

**LIMAVADY BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMHAIRLE BHUIRG LÉIM AN MHADAIDH**

SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE

14 JANUARY 2010

Minutes of meeting held in the Council Offices, 7 Connell Street, Limavady at 7.00 pm on the above date.

PRESENT:

Aldermen G Mullan, G Robinson and J Rankin. Councillors A Brolly, P Butcher, M Carten, B Chivers, L Cubitt, M Coyle, M Donaghy (chair), B Douglas, J F McElhinney, C Ó hOisín, A Robinson and E Stevenson.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Committee Clerk, Director of Development, Director of Environmental Services, Director of Support Services, Finance Manager, Finance Assistant and the Chief Executive.

APOLOGIES: - None.

MINUTES:

The minutes of meeting dated 1 December 2009 were approved and signed on the proposal of Councillor Mullan, seconded by Councillor Chivers.

MATTERS ARISING:

Payment of Accounts – September 2009: The Director Support Services clarified to a member specific items listed in the Payment of Accounts for September 2009 which was noted.

PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS:

The payment of accounts for the month of November 2009 were tabled and noted.

HUMAN RESOURCES:

Human Resource Report: IN COMMITTEE on the proposal of Councillor Butcher, seconded by Councillor Ó hOisín.

The Director of Support Services presented the Human Resource Report dated 14 January 2010 which detailed recruitment & selection, absenteeism, analysis of cause of long term absence and issues relating to Investors in People. The report was adopted on the proposal of Councillor Butcher, seconded by Councillor Cubitt subject to the following:

Absenteeism: The figure of 8.06% absenteeism was commended by members and it was suggested that policies Council had put in place in the past were now paying off.

Leavers: Council had requested that congratulations and best wishes be passed on to Marie Gormley on her new post.

Investors in People Award: Members were informed that following assessment on December 2009, the independent assessor Mr Roy McCleary had confirmed that he would be strongly recommending the Investors in People award for Limavady Borough Council and that Council was awaiting a formal report confirming this result by the end of January 2010. It was agreed that staff involved in the IIP process would be congratulated for their hard work on behalf of Council and that an event would be held to publicise the award.

Media Relations Officer: It was agreed that the Media Relations Officer hours of work would be extended from 20 to 27.5 hours per week from 1 January – 31 March 2010. There would be no additional cost to Council as the hours would be covered through the existing Good Relations budget.

Formal Employees Complaint – Legal Costs Request: Members were reminded that following legal advice, Council had approved issue of letter of apology to two former employees in September 2009 following a complaint received about an article in the press in June 2007. Since the letters had been issued, the Solicitors acting on behalf of Council had received a request from the former employees for Council to agree to cover their legal costs of £1,995 + VAT.

Although the former employees had not requested this previously, Alderman Coyle proposed that Council had a moral obligation to pay the legal costs as the matter had dragged on far too long. This was seconded by Councillor Mullan. The proposal was put to the meeting and declared lost, 4 for, 8 against and 4 abstentions.

OUT OF COMMITTEE on the proposal of Councillor Ó hOisín, seconded by Councillor Cubitt.

ABSENTEEISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND COUNCILS 2008/09 – REPORT BY THE CHIEF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUDITOR:

The report on Absenteeism in Northern Ireland Councils for 2008/09 by the Chief Local Government Auditor was noted.

ACCOUNTS FOR 8 MONTHS ENDED 30 NOVEMBER 2009:

The Director of Support Services presented the 8 months accounts for the period ended 30 November 2009 which were prepared on an accrual basis. The surplus for the 8 months was £119k, however as a budget surplus of £38k had been forecast, there was a favourable variance of £81k.

The main variances were:

- landfill site closure costs - £50k adverse
- landfill site post closure costs - £40k adverse
- rate reserve clawback - £72k adverse
- waste disposal gate fees - £77k favourable
- loan/lease charges - £92k favourable

Individual variances both adverse and favourable in relation to salaries & wages, other expenditure, other income and grants as appeared on pages 4 & 5 in the accounts package were explained in detail by the Director. He further pointed out that a revised forecast to year end 31 March 2010 had been carried out which indicated that Council's reserves at year end should be in the region of £650k to £700k. He also drew member's attention to the fact that Council had received a net £118k as a result of a value added claim relating to previous years, which had been carried out on behalf of Council by PriceWaterhouse Coopers.

