

LIMERICK CITY COUNCIL

The Annual Budget Meeting of Limerick City Council was held in the Council Chamber, City Hall on Thursday, 11th December, 2008 at 2.00 pm

The following were in attendance:

In the Chair: Cllr. John Gilligan, Mayor

Councillors: J Leddin, K. Leddin, J. Cronin, G Fahy, K. Kiely, G. McLoughlin, J. Houlihan, J. Long, M. Hourigan, J Ryan, K. O’Hanlon, K Walsh, P Kennedy, L. Wallace, M. Byrne, and D Scully.

Officers Present: T. Mackey, City Manager
P Dromey, Director of Services
C. Curley, Director of Services
K. Lehane, Director of Services
P. Dowling, Director of Services
J. Field, Head of Finance
P. Murnane, Financial Accountant
C. Quaid – Clerical Officer
G Dillon – Senior Executive Officer
J Delaney, Senior Executive Officer
P Liddy – Senior Executive Officer
C Sheedy – Internal Auditor
V Murray – Senior Engineer
D Winston – Executive Engineer
S Deegan – Arts Officer
S. Doherty – Acting Senior Staff Officer

Cllr J Gilligan, Mayor, opened the meeting outlining the outstanding progress made by Limerick City Council in recent years in reducing down Commercial Rates charges. The reduction by Limerick City Council over the previous three budgets, contrasted with increased over the same period by all other Irish local authorities including, Cork City, Waterford City, Dublin City, and Limerick County Council.

He further recognised that Limerick City Council was continually in Revenue Deficit from 1979 up to 2005, and there has been a turn-around in the management of Limerick City Council's finance in recent years. Cllr Gilligan referred to the positive work arising from the City Centre Strategy, Riverside Strategy.

Cllr Gilligan made specific note of his disappointment of a 7% reduction in the Local Government Fund (LGF) from central Government in 2009, even though the land mass of Limerick City Council has increase by a further 50% with the boundary extension.

The City Manager stated he was presenting this Annual Budget for 2009 which incorporated a large programme of works for the year ahead, with budget expenditure of €88.8m. The Manager stated that the year ahead will be difficult due to the national economic slowdown, and much has changed since Budget 2008's meeting as a result.

The Manager commented on the reduction in the Rates Support Grant. He further outlined that Limerick City Council is in a much better place to establish a steady financial position for the City, with accounts balancing each year, which illustrates the financially prudent approach taken by Limerick City Council in recent years.

The Manager outlined to the members that the format of Budge 2009 had changed due to the introduction of a new Costing system, which is implemented to reflect the true costs of services.

The Manager further outlined to the members of the need to have a successful heart to our City, and the need to improve the City's economic base. There is also a need to consider the disadvantaged areas of city as well, with continued focus on the Regeneration effort. He further stated to the members that in preparing the budget there is a need to ensure Rates and Charges do not become an economic burden, while highlighting the need to delivery quality services and products to the public. He outlined central government have requested a 3% cut in payroll costs in 2009, which had to be delivered. With limited resources there is a need to prioritise where they are used, which will involve re-deploying some staff and will also advertising certain vacancies as they arise during the year, and he would endeavour to ensure that services will not be negatively effected.

The Manager thanked the Corporate Policy Group, Council members, Head of Finance, Directors of Services, Cllr Ger Fahy (Mayor for 2007/2008), the finance staff and all senior staff in Limerick City Council for their input in the preparation of Budget 2009.

He outlined that Limerick City Council would be seeking a 3% increase to the Annual Rate on Valuation for 2009.

The Manager recommended the adoption of the Annual Budget as set out.

The Mayor thanked the City Manager and requested the Members to proceed to consider the Annual Budget programme group by programme group.

The following are the main points highlighted by Councillors categorised by Programme group.

