

**Minutes of Budget 2020 Meeting of Clare County Council held in the Council Chamber, Áras Contae an Chláir, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare on Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2019 at 3:30 p.m.**

**Present:**

Councillors M. Nestor, J. Flynn, P. Murphy, P. Daly, J. Cooney, P. Hayes, P. Burke, A. O’Callaghan, T. O’Brien, C. Crowe, J. Crowe, M. Begley, P.J. Ryan, P. McMahon, G. Flynn, S. Talty, J. Killeen, J. Garrihy, P.J. Kelly, B. Chambers, G. Keating, C. Murphy, I. Lynch.

- Mr. Pat Dowling, Chief Executive.
- Ms. Ann Reynolds, Meetings Administrator.
- Ms. Margaret O’Rourke, Assistant Staff Officer.
- Ms. Anne Haugh, Director of Social Development.
- Mr. Leonard Cleary, Director of Rural Development.
- Ms. Carmel Kirby, Director of Physical Development.
- Ms. Noeleen Fitzgerald, A/Head of Finance.
- Ms. Trina Rynne, Financial Accountant.
- Ms. Caroline O’Connor, Management Accountant.
- Ms. Carmel Greene, Senior Executive Officer, Economic Development.
- Ms. Siobhán McNulty, Senior Executive Officer, Social Development.
- Ms. Leonore O’Neill, Senior Executive Officer, Physical Development,
- Mr. Seán Lenihan, Senior Engineer, Physical Development.
- Mr. John Leahy, Senior Engineer, Physical Development.
- Mr. Cyril Feeney, Senior Engineer, Physical Development.
- Ms. Helen Walsh, County Librarian.
- Mr. Denis O’Connell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

**Apologies:** Cllrs. A. Norton, M. McKee, M. Howard, C. Colleran Molloy, R. Garvey.

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Cathal Crowe presided.

At the outset, the Cathaoirleach called on the Chief Executive, Pat Dowling to introduce Budget 2020.

Mr. Dowling addressed the meeting and stated that this is the first budget of a new five year term of Clare County Council and it affords the opportunities to sustain and grow the Council’s income during this period so that we can drive forward on a range of key infrastructural and economic initiatives. In this regard, Mr. Dowling noted and acknowledged the decision by a majority vote of the members concerning the Local Property Tax (Local Adjustment Factor) on 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

Mr. Dowling stated that the annual budgetary process both current and capital continues to be about finding a balance, a trade off between our responsibility as a service provider, as a protector of the environment, as an employer, as a catalyst for economic development, as a voice for rural communities, as an advocate for the disadvantaged, as a deliverer of key infrastructural initiatives, as a first responder in major emergencies and as a champion in the mitigation of the effects of climate change.

Mr. Dowling stated that the budget documentation gives details of the key objectives and projects which the Council hopes to deliver in the year ahead. They are set out within the Economic, Social, Physical, Rural and Finance/Support Services/sectoral divisions of the book.

Mr. Dowling stated that for over 25 years leading up to 2016, Clare County Council carried a deficit on it's annual accounts. At the height of this period, the Council had an accumulated loss of over €9m. In 2016, 2017 and 2018 the Council returned a balanced situation with a slight surplus and is on target to balance in the current year also.

Mr. Dowling thanked the Mayor and all the elected members who engaged in the preparation of this budget at Municipal District level and at county level. He acknowledged the hard work and dedicated efforts of the Council's Finance team led by Noeleen Fitzgerald, supported by Caroline O'Connor, Trina Rynne and staff in the preparation of this budget.

In conclusion, Mr. Dowling stated that the collective current and capital expenditure for 2020 totals over €27m of which the Revenue Budget comes to €128m.

Mr. Dowling recommended the Draft Budget 2020 to Council for consideration.

Noeleen Fitzgerald, A/Head of Finance gave a presentation on Clare County Council's Draft Budget 2020 which commenced with a look back at 2019 budget and the Council's key performance indicators. The presentation outlined the process overview and the key objectives underpinning the draft budget 2020 together with emerging demands on 2020. Ms. Fitzgerald presented a breakdown of revenue expenditure 2019-2020 and a detailed account of revenue income 2015-2020 was also provided. Details of Local Property Tax 2020 allocation was outlined in the presentation. Figures for commercial rates income were made available together with a profile of commercial rate customers. Ms. Fitzgerald provided information on the Draft Budget 2020 for each sectoral division. Details of the Council's capital programme 2020-2022 were also outlined in the presentation.

## **Social Development Directorate**

**Division A    Housing and Building**

**Division F    Recreation & Amenity**

Cllr. G. Flynn, Chair of the Social Development S.P.C. addressed the meeting and provided an outline of activities for the Social Development Directorate. This gave

information on progress in the delivery of the Council's own social housing construction programme and collaboration with the AHB sector to continue to yield significant numbers of new homes for occupation by the Council's social housing applicants. Cllr. Flynn provided information on the delivery of homeless services, the maintenance of the Council's social housing stock, private housing grants and housing support services.

In relation to Division F, Cllr. G. Flynn stated that the draft budget includes the provisions for leisure centre operations, outdoor recreational facilities, the library and archival service and the operation of the Arts Programme.

Queries were raised by members in relation to housing maintenance and the operation of homeless accommodation facilities. A. Haugh, Director of Social Development responded to queries raised.

## **Physical Development Directorate**

**Division B Road Transport and Safety**

**Division C Water Services**

**Division E Environmental Services**

**Division G Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare**

Cllr. J. Crowe, Chair of Physical Development S.P.C. addressed the meeting and provided a summary of activities for the Physical Development Directorate. Cllr. Crowe provided details of a variety of projects being managed by the Council's Project Management Office and referred to the new Transport Strategy for the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area, being developed by the National Transport Authority. Cllr. Crowe stated that a key focus of the Physical Development Directorate is to maintain and improve the condition of non-national road infrastructure through Department Grants and own resources. Cllr. J. Crowe also referred to projects being undertaken by the Emergency Services for 2020.

Cllr. J. Crowe stated that the Physical Development Directorate will lead a Climate Change Adaptation Steering Group across all directorates to co-ordinate and implement the adaptation actions and Climate Action will be considered by all four S.P.C.'s. He also stated that the Physical Development Directorate will continue its programme of environmental awareness, monitoring and enforcement measures and maintain our 9 blue flag beaches and 3 green coast accreditations for 2020. Cllr. Crowe informed the meeting that the Council will continue to manage and operate water services on behalf of Irish Water under the terms of a Service Level Agreement.

The elected members raised queries concerning the need for improved commuter services between Ennis and Limerick, agreement between the National Ambulance Service and National Fire Services in acting as rapid response teams and the equal distribution of gardening services and street cleaning in the county.

C. Kirby, Director of Physical Development addressed these queries.

## **Economic Development Directorate**

### **Division D Development Management**

Cllr. P. McMahon, Chair of the Economic Development S.P.C. addressed the meeting and outlined key objectives for the Economic Development Directorate for 2020 which include, working with UL to help deliver the SDZ, the completion of a business case/feasibility study for a Cahercon Commercial Marine Training facility on the Shannon Estuary, working with the Data Centre promoters to find an end-user for the Ennis Data Centre site, further development of third level educational facilities in County Clare, the completion of Ennis 2040 Economic and Spatial Strategy, the commencement of the Ennis 2040 strategic sites assembly process, preparing a Shannon town economic and spatial masterplan, reviewing the County Development Plan, completing a Cappa Pier Enhancement Strategy, reviewing vacant sites across the county and examining the current Development Contribution Scheme.

Queries were raised in relation to vacant property levy and taking in charge. An update on the Ennis 2040 Economic and Spatial Strategy was also requested. P. Dowling, Chief Executive and Carmel Greene, Senior Executive Officer, Economic Development Directorate responded to the queries raised.

## **Rural Development Directorate**

### **Division D Development Management**

Cllr. P. Hayes, Chair of the Rural Development S.P.C. addressed the meeting and provided an overview of the main activities in this area and the main items budgeted for in 2020 which include the completion of the County Tourism Strategy 2030, the preparation of the Cliffs of Moher Strategy 2040, Community Grants Scheme, Ennistymon Digital Hub, ICT licensing/security and the delivery of the new imminent Clare Tourism Strategy.

Cllr. P. Hayes referred to RRDF Funding being invested into large scale projects which involve Inis Cealtra/Holy Island, Loop head Lighthouse and Vandeleur Walled Garden. Cllr. Hayes stated that Clare County Council will be match-funding 25% of this investment.