The accounts for the 8 months ended 30 November 2009 were approved on the proposal of Alderman Rankin, seconded by Alderman Robinson. The Director of Support Services was congratulated on what was considered a healthy set of accounts in the run up to RPA.

RATES ESTIMATES 2010/2011:

It was agreed that discussion on the rates would be held **IN COMMITTEE**.

The Director of Support Services gave a detailed presentation on the main elements of the rates which were loan charges, other expenses, salaries & wages and income. He highlighted areas where there were variances from last year and/or from the previous two years actual figures. He then gave a supplementary explanation of the main areas that were causing an increase in the rates as follows:

Loan Charges of £1,055k – this represents an increase of £44k or 4.31%. This increase is due to the provision of a new multi-purpose Civic Centre costing £75k off-set by savings of £31k achieved through reduced interest rates and the timing of draw down of loans.

Wages and Salaries of £5,110k - this represents an increase of £108 k or 2.16% and is due mainly to the staffing of the new civic centre costing £135k, an increase in employer's pension contributions rate from 16% to 17% costing £44k. These increases are off-set by savings in the cost of living increase of £38k. This is due to the fact that the actual increase for 2009/10 was less than budgeted for and also a result of a nil increase being allowed for in 2010/11.

Other Expenses of £4,863k - this represents an increase of £29k or 0.60%. The increase in these expenses is due to:

- Overheads and arts programmes associated with the new Civic Centre costing £151k,
- landfill tax associated with the disposal of 8850 tonnes costing £45k,

These additional costs are offset by savings achieved as a result of:

- recycling initiatives resulting in a reduction of 2000 tonnes saving Council £73k,
- a reduction in central overheads of £28k,
- a saving of £23k as a result of Council no longer requiring security at the car ferry terminal and
- reductions in local community fund spend and Councils training budget of £26k and £22k respectively.

Income of £2,086k - this represents a decrease of £20k or 0.93%. The decrease is due to lower bank interest earned due to lower rates costing £33k and a reduction in waste disposal recycling sales due to market conditions costing £20k. These reductions in income are offset by an increase in receipts at the new Civic Centre generating £36k.

This results in net expenditure of £8,941k - an increase of £200k or 2.29%.

The Director of Support Services outlined that the amount of the General Grant would be in the region of £1,484 – a decrease of £81k or 5.20% from the previous year.

Therefore, the amount to be raised by the rates was £7,304k which is equivalent to a Domestic Rate of 0.3885 pence in the pound - an increase of 3.60% and a Non-Domestic Rate of 26.5979 pence in the pound - an increase of 3.60%.

The Director of Support Services drew member's attention to page 27 of the Estimates and advised that potential maximum additions to the estimates included £133k for the car ferry and £35k for village renewal measures, which would mean that the final figure for the rates could be raised by an additional 2.38%.

The following points made were noted:

- slippage money should go to the North West 200
- money set aside for tourism general included funds towards Causeway Coast & Glens, Sperrin Tourism, Northern Ireland Milk Cup and the Dog Leap Rally
- funds had been set aside for townland names
- security was needed at the entrance and front desk of RVLC
- concern was raised at the level of funds which the car ferry might require
- funds to outside bodies should be allocated respectively and it should be stipulated in Letter of Offer or Service Level Agreement that Council had option of claw-back of funds when accounts were scrutinized.

It was finally agreed that in striking the rate for next year Council should include in addition to the 3.6% increase, an amount of £35k for village renewal and a maximum of €100k or £91k in relation to the car ferry. This amount would have to be established after renegotiation with the Lough Foyle Car Ferry Company. The worst case scenario therefore would be an increase of £126k or 1.79% leaving an overall increase of 5.39% for next year. It was agreed that the rate would be struck on this basis at the February 2010 Monthly meeting of Council.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

Award - National Benchmarking Service: The Chief Executive informed members that RVLC had been nominated for a customer satisfaction award by the National Benchmarking Service. It was agreed that two officers from the RVLC would attend the award ceremony and workshop to be held in Milton Keynes on 11 February 2010.

NEXT MEETING: - 2 February 2010.

THE BUSINESS CONCLUDED AT 9.20 PM

Chair: _____