Cllr J Leddin:-

- Expressed his concern with the 7% reduction in the Local Government Fund, even though Limerick City Council's boundary has been extended. He further noted, Limerick County Council's ability to have no increase in Rates in 2009, which highlights the boundary issue.
- Noted the achievement of the RAS (Rental Accommodation Scheme) unit, and congratulated them.
- Stated that the Windows & Doors programme was one of the most successful housing projects in recent years.
- Stated that DPG's process should be simplified.
- Expressed his support for the concept of Regeneration, but is of the opinion the Masterplans are aspirational.
- Outlined his preference for councillors to convene a meeting with Regeneration Agencies, setting priorities jointly on how monies to be spent, such as on a Retirement village.
- Outlined that Social aspects of Regeneration are very important, and requested Mr Brendan Kenny set up a meeting with the Department of Education to progress plans.
- Asked if there was a possibility of introducing an 'insulation' scheme for houses.
- Questioned if it would be possible to look at similar schemes housing the elderly such as Vizes Court, and also re-house elderly people currently in 3 or 4 bed houses to smaller houses, and free up such homes for families.
- Noted the effectiveness of the Public Realm strategy, which has resulted in a palpable buzz in the city, with shoppers returning.
- Welcomed the new library in the City.
- Welcomed Affordable Housing units that came on stream during year.
- Requested that the increase in the Annual Rate on Valuation be reduced by as much as possible, and that he was aware of the zero rates buoyancy existing in the city.
- Complimented the success of predestination in the city.
- Asked the Director of Service to be conscious of parking permit appeals.
- Requested an update on the start date of the inner orbital route.
- Welcomed the taking-in-charge of the Georgian Village on Old Cork Road.
- Expressed disappointment with funding under the Gateway Innovation Fund (€300m) not being made available in 2009.

Cllr Jim Long:-

- Expressed his concerns about the existence of lead water pipes in the city, and there is an urgent need to review this issue, and obtain funding from Minister Gormley.
- Queried what €8m in Regeneration would be spent on.

- Queried what programmes were being rolled-out to deal with lead pipe replacement, and asked if meeting has taken place with the Minister to seek funding.
- Queried if the water quality of the Shannon is up to standard, due to primary sewage treatment system on one side of the city in Clare Co Co and on the other side of the city in Limerick Co Co. He outlined there is a need to engage with neighbouring local authorities.
- Asked if there would now be an additional charge for dry recyclables in the City due to the down-turn in market for recyclable goods.
- Welcomed the efforts made in Baggot Estate.
- Asked for reinstatement of walkways lost due to the Direct Route South Ring Road project.
- Commended Caroline Curley and her staff on the Refuse Waiver Scheme.
- Queried if the smoke alarm scheme would be rolled out to local authority houses in 2009.
- Outlined he was looking forward to seeing the Dockers monument in 2009.

Cllr. Pat Kennedy:-

- Requested addition of the following to the end of Section 5, Page 17 of the Report accompanying the Annual Budget as follows:
 “However, it was noted that it was the unanimous decision of Limerick City Council not to proceed with Green Routes at Ballinacurra Road/ O’Connell Avenue, Mulgrave Street/Roches Street, Ennis Road and Bengal Terrace”
 This additional paragraph was proposed by Cllr. Pat Kennedy and seconded by Cllr. Kieran Walsh and unanimously agreed.
- Noted a reduction in the Local Government Fund of 7% was regrettable and crippling, and it illustrated Central Government has little regard for elected representative to act locally.
- Requested a transparent statement on regeneration – as the Regeneration Agencies are agents of Limerick City Council.
- Congratulated the Community Co-ordinators scheme.
- Outlined there has been delays in processing Disabled Person’s Grants (DPG’s).
- Queried the possibility of Affordable Housing being made available to young people.
- Queried what was being done in Limerick City to secure funding for the area of building conservation and protected structures, and specifically asked if the Council could look at Brian Boru House, Mulgrave St. from conservation perspective.
- Requested some data on the performance of the Domestic Refuse Disposal waiver scheme.
- Referred to the Urban Forestry scheme, and outlined that it’s a good initiative, but there is a need to ensure such areas are secure. He requested that pedestrian walks be opened up, and specifically made reference to security concerns in the Baggot Estate, and Ballinacurra.

- Requested Southern Ring Road project reinstates walk-ways for public in Ballinacurra Gardens area.
- Congratulated the business community in Limerick for continually to invest in the City over the last number of years, which has lead to rates buoyancy over this time-frame.
- Noted, even though Limerick City Council got a boundary extension, net effective valuation increased by 4.2% only.
- Expressed his preference for a reduction in the increased rate of 3% to aid the business communities, and was in agreement with the Chamber of Commerce.

Cllr. K O'Hanlon:-

- Expressed his regret of the cuts in local roads and footpaths, and asked if this would increase the level of claims against Limerick City Council.
- Noted that the public lighting was in adequate in some estates and welcomed the increased allocation towards this area.
- Expressed his dissatisfaction with the Traffic Lights in the following locations – on Dublin Road, Childers Road, which he said he has queried before, and also the traffic lights outside old Dunnes Stores on Liddy Street.

Cllr. J Cronin:-

- Highlighted the 'world' is in recession and not just Ireland.
- Welcomed the regeneration process, and asked the question if the O'Malley Park Regeneration monies of €15.8m were not accessible due to the appointment of the Regeneration agencies.
- Welcomed any possible reduction in increase of the Annual Rate on Valuation to encourage development of business in the City, and to reverse the donought effect with retail parks etc. in the suburbs.
- Congratulated St. Munchin's Centre.
- Outlined in his opinion there was a lot of 'red-tape' in the DPG process, and asked if it could be simplified.
- Expressed that in his opinion there were too many off-licences and takeaways in the City, and if anything could be done from a tax perspective to limit them
- Welcomed the developments and remedial works at Longpavement Landfill.
- Congratulated the Parks staff, and expressed his preference for more play areas for children.
- Thanked the Fire Service and Civil Defence staff for their services during the year.

Cllr. M. Hourigan

- Complemented the works on O’Callaghan and Clancy Strands.
- Requested that Borough Boundary extension issue be brought to Dail Eireann by local representatives.
- Expressed his concern of the non-renewal of employment contracts for temporary staff.
- Queried if the Shared Ownership programme was still in existence.
- Outlined that there was wonderful work being carried out in St. Munchin’s Centre.
- Queried if any change on part of the route on the Orbital route (Patrick Street/Lelia Street).
- Asked if there were any talks about having Park Ride facilities on the North side of the city.
- Asked if there was any chance of including the Creek onto Ennis Road as far as Moyross in the Boardwalk project.
- Asked if it was possible to have a Portoloo in Shelbourne Park.
- Asked the Manager for clarification the possible effects of not securing funding in 2009 under the Gateway Innovation Fund.
- Complemented the work done on the weeds in Westfields, and asked for this to be continued in 2009.
- Queried if Limerick City Council were in discussion with HSE on the LYMPA grounds.
- Complemented the work of Limerick Civic Trust.
- Complemented the library staff, and queried what was happening with the Caherdavin library.
- Expressed his satisfaction with the management of the Municipal Golf Course.

Cllr. M Byrne:-

- Requested that people remaining in Hyde Road/Bourke Avenue be moved to alternative accommodation, as most of units are already empty.
- Outlined some blocks of houses could be re-let, rather than being left empty.
- Complemented the Vizes Court scheme, and requested a full-time caretaker being appointed.
- Complemented the RAS programme, and the 450 inspections carried out.
- Requested that talks with local residents be held in relation to the relocation of the Homeless centre.
- Queried if funding had arrived for O’Connell Street modelling.
- Noted green route being built on Condell Road, and asked if any possibility of putting bus lane on Dock Road.
- Asked if the widening of Punches Cross is due to take place.
- Congratulated the Library staff, and particularly the success in Watchhouse Cross Library.
- Requested that further funding be given to workshops held in the Art Gallery.
- Queried where funding for Art Gallery extension would come from.

- Welcomed the opening of the Artists apartments next year.
- Referred to City of Learning audit currently underway.

Cllr. L. Wallace:-

- Stated she was not in favour of reducing the proposed increase in the annual rate on valuation, and wants to see more investment in William Street.
- Congratulated the Parks department.
- Expressed her dissatisfaction with a reduced Local Government Fund, and asked if the Manager had discussed this with the Department of Environment.
- Asked for clarification on how the non renewal of temporary contracts and embargo on the replacement of certain positions will impact on services and council staff.
- Express her disappointment that consultation with councillors was very low in preparation of the Regeneration Masterplan.
- Queried why the Estate Management Office was opened for 1.5 hours during day only.
- Outlined in her opinion that the Community Coordinators should disperse themselves further, rather than working in groups of 3 people.
- Complemented the RAS scheme.
- Expressed her concern over Jail Boreen, which can be chaotic, and ask for Traffic Management plan
- Outlined that the Exit from Glasgow park currently has half box, currently not working.
- Outlined some issues in road and footpath maintenance in Galvone in Kennedy Park.
- Queried if REPAK are going to continue to pick up the bill for recycling of waste, or will the ordinary consumer have to pick up the cost.
- Congratulated all of those involved in the Skateboard park.
- Thanked the Council for its contribution to St. Enda's Sports Complex.

Cllr. K. Leddin:-

- Complemented management of Limerick City Council for the prudent management of finances over the last 5-6 years.
- Commented on the impact of County Council's planning permission policy and the negative effect it's having on the development of the city.
- Asked for DPG process to be simplified.
- Agreed with the prioritisation of a Retirement Village as one of the first steps of the Regeneration Agencies.
- Asked if there was a date for commencement and completion of the Riverside Boardwalk.
- Complemented the works on Clancy and O'Callaghan Strand.
- Outlined that the Ennis Road traffic volume, has an impact on local traffic on the Shelbourne Road and the North Circular Road – and asked if it would be possible to remedy this.

- Outlined that there was significant flooding in the middle-road on North Circular Road & asked for clarification if it was included in the plan for 2009.
- Expressed her agreement on City Council on Brian Boru House on Mulgrave St., and outlined that there may be title dispute on this property.
- Noted her appreciation for works in Westfields during 2008.
- Congratulated the Parks staff, especially their Bridges in Bloom programme.
- Asked if there were any plans for an extension of the Art Gallery, as it can be very crowded at exhibitions.
- Congratulated the new playground in Shelbourne Park.
- Expressed her satisfaction with the works carried out the church in St. Lawrence cemetery.
- Congratulated library staff on the success of Watchhouse Cross Library.

Cllr. G Fahy

- Expressed his concern with the 7% reduction in the Local Government Fund, even though Limerick City Council's boundary has been extended. He outlined that in his opinion Limerick City Council have been penalised rather than being rewarded for operating in a prudent manner over the last number of years.
- Expressed concern that the momentum behind Regeneration has slowed down, if not disappeared.
- Outlined his preference for Regeneration to commence immediately on a Retirement Village.
- Stated his satisfaction that DPG's allocation for 2009 was not cut.
- Complimented the City Co-ordinators on their successful work, and asked for clarification on the status of the city co-ordinators scheme for 2009 and beyond.
- Complimented the Civic Trust for their work over the years, carrying out 140 projects at a cost of €16m, which is impressive for a voluntary group.
- Acknowledged the great work of the Fire Service and Civil Defence.
- Commended the work of the Marine Search and Rescue volunteers.
- Expressed his concern that current funding structures for St. Enda's was inadequate, and would need to be reviewed by relevant stakeholders in the centre, particularly the Department of Education.

Cllr. K. Walsh:-

- Enquired about expenditure in service area B0103- discrepancy between Budget 2009 and Outturn 2008.
- Thanked the staff of Limerick City Council for their assistance during the year.
- Expressed his disappointment with the Gateway Innovation Fund monies not being made available in 2009.
- Welcomed the Boundary extension, and expressed his disappointment that the Local Government Fund didn't reflect this with an increased allocation.
- Congratulated all involved in the Skateboard park.

- Queried how much was to be given in grant aid to St. Enda's Sport Complex in Budget 2009.

Cllr. J. Houlihan:-

- Stated that was huge potential for Regeneration to make a difference to the city, but it was in danger of being perceived as a PR agency.
- Asked if it would be possible to know how funding on Estate Management was being spent.
- Stated that Bengal Terrace development was an important example of Affordable and Social Housing together, and was in important example of Social Inclusion.
- There is a need to 'take in charge' estates as soon as possible.
- Requested that St. Enda's be included in the strategy document of the Regeneration Agency for the Southside, and asked for confirm commitment to be obtained from the Regeneration Agency for this.
- Enquired how Estate Management Grants would be dealt with and managed.
- Expressed his concern about the non-renewal of contracts for temporary, and queried if services of council could continue to be delivered at the same level.
- He expressed his dissatisfaction with the possibility of jobs being outsourced in Limerick City Council, and he would not accept this position.
- Congratulated all of those involved in the Skateboard park.
- Thanked the Council for its contribution to St. Enda's Sports Complex.
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Cllr Scully

- Referred to the recessionary environment and general economic decline, with people being laid off in the Limerick region.
- Commented that the finance of Limerick City Council have been well managed over the last five years, and that is the National finances that have been mis-managed, but Limerick City Council is paying the costs of this with the reduction of 7% in the Local Government Fund.
- Recommended reduction in the proposed increase of 3% in the Annual Rate of Valuation.
- Welcomed that DPG's were not being cut in 2009.
- Expressed that he was sceptic of Regeneration – as initial reports were building to start in March 2009, but this is now set for January 2010. He expressed that Regeneration was impacting negatively on the values of people's homes – example of Carew Park was given. He outlined there's a need for certainty of the progress of Regeneration.
- Outlined that in his opinion Affordable Housing is not good in the current economic environment, due to risk of negative equity.
- Queried a number of figures in the Housing Finance Budget, which were addressed by Mr J Field.
- Queried the funding in the Roads Programme in the Budget.

- Clarified that Heritage funding had been obtained the City Walls project, and completed Brian Hodkinson for his contribution to the area of Heritage in the City.
- Noted that the area of Arts expenditure has fallen for 2009, and also community grants and book purchase fund was also effected negatively in 2009
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Cllr. K Kiely:-

- Complemented the Shelbourne Road housing scheme, and also the housing scheme in Thomondgate.
- Enquired if it would be possible to have security improved in local authority housing schemes, such as security gates, and mentioned specifically de Valera Park.
- Outlined Ballinanty Road and Shanabooley Road will be two new housing schemes in 2009
- Asked if further monies could be given to Kileely centre.
- Asked if houses for sale in Kileely could be purchased by the Council for those on the waiting lists.
- Knocklasheen distributor Road, is this on time for completion and what is the situation for funding.
- Complemented the Clancy and O'Callaghan Strand improvements.
- Requested the reinstatement of footpaths at Bellfield Gardens, Ennis Road.
- Expressed his concern that Limerick City Council planning section make a mistake in turning down part of recent planning application for the development at Coonagh Cross, and outlined the project could potentially employ up to 1,000 people.
- Expressed his concern that a fellow councillor may not have disclosed a possible conflict of interest in the council chamber when a planning application was being discussed.
- Requested that temporary footpaths be put in place in Mount St. Oliver, as certain areas are extremely wet for mourners to attend funerals there.

Cllr. G. McLoughlin:-

- Expressed his confidence in the Regeneration process, and law and order is a significant element in the Regeneration process.
- Enquired about the current status of the Grove Island roundabout traffic lights.
- Congratulated Caroline Curley and all her staff.
- Requested that some money be spent on the promotion of the city as a place to stay, shop, and demonstrate its sporting history.
- Congratulated the Parks staff for their bridges in bloom scheme, and also for winning an award for the People's Park.

- Queried the cost of rounding up loose horses, and asked if it was good value for money.
- Asked if it would be possible to operate schemes with Fás during the year, to clean up estates.
- Asked that Limerick City's fair trade status be maintained.
- Asked what did "initial consultation" for City Development Plan mean.
- Requested that sports grants to be given to school boy's clubs.

All Councillors commended and thanked Limerick City Council Staff for their hard work and commitment

Both Mr. Kieran Lehane and Mr Tom Mackey responded to any queries raised re Division A

Mr. Pat Dromey responded to any queries raised re Division B & C

Mr. John Field responded to any queries raised re Division D

Mr. Caroline Curley responded to any queries raised re Division E

Mr. Pat Dowling responded to any queries raised re Division F

Mr. John Field responded to any queries raised re Division G & H and Central Management Charge

Meeting adjourned at 4.55pm for 30 minutes.

Meeting adjourned at 6.30pm for 10 minutes.

Meeting adjourned 8.15pm for 15 minutes.

Meeting closed at 8.40pm.

It was proposed to consider Division B and Division C together by Cllr K Walsh, and seconded by Cllr J Leddin.

It was proposed to consider Divisions D & E together by Cllr. K Kiely, and seconded by Cllr Fahy.

It was proposed to consider Division F, G & H together by Cllr J Cronin, and seconded by Cllr Walsh.

Division A was proposed by Cllr. J Ryan and seconded by Cllr. G Fahy

Divisions B & C was proposed by Cllr. K. Kiely and seconded by Cllr. J Ryan.

Divisions D & E was proposed by Cllr. J Cronin and seconded by Cllr. K Kiely

Divisions F, G & H with amendment & resolution was proposed by Cllr. K O' Hanlon and seconded by Cllr. K Walsh.

Water and waste water charges were agreed by the members as noted in the Budget presented by the Manager.

The following resolution was put forward by the Mayor, and signed by Cllr K O'Hanlon and seconded by Cllr K Walsh, and was unanimously accepted by the Council:-

Resolution

THAT the draft Annual Budget for the financial year ending 31st December, 2009 prepared and circulated by the City Manager be amended as per the schedule attached. The amendment to central management charge outlined on the schedule will require a re-allocation to be run in the costing system.

AND THAT the amendments required to service support costs in each sub service are hereby approved on the basis that the total expenditure for 2009 will be €88,747,627.

AND THAT, as so amended, the Annual Budget be and is hereby adopted as per amended Tables A,B,D,E & F.

AND THAT, in accordance with the Annual Budget thus amended and adopted €76.4576 be and is hereby determined as the General Annual Rate on Valuation to be levied for the several purposes specified in the said Tables, as amended, for the financial year ending on 31st December, 2009.

AND THAT, in accordance with Section 142 of the Local Government Act 2001 a sum of €10,500 per councillor be approved under sub-service H0904.

The City Manager outlined the under-listed schedule of amendments to the Budget originally proposed which would facilitate a reduction of 0.2% from 3% to 2.8% in the Annual Rate on Valuation.

Schedule of Amendments

	(Decrease)/Increase expenditure
Central Management Charge – Finance Function Overhead – Bank Interest	(30,000)
H0303 Refunds and irrecoverable rates	(28,959)
Net (decrease)/increase in expenditure	(58,959)
	Decrease/(Increase) income
Commercial Rates Income reduction	58,959
Net decrease/(increase) in income	58,959
Net effect	Nil

The resolution was put to the meeting, and was accepted unanimously.

Resolution was:

Proposed by Cllr. O'Hanlon

Seconded by Cllr. Walsh

His Worship The Mayor, Cllr. John Gilligan declared the Proposal carried unanimously.

His Worship The Mayor, Cllr. John Gilligan formally declared the Annual Budget, as amended, adopted by Limerick City Council.

The City Manager thanked the Members for their co-operation.