

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS AT MEETING OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DOORADOYLE, LIMERICK, AND ONLINE, ON FRIDAY, 17<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2023, AT 10.00 A.M. TO CONSIDER THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2024.**

**PRESENT IN THE CHAIR:**

Councillor G. Mitchell, Mayor.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

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

**OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Chief Executive (Mr. P. Daly), Deputy Chief Executive and Director, Support Services (Mr. S. Coughlan), Director, Housing (Ms. C. Curley), Director, Economic Development, Enterprise & Tourism (Mr. G. Daly), Director, Regeneration, Sports and Recreation (Mr. J. Delaney), Director, Rural, Community & Culture Development (Mr. S. Duclot), Director, Transportation and Mobility (Mr. B. Kennedy), Director, Planning, Environment and Place-Making (Mr. V. Murray), A/Director, National and Regional Shared Services (Ms. S. Reidy), Meetings Administrator (Ms. L. Flannery), Administrative Officer, Corporate Services and Governance (Mr. M. Leahy), Senior Staff Officer, Corporate Services and Governance (Ms. A. Foley), Financial Accountants (Ms. I. Griffin and Mr. P. Murnane), Administrative Officer, Finance (Mr. S. Calton).

Circulated, (a) Draft Chief Executive's Budget Report and Tables, including Capital Programme 2024-2026; (b) Proposed Vacant Property Refund Scheme 2024; (c) Proposed Small and Medium Business Support Scheme 2024; (d) Proposed Retail Economic Incentive Scheme for Vacant Property 2024; and (f) Budget 2024 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 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2024, 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, and the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act, 2019, as amended.

Firstly, he requested the Meetings Administrator to set out the meetings protocol for the Statutory Budget Meeting and he appealed for co-operation to assist with the efficient running of the Meeting. The Meetings Administrator then proceeded to set out the meetings protocol for the Statutory Budget Meeting.

The Mayor then went on to say that the Budget process for the preparation, consideration and adoption of the budget required statutory compliance with a number of steps. He outlined that engagement with members had commenced on 18<sup>th</sup> September last with an initial CPG meeting setting out the Budget 2024 parameters. There were two further CPG meetings held on 16<sup>th</sup> October and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

In addition, the draft budgetary plan was approved by the Municipal District of Cappamore-Kilmallock on 19<sup>th</sup> October, the Metropolitan District on 16<sup>th</sup> October, the Municipal District of Adare-Rathkeale on 17<sup>th</sup> October and the Municipal District of Newcastle West on 1<sup>st</sup> November.

A detailed Online Workshop for the Members had been held on 13<sup>th</sup> November where the Executive presented the draft budget in detail and addressed any questions / concerns by Members. The Executive had also been available all week to Members for further follow up-queries and the Parties availed of this.

He said the Statutory Budget Meeting was being held to consider the Chief Executive's draft budget for 2024, along with determining the Annual Rate on valuation, in accordance with Section 103 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, and the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019 as amended.

In addition, the 3-year capital programme 2024-2026 would be considered in accordance with Section 135(2) of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended.

In relation to the various proposed schemes, they would be considered subsequently as set out on the agenda.

He welcomed the fact that the proposed Budget had been prepared in the context of no commercial rate increase and maintaining service provision at the same levels as 2023, while also enhancing resources in key priority areas as identified through engagement with Councillors during 2023. These key priority areas would bring focus on local service improvement with the aim of stimulating a positive economic boost.

The Mayor then called on the Chief Executive to present an overview of his draft 2024 Budget.

### **Outturn 2023**

In recommending the Annual Budget for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2024, to the Council for adoption, the Chief Executive summarised the financial position of Limerick City and County Council. He had reviewed the up-to-date position and he was satisfied that every effort would be made to break even on the Revenue Account for 2023. There was pressure on a number of income heads and ongoing controls on expenditure were in place.

### **Budget 2024**

The draft Annual Budget for 2024 has been prepared in the context of maintaining the service provision at the same levels as 2023 while also enhancing resources in key priority areas

identified through engagement with Councillors. These key priority areas would bring focus on local service improvement with the aim to stimulate a positive economic boost.

A key challenge was the ongoing inflationary pressures on all the Council's services but particularly in the areas of housing maintenance, street cleaning, grass cutting and roads maintenance. The energy inflationary support grant of €3m during 2023 was critical to meeting these additional cost increases. However, this support was no longer available for 2024. While this budget had increased resources across services, some elements would be eroded through inflationary increases in energy and other input costs.

The key areas where additional resources had been provided included:

- Housing in particular in the areas of maintenance, boiler servicing and the homeless provision.

The level of own resource contribution towards the Housing Adaptation Grants had been maintained at the same level as 2023 at €810k which reflected an increase of €180k on 2022 levels.

- The Council's budget provision for Local and Regional Roads own resources had also been increased reflecting the additional service demands within this area.
- Increased resources to deliver on the Town Centre First policy, which aimed to create town centres that functioned as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community. The Budget included additional resources to progress projects for RRDF funding and also focus on Rathkeale town in conjunction with other agencies of the state.
- The budget included the provision of three mini-sweepers for each of the three rural Municipal Districts to provide a more efficient and dedicated service. In addition, a new rapid response team, headed up by an executive engineer, would be created to enhance the City Centre Public Realm with focus on street cleaning, maintenance, litter and engagement with traders.
- The Horticulture budget would also see an increase on staff resources and grass cutting.

The Budget sought to maximise the available income base in order to fund the above additional resources. There was no proposed increase in the Commercial Rate but a reduction of €1.2m in the bad debt provision reflected a projected collection rate of 95%.

The proposed SME Support Schemes, both local and national, were critical to maintaining this strong collection rate. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Simon Coveney, TD, had announced a Budget 2024 package, which recognised the ongoing challenges businesses were facing which included the approval for the Increased Cost of Business Scheme (ICOB), which was a once-off grant to benefit up to 130,000 small and medium businesses at a cost of €250m. The detailed terms and conditions attached to the grant were

to be finalised by the Minister. The details of the scheme would be finalised for implementation in 2024.

The budget also reflected increased income from differential rent, deposit interest and Local Property Tax.

The ongoing provision of new amenity facilities and public lighting upgrades would have to be funded by loans raised and financed through the revenue budget, placing further pressures on the Council's income base.

The Council was pursuing an ambitious capital programme, which was maximising investment into the City and County from a range of national programmes, including URDF, RRDF, Outdoor Recreation Scheme, Town and Village Renewal etc. All of these projects required co-funding from the Council.

The proposed budget also included the SME Support, Retail Economic Incentive Scheme, and Vacancy Refund Scheme to assist key sectors of the economy.

Under the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended, the Draft Budget was 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 was underpinned by the Corporate Plan that supported the overall budget strategy.

### **The Economic Outlook for Limerick**

The last year had once again been a challenging one, with the war in Ukraine, inflation and the need for housing, all impacting on all our communities.

Despite these challenges, there was much to be positive about in Limerick and the Mid-West Region.

The population of Limerick had grown by 8% since the last census, and employment had increased by 17%.

Major job announcements at Lilly, Ballygowan and H&MV Engineering, to name a few, showed that industry leaders continued to have confidence in the future of Limerick.

During 2023 saw the completion of the Limerick Regional Athletics Hub in Newcastle West and there were a number of major capital projects underway, including the Opera Centre, the Cleeves Site, the Arthur's Quay Masterplan, while there were key strategic milestones on the horizon also, with the publication of the Shannon Foynes Taskforce Report, the M20 and Foynes Road projects, alongside planning for the 2027 Ryder Cup in Adare Manor.

Despite the challenges, there were a number of opportunities for Limerick in 2024 and beyond, as Limerick's "different kind of energy" positioned the City and County as the centre of the renewable energy landscape.