Cllr. P. Hayes informed the meeting that there will be large scale improvements to visitor facilities at the Cliffs of Moher and this will be self-funded.

Cllr. Hayes referred to recent Government Capital Funding approved in 2019 for small to medium projects that will engage with the 2020 Budget and provided examples such as CLAR Initiative 2019, Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2019, Rural Regeneration & Development Fund 2019, Community Enhancement Fund, Men's Shed Fund.

Cllr. P. Hayes also stated that funding announcements are awaited shortly on Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and Healthy Ireland Fund.

The elected members welcomed the ongoing progress in the Rural Development Directorate and congratulated the Council on the level of engagement with community groups. The members raised concerns in relation to vacant properties and the need to encourage property owners to upgrade derelict buildings. It was recommended that a review of the commercial rates vacant property relief take place in 2020 for 2021 budget. The members felt that more hubs are required in the county and that a more balanced charging system needs to be introduced so that community operated hubs can remain sustainable. The need for a co-ordinated transport system in the county was highlighted by the members.

Pat Dowling, Chief Executive, Noeleen Fitzgerald, A/Head of Finance and Leonard Cleary, Director of Rural Development replied to the queries raised by the members.

**Division H    Miscellaneous Services**  
**Division J    Central Management Services**

Noeleen Fitzgerald, A/Head of Finance responded to queries raised in relation to loans raised by the Council.

Cllr. J. Crowe then proposed that the budget as presented be adopted, this was seconded by Cllr. P. Daly.

The following proposal was read out by the Meetings Administrator, as proposed by Cllr. J. Crowe and seconded by Cllr. P. Daly and agreed by the members present.

“That pursuant to Section 103 of the Local Government Act 2001 (substituted by Section 58 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014) the Draft Budget 2020 as presented by the Chief Executive is hereby adopted”.

The following proposal was read out by the Meetings Administrator and was proposed by Cllr. C. Crowe, seconded by Cllr. J. Garrihy and agreed by the members present.

“That the Council hereby determine in accordance with the draft budget 2020 as presented by the Chief Executive, the General Annual Rate on Valuation for the County of 72.99 set out in Table A.”

The following proposal was read out by the Meetings Administrator and was proposed by Cllr. P.J. Ryan, seconded by Cllr. M. Begley and agreed by the members present.

“Pursuant to Section 31 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and Article 29 of the Local Government (Financial and Audit Procedures) Regulations 2014 that the level of Rates refund (Vacancy Credit) that applies is 100%.”

The following proposal in relation to the rates payment incentive grant scheme was read out by the Meetings Administrator and was proposed by Cllr. J. Flynn, seconded by Cllr. S. Talty and agreed by the members present.

“That the rates payment incentive grant scheme for 2020 in respect of occupied properties, with a rates value up to €10,000, be as follows in respect of the areas set out below:

Former Ennis Town Council Area	9% of the 2020 Rates Cost or €450 if lower
Former Kilrush Town Council Area	12% of the 2020 Rates Cost or €600 if lower
Former County Council Area	3% of the 2020 Rates Cost or €100 if lower

where the rates are paid on time; or where there are established payment plans (or new payment plans that have been agreed in writing with the council on or before July 31st 2020) which provide for the clearance of all the rates due by December 2020 and where the rates outstanding are actually cleared in line with the payment plan.”

The following proposal regarding additional expenditure was read out by the Meetings Administrator and was proposed by Cllr. C. Murphy, seconded by Cllr. M. Begley and agreed by the members present.

“Pursuant to the provisions of Section 104 of the Local Government Act 2001, additional expenditure in the amounts set out below in respect of the Divisions listed is hereby approved:

Division A: Housing and Building	€2,261,387
Division B: Road Transport & Safety	€2,893,969
Division C: Water Services	€174,294
Division D: Development Management	€3,292,806
Division E: Environmental Services	€16,391
Division F: Recreation & Amenity	€1,749

The Cathaoirleach thanked the members, Chief Executive, Directors of Service and A/Head of Finance and their staff for their co-operation in the preparation and adoption of the Budget for 2020. He also thanked members of the Corporate Policy Group and all members for their input into the Budget process.

The meeting then concluded at 6:20 p.m.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Riarthóir Cruinnithe**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Cathaoirleach**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_