

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS AT MEETING OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL HELD AT THE MILLENNIUM THEATRE, TUS (FORMERLY LIT), MOYLISH CAMPUS, LIMERICK, ON FRIDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER, 2021, AT 1.30 P.M., TO CONSIDER THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2022.

PRESENT IN THE CHAIR:

Councillor D. Butler, Mayor.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors Benson, Carey, Collins (B), Collins (J), Collins (M), Costelloe, Daly, Donegan, Foley, Galvin, Hartigan, Keary, Kiely, Kilcoyne, Leddin, McSweeney, Mitchell, Murphy, Novak Uí Chonchúir, O'Brien, O'Dea, O'Donoghue, O'Hanlon, O'Sullivan, Ruddle, Ryan (M), Scanlan, Secas, 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 O'Donovan.

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive (Mr. P. Daly), Deputy Chief Executive and Director, Support Services (Mr. S. Coughlan), Director, Housing (Ms. C. Curley), Director, Community, Tourism and Culture (Mr. G. Daly), Director, Regeneration (Mr. J. Delaney), Director, Transportation and Mobility (Mr. B. Kennedy), Director, National and Regional Shared Services (Mr. K. Lehane), A/Director, Economic Development and Enterprise (Mr. V. Murray), Meetings Administrator (Ms. L. Flannery), Administrative Officers, Corporate Services and Governance (Mr. M. Leahy and Ms. F. McCormack), Staff Officer, Corporate Services and Governance (Ms. L. Creamer), Financial Accountants (Ms. I. Griffin and Mr. P. Murnane), Administrative Officer, Finance (Mr. K. Dore).

Circulated (a) Draft Chief Executive's Budget Report and Tables, including Capital Programme 2022-2024; (b) Proposed Vacant Property Refund Scheme 2022 (c) Proposed Small and Medium Business Support Scheme 2022; (d) Proposed Tourism Sector Support Scheme 2022; (e) Proposed Business and Retail Incentive Scheme for Vacant Property 2022; and (f) Budget 2022 Presentation.

The Mayor opened the Meeting by stating that the Members were required to consider the Chief Executive's Draft Budget of Limerick City and County Council for year ending 31st December, 2022, the Draft Budget having been served in accordance with Section 103 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act, 2014.

In recommending the Budget to the Council for consideration, the Chief Executive acknowledged that it had been a tough 12 months for everyone, especially the business community who have had to operate within severe restrictions as we all learned to live with

COVID-19. After suffering a very sharp fall in economic activity during 2020, the Limerick economy commenced its recovery in mid-2021 as we began to open up after COVID.

While Covid-19 caused unprecedented disruption through successive lockdowns, the re-opening of the economy this summer provided some cause for optimism for the post-pandemic recovery.

Limerick City and County Council was proud to play its part in the national response across many of our service areas. In relation to business supports; we distributed almost €1.4m in the Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID, and government supports have facilitated waiving in excess of €16 million in commercial rates over the last 12 months for those impacted.

As the economy re-entered lockdown in the first quarter of 2021, over 27,400 workers (32% of employment) in the City and County were reliant on the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) or Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), as businesses remained closed due to public health restrictions.

Outturn 2021

In presenting the Annual Budget for the year ended 31 December 2022 to Council, I wish to take this opportunity to summarise the financial position of Limerick City and County Council. I have reviewed the up to date position and I am satisfied that every effort will be made to break-even on the Revenue Account for 2021 despite challenges faced by the Council with the Covid-19 global pandemic. There is pressure on a number of income heads and ongoing controls on expenditure are in place.

Budget 2022

The Draft Budget has been prepared on the principle of a “balanced budget” based on the overall level of resources available to the Council and the requirement to meet statutory, contractual, legal and other obligations.

It incorporates the decisions made by the Council in relation to the Local Property Tax and General Municipal/ Metropolitan Allocations. The budget proposes no increase in the Annual Rate of Valuation for commercial ratepayers. The proposed budget schemes such as the SME scheme, tourism scheme, business and retail incentive scheme, & vacancy refund scheme are retained to assist many key sectors of our economy.

Under the Local Government Act, 2001 as amended, the Draft Budget is required to set out the expenditure necessary to carry out the functions of the Council and the income estimated to accrue to the Council. The budget is underpinned by our Corporate Plan that supports the overall budget strategy

Despite Covid-19, The Economic Outlook for Limerick continues to be positive.

Limerick received some early good news with major announcements by the Bon Secours and UPMC Hospital groups creating over 500 new jobs between them. This is in addition to jobs announcements later in the year by Bosch and Legato and very positive announcements by many companies including Edward Lifesciences, Regeneron, Transact Campus, 4Site, Screwfix, AMCS, Takumi and Kneat.

A very welcome boost was the announcement by Government of €116 million in funding under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund for key city-centre projects including Cleeve's Riverside Campus, the digital accelerator and a new city-centre footbridge.

Construction work commenced on the Opera Centre site, public realm work on O'Connell Street, the Rugby Experience and Bishops Quay delivering a timely boost to our city-centre.

This year our Draft Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 went out to public consultation setting out our blueprint for the development of Limerick over the next six years.

We also completed our review of the Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan that will guide our economic recovery from COVID.

The budget also supports the continued implementation of Limerick's new brand identity & strategy to internationalise Limerick as an investment and tourism destination and it is creating a new narrative & perspective for Limerick.

Place-Making and Public Realm Department

I introduced a new organisational structure, which came into effect on 1st July 2021. This restructuring responded to international, national and local priorities including climate change, housing, regeneration and the importance of creating quality places where people want to live, work, play and learn in. The creation of the Place-Making and Public Realm Department responds directly to the heightened appreciation of the importance of quality spaces and public places in the built and natural environment.

Climate Action

The recently enacted Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 gives legal recognition to the commitment to achieve a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030; provides for the introduction of carbon budgets; and provides that each local authority must develop a Climate Action Plan within 18 months of the enactment of the Act. The Plan will incorporate actions across all Directorates of the organisation to ensure that the Council contributes to achieving its share of the national emissions reduction targets. The development of the Council's Climate Action Plan will begin in 2022.

Provision has been made in Budget 2022 to advance studies and schemes which will allow the Council to prepare to meet the targets set out under national climate change policy, including building the resilience of the organisation to respond to climate change events, the promotion of green infrastructure and biodiversity, increased energy efficiency.

Infrastructure

Going forward across Limerick, there will be a new emphasis on connectivity and hybrid working as we emerge from the pandemic. Infrastructure investment is not only about helping people to move around; considerable investment is also required to reduce carbon emissions, either by facilitating remote working through broadband investment or decarbonising transport networks or providing funding to make homes more sustainable.

The pandemic has accelerated this agenda and is likely to boost investment levels over the medium term. €17 million in new funding has been allocated by the National Transport Authority to sustainable transport projects in Limerick in 2021; while in the long-term, the implementation of the Limerick Shannon Transport Strategy and the Colbert Station redevelopment will be vital to facilitate population growth in the City and wider Mid-West region.

Provision in the budget is also made to progress key infrastructure projects such as the Foynes to Limerick route, the Cork to Limerick Motorway, the O'Connell Street urban renewal project and many others.

We are working with The Land Development Agency on master planning public lands around Colbert Station for a new mixed-use residential district that could accommodate up to 5,000 people and other exciting developments are under discussion.

The Limerick Greenway is Limerick's largest outdoor tourism amenity and was officially opened on 5th November. The multimillion-euro Greenway has attracted almost a quarter of a million visitors since it opened to the public on 5th November.

In addition, the Development of shared e-workspaces for the County Limerick led by Innovate Limerick has seen new projects for NCW & Abbeyfeale.

Community

Budget 2022 will actively allow for the further engagement with and support of our communities. It will address enhancing quality of life for our citizens by supporting new public realm projects & programmes across the City & County in our libraries, galleries, museums, cultural and arts centres and across events. It also will continue a focus on dereliction/vacancy and delivery of public realm improvements in our urban areas and villages that will animate the public space and support place-making activities.

Housing

The budget will also help us deliver on targets set out across the four pathways within the 'Housing for All' Plan. It will enable & improve our own social housing stock and aid in tackling homelessness and support the regeneration programme.

Operations

Operationally, the budget will allow us to meet our commitments to continue the delivery of essential and statutory services in housing maintenance, roads, libraries, fire services. It will allow us to be efficient, effective and committed to providing services that will underpin a growing and dynamic Limerick. The professionalism, commitment and determination of staff to react to unforeseen events was again demonstrated in 2021.

Capital Programme

The budget also makes clear our Capital Works Program for the next three years - 2022-2024, which is included with Budget Documentation. This programme is wide-ranging over the 3 year period for a wide mix of key public projects for Limerick and is projected to cost €1.2B which is funded from a number of sources, including own resources, national programmes grant schemes and debt financing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the draft budget 2022, which has benefitted from very significant feedback from members in the Budget process, has committed to maintain service delivery in the face of severe socio-economic challenges and the member's decision to vary the rate of LPT has facilitated this commitment.

