

Minutes of Statutory Budget Meeting of Monaghan County Council held in the Council Chamber, Mtek on Friday, 24 November 2023 at 2.00 pm

Chair: Cllr D. Maxwell, Cathaoirleach

Present: Cllrs. Aughey, Bennett, Campbell, Carthy, Connolly, P. Conlon, S. Conlon, Gilliland, Keelan, McElvaney, McKenna, O’Hanlon, P. Treanor and Truell.

Apologies: Cllr S Coyle

Via Teams: Cllr A McCooey

Mr. R. Burns, Chief Executive, Mr. C. Flynn, Ms. P. Monahan, Ms. Carmel O’Hare, Directors of Services, Mr. G. McMahan, Ms. O. McConnon, A/Directors of Services, Meetings Administrator, Ms. M McGarvey

At the outset members extended votes of congratulations to the following who recently received awards:

- Pride of Place Awards - Blayney Blades on receiving Community Wellbeing Initiative award
- Excellence in Local Government Awards 2023 – Shortlisted projects - MyCoCo - Delivering Local Authority Services Online in Local Authority Innovation category and Magic Under Monaghan in Sustainable Environment & Biodiversity category

The Cathaoirleach paid tribute to the Monaghan Town Team on hosting the Monaghan Town Business Awards, an excellent night that showcased businesses in Monaghan. The members extended their congratulations to the following who received awards on the night:

- EY Young Entrepreneur of the Year Sam Moffett
- Established Entrepreneur of the Year Kieran Marron
- Life time achievement award Michael Treanor

The Chief Executive welcomed all present to the Statutory Budget meeting for 2024. He stated that the budget being presented today reflects a proposed expenditure of €90 million and together with the Capital Programme represents a very significant investment in the County. Mr Burns stated that Budget 2024 is a sizable increase on Budget 2023. The Annual Budget equates to an increase of 12% on Budget 2023.

Mr Burns stated that the challenges and pressures are reflected in the costs we now have, inflation is around 5-6%. There is a need to recognise that Monaghan Co Council are a significant employer, with over 500 people employed across the organisation. Staff provide a high-quality public service and Monaghan Co Council will continue to enhance this service where possible. He stated that staff are critical in the implementation of a €370million Capital Programme over the next 3 years which is a significant investment in the County’s infrastructure. Mr Burns emphasised that currently 23 projects valued at €43 million are on site and 12 further projects valued at €33 million are due to go on site shortly.

Mr Burns concluded by thanking Olga McConnon, A/Head of Finance, Johanna McKenna, Financial Management Accountant, the Corporate Policy Group (CPG), Executive and staff for their work in preparing the draft Budget.

Budget 2024

Ms O McConnon, A/Head of Finance outlined the main salient points of Budget 2024:

- €9.6m budget increase year on year
- ARV 3% increase (0.2445)
- NEV reduction 720k equates to €176k
- Rent review €1.0m
- LPT increase €1.5m
- +15% increase LPT adopted (€274k per MD)
- Vacant property write off (80% in 2023)

She outlined increases in the budget (contra items) due to the following:

- Retained Fire Officer €0.6m
- Road Projects €4.0m
- GWS Subsidy €0.8m
- Payroll €2.0m (€1.1m funded)
- Peace Plus €0.5m

Increased income is reflected due to:

- €1.5m LPT
- €1.0m Rents
- €0.1m RAS Admin
- €0.27m Rates
- €0.4m FEMPI (annual grant for pay restoration)

Reductions in Income due to the following:

- -€0.5m Energy Grant (energy grant received in 2023, not available in 2024)
- -€0.2m Uisce Eireann (costs were previously recouped from Uisce Eireann (Irish Water) apart from GWS and public conveniences. Uisce Eireann will continue to fund payroll costs but CMC will now be funded by the Department based on 2022 CMC charge rather than 2024 charge)
- -€0.1m NPPR
- -€0.2m Pension gratuity provision

On the proposal of Cllr H McElvaney, seconded by Cllr N. Keelan it was agreed to write to the Department of Housing Local Government & Heritage in relation to the grant defraying the Water Services CMC charge and request that the defrayment grant covers the current year CMC costs.

Ms McConnon continued by outlining the following reductions in expenditure and areas of increased expenditure:

Reductions in Expenditure due to:

- -€0.2m Energy costs
- -€0.1m Tourism Strategy/LECP
- -€0.05m EHO

- -€0.05m subsidiary support
- -€0.15m Irrecoverable rates

Increased Expenditure due to:

- €0.1m Disabled persons grants
- €0.1m (net) Peace Campus
- €0.45m New Offices provision
- €0.2m Sweeping & Scavenging

Ms McConnon concluded her presentation by providing an overview of new staffing costs to be met from own resources and those which will be externally funded.

Ms McConnon proceeded to outline the provisions of the Draft Budget for 2024 under the various divisions.

Division A – Housing and Building

Ms McConnon outlined the proposed expenditure and income provision for 2024 under this division. She highlighted the following:

- *Rents expected to increase by €1million*
- *Additional costs in relation to homelessness services – 90% funded*
- *Housing for All – additional staff allocation*
- *RAS – Admin grant support from 2024*
- *HAP Place Finder staff member 90% funded*

Division B – Roads Transport and Safety:

Ms McConnon outlined the proposed expenditure and income provision for 2024 under this division. She stated that the out-turn for 2023 budget provision will generally form the budget for 2024. She stated that a €4million increase is expected for 2024.

Matters raised by the members included the following:

- *LIS*
- *Public Lighting deficits*
- *Traffic Management – plans for addressing issue in Monaghan Town*
- *Road Safety / Low cost safety schemes*

On the proposal of Cllr B McKenna, seconded by Cllr A Campbell it was agreed the Low Cost Safety Schemes and Public Lighting be referred to the Transport & Community SPC for review.

Ms G McMahon, A/Director of Roads, responded to the matters raised.

Division C – Water Services:

Ms McConnon confirmed that costs were previously recouped from Uisce Eireann (Irish Water) apart from Group Water Schemes and public conveniences. Uisce Eireann will continue to fund

payroll costs etc. but CMC will now be funded by the Department based on 2022 CMC charge rather than 2024 charge apart from the Pension element which will be based on actual year CMC charge.

Division D – Development Management

Ms McConnon outlined the proposed expenditure and income provision for 2024 under this division. She highlighted the following:

- *Tourism Plan – staff expansion in line with Tourism Strategy requirements*
- *Peace Campus running costs – expectation of opening in Q2 2024*

Matters raised by the members included the following:

- Availability of a schedule of various funding schemes for circulation to the public
- Disability Participation & Awareness fund 2021 – response for December 2023 meeting

Ms McConnon responded to the matters raised.

Division E – Environmental Protection

Ms McConnon outlined the proposed expenditure and income provision for 2024 under this division. She highlighted the following:

- Sweeping and Scavenging - €175k increase – has historically been underbudgeted so aim to regularise in budget 2024
- Operation of Fire Service – €600k increase but expect this to be fully funded
- Pollution Control – recruitment of a Scientist
- Climate - 3 staff, fully funded

Mr McConnon and Ms Monahan responded to queries raised.

Division F – Recreation and Amenity

Ms McConnon outlined the proposed expenditure and income provision for 2024 under this division. She highlighted the following:

- *Library – Monaghan library will move to Peace Campus. Increase in staffing for new library branch in Castleblayney*
- *Arts Strategy due to be delivered in 2024*
- *Members previously recommended an increase in Artist Support Grant for 2024 – incorporated into budget*
- *Museum – relocation to Peace Campus*
- *Budget allocation for Project Children, Monaghan Bombing memorial event and Billy Fox memorial event*

Matters raised by the members included the following:

- *Examine a funding stream for Town Events in 2025 budget*

- *Rossmore Mausoleum – details of exact works carried out to be provided at future Council meeting.*

Ms McConnon and Ms Monahan responded to queries raised.

Division G – Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare

Ms McConnon outlined the proposed expenditure and income provision for 2024 under this division.

