

**Minutes Of The Local Authority Pre Budget Meeting Of Carlow
County Council For The Financial Year 1st January, 2012 to the
31st December, 2012 Held In Committee In The Council
Chamber, County Offices, Athy Road, Carlow On Friday 6th
January, 2012 At 11.00 a.m.**

- Present: Councillor T. Kinsella, Cathaoirleach
Councillor M. Abbey,
Councillor A. Ahern (Nee Long)
Councillor F. Browne
Councillor M. Doran
Councillor W. Fennell,
Councillor D. Foley,
Councillor D. Hurley
Councillor W. Lacey
Councillor J. Murnane-O'Connor,
Councillor C. Murphy,
Councillor J. Murphy,
Councillor T. O'Neill
Councillor P. O'Toole,
Councillor W. Paton
Councillor J. Pender,
Councillor W. Quinn.
Councillor J. Townsend,
- Apologies Councillor F. Hunter
Councillor A. McDonald
Councillor C. Townsend
- In Attendance: Mr. Tom Barry, County Manager.
Mr. Ronan Fitzgerald, Acting Head of Finance
Mr. J. Carley, Director of Services Environment,
Water Services, Health & Safety.
Mr. D. McInerney, Director of Services
Transportation & Safety & Emergency Services.
Ms. B. O'Brien, Director of Services Community &
Enterprise & Economic Development & Corporate
Services.
Mr. T. Butler, Acting Director of Services, Housing,
Recreation & Amenity & Special Projects.

Mr. J. Kinsella, Administrative Officer, Finance
Mr. Bryan Doherty, Internal Auditor
Mr. E. Brophy, Senior Executive Officer, Corporate
Services.
Ms. B. Whelan, Assistant Staff Officer.

The Cathaoirleach, Councillor T. Kinsella welcomed Members to the Pre-Budget Meeting.

The County Manager advised of significant budget issues in preparing the 2012 draft budget having regard to a reduction of €2.2 million in the Council's income compared with the 2011 adopted budget.

The County Manager advised that the principal considerations in preparing the Draft Budget were as follows:

- No increase in commercial rates
- No increase in water charges unless statutorily imposed
- €525,000 loss in Water/ Waste Water income from adjoining counties
- Reduced income of €361,490 from County Demand
- Reduced income of €755,896 from the Local Government Fund.
- €270,000 provided as a local contribution towards Housing Grants
- €786,000 contribution towards the Local Road Programme

The County Manager advised that essential services will be maintained but services will be cut in certain areas such as street cleaning, reduction in bring centres, housing maintenance and library service.

DRAFT BUDGET

Mr. R. Fitzgerald, Acting Head of Finance gave an overview of the Draft Local Authority Budget for the 2012 financial year. Mr. Fitzgerald advised that the period for the consideration of the draft budget is from 24th November 2011 to 13th January 2012. The 2012 Budget must be adopted on or before 26th January 2012.

Mr. Fitzgerald advised Members of the following:-

- 2012 Budget Format -presented in the activity based costing format.
- National issues – EU/IMF Programme
- Dept of Environment Community and Local Government Current Budget Expenditure. In 2012 the Exchequer contribution to the Local Government Fund of €164m is ended.
- 2012 Local Issues – Expenditure reduced to €46.9m from €49.1m. Income reduced to €46.9m. Local Government Fund reduced to €8.5m. €525K reduction in Water/Waste Water income from other Local Authorities
- €361k Reduction in County Demand
- Commercial rates contribution across the services
- No rate increase in 2012 – Proposed €66.47 annual rate of valuation
- Annual Rate of Valuation for adjoining County Councils - regional average €67.23
- Distribution of rate customers – total 882 with 31% paying less than €1,500, 59% paying €1,500-€3,000, 73% paying €3,001-€5,000. Only 15 rate payers pay in excess of €50, 000 to €100,000 and 8 rate payers in excess of €100,000.
- Proposed average weekly rent 2012 €49
- No increase 2012 for Water or Waste Water

Mr. Fitzgerald outlined the principal service costs included in the 2012 Draft Budget.

HOUSING

- Provision of €911,272 is included for the housing maintenance programme. Provision is included for pre letting repairs, completion of soffit and fascia replacement programme, insulation, mechanical ventilation, smoke alarms and self help scheme.
- €270,000 is provided to meet 20% local funding requirement for disability, mobility and aid for the elderly grants. This provision will fund a €1,350,000 programme of works subject to 80% matching funding from Central Government.

- Provision is also made for Housing Loan Charges, Voluntary Housing Loans Charges and RAS.

Total provision €9.03 million.

Following Members query in relation to housing aid grants for the elderly Mr. Butler advised that the Local Authority will continue to prioritise category 1 grants and no new applications will be accepted for category 2 and 3 until category 1 has been cleared. The Scheme is dependent on 80% matching funding from Central Government.

ROADS

- €4,225million in included in the 2011 budget to reflect anticipated funding available. The general maintenance of local roads the Council's internal funding is reduced by €900,000 to €786,000.
- A comprehensive programme of works will be brought to Council when the actual road grants notification is received.

