

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE
MINUTES OF STATUTORY BUDGET MEETING FOR GALWAY COUNTY
COUNCIL HELD AT ARAS AN CHONTAE, PROSPECT HILL, GALWAY ON THURSDAY 1st
DECEMBER AT 12.00

I LATHAR:

CATHAOIRLEACH:

Cllr. Michael Connolly
Cathaoirleach of the County of Galway

BAILL:

Cllrs. J. Byrne, N. Byrne, Canning, Charity, D. Connolly, Comh. O’Cualáin, Cllrs. Cuddy, Cunniffe, Comh. O’Curraoin, Donnellan, Donohue, Fahy, Feeney, G. Finnerty, M. Finnerty, Healy, Hoade, Hynes, Joyce, Kearney, Keaveney, Killilea, Kinane, Maher, Mannion, McClearn, K. McHugh, T. McHugh, Noone, Roche, Thomas, Comh. Ó Tuairisg, Cllrs. Walsh & Welby.

OIFIGH:

Mr. Kevin Kelly, Chief Executive, Mr. G. Mullarkey, Head of Finance, Mr. J. Cullen, Director of Service, Ms. C. Mc Connell A/Director of Service, Mr M. Owens, A/Director of Service, Mr. M. Timmins, A/Director of Service, Ms. Eimear Dolan, A/County Secretary & Meetings Administrator, Mr. M. McGovern, Management Accountant, Ms. M. McGann, Administrative Officer, Ms. F. Miskell, Asst. Staff Officer, Ms. M. Donohue, Senior Staff Officer.

Thosnaigh an cruinniú leis an paidir.

The Cathaoirleach Cllr. Michael Connolly welcomed the elected members, officials and the press to the Statutory 2017 Budget Meeting.

RESOLUTIONS OF SYMPATHY

2893

A resolution of sympathy was also extended to the following:

Gearóid Forde, Clonboo Cross, Corrandulla, Co. Galway.

Padraic Reaney, Mossfort, Caherlistrane, Co. Galway.

Pauline Ryan, Hymany Park, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.

Mrs. Joe Quinn, Coill Rua, Indreabhán, Co. na Gaillimhe.

CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF BUDGET FOR YEAR 2017

2894

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Michael Connolly, advised that the first item on the Agenda was the consideration and adoption of the Budget for 2017 and he requested the Chief Executive to introduce the Draft Budget.

The Chief Executive referred to the significant discussions which had taken place to date in relation to the budgetary process including discussions on the Local Property Tax, the General Municipal Allocations, and the draft budget now before the Council. He stated that the Council's total proposed expenditure for 2017 of €105m was equivalent to 2003 levels, despite the extensive range of services which the Council now provides under the various service headings. He outlined that the expenditure budget had reduced by 34% from €160m to €105m since 2008 and in the same period staff numbers had reduced by 31% from 1,075 to 746 whole time equivalents (wte). He stated that while the scale, context and relative priority of services may differ between local authorities, comparison through published data with other similar sized local authorities counties show that Galway has;

- The highest population at 2011 census
- The lowest wte staffing levels at the end of 2015
- The lowest commercial rate income
- The lowest Revenue budget in monetary terms
- The lowest Revenue budget per head of population

In terms of the Local Government Fund, Galway had an equivalent share to comparable counties in 2007 (€38.4m in a range of €27.6 - €42.9m), however this had reduced significantly by 2013 (€12.5m in a range of €11 - €22.7m). He stated that the Council had managed its finances by not spending when funds were not available, and national comparison figures from the National Oversight and Audit Commission showed that Galway County Council had the;

- lowest per capita spending on the library service
- 2nd lowest per capita spend on planning
- 4th lowest spend on ICT
- 6th lowest per unit spend on housing repair and maintenance

However, he stated that increased spending was needed in many areas and the requirement to curtail current revenue spending had to be considered in the context that it may lead to increased costs or significant problems at a later date.

He outlined that the decision of the Members to increase the Local Property Tax realised additional income of €1.45m and was absolutely fundamental and necessary to provide a balanced and realistic budget. Without this income, the impact on essential services would have been significant, with cuts to roads funding of €800,000, housing of €130,000 and economic and community development of €160,000.

The Chief Executive stated that the Council had introduced many initiatives since 2008 to reduce costs, but many of these such as procurement had reached a point where there were diminished returns from further actions. He outlined areas where developments

outside the control of the Council had resulted in additional expenditure costs in the region of €1.25m;

- Increased cost of insurance premia	€340,000
- Increased costs of CAMP West due to withdrawal of HSE	€ 81,000
- Reduced recoupment for the operation of Recycling Centres	€ 50,000
- Increased costs of Public Lighting	€100,000
- Non-recoupment of lost income on global valuations	€570,000
- Reduced staff numbers recouped by Irish Water	€140,000

The Chief Executive explained that the draft budget made provision for amending various components of housing rents and progressing the merger of the commercial rate in the former Ballinasloe Town Council with that pertaining in the rest of the county, and this increase was a necessary part of balancing the budget.

He stated that the proposed Capital Scheme for Tourism and Amenity is a great opportunity to deliver tangible benefits to local communities through projects of a capital nature, and that the scheme will be devised in consultation with relevant Units of the Council and brought before the Members in due course. He noted that there will be a co-funding requirement to be met by applicants, and the criteria for assessment will be based on corporate objectives in respect of tourism and economic development, and the relative merit and priority of proposals.

The Chief Executive clarified that there was no provision for increasing staff numbers, and expressed his appreciation to the staff of the Council for their work in ensuring the continued delivery of services. He thanked the Directors of Services and their staff for the examination of budget headings during the preparation of their draft budgets, and in particular, acknowledged the work of Mr. Ger Mullarkey, Mr. Michael McGovern, Ms. Caitriona Lusby, Ms. Bernadette O'Connor and the staff in the Finance Unit.

The Chief Executive then recommended the adoption of the Draft Budget 2017.

The Cathaoirleach then invited comments or submissions from the Members on the Draft Budget.

Comh. T. O'Curraoin stated that the current financial situation was very difficult due to reduced funds and lower staff levels and felt that pressure must be put on central government to allocate additional funding to local government.

Cllr. M. Fahy stated that if the Local Property Tax had not been increased, it would have resulted in a very bad budget. He referred to the need to reform local government and the need for greater efficiency between Councillors. He stated that the role of Cathaoirleach was very important and onerous in terms of attendance at functions and proposed that the Cathaoirleach's allowance be increased to €50,000 and Councillor's allowance be increased to €30,000. This proposal was seconded by Cllr. S. Walsh.

Cllr. M. Hoade stated that the comparison with other County Councils presented some startling information and in light of Galway's higher population, she requested the full

comparative data regarding neighbouring counties. Cllr. Hoade stated that it was difficult times for the local authority and any business would have difficulty framing a budget with a €55m reduction in spending and 330 less staff, however, the Council was managing to provide the same level of services. Cllr. Hoade stated that members had not wanted to increase the Local Property Tax but had to in the circumstances, however, adequate funding was needed for future years as many service areas required more funding.

Cllr. P. Roche stated that it was very difficult and complex to frame a budget in the current climate, and as one of the larger local authorities, we need to appeal for more funding as additional services such as LEO cannot be provided without certainty of funding. He referenced the commentary at the City Council Meeting regarding the contribution by this Council towards the European Capital of Culture and enquired if the €45m allocation to be discussed at the January meeting will be sufficient for the entirety of the project. He also queried the collection rate for Local Property Tax and whether it is at the level expected and required.

Cllr. P. Hynes stated that there had been a huge reduction in funding over the years, and the reductions in staff levels were felt most on the front line and had a knock-on effect on the upgrade and repair of local roads, hedge-trimming and drainage. He stated that additional funding was needed to address these issues, and the crisis in housing provision. Cllr. M. Maher stated that it was a difficult budget to balance. He stated that the role of the Councillor was diminishing and it was necessary to work together to make a difference. Cllr. Maher noted that he wished to make an improvement to BO502 Public Lighting.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Maher, **SECONDED** by Cllr. Hoade, the Members **AGREED** the following: All thirty-nine Councillors can if they wish allocate, up to a maximum of €3000 from their Notice of Motion (NOM) allocation to erect a Street Light in their area in consultation with the Area Engineer'.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the proposal to allocate N.O.M. funding to Public Lighting but cautioned that any such proposals would have to be examined in light of the relative priority of works, public safety, and other considerations such as ensuring a commonality of approach across the county. He stated that the public lighting allocation had been increased this year by €100,000 and may have to increase next year by at least €150,000 due to the ongoing process of changing the billing process from general tariff to individual rates. There were other considerations such as the national study of energy efficient options and the Council had to recognise all the constraints in relation to maintenance costs before adding to the existing network.

Cllr. D. Joyce stated that an examination of future funding was required if Galway, as the second largest county, was not receiving the same levels of funding as other counties. He stated the the reduction of roads funding was a major problem and queried if Councillors N.O.M. funding could be increased. He stated that outdoor staff needed to be replaced to carry out local works as the reduction in numbers over the years was alarming.

Cllr. J. Byrne stated that he would prefer to describe the Council's glass as 'half-full' and that this was testament to the wonderful work being carried out across many areas, such as provision of new housing units, progression to a planning application for South Galway Flood Relief Scheme, and works being done in partnership with Community Groups. In

particular, he referred to the Community Awards the previous night, and congratulated Cllrs. Kinnane and McClearn who were involved with 2 groups whose work was recognised.

Cllr. D. Connolly queried how the expenditure of €893,606 for land drainage costs would be allocated across the Municipal Districts and also queried if the full cost of global valuation would be borne by the Council this year. He stated that significant funding was required to deal with issues such as homelessness and the overall level of expenditure was unacceptable and if Members accepted a budget based on this expenditure, the pressure would get worse in future years.

Comh. S. O'Tuairisg stated that it was very difficult to frame a budget under current funding arrangements, and with staff resources reduced by a third, and that the Council is faring poorly compared to the resources available to other County Councils.

Cllr. M. Finnerty stated that the comparative figures provided by the Chief Executive were very useful and he expressed his appreciation to the Cathaoirleach for his efforts in relation to commercial rates in Ballinasloe. He referred to the statement on page 90 of the Draft Budget Report that there were no derelict sites currently on the Register, and requested that the accuracy of this statement be examined.

Comh. S. O'Cualain stated that the biggest problems encountered in recent years were as a result of 'mother nature' and an ongoing budget was needed for coastal damage. He added that clarification was required on the breakdown of responsibility for piers between the Department of Marine and the Council, and for drainage between the OPW and Council. He queried why the N.O.M. allocation per Councillor was €40,000 in Mayo versus €18,000 in Galway.

Cllr. B. Connolly stated that if the Council wanted to avoid ongoing reductions and comparisons, a cross-party approach was required in early 2017 to approach central government regarding additional funding. He said he wished to formally welcome the allocation of €392,000 Clar funding.

Cllr. A. Donohue stated that a comparison of expenditure figures over a period of 10 years was unrealistic and a more feasible comparison would be over a 5 year period. He stated that the local economy in Ballinasloe was still suffering from low footfall and he stated that the proposed increase in the Ballinasloe rate from €55 - €61 should be halved to €55 - €58.

Cllr. E. Mannion stated that a tough decision had been made by Members to increase the Local Property Tax in order to maintain services. She welcomed the €1.5m allocation for Tourism and Amenity capital projects, and other projects in the Draft Budget Report for the Connemara region, especially the Fire Station in An Cheathrú Rua which had come to fruition after many years. She expressed the hope that there would be more awareness and uptake of the Rates Incentive Scheme in 2017.

Cllr. I. Canning stated that the loss of outdoor staff was a major problem and queried if outdoor staff would be replaced on retirement.

Cllr. M. Kinnane stated that the Draft Budget showed the stark reality of the funding crisis and a balanced budget was only possible because of the decision to raise Local Property Tax to protect frontline services. She stressed that action needed to be taken from January 2017 to engage with Public Representatives and central government regarding funding support for future years.

Cllr. J. Charity stated that it wasn't accurate to say that the same level of services were being maintained from year to year, as the standard of infrastructure in rural areas and roads were in poor condition. He stated that the Local Property Tax increase was used to plug the gap and if the Members continued to approve budgets on this funding basis, they should expect the same results. He queried what Council Management were doing to make a case for Departmental funding, and requested an outline of the creditors figure for the Council, in particular regarding shared services. He queried the reduction in the overall funding for Recreation and requested clarification on the NPPR budgetary figure. He stated that the proposal to increase the Cathaoirleach's allowance was outrageous in the current budgetary climate.

Cllr. M. Noone referred to the cost of delivering water to all households and stated that rural Ireland had no problem in paying towards Group Water Schemes and were used to doing so, and the country was being held to ransom by the cities regarding payment of water charges. Cllr. Noone stated that the Cathaoirleach's allowance should not be increased, and that all Councillors needed to address the issue of funding with central government in Dublin.

The Cathaoirleach clarified that he did not agree with Cllr. M. Fahy's proposal to increase the Cathaoirleach's allowance.

Cllr. K. McHugh referred to the reduction in roads funding from €31.5m to €18.5m and stated that it was unfortunate a natural disaster had to occur to release additional departmental funding. She agreed that the Council had to go back to central government regarding funding as services are not being provided to an adequate level.

Cllr. D. Burke queried the impact of the proposed rate increase in Ballinasloe as outlined in the Draft Budget Report, and stated that he recognised that the increase in rates had to be made, but he felt it would have to be done slowly over time.

Cllr. P. Feeney stated that this year's budgetary process was very difficult and the comparison with other counties showed that something has to happen and he would encourage making a case for extra funding to central government. He welcomed the €1.5m allocation for Tourism & Amenity which could make a great difference to local communities if it was built on from year to year.

Cllr. N. Thomas stated that the only solution to facing this same situation every year was to secure more funding from central government. He agreed with Cllr. Canning that outdoor staffing levels needed to be addressed as current response times were too long.

Cllr. Thomas queried the figure owed by the City Council to County Council and it's impact on the budget.

Cllr. T. McHugh stated that the decision taken to increase Local Property Tax by 10% was not something which can be done continuously and the few income streams available to the Council were under severe pressure.

Cllr. S. Donnellan stated that he hadn't wanted to increase Local Property Tax but it was necessary to deliver services, and he welcomed the €1.5m funding for Tourism projects which would hopefully be of benefit to businesses and communities going forward.

Cllr. J. Cuddy pointed out that the allocation for the Oranmore/Athenry M.D. excluding roads was 11.6% of the total, however the area accounted for 20% of Local Property Tax proceeds for the county, and he felt this could not be justified. He stated that the public were angry that all proceeds from taxes were remitted to Dublin and weren't being fed back, and central government needed to step up to the plate in terms of providing funding.

Cllr. M. Noone complimented the work being done by Municipal District Engineers and stated that Councillors N.O.M. monies can be utilised best in consultation with the Engineers.

Cllr. T. Healy stated that the financial audit of the Council showed that that the Council was very prudent in terms of its budgeting, but was clearly not getting enough support from central government and the funding model as a whole was flawed. He queried whether the Council was at a loss of €800,000 from global valuations, and also queried the budgetary position on street cleaning.

The Chief Executive advised the Members that they had a choice to adopt the budget or not, however, if they failed to do so the Council could fall and be replaced by a Commissioner. He pointed out that in addition to the €105m revenue budget and capital spend, the Council sought and was allocated funding from other sources such as REDS, Urban & Village Renewal, Clár and other initiatives and opportunities for co-funding to deliver for our communities.

In relation to staffing, the Chief Executive clarified that there was not an embargo on filling existing vacancies, the issue was the capacity to fund these posts. Outdoor staff who retire could be replaced and the outdoor staffing numbers were being reviewed by the Roads Unit who would draw up a staff structure and the Council can work towards that in the future. In relation to a query from Cllr Canning regarding existing vacancies, he stated that the objective of the Council is not to allow staffing numbers reduce any further. He referred to the agreement to increase the LEO staffing allocation by 3-4 staff members which would lead to a significant increase in delivery of services through the Unit and in collaboration with CEED Unit, but would in the long-term lead to increased costs.

In relation to the European Capital of Culture, the Chief Executive clarified that €45m is the budget for overall progression and he wouldn't see this increasing although there may be changes within the budget, and he confirmed that there would be a presentation to the

Members in early 2017 to determine the contribution, timeframe and method of payment. He stated that the bill for shared services was a separate matter. He clarified that the methodology for billing for shared services had changed over time and a review was undertaken by both local authorities in recent years to agree a new methodology and the amounts to be paid by the City. All previous amounts were paid up-to-date and the only outstanding issue was agreement over the amount of any shortfall to be paid by the City Council under the new methodology for the past few years, and he would revert to the Members once this was agreed and available.

In relation to Notice of Motion allocations, the Chief Executive confirmed that N.O.M.'s were peculiar to a small number of local authorities and he did not envisage that an increase in the allocation would lead to a better outcome than existed at the moment, as the overall funding was assigned to roads in any case.

In relation to the budgetary position for storm or coastal damage, the Chief Executive clarified that allocations from the OPW may not be in the Draft Budget as they were separate allocations. He clarified that allocations for drainage works were in the budget, as well as any co-funding requirements.

In relation to raising the commercial rate for Ballinasloe Town, the Chief Executive stated that the Members should reflect on pushing the amalgamation of rates outwards as it will delay any increase in the county rate, and a point will come where additional funding may be required from that source. He advised the Members that reducing the proposed increase by 50% would require a reduction in expenditure of €63,000 across other expenditure areas, and would push out the period for amalgamation.

In relation to funding, the Chief Executive stated that the Members could be assured that everything was being done at executive level, both administratively and politically, to make a case for extra funding. He advised that he would circulate the figures regarding the comparative financial situation to the Members.

G. Mullarkey clarified that the reduction in the budgetary figure for Recreation & Amenity was due to a reduction in the Community Employment Scheme budget from €1.5m to €1m which was a contra item, and there was no net loss to the Council. He also clarified that the NPPR budget included provision for 2 staff members and €50,000 for refunds for those who satisfied the relevant criteria.

In relation to a query from Cllr. G. Cronnelly regarding the budget for sewerage scheme upgrades, J. Cullen confirmed that waste water schemes will be continued into 2017, and schemes due to open such as Claregalway and Milltown will facilitate additional development when they come to fruition. In relation to a query from Cllr. S. Walsh regarding issuing of fire bills where property had been lost to the fire, he stated that the Council can't forego charging without cutting expenditure elsewhere, however, the Fire Station can look at individual cases in terms of its waiver scheme.

The meeting was then adjourned.

In reply to a query from Cllr. D. Connolly regarding the breakdown of the budget for drainage works across the Municipal Districts, the Chief Executive clarified the breakdown of expenditure across the drainage districts and projects.

In reply to a query from Cllr. T. Healy regarding the urgency of providing LED lighting in the immediate future, the Chief Executive stated that the provision of LED public lighting is the way forward but a full-scale programme of works is beyond our capabilities currently, however it may be possible to have further discussions with SEAI following completion of the study at national level.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Noone, and **SECONDED** by Comh S. O'Tuairisg, it was **AGREED** "to reduce the provision for local representation/civic leadership in Service H0904 Expenses by €3,500 and increase the provision for Community Sport and Recreational Development in Service F0401 Community Grants. The impact of same will be to transfer €3,500 from the Councillors Conference and Training allocations to the provision of Community Grants in order to facilitate the Council providing a grant to support an initiative by Coláiste Bhaile Chláir, subject to the normal requirements pertaining to community grants.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. T. Broderick, **SECONDED** by Comh. S. O'Cualain , it was **AGREED** to allow Cllr. Broderick to allocate €1,200 from his training monies to Kilconnell Graveyard Committee, towards development of car parking at the new cemetery.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. T. Broderick, **SECONDED** by Comh. S. O'Cualain , it was **AGREED** subject to the normal requirements of Community Grants to allow Cllr. Broderick to allocate €1,500 from his training and conference monies to Pdraig Pearses GAA Club at Ballymacward, towards the development of a car parking area at the pitch.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. T. Broderick, **SECONDED** by Comh. S. O'Cualain , it was **AGREED** subject to the normal requirements of Community Grants, to allow Cllr. Broderick to allocate €750 from his training monies to Kiltormer Community Sports Complex, towards the purchase of a defibrillator storage box", subject to the normal requirements pertaining to community grants.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. M. Finnerty, **SECONDED** by Cllr. J. Byrne , it was **AGREED** subject to the normal requirements of Community Grants, to allow Cllr. Finnerty to allocate €3,500 (2800 + 700) from his Training and Conference allowance to Ballinasloe Town Twinning Group,

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. B. Connolly, **SECONDED** by Cllr. D. Joyce, , it was **AGREED** subject to the normal requirements of Community Grants to allow Cllr. Connolly to allocate €1,700 of his Conference funds as follows:

- A) €700 – Lavally Community Group – for purchase of defibrillator
- B) €1,000 – Corofin Community Development Group – for Community Walkway

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. D. Connolly, **SECONDED** by Cllr. T. Healy, it was **AGREED** subject to the normal requirements of Community Grants, to allow Cllr. Connolly to allocate €1,500 to Cumann Cunochnaichta na Gaillimhe for development work on the new County Pitch Project at Kilreekil from his conference/training allocation.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. A. Donohue, **SECONDED** by Cllr. D. Burke , it was **AGREED** to reject the proposed rates increase in the old Ballinasloe U.D.C. area to a rate of 61.00 and instead propose a new rate of €58.00.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. N. Thomas, **SECONDED** by Cllr. E. Mannion, it was **AGREED** that Galway County Council would continue in their support for Galway Mountain Rescue and provide them with the €10,000 funding again in this year's budget, from Community Grants. Cllr. D. Killilea suggested that Galway Mountain Rescue be invited to make a presentation to the Members.

Cllr. J. Byrne queried the re-allocation of conference & training money and queried whether it could be spent on any purpose selected by the Members. Mr. M. Owens clarified that there was a process in place for re-allocation of conference/training monies to N.O.M. roads funding, and if Councillors wished to allocate funding for another purpose, it was allocated to that expenditure heading and ringfenced for the specified purpose subject to normal criteria. In this instance, the monies were allocated to Community Grants and ringfenced for the agreed purpose subject to the group applying and meeting the normal criteria for funding.

Cllr. S. Cunniffe queried the figure for irrecoverable rates, and the collection of Rates in the Tuam Area, and in response, G. Mullarkey replied that these would be made available to Cllr. Cunniffe once collated under the new financial system. In reply to Cllr. Cunniffe's query regarding expenditure on public conveniences in Tuam, J. Cullen replied that a 10 year contract followed by a 5 year maintenance period was agreed and the Council would need to check if it was tied into contractual obligations.

Cllr. T. Welby stated that a Finance Committe should be established to examine all headings in detail and look at all financing and rebate options on an ongoing basis.

Cllr. D. Connolly queried the loss from global valuation and in response, the Chief Executive confirmed that the revised valuation was part of the normal valuation process which resulted in reductions in some valuations and increases in others.

Cllr. M. Fahy confirmed that he was deferring his earlier motion regarding increasing the allowance for Cathaoirleach and Councillors.

Cllr. J. McClearn complimented the officials on a very comprehensive and pro-business budget and highlighted Council-led initiatives such as free parking for December, the Tourism Strategy fund of €1.5m, Town & Village Renewal Schemes, and the new housing scheme coming on stream. He acknowledged that the reduction in the proposed rate for Ballinasloe would require a reduction in expenditure of €63,000.

It was **PROPOSED** by Cllr. J. McClearn, and **SECONDED** by Cllr. M. Hoade, to consider and adopt the draft Budget for 2017 subject to the following amendments:

1. The increase in the Ballinasloe Rate be reduced from €61 to €58. This will affect the following and require reductions as follows:
2. B0405 – Local Roads - €25,000
3. E1101 – Operations Fire Services - €10,000
4. E1103 – Fire Services Training - €10,000
5. D0501 – Tourism Development - €10,000

6. F0301 – Parks & Open Space - €8,000

The Cathaoirleach requested the motion proceed to a vote and the sign in process for the vote was commenced.

