

MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF SLIGO COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON MONDAY, 13TH JULY, 2015 AT 2.00 PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, RIVERSIDE, SLIGO

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

- Councillor Bree,
- Councillor Casserly,
- Councillor Clarke,
- Councillor Gormley,
- Councillor Healy,
- Councillor Lundy,
- Councillor Maguire,
- Councillor MacManus,
- Councillor Mac Sharry,
- Councillor Mulvey,
- Councillor O'Boyle,
- Councillor O'Grady,
- Councillor Queenan,
- Councillor Scanlon,
- Councillor Taylor.

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

- Mr. Ciarán Hayes, Chief Executive
- Mr Tom Kilfeather, Director of Services
- Ms. Marie Whelan, Head of Finance
- Mr. Bartley Gavin, A/Director of Services
- Mr. John Moran, Senior Executive Officer
- Mr. Joe Murphy, Senior Executive Officer
- Ms. Patricia Guckian, Financial Accountant
- Ms. Nuala Fowley, Clerical Officer
- Ms. Jo-Anne McGonigle, Assistant Staff Officer

CATHAOIRLEACH:

The Cathaoirleach, Councillor Rosaleen O'Grady presided.

1. TO AUTHORISE OVER-EXPENDITURE OF €5,173,411 REPORTED IN THE 2014 ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT:

Proposed by Councillor T. MacSharry

Seconded by Councillor D. Bree

AND AGREED

“That item No. 1 “To authorise over-expenditure of €5,173,511 reported in the 2014 Annual Financial Statement in accordance with section 104 (7) of the Local Government Act, 2001.” be deferred for consideration until such time as the Council is in receipt of the audited accounts for the year ending 31st of December, 2014”.

Some members felt that the over-expenditures should have come before the Council at the time they were incurred. The Chief Executive clarified that the normal custom and practice is that the draft accounts are initially considered by the Members in March or April each year and authorisation of over-expenditures are dealt with at the same time, following which the AFS is forwarded to the Auditor together with the Council's approval of any over expenditures. The over-expenditure figure presented to the Members does not represent a

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€5.17 million over-run, income is also over target which off-sets some of the over-expenditure.

The breakdown of the €5.1 million referred to was

Rates write-off	€2.2 million (vacant premises/not collectable)
Pensions	€1.2 million
Coroner's Fees	€170,000
Housing and Roads	€1.5 million

There is provision in Local Government legislation for the approval of over-expenditure by the Chief Executive if not approved by the Members.

2. ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 2014:

Proposed by Councillor D. Bree

Seconded by Councillor S. MacManus

AND AGREED

“That the Annual Financial Statement for the Financial Year ended 31st December, 2014 be forwarded to the Local Government Auditor forthwith”.

In response to issues raised in relation to the manner in which figures were presented, Ms. M. Whelan, Head of Finance, stated that the Financial Statement is a technical document and must be presented in a particular format. The breakdown of the €5 million, on the other hand, was presented in a simple format. These differing formats may have caused some confusion as a result.

Members asked for clarification as to whether the €750,000 had been withdrawn by the Minister due to the Council's Financial Plan not having been produced. The Chief Executive advised the meeting that it was, in fact, while negotiations were still ongoing relating to the Financial Plan and criteria in late January/early February of this year that the €750,000 was withdrawn. The Plan had been submitted by the due date, meeting the criteria set out by the Department at that time. It was not until four or five weeks later that he had been informed of the decision to withdraw that amount.

Ms. Whelan, Head of Finance, added that the figures had been compiled in January and there was a surplus of €175,000. It was only when the Council was later advised of the €750,000 being withdrawn that there was the resultant deficit of €500,000.

With Members expressing their concern about the amount of expenditure on Coroner's Fees, the Chief Executive confirmed that this is a cost all local authorities must meet. No funding is received yet we must pay for a service we do not have any role in. Contact had been made with the Department of Justice but, to date, nothing had come of that. All costs incurred in the provision of this service to the end of 2014 had been cleared. Any outstanding amounts owing referred to 2015 invoices and costs. The Cathaoirleach welcomed this information.

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3. FINANCIAL PLAN:

The Chief Executive’s presentation on the Financial Plan outlined details for the Members under the following headings:

- Progress to date
- Financial Plan Proposals
- Department requirements
- Regional comparisons.

The reduction in staff numbers from 637 in September 2008 to 435 currently, i.e. a reduction of 202 or 32%, was outlined. A further reduction of 64 is proposed in the Financial Plan forwarded to the Department, which would bring staff numbers down to 371 by the end of 2019.i.e. an overall 42% reduction. The reduction of 64 will arise through natural attrition (45) and Voluntary redeployment (19).

