



**Comhairle Cathrach
na Gaillimhe**
Galway City Council

Case for the review of the funding status of Galway City Council

Prepared by Dr. Seán O Riordáin
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Executive Summary

1. Galway City is one of the most dynamic urban developing centres in the OECD but operates with a funding model that is dated and inadequate for delivery of current national policies, most notably the Renewed National Planning Framework, Delivering Homes, Building Communities and other underpinning policy platforms.
2. The City has seen its population expand to over 85,000 residents in 2025 which is supplemented on a daily basis by up to 30,000 students in the City's Universities as well as over 2.4 million visitors on an annual basis, all of whom are dependent on varying degrees of need that have to be met on a daily basis by City Council services. The City has 32 registered Hotels with 3,349 Hotel Rooms which accounts for 8,403 bedspaces. Nearly 30% (29.9%) of all workers in the Western Development Commission Area live in Galway city catchment, up 3% since last Census. The City is unique in having two Gaeltacht Areas and in being a Gaeltacht Service Centre for the Connemara Gaeltacht in County Galway.
3. This Report provides an overview of the current financial arrangements applied to Galway City Council through the National Exchequer having regard to the commitment of the elected members to provide for a 15% uplift to local property tax and ARV arrangements over the lifespan of the current Council.
4. The report highlights the mismatch between current arrangements and the objectives of the Revised National Planning Framework and Housing for All, among other policies, whilst particularly noting the mismatch between the scale of development of Galway City and Environs of recent decades, resulting in significant gaps in service delivery and public infrastructure across the Galway Metropolitan Area.
5. The Report highlights the considerable number of National Policy Objectives that are to be implemented to ensure delivery of an expanded sustainable Galway City and Environs and that as a consequence a significant review of current finance arrangements for the application of the Local Government Fund is required and urgently needs to reflect new and increasingly urgent policy priorities.





6. The report notes that Galway City is effectively treated as an Authority at the lower end of resource need by the current national arrangements and highlights that this cannot continue if the policy objectives of the new Government are to be achieved.
7. Delivery of housing, underpinning utilities, expanded healthcare, fit for purpose transport networks, culture and arts infrastructure etc. requires a more dynamic regime in the funding arrangements of the city and environs.
8. A review of current funding arrangements for the City should be undertaken which will have regard to the increasingly urbanised status of the City as well as the various regional and national expectations on the Council as well as the practical requirements of providing for a high density urban setting that is expected to act as a counterbalance to other urban areas in the State. In addition, a bespoke investment plan for the Galway Metropolitan Area, underpinned by appropriate institutional arrangements is required as a matter of urgency.
9. The City Council should be appropriately resourced where it takes a regional leadership role in tourism, catchment management, homelessness, and other obligations of a regional and national nature.
10. The non implementation of the findings and recommendations of this Report will undermine delivery of the National Policy Objectives of the National Planning Framework.

Introduction

Galway City primarily falls under the local governance of Galway City Council and shares the Galway Metropolitan Area, as defined by the Renewed National Planning Framework, with Galway County Council. The city area currently has a population (2022 census) of 85,000 residents which increases, daily, to some 150,000 with commuters mainly within the Metropolitan Area but also extending into East and West Galway, North Clare and West Roscommon. Nearly 30% (29.9%) of all workers in the Western Development Commission Area live in the Galway city catchment, up 3% since last Census. In addition, some 30,000 higher level students are based in the two Third Level institutions in the City. The City hosts in excess of 2.4 million visitors every year.

Generally, it is acknowledged that the City and surrounding areas are among the most rapidly growing urban centres in Western Europe, with an expectation of growing to some 122,000 plus over the next 15 years, making it a city of similar scale to that of Cork prior to its extension in 2019.

Notwithstanding this exceptional level of growth, the Council operates on a financial platform which places it alongside the smaller local authorities in Ireland and consequently its funding basis is more restricted than for other urban centres in Ireland, not to mention other urban centres of similar growth and status across the OECD.

This report examines the basis for the designation of the City as effectively below that of every other local authority (see appendix 2), urban and rural, in Ireland. It highlights the critical need for a re-examination of this status in light of on-going policy developments at regional and national level, most notably within the framework of the renewed National Planning Framework.

The report also acknowledges the increasing demands that are being placed on the City Council in terms of its wider regional role as well as the gaps in its service provision arising from restrictions on its funding in recent decades. This has led to a legacy of having to operate service delivery within a national policy context which has somewhat misplaced the City within a small rural development context rather than the high growth reality of the past two decades, in particular.

The Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2029 has a set of key goals that include:

- **Sustainability:** Making Galway a climate-resilient, biodiversity-rich, and carbon-neutral city by 2050.
- **Inclusivity:** Promoting equality and social inclusion, ensuring that all communities in Galway benefit from the city's growth.
- **Economic Development:** Supporting Galway's role as a regional economic hub, focusing on employment-led development and creating opportunities for local businesses.
- **Cultural Leadership:** Strengthening Galway's position as a cultural and creative centre, leveraging its status as a European Capital of Culture, UNESCO City of Film, and its thriving arts scene.
- **Innovation and Efficiency:** Using innovation, digital technologies, new and emerging skill sets to improve service delivery, increase operational efficiency, and ensure the effective use of resources. The National Planning Framework highlights Galway's key strengths as including a "...world class med-tech cluster, third level institutions embedded within the City, a vibrant arts and cultural scene, year-round tourism and an attractive natural setting."

In this context it is important to note that the current financial arrangements place Galway City, and arguably Galway County, at a considerable disadvantage. If this 'designation' is continued the City and surrounding environs will be severely restricted from achieving its full potential as a critical driver of socio-economic development as envisaged by the revised National Planning Framework as well as the new Programme for Government.

The following report therefore examines:

- Current status of the City
- Key additional responsibilities for Galway in its current regional role, including public services external to the Council mandate, shared services, and other public services which are dependent upon the Council meeting its mandate.
- The City as a Gaeltacht and as an arts/cultural/SMART leader and, in the broader context, the City as an international city.
- Future planning for Galway, growth and the Renewed National Planning Framework, local and regional public service leadership, national roles.
- The Council's sectoral responsibilities in Housing and Homelessness, Climate, Transportation, Economic and Tourism Development, and its National/regional Cultural Role.
- Level of City/Metropolitan Area against current LA designations, including at the level of the EU.
- Key needs to regrade the City to meet policy expectations.



Current status of the City

Galway is the largest urban centre in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly area of Ireland. It acts as the key driver of economic development and competitiveness in the region, making a significant contribution to Regional and National GDP. It plays a critical national role as a development centre for Ireland, and it is highlighted across public policy platforms as a central platform on which balanced regional development in Ireland shall be delivered. Galway City Council plays a vital role in the governance of the City while also ensuring that the needs and expectations of the City's residents, businesses, investors and visitors are managed and delivered upon within a democratic context. The Council is the only fully local democratically accountable public service operating within the City. The Council has a budgeted combined expenditure of €270m Euro in 2026. Some €161m is to be spent on day-to-day services alongside a projected €110m to be spent on capital.

Day to day spending is funded by:

- Charges for goods and service;
- State funding and programmes;
- Commercial rates; and
- Local Government Fund (LGF)

Capital expenditure is mainly supported by the national exchequer and local borrowing. The investment programme for Budget 2026 was developed by the Council in response to the 2024 priorities of the Elected Members (See Appendix 1 for detail) and to meet the ongoing shortfalls in service delivery and projects arising from expenditure inflation of over 30% since 2019, rising operational costs, and increased demands for services. The City is effectively seen on the one hand as a key growth centre, supporting regional development policy at national level, while for financial purposes is effectively considered to be a Council with a lesser need for services.

There is, consequently, a mismatch between national policy and financial designation which will need to be addressed against the backdrop of national policy in planning, housing and economic development generally if the objectives of national policies in these areas are to be achieved.

Additionally, in the case of the Local Government Fund allocations available to the City Council by the National Exchequer, the Local Property Tax (LPT) is the primary resource for the Fund for the City. In other local authorities this LPT funding is supplemented by receipts from motor tax revenues and other payments from the Exchequer (the Government's central fund) in the overall allocations from the Local Government Fund.

Galