

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Ceantar Bardasach Bhaile Locha Riach *Municipal District of LOUGHREA*

Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held in the Loughrea Municipal District on 14th October 2024

I LATHAIR:

Cathaoirleach

Cllr. M. Kinane

Baill:

Cllr's. S. Curley, D. Kelly, PJ Murphy, G. Finnerty, I. Canning, G. Donohue, J. McClearn, P. Killilea

As Lathair

Cllr. M. Maher

Oifigigh:

Ms. E. Ruane, Director of Services
Ms. K. O'Connor, Head of Finance
Ms. R. Lowe, Senior Engineer
Mr. G. Haugh, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. E. Gallagher, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. L. Flynn, Executive Engineer
Mr. N. Kennedy, Executive Engineer
Ms. A. Fenton, Financial Accountant
Ms. M. Flynn, Administrative Officer
Ms. M. Duddy, Administrative Officer
Ms. S. Cleary, Staff Officer

To consider and adopt (with or without amendment) under Section 58 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 a Draft Budgetary Plan for the Municipal District of Loughrea as prepared under the direction of the Chief Executive (Report attached).

LMD2386

Ms. O'Connor, Head of Finance, briefed Members on the detail presented in the draft budgetary plan for the Loughrea Municipal District (MD) for 2025 showing an indicative expenditure of €12,000,885 an increase on the updated 2024 expenditure.

Members were notified that in June 2024 the 2025 Local Property Tax (LPT) allocation for Galway County was €20,309,071. In preparing the draft budgetary plan Ms. O'Connor stated that the decision taken by the Council at the LPT meeting held on 23rd September 2024 to increase the local property tax rate by 15% for five years results in an increase in the LPT of €2,370,963 for 2025.

Ms. O'Connor elaborated on the three main stages of the overall budgetary process being (i) decision on the Local Property Tax, (ii) consideration of the draft Municipal District Budgetary Plan and (iii) the consideration of the Draft overall Budget for Galway County Council. Stating

the overall process was made more difficult as the full budgetary information is unavailable for the first two steps and information available in mid-September in advance of the LPT decision indicated a deficit gap between income and expenditure of €10.8m.

Further explaining the GMA allocation as the discretionary funding which is available to the municipal members for allocation in the draft plan Ms. O'Connor outlined that the D0905 GMA is a proportion of the local property tax allocation to each MD.

Ms. O'Connor described this a great opportunity for each MD to focus on larger scale projects and use this as leverage to raise match funding for projects. The funding will be allocated each year for the next five years to the revenue account. The unspent money at the end of each year will transfer to a capital account and accumulate year on year. Clarifying that a specific meeting will be held for members to bring forward a list of projects and work with the Mayor, Chairs and Director of Services to agree on projects through the injection of the LPT funds over the next five years and decisions to be brought before Plenary to be noted.

In accordance with Section 58 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 Ms. O'Connor requested the members to consider by resolution to adopt with or without amendment the draft budgetary plan for the Loughrea Municipal District.

The members thanked Ms. O'Connor and the Finance Team for their presentation.

Commenting on the LPT increase Cllr. Kinane acknowledged the difficult decision taken to increase the LPT which she fully supported and noted the increase being larger in Loughrea area in comparison to other MD's which will benefit the MD positively and people will yield the benefit.

Cllr. Donohue raised a query under Sub-Service E0201 Recycling Facilities Operations regarding Gort Civic amenity. In response Ms. Ruane confirmed this was provided through capital account and update to issue from Environment Section.

Cllr. Canning queried the allocation under E0901 Maintenance of Burial grounds given number of volunteers that maintain grounds. Ms. Flynn confirmed this covers maintenance grants and minor works.

Cllr. McClearn welcome the budget and stated to make changes you must find money.

Commenting on the need to commence planning for community projects, Cllr. Finnerty stated how difficult the process is for submitting funding applications.

Cllr. Curly queried if taken in charge was factored into housing maintenance and commented on the increase against D0905 yet local roads allocation is reduced.

Ms. O'Connor responded by outlining that LPT money included in D0905 with other items. One third of LPT is split amongst the 39 members of Galway County Council and then multiplied by number of members in each Municipal District. Elaborating how Councillors bring forward to MD proposals and agree key points Ms. O'Connor added the opportunity to agree on a concept resulting in something tangible. Unspent monies in a year will move to a capital code which can be used to leverage part funding.

Ensuing discussion Cllr. Kinane added the intention if the draft budget is adopted the MD will hold a special meeting to discuss programme of works and plan how to utilise the fund over the five years.

In response to roads budget Ms. Lowe commented that the GMA is a combination of grant codes with final allocation to regional and local roads- expected to be confirmed in February 2025. The bulk of roads funding comes through the grant schemes provided by the Department of Transport and spending under those grants is governed by the DoT rules. Some works can be completed by contract or direct labour, but the Council must follow the

Cllr. Murphy raised query assuming the running costs of MD for employment of staff. Ms. O'Connor confirmed such expenditure is covered in main budget not split by MD.

Cllr. Kelly enquired as to the expenditure under operation of street parking, which Ms. O'Connor confirmed covers parking enforcement and maintenance contracts. Discussion ensued with the abuse of disabled parking, lack of designated identification. Mr. Haugh is aware of the matter and had issues with concrete sub surface which they agreed to revisit.

Cllr. Kinane welcomed an increase in parks pitches and open spaces and expressed interest if installation of urns walls has been considered for future cemeteries and possible opportunity to increase funding for installation works to address long term issues with space. Ms. Ruane confirmed F0301 uplift proposing to allocate to car park space and Ms. Finn confirmed development in transition period plots is on programme.

The members thanked Ms. O'Connor and the Finance Team for their presentation.

On the PROPOSAL of Cllr. McClearn **SECONDED** by Cllr. Donohue the members agreed to adopt without amendments, under Section 58 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, a Draft Budgetary Plan for the Municipal District of Loughrea, as prepared under the direction of the Chief Executive.

Confirmation of Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held in the Loughrea Chamber on 9th September 2024 **LMD2387**

The Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District (MD) of Loughrea held on 14th October 2024 were **PROPOSED** by Cllr. Kelly, **SECONDED** by Cllr. Curley and agreed and signed by the Cathaoirleach.

Cllr. Kelly raised concerns regarding road surface conditions on Abbey Street, Loughrea. He advised that he received a petition signed by over 200 people regarding safety at the junction adding that vehicles travel at excessive speed down the narrow road which is a major safety issue. He appealed for traffic calming measures at the location. Mr. Haugh responded that speed on this road was not highlighted as a concern previously, but he would arrange for an assessment of the area to be carried out. He also confirmed that he was aware of the road condition and this road would be considered further under the 3-year Roads Programme. Cllr. Kelly presented the petition and signatures to Ms. Flynn.

In response to Cllr. Curley's query regarding the use of CCTV cameras, Ms. Flynn stated that the Executive is progressing this issue, and it is hoped that the DPIA will be completed by Quarter 1 2025, she said she would discuss the matter further with him directly after the meeting.

In response to Cllr. Kelly's question on whether the CCTV cameras at Station Road Car Park are active, Ms. Flynn responded that they are not currently active.

Cllr. Curley asked if there is flexibility in the budget to repair/replace footpaths, Ms. Lowe responded that limited funding is the primary issue regarding the repair of footpaths. Funding comes primarily from NOM or general road maintenance. These funds must do a lot of heavy lifting across the board, including pothole repair, drainage etc.

Cllr. Curley stated there has been no improvement on the provision of public transport to Loughrea Town and requested pressure be put on the National Transport Agency (NTA) to

provide appropriate public transport. Ms. Flynn responded that the NTA have been invited to attend the Plenary meeting, but the date is not yet confirmed.

Cllr. Kelly stated that funding was recently given for accessibility works at the swim area in Portumna, he stated he would support works to make the area accessible to people with mobility issues. Ms. Lowe advised that he should reach out to Mr. Shane Coogan, Water Safety Development Officer in this regard.

Cllr. Murphy stated approximately thirteen months ago the Members approved a Part 8 Housing Application for Ardrahan, he emphasised his agreement was conditional upon the provision of a segregated footpath between Ardrahan and Labane, he asked for the Housing Director of Services to provide clarification on when the footpath would begin. Ms. Ruane stated she would request clarification from the Director of Housing.

Cllr. Finnerty stated, if the footpath is not provided between Ardrahan and Labane, it would pose serious safety issues for residents in this area.

Cllr. Donohue enquired regarding progress on the provision of safety improvement measures to be implemented at Hennelly's Cross, Gort. Ms. Lowe responded that a significantly large number of houses are planned for the area and that there are proposals linked to that development for improvements to the junction. Mr. Haugh stated that he would issue an email to the Members regarding proposed minor junction modifications at the location as an interim measure.

Cllr. Canning stated a section of road to the swim area in Portumna has been completed but it does not extend as far as required, Mr. Haugh responded that the work extents were as per the approved Annual Roads Programme.

Cllr. Canning stated traffic calming measures were installed at St. Brendan's, which is a very busy road. He stated it was a costly project but made no difference to the speed vehicles travel at. He stated speed ramps should be considered, even as a temporary measure.

In response to Cllr. Canning's request for the pedestrian lights in Portumna to be repaired to assist visually impaired persons, Mr. Haugh stated he would follow up on this issue.

Cllr. Kinnane, on behalf of Cllr. Maher requested an update on the traffic lights at the Westbridge, Loughrea. Mr. Haugh stated that an email had issued to the Members advising that the detection loops in the road were damaged/removed during road resurfacing works carried out by Uisce Eireann (UE), he added, the Council has contacted a specialist contractor to replace the detection loops and added, recovery of the costs will be sought from Uisce Eireann.

Cllr. Finnerty enquired when the bus shelter would be replaced in Labane, he added it was understood it would be in place at end of September. He referred to the increase of the LPT. Ms. Lowe advised that the NTA did not replace this shelter directly but rather asked Galway County Council to include the replacement in its tender for other bus shelters. This did not assist the speedy replacement of the shelter at this location, but Ms. Lowe said she would seek to expedite this particular shelter as it did not require any new enabling works.

Confirmation of Minutes of Special Meeting of Municipal District of Loughrea held on Monday 30 September 2024

LMD2388

The Minutes of the Special Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held on 30th September 2024 were **PROPOSED** by Cllr. McClearn, **SECONDED** by Cllr. Finnerty and agreed and signed by the Cathaoirleach.

Flooding Update

LMD2389

Mr Gallagher updated the meeting as follows:

The engineering and environmental consultants held a joint site meeting on the 12th & 13th September, to review locations where IROPI concerns have been raised by the environmental consultant. A total of twenty-five sites were visited over the two days.

Mr. Gallagher gave several examples of the sites visited and the issues that were reviewed on the sites. The engineering consultants have now commenced the preparation of amended designs, drawings, and work method statements for the sites where issues were raised. This information will be provided to the environmental consultant when completed and a further review of the proposals will be undertaken. Every effort will be made to overcome IROPI concerns by amending engineering methods.

Cllr Finnerty requested that a copy of the locations visited are circulated to the members, so they can better understand the issues being reviewed.

Regarding the Coastal Flood Study from Oranmore to Kinvarra, Mr. Gallagher advised the meeting that RPS are expected to commence site visits and meet with affected householders in the next fortnight. Information will be collated from residents before a surveyor is employed to take levels throughout the study area.

Mr. Gallagher confirmed to Cllr. Kinane that the issues of the walls on the Maree Road and the Coast Road will be prioritised, following the survey works and possibly some minor modelling works. He also confirmed that businesses flooded during Storm Debi are included in the upcoming site visits.

Speed Limit Update

Mr. Gallagher informed the meeting that the speed limits byelaws discussed at the previous month's meeting were put on public display. They will be on display for five weeks. They can be viewed at local area offices or on the Council's website. The items on display for public consideration are:

- The retention of 80kph speed limits on four road lengths in County Galway (two on the Athenry ring road and two in the Ballinasloe area)

- The conversion of five road lengths inside former town urban boundaries from 80kph to 60kph limits (two in Loughrea town and three in Ballinalsoe town)
- The introduction of Periodic Speed limits at four schools located on former national roads (now regional roads)
- The introduction of 30kph speed limits in 76 housing estates throughout the county, that have been taken in charge since the last speed limit review in 2018.

Standing Orders for MD – Hybrid Meetings section to be approved

LMD2390

The Amendment to the Standing Orders of the Municipal District of Loughrea were **PROPOSED** by Cllr. Canning, **SECONDED** by Cllr. Curley and agreed.

Cllr. McClearn advised that a new directive will issue from the Department clarifying that travel remuneration may only be claimed where persons attend meetings in person.

Cllr. Kinane stated that anomalies will arise and that she hopes the Department issues clear guidelines. She added, hybrid attendance at meetings provides opportunities for those who wish to become Councillors such as women and people in full time employment. She stated, it will facilitate various lifestyles and homelives.

Cllr. Murphy added that MD meetings are held every second Monday and therefore can be planned for in advance. He added, outside of Municipal District and Plenary meetings, all other meetings should facilitate remote attendance.

Cathaoirleach's Business

LMD2391

Cllr. Finnerty raised concerns regarding hedge cutting in the MD and at Ballyturin. He stated that hedge cutting should be prioritised when the children return to school. He added this is a major safety issue and he outlined that cars are being damaged and road signage is blocked from view. He enquired if he could put NOM funding towards hedge cutting.

Cllr. Donohue stated that the Government waves the 1993 Roads Act around, but she added that there are risks to lives. She said she had previously raised the issue of ash dieback and stated that Members need to highlight hedge cutting as an issue. She referred to grants allocated by Clare County Council for the purpose of hedge cutting and enquired if similar grants could be made available for cutting of hedges.

Cllr. Murphy stated he pays a contractor to cut hedges and that farmers have an obligation to maintain trees and hedges on their property. He stated that confusion is caused when the Council cut hedges as, farmers will accept that the responsibility will fall to the council. He added this is counterproductive and clear instructions should issue to farmers regarding their responsibilities in this regard. He stated that Council should either do all or none of it.

Ms. Lowe stated that the Council does not receive a specific budget for hedge cutting, and to facilitate it, funds must be pulled from other budget allocations. She stated there is a clear obligation on the landowner to maintain trees and hedges under the Roads legislation. The

Council undertakes hedge cutting only from a safety perspective. She advised that various Local Authorities handle the issue of tree and hedge maintenance differently. Some local authorities issue grants – but there is a heavy administrative role in the issuing of grants and uptake can be limited. Other local authorities write to individual landowners to remind them of their obligations, but again this is administratively burdensome. –The Council issues newspaper notices annually regarding the Roads legislation requirements. She suggested the members put this issue on the Roads and Transportation SPC agenda for further consideration. –

Mr. Haugh clarified the method in which hedge cutting was rolled out across the MD this year and over the 5 years of the Council's elected term, he added this ensures fairness to each area within the MD. He stated, he will always accept NOM support from members to support hedge cutting operations.

Cllr. McClearn stated that in some areas the growth has proceeded overhead, directly over the road and the sun does not reach some areas of roadway which has other implications for the road surface, he stated, pressure needs to be put on landowners to remove these trees.

Cllr. Kinane stated that having listened to what is being said, it is clear the Members are asking for change, and this change should be focussed, as the current procedures are not working. She enquired regarding the total amount of NOM funding required for hedge cutting in the MD adding that Members do not have a large amount of NOM funding available. She stated there is a problem and answers need to be found.

Cllr. Murphy agreed with the Cathaoirleach and stated the Council needs to look at the way hedge cutting is dealt with, he added, the people who are meant to be carrying out hedge cutting are not doing it. He stated, other Counties are timelier in completing hedge cutting and the mindset in Galway should be changed. He asked if the Councils should refrain from hedge cutting and let landowners shoulder their responsibility. He added, the Council is utilising funding for this work and that funding should be allocated to other works.

In response to Cllr. Finnerty's comment, Mr. Haugh responded that the MD is split into three separate supervisor areas and four hedge cutting crews are currently engaged to deal with hedge trimming. Ms. Lowe added, hedge cutting is very costly and funding for this is sourced from the same budget that funds labour, pothole repairs, drainage, signage, emergency works and other projects.

Cllr. Donohue stated that enforcement may be an area that should be considered under the 1993 Roads Act where a safety issue is presented.

Cllr. Donohue **PROPOSED** putting hedge cutting as an item on the Roads and Transportation SPC meeting. The proposal was **SECONDED** by Cllr. Kinane.

Cllr. Curley sought clarification on the repair of the public lights at the Coils Furain housing estate, he stated there is approximately 300 metres of darkness which is a safety concern. He enquired regarding the provision of emergency resources which can be put in place until the issue is resolved. Ms. Lowe responded that the Council is aware of this issue and liaised with ESB and Electric Skyline, she responded the use of generators is not an option.

Cllr. Donohue state that the Local Area Plan is an opportunity for local people to have their say. The Last Local Area Plan expired in 2018 and it has been 6 years for people to get an opportunity to have their say only to be told now that the plans they desire for the town as in the sports development complex is not being allowed for zoning by the Council and the Ministerial directive etc.

Cllr. McClearn stated Mr. Cullen of the Regional Sports Group asked for the Councillors representing the Loughrea MD write to Minister A. Dillon detailing the submission's that have been made in relation to the draft directive which was issued regarding material alteration 35 of the local Area Plan.

Motion of Cllr. Declan Kelly

Cllr. Kelly read out a Motion he put forward:

I propose that Galway County Council and the Chief Executive of Galway County Council commit to making a publicly owned public swimming pool in Loughrea an urgent priority of the Council. I further propose that potential sites in public ownership be evaluated and that if none are suitable then privately owned sites be considered. This preparatory work and business plan should be finalised with an ambition to commence construction in 2025.

M. Flynn referred to a response she issued to Cllr. Kelly dated 10th October 2024 and read the response to the Members; content as follows:

The Loughrea Local Area Plan Community Facilities Zoning allows for the development of civic, community and educational facilities to facilitate the necessary community, health, religious, educational, social, and civic infrastructure within the lifetime of the Local Area Plan. The Land use matrix of the LAP allows for this to be considered.

Galway County Council considered an expression of interest submitted for a swimming pool for Loughrea in the context of the Large-Scale Sports Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF). In the submissions that went forward from the Local Authority the swimming pool expression of interest was not included as the criteria stated that projects for submission and funding consideration should be in a state of readiness in terms of being shovel ready. Moreover, applicants would need to have a site acquired or a long-term lease in place as part of the eligibility criteria.

The Community Development Team has engaged extensively with the local groups and Loughrea MD in this regard thus far.

Cllr. Kelly stated, a site needs to be identified and acquired, and resources need to be secured for the swimming pool.

Cllr. McClearn stated the issue of the requirement for a swimming pool for Loughrea has been ongoing for 25 years. He added, the lands on the N65 have been identified as not suitable and therefore pressure should be put on the Executive to identify a suitable site. He requested his colleagues to write to the Minister in this regard, adding that this Municipal District must keep this item on the agenda at MD and Plenary level. He added that they must get this project over the line.

The **PROPOSAL** put forward by Cllr. Kelly was **SECONDED** by Cllr. Donohue and agreed by all members.

Ms. Flynn provided the members with an update on Local Community and Economic Plan submitted by Mr. Kieran Coyne.

CHRIOGHNAIGH AN CRUINNIU ANSIN

Martina Kinane

CLLR MARTINA KINANE

11 / November / 2024

DATE

