are very expensive, consideration of deploying mini sweepers in other areas will be reviewed.

Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare

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

- The drainage allocation has increased to €60,000.

The members welcomed the increase in funding for drainage and said this could be trebled as it is badly needed.

Miscellaneous Services

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

- A provision is made to cover the 2024 Local Election Process

Mr. Joseph Gilhooly advised the members in order to ensure the continued enabling and delivery of the 6 year Capital Investment Programme it is necessary to include a 3.5% increase in commercial rates in the 2024 budget, which 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 Joseph Gilhooly, 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 Callian Ellis seconded by Councillor Paddy Farrell AND AGREED

“That Leitrim County Council adopts for the financial year ending 31st December 2024, the Budget set out in Tables A and F and by resolution determined in accordance with the said Budget the rate set out in Table A to be the Annual Rate on Valuation to be levied for that year for the purposes set out in those Tables.”

Councillor Des Guckian opposed the budget, highlighting that there was no energy funding this year, funding should be doubled for Roads and Housing and the LPT is grossly unfair for rural dwellers.

MM.166.23 Determine, by resolution, the Annual Rate on Valuation to be levied for the financial year ending 31st December 2024 for the several purposes specified in the Adopted Budget

Proposed by Councillor Justin Warnock 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 2024. The Annual Rate on Valuation determined was 0.2436”.

MM.167.23 Approve, by resolution, the application of a 75% abatement of rates due by liable persons, in respect of vacant properties for the financial year ending 31 December 2024.

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

“That Leitrim County Council approve by resolution the application of a 75% abatement of rates due by liable persons in respect of vacant properties for the financial year ending 31 December 2024”.

MM.168.23 Receive report on the Programme of Capital Works 2024-2029

Mr. Vincent Dwyer referred to the Capital Works Programme 2023-2029, as circulated to the members.

The members raised the following queries:

- Date for the completion of the Public Realm works and Fire Station in Manorhamilton
- Match funding of €5 million will be expensive for Leitrim.
- Update on CFRAMs project
- Update of Carrick Dromod By Pass
- Delegation in regard to Lennox Bridge

Mr Shay O'Connor responded to the members as follows:

- Some issues are outstanding on the Manorhamilton Public Realm works
- Manorhamilton Fire Station application has been referred to An Bord Pleanála for consideration
- Carrick & Leitrim Village CFRAMS schemes must be considered by An Bord Pleanála for decision. An Bord Pleanála don't have to make a decision within a specific time period and the timeframe can be lengthy

Mr Terry McGovern responded to the members as follows:

- Lennox Bridge: an options report is with the TII and then it will go through the Planning Process
- Carrick-on-Shannon and Dromod Bypass is progressing. Currently working through Phase 3 and Phase 4 which is due to be completed by 2026.

On the proposal of Cllr Justin Warnock and seconded by Cllr Felim Gurn it was agreed that Leitrim County Council write to the Minister for Transport seeking a delegation with representatives from both Donegal County Council and Leitrim County Council to meet the Minister in regard to expediting and progressing the Lennox Bridge Project, as the existing bridge is narrow and dangerous for current traffic flows between the country boundaries of Leitrim and Donegal.

The Capital Works programme was noted by the members.

MM.169.23 AOB

The Members extended a vote of congratulations to the following:

- Ballinamore Sean O'Heslins Ladies on winning the Connacht LGFA Intermediate Club Championship Final
- Carrigallen GAA Healthy Club on winning the Pride of Place Award in their category "Welcoming New Communities".
- Shane McGourty on winning the World Irish Dancing Champion.

Ms Quinn advised that a workshop will be held with Irish Water at 12.30 pm on 4th December 2023 following the JPC Meeting in Áras an Chontae, Carrick-on-Shannon.

This concluded the business of the meeting at 1.40 pm

Signed:

Councillor Justin Warnock
Cathaoirleach

Kieran Brett
Meetings Administrator

Dated: Monday, 8 January 2024