

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE UÍBH FHAILÍ

MINUTES OF IN COMMITTEE BUDGET MEETING OF OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL

HELD IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, TULLAMORE
ON MONDAY, 21ST DECEMBER 2009 AT 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT: Cllr. N. Bourke (Presiding), Cllrs. M. Buckley, J. Butterfield, J. Carroll, , B. Cowen, E. Dooley, S. Dooley E. Fitzpatrick, J. Foley, C. Hanniffy, N. Hogan, T. McKeigue, J. Leahy, T. McLoughlin, S. Moylan Ryan, D. Owens, and L. Quinn.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr. P. Gallagher, County Manager, Mr. D. Conlon, Head of Finance, Mr. M. Roche, D.O.S., Mr. S. Murray, D.O.S., Mr. F. Heslin, D.O.S., Mr. D. Kirrane, D.O.S., Mr. T. Mawe, Financial Management Accountant, Mr. E. O’Ceilleachair, CFO, SE, Ms. M. Cleary, Meetings Administrator.

APOLOGIES: Cllr. P. Clendennen, D. Dolan, P. Ormond and G. Plunkett

INTRODUCTION

The Cathaoirleach thanked the members for attending and advised that the main issue outstanding from their Draft Budget Meeting of 14th December was the €3.3m allocated to the Fire Service and its implications for the operation of the fire brigades at Kilcormac, Banagher and Daingean. He noted that further documentation had been circulated to the members on Friday, 18th December 2009. He requested that any proposals from members advocating that additional funds be provided to maintain and operate a fire station should state the source of the proposed funding.

Mr. F. Heslin, DOS, briefed the members on the Fire and Emergency Operations Plan and the additional information circulated the previous week. He read Senior Counsel’s legal opinion and reiterated management’s recommendation as outlined in his correspondence circulated on Friday, 18th December 2009.

Cllr. E. Dooley recommended that the Draft Budget be adopted and that the fire service be required to work within its €3.3m budget. He suggested that greater efficiencies could be achieved within the fire service budget and queried if changes to current operational procedures would provide adequate finances to allow for the stations to be appropriately staffed. He proposed that, if this could not be achieved, consideration be given to standing down the three stations in the interim.

Cllr. J. Leahy proposed that the proposal tabled by the Fianna Fáil grouping in November be supported. He proposed that additional savings could be achieved and queried the

Executive in relation to some of the costs being assigned to the operation of the Kilcormac Brigade.

Cllr. T. McKeigue recommended that the eight fire stations be maintained and that it was a matter for the Executive to fund and staff the service appropriately. This recommendation was supported by the Fine Gael grouping.

Cllr. C. Hanniffy acknowledged the legal implications for Councillors' as outlined in Senior Counsel's opinion. She sought a complete breakdown of the Fire Services budget of €3.3m. She suggested that the adoption of the Budget be postponed until 11th January to allow for these figures to be made available and to allow for further consideration to changing work practices. She queried if the 2010 payroll savings would result in additional finances for the service.

Cllr. S. Moylan Ryan sought clarification on the current status of Banagher Fire Station as, according to Cllr Moylan Ryan, a number of fliers were being distributed stating that the station had been closed, when this is not the case.

A number of the members spoke on the matter, each recommending that the eight (8) stations be maintained and recommended that savings from training, improved work practices and other efficiencies be introduced to support this position.

The County Manager, Mr. F. Heslin, D.O.S., and Mr. E. O'Ceilleachair, Chief Fire Officer in responding to the queries raised advised that:

- It was not possible to operate a fire service from eight (8) brigades and Portarlinton from within the €3.3m budget.
- The Council had to be cognisant of health and safety concerns and also of the legal advice received.
- Management would pursue the introduction of rostering which he suggested could result in savings of €100,000 to €125,000. However, the County Manager advised that this matter may take a number of months to finalise and accordingly these savings could not be factored into the 2010 budget.
- The payroll savings for 2010 from the Fire Services amounted to approximately €75,000 and these savings had been re-allocated in accordance with the document circulated at the meeting on 14th December.
- The original Fire Services budget for 2009 was €3.6m. This allocation was reduced to €3.3m as advised in July 2009. The €0.3m savings achieved had resulted from the non-recruitment of fire fighters in accordance with the moratorium on staff recruitment.
- Payroll costs accounted for approximately 70% of the Fire Services budget.
- Where brigades attend only a low level of incidents there is a requirement to hold an increased level of training and exercise drills. Mr. F. Heslin, D.O.S., advised that the Department had indicated that an increased level of training would be required in

