

Kildare County Council
Minutes of Budget Meeting
held at 3.00 p.m. on Monday, 20 November 2023
in Council Chamber, Áras Chill Dara

Members Present: Councillor D Fitzpatrick, (Cathaoirleach), Councillors V Behan, A Breen, A Breslin, B Caldwell, , M Coleman, A Connolly, N Connolly, P Curran, S Doyle, A Farrelly, A Feeney, C Galvin, P Hamilton, N Heavey, Bob Quinn, N Killeen, M. Leigh, V Liston, P McEvoy, S Moore, J Neville, C Pender, R Power, B Weld and B. Wyse

Attending Remotely: Councillors, F Brett, B Clear, Í Cussen, B Dooley, K Duffy, T Durkan, C Kelly, F McLoughlin Healy, N Ó Cearúil, P O'Dwyer, T O'Dwyer, E Sammon and P Ward.

Apologies Councillor I Keatley

Also Present: Ms A Aspell (A/Chief Executive), Ms F Millane, (A/Head of Finance), Ms B Sweeney (Financial Accountant) Ms M Higgins, Mr E Ryan (Directors of Service), Ms C Barrett (A/Director of Service), Ms C O'Grady (Meetings Administrator) and Mr J Hannigan (Meetings Secretary) and other officials

BM01/2023

Consideration of Budget

The Cathaoirleach welcomed the members to the Budget meeting and reminded all present that no recording or photography is allowed online or in the chamber during the meeting. He also reminded members that there is no privilege attaching to anything said at the meeting either online or in the chamber.

He asked if there were any Declarations of (a) conflicts of interest or (b) pecuniary or beneficial interests under section 177 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended. There were none.

As due notice of the meeting and of the preparation of the budget had been given as required by law, the council considered the draft budget for the year ending 31 December 2024.

The Cathaoirleach thanked the members who attended the online briefing on the 13 November 2023. He gave the apologies of the Chief Executive who was unable to attend, welcomed the Deputy Chief Executive Ms. A. Aspell and invited Ms F Millane A/Head of Finance to present a PowerPoint presentation to the members.

Ms F Millane took the opportunity to thank the Cathaoirleach and the elected members for their ongoing co-operation and support. 2024's draft budget was a really positive one with an expected expenditure level of over €236million. For context, 2015 was the first full year where the town and county councils were amalgamated, and the budget was a little over €136million. This was a €100m (73.5%) increase in revenue expenditure over 10 budget cycles. The Capital Programme shows an expected expenditure of over €224m in 2024 and over €840m in the lifetime of the programme. She informed the members that questions on the Capital Programme would be taken at a separate meeting on Monday 27 November to discuss the Capital Programme 2024-2026.

She thanked the Management Team and senior staff, but especially Barbara Sweeney for all their input in both the draft budget and Capital Programme which is for discussion on the 27th.

Ms. Millane then proceeded to take members through the budget process confirming that in accordance with S102 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, the Draft Budget had been prepared in the statutory format. The process of preparing the Budget involved a number of stages including the consideration by Corporate Policy Group (CPG) of the broad parameters of the budget (this was done at the July, September and October CPG meetings) and at a number of Finance Committee meetings. It also involved a detailed review of income and expenditure

headings by Management Team. The decision to retain the Local Property Tax rate was made in September 2022 and the draft budgetary plans were discussed at each of the Municipal District (MD) Meetings in October.

She informed the Members that they would be asked to adopt the budget with or without amendment and advised that a number of reserved functions were required to be determined as follows

- The adoption of the budget by resolution (with or without amendment)
- The determination of the Annual Rate on Valuation
- Approval of the vacancy abatement rate
- And while there was a separate meeting to discuss it, she asked that the members note the 3 year capital programme.

She gave an overview of the budget changes as follows.

