

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL BUDGET MEETING OF WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON
MONDAY 27TH NOVEMBER, 2023, COMMENCING 10.00 AM AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

PRESENT:

**QUORUM: COUNCILLORS A. FLYNN KENNEDY CATHAOIRLEACH, T. ANNESLEY, M. BARRY,
M. CORRIGAN, A. CRONIN, A. FERRIS, M. KAVANAGH, P. LEONARD, D. O'BRIEN
P. O'BRIEN AND R. O'CONNOR (11)**

APOLOGIES

**CLLRS. J. BEHAN, V. BLAKE, S. BOURKE, S. CULLEN, E. DOYLE, G. DUNNE, P. FITZGERALD, T.
FORTUNE, P. GLENNON, P. KENNEDY, D. MITCHELL, J. MULLEN, M. MURPHY, G. O'NEILL, L.
SCOTT, J. SNELL, S. STOKES, E. TIMMINS, G. WALSH AND I. WINTERS (20)**

IN ATTENDANCE:

**MS. E. O'GORMAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE
MS. L. GALLAGHER, DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
MS. H. PURCELL, SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER/MEETINGS ADMINISTRATOR
MS. T. BYRNE, ASSISTANT STAFF OFFICER**

At the commencement of the meeting a roll call was taken.

It was proposed to adjourn the meeting to 2.30 p.m. in the afternoon due to the passing Ms. Nora Timmins, mother of Cllr. E. Timmins to allow the Elected Members to attend the funeral.

The Meetings Administrator advised the Elected Members of Section 17 of Standing Orders as follows:

'17. Adjournment of Council

a) A motion for adjournment of the Council may be made at any time and shall be determined without amendment and without debate, except that the mover of the Motion of adjournment and the mover of the Motion immediately affected by it, may each address the Council for not more than five minutes on the question of the adjournment ; and when the Motion for adjournment is adopted, the meeting will stand adjourned to a day then named or in the event of no such date being named, to the next occurring ordinary meeting'.

It was proposed by Cllr. M. Kavanagh, seconded by Cllr. M. Corrigan and agreed by all to adjourn the meeting to 2.30 p.m. in the afternoon.

2.30 p.m. – Monday 27th November 2023

PRESENT:

COUNCILLORS A. FLYNN KENNEDY CATHAOIRLEACH, T. ANNESLEY, M. BARRY, J. BEHAN, V. BLAKE, S. BOURKE, M. CORRIGAN, A. CRONIN, S. CULLEN, E. DOYLE, G. DUNNE, A. FERRIS, P. FITZGERALD, T. FORTUNE, P. GLENNON, M. KAVANAGH, P. KENNEDY, P. LEONARD, D. MITCHELL, J. MULLEN, M. MURPHY, D. O'BRIEN, P. O'BRIEN, R. O'CONNOR, G. O'NEILL, L. SCOTT, J. SNELL, S. STOKES, G. WALSH AND I. WINTERS (30)

APOLOGIES

CLLR. E. TIMMINS (1)

IN ATTENDANCE:

**MS. E. O'GORMAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE
MS. L. GALLAGHER, DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
MS. B. KILKENNY, DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
MS. L. EARLS, DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
Ms. T. O'BRIEN, A/DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
MR. M. NICHOLSON, DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
MR. B. GLEESON, HEAD OF FINANCE
MS. H. PURCELL, SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER/MEETINGS ADMINISTRATOR
MR. J. BOWES, SENIOR ENGINEER
MS. H. FALLON, SENIOR ENGINEER
MS. S. WALSH, SENIOR PLANNER
MS. E. O'DONOVAN, HEAD OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS
MS. B. MCCARTHY, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTANT
MS. D. KINSELLA, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTANT
MS. J. CARROLL, SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
MS. L. HEALY, A/SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
MS. S. NICHOLS, A/SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
MR. K. SCANLON, SENIOR EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
MR. D. PORTER, ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
MR. M. O'NEILL, ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
MS. K. BOYLE, ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
MS. V. ARMSTRONG, EXECUTIVE ACCOUNTANT
MR. G. HICKEY, DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR
MR. M. CANAVAN, SENIOR STAFF OFFICER
MR. G. O'CONNOR, SENIOR STAFF OFFICER
MS. S. BISHOP, STAFF OFFICER
MS. L. O'TOOLE, ASSISTANT STAFF OFFICER
MR. G. MURPHY, IS TECHNICAL SUPPORT OFFICER
MS. T. BYRNE, ASSISTANT STAFF OFFICER**

At the commencement of the meeting a roll call was taken. The Meetings Administrator advised of meetings etiquette for online meetings and that the press and some members of the public were also present.

Votes of Sympathy

Elected Members passed a vote of sympathy to the families of the late Mr. Noel McDonald, Ms. Nora Timmins, Mr. Vincent Kelly, Mr. Tom Kehoe, Mr. Mark Pierce and Ms. Ann Curran. A minutes silence was observed for the deceased.

The Cathaoirleach congratulated Wicklow County Council and the Library Service who were worthy winners of the Age-Friendly category at the Chamber of Ireland Excellence in Local Governance Awards, for an initiative run by the Library Service supporting younger people and older people to work together around technology.

ITEM NO. 1

To consider and adopt the Wicklow County Council Draft Annual Budget for financial year ended 31st December 2024.

Elected Members were circulated with Wicklow County Council Local Authority Budget 2024 with report of the Chief Executive dated 17th November 2023.

TO: CATHAOIRLEACH AND MEMBERS OF WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

Report of Chief Executive on the Draft Budget for Wicklow County Council for the local financial year ending 31st December, 2024.

Dear Councillors,

The Draft Annual Budget and Chief Executive's Report for the financial year ended 31st December 2024 has been prepared in the statutory format, in accordance with S102 of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended). The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage has determined that the prescribed period for the holding of the Annual Budget Meeting for 2024 is 1st November to 8th December 2023. Accordingly, the statutory Annual Budget Meeting is scheduled for Monday November 27th. The Budget must be adopted within a 14-day period commencing on that date.

As you are aware, there are four main stages to the Local Authority budgetary process.

1. Agree the Budget Strategy and Local Property Tax variation.
2. Develop Draft Budgetary plans for the Municipal Districts.

3. Draft and Adopt the Statutory Annual Budget.
4. Prepare the Schedule of Municipal District Works and Service Delivery Plan.

Furthermore, the attached Draft Budget has been prepared in consultation with the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) taking account of all known financial parameters.

The 2024 Budget presented to you provides for expenditure of €160.1m. This represents an increase of €17m (or 12%) on last year's budget. This increase is mainly as a result of increased funded leasing costs under Housing Payment & Availability schemes, extra provision for pre-letting expenditure, additional payroll costs due to national pay increases, extra goods and services costs due to the current inflationary environment and increases in key policy driven services such as climate action, social integration and town regeneration.

Budget 2024 is framed following a challenging 2023 impacted by cost of living increases on businesses, voluntary groups and citizens. While reduced from the high levels of 2022, energy costs still remain high. Furthermore, continued global uncertainty has led to significant inflationary and interest rate increases during 2023, and these issues have impacted on service provision for the Council. Unfortunately, the energy/inflation compensation of €1.7m provided by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in 2023 will not be repeated in 2024. However, in recognition of market reductions in energy costs, an expenditure saving of €0.5m has also been applied. Furthermore, an extra €3m provided through the LPT Baseline Review has helped to alleviate a lot of the financial pressures facing the Council next year.

In relation to Water Services, Wicklow County Council has been operating under a Service Level Agreement with Uisce Éireann since 2014 for the provision of water supply and wastewater operation and maintenance. The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage published a framework for the future delivery of Water Services in 2022, which sets out the policy on Uisce Éireann taking full control of water and wastewater services and this took effect in Wicklow on September 6th 2023. Wicklow County Council will continue to work with Uisce Éireann under a new Master Co-operation Agreement which includes a Service Support Agreement until 31st December 2026.

Notwithstanding these challenges, I believe this Budget represents a very positive outcome for Wicklow County Council in that it avoids any cuts to front line services, through the maximisation of existing resources, strong budgetary management, and securing higher levels of Government grant funding. In addition, no increase to the Commercial Rates ARV has been proposed for 2024, while extra provisions have been made for priority areas of housing and climate action.

Local Property Tax

At the Local Property Tax meeting of 9th October, the LPT variation rate of 6% was maintained, resulting in no increase to household payments for 2024. Furthermore, the €1.2m raised was ring-fenced for discretionary funding within the 5 Municipal Districts to implement important public realm projects and was distributed as follows:

Arklow	Baltinglass	Bray	Greystones	Wicklow	Total
223,028	223,028	297,370	223,028	223,028	1,189,482

Moreover, the long awaited LPT Baseline Review was completed in September this year. A new model was introduced to allocate available funding to local authorities in a fair, equitable and transparent manner. The new model provided for the distribution of funding in line with the following indicators and weightings:

- Population: 10%,
- Area: 35%
- Deprivation Levels: 20%
- Local Authority locally raised Income: 27.5%
- Achievement of National Policy Priorities: 7.5%

It was determined by the group that no local authority should see a reduction in baseline funding upon application of the new model, meaning that the new baseline to be applied in 2024 will maintain some historical elements of the previous baseline. Accordingly, the overall LPT Baselines of Local Authorities for 2024 were increased by €75m, from €353m to €428.4m. Wicklow County Council's Baseline for 2024 has been increased from €8,547,247 to €11,230,668, which represents an additional funding provision of €2.7m.

Wicklow County Council's LPT allocation for 2024 is €19,824,676. This increase is based on increased property numbers and revised valuations. Wicklow will receive €4,460,552 (22.5% of the LPT allocation of €19.8m) in addition to the revised funding baseline of €11,230,668. Added to this is the increase secured by the elected members by retaining the Local Adjustment Factor of 6%. Consequently, the amount retained for own use in the Revenue Budget 2024 is €16,880,701, an increase of €3,059,130 on the 2023 LPT amount retained. As stated at the outset, this extra funding is being used to offset the additional costs arising in 2024.

Details on the 2024 LPT Allocation are provided in Table 1 below and in Appendix 2 of the Draft Budget Tables.

Table 1 – 2024 Local Property Tax Allocation

Wicklow LPT Allocation 2024		€
100% of LPT Income Allocations for Wicklow	A	19,824,676
0% to National Equalisation Fund	B	0
100% of LPT to be retained locally	C	19,824,676
Baseline - Minimum level of funding	D	11,230,668
"Surplus"	E = (C-D)	8,594,008

LPT Surplus - Net Discretionary Income	F = 22.5% of A	4,460,552
Amount of surplus to self-fund housing services	G = E-F	4,133,456
Additional LPT funding on retaining 6% LAF	H	1,189,482
LPT Funding available for Budget 2024	I = C-G +H	16,880,701

General Municipal Allocation

The General Municipal Allocations (GMA) were considered by the Members under the draft Budgetary Plan that was presented to them at the most recent Municipal District meetings. The 2024 GMA includes Discretionary Funding, Town Twinning, Economic Development, Festivals, and Civic Reception funding allocations.

