

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

**COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 11th APRIL 2024 IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CITY
HALL, WATERFORD.**

Present

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

Officials in Attendance

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

1. Confirmation of Minutes

Minutes of Plenary Meeting held on 14th March 2024 proposed by Cllr. Kelly and seconded by Cllr. E. Quinlan and agreed by all.
 Minutes of Plenary Special Meeting held on 27th March 2024 proposed by Cllr. J. Power and seconded by Cllr. Keating and agreed by all.

2. Matters Arising

Cllr. Ryan asked if a letter had issued to the Palestinian Ambassador inviting her to address the members and if so had a response been received. The Mayor confirmed that it had and a response had been received.

Cllr. Kiely asked for an update on the recording of Council Meetings, planning permissions for Casinos and the planning application in relation to the North Quays.

Cllr. McGuinness said he was grateful for the letter issued to An Post in relation to An Rinn Post Office saying however the response was not what was hoped for.

P. Johnston A/DoS said the Planning Application for the North Quays is due in coming weeks and as regards planning permissions for casinos he said an updated list of gaming licenses had been sought from the Revenue Commissioners.

H. Dunphy, MA said further information is awaited in relation to recording of Council Meetings.

Following Item 2 on the Agenda the Mayor called for a suspension of standing orders to allow Cllr. Barry raise his motion under Item 8 on the Agenda.

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

1. Motion in the name of Cllr. Donal Barry

“That the members of Waterford City and County Council request that the Minister for Social Protection and this present Government, initiate an independent review of how nearly 450 former employees of Waterford Crystal were misinformed concerning their future pension entitlement at the time of their redundancy in the company”.

Reg. No. PA/2024/242 (dated 20th March 2024)

In proposing the motion Cllr. Barry said it is a great honour to propose the motion on behalf of the 450 workers and called on the Minister for Social Protection to deal with the workers swiftly, hear their case and hold an investigation into what happened in order to establish the facts and bring closure.

Cllr. Ryan seconded the motion saying it deals with an injustice to the former Waterford Crystal workers and asked that a letter issue to the Minister requesting that she meet with the Action Group.

Cllrs. Kelly, O’Leary, Hearne, Bailey, Murphy, McGuinness, Phelan, Geoghegan, Kiely, Griffin, F. Quinlan, Roche, Fitzgerald, O’Sullivan and Clune all spoke to support the motion.

Proposed by Cllr. Barry and seconded by Cllr. Ryan and agreed by all.

3. Land Disposals

P. Johnston A/DoS outlined details of the disposals of land for approval.

Cllrs. Clune and McGuinness asked in relation to the disposal of 11 Bailey’s New Street and 82 New Street, Lismore if it would be more prudent to bring these properties acquired compulsorily under the derelict Sites Act 1990 into our own housing stock.

Cllr. Roche asked if there was a means of ensuring that the properties once sold would not remain derelict.

Cllr. Griffin asked if it could be a condition of sale of the disposal to Irish Water that any land not required for the Pumping Station be maintained.

In relation to the sale of Fee Simple in 98 Grange Heights, Cllr. Fitzgerald enquired if all house owners were aware that they could purchase the Fee Simple in their property.

P. Johnston A/DoS said 11 Bailey's New Street and 82 New Street, Lismore were identified as part of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) which specifically targets derelict properties with the aim of returning the property to full use for private tenure. He said he would follow up with Irish Water in relation to landscaping and said there is generally a condition in Contract of Sale as regards returning the properties to full use. He said he would try and establish the number of properties in Grange Heights where the Fee Simple has not been sold to owners.

Cllr. McGuinness asked for clarification on the URDF.

I. Grimes, DoS reiterated that the URDF is a specific funding stream to return derelict property to full use for private tenure.

M. Walsh, CE said it is not always value for money to bring derelict property into our own housing stock and selling establishes on the open market value and reduces our exposure in the Compulsory Purchase process.

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

4. Monthly Management Report

Cllr. Roche asked that further information be provided in the Monthly Management Report or otherwise in relation to startups supported by LEO. She asked if planning permission had been sought and granted for the accommodation pods in Mount Congreve and if there was a budget for their maintenance and for staff who would be required to be on site after hours. She noted the privatisation of shop and restaurant and expressed concern that the focus remains on the gardens.

Cllr. Griffin spoke about the "Kickstart to Recovery" programme between Mental Health Services and the Football Association of Ireland running in the Butler Centre and asked if funding could be provided for the period May to September as funding is not immediately available from the FAI for this period. If funding is not available, he asked if the rental cost of the venue could be waived.

Cllr. S. Power mentioned the closure of public toilets and overflowing bins on our beaches and asked that these issues be rectified particularly in advance of the tourism season.

R. Walsh, SEO said further detail in relation to startups and how best to share that information with the members would be looked at. In relation to Mount Congreve he said a report on all the business elements could be presented as part of their agreed annual reporting to the Council.

I. Grimes, DoS said he would liaise with Cllr. Griffin to look at ways in which the Council may be able to support the "Kickstart to Recovery" programme.

F. Galvin, DoS said public toilets on beaches are open May to September and resources are not available to keep them open all year round.

Cllr. Murphy noted the overcrowding on the Irish Rail service from Dublin to Waterford. This service has six carriages compared to eight on other inter-city services. The reason for this is the platform at McDonagh Station is too short and he asked if Irish Rail and Kilkenny County Council can be contacted in this regard.

Cllr. J. Power noted eight properties have appealed valuations under the Derelict Site Levy to the Valuation Tribunal and asked the timeframe for decisions. He asked if extra funding is available to repair damage caused to roads by heavy rainfall and if the Council has a strategy to deal with the ever-increasing drug problem in the city and county.

Cllr. Kiely also asked about the pods in Mount Congreve which she said are available to book online. She queried the planning permission, insurance, arrangements with the Office of Public Works and so on. She also expressed concern that the local market was not been targeted. She requested a workshop on Mount Congreve and reiterated her call in relation to planning permissions for casinos be reviewed.

P. Johnston A/DoS said the process of a review of planning permissions in relation to casinos has begun with information awaited from the Revenue Commissioners.

M. Walsh said Mount Congreve has been advertised recently in the local papers. The gardens are of primary importance and said he would be happy to do a workshop in the next number of weeks.

F. Galvin, DoS said extra funding had been received for roads with further applications for funding to be made to tackle ongoing issues.

I. Grimes, DoS said the Council works with the other agencies through the Community Safety Partnership in relation to tackling drug use.

In response to Cllr. Murphy M. Walsh, CE said the Council would raise the issue with Irish Rail and in response to Cllr. J. Power in relation to appeals of valuation to the Valuation Office he said the Council has no control over the time frames.

Cllr. Barry asked if the end of year report from Waterford Area Partnership presented to the Local Community Development Committee be circulated to the Members. He enquired if there is an independent evaluation of projects to ascertain if the projects are necessary and to ensure projects are not being replicated by other groups. He asked if there were any plans to increase the number of Environment Enforcement Officers given that to the 25/03/2024 there were 846 environment complaints received.

Cllr. McGuinness noted that Waterford City & County Council received no funding under the Fire Service Capital Programme during the last five years. He asked if the Council had made any application for funding and if so why the application was unsuccessful or if no application was made the reason for that. He said the majority of our fire stations need significant work with some stations lacking basic facilities. He said there needs to be a conversation about the medium and long-term future of our fire services and asked that this be an incoming issue for the new Council.

I. Grimes, DoS said he would enquire if it was in order to circulate the WAP report to Members. WAP are subject to annual audit by their own independent auditors and also by the Local Government Audit Service. He said there is provision in the budget for maintenance of fire stations. There is currently a project for a new fire station in Kilmacthomas in the Fire Service Capital Programme. We are actively recruiting retained fire fighters and investment will be required to provide facilities for female fighters.

F. Galvin, DoS said the Environmental Enforcement Team consists of four Enforcement Officers and one Supervisor supported by two engineers and administrative staff which he said is adequate.

Cllr. Wyse asked for clarification that social houses are allocated in accordance with and only in accordance with the Housing Allocation Scheme.

Cllr. O'Leary asked for an update on the 12 projects around the county funded under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2020 to 2023.

Cllr. Kelly asked if there was funding available to improve access to Mount Congreve from the outer ring road and whether one of the pods will be for the use of staff only. He asked if the Council had plans to advertise to encourage people to register to vote and to exercise their vote in the upcoming Local Elections.

I. Grimes, DoS clarified unequivocally that social houses are allocated in accordance with the Housing Allocation Scheme.

M. Walsh, CE said the council will look at prioritising the roadway to Mount Congreve and said a number of staff do live on site as part of their contracts but not in the pods.

H. Dunphy, MA said the Notice of Election will appear in the local papers next week, the Election Hub on the website will be promoted on social media and the checktheregister.ie campaign is a national campaign by the Department.

R. Walsh, SEO said information in relation to the ORIS projects is provided at district level but an overall generic report could be provided.

Cllr. Fitzgerald asked if the funding for thatch house projects included in the funding for Built Heritage was still open for applications.

Cllr. Nugent noted that the Department of Agriculture have suspended farm inspections until the end of April and asked that the Council do likewise.

Cllr. Pratt, in relation to the Register of Electors, suggested targeting Transition Year Students and asked for clarification around additional funding for roads.

F. Galvin, DoS confirmed that the council would also be suspending farm inspections. Extra funding had been received for roads with further applications for funding to be made to tackle the impact of the current extreme weather.

H. Dunphy, MA said that our local advertising campaign in relation to the Register of Electors towards the end of 2023 had included visits to some schools and to SETU and plan to do this again in September.

P. Johnston, A/DoS confirmed the funding for thatch house projects has already been allocated.

Cllr. E. Quinlan enquired if the Housing Aid for Older People Grant would cover the cost of installation of CCTV. He asked if the Council could liaise with Iarnród Eireann in relation to a Waterford to Dublin express train. He enquired about the opening of the North Quays bridge for ships and boats and its operating costs.

Cllr. Phelan asked for further clarification in relation to Housing Allocations. He noted the approved allocations by LCDC under the Local Enhancement Programme 2024 and asked if the applicants had been notified. He asked for an update on the use of CCTV for litter detection and prosecution and enquired about the Community CCTV Schemes. He concurred with Cllr. S. Power as regards the operation of public toilets and the emptying of bins on our beaches and asked what the shortfall is between funding received annually compared to the funding actually required to maintain our roads network.

Cllr. Daniels asked about the possibility of investing in a jet patcher, the national speed limit review and the means available to the Council to reduce speed on our roads. He called for a presentation by the IDA to the Council post June ideally with a representative of the Housing Minister saying that jobs are being impacted here by the lack of housing.

F. Galvin, DoS said the guidelines in relation to the operation of CCTV have been received. There is a lot of paperwork around the application of any CCTV system including review by an internal oversight board, data protection impact assessment, sign off by CE and so on. However hopefully by the end of the year CCTV will be in operation to tackle illegal dumping and littering. Roads allocation for 2024 was €25M but twice that would be required to address all the issues. We currently have 3 jet patchers with a fourth one due to be delivered shortly. Guidance is awaited from the Department of Transport in relation to the speed limit review. He said speed ramps would be considered where appropriate to reduce speed and additional measures include signage.

I. Grimes, DoS said he would ask the Department if the Housing Aid for Older People Grant could be used to cover the cost of installation of CCTV. He further clarified that accommodation provided to refugees has no impact on the social housing list. Allocations under the Local Enhancement Programme 2024 will be announced by the Minister for Rural and Community Development and we will not be communicating with successful applicants until that announcement is made.

M. Walsh, CE said there would not be significant cost in respect of opening the bridge. It would not necessarily be opening more than Rice Bridge. The issue around train services can be raised with Iarnród Eireann and said the Regional Chief Executives have a meeting with the Chief Executive of the IDA in the coming weeks where issues raised will be discussed.

I. Grimes, DoS said the administration of the Community CCTV Schemes would come under the Housing Department.

M. Walsh iterated the complex process around CCTV schemes including issues around data protection and data control. He said requests by community groups to consider a scheme would be looked at but the Council would not be in a position at this time to make an application to the Department.

Cllr. Hearne said he commended Cllr. J. Power on his question in relation to drugs and welcomed the DoS response and suggested a presentation by the Gardaí to the next Council. He enquired about funding for the planting of our towns and city.

Cllr. Bailey said she welcomed the funding for Community CCTV Schemes. She asked in relation to the tenant in situ scheme where agreement cannot be reached with Landlord as regards purchase price and if the difference between asking price and the Council's offer is not significant if anything could be done in these instances.

Cllr. Ryan noted the 600 housing applications received to date with only 192 of those assessed asking the reason for this. He asked again that the Council facilitate a housing one stop shop where the public could attend and receive information in relation to the various housing options now available to them.

Cllr. Doocey called for the complete withdrawal of farm inspections. He said inspections of our housing stock are required to ensure they meet required standards. He spoke about the Agriculture Sector, the impact of the heavy rainfall and the over regulation.

I. Grimes, DoS said as regards the tenant in situ scheme that the Council engage independent estate agents who value the property and there is no room for negotiation. A number of documents must accompany a housing application and in many cases all the documents are not submitted with the initial application and so further information would have to be requested. A one stop shop may not be the best way to get information out there as it would require significant staff resources but rather he would look at facilitating a public meeting.

Cllr. O'Donnell asked if the windows and doors in our older housing stock could be looked at.

I. Grimes, DoS said we have the Energy Retrofit programme and are looking at the poorer performing properties and what is required to improve their energy efficiency which may include replacement windows and doors.

5. Audit Committee Annual Report 2023

Mr. Padraic Doherty, Chairperson of the Audit Committee presented the Committee's Annual Report for 2023. He said an independent Audit Committee is an important feature of good corporate governance. He noted the improvement in the adoption and closure times of audit recommendation actions and an improved emphasis on the use of the risk register. The following area was brought to the attention of the Council: Social Housing Rents.

Cllrs. Kelly, Barry, Phelan, J. Power, Kiely and Roche all contributed to a discussion in relation to the Audit Committee Report. Items raised included rent arrears, best use of public money, quarterly audit committee updates, the qualitative nature of the report and sight of Risk Register and the Internal Audit Reports.

I. Grimes, DoS said much of the rent arrears are historical. The 2023 Rent Review which resulted in backdated rent being applied as a result of undeclared income contributed to the increase in the number of accounts in arrears.

P. Doherty, Chairperson said he would discuss at next Audit Committee Meeting the publishing of Internal Audit Reports. He said Internal Audit is concerned with procedures and processes and ensuring the controls in place are followed. The recommendations set out in Internal Audit Reports are followed up monthly and would see how best this information could be shared.

I. Grimes, DoS, agreed to publish the Risk Register.

Cllrs. Geoghegan and E. Quinlan both spoke to thank the Audit Committee for their work and commitment.

6. Community Recognition Fund

I. Grimes, DoS said the Minister for Rural & Community Development announced details of a €50 million Community Recognition Fund on 15th March 2024. The allocation for Waterford is €1.4 million. The initiative is aimed at supporting the development of community infrastructure and facilities for the benefit of the entire community in recognition of the contribution being made by communities in welcoming and hosting arrivals from Ukraine and other countries. Only areas which have high levels of new arrivals will be eligible for the scheme. The main areas in Waterford are Waterford City, Tramore, Lismore and Dungarvan.

Cllrs. Daniels, Griffin, Kelly, Phelan, Pratt, Fitzgerald, Kiely and Geoghegan welcomed the funding. Questions raised were addressed by I. Grimes, DoS.

Mayor called for a 15-minute extension to Standing Orders.

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

7. Correspondence

Proposed by Cllr. Pratt and seconded by Cllr. O'Leary and agreed by all.

8. Notice of Motions

1. Motion in the name of Cllr. John Pratt

“With the continuing increase of road fatalities and serious injuries, Waterford City & County Council does not have a dedicated, full time and permanent road safety officer employed for the city and county. Can the council review having a permanent road safety officer employed”
Reg. No. PA/2024/243 (dated 2nd April 2024)

In proposing the motion Cllr. Pratt noted the increase in deaths and serious injuries on our roads and while acknowledging the need for a greater Garda presence on our roads he said employing a full time Road Safety Officer would be a step in the right direction for Waterford. Cllr. Phelan seconded the motion.

Cllrs. O’Leary, McGuinness, Kiely and Kelly spoke in support of the motion.

Proposed by Cllr. Pratt and seconded by Cllr. Phelan and agreed by all.

9. AOB

Tributes were paid by the Members to Cllr. Barron who is not seeking re-election in the Local Elections in June.

M. Walsh, CE also extended his best wish wishes to Cllr. Barron.

Cllr. Barron thanked the Members for their warm wishes saying he had made great friends and wished the Councillors success in the upcoming Elections.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____
Mayor of Waterford City & County

Dated: _____