Increases in costs:

Funded increases:

- Housing maintenance – expected rents to increase by approximately €3 million – all this increase was being ringfenced into Housing, primarily into Housing Maintenance
- Housing leasing – leasing had grown exponentially, while at the same time RAS had decreased – increased net was approximately €10 million.
- Croí Conaithe / Housing for All /Energy works to Kildare County Council housing stock.
- Payroll – payroll increased through financial emergency measures in the public interest (FEMPI) are primarily funded – Kildare County Council are not budgeting for pay increases based on new national talks as it was expect that they will be funded.
- Firefighters national pay award – confirmation of the funding only issued on 13 November. Only 50% of the anticipated €1.6m increased cost was being funded. Kildare County Council had budgeted for more funding but however, it was expected that 2024 will not be affected as additional staff would not be in place from 1 January, however there would be impacts on the 2025 budget.

- Roads grants had increased by almost €3 million – there were variations across categories - these would be reviewed based on actual in Q1.
- There are new and increased headings in Heritage – including community monuments/national biodiversity action plan/Irish walled towns.

The key ‘additional’ spends in Budget 2024 are as advised at the Municipal District, Corporate Policy Group and Finance Committee briefings in October and included:

Changes to income:

- Rental Income - increased by €3 million.
- Rates - As advised to CPG and the MDs in October, Táilte Eireann (rates valuation office) rated properties over the past month or so - this additionality in rates has enabled us to draft a positive budget that enables the Finance Department to build on previous budgets directing financial resources to key priority areas.
- Grants – Increased by approximately €24 million – and included housing grants (leasing/croi Conaithe/ RLS energy) roads grants, community grants, FEMPI and firefighters.
- Pay Parking - This was discussed at the MD meetings in October.
- LPT Income - change relates to additional units being included for LPT in 2023 plus the increase in the baseline.

Ms. Millane informed the members that the budget book that was previously circulated to the members was divided into a number of sections and would be discussed under the different sections as follows:

Section 1

- The report of the Chief Executive – this report provides the context for the figures in the budget.
- The report of the departments
- The ‘Key Features’ (coloured pages) – historically Council looked for additional detail (for some figures) than that provided in the statutory budget. As there was no provision to amend the format or detail of the statutory budget, some additional detail was provided here.

Section 2

- The actual statutory budget (pages T1 to T29) – this comprises statutory and explanatory tables which Council (with or without amendment) shall adopt.

Section 3

- The Capital Programme 2023-2025. This report was just for noting.

The format of the budgetary tables was prescribed under the Accounting Code of Practice.

The statutory tables comprised of the following:

Table A – (page T1)

This was a high-level summary of the draft budget by Division (divisions were Housing/B Roads/C Water Services/etc). The key figure that required attention was the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) which Council adopts. For 2023 we are proposing to retain the ARV of .2268. Table A showed that the budgeted expenditure for 2024 was €236.7m (2015 was €136m), spread across the 8 diversions. Income from Goods and Services and Grants amounts to €143,290,318. LPT Income was €21,460,408 (this included the variation that was maintained from 2022 and which was directed for use by the Municipal Districts (but doesn't include the €6,309,068 (2023 - €6,194,481) that the council had been instructed to use in Housing as 'self-funding' of expenditure that would have previously been grant funded).

Table B (pages T2 and T3)

These are slightly more detailed breakdown of income and expenditure following Table A

Tables D & E (T5 & T6)

These provide a breakdown of income excluding LPT and Rates. The income on these two tables combine for 2023 to the €143.29m which is the total income showing on Table A.

Goods and Services are estimated at €41,339,749.

- The major change relates to the increase in Rents which was budgeted as increasing by over€3m.

- The other significant change was the reduction to Irish Water income – this was because the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage now funds the CMC element of Water Services income, and this was reflected under Water Services Grant income.

Grants and Subsidies were estimated at €101,453,569 (Table E grants and subsidies are split by source department – so €78 million comes from our parent department, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, with the balance coming from other departments, primarily Department of Transport DoT)

As per the Chief Executive's report, 56% of income was locally generated i.e., rates, LPT and goods and services. In 2023 this was 61%, however there has been a significant increase in grants which has meant changes to relative percentages.

