

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE
MINUTES OF STATUTORY BUDGET MEETING FOR GALWAY COUNTY
COUNCIL HELD AT ARAS AN CHONTAE, PROSPECT HILL, GALWAY ON MONDAY 27TH
NOVEMBER AT 11.00AM

CATHAOIRLEACH:

Cllr. Eileen Mannion
Cathaoirleach of the County of Galway

I LATHAR:

BAILL:

Cllrs. T. Broderick, D. Burke, J. Byrne, N. Byrne, I. Canning, J. Charity, D. Connolly, M. Connolly, G. Cronnelly, Comh. S. Ó Cualáin, Cllrs. J. Cuddy, S. Cunniffe, Comh. T. Ó Curraoin, Cllrs. S. Donnellan, A. Donohue, M. Fahy, P. Feeney, G. Finnerty, M. Finnerty, T. Healy, M. Hoade, P. Hynes, D. Joyce, F. Kearney, P. Keaveney, D. Killilea, M. Kinane, M. Maher, J. McClearn, K. McHugh, T. McHugh, M. Noone, P. Roche, N. Thomas, Comh S. Ó Tuairisg, Cllrs. S. Walsh, T. Welby

OIFIGIGH:

Mr. Kevin Kelly, Chief Executive, Mr. G. Mullarkey, Head of Finance, Mr. J. Cullen, Director of Service, Mr. A. Farrell, A/Director of Service, Mr. M. Owens, A/Director of Service, Mr. M. Timmins, A/Director of Service, Ms. Eimear Dolan, A/County Secretary & Meetings Administrator, Mr. M. McGovern, Management Accountant, Mr. S. Groarke, Administrative Officer,

Thosnaigh an cruinniú leis an paidir.

The Cathaoirleach Cllr. Eileen Mannion welcomed the elected members, officials and the press to the Statutory 2018 Budget Meeting.

RESOLUTIONS OF SYMPATHY

3141

A resolution of sympathy was also extended to the following:

Marcus & Nancy Mulkerrins, Callowfeenish, Cárna, Co. na Gaillimhe.

Mrs. Kitty Quinn, Orainn, Leitir Móir, Co. na Gaillimhe.

Mr. Connie Joyce, Shanakeela, Recess, Co. Galway.

Mr. Ciarán Ó Flathearta, Leitir Caladh Ó Thuadh, Leitir Mór, Co. na Gaillimhe.

Ms. Bríd Burke, Cappagh na gCapall, Clonbur, Co. Galway.

Mr. Paddy Nevin, Castlebin, New Inn, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.

Mr. Shane Glynn, Skehenane, Woodlawn, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.

The Family of Chrissie Ruane, College Road, Newtown, Mountbellew, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.

The Family of Michael Keary, College Road, Newtown, Mountbellew, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.

CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF BUDGET FOR YEAR 2018

3142

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Eileen Mannion, advised that the first item on the Agenda was the consideration and adoption of the Budget for 2018 and she proposed that each elected member who wishes to speak would be allocated 3 minutes which was agreed. She requested the Chief Executive Mr. Kevin Kelly to introduce the Draft Budget.

The Chief Executive referred to the continuous meetings held during the year which provided a forum for discussion and consideration of budgetary matters and acknowledged the amount of work undertaken by the Finance Committee. The meetings included not only the Finance Committee but also the CPG and each Municipal District considered their draft Budgetary Plans. He advised that the decision taken at the meeting on the 29th of September not to increase the LPT has resulted in a reduction of income of €1.45 million. He noted that the draft municipal district budgets had reflected a reduction in expenditure and outlined the services with the adjustments as follows;

- Local Road Maintenance -€1 million
- Traffic Management -€50,000
- Parks & Open Spaces -€30,000
- Community Grants -€70,000
- Street Cleaning -€50,000
- Amenity Grants -€80,000

He stated that these adjustments were reflected in the Statutory Budget figures except for Street Cleaning which has been restored to the 2017 level. He outlined other main changes which have an impact on the Budget.

- Increased cost of IPB insurance premia and the reduced dividend which will result in an increased cost of €600,000.
- Increased cost associated with the National Pay Agreement and the 80% recoupment by the Government which will result in a shortfall of €500,000

- Increased Pension/Gratuity costs and replacement cost for 23 staff members who will retire in 2018.
- Reduction in income from the NPPR of €100,000
- Estimated extra income from additional rate valuations of €1.6 million. He referred to the fact that the Council had a meeting with the Valuation Office in regard to the list of outstanding valuations and they have been requested to prioritise this. This process will continue in 2018 but the valuations are subject to the appeals procedure.
- Additional costs associated with the Minimum Standards and Preventative Maintenance requirements which are applicable to the Council's housing stock. This is a statutory obligation and €275,000 has been provided in the budget for this.
- Increased costs associated with Housing maintenance, health & safety and the introduction of new initiatives such as e-planning.
- Additional income from Planning, Housing rents and fire fees. He referred to the completion of the rent review process.
- Filling of recent vacancies which will affect the payroll budget.
- Additional costs associated with the improvement of town centres. This scenario may include the initiation of a pilot programme in conjunction with Tidy Towns Committees.
- Funding of national initiatives including urban renewal, RAPID programs, Clár & REDS.

The Chief Executive explained that while the total gross expenditure of €112 million for 2018 shows an increase of €7 million, the net increase over the estimated outturn for 2017 is €89,000. This is due to the fact that grants received in 2017 were more than expected and this trend will continue in 2018. The additional grants however, relate to expenditure which is a contra item and refer to the following:

- Roads- €2.5 m
- Water - €1.1 m
- RAS- €300,000
- CES- €400,000
- Nat Pay €1.9 m

He referred to the cut in the Road Maintenance budget and stated that, every effort will be made to secure additional funding for roads and provide for service delivery. He referred to the reduction in the staff level complement and advised that the Council has very limited scope to increase same – it may be limited to 2-3 additional positions. He advised that special attention will be focused on income collection and explained the setup of a dedicated debt collection unit in the Finance Section. The recent trend is an increase in income collection but, he advised that more work has to be done including a focused strategy on legal action. He referred to the Director's reports which outlined the scale of activity undertaken by the Council despite difficult circumstances. He stated that, this is a reasonable Budget and recommended it for adoption by the Council.

The Cathaoirleach then invited comments or submissions from the Members on the Draft Budget.

Cllr. M. Fahy complimented the Chief Executive and Head of Finance on presenting the Budget. He had proposed adopting the budget at the Loughrea Municipal District as it was clear that no further money is forthcoming. He stated that in his opinion the 5 T.D'S have not asked for more funding for the Council from the Government. He advised that he is content with the fact that the Local Property Tax (LPT) has been reduced in 2018 as people are enduring hardship and this will be seen as a gesture of help. He explained that the proposed merger of the 2 local authorities will result in reduced revenue for the Council and the departure of its best staff. He referred to the damage caused to roads by Coillte such as at Peterswell and recommended that contributions be sought from them by the Council to repair same. He stated that each Councillor should retain part of their Notice of Motion (NOM) to fund a new light next year. He explained that he will support the budget as the Council has limited funding.

Cllr. D. Burke referred to Table C on page 10 of the Statutory Tables and sought clarification as to whether the rate increase proposed for Ballinasloe is €61 or €66. He stated that the policy up to now was to progressively increase the rate for Ballinasloe to reach the County level and this is hitting the businesses there hard. He sought a commitment that funding for Ahascragh & Eyrecourt in regard to the Town & Village renewal scheme will be maintained.

Cllr. T. McHugh acknowledged that work of the Chief Executive and the Director of Services on the budget and welcomed the additional grant aid of 7 million from Government Departments. He stated that it augurs well for the future as the last 9 years were a firefighting effort. He referred to incentives listed on page 5 in regard to Economic and Community Development and stated that the Council does its best with the resources available.

He advised that the new motorway is a very positive development for Tuam. He referred however, to the traffic congestion at peak times in Galway and how it can take over an hour and a half for some commuters to reach Galway on the N17. He stated that traffic can be bumper to bumper at times on the N6 between Rathmorrissey and Galway.

He further recommended that the Council should look at the achievements of Limerick in regard to economic development and promotion of its vision. He stated that a process of decentralisation should take place between Galway and Tuam as the latter is not congested with traffic and has a technology park located on 25 acres.

Cllr. M. Maher stated that lot of work was undertaken to present the budget which will be hard to adopt but the €7 million extra funding is a positive story. He advised that the Council has no choice but to make the cuts to find the money for the budget and hoped it will be agreed. He referred to

the funding announced by Ministers Ring & Kyne in regard to the LIS & Tidy Towns and stated that the extra grants and funding should help to offset the cuts.

Cllr. J. Byrne stated that one has to be positive and that he takes the view that the glass is half full rather than half empty. He stated that the €7million increase in grants is great boost and commended the role of the Finance Committee. He acknowledged the increase in funding for the Social Housing Strategy from €11.6 to €17.8 million, the acquisition of 59 houses and €13 million provided for the construction of 58 new housing units. He referred to the increase in the funding for the Library service from €4.9 to €5.2 million and requested that Gort Library be made full time under the public library strategy with full time staff. He requested the Executive to examine the fire service charges as some people can be charged up to €5,000.

Cllr. P. Roche complimented the Executive and the Finance Committee but advised that the Council had the same problems as regards funding and something is fundamentally wrong when its budget of €112 million is compared to Counties such as Mayo €122 million, Kerry €126 million, Donegal €132 million and Tipperary €135 million. He stated that given its size and population –Galway has the fifth largest population but the second lowest revenue budget. It is not being adequately funded and its per capita funding from the Equalisation fund is very low. County Galway has a population of 179,048 while Mayo's is 130,507. He stated that while the Council has to implement a budget, it cannot respond to the needs of the community with inadequate resources. He advised that the Oireachtas members who represent the County need to do more as regards sourcing funding and the Department needs to respond.

Cllr. A. Donoghue welcomed the €7 million extra funding and the work of the Finance Committee. He referred to page 18 and requested a breakdown of parking fines in regard to fines issued and paid. He also sought clarification in regard to the annual rate of valuation from €58 to €61 for Ballinasloe.

Cllr. D. Connolly advised that the MD budget for Ballinasloe was not passed due to the deficiency in the level of funding. He referred to the €112 million figure listed on page 7 and enquired as to when the increase of the €7 million will be reflected in the codes. He stated that Ballinasloe was not getting its fair share of funding for services-economic development is reduced to €7,690 and parks and open spaces reduced by €30,000. He stated that the €2.5 million extra funding for roads is not reflected in the Municipal Budget and it appears that rural roads will not get services. He enquired if the proposed Town Enhancement Scheme for Ballinasloe will go through as it is not included on the Budget and if the commitment given in regard to the inclusion of Ahascragh in the Village Improvement Scheme will be honoured.

Cllr. N. Thomas expressed his disappointment at the cuts in frontline services but the Council has to find money and has very little control over the fate of the Budget. He stated that the Minister

and the TDs are not doing enough to secure adequate funding and the Government has let the Council down when the case was made to them. He expressed his view that the Oireachtas members are renegeing on their responsibility to represent the County at national level and advised that the Council is not seeking special treatment but fairness. He cited the fact that Galway has more road mileage, more planning applications but less planners and a bigger population than Mayo –which derives more funding from the Equalisation Fund. He advised that a strong message has to be conveyed to the Government.

Cllr. M. Kinane referred to the reduction in income for 2018 and the lack of funding from Central Government since 2014. She stated that it was a difficult decision to increase the LPT last year and she flagged it as a once off increase. She advised that she is a member of the Finance Committee and it had lobbied T.Ds and the Minister in regard to the fact Galway is not getting its fair share from the Equalisation Fund. She stated that Central Government have ignored the representations made and lack of funding has a huge impact on roads. She advised that there was a lack of time to trawl through the figures and the Athenry-Oranmore MD rejected the draft budgetary plan as they did not know the full extent of the cuts. She advised that while the North & West Regional Assembly do good work- the Council has to make a contribution of €263,654 which should be funded by the Government.

Cllr. G. Finnerty advised that the Council has no scope to raise revenue and in effect are here to rubber stamp the budget. The main source of revenue is the LPT and Rates which is not a runner and the Council have less than 10% discretion as regards the figures. He stated that the Council is starved of funding and referred to the fact that it is required to fund bodies such as the North & West Regional Assembly. He referred to the disconnection between politicians and the public who are in effect voting for flash flooding, overgrown hedges and potholes on the roads. He stated that politicians would advise constituents to follow up with the Council if their vehicles were damaged by potholes.

Comh. S. O'Tuairisg referred to the representations made to the Department by the Executive and the Finance Committee in regard to funding and also the meeting with Minister Damien English & Oireachtas members. He stated that the criteria used for the calculation for the LPT Baseline figure in 2014 has resulted in County Galway getting substantially less than other counties such as Donegal (€11million from the LPT + €13 Top up giving a total of €24 million) and Longford (€2 million from the LPT + €7 million top up giving a total of €9 million). He advised that Longford has a population of 30,000 equivalent to Conamara – County Galway should be receiving €45 million at that rate. He stated that the Council got nowhere with its representations and enquired if there was another agenda affecting this such as the proposed amalgamation. He stated that the €7 million figure as regards extra funding is misleading as the net gain is €89,000. He advised that the funding problem needs to be addressed as the Council is entitled to its fair share and it is doing the job for the Department when it raises the LPT and penalises the people.

Cllr. M. Connolly welcomed the increase in the budget from €105-€112 million. He referred to the

meeting which Oireachtas members were invited to in County Hall to discuss budgetary matters but did not have the courtesy to attend. He stated the Council bailed out the Oireachtas members last year when it increased the LPT. He advised that something was fundamentally wrong with the Equalisation Fund distribution and referred to the fact that Mayo is represented by Enda Kenny and Michael Ring, Tipperary by Alan Kelly & Michael Lowry and Donegal by Pat “The Cope” Gallagher and they have been influential. He was critical of Oireachtas members from all the parties and the Council cannot hope to make an impact with Government Departments when they show no interest in matters like road maintenance which directly impacts the lives of ordinary people. He referred to the fact that the National Pay Agreement will cost the Council €1.9 million of which €1.5 million will be funded by the Department leaving a net cost of €400,000. He referred to the Town Enhancement Scheme for Ballinasloe and the inclusion of Ahascragh in the Town & Village Renewal Scheme. He stated that the Council has no choice but to make the cuts as the alternative is to hand over to a Commissioner. He advised that the political representatives representing Galway in the Oireachtas will have to do more in regard to the funding issue.

Cllr. J. McClearn stated that nobody was happy with the draft budget as there is little discretion and funding is an ongoing issue. He advised that the Finance Committee should be kept in place and the Council cannot let the Department off the hook. He stated that there was a sense of relief that the draft budget was not as bad as forecast and the Council will have to work to address the funding situation. He advised that the problem associated with commercial vacant properties cannot go on and will have to be addressed. He explained that towns such as Ballinasloe and Portumna are decimated with vacant commercial properties which are owned by financial speculators, developers and bodies such as NAMA who do not live in and have no commitment to these towns. He stated that he will make a proposal to the Finance Committee that there should be a 50% rates charge on commercial property which is vacant for more than 5 years. He also referred to the fact that the rates remission incentive proposed by the Economic SPC in regard to the setup of new businesses as a low take up.

Cllr. I. Canning advised that the Council has been let down by the Government which has cast a blind eye to the operation of the Equalisation Fund. The Council requires a clear answer as to how the system was devised and is being applied.

Cllr. N. Byrne welcomed the increase in the budget to €112 million and stated it was the largest budget since she was elected. She advised that some of the figures taken in isolation are impressive and welcomed the second tranche of €406,000 for LIS and the €600,000 IPB fund. She referred to the problem associated with retaining Engineers in Conamara- the Councillors had to deal with 5 different Engineers in the past few years. She explained how the constant change of roles and the fact that the Engineers are overburdened has a detrimental effect on services- she had to place an application herself as regards the Town & Village Renewal Scheme as there was no Engineer available to assist. She also referred to the fact that Engineers are not available to devise a Traffic Management Plan for Maigh Cuilinn. She expressed her disappointment with the cuts in roads and other services and called on Minister John Paul Phelan to put an end to the proposed amalgamation

of the two Galway Local Authorities.

Cllr. G. Cronnelly advised that the Athenry-Oranmore MD rejected their draft budget as it was devised in an unfair manner-their represent 20% of the population and are propping up the other MDs in regard to share of funding. He spoke of the problem of derelict properties and unfinished estates in towns & villages and proposed that some penalty be levied on speculators and developers so that some of these can be freed up for social housing.

Cllr. T. Healy advised that he is a member of the Finance Committee and they were previously advised of a €4.5 million shortfall and while he welcomes the €7 million extra funding it remains a mystery budget as they are still facing cuts. He advised that the Council has the second lowest per capita spending and enquired if the cut made in regard to road maintenance is reflected in the MD budgets. He stated that he wished to see full time Directors, Planners and Engineers, rather than continual Acting. He referred to the announcement made by Minister Eoghan Murphy T.D in regard to a substantial increase in funding for Housing but there will be no change in the Department's budget for Local Authorities. He referred to page 15 of the tables and stated that the Housing Budget only shows an increase of €700,000. He advised that he is in agreement with the proposal to impose a charge of 50% on the rates for vacant commercial property.

Cllr. M. Hoade acknowledged the work done by the Chief Executive, the Head of Finance and the Finance Committee and welcomed the €7 million increase in the budget-she pointed out however that the budget was €160 million 10 years ago. She stated that more services are being required from the Council. She advised that the Finance Committee was established last year but the position as regards the Equalisation Fund is not sorted despite several Dáil questions. She proposed that a complete review of the Equalisation Fund be undertaken by the Government. She referred to the 23 staff about to retire and the fact that there is not enough staff. She stated that the Council has a duty to pass a balanced budget but this will involve cuts which will have serious effect on services. She advised that the Finance Committee will have to try to improve the situation.

Cllr. S. Walsh advised that the Department are leaving the Council €14 million short as regards the Equalisation Fund and it is owed €50 million in arrears. He stated that he resented the fact that the Council is being blackmailed by the Department as regards increasing the LPT. He stated that Galway should be receiving more than Mayo, Tipperary and Donegal and that the T.Ds have failed us by not having fought the case for more funding. He stated that this will have to be addressed by the Government and a clear message will have to be sent to the T.Ds who represent the County. He stated that the Council should spend what is required and present the bill to the Oireachtas members for them to solve.

Cllr. S. Donnellan referred to the fact that the Council is struggling to agree the budget and it is not sustainable to be left short changed by €12-14 million from the Equalisation Fund. He advised that

difficult choices have to be made and the outlook is bad for 2018 as regards sources of funding. He referred that among the positives is that good work is being done as regards community initiatives.

He enquired about the Drainage scheme for Dunkellin and in regard to the 1,096 planning applications the split between residential and commercial and how many proceed to development.

Cllr. D. Joyce referred to the problem with the staffing levels which needs to be addressed. He stated that cuts were being made as the Council is being short changed as regards levels of income. He referred to page 47 in regard to the reduction in funding notified by TII in regard to National Road maintenance. He stated that the Oireachtas members will have fight harder on behalf of Galway and a clear message will have to be sent to Dublin as regards funding for the Council.

Cllr. T. Broderick stated that while the €7 million extra was welcome-no Municipal District had adopted their budget and that it is a contradiction in terms to adopt the budget today. He advised that the cuts are distasteful and people in the past have been asked to continually put their hands in their pockets. He proposed that the Capital Reserve Fund be used as a vehicle for funding in the short term. He enquired as regards the breakdown of shared services which include the Fire Service, Library Service and Coroners Fees and how much is owed by the City Council.

Cllr. P. Hynes referred to his role on the Housing Committee and stated that the cut backs do not seem to have impacted on the Housing budget. He requested that the Government would increase the grants for Housing for the disabled and for mobility aids. He stated that the problems in regard to Social Housing will have to be addressed as applicants have to wait 7-10 years and cannot find accommodation to rent. He advised that the LIS is a huge success but is oversubscribed for 2018. He welcomes the fact that Minister Ring will retain it. He stated that the proposed Greenway between Athlone –Galway should continue to be progressed with consultation with the IFA and be brought to fruition. He also referred to the need to develop waterways.

Comh. S. O’Cualáin referred to the lack of staff especially in Planning and the Housing Department. He referred to the Government policy on housing and stated that its implementation is important. He advised that there is cut backs everywhere and that the Council should not cut back on funding for roads as they are getting worse. He referred to the problem in Conamara associated with the constant change of Engineers and lack of continuity-who in some cases are temporary and then take up positions with the private sector-the Council is providing training and they leave.

Cllr. J. Charity spoke of the atmosphere of excitement today in contrast to the bad news story a month ago and that he found the €7 million increase in the Budget surprising. He referred to the fact that the Councillors were told if they did not pass the budget they will be issued with their P45s. He advised that the yardstick being used for comparisons with other counties such as Mayo appears to be population when geographical size should be a consideration. He advised that further clarity is required in regard to the proposed amalgamation with the City as the Council is operating on a skeleton staff with Acting Directors. He stated that he is in agreement with the proposed 50%

charge on commercial units vacant for over 5 years but, it requires more assessment-as companies may lease the units to get around the 5 year timeframe.

Comh. T. O'Curraoin referred to the budget of €160 million in 2008 and stated that this was the time of the Celtic Tiger which was a false economy which resulted in the Government propping up the banks. He enquired whether the 23 staff due to retire will be replaced. He disagreed with the cuts to roads as they are in a terrible state. He stated that Norway derived 67% benefit from its oil and gas unlike Ireland which sold off its oil and gas together with Eircom and the Corrib Fishery will follow. He advised that the proceeds of motor tax and the LPT should be retained in the County. He stated that the Council should follow up on derelict buildings and do more to promote tourism.

Cllr. J. Cuddy advised that he could not support this budget and asked how the Executive could expect the Council to adopt it. He stated that the €7 million was a drop in the ocean and that the allocation to the Athenry -Oranmore MD which represents 1.37% of the total was not on. He stated that 90% of the calls received by Councillors refer to roads and the Engineers complain that they have no money for basic improvements. He advised that Athenry-Oranmore has some of the heavy trafficked roads in the County and it is the Executive which decides the allocation of funding. He advised that the allocation for surface dressing is miniscule and a vast amount of funding is required as the roads are in a chaotic state. He complained that the budget does not deal with the major issues.

Cllr. T. Welby advised that the rate base has increased this year and the Finance Committee have examined the matter internally. He stated that the Equalisation Fund process commenced in 2014 when the baseline figures were established. He stated that it is a politically driven fund and not an Equalisation Fund similar to those operated by the EU which Ireland got funding in the past. He advised that the Department's response is that they have to take it from someone else in order to increase the Council's share. They do not intend to review this until 2019 and it appears that they do not want to give more funding to Galway. He referred to the fact that the Government can find €173 million for the water refunds and Michael Ring is providing an additional €7.4m for LIS. He stated that the €7 million will not change anything and Galway is badly done by which is a reflection on the Government. He advised that he will not support the budget.

Cllr. M. Finnerty welcomed the €7 million additional grant funding and requested the Chief Executive to confirm if the Enhancement Scheme for Ballinasloe will go ahead.

