

**MINUTES OF THE STATUTORY BUDGET MEETING OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON
THE 18th OF NOVEMBER 2024 IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, ÁRAS AN CHONTAE,**

PRESENT:	Councillor	Padraig Fleming	In The Chair
	Councillors	Aisling Moran Ben Brennan Aidan Mullins Seamus McDonald Catherine Fitzgerald Ollie Clooney Barry Walsh Vivienne Phelan	James Kelly Tommy Mulligan Paddy Bracken John Joe Fennelly Paschal McEvoy John King Conor Bergin Caroline Dwane Stanley
APOLOGIES:	Councillor	Willie Aird	Marie Tuohy

IN ATTENDANCE:

Messrs Simon Walton, Interim Chief Executive, Donal Brennan, Director of Services, Paul McLoughlin, A/Director of Services, Ms. Georgina Ireland, A/Director of Services, Ms. Julie Bergin, A/Director of Finance, Ms. Carmel McNicholl, A/Director of Services, Ms. Irene Delaney, A.O., Ms. Linda Phelan, A/Administrative Officer & Ms. Michelle McCormack, S.O.

183. CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DRAFT BUDGET FOR LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2025 PURSUANT TO SECTION 103 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2001

The Interim Chief Executive, Mr. Simon Walton referred the Members to his report of November 8th, 2024. As with recent budgets, Budget 2025 is focused on consolidating progress and providing positive impacts for local citizens, communities and businesses. He advised that Budget 2025 seeks to support regeneration and a business stimulus effect in the local economy. The past number of years have witnessed a steady increase in revenue expenditure committed to services provided by Laois County Council. The Draft Revenue Budget put forward for consideration by the elected members now stands at €123,693,332. This represents an increase of €9,812,332 over the adopted Budget 2024 or an increase of €5,447,432 on an anticipated outturn for Budget 2024.

Ms. Julie Bergin, A/Director of Services thanked the staff in the Finance Section and in particular Ms. Linda Phelan, A/Administrative Officer for her assistance in the preparation of the draft Budget. Ms. Bergin also thanked the Cathaoirleach and the Members of Laois County Council together with the Interim Chief Executive, Management Team and staff of the Council for their assistance in the preparation of the draft Budget. She referred to the Budget documents which were circulated to Members and confirmed that these have been prepared in the statutory format. She outlined details of the general objectives of Budget 2025 as follows:

❖ **Housing and Regeneration of Vacant Buildings**

- Continue to meet and exceed the targets set out for Housing supply, specifically, social housing construction, affordable and cost rental supply, expanding the use of the “Croí Cónaithe Fund” for vacant and derelict buildings and providing sites for self-builders.
- Maximise Housing Adaptation Grants.
- Maintain resources and standards in estate management and enforcement of tenancy conditions.
- Continue to improve public housing stock condition through planned maintenance and energy efficiency upgrades.

❖ **Economic Development**

- Continue to deliver the Local Enterprise Office programme of supports.
- To maintain the J17 National Enterprise Park to the standard envisaged in the Masterplan underpinning its development.
- Continue to stimulate economic and business development in collaboration with the Laois Chamber Alliance, the Cube Innovation Centre and the Council’s Business Support Unit.
- Maximise drawdown and use of the EU Just Transition Fund (2022-2027) so as to create jobs in Co. Laois and to align with climate action and energy efficiency policies.
- Enhance the growing reputation of County Laois as an Events and Business location.

❖ **Place Making and Environment**

- Ensure increased focus on place making in the delivery of the Council’s Capital Programme.
- Continue to work towards our 2030 climate action targets and meet the objective of the Water Framework Directive.
- Protect the natural and built environment and heritage of Co. Laois.
- Promote a clean and pristine environment conducive to a high standard of public health and wellbeing.

❖ **Community and Rural Development**

- Continue to engage with and offer advice to communities on grant schemes and other supports.
- Continue to provide supports for festivals and events.
- Support culture and arts programmes in County Laois.
- Support the community wide role of our libraries in enhancing the quality of life for citizens.
- Provide continued support to refugees and set up a new integration support service.

❖ **Transportation and Mobility**

- Continue to invest in rural and urban infrastructure through the delivery of the 2025 Road Works Scheme and the municipal district works schedules.
- Delivery of sustainable and active travel projects in collaboration with the National Transport Authority.
- Provide a good standard of car parking, bicycle facilities and bus shelters at key locations.
- Provide and maintain public street lighting to a satisfactory standard.

❖ **Shared Services Centre**

- Continue to lead and host the national shared service on pay and superannuation.