Limerick, along with its regional partners, had the potential to develop a floating offshore wind industry, which could create thousands of jobs and make Limerick a major energy player. Limerick's growing population presented an opportunity also to boost the local economy and create new jobs. The major capital projects underway in Limerick would create jobs alongside boosting the local economy.

Investment in building more affordable housing and in retrofitting existing homes to make them more energy-efficient would help to support businesses to create jobs and to grow the local economy alongside dereliction and town centre focused planning.

Continued focus on Infrastructure and services investment, to support the growing population, such as roads, schools, and public transportation in 2023 continued to support the delivery of major capital projects, and achieving the key strategic milestones.

By investing in our communities and building a better future for all, this would ensure that Limerick would continue to grow and thrive.

### **Climate Action**

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 provided that each Local Authority must develop a Climate Action Plan. The preparation of the Plan commenced in early 2023 and would be completed in Q1 2024. The plan would also include details for a proposed decarbonisation zone.

The Decarbonisation Zone would be a test bed that would not only demonstrate what could be done and accelerate learning for other areas, but also help understand the scale of the challenge in decarbonising the economy and wider society. Preparatory work had commenced on the plan with the procurement of baseline studies to inform the plan preparation.

It was hoped that the climate action plan would harness and facilitate investment and funding into the Council from a range of sources, including the Climate Action Fund.

### **Infrastructure**

Going forward across Limerick, there would be a new emphasis on connectivity and hybrid working. Infrastructure investment was not only about helping people to move around; considerable investment was 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.

Provision in the budget was also made to progress key infrastructure projects such as the Foynes to Limerick route, the Cork to Limerick Motorway and many others.

Limerick Twenty Thirty DAC would progress key strategic sites including the Opera Development and Cleeves. The DAC aimed to continue to self-develop and partner with other developers, as well as local and national agencies, to transform strategic sites.

Innovate Limerick would continue to maximise the benefits and strengths arising in collaboration and co-location of disruptive technology expertise to support all levels of regional technology activity in the Mid-West. Innovate Limerick also had developed and was managing engine hubs which was a connected network of private and public enterprise spaces across the Mid-West.

### **Community & Tourism Development**

Budget 2024 would actively allow for the further engagement with, and support of, our communities. It would address enhancing quality of life for our citizens by supporting new public realm projects and programmes across the City and County in our libraries, galleries, museums, cultural and arts centres and across events. It also would continue a focus on dereliction/vacancy and delivery of public realm improvements in our urban areas and villages that would animate the public space and support place-making activities.

The budget looked to provide resources both staff and match funding for preparation for the hosting of the Ryder Cup and developing legacy projects. The Ryder Cup would be the largest global event held in Ireland this decade.

The Discover Limerick DAC would continue to seek to develop opportunities, including the promotion of King John's Castle, redevelopment of the Adare Heritage Centre, Lough Gur and other projects.

### **Housing**

The budget would also help the Council deliver on targets set out across the four pathways within the 'Housing for All' Plan. It would enable and improve the Council's own social housing stock and aid in tackling homelessness and support the Regeneration Programme.

The Draft Budget also included resource increases in the housing maintenance, traveller accommodation and housing grants areas.

Ongoing engagement with The Land Development Agency to develop the public lands in Mungret and Colbert Station and other exciting developments were under discussion.

### **Ukraine Response**

There were approximately 3,600 Ukrainian Refugees being supported in Limerick. The Council's Ukrainian Response Team had provided for the refurbishment and operation of three Local Authority Managed Accommodation Centres at Cappamore, Abbeyfeale and Askeaton. Working with the Community Response Forum and other national, regional and local agencies, the Ukrainian Response Team would continue to enable wraparound support services to Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection living, working and / or being educated in Limerick City and County.

### **Capital Programme**

The budget also made clear the Council's Capital Works Programme for the next three years - 2024-2026, which was included with Budget Documentation. This programme was wide-ranging over the three-year period for a wide mix of key public projects for Limerick and was projected to cost €1.3B which was funded from a number of sources, including own resources, national programmes' grant schemes and debt financing.

### **Directly Elected Mayor**

The proposed major change in the governance of this Local Authority in 2024, with the introduction of the Directly Elected Mayor with executive powers, will have implications for this Local Authority, including the adoption of the Annual Budget.

On 25<sup>th</sup> July 2023, the Government signed off on publication of the Local Government (Mayor of Limerick) Bill, 2023, which established the Office of Mayor and its Mayoral functions, set out the governance structures to support that Office and provided a code for the election of the Mayor. Government had decided that the election for a Directly Elected Mayor for Limerick would be held on the same date as the Local and European Elections in 2024, which would be held in June 2024.

The Council had provided every assistance in the drafting of this legislation and would work with all the key stakeholders during 2024 while this key local government change was implemented.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the draft budget 2024, which had benefitted from very significant feedback from members in the Budget process, had committed to maintain and, in some cases, enhance service delivery. The demand for services across Limerick continued to grow and this was matched by an increase in public expectation.

The professionalism, commitment and determination of staff to react to unforeseen events was again demonstrated in 2023.

Finally, the Chief Executive stated that the Council would continue to operate in an uncertain environment in 2024 and the continued support of the Government to Local Authorities was critical and appreciated.

He thanked the Mayor and the Elected Members for all their assistance and guidance in framing the budget.

He also thanked his colleagues in the Management Team and their senior teams for their commitment and hard work in preparing this budget.

He expressed special thanks to all the Finance Team for the dedicated work and support in drafting and presenting the Budget, which, he was sure, the Members would agree, was exemplary.

In conclusion, the Chief Executive recommended the Draft Budget to the Elected Members for adoption.

**It was then unanimously agreed that the Chief Executive's Report on the Draft Budget 2024, as circulated to Members, would be read into the Minutes of the Meeting as follows:**

### **“Introduction**

The Draft Budget for the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 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 and Local Government Rates & Other Matters Act 2019 as amended.

Circular Fin 06/2023 refers to the prescribed period that applies for the holding of the 2024 Budget meeting for Local Authorities as follows; 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023 to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2023. It was agreed by the Members at the September Council meeting to hold the statutory Annual Budget Meeting on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 10am, at Council Chamber, Dooradoyle. Section 103 of the Local Government Act 2001 as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and Local Government Rates & Other Matters Act 2019 as amended 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 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023.

### **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 the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022 to leave the LPT adjustment factor at the 2022 levels for 2023 and 2024.

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

Metropolitan District of Limerick	16 <sup>th</sup> October
Adare / Rathkeale Municipal District	17 <sup>th</sup> October
Cappamore / Kilmallock Municipal District	19 <sup>th</sup> October
Newcastle West Municipal District	1 <sup>st</sup> November

***Step 3 - Consultation with the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) and adoption of the Draft Budget by Council.*** Initial CPG meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> September. Budget Strategy presented to CPG Meeting held on the 16<sup>th</sup> October with further meeting held on the 16<sup>th</sup> November. The Statutory Budget meeting is scheduled for 17<sup>th</sup> November with a budget workshop with Councillors to be held on the 13<sup>th</sup> 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 2024 following the adoption of the Budget.

***Step 5 - Consideration and adoption of the Service Delivery Plan.*** The 2024 Service Delivery Plan will be presented to Council at the January 2024 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 vacancy abatement schemes on vacant commercial premises.

### **Budget 2024 Context**

The draft Annual Budget for 2024 has been prepared in the context of maintaining the service provision at the same levels of 2023 while also enhancing resources in key priority areas identified through engagement with Councilors during 2023. These key priority areas will bring focus on local service improvement with the aim to stimulate a positive economic boost.

A key challenge is the ongoing inflationary pressures on all our services but particularly in the areas of housing maintenance, street cleaning, grass cutting and roads maintenance. The energy inflationary support grant of €3m during 2023 was critical to meeting these additional cost increases. However, this support is no longer available for 2024. While this budget has increased resources across services, some elements will be eroded through inflationary increases in energy and other input costs.

The key areas where additional resources have been provided include:

- Housing maintenance
- Local and Regional Roads own resources
- Town Centre first with particular focus on Rathkeale

- Street-cleaning with particular emphasis on enhanced City Centre Public Realm
- Horticulture.

The Budget seeks to maximise the available income base in order to fund the above additional resources. There is no proposed increase in the Commercial Rate but a reduction of €1.2m in the bad debt provision reflects a projected collection rate of 95%. The proposed SME support schemes both local and national are critical to maintaining this strong collection rate. The budget also reflects increased income from differential rent, deposit interest and Local Property Tax.

The ongoing provision of new amenity facilities and public lighting upgrades will have to be funded by loans raised and financed through the revenue budget placing further pressures on our income base.

The Council is pursuing an ambitious capital programme, which is maximising investment into the City and County from a range of national programmes including URDF, RRDF, Outdoor Recreation Scheme, Town and Village Renewal etc. All of these projects require co-funding from the Council.

### **National Economic Outlook**

As the overall stance of macroeconomic policy adjusts – via a tightening of monetary policy and the gradual withdrawal of fiscal support – global growth has slowed. Ireland cannot be immune from these trends, with trade a key transmission channel from the international to the domestic economy. In other words, lower external demand is weighing on export growth. This impact is amplified by a number of sector-specific adjustments taking place in some multinational-dominated sectors, such as reduced demand for Covid-related products in the pharma sector. Sub-sectors such as semi-conductors have also posted lower foreign sales, as have exports related to “contract manufacturing”. As a result, exports and GDP growth are revised down for this year and next year.

For domestic demand, incoming data are sending mixed signals. On the one hand, the domestic economy has proven to be remarkably solid, evidenced by an unemployment rate that has stabilised at just over 4 per cent throughout this year. On the other hand, the level of Modified Domestic Demand (MDD) - a measure of the domestic economy - in the second quarter this year was largely unchanged since the second quarter of last year, while higher-frequency data (e.g. retail sales, consumer sentiment, payroll data) suggest a softening in activity more recently. MDD is now expected to increase by 2.2 per cent this year, a small downward revision of 0.1 percentage points compared to the spring forecasts. For next year, MDD growth of 2.2 per cent is projected; a 0.4 per cent decrease in the projection (relative to the spring 2023 forecasts) largely reflecting the headwinds associated with tighter monetary policy working its way through the economy. Consumer spending, the largest component of MDD, is forecast to grow by 3.3 per cent this year and 3.2 per cent next year,

a downward revision in both years of just over  $\frac{1}{2}$  percentage point from the spring 2023 forecasts.

With underlying inflation providing to be more persistent than expected consumer price inflation - as measured by the HICP index - is revised by just under  $\frac{1}{2}$  point to 5.3 per cent for this year. For next year, a rate of 2.9 per cent is forecast, as lower energy prices pass through to consumer bills.

For this year employment growth of 3.4 per cent is projected, easing to slower rate of growth of 1.3 per cent next year, consistent with the outlook for the domestic economy. An unemployment rate of 4.1 per cent is projected for this year, increasing marginally to 4.2 per cent next year. Almost all of the additional employment arose from increases in labour supply. Net inward migration and increased participation – particularly female participation – were the key drivers of this increase in labour supply.

Risks to the macroeconomic outlook are two-sided but tilted to the downside. A general government surplus of €8.8 billion (3.0 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI)) is projected for this year. For next year, the general government surplus is projected at €8.4 billion (2.7 per cent of GNI). Stripping out the Department's estimate of 'windfall' corporate tax receipts, a deficit of €2.0 billion would be recorded this year and €2.7 billion next year. Public indebtedness next year is projected at €222 billion; pre-pandemic this figure was closer to €203 billion.

To conclude, the experience of the last few years – the UK's exit from the European Union, a global pandemic and major war in Europe and now unrest in the Middle East – highlights the major changes that are underway internationally and the impact geopolitics can have on economic outcomes. Moreover, it is also clear that the geopolitical landscape is evolving, with at least some decoupling of western economics from China now underway: several multinational firms and some governments are de-risking their exposure to the Chinese economy, *inter alia* by diversifying supply chains, in order to limit the impact of any shock originating in that country, be it economic, geopolitical or other. A fragmentation of the global economy along geopolitical lines is an important channel through which Irish living standards could be held-back in the years ahead.

**Table 1** below outlines the main economic and fiscal variables underlying the Department of Finance's budget for 2024.

<i>Variable - % change (unless stated)</i>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2026</b>
<b><i>Economic Activity</i></b>	<b><i>% change (unless stated)</i></b>				
Real GDP	9.4	2.0	4.5	4.5	4.5

Real GNP	3.9	1.0	4.0	4.0	3.9
Modified domestic demand	9.5	2.2	2.2	2.5	3.0
<b>Prices</b>					
Core HICP (inflation measure)	5.0	5.1	3.4	2.5	2.3
<b>External Trade</b>					
Modified current account (per cent of Gross National Income-GNI)	7.0	7.5	7.5	7.0	6.2
<b>Labour Market</b>					
Total Employment ('000)	2,547	2,635	2,670	2,705	2,744
Employment	6.6	3.4	1.3	1.3	1.4
Unemployment (per cent)	4.5	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4
<b>Public Finances (per cent of GNI)</b>					
General government bal (€ bn)	8.5	8.79	8.36	14.245	14.615
Net debt position (€ billion)	188.1	184.3	194.5	192.9	192.2
Net debt ratio (year-end)	68.9	63.0	63.3.	60.1	57.4

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

Source: Department of Finance Economic and Fiscal Outlook Budget 2024 Summary, p.4

### Local Outlook:

The last year has once again been a challenging one, with the war in Ukraine, inflation and the need for housing, all impacting on all our communities.

Despite these challenges, there is much to be positive about in Limerick and the Mid-West region.

The population of Limerick has grown by 8% since the last census, and employment has increased by 17%.

There are a number of major capital projects underway, including the Opera Centre, the Cleeves site, the Arthur's Quay Masterplan, while 2023 saw the completion of the Limerick Regional Athletics Hub in Newcastle West.

There are key strategic milestones on the horizon also, with the 2023 publication of the Shannon Foynes Taskforce report, the M20 and Foynes Road projects alongside planning for the 2027 Ryder Cup in Adare Manor.

Despite the challenges, there are a number of opportunities for Limerick in 2024 and beyond, as Limerick’s “different kind of energy” positions the City and County as the centre of the renewable energy landscape.

Limerick, along with its regional partners, has the potential to develop a floating offshore wind industry, which could create thousands of jobs and make Limerick a major energy player.

Limerick's growing population presents an opportunity also to boost the local economy and create new jobs. The major capital projects underway in Limerick will create jobs alongside boosting the local economy.

Major job announcements at Lilly, Ballygowan and H&MV engineering, to name a few, show that industry leaders continue to have confidence in the future of Limerick.

Investment in building more affordable housing and in retrofitting existing homes to make them more energy-efficient will help to support businesses to create jobs and to grow the local economy alongside dereliction and town centre focused planning.

Continued focus on Infrastructure and services investment, to support the growing population, such as roads, schools, and public transportation in 2023 continued to support the delivery of major capital projects, and achieving the key strategic milestones.

By investing in our communities and building a better future for all, we can ensure that Limerick continues to grow and thrive.

