

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS AT SPECIAL MEETING OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DOORADOYLE, LIMERICK, AND ONLINE ON MONDAY, 7TH APRIL, 2025, AT 12.30 P.M.

PRESENT IN THE CHAIR:

Príomh Chomhairleoir, Councillor D. McSweeney

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mayor Moran,

Councillors Beasley, Benson, Butler, Carey, Collins (B), Collins (M), Conway, Daly, Donoghue, Doyle, Foley, Hartigan (S), Hartigan (T), Hickey-O'Mara, Keary, Kiely, Kilcoyne, Leddin, O'Sullivan (O), O'Sullivan (T), Pond, Ruddle, Scanlan, Secas, Sheahan, Slattery, Stokes, Talukder, Teefy, Teskey, Ward.

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

Director General (Mr. P. Daly), Director, Finance, Economic Development, Digital and ICT Services (Mr. M. White), Director, Housing (Mr. B. Kennedy), Director, Regeneration, Sports and Recreation (Mr. J. Delaney), Director, Rural, Community, Culture and Tourism Development (Mr. S. Duclot), A/Director, Transportation and Mobility (Mr. H. McGrath), Director, Planning and Place-Making (Mr. V. Murray), Meetings Administrator (Mr. C. Farrell), Administrative Officer, Corporate Services, Governance and Customer Services (Ms. A. Foley), Senior Staff Officer, Corporate Services, Governance and Customer Services (Ms. C. Sheehy), Senior Engineer, Housing Maintenance (Mr. B. Kidney), Senior Executive Engineer, Housing Maintenance (Mr. K. Murphy), Administrative Officer, Housing Maintenance (Ms. G. McNamara).

The Príomh Chomhairleoir welcomed everyone to the Council Chamber and stated that he had been asked to call the Special Meeting following a request from Councillors Benson, Gavan, O'Donovan, Hickey-O'Mara, Reale, Secas to discuss the issue set out in the Agenda as follows:

“To discuss the budget and available funding for the voids programme this year, given the fact that as of March 2025 there is already a €1.5M deficit in the projected cost of refurbishing current listed vacant units.”

The Director of Housing informed the Members that the average cost to refurbish a void was approximately €48,000. However, with only €11,000 in funding per property, and with approximately 10 properties per month coming back as voids, it was very difficult to keep up with demand.

The Senior Engineer, Local Authority Housing Maintenance, gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Members on housing voids. He informed the Members that within Limerick City and

County Council housing stock of 6,192 of which 113 were awaiting minor repairs and 103 were awaiting major refurbishment. As part of the presentation, he reviewed the voids over the previous 12 months, the costs involved and the proposals going forward as follows:

The Senior Engineer referred to the initial two funding streams for voids - €50,000 towards derelict properties under Category 3 and 4; and €11,000 towards minor repairs under Category 1 and 2. However, he informed the Members that the €50,000 had been suspended and the €11,000 had not increased despite construction inflation of 114% since 2014.

The Senior Engineer advised that in 2022, a €5 million fund was set up by the Council to address deficits related to voids. This fund was financed through a combination of its own resources and the repurposed Troy Studio Loan. He noted that the Fund was specifically set up to deal with the shortfall in funding for voids but has since been depleted. He further advised that, any additional funding outside the €11,000 must come from the Council's own resources.

The Senior Engineer provided an overview of the expenditure incurred to refurbish Void properties between 2022 and 2024. He noted that, the DHLGH covered the full refurbishment costs in 2023 for all Void properties completed by December of that year.

The Senior Engineer then presented the proposals for going forward, highlighting the following key priorities:

- A business case for extra funding to be made before Quarter 4, 2025.
- Energy efficiency retrofit funding to include void works.
- Using Supplygov.ie framework to ensure better value for money was achieved.
- Bringing units up to minimal rental standards.

Councillor Benson thanked the Príomh Chomhairleoir for calling the Special Meeting. She referred to the serious need for housing and the ongoing housing emergency. She stressed the need for more help from the Department and emphasised that the €11,000 grant had not increased in line with inflation.

Members welcomed the Special Meeting to discuss the available funding for the voids programme this year and the urgent need for additional supports from the Department. The following issues were raised:

- Members expressed their concerns at the lack of funding and asked if the Department was aware of the Council's current situation in relation to voids.
- Members expressed their disappointment at the length of time a house remained empty after becoming vacant and asked for clarification on the turn-around time to get these voids back into stock.

- Members queried how many tradespeople were employed by the Council and what type of tradespeople.
- Members queried if other Local Authorities were in a similar situation.
- Members queried if it was more efficient to go for “3 Quotes” for minor works.
- Members suggested scoping work could be carried out prior to the tenant vacating the property.
- Members queried if there was a minimum BER requirement for a re-let.
- Members sought a breakdown per district of the following – Schedule of Costs and No. of Units.

In response to the Members queries, the Senior Engineer stated the Department is aware of the lack of funding and the urgent need to return Voids to use to meet the housing demands. He noted that the average re-letting time for voids is approximately 8 months, however, this can vary depending on the condition of the void. The Members were advised that the Council has a direct labour crew in the Metropolitan District and the Municipal Districts, which includes carpenters, plumbers and masonry tradespeople responsible for both the day to day maintenance and refurbishment of the Council’s housing stock. He noted that other local authorities have a mix of direct labour and contractors, which is similar to Limerick.

It was agreed that a breakdown of stock would be given to the Members.

Members discussed the need to recruit tradespeople with the required qualified skillset to actively work on voids as well as day to day maintenance in housing. They requested the Council consider running a Pilot Apprentice Programme for tradespeople with an administration element to the training programme. The Mayor supported this initiative.

The Senior Engineer informed the Members that the Council is currently in contact with TUS to develop an apprenticeship programme and welcomed this initiative, acknowledging the benefits this would have for the housing maintenance team.

On the proposal of Councillor Benson, seconded by Mayor John Moran the following was agreed:

“That, we will write to and call on the Government to urgently review the funding allocation to Local Authorities for voids and to consider the impact that construction inflation has had on the ability of Local Authorities to refurbish these properties. We also, call on the Government to review the 4 stage approval process for SHIP renewals.”

The Mayor supported the Motion and highlighted the need for funding as the Council did not have the capacity within its own budget. He referred to the need for more housing and how Limerick must find alternative solutions to this issue. He agreed that some houses were

returned in a reasonable condition but this Local Authority must meet minimal rental standards before re letting them.

The Senior Engineer advised the Members that the Council would be commencing an inspection programme of all stock and any issues should be identified during the inspections.

The Príomh Chomhairleoir thanked the staff for their presentation. He referred to the seriousness of the issue and the need to find solutions.

This concluded the Meeting.

Signed: _____
Príomh Chomhairleoir

Date: _____