



Minutes of the In-Committee Budget Meeting of Offaly County Council
Held on 11 November 2024 at 2.00 pm, in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road,
Tullamore and via Zoom

The Meetings Administrator carried out a roll call to confirm attendance

Present

Cllr. Tony McCormack, Cathaoirleach

Bryant, Ollie	Maher, Sean
Clendennen, John	McDonnell, Fergus
Cribbin, Noel	Moran, Frank
Egan, Hugh	Murray, Claire (SF)
Feighery, Neil	Murray-Smale, Claire (FF)
Fitzpatrick, Eddie	O'Brien, Sean
Harvey, Declan	Ormond, Peter
Hennessy-Kennedy, Audrey	Quinn, Liam
Leahy, John	

Apologies

Aoife Masterson

Officials in Attendance

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Ms. F. Millane, D.O.F.; Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S.; Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S.; Mr. N. Gorman, D.O.S.; Mr. A. Murray, A/D.O.S.; Ms. J. Ryan, A/D.O.S.; Mr. T. Mawe, F.M.A; Ms. M. Feighery, Accountant; Ms. L. Giles, A/S.E.O. Meetings Administrator; Mr. G. Bruton, A.O; Ms. L. Carbery, C.O.

1. Draft Budget 2025

The Chief Executive brought the members attention to the Draft Budget 2025, and she advised that the Executive had taken into account the members comments and concerns when drafting the Budget. She highlighted that the total Budget for 2025 was €97 million, which was an increase on previous years. She advised that the Executive were committed to the continued delivery of services across all business areas. She noted that the members had agreed at recent Municipal District meetings to increase the GMA allocations. Further proposed increases are proposed in Housing Maintenance, DPG allocations, the Taking-in-Charges of Housing Estates, Greenways maintenance and County Roads. Also increased allocations for Tourism events, Biodiversity, Cemetery maintenance, IT Digitisation Programme, and the library book fund.

She advised that the Department had agreed to provide an additional allocation to offset the rates loss arising from the closure of West Offaly Power station, in Shannonbridge, however this allocation was

only guaranteed until 2026 and provision for this short fall will be required for the future. She advised the members that there is no proposed increase in the Rateable valuation in 2025 and that the issue of rateable valuations for Wind Farms should be resolved in 2025. It is proposed to clear the revenue deficit of €400k in 2025.

Ms. F. Millane thanked the Cathaoirleach and the elected members for their ongoing co-operation and support. She welcomed the 2025's draft budget as a positive one with an expected expenditure level of over €97million and the Capital Programme expected expenditure of over €50m in 2025 – and over €150m in the lifetime of the programme. She also thanked the Management Team and senior staff, in particular Thomas Mawe for all their input in the budget 2025.

She outlined the process of preparing the budget in accordance with S102 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended. She provided the members with details of changes in areas of housing, greenways and roads, PLEEP for street lighting, taking in charge, land fill leachate management, tourism, biodiversity, digitisation and a number of small variations. She stressed that there have been no reductions to any budget line and therefore no reductions to services.

She advised the members that Táilte Eireann (rates valuation office) rated properties over the past month and this additionality in rates has made it possible to draft a positive budget directing financial resources to key priority areas. Grants have increased by approximately €6.5m and include housing, roads and community grants. She noted that the FEMPI increase for 2025 covers the full increase in budgeted pay costs for the year. She advised that Housing is showing substantially higher grants than 2024 due to changing the accounting showing the full value of DPGs/HAGs, not just the council contribution. Development Management is showing a reduction in grants as the Leader programme has moved away from the local authority to the Offaly Local Development Company.

She advised the members that Offaly County has almost 2,300 properties generating a total rates income in the region of € 19million. Of this total 83.5% pay less than €5,000 per annum, and 57% pay less than €2,000 per annum. The top 8% of properties produce 77% of rates income.

She brought the members attention to the directorate reports that provide substantial information on services delivered in 2024 and plans for 2025. She highlighted that the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) 2025 proposed to retain the ARV of .2198. Budgeted expenditure for 2025 is €97,021,595, including the provision for the debit balance (2024 was €85m), spread across the 8 divisions. The income from Goods & Services and Grants amounts to €65,422,594 and LPT Income is €12,000,357, for co-funding major infrastructural projects.

She noted the increase in Other Income is primarily the NWCPO recoupment which has increased by €500k, over 560k in respect of the Offaly Sports partnership recoupment and expected rates for 2025. The other significant change is the reduction to Irish Water income as the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage now funds the CMC element of Water Services income as reflected under Water Services Grant income.

She outlined the Grants & Subsidies estimated at €44,550,811 and provided the members details on the increases, noting this is the first year for the Croí Conaithe grant of €1m in the budget. She highlighted that budgeted expenditure has increased between 2021 and 2025 by over €24m which is a 33% increase. €12.8m of this is in Housing, reflecting the significant changes and additional functions that have been taken on in this directorate over the past few years.

She provided the members with a detailed breakdown at sub service level within each Division. Increase in housing include areas of pre-lets, planned maintenance, DPGs and homelessness. In total the Housing budget has increased by €1.6m from own resources. Most of the changes to Roads budgets relate to grant aided works and the roads' grants for 2025 are usually advised in quarter 1 of the year. Increases from our own resources include winter and general maintenance and PLEEP.

