

Today, in the full-house assembly of the Consell de Formentera, cabinet councillors of Gent per Formentera and PSOE overcame abstention by representatives of Sa Unió to pass the administration's largest-ever budget. Spending in 2023 totals €38.4 million and marks a 13.52% increase compared to the €33.8 million budget in 2022. Bartomeu Escandell, councillor of finance, highlighted budgetary growth since the Consell de Formentera's first €21.7 million budget in 2008. Escandell traced the record-setting expansiveness of 2023 spending to increased current transfers under legislation on financing for island administrations, more capital transfers of Next Generation funds from the European Union and the municipal government's own fiscal efficiency.

The accounts are divided into basic public services (€12.27 million), social protection and promotion (€4.89m), production of preferential public assets (€6.49m), economic actions (€8.77m) and general actions (€5.98m). In this sense, Councillor Escandell affirmed, "We are above all service-providers. Moreover, we are continually expanding aid to the associative fabric of the island". "Despite the global crisis, the Consell de Formentera is a healthy, financially-stable and zero-deficit institution with €6 million in strategic reserves to deal with externalities that may come", he asserted.

Subsidising childcare

Assembly members were briefed on approval of a change to the tax ordinance that sets facilities and service fees for the island's nurseries (*escoletes*). From January to June, a 30% reduction will apply to the fee for daily service (8.30am to 12.30pm) for years one and two of early-childhood education. This special reduction, the latest in a series of that have been included in the ordinance, brings Formentera one more step closer to free schooling for zero- to three-year-olds.

Financial and family reductions and exemptions in the escoletes ordinance will be maintained and single-parent families and victims of gender violence will join large families in benefiting from a 30% discount. Since September, children in year three at the escoletes have benefited from fully-subsidised fees, while all children on the island will receive full subsidies for their annual tuition of €70 in 2022-2023.

Container deposit scheme
Unanimous backing also materialised for a proposal tabled by Antoni Tur, councillor of environment, to rebate 60% of the waste collection fee for establishments that participate in a pilot test of a deposit system for packaging. The rebate will apply for the duration of the pilot test. "We continue to take steps towards a circular management of our waste – an issue of utmost importance for Formentera's environmental sustainability", said Councillor Tur.

Public transport
The GxF-PSOE cabinet once again overcame opposition abstention to pass an update of the project for regular passenger road transport services on the island. Rafael González, councillor of mobility, attributed the need to expand the project budget to rising costs and explained that the planned new service would offer four new service routes –two year-round and seven seasonal– bringing the total to nine. "Buses will link to towns, the port, the social and health services hub, beaches and the main tourist areas", he added. The company that obtains the concession must have a ten-bus fleet, plus one reserve mini- or midibus, and be tailored to the characteristics of the island. The change will mean a doubling of the current offer and is expected to bring a 31% increase in ridership.

Assembly members also approved a feasibility study of the contract for the public passenger transport service. The ten-year public contract will be worth €20.5 million, revenue from fares is expected to reach €8.5 million (40% of the service budget) and the Consell de Formentera will contribute €12 million (60%). "Until 2019 Formentera's bus service had no funding from the Consell", the councillor pointed out, "so we are retooling and tailoring it to current needs. That comes at a cost, which is worth it given the service provided and the benefits it will mean for the environment, tourism and the island."

In year one of roll-out, the Consell de Formentera will contribute one million euros, with contributions of €1.2 million each year thereafter. The councillor of mobility asserted that in 2023 new sources of income would ensure the viability of the service, pointing to an expected €600,000 through formentera.eco and €400,000 from the Balearic Government, and adding, "After today's approvals, this winter we will take the project to tender." González called the steps "important progress in local mobility" and insisted, "We hope that this new contract and formentera.eco will make mobility truly sustainable and deliver something that residents and tourists use every day."

Members of the assembly also handed cross-party support to Formentera's signing of a declaration in defence of the night sky and the right to starlight. By signing, the island shows its support for protections, awareness and the other objectives contained in the declaration.

Fourth Plan for Substances, Screens and Games
Assembly members came together to pass the fourth Substances, Screens and Games Plan for 2022-2025 (*Pla insular sobre l'ús de sustàncies, pantalles i jocs, PIUSPJ*). In the words of Rafael Ramírez, councillor of social welfare, "this plan has been open to the participation of all social stakeholders, and it is a good plan that has been designed to protect our young people." The plan was developed by Fundació Salut i Comunitat with collaboration from the Office of Social Welfare.

Two joint proposals
Additional backing was secured for two joint opposition-cabinet proposals brought by representatives of Sa Unió. One reiterates to the Balearic Government the need to urgently remodel the outfall of the waste water treatment plant (WWTP) "to minimise the impact on the adjacent posidonia meadow." Plenary members also pressed the Balearic administration and ABAQUA to "respect the timeframe established" to expand the WWTP and "include in the 2023 audit annual reports on the Formentera WWTP, after the planned works, so that improvements in the emissions of treated water can be verified."

Under the other joint proposal, assembly members agreed to update the wording of the Consell de Formentera ordinance on language use to make clear reference to the Statute of Autonomy of the Balearic Islands. They voted to add an article explicitly tracing the use of language to the Statute – a point that highlights the value of the Consell's Language Advisory Service (*Servei d'Assessorament Lingüístic, SAL*
). Under article 2.5 of the Normalising Language Act, the SAL's remit includes "establishing, promoting and disseminating the correct lexical, verbal and other forms of Catalan which are closest to that which is spoken on Formentera."

40th anniversary of the Statute of Autonomy
Plenary members also voted unanimously to commemorate the 40th anniversary of enactment of the Balearic Islands' Statute of Autonomy. President Juan described it as "a celebration of this important milestone in our region's history." Juan also encouraged islanders to get involved in the commemorative events programmed around the Balearic magna carta: "These events are designed to highlight and increase visibility around our island's reality under the Statute of Autonomy of the Balearic Islands."

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