



MINUTES OF STATUTORY BUDGET MEETING HELD
ON FRIDAY, 6 DECEMBER, 2024 AT 3.00 P.M.

Chair: Cllr. Michael McCarthy

Elected Members: *Council Chamber*

Cllrs. John Brennan, Tomás Breathnach, Mary Hilda Cavanagh, Pat Fitzpatrick, John Coonan, Fidelis Doherty, Pat Dunphy, Ger Frisby, Joe Malone, Andrew McGuinness, Eugene McGuinness, Deirdre Cullen, Joe Sheridan, Michael Delaney, Maurice Shortall, Seán Ó hArgáin and Jenny Catt Slattery.

MS Teams

Cllr. Joe Lyons.

Apologies

Cllrs. Maria Dollard, Stephanie Doheny, Michael Doyle and David Fitzgerald.

Officials: Lar Power, Martin Prendiville, Mary Mulholland, Tim Butler, Fiona Deegan, Ian Gardner, Catherine Cooney.

Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Michael McCarthy welcomed all Members to the Statutory Budget Meeting.

The Cathaoirleach expressed his congratulations to the newly elected Oireachtas Members following the recent General Election: Deputy John McGuinness, T.D., Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere, T.D., Deputy Jennifer Murnane, T.D., Deputy Catherine Callaghan, T.D. and Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan, T.D. He also offered his commiserations to Cllrs. Eugene McGuinness, Seán Ó hArgáin, David Fitzgerald and Michael Doyle and acknowledged their bravery in participating in the campaign.

Cllrs. Mary Hilda Cavanagh, Andrew McGuinness and Tomás Breathnach requested to be associated with the Cathaoirleach's comments of congratulations and commiserations on behalf of the Fine Gael Party, Fianna Fáil Party and Technical Group respectively.

The Cathaoirleach went on to advised the Elected Members in relation to the co-option process to fill the casual vacancy created by Cllr. Peter 'Chap' Cleere stating that the Co-Option meeting cannot take place until after the expiration of 14 days from the occurrence of the vacancy, the 14th day being 16th December, 2024. As the co-option cannot take place at the December Plenary Meeting, it is proposed to hold a Special Meeting at a date to be agreed.

He stated that the Council will consider a Budget of €120.9m for the County of Kilkenny for the Year 2025. He invited Mr. Lar Power to present his Report.

Mr Lar Power, Chief Executive also congratulated the newly elected Oireachtas Members on commiserated with the Elected Members that were not successful on behalf of the Staff and Management Team and commended them on their campaigns. He advised Members that the Report on the Budget has been circulated and he will take it as read.

He stated that choices have been made to present a balanced Budget of €120.9m. This is an increase of 8% over the Budget for 2024. 76% of this increase will be expended in housing, roads and environment. This represents a significant increase in the delivery of services for the citizens of Kilkenny. Kilkenny is a very ambitious County and we need to continue to invest in the City and County to build on the many strengths that we have as a County.

The draft Budget maintains the full range of core services while also providing match funding for a number of programmes such as Climate Change and Town Regeneration. It is important that the Council drives the economic development of the County. Development is important as it has a positive impact and provides for better places to work and invest in. The Council also has an ambitious Capital Programme and this will need to be funded at all times. We have to be mindful of the financial stability of the Council. He advised Members that the Budget presented is fair and strikes a balanced between competing demands for limited resources, while protecting the delivery of our services to the people of Kilkenny. As a Council we have to address the impact that the unprecedented level of inflation is having on our services. This Budget facilitates continued investment in key infrastructure and amenities and supports our work at community level across County Kilkenny. He recommended adoption of the draft Budget for 2025 to the Elected Members.

Cllr. Michael McCarthy thanked the Chief Executive and invited Mr. Martin Prendiville, Head of Finance to give an overview of the Budget and present details of each Service Division.

Mr. Prendiville advised that the Budget Book was issued to Members on 29th November, 2024 and workshops have been held with Elected Members to discuss the details of the Budget. These Workshops have been invaluable in shaping the Budget for 2025. Difficult decisions had to be made in terms of spending. Draft budgetary plans have been adopted by each Municipal District for the General Municipal Allocations subject to funding being available. Mr. Prendiville gave a presentation to the Elected Members under the following headings:

- Budget Challenges.
- Local Property Tax.
- Inflation.
- Commercial Rates.

He advised that all of the discretionary expenditure has been maintained. We await Road Grant Allocations for 2025 but this does not materially affect the Budget presented.

Following Mr. Prendiville's presentation, Cathaoirleach Cllr. Michael McCarthy thanked him for his presentation. Cllrs. Andrew McGuinness, Mary Hilda Cavanagh, Eugene McGuinness and Seán Ó hArgáin raised queries and commented on the following:

- Impact of a 6% rate increase would have on small local businesses.
- Funding system of local government in Ireland.
- Recognised the volume of work involved in preparing a Budget.

Mr. Prendiville responded to queries raised.

It was:

Proposed by: Cllr. Andrew McGuinness

Seconded by: Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh

And Agreed

"That the Budget Meeting would adjourn for 15 minutes to allow discussions to take place amongst the political groups."

When the meeting resumed Cllr. Andrew McGuinness advised that the Elected Members are not in favour of a 6% rate increase as presented in the Budget Book and it was:

Proposed by: Cllr. Andrew McGuinness

Seconded by: Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh

And Agreed

"That the Budget Meeting would adjourn for a further 5 minutes to allow the Finance Team to look at what impact a 4% rate increase would have on the Budget".

When the meeting resumed, Mr. Prendiville outlined the impact a 4% rate increase would have on the overall budget stating that total income would be reduced by €265,000 and it will be necessary to reduce the prompt payment Rates Incentive Grants Scheme to 8.3%. The impact on the small rate payer will be relatively small and the proposed increases set out in the Budget Book will be reduced across the Programme Groups.

At this stage, the Elected Members agreed for Mr. Prendiville to proceed to highlight some of the significant items in each Service Division and referred Members to the first Service Area.

1. Service Division A: Housing & Building

Total Expenditure - € 30.75. Increase of €4.5m. Total Income €32.856m

- Housing Maintenance – Increase of €3.45m.
- Estate Management - €75k, no change.
- Homeless – increase in Grants of €298k.
- RAS – expenditure increased by €92k.
- Croí Conaithe Grants - €2m, no change.
- Housing Loans Interest - €1.5m.
- (A09 – PG 60) Housing Grants – increase of €200k.
- Grants and Subsidies Income – additional income of €3.3m.
- Housing Rents Income – additional income of €1.3m.

On the proposal of Cllr. Andrew McGuinness seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That the expenditure and income in Service Division A was considered and noted."

2. Service Division B: Road Transportation Safety

Total Expenditure € 31.385m. Increase of €1.425m Total Income €22.5m

- Community Involvement Scheme – Increase of €230k.
- Provision for Local Roads Maintenance – increased of €285k.
- Municipal funding allocation - €200k, no change.
- Public Lighting Energy/Maintenance Costs – increased of €294k
- Loan Charges – PLEEP – increased of €100k.
- Car Parking costs – increased of €10k.
- Roads Grants income – not confirmed until early 2025.
- Parking Charges – increased of €150k.

On the proposal of Cllr. Andrew McGuinness seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That expenditure and income in Service Division B was considered and noted."

3. **Service Division C: Water Services**

- Budget for 2025 not yet agreed with Uisce Eireann.
- Draft budget assumes full cost recovery except for salaries with <50% allocation.
- Administration of group and private wells – increase of €350k.
- Budget for maintenance of public convenience €65k, no change.
- Central Management Charge recovery Uisce Eireann – Assume full recovery.
- Other income – increase of €250k for well testing and auditing.

On the proposal of Cllr. Andrew McGuinness seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That the expenditure and income in Service Division C was considered and noted."

4. **Service Division D: Development Management**

Total Expenditure €15.419m. Increase of €0.7m. Total Income €6.59m

- Forward planning – increase of €120k.
- Development Management – increase of €39k.
- Enforcement Costs – increase of €11k.
- Festival Support – increase of €29k.
- Yulefest Kilkenny – increase of €30k.
- St. Patrick's Festival Kilkenny – increase of €35k.
- Maintenance of Woodstock – increase of €20k.
- Contribution to Castlecomer Discover Park – increase of €80k.
- Community Salaries and Expenses – increase of €178k.
- Town Regeneration Office Salaries/Expenses – increase of €206k.
- SICAP – increase of €360k.
- Bike Week – increase of €10k.
- Creative Ireland – increase of €15k.
- Support Women in Local Government – increase of €10k.
- Contribution to Regional Assembly – increase of €19k.
- National Broadband Plan and BCPs – increase of €35k.
- Economic Programme – increase of €20k.
- Night Time Economy Pilot – increase of €15k.
- Exit 4 Urlingford – increase of €20k.
- Biodiversity Programme – increase of €75k.
- Irish Walled Towns Network Fund – increase of €28k.
- Grants and Subsidies reduction in income – decrease of €982k (Ukrainian Supports).
- Planning Fees Income – €582k, no change.

On the proposal of Cllr. Andrew McGuinness seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That expenditure and income in Service Division D was considered and noted."

5. Service Division E: Environmental Services

Total Expenditure €18.992m. Increase of €2.093m. Total Income €7.7m

- Historical Landfills – increase of €35k.
- Bring Banks/Recycling – €197k, no change.
- Dunmore Civic Amenity - €850k, no change.
- Anti Dumping/residual waste - €223k, no change.
- Litter Management – increase of €31k.
- Street Cleaning – €1.39m, no change.
- Enforcement – increase €47k.
- Increases of €14k for Burial Grounds.
- Increase of €29k for Civil Defence.
- Substantial Increases for Fire Service – increase in salaries/wages, pensions, WRC Agreement.
- Provision for additional payroll costs for Climate Action.

On the proposal of Cllr. Andrew McGuinness seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That the expenditure and income in Service Division E was considered and noted."

6. Service Division F: Recreation & Amenity

Total Expenditure €9.43m. Increase €0.85m Total Income €312k

- Library Book Fund – increase of €28k
- Playground Maintenance – increase of €90k.
- Increase in provision for Parks operational costs – increase of €263k
- Operation of Arts Programme – increase of €64k.

On the proposal of Cllr. Andrew McGuinness seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That expenditure and income in Service Division F was considered and noted."

7. Service Division G: Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare

Total Expenditure € 354,000

- Provision increased for Dog Control - €5k.
- Increase in cost of Horse Control - €3k

On the proposal of Cllr. Andrew McGuinness seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That expenditure and income in Service Division G was considered and noted."

8. Service Division H - Miscellaneous Services

Total Expenditure €6.9m. Increase €610k. Total Income €5.6m

- Rates refunds/strike off – increase €365k.
- Coronor's costs – increase €36k.
- Franchise Costs – increase of €35k.
- Motor Taxation Office – increase of €17k.
- Payroll compensation – increase of €1.5m.

On the proposal of Cllr. Andrew McGuinness seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That expenditure and income in Service Division G was considered and noted."

9. Service Division J – Central Costs

Total Expenditure €16.3m. Increase €1.1m. Total Income €950k.

- Corporate Buildings – increase €24k.
- Corporate Costs – increase €192k.
- I.T. Services – increase of €322k.
- Human Resources – increase of €244k.

On the proposal of Cllr. Andrew McGuinness seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That expenditure and income in Service Division J was considered and noted."

It was proposed by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh, seconded by Cllr. Andrew McGuinness and agreed:

"That Kilkenny 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 50% of rates due to Kilkenny County Council by liable person for the financial year ending 31st December 2025."

It was proposed by Cllr. Andrew McGuinness, seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That for the financial year ending 31st December, 2025, Kilkenny County Council will increase the Rates Incentive Grants Scheme to a grant of 8.3% of the 2025 rate demand (excluding arrears) up to a maximum value of €300 subject to the satisfying of existing terms and conditions"

It was proposed by Cllr. Andrew McGuinness, seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That the Budget of Kilkenny County Council for the financial year ending 31st December, 2025 as set out in Table B, be adopted, as amended".

It was proposed by Cllr. Andrew McGuinness, seconded by Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh and agreed:

"That the rates set in Table A, of the Draft Budget of Kilkenny County Council for the year ending 31st December, 2025 be determined in accordance with the said Budget to the Annual Rate on Valuation to be levied for that year for the purposes set out in Table A, as amended."

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Michael McCarthy thanked Mr. Lar Power and Mr. Martin Prendiville for the detailed overview of the Budget for 2025.

Cllrs. Mary Hilda Cavanagh, Andrew McGuinness and Tomás Breathnach acknowledged all the work involved over the last few months in preparing the 2025 Budget in these difficult and challenging times. Budget 2025 has provided for the protection of the full range of services and grants to organisations and communities and are delighted that the Budget has been passed unanimously. It is important to retain relationship with our communities. The Members thanked their fellow Councillors for engaging fully in the preparation of the Budget and for their attendance at the many workshops. They thanked the Chief Executive and Head of Finance for the time given to all the Members during the preparation of the Budget and for being available to answer their queries at all times.

Mr. Martin Prendiville thanked all involved in the Budget process especially the Elected Members, the Whips and the Cathaoirleach for their contribution and robust discussions on the various issues in the Budget during the Workshops. He also thanked the Management Team, the Finance staff and all staff involved in preparing Budgets and Reports.

Chief Executive, Lar Power stated that it has not been easy to present a balanced Budget but this process has been a demonstration of the excellent manner in which the Executive and Elected Members must work together to deliver for the people of Kilkenny.

He thanked his colleagues on the Management Team for their input in the preparation of the Budget. He expressed sincere gratitude to Martin Prendiville and his team in Finance for the budget preparations. He willingly made himself available at all times to Elected Members over the last few weeks. He paid tribute to all the Finance Staff for their work in financial management over the year. He thanked all the staff across the Council for all their work throughout the year.

Mr Power thanked the Elected Members for their attendance at Workshops and their due diligence and careful consideration given to the budget process. He expressed thanks in particular to the Whips for their guidance.

Finally, he thanked the Cathaoirleach for his support and all the Elected Members for their civic leadership throughout the year.

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Michael McCarthy thanked Lar Power, Martin Prendiville and all staff for their preparation of the Draft Budget. He thanked all the Elected Members for engaging in the process and attending the Workshops.

That concluded the business of the meeting.

CATHAOIRLEACH

DATE