Table 2 – 2024 Revised General Municipal Allocations

Description	Arklow	Baltinglass	Bray	Greystones	Wicklow	Total
Town Twinning	6,000	6,000	10,000	6,000	6,000	34,000
Economic Development and Promotion	28,000	7,000	9,500	10,000	9,000	63,500
Festivals / Other	25,000	20,000	52,000	20,000	25,000	142,000
Civic Receptions	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	10,000
Discretionary Funding	223,028	223,028	367,370	223,028	223,028	1,259,482
Total	284,028	258,028	440,870	261,028	265,028	1,508,982

Additional income of €70k for Bray Municipal District has been added to the discretionary fund allocation for 2024 as result of their decision in 2022 to increase parking charges within their area. It should be noted other Municipal Districts may also consider changes to the local charges applied in their district, with any increase or decrease in those charges impacting on the overall level of funding made available to the district.

Schedule of Municipal District Works

Following the adoption of the annual budget, a schedule of proposed works of maintenance and repairs to be carried out in each municipal district shall be prepared for adoption by the members in early 2024. To this end, it is appropriate that each Municipal District review their 2023 operations to assess how they have delivered on the Service Plan with a view to agreeing the 2024 works early next year. Furthermore, the process allowing Members' input into the decision-making process for the Roads Programme will continue in 2024. To

this end, Members will be asked to submit their requests in December in respect of Restoration Improvement and Restoration Maintenance works for next year.

Commercial Rates

Commercial Rates income is estimated at €31.046m for Budget 2024 which represents a decrease of circa €0.4m due to global revaluation reductions, delisting of derelict/change of use properties as well as reductions in relation to revaluation appeals heard by the Valuation Tribunal. Some of the revaluation reductions have been offset by upward revisions to existing properties and the inclusion of new property builds.

Similar to last year, the 2024 budgeted rates amount of €31m includes a 'G Factor' provision which must be set aside in the form of a capital reserve to cover any possible losses in the future, arising from appeals made to the Valuation Tribunal. The provision included in the 2024 Budget is €0.6m. Details of movements in valuations are outlined below in Table 3:

Table 3 – 2024 Commercial Rates

	Valuation	ARV	Rate Demand
Budget 2023 Rates Book	144,723,712	0.217	31,405,046
Valuation Tribunal Appeals	-1,308,418	0.217	-283,927
Global Revaluations Decrease	-10,260	0.217	-2,226
New Build Additions	836,840	0.217	181,594
Revisions/Delisting	-1,173,280	0.217	-254,602
2024 Valuation Listing and Rates Income	143,068,594	0.217	31,045,884

2024 Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV)

The total valuation figure for Wicklow properties is €143,068,594. However, the ARV, which is set by the Members each year, acts as the multiplier to calculate the ratepayer's estimated liability for the coming year. Given the current inflationary pressures facing businesses, it is not proposed to increase the ARV for 2024 from its current rate of 0.217. The decision to confirm the ARV for 2024 must be taken by the Members at the Annual Budget Meeting.

2024 will see the commencement of a number of new rates provisions included in the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act (LGROMA) 2019 and the Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023. The main changes will see the removal of the current two moiety process – there will now be a single bill issued for the year. In addition, any amendments (additions, removals and revisions) made by Tailte Éireann to the valuation list will be effective immediately i.e. there will now be provision for pro-rata liability and billing where occupation ends or begins mid-year. As this new billing system will replace the heretofore Property Entry Levy (PEL) charge, it will have a neutral impact on the Council Budget. An amount of €0.4m has been included in the budget for new builds in 2024 which is an increase on the 2023 PEL provision of €0.2m.

Rates Incentive Schemes

The current Small Business Rates Incentive Scheme provides for a grant of 5% of the current year bill up to a maximum of €250 as a financial support to occupiers of commercial properties with total annual commercial rates bills of up to and including €10,000, subject to certain terms and conditions. Nearly 90% of ratepayers currently operating in County Wicklow are small and medium businesses who are deemed eligible to apply under the incentive scheme.

We are also recommending the continuation of a separate rates incentive scheme that was introduced for new businesses. This scheme is aimed at encouraging the use of long-term vacant premises in the County through the provision of grant support to new businesses. Wicklow County Council aims to encourage the establishment of new businesses and wants to see the number of vacant retail/commercial properties decrease. This grant scheme is intended to incentivise and encourage new commercial ventures, reoccupy vacant properties and assist in job creation.

Rates on Vacant Premises

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provides for a change to rating law in relation to the refund of rates on vacant properties. The elected members may, by way of reserved function, vary the levels of rates refund applicable to vacant property. The decision to alter the rate of refund must be taken at the Annual Budget Meeting.

In order to stimulate the commercial rates sector and to compliment the introduction of the New Business Rates Incentive Scheme outlined above, it was decided in 2020 to reduce the vacancy refund rate from 100% to 60%. This decision was also taken with the knowledge that new rates legislation provides for the introduction of a maximum level of vacancy to be determined by the Minister. Furthermore, considering the financial challenges we are currently facing any upward adjustment to the existing rate would reduce the income in the proposed Budget and therefore additional savings would have to be identified elsewhere in order for the budget to balance. In light of these factors, it is recommended that the rate of refund for eligible vacant properties be retained at 60% for 2024.

Matched Funding for Capital Projects

A capital funding provision of €0.3m has been included in the 2024 Budget which represents a decrease of 200k on last year. Heretofore, the retained earnings income paid over from IPB was used to fund the Council's annual Match Funding capital provision. As a result of the reduction in the payment next year, this transfer has now been reduced from €500k to 300k in the annual budget. Moreover, as 2024 represents the final year of the retained earnings distribution payment from IPB a new source of funding will have to be identified for this expenditure commitment from 2025 onwards. This provision is considered essential to the strategic vision of Wicklow County Council, as it allows us the opportunity to apply for and drawdown substantial Government funding under the National Development Plan Schemes, such as the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and the Rural Regeneration and Development Funds etc. Wicklow County Council has been successful in securing over €60m in Government funding in respect of ongoing capital projects which require matched funding of up to €14m. Moreover, we have other applications submitted and plans for future projects which will require further match funding.

A minimum matched funding element of 25% must be provided by the local authority for successful applications. In the majority of applications, the use of development contributions is used for matched funding. However, this will not be the case for all projects especially in relation to smaller funding schemes such as Town and Village, CLAR and Community CCTV etc., and for certain economic development projects, therefore this matched funding element must be provided from the Revenue Budget.

Payroll / Pensions

A total of €57.4m is included in the budget for pay and pension costs. This is an increase of €4.4m on the 2023 budgeted figure. This increase is as a result of the application of the pay increases included in the National Pay Agreement, the recruitment of new staff and additional pension costs.

National Pay Talks in respect of a new pay agreement are ongoing and no information is available at present. However, in line with responsible budgeting an estimated 2% increase has been included in the 2024 Budget. In addition, the 1.5% October increase has been applied on a full year basis. The estimated cost of these increases is circa €2m. It is expected that the usual compensation level of 85% will be provided by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to offset the majority of these costs, however this still leaves an amount of circa €0.3m to be funded from our own resources.

A funding allocation of €1.4m has also been provided from the Department towards the implementation of the recent WRC agreement in relation to pay and terms and conditions for Retained Firefighters.

There is an ongoing need to recruit staff to maintain services and Budget 2024 attempts to address these demands within the existing financial constraints. The Budget provides for additional personnel in the areas of Housing, Planning, Communications, Community Development, Climate & Energy, and Law. WCC has also applied for a number of graduate posts under the 2024 LGMA Graduate Recruitment Programme which are included in the Budget. Due to natural timing delays associated with recruitment campaigns and the central funding of certain positions, the net increase in costs for these new positions is circa €0.3m to the Council.

Budget 2024 also provides for a new fully funded €300k Integration Team. The primary role of the Local Authority Integration Team (LAIT) is to provide ongoing integration supports information, advice and guidance to International Protection applicants and refugees (both programme refugees and beneficiaries of temporary protection). This will primarily involve linking these new arrivals with mainstream support services, ensuring their basic needs are met and facilitating independent living within the community.

The appointment of outdoor staff going forward will be linked to the Uisce Éireann transition, as it is likely that excess staff will arise under this process. At the end of the transition period in 2026 local authorities will cease to be involved in the public water system. As part of the transition process a joint trade union/management water services forum comprising of management and union representatives has been established, chaired by the Director of Services HR. The primary purpose of the forum is to discuss procedures to facilitate those staff who wishes to reassign out of water services to other roles in the local

authority. For those staff that wishes to remain as local authority employees but working outside of water services, Wicklow County Council will work to re-assign staff to suitable vacancies within grade and competence to other local authority service areas. Pension costs of €8.2m has been provided in the total payroll costs which is an increase of €517k on 2023. There is no central funding provided for these costs and as such they must be met from the Council's own resources. Due to the unsatisfactory nature of this situation and the significant burden it places on Local Authority finances each year, the CCMA Finance Committee established a sub-group to examine this specific area. A report including recommendations about how to address this funding gap into the future will be submitted to the Department for consideration shortly.

2024 Draft Budget Overview

The Draft Budget presented to you provides for expenditure of €160.1m in 2024. However, as the Council is statutorily required to prepare a balanced budget, expenditure provisions must be matched by income. The Draft Budget has therefore been prepared with the following income projections:

Divisional Income	€112.2M
Local Property Tax	€16.9M
Commercial Rates	€31M

While Budget 2024 is set at a higher level compared to last year, this is mainly due to increased grant aid for housing services and the roads programme which are contra items and also pay and pension increases.

Budget Adjustments in 2024

In preparing Budget 2024 we have faced considerable challenges, none more so than the ongoing impact of the War in Ukraine. This budget has been developed and framed on the basis that the necessary Government supports will continue to be provided in 2024 to support the local authority's response in this area. To this end, an allocation of €1.8m has been provided under this programme for 2024.

In line with national priorities, Wicklow County Council's main focus for Budget 2024 has been on the areas of Housing and Climate Action.

Housing and Building

Of the total Budget of €160m, over €58m has been allocated under Division A – Housing and Building. One of the main expenditure demands each year relates to pre-letting repair costs on local authority houses. The net allocation for 2024 is €3.8m based on gross expenditure of €4.9m offset by central funding of €1.1m. The gross amount represents an increase of nearly €0.8m on last year's allocation.

An increase of €250k is provided for housing repairs and maintenance, bringing the total allocation up to €2.6m. A separate fully funded planned maintenance programme is also

provided for in the Budget in the amount of €250k. Furthermore, an extra €400k has been allocated for central heating/boiler/heat pumps/alarm maintenance.

Based on the volume of applications received under the Croí Cónaithe Vacancy Property Grant Scheme, this fund has been increased to €3.3m for 2024. In addition, Payment and Availability and Long-Term Leasing allocations have increased by €5m.

As a consequence of Wicklow County Council continuing to exceed its social housing delivery targets, the annual rental income has increased by just over €1m, all of which has been retained under the Housing and Building Programme to fund the additional services outlined above.

Climate Change/Energy Initiatives

Wicklow County Council is currently progressing its first ever Climate Action Plan. As part of the public consultation phase, the draft plan was put on display from October 3rd to November 15th. It is expected that the final plan will be brought before the elected members for approval in January 2024. An amount of €230k has been included in the 2024 Budget to commence priority actions within the plan. The Arklow Decarbonisation Zone plan will also be progressed next year with key items identified for implementation.

Following the establishment of the Mid East Energy Unit last year with Kildare and Meath County Councils, a number of joint initiatives will commence in 2024 under the SEAI Pathfinder Programme. An amount of €440k is included in the Budget to support Wicklow's commitment under the retrofit programme as well as funding other Council led energy saving initiatives.

The Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project (PLEEP) for Eastern Region is expected to be rolled out in Wicklow during the second half of 2024. The Budget includes a capital transfer provision of €200k which was established previously to build up a reserve to fund these works.

Other significant budget items and relevant adjustments for Budget 2024 include:

- Non-Principal Private Residence (NPPR) income has been reduced by 100k following the expiration of the 2012 charge on 1st April 2024. The NPPR charge will expire completely on 1 April 2025.
- The IPB annual dividend will reduce by €179k in 2024. However, our annual insurance premium has also decreased by €96k.
- Economic Development has received additional funding of €330k in respect of the Skills Strategy, Town Regeneration, Tourism Promotion and other economic initiatives.
- The Community Grant Scheme allocation for 2024 remains unchanged at €120k. However, additional funding of circa €116k has been provided for various community and voluntary groups e.g., Access, PPN, County Wicklow Volunteer Bureau, Wicklow Uplands, as well as a brand-new funding provision to support the implementation of outdoor recreation initiatives.

- An additional financial provision of €100k has been provided to support works associated with an emergency dredging foreshore application for Wicklow Harbour. The annual capital transfer for this project now stands at €250k.

While addressing the financial challenges we face in 2024, we are restricted in the areas from which savings can be identified and taken. Up to 90% of our expenditure each year is considered to be 'Non-Discretionary', covering items like pay and pensions, contra/grant funded areas such as RAS/HAP, DPGs, Housing the Homeless, Roads Grants, SICAP, LEO, Sports Partnership, Irish Water and the Machinery Yard. Other non-discretionary costs include light and heat, insurance, loan interest, capital transfers and statutory contributions. This leaves the following limited areas of 'Discretionary' costs from which to find savings:

- Regional and Local Roads Maintenance (own resources)
- Public Lighting
- Housing Maintenance
- Community Supports
- Environmental Initiatives
- Arts and Festivals
- Library Book Purchases
- Economic supports
- Matching funding for Capital Programmes
- Discretionary spend in Municipal Districts

However, I am pleased to report that in order to meet our statutory obligation to balance the budget we have not had to cut front line services.

Key changes in the Draft Annual Budget are summarised in Tables 4 & 5 below.

Table 4 - Budget 2024 v 2023 Main Expenditure Variances

Division	Expenditure	€000's
Housing	Pre-letting	767
	Repairs and Maintenance	247
	Boiler, Heatpump and Central Heating	400
	P&A Agreements	4,619
	Long Term Leasing Scheme	435
	Croi Conaithe Vacant Property Grant Scheme	3,290
	Disabled Persons Grants	628
Roads	Regional Road Maintenance	467
	Local Road Maintenance	670
Development	Ukraine Response	664
Management	Local Authority Integration Team	339
	Town Regeneration	142
	Match Funding Provision	-200
Environment	Climate Action & Energy	326

	Fire Service Operations	1,400
	Recycling services	78
	Landfill Aftercare and Remediation	109
	Street Cleaning	78
	Harbour Operations	155
Recreation & Amenity	Libraries	155
	Outdoor Recreation Strategic Initiatives	40
Miscellaneous	Discretionary Expenditure	79
	ICT Costs	426
	Pensions	414
	IPB Premium	-96

Table 5 - Budget 2024 v 2023 Main Income Variances

Division	Income	€000s
Housing	Rental income	1,066
	Pre-letting grants	300
	RAS Operations	-561
	P&A, Targeted and Home for Life Leasing	5,091
	Housing of the Homeless	227
	Disabled Persons Grants	522
	Croi Conaithe Vacant Property Grant Scheme	3,350
Roads	Road Grant Allocation 2022 increase	1,643
Development	Structures at Risk Funding	140
	Social Inclusion (Incl. Ukraine support)	1,050
	Town Regeneration	98
Environment	Climate Action Funding Streams	100
	Retained Firefighters WRC Agreement	1,400
Miscellaneous	Pay Agreement Compensation	1,523
	Energy Cost increase Compensation	-1,667
	IPB Dividend	-179
	IPB Retained Earnings	-200
	Investment Income	285
	NPPR	-100
	New Property Commercial Rates Valuations	200
Other	Local Property Tax	3,059

Conclusion

I have prepared the 2024 Draft Annual Budget in consultation with the Corporate Policy Group and in accordance with the Local Government Act, 2001 (Section 133). This consultation with the Corporate Policy Group has been a key aspect of the budget preparation. At these meetings significant factors within the Budget were raised and discussed and I am grateful to the Members of the Corporate Policy Group and the Cathaoirleach Cllr. Aoife Flynn Kennedy for their constructive engagement with the budgetary process.

The 2024 Draft Budget before you today is a plan of action to best deal with the challenging environment of local government. While significant challenges remain in dealing with the economic realities facing the Council next year, we can cautiously look to build on the progress achieved to date and translate this to increased and improved services growth across the County. Moreover, we will continue to seek out alternative sources of funding and work in collaboration with the relevant State Agencies, Government Departments, Business Community and the Community and Voluntary Sector to maximise all available opportunities to address the local needs and support the economic and social development of County Wicklow.

The draft budget has been prepared in accordance with the relevant statutory provisions, and this report, with the accompanying detailed financial tables, sets out the position for consideration by the Council. There is considerable detail contained in the Draft Budget Report to assist the Members in their deliberations. Please take the opportunity to discuss aspects of the Draft Budget with each of the Heads of Function.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Members of the Council for their support and look forward to continuing to work with the Elected Members to deliver high quality services for the people of Wicklow.

The Draft Budget preparation required significant input from staff across the Council's Divisions. I wish to thank all the Directors and their staff who have contributed to and supported that process. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to the Head of Finance, Brian Gleeson and the staff in the Finance Section for their hard work in preparing and framing this Budget.

I recommend the 2024 Budget to you for adoption.



EMER O'GORMAN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive gave a brief overview of the budget. She thanked members of the Corporate Policy Group and all of the Elected Members for their input into the deliberations in order to get a balanced budget.

Mr. B.Gleeson, Head of Finance presented to the Elected Members covering the following areas:-

Summary

- 2024 Budgetary Process
- 2024 Planned Expenditure and Income
- Budgetary Challenges for 2024
- Expenditure/Income Adjustments to 2024 Budget
- Commercial Rates – 2024 ARV and Rates Vacancy Relief
- Budget Review by Service Division
- Adoption of Budget 2024

2024 Budget Meeting Decisions

1. Agree Annual Rate of Valuation (ARV) for 2024 Commercial Rates.
2. Agree Rates Relief % on Vacant Premises.
3. Adopt Statutory Annual Budget for 2024.

2024 Budget Process

- Local Property Tax Rate Variation Decision
- Municipal District Draft Budgetary Plans including the General Municipal Allocation (GMA)
- Adoption of the Statutory Annual Budget
- Schedule of Municipal District Works

Local Property Tax

- Wicklow County Council's Baseline has been increased from €8,547,247 to €11,230,668. Increase of €2.7m
- New properties and valuations generated €0.3m extra income.
- Additional funding provision of €3.06m in 2024.
- LPT 2024 net provision €16.88m (2023 €13.82)
- The decision taken by Members at the LPT meeting on Oct 9th to retain the basic rate of 6% generates €1.2m income.

- 100% of this money has been ring-fenced for Discretionary Funding in the Municipal Districts.

Arklow	Baltinglass	Bray	Greystones	Wicklow	Total
223,028	223,028	297,370	223,028	223,028	1,189,481

Municipal District Expenditure

- General Municipal Allocation includes Twinning, Festivals, Economic Development & Discretionary Funding. Total allocation €1.5m.

Description	Arklow	Baltinglass	Bray	Greystones	Wicklow	Total
Town Twinning	6,000	6,000	10,000	6,000	6,000	34,000
Economic Development and Promotion	28,000	7,000	9,500	10,000	9,000	63,500
Festivals / Other	25,000	20,000	52,000	20,000	25,000	142,000
Civic Receptions	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	10,000
Discretionary Funding	223,028	223,028	367,370	223,028	223,028	1,259,482
Total	284,028	258,028	440,870	261,028	265,028	1,508,982

2024 Budgeted Expenditure

Div	Description	2023	2024	Variance	Variance %	Divisional %
A	Housing and Building	46,753,518	58,328,381	11,574,863	25%	33%
B	Road Transportation and Safety	28,802,777	30,120,720	1,317,943	5%	20%
C	Water Services	7,441,337	6,623,181	-818,156	-11%	5%
D	Development Management	17,817,969	19,665,715	1,847,746	10%	12%
E	Environmental Services	16,026,515	18,254,318	2,227,803	14%	11%
F	Recreation & Amenity	11,581,098	12,280,857	699,759	6%	8%
G	Agriculture, Education, H & Welfare	2,460,728	2,607,094	146,366	6%	2%

H	Miscellaneous Services	11,744,819	12,118,659	373,840	3%	8%
	Provision for Debit Balance	150,000	150,000	0	0%	0%
	TOTAL EXPENDITURE	142,778,761	160,148,925	17,370,164	12%	100%

2024 Sources of Income

Income Category	€	%
Grants & Subsidies	74,309,865	46%
Goods & Services	37,912,475	24%
Commercial Rates	31,045,884	19%
Local Property Tax	16,880,701	11%
Total income	160,148,925	100%

2024 Budget Challenges

- Ongoing conflict in Ukraine
- Inflationary costs
- Increased Pay & Pension Costs
- Climate Action commitments/Energy Targets
- Increased demand for Housing Expenditure
- Continued demand for Road improvements
- Match Funding Capital commitments
- Per Legislation must approve a Balanced Budget

Non-Discretionary Costs

- **Payroll Costs:** Salary/Wages/Pensions.
- **Contra/Grant Funded Items:** RAS/HAP, DPGs, Homeless Funding, Road Grants, SICAP, LEO, Sports Partnership, Irish Water, Machinery Yard.
- **Other Non-Discretionary Costs:** Light & Heat, Insurance, Loan Interest, Capital Transfers, Statutory Contributions, Rates Write Offs.
- 90% of Budget Expenditure

Discretionary Costs

- 10% of Budget
- Regional & Local Roads Maintenance (own resources)
- Public Lighting
- Housing Repairs & Maintenance
- Community Grants
- Environmental Initiatives
- Arts and Festivals
- Library Book Purchases
- Economic and Tourism supports
- Match funding for Capital Programmes
- Discretionary Funding for the Municipal Districts

Corporate Policy Group Input

- The Local Government Act 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014, provides the legislative basis for the budget process.
- The adoption of the budget is a reserved function of the members of the local authority.
- The CPG should assist with the setting of overall parameters and the identification of issues and approaches to be taken.
- CPG met to agree Budget Proposals on 6th & 20th Nov

2024 Budget Adjustments

Housing & Building

- Extra Rental Income €1.1m up to €18.6m
- Pre-letting increase of €0.8m up to €4.9m
- Housing R&M increase of €0.25m up to €2.6m
- Funded Planned Maintenance Programme €0.25m
- Additional provision of €0.4m for boiler, central heating, heat pump and alarm servicing
- Disabled Persons Grants up €0.63m to €2.4m
- Housing of the Homeless up €0.3m to €2.2m
- Payment & Availability and Long-Term Leasing expenditure and income increased by €5m.
- Croí Cónaithe Vacant Property Grant Scheme €3.3m.

Roads, Transport and Safety

- Roads allocation up €1.3m to €30.1m
- National Roads Maintenance €105k increase
- Regional Road Maintenance €386k increase
- Local Road Maintenance €710k increase

Development Management

- Town Regeneration €142k Increase
- Skills Strategy €30k
- Tourism Promotion €43k increase.
- Strategic Land Development €30k increase
- Ukraine Support €1.8m
- Matched Funding €200k decrease.

Community and Recreation

- Community Grant Scheme €120k
- Disability Strategy implementation €25k
- Community Building maintenance €30k
- Outdoor Recreation Strategies €40k
- Co. Wicklow Volunteer Bureau, PPN, Wicklow Uplands, Wicklow Way, Tinahely Show, €24k increase

Environment

- Climate Action Plan €230k, increase of €100k
- Energy Initiatives €440k, increase of €170k
- Climate Action/Biodiversity Fund €180k
- Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project (PLEEP) 200k
- Wicklow Harbour Dredging Programme €250k, increase of €100k
- Conservation Grant Scheme €140k increase
- Recycling Operations €78k increase

Miscellaneous

- NPPR income reduced by 100k
- IPB annual dividend reduced by €179k
- Insurance premium decreased by €96k
- Energy/inflation compensation of €1.667m not repeated for 2024.
- Investment Income is projected to increase by €285k.

Pay & Pensions

- A total of €57.4m is included in the budget for pay and pension costs
- National Pay Agreement Increases circa €2m
- Provisional funding allocation of €1.4m for Retained Firefighters Agreement
- New Positions Net Cost €0.3m
- Local Authority Integration Team €0.3m
- Pension costs of €8.1m which is an increase of €0.5m on 2023

Commercial Rates 2024

	Valuation	ARV	Rate Demand
Budget 2023 Rates Book	144,723,712	0.217	31,405,046

Valuation Tribunal Appeals	-1,308,418	0.217	-283,927
Global Revaluations Decrease	-10,260	0.217	-2,226
New Build Additions	836,840	0.217	181,594
Revisions/Delisted	-1,173,280	0.217	-254,602
Current Valuation Listing and Rates Income	143,068,594	0.217	31,045,885
Per Rates Book	143,068,594		-359,161

- Includes G Factor Provision €0.6m for Valuation Tribunal Appeal
- Additional new build valuations for 2024 are estimated at €400k

Commercial Rates ARV 2024

- Impact of energy and inflation costs on local businesses
- Assist ongoing recovery from Covid 19 impact
- Recommendation to leave the ARV unchanged at 0.217 for 2024

Commercial Rates – Vacancy Relief Rate

- Recommendation that the rate of refund for eligible vacant properties is retained at 60% for 2024.
- Compliments the Council's Rates Incentive Scheme for New Businesses reoccupying Vacant Properties.
- Average relief applied across all LAs is 57%.
- Any increase to the existing vacancy rate would generate an additional cost to the Budget.

Budget 2024 Summary

- €160m Budget
- €17.3m (12%) increase on last year
- Avoids reductions to existing services
- Focus on Housing and Climate Action
- Increases across most services to address pay, cost inflation and increased demands
- Provision of €1.2m Discretionary Funding for the Municipal Districts

Budget 2024 Divisional Review

- Division A – Housing & Building: Pages 61, 72-74
Expenditure €58.3m Income €57.7m
- Division B – Roads, Trans & Safety: Pages 62, 75-77
Expenditure €30.1m Income €18.6m
- Division C - Water Services: Pages 63, 78-79

- Expenditure €6.6m Income €5.9m
- Division D – Development Mgt: Pages 64, 80-82
Expenditure €19.7m Income €10.2m
- Division E – Environmental Services: Pages 65, 83-85
Expenditure €18.2m Income €4.2m
- Division F – Recreation & Amenity: Pages 66, 86-87
Expenditure €12.3m Income €1.2m
- Division G – Agriculture, Ed, H&W: Pages 67, 88-89
Expenditure €2.6m Income €1.1m
- Division H – Miscellaneous Services: Pages 68, 90-92
Expenditure €12.2m Income €13.3m

Post Presentation Decisions

1. Agree Annual Rate of Valuation (ARV) for 2024 Commercial Rates
2. Agree Rates Relief % on Vacant Premises
3. Adopt Statutory Annual Budget for 2024.

A discussion followed. The Elected Members acknowledged the amount of work involved in preparing the draft budget and some of the items discussed were as follows:

- Housing for people with disabilities.
- Residential zoned land tax.
- Greenhills Road affordable housing scheme – Homebond.
- Noise mitigation measures – Kilmacanogue.
- Maintenance and improvement costs of local authority housing units.
- Rocky Road improvement scheme.
- Maintenance of bicycle lanes.
- The Rectory, Bray – 44 houses.
- Enterprise Centre for Greystones.
- Recycling centre for Greystones.
- Staffing levels.
- Regeneration of town centres.
- Avondale Business Park - Opportunities and employment areas across the districts.
- Recruiting of extra dog wardens.
- Wicklow Harbour.
- Litter bins improvement and provision.
- Footpath maintenance.
- Masterplans Brides Head and Rathdrum.
- Green flag beaches.
- Leisure facility operation.

Cllr. J. Behan proposed an emergency motion *'that this Council has no confidence in the operation of the Homebond Scheme and how it is being managed'* There was no seconder to the motion.

Cllr. P. Leonard proposed, seconded by Cllr. M. Kavanagh, an alteration to the business rates exemption, 75% exempt year 1, 50% year 2 and 25% year 3, with criteria for vacant units to be reduced from 12 months to 6 months.

A discussion on the proposal took place, Cllr. Leonard withdrew the motion and it was agreed this matter would be referred back to the SPC to be fully costed and options examined.

Time Extension: It was proposed by Cllr. J. Behan, seconded by Cllr. J. Mullen and agreed by all to extend the meeting to its conclusion.

TO RETAIN THE ANNUAL RATE OF VALUATION FOR 2024 SET AT 0.217

It was proposed by Cllr. I. Winters, seconded by Cllr. P. Glennon and following a roll call it was agreed to retain the Annual Rate of Valuation for 2024 set at 0.217 by a margin of 28 votes for and 3 not present viz:-

FOR 28	CLLRS. T. ANNESLEY, M. BARRY, J. BEHAN, V. BLAKE, S. BOURKE, M. CORRIGAN, A. CRONIN, S. CULLEN, E. DOYLE, G. DUNNE, A. FERRIS, P. FITZGERALD, A. FLYNN KENNEDY, P. GLENNON, M. KAVANAGH, P. KENNEDY, P. LEONARD, D. MITCHELL, J. MULLEN, M. MURPHY, D. O'BRIEN, P. O'BRIEN, R. O'CONNOR, G. O'NEILL, L. SCOTT, S. STOKES, G. WALSH AND I WINTERS.
NOT PRESENT 3	CLLRS T. FORTUNE, J. SNELL AND E.TIMMINS

TO ADOPT A VACANCY RATE FOR COUNTY WICKLOW

It was proposed by Cllr. V. Blake, seconded by Cllr. P. Fitzgerald and following a roll call it was agreed by a margin of 28 votes for and 3 not present to retain the 60% commercial rates relief percentage on vacant premises viz:-

FOR 28	CLLRS. T. ANNESLEY, M. BARRY, J. BEHAN, V. BLAKE, S. BOURKE, M. CORRIGAN, A. CRONIN, S. CULLEN, E. DOYLE, G. DUNNE, A. FERRIS, P. FITZGERALD, A. FLYNN KENNEDY, P. GLENNON, M. KAVANAGH, P. KENNEDY, P. LEONARD, D. MITCHELL, J. MULLEN, M. MURPHY, D. O'BRIEN, P. O'BRIEN, R. O'CONNOR, G. O'NEILL, L. SCOTT, S. STOKES, G. WALSH AND I WINTERS.
NOT PRESENT 3	CLLRS T. FORTUNE, J. SNELL AND E.TIMMINS

TO ADOPT THE STATUTORY ANNUAL BUDGET FOR 2024, AS PRESENTED.

It was proposed by Cllr. V, Blake, seconded by Cllr. G. Dunne and following a roll call it was agreed by a margin of 27 for, 3 not present and 1 abstained to adopt the statutory Annual Budget 2024, as presented.

FOR 27	CLLRS. T. ANNESLEY, M. BARRY, J. BEHAN, V. BLAKE, S. BOURKE, M. CORRIGAN, A. CRONIN, S. CULLEN, E. DOYLE, G. DUNNE, A. FERRIS, P. FITZGERALD, A. FLYNN KENNEDY, P. GLENNON, M. KAVANAGH, P. KENNEDY, P. LEONARD, D. MITCHELL, J. MULLEN, M. MURPHY, P. O'BRIEN, R. O'CONNOR, G. O'NEILL, L. SCOTT, S. STOKES, G. WALSH AND I WINTERS.
NOT PRESENT 3	CLLRS T. FORTUNE, J. SNELL AND E.TIMMINS
ABSTAIN 1	CLLR. D. O'BRIEN

In conclusion, the Cathaoirleach thanked all of the Elected Members for their time and attention.

Chief Executive Emer O'Gorman thanked the Head of Finance Brian Gleeson and his team in Finance and the Management Team and staff of Wicklow County Council involved in the process.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

**CLLR. AOIFE FLYNN KENNEDY
CATHAOIRLEACH
WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL**

**MS. HELEN PURCELL
SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER/
MEETINGS ADMINISTRATOR**

Confirmed at meeting of Wicklow County Council held on Monday the 8th January 2024