

**COMHAIRLE CATHRACH AGUS CONTAE PHORT LÁIRGE
WATERFORD CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL**

COUNCIL BUDGET MEETING HELD ON 23rd NOVEMBER 2021 BY MS TEAMS

Present

Cllr. Donal Barry	Cllr. Jason Murphy
Cllr. Liam Brazil	Cllr. Pat Nugent
Cllr. Joeanne Bailey	Cllr. Seamus O'Donnell
Cllr. Ger Barron	Cllr. John O'Leary
Cllr. Declan Clune	Cllr. Lola O'Sullivan
Cllr. Joe Conway	Cllr. Thomas Phelan
Cllr. Tom Cronin	Cllr. Jody Power
Cllr. Conor D. McGuinness	Cllr. Seanie Power
Cllr. David Daniels	Cllr. John Pratt
Cllr. Declan Doocey	Cllr. Eamon Quinlan
Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald	Cllr. Frank Quinlan
Cllr. Damien Geoghegan	Cllr. Mary Roche
Cllr. Jim Griffin	Cllr. Seamus Ryan
Cllr. John Hearne	Cllr. James Tobin
Cllr. Joe Kelly	Cllr. Eddie Mulligan
Cllr. Cristiona Kiely	Cllr. Adam Wyse

Officials in Attendance

Mr. M. Walsh, Chief Executive
 Mr. K. Kehoe, Director of Services, Corporate, Culture, HR & IS
 Mr. F. Galvin, Director of Services, Roads, Water & Environment
 Mr. M. Quinn, Director of Services, Economic Development and Planning
 Mr P. Johnston, Acting Director of Services, Housing, Community & Emergency Services
 Mr. B. Pollard, Head of Finance
 Ms. H. Dunphy, Meetings Administrator
 Mr. D. Mitchell, Corporate
 Mr. Conan Power, Communications
 Mr. Jon Hawkins, Information System

Meetings Administrator carried out a roll call to confirm meeting attendance.

1. Chief Executives Report and Draft Budget Book 2022

M. Walsh (CEO) introduced the budget for 2022. He stated that Covid distorted normal operation in 2021 and there had been a dependency on central government for support particularly through the Rates waiver which practically guaranteed income. The 2022 budget had been prepared on the assumption of a return to business as usual. With construction inflation running at 10% and energy inflation running at 16% there had to provision made in the proposed budget.

He commented that during Covid there had been increased demand for the council's services particularly in areas such as planning and housing but also in the provision of outdoor areas all of which continued to stretch capacity. Asset Maintenance was suffering due to continued budget discipline by the executive. Mr.

Walsh pointed out that funding initiatives by government now have a dependency on levels of matching funding by the Council that this also created new opportunities in areas like URDFs.

The proposed budget needs to allow for the promotion of Waterford particularly considering our “Best Place to Live” designation by the Irish Times. The current budget had little spend allocated. Decarbonisation was something that Waterford needed to lead on rather than waiting to have change imposed. Having a first mover advantage and availing of funding opportunities, particularly from the EU. The dilemma for the council in creating the 2022 budget was to be progressive while not damaging vulnerable businesses. The proposed budget seeks to achieve this by increasing rates by 5%, smaller vulnerable business would be sheltered from the increase which would be borne by larger businesses in sectors that had flourished through the pandemic. This would align the goals of the council with the business community and allow the council to allocate staff and resources for the decarbonisation initiative.

He recommended the budget to the members as being progressive and unique among Irish local authorities.

Cllr. Conway spoke to propose the budget and thanked the council for the privilege of doing so. He stated that it was a budget of vision and realism showing leadership and community engagement. It gave Waterford the ability to build on its Best Place to live accolade. It was also a prudent proposal that offered access to government funding mechanisms.

Cllr. Geoghegan seconded the budget and stated that it provided for an imaginative and prudent approach in creating a progressive solution. He added that 86% of rate payers would not be impacted by the increase if they engaged with council on climate change.

Cllr. Phelan commented that it looked progressive on the approach to rates and the decarbonisation emphasis and sought clarification on a number of areas;

- If people in rates arrears or repayment plans would be able to avail of the rates increase offsetting grant
- What arrangements would be in place for the hospitality sector many of whom had a liability greater than €10k.
- He wanted to know about where the provision of new public toilets in Dungarvan was included and how much of the allocation was for maintain and cleaning them.
- What arrangement would be made to elongate the tourist season by having the seasonal facilities and service
- He also asked where provision for feasibility study for the Dungarvan swimming pool was included.

B. Pollard (HoF) clarified that the public toilets were included at a cost of €70k under C0401 and €40k was to build them and the balance was cleaning and maintenance. There was a €20k allocation for the swimming pool feasibility study included in F0102. He further clarified that all hospitality sectors would get the rebate of the rates increase and that those in arrears would need to at least be engaged in a payment plan to be eligible for the rebate.

F. Galvin (DoS) stated that the summer season would be the same as 2021 commencing at the start of May and continuing to mid-September.

Cllr. Barry saw the budget as being the right approach in the current covid environment with the higher costs of fuel and materials. He would like to see reports on the impact of the extra money spent marketing Waterford and the extra staff during the year. He welcomed the extra spending on roads, lighting, lifeguards, and footpaths. He is supporting the budget as proposed.

Cllr. Ryan welcomed and supported the budget and its emphases on climate change noting that it will give certainty to both business and householders. He queried a number of issues that he wanted to raise

- There was a backlog in Housing Adaptation Grant applications and asked if it was possible to increase staffing or resources available.
- Enquired as to when the public parks lighting programme would commence
- Would there be any additional funding for e-books in the libraries

Cllr. J. Power welcomed the budget as being transformative, innovative, and progressive. He welcomed the additional jobs being created. He queried if the income from the amenities such as the museums should not be higher and why the school meals was €26k which was the same as 2021. He also asked about the LEO budget allocation given the output on jobs was not great the previous year.

K. Kehoe (DoS) outlined that €20k was allocated and the libraries were still able to purchase a similar number of hardback books due to effective procurement. The budget for school meals was the same because it is based on allocation from Department and is fully recoupable.

M. Walsh (CEO) outlined that there is a commitment to look at providing extra resources for Housing Adaptation Grant processing through staff allocations noting to the members that there was still a dependency on the input from Occupational Therapists. All the lights including park lighting due to be replaced with LED lights, it is a regional initiative for which the contracts were in the process of being signed. Commencement of works due mid 2022 and a Part 8 will be before the members in the New Year. The LEO performance was good in most areas, but the job creation was impacted by some historical adjustment to employment numbers. If viewed over a 10-year period, the performance was on par with other counties.

M. Quinn (DoS) pointed out that the museums were independent companies outside our direct control and if they do achieve higher revenues, it would reduce the council's level of subvention to them.

Cllr. Tobin welcomed the budget as one of the better ones he had seen and was delighted that the hospitality sector would not be subjected to the rates increase even the bigger ones. He welcomed the increased roads spend which was very important rurally. He thought it was a shame Active Travel could not be shown in the book. Additionally, he hoped that extra staff could be allocated to planning to facilitate the increased workload.

Cllr. O' Leary said that he would be supporting this progressive budget with the increased spend on lighting, roads, footpaths, homeless services, and lifeguards. He noted that resourcing some initiatives like URDF and Clar required matched funding. He added that the approach to decarbonisation in the budget was exciting especially with the community involvement.

Cllr. Daniels said it was difficult to argue with the CE's report and was concerned the Local Government Fund did not follow inflation. He was worried that the budget was prepared based on a business-as-usual assumption given where we were still with Covid. He also called for assistance with the resources allocated to adaptation grants and asked about the income from the marina and the budget. He also asked what the implications were for the loss of the Irish Water funding.

B. Pollard (HoF) confirmed that the hospitality sector is 100% included in the rebate/grant scheme to offset the 5% increase in rates. He clarified that the amounts for Active Travel were included in code 0406 at €3m and on 1101 at €826k. He also confirmed that Marina income had increased by €26K.

M. Walsh (CEO) confirmed that the Government had not changed the LG Fund in many years. He said that the budget in Covid times was far from normal and the exclusion of smaller rate payers from liability for the rates increase was considering capacity to pay. The issue of Irish Water funding loss is over now and there is nothing that can be done about it in the budget. He committed to look at the Housing Adaption Grants applications resourcing. There was limited capacity to change as it was set at national level. If the workload in planning continued it would generate extra planning fees and he would look at adding additional staff. We just needed to be cautious as the increased applications could just be a bubble.

Cllr. Griffin congratulated the Finance Team and the CEO on the progressive budget which addressed decarbonisation. He welcomed the engagement that had occurred between the executive and the members in preparing it. He wanted to know if small retailers who were in arrears but had not entered a payment plan would be allowed to claim the grant back on rates. He also felt that vacant premises should have higher rates and would like to see small builders become involved in doing the Adaptation Grant related work. He also enquired about the Airport Funding.

Cllr. Pratt spoke in support of the budget proposal. He raised the long wait tenants have for Housing Adaption Grant applications and would like to see an extra line in the budget for footpaths.

Cllr. Mulligan welcomed the content of the budget although he feared the rates increase might add to inflation. He noted the increase in staff costs and asked if the 5% rates rebate/grant might be carrying on beyond 2022. He also wanted to know if the 2019 rates increase of 2.5% was ever passed back.

B. Pollard (HoF) outlined that he was very cognisant of distressed businesses in the current environment and the council were engaging with payment plans to assist them where needed. He confirmed the 2.5% increase in 2019 was applied at this stage. The 5% being rebated in 2022 may continue in other years but it would need the members to approve. He also stated that footpath repair should have a budget line – he will investigate and report back.

M. Walsh (CEO) stated that the planning permission decision was still awaited on the airport runway extension, and he hope the promised funding by government will still materialise. The Council could not avoid the increased staff costs that came about through contractual or national pay agreements. The jobs that were being added to the council workforce were high quality roles dealing with decarbonisation, active travel, marketing. He also expected there would be more retirements followed by the addition of new staff for the organisation.

Cllr. McGuinness thanked the CEO and Head of Finance for their engagement and listening to all voices in the budget preparation. He welcomed and supported the proposed budget which was progressive and looks at maintaining services and improving them in some areas which is very important. The extra €100k for piers and marinas will help get further funding from the Department of the Marine. He welcomes the provision of public toilets in Dungarvan and provision for swimming pool feasibility study. Additionally, he welcomes the grant to offset the rates increase for SMEs and the focus on decarbonisation.

Cllr. Kiely said she was proud to see a budget that was innovative, ambitious, fair, and just which she supported 100%. She said it made sense to link the rebate with decarbonisation. This was the opportunity for Waterford to lead. She noted a number of points;

- Breakdown of footpaths and Active Travel
- Addition of Decarbonisation to the title of E1501 for Climate and Flooding
- She asked if there was an appeals process for any ratepayers that might be marginally over the 10K and not automatically be entitled to the rebate.

Cllr. O' Donnell congratulated the CEO and management team on the great job they did with the budget. He welcomed how roads and lighting had been dealt with.

Cllr. Brazil welcomed the budgeted spend on roads in rural areas. He would however like to see Clar Funding extending to other areas. He welcomed the potential increase in staff in the areas of planning and Adaption Grants for later in the year together with the extended season for beach services like toilets. He asked if the lifeguards in Bonmahon would be starting earlier with the extended season and if the new fire station for Kilmacthomas was being funded. He added his support to the overall budget.

B. Pollard (HoF) stated that the rates appeal process was clear cut now and that the council would encourage people into it and do its best to support them. He explained that it was not possible to change names of items in the budget book but agreed that there could be a structure put around reporting on Active Travel.

Cllr. Fitzgerald stated that he was delighted to support the budget which was progressive. He commented that service delivery had been good in recent years and would welcome the extra staff proposed. He would like to see more rural housing. The EPA Guidelines will now be used on water supply which implies a 15m distance for well and boreholes and wells from septic tanks or biocycle units he thinks this needs to be viewed with caution and would like clarification.

Cllr. Roche stated that she would support the budget as she had in the past. Waterford City and County Council had taken the lead in developing the greenways, city centre and decarbonisation. She added that the North Quays and Michael Street were a challenge and hoped they would progress in the next twelve months. She looked forward to movement on derelict sites and the traffic coming though the city but not

stopping. She welcomes investment in park lighting and play areas and thanked the executive for their work on the budget.

Cllr. Doocey welcomed the budget and the extra spend on roads and planning, the swimming pool feasibility study, and public toilets in Dungarvan. He believed that giving back the 5% rates increase for climate change engagement was a great initiative.

Cllr. Murphy stated that the budget was the most progressive and forward thinking that he had seen, and he thanked the executive for listening to the views of the members. There was something for every area of the county and the imaginative approach to rates and climate change would push SMEs in the right direction.

Cllr. Wyse stated that this council budget was historical and backs what science is telling us about the environment. It was also encouraging businesses to deal with climate change and not beating them with a stick. He pointed out that it was necessary to act or many of these businesses would end up under water if climate action is not taken now. He was delighted and proud to support the budget.

M. Walsh (CEO) stated that the Clar designation was done nationally. The fire station for Kilmacthomas would not be in this budget as it was part of a capital programme. He also stated that Rural Housing and planning were more development plan related rather than budget related at present. He committed to reviewing the resource allocation in planning and adaptation grants going forward.

F. Galvin (DoS) clarified that the issue with getting Bunmahon lifeguards was availability of qualified individuals and was working on improving this in 2022.

Cllr. Kelly added his support to the budget and the €500k investment in decarbonisation. He was of the view that Waterford City and County Council were setting the pace for other local authorities to follow. In doing so we were also at least maintaining current services and improving in some areas for 2022.

At the suggestion of Cllr. Geoghegan, the Mayor called for a roll call vote on the budget, and this resulted in unanimous acceptance of the budget as proposed.

Name:	In Favour	Against	Abstain	Absent
Ger Barron (Lab)	Yes			
Donal Barry (Ind)	Yes			
Liam Brazil (FG)	Yes			
Joeanne Bailey (SF)	Yes			
Declan Clune (Ind)	Yes			
Joe Conway (Ind)	Yes			
Tom Cronin (FF)	Yes			
Conor McGuinness (SF)	Yes			
Davy Daniels (Ind)	Yes			
Declan Doocey (FG)	Yes			
Pat Fitzgerald (SF)	Yes			
Catriona Kiely (GP)	Yes			
Damien Geoghegan (FG)	Yes			
Jim Griffin (SF)	Yes			
John Hearne (SF)	Yes			
Joe Kelly (Ind)	Yes			
Eddie Mulligan (FF)	Yes			
Jason Murphy (FF)	Yes			

Pat Nugent (FG)	Yes			
Seamus O'Donnell (Ind)	Yes			
John O'Leary (FF)	Yes			
Lola O'Sullivan (FG)	Yes			
Thomas Phelan (Lab)	Yes			
Jody Power (GP)	Yes			
Seanie Power (FG)	Yes			
John Pratt (Lab) *	Yes			
Eamon Quinlan (FF)	Yes			
Frank Quinlan (FG) *	Yes			
Seamus Ryan (Lab)	Yes			
Mary Roche (Ind)	Yes			
James Tobin (FF)	Yes			
Adam Gary Wyse (FF)	Yes			
Total	24	0	0	0

*Due to connectivity issues these votes were taken by the meetings administrator phoning the councillor directly

Cllr. Tobin commended the mayor on getting unanimous acceptance, his handling of the negotiations and conduct of the meeting.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____
Mayor

Dated: _____