Significant Grant changes include:

- Social Leasing
- Croi Conaithe
- Repairs and Lease Scheme
- Roads Grants
- Water Services CMC
- Heritage grants
- Increase in Ukraine recoupments.
- Firefighter's pay agreement.
- FEMPI
- Reductions under 'other' grant income primarily relate to the non-renewal of the inflation & energy grant of over €1.5m in 2023.

Table F

This gave a somewhat more detailed breakdown at what was referred to as 'sub-service' level within each Division. Out-turn for 2024 was showing as the same as budget for 2023 with a small few exceptions. This is because at the time finance department were working through the budgets they were aware that the income and expenditure was running similar to budget, as reported on to council in the monthly

and quarterly reports, with the exceptions of recoupable areas such as Roads Grants (where the grants allocated were higher than budgeted), Community Grants (including Ukraine Crisis Costs– contra), etc. The actual out-turn will be provided in the New Year once the Annual Financial Statements are completed. Service support costs appear on the budget – these are primarily the reallocation of the Central Management Charge (Appendix 1-page T29). Central Management is the cost of the support services so the cost of the building, insurance, pensions, cost of Corporate Services, HR, Finance, IT etc, the reallocation are done under national rules. For example Finance was recharged based on the number of transactions, while the building was reallocated based on square footage etc. Budgets have increased from 2024. These are a combination of where there are increases to grants in 2023 and the finance department have assumed that these increases will be maintained into 2024. If they are not, expenditure will be adjusted to match. Also, there are rates changes and changes to the LPT baseline.

The framing of the budget takes account of a wide range of factors. In addition, the council have to be mindful of its rate payers and the economy in which they operate. At a national level this is also a concern as demonstrated by the National Budget for 2024 which provides for €250m to assist small businesses with a one-off grant equivalent to up to 50% of the annual commercial rates paid by the business in 2023. Táilte Éireann does not value all properties in County Kildare, if they could get to the point of being in a position to value all new properties in a given year it would be easier to balance. Kildare County Council have no control over this.

Housing (T7 – T9)

Some key increases, which are being financed through an increase in rental income. This increase in income is as a direct result of the increases in numbers of units. In addition, there are increases to grants as referenced earlier:

- There is an increase in Housing maintenance of €4m. This is a combination of an increase in response and planned maintenance, increases to LPT payable, to management company fees and some small increases in payroll. It also includes the increased costs associated with energy efficiency works (which are funded – including €1m) and voids (which are part funded – including 500k).
- There is an increase to the Housing assessment and allocations team in A02.

- A0301 includes increased provisions to cater for rent assessments and collections.
- A0403 includes an increased provision to support the 5 community workers who provide support to communities and tenants of Kildare.
- A07 RAS/ Social Housing Initiatives – there is significant uptake in social leasing and the budgets are proposed to increase from €24m to €34m, with matching increases to income.
- A0901 - In Budget 2023 the Members voted to amend the budget and transfer monies from the Tenant Support Scheme to HAGs – this was for one year, so the monies have been returned to the Tenant Support Scheme which is included in A0101 Housing Maintenance. However – this budget includes an increase of €500k to HAGs and DPGs.
- A0904 – other grants – these were Croí Cónaithe and Repair and Lease Schemes which are fully recoupable.

Roads (T10-T12)

Most of the changes to Roads budgets relate to grant aided works. The council have not yet been advised of the road's grants for 2024 – these are usually advised in quarter 1 of the year. As such, Roads will come back to each of the Municipal Districts in Quarter 1 with the Road Works programme for 2024 which will reflect the actual grants received – for the moment finance are estimating based on the grants received in 2023.

- B0402 and B0405 should be taken together. The Finance Department have taken the opportunity to split Local Roads funded (now B0402) and to leave Local Roads General Maintenance (B0405) to only include the Kildare County Council funded element. For 2024 we are proposing increasing the non-payroll element of B0405 by €500,000.
- Public Lighting –Kildare County Council has been providing for this project for some years, and the members will recall that the annual provision reduced in 2021 as part of the reductions that had to be made to balance the budget. Work in Kildare was expected to commence in Q1 2024. The long-term benefits of this project cannot be overstated, and it is a key element towards

Kildare County Council delivering on its 2030 targets. The anticipated savings will not be visible until all elements of the project are complete.

- Pay-parking had been discussed as part of the Municipal Districts meetings in October and the figures included in the budget are those that were brought to the Municipal Districts at that time.
- B10 – DoT and NTO funded salaries are now included directly with their associated projects as they are recoupable.

Water (T13 – T14)

Water Services are operated under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Irish Water and the direct costs under the SLA are fully recoupable.

C05 the cost of Group Water Schemes was not included in the SLA, but the direct costs are recoupable.

The DHLGH funding of CMC was included in C08.

Development Management (T15-T17)

- D0101 - For information the non-payroll cost of statutory plans is estimated on a multi-annual cycle which is reviewed based on number of plans etc every couple of years.
- D0501 – Members voted to transfer funding from Kildare Fáilte to Brigid 1500 in 2023. This has reverted as part of Budget 2024.
- D0601 – Increases in General Community reflect staff allocations in particular in Community services and LCDC.
- D0603 – both Leader and SICAP (both of which are funded) are expected to continue the current levels of activity over the coming years, so both budgets have been maintained at €1.5m. In addition, the Ukrainian Crisis costs are included under Social Inclusion (D0603) and these have been increased.
- D0701 – reflects staff allocations towards Taking in Charge
- D0905 Economic Development – the increase here reflects an increased provision for staff in the Economic Development Team. It also reflects a new Project Management Team that will assist the non-technical departments (such as libraries) deliver large projects.

- D0906 Local Enterprise Office (LEO) – most of LEO costs are recoupable from Enterprise Ireland.
- D1001 Property Management – we have moved the Strategic Property Fund (that was included in D0905 in 2023 to here, along with some funding to secure and fence KCC property. There is also provision for management of any lands / property that may be acquired by the council.
- D1101 Heritage – the budget line includes a provision towards a Bio-diversity fund to enable the Bio-diversity officer deliver projects and leverage other funding. It also reflects an anticipated increased level of funding for community monuments / walled towns / etc – these are also reflected in T17 grant income.

Environmental Services (T18-T20)

- E0202 – Bring Centres reflected the actual costs as there is now just a single provider of this service in the county, plus there are additional locations provided.
- E0901 – burial grounds this reflected an increase in staff costs.
- E11/E12 – refers to the Fire Services and the new agreement estimates a cost of over €1.6m. The funded element (of 50%) was notified on 13 November. We had estimated this as being 75% funded. The original indications were for between 66 and 80% funding. There is unlikely to be any impact on the 2024 budget as all staff resources will not be in place for the full year. However, there would be an impact on 2025.
- E1501 Climate Change for 2024. This includes an additional €100k towards delivery of actions between climate and energy. As a CARO lead it is important that Kildare County Council lead the way on this area.
- A small provision of €12,000 towards a GoCar Pilot is also included.

The balance of the increase relates to community climate action officers and CARO costs both of which are fully funded.

Recreation and Amenity (T21 – T22)

- F0201 Libraries – the increase relates to €300k towards Naas library. This is an area we expected to see further increases in over the coming years as the County Library, Clane Library and Celbridge Library come on stream.
- F0204 The funding increased for library books (both physical and eBooks) by €150k. Social equity is about ensuring that everyone has equal access and opportunities. Kildare's library service is available to all, for free and provides access not only to books, but also to digital services and a myriad of talks, meeting groups etc.
- F0301 Parks and Open Spaces – As advised at the October Municipal District meetings provision is being made for a small public realm maintenance team, reporting to the area engineer, in each Municipal District. The costs are reflected in the F301 (820k). The gross costs for Kerdiffstown (411k) are also included in F301 and there is an associated income of €155k.
- F0403 Community Facilities – Bawnogues community centre is include here (120k) for a full year and there is an associated income (60k). There is also increased the general provisions to allow for additional costs associated with community centres.
- F0403 also contains a provision towards the seed funding of the community refundable grant scheme.
- F0503 – Further to the confirmation of significant capital funding the Shackleton Museum project had now been greenlit - A manager will be required – this budget allowed for their payroll and associated costs.
- F0509 – Bridget 1500 is a major opportunity for Kildare from a tourism and economic perspective. As such we have increased the provisions.

Agriculture, Education Health & Welfare (T23-T24)

- G0101 Land Drainage – most of the work done by this team is Capital and therefore capital funded – however some work relates to the ongoing river drainage maintenance (formerly done by specific boards – e.g., Barrow drainage board/ Lerr drainage board/etc). The increases here relate to staff reallocation from codes within the Environment Section

- G0402 – there is a reduction to this subservice as the vet is no longer employed directly by Kildare County Council and this is a 100% recoupable code so the reduction in cost had a matched reduction in income.
- G0404 there is a small increase to the Dog Warden Service costs. On T24 there is also a small increase to dog licence fee income.

Miscellaneous Services (T25-T27)

- H0303 - Refunds and Irrecoverable rates reflects the level of irrecoverable rates in 2022 plus/minus anything that we were aware of in 2023/4.
- H0501 – Coroners are a ‘demand’ and must be paid and the increase reflected the current actuals.
- H0901 – Representational Payments. It needs to be noted that Moorhead, which was funded in 2022, is not being funded in 2023.
- H0901/H0904 – Representational Payments / Members Expenses - there are some changes to representational payments and vouched v unvouched expenses which are reflected here.
- H0909 – represents a combination of retained LPT and pay parking to be spent at the direction of the Members and these figures were agreed at the Municipal Districts meetings in October.

Government Grants on T27 have decreased by €1.5m re inflation but increased by €0.9m which is the FEMPI (financial measures in the public interest) recoupment.

Central Management Charge (T28)

- Corporate Buildings – the increase here is based on inflation and energy costs.
- Corporate Services have increased due to:
 - Expansion of the property management and procurement teams (previously PIR and procurement)
 - Small provisions towards developing reports on SDGs
- HR increase in training and recruitment costs.
- Finance and IT increase in staff costs / software licence increases and an innovation fund.

Ms F Millane re-iterated that this was an extremely positive budget. As advised at CPG and the MD meetings in October we were fortunate that there was buoyancy in the rates which was only confirmed in the past couple of weeks. This has enabled us to deliver on supports and grants across the county. Kildare has seen an increase in population of 11% between 2016 and 2022's censuses which continues to create a significant level of demand from the local authority. In addition, in a time of full employment there are difficulties in filling some positions which also puts a strain on those who work in Kildare County Council. Management have listened to the members over the past year and directed additional financial resources toward areas such as Public Realm Maintenance, Climate Action/Energy Efficiency, Housing Maintenance, Housing Adaptation Grants, Tidy Towns & Residents Association Grants, Local Roads etc in order that we can deliver on key priority areas, whilst acknowledging that there is more to be done in these and other areas.

BM02/2023

Motion Cllr. Durkan

The members considered the following motion in the name of Councillor Tim Durkan. That all unspent Local Property Tax monies, plus pay parking surpluses, are retained and rolled over within their respective municipal districts.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Durkan and seconded by Councillor Liston.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Durkan seconded by Councillor Liston and agreed by the members present that all unspent Local Property Tax monies, plus pay parking surpluses, are retained and rolled over within their respective municipal districts.

Motion Councillor N Connolly

In an effort to address the blight of dereliction on our towns and villages, that Kildare County Council introduce a 50% rates abatement on vacant commercial buildings.

The motion was proposed by Councillor N Connolly and seconded by Councillor Pender.

A report was received from the Ms. F. Millane A/Head of Finance advising the members that the Draft Budget, as presented, recommends vacancy relief of 100%. A high-level review of the vacancy relief given in 2022 (2023 vacancies will be addressed in Jan 2024) was done. Should the vacancy relief be reduced from 100% to 50%, as proposed, it would only affect 49% of the vacancy relief given in 2022 (this figure varies substantially from year to year). As per the table below, the yellow highlighted numbers represent the 51% of customers to whom vacancy relief couldn't (e.g., KCC properties) or wouldn't (we would be reluctant to charge rates on charities) apply.

Rates Strikeoffs by Category 2022	%
Property currently vacant and available for letting/sale	41.60
Partial Vacancy Applied, unit now occupied	1.52
Vacant and undergoing refurbishment/redevelopment	6.15
TOTAL VACANT	49.20
Domestic/Derate/Derelict	2.92
Exempt/ Charity	9.68
No funds Rece/Liq/ Exam	0.18
Bad Debt/ Gone Away	2.01
Tribunal Adj Prev Yrs	12.57
Tribunal Current Yrs	8.21
KCC Own Properties	15.15

The application of vacancy relief was not automatic. It was only applied to accounts where documentation has been supplied showing that the property was vacant and available for sale/ letting or undergoing refurbishment. Documentation required includes (but was not limited to) a copy of the property's letting/sale advertisement, a letter from their letting agent confirming same, photographs of the property with for sale/letting, details of planning permission and evidence of ongoing works being carried out. Reducing the vacancy relief rate to 50% will not further encourage these property owners to seek tenants for their properties as those who get vacancy relief are already doing so and submitting proof of same.

Property owners who do not submit a vacancy application and required documentation do not get vacancy relief and hence are fully liable for the payment of

rates on their vacant properties. A reduction to 50% will not further encourage these property owners since they don't apply for vacancy at 100%. These owners are pursued through KCC's standard debt collection processes to recover monies owed up to and including the issue of court proceedings.

Given the current pressures experienced nationwide such as the cost of utilities, increasing interest rates and goods inflation, we are seeing some turnover particularly in areas such as hospitality but overall, the number of rates accounts with a vacant status has reduced by 15% since the start of 2023. In addition, Central Government announced a 'once off' measure to support small-medium businesses in Budget 2024 – this measure was directly related to the rates paid in 2023. This was an acknowledgement of the difficulties and challenges facing small – medium businesses and we believe that the majority of property owners are actively seeking to let/sell any vacant properties. In 2022 we took a sample of vacant properties and engaged our own valuer to review the sales and/or rental figures included in the advertisements, to ensure they were reasonable based on location and property condition. The reports did not show any excessive rental or sales prices.

The motion would therefore be to apply 50% vacancy on customers who are eligible for vacancy relief – customers that we have proof are trying to let / sell / refurbish their properties. Given the additional workload it would a) require additional staff resources and b) will result in legal costs. We have spoken with a number of other authorities that give less than 100% vacancy relief – the collection rate in this area was significantly lower than for standard rates, and therefore means that the full value was not available for use.

The Finance Committee have, in its work programme for 2024, included a review on the approach to long term vacant, town centre premises – however that review was only at scoping stage at this time.

As a result, the council recommend a continuance of 100% vacancy relief for 2024.

Councillor N Connolly informed the members that he was seeking the members support in reducing Vacant Commercial Property Rates relief, now known as rates abatement, by 50%, to a rate of 50%. In South Kildare in particular the main streets of some towns are like a rust belt. There was major dereliction on the main streets

of Monasterevin, Athy, Rathangan and in the back streets of Kildare and Newbridge towns. In Monasterevin, there were more than 10 vacant commercial properties, and these are owned by a combination of companies and individuals. All of them are habitable but none of them are available to rent or buy. They haven't had signs advertising letting or sale, nor have they appeared on property websites, in over 20 years. He said he did not know if owners are waiting for properties prices to rise. They have been vacant and/or derelict for 20 to 30 years and are likely to be vacant for 20-30 more. There must be a carrot and a stick approach. The carrot was the repair and lease scheme or the Long-Term Leasing Initiative, at the moment there was no stick, or these properties would be available for sale or rent. Kildare was one of just 11 Local Authorities who offer 100% relief. Other counties vary from 10% to 90%, with some offering graduated schemes depending on rateable value or length of time vacant. In Dublin City and Clare County Council vacant rates relief was 25%, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown, Waterford and Galway City are between 35 and 40% and in Fingal, Cork City, Louth and South Dublin it was 50%. These empty spaces not only represent lost opportunities but also contribute to a decline in the overall vibrancy of our towns and cities. This reduction was not merely a fiscal adjustment; it was a strategic step towards revitalizing local economies and fostering growth in our communities. The Council need to address dereliction urgently and reducing vacant rates relief to 50% was the best place to start.

The members raised the following points:

- Could this go through the Finance Committee?
- Could the motion be amended to include reference to the history of a site?
- There are other options such as Town Centre First and the Regeneration Scheme.
- The Council need to claw back rates from people that are not engaging.
- There was a big problem in Leixlip with derelict and vacant sites with owners erecting sale and to let signs but not really selling them.
- Leaving properties derelict or vacant was not acceptable.
- There were vacant properties on the back street of Newbridge.
- Cannot see why the members would vote against this motion.

- There is a disconnect between what was actually vacant listed and derelict empty properties.
- There are a large numbers of Charity Shops.
- Could two municipal Districts be looked at as a trial or would this be mammoth task?
- Conscious that this would need to be done in a nuanced fashion, it would need to be set out and let owners know in advance.
- Should this be referred to the SPC?
- Could the council compare with other local authorities and learn from them?
- Could the scheme be looked at for April/May and not require the making of policies on the fly.
- There are a lot of key indicators and a need to implement an appeals process in the policy.
- Could property owners not pay their rates and then look for a rebate?
- Dereliction returns had worked.
- Reluctant to pass this motion as there are too many circumstances to be looked at.
- Towns and Villages are suffering.
- Section 31 of the 2019 Act introduced new factors that could be applied at local level.

Councillor N Connolly informed the members that he was happy to amend his motion as follows. In an effort to address the blight of dereliction on our towns and villages, that Kildare County Council introduce a 50% rates abatement on vacant commercial buildings, while allowing an exemption for charities, owner occupiers living above commercial properties and properties unoccupied since the Covid pandemic began in February 2020.

This was seconded by Councillor Pender

Ms A Aspell informed the members that a lot of work had been done on the Vacant Home Scheme. The team had only been established. She said that the members

really needed to give the Finance Committee a chance as this scheme would be helpful to the team when making a policy for the reduction in Vacancy Rates.

Ms F Millane informed the members that she fully supported the concept but needed to make the members aware that a policy was needed for this motion, and it needed to be done right with a plan put into place. She said that the Finance Committee could look at this and have a plan in place for May 24. A targeted approach and town centre was key and could be built into 2025 budget. She also made the members aware that if this motion was to be agreed that the Budget for 2024 could not be adopted as a budget has to be balanced and no costs had been done out for this.

The members voted on the proposal to amend the motion.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor N Connolly seconded by Councillor Pender and with 7 members voting in favour, 27 members voting against and no members abstaining, the amendment to the motion was defeated.

The members considered the original motion.

In an effort to address the blight of dereliction on our towns and villages, that Kildare County Council introduce a 50% rates abatement on vacant commercial buildings.

