

| <b>Minutes of the Special Meeting of Galway City Council<br/>held in the Council Chamber, City Hall and Online via MS Teams<br/>on Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2025 at 11.00a.m.</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| <b>Presiding:</b>                                                                                                                                                                     | Cllr. Mike Cubbard, Mayor of the City of Galway.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Present<br/>(Elected Members):</b>                                                                                                                                                 | Councillors: A. Burke, A. Cheevers, F. Fahy, J. Forde, C. Higgins, E. Hoare, D. Lyons, J. McDonagh, D. McDonnell, N. McNelis, T. O'Flaherty, H. Ogbu.                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Online<br/>(Elected Members):</b>                                                                                                                                                  | Councillors: A Curran, S. Forde, E. Seoighthe.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Present (Executive):</b>                                                                                                                                                           | Chief Executive Mr. L. Cleary.<br>Director of Services; Ms. P. Philbin, Mr. P. Greene, Ms. H. Kilroy, Mr. D. Pender, Ms. E. Fanning, A/DoS, Ms. M. Duddy, Administrative Officer, Ms. Molly McCarthy, Ms. Mary Rose Biggins, Clerical Officers<br>Mr. PJ Power, Mr. Philip Browne: Power Property Group, Mr. Roger Keogh, Avison Young. |
| <b>Apologies</b>                                                                                                                                                                      | M.J. Crowe, P. Keane.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

Mayor M. Cubbard welcomed all to the meeting. Due to technical issues, Mayor Cubbard adjourned the meeting and the meeting recommenced at 11:30a.m.

The Chief Executive, Leonard Cleary, provided a brief introduction to the presentation and outlined the rationale behind the decision process. He apologised for the lack of space and the technical issues.

#### **Presentation on Crown Square.**

Ms. H. Kilroy and Mr. D. Pender delivered a presentation on the Crown Square development.

Ms. H. Kilroy provided a summary of the background and relocation history related to Crown Square. The various relocation options that had been considered were outlined. Ms. Kilroy provided details on the challenges with the existing buildings noting a deep retrofit of City Hall would cause significant disruption and lead to unforeseen costs.

Mr. D. Pender informed Elected Members that the existing building was built in 1980, which has served the Council well for decades, however components are now end of life. The option of leasing Crown Square was considered but due to the high costs involved over a five-year period, the purchase of Crown Square was deemed the only viable long-term solution.

Mr. Roger Keogh, Chartered Surveyor of Avison Young was invited to speak and briefed on his independent value assessment of the Crown building undertaken in 2022 and 2025 and gave a detailed overview of the rational. He explained downturn in property market resulting in the value decrease from 2022 to 2025 due to rising

interest rates, office occupancy, trends of remote working in response to Covid, and broader economic uncertainty stemming from U.S. affecting occupier demand.

Mr. PJ Power, Chartered Surveyor, Managing Director of Power Property valued the property in 2022. He reviewed the actual cost and assessment carried out by Aecom, considering factors including location, market transactions, parables and considered car spaces. Mr. Power concluded that Crown Square represented good value for money.

Mr. Philip Browne, Chartered Surveyor at Power Property, commented on his review of the 2025 valuation. He explained the 15% reduction in valuation and factors involved in this included Covid, lifestyle changes, hybrid working, construction cost and increased interest rates. Mr. Browne referenced the latest investment report and noted the long-term value of the property will uphold.

Ms. H. Kilroy thanked Valuers for their input and comments.

Mr. D. Pender informed the meeting on Union engagement and mobility plans. He confirmed that suitability assessments were concluded with four qualified contractors. It is intended to have tender prices back before the end of August or early September under Stage 2. Mr. Pender then presented a fly through video of the Crown Square building and confirmed that the relocation will take place in late 2026.

Ms. H. Kilroy updated on a media briefing held earlier that morning.

The Chief Executive, Leonard Clearly acknowledged the number of people online and wider stakeholders in attendance. The CE outlined the three possible options that were under consideration: (i). Secure a loan for the fit-out of the property, (ii). Leave property unoccupied or (iii). Sell the property at a loss. The Chief Executive recommended to raise a loan to proceed with the fit-out of the property and complete the decision made in 2022 regarding Crown Square.

Mayor Mike Cubbard opened the floor for questions and discussion.

Elected Members collectively extended thanks to the Executive and the Valuers for the informative presentation.

Cllr. D. McDonnell raised concerns regarding staff privacy and asked if consideration was given to cater for an increase in staff numbers in the future. He further queried if documents were available to prove pricing was sought for offices at the Bonham Quay site.

Cllr. N. McNelis raised concern about due diligence and use of funds, questioned selection process of Power Property, queried how workspaces will be booked and if adequate workspace for private communications (i.e. social workers). He emphasised that the cost implications for taxpayers must be considered and questioned whether the citizens of Galway would receive improved services as a result.

Cllr. F. Fahy raised a series of questions regarding the capacity of Crown Square vis-à-vis City Hall and whether there are plans to expand the new building further. He queried whether the existing foundation of the structure could support any additional development. Cllr. Fahy expressed concern that very little progress appears to have been made since Crown Square was purchased in 2022.

Cllr. Fahy referred to an email from the Union Fórsa regarding staff consultation. He asked what financial arrangements are to fund repayments of the proposed loan. He also questioned whether a formal valuation of the City Hall building has been carried out and sought information on both the short-term and long-term plans for City Hall.

Ms. Kilroy reported that five different options were analysed each with its own pros and cons with Crown emerging as favourable option. The process included legal due diligence, market evaluations, two barristers involved as well as technical and structural engineers and fire safety inspector. Tender for valuers took place in 2022 where Power Property received highest score and then Avison Young.

The Chief Executive confirmed that hot desking will be in operation. He ensured that staff safety is a top priority.

The Chief Executive noted that the masterplans are in early stages, with all options under consideration to maximise income and confirmed proposals will be presented to Elected Members. He added that Crown Square will enhance service delivery to citizens of Galway offering more space for the public to come into council meetings, all departments in the one building, it's accessible on a bus route and more parking spaces. The Chief Executive plans to identify a customer unit area in the city for customers who wish to pay a bill.

Mr. D. Pender responded to capacity concerns, informing of the Strategic Workforce plan being prepared for submission to the Department for sanction. He elaborated with the 3 days working onsite and 2 days remote that Crown has capacity to facilitate all, supported by 128 additional break-out areas and meeting rooms provide adaptable space.

Ms. H. Kilroy confirmed loan repayments will be funded through the annual revenue budget.

Cllr. D. Lyons expressed disappointment over the time lost in the past years but welcomed commitment on mobility. He requested clarification on current staff numbers and projected staff numbers for 2029.

Cllr. C. Higgins made a request to retain a presence in City Hall. Clarification was sought on how many staff will require workstations, questions raised about current growth, what year will numbers outgrow Crown Square. From financial perspective Cllr. Higgins questioned the risk of failing on loan repayments and an update requested on spend to-date along with cause of delay? Staff concerns were acknowledged by Cllr. Higgins who sought steps taken to restore confidence in staff members.

Cllr. A. Cheevers requested clarification on how the purchase price was agreed for Crown Square. He asked if offers were held on file and what efforts were made to get

the best prices for the taxpayer. He also inquired about the sale price if the property was sold as a shell.

In responses to staffing numbers current and future projections Ms. P. Philbin confirmed headcount 2022 – 555 (310 indoor), June 2025 655 (408 indoor), 2029 predicted 308 extra staff (90 outdoor) subject to available finances and sanctions from the Department.

Ms. H. Kilroy informed the asking price was dealt with directly between members of the executive team in office at the time and Crown Square. Documentation of price was held on file Ms. Kilroy confirmed the spend to-date on Crown Square was €1.528 million.

Cllr. J. McDonagh sought clarification on engagement with unions and staff throughout the process. Questions raised regarding impacts on outdoor staff.

Cllr. McDonagh asked if solar panels were included in the design that can maintain proper temperatures. He asked for estimated inflation rate from 2019/2020 and further queried if fitout was considered at the time of purchase?

The Chief Executive advised that a comprehensive masterplan will be developed to explore all potential options engaging legal, financial, and property professionals. The masterplan will be presented to Elected Members outlining viable development options for review and discussion at a later date, noting the asset of the site to support finances going forward. He committed to find a solution to work for all to address Union and Non-union cohort and informed of a high-level steering group with Union engagement and representation. The Chief Executive committed to include regular updates on the Corporate Policy Group discussion with Unions.

Mr. D. Pender confirmed that solar panels will be installed. He elaborated that the building incorporates smart technology, enabling it to self-regulate. Mr. Pender addressed the query of construction inflation metrics, outlining costs have increased by 64.8%.

Cllr. T. Flaherty expressed disappointment at the Crown site remains idle. She proposed a site visit to ARM, noting she was very impressed with the fit-out, where approximately 90 staff are currently based. She emphasised the need for a masterplan for the City Hall site and suggested considering a new location for the library, along with a mixed-use development that includes housing for elderly.

Cllr. H. Ogbu raised a request to ensure the provision of adequate workstations and dedicated office spaces for staff handling sensitive matters, such as social workers. It was also suggested to explore the possibility of securing a space within the city. Additional requests included the inclusion of a mother and baby room, as well as a faith room.

Mr. Pender responded that how the floor space is operated within each Directorate is a matter for each Director. A parenting room has been provided for within the existing plans. Cllr. E. Hoare inquired whether all staff had been invited to attend the meeting. He also asked if, during the media briefing held earlier that morning, there had been an opportunity for the media to ask questions. He raised concerns about the accuracy

of the current project timelines and sought clarification on whether the valuations provided by Power Property included a Category A fit-out. Additionally, he questioned whether the Council was paying for parking spaces and if the Valuers had assigned a value to the City Hall site. Finally, he asked if there had been any updates regarding the redevelopment or improvement of the City Hall site.

Cllr. S. Forde expressed the need to consider cost of mobility plans going forward and asked if Trappers had been contacted regarding parking.

Cllr. A. Burke raised the following points for consideration whether the annual maintenance fee accounted for the completion status of the fitout prior to the Council's purchase of the property, the need to ensure bathroom accessibility for individuals with limited mobility. That the City Hall Masterplan should consider COPE and its services. Whether there has been any consideration for disability and elderly housing, and if there are plans to retain the social work department on-site to support these residents.

Chief Executive responded by confirming that Heads of Function were asked to inform staff in their department of today's meeting. In response to the master plan for City Hall the Chief Executive said he will get back to Elected Members with details discussed.

Mr. D. Pender confirmed that no discussion on parking arrangements has taken place with Trapper's. He advised that Crown building will be LEED gold standard the most energy efficient building in the city with maintenance costs a lot less than at City Hall. Mr. Pender confirmed media asked questions this morning. He confirmed area size of Crown Square is 74,000 square feet with details on City Hall to follow.

Ms. H. Kilroy informed that the valuation in its current state as shell and core. As well as confirming one payment has been made for parking.

Mayor M. Cubbard made the following remarks for the need to fast-track the City Hall Masterplan and highlighted the importance of ongoing staff engagement, suggesting that monthly discussions with the Union be maintained. He proposed that any information shared at the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) should also be made readily available to party whips and independent Councillors.

The meeting concluded at 1.40p.m.

Minutes, Confirmed & Signed  
Mayor M. Cubbard

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