

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

**COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 8th JUNE 2023 IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, DUNGARVAN, CO.
WATERFORD.**

Present

Cllr. John O’Leary (Mayor)	Cllr. Cristiona Kiely
Cllr. Ger Barron	Cllr. Conor McGuinness
Cllr. Liam Brazil	Cllr. Jason Murphy
Cllr. Joanne Bailey	Cllr. Pat Nugent
Cllr. Declan Clune	Cllr. John Pratt
Cllr. Joe Conway	Cllr. Lola O’Sullivan
Cllr. Tom Cronin	Cllr. Thomas Phelan
Cllr. Mairead Tobin	Cllr. Jody Power
Cllr. Declan Doocey	Cllr. Seanie Power
Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald	Cllr. Eamon Quinlan
Cllr. Damien Geoghegan	Cllr. Frank Quinlan
Cllr. Jim Griffin	Cllr. Mary Roche
Cllr. John Hearne	Cllr. Seamus Ryan
Cllr. Stephanie Keating	Cllr. Donal Barry
Cllr. Joe Kelly	

Apologies: Cllr. Adam Wyse, Cllr. David Daniels, Cllr. Seamus O’Donnell.

Officials in Attendance

Mr. M. Walsh, Chief Executive
 Mr. K. Kehoe, Director of Services, Corporate Services, IS, HR, Culture and Planning
 Mr. I. Grimes, Director of Services, Housing
 Mr. M. Quinn, Director of Services, Economic Development
 Mr. F. Galvin, Director of Services, Roads, Water and Environment
 Mr. B. Pollard, Head of Finance
 Ms. H. Dunphy, Meeting Administrator
 Ms. A. Flynn, Corporate

1. Confirmation of Minutes

Plenary Meeting held on 11th May 2023 Proposed by Cllr. Brazil and seconded by Cllr. Kelly and agreed by all.

2. Matters Arising

Cllr. Doocey noted that adjoining properties owners have concerns in relation to the Dungarvan to Mallow Greenway, he has received a petition from residents along the proposed route.

M. Quinn, DoS said that the current part of the consultation process is talking to all landowners and to property owners that are directly or indirectly impacted. He will pass on the petition to the Project Team.

Cllr. Bailey asked that the detail she requested in relation to vacant sites and the vacant site levy be provided.

Cllr. Kelly asked if the errors noted on Waterford City & County Council's website in relation to the Housing Application process and the Tenant Purchase Scheme have been rectified.

I. Grimes, DoS confirmed that the website has been updated.

3. Land Disposals

None.

4. Monthly Management Report

Cllr. Geoghegan spoke about lifeguard cover on Waterford's blue flag beaches and that it should be provided during the week in the month of June and not just weekends.

Cllr. E. Quinlan asked that the €550.00 callout charge for fires in woodlands or green areas be reviewed to encourage people to report these incidents. He asked if the Local Enterprise Office might liaise with mental health professionals to offer support to anyone with mental health issues to start or grow a business.

Cllr. Ryan said the Government is seeking expressions of interest for the provision of Mobile Library Services and asked if Waterford City & County Council has applied. He noted an increase of 100 in housing applications for May 2023 compared to May 2022 and asked if the housing application form could be simplified.

I. Grimes, DoS said there is no budget this year to provide lifeguards during the week in June and noted that in June many of the successful candidates are sitting their Leaving Certificate examinations. In relation to callout charges for fires he said they will be looked at. As regards the Housing Application form it is a national form and changes cannot be made to it.

K. Kehoe, DoS said a submission has been made for funding for the provision of Mobile Library Services.

M. Quinn, DoS said that the programme of supports provided by the Local Enterprise Office is agreed by Enterprise Ireland and currently does not include any mental health support. He will suggest it to Enterprise Ireland, and it may be something that could be incorporated in the future.

