

Kildare County Council

Minutes of Budget Meeting held at 3.00pm on Monday, 23 November 2020 at Newbridge Town Hall, Newbridge, Co Kildare

Members Present: Councillor M Stafford (Cathaoirleach), Councillors V Behan, A Breen, A Breslin, F Brett, B Caldwell, B Clear, A Connolly, N Connolly, Í Cussen, B Dooley, S Doyle, K Duffy, T Durkan, A Farrelly, A Feeney, D Fitzpatrick, C Galvin, P Hamilton, N Heavey, I Keatley, C Kenny, C Kelly, N Killeen, V Liston, P McEvoy, F McLoughlin Healy, S Moore, J Neville, N Ó Cearúil, P O'Dwyer, T O'Dwyer, C Pender, R Power, E Sammon, P Ward, B Weld and B Wyse.

Apologies: Councillors M Coleman, N Ó Cearúil and P O'Dwyer.

Also Present: Mr P Carey (Chief Executive), Ms F Millane A/Head of Finance, Mr J Boland, Ms S Kavanagh, Mr E Ryan, Ms A Aspell (Directors of Services), Ms C Barrett, A/Director of Service, Ms B Sweeney, Financial Accountant, Ms C O'Grady (Meetings Administrator) and Ms K Keane (Meetings Secretary).

Consideration of Budget

The Cathaoirleach welcomed the members to the meeting.

As due notice of the meeting and of the preparation of the budget having been given as required by law, the council considered the draft budget for the year ending 31 December 2021.

The Cathaoirleach thanked the members who attended the briefing on the 16 November 2020 and invited the Chief Executive to introduce the draft Budget 2021 and the A/Head of Finance to present it to the members.

The Chief Executive gave an overview of the revenue budget confirming it totaled €164 million and related to the day to day expenditure of the council. He noted the uncertainty that had arisen due to the Covid pandemic stating it had devastated both the hospitality and the tourism sector and the Government interventions had been hugely supportive in these areas. In relation to the business supports administered since the start of the pandemic, Mr Carey thanked the Finance team and the LEO team for the supports they had administered to the business community. He also noted that this was the 12th year that there had been no increase in commercial rates which was an 'indirect' support to the business community also. He outlined the additions to this year's budget to include a full time Climate Action Officer, Energy Efficiency Officer and the recent appointment of a Communications Officer. He paid particular thanks to the Head of IT, Rory Hopkins and his team for their work in developing and delivering a remote working service since the pandemic hit. He commended the elected members for retaining the 7.5% increase to LPT noting the value of work that was being delivered through this mechanism. He noted that Equality and Inclusivity had been imbedded throughout the entire budget and concluded by stating this was a very positive budget in very difficult times and sought the members support in adopting it as presented.

The A/Head of Finance stated that in accordance with S102 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, the Draft Budget has been prepared in the statutory format. She confirmed the process of preparing the Budget involved a number of stages including the consideration by CPG of the broad parameters of the budget which was done at both the July and September CPG meetings, followed by a detailed review of income and expenditure headings by Management Team. The decision to vary the Local Property Tax rate was made in September and the draft budgetary plans were discussed at each of the Municipal District meetings in October.

She confirmed that a number of reserved functions would be determined at the budget meeting including:

- The adoption of the budget by resolution (with or without amendment).
- The determination of the Annual Rate on Valuation.
- Approval of the vacancy refund rate.
- Noting the 3-year capital programme.

She noted that balancing this budget had been very challenging but that overall budgets were very similar to 2020, with some slight reductions to variable expenditure as flagged at the municipal district meetings in October. These were unavoidable in the balancing of this budget however, the Department had indicated that there may be some monies coming back to the sector and that if this happened, these reductions would be addressed as a matter of priority. She referred to a copy of the letter that was sent to the Chief Executives the previous week which had been circulated that morning, noting that whilst there were no specifics included for 2021, the indications were positive. She outlined that the executive had also been mindful of the most vulnerable sectors in our budget, and where possible they had maintained expenditure in those lines ie. Housing Adaptation budgets.

Ms Millane stated that as advised to Finance Committee, Corporate Policy Group, the October Municipal District Committee meetings and Full Council at their September meeting, that non-grant income had remained broadly stagnant with the key changes being:

- Increases in IT costs as a direct result of Covid-19 and additional licencing and software costs in order to enable remote working.
- Increases in Payroll costs – Due to FEMPI (financial emergency measures in the public interest) related (row back of pay reductions under National Pay Agreements) of which the Department will fund €600k towards the FEMPI related increases and additional staff part budgeted for in 2020, but who need to be provided for a full year in 2021.

She also outlined the changes to income under the headings of Rental Income, Rates, Property Entry Levy, Payparking and LPT income.

Ms Millane confirmed that the budget book before the Members was divided into 3 main sections and that the that the format of the budgetary tables was prescribed under the Accounting Code of Practice

1. The report of the Chief Executive – this report provides the context for the figures in the budget.

2. The 'Key Features' (coloured pages) – historically Council looked for additional detail (for some figures) than that provided in the statutory budget. As there is no provision to amend the format or detail of the statutory budget, some additional detail is provided here.
3. The actual statutory budget (pages T1 to T29) – this comprises statutory and explanatory tables which Council (with or without amendment) shall adopt.

Division A - Housing and Building

Ms Millane stated that the key points to note were as follows (T7-T9):

There was a small reduction in Housing maintenance of €37k

A0403 Have provided for additional Community Worker to provide support to communities and tenants of Kildare

A0502 Homelessness (which is partially recoupable) was expected to increase slightly so we have provided for an increase of €70k (*90% for preventative work and 7% for the rest – budget therefore as 85%*). As a point to note, in the budget we only budget for Kildare's element – as part of the year end accounts (the AFS) as we are the lead authority for the region, the monies claimed by Meath and Wicklow go through our books so the figures appear to be higher.

A0702 Social Housing Initiatives – there is significant uptake in this area and the budgets are proposed to increase from €9.9 to €11.1m, with matching increases to income

A09 – the various housing adaptation schemes are being maintained at 2020 levels - these will be reviewed, and if necessary amended, when the Department advises how much the 2021 grants will be.

A1201- additional resources being provided due to the positive uptake in the scheme.

Division B - Roads and Transportation

Ms Millane stated that the key points to note were as follows (T10 to T11):

Most of the changes to Roads budgets relate to grant aided works. We have not yet been advised of the roads grants for 2021 – these are usually advised in quarter 1 of the year. As such, Roads will come back to each of the MDs in Quarter 1 (generally the March meeting) with the Road Works programme for 2021 which will reflect the actual grants received – for the moment we are estimating broadly based on the grants received in 2020. In addition, you will note that the funding for TAAG has been re-distributed to local roads maintenance as the Area Engineers will lead on progressing local projects.

Local Roads General Maintenance, KCC funded element has been reduced by €80k.

Local Roads General Improvement has also decreased, and whilst €50k relates to KCC funded footpaths, most of the reduction is grant related. You will note, however that here is an increase in grants in B0405 Local Roads General Maintenance and Regional Roads (B0301). This reflects the 2020 grant allocations and will be updated once the 2021 allocations are notified.

Public Lighting's budget has reduced – we have been putting money aside each year towards the new Public Lighting Project to reduce the amount we will need to borrow– this is a national project which is expected to roll out in Kildare in 2021. The expected loan repayment has been provided for in this budget. This project is expected to have a significant impact on energy usage.

Pay-parking has been discussed as part of the MD meetings in October and the figures included in the budget are those that were brought to the MDs at that time.

Division C – Water Services

Ms Millane confirmed that Water Services are operated under an SLA with Irish Water and that the costs under the SLA are fully recoupable.

She confirmed that C05 - the cost of Group Water Schemes - is not included in the SLA but the direct costs are recoupable.

Division D - Development Management

Ms Millane confirmed the key points relating to Development Management (T15-T17) were as follows:

Reallocation of staff costs have been reflected in a reduction in D0201 Development Management and an increase in Public Realm (D0905).

D0501 – further to the Chief Executive's commitment to increase tourism over the coming years the tourism budget has been maintained for 2021.

There is some reallocation of staffing between Taking in Charge and Building Control D0701 and D0802

D0901 Urban and Village Renewal has a cost of €600,000 included – this is a contra item.

D0905 Economic Development – the increase here reflects the staff cost of the public realm team. There is also a €50k increase in Economic Dev initiatives.

D0906 Local Enterprise Office – the increase is staff related – most of LEO costs are recoupable from Enterprise Ireland ***Business Support Grants, which are a contra item, of €25m are included in the out-turn.

Division E - Environmental Services

Ms Millane confirmed the key points were as follows (T18-T20) -

E0103 Landfill aftercare costs – there has been a reduction to the provision for 2021 of €13,500 (was €100k)

E0503 Litter Management (see E0501) the increase here reflects the reallocation of staff. There has been some reallocation of staff between E0702 (enforcement), E0801 (waste management plan) and E1301 (pollution control).

E0901 Operation & Maintenance of Burial Grounds increase is due to an increase in numbers of burial ground caretakers.

E1001 Civil Defence includes the cost of renting a new space for the Civil Defence in 2021. This is part funded through the Department of Defence.

E1501 Climate Change – In 2021 an amount for the Environmental Awareness Officer, together with a provision of €50,000 towards leveraging funds for projects/grants has been included.

Division F - Recreation and Amenity

Ms Millane outlined confirmed that Recreation and Amenity came under T21 – T22) and the increase in F0301 Parks & Open Spaces - was due to additional staff costs.

Agriculture, Education Health & Welfare

Ms Millane outlined this item was covered in T23-T24 and that under G0101 Land Drainage – most of the work done by this team is Capital and therefore capital funded – however some work relates to the ongoing river drainage maintenance.

Miscellaneous Services

Ms Millane outlined that Miscellaneous Services (T25-T27) covered the following:

H0303 - Refunds and Irrecoverable rates reflects the level of irrecoverable rates in 2019 plus/minus anything that we are aware of in 2020.

H0401 - Register of elector costs – this reflects the allocation of staff costs

Other Income on T27 – decrease of €500k – for 2020 the Valuation Office had visited a small number of priority sites in December 2019 and the valuations came through in 2020 resulting in PEL income. These have now translated to Rates.

The Valuation Office has not added more than those in 2020 so we are reducing back to pre-2020 levels for 2021.

Government Grants on T27 had increased by €600k which is FEMPI recouplement

Central Management Charge

Ms Millane outlined that the Central Management Charge (T28) covered Corporate Services increases related to staff costs, in the main v to the Communications Team. IT costs as advised previously, related to the licencing and software costs required to optimise service delivery throughout 2021.

The Cathaoirleach thanked Ms Millane for the detailed overview and proposed that a short break be taken to allow members to consider, based on the reports provided, if they wished to advance the written motions they had submitted in advance of the meeting. He asked that they advise both he and the Meetings Administrator in writing to this effect. He also confirmed that written motions could be accepted at this point of the meeting also.

On the resumption of the meeting the motions that had been submitted and agreed for tabling, were put to the members for their consideration.

Motion 1 – Councillor Íde Cussen

That F0301 Operation, Maintenance and Improvement of parks, pitches and open spaces include a defined expenditure allocation for the rolling out of Changing Places in Kildare. (There is an increase in this code from 2020 to 2021, so no further funding required to enable this amendment). <https://changingplaces.ie/>.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Cussen and seconded by Councillor Pender.

A report from Ms Kavanagh explained that F0301 was made up of about 50% payroll costs for the Parks Team and 50% maintenance budget for parks and other green

areas. Spend in relation to “changing places” type facilities were a capital expenditure item and that would need to be included in the capital programme.

Councillor Cussen requested that the amendment being sought was for one year only and that the council had an obligation to do better in the area of Accessibility, acknowledging the work done to date by the Access Officer.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Cussen, seconded by Councillor Pender with 9 members voting in favor of the motion, 22 members voting against and with 3 abstentions, the motion was defeated.

Motion 2 – Councillor Íde Cussen

That a portion of D0903 funding be diverted to D0905 enable the formation of a separate Accessibility Grant Scheme for Small Businesses with an allocation to each Municipal District from this (as per Shop Front Scheme).

The motion was proposed by Councillor Cussen and seconded by Councillor Pender.

A report from Ms Kavanagh stated there was a total budget of €56,000 in DO903. This funds all the Twinning Committees around the County and the County Twinning Committee. It was agreed that Twinning in its “traditional” form would most likely not go ahead in 2021, however, as all other sectors have had to diversify and innovate, I am sure that the twinning groups around the county will follow suit. There was also an opportunity for the twinning groups to work with Kildare Failte to plan events for when travel restrictions are lifted. The diversion of this fund is of course a matter for the members but the provision (if divided by the 5 MDs) would be of such a small scale that it would add little to the Shop Front / Accessibility Grant Scheme and it would mean that no twinning activities could take place in 2021.

Councillor Cussen clarified that the amendment sought was for one year only and sought the members support on the motion as accessibility within shops/businesses was much needed. She asked that the surplus in the Twinning Budget be divided out amongst the MDs to enable this to happen.

Ms Kavanagh reiterated the point that accessibility works are both eligible and welcome under the Shop Front Grants Scheme and did not want the debate to become a case of one budget line versus another.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Cussen, seconded by Councillor Pender with 8 members voting in favor of the motion, 28 members voting against and with no abstentions, the motion was defeated.

Motion 3 – Councillor Noel Connolly

That the council reduce its Vacant Commercial Property Rates relief by 25% for properties that are vacant for over one year.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Noel Connolly and seconded by Councillor Clear.

A report from Ms Millane noted that vacancy relief on vacant property is given in compliance with rates legislation and is only available where:

1. The property is available for letting at a reasonable rent for the area
2. The property is for sale – also at a reasonable value for the area
3. The property is undergoing significant renovations and is therefore closed for business
4. Registered charities that operate in a rated property

Kildare County Council only gives vacancy relief where there is proof that these conditions are met – so for example if the property is only for letting on a short (say 6 months) lease, then this would not be given vacancy relief. If vacancy relief is reduced, under current legislation it is reduced for all – there is no distinguishing between the various headings.

She confirmed there was a new Rates Act since 2019 – it will allow for some flexibility in approach. It has not all been enacted yet and it was recommended that in the current economic climate, Kildare County Council maintains the 100% vacancy relief for 2021 but that this ultimately was a matter for the members to agree.

Councillor Connolly stated that the council needed to do more in this area and by reducing this rate, it would demonstrate that the council was serious about tackling the issue of vacant properties and support the work of the for Public Realm Team in bringing these areas back into use.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Noel Connolly, seconded by Councillor Clear with 6 members voting in favor, 27 members voting against and with no abstentions, the motion was defeated.

Motion 4 – Councillor Noel Connolly

That the council reduces its Town Twinning budget to €15,000 and increases A0901 Disabled Persons Grants by €41,139.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Noel Connolly and seconded by Councillor Cussen.

A report from Ms Kavanagh stated that there was a total budget of €56,000 in DO903 and that this funded all the Twinning Committees around the county and the County Twinning Committee. It was agreed that Twinning in its “traditional” form will most likely not go ahead in 2021, however, as all other sectors have had to diversify and innovate and the twinning groups around the county will follow suit. There was also an opportunity for the twinning groups to work with Kildare Failte to plan events for when travel restrictions are lifted. However, ultimately, the diversion of this fund was a matter for the members.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Noel Connolly, seconded by Councillor Cussen with 4 members voting in favor, 31 members voting against and with no abstentions, the motion was defeated.

Motion 5 – Councillor Nuala Killeen on behalf of the Social Democrats

We propose that Kildare County Council ringfences the first €250,000 of any potential funding, either received from Central Government or if any funds are unspent in 2021, for prioritising in community-based initiatives; such as Libraries, Community Grants, Community Facilities and Disabled Persons Grants and whilst our ultimate goal is to see 2% investment into the future, our motion today is seeking

an allocation of 0.1% of the overall budget and would seek members support in same.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Killeen and seconded by Councillor Pender.

Councillor Killeen stated the Social Democrats group acknowledged that we had to survive the #Covid19 era but we also have to invest in our communities to deliver a society and an economy that can survive and revive well. They acknowledged that pre-Covid, Kildare was dealing with the consequences of a decade of underinvestment, lack of access to housing, economic inequalities, and lack of opportunities and that all of these challenges remained with many worsening by the effects of the current crisis. She confirmed they were seeking to create an inclusive, just and equitable society and it should be a goal to gender and equality proof all decisions on expenditure and revenue raising.

The A/Head of Finance stated she was happy to prioritise those areas if the members agreed.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Killeen, seconded by Councillor Pender and agreed by the members that Kildare County Council ringfences the first €250,000 of any potential funding, either received from Central Government or if any funds are unspent in 2021, for prioritising in community based initiatives; such as Libraries, Community Grants, Community Facilities and Disabled Persons Grants.

Motion 6 – Councillors Vanessa Liston, Nuala Killeen, Joe Neville, Ciara Galvin, Ide Cussen, Mark Leigh, Peter Hamilton, Colm Kenny

Acknowledging the lack of funding for eliminating the use of glyphosate across the county in Budget 2021 despite the opportunity and success of the county pilots, that Municipal Districts reaffirm our commitment to the cost of €65,000 for 2020-2021, with the aim of Kildare County Council working to including this funding for item F0301 in the 2021 budget, from H909.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Hamilton and seconded by Councillor Liston.

The A/Head of Finance stated the matter of LPT distribution within the Municipal District, was a matter for the members of each Municipal District.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Hamilton, seconded by Councillor Liston and with the agreement of the members, that Municipal Districts reaffirm our commitment to the cost of €65,000 for 2020-2021, with the aim of Kildare County Council working to including this funding for item F0301 in the 2021 budget, from H909.

Motion 7 – Councillor Vanessa Liston

That individual members who do not aim to use their conference allocation in 2021, move this amount from H0904 to DO603 for community groups, games and youth initiatives.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Liston and seconded by Councillor Hamilton.

Councillor Liston sought the members support for her motion. The Cathaoirleach clarified that the amount assigned to conferences per councillor was €700 and subject to the members approving the motion, it would be up to each councillor to advise the Corporate Services department of their intention in this regard.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Liston, seconded by Councillor Hamilton and with the agreement of the members, individual councillors who do not aim to use their conference allocation in 2021, advise the Corporate Services Department as such and this amount be moved from H0904 to DO603 for community groups, games and youth initiatives.

Motion 8 – Councillor Fiona McLoughlin Healy

That annual performance reviews and variance analysis of Kildare Failte and any organisations/groups in receipt of more than €50k of public funds, be provided in advance of future budgets for elected representatives.

The motion was proposed by Councillor McLoughlin Healy and seconded by Councillor Cussen.

Councillor McLoughlin Healy stated that the council was duty bound to ensure due diligence and as such, performance review was required at the end of each year. She stated that she had sought Key Performance Indicators from Kildare Failte and

had queried compliance with their Articles of Association previously in relation to Municipal District representation.

Ms Kavanagh confirmed that Kildare County Council transferred money in the form of a grant to Kildare Failte, who are answerable to their own Board of Directors. She stated she did not want Kildare Failte to be portrayed in a negative light given the great work they do for the tourism and the hospitality sector. She concluded by stating that there was no issue with KPI's or Service Level Agreements with any group the council gave grants to.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor McLoughlin Healy, seconded by Councillor Cussen and with 3 members voting in favor of the motion and the majority voting against the motion, the motion was defeated.

Motion 9 – Councillor Fiona McLoughlin Healy

That the budget for Twinning be reduced by as much as the committees did not expend of their current budget and the surplus be reallocated to community grants. The motion was proposed by Councillor McLoughlin Healy and seconded by Councillor Cussen.