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor N Connolly seconded by Councillor Pender and with 4 members voting in favour, 27 members voting against and 1 member abstaining, the motion was defeated.

BM03/2023

Motion Councillor Kelly

Councillor Kelly proposed that funding of €33,000 be moved from D0905 Shop Front Scheme. to Twinning D0903

The motion was proposed by Councillor Kelly and seconded by Councillor Caldwell

A report was received from the Economic Development Department informing the members that of the €200,000 allocated in 2023, there is a total balance of €3,600 remaining in the code. The uptake and popularity of this scheme is reflected in the fact that an additional 40 premises were grant aided in 2023 versus 2022.

The €200,000 budget is used to fund the following programmes:

- Shop front painting, signage, planting and lighting as well accessibility [which we potentially require additional budget]
- Window display campaigns for all 4 seasons including St Bridget's celebrations and St Patrick's
- Signage that is visible in empty shops highlighting the incentives available from KCC to potential owners, thus driving revitalisation of vacant units.
- Pride of Premises awards which are held at an MD level each year and award businesses who made significant improvements in their shop front and high street presence.

This budget also supports year-round shop local campaigns and a particular shop local programme in advance of the Christmas period.

It is also important to note that the Economic Development Team have been required to develop and implement a Shop Front Age Friendly Campaign in 2024 and this budget line has been identified to assist in this regard.

Councillor Kelly Informed the members that the budget for Twinning had been €66,000 since she had been in the council. Brigid 1500 presents an opportunity to promote Kildare in the coming year. Twinning with other municipalities encourages tourism.

The members raised the following points:

- Funding from this was used to improve accessibility and make premises age friendly
- Shop Front Scheme is very important and should not be touched.
- Accessibility should be increased not decreased it was counterproductive.
- How often could shop owners apply for this grant?

Ms M Higgins informed the members that the Shop Front Scheme was very important. She said that Twinning could apply for grants under Bridget 1500.

Ms F Millane informed the members that there was an opportunity for municipal district committees to use part of their retained LPT of €5.5 million to promote twinning.

Councillor Kelly said that she accepted the report and wished to withdraw the motion. This was agreed by the members.

BM04/2023

Conference Budget

Motion Councillors Liston, Farrelly, Pender and Killeen.

Councillor Liston proposed that her Conference Allocation be moved from H0904 Members Expenses Conference to D0603 Contributions to Community Games /Youth interactions. Councillor Farrelly, Councillor Pender, and Councillor Killeen also asked for their personal allocation to be moved from H0904 Members Expenses Conference to D0603 Contributions to Community Games /Youth interactions

The members were informed that this was not possible as members did not have a personal allocation. They could only claim expenses incurred for attending conferences from the overall conference budget.

BM05/2023

The Cathaoirleach proceeded to a vote on the adoption of the budget. The Meetings Administrator read the Resolution for Budget 2024 and the following was agreed.

Adoption of Budget

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Doyle, seconded by Councillor Breen, with one member voting against, no member abstaining and all others present voting in favour that pursuant to Section 103(7) of the Local Government Act 2001, Kildare County Council do hereby adopt for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 the budget set out in tables A, B, D,E and F of the draft budget without amendment

presented to the council and do hereby determine in accordance with the said budget on the proposal of Councillor McEvoy seconded by Councillor Liston and agreed by the members, the annual rate on valuation set out in Tables A, B, D, E and F of €0.2268 to be the annual rate on valuation to be levied for that year for the purposes set out in those tables.

Vacancy Relief

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor Power seconded by Councillor Caldwell and agreed with two members voting against, no member abstaining and all others present voting in favour that Kildare 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 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 100% of rates due to Kildare County Council by a liable person for the financial year ending 31 December 2024.

Capital Programme 2024-2026

Resolved on the proposal of Councillor McEvoy seconded by Councillor Doyle and agreed by the members present that the Capital Programme 2024 – 2026 be noted.

The meeting concluded.