The result of the vote was as follows:

FOR:

Cllr. Aidan Donohue	Cllr. Donagh Killilea	Cllr. Donal Burke	Cllr. Eileen Mannion
Cllr. Frank Kearney	Cllr. Ivan Canning	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn	Cllr. Joe Byrne
Cllr. Malachy Noone	Cllr. Martina Kinane	Cllr. Mary Hoade	Cllr. Michael Connolly
Cllr. Michael Fahy	Cllr. Michael Finnerty	Cllr. Michael Maher	Cllr. Niamh Byrne
Cllr. Noel Thomas	Cllr. Pat Hynes	Cllr. Peter Feeney	Cllr. Peter Keaveney
Cllr. Peter Roche	Cllr. Seamus Walsh	Cllr. Shane Donnellan	Cllr. Tom McHugh

Comh. Ó Tuairisg

[25]

AGAINST:

Cllr. Billy Connelly	Cllr. Dermot Connolly	Cllr. Des Joyce	Cllr. James Charity
Cllr. Jim Cuddy	Cllr. Karey McHugh	Cllr. Shaun Cunniffe	Cllr. Thomas Welby
Cllr. Tom Healy	Comh. Seosamh Ó Cualáin		Comh. Ó Curraoin

[11]

ABSTAIN:

[0]

The Meetings Administrator noted the result of the vote and the Cathaoirleach declared the vote carried, and reminded the Members to send out the message now to all public representatives that we don't wish to be in the same financial position this time next year.

DETERMINATION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BUDGET ADOPTED, OF THE RATE ON VALUATION TO BE LEVIED FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER, 2017 2895

It was **PROPOSED** by Cllr. T. McHugh, **SECONDED** by Cllr. Hoade and **AGREED** to determine, in accordance with the Budget adopted, the rate of valuation to be levied for the financial year ending 31-12-2017.

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE ESTIMATED OUTTURNS 2016

2896

It was proposed by Cllr. Hoade, **SECONDED** by Cllr. McClearn and **AGREED** to adopt the estimated outturns for 2016.

TO NOTE THE REPORT ON THE THREE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME

2897

It was **PROPOSED** by Cllr. McClearn, **SECONDED** by Cllr. Donnellan and **AGREED** that the Report on the 3 year Capital Programme be noted.

TO NOTE THE ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT ON THE GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN 2015 -2019 IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 134 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2001 (AS AMENDED)

2898

It was **PROPOSED** by Cllr. Mannion, **SECONDED** by Cllr. Maher and **AGREED** that the Annual Progress Report on Corporate Plan 2015-2019 be noted.

TO CONSIDER AND IF DEEMED APPROPRIATE TO AUTHORISE THE ATTENDANCE AT TRAINING IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 142 (5a) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2001 (AS AMENDED) **2899**

It was **PROPOSED** by Cllr. F. Kearney, **SECONDED** by Cllr. T. McHugh, and **AGREED**, that the attendance of the Members named hereunder at the AILG – Regional & Local Development & Review of new Regional Assemblies, Red Cow Moran’s Hotel, Dublin, on 19th November 2016 be authorised:

Cllr. Michael Maher

It was **PROPOSED** by Cllr. J. Byrne, **SECONDED** by Cllr. F. Kearney, and **AGREED**, that the attendance of the Members named hereunder at the AILG – Module 6 Regional Assemblies, Shearwater Hotel, Ballinasloe, on 24th November 2016 be authorised:

Comh. Seán O’ Tuairisg

Cllr. Seamas Walsh

Cllr. Tom Welby

Cllr. Donagh Killilea

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS **2900**

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. T Healy, **SECONDED** by it was **AGREED** that the Standing Orders be suspended in order to allow the Meeting continue after 5 p.m. and allow a discussion on the Ferry Service to Inis Mór.

Comh. S. O’Tuairisg said there was a highly critical situation regarding the ferry service to Inis Mór and asked the Chief Executive to give an outline of the current situation.