Total Provision €7.69 million.

Members raised the following issues:-

- Public lighting, replacement of heads for lights and installation of new lights
- Category 3 roads – to be discussed at SPC meeting. Reintroduction of Community Involvement Scheme
- Traffic Management Plan, Borris
- Maintenance of bridges
- Car Parking charges, Tullow, Bagenalstown and Borris

Issues raised by Members were answered by Mr. McInerney

Public Water Production and Waste Water Treatment

- Costs include the operation and maintenance of water and waste water infrastructure.
- Compliance with drinking water directives/water quality monitoring and waste water licensing requirements.

Total provision €7.69 million.

Physical Planning and Community Promotion

- Support for planning services, economic development and community initiatives.

Total provision €2.46 million

Members raised the following issues:-

- Derelict Sites
- Building Control Inspection/Enforcement costs
- Categorising unfinished estates and if new household charge will apply to unfinished estates.

Queries raised by Members were answered by the County Manager.

Environmental Protection, Waste Disposal, Recycling, Litter Control, Emergency Services and Pollution Control

- Powerstown will continue to operate in 2012 and has been facilitated by ongoing rationalisation and cost saving measures with a reduction in operation costs from €1,312,000 in 2007 to €595,000 in 2011.

Total provision €5.84 million

A discussion took place in relation to Powerstown Landfill. The Manager advised that Powerstown is a complex issue. Rationalisation of the facility has taken place and the opening hours relate to overtime costs. He advised if Powerstown closed there is no waste facility available in the County and in addition the Council would incur the cost of disposing of its own waste outside the county. There would also be ongoing aftercare and significant reinstatement costs required. He advised that efforts to secure additional waste for disposal at Powerstown are ongoing but the Local Authority is unable to compete with larger waste market sectors.

The Manager further advised that all proposals for the future of Powerstown are currently being examined and the continued operation of the facility will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Members also raised the following issues:-

- Closure of Kernanstown as Recycling Centre

- Collection of plastics, Borris
- Replacement of small street sweepers with 2 large sweepers covering all of county.
- Withdrawing of bring centres and paper banks
- No glass bottle collection facility in Carlow
- Extra recycling facilities at the Christmas period
- Inspection of night clubs under health and safety at busy periods
- Proposals for Haroldstown.

Queries raised were answered by the County Manager and Mr. Carley.

Recreation and Amenity

- €235,000 has been included as an operating subvention towards VISUAL and the George Bernard Shaw Theatre. Provision has been made for the continued upkeep of Oak Park and Ducketts Grove.
- Provision has been made for the Library services in Carlow, Tullow, Bagenalstown and Borris. €400,000 is currently being spent on refurbishment of Bagenalstown Library. €70,000 has been included for the library book fund. A sum of €40,000 for matching funding projects under the Rural Development programme has also been included in the draft budget.

Total provision of €2.45 million.

Agriculture, Education and Health

- Provision is made for Food Safety, Higher Education Grants and VEC and I.T. pensions which are contra items. The pension awards for VEC and I.T. staff will be transferred to the Office of the Paymaster General in 2012. It is also expected that the Higher Education Grants Scheme will be centralised for new applicants from the academic year 2012/2013.

Total provision of €7.85 million.

Miscellaneous Services

- Includes Council plant, local elections, agency services and members' expenses.

Total provision of €3.89 million.

Members raised the following issues:-

- Collection of outstanding monies
- Minimum charge for landfill unfair
- Chairman's expenses abroad.
- Training for Councillors

Queries raised were answered by the County Manager and Ms. O'Brien.

Central Management

- Includes office accommodation, energy, financial management, human resources, health and safety and information technology.
- Internal audit and audit committees.

Total provision of €5.5 million (apportioned over programmes)

Voluntary and Community Contributions

- Community based programmes.

Total provision of €648,800

Members expressed dissatisfaction with the reduced funding from €3,500 to €1,500 for Carlow Mans Association.

Commercial Rates and Water Service Charges

- No increase has been projected in the 2012 draft Budget. Mr. Fitzgerald advised that 31% of rate accounts have a demand less than €1,500 and 59% less than €3,000 and 73% less than €5,000. Mr. Fitzgerald advised that the rate of valuation Carlow County Council is mid range across the spectrum of Local Authorities in the Country.
- The charge of €2.30 per M3 for water services will not increase. The removal of the minimum charge saw a significant reduction in demands for customers with low consumption. The billing period also moved from half yearly to quarterly billing and facilitates payment by direct debit or on line.

- Under the National Recovery Plan 2011 to 2014 it is proposed that by 2014 domestic water charges will be re introduced.

Following Members query the County Manager advised there can be no reduction in the rate.

Members proposed that the service and sub- service divisions of the Draft Local Authority Budget 2012 be discussed in detail at the Statutory Budget Meeting to be held at 2.00 p.m. on Friday, 6th January, 2012.

This concluded the business of the pre budget meeting.