

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS AT ANNUAL MEETING OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL HELD IN THE MILLENNIUM THEATRE, LIMERICK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, MOYLISH, LIMERICK, ON WEDNESDAY, 30TH JUNE, 2021, AT 3.00 P.M.

PRESENT IN THE CHAIR:

Councillor M. Collins, Mayor.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors Benson, Butler, Carey, Collins (B), Collins (J), Costelloe, Daly, Donegan, Egan, Foley, Galvin, Hartigan, Keary, Kiely, Kilcoyne, Leddin, McSweeney, Mitchell, Murphy, Novak Uí Chonchúir, O'Brien, O'Dea, O'Donoghue, O'Donovan, O'Hanlon, O'Sullivan, Ruddle, Ryan (E), Ryan (M), Scanlan, Sheahan (J), Sheahan (K), Sheahan (M), Sheehan (C), Slattery, Talukder, Teefy, Teskey.

An apology for her inability to attend the Meeting was received from Councillor Secas.

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive (Dr. P. Daly), Director, Community Development (Mr. G. Daly), Director, Capital Investment (Ms. N. Gallagher), Director, Physical Development (Mr. B. Kennedy), Director, Service Operations (Mr. K. Lehane), A/Director, Economic Development (Mr. V. Murray), Meetings Administrator (Ms. L. Flannery), Administrative Officer, Corporate Services and Governance (Ms. F. McCormack).

Apologies for their inability to attend the Meeting were received from the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Support Services, and the Director, National and Regional Shared Services.

Vote of Sympathy

The outgoing Mayor, Councillor Collins (M), opened the Meeting by welcoming all attendees.

The Mayor then acknowledged the passing of Mrs. Anne Sheahan, Mother of Councillor Sheahan (J) and extended his sympathy to John and his family at this very sad time. All the Members joined in the Vote of Sympathy and extended condolences to Councillor Sheahan (J) and his family.

The Chief Executive offered his condolences on behalf of the Management and staff.

Councillor Sheahan (J) thanked the Mayor, Elected Members and the Chief Executive for their sympathy and support.

A minute's silence and reflection was then observed as a mark of respect.

The Mayor informed Members that the media were present and may wish to record elements of the meeting. In accordance with Standing Orders, the Mayor sought agreement from the Members in this regard. All Members were in agreement for recording to proceed if required.

The Meetings Administrator referred to the recent public health announcements in relation to the COVID-19 variant and in light of this requested the Members to keep their masks on while seated and only to remove when speaking.

The Mayor then gave the following address:

“Members Management and Staff, today we elect a new Mayor to represent us in the year ahead. My words today will be brief so we can get through the main order of business. We have experienced and come through what has been a difficult year for many. However, this Council has been to the fore on many issues, projects and developments.

As Mayor, I have experienced first-hand the incredible work, loyalty and commitment of this Local Authority, its Management, Staff and Council Members, to Limerick, and the betterment of our communities and citizens.

At the start of my tenure, I represented the Members on the Community Crisis Response, led by Gordon Daly and his staff but, in particular, Anne Rizzo. This committee did amazing work in showing the strength and depth of volunteerism at its best in Limerick. It gave peace and comfort to the elderly and vulnerable in society as they faced the uncertainty of COVID and lockdowns. I am proud of everyone and glad to have been a part of that.

The economic development of Limerick has started and I was present for the launch of the demolition and construction of the Opera Site and this work is happening as I speak. A total of €73.4m will be used to fund plans for the waterfront along the River Shannon which will include the development of the Cleeves Riverside Quarter and the construction of new pedestrian bridges. Public realm works and re-alignment of a public road at Arthur’s Quay and Honan’s Quay will be a game changer in the redevelopment of the city centre, not to mention the O’Connell Street works currently underway at a cost of €9.1m.

In the County, I was proud to have turned the sod in our €3m regional athletics hub, a project I have been involved in from the start a mere seven years ago. I look forward to seeing this open in the year ahead and again I want to thank Gordon Daly and his team for their fantastic work and commitment to this project.

Tomorrow we see the opening to the public of what I consider to be a tourism game changer for Limerick - the Limerick Greenway. 40kms of a world-class, state-of-the art Greenway that will compete with any Greenway, not just here in Ireland but across the globe. I visited the Greenway yesterday to do the final snag list and I am completely blown away with what I saw. As Mayor, I am especially proud to have seen this project start and complete in my term. Well done to everyone.

As Mayor, and on behalf of the people of Limerick, we are indebted to the frontline healthcare workers for their hard work and sacrifices since the outbreak of COVID-19. Over the past 18 months or so, we have seen the way our healthcare staff have dedicated themselves to caring for and saving countless lives in our hospitals and community settings. I was delighted to hold a Reception and present Scrolls to the following:

- **Noreen Spillane, Chief Operations Officer, UL Hospitals Group.**
- **Dr. Mai Mannix, Director of Public Health Mid-West.**
- **Maria Bridgeman, Chief Officer, HSE Mid West Community Healthcare.**
- **Ian Brennan, Assistant Chief Ambulance Officer, National Ambulance Service, Mid-West Region.**

The Scrolls are in recognition and appreciation of the outstanding dedication, care and support provided by the staff of these organisations to the many people who availed of their services, especially during the COVID pandemic.

In the past few weeks, I had the honour of getting around our County visiting all GAA clubs, 76 in total. This has been an incredible experience and witnessing first-hand the incredible facilities in our communities. Limerick GAA, as well as other sporting organisations, were to the fore in Limerick's COVID Crisis Response and it was a pleasure to thank them personally for their good work and volunteering support.

Thanks to all the wonderful groups, organisations and individuals too numerous to mention that I met during the year.

Dr. Daly, thanks to you, the wonderful Management and staff across all Departments, including District Offices, and outdoor staff, who do incredible work on a daily basis for all of Limerick.

To the staff in Corporate Services that supported me all year, your commitment and professionalism knows no bounds and I have to mention Eleanor Buckley, who kept me and my diary going at all times, to Liz Creamer, Fiona McCormack, Laura Flannery, James Clune and Peter Williams - Thank you.

To our wonderful Communications Team, Laura Ryan and Denis Tierney, as I call them the eyes, ears of the Council who give endless hours promoting Limerick. Thank you both.

To Sean Coughlan, thank you for all your support, and the wider Management Team for their assistance in my role as Mayor of the City and County."

In conclusion, the Mayor thanked the outgoing Deputy Mayor, Councillor Talukder, for his invaluable support during the year and invited him to address the Meeting.

Councillor Talukder thanked the Mayor and all the Members for their support since his election to the Council. He referred to his life in Ireland and his pride in Limerick. He thanked his family and the Fianna Fáil Party for their support. He acknowledged the people of Limerick and the opportunity that he had been given to contribute to Limerick. He thanked the staff for their assistance and support over the last number of years.

1. Election of Mayor of the City and County of Limerick

The outgoing Mayor invited nominations for the Office of Mayor of the City and County of Limerick for the coming year.

Proposed by Councillor Sheahan (J);
Seconded by Councillor McSweeney;

“That, Councillor Daniel Butler be appointed Mayor of the City and County of Limerick to hold office to the next Annual Meeting or until his successor is appointed.”

As there were no other nominations, the outgoing Mayor declared Councillor Butler elected as Mayor of the City and County of Limerick and offered him his congratulations and best wishes for the coming year.

Having taken the Chair, the incoming Mayor, Councillor Butler, gave the following address:

“Councillors, Council Executive, press, family and friends, thank you everyone and let me assure you, as Confucius said, ‘The Superior man is modest in his speech but exceeds in his actions,’ and I hope that to be the case for me.

I believe we are in a time when more than ever we need compassion and forgiveness and leadership that reflects that. We are now in a time when we must heal, grow and hopefully flourish. It was Paulo Coelho who said, “We can never judge the lives of others, because each person knows only their own pain and renunciation. It's one thing to feel that you are on the right path, but it's another to think that yours is the only path.”

Often the focus of a new Mayor is to talk about economic, educational or environmental plans for Limerick and I will focus on those. But I want to firstly speak about who I have been elected to represent - the citizens of Limerick and their value, their culture, their stories and, in these times, their wellbeing. As we emerge from COVID, my commitment is to listen, have empathy and to open my mind to new experiences. Everyone may not agree with me, but I hope they will be able to understand and accept the reasoning behind my decisions.

I am open to constructive dialogue and I want to be a Mayor for ALL of the people of Limerick, not just the ones who speak loudest. The message to every citizen, especially those who are struggling, is that I see you, I value you for who you are, you are important to me and to Limerick, and I hold you central to today's event. We cannot be US without YOU.

I want to acknowledge my colleagues here who are impacted daily by the stories of our citizens that can be upsetting. We are often the last line of defence for many vulnerable members of our communities. I am sure, like me, you too struggle in the times that you cannot help someone in a difficult situation. They are certainly the ones that stay with me. I applaud you all and I think you all do incredible work.

Ag an bpointe seo, tá dearcadh dóchas agus athnuachán ag teastáil uainn. Domsa, is teanga dóchais é ár dteanga naisiúnta - an Gaeilge. Sháraigh sé go leor dúshlán tríd na blianta ach tríd na céadta bliain agus leanann sé ar aghaih i gcoinne na n-odds. Ní amhain go mbainim taitneamh as binneas agus fuaimeanna an dteanga, ach níos mó na sin, bainim taitneamh as saibhreas iliomad na scéalta as gaeilge atá le fail - stairiúil no nua-aimseartha.

Táim ag súil agus muid ag athnascadh mar tír arís, go gcuirfimid comhrá gearr taobh thiar dinn, go glacaimid leis an saghas comhrá agus roinnt na scéalta a bhíodh againn. Breathnaím ar ár dteanga agus ar ár stair mar slí chun sinn féin a chur in iúil agus muid ag teach chun cinn, bruite ach dóchasach o gCovid.

The Irish language for me is a language of hope. It has repelled many challenges in our history and continues to do so against all the odds in a globalised world. Its musicality and sound are one of depth and joy but more so I enjoy the many stories we have from our history through Irish and the richness it brings to storytelling.

In Limerick, we are a very proud people. The recent Forbes story took everyone by surprise, falling way below the standard associated with what is one of the world's best known and most reputable business publications. How out of sync it was with the publication's standards was that Forbes removed it shortly after it appeared online, stating that it failed to meet its publication standards. But it was the response of the people of Limerick here at home and across the world that was the biggest take-away from that wider experience. That night, the #LimerickandProud hashtag started trending on social media and was engaged in more than 8 million times over that week active across North America, Brazil, Europe, South Africa, India, China and Australia, people from across the world united in their support for Limerick.

That response re-affirmed to me what Limerick is today: an ambitious, confident, go-forward city and people either from, or familiar with, Limerick simply did not stand for what was written. We have had very positive communication with Forbes since the publication of the article and they have committed to bringing the Forbes 30 under 30 event to Limerick. I look forward to this event as Mayor. This is a huge opportunity as it will showcase Limerick and the stories of its top young entrepreneurs to a potential monthly audience of over 200 million people.

It is our stories that ultimately unite us. We have a culture of storytelling and of the seanchaí. Stories of who we are, our communities, our Limerick, our funny experiences or our life lessons. Seamus Heaney said, 'If you have the words, there's always a chance that you'll find the way.'