Cllr. D. Killilea enquired if the Council received a reply from the Minister as regards the funding issue or are we being ignored. He referred to the 20% tab which the Council will have to fund in regard to the National Pay Agreement. He stated that he was not in favor of increasing the LPT as there is a failure by Government to fund the Council and ordinary people are been hit all the time. He found merit in the proposal to place a 50% charge on vacant commercial properties –but emphasised it

has to take into account rural businesses that had to close and cannot be let due to economic circumstances and are not owned by banks or NAMA. He advised that he does not agree with using the Capital Reserve Fund to plug a hole and does not agree with the €1 million cut to Roads. He stated his support for the call for the review of the Equalisation Fund as our TDs have let us down and have questions to answer. He stated that he was not in favor of the amalgamation of the 2 local authorities and wanted a full time Chief Executive and Directors for the Council. He referred to the shortfall in funding for Housing Maintenance and stated that €270,000 was insufficient in regard to funding the requirements of the Minimum Standards.

Cllr. S. Cunniffe commented that the Council has no real input to the Budget as it is starved of funds and has no discretion as regards expenditure. He stated that the Government expect the Council to engage in a range of core activities such as economic development and fund statutory demands and yet leave it deprived of funds- we should fight this. He referred to the housing crisis and the new requirements for housing maintenance and cited the fact that €275,000 has to be provided for the minimum standards. He requested clarification in regard to the write off of rates in regard to vacant properties –is it €6 million or €4.8 million in 2018. He stated that he is in favour of the proposed 50% charge on vacant commercial properties on a gradual basis and ring fenced for economic development. He advised that he cannot support the budget and that a clear message should be sent to the Government in regard to the funding issue.

Cllr. F. Kearney complimented the Executive for drafting the budget and stated that there has been some good news today. He advised that the funding problem was raised with Central Government and another message will have to be sent to it. He stated that the Galway appears to be 3 different constituencies in regard to coverage by the Oireachtas members. He advised that some of the senior officials are still operating in an acting role. He referred to the ongoing issue concerning coroner's expenses and the review conducted last month in regard to funeral directors fees. He enquired that if this can be implemented with additional funding if the budget is passed today. He stated that funeral directors are concerned about the way they are being treated and may refuse coroner's requests in regard to the funding issue.

The Chief Executive then requested the Directors of Service to respond to the queries raised by the members.

G. Mullarkey confirmed that the proposed commercial rate for Ballinasloe has been increased from €58 to €61 in accordance with the trend to bridge the gap with the County rate-it will be €64 in 2019. He advised that the amounts due from the City Council in regard to shared services are €4.65 million for the Fire Service, €1.575 million for Libraries and €175,000 for the Coroners expenses. In regard to the breakdown of the €757,000 income for parking-he advised that €57,000 was for fines and the remainder for the street parking charges. He confirmed that the bad debt provision for Rates in 2018 in regard to vacant properties is €4.8 million.

Cllr. Cunniffe enquired if the proposed write off of €6 million of rates is reflected in the budget-G. Mullarkey advised that provision has been made to write off €4.8 million in 2018.

J. Cullen advised that it is intended to refer the shared services arrears situation with the City Council to an arbitration process/independent determination by a third party. He stated that what was estimated in the past may not fully reflect the actual cost. There are many factors to be considered including the costs associated with providing a fire service in a large County with a sparse population. The arbitration process would be based on criteria such as the average of averages. In response to a query from Cllr. T. Broderick whether the Council should treat the amounts due from the City Council as arrears-he advised the arrears are historical and that there is provision in the accounts for debtors-the arrears will not impact on the budget for 2018.

M. Owens advised that a review has been completed of the core services provided by the Housing Department and that substantial additional funding will be required for additional as well as existing initiatives under the Rebuilding Ireland and other programmes. He advised that a significant capital investment programme is required for the Council's housing stock in order to comply with revised minimum standards for rental accommodation which were introduced in July 2017. This will include the co-funding of energy efficiency works under the EERP Program (Energy Efficiency Retrofit), the return of vacant/void housing stock back to productive use, the requirement to undertake a stock inventory & the delivery of a preventative Maintenance Programme. This will include provision of insulation, fire detection equipment and the testing of electrical equipment and boilers. He stated that it is intended to avail of internal capital receipts to fund an improvement programme in the existing housing stock to meet the statutory requirements. He advised that it is essential to retain sufficient funding in the budget in order to match funding which is a requirement for the drawdown of housing grants. He outlined the measures the Housing Office is engaged in under the Social Housing Strategy including approval for the construction of 104 units and proposals for an additional 58 units, the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) funding for Voluntary Housing Associations, the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), the Housing Acquisition Programme including Part Vs, turnkey developments and the Buy & Renew Scheme in regard to vacant & derelict properties.

He also referred to the Vacant Housing Repair & Leasing Scheme which applies to existing housing stock and that the number of technical staff has increased. He advised that the maximum rent was increased from €84 to €130 following a review of the Differential Rent Scheme which is based on household income. He spoke about the current housing crisis and the shortage of rental accommodation which according to Threshold less than 40 rental properties are available in Co. Galway which has the second highest increase in demand. He also advised that the Council is committed to continuing a full time library service for Gort.

M. Timmins advised that the reduction of €750,000 in regard to National Road maintenance was due to the fact that there has been a reduction in the length of National Primary Road in the County and that Transport Infrastructure Ireland are responsible for the Motorway Maintenance. He also referred to the €3 million increase in the funding of road grants in 2017 which also included LIS and Gaeltacht grants. He stated that he does not have a breakdown of the parking charges but this can be provided.

The Chief Executive advised of the estimated €1.6 million increase in commercial rate income but that the other increases in funding are contra items. He stated that the Council is committed to proceeding with the Town Enhancement Scheme for Ballinasloe and the tendering process is completed and also the village renewal scheme for Ahascragh.

The meeting was then adjourned at 1.40 p.m and resumed at 2.40 p.m

Cllr. M. Hoade advised of the work by the Finance Committee and the difficulty with presenting a budget with not enough funding but they have a duty to consider it. She proposed that the Council adopt the Budget with the cuts as presented. She also proposed that the Council contact the Department to seek a review of the Equalisation Fund and how the distribution was calculated. The proposals were seconded by Cllr. J. McClearn.

Cllr. J. McClearn stated that he was not happy with the draft Budget as presented but will second Cllr. Hoade's proposal to adopt it. He advised that he is determined that his own proposal in regard to a charge on vacant commercial property should happen and 2019 may be more appropriate than 2018. He stated that a strong message will have to be issued to the owners of such properties that they will be pursued vigorously and they have 12 months to dispose of or adopt these properties to other uses such as residential facilities. He proposed that the Finance Committee meet in January 2018 to assess the situation and to ensure that the interaction with the Department on the funding issue is kept up. This proposal was agreed.

Cllr. J. Cuddy spoke of the inconsistency whereby each of the MDs rejected their budgets but members propose to come along today to accept it. He stated that this is not based on any real improvement on the previous figures. He enquired as to what happens when parking fines are not paid and what % are paid.

The Cathaoirleach requested that the motion to adopt the Budget as presented proceed to a vote and the sign in process for the vote was commenced.

The result of the vote was as follows:

FOR:

Cllr. Aidan Donohue	Cllr. Donagh Killilea	Cllr. Donal Burke	Cllr. Eileen Mannion
Cllr. Frank Kearney	Cllr. Gerry Finnerty	Cllr. Ivan Canning	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn
Cllr. Joe Byrne	Cllr. Malachy Noone	Cllr. Martina Kinane	Cllr. Mary Hoade
Cllr. Michael Connolly	Cllr. Michael Finnerty	Cllr. Michael Maher	Cllr. Niamh Byrne
Cllr. Noel Thomas	Cllr. Peter Feeney	Cllr. Peter Keaveney	Cllr. Peter Roche
Cllr. Seamus Walsh	Cllr. Shane Donnellan	Cllr. Tom McHugh	Comh. S. O'Tuairisg

[24]

AGAINST:

Cllr. Gabriel Cronnelly	Cllr. James Charity	Cllr. Jim Cuddy	Cllr. Pat Hynes
Cllr. Shaun Cunniffe	Cllr. Thomas Welby	Cllr. Tim Broderick	Cllr. Tom Healy
	Comh. Tomás O'Curraoin		

[9]

ABSTAIN:

[0]

The Meetings Administrator noted the result of the vote and the Cathaoirleach declared that the Budget has been adopted. The Cathaoirleach expressed her appreciation to the members for their participation, the Finance Committee for their input, the Chief Executive, the Head of Finance and Directors and the staff for their dedication and spoke of the need to work together. She acknowledged that this was a difficult time and welcomed the extra funding and noted positive developments such as the new Treatment Plant for Athenry and new Fire Station for Tuam.

Cllr. M. Noone proposed that the Council implement a feasibility study as regards the two city centre sites it owns which are the parking area at the rear of Áras an Chontae and the site located at Sandy Row. He advised that these are valuable sites which the Council is not making best use of and would provide a revenue stream. He suggested that 5 from the members and 4 from the Executive be included on the steering committee implementing the feasibility study which will report to the Council at the March 2018 meeting. He referred to the multi-story carpark adjacent to Debenhams and suggested that a similar structure can be developed at the Áras site with a bus bay underneath, a restaurant on the top and also space for a library. This would alleviate the cost associated with the current Library building and Island House. He suggested another alternative feasibility be undertaken as regards courthouses. His proposal was seconded by Cllr. T. McHugh.

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Cllr. P. Feeney referred to the buildup policy as regards city centre and advised that the Council should examine this proposal with an open mind.

