

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

MINUTES OF GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET MEETING

HELD AT ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, PROSPECT HILL, GALWAY

ON MONDAY, 9TH DECEMBER, 2024 AT 2P.M.

LEAS CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr. O. Turner

Leas-Cathaoirleach of the County of Galway

I LATHAIR FREISIN:

Baill: Comh./Cllr. I. Canning, J. Charity, D. Collins, D. Connolly, M. Connolly, S. Cunniffe, S. Curley, T. Curraoin, G. Donuhue, P. Feeney, G. Finnerty, T. Grealish, M. Hoade, C. Keane, P. Keaveney, D. Kelly, D. Killilea, P. Killilea, M. Kinane, G. King, M. Leainde, M. Lee, P. Mac an Iomaire, M. Maher, E. Mannion, J. McClearn, K. McHugh Farag, P.J. Murphy, Dr. E. F. Parsons, A. Reddington, N. Thomas, S. Walsh, T. Welby.

As Láthair: Comh./Cllr. A. Dolan, D. Geraghty, A. Harney, L. O'Hara, P. Roche.

Oifigh: Mr. L. Conneally, Chief Executive, Ms. K. O'Connor, Head of Finance,
Ms. E. Ruane, Director of Services, Mr. M. Owens, Director of Services, Mr. U. Finn, Director of Services, Ms. J. Carroll, Director of Services,
Mr. Michael McGovern, Management Accountant, Ms. Áine Fenton, Financial Accountant, Ms. J. Brann, Meetings Administrator, Ms. M. Jordan, Administrative Officer, Ms. M. Duddy Administrative Officer.

Thosnaigh an cruinniú leis an paidir.

The Leas-Cathaoirleach O. Turner welcomed Members to the annual statutory Budget 2025 Meeting and noted apologies. The Leas-Cathaoirleach extended sympathies to Cllr. Thomas and remarked on the warm tributes shared at the previous meeting on the passing of Cllr. Thomas late father.

Congratulations were extended to A. Dolan, L. O'Hara and P. Roche on their successful election to Dáil Éireann.

ITEM NO. 1 CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF BUDGET FOR YEAR 2025

4462

The Draft Budget 2025 Report as prepared by the Chief Executive was circulated.

The Chief Executive, Mr. Conneally presented the Draft Budget for 2025. Emphasis was placed on maximizing the value of every euro spent. Members were informed that Senior Management Team were tasked with justifying every expenditure line for value for money and priority alignment with Galway County Council's Corporate Plan.

The total revenue spend for the Council is €193 million, the majority of the spend consists of non-discretionary costs such as loans, payroll, pensions, and insurance.

Annual demands for increased services include: Housing: €6 million, Roads: €4 million, Development Management: €4.4 million, Environment: €3 million, Recreation and Amenity: €2.3 million, Miscellaneous (Rates incentives): €940k showing a proposed increases across all divisions of public services.

The Chief Executive highlighted the practical targets for each Directorate that align with the recently adopted Corporate Plan and its work program. The 5-year Corporate Plan will be broken down into Annual Service Delivery Plans for each Directorate. Each Directorate will recruit additional staff as per their priority work deliverables.

The Chief Executive emphasised the importance of the members decision on the local property tax over the next five years. He stated that the Budget Book presented has a net increase in the rates of €3.6 million which is achieved through a Rate Incentive Scheme of 6% for compliant rate payers with a rate bill of under 10K and funded by an increase in the Annual Rate on Valuation to 0.24.

To maintain the standard of public services, the Chief Executive stressed the crucial need to increase every source of income, especially given the inflationary pressures. The 2025 budget includes a strategic workforce expansion, ensuring each new post is justified and aligned with our Strategic Workforce Plan.

Presenting a balanced budget is essential, and the Chief committed to lead an organisation that delivers high-quality services for the people of Galway while keeping the finances of the Council in check.

The Chief Executive recommended the adoption of the 2025 Budget Book as presented.