This budget builds on past budgets that consolidated our council finances and allowed for the innovative delivery of many services, programmes and projects that have set Limerick apart as an enviable location to live in, invest in and visit.

Finally, Mayor, I would like to thank you and the elected members for all your assistance and guidance in framing the budget. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Management team and their senior teams for their commitment and hard work in preparing this budget.

Special thanks goes to all the finance team for the dedicated work and support in drafting & presenting the budget, which I am sure you would agree, is exemplary.

In conclusion, he recommended the draft Budget, as presented, to the Members for adoption.

It was unanimously agreed that the Chief Executive's Report on the Draft Budget 2022, as circulated to Members, would be read into the Minutes of the Meeting as follows:

Introduction

The Draft Budget for the financial year ending 31st December 2022 has been prepared, circulated to Members and public notice of the Budget Meeting placed in the press, in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2001 as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

Circular Fin 16/2021 refers to the prescribed period that applies for the holding of the 2022 Budget meeting for Local Authorities as follows: 1st November 2021 to 30th November 2021. It was agreed by the Members at the September Council Meeting to hold the statutory Annual Budget Meeting on Friday 26th November 2021 at 1.30pm, at Millennium Theatre, TUS, Moylish Campus. Section 103 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014, provides that the Budget must be adopted within a period of 14 days beginning on the day on which the local authority budget meeting meets. The Budget therefore must be adopted by 10th December 2021.

Budget Process

The budget process for the preparation, consideration and adoption of the budget requires statutory compliance with a number of steps, which can be summarised as follows:

Step 1 - Decision by the Council on the adjustment factor to the Local Property Tax (LPT) following a public consultation process. This decision was made at the Council Meeting on 5th July to leave the LPT adjustment factor at the 2021 levels.

Step 2 - Allocation of the General Municipal/ Metropolitan Allocation (GMA). The Draft Budgetary Plan was considered at the following meetings:

Metropolitan District of Limerick	18 th October
Adare / Rathkeale Municipal District	3 rd November
Cappamore / Kilmallock Municipal District	4 th November
Newcastle West Municipal District	20 th October

Step 3 - Consultation with the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) and adoption of the Draft Budget by Council. Initial CPG meeting held on 28th June in advance of the LPT variation decision. Budget Strategy presented to CPG Meeting held on 20th September, with further meeting held on 15th November. The Statutory Budget Meeting is scheduled for 26th November with a budget workshop with Councillors to be held on 23rd November.

Step 4 - Consideration and adoption of the schedule of Municipal works by each of the Metropolitan / Municipal Districts. These meetings will be convened in early 2022 following the adoption of the Budget.

Step 5 - Consideration and adoption of the Service Delivery Plan. The 2022 Service Delivery Plan will be presented to Council at the January 2022 Council meeting.

Through consultation with the Corporate Policy Group and consideration of the views of Council as expressed through the different stages of the budgetary process, in particular as

expressed through the meetings of the Municipal/Metropolitan Districts, the budget as presented considers this feedback in a reasoned and balanced manner.

At the Statutory Budget Meeting, the Members will be asked to make the following decisions:

- Adopt the Budget with or without amendment.
- Determine the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV).
- Determine the proportion of Rates Refund applicable on vacant commercial premises.

National Economic Outlook

It is just over a year-and-a-half since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic triggered massive upheaval in the global economy. Since then, the pandemic has taken a heavy toll on societies everywhere with, across the world, over 4½ million lives lost due to the virus.

While the pandemic itself is changing due to the vaccination programme, both domestically and in other advanced economies, several economic aftershocks are now being felt. Disruption to supply chains, higher energy prices, labour market shortages in some sectors and a pick-up in inflation have become a feature of many economies. If sustained, these side effects of the pandemic could potentially slow the global recovery, an outcome to which the Irish economy would not be immune.

After recording an Exchequer deficit of €12.3 billion last year, a further deficit of €12.1 billion is in prospect this year. Even with economic recovery, the Exchequer is projected to run another large deficit of €7.7 billion in 2022.

Public indebtedness has increased significantly, as the Government has used its balance sheet to absorb the pandemic-induced shock to economic activity. At the end of this year, gross public debt is estimated at €236.7 billion, the equivalent of 106.2 per cent of modified national income/GNI (Gross National Income). Relative to pre-pandemic levels at end-2019, this is an increase of 11.5 percentage points of GNI. Further public debt accumulation is in prospect for next year. Based on current expectations for the headline deficit, the stock of outstanding public indebtedness is projected to increase to €238.7 billion by end-2022; this would result in a debt-GNI ratio of just over 99.2 per cent. By the mid-part of this decade, the economic and fiscal projections outlined earlier imply gross public debt amounting to around €252 billion by end-2025. Allowing public debt to temporarily increase was the most appropriate way of cushioning the impact of the pandemic.

The need for a medium-term orientation for budgetary policy is further reinforced by the ageing of the population, which will involve significant fiscal costs. Financing the ‘two transitions’ – the transition to carbon (net-) neutrality and the transition to a digitised economy – will also absorb much of the resources generated by the economy in the years ahead. These resources are currently flattered by exceptionally strong corporation tax receipts, which are unlikely to persist. The revenue-at-risk from international corporation tax changes is tentatively estimated at around €2 billion per annum (c.1 per cent of modified national income) from the mid-part of this decade, and budgetary policy must be formulated based on this permanent revenue loss.

A perfect storm has given rise to a pick-up in both headline and core inflation since the spring, a feature of almost all advanced economies at this point. Amid tight supplies and growing demand on foot of economic recovery, higher energy prices have pushed the headline inflation rate higher. More fundamentally, a mismatch between demand and supply in some markets has been behind the increase in 'core' (i.e. excluding energy and food prices) inflation.

Overall, employment growth of 7¼ per cent is expected for the year (c. 150,000 jobs), with the unemployment rate approaching 9 per cent by year-end. For next year, employment growth of just over 13 per cent (c. 275,000 jobs) is projected, with particularly strong growth in part-time employment assumed. On this basis, the number at work is expected to return to its pre-pandemic level in the mid-part of 2022, with the unemployment rate expected to fall to 6½ per cent by the end of next year.

Table 1 below outlines the main economic and fiscal variables underlying the Department of Finance's budget for 2022.

<i>Variable - % change (unless stated)</i>	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<i>Economic Activity</i>					
Real GDP	8.2	5.6	5.9	15.6	5.0
Real GNP	6.5	3.4	3.4	9.1	4.5
Modified domestic demand	-	3.3	-4.9	5.2	6.5
<i>Prices</i>					
Core HICP	0.2	0.9	-0.1	1.7	2.1
<i>External Trade</i>					
Modified current account (per cent of Gross National Income-GNI)	10.6	-11.3*	11.5	10.6	9.2
<i>Labour Market</i>					
Total Employment ('000)	2,258	2,323	1,932	2,082	2,357
Employment	2.9	2.9	-16.7	7.8	13.2
Unemployment (per cent)	5.8	5.0	19.2	16.8	7.2
<i>Public Finances (per cent of GNI)</i>					

General government balance	0.1	0.5	-8.8	-5.9	-3.4
Net debt position (€ billion)			185.9	201.4	212.3
Net debt ratio (year-end)			89.3	90.4	88.2

Table 1: Summary of Main Economic and Fiscal Variables (per cent change (unless stated))

*Current Account Balance 2019 distorted by large-scale on-shoring of Intellectual Property assets & Other Globalisation factor.
Source: Department of Finance Economic and Fiscal Outlook Budget 2022, p.4

Local Outlook

It has been a tough 12 months for everyone, especially our business community who have had to operate within severe restrictions as we all learned to live with COVID-19. After suffering a very sharp fall in economic activity during 2020, the Limerick economy commenced its recovery in mid-2021 as we began to open up after COVID.

While Covid-19 caused unprecedented disruption through successive lockdowns, the re-opening of the economy this summer, as well as building back better and more sustainably, provided some cause for optimism for the post-pandemic recovery.

As the economy re-entered lockdown in the first quarter of 2021, over 27,400 workers (32% of employment) in the City and County were reliant on the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) or Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), as businesses remained closed due to public health restrictions.

Government support for employees and businesses helped to ease the burden of these severe restrictions while state agencies worked with bringing the virus under control. Limerick City and County Council was proud to play its part in the national response across many of our service areas and in relation to business supports; we distributed almost €1.4m in the Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID (SBASC1 and SBASC2) and government supports have facilitated waiving in excess of €16 million in commercial rates over the last 12 months for those impacted. Limerick received some early good news with major announcements by the Bon Secours and UPMC Hospital groups creating over 500 new jobs between them. This is in addition to jobs announcements later in the year by Bosch and Legato and very positive announcements by many companies including Edward Lifesciences, Regeneron, Transact Campus, 4Site, Screwfix, AMCS, Takumi and Kneat.

A very welcome boost was the announcement by Government of €116 million in funding under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund for key city-centre projects including Cleeve's Riverside Campus, the digital accelerator and a new city-centre footbridge. This year our Draft Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 went out to public consultation setting out our blueprint for the development of Limerick over the next six years. We also completed our review of the Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan that will guide our economic recovery from COVID. Construction work commenced on the Opera Centre site, public realm work on O'Connell Street, the Rugby Experience and Bishops Quay delivering a timely boost to our city-centre. The vaccination programme and government's roadmap to reopen retail and

hospitality provided us with a pathway out of lockdown, and this has restored our freedom to travel and enjoy our city and town centres. As Limerick reopened, it was important that we all shopped locally to support local business and jobs. While many of our key index figures declined during Covid, they have started to stabilise over the last six months as we all look forward to a continued recovery in our economy. Economic data also reflects the resilience of many sectors of Limerick.

Limerick is performing relatively well compared to other counties during COVID-19, with the predominance of remote-enabled sectors in the City more resilient to the disruption of the pandemic. Reflecting the national picture, the housing market has also remained resilient, with price rises in the City and county and lower residential vacancy rates pointing to continued strong demand, outpacing that of Dublin and other cities.

Going forward across Limerick, there will be a new emphasis on connectivity and hybrid working as we emerge from the pandemic. Infrastructure investment is not only about helping people to move around; considerable investment is also required to reduce carbon emissions, either by facilitating remote working through broadband investment or decarbonising transport networks or providing funding to make homes more sustainable. The pandemic has accelerated this agenda and is likely to boost investment levels over the medium term. €17 million in new funding has been allocated by the National Transport Authority to sustainable transport projects in Limerick in 2021; while in the long-term, the implementation of the Limerick Shannon Transport Strategy and the Colbert Station redevelopment will be vital to facilitate population growth in the City and wider Mid-West region.

While the workplace of the future will look different to pre-Covid, offices will continue to remain necessary for collaboration and knowledge sharing, and urban centres vital for the clustering of economic activity. The development of the Shannon Estuary as a renewable energy hub and the €73m in redevelopment funding for Limerick City Waterfront are the standout investments that will benefit the local economy in the near term. Businesses will also need to adapt to continued public health restrictions while public spaces are being re-imagined as attractive spaces for people to revitalise urban centres. At a local level, the hospitality sector has been facilitated to operate outdoors through the waiving of licence fees and grants to purchase outdoor equipment, taking advantage of the summer and seasonal 'staycations' in Ireland. With continued fiscal support, the recovery phase should look very different to the aftermath of the financial crisis a decade ago.

Limerick City and County Council will continue to support its citizens and business community to ensure that as we emerge from COVID, future growth is sustained and sustainable. Limerick City and County Council established a COVID-19 Community Response Team in 2020. The work of this team continued throughout 2021 dealing with calls and referrals and providing necessary supports.

Budget Strategy & Objectives

The Draft Budget has been prepared on the principle of a "balanced budget" based on the overall level of resources available to the Council and the requirement to meet statutory,

contractual, legal and other obligations. It incorporates the decisions made by the Council in relation to the Local Property Tax and General Municipal/ Metropolitan Allocations. Under the Local Government Act, 2001 as amended, the Draft Budget is required to set out the expenditure necessary to carry out the functions of the Council and the income estimated to accrue to the Council.

The key objectives of the 2022 Budget are set out below:

1. Housing & Regeneration

- Deliver on the 2022 targets across the 4 pathways within the ‘Housing For All’ plan
 - Pathway 1: Supporting Home Ownership and Increasing Affordability
 - Pathway 2: Eradicating Homelessness, Increasing Social Housing Delivery and Supporting Social Inclusion
 - Pathway 3: Increasing New Housing Supply
 - Pathway 4: Addressing Vacancy and Efficient Use of Existing Stock
- Continue to support the Regeneration Programme (Physical, Social & Economic)
- Maximise the output of Approved Housing Bodies as a key delivery mechanism
- Continue our planned maintenance programme to leverage additional sources of funding
- Maintain resources for the maintenance budget to meet the ongoing demands of our social housing stock and provide match funding to address voids, dereliction and vacant properties
- Develop key sites in our ownership identified for social and affordable housing
- Maintain resources in Estate Management and Tenancy Enforcement

2. Planning, Environment & Place Making

- Protect the natural and built environment for Limerick City and County including the progression of the CFRAMS programme in conjunction with the OPW
- To continue to work towards our 2030 climate change targets and to meet the objectives of the Water Framework directive and the climate action plan.
- Ensure increased focus on Place Making in the delivery of the Capital Programme
- Deliver on e-planning project thereby enhancing engagement with applicants and the public through the planning process
- Delivering new and enhanced sports and recreational facilities

3. Community Development Directorate to provide a stronger focus on a number of interrelated areas around support to communities

- Community Development Supports
 - Engagement and advice to communities on grant schemes and other Council led support measures including:
 - Covid-19 related supports and grant schemes to assist recovery and adaptations
 - Leading at a local level on the Government’s ‘keep well’ campaign

- Facilitating the work of the LCDC
- Securing maximum level of funding from national funding calls
- Continue and where possible enhance our programme of supports to our communities
- Delivering a cultural and arts programme for the benefit of the Citizens of Limerick and visitors to our City and County and supporting an arts and creative sector, which continue to be impacted by Covid-19.
- Restored Support for festivals and events following Covid restrictions in 2020 and 2021
- Supporting the recovery of the Limerick Tourism Sector and driving the implementation of the Limerick Tourism Development Strategy
- Strengthening the role our libraries, gallery & museum play in enhancing the quality of life of our citizens.

4. Economic Development

- Return the pace of economic investment and job creation to 2019 levels
- Ensure that Limerick is at the forefront in targeting European funding & investment
- Formally launch and expand 'HAPPEN' the mid-west co-workspace platform and complete capital works to E-Hubs in Abbeyfeale and the Digital Collaboration Centre in Cecil Street
- Advance the economic revitalisation of our city centre and towns and continue to address the crisis in the retail sector.
- Review the Limerick City and County Development Plans and prepare the first Development Plan for Limerick City and County Council
- Lead a digital strategy that will lay the foundation for a 'Smart & Greener Limerick Region'.
- Continue to promote and develop the Limerick Brand and Limerick as a destination for investment, socialise, work and reside.
- Deliver the Local Enterprise Office programme of supports for the SME sector as they recover from the impact of Covid.

5. Transportation & Mobility

- To continue to invest in the rural and urban infrastructure through the delivery of the 2022 schedule of municipal district works subject to the availability of national funding.
- Progress key infrastructure projects to provide momentum to the economic growth in Limerick and the Mid-West, which have been impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. These projects will also assist in optimising Limerick's position adjacent to Maritime and Aviation routes in a post Brexit environment.
- Delivery of sustainable and active travel projects identified in the draft Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy in conjunction with the National Transport Authority.

6. Frontline Local Authority Services

- Continue to deliver on key frontline services and maintain our ability to react to unforeseen events such as Covid pandemic and extreme weather.

7. HAP Shared Services Centre

- Deliver 2022 targets set for HAP shared service and continue to provide a quality service while actively looking to implement innovative solutions to deliver further efficiencies.

8. Continue to seek efficiencies in service provision, cost reduction and value for money

Outturn 2021

In presenting the Annual Budget for the year ended 31 December 2022 to Council, I wish to take this opportunity to summarise the financial position of Limerick City and County Council. The Annual Financial Statement of Limerick City and County Council for the year 2020 shows the accumulated balance on the Revenue Account is in a credit position of €887,563. I have reviewed the up to date position and I am satisfied that every effort will be made to break-even on the Revenue Account for 2021 despite challenges faced by the Council with the Covid-19 global pandemic; however there is pressure on a number of income heads and ongoing controls on expenditure are in place. The impact of the windfarm appeals has been highlighted to members and this could impact adversely in achieving a balanced outturn. The 2022 draft Budget reflects the need to continue a strong financial management ethos while making every effort to meet the ever-increasing demands on the services of Limerick City and County Council.

Analysis of Expenditure Requirements 2022

The total estimated expenditure included in the Draft Budget for 2022 amounts to €952.232 million, an increase of €95 million on the adopted figure for 2021. The growth in the HAP transactional Shared Service Centre accounts for the majority of this increase. As this expenditure is matched by an increase in corresponding income, it has no net effect on the Budgetary Provisions. The following Table 2 depicts Revenue expenditure by Division.

Division	Draft Budget 2022	Adopted Budget 2021
A - Housing & Building	€46,247,935	€44,770,339
A - HAP Shared Service Centre	€749,234,667	€659,239,948
B - Road Transport & Safety	€47,013,010	€49,136,641
C - Water Services	€16,471,573	€16,152,091
D - Development Mgt	€24,931,389	€22,691,165
E - Environmental Services	€37,191,980	€34,938,741

F - Recreation & Amenity	€14,580,049	€14,189,388
G - Agri, Ed, Health & Welfare	€1,327,103	€1,349,894
H - Misc Services	€15,234,154	€14,765,389
	€952,231,860	€857,233,596

Table 2: Analysis of Expenditure by Division

The following chart gives a breakdown of expenditure by each division.

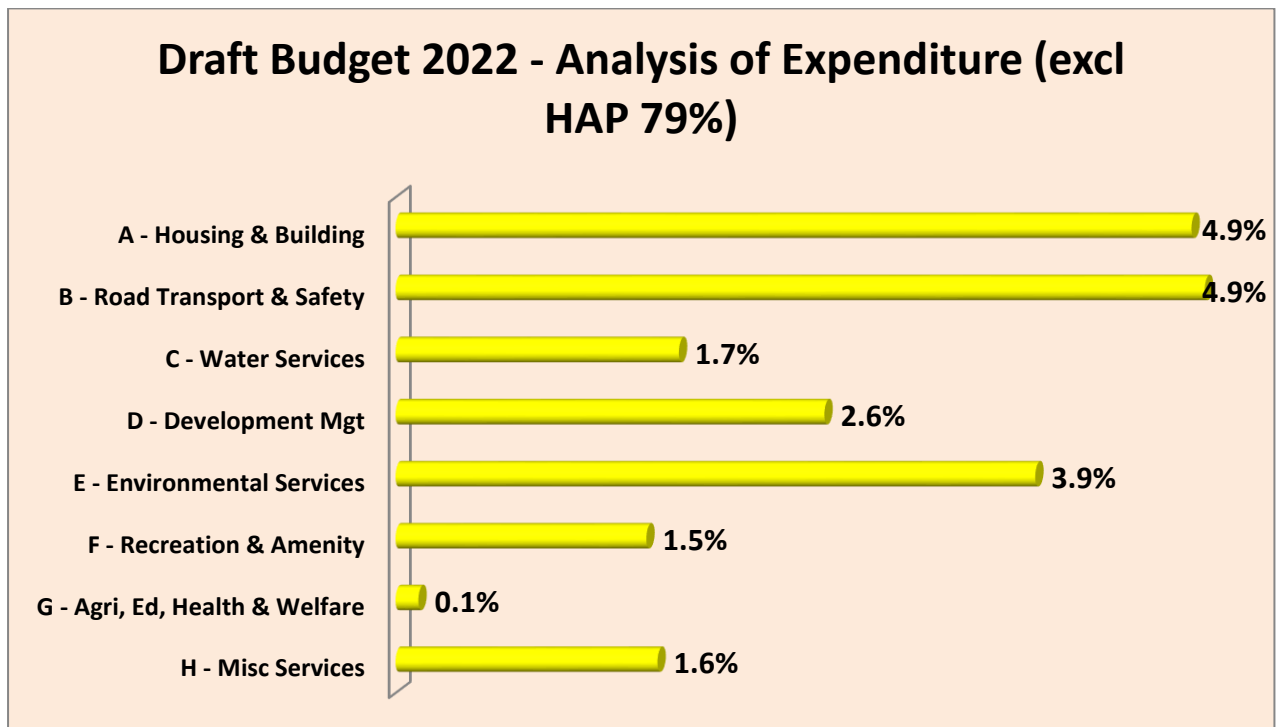


Chart 1: Analysis of split of Expenditure (excl HAP) by Division

The following bar chart shows the estimated expenditure for Draft Budget 2022 for each Division, with comparative figures for 2021:

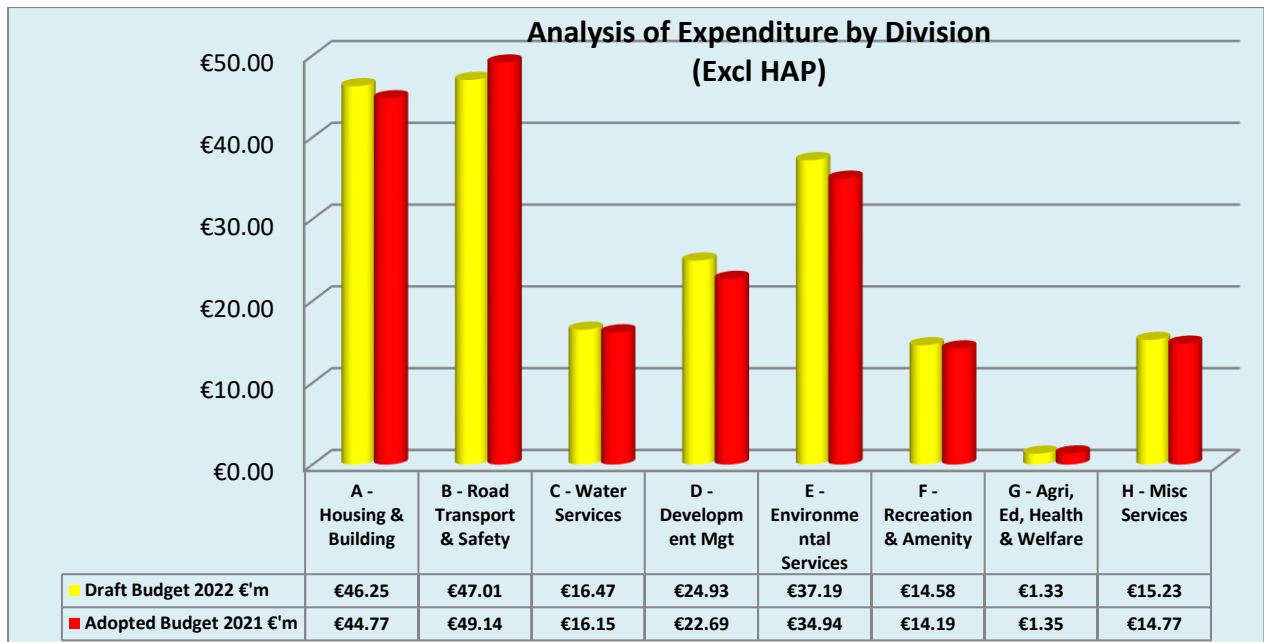


Chart 2: Analysis of Expenditure (excl HAP) by Division - Draft Budget 2022 versus Budget 2021

Analysis of Income 2022

The level of expenditure shown above, at €952.232 million, will be financed from the following sources:

Source	Amount
1. Local Property Tax	€19,952,507
2. Commercial Rates	€59,279,416
3. Grants & Subsidies (net of HAP)	€68,427,025
4. Goods & Services (net of HAP)	€55,339,832
Sub Total Income (Excluding HAP)	€202,998,780
1. HAP Differential Rent	€177,079,240
2. HAP Subsidy from DHPCLG	€572,153,840
Sub Total HAP	€749,233,080
Total including HAP	€952,231,860

Table 3: Analysis of Draft Budget 2022 Income

The following Pie chart highlights the % split by income category excluding HAP.

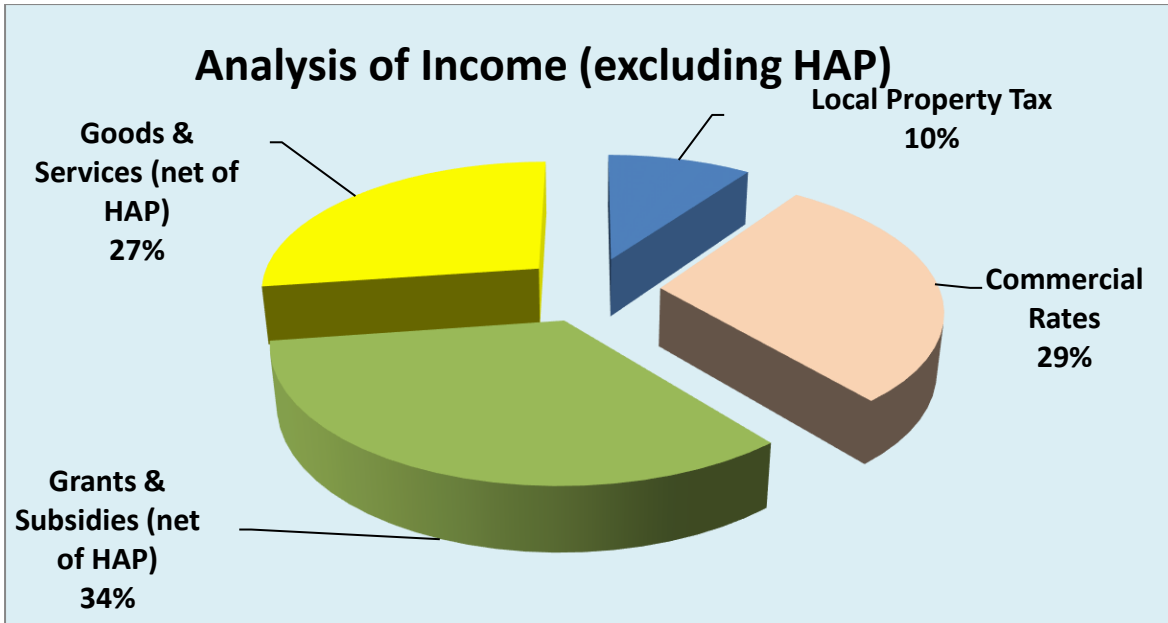


Chart 3: Analysis of Draft Budget 2022 Income (excluding HAP)

66% of the Council's income (excluding HAP) is now generated locally through Commercial Rates (29%), LPT (10%) and Goods & Services (27%).

Comparative figures for Budgets 2022 and 2021 are shown hereunder.

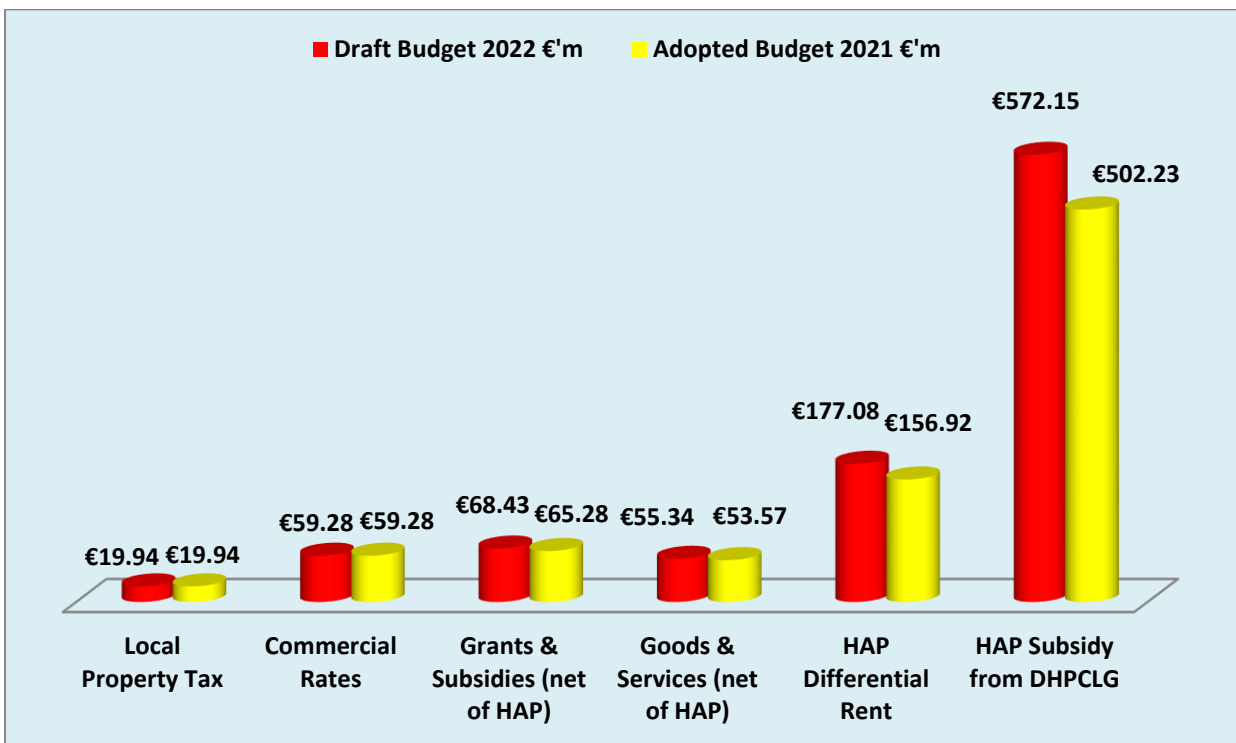


Chart 4: Analysis of Income: Draft Budget 2022 v's Budget 2021

Goods and Services Income

Goods and Services income excluding HAP income for Draft Budget 2022 is €55.340m and is noted in Table D. This includes income headings such as income from single differential rent scheme of €16.65m for Budget 2022 (increase of €700k on Budget 2021). Income from Irish Water is also accounted for under this heading with Budget 2022 at €12.97m. Other income sources noted under Goods and Services include:

- Planning Fees income of €0.87m noted for Budget 2022 (compared to €0.69m in Budget 2021).
- Parking Fines & Charges with income of €2.1m noted for Budget 2022 (compared to €1.9m in 2021).

One key assumption noted in Budget 2022 is that reduced compensation of Euro 300k from central Government will be received in 2022 for loss of income in Goods and Services due to Covid-19 restrictions (this compensation is noted under Grants & Subsidies for Budget 2021 was for €1.05m).

Grants and Subsidies Income

Grants and Subsidies income excluding HAP income for Draft Budget 2022 is €68.427m and is noted in Table E. Some of the key income sources under this heading include:

- Road Grants are assumed to remain at 2021 levels.
- Compensation for increases in rates of pay and PSPR resulting from the unwinding of FEMPI legislation and increases in pay and pensions relating to the Public Sector Stability Agreement noted at €6.44m in Draft Budget 2022 (increase of €1.33m compared to 2021 due to pay increases in 2021).

Local Property Tax Allocation 2022

Local Property Tax (LPT) is now a key funding source for Local Government replacing the General Purpose Grant funding allocation. The initial allocation under this funding heading was confirmed as €17,554,464. The basis of this funding is an allocation of 80% of the LPT collected from property owners in the City and County and retained by the Local Authority with the remaining 20% being paid into an equalisation fund from which payments are made to Counties not achieving a level of funding equivalent to the 2013 General Purpose Grant (GPG) through their own LPT receipts.

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 and associated Regulations permits the Members of the Council to vary the Rate by a maximum increase or decrease of 15%. The Council decided to adjust the LPT rate upwards by 15% in 2022 equating to an increase of €2,398,043. The revaluation process commenced during October/ November 2021 and detailed information on new yields will not be available for Budget 2022, but the Department have confirmed LPT allocations for 2022 to Limerick City and County Council via Circular Fin 18/2021.

The 2022 allocation from the Local Property Tax and the calculation provided by the DHPLG on the basis of this allocation is set out in **Table 4** below:

Limerick City and County Council - 2022 LPT Allocation	
LPT 100%	€15,986,957
LPT 20% to Equalisation Fund	(€3,197,391)
=> LPT 80% Retained Locally	€12,789,565
Distribution from Equalisation Fund	€4,764,899
Original LPT Allocation	€17,554,464
15% increase in LPT rate	€2,398,043
Revised LPT Allocation 2022	€19,952,507

Table 4: LPT Reconciliation

The 15% LPT variation for 2022 of €2,398,043 has been allocated to provide additional resources for the delivery of the following services as follows:

Svc	Service Description	LPT 15% Allocation 2022
B03 & B04	Own Resource element of Local & Regional Roads including Capital Investment New Plant to Deliver efficient Local resources	€778k
E0601	Street cleaning	€220k
B0601 & B0602	Traffic Management	€200k
D0901	Urban and rural Regeneration	€550k
F0301	Maintenance of Parks, Pitches & Open Spaces	€140k
F0201	Library Service	€50k
E1101	Fire Service	€100k
D05	Additional GMA for 2022 (similar to 2021 & 2020)	€200k
D0501	Tourism Development & Promotion	€151k

Table 5: Allocation of additional resources

Commercial Rates

Commercial Rates is a significant contributor to the total budgeted income for the Council and it is vital to the level of service delivery that income from this source is maximised. In this respect, it is critically important that the Valuation Office reverts promptly with new valuations during 2022. Limerick City and County Council will continue to ensure that all commercial properties in the City and County are included on the rates records and are properly rated.

Due to COVID-19, 2021 has been a very challenging year for the Council's Ratepayers. But supports from central government have aided businesses including:

- Scaled back Rates Waiver scheme during 2021 which was further restricted in Quarter 4, 2021 to the Hospitality sector.
- Local Authority support schemes (SME & Tourism)

There are still outstanding appeals from Windfarms to be adjudicated by the Valuation Tribunal, which could result in further financial losses from reduced Commercial Rates of €700k per annum (arrears of €4.2m).

This financial loss in Commercial Rates for 2022 due to the windfarms' appeals and reduction in the global valuations of some utilities has been part mitigated by the Council receiving some Rates buoyancy in Commercial Rates.

Vacant Property Scheme 2022

Section 31 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 gives the power to the members of local authorities to vary the level of rates refunds that apply in individual local electoral areas within the overall administrative area of the local authority.

Article 29 of the Local Government (Financial & Audit Procedures) Regulations 2014 provides that the decision to alter the rate of refund should be decided at the statutory annual budget meeting and that the rate of refund decided in respect of the relevant local electoral area shall apply to eligible persons for the year to which the budget relates. The budget has been framed on the basis the refund rates on vacant property noted in **Table 6** below.

The following amended vacant property scheme is proposed to continue in 2022:

Band	% Refund
Up to €2,856 Annual Rate Demand	100%
€2,857 to €11,376 Annual Rate Demand (with payment of 50% required)	50%

€11,377 to €57,024 Annual Rate Demand (with payment of 75% required)	25%
Over €57,025 Annual Rate Demand (with payment of 90% required)	10%

Table 6: Proposed Vacant Property Scheme 2022

Small and Medium Business Support Scheme 2022 (SME Scheme)

The proposed Small and Medium Business Support scheme will pay a financial support to occupiers of commercial properties with a total annual commercial rate bill of up to and including €25,000 but not less than €1 in 2022. The proposed % support for 2022 rates is 9% subject to a maximum refund of €1,000, which will be subject to a number of terms and conditions, including 25% of arrears, must be paid in year 1 to qualify for the scheme with a payment plan in place over years 2 to 4 for the remaining arrears.

Tourism Sector Support Scheme 2022

The Proposed Tourism Sector Support Scheme for 2022 will be a financial support/reduction to occupiers of commercial properties directly linked to the Tourism Sector. In order to qualify, the total annual Commercial Rates liability must be in excess of €25,000 (Businesses with a Rate Demand less than €25,000 already qualify for the SME Scheme 2022) and is subject to a number of terms and conditions. The support grant payment, which is aimed specifically at the Tourism and Hospitality Sector, will be set at 4% of the total Rates, including arrears, up to a maximum grant payment of €5,000, for 2022 subject to the Scheme being approved by the Council.

Business & Retail Incentive Scheme 2022

The Proposed Business & Retail Incentive Scheme for 2022 will continue to be available for businesses in all towns and villages across Limerick City and County Council. The scheme is intended to address property vacancy rates, improve streetscapes and to support the business community.

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Transactional Shared Service Centre

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is the principal platform for underpinning the provision of housing support in Ireland and has been in operation for a number of years. HAP is a form of social housing support provided by all Local Authorities under the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. The availability of HAP enables all Local Authorities to provide housing support to over 62,000 households with a long-term housing need, including many long-term Rent Supplement recipients.

The key business processes delivered on behalf of the Local Authorities by the HAPSSC are Tenancy Processing, Weekly Tenant Rent Run, Monthly Landlord Payment, Tenancy

Amendments, Debt Management, and Recoupment Management. The cost of running the national centre is fully recouped by government.

During the Covid 19 pandemic, the HAPSSC has continued to support over 62,000 active HAP tenancies.

The HAPSSC will administer circa 14,000 new tenancies in 2022 and process €708 million in payments to HAP landlords and collect €177 million in differential rent from HAP tenants.

Place-Making and Public Realm Department

A new organisational structure came in effect on 1st July 2021. This restructuring responded to international, national and local priorities including climate change, housing, regeneration and the importance of creating quality places where people want to live, work, play and learn in. The creation of the Place-Making and Public Realm Department responds directly to the heightened appreciation of the importance of quality spaces and public places in the built and natural environment.

Climate Action

The Council adopted the Limerick City and County Climate Change Adaptation Strategy in July 2019 in accordance with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015.

The recently enacted Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 gives legal recognition to the commitment to achieve a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030; provides for the introduction of carbon budgets; and provides that each local authority must develop a Climate Action Plan within 18 months of the enactment of the Act. The Plan will incorporate actions across all Directorates of the organisation to ensure that the Council contributes to achieving its share of the national emissions reduction targets. The development of the Council's Climate Action Plan will begin in 2022.

Provision has been made in Budget 2022 to advance studies and schemes which will allow the Council to prepare to meet the targets set out under national climate change policy, including building the resilience of the organisation to respond to climate change events, the promotion of green infrastructure and biodiversity, increased energy efficiency.

Limerick Greenway

Limerick Greenway is Limerick's largest outdoor tourism amenity and was officially opened on 5th November. The multimillion-euro Limerick Greenway has attracted almost a quarter of a million visitors since it opened to the public on 5th November. The 40km greenway, which connects the towns and villages of Rathkeale, Newcastle West, Ardagh, Templeglantine and Abbeyfeale, opened on July 1 following the completion of upgrade works. Counters placed at strategic locations along the route show that 218,496 people visited the Limerick Greenway since it opened. The data shows that over 70% were cyclists and there has been overwhelmingly positive feedback from local hospitality businesses across the region. The investment in the Limerick Greenway has provided a strategic piece of sustainable travel

infrastructure and a tourism amenity, which will support local community development socially, culturally and economically. The local authority led the project with the support of the Department for Rural and Community Development, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Department of Transport and Fáilte Ireland.

General Municipal/ Metropolitan Allocation 2022

Circular Fin 08/2015 referred to the Local Government (Financial and Audit Procedures) (Amendment) Regulations (S.I.363 of 2015), which amends the Local Government (Financial and Audit Procedures) Regulations 2014 by providing that the meeting at which Municipal/ Metropolitan members consider the draft budgetary plan must conclude no later than 10 days prior to the local authority budget meeting.

Following the adoption of the budget, a schedule of proposed works of maintenance and repairs to be carried out during 2022 in each Municipal/ Metropolitan District will be prepared for consideration and adoption by the Municipal/ Metropolitan District Members.

The draft budget has included a general Municipal/ Metropolitan allocation of €1.403m in total for district members, which will provide a focus and clarity as regards how the elected members want to account for the expending of monies within their area.

Workforce

Recruitment of staff within the Organisation will continue and in particular will focus on the replacement of staff following retirements, promotions and departures. A new Active Travel unit was established in 2021 in Limerick City and County Council and will be fully funded by the NTA.

As a major employer in the region, it is important that we provide employment opportunities to the communities we serve. The Graph below shows our overall numbers at present and the number of retired staff.

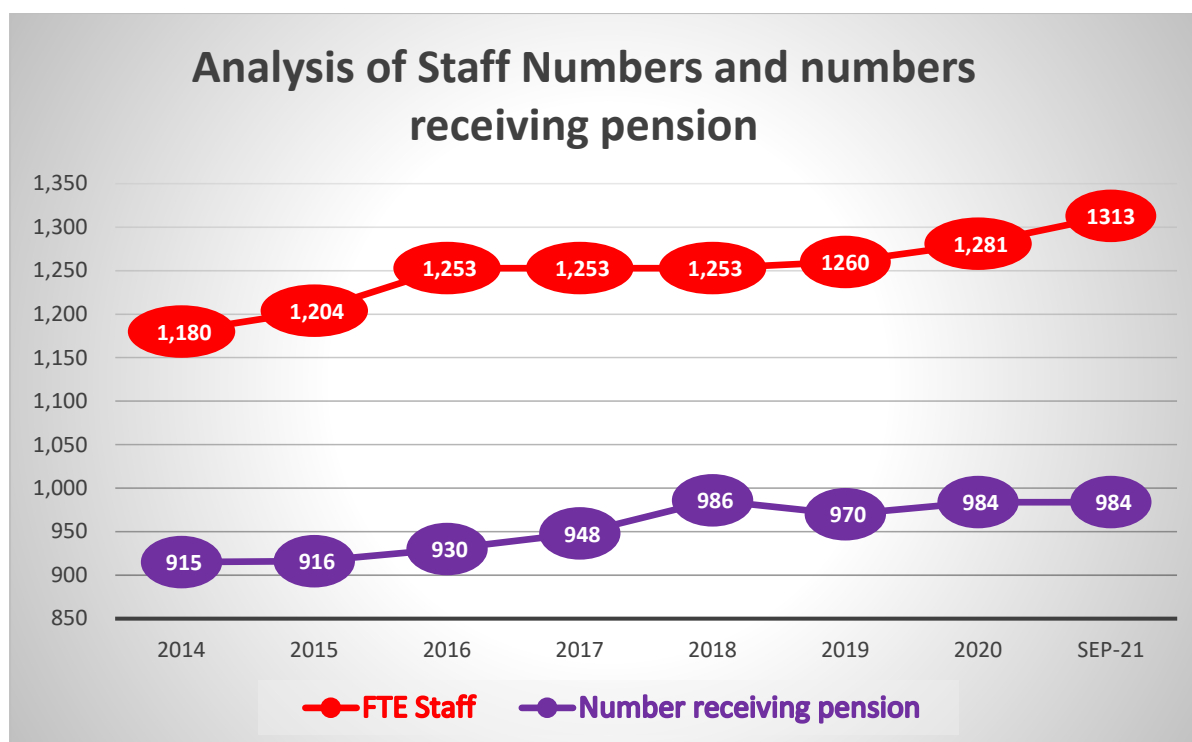


Chart 5: Analysis of staff numbers and number receiving pensions 2015-2021 (Sept)

Business Improvement Department:

The Business Improvement Unit provides support to the organisation in the assessment of internal and external service delivery for efficiency and effectiveness. The team assists in mapping and standardising processes ensuring the organisation is producing value for money services that provide the best customer experience.

Water Services/ Irish Water

The Water Services budget now largely covers the payroll costs for 139 full time staff equivalents and central management charges that will be recouped from Irish Water. Materials, equipment, services, plant hire and energy are now primarily purchased through the Irish Water procurement system and, therefore, no longer appears on the Council's expenditure system.

Covid-19

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic, Limerick City and County Council has continued to deliver all essential services to the public.

In 2020 a Covid Crisis Management team was established and this group have met regularly and ensured that the Council's strategic aims are met. These include following national advice to contain spread of COVID-19, showing leadership to staff and public as well as protection to the Health, Safety and Welfare of Staff, Councillors and Customers.