### **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 by the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and Local Government Rates & Other Matters Act 2019 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 2024 Budget are set out below:***

**1. Housing & Regeneration**

- Additional resources for the maintenance budget to meet the ongoing demands of our social housing stock
- Continue our planned maintenance programme to leverage additional sources of funding
- Maintain resources in Estate Management and Tenancy Enforcement (A04)
- Continue to support the Regeneration Programme (Physical, Social & Economic)
- Maximise Housing Adaptation Grants
- Additional Resources towards the Homeless Service
- Deliver on the 2024 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

**2. Sport & Recreation**

- Adoption of a Sports and Recreation Strategy for Limerick in conjunction with Sports Ireland.
- Resourcing and maintaining our key Council led Sports and Recreation facilities and leveraging match funding for essential capital works.
  - Finalise Operator for Grove Island and Askeaton Pool and Leisure Centres
  - Complete energy efficiency and plant capital works to allow Askeaton Pool and Leisure Centre to open in early 2024
  - Ongoing support for Rathbane Golf Club
  - Operate and Maintain Newcastle Regional Athletics Hub to the highest standards
- Develop other local smaller facilities as required and dependent on resources
- Support other stakeholders to enhance their facilities

**3. Environment & Climate Change**

- 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.

**4. Planning & Place Making**

- 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

## **5. Rural and Community Development**

- Deliver on the Town Centre First policy which aims to create town centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.
- Revitalisation of our urban areas and villages through a stronger focus on addressing dereliction, vacancy and delivering public realm improvements. Facilitating the Croí Cónaithe scheme
- Community Development Supports
- Engagement and advice to communities on grant schemes and other Council led support measures including:
  - Support to Ukraine Refugees
  - 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

## **6. Cultural Development**

- Delivering a cultural and arts programme for the benefit of the Citizens of Limerick and visitors to our City and County
- Supporting the role our libraries, gallery & museum play in enhancing the quality of life of our citizens.

## **7. Tourism Development:**

- Driving the implementation of the Limerick Tourism Development Strategy and Wild Atlantic Way Gateway Strategy. Also to focus on resourcing and leveraging match funding ahead of hosting major events.
- Support Discover Limerick DAC a wholly owned subsidiary of Limerick City and County Council to operate and develop key tourism attractions in Limerick including King Johns Castle, Lough Gur and Adare Heritage.
- Enhanced Support for our key festivals and events
- Continue to maintain and market the 40km Limerick Greenway from Rathkeale to the Kerry bounds which is delivering a significant economic return for Limerick.

## **8. Economic Development**

- Deliver the Local Enterprise Office programme of supports along with other Council initiatives to support the SME sector
- Continue to enable economic growth in the City and County
- Maintaining a clean and safe City Centre public realm essential to creating a positive urban environment and promoting economic activity for residents, visitors, and businesses.
- The economic revitalisation of our city centre and towns and continue to address the crisis in the retail sector.
- 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.

## **9. Transportation & Mobility**

- To continue to invest in the rural and urban infrastructure through the delivery of the 2024 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.
- Delivery of sustainable and active travel projects identified in the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy in conjunction with the National Transport Authority

## **10. Frontline Local Authority Services**

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

## **11. HAP Shared Services Centre:**

- Deliver 2024 targets set for HAP shared service.

## **12. Directly Elected Mayor (DEM) with Executive powers**

- Support the DEM and implementation of programme

## **13. Continue to seek efficiencies in service provision, cost reduction and value for money**

### **Outturn 2023**

In presenting the Annual Budget for the year ended 31 December 2024 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 2022 shows the accumulated balance on the Revenue Account is in a credit position of €932,320. 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 2023 despite challenges faced by the Council; however there is pressure on a number of income heads and ongoing controls on expenditure are in place. In particular, I am concerned with the significant increase in energy costs and other inflationary pressures, which are affecting not only our own services but also those of our subsidiary companies. The 2024 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 2024**

The total estimated expenditure included in the Draft Budget for 2024 amounts to €942.79 million, an increase of €37.71 million on the adopted figure for 2023. The increased activity in the HAP Shared Service Center accounts for the majority of this increase. As this expenditure is matched by a corresponding income, it has no net effect on the Budgetary Provisions. The following Table 2 depicts Revenue expenditure by Division.

Division	Draft Budget 2024	Adopted Budget 2023
A - Housing & Building	€67,606,276	€59,374,462
A - HAP Shared Service Centre	€693,706,315	€674,099,218
B - Road Transport & Safety	€52,652,751	€48,472,220
C - Water Services	€16,962,684	€16,427,716
D - Development Mgt	€29,962,342	€29,844,880
E - Environmental Services	€46,475,355	€41,034,879
F - Recreation & Amenity	€18,087,985	€16,402,873
G - Agri, Ed, Health & Welfare	€1,279,013	€1,311,337
H - Misc Services	€16,056,951	€18,652,859
	<b>€942,789,672</b>	<b>€905,620,444</b>

Table 2: Analysis of Expenditure by Division

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

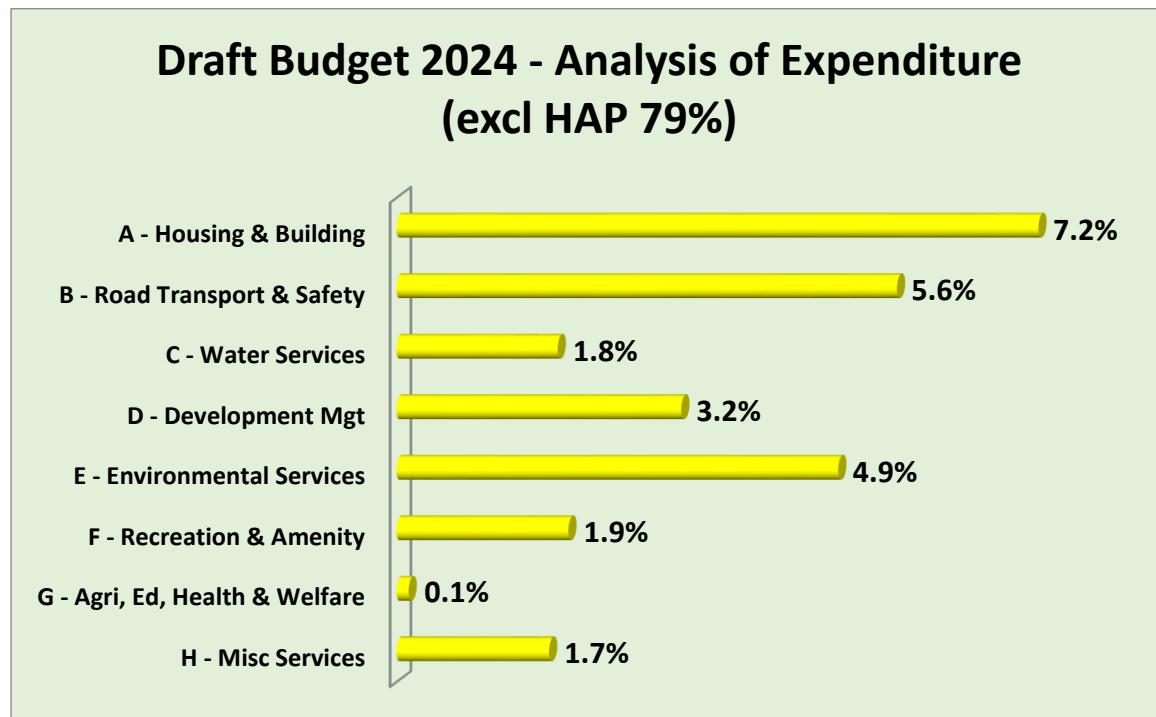
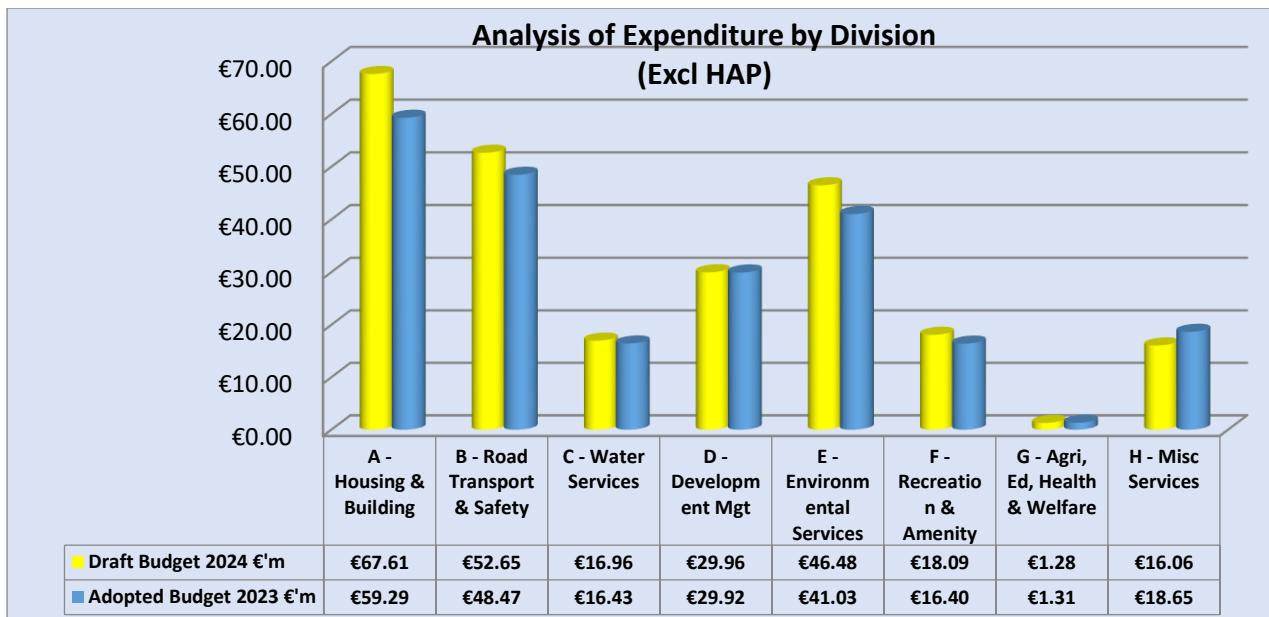


Chart 1: Analysis of split of Expenditure (excl HAP) by Division

The following bar chart shows the estimated expenditure for Draft Budget 2024 for each Division, with comparative figures for 2023:



**Chart 2: Analysis of Expenditure (excl HAP) by Division - Draft Budget 2024 versus Budget 2023**

### Analysis of Income 2024

The level of expenditure shown above, at €942.79 million, will be financed from the following sources:

Source	Amount
1. Local Property Tax	€21,329,589
2. Commercial Rates	€64,181,299
3. Grants & Subsidies (net of HAP)	€104,799,070
4. Goods & Services (net of HAP)	€58,696,229
Sub Total Income (Excluding HAP)	€249,006,187
1. HAP Differential Rent	€161,503,409
2. HAP Subsidy from DHPCLG	€532,280,076
Sub Total HAP	€693,783,485
<b>Total including HAP</b>	<b>€942,789,672</b>

**Table 3: Analysis of Draft Budget 2024 Income**

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

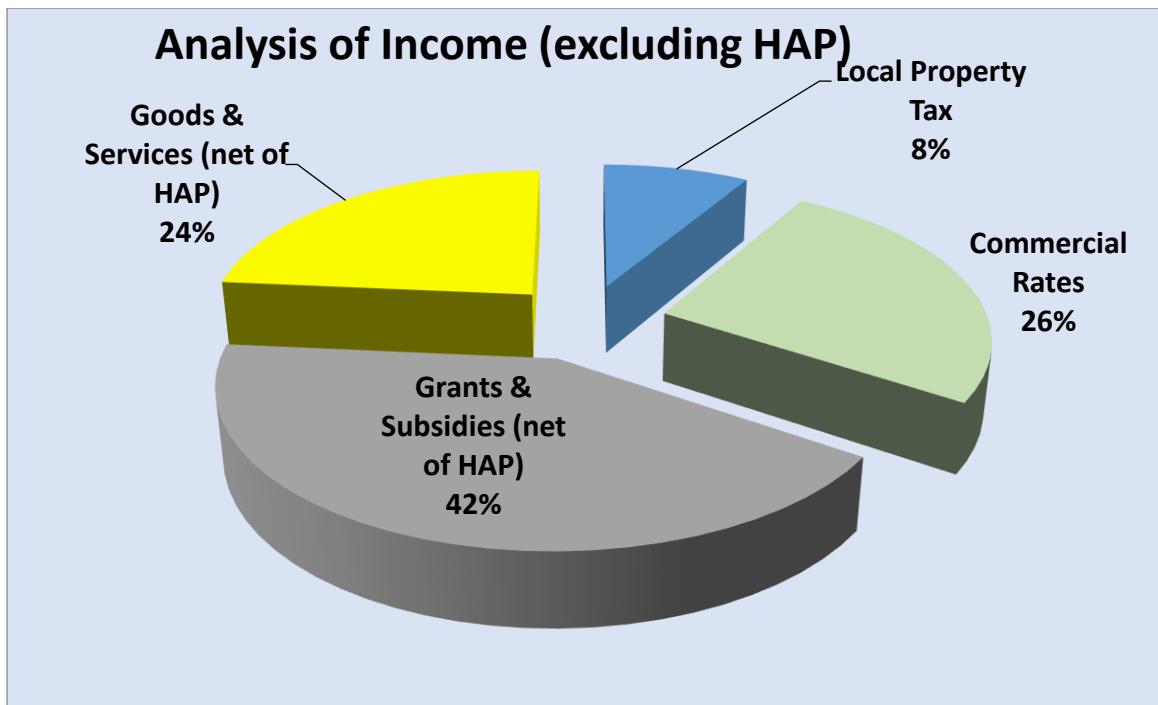


Chart 3: Analysis of Draft Budget 2024 Income (excluding HAP)

58% of the Council's income (excluding HAP) is now generated locally through Commercial Rates (26%), LPT (9%) and Goods & Services (24%).

Comparative figures for Budgets 2024 and 2023 are shown hereunder.

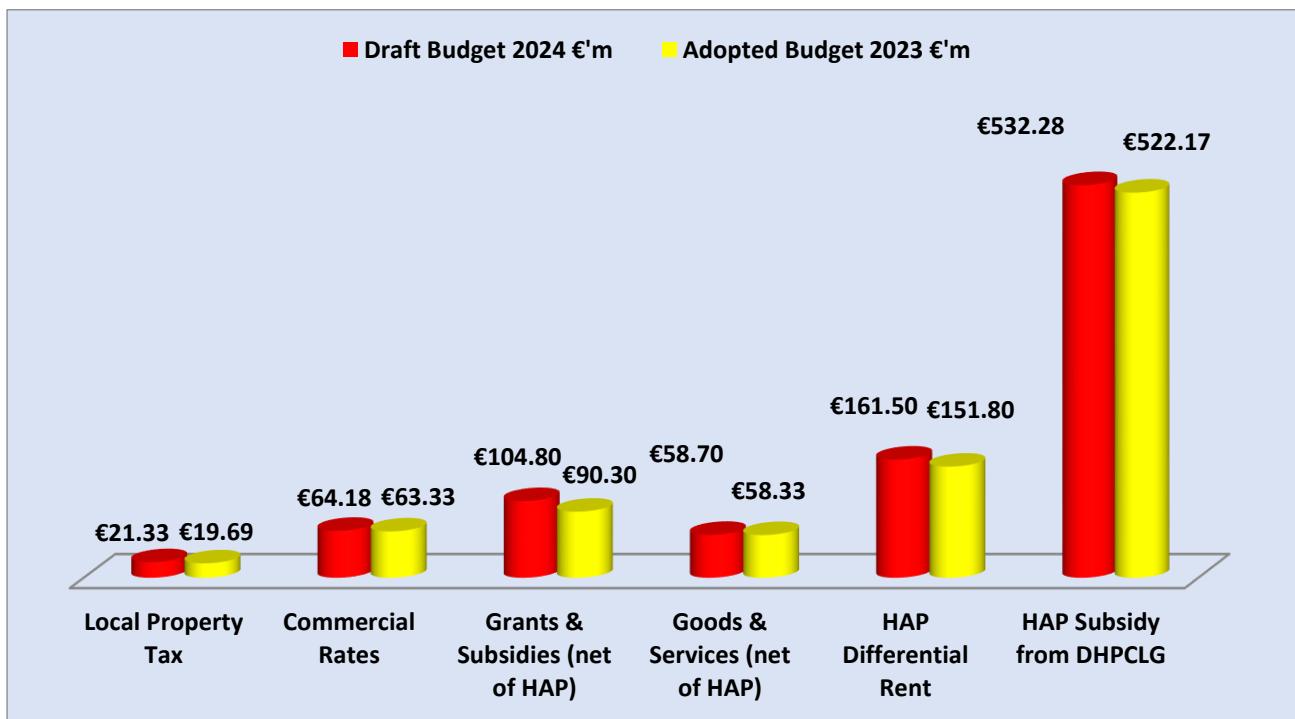


Chart 4: Analysis of Income: Draft Budget 2024 v's Budget 2023

## **Goods and Services Income**

Goods and Services income excluding HAP income for Draft Budget 2024 is €58.70m and is noted in Table D. This includes income headings such as:

- Differential rent income of €19.2m for Budget 2024 (increase of €1.4m on Budget 2023)
- Income from Uisce Éireann (formerly Irish Water) is also accounted for under this heading with Budget 2024 at €8.956m compared to €12.92m (difference is funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage)
- Planning Fees income of €1.05m noted for Budget 2024 (compared to €1.022m in Budget 2023).
- Parking Fines & Charges with income of €1.93m noted for Budget 2024 (compared to €2.1m in 2023).
- Non-Principal Private Residence with income of €200k noted for Budget 2024 (compared to €250k in 2023).

## **Grants and Subsidies Income**

Grants and Subsidies income excluding HAP income for Draft Budget 2024 is €104.80m and is noted in Table E. Some of the key income sources under this heading include:

- Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) supports the delivery of social housing by providing financial support to local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies for the leasing of houses and apartments. Such long term leasing is noted at €13m for 2024 compared to €10m in 2023 (increase of €3m).
- Road Grants are assumed to remain at 2023 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 and assumed pay increases for 2024 (pending national pay-talks) is noted at €14.27m in Draft Budget 2024 (increase of €2.65m compared to 2023 due to pay increases in 2023 & assumed for 2024). The actual final amount payable for 2024 by the Department to individual authorities will be the authority's proportional share of the available funding, which will be calculated based on vouched actual increased costs at the end of 2024. The Department have currently confirmed payment of €12.84m, which does not include any additional pay increase for 2024.

## **Local Property Tax (LPT) Allocation and LPT Baseline Review 2024**

Local Property Tax (LPT) is a key funding source for Local Government replacing the General Purpose Grant funding allocation.

### **LPT Baseline Review 2024:**

Under the current LPT allocation model, every local authority is entitled to receive a minimum amount of funding under the LPT allocation process, known as the Baseline. A working group, which included representatives from the local government sector, was set up earlier this year to review and establish a new model to determine LPT baseline funding levels. The work of the group has now concluded with the following recommendations:

1. That from 2024, funding would be distributed in accordance with the allocation model developed by the working group, according to the following indicators and weightings: population: 10%, area: 35%, deprivation levels: 20%, Local Authority locally raised Income: 27.5% and achievement of National Policy Priorities: 7.5%;
2. That no local authority should see a reduction in baseline funding upon the application of the above model; and
3. That this model is used to review local authority baselines every 5 years, following updated census data.

The Minister has approved the recommendations of the group, and, furthermore has committed to ensuring that every authority receives an increase in baseline funding in 2024 of at least €1.5m. Limerick City and County Council will be in receipt of this additional Euro 1.5m, but will counteract with no central Government support for energy support grants to the Local Authority for 2024 (€3m was noted in Budget 2023).

### **Equalisation**

In line with the commitment in the Programme for Government – “Our Shared Future”; 100% of the estimated LPT yield is retained locally within the local authority area where it is collected. All equalisation funding will be met by the Exchequer, to ensure that all authorities receive, at a minimum, an amount equivalent to their Baseline. The equalisation funding requirement will be based on the total expected level of LPT in each local authority area and will not be adjusted if the basic rate of LPT is varied.

Based on its shortfall position when expected 2024 LPT receipts are compared to the 2024 Baseline, Limerick City & County Council will be in receipt of equalisation funding in 2024.

The Local Property Tax (Local Adjustment Factor) Regulations 2022 do not refer to yearly decisions but instead to “a period as specified in the resolution”, meaning elected members can now set a local adjustment factor for a period of their choosing. 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%. In September 2022, the Council decided to adjust the LPT rate upwards by 15% for 2023 and 2024 equating to an increase of €2,275,125. It should also be noted that after the 2021 property revaluation for LPT assessment over 50%

of properties in Limerick now fall into the 1<sup>st</sup> valuation category with a base value for Local Property Tax of €90.

The 2024 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:

<i>Limerick City and County Council - 2024 LPT Allocation</i>	
<b>LPT Retained Locally 100%</b>	€15,167,516
<b>2024 Baseline</b>	<b>€19,054,464</b>
<b>2024 Shortfall (LPT retained locally -2024 Baseline)</b>	-€3,886,948
<b>Distribution of equalisation funding</b>	€3,886,948
<b>Total LPT Funding to be provided in 2024</b>	<b>€19,054,464</b>
<b>15% increase in LPT rate</b>	€2,275,125
<b>Revised LPT Allocation 2024</b>	<b>€21,329,589</b>

**Table 4: LPT Reconciliation 2024**

The 15% LPT variation for 2024 of €2.275m has been allocated to provide additional resources for the delivery of the following services:

<i>Service Description</i>	<i>LPT 15% Allocation 2024</i>
<i>Local &amp; Regional Roads/ Traffic Management/ Street Cleaning</i>	<b>€768k</b>
<i>Other Local Services (e.g. Fire/ Library etc.)</i>	<b>€357k</b>
<i>Capital Investment in New Plant to Deliver Efficient Local Services</i>	<b>€400k</b>
<i>Urban and rural Regeneration</i>	<b>€550k</b>
<i>GMA for 2024 (similar to 2023, 2022 &amp; 2021)</i>	<b>€200k</b>
<b>Total Post LPT Revaluation</b>	<b>€2.275m</b>

**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 2024. 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.

Draft Budget 2024 is presented with no commercial rate increase for 2024.

### **Vacant Property Refunds 2024**

The commencement of section 9 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019, as amended, will allow local authorities to adopt schemes for the abatement of rates in respect of vacant property for 2024. These schemes are to replace the refund of rates on vacant property adopted annually. The Local Government Act 1946 are now repealed and replaced by section 9. Vacancy abatement schemes under section 9 are a reserved function to be approved at the local authority budget meeting. It is proposed for an abatement of 10% of rates due to Limerick City and County Council by a liable person for the financial year ending 31 December 2024.

Separately the Council will be asked to consider the adoption of the Vacant Property Refund Scheme 2024 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 as outlined in Table 7 below:

<b>Band</b>	<b>% Refund</b>
Up to €3,000 Annual Rate Demand (with payment of 25% required)	25%
€3,001 to €12,000 Annual Rate Demand (with payment of 50% required)	50%
€12,001 to €60,000 Annual Rate Demand (with payment of 75% required)	25%
Over €60,001 Annual Rate Demand (with payment of 90% required)	10%

**Table 7: Vacant Property Scheme 2024**

### **Small and Medium Business Support Scheme 2024 (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 €30,000 but not less than €1 in 2024. The proposed % support for 2024 rates is 13.5% subject to a maximum refund of €1,500, which will be subject to a number of terms and conditions.

## **Retail Economic Incentive Scheme**

The Business & Retail Incentive Scheme has been replaced for Budget 2024 with the Retail Economic Incentive Scheme. The Retail Economic Incentive Scheme offers an incentive to retailers to encourage and develop certain retail uses in our city and town centres. The new scheme is designed to combat increasing vacancy in the core retail area of Limerick City Centre and our main towns. The Council continues to work with Retail Excellence Ireland, Retail Ireland, and Limerick Chamber of Commerce and other local stakeholders in developing a vibrant City Centre.

## **Increased Cost of Business Scheme (ICOB)**

The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Simon Coveney TD has announced a Budget 2024 package, which recognises the ongoing challenges businesses are facing which included the approval for the Increased Cost of Business Scheme (ICOB), which is a once-off grant to benefit up to 130,000 small and medium businesses at a cost of €250m. The detailed terms and conditions attached to the grant are to be finalised by the Minister. The details of the scheme will be finalised for implementation in 2024.

## **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 59,200 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 from Government.

The HAPSSC will administer circa 8,800 new tenancies in 2024 and process in excess of €670 million in payments to HAP landlords and collect €160 million in differential rent from HAP tenants.

## **Ukrainian Response**

The Ukrainian Response in Limerick has provided for the refurbishment and operation of three Local Authority Managed Accommodation Centres at Cappamore, Abbeyfeale and Askeaton. 2024 will see the continued operation of these three Local Authority Managed Accommodation Centres for Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (those fleeing the war in Ukraine). Additional opportunities to refurbish state owned properties for temporary accommodation centres will be explored and the Ukrainian Response Team will continue to

work with potential commercial proposals to ensure national standards for such accommodation and the operation of same are met.

Limerick City & County Council continue to operate the Offer a Home Programme in Limerick. This programme saw the occupation of approximately 80 vacant homes across Limerick City and County during 2023 and additional offers will see more families being offered a temporary home under this programme throughout 2024. The Ukrainian Response Team continue to support both the pledger and the families in every offer.

Working with the Community Response Forum and other national, regional and local agencies, the Ukrainian Response Team will continue to enable wraparound support services to Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection living, working and / or being educated in Limerick City and County.

### **Climate Action**

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 provides that each Local Authority must develop a Climate Action Plan. The preparation of the Plan commenced in early 2023 and will be completed in Q1 2024. The plan will also include details for a proposed decarbonisation zone. The Decarbonisation Zone will be a test bed that will not only demonstrate what can be done and accelerate learning for other areas but also to help understand the scale of the challenge in decarbonising the economy and wider society. Preparatory work has commenced on the plan with the procurement of baseline studies to inform the plan preparation. It is hoped that the climate action plan will harness and facilitate investment and funding into the council from a range of sources including the Climate Action Fund.

### **General Municipal/ Metropolitan Allocation 2024**

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 2024 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 €1.463m 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 with ongoing focus on the replacement of staff following retirements, promotions and departures. There will also be continued emphasis on filling specific purpose posts funded for fixed term periods.

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.

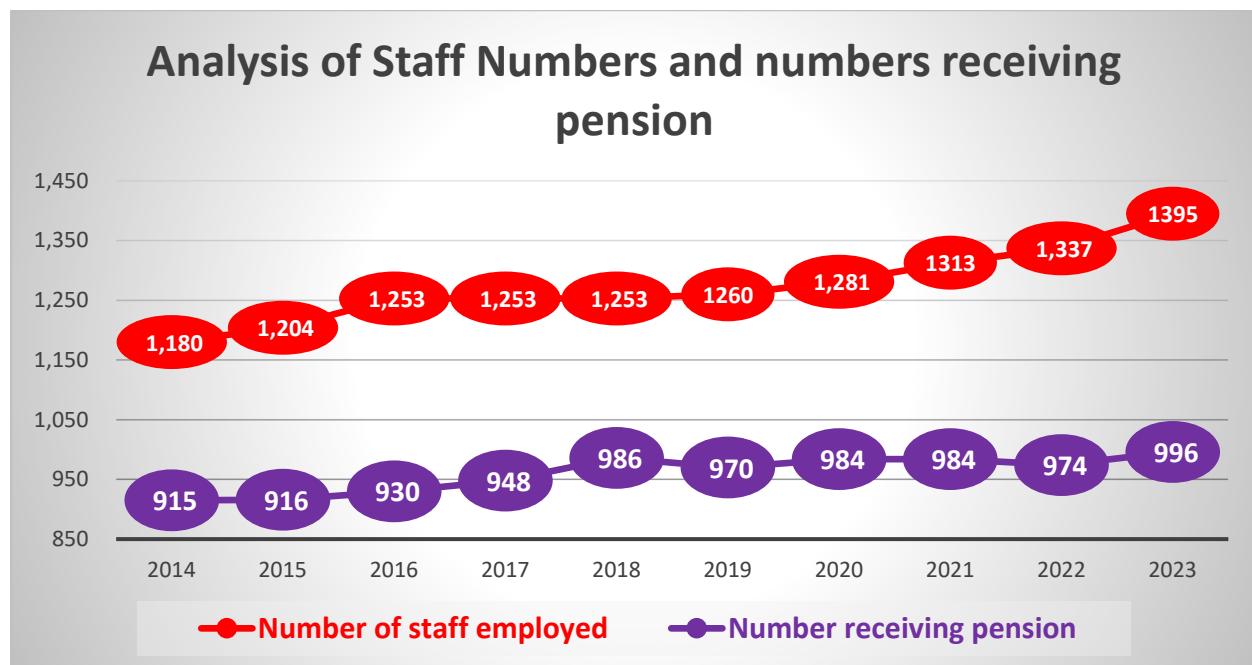


Chart 5: Analysis of staff numbers and number receiving pensions 2014-2023 (Sept)

Blended working in the local government sector reflects the implementation of government policy that public sector employees move to 20% remote working. Following the issue of a Local Government Blended Working Framework, Policy, and FAQ, Limerick City and County Council approved a Policy for Blended Working based on the national framework. Blended Working was introduced in Limerick City and County Council on 25th July, 2022 and has continued during 2023.

## Water Services/ Uisce Éireann (formerly Irish Water)

The Water Services budget now largely covers the payroll costs for 129 full time staff equivalents and central management charges that will be recouped from Uisce Éireann. Materials, equipment, services, plant hire and energy are now primarily purchased through the Uisce Éireann procurement system and, therefore, no longer appears on the Council's expenditure system.

### **Directly Elected Mayor:**

On 25th July 2023, the Government signed off on publication of the Local Government (Mayor of Limerick) Bill 2023 which establishes the office of mayor and its mayoral functions, sets out the governance structures to support that office and provides a code for the election of the mayor. Furthermore, Government has decided that the election for a directly elected Mayor for Limerick will be held on the same date as the Local and European Elections in 2024, which will be held in June 2024.

Instead of the current ‘two-pillar’ structure, with the elected council and the chief executive performing the functions of Limerick City and County Council, under the new arrangements there will be a ‘three-pillar’ structure composed of:

- the elected council
- the directly elected mayor
- the director general (formerly the chief executive officer)

### **Capital Budget 2024-2026**

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 2024 to 2026. 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 2024 to 2026.

Capital Expenditure 2024 -2026	Grant funded	Loan funded	Development Levy Funded	Revenue Funded	Other (Land Sales / Contributors)
€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
1,317	1.180	63.80	10.185	22.416	41.03

Table 8: Summary Capital Plan 2024-2026

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



**Chart 6: Summary Capital Plan 2024-2026 by year**

## **Conclusion**

The overall objective of the budget preparation for 2024 has been again to maintain existing services to a high standard and ensure that Limerick City and County Council fulfils its statutory and regulatory obligations in an environment of increased costs and limited funding. The demand for services across Limerick continues to grow and this is matched by an increase in public expectation.

In balancing the budget, I have taken into consideration members' feedback particularly in relation to increased maintenance demands on our social housing stock, the level of match funding for housing grants, continued investment in our road infrastructure, and demands on our horticulture section with new and existing amenities to be maintained.

The budget also looks to provide match funding for tourism development including the hosting of major events, which will allow the Council to leverage national funding. The successful transfer of King John's Castle from Shannon Heritage to Discover Limerick DAC a wholly owned subsidiary of the Council in 2022 was an important milestone in bringing Limerick's iconic landmark under the control of the Council. Moving forward the DAC will seek to develop other opportunities including the redevelopment of the Adare Heritage Centre in advance of hosting the Ryder Cup in 2027.

During 2023, the Council again had to react to unforeseen events such as the humanitarian response for those fleeing the war in Ukraine, increased inflationary pressures arising from the invasion of Ukraine and related uncertainty on energy costs, which demonstrated the professionalism, commitment and determination of staff to manage the impact of these events.

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 17th November 2023."

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.

### **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 on behalf of the people of Limerick.

He noted that it was a balanced budget being proposed and complimented the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) on their work and input into the preparation of the Budget. This Budget was a progressive Budget and he welcomed the fact that there was no proposed increase in rates and that the bad debt provision had been reduced. No proposed increase in the Local Property Tax (LPT) was also very significant and he welcomed the fact that an additional €1.5m in funding from the Government following the baseline review carried out on the Local Property Tax rates.

He outlined how this Budget was being proposed in the context of an overall Government surplus nationally, but he cautioned against the over reliance on Foreign Direct Investment and earnings from Corporate Taxes. He welcomed the proposed increases in housing maintenance and homeless services supports, along with funding for road maintenance. He was happy to see the new Athletics Hub being opened in Newcastlewest but stressed the fact that this facility, along with other new infrastructure such as Active Travel cycle paths, etc. also needed to be maintained.

On behalf of the Fine Gael Group, he formally proposed the Draft Budget for 2024.

### **Councillor O'Hanlon**

Councillor O'Hanlon, 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 noted the fact that there was no increase in commercial rates or in the Local Property Tax, which was very important measure.

He welcomed the fact that the proposed budget provides for the continuation of all Council services for 2024. He also noted that the bin waiver scheme continued to be supported and how Limerick City and County Council was one of the few local authorities to support such a scheme. He emphasised the importance of ongoing funding for road improvements and maintenance, in addition to the funding being provided for Active Travel schemes, to make Limerick an attractive place for people to come and live, visit and enjoy all the amenities in the city and county. He welcomed the funding increases in housing maintenance, housing grants and in the homeless services, which were especially important for people.

On behalf of the Fianna Fail Group, he formally seconded the proposal to adopt the Budget for 2023.

#### **Councillor Benson**

Councillor Benson, speaking on behalf of the Sinn Féin Party, referred to ongoing housing accommodation and homelessness issues and the cost of living challenges faced by people, which resulted in a challenging couple of years for everybody. She thanked the Deputy Chief Executive and his Finance team for their hard work and assistance during the Budget process, and she praised the staff for their ongoing commitment and delivery of services across both city and county.

She welcomed the provision of additional resources allocated for housing maintenance and the homeless service, and the retention of the Bin Waiver Scheme. She criticised the amount being paid to private landlords via the HAP and RAS schemes and stated that this money would be better off spent on building local authority housing.

She welcomed the fact that there was no proposed increase in commercial rates and stressed the importance of building up the city centre and revitalising Cruises Street, and attracting more businesses to locate in the city centre. She confirmed that the Sinn Féin team on the Council would be voting for the proposed Budget.

#### **Councillor C. Sheehan**

Councillor Secas, on behalf of the Labour Party, thanked the Deputy Chief Executive and his team for the work done in the preparation of the budget and for their commitment and availability during the Budget process. He welcomed the increases in housing maintenance and for homeless services, the increased budget for street cleaning and the introduction of a new city centre-cleaning unit. He emphasised the importance of building more local authority housing rather than leasing and stressed the importance of the continued delivery of a wide range of services across the City and County. He confirmed that the Labour Party would be supporting the budget.

### **Councillor Hartigan**

Councillor Hartigan, on behalf of the Green Party, welcomed the budget for 2024 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 welcomed the continued expenditure on Active Travel measures across the city and county. He emphasised the importance of increased expenditure on social and affordable housing provision and welcomed the increase in budgets for housing maintenance and homeless services. He confirmed that the Green Party would be supporting the budget.

### **Councillor Scanlon**

On behalf of the Independent Group, Councillor Scanlon 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.

He welcomed the increased budget provision for housing maintenance and homeless services, and the increase for Housing Adaption Grants. He noted the fact that there was no increase in commercial rates for 2024 and he stressed the importance of continuing to support businesses. He confirmed that the Independent Group would be supporting the budget.

### **Proposed Amendment**

With regard to the Vacant Property Refund Scheme 2024, the following amendment was proposed by Cllr L. Galvin as follows:

The introduction of a new 4<sup>th</sup> Band for Commercial Properties up to €3,000 Annual Rate Demand which will attract a refund of 75% upon payment of 25% of the associated Commercial Rates Demand.

The following table outlines that amended Vacant Property Refund Scheme as proposed for 2024 with no change proposed to the Terms and Conditions as outlined in Agenda Item 5:

<b>Band</b>	<b>% Refund</b>
Up to €3,000 Annual Rate Demand (with payment of 25% required)	75%
€3,001 to €12,000 Annual Rate Demand (with payment of 50% required)	50%

€12,001 to €60,000 Annual Rate Demand (with payment of 75% required)	25%
Over €60,001 Annual Rate Demand (with payment of 90% required)	10%

With the above new 4<sup>th</sup> band I propose the adoption of the Vacant Property Refund Scheme 2024 as amended 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.

Proposed by Councillor L. Galvin;

Seconded by Councillor John Sheehan, and agreed.

**Adoption of draft Annual Budget for the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2024**

Proposed by Councillor J. Sheahan

Seconded by Councillor K. O'Hanlon

And agreed and resolved:

**THAT** the draft Annual Budget for the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2024 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 the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019 as amended.

**AND THAT**, in accordance with the Annual Budget adopted and subject to section 6 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019 as amended, **€0.2797** be and is hereby determined as the General Annual Rate on Valuation to be levied for the several purposes specified in the said Tables, for the financial year ending on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2024, in accordance with section 3 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019 as amended.

**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 2024 – 2026 as presented to the meeting is considered (Item 3 on Meeting Agenda)

**AND THAT** Limerick City and County Council makes a scheme for the abatement of rates due to it by liable persons, or classes of liable persons, in respect of vacant properties in accordance with the provisions of Section 9 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019, as amended. Such a scheme in respect of vacant property will provide for an abatement of 10% of rates due to Limerick City and County Council by a liable person for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 (Item 4 on Meeting Agenda).

**AND THAT** the Vacant Property Refund Scheme 2024 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 amended by resolution (Item 5 on Meeting Agenda).

**AND THAT** the Small and Medium Business Support Scheme 2024 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 Retail Economic Incentive Scheme for Vacant Property from 01/01/2024 until 31/12/2024 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 7 on 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: \_\_\_\_\_