Ms. O'Connor, Head of Finance outlined the agenda items to be covered in the presentation:

- Consider and adopt the 2025 Budget for Galway County Council.
- Determine the rate on valuation to be levied for 2025.
- Consider the abatement scheme of rates for vacant properties as per Section 9 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019.
- Approve the Rate Incentive Scheme in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014.
- Approve the estimated outturns for 2024.
- Note the Report on the three-year Capital Programme.
- Note the Annual Progress Report on the Galway County Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024.

The build-up to the budget was discussed which involved five Municipal District meetings held in October where General Municipal Allocations (GMAs) were passed in all five MDs. Common issues identified included underfunding and the need for improvements

in hedge cutting, footpath resurfacing, and burial grounds. Budget Workshops were held on November 4th and 18th, with continuous engagements throughout the process. Directors of Service provided detailed analyses of core services, and the impact of changes in the Annual Rate of Valuation was discussed. Updates were given at the CPG meeting on November 18th and the Plenary meeting on November 25th and the budget meeting on November 30th was adjourned until this meeting.

Ms. O'Connor presented the proposed expenditure for 2025 by each service division and stated how funding proposed increase in expenditure for most Directorates, with a total increase in funded expenditure of over 12% year on year.

Ms. O'Connor outlined the total projected income from grants, subsidies, and other sources as €129 million, an increase of €13 million from the previous year. Noting income from the Local Property Tax (LPT) increased by €2.37 million due to a vote on 23rd September. The commercial rates figure is nearly €42 million, with an increase in the Annual Rate on Valuation to 0.24.

The Housing Directorate's budget increased from €26 million in 2024 to €32 million in 2025. Key areas of expenditure were outlined to include maintenance and improvement of Local Authority housing units, administration of homeless services, rental accommodation schemes, and housing grants. The budget includes funding for up to 26 new posts.

Detailing the proposed expenditure for Road Transport and Safety as €62 million, Ms. O'Connor explained significant spending on the maintenance and improvement of local and regional roads. The budget includes funding for up to 24 new posts.

Galway County Council continues to support Uisce Éireann in delivering public water and wastewater services. Expenditure and income are expected to reduce due to the transition to Uisce Éireann under the new SLA.

The Development Management budget focuses on forward planning, economic, community, and social initiatives. The budget includes funding for strategic projects, new posts, and community and enterprise functions.

For Environmental services the proposed expenditures include the operation of fire services, litter management, and other environmental initiatives. The total expenditure for this directorate increased by €3 million.

For the Recreation and Amenity category main category in this area is the proposed expenditure on the operation of our library services of €6.9m. Other areas include community employment schemes and outdoor leisure areas.

The Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare directorate includes spending on piers and harbours, land drainage, and veterinary services. Stating the proposed expenditure has remained relatively stable. Members were informed that veterinary services will be moving out of the remit of GCC from 2025 to Department of Agriculture, so there was a decrease in the salaries however, budgeted increase expenditure in areas such as dog control and an additional dog warden for new legislations.

Miscellaneous Services includes administration of rates, costs related to local representatives, and motor taxation services. The total expenditure for this directorate has increased.

The Head of Finance concluded with some overarching comments stating that this is an expansionary budget, reflecting an increase in expenditure across all Directorates. In addition, Ms. O'Connor added that the Council will continue to advance several significant national and local policies, including the Climate Action Plan, the development of the Project Management Office, various housing initiatives, local road maintenance and improvements, strategic economic developments, work on Greenways, the tourism strategy, and the strategic workforce programme. Ms. O'Connor noted the programme focus will not only be on staffing numbers but also on efficiencies and deliverables.

To achieve these goals, Ms. O'Connor indicated both internal and external funding sources must be considered, to include a rise in the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) for 2025, a rent review, an increase in staffing across Directorates to draw down further State grants and funding into County Galway, and maintaining open and fluid communications with the department regarding funding supports for Galway County Council.

In closing, Ms. O'Connor expressed gratitude to the Councillors for their time, input, and support throughout the budgetary process, acknowledging the numerous meetings held in preparation. Special thanks were extended to the Directors of Service for their support and input, and to the Finance Team, particularly Áine Fenton and Michael McGovern. Ms. O'Connor also thanked the Cathaoirleach and the Chief Executive for their continued support.

The Leas-Cathaoirleach then invited contributions from the Elected Members.

Cllr. McClearn noted an extremely challenging Budget Balancing process. As previously pointed out, there is less than 20% available to make adjustments. Cllr. McClearn emphasised the difficulty in ensuring value for money in a competitive environment. The Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) is lower than in Kerry, Donegal, Sligo, and Mayo.

Highlighted the need for increased funding for housing, disability maintenance improvements, public lighting, and the Project Management Office to deliver Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) projects. Additionally, Cllr. McClearn mentioned the necessity of securing funds for firefighting, litter management, and increasing staffing levels.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. McClearn **SECONDED** by Cllr. Hoade with Cllr. Welby associated AGREED to propose the following amendments:-

Division A – Housing

Service Support Costs: Reduce A0199 by €170,056.

This will see a movement from the Budget Book of €3,707,094 to €3,573,038. This is still an increase of over €1m from the prior year adopted budget.

Social and Community Housing Service: Reduce A0403 by €84,284.

This will see a movement from the Budget Book of €105,000 to €20,716. This is still an increase of over €20k from the prior year adopted budget.

Central Management Charges - Relating to the CMCs - there is to be a reduction of the CMCs apportioned across each of the Service Support Costs in the Housing Division of €76,100.

Division B – Roads

Agency & Recoupable Service: Reduce B1101 by €248,188.

This will see a movement from the Budget Book of €1,656,925 to €1,408,737. This is still an increase of over €1.1m from the prior year adopted budget.

Central Management Charges - Relating to the CMCs - there is to be a reduction of the CMCs apportioned across each of the Service Support Costs in the Roads Division of €99,157.

Division C – Water Charges

Central Management Charges - Relating to the CMCs - there is to be a reduction of the CMCs apportioned across each of the Service Support Costs in the Water Services Division of €64,531.

Cllr. Hoade commented on the increasing services to bring these in line with proposed amendments as follows:

Division D – Development Management

Economic Development and Promotion - Reduce D0905 by €72,997.

This will see a movement from the Budget Book of €2,586,536 to €2,513,539. This is still an increase of €1,348,252 from the prior year adopted budget.

Central Management Charges - Relating to the CMCs - there is to be a reduction of the CMCs apportioned across each of the Service Support Costs in the Development Management Division of €71,497.

Division E – Environment Services

Operation of Fire Brigade Services - Reduce E1101 by €169,132

This will see a movement from the Budget Book of €13,088,887 to €12,919,755. This is still an increase of €1.2m from the prior year adopted budget.

Central Management Charges - Relating to the CMCs - there is to be a reduction of the CMCs apportioned across each of the Service Support Costs in the Environmental Services Division of €84,044.

Division F – Recreation and Amenity

Central Management Charges - Relating to the CMCs - there is to be a reduction of the CMCs apportioned across each of the Service Support Costs in the Recreation and Amenity Division of €41,046

Division G – Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare

Central Management Charges - Relating to the CMCs - there is to be a reduction of the CMCs apportioned across each of the Service Support Costs in the Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare Division of €4,680.

Cllr. Welby agreed with colleagues on the difficulty establishing cuts to the budget and proposed the following amendments:-

Division H – Miscellaneous Services

Administration of Rates office - Reduce H0301 by €100,000

This will see a movement from the Budget Book of €553,828 to €453,828. This provision relates to the G factor on the rates and will see a decrease from the prior year adopted budget, in line with expectations.

Refunds and irrecoverable rates - H0303 to provide for the increase in the rate incentive scheme to 10% for compliant customers with a rate bill of under €50,000 in 2024 we are to increase this code by €1,314,753. This will see a movement in this code from €5,965,435 to €7,280,188

Central Management Charges - Relating to the CMCs - there is to be a reduction of the CMCs apportioned across each of the Service Support Costs in the Miscellaneous Services Division of €29,041.

The Leas-Cathaoirleach welcomed questions.

Cllr. Connolly requested an opportunity to assess the implications on the changes proposed and sought further information on funding for Ballinasloe Fire Station (referencing Pg 192).

In response and summation of the proposed amendments Ms. O'Connor listed the effects under each Division as follows: Housing budget started at €32,081,386 revised uplift €31,750,946 being 5.6m, Roads budget started at €62,188,387 moved to €61,841,042, revised uplift 4m, Water Services started at €17,037,755 revised uplift €16,973,224, Development Management started at €20,889,424 revised uplift €20,744,931, Environment started with budget of €28,313,716, revised uplift €28,060,540, Recreation and Amenity started at €13,306,685 revised uplift €13,265,639, Agriculture started €2,845,331 revised uplift to €2,840,651 and Miscellaneous Services started with a budget of €16,893,413 revised uplift to €18,079,125

Ms. O'Connor notified Members that the Budget Book expenditure total presented is €193,556,097 and after the proposed adjustments total expenditure remains the same.

Cllr. Cuniffe asked in regard to the effect of the ARV on businesses.

In response Ms. O'Connor addressed the query with rate impact evaluation and noted the increase to the ARV brings Galway County Council into line with the counties on the western seaboard, to include Kerry (0.245), Donegal (0.243), Sligo (0.2415) and Mayo (0.247) stating all still have an ARV higher than the proposed 0.24. Further demonstrating that Galway County Council align with our neighbouring counties Ms. O'Connor highlighted Clare ARV at 0.239, Mayo ARV at 0.247 and Roscommon ARV at 0.237.

With regard to the impact Ms. O'Connor detailed the effects for 90% Rate Payers under €10k being €82 per annum, 4% Rate Payers between €10-€15k as €420 per annum, 2% Rate Payers between €15-€20k as €596 per annum, 2% Rate Payers between €20-€30k €1,327 per annum, 1% Rate Payers between 50-100k as €10,375 per annum and 1% over 100k as €73,779 per annum.

Director of Services U. Finn, in response to Cllr. Connolly query regarding Ballinasloe Fire Station explained this is part of the capital programme.

Cllr. O Curraoin commented on the allocation of funding for flood prevention across an extensive coastline from Leenaun to Kinvara and stressed the importance and the requirement to protect the islands.

In response the Chief Executive referred to Capital Report (Pg 194) Flood Scheme which he advised were fully recoupable through the OPW and national Departments a along with other coastal protection works.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. McClearn **SECONDED** by Cllr. Hoade the Members **AGREED: to adopt Budget 2025.**

The Leas-Cathaoirleach confirmed the Draft Budget 2025 with amendments as **ADOPTED.**

ITEM NO. 2 DETERMINATION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BUDGET ADOPTED, OF THE RATE ON VALUATION TO BE LEVIED FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2025.

4463

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Keaveney **SECONDED** by Cllr. Finnerty the Members **AGREED:**

"That Galway County Council hereby determine in accordance with the Budget adopted, of the rate on valuation to be levied at 0.2400 for the financial year ending 31st December, 2025".

ITEM NO. 3 CONSIDER SCHEME FOR THE ABATEMENT OF RATES DUE 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.

4464

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Maher **SECONDED** by Cllr. Finnerty the Members **AGREED to APPROVE** the scheme for the abatement of rates due 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.

ITEM NO. 4 TO APPROVE THE RATES PAYMENT INCENTIVE SCHEME. 4465

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. McClearn **SECONDED** by Cllr. Hoade the Members **APPROVED** the new Rates Payment Incentive Scheme.

ITEM NO. 5 TO APPROVE THE ESTIMATED OUTTURNS 2024. 4466

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Finnerty **SECONDED** by Cllr. Maher the Members **APPROVED** outturns 2024.

ITEM NO. 6 TO NOTE THE REPORT ON THE THREE-YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME. 4467

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Killilea **SECONDED** by Cllr. Connolly the Members **NOTED** the Three Year Capital Programme.

ITEM NO. 7 TO NOTE THE ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT ON THE GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN 2020-2024 IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 134 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2001 (AS AMENDED). 4468

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Keaveney **SECONDED** by Cllr. Feeney the Members **NOTED** the Annual Progress Report on the Galway County Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024 in accordance with Section 134 of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended)

Chriochnaigh an Cruinniú Ansin.

Submitted, Signed and Approved

Cathaoirleach: Martina Kinane

Date: 27/1/2025