The Chief Executive briefly recapped on the situation that went back to 2010 when the Bye-Laws were drafted and Members agreed a proposal to reduce the charge from €1.20 to 0.80c per visitor and a €5 annual fee for multi-trip users. The Service Provider took cases to the High Court and Supreme Court who both found in favour of the Council and found that the charge set by the Council was modest, was set after proper analysis and debate, and its collection would not be an administrative burden on the Service Provider. On 8th November 2016, Island Ferries Teoranta accepted the principle of the Bye-Laws and put forward a proposal to reduce the levy from 0.80c to 0.40c, remove the €5 charge, and retrospectively apply the revised charge from 2012 to 2016. The Chief Executive reminded the Members that the original charge was €1.20, legal fees remain unpaid by the Service Provider, and they claim the introduction of the fees has seriously affected their commercial viability despite the fact that the charge would be passed on and not subsumed by the Provider. The Chief Executive gave the example of how the Bye-Laws could be implemented by the Provider as follows:

- The per passenger charge could be increased from €24 to €25
- €0.80 would be in respect of the Bye-Laws

- €0.20 would be in respect of the administration of the scheme

The Chief Executive noted that adoption of Bye-Laws was a reserved function and he was representing the Members in discussions with the Company, while ensuring the Bye-Laws were implemented and respected.

Comh. S. O'Tuairisg stated that it was vital to engage with Island Ferries Teoranta to resolve the situation without compromising the spirit of the Bye-Laws and he proposed that the Chief Executive meet with the Company again on condition that the service is resumed immediately and with a view to entering a Public Service Agreement to guarantee the service in the future. Cllr. E. Mannion seconded this proposal and added that the Department also be requested to participate in a timely meeting, and that in the spirit of fairness, the Service Provider should re-instate the service while talks are ongoing.

Comh. S. O'Cualain stated that he was in favour of dialogue as the only way forward and that this was a very serious situation and the service should be restored as soon as possible.

Cllr. Thomas stated that an immediate ferry service was required, including an emergency service if necessary. He stated that from his discussions with the service provider, he would collect 0.40c but did not wish to implement a charge for multi-users.

Cllr. N. Byrne welcomed the proposal of Comh. O'Tuairisg and stated that it was shocking that the Chief Executive had to sit in talks regarding the ongoing provision of the service when the issue had been decided in the Courts. She stated she was in agreement with Cllr. Mannion that the meeting should be timely and hoped that it could be resolved quickly now that the Service Provider had accepted the principle of the Bye-Laws.

Cllr. T. Healy stated that the Council's duty of care to the islanders is the foremost priority, followed by a duty of care to the employees of the ferry provider, and called on the Chief Executive to resolve the issue tomorrow and inform Members of the update. He queried the Council's payment towards a Harbour Master and whether this was being recouped.

Comh. O'Curraoin stated that this issue was dragging on for years, and the fees issue should have been decided before the pier was built as the Department were now washing their hands of the issue.

Cllr. P. Roche said that he felt compelled to say that the Chief Executive could not have been more generous in agreeing to meetings with Island Ferries Teo., and stated that as the matter had huge budgetary implications, all Councillors should be kept informed.

Cllr. Walsh stated that this was a serious problem as any contractor or provider of a service should be compliant with all legal requirements and where they fail, it should be a duty of government to reach a solution. While he welcomed the Chief Executive meeting the company, he felt that Ministerial intervention was required in this case.

Cllr. D. Connolly stated that this issue arose because of privatisation of services and the state has a responsibility to intervene to provide transport. He proposed that the 3 state

departments involved not abdicate their responsibility in this regard, and this was seconded by Cllr. S. Walsh.

Cllr. Charity stated that the Ferry Operator was holding the island to ransom and the Department should intervene to ensure the service was re-instated. Cllr. Noone stated that discussions should only take place if the service was in place, as if it was removed, the issue is about provision of emergency services.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. S. O'Tuarisg, **SECONDED** by Cllr. E. Mannion, it was **AGREED** that the Members of Galway County Council mandate the CEO to engage in discussions with Island Ferries management and the Department of the Gaeltacht and Islands, with a view to securing the ferry service to Inis Mór. These discussions must cover all aspects of the costs involved and the per passenger levy without affecting the principle of the Bye-Laws which must remain in place.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. D. Connolly, **SECONDED** by Cllr. S. Walsh, it was **AGREED** that Galway County Council call on the Departments of the Taoiseach, Gaeltacht and Transport to provide emergency ferry services for people on Inis Mór island as a matter of extreme urgency.

The Cathaoirleach thanked everybody for attending the meeting and then declared the meeting closed.

CHRIOCHNAIGH AN CRUINIÚ ANSIN