

WEXFORD COUNTY COUNCIL

***Minutes of Statutory Budget Meeting of
Wexford County Council
Held on Monday 27th November 2017 at 10.00 a.m.
In the Council Chamber, County Hall, Carricklawn, Wexford.***

Attendance:

In the Chair: Councillor J. Hegarty, Cathaoirleach.

Councillors:

P. Breen,	M. Byrne;	G. Carthy,	K. Codd Nolan,
A. Connick,	A. Donohoe,	K. Doyle,	M. Farrell;
W. Fitzharris,	J. Fleming,	D. Hynes,	R. Ireton,
P. Kavanagh,	W. Kavanagh;	A. Kelly,	G. Lawlor,
L. McDonald;	J. Moore,	BA Murphy,	M. Murphy;
J. Mythen,	L. O'Brien,	O. O'Connell,	J. O'Rourke,
M. Roche,	M. Sheehan,	J. Sullivan,	O. Walsh;
T. Walsh;	M. Whelan.		

Officials:

Mr. T. Enright, Chief Executive;
T. Larkin, E. Hore, J. Carley, E. Taaffe, Directors of Services;
Ms. A. O'Neill, Head of Finance;
Ms. L. Lacey, Financial Accountant;
Mr. P. Collins, County Secretary.

Apologies:

Cllr. T. Dempsey; Cllr. F. ÓSúilleabháin; Cllr. F. Staples.

At the outset the Cathaoirleach advised the Members that this was an important meeting with four specific decisions to be made. He noted that decisions made at the Budget meeting will impact directly on the Council's ability to access funding to deliver its ambitious development programme. In light of the significant proposals presented in the budget he urged Members to seek any clarification they needed to ensure they are happy to support the budget as presented.

Ms. A. O'Neill, Head of Finance, gave an overview presentation of the main factors informing the preparation of the Draft Budget 2018 and highlighted some of the specific changes/movements over 2017 figures. She then answered queries from the Members regarding the presentation primarily in respect of the proposal for rates harmonisation in the former New Ross and Enniscorthy Town Council areas and the associated Special Rates Incentive Scheme.

Following further discussion the New Ross Members of the Council left the meeting to hold a private discussion on the matters relating to ratepayers in their district. The meeting then was adjourned briefly as some specific items were further clarified for New Ross members by the Head of Finance and the Chief Executive.

When the meeting resumed the matter of rates relief on vacant properties was discussed. The Council's current approach for dealing with rates on vacant properties was outlined and the proposal for 2018 was set out for Members.

The Council then considered Divisions A-H of the Draft Budget 2018 in detail and raised queries in all the programme groups which were answered by the Head of Finance, Chief Executive and by other Council Officials in attendance.

The Head of Finance then circulated Sample Indicative calculations for the commercial rates proposed for 2018 across the three variants proposed for 2018.

Following the presentation by the Head of Finance, the Chief Executive Mr. T. Enright addressed the meeting. He firstly thanked the Head of Finance and her staff for the work they had put into preparing the budget and he also thanked the Members of the Council for their input during the various stages of the budget process.

The Chief Executive recommended that the Council adopt the budget as presented. He noted that the staff embargo has been lifted and that provision has been made for some restoration of staffing levels which will help to provide better services at a proper level.

He also noted that there are some new items such as the €50,000 for the Fleadh Ceoil bid as part of the Council's commitment to try and secure that event for the county. He further advised that the economic benefit for County Wexford would be substantial. He also referred to the figure of €100,000 of community budget funding for Sports Officers from the GAA, Leinster Rugby and the FAI within the council's budget.

The Chief Executive went on to speak about the high level on unemployment in Wexford and noted that 17% of the workforce leave the County everyday for work. He further noted that the recent report from the CSO showed that Wexford had the lowest level of 3rd Level participation in Ireland. The numbers of opportunities of work for young people were limited in the region and that it required extra resources, such as those proposed using provisions in the Draft Budget to increase those opportunities.

Central to the Budget strategy is the raising of extra revenues to allow the Council to access funding to pay for the investment Programme. To achieve the extra revenue, the harmonisation of rates in New Ross and Enniscorthy, and an increase of the general rate of 3% are required. These measures together with the LPT increase will allow the Council to raise the finance to fund its Investment Programme, which in turn will generate economic activity and bring more jobs to County Wexford.

The Chief Executive stated that the rate had not been increased since 2009 and he advised that the Council had met with the Chambers of Commerce throughout the County and had also held town hall meetings to explain the reasons for the increases. He also updated the meeting with regard to major projects in each of the four districts.

He advised that money could be borrowed at a 1% fixed rate over a 20 year loan period at the present time. This advantageous rate would not be available much longer and that now is time to borrow for investment.

It was the Chief Executive's intention to inform the public and the rate payers of the new proposals and the ambitious programme that the Council has to improve the economy of County Wexford and to facilitate this brochures are currently being drafted by the Communications Officer and will be delivered to each of the 55,000 houses in the County via An Post. He also committed to issuing a further update of the programme in 18 months time to keep citizens updated on the progressing of the programme.

Cllr. W. Fitzharris on behalf of the Members of New Ross District thanked the Chief Executive and his team and asked for clarification regarding the 17% Special Rates Incentive Scheme for the New Ross area, proposing it be retained over a 3 year period.

Cllr. J. Mythen supported this proposal and commented that while a commitment for a future County Council could not be made at this point that the spirit of the agreement of the 17% rebate could be made by this Council.

A show of hands confirmed unanimous support for the proposal and the Chief Executive noted the Members proposal in this regard.

- **Decision on Rates to be applied to Vacant Properties**

On the proposal of Cllr. M. Byrne, seconded by Cllr. W. Fitzharris, the Members resolved to approve the following motion in respect of the Vacant Premises Scheme for 2018.

In accordance with Section 31 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 that the owners of vacant premises in all local electoral areas within the Council's administrative area shall be entitled to claim and receive a refund of a maximum of 90% of the total annual commercial rates applicable to that premises.

A roll call was then taken as follows:

Voting in favour: – Cllrs: P. Breen; M. Byrne; G. Carthy; K. Codd Nolan; A. Connick; A. Donohoe; K. Doyle; M. Farrell; W. Fitzharris; J. Fleming; J. Hegarty; D. Hynes; R. Ireton; P. Kavanagh; W. Kavanagh; A. Kelly; G. Lawlor; J. Moore; B.A. Murphy; M. Murphy; J. Mythen; L. O'Brien; O. O'Connell; J. O'Rourke; M. Roche; M. Sheehan; J. Sullivan; T. Walsh; O. Walsh; M. Whelan.

Voting against – Cllr. L. McDonald.

The proposal was adopted.

- **Decision on Rates Harmonisation and elimination of the base year adjustment**

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Moore, seconded by Cllr. R. Ireton the Members resolved to approve the following motion in respect of Rates Harmonisation and elimination of the base year adjustment:

In accordance with Section 29(7)(b) of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 that the adjustment periods for the "specific areas" (as defined in Section 29(1)) comprising the administrative areas of the former Enniscorthy and New Ross Town Councils cease on

the passing of this resolution, the base year adjustments for each of those areas having been hereby eliminated”.

A roll call was taken as follows:

Voting in favour: – Cllrs: P. Breen; M. Byrne; G. Carthy; K. Codd Nolan; A. Donohoe; K. Doyle; M. Farrell; W. Fitzharris; J. Fleming; J. Hegarty; R. Ireton; P. Kavanagh; W. Kavanagh; A. Kelly; G. Lawlor; L. McDonald; J. Moore; B.A. Murphy; M. Murphy; J. Mythen; L. O’Brien; O. O’Connell; J. O’Rourke; M. Roche; M. Sheehan; J. Sullivan; O. Walsh; M. Whelan.

Voting against – Cllrs. A. Connick; D. Hynes; T. Walsh.

The proposal was adopted.

- **Decision on Increase of 3% in Annual Rate on Valuation (€71.52 to €73.67)**

On the proposal of Cllr. R. Ireton, seconded by Cllr. W. Fitzharris, the Members adopted the following motion in respect of an increase of 3% in the Annual Rate on Valuation:

In accordance with Sections 102-103 of the Local Government Act 2001 and with the provisions of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 that the ARV applicable in the whole rating area in County Wexford is increased by 3% resulting in a move from €71.52 to €73.67.

A roll call was then taken as follows:

Voting in favour: – Cllrs: P. Breen; M. Byrne; G. Carthy; K. Codd Nolan; A. Donohoe; K. Doyle; M. Farrell; W. Fitzharris; J. Fleming; J. Hegarty; R. Ireton; P. Kavanagh; W. Kavanagh; A. Kelly; G. Lawlor; J. Moore; B.A. Murphy; M. Murphy; J. Mythen; L. O’Brien; O. O’Connell; J. O’Rourke; M. Roche; M. Sheehan; J. Sullivan; O. Walsh; M. Whelan.

Voting against – Cllrs. A. Connick; D. Hynes; L. McDonald; T. Walsh.

The proposal was adopted.

- **Decision on Adoption of the Statutory Budget for Wexford County Council without amendment**

On the proposal of Cllr. P. Kavanagh, seconded by Cllr. M. Byrne, the Members adopted the following motion with regard to the Statutory Budget for Wexford County Council for the financial year ending 31st December, 2018:

In accordance with Sections 102-103 of the Local Government Act 2001 and with the provisions of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, that the draft Budget as set out in Tables A to F of the prescribed form of Budget prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended) and Local Government Financial Procedures and Audit Regulations 2002 presented to Members, is adopted without change.

A Roll Call was then taken as follows:

Voting in favour: – Cllrs: P. Breen; M. Byrne; G. Carthy; K. Codd Nolan; A. Donohoe; K. Doyle; M. Farrell; W. Fitzharris; J. Fleming; J. Hegarty; R. Ireton; P. Kavanagh; W. Kavanagh; A. Kelly; G. Lawlor; J. Moore; B.A. Murphy; M. Murphy; J. Mythen; L. O'Brien; O. O'Connell; J. O'Rourke; M. Roche; M. Sheehan; J. Sullivan; O. Walsh; M. Whelan.

Voting against – Cllrs. A. Connick; D. Hynes; L. McDonald; T. Walsh.

The proposal was adopted.

The Cathaoirleach then thanked Ms. A. O'Neill, Head of Finance, Ms. L. Lacey, Financial Accountant and other officials involved in the preparation of the Draft Budget for 2018. He noted that this was a vote for the future of the County and that some hard decisions had to be made in particular for those Members from New Ross and Enniscorthy Districts.

He stated that the fruits of this decision will be seen in the future and it is a great endorsement of the plan put forward by the Chief Executive. It is critical that the message and the programme be communicated to the public with regard to the projects in their area and the delivery of those projects.

A number of the Members from the various political parties joined with the Cathaoirleach in congratulating Ms. A. O'Neill and her team and echoed the sentiments expressed by the Cathaoirleach with regard to difficult decisions and the ambitious programme ahead of the Council.

Cllr. A. Kelly then addressed the Council; he advised that following today's meeting he would be stepping down as a Member of Wexford County Council. He thanked everybody for their courtesy and help over the years. He advised that, after his illness, his workload had increased and that he had less energy and that it was now time for him to look after his own health. He further advised that it is proposed that Tom Forde will replace him as a Member of the Council.

He thanked the Chief Executive and the other Members of the Management Team. He also noted that he had made many friends over the years amongst the other Councillors and that, despite their political differences, they were all working together for the good of Wexford.

Cllr. G. Lawlor on behalf of the Labour Party advised that he had worked with Anthony for many years and had fought many battles with him over that time. He stated that Anthony's passion was for the people of Wexford and that he was a man of the people who worked for the people over the years.

Cllr. P. Kavanagh on behalf of Fine Gael stated that this resignation came out of the blue but he would like to pay tribute to Anthony whom he had only worked with since 2014. He noted that he was a gentleman and despite their political differences he was a friendly person and wished him every health and happiness in the future.

Cllr. K. Doyle on behalf of Fianna Fail thanked Anthony for his contribution in the Chamber, he was an honorable Councillor and dogged in his efforts to work for the people of Wexford.

Cllr. D. Hynes said it was a sad day for the Council that Anthony Kelly was retiring. He noted that Cllr. Kelly was a fighter and did Trojan work for the people of Wexford. He also noted that the workload had increased for the Council Members in Wexford town given the small number of Councillors in the town and he stated that Anthony had more than proved himself as a Councillor over the years.

Cllr. T. Walsh on behalf of the PBP advised that Deirdre Wadding who had worked with Anthony Kelly would wish him the best of luck in the future and that he had helped herself and Tony Walsh as new Members of the Council over the past number of years.

Cllr. G. Carthy also wished Anthony the best in the future and noted that he had worked for the people of Wexford.

Cllr. J. Mythen on behalf of Sinn Fein, said this was a sad occasion. Anthony had suffered a major trauma a year and half ago and that he had huge strong character to get back on the road and represent the people of Wexford; Anthony was a great man and Cllr. Mythen stated that he was privileged to meet and work with him.

The Chief Executive spoke on his own behalf and on behalf of the staff of Wexford County Council and wished Cllr. Kelly the best in the future. He noted that he has made a huge contribution to public life in County Wexford, he is a gentleman and is held with huge respect and regard among both the staff and the general public. He has always worked hard for the people of Wexford, even after his recovery from illness. He wished him well with every health and happiness in the future.

The Cathaoirleach added that Cllr. Kelly had represented the people of Wexford very well; his efforts in recent years were a tribute to his spirit after his illness. He had made the decision to leave the Chamber on his own terms; he thanked all the Members for their good wishes to Cllr. Kelly.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

County Secretary.

Daingnithe ar an _____la de Nollaig, 2017.

Cathaoirleach