A report from Ms Kavanagh stated there was no surplus held in 2020 and that any budgets remaining at the end of 2020 will, most likely, be subsumed by budget overruns elsewhere.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor McLoughlin Healy, seconded by Councillor Cussen and with 3 members voting in favor of the motion and the majority voting against the motion, the motion was defeated.

Motion 10 – Councillor Fiona McLoughlin Healy

That a clear definition of 'Festival' is developed and promoted widely when advertising festival grants and clarity provided regarding the eligibility of housing estates/Residents Associations for the grant.

The motion was proposed by Councillor McLoughlin Healy and seconded by Councillor Cussen.

A report from Ms S Kavanagh stated the Local Community and Culture SPC had agreed guidelines for the community and festival grant scheme. The grants schemes are designed to provide financial assistance to voluntary community groups engaged in the planning, organisation and roll-out of activities, events or projects which encourage local community participation and development in County Kildare.

Definition for Festival Grant Scheme

The Festival Grants Scheme is open to all voluntary groups which run/organise key festival events in County Kildare, such as community fun days, historical re-enactments, drama/musical/food festivals, intercultural days or annual parades.

Councillor McLoughlin Healy stated she considered the definition outlined to be spurious and asked for clarity on who or what groups can apply for these grants.

Ms Kavanagh confirmed the matter would be considered by the SPC and a report sent to full council on the matter. Councillor McLoughlin Healy accepted the response.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor McLoughlin Healy, seconded by Councillor Cussen and with the agreement of the members, the motion to be referred to the Local Community and Culture SPC and an agreed definition of “Festival” returned to full council for their approval.

Motion 10 – Councillor Tim Durkan

That all unspent Local Property Tax monies, plus pay parking surpluses, are retained and rolled over within their respective municipal districts.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Durkan and seconded by Councillor Keatley.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Durkan, seconded by Councillor Keatley and with the agreement of the members, the motion was approved.

As there were no further motions to be considered, the Cathaoirleach called on the Meetings Administrator to read the resolution for Budget 2021 into the record.

The Meetings Administrator read the Resolution for Budget 2021 as follows:.

Adoption of Budget

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Suzanne Doyle, seconded by Councillor Ivan Keatley and with 36 members voting in favor, 1 member voting against and with no abstentions, that pursuant to Section 103(7) of the Local Government Act 2001, Kildare County Council do hereby adopt for the financial year ending 31 December 2021, the budget set out in tables A, B, C, D and E of the draft budget presented to the council.

Annual Rate on Valuation

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Tim Durkan, seconded by Councillor Kevin Duffy with all members agreeing that this council do hereby determine in accordance with the said budget the annual rate on valuation set out in Tables A to E of €0.2246 to be the annual rate on valuation to be levied for that year for the purposes set out in those tables.

Vacancy Relief

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Pdraig McEvoy, seconded by Councillor Vanessa Liston, with all members agreeing that this council continue to effect vacant premises relief as outlined in Section 14 of the Local Government Act 1946.

Capital Programme

Ms Millane outlined that the capital programme 2021 -2023 was a rolling programme and was prioritised based on income, primarily grants, that is anticipated in this period. She noted the capital programme was only a commitment to progress projects once funding had been committed.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Joe Neville, seconded by Councillor Seamie Moore and agreed by the members, that the Capital Budget 2021 – 2023 be noted.

The Cathaoirleach thanked the Chief Executive, Ms Millane, Ms Sweeney and the Management team for all their work in the preparation of this budget. He also thanked the Directors of Service for their availability and efficiency in responding to

and reporting on the myriad of queries submitted to them in advance of the Budget briefing and the Budget meeting today.

The Chief Executive thanked the Cathaoirleach and the members for adopting the budget today. He thanked Ms Millane, Ms Sweeney and the Management Team for delivering a balanced budget in what was an extremely challenging economic environment. He thanked the members for their support in adopting the budget and for their work and support over the previous challenging months due to the ongoing pandemic.

The meeting concluded.