

**Minutes of Budget 2021 Meeting of Clare County Council held in Glór, Ennis,  
Co. Clare on Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2020 at 3:30 p.m.**

**Present:**

Councillors M. Howard, M. Nestor, C. Colleran Molloy, P. Murphy, A. Norton, P. Daly, J. Cooney, A. O’Callaghan, J. Crowe, M. Begley, P.J. Ryan, P. McMahon, G. Flynn, D. McGettigan, P. O’Gorman, J. Killeen, J. Garrihy, P.J. Kelly, B. Chambers, G. Keating, C. Murphy.

**Attending via MS teams:** Cllrs. J. Flynn, P. Hayes, P. Burke, T. O’Brien, S. Talty, I. Lynch, S. Crawford.

- Mr. Pat Dowling, Chief Executive.
- Ms. Ann Reynolds, Meetings Administrator.
- Ms. Margaret O’Rourke, Assistant Staff Officer.
- Ms. Anne Haugh, Director of Social Development.
- Mr. Liam Conneally, Director of Economic Development.
- Mr. Leonard Cleary, Director of Rural Development.
- Ms. Carmel Kirby, Director of Physical Development.
- Ms. Noeleen Fitzgerald, Director of Finance and Support Services.
- Ms. Trina Rynne, Financial Accountant.
- Ms. Caroline O’Connor, Management Accountant.
- Mr. Seán Lenihan, Senior Engineer, Physical Development.
- Mr. John Leahy, Senior Engineer, Physical Development.
- Ms. Siobhán McNulty, Senior Executive Officer, Social Development.

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Mary Howard presided and extended congratulations to the following:

- Clare Youth Action Group from Ennistymon, winners of the Pride of Place Awards 2020.
- Labasheeda Le Chéile who were runners up and
- Clare Community Action who were finalists in this competition.
  
- The Burren Eco Tourism Network winners of the Lonely Planet Best in Travel 2021 Award.

Congratulations were extended to the following projects shortlisted in Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards:-

- Ennis Municipal District Mobility Plan – Outstanding Initiatives through the Municipal Districts
- Ennistymon Multi Service Innovation Centre - Supporting Sustainable Communities

- Ballyalla Lake Amenity Enhancement Plan - Best Practice in Community engagement
- Clare Food and Drink Fleadh - Festival of the Year Category
- Restoration and refurbishment of Turret Lodge, Kilrush - Heritage and Built Environment Section and
- The winner in the Best Library Service category was awarded to the Syrian Literacy Project – connections – stories by Syrian families in County Clare.

The Cathaoirleach then called on the Chief Executive, Pat Dowling to introduce Budget 2021.

Mr. Dowling addressed the meeting and stated that for the past nine months Clare County Council has played a huge role in underpinning local confidence that the county will cope with the challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic, because it has the necessary resilience to address this and other probable future challenges.

Mr. Dowling stated that Clare County Council must adjust, rebuild and recover while always being ambitious and confident for the future. He assured the members that services will be maintained as much as possible and that savings must be found in ways internal to the operations of the Council.

Mr. Dowling informed the meeting that he fully understands the importance of local discretionary funding via the GMA, the pressures on business and commerce in the context of rates and the value of business supports, as well as the need to awaken dormant commercial activity. Furthermore, Mr. Dowling stated that provision has been made for a number of additional strategic initiatives crucial to the future well being of our county and communities, notably Forward Planning for our county towns and capital, and an intensified approach to dealing with unrest and anti-social activities and unauthorised occupation.

Mr. Dowling stated that the financial impact of Covid on the local authority sector in 2020 totalled in the region of €175m, comprising loss of income in goods and services and also exceptional and unforeseen costs arising from the Covid crisis. In Clare that loss of income is €5.6m and increased spending commitment is close to €2m.

Mr. Dowling continued that the financial challenges in the year and years ahead will be compounded by the long-term effects of Covid, the revaluation of ESB Moneypoint and the high dependency of Clare and Clare County Council in it's former vibrant tourism sector. Projected loss of income/buoyancy in 2021 could reach up to €400m across the local authority sector and this is significantly worse in relative terms given our high dependency on tourism. This represents ongoing loss in goods and services income, additional uncollectable rates vacancy, bad debt provision and additional Covid expenditure.

Mr. Dowling acknowledged the backing of the Council's parent Department in offsetting a significant proportion of the projected loss of rates/income from Moneypoint to the value of €2.5m, yet to be formally confirmed.

Mr. Dowling noted the interventions of Central Government and the advocacy of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in leveraging assistance via Department of Public Expenditure and Reform/Department of Finance to help overcome our financial difficulties in 2020.

Mr. Dowling stated that the proposed current/revenue account for 2021 totals €131m and projected capital expenditure of approx. €93m over three years (conditional on income, grants and matching funding). Mr. Dowling informed the members that many elements of Clare County Councils finances for 2021 will be contingent upon further government support, particularly if the Covid-19 trajectory continues unfavourably,

Mr. Dowling thanked Mayor, Cllr. Mary Howard for her ongoing support and he thanked all the members who engaged in the preparation of this budget at Municipal District and county level.

Mr. Dowling acknowledged the hard work of the Council's Finance team under Noeleen Fitzgerald, Director of Finance, ably supported by Caroline O'Connor and Trina Rynne and others and stated that the preparation of our Budget for 2021 has been extremely difficult. Mr. Dowling recommended the Draft Budget 2021 to Council for consideration.

Noeleen Fitzgerald, Director of Finance and Support Services gave a presentation on Clare County Council's Draft Budget 2021 and outlined the purpose of the meeting as follows:

1. Consider the Chief Executive's Draft Budget of Clare County Council for year ending 31st December, 2021.
  - i. Adopt budget 2021
  - ii. To determine, in accordance with the Budget adopted, the annual rate on valuation to be levied.
  - iii. To determine the proportion of commercial rates refund / credit that applies on vacant properties in 2021 within the administrative area of Clare County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 31 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, and Part 5 of the Local Government (Financial and Audit Procedures) Regulations, 2014, and Section 14 of the Local Government Act, 1946, which is recommended to be set at 25% for 2021.
  - iv. To consider the adoption of the Vacant Property Refund Scheme 2021 to encourage the beneficial use of commercial property in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014. Tiered vacancy credit relief as outlined in Chief Executive Report and summary document attached.

- v. To consider the adoption of the Small and Medium Business 10% Support Scheme 2021 in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014.
  - vi. To consider the adoption of the Long Term Vacant Property Incentive Scheme 2021 from 01/01/2021 until 31/12/2021 in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014.
  - vii. To Approve Additional Expenditure 2020 Under Section 104 Local Government Act 2001 for the financial Year 2020 as set out in the Draft Budget report 2021- table B.
2. Consider the Capital Programme 2021-2023 in accordance with Section 135 (2) of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act, 2014.

Ms. Fitzgerald provided an outline of the highlights of the draft Budget 2021 together with details of the Long Term Vacant Property Incentive Scheme 2021, the SME scheme and schemes to incentivise property occupation. Ms. Fitzgerald presented details of the revenue and capital expenditure for 2015 – 2021 as well as details of the capital expenditure for 2021 – 2023.

## **Social Development Directorate**

**Division A    Housing and Building**  
**Division F    Recreation & Amenity**

Cllr. G. Flynn, Chair of the Social Development S.P.C. addressed the meeting and provided an outline of activities for the Social Development Directorate which administers responsibility for the housing, cultural and recreational services delivered by Clare County Council.

Cllr. G. Flynn provided details of the capital programme for the Social Development Directorate as well as provisions in housing maintenance, tenancy management, homeless services, RAS, HAP and Social leasing.

Cllr. G. Flynn outlined provisions for library and arts service as well as the leisure facilities.

## **Physical Development Directorate**

**Division B    Road Transport and Safety**  
**Division C    Water Services**  
**Division E    Environmental Services**  
**Division G    Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare**

Cllr. J. Crowe, Chair of Physical Development S.P.C. addressed the meeting and

provided a summary of activities for the Physical Development Directorate. Cllr. J. Crowe provided details of capital projects being managed by the Council's Project Management Office together with projects being undertaken by the Road Design Office, the General Design Office and the Emergency Services.

Cllr. J. Crowe stated that Clare County Council continues to deliver the objectives of the climate change adaptation strategy. Clare County Council attained international accreditation for our Council Energy Management Systems in 2020 and this will greatly assist the Council in achieving its long term 2030 energy efficiency targets.

Details of the Environment Departments programme of monitoring and enforcement measures were outlined together with details of Service Level Agreement with Irish Water and the provision of water services and related capital investment. Cllr. J. Crowe also outlined details of the Ennis Public Realm Enhancement programme being progressed by Ennis Municipal District.

## **Economic Development Directorate**

### **Division D Development Management**

Cllr. P. McMahon, Chair of the Economic Development S.P.C. addressed the meeting and outlined key objectives for the Economic Development Directorate for 2021 which include progressing the University of Limerick/South Clare Campus Strategic Development Zone, Clare Marine Education Training facility and Ennis Data Centre.

Cllr. P. McMahon provided an update on the Ennis 2040 Economic and Spatial Strategy, Forward Planning and Statutory Plans, vacant sites, Local Enterprise Office, development management, development contributions, taking in charge, property management and derelict sites.

## **Rural Development Directorate**

### **Division D Development Management**

Cllr. P. Hayes, Chair of the Rural Development S.P.C. addressed the meeting and provided an overview of the main activities in this area which included the Clare Community Response to Covid-19, Clare Tourism Strategy 2030, the Cliffs of Moher Strategy 2040 and Clare County Council's Digital Hub programme.

Cllr. P. Hayes provided details of rural and community projects that were supported by grant funding at local level.

Cllr. P. Hayes informed the meeting that investment continues at a multi-million euro level in our Clare RRDF projects at Inis Cealtra (Holy Island), Vandeleur Stables, Loop Head and Lahinch Seaworld.

Cllr. P. Hayes referred to funding provided for burial grounds and community grants.

**Division H    Miscellaneous Services**  
**Division J    Central Management Services**

Details of Finance and Support Services were outlined in the Draft Budget 2021.

The elected members raised queries in relation to the Local Property Tax equalisation fund, long term vacant properties, commercial rates and the Rebuilding Ireland home loans. Noeleen Fitzgerald, Director of Finance and Support Services replied to the queries raised by the members.

The elected members thanked Pat Dowling, Chief Executive, Noeleen Fitzgerald, Director of Finance and Support Services and her team and all the Council executive for their work and support in preparing Budget 2021. The Councillors present acknowledged the engagement by the Council executive in sourcing solutions to issues raised during the year and addressing these issues in the budget for 2021.

Ar moladh Cllr. J. Cooney  
Cuidithe ag Cllr. B. Chambers agus glacadh leis

“That pursuant to Section 103 of the Local Government Act 2001 (substituted by Section 58 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014) the Draft Budget 2021 as presented by the Chief Executive is hereby adopted.”

Ar moladh Cllr. P.J. Ryan  
Cuidithe ag Cllr. C. Colleran Molloy agus glacadh leis

“That the Council hereby determine in accordance with the draft budget 2021 as presented by the Chief Executive, the General Annual Rate on Valuation for the County of 72.99 set out in Table A.”

**Ar moladh Cllr. C. Murphy**  
**Cuidithe ag Cllr. A. O’Callaghan agus glacadh leis**

“That in accordance with the provisions of Section 31 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, and Part 5 of the Local Government (Financial and Audit Procedures) Regulations, 2014, and Section 14 of the Local Government Act, 1946, that the proportion of commercial rates refund / credit that applies on vacant properties in 2021 will be 25%.”

Ar moladh Cllr. J. Crowe  
Cuidithe ag Cllr. P. Daly agus glacadh leis

“That to encourage the beneficial use of commercial property, approve in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the

Local Government Reform Act, 2014. A tiered vacancy property refund/ credit scheme as outlined in Chief Executive Report and below.

<b>Band</b>	<b>%</b>
Up to €20,000 Annual Rate Demand	75%
€20,001 to €50,000 Annual Rate Demand	50%
€50,001 to €100,000 Annual Rate Demand	25%
Over €100,001 Annual Rate Demand	0%

Ar moladh Cllr. J. Garrihy  
Cuidithe ag Cllr. M. Nestor agus glacadh leis

“To consider the adoption of the Small and Medium Business 10% Support Scheme 2021 in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014.

The SME 10% Support Scheme for 2021 is in respect of occupied properties, with a total rates value up to €10,000, will provide for a 10% credit, to a maximum of €750.00, against the subsequent year commercial rates liability where the customer discharges their rates invoice by direct debit in the year. Exceptions to the scheme:

- Pipeline, Mast/Antenna, Generating Station, Advertising Station, Global Valuations and ATM.”

Ar moladh Cllr. P. Daly  
Cuidithe ag Cllr. J. Flynn agus glacadh leis

“To consider the adoption of the Long Term Vacant Property Incentive Scheme 2021 from 01/01/2021 until 31/12/2021 in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014.

By encouraging the re-occupation of vacant premises that were previously occupied and now vacant, the grant scheme is a grant of the following where the commercial rates are paid in full in the financial year.

- 75% of commercial rates payable in year one up to a maximum of €3,750
- 50% of commercial rates payable in year two up to a maximum of €2,500
- 25% of commercial rates payable in year three up to a maximum of €1,250”

Ar moladh Cllr. M. Begley  
Cuidithe ag Cllr. P. Murphy agus glacadh leis

“Pursuant to the provisions of Section 104 of the Local Government Act 2001, additional expenditure in the amounts set out below in respect of the Divisions listed is hereby approved:

Division A:	Housing and Building	€1,577,449
Division B:	Road Transport & Safety	€1,188,610
Division C:	Water Services	€254,271
Division D:	Development Management	€10,698,028
Division E:	Environmental Services	€644,770
Division H:	Recreation & Amenity	€675,923

The Cathaoirleach thanked the members, Chief Executive, Directors of Service and Director of Finance and their staff for their co-operation in the preparation and adoption of the Budget for 2021. She also thanked members of the Corporate Policy Group and all members for their input into the Budget process.

The meeting then concluded at 4:45 p.m.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Riarthóir Cruinnithe**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Cathaoirleach**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_