

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE UÍBH FHAILÍ
MINUTES OF IN-COMMITTEE BUDGET MEETING
OF OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL

HELD IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, TULLAMORE
ON FRIDAY, 7TH JANUARY 2011 AT 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT:

Cllr. D. Owens (Presiding), Cllrs. N. Bourke, M. Buckley, J. Butterfield, J. Carroll, P. Clendennen, D. Dolan, E. Dooley, S. Dooley E. Fitzpatrick, J. Foley, C. Hanniffy, T. McKeigue, J. Leahy, T. McLoughlin, S. Moylan-Ryan, P. Ormond, D. Owens and L. Quinn.

APOLOGIES:

Cllrs. B. Cowen, N. Hogan and G. Plunkett.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr. P. Gallagher, County Manager, Mr. D. Kirrane, D.O.S., Mr. F. Heslin, D.O.S., Mr. D. Conlon, H.O.F., Mr. T. Shanahan, A/D.O.S., Ms. M. Cleary, Meetings Administrator, Mr. D. Mahon, S.E.O.

DRAFT BUDGET 2011:

Fire Service

Cllr. D. Owens, Leas Cathaoirleach, informed the members that the Fire Service Sub Committee, Mr. F. Heslin, D.O.S. and Mr. E. O’Ceilleachair, C.F.O. met the DBK – SOS (Daingean, Banagher and Kilcormac – Save Our Stations) Group on Thursday, 6th January 2011. Cllr. D. Owens requested Mr. F. Heslin to brief the members on the meeting.

Mr. F. Heslin, D.O.S., advised that the DBK – SOS proposal included figures extracted from various reports over the previous two years and provided for fifteen (15) Fire-fighters and a two-pump station in Tullamore and eight (8) Fire-fighters and a one-pump station in each of the other seven stations. Their proposal also provided for an additional full-time Station Officer in the Birr and Edenderry Fire Stations. They proposed to reduce the number of Senior Fire Officer posts. Other reductions proposed included a reduction in training costs and a 50% reduction in protective personal equipment (PPE).

Mr. F. Heslin, D.O.S., informed the members that he was not in a position to agree with the DBK-SOS proposal. The full costing for the DBK - SOS proposal (as circulated) is €4,190,968 and represents an additional cut of €1,216,705 on the proposed 2011 Draft Budget of €2,974,263. Mr. Heslin advised that there are fifty-three (53) new national Standard Operating Guidelines being introduced in 2011 and that the Council was obliged to provide training on these Guidelines and other operating procedures on an on-going basis. The savings proposed in Health and Safety, including the reductions in the provision of PPE, were not possible.

Mr. P. Gallagher, County Manager, thanked the Sub-Committee for reviewing the matter and Mr. F. Heslin and Mr. E. O’Ceilleachair for preparing their report. He noted that Birr and Edenderry have historically each had a two-pump station and that it was neither appropriate nor feasible to make these into one-pump stations, as proposed by the DBK-SOS group. He informed the members that the review of the Fire Service should be in the context of the overall Council budget. He noted that Roads and Water Services had incurred significant expenditure in addressing the severe weather conditions over the past number of weeks. The estimated cost for Water Services to date was approximately €400,000. He noted that the Local Government Fund (LGF) had reduced by 24% since 2008, and that

staff numbers had reduced by 20%. The Draft Budget proposed an increase in fire charges for 2011. Every effort was being made to collect these charges. He informed the members that there were national agreements with regard to the number of Retained Fire-fighters that must be assigned to one-pump and two-pump stations.

A lengthy discussion on the Fire Service ensued. Mr. F. Heslin, in responding to queries, advised that he had agreed to present the members with his opinion on the DBK – SOS proposal. He drew the members' attention to the *Draft Plan for Fire and Emergency Operations, Sections 26, Fire Services Act 1981* that was circulated in September 2009. He advised that he had presented a number of reports to the members and had addressed the issues raised by the SOS – DBK proposal in previous correspondence. He informed the members that the additional ten (10) Fire Fighters included in the DBK – SOS proposal were not included in the Draft Budget circulated to the members; the Fire Services budget was based on five (5) operational Fire Stations and on savings being achieved, e.g., introduction of rostering arrangements, efficiencies being achieved through the Labour Relations Commission process. Mr. Heslin emphasised the importance of Fire Prevention and advised that he was not prepared to propose any further savings in the Fire Prevention area. He agreed that the cost of on-going drills was significant but these drills, he advised, were fundamental to the requirements of the service. He informed the meeting that every effort was made to redeem outstanding charges. Mr. Heslin reiterated that Offaly Fire Service could not be compared to Laois Fire Service.

Mr. D. Conlon, H.O.F., in replying to a question, advised that the Town Demands included €35,000 in respect of Fire Services. This sum was apportioned on the basis of population, i.e., one-third to Birr Town Council and two-thirds to Tullamore Town Council.

Cllr. D. Owens, Leas Cathaoirleach, reminded the members that they were required in accordance with the legislation to formally adopt a balanced Budget. Accordingly, he advised that any member proposing to assign funding to a Fire Station should demonstrate the source of that funding.

Draft Budget 2011

A discussion on the other elements of the Draft Budget 2011 followed. The members acknowledged that the additional costs arising from the recent severe weather may have to be met from the Council's resources in the coming months. The members agreed that additional funding needed to be assigned to Disabled Persons Grants. Cllr. T. McKeigue proposed that €100,000 be transferred from the Arts Programme to the Disabled Person Grants.

The County Manager advised that the Roads Section had applied to the National Severe Weather Fund for €77,000. The Council received notification in late December that a grant in the sum of €230,000 (€140,000 for clearing and treating roads and €90,000 for water services repairs carried out to that date) would be paid. This sum, he advised, would defray the over expenditure incurred in 2010 but would not meet the costs associated with works over the holiday period and the remedial works that would be required.

Mr. T. Shanahan, A/D.O.S., advised that 1,200 leaks to individual services and 70 repairs to water mains were made to date. He informed the members that water consumption had peaked on 27th December 2010 at 37,000 cubic meters and he estimated that water production will be between 15,000 and 20,000 cubic meter higher than normal. He advised that not all the data and costs had been collated at this time but the estimated costs to the Council were in the region of €400,000.

Mr. F. Heslin, D.O.S., noted that the National Roads Authority provided the salt. He suggested that the costs to the Roads Section exceeded the Council's grant of €230,000 by approximately €150,000. He stated that the County Council co-ordinated Housing works with the Town Councils in an effort to maximise efficiencies.

Ms. M. Cleary, S.E.O., informed the members that the Arts Service supported a number of festivals, individual artists and groups throughout the county through various grant and Art Schemes. She