The Covid Community Response Team, supported by our Customer Services Department, provided an invaluable support structure to local communities.

A range of Covid-19 safe work practices have been rolled out and adopted by staff to minimise the risk of infection. In this regard continuing to adhere to public health advice is of utmost importance.

Council Meetings have also adapted to the circumstances to ensure adequate social distancing and a safe environment for staff and Elected Members, while many other meetings have moved online. The Council also holds meetings in a blended physical and online format.

Directly Elected Mayor:

Mr. Peter Burke TD, Minister of State for Local Government and Planning met with key stakeholders in Limerick to discuss plans for a democratically elected Mayor. The General Scheme of Local Government (Directly Elected Mayor with Executive Functions in Limerick City & County) Bill 2021 was presented to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process. Elected Members and the Chief Executive made submissions on the General Scheme in July 2021.

No budgetary provision has been made in the 2022 budget for a Directly Elected Mayor on the basis that the report recommended that any additional mandate must also have additional means to deliver.

Capital Budget 2022-2024

In accordance with Section 135 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended the Local Government Reform Act 2014, please find attached a report on the programme of capital projects proposed by Limerick City and County Council for the 3 years 2022 to 2024.

A key element of the Capital Programme over the coming years is delivering on the Limerick 2030 plan. Council members agreed to the raising of a working capital loan in 2014 of €32m and in 2017 approved loans of €170m from the European Investment Bank and Council of Europe Development Bank to help fund this programme. In 2020, with the commencement of the Opera Project, the Council requested and received the first drawdown of €25m from the EIB. Also, The Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF) and the Urban Regeneration & Development Fund (URDF) will provide funding opportunities for the Council to develop strategic projects.

Given the fact that we are proposing allocations over 3 years, it would be unrealistic to suggest that these allocations are definitive and are subject to funding being available in future years. Capital projects by their very nature are flexible rolling plans, which involve an annual review and possible adjustment. Below please find a summary of potential spend and source of funding for the 3-year capital plan 2022 to 2024.

Capital Expenditure 2022 -2024	Grant funded	Loan funded	Development Levy Funded	Revenue Funded	Other (Land Sales / Contributors)
€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
1,199	993.47	150.23	27.27	10.75	17.34

Table 7: Summary Capital Plan 2022-2024

Chart 6 profiles the Capital Expenditure for each of the three years:

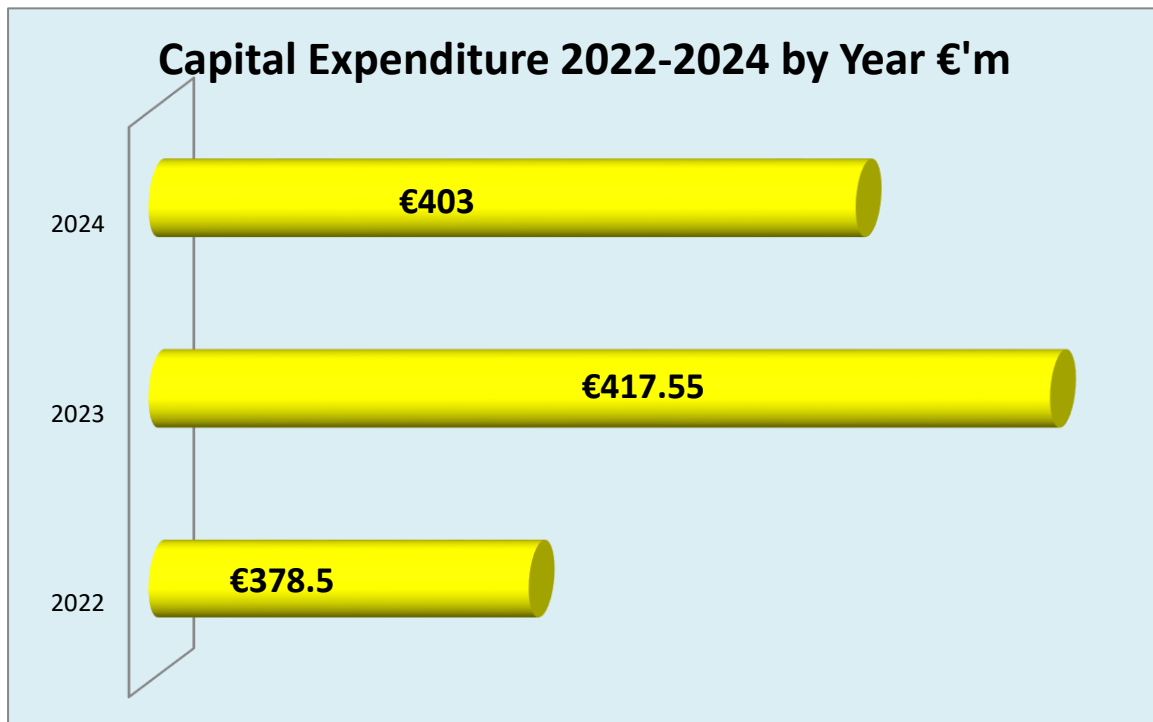


Chart 6: Summary Capital Plan 2022-2024 by year

Conclusion

The Council, since its inception in 2014, has positioned itself as an ambitious, innovative, proactive and engaged organisation to serve the people of Limerick. The transition to a Directly Elected Mayor with executive powers is a fundamental change in local government and will again require significant cultural change within the organisation.

The proposed Draft Budget for 2022 will maintain existing services to a high standard and ensure that Limerick City and County Council fulfils its statutory and regulatory obligations.

The demand for services across Limerick continues to grow and this is matched by an increase in public expectation. Our Customer Service is connected to our service catalogue, which allows us to access the demand for services, see where the gaps are and allow us to be proactive in allocating budgets and staffing levels that align with our citizen demands.

Limerick City and County Council will also facilitate economic development by progressing key capital projects including Urban and Village Renewal while also marketing Limerick as a great place to live, visit and do business.

During 2021, the Council again had to react to unforeseen events such as the Covid-19 global pandemic, which demonstrated the professionalism, commitment and determination of staff to manage the impact of these events.

The crisis highlighted the true nature of public service in communities across Limerick. Faced with the challenge of social distancing, and with many of our staff working from home, we had to deliver support and bring novel solutions to complex problems posed by the new realities of lockdown.

With the strategic direction of our Limerick brand clear, it acted as a springboard to unite Limerick and it became the impetus behind the highly successful local initiatives we ran during lockdown. Moreover, unity was vital as we sought to protect the small businesses at the heart of our communities.

Again, it was a partnership approach and a clear vision that let us move quickly and an engaged community has given us the clarity, focus and energy to move forward and make a difference.

In addition, I believe it is this united confidence, sense of identity and momentum that forecasts a brighter future for Limerick as we plan for 2022.

The draft 2022 budget has been prepared with no proposed increase in Commercial Rates ARV (Annual Rate on Valuation), and reflects the decision by elected members to maintain the rate of Local Property Tax (LPT) at the 2021 level.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Mayor and the Elected Members for their assistance and support, particularly the Members of the Corporate Policy Group in preparing this budget.

I also wish to express my appreciation to the Management Team and their own teams for their commitment and hard work in preparing this document. The coming year will again be challenging, but it will offer significant opportunities.

I look forward to the full support of the Members at the Statutory Budget Meeting to be held Friday 26th November 2021.”

The Deputy Chief Executive then provided an overview of the Budget including an overview of all Divisions within the Revenue Account and the corresponding Capital programmes.

Following the Deputy Chief Executives overview of the Budget, the Mayor confirmed that this concluded the review of all Divisions within the Revenue Account and the Members would be afforded the opportunity for questions and answers in relation to each division. He then asked for a Proposer for the draft Budget, as presented.

Councillor Sheahan (J)

Councillor Sheahan (J), speaking on behalf of the Fine Gael Group, thanked the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive and their team for the work that had gone in to the preparation of the Budget and also thanked the Executive of the Council for their work during the Covid pandemic. He commended the people of Limerick for their resilience during the

worst health and economic crisis the modern world has experienced. He also acknowledged the Elected Members for the work they have done on behalf of the people of Limerick.

He referred to the cost to date of the pandemic, estimated at €40m, and referred to the high level of national debt, which was currently at €237 billion, and the implications of this level of debt for future budgets. He noted that the balanced budget presented by the Executive has been made easier to balance by supports received in the form of National Grants towards the waiving of the rates etc. He also welcomed the fact that there was no proposed increase in commercial rates and the importance of supporting the Councils ratepayers especially during these difficult Covid times.