Cllr. Fitzgerald asked if additional parking can be provided at the many beauty spots in Waterford in order to prevent residents of these areas being inconvenienced. He asked if there should be a separate budget allocation for the maintenance of our cliff walks and greenways. He requested a list of the applications that have been submitted to the Heritage Council's Community Heritage Fund.

Cllr. J. Power asked about the wastewater treatment plant noting the presence of foam in the water at Checkpoint and requested an update on the proposed plan for upgrading, if the treatment plant is at capacity does that interfere with future developments.

Cllr. Conway spoke about the serious deficit of hotel accommodation in Waterford noting that there are two hotels lying vacant in one of the main tourist areas and asked what is being done to address this issue.

F. Galvin, DoS acknowledged that parking at outdoor amenity areas remains an issue at some locations. Improvements have been made and have engaged with landowners to provide temporary parking and continue to review options. Confirmed that there is a specific budget for the maintenance of the Waterford/Dungarvan Greenway. The Wastewater Treatment Plant is a matter for Irish Water and Glanbia.

K. Kehoe, DoS said in relation to the hotel issue that the Council are proactive in this area and will support proposals submitted.

Cllr. Clune asked why the policy in relation to grass cutting differed between rural and urban areas. He also asked what criteria is used in determining the remediation value of solar farms in the planning process.

Cllr. Barry noted that Waterford forms part of the EuroVelo, the European Cycle Route Network and asked if there are any plans to market and promote this as it offers another opportunity to showcase what Waterford has to offer. He asked for an update in relation to the Waterford City & County Council Tourism

Strategy as the current strategy covered the years 2017 to 2022. He also asked if there has been any indication from Fáilte Ireland if the tourist office in Waterford will reopen.

Cllr. McGuinness repeated his request for the provision of emergency accommodation in West Waterford noting that emergency accommodation in Waterford City is not an option for many and in particular is not an option for those who work in West Waterford, for those who have children in school in West Waterford and for those whose family support network is in West Waterford.

F. Galvin, DoS outlined that grass cutting is carried out in the main public open spaces across the county and is not cut in housing estates. In relation to the EuroVelo he said the routes in Waterford which make up sections of the European Cycle Route Network are mapped out. They are up on Euromaps, and the maps are also on Garmin.

M. Quinn, DoS, said in relation to the Tourism Strategy that Fáilte Ireland have almost completed their visitor destination plan for Waterford which will be brought to the members in September noting that it would not be necessary to develop our own strategy. In relation to the tourist office, the Tourist Office in the Museum of Treasures is manned over the summer period as previously agreed and off season is manned by the staff of the Museum of Treasures and noted that there are no plans to reverse this decision.

K. Kehoe, DoS said bonds are determined on a case by case basis and associated with required remediation costs.

I. Grimes said that the provision of emergency accommodation for families is under constant review noting that there is emergency accommodation provision in Dungarvan.

Cllr. Bailey asked for a review of the monthly housing report noting discrepancies in figures for Energy Efficiency Retrofitting and noting that the report is still stating there has been no submission under the scheme for 2023. She asked that the tenants in situ scheme numbers be added to the report as previously requested and in relation to housing grants asked the length of time between approval of application and completion of work. She also requested a Housing SPC meeting as the committee last met in January.

Cllr. Hearne asked if the Council could put in place a scheme that would assist older people in terms of doing odd jobs for them which they can no longer manage themselves.

Cllr. Phelan agreed with Cllr. Geoghegan in relation to lifeguard cover on Waterford's blue flag beaches saying provision should be made in the estimates for full time lifeguard cover from June onwards on our blue flag beaches and in addition year-round provision of public toilets and emptying of bins. He supported Cllr. McGuinness's call for emergency housing accommodation in Dungarvan and asked if Homeless Services are sufficiently staffed to support the increased numbers seeking their services. He asked if there is further funding under the Community Recognition Fund that the projects to be funded be brought before the members by district to ensure alignment with the objectives of the City & County Development Plan.

I. Grimes, DoS said notification from the Department allocating €1.98m for 2023 to facilitate the retrofitting of 57 houses was received on Friday the 2nd June with a submission to the Department due mid-June. In relation to the 2022 figures there is an anomaly as the Department figures only include properties in respect of which payment was made by them in 2022. In relation to the tenants in situ scheme he said there is engagement with the landlords who have issued Notices to Quit representing half of the people who have presented to Homeless Services in the last six months. Vacancies in Homeless Services due to promotions are currently being filled with a full and adequate compliment of staff in place by the end of the month, future funding under the Community Recognition Fund is not notified in advance.

K. Kehoe, DoS in reply to Cllr. Hearne said he would check if the scheme suggested by him were feasible.

F. Galvin, DoS, noted budgetary request for year-round provision of toilets and bins on Waterford's blue flag beaches.

Cllr. Kiely supported request for full lifeguard cover in June, enquired about lifeguard cover on beaches without a blue flag and asked if there are plans to regain those blue flags lost this year. Signage highlighting the dangers of rip tides and other water safety issues at our beaches should be in other languages.

Cllr. Pratt asked if it were possible to appoint members of Comhairle na nÓg to the Strategic Policy Committees and asked for the installation of Communication Boards in playgrounds.

Cllr. Kelly commended the Local Enterprise Office scholarship programme under which four new entrepreneurs took up desk space at Boxworks. He asked if the Council have any involvement in the provision and management of clothes bank saying that he had recently seen a child inside one. He also asked if it would be appropriate for the Council to organise a trip for members on the Greenway.

Cllr. Griffin asked that a letter issue regarding the serious concerns voiced around Waterford Estuary.

Cllr. Murphy commended the Council on the high standard of accommodation provided in new social housing developments and asked if prior to residents moving in that members and local media be invited to see the standard of accommodation that is being provided.

Cllr. Nugent spoke to support the other Councillors in relation to our blue flag beaches stressing the importance of signage warning of rip tides etc. on all beaches.

I. Grimes, DoS, said it was important to stress that all lifeguards are fully qualified and similar to other local authorities Waterford City & County Council are struggling to recruit lifeguards adding that many lifeguards were unable to take up their roles because they were sitting the Leaving Certificate or finishing college work.

F. Galvin, DoS, noted working on a plan to rectify the issues that resulted in the loss of blue flags. There is signage warning of dangerous currents in a number of locations, not practical to have in all languages. Communication Boards have been installed in a number of places. Some of the clothes banks are provided to us under contracts and we will raise the issue with the suppliers. The Rogue Shore Estuary project which will incorporate from Waterford City down as far as Hook Head and Dunmore East is due to commence later this year and will address the issues of the River Suir Estuary.

K. Kehoe, DoS, said there may be issues as regards the age of members of Comhairle na nÓg and child protection in relation to membership of the committees, can look at another mechanism to inform them of issues being addressed by the Strategic Policy Committees.

5. Audit Committee Annual Report 2022

The Chairperson of the Audit Committee, Mr. Padraic Doherty presented the Audit Committee Annual Report for 2022. He welcomed the significant improvement in the adoption and closure of audit recommendation actions during the year.

Cllr. Kelly queried the level of rent arrears and if the doubtful debt provision of €2.6m was sufficient. He also asked what steps were been taken to improve the situation.

B. Pollard, Head of Finance confirmed that there is currently about €3.9m of rent arrears.

I. Grimes, DoS said the majority of the €3.9m rent arrears are historical. There are approximately 200 tenants who account for the vast majority of arrears saying taking action through the courts is expensive and can be counterproductive adding that tenants in arrears receive only emergency maintenance. New tenants are required to pay weekly by standing order or through An Post. A rent review is currently being carried out which may result in an increase in rent arrears, rent is calculated based on household income.

Cllr. J. Power said that €3.9m was significant arrears and it was unfair on the vast majority of tenants who do pay.

Cllr. Ryan, Cllr. Barry, Cllr. Griffin, Cllr. Murphy and Cllr. S. Power also contributed to the discussion on rent arrears asking about payment plans and about engagement by tenants with the Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS).

Cllr. Keating asked would arrears accumulate for tenants who have a rent increase in the review because of the time lapse between submission of forms and notifications of new rents.

I. Grimes, DoS said there were issues around the delay in notifying tenants of new rents previously and it is something the Rents Office are aware of.

Cllr. Roche and Cllr. Kiely asked if there were any issues with Low Value Purchase Cards.

The Audit Committee Chairperson said that there are safeguards in place with certain merchant categories blocked for users.

Cllr. Phelan asked if the confidentiality section of the Audit Committee Charter was a barrier to reporting to which the Audit Committee Chairperson said it was not an impediment.

Cllr. Geoghegan spoke to commend the work of the Audit Committee.

6. Filling of Chair of Environment, Biodiversity and Climate Change

It was proposed by Cllr. Bailey and seconded by Cllr. Phelan that Cllr. Hearne be appointed as Chair of Environment, Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategic Policy Committee and agreed by all.

7. Waterford Age Friendly Strategy 2023-2028 – for noting

M. Walsh, Chief Executive, outlined that the Strategy was based on consultation with older people and people with an interest in issues that affect older people, and this ensures that change happens in the most inclusive way possible.

Cllr. J. Power, Cllr. Kelly, Cllr. Phelan, Cllr. Murphy, Cllr. Hearne, Cllr. Pratt and Cllr. Ryan contributed to the ensuing discussion where the issue of two bed accommodation being more suitable for older people was raised. Cllr. Ryan proposed that a letter issue to the Minister in this regard, seconded by Cllr. McGuinness and agreed by all.

8. Twinning Ramallah Municipality

The twinning between the Ramallah Municipality and Waterford City & County Council was proposed by Cllr. McGuinness and seconded by Cllr. Ryan and agreed by a majority vote of a show of hands.

Cllr. Conway proposed the following amendment “that this Council disregards the call to twin with Ramallah because of the deficit in democracy, in respect of human rights and rule of law”.

The amendment was ruled out of order under section 24 of the Plenary Standing Orders. “An amendment shall not be in order if it is equivalent to a direct negative or if it is not in fact an amendment of the motion it purports to amend”.

9. Correspondence

Proposed by Cllr. Kelly and seconded by Cllr. J. Power and agreed by all.

10. Notice of Motions

1. Motion in the name of Cllr. Damien Geoghegan

“That Waterford Council provides all lifeguards on duty over the summer months at our beaches with basic training in the use of VHF Marine Radio.”

Reg. No. PJ/2023/229 (dated, 6th March 2023)

Proposed by Cllr. Geoghegan and seconded by Cllr. Cronin and agreed by all.

Proposing the motion Cllr. Geoghegan said that it was brought to his attention by a member of the RNLI that they have no way of communication with lifeguards and said training lifeguards in the use of VHF marine radio would improve communication.

I.Grimes, DoS, will price the provision of providing VHF equipment, training and licensing for the 2024 budgetary discussions and will follow up with the Lifeguard Commission on the motion as presented.

2. Motion in the name of Cllr. Eamon Quinlan, Cllr. Thomas Phelan, Cllr. Liam Brazil, Cllr. Jody Power, Cllr. Cristiona Kiely

“That County Councillors support the Retained Fire and Rescue Service personnel and their continued struggle for improvements in pay, conditions and a decent work/life balance with agreed time off and call on the Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Public Expenditure to provide the funding necessary to sustain and enhance the service now and for future generations.”

Reg. No. PJ/2023/230 (dated, 25th May 2023)

Proposed by Cllr. E. Quinlan and seconded by Cllr. Phelan and agreed by all.

Proposing the motion Cllr. E. Quinlan said given their commitment and the sacrifices they make; this is not reflected in their pay and conditions of work.

Cllr. Phelan seconded the motion saying many people owe them their lives and they deserve a good livelihood and quality of life.

3. Motion in the name of Cllr. Conor D. McGuinness, Cllr. Jim Griffin, Cllr. John Hearn, Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, Cllr. Joanne Bailey

“Waterford City and Council

- *acknowledges the essential role played by our retained firefighters.*
- *notes the ongoing recruitment and retention crisis which is threatening the viability of the service they are proud to provide.*
- *regrets that the failure by government to address their serious concerns has forced them to take industrial action.*
- *calls on Government to urgently agree serious and meaningful proposals on pay and work life balance that can be put to the Retained Firefighters in order to bring this dispute to an end.”*

Reg. No. PJ/2023/231 (dated, 25th May 2023)

Proposed by Cllr. Griffin and seconded by Cllr. Bailey and agreed by all.

Cllr. Fitzgerald said that fire crews encounter some very stressful situations which is not reflected in their pay, and they must sign for social welfare also.

Cllr. Kelly said we count on these men and women when there are serious incidents, and they deserve every support.

Cllr. McGuinness said the Government need to act to avert strike action which he said no one, not least the firefighters themselves wanted.

Cllr. Geoghegan also said the answers lie with the Minister and the service requires a serious injection of cash on an ongoing basis.

Cllr. Conway said he has seen their professionalism first hand and said he hoped they get everything they deserve.

4. Motion in the name of Cllr. Conor D. McGuinness, Cllr. Jim Griffin, Cllr. John Hearn, Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, Cllr. Joanne Bailey

Waterford City and County Council

- *sends solidarity to water services workers here in Waterford and to their colleagues in local authorities across the state.*
- *supports their efforts to protect local services and their conditions of employment.*
- *calls for water services to be returned to local authorities including Waterford City and County Council, to ensure they are responsive to local need and subject to local democratic oversight into the future.*
- *calls on Government to set a date for a referendum on public ownership of water services.*

Reg. No. PJ/2023/232 (dated, 25th May 2023)

Proposed by Cllr. McGuinness and seconded by Cllr. Fitzgerald and agreed by all.

Proposing the motion Cllr. McGuinness said water services workers are disappointed and concerned by the decision to transfer water services to Uisce Éireann and commended the workers who campaigned to defend their pay and conditions of employment. He said industrial action has been deferred. The motion sends solidarity to water services workers and supports their efforts to protect local services and their conditions of employment and calls for water services to be returned to local authorities. He said it calls on the Government to set a date for a referendum on public ownership of water services.

Cllr. Fitzgerald seconded the motion saying water services workers are not looking for anything extra adding that the package being offered is not applicable to those workers over 60 years of age.

Cllr. Phelan, Cllr. S. Power and Cllr. Kelly all spoke in support of the motion.

5. Motion in the name of Cllr. Seanie Power

That Waterford City and County Council welcomes the decision of government to introduce a Temporary Time-Limited Waiver in respect of Development Contributions which will boost the supply of housing nationally.

Further requests the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage to consider back dating the Temporary Time-Limited Waiver in respect of Development Contributions to January 1st, 2023, to ensure any development which commenced in 2023 can avail of the waiver.

Reg. No. PJ/2023/233 (dated, 29th May 2023)

Proposed by Cllr. S. Power and seconded by Cllr. Brazil and agreed by all.

11. AOB

Cllr. Pratt said that insurance claims arising from accidents on footpaths have cost Waterford City & County Council €3.5m between the years 2019 and 2023 and asked if there was more funding for footpaths would claims be fewer. He asked if there was a mechanism to reclaim money from the Council's insurers which could then be invested in footpaths.

Cllr. F. Quinlan mentioned the Hook or by Crook Triathlon which takes place on Saturday the 11th June in Dunmore East.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____
Mayor of Waterford City & County Council

Dated: _____