Cllr. N. Thomas referred to the revenue the City Council receives from the multi-story carpark at Debenhams and advised that the 2 sites are a valuable asset.

DETERMINATION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BUDGET ADOPTED, OF THE RATE ON OF VALUATION TO BE ADOPTED. **3143**

It was **PROPOSED** by Cllr. J. McClearn, **SECONDED** by Cllr.M. Hoade and **AGREED** to determine, in accordance with the Budget adopted, the rate of valuation to be levied for the financial year ending 31-12-2018.

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE ESTIMATED OUTTURNS 2017 **3144**

It was **Proposed** by Cllr. M. Maher, **SECONDED** by Cllr.T. McHugh and **AGREED** to adopt the estimated outturns for 2017.

TO NOTE THE REPORT ON THE THREE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME **3145**

It was **PROPOSED** by Cllr. T. McHugh, **SECONDED** by Cllr. M.Hoade and **AGREED** that the Report on the 3 year Capital Programme be noted.

TO NOTE THE ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT ON THE GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN 2015 -2019 IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 134 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2001 (AS AMENDED) **3146**

It was **PROPOSED** by Cllr. G.Finnerty, **SECONDED** by Cllr. S. Walsh and **AGREED** that the Annual Progress Report on Corporate Plan 2015-2019 be noted.

The Meetings Administrator then read the other proposals received as follows.

On the **Proposal** of Cllr. M. Kinane, **Seconded** by Cllr. D. Connolly it was agreed that the Council will seek to have the Statutory Demand levied on it by the Northern & Western Regional Assembly be funded by Central Government. This year (2017) €220,429.53 was paid to NWRA and for 2018 this figure has been increased to €263,654.32

On the **Proposal** of Cllr. M. Finnerty, **Seconded** by Cllr. P. Feeney it was agreed to allow Cllr. Finnerty to allocate €1,000 to Ballinasloe Town Twinning and €1,000 to Ballinasloe Fair & Festival from his Training & Conference Allowance.

On the **Proposal** of Cllr. J. Byrne, **Seconded** by Cllr. M.Maher it was agreed that funding be

sought to make Gort Library a full time Library. A full time member of staff should be reinstated to ensure proper & adequate services are maintained as soon as possible.

On the **Proposal** of Cllr. D. Killilea, **Seconded** by Comh. S. O'Tuairisg it was agreed to allow Cllr. Killilea to allocate €1,200 to Tuam Christmas Lights & St. Patrick's Day Parade, €1,000 to Corofin G.A.A Club and €600 to Belclare Community Council from his Training Fund.

On the **Proposal** of Cllr. A. Donohue, **Seconded** by Cllr. F. Kearney it was agreed to allow Cllr. Donohue to allocate €500 to Garbally Drive Residents Association from his Training Fund 2017.

On the **Proposal** of Cllr. P. Feeney, **Seconded** by Cllr. T. McHugh it was agreed to allow Cllr. Feeney to allocate €2,000 to Athenry Playground Group from his Training Fund 2017.

On the **Proposal** of Cllr. M. Noone, **Seconded** by Cllr. P. Feeney it was agreed that the Council would commission a feasibility study to be carried out on the 2 city centre sites both

1. The carparks on the Áras an Chontae Site &
2. The Sandy Row Site

This study will consider the best type of use of the sites regarding the consolidation and improvement of services and structure. This would reduce costs both in regard to rental and maintenance and could in addition provide a revenue stream for the Council. This study should be presented to the March 2018 meeting and in order to steer its deliberations a special committee should be set up by 31-12-2017. This committee should be made up of 5 members of the Council and 4 executive members and should be chaired by an elected member.

Cllr. M. Connolly advised that the Motorway between Gort and Limerick was not maintained by TII in freezing weather conditions several times in the past –it should be salted and gritted and he requested the Council to contact them about this.

Cllr. D. Connolly welcomed the commitment given for the Ballinasloe Enhancement Scheme and the Ahascragh village renewal. He referred to the Municipal Budget for Ballinasloe which was rejected and cited codes where reductions in funding have occurred. He advised that the budget for Parks & Open Spaces has reduced from €125,000 to €95,000, Economic Development from €20,000 to €7,600 and Community Grants from €42,000 to €25,000. He enquired as regards a revision of these codes after the budget. He stated that the reality is that the grass will not be cut in many of the estates and when the Town Council was abolished services have not been maintained.

The Chief Executive advised that the Municipal Budgets contain details of discretionary

expenditure and the members can switch amounts between the codes. He stated that Ballinasloe was the only town with private estates which received funding from the Council but this will be discontinued next year. M. Owens advised that 11 estates are impacted by this and he will circulate details to the members from Ballinasloe.

The Cathaoirleach thanked everybody for attending the meeting and then declared it closed.

CHRIOCHNAIGH AN CRUINNIÚ ANSIN