On top of this, the Department is seeking further savings of €1m per annum. If this were to be secured through the reduction of payroll costs alone, staff numbers would have to be reduced by a further 20, which would bring the overall reduction to 286 or 45%. This would present major difficulties in continuing to deliver services, for example Libraries, Motor Tax, Teach Laighe and Machinery Yard. To maximise the use of remaining resources, Service delivery models will have to be reviewed which will involve extensive negotiations with Unions and Staff. The further reduction of staff numbers over and above those already provided for in the financial plan could only be achieved by declaring a surplus of staff and compulsory redeployment. A trade Union has given notice of strike action in the event of this occurring.

Regional comparisons in staff numbers were set out as follows:

County	No. of Staff	Population	Comments
Roscommon	432	56,768	Formerly 1 Town Council (5,693)
Longford	287	39,000	Formerly 2 Town Councils (9,601)
Leitrim	272	31,796	No Town Council
Sligo (2015)	435	65,393	*Former Borough (19,452) *Cranmore Regeneration *Gateway City *Sligo Harbour *Regional lead on Homelessness
Sligo (2019)	371	65,393	

The Department’s requirement is an additional €1 million surplus per annum. The options to achieve this are reduced staff by a further 20, increase income by €1 million or a combination of both. No option is palatable or easily achieved.

Following a query regarding contact with the Department, the Members were advised that contact with the Department will be informed by decisions to be made both by the Members and the Executive as to how services can be curtailed in order to generate the additional €1m surplus per annum.

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Councillor MacSharry asked it to be noted that the Members' position is clear on not increasing the Local Property Tax or Commercial Rates in Sligo. Some Members added that if businesses are already not in a position to pay their rates, it will be pointless for the Council to increase them.

Based on the details outlined in the Presentation, some Members expressed the opinion it appeared the Department did not seem willing to accept any Plan that would be submitted.

The Chief Executive referred to an inordinate numbers of hours having been put in by the Management Team in compiling the Financial Plan to 2019. Before anything further can be sent to the Department, any additional proposals to cut expenditure / increase income will have to be considered by the members.

4. EMERGENCY FUNDS FOR CLASS 2 AND 3 COUNTY ROADS:

Proposed by Councillor M. Gormley

Seconded by Councillor J. Lundy

“Due to the deplorable state of roads in the county this Council calls on the Minister for Transport to make emergency funds available for Class 2 and 3 county roads”.

Councillor Gormley summarised the difficulties being experienced by residents of rural areas in the county in relation to the condition of the roads to their homes and farms. With agriculture being one of the main industries in the county, residents felt that they were not receiving a fair return for the monies they were paying in various taxes and charges.

Clarification was given by the Head of Finance, in response to queries from Members, that the Local Property Tax is now our main source of funding.

COSTS RELATING TO ROYAL VISIT:

Proposed by Councillor D. Bree

Seconded by Councillor S. O'Boyle

AND AGREED

“That the schedule of expenditure supported by invoices in respect of the costs relating to the Royal visit be made available for inspection by the elected members”.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR PROGRAMME GROUPS F04, D04 AND F05:

Proposed by Councillor D. Bree

Seconded by Councillor S. O'Boyle

AND AGREED

“That councillors be provided with an up to date financial statement in respect of monies provided in the annual budget under Programme Group F04 – Community Grants; Programme Group D04 – Tourism Development and Promotion; and Programme Group F05 – Funding for Arts Activities, including details of unexpended funds”.

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**VOTES OF CONGRATULATIONS:
Proposed by Councillor M. Gormley
Seconded by Councillor E. Scanlon**

AND AGREED

“That a vote of congratulations be extended to Ronan McDonagh of Rinnarogue, Bunninadden, Co. Sligo on winning two gold medals at the Youth European Darts Competition in Denmark”.

**Proposed by Councillor M. Gormley
Seconded by Councillor E. Scanlon**

AND AGREED

“That the Council send their best wishes to the Sligo minor and senior team for the Connacht Finals on Sunday”.

**Proposed by Councillor M. Gormley
Seconded by Councillor R. O’Grady**

AND AGREED

“To extend best wishes and thanks to Marian McGovern, Corporate Services Section on her move, under redeployment, to Leitrim County Council”

Members wished to be associated with the good wishes.

The Chief Executive added his tribute to a valued member of Staff and wished to publicly thank her for her work in Sligo County Council. He referred to the earlier discussions outlining that very good staff are now leaving under redeployment.

The meeting concluded at 3.50 p.m.