On my father's side, they were all working hard from a very young age on and around the Docks. My uncle Billy, who we lost this year, was working in the Docks from the age of 12 before heading to the UK to work aged 17/18, where my other uncle Robert followed aged 16. My father worked night shifts aged 15/16 in Ferenka and worked on the periphery of the Docks. This is why I am so proud of our Docklands and the stories told from those times, stories that are grounded in honest, hard work.

My mother grew up on a farm in Glin and then Ardagh. She sadly lost her mother at a very young age leaving the family to pull together to raise themselves, with her milking the cows every morning before school. One of her sisters became the mother figure in the family in her teenage years. I am very proud of my West Limerick roots and the journey of the Culhanes.

So, you can see where I get my work ethic from when you have parents like I had who worked hard all their lives to support my sister and I to have a better life. It allowed me to become the first Butler to ever attend University. As much as we did not have much money when I was very young, my parents gave me everything I needed. We were supported by our family, our community and, indeed, by supports like social housing. That is part of my story. You have yours, as does every Limerick Citizen.

I hope this year, as a way of reconnecting, a way of sharing our history, our learning, our burdens and our sense of fun, that the art of storytelling is rekindled. Limerick is a place where you can write your own story and decide your own destiny.

The upcoming year is an important one for local democracy and Limerick has a long and distinguished story in its evolution. The most important title is not Mayor or Councillor - it is Citizen. It is a title that unites us all and does not change.

The citizens of Limerick voted in a plebiscite in 2019 for Limerick to become the first Local Authority area in the history of the State to have a Directly Elected Mayor with Executive Functions. This project is another key example of Limerick as a national leader in terms of innovative and progressive thinking. I will play a positive and active part as we step closer to this new chapter in our history in our story.

It was the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg who said, "Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you." Wise words in a divided world that we here in Limerick must heed. I look forward to playing a key role to help shape the direction of Limerick city and county into the future, which will be the single biggest reform of local government since the foundation of the State.

We have all experienced how COVID-19 has transformed how we live and work - not just here in Limerick - but the world over, and has brought about a deep reflection generally in society. Almost overnight, we adopted new ways of living, working and connecting. COVID has become an accelerator. We have leaped into a new world order, but an order that Limerick can be a leader nationally and internationally in. The acceleration has been in so many respects a positive one. For example, the need to tackle climate change has brought

more clarity than ever and it will undeniably be at the top of the world agenda when COVID is finally brought under control.

Not far behind will be 'connectedness:' how we stay close in a new world that will be a blend of offline and online, of the virtual and the present, enabled by a digital transformation.

As the Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar, said last March, at the launch of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Bill on Ireland's Digital Green Transformation, "A twin transition to a new economy, a transition that is digital and green. And the countries that will do best are ones that are early movers, ones that adopt the digital agenda first and ones that adopt the green agenda early. That is what we are trying to do as a Government; trying to decouple economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions and marry economic progress with environmental protection."

This is a huge opportunity for Limerick, which is already an exemplar in both these areas nationally and internationally. We have the +CityxChange programme where we are one of two European lighthouse cities; we have the Shannon Estuary, where ambitious plans are afoot to transform it into a major European renewable energy hub. And we have our incredible heritage on the River Shannon – almost 100 years ago it was home to the world's greatest hydro-engineering solution, the Shannon Hydro Electric Scheme at Ardnacrusha. When it comes to the digital transformation, think our Smart City programme; our technology heritage, through our FDI and indigenous tech sector. And already we are seeing the twin transition, just one example being the planned 'first in Europe' floating data centre. COVID has made us turn to nature for refuge, for renewal, for escape and a sense of connection. We have always known the value of our environment and now more than ever we can clearly see it.

Let us leave the car in the driveway and walk/cycle to the shops or school; let us support our workers to work from home; let us repair rather than dump.

In Limerick, we have demanded our Transport Plan reflect the ambition we have for sustainable transport and development, coupled with our work on the recent Development Plan. We want to set ambitious targets and play our part.

We have some of the finest farming lands and farmers in the world. It gives us access on our doorstep to the finest produce from farmers, setting standards in sustainable farming practices that we should be hugely proud of.

We want to be world leaders in green energy and sustainable living. So we extend an invite to the world that we want you to join us in this journey. It is time to tell the world that if you want to live sustainably in an increasingly digital world, Limerick is the ideal location.

Limerick has its challenges and we must be honest about them. We have some of the highest levels of social deprivation in the country and highest unemployment blackspots. If we are to truly succeed as a city and county, then it must be success for all - not just the few. Many of these communities see very low levels of Third Level educational attainment

and that must change. Education is a key driver of real social change and it is no different here in Limerick. We have incredible Third Level institutions in Limerick which do much but must do more.

I am fortunate to have formed many friendships in the communities I work professionally in over the years. One of the many things that frustrates me is when I see the many capable and talented young people not getting the opportunities and supports to succeed! We need to see our Regeneration programme look to the social regeneration aspects much more and in strategic ways such as Third Level partnerships embedded within communities. We need to see the work already underway in relation to apprenticeships being expanded with urgency.

Finally, we need to see people supported to succeed and to do so while continuing to live in the communities they grew up.

As Mayor, I am looking forward to attending cultural events, whether it be gigs, plays or art exhibitions that we have all missed over the last 18 months. It is what feeds our souls and fills us with joy.

Limerick's designation as a National City of Culture in 2014 rekindled our passion and imagination as an artistic city and made it accessible and open to all and not just the few - lessons we must cherish. As we emerge from COVID, I hope we can work together to support our creative community because we need them more than ever to put expression to our experiences and to offer an opportunity to escape to the refuge of our imaginations. When you see the success of Denise Chaila internationally, it has been a true source of inspiration. She is our modern day poet reflecting her reality in the words she weaves. She represents the new identity emerging from Limerick and as she says 'You came to the 061. We'll show you how to get things done.' Because that is what we do in Limerick - we get things done.

There is no doubt we need the arts and the arts needs us so let us get out and enjoy and support our creative citizens so we can reclaim what COVID took from us.

In my time with Healthy Limerick, we decided on social connectedness as the key driver for social health. The research shows that the healthiest communities are those that are most connected.

COVID has disconnected us and built on the damage our busy lifestyles have done to our ability to connect within our community. Many of us do not know our neighbours anymore. This despite the fact social connectedness improves our social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

In a time of unending online connection, we are seeing greater levels of loneliness and social isolation, not just in rural areas but increasingly in our urban areas as well. Now more than ever we must reach out, we must connect with each other, with our environment, with our Limerick. Let us embrace and retain the outdoor dining and realise there is no such thing as bad weather, just wrong clothing.

Let me conclude and reinforce that I want to put first and central the citizens of Limerick, their value, their culture, their stories and in these times their wellbeing.

And I ask you - the people here today and the people of Limerick - to listen to the inspiring words of Seamus Heaney, 'Walk on air against your better judgement.' Or, as Denise Chaila says, 'Go Bravely.' I did, and here I am, hugely honoured to be your Mayor. Thank you."

2. Election of Deputy Mayor of the City and County of Limerick

The Mayor invited nominations for the Office of Deputy Mayor of the City and County of Limerick for the coming year.

Proposed by Councillor Sheahan (J);
Seconded by Councillor Galvin;

"That, Councillor Tom Ruddle be appointed Deputy Mayor of the City and County of Limerick to hold office to the next Annual Meeting or until his successor is appointed."

The Mayor declared Councillor Ruddle elected as Deputy Mayor of the City and County of Limerick and congratulated him on his election.

The incoming Deputy Mayor, Councillor Ruddle, then addressed the Meeting:

"Mayor Butler, Senator, Fellow Councillors, Chief Executive, Dr. Pat Daly, and Officials of the Council.

I am delighted to be elected today to the post of Deputy Mayor. Thanks to my Fine Gael colleagues for nominating me, and all my colleagues who supported me here today. This is the ultimate honour for me, I never thought I would be here today when first elected two years ago. I am honoured to take up the position of Deputy Mayor of our fine city and county. I will endeavour to work hand-in-hand with Mayor Daniel Butler in supporting him in carrying out his duties as Mayor and I know we will work very well together.

I would like to compliment the outgoing Mayor, Councillor Michael Collins, from my home town, Newcastle West, on his excellent stewardship in conducting our meetings with such efficiency in such difficult circumstances due to COVID. Also, well done to Councillor Asad Talukder for stepping into the role when called upon.

I really thought I had it made recently. I was queuing in a shop in Newcastle West and there were three young boys in front of me. One of the boys looked at me and whispered, 'he is famous.' I really thought this is great. The other boys, all excited, asked who is he. He answered, 'that's Jerome Scanlan.'

The highlights for me over the past two years have been:

- Seeing the Limerick Greenway come to fruition. This is a fantastic amenity for the whole county, especially West Limerick. It will bring tourism to the West. Well done to Gordon Daly and his team for delivering this. I was glad to be part of this with my fellow Councillors. I will look forward to its opening in July.
- The sod turning on the new athletics facility in Newcastle West. In twelve months' time, this will be up and running. This is close to my heart, having represented Ireland in my youth.
- New industry and jobs to Newcastle West. The Ortec Factory and the Primary Care Centre under construction, bringing over 200 jobs to Newcastle West. I hope to promote the area as a destination for more companies to consider setting up in Limerick city and county. I am delighted to be assisting Mayor Butler who will promote Limerick wherever he goes.

Things I would like to see being achieved in my time in the Council are –

- More houses in our small towns and villages. This needs to be a priority. Rural Limerick has to be kept alive. There is a fantastic community spirit, in the sports clubs and community groups, in the smallest of areas, and this needs to be harnessed.
- Upgrade of our sewerage treatment plants - the Council to put pressure on Irish Water to at least upgrade one to two sewerage treatment schemes per year in our towns and villages.
- Speed up house building by the Council of both Social and Affordable Housing.
- Nationally, I would like to see Broadband rolled out at a faster pace. COVID has shown us the importance of this - from every worker, parent, child studying at home, this has never been so important.

I would like to thank my family, my wife Marie who has put up with me for the past thirty years, my daughter Blathnaid and my son Andrew, for supporting me on this journey.

I would also like to thank two great friends of mine, who are here today with my family, former Deputy, Michael Finucane, and Colum Dalton. They helped and encouraged me every step of the way on my election to the Council. They say you are only as good as the people around you, and it is very true in this case. I will be forever grateful for all their time and effort.

Finally, many thanks to Laura Flannery and her colleagues for organising today's event. Well done."

The Members welcomed the guests who were present. They congratulated the Mayor and Deputy Mayor on their election and assured them of their full support. They wished them well in the year ahead and expressed confidence in their ability to carry out the duties of Mayor and Deputy Mayor with great honour and distinction. Tributes were also paid to the outgoing Mayor, Councillor Collins (M), and the outgoing Deputy Mayor, Councillor Talukder. Members commended them for the manner in which they had performed their roles during a very challenging year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chief Executive firstly congratulated Councillor Butler and Councillor Ruddle on their elevation to the Office of Mayor and Deputy Mayor of the City and County of Limerick respectively. He stated that it was an honour to hold the Office of Mayor, a responsible position that carried with it the challenge of delivering leadership for and on behalf of the people of Limerick. He looked forward to working with them over the next twelve months to promote Limerick. He also acknowledged the difficult year of the outgoing Mayor and Deputy Mayor and their efforts to lead the Council in very challenging circumstances. He referred to the difficulties faced by Members as a result of COVID-19. In conclusion, he commended them for their ability to adapt and conduct the business of the Council in an efficient manner through online meetings.

This concluded the Meeting.

Signed:

Mayor

Date:
