

Minutes of the Statutory Budget meeting of Monaghan County Council held in the Council Chamber, Mtek Building, Monaghan on Monday 6th January, 2014 at 10.00 a.m.

Chair: Cllr S. Conlon, Mayor.

Present: Cllrs Bannigan, Bennett, Carthy, Carville, Connolly, Crowe, Coyle, Gallagher, Keelan, Maxwell, McElvaney, McKenna, McNally, McPhillips, Murray, O'Brien, O'Hanlon, P. Treanor and S. Treanor.

Mr. E. Cummins, County Manager, Mr. P. Clifford, Mr. A. King, and Mr. D. Treanor, Directors of Service, Mr. J. Murray, Head of Finance, Mr. J. McNally, Financial Management Accountant, Ms. N. Woods, SEO Housing and Ms. C. Thornton, Meetings Administrator.

The Mayor welcomed all present to the first meeting of 2014 and wished everyone a very happy new year.

He also welcomed the new County Manager, Mr. Eugene Cummins, who was taking up appointment that day and wished him a long and productive tenure in Monaghan County Council.

The party whips joined the Mayor in expressing good wishes to Mr. Cummins.

Mr. Cummins thanked the Mayor and members for their good wishes and stated that he had looked forward to coming to Monaghan and to working with the members and executive as one for the betterment of the county. He said that the coming year would be a very exciting one for local government and would form a transition period between the old and the new. He said his emphasis would be on economic development and everything that can be done to create and promote jobs in the county.

The Mayor paid tribute to the outgoing Manager, Mr. David Fallon and to Mr. Paul Clifford for his role as Temporary County Manager.

Budget 2014:

Mr. P. Clifford referred to the Foreword contained in the Draft Budget for 2014. He referred to the implications for the local authority arising out of the transfer of water services to a new state company – Irish Water. He also referred to the abolition of the Town Councils and the establishment of the County Council as the sole local authority in the county. From mid-2014 it is planned to deliver housing, roads community and civic services through three Municipal District – Monaghan, Ballybay-Clones and Carrickmacross-Castleblaney.

He also referred to the fact that eighteen staff will be leaving the organisation under the Voluntary Redundancy Scheme which will require a new framework and approach towards the organisation of services. The Council will continue to maintain its existing services and, through efficiencies, service new functions in the areas of tourism, economic development and community development. Its objective is to deliver services as efficiently and effectively as possible and support the local economy.

Mr. Clifford then informed the members that the Council is pursuing the purchase of 16 houses and development lands on the outskirts of Monaghan Town. The project is at a delicate stage as final contracts have still to be signed. A significant financial contribution is required for the purchase cost of the site. The Council has received confirmation of a grant from the DoECLG towards the purchase of the houses. However due to restrictions of the Government Borrowing Requirement, the council could not borrow to purchase the lands. He had recommended to the Corporate Policy Group the allocation of €400,000 towards the purchase of the site.

Mr. Clifford then responded to queries received from the members.

The Mayor stated that in addition to the objectives referred to by Mr. Clifford, he was advocating that the All-Ireland Fleadh would be hosted in County Monaghan in the near future. He had already met with officials from Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann in this regard. He said the starting point would be the hosting of the Ulster Fleadh in the county in the next few years and he was seeking the support of the members in bringing this to fruition.

On the proposal of Cllr Connolly, seconded by Cllr S. Treanor it was agreed that the Council write to the I.D.A. outlining the fact that a market value has now been established for land in the Monaghan area and enquiring if it has any plans to review their asking price for the land at Knockaconny, Monaghan.

Mr. J. Murray, Head of Finance then proceeded to outline the budget provision for 2014 under the various divisions.

Division J – Central Management Charge

Mr. John Murray, Head of Finance outlined the proposed expenditure and income provision for 2014 under this division. He indicated that central management charges are apportioned across the other divisions.

Division A – Housing and Building:

Mr. John Murray, Head of Finance outlined the proposed expenditure and income provision for 2014 under this division.

Mr. A. King, Director of Housing responded to queries from the members, as follows:

- The Council purchased 21 houses under the Housing Capital Programme in 2013
- The Capital budget for 2014 is expected to be circa €1,000,000, which depending on the asking price will purchase approx ten houses.
- Nine houses are being constructed at McCurtain
- 370 people currently being accommodation on the Rental Accommodation Scheme
- The Council is making good progress with retrofitting of its stock of houses under the Building Energy Rating Scheme (BER)
- Housing Adaptation Grants Scheme allocations are expected in early 2014.
- It is expected that a new Tenant Purchase Scheme will be announced this year.

Division B – Roads Transport and Safety:

Mr. John Murray, Head of Finance outlined the proposed expenditure and income provision for 2014 under this division. He indicated that central management charges are apportioned across the other divisions.

Mr. D. Treanor, Director of Roads responded to queries from the members, as follows:

- The Council's Winter Maintenance gritters had been dispatched on thirty occasions since November.
- It would be difficult to extend the salting programme, as the Council already provides an extensive programme, over 600 Km per night.
- There is provision of €10,000 per area for new public lighting. However more lights means increased costs. The Council's intention is to undertake an audit of all public lighting to see if savings can be achieved.
- The only contact with the Office of Public Works was in relation to specific drainage schemes when funding was sought.
- The allocation of road grants in each electoral area is a matter for the local elected members.

On the proposal of Cllr Keelan, seconded by Cllr P. Treanor it was agreed that the Council produce a report investigating the introduction of L.E.D. lighting as a cost saving measure.

Cllr Connolly proposed and Cllr S. Treanor seconded that in relation to public lighting and in order to reduce future costs that when bulbs are being replaced they are replaced with long life L.E.D. bulbs.

It was agreed that this motion be deferred pending the preparation of the report requested by Cllr Keelan.

Division C – Water Services:

Mr. Murray informed the members that the net cost to the Council of the Water Services budget for 2014 was €110,000.

Cllr O'Hanlon referred to the transfer of the assets related to the Water Services function to Irish Water - estimated value of between €200 - €250 million. He said it was unacceptable that the Council are not being compensated for the transfer of these assets.

Cllr Carthy referred to a motion that had been passed at a previous Council meeting directing that legal advice be sought before any agreement is signed with Irish Water. He enquired if the advice had been sought or obtained.

Mr. P. Clifford, Director of Corporate Services stated that the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government had, by an Act of the Oireachtas, transferred the water assets of all local authorities to Irish Water. He referred to documentation he had distributed to the members. He stated that the Water Services Transition Office (WSTO) the agency established by the City and County Managers Association that acts on behalf of all

local authorities in the transition process, had sought legal advice in relation to the Service Level Agreement with Irish Water. In his capacity as Acting County Manager he had signed an Order on behalf of the Council agreeing that Council staff would maintain and operate Water Services on behalf of Irish Water for 12 years with effect from 1st January 2014 (copy circulated at the meeting). There was no provision within the service level agreement for the transfer of the assets. All assets were transferred to Irish Water under section 12 of the Water Services (No.2) Act.

Cllr Murray pointed out that the assets in question had been fully granted aided by the State to Monaghan County Council and were now being transferred to another public body.

Cllr McNally proposed, Cllr O'Hanlon seconded that the Council proceed to get independent legal advice on denying Irish Water from taking over the water assets of Monaghan County Council on foot of the Water Services Act, 2013.

A number of members referred to the cost of acquiring legal advice and cited examples of the significant costs incurred in the past when obtaining legal advice.

The time being 1.00 pm the Mayor indicated that he proposed to adjourn further consideration of the draft Budget until the 20th January, 2014, as the monthly Council meeting was scheduled to commence at 2.00 pm. The Mayor put the proposal to adjourn to the meeting. A vote by show of hands resulted in 12 for adjourning the meeting to the 20th January. The Mayor declared the proposal carried.

In relation to Cllr McNally's proposal it was agreed, in the interim period, that a quotation for independent legal advice would be sought and presented to the Council at the adjourned Budget meeting on 20th January.

The meeting then concluded.