

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE UÍBH FHAILÍ
MINUTES OF STATUTORY BUDGET MEETING
OF OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL

HELD IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, TULLAMORE
ON MONDAY, 21ST DECEMBER 2009 AT 2 P.M.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr. P. Gallagher, County Manager, 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. D. Conlon, Head of Finance, Ms. M. Cleary, Meetings Administrator and Ms. N. Troy, Clerical Officer.

APOLOGIES: Cllr. P. Ormond.

**STATUTORY
BUDGET
MEETING –
INTRODUCTIO
N AND
RECOMMEND-
TION**

The Cathaoirleach opened the meeting and referred to Circular Fin. 12/2009 received from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government dated 11th December 2009. The Circular advised that the 2010 Local Government Fund (LGF) allocation for Offaly County Council is provisionally €15,388,672.

He referred the members to three other letters, namely: the County Managers letter, dated 14th December, setting out a supplementary report on the draft Budget following receipt of the LGF allocation; Mr. D. Conlon, HoF, letter dated 21st December outlining in further detail the re-allocation of resources; and Mr. F. Heslin, D.O.S., letter dated 18th December regarding the Draft Fire and Emergency Services Plan.

The Cathaoirleach asked the County Manager to summarise the correspondences, reports and the Draft Budget.

The County Manager advised that the 2009 Budget was based on a reduced L.G.F. and that the L.G.F. had been reduced further in July 2009. The draft Budget for 2010 was based on a further reduced L.G.F. allocation. He noted that many efficiencies and savings were implemented throughout 2009 and that these savings had impacted on the delivery of services. He noted that the Local Government Act, 2001 states that a Local Authority in discharging its functions should have regard to the resources available to it. He further noted the increased regulatory legislation that the Local Authority is required to comply with.

He advised that no increase in commercial rates were proposed. However, he noted that Offaly ranked 28th within the 34 Local Authorities with the lowest rateable income.

The Manager stated that the Draft Fire and Emergency Operations Plan, deferred from the September monthly meeting, impinged seriously on the Budget. The revised 2009 Fire Services allocation of €3.3m was being proposed for 2010.

The Manager advised that the L.G.F. had been reduced by 5% and not 10% as anticipated. The Payroll Savings introduced in the Minister's Budget provided that 65% of staff pay reductions (approx. €600,000) would be allocated to the Council and the remaining 35% would be returned to the Exchequer. Accordingly, the net finances available to Offaly County Council were much the same as the reduced LGF allocation notified in July 2009.

He thanked the Cathaoirleach, his predecessor, elected members, Corporate Policy Group members and staff for their continued support.

The Cathaoirleach then asked Mr. D. Conlon, Head of Finance, for an overview. Mr. Conlon advised the members that the Council had an anticipated deficit of €267,000 for 2009. He drew the members' attention to the cost saving exercise that had been implemented in July 2009 and advised that these savings would carry forward into 2010. He noted that the Council employed fifty-five (55) fewer staff now than at the end of 2008. He noted that the adjustments circulated on 14th and 21st December will amend Table A – Calculation of Annual Rate of Valuation for the Financial Year 2010, i.e., income and expenditure will increase by €1,220,799 while the figure for rates will remain the same.

The members complimented Management and staff for their preparation of the Draft Budget and raised specific issues and concerns to which the Management responded as follows:

- The Draft Budget document originally circulated was based on a 10% reduction in the L.G.F. The Council had since received notification that this shortfall was 5% and the proposed reallocation of resources to Disabled Persons Grants, Non National Roads, Swimming Pools etc were to be welcomed.
- Management had considered issues raised by the Corporate Policy Group and by members in their meeting on 14th December and had proposed assigning finance to the drafting of a Drainage Plan for the county etc.
- The Council were committed to pursuing the introduction of rostering arrangements within the Fire Service. However these negotiations would probably take 12-15 months to conclude

and reallocation of fire service resources would be dependent on the outcome..

- The increasing cost of enforcing regulations and ensuring compliance was impacting on the assignment of resources. The legislation setting out the regulations were not at the discretion of or discussed in advance with local authorities.
- The cost involved in maintaining the Register of Electors was significantly reduced and would result in the non-recruitment of field workers in 2010.
- The Demand levied on Town Councils is based on population. The Council was also recouping further costs associated with water services that had transferred from Town Councils.
- It was not possible to consider a reduction in rates at this time.
- Approximately 50% of water was unaccounted for. However, without significant investment it may not be possible to reduce the percentage of unaccounted water further.
- The Council had held a significant awareness campaign to advise people that water charges were now based on the level of usage.
- A number of staff had been assigned to address planning enforcement issues.
- The veterinary service is supported by funding under an agency agreement with the Food safety Authority.
- Housing capital projects are co-ordinated between the three Authorities. However, three separate housing authorities existed in accordance with the legislation.
- The budget allocated to Arts provides for staff salaries, the Arts Act Grants (reserved function) and contributions to various arts projects in the county.

**ADJUREMENT
OF MEETING**

The Cathaoirleach thanked the members and Management Team for their comments and responses.

At the proposal of Cllr. E. Dooley, seconded by Cllr. C. Hanniffy it was agreed to adjourn a decision on the Draft Budget 2010 until Monday, 11th January 2010. The members agreed to meet in committee at 10a.m. to consider the issues further and that the Statutory Budget meeting would re-convene at 2p.m.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

MINUTES CONFIRMED:

CATHAOIRLEACH

RUNAÍ

15TH FEBRUARY 2010