

## Council receives additional €2m ahead of Budget meeting

Waterford Council has been granted additional funding to assist in its budgetary process. Earlier this month, Councillors had requested an emergency meeting to discuss the budget deficit. At the meeting, CEO Michael Walsh briefed Councillors on the state of affairs and the need to fill a €3.3 million euro hole in their annual budget after a revaluation of Irish Water rates. The problem arose as a result of changes to how commercial rates on Irish Water infrastructure are calculated.

Mr Walsh explained that, proportionately, Waterford City & County Council is among the worst-affected with a €3.3m cut on the cards. Councillors are due to meet this Friday at City Hall for the Statutory Budget Meeting of Waterford City and County Council. Last week, Fine Gael election candidate Cllr. John Cummins issued a statement welcoming the news that his colleague Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government Eoghan Murphy has granted Waterford City & County Council an additional €2 million to assist in the budgetary process following extensive lobbying.



Cllr. Cummins said: “While Fine Gael is not in the pact that controls the purse strings of Waterford City and County Council, all my party colleagues put their shoulder to the wheel over the last couple of weeks and have been involved in an extensive lobbying effort to ensure the shortfall was minimised. Thankfully as a result of our efforts an additional €2 million has been given to Waterford City and County Council which puts us in a much better position than we were a couple of weeks ago.”

He added: “As with every budget, challenges always arise, such as the €1.2 million shortfall we faced a couple of years ago due to another revaluation of global utilities, in that case telecommunications. The current shortfall while challenging is now commensurate with that figure following our increased subvention of €2 million and I am sure there will be a vast array of opinions on how that gap should be closed”.

Cllr. Cummins concluded: “There is nothing unusual about difficult budgets, in fact our income from Irish Water (separate to rates) has dropped by €3.2 million over the past five years while our housing maintenance budget for example has increased by €985,000 over the same period. Difficult decisions always face the pact of the day but positions come with responsibility. Over the past decade when we were members of the controlling group we always managed to pass a balanced budget; only time will tell what will happen on Friday 29th November.”

In the Dail last week, Simon Coveney said there is “ongoing dialogue” with Waterford Council management to work through the issues.

Mr Coveney did accept that Waterford City and County Council is particularly impacted, losing 70% of the income previously received through Irish Water rates related compensation. "It is far less equipped to deal with such a reduction in income compared to the other impacted authorities, namely the four Dublin local authorities, as well as Wicklow and Kildare local authorities. The loss creates a gap for Waterford to deal with of up to €3 million for its 2020 budget," he said.