

WEXFORD COUNTY COUNCIL**Minutes of Meeting of Wexford County Council Held on Monday 4th December, 2023
in the Council Chamber at 10am (with some remote attendance via Microsoft Teams)****Attendance:****In the Chair:** Cllr. John Fleming, Cathaoirleach**Councillors:**

BELL	MAURA (Remote)	FARRELL	MARY (Remote)	O'ROURKE	JOHN (Remote)
BOLGER	ANDREW (Remote)	FORDE	TOM	Ó'SÚILLEABHÁIN	FIONNTÁN
BREEN	PIP	HYNES	DAVID (Remote)	OWENS	JACKSER
BROWNE	AIDAN	KAVANAGH	WILLIE	SHEEHAN	MICHAEL
BYRNE	CATHAL	KELLY	LEONARD	SULLIVAN	JOE
CARTHY	GER	KENNY	DONAL	STAPLES	FRANK
CODD	JIM	LAFFAN	GARRY	WALSH	OLIVER (Remote)
CODD-NOLAN	KATHLEEN	MCDONALD	LISA	WHELAN	MICHAEL
CONNICK	ANTHONY	MOORE	JIM (Remote)		
DEVEREUX	DIARMUID	MURPHY	BARBARA ANNE		
DONOHUE	ANTHONY	MURPHY	BRIDÍN (Remote)		

Officials:

Mr. Tom Enright, Chief Executive
 Mr. Eamonn Hore, Director of Services
 Ms. Lynda Lacey, A/Head of Finance
 Ms. Carolyne Godkin, Director of Services
 Ms. Elizabeth Hore, Director of Services
 Mr. Eddie Taaffe, Director of Services
 Ms. Amanda Byrne, A/Director of Services
 Mr. Michael Drea, County Secretary
 Mr. Seamus Begley, Management Accountant
 Ms. Anna Marie Colfer, A/Administrative Officer

Apologies:

Cllr. John Hegarty, Cllr. George Lawlor

At the outset, Mr. M. Drea informed the meeting that there were technical issues which meant those coming in remotely could hear what was being said in the Chamber but those in the Chamber couldn't hear the remote attendees. Mr. Drea apologised for the inconvenience caused.

Mr. T. Enright briefed the Members on an announcement last Friday of funding for Waterford airport. Mr. Enright confirmed a combination of public and private investment with Wexford County Council due to make a modest investment of c€400,000. This update was broadly welcomed by the Members.

1. Opening address – Mr. Tom Enright, Chief Executive

Mr. T. Enright advised that the 2024 budget reflects a 9% increase on 2023. Mr. Enright said the increase reflects the increased cost of doing business and increase in service provision. Mr. Enright advised that the budget will provide for high quality services in 2024.

2. Draft Budget Overview – Presentation

Ms. L. Lacey gave a presentation which outlined the following:

- Backdrop to budget 2024
- Funding position for 2024
- Local Government Rates & Other Matters Act 2019 (LGROMA 2019)
- Commercial Rates Buoyancy 2024
- LPT 2024
- NPPR Income - Expiry
- Budget 2024 income and expenditure summary
- Expenditure and income movement overview
- 2024 Budget decisions to be made, including:
 - Section 1 – 2024 Decision on Local Adjustment Factor for LPT
 - Section 2 – Commercial Rates 2024 & ARV
 - Section 3 – General Municipal Allocations
 - Section 4 – Rates on Vacant Properties
 - Section 5 – Small Business Support Scheme 2024 (SBSG)
 - Section 6 – Conclusions/Recommendations

3. Draft Budget 2024

Consideration of Statutory Budget Tables

Ms. L. Lacey then brought the Members through each line of the budget tables and together with her colleagues from the Management Team responded to queries from the Members on a number of elements of the Draft Budget, as follows:

Division A

- Clarification on increase in outturn for 2023 for A0904, A0905 and A0999.

- Query as to what the loan charge in A0602 is?
- Query as to why mobility aid grants were underspent in 2023?
- How much of spend is based on proposed rent increases in 2024?
- What is RAS expenditure of €3.6m spent on?
- Request for additional breakdown of dereliction funding.
- Request that a second Vacant Homes Officer be employed.
- Query in relation to the funding for homelessness.

Cllr. Jackser Owens left the meeting at this point.

- Query as to how the Council can address falling income.
- Query if Wexford County Council is funding RTB inspections or if the cost is recoupable.

Division B

- How can roads funding be increased?
- Is Wexford County Council installing new public lighting from its own resources and if so, is it funded from B0501?
- Is Wexford County Council reducing its own funding in 2024 under B0406?
- Why are there reductions in B0305 and B0406?
- Should Wexford County Council seek to increase income by increasing parking charges?
- Can the funding of B0305 be kept at 2023 level with an increase in income?
- Need for additional investment in roads to enhance tourism offering.

Cllr. L. Kelly left the Chamber at this point.

Division C

- Is grant for septic tanks included in division C?
- How are water services costing the Council €2m if it is a function of Uisce Éireann?
- If Uisce Éireann are no longer going to cover the CMC, is there any service we can pull back on?

Division D

- What do Rapid costs cover?
- How will economic development increase of €1m be spent?
- What are enforcement costs for?
- Reason for decrease in funding under Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and Gaeltacht?
- Did Wexford County Council recoup funding for a Heritage Officer?
- Is €600,000 in social inclusion to deal with displaced Ukranian costs?

Division E

- Is E1004 to facilitate CPO's?
- Why is fire expenditure increased by €1m?
- Is there any provision to cover CCTV costs for fly tipping?
- Is there any funding included to extend public burial grounds?
- Can a breakdown of street cleaning costs under E0601 be provided?

- What does landfill operation costs cover?

Cllr. L. Kelly joined the meeting remotely.

Division F

- What is other income of €675,000?
- Has a provision been made for Seachtain na Gaeilge?
- What is community grants under F0401?
- What is covered under F0404?
- What feedback is obtained on festivals which are funded by the Council?
- What is the total funding for the Opera Festival?
- Why is Wexford Borough MD the only MD with a specific Culture Night budget?

Division G

- Request for clarification what G0101 consists of?
- Is there a significant problem with horse control as G0405 is a significant cost?
- Where does funding for school meal programme come from?

Division H

- Will there be a reduction in the cost of producing the register of electors due to changes?
- Is the % of irrecoverable rates increasing?
- Query in relation to the service support costs for motor tax.
- Request for breakdown of motor tax income or value of motor tax income.

Cllr. C. Byrne proposed an amendment to increase the Amenity Grant by €1,000 per Councillor with a commensurate reduction in other areas of F0401. This was seconded by Cllr. M. Sheehan and agreed by all.

Decision on Rates to be applied to Vacant Premises

Recommendation to retain tiered basis.

- Retain 90% relief for all properties with annual rates to €2,000
- Apply 80% relief for properties with annual rates over €2,000 and less than €10,000
- Apply 60% relief for properties with annual rates over €10,000

Cllr. T. Forde proposed a reduction of 10% on each of the three tiers of the Rates Abatement Scheme (new rates to be 50%, 70% & 80%). This was seconded by Cllr. F. Ó'Súilleabháin.

The Cathaoirleach advised that there would be a roll call vote in relation to Cllr. Forde's proposed amendment to the Rates Abatement Scheme. The outcome was that the proposal to amend the Rates Abatement Scheme was defeated with 8 in favour and 20 against. The voting was as follows:

BELL MAURA	A	FARRELL MARY	A	Ó'SÚILLEABHÁIN FIONNTÁN	F
BOLGER ANDREW	A	FLEMING JOHN	A	SHEEHAN MICHAEL	A

BREEN PIP	A	FORDE TOM	F	STAPLES FRANK	A
BROWNE AIDAN	A	HYNES DAVID	F	SULLIVAN JOE	A
BYRNE CATHAL	F	KAVANAGH WILLIE	A	WALSH OLIVER	A
CARTHY GER	A	KELLY LEONARD	F	WHELAN MICHAEL	A
CODD JIM	F	KENNY DONAL	A		
CODD-NOLAN KATHLEEN	A	LAFFAN GARRY	A		
CONNICK ANTHONY	F	MCDONALD LISA	A		
DEVEREUX DIARMUID	A	MURPHY BARBARA ANNE	A		
DONOHUE ANTHONY	A	O'ROURKE JOHN	F		

On foot of the adoption of the proposed tiered rates abatement, Wexford County Council makes a scheme for the abatement of rates due to it by liable persons, or classes of liable persons, in respect of vacant properties in accordance with the provisions of Section 9 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019, as amended. Such a scheme in respect of vacant property will provide for an abatement of either 60%, 80% or 90% (depending on value of annual rates) of rates due to Wexford County Council by a liable person for the financial year ending 31 December 2024.

Adoption of Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV)

Recommendation – Retain ARV of €0.253

On the proposal of Cllr. B.A. Murphy, seconded by Cllr. G. Carthy and agreed by all, the Members resolved to retain the ARV of €0.253.

Decision on Small Business Support Scheme

Recommendation - retain existing scheme

- To provide SBSG at 10% of Annual Rates up to a max of €800
- To be applied to all with annual rates up to €30,000 meeting T&C's

On the proposal of Cllr. G. Carthy, seconded by Cllr. M. Whelan and agreed by all, the Members resolved to retain the existing Small Business Support Scheme.

Adopt 2024 Budget with or without amendment

On the proposal of Cllr. B.A. Murphy, seconded by Cllr. O. Walsh and agreed by all, the Members resolved to adopt the 2024 budget with an amendment to increase the Amenity Grants by €1,000 per Member (€7,000 to €8,000).

Mr. T. Enright thanked Ms. L. Lacey, Mr. S. Begley, Ms. A.M. Colfer, Mr. D. Noonan and the Directors of Service for their efforts in drafting the budget.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUISNESS OF THE MEETING

Daingithe ar an lá de Nollaig, 2023.

Cllr. John Fleming
Cathaoirleach

Michael Drea,
County Secretary