



Members of the Consell de Formentera gathered today for the island's September plenary, a session that saw the GxP-PSOE cabinet secure the preliminary green light for a modification of the island's 2020 budget. "The situation in November 2019 when this year's spending framework was voted in is completely different to the one we're in today", quipped the chief of the finance and tax offices, Bartomeu Escandell. The pandemic and attendant crisis have forced a change in priorities, he continued, "and right now it's crucial we devote resources to tackling this social emergency".

Among the actions designed to supply urgent relief to islanders and local businesses, including €30,000 for Formenterers Solidaris and a €100,000 increase in social spending, €100,000 for student aid, €300,000 in food vouchers and €350,000 for freelancers and Isba loans, Escandell pointed to urgent relief amounting to €150,000 in renter's assistance. "This boils down to a basic necessity for a great many Formentera families", asserted the conseller.

Ca na Costa

The finance chief explained that an additional €900,000 included in the spending adjustment would enable the Consell to use the right of first refusal amid a potential land sell-off. "The Consell has been notified of the possible sale of Ca na Costa," said Escandell, "if it goes forward and the price is right, the Consell will exercise its prerogative to acquire a heritage site which dates to roughly 2000 BC. Not only is Ca na Costa the oldest megalithic site in the Balearic Islands, but features like the chamber, perforated tiles, radials, outer platform and retaining walls make it wholly unique in the world".

The Ca na Costa archaeological dig site was classed as a cultural interest asset in 1994. The remains of eight individuals figure among the materials uncovered there. Conseller Escandell said the land, which sits on 100,000 square metres at the eastern side of Estany Pudent, "is of an incalculable importance to Formentera's heritage and the local environment".

Refunding tax on dynamic advertising

Cross-party support also materialised behind a proposal to modify the guidelines of a tax on so-called dynamic advertising. Mobility chief Rafael González announced local government would be refunding in full the levy paid by taxi drivers to engage in dynamic marketing,

reasoning that taxing such advertising “isn’t a priority during these times of crisis”.

Honouring law enforcement

A proposal to honour members of Formentera Local Police and other security forces received backing from both the GxF-PSOE cabinet and Sa Unió. “Amid emergency orders and afterwards, during this eminently atypical summer season, island law enforcement went above and beyond to ensure compliance with the imperatives of the public health crisis”, said the chief of the interior department. “These distinctions are a way to applaud those efforts.”

Assembly members voted to award the Cross for Police Merit to nine officers on the island force, including police chief Félix Ramos Pérez. Special Consell de Formentera honours went to chief commander of the Eivissa-Formentera Civil Guard, Enrique Gómez Bastida, “for his dedication and commitment to Formentera Local Police missions”.

Waste management contract

Cabinet members overcame opposition abstention to pass framework for the island’s waste management contract—“a necessary step in order to tender a crucial local service”, indicated environment chief Antonio J Sanz. The conseller said the terms of the contract were nearing completion and the offer would be put to tender pending plenary approval.

Another measure to pass with cabinet support despite opposition abstention was a partnership between the Formentera Department of Environment and Balearic Agency of Water and Environmental Quality (Abaqua) to upgrade the sanitation service and water purification plant. “This is a compact that hasn’t been renewed since 2005”, said the environment chief, “but it means Abaqua can continue running the plant without losing any of the new upgrades and maintenance funding that have been secured”.

Highway agreement

Assembly members granted support to a GxF-PSOE-brokered proposal to petition the central government to update its roads agreement with the island. Such a change could usher in road improvements as recommended in an investment report prepared by the Consell de Formentera and currently awaiting revision. According to the mobility conseller, the measure means holding Madrid’s feet to the fire on writing improvements of island roads into the Spain’s general 2021 spending plan.

Health care improvements

Another cabinet-brokered proposal to succeed despite the abstention of the opposition was a motion to petition the Balearic Health Service to restructure and expand face-to-face primary care at the Formentera Health Centre (Centre de Salut de Formentera, CSF). The change is aimed at equipping the CSF for differentiated care based on whether patients present respiratory difficulties, differentiated care for visits by paediatricians, replacements of absent staff and an upgraded system of online care.

An additional motion tabled by the opposition sought to urge the Balearic Health Service to upgrade dialysis spaces and terminals at the Formentera hospital and restore dialysis service on the island—“a change that would allow local patients to forgo travel to Eivissa”, reasoned social welfare chief Rafael Ramírez.

Progress report from Consellera Juan

Consellera Ana Juan stood before the assembly to take stock of efforts in departments within her remit. “Covid-19 has left us rattled, particularly in terms of well-being, and in this unusual and trying situation, vision, dialogue and consensus are more important than ever. The people of Formentera need to be our number-one priority”, she insisted.

Juan pointed to €150,000 in housing assistance adopted by members of the day’s plenary. The special line of assistance is designed to help low-earning families and “cohabitation units” access and keep rental housing. Meanwhile, she stressed that older islanders were one of the most vulnerable groups amid the current pandemic, and highlighted Covid-19-related measures at the start of the pandemic involving “telephone-based support and upwards of five hundred phone calls in an effort to detect possible victims of the disease who lived alone and needed help”.

Consellera Juan likewise described one project in early stages of development and receiving funding from the regional job seekers’ office that is geared toward local employment, training and entrepreneurialism and moving towards full employment in 2020–2023. She underscored an array of training and employment courses as well, “all aimed at reaching as many people as possible; we’re in an immensely tricky situation and need all hands on deck”. Juan’s review extended to cooperation with groups representing local businesses and sellers at Formentera’s outdoor markets —“a sector that generates wealth based on trust and proximity”, the consellera noted— to support and publicise commercial operations battered by the pandemic.

Proclamation

Lastly, unanimous support was secured for an official statement from the Consell on World Day against Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking in Women, Girls and Boys, celebrated 23 September. As Local equality chief Vanessa Parellada put it, “equality between women and men will remain a chimera so long as women, girls and boys are bought, sold, exploited and prostituted”. Parellada insisted on the importance of abolishing prostitution and eradicating human trafficking for sexual exploitation. In the statement, assembly members declared that “as apparent with the first-ever ‘Feminist Classrooms’ event hosted last week, islanders stand united behind these principles”.

25 September 2020

**Department of Communications
Consell de Formentera**