

**MINUTES OF ANNUAL MEETING
HELD IN THE WATERGATE ON FRIDAY, 18TH JUNE, 2021
AT 3.00 P.M.**



Chair: Andrew McGuinness

Cllrs: Eamon Aylward, Tomás Breathnach, John Brennan, Martin Brett, John Coonan, Peter Cleere, Deirdre Cullen, Michael Delaney, Fidelis Doherty, Maria Dollard, Matt Doran, Michael Doyle, Pat Dunphy, David Fitzgerald, Pat Fitzpatrick, Denis Hynes, Joe Lyons, Joe Malone & Michael McCarthy

MS Teams: Cllrs. Mary Hilda Cavanagh, Ger Frisby & Patrick O'Neill.

Apology: Cllr. Eugene McGuinness.

Officials: Colette Byrne, Tim Butler, Martin Prendiville, Mary Mulholland, Sean McKeown, Kevin Hanley, Anne Maria Walsh & Catherine Cooney.

Cllr. Andrew McGuinness welcomed all the Members to the Watergate Theatre. He also welcomed members of the public.

Cllr. Andrew McGuinness addressed the Council as follows:

"It's been a tremendous honour to have served as Cathaoirleach of Kilkenny County Council for the last 12 months. There is no doubt that it was a difficult year to be in such a position but that was a challenge I was happy to take on and looking back over the last year, I can say with confidence that I did my best. Despite Covid related restrictions, it was a very busy year, albeit far from normal, but Kilkenny County Council and the people of Kilkenny City and County responded like a call to arms, pro-actively and with a duty of care to our elderly and most vulnerable.

I have seen first hand how far people in Kilkenny are willing to go to protect their neighbours, family and friends, to ensure that those living alone were not alone, helping their local communities to get through the most difficult time we have ever seen.

We have seen our front line workers, every one of them from doctors, nurses and guards to supermarket cashiers, refuse collectors, our Civil Defence, our Council staff and of course our local musicians who kept our spirits high and continue to do so, go far beyond their call of duty for the benefit of all of us. The level of volunteerism in Kilkenny is outstanding and as a community, in city and county, we can be very proud of how we responded to such an unpredictable crisis that has left so many devastated. I want to thank and commend everyone for that because everyone of us had a part to play. Kilkenny has done very well in terms of keeping our Covid cases down and that is due to the massive efforts and sacrifices of all of us.

It's not over yet but we are certainly looking at the light at the end of the tunnel and as we approach normality I want to remind everyone how important it is to continue that community spirit and to be there for our local businesses, pubs & restaurants, who have endured so much pain and are now reopening. They shut their doors to protect our health, it's now our turn to protect our local businesses and the jobs that they create – Shopping local has never been more important.

Speaking of our pubs, I want to commend all of our publicans for the efforts they have made to reopen safely, providing safe places for people to socialise again, after such a long time of uncertainty. I also want to thank Anthony Morrissey and our Vintners for fighting our case to keep the Smithwicks Experience open. I want to make particular mention of one local publican – Tommy Hackett, who was the first city publican to close his doors at the start of the pandemic. I told Tommy back then that the first pub I would visit when they reopened would be his, to thank him for putting public health first. I did that today and that was my last occasion to wear the Cathaoirleach's chain.

When I look back over the last 12 months there were many highlights.

We had a very Successful Yulefest festival which took place on a virtual platform and attracted great interest from all over the county.

We had our First Kilkenny Day in October celebrating everything that is wonderful about Kilkenny city and county; our communities, our heritage, our environment, our commerce, our creativity, our food, our hospitality, our sport and above all, our people. We can look forward to Kilkenny Day 2021 taking place on 10th October.

We Rebranded and launched the new kilkenny.ie website, and as we reopen society this initiative will help us to attract visitors and investors to the county by raising awareness of the many outstanding attributes that make Kilkenny an ideal place to visit, shop, work, locate a business, live and raise a family.

The National Pride of Place Virtual Awards saw Castlecomer Discovery Park take top spot in the Community Tourism category and Callan Town Team came runners up in the Areas with a population between 2,000 and 5,000, and Clogh Community Group in the population between 300 and 1000 category. Ferrybank Allotment also received a nomination. I want to commend those communities for their outstanding work.

The First Citizens Forum was launched - The first-of-its-kind in the South East with an aim to bring Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford under one forum to address the structural challenges faced by the South East. It was a privilege to be part of that.

We Received €4.3 million for Active Travel Projects - This will see a number of projects completed in the city and county in 2021 and others planned for implementations in future years.

We launched the new online Interactive Grants Booklet - This allows us to reach more groups throughout the county who may not be aware of the various grants and community supports available.

During 2020, 183 new houses were provided by the Council through construction, acquisition and leasing. Housing developments delivered in 2020 included Breaghagh Place in Piltown, Nuncio Road in Kilkenny City and Hoban Park in Callan. I was delighted to visit all of these projects along with our Municipal District Chairs and Chairperson of our Housing SPC.

Kilkenny retained its crown again in the Irish Business Against Litter Survey, a fantastic achievement that the people of Kilkenny can be very proud of.

Kilkenny County Council secured ISO accreditation - the world's leading Energy Management Standard for energy use and consumption.

A Total of €140,000 was awarded in Amenity Grants to 181 Resident Associations, Tidy Towns Groups and Community Organisations across County Kilkenny. These groups deserve every penny and more for the tireless work they carry out for the betterment of their own local areas.

We were allocated almost €16.8 million in funding for roads this year which will enable us to carry out improvement works right across the City and County with some additional specific funding grants allocated for bridge rehabilitation works, specific improvement grant and safety improvement works. I Welcome this investment as it will go a long way to improving and maintaining the quality road network that is so important to Kilkenny business and tourism.

The last year has shown the important role that amenities have played in our physical and mental wellbeing and has seen a significant increase in the number of people using our walking routes, cycle tracks, parks and other amenities to exercise and keep fit, while having regard to guidelines on social distancing. In that regard, funding of €113,291 for six Kilkenny projects was allocated.

I visited many of our Rural Regeneration/Town & Village renewal projects including the Fair Green Project in Callan, the Ballyhale to Knocktopher Footpath, Thomastown Recreational Park and the square in Castlecomer that was upgraded to facilitate social distancing measures.

The list is long and if I were to go through it all we would be here all day.

I want to commend our Council Staff and Executive and the Elected Members for making hard decisions in order to create safe streets for our shoppers and local businesses. I want to particularly mention our Civil Defence Team who's volunteers completed 350 COVID-19 related duties, giving 2,112 hours of time and effort, packing and delivering 340 care boxes to the elderly, children with disabilities and vulnerable families, 100 medical transports to hospitals, doctors and COVID Assessment Units and administrative support to the Irish Blood Transfusion Service for 5 weeks.

I want to thank the Taiwanese Embassy for donating large quantities of PPE to us on two occasions this year. I delivered those donations to community hospital facilities and nursing homes throughout the county.

One of the greatest highlights for me this year was the music and entertainment that we provided to our nursing homes from a safe distance. To see the smiles on the faces of the residents, after they have endured so much, was heartwarming. There is no doubt that music is a universal language that gives us positivity, comfort and hope when we are at our lowest. I ask all of you to think of that and remember how our local musicians have helped us through the last 18 months – I ask you to join with them next week when they peacefully protest the fact that they have been left behind in terms of supports. I will certainly be there.

Of course, opening the impressive Butler Gallery and our long awaited Skate Park and Riverside Gardens were special occasions that I'm grateful to have participated in along with representing the elected members unveiling the Thomas Woodgate Memorial and acknowledging our War Dead among many other occasions.

I want to thank former Mayor John Coonan and commend him on a great year. We worked very well together and that is exactly how it should be.

I want to thank our Council staff for all the great work that they do on our behalf every day. I want to thank Tom and Kay at the front desk who always had something positive to say every time I walked through the door, Brenda, Catherine and Teresa for their great support, Deirdre and Mark for their videos and photography, our CE Collette Byrne for her support throughout the year.

I want to say a special thank you to Catherine Cooney, Anne Maria Walsh and Tim Butler for going above and beyond to facilitate me, I will be forever grateful for your friendly support and for making this year very enjoyable – we are lucky to have all of you.

Lastly, I want to thank you, the Elected Members - I'm very grateful to all of you for giving me the opportunity to represent you and the people of Kilkenny City and County as Cathaoirleach.

The support you have all given me, the messages after meetings, the phone calls of support and the friendly advice is very much appreciated. We may be elected as politicians representing different political parties and none, but this year I have experienced nothing but great comradery and friendship and I know too well that everyone on this Council puts their heart and soul into their work and we all share the common desire to always do what is right for Kilkenny and the people we represent.

All of the fantastic projects that I have listed and lots more, are driven by all of you and you should all be deeply proud of your work on behalf of the people of Kilkenny.

I will finish by thanking my family for their unwavering support and the people of Kilkenny City and County for their warm welcome wherever I went.

I look forward now to representing you as Mayor of Kilkenny City."

Item 1: Election of Cathaoirleach

Cllr. Michael Doyle proposed Cllr. Fidelis Doherty as Cathaoirleach for the coming year. He referred to Cllr. Doherty's career in politics since 2009. He referred also to her outstanding contribution to her community since she came to live in Glenmore. She has been involved in many organisations and is very hardworking. She is a member of ETB, Watergate Theatre, Audit Committee, Animal Welfare Committee and more. He said she brings a wealth of experience to the role of Cathaoirleach.

Cllr. Pat Dunphy seconded the proposal of Cllr. Fidelis Doherty as Cathaoirleach. Cllr. Dunphy referred to Cllr. Doherty's work in the Piltown Municipal District and that she is the first female to be proposed as Cathaoirleach from the Piltown Area. She is very efficient and hardworking and will do her county proud.

Cllr. McGuinness asked for any other proposals. As there were no other proposals Cllr. Andrew McGuinness declared Cllr. Fidelis Doherty to be elected as Cathaoirleach of Kilkenny County Council and invited her to take the Chair and Chain of Office.

Cllr. Fidelis Doherty addressed the Council as follows:

"I would like to sincerely welcome everyone here today to the Annual Meeting of Kilkenny County Council 2021, my fellow Elected Members, members of the public and media.

At the outset I wish to thank my fellow Councillors for putting your trust in me to carry out the role of Cathaoirleach for the next twelve months. In particular, I thank my proposer Cllr. Michael Doyle and my seconder Cllr. Pat Dunphy.

Thank you both.

I would like to pay tribute to the outgoing Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Andrew McGuinness and congratulate him on his year representing the Council particularly during this difficult pandemic time. I thank him for his contribution to all the activities and advancements throughout the County during the year. He has set a very high standard for me to follow but I intend to do all I can to ensure that the next twelve months are productive and fruitful. I look forward to working and representing our County with you as Mayor of Kilkenny City and also Cllr Dunphy & Doyle as recently elected Chairs of Municipal Districts.

On this special day as your new Cathaoirleach, it is an honour for me to have my parents Jim and Mairead O' Mahony from Rathmacknee, Killinick, Co. Wexford present with me - my father Jim is Kilkenny born and raised and since 1959 lives in Wexford. And also, my sister Orna.

I am particularly proud to welcome my own family - my husband Andrew and our family Ben, Rory and Katie and also the special people in their lives - you're all very welcome and I'm so happy that you're here today with me... and loyal supporters of mine down through the years, Eily Roche, Kathleen Cody, Donie Aylward and Michael Aylward. You along with many others have travelled the highways and byways across the parishes of south Kilkenny with me. I would like to remember Willie Walsh of Busherstown, Glenmore who isn't with us today but who has always been there for me with some great advice and guidance.

I cannot let this day past without remembering a neighbour of ours in Ballyfacey, Glenmore who would have only loved to be here on this special day, my friend Matty Aylward who passed away in March, 2013. He loved all things political ... be it breaking news stories local or national, local elections, or general elections or European elections, bye elections, referendums or Presidential elections. Matty had his own thoughts and predications and was never too far astray in the eventual outcomes.

I was elected on my first attempt in June 2009 and I wish to thank everyone who supported me then and who continued to support me in the Local Elections of May 2014 and again in May 2019. I thank the Glenmore Fine Gael Branch for their support and nominations on each occasion.

On my decision to contest for a seat in local government in June 2009, I was to follow in the footsteps of my father's father, my late grandfather Phil Mahony of Viper, Kells, Co. Kilkenny who was elected on the 25th August 1942 for the Thomastown Area. He was elected to Dáil Eireann in the General Election of 1943 and was subsequently re-elected to Kilkenny County Council on the 20th September 1950. Sadly, he passed away in April 1972.

This got me thinking As to what age was he when he was first elected to Kilkenny County Council. When I did the maths, I discovered he was the very same age as me when I was first elected

I am delighted as your chair to welcome all the exciting projects that are been delivered or in the pipeline by the Council. I will offer support to all in reaching all the milestones to ensure that Kilkenny benefits from any funding to achieve our ambitious plans to make our County a better place for people to live, work and visit.

I am looking forward with confidence to the year ahead. But I am conscious that for our meetings to be efficient and effective, I will need the support of my fellow members. I am determined to chair our monthly meetings fairly but firmly. We are all bound by the democratic mandate which we received from our electorate, and we are also bound by a code of conduct in this chamber in relation to the standard of contribution and debate. Our meetings are governed by our self-adopted standing orders, and I am asking all members to adhere to the standards which we set for ourselves. I intend to ensure that every member is given full opportunity to contribute to each meeting, and I intend to get through each monthly agenda as efficiently as possible.

I am conscious that we have set ambitious targets for developments in all of our service areas and I don't intend to speak about all of the projects which are covered in various policy documents.

I am particularly pleased to see in my own area progress on the Waterford to New Ross Greenway, the South East Greenway incorporating the Kilkenny Greenway. I will watch with interest the works that have commenced and will hopefully see people using it during my term of office. I would hope that the south of the County will see the creation of additional jobs in providing services and facilities for those using and enjoying a much need amenity.

Since I became a member of the Council in 2009, the development of the Abbey Quarter in Kilkenny has been an ambition for the regeneration of that strategic area in the centre of Kilkenny City. Despite delays and setbacks, it is great to see the completion of the Riverside Garden and the Skate Park after so many years. It is apparent from the use of these amenities over the last month that this is a very welcome addition to the City's offer. I will support further developments in this area and look forward to the completion of the Brewhouse and public realm in Horsebarrack Lane. In particular, I look forward to the commencement of the new Library in the former Mayfair building. The importance of the Library Service has been very evident over the years and was very valuable during the last 18 months for the support and interaction with our elderly people cocooning.

There are many, many capital projects in the pipeline in Housing, Roads, Amenities, Public Realm, Parks etc - there are so many that it is impossible to refer to them all. I acknowledge all the work of the staff and Members in progressing these projects through design, planning and construction.

Housing is a necessity for every one of us and it is great to see the number of projects been undertaken by the Council to deliver much needed accommodation for those in most need. We will always require more and this will be a challenge to ensure that all have accommodation that suits their need.

In the area of Roads, there is also a very ambitious programme to improve our road network and it is heartening to see the Council securing much needed grants to deliver an improved local and regional road network to protect all our road users.

The development of our national routes and in particular our connections to other major urban centres will facilitate economic development in Kilkenny and the South East. It is noted that Kilkenny County Council staff will advance the design work on N24 Waterford to Cahir Scheme and N25 Glenmore to Waterford Scheme and I will look forward to the advancement of these schemes in my own area.

The development of the infrastructure in the Breaghagh Valley will enable growth in that area of the City and I would hope to see the construction of the proposed schools and private housing commence during the next 12 months.

It is a great honour to acknowledge the huge work that went into the New Ross By Pass and the beautiful iconic bridge which has been completed across the river Barrow. Today it has won a prestigious international award for engineering excellence and design.

The International Association for Bridge and Structural Engineering said the bridge is “a landmark structure” that has pushed the boundaries for the span of a “concrete extrados bridge”. The association is a scientific and technical group with members in 100 countries, was founded in 1929 and has its seat in Zurich, Switzerland.

I feel very strongly about personal road safety Can I please ask, plead with the driving public to please slow down when driving our roads and to note that there are people sharing and using that space and with many more people walking, jogging and cycling And by the same token can I please ask that people walking, or jogging or cycling to please wear hi vis jackets at all times, be it day or night You can't presume that you are seenMy thoughts and prayers are with all those families who have lost loved ones and those who have been seriously injured in traffic accidents.

As I speak here today, there are so many things I would like to refer to but time does not allow. I wish to acknowledge the work of all communities who work tirelessly to develop their own areas and to all those who do this voluntarily. There are too many areas to mention when you consider all the grant schemes available to assist in funding – CLAR, Town & Village Renewal, Amenities Grants, Arts Grants, Creative Ireland etc. I would sincerely hope that I will have an opportunity to acknowledge the great work done by so many communities during my term of office. We look forward to returning to some form of normal living.

Kilkenny's reputation is positive and is the result of good decision making by this and previous Council's and it is up to this Council to preserve and enhance that reputation.

In November 1984, I came to live in Glenmore and from early days became involved with many groups and committees - such as the Glenmore Parish Committee, the Glenmore ICA, the choir in St. James Church, past member of Ballyfacey National School Board of Management, Kilkenny Citizens Information Service based in Glenmore Hall along with Tom Ryan and Jackie Hennessy, Glenmore GAA Juvenile and camogie club committees, Eigse Slieverue Committee member, Glenmore Rural Development Group, St. Moling's Well Committee, the Glenmore Rural Graveyard Group, Glenmore Tidy Towns, Listerlin Tidy Towns , Glenmore Men's Shed. I enjoyed and continue to enjoy that great interaction with local communities and to offer support and help to them and working with them to achieve their aims and goals for all our communities.

Today, I wish to thank all the many volunteers of the county who give, and who have given so very generously of their time, effort and commitment to their respective communities and none more so than since the arrival of the Corona virus.

Where would we be as a community without such great people - I would like to give a special mention to the Glenmore Golden Club and to the ladies who provide lovely opportunities to bring together our parish's senior citizens. I'm sure they, like others are very much missing these get togethers and the chat and the banter Hopefully life as we know it will return to some normality.

Today I would like to acknowledge all the Tidy Towns Groups, families, individuals and all voluntary people who did and have done litter picking and who have cleared our county's roads of vast amounts of discarded items and all types of material. While it is not pleasant work, all of you are brilliant and your efforts made such a difference. Shame on those who day on day just feel it's ok to roll down their car window and toss out all kinds of recyclable items and plastics.

Can I take this opportunity to say thanks to Kilkenny County Council and the Environment Section and all the staff who do such good work in keeping our County clean. It is very much appreciated.

Since the onset of COVID, all of us have appreciated what we have in our own County, we have all enjoyed been able to go out and just enjoy the simple pleasure of a walk around. Our eyes have been open to all the facilities which are on our doorstep such as Woodstock, Castlecomer Discovery Park, Silare Wood, Clonassy Falls, Motte Park, Linear Park walks and Tory Hill etc. The Council is continuing to improve and develop more amenities for us and for visitors to enjoy also.

I look forward to the easing of restrictions with hope and that we can then support our businesses and cultural amenities. It has been a very difficult year and half for all of these businesses. As people enjoy their staycation in Kilkenny, I would encourage all to visit the Medieval Mile Museum, Butler Gallery, Rothe House, Kilkenny

Castle in Kilkenny City and to take an adventure into the County and visit the many tourist attractions in our towns and villages, such as Woodstock Gardens, Castlecomer Discovery Park, Kells Priory and many more too many to mention. There is so much to explore in Kilkenny and I encourage all of us to promote every part of our County and support businesses across the county. Overnight visitors will be welcomed with open arms.

I acknowledge the creativity that County Kilkenny has to offer in crafts, festivals, food producers and artisan food people etc, these all need our support now. Cartoon Saloon has kept Kilkenny on the international stage and it was disappointing that an Oscar did not come home to Kilkenny. We will continue to promote Kilkenny as the Cultural Capital of Ireland.

Today as first citizen of Kilkenny, I would like to extend an invitation to everyone ... it's a simple little ask really that I'm sure will brighten up the day for the cocooner Can I invite everyone to write a hand written note to a friend, or a family member or relative or someone you haven't seen or spoken to for some time ... some people have been unable to meet/connect with family, friends or any person since the pandemic. And at the same time, you're supporting An Post And don't forget ... the regular stamp is now €1.10.

Finally - a huge word of thanks to all the frontline workers, all the medical personnel in healthcare settings, all the carers who look after those who need care in their own homes, all the retail and shops staff who have looked after us all throughout the pandemic Thank you so much.

In conclusion.... I would like to thank my family... my husband Andrew and our family Ben, Rory and Katie.

They too have travelled the road with me since June 2009 ... their words of advice and sometimes caution are always noted and taken on board Today I say a sincere thank you.

I would like to wish the incoming Leas Cathaoirleach the very best in their posting and I look forward to working with him.

I can assure you that I will work hard as Cathaoirleach and I look forward to working with the Members, Colette Chief Executive and the Executive and all the Council staff. I will represent and promote our County on your behalf."

Item 2: Election of Leas Cathaoirleach

Cllr. Peter Cleere proposed Cllr. Michael McCarthy as Leas Cathaoirleach. He referred to his years of service as a Councillor since 2009 and his recent role as Chairman of the Castlecomer Municipal District. He spoke on how Cllr. McCarthy gets his work done quietly.

Cllr. Andrew McGuinness seconded the proposal of Cllr. Michael McCarthy as Leas Cathaoirleach. He referred to the importance of this role as a support to the Cathaoirleach.

Cllr. Fidelis Doherty called for any other proposals. As there were no other proposals Cllr. Fidelis Doherty declared Cllr. Michael McCarthy to be elected as Leas Cathaoirleach. Cllr. Doherty invited Cllr. Michael McCarthy to come forward and take his Chain of Office.

Cllrs. Peter Cleere, Andrew McGuinness, Tomás Breathnach, Maria Dollard and Michael Doyle congratulated Cllr. Fidelis Doherty and Cllr. Michael McCarthy on their election as Cathaoirleach and Leas Cathaoirleach and offered the support of all Members for the coming year.

Ms. Colette Byrne, Chief Executive congratulated Cllr. Fidelis Doherty on her election as Cathaoirleach. She wished her well in her role as First Citizen of Kilkenny. The Executive and staff look forward to working with you and the Council as we work through these challenging times and progress the many projects you referred to in your address. She assured her of the support of all staff and hoped she will have an enjoyable year. She said that the support of her family and party colleagues will also be needed.

Ms. Colette Byrne congratulated Cllr. Michael McCarthy as Leas Cathaoirleach and wished him well.

Item 3: Dates for Ordinary Meetings

It was proposed by Cllr. Pat Fitzpatrick, seconded by Cllr. Andrew McGuinness and agreed:

“That Kilkenny County Council hereby approves the following dates for Plenary Meetings of Kilkenny County Council for the period June 2021 to May 2022:

<i>June.....</i>	<i>21st June, 2021</i>
<i>July</i>	<i>19th July, 2021</i>
<i>August.....</i>	<i>No Meeting</i>
<i>September</i>	<i>20th September, 2021</i>
<i>October</i>	<i>18th October, 2021</i>
<i>November.....</i>	<i>15th November, 2021</i>
<i>December</i>	<i>20th December, 2021</i>
<i>January</i>	<i>17th January, 2022</i>
<i>February</i>	<i>21st February, 2022</i>
<i>March</i>	<i>21st March, 2022</i>
<i>April</i>	<i>18th April, 2022</i>
<i>May.....</i>	<i>16th May, 2022</i>

That concluded the business of the meeting.

CATHAOIRLEACH

DATE