The main factors that shaped the drafting of the 2025 Budget as outlined in the Chief Executive's report are as follows: -

On the Income side:

1. An assumption that the new Government will provide grant aid and subsidies to an overall value of €70,745,740, across a broad range of service areas,
2. An assumption of a steady state business environment with little or no additional yield or loss from commercial rates,
3. An assumption/expectation that the costs of implementing the WRC Fire Service Agreement will continue to be met fully by Central Government,
4. An increased income from Local Property Tax of €300,000, by comparison to 2024,
5. An increase of €480,000 from rents on 2,435 Council owned houses,
6. Acknowledging a €350,000 decrease in income at Kyletelesha for the disposal of inert soil and stone,
7. Acknowledging a €150,000 reduction for Budget 2025 in income from Non-Principal Private Residence Tax

On the Expenditure side:

1. To provide similar levels of service across all service areas, commensurate with service levels provided in recent years,
2. To continue the Croi Conaithe (Vacant Property Retrofit Grant) with an increase in expenditure of €3,900,000 in 2025, by comparison to 2024,
3. To support planned housing maintenance, emergency repairs and relet works, providing an additional €270,000 in Budget 2025,
4. To provide an additional €330,000 in Match Funding to Housing Adaptation Grants,
5. To allocate €300,000 of additional LPT income towards Playground Equipment and Surface Replacement, Match Funding to unlock Government Grants, Elected Member's Discretionary Funding and meeting the needs of the vulnerable,
6. To provide physical improvements in the County's main towns and villages, including a continued use of the CPO process to acquire derelict buildings,
7. To provide match funding to 'unlock' state grants and support numerous projects and programmes including,

- a. Town and Village Renewal Schemes
 - b. Rural Regeneration Development and Urban Regeneration Fund projects
 - c. Outdoor recreational improvement schemes
 - d. CLAR programmes
8. To commence setting aside of annual funds to support the refurbishment of Portlaoise and Portarlington Leisure Centres (€40k in 2025 increasing to €120k per annum thereafter),
 9. To meet targets and develop actions to comply with Public Sector obligations in the Climate Action Plan 2021 and the Laois County Council Climate Action Plan,
 10. To provide support to business and tourism in the County.

Ms. Julie Bergin, A/Director of Services advised the Members on a division-by-division basis of the Council's Expenditure & Income proposals for 2025 and responded to various queries raised.

The Members collectively and individually complimented Ms. Julie Bergin, A/Director of Finance and her team in the preparation of the budget.

The Interim Chief Executive extended his appreciation to Ms. Julie Bergin, A/Director of Finance and staff in the Finance Section for their work in the preparation of the Budget. He also extended his appreciation to the Directors of Services and their staff members for their commitment and hard work over the past year. He thanked the Cathaoirleach, Councillor Padraig Fleming, the Corporate Policy Group, and the Elected Members for their assistance also.

On the proposition of Councillor John Joe Fennelly, seconded by Councillor Paddy Bracken, the Members agreed that in accordance with Section 103 of the Local Government Act, 2001 (as amended) to adopt the Budget for the financial year ending 31st of December 2025.

184. DETERMINE THE ANNUAL RATE ON VALUATION (ARV) TO BE LEVIED FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2025 PURSUANT TO SECTION 6 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT RATES AND OTHER MATTERS ACT 2019 AS AMENDED

On the proposition of Councillor John King seconded by Councillor Ollie Clooney, the Members agreed to determine the annual rate on valuation (ARV) to be levied for the financial year ending 31st December 2025 at 0.2217 in the calculation of the amount of Rate under Section 4 of the Local Government (Rates and Other Matters) Act, 2019 pursuant to Section 6 of the Local Government Rates and other matters Act 2019 as amended for the financial year 2025.

185. DETERMINE A SCHEME FOR THE ABATEMENT OF RATES IN RESPECT OF VACANT PROPERTIES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 31ST DECEMBER 2025 PURSUANT TO SECTION 9(1) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT RATES AND OTHER MATTERS ACT 2019 AS AMENDED

On the proposition of Councillor Ollie Clooney seconded by Councillor Paschal McEvoy, the Members unanimously agreed to determine a Scheme for the Abatement of rates in respect of Vacant Properties for the financial year 31st of December 2025 pursuant to Section 9(1) of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act, 2019 as amended.

186. TO NOTE THE INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DRAFT THREE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025-2027

The programme was circulated and noted and the Members were advised that the matter would be tabled for consideration at the December meeting of Laois County Council.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

SIGNED: _____
CATHAOIRLEACH

CERTIFIED: _____
**DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
CORPORATE AFFAIRS**