She advised that Water Services are operated under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Irish Water and the direct costs are fully recoupable. The cost of Group Water Schemes is not included in the SLA but the direct costs are recoupable. In the area of Development Management an additional €25k has been provided towards events and festivals supports and 30k to key biodiversity projects. In relation to unfinished housing estates there are now 2 staff in Taking in Charge. Newer estates should be cost neutral but there are some legacy issues and €310k is provided towards addressing these estates.

Environmental increases include additional leachate management, street cleaning supports of €66k and the cemeteries reserve increase of €30k. Recreation and Amenity increases include staffing and library maintenance. This is an area that will need further increases in the coming years as Edenderry Library comes on stream and is fully staffed. Other increases include €35k for library books and €100k for Greenway maintenance. She advised there are no notable changes to Agriculture, Education Health & Welfare, however there are discussions nationally about Local Authorities and XL bulldogs.

She noted that in Miscellaneous Services the General Municipal Allocation has a proposed increase of 4%. The NPPR income is budgeted at €20k as it will no longer be in place by the end of March, however there are a small number of payment plans still in operation. Ms. F. Millane advised that in regard to Central Management an Irish officer been appointed and HR have been provided with an additional €8,500 towards staff training. IT have increased cyber security, licencing and digitisation costs. Pensions continue to rise and are funded through the annual budget.

She noted that following the public consultation and discussions with CPG, 100% abatement for vacant premises where the rates value is under €20,000 and the property is available for sale/rent or is undergoing significant renovation, was recommended. Where the rates value is over €20,000 a rates abatement of 50% to apply.

She advised the members that the Capital Programme 2025-2027 is showing an expected spend of over €50m per annum over the next three years. This includes projects that are expected to commence, but not be completed in the three years. Progress on projects will be brought to Council on a regular basis.

In conclusion she acknowledged that this is a very positive budget. The members concerns over the past year have been considered and additional financial resources have been directed toward areas such as Housing, Roads, Taking in Charge and Cemeteries. She welcomed the proposed clearance of the historic cumulative deficit by the end of 2025. She noted the need to be mindful of the fact that the exchequer subvention for the loss of Shannonbridge rates is not committed beyond 2026 and this will need to be managed carefully over the next few years.

She advised that should the members wish to amend the budget, there must be a proposer and seconder, and the member must identify where the corresponding reductions to expenditure will be made from discretionary costs.

The Cathaoirleach noted that this was a very positive budget and addressed a number of issues that the members had raised with the Executive. He welcomed the additional funding for the DPG

programme, Taking in Charge of Housing Estates in the county. He sought clarification on the Rates Abatement Process.

The members welcomed the Budget. They sought clarification on the increase in the Homeless funding. They noted the increase in the provision of Public Lighting however they expressed concerns about the quality of the new Public Lighting. It was noted that there was no increase in the allocation for Surface Dressing. They noted that there were no increases in the allocation to the Traffic/Litter Warden service, and there were no allocations for Parks or Public Open Spaces. They noted that a maintenance allocation was required for Playground equipment.

The members welcomed the increase in the GMA allocation to the Municipal Districts. They queried if an additional allocation could be made to the MD's to fund Christmas Lights in the towns and villages across the county. They sought clarification on the funding to Community Swimming Pools. They noted the funding to the Winter Maintenance Programme and sought a review of the Programme to include additional routes in the county.

Responding to the Members queries and comments the members of the Management Team advised that no Rates increase was proposed for 2025 however an increase may have to be considered for 2026. In relation to Community Swimming Pools, Ms. Millane advised that the allocation to Swimming Pools was increased in 2024 to take account of increased energy costs; the 2025 allocation remained unchanged from the 2024 one. Ms. Millane clarified the proposals on the Rate Abatement. She noted that the organisation was awaiting a decision on the Rateable Valuation of Renewable Energy projects, ie Wind Farms, Solar Farms and Battery Storage Units. Ms. Dillon advised that the new Fire Service Training Centre which was scheduled for completion in 2026 would be an additional revenue stream for the organisation. Mr. Shanahan responded to the members queries regarding the allocation towards Surface Dressing and clarified the situation regarding the Public Lighting Network. He advised that additional resources would be provided to the MD's to assist with Road Sweeping. Ms. J. Ryan responded to the member's queries regarding the Homeless Services, advising that the additional allocation was to cover the costs of the facilities at Clonamore House. The Chief Executive noted that the organisation had recently appointed an Irish Language Officer and these additional costs were included in the allocation towards Communications.

The Cathaoirleach noted that this was Ms. Jean Ryan's last meeting with Offaly County Council as she is shortly to take up a position of Director of Service with Westmeath County Council. The members wished Ms. Ryan every success in her new role and thanked her for her work with Offaly County Council and Tullamore Municipal District.

The Cathaoirleach welcomed Mr. Noel Gorman to his first meeting of Offaly County Council and advised the members that Mr. Gorman was assigned to the post of Director of Service for Housing and Integration and assigned the responsibility for Tullamore MD. The members welcomed Mr. Gorman to his new post and stated that they looked forward to working with him in the future.

MINUTES CONFIRMED:

CATHAOIRLEACH

RUNAÍ

16 December 2024

