

In today's full-house November assembly of the Consell de Formentera, "yes" votes from the Gent per Formentera-PSOE cabinet meant the administration's proposed 2021 budget —nearly €30.7 million, or a more than1.9% spending increase— went ahead despite abstention from Sa Unió opposition councillors.

Economy and finance councillor Bartomeu Escandell said the ongoing pandemic permeated the budget, stressing key components like "assistance for the most vulnerable, agriculture, families renting their home and other islanders affected by the Covid-19 crisis".

Casting future prospects as "still uncertain" and the summer 2020 season as "short and atypical, but better than expected in May", Escandell said the spending plan was "designed to help islanders and Formentera businesses weather a winter that's expected to be tough" and described the guiding vision as "no islander be left behind".

Helping people
€130,000 in food vouchers
€150,000 in renters' assistance
€100,000 for students
Escoleta, music and dance school and municipal sports service fees waived
Urban estate tax rate cut

Economic stimulus
€150,000 for freelancers and business owners
Public thoroughfare occupancy tax rebates
Fees for reforms and upgrades waived
Slaughterhouse fees waived

Escandell explained that the plan redirects €736,500 toward keeping businesses operational and helping families and Formentera's agricultural sector, with total spending in those areas approaching €2,070,000—a 55% increase on 2020 figures.

He additionally highlighted inflated investment capital and current transfers, flattening current income from the region and a reduction in the urban estate tax (IBI), with borrowing kept at zero.

Investment criteria

Sustainability is still the priority, said Escandell, pointing to the anticipated recovery of natural spaces like S'Estany des Peix as well as increasingly sustainable mobility and waste management. Escandell told assembly members to watch for phase two of reforms on avinguda Miramar in the centre of Es Pujols along with improvements on the access road to Sant Ferran school and the senior living centre plus a fitness circuit and skate and sports park in Sant Francesc.

Other headline projects in 2021 involve preserving heritage sites, like through the rehabilitation of Casa de Can Ramon and the creation of a cultural centre at the current site of Sant Ferran school, and by promoting islanders' active participation in local affairs, such as with the Consell d'Entitats' participatory spending initiative.

And finally, the elderly, adolescents and children constitute priorities in the budget too, with plans in place to open the island's first old people's home and the Sant Ferran escoleta (nursery), not to mention the scheduled construction of the Sant Ferran skate and sport park.

Unity of the Catalan language

The cabinet overcame opposition resistance to highlight certain government agencies and offices' failure to recognise Catalan as a single, cohesive language, adopting a motion to "recognise and proclaim the integrality of the Catalan language, a fact that need not debase other existing denominations". Councillor Raquel Guasch, chief of the language policy department, rejected attempts in places where Catalan enjoys official language status to "create barriers to normalised Catalan use and undermine protections of linguistic unitarity". The measure also presses the central government to grant "public and official acknowledgment of the unity of the Catalan language". Guasch bemoaned the lack of administrative and policy coordination that speakers of the language still endure, casting the failure as "a violation of rights". "It's time for the five regions where Catalan is spoken and the central government to come up with real policies recognising Catalan's cohesiveness and the rights of those who speak it", she insisted.

Adopting an appeal that was brought (and subsequently rejected) by the opposition and ultimately brokered by the cabinet, plenary members urged the Spanish Ministry of Energy Transition to monitor SARS-Cov2 in wastewater on the island. Environment councillor Antonio J. Sanz defended the proposal, saying monitoring could be carried out in "a remote area not well connected to the sewage network". "Connections are typically limited between remote homes and between remote homes and urban homes. The studies executed so far have focused on water treatment plants in urban areas and areas that are well connected to the sewage grid", asserted the councillor.

PCR screening

With one measure that was presented by the opposition and brokered by the cabinet, assembly members agreed to urge the Spanish Ministry of Health to require proof of PCR screening and negative Covid-19 status before travellers from mainland Spain can come to the Balearics. Consell premiere and tourism councillor Alejandra Ferrer highlighted an additional caveat that would allow "similar faster or cheaper tests, particularly given the approach of Christmas and family get-togethers, so we can ensure visits happen safely — for travellers, hosts and the island at large".

Cross-party backing was secured by Sa Unió party members' proposal to revise and renovate road signs and change the names of the arterials constituting the local roads network.

Report from Rafael Ramírez

Councillor of social welfare, management and transparency Rafael Ramírez offered assembly members a review of his departments' operations. He began his remarks by highlighting the challenge that the pandemic is posing for local government and asked for understanding if "decisions made in recent months failed to rise to the situation".

"The pandemic laid bare the importance of quality public systems to safeguard the rights of islanders", said Ramírez, describing the work of Formentera Social Welfare Department personnel as "a point of pride": "Staff have reorganised services and updated the channels that make them accessible to islanders, adjusting to the evolving reality imposed by pandemic".

After an overview of services assured by FSWD, the councillor detailed some of the advances made in the last twelve months by the Formentera Transparency Department, such as up-to-date data on FTD's online portal and the Consell de Formentera website and coordination with the human resources department around collective bargaining talks.

Official proclamation
Plenary members struck unity behind a statement on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Equality councillor Vanessa Parellada plead the case for "a reiteration of our commitment to tackling violence against women and their children" and "vigilance against that which would put safeguards to our liberties at risk".

Plenary members encouraged caution given policies of isolation and lockdown work to exacerbate the risk of domestic, sexual and gender violence, insisting the very fact made additional safeguards necessary. They described local government's role in making the economy and society more equitable, inclusive and sustainable as "decisive and transformative".

In the proclamation, councillors called for gender equality and women's rights to stay central on the political agenda, demanding wide-reaching consensus-based action so policies aimed at stamping out gender violence can enjoy continued traction.

At 12 noon today, 25 November, plenary attendees observed a minute of silence for International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

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Communications Department
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