On the proposal of Cllr S Conlon, seconded by Cllr B McKenna it was agreed that this Council write to the Department of Rural and Community Development seeking to address the issue of every Council dog control and warden service in the State operating at a deficit, and for this Department to establish a specific allocation to each local authority to ensure the warden service is adequately funded.

Division H – Miscellaneous Services

Ms McConnon outlined the budget provision for this division and highlighted the following:

- Irrecoverable rates - €2.4 million
- SPC allowances paid under Mayor and Deputy Mayor allowances
- Motor Tax provision reduced as a result of reduction in staff numbers.
- NPPR income will be eliminated from 2026 onwards
- MD Allocation for 2024 - €274,444

Division J – Central Management Charges

Ms McConnon explained and outlined the apportionment of the Central Management Charge across all budgets. She stated that the overall cost of support services – HR, Finance, IT is €15 million. These are all the costs that cannot be charged up to individual sections. The costs are distributed across all sections as follows:

- IT costs – apportioned based on number of PCs in each section
- Corporate Buildings - apportioned based on area occupied by each section
- Pension and HR costs – apportioned based on no of employees

Ms McConnon referred to the following:

- Mtek – increased rental costs
- New Offices provision €1.1m for 2024
- Corporate Support Services – new Corporate Plan
- Corporate Procurement / GDPR – additional staff
- HR – additional staff
- Pensions - additional budget €200k in 2024

On the proposal of Cllr S Conlon, seconded by Cllr B McKenna, it was agreed that in an effort at addressing the excessive time delays occurring in recruitment procedures across all local authorities

resulting in posts remaining vacant over many months, that this Council write to the Public Appointment Services and Department of Local Government to address this issue.

Ms McConnon responded to the matters raised.

Proposals relative to Budget adoption:

Ms McConnon then informed the members that there were two resolutions that required adoption by the Council before the conclusion of the meeting and these were referred to on Page 7 of the budget report.

(i) Refund of rates on vacant commercial premises

On the proposal of Cllr P Treanor, seconded by Cllr R Aughey, it was agreed that the level of refund of rates on vacant commercial premises, that are available for rent or lease or are undergoing refurbishment, for the local financial year 2024 would be 80%.

(ii) Adoption of the Budget and the determination of the Annual Rate on Valuation:

Cllr B McKenna proposed, Cllr C Carthy seconded

That the Council adopt the Draft Budget for 2024, as presented, and that the Annual Rate on Valuation for 2022 be determined at €0.2445.

A recorded vote was taken which resulted as follows:

For: Cllrs Aughey, Bennett, Campbell, Carthy, S. Conlon, Gilliland, Keelan, P. Conlon, McElvaney, McKenna, O'Hanlon, P. Treanor, Truell

Total: 13

Against: Cllrs P Connolly, O'Hanlon, McCooey

Total: 3

The Cathaoirleach declared the proposal in relation to the adoption of the Budget for 2024 carried.

3. To consider recommendations and minutes from Corporate Policy Group meeting held on 02, 17, 23 October 2023 and 13 November 2023.

The members noted the minutes of the Corporate Policy Group meetings held on 02nd, 17th and 23rd October and 13th November 2023 which had been circulated.

On the proposal of Cllr N Keelan seconded by Cllr R Aughey, it was agreed that the minutes of the Corporate Policy Group meetings held on 02nd, 17th and 23rd October and 13th November 2023 and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

4. Capital Programme 2024– 2026

The members noted that the Capital Report 2024– 2026 had been circulated along with the Budget report. Mr C Flynn, Director of Services stated that the Capital Programme would be an item for discussion on the January 2024 Council agenda.

The Cathaoirleach thanked the members of the CPG, the Management Team and the Councillors for all the work undertaken in the preparation, consideration and approval of the Budget for 2024. Cllr Maxwell congratulated Ms McConnon and Ms McKenna on the delivery of their first statutory budget.

The meeting then concluded.

Signed: _____
Cathaoirleach

Meetings Administrator

Date: _____
