

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

**PLENARY BUDGET MEETING HELD ON 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 2pm IN COUNCIL  
CHAMBER, WATERFORD.**

**Present**

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

Apologies: Cllr. Declan Doocey, Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, Cllr. Jim Griffin, Cllr. Seamus O’Donnell

**Officials in Attendance**

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

The meeting was adjourned to 3.00p.m. as a mark of respect for the family of Cllr. O’Donnell on the death of his brother Patsy O’Donnell.

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

**1. Chief Executives Report and Draft Budget Book 2024**

M. Walsh, CE in recommending Budget 2024 said that we have come through a number of difficult years and have managed to maintain services. He said Government support is vital noting the increase in the Local Government Fund which together with increases in Housing Rents and Rates

deliver additional income of €1.1 Million. He said the proposal is a 1% increase in rates to be countered for approx. 80% of ratepayers by a grant for those businesses who engage with the climate change programme. He noted the additional expenditure in the areas of housing, roads, derelict sites, community and culture, climate change, public toilets and IT infrastructure and said the budget provides for full staffing complement. In conclusion he said the budget is reasonable and emphasises stability and the maintenance of current levels of service and asked for the members' support. He thanked the Mayor and members of the Council for their work in advance of the budget, the Corporate Policy Group, the members who engaged in the recent workshop, the Management Team, the Head of Finance, the Financial Accountant and the Finance Team for their work in preparing Budget 2024.

In proposing Budget 2024 Cllr. Kelly said it was a well-balanced budget and highlighted the increased expenditure of €500,000 for housing maintenance, €500,000 for roads, €220,000 for community and culture and €30,000 for public toilets. He noted the sum of €250,000 provided for by way of grants to small and medium sized businesses who engage with the climate change programme. He said the 1% increase in rates can be countered for approx. 80% of ratepayers who engage with the climate change programme noting that over 1200 ratepayers have done so over the last number of years. He said this budget of €183 Million allows for the delivery of the best services possible for the people of Waterford, saying with the North Quays, Mount Congreve and improved tourism, the future is bright for Waterford and this budget helps us to look to that future with confidence.

Cllr. Geoghegan seconded the proposal to adopt the budget as presented also welcoming the increased expenditure in housing, roads, derelict sites, community and culture, public toilets and IT infrastructure and praised the initiative whereby the 1% increase in rates can be countered for approx. 80% of ratepayers who engage with the climate change programme.

Cllr. Phelan asked if there would be year-round servicing of public toilets at beaches and asked about the provision of a public toilet in Dungarvan noting there was no provision in the budget for its maintenance. He also asked for further information in relation to the grant available to small and medium sized businesses who engage with the climate change programme.

Cllr. Pratt said he supported the budget as presented but he said he was concerned in relation to funding for footpaths.

Cllr. Ryan said the budget of €183 Million was progressive and welcomed the additional sums of €500,000 each for housing maintenance and roads. He also welcomed the expenditure of just under €6 Million for library services and the funding provided for the arts and in particular for Theatre Royal and Garter Lane.

M. Walsh, CE said in relation to servicing public toilets that the intention was to service those areas with the greatest demand to the end of September and said there is no budget for the operation of a public toilet in Dungarvan in 2024 saying there are challenges in its provision. In relation to the grant available to small and medium sized commercial ratepayers he said approx. 80% of ratepayers will not have pay this 1% increase or 9% of their rates as long as they engage with our climate change team who will outline the choices, services and grants available. As regards the funding available for footpaths he said there is a reasonable level programme on footpaths and in relation to libraries he said we are providing a good service.

Cllr. Kiely described the budget as progressive welcoming the additional expenditure in some areas and said better communication is needed in relation to the grant available to small and medium sized businesses if they engage with the climate change programme and asked for

information on the climate change training and for data in relation to the actions taken by businesses and their savings.

Cllr. J. Power said the budget was a positive one. He noted the decrease in estimated expenditure for 2024 for street cleaning and public lighting and queried the budget figure in relation to public toilets. He asked for information in relation to improvements arising from the climate change programme and asked if we are protected from a cyber-security perspective. He asked if this budget will induce more ratepayers to apply for the grant available if they engage with the climate change team.

Cllr. Barry said he would like to see specific projects such as replacement of windows and doors and housing adaptations included in the additional income in 2024 from housing rents. He asked if the income from Kilkenny County Council in relation to fire services is included in the budget and asked for clarification in relation to expenditure in respect of Housing Community Development Support. He asked if the €7.98 Million expenditure for the Homeless Service was in respect of the entire South East region and if extra funding had been provided by the Government and asked in relation to the €1.4 Million provided for Safety of Structures and Places and the €772,000 provided for Coastal Protection. He welcomed the increase for Water Quality Management and asked for a breakdown of expenditure of Housing Estate Management and Tenancy Management for City and County.

M. Walsh, CE in reply to Cllr. Kiely said to date we have not sought feedback from businesses of progress made in terms of decarbonisation and said there has been improvements in the Council's own energy use and said there is a number of schemes throughout the City being looked at. In terms of expenditure on public toilets he said there has been benefits in the budget in terms of reduced insurance and energy costs and the additional income of €30,000 will allow for an increased level of services. He said we have a good level of cyber-security protection and have insurance to recover some of our costs should a significant event occur. In relation to communication to ratepayers he said there is direct communication to ratepayers by the Finance Department but said a more promotional campaign may be required. He said programmes such as replacement windows and doors are being looked at in relation to increased income from Housing Rents. He said the income in respect of fire services to Kilkenny County Council is included in the budget and said the expenditure in the budget for homeless services is in respect of the South East. He said the expenditure in the budget is very small for Coastal Protection and we depend on individual grants being sought from the Government which are not shown in the revenue budget.

Cllr. Brazil spoke in support of the budget which he said was well balanced and welcomed the increased expenditure in the areas of housing, roads and public toilets.

Cllr. McGuinness also welcomed the additional expenditure in housing, roads and community and said he and his party will be supporting the budget as presented. He said the budgetary process is not fit for purpose adding that we have one of the most centralised systems of local government in the world. He noted the additional sums for roads and housing may be negated by inflation. He welcomed the €220,000 increase in Community and Cultural Supports, the emphasis being placed on the elimination of derelict sites and the objective in relation to staffing in the CE report and supported the 1% increase in rates to be countered for approx. 80% of ratepayers by a grant for those businesses who engage with the climate change programme.

Cllr. Roche said she supported the budget as presented and commended Waterford City & County Council on its spending in relation to the community, the arts, museums, culture and tourism and said in general we do a really good job in Waterford. She agreed with Cllr. McGuinness in relation to the lack of autonomy of local authorities and asked about the zero expenditure in the budget for

Homeless Service. She called on the private sector in Waterford to look at what they can do to assist Waterford City & County Council achieve its goal for the city and county.

Cllr. Bailey said she too would be supporting the budget and asked if money could be ringfenced for replacing windows and doors and for other renovations of our older housing stock. She asked about the outstanding debt in relation to the derelict sites levy. She asked about the Healthy Waterford Programme and Waterford Autism Friendly City.

Cllr. O'Leary said it was a tribute to all involved in its preparation that the budget would be passed unanimously. He asked if anything could be done in relation to the change in policy to Active Travel funding, the policy change having affected rural schemes noting the expenditure of €8.73 Million for Regional Roads in 2024. He also noted the expenditure of €3.5 Million on street cleaning.

M. Walsh, CE said in relation to active travel funding that we continue to lobby for approval for the schemes that were brought through the planning process. In reply to Cllr. Roche he said the Homeless Service expenditure is included in the Service Support Costs. In relation to the derelict sites levy he said the levy has increased from 3% to 7% and said in the case of maybe 80% of derelict sites there are problems in relation to ownership, legal disputes or otherwise and said compulsory acquisition will be of huge value.

Cllr. Nugent welcomed the additional expenditure on housing and public toilets. He asked about landfill costs, superannuation for members and the provision of a public swimming pool in Dungarvan.

Cllr. Hearne said that Larchville/Lisduggan won first prize at the All-Ireland Pride of Place Awards and thanked the council for its investment in the Community.

Cllr. E. Quinlan praised the Council's creative initiative in relation to rates saying that 80% of our ratepayers are eligible and welcomed the additional income in the various areas.

M. Walsh, CE said expenditure on landfill is across all landfill sites to ensure compliance with waste licenses and as regards a public swimming pool for Dungarvan he said there is money available for a feasibility study.

Cllr. Murphy welcomed the budget and asked once acquired if the derelict sites could be developed by the Council for housing and if not could we assure once disposed of that they come back into reuse in a timely fashion. In relation to the budget for roads he asked that an emphasis be put on repairing roads in the City.

M. Walsh, CE in reply to Cllr. Murphy said than in general the objective will be disposal of the sites to the market.

Cllr. Geoghegan said it was worth noting that in the government's Budget 2024 there is a proposal of a grant in 2024 amounting to up to 50% of commercial rates paid in 2023 for rate payers who pay less than €20,000 per annum in rates.

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

The Mayor spoke to extend his appreciation to M. Walsh, CE and his team and to the Councillors. He welcomed the emphasis being put on the elimination of derelict sites and the additional income available for some services. He thanked B. Pollard, Head of Finance and D. Murphy, Financial Accountant and thanked the members for their contributions.

The members congratulated K. Kehoe, DoS on his recent appointment as CE of Meath County Council and wished him the very best for the future.

This Concluded the business of the meeting.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dated:** \_\_\_\_\_