Councillor Sheahan welcomed the total revenue budget of €952.23 million and the capital budget of €378.5 million for 2022, and the provision for an overall capital budget of €1.2 billion over three years entailing a programme of capital projects proposed by Limerick City and County Council for the period 2022 to 2024. He stated that the proposed budget would protect the Council's service delivery to the people. He welcomed the commitment to continue the planned maintenance programme; to maintaining resources for the maintenance budget to meet the ongoing demands of the social housing stock; and the provision of match funding to address voids, dereliction and vacant properties. He also welcomed the intention to maintain resources in the area of Estate Management and Tenancy Enforcement

He also welcomed the proposals on Local Property Tax, which would facilitate the ongoing investment in local projects and schemes under the General Municipal Allocation (GMA) scheme. He noted the importance of housing delivery in the county in the years ahead and while the Governments Housing for All policy initiative did not address all housing issues in the county, he stressed the importance of providing a supply of additional housing in the county to support those in need of social or affordable housing. This was also dependent on the provision of adequate basic infrastructure such as water and sewage, which was vital for the provision of housing to meet the demand at the current time.

On behalf of the Fine Gael Group, he formally proposed the Draft Budget for 2022.

Councillor Collins (M)

Councillor Collins (M), speaking on behalf of the Fianna Fail Group, welcomed the Budget and thanked the Chief Executive, the Deputy Chief Executive, and their team for the work that had gone in to the preparation of the Budget. He also thanked the staff of the Council, including outdoor staff and staff based in the Municipal District Offices, for their work during the Covid pandemic.

He welcomed the provisions contained in the Budget, which would ensure the continued delivery of a wide range of services across the City and County. He also welcomed the fact

that there was no increase in commercial rates, which would continue to support the business community in current times.

He welcomed some of the provisions in the Revenue Budget 2022 which included funding for Housing Maintenance, Traveller and Estate Management of €8.5m; Local and Regional, Primary and Secondary Roads, Public Lighting, Road Safety and Traffic Management €47m; funding of €11.4m for the Limerick Fire & Rescue Service; Street Cleaning and Illegal Dumping €3.8m; and funding for Grass Cutting/ Trees and Horticulture, Maintenance of Parks of €2.6m.

He referred to the targets outlined in the Governments Housing For All policy and the importance of providing additional housing supply, but noted possible issues in meeting the stated targets due to increased building costs; scarcity of building contractors; and issues around basic infrastructure. He welcomed the funding provisions for housing grants, housing maintenance, and estate management.

He welcomed the investment in the Roads infrastructure in Limerick city and county and the proposals for bypasses of Newcastlewest and Abbeyfeale. He also stressed the importance of promoting economic development across both the city and county, and the promotion of the Limerick Greenway, which was a significant new tourism initiative for County Limerick.

On behalf of the Fianna Fail Group, he formally seconded the proposal to adopt the Budget for 2022.

Councillor Teefy

On behalf of the Independent Group, Councillor Teefy thanked the Deputy Chief Executive, his team and all involved for the work they have done in presenting a balanced budget under difficult circumstances and for their availability at all times during the Budget process.

She acknowledged that despite the challenges of Covid, that the Council continued to carry out its Works Programme and to provide all the necessary services. She commended management and all the staff, both indoor and outdoor, for their hard work and commitment and she expressed her heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all front line staff.

She stated that Limerick had one of the largest local authority spends this year with the Council's budget, including revenue and capital, now at €1.3 billion. She welcomed the investment in housing and building and the continued provision for housing maintenance and Housing Adaption Grants, but noted concerns about increased building costs and the impact that this would have.

Councillor Teefy also welcomed the continued capital investment in the Roads infrastructure in Limerick city and county. She welcomed the roads revenue budget stating that local and

regional roads are so important and it is essential that they are maintained properly. She also referred to the resources made available from the Local Property Tax, which has allowed additional investment in roads/footpaths. She noted the recent improvements at Lough Gur and the provision of the new Greenway in County Limerick, which would be a great tourism boost for the county.

She highlighted the importance of sealing with dereliction in many of our villages and towns and she also referred to the Library service and the important role it plays in the community, the maintenance of parks and open spaces and the different programmes in Arts and Culture.

She welcomed the fact that there was no proposed increase in commercial rates in 2022 and stressed the importance of continuing to support businesses during these uncertain times of Covid 19 and Brexit, and would encourage similar Government supports and interventions in 2022, which are so important for the businesses impacted.

She confirmed that the Independent Group would be supporting the budget.

Councillor Secas

Councillor Secas, on behalf of the Labour Party, stated that the Labour Party would also be supporting the Budget for 2022.

She acknowledged the work done in the preparation of the budget and thanked the Deputy Chief Executive and his team for their commitment and availability during the Budget process. She welcomed the provisions contained in the Budget and the importance of the continued delivery of a wide range of services across the City and County, and she thanked the staff for their ongoing commitment to provide services, especially during the current pandemic.

She welcomed the fact that there was no increase in commercial rates, which would continue to support the business community. She noted the importance of business supports at the current time to assist Small & Medium Enterprises (SME's), which are so important to the economy.

She also welcomed proposals in relation to housing including the housing capital programme; traveller accommodation and the importance of additional housing supply, which was so important at the current time for many people. She welcomed the proposals on Local Property Tax, which would facilitate the ongoing investment in local projects and schemes under the General Municipal Allocation (GMA) scheme, and she noted the various initiatives in relation to tourism promotion across both the city and county.

She confirmed that the Labour Party would be supporting the budget.

Councillor Benson

Councillor Benson, on behalf of the Sinn Féin Party, stated that this has been a very challenging year for everybody and praised the staff for their commitment under very difficult circumstances. She thanked the Deputy Chief Executive and his Finance team for their patience and assistance during the Budget process.

She expressed disappointment at the resources allocated for housing maintenance, traveller accommodation and estate management, and said that more needed to be done across the whole area of housing, given that there was a housing crisis ongoing at the current time. She referred to the high numbers on the Housing Waiting List and the serious shortage of housing supply across Limerick. She also stated that housing grant funding should have been increased having regard to the increase in building costs and lack of availability of building contractors.

She criticised the Governments Housing for All initiative and criticised the level of expenditure on the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) schemes, as they would not provide any additional long-term social housing for people. She stated that additional funding should not be allocated to private landlords but rather it be directed towards a sustainable public housing stock.

She stressed the importance of the Council progressing housing capital projects so that they can be delivered in a timely fashion. She also noted the lack of provision of basic sewage and water infrastructure; recent increases in building costs; and the possible scarcity of building contractors, which could also affect the supply of badly needed new housing.

She said that because of these reservations about aspects of the 2022 budget, that the Sinn Féin team on the Council would not be voting in favour of this budget.

Councillor Hartigan

Councillor Hartigan, on behalf of the Green Party, welcomed the budget for 2022 and thanked the Chief Executive, Management team and staff for the work they did in preparing the budget and for engaging with the Elected Members during the Budget process.

He emphasised the importance of increased expenditure on social and affordable housing provision and that the provision of new social and affordable housing is urgently required. He also highlighted the importance of maintaining current housing stock to the highest possible standard. He welcomed the proposed expenditure on Active Travel measures across the city and county, including the UL-Annacotty cycling route, which would allow more people to walk or cycle around their areas, thereby reducing the reliance on cars. He welcomed the National Transport Authority Bus Connect Scheme and acknowledged the importance of climate action

initiatives that were proposed in the budget, and the importance of delivering the Castleconnell Flood Relief Scheme as soon as possible for that area.

He confirmed that the Green Party would be supporting the budget.

Proposed by Councillor Sheahan (J)

Seconded by Councillor Collins (M)

And agreed and resolved:

THAT the draft Annual Budget for the financial year ending 31st December, 2022 prepared and circulated by the Chief Executive be adopted.

AND THAT, the Annual Budget be and is hereby adopted as per Tables A, B, D, E & F, in accordance with Section 103 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act, 2014.

AND THAT, in accordance with the Annual Budget adopted **€0.2677** 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, 2022, in accordance with Section 103 of the Local Government Act, 2001, by the Local Government Reform Act, 2014.

AND THAT, in accordance with Section 135 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, the Report on Capital Projects 2022 – 2024 as presented to the meeting is considered (Item 3 on Meeting Agenda).

AND THAT, the proportion of commercial rates refund that applies on vacant properties in 2022 within the administrative area of Limerick City and County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 31 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, and Part 5 of the Local Government (Financial and Audit Procedures) Regulations, 2014, and Section 14 of the Local Government Act, 1946, **be set at 10% for 2022** (Item 4 on Meeting Agenda).

AND THAT the Vacant Property Refund Scheme 2022 to encourage the beneficial use of commercial property in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, is adopted as circulated without amendment (Item 5 on Meeting Agenda).

AND THAT the Small and Medium Business Support Scheme 2022 in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, is adopted as circulated without amendment. (Item 6 on the Meeting Agenda).

AND THAT the Tourism Sector Support Scheme 2022 in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, (Item 7 on the Meeting Agenda) is adopted as circulated without amendment.

AND THAT Business & Retail Incentive Scheme for Vacant Property from 01/01/2022 until 31/12/2022 in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 subject to finances available, is adopted as circulated without amendment (Item 8 on the Meeting Agenda).

The Mayor and Members thanked the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and the staff for their assistance in the formation of the Budget.

This concluded the business of the Meeting.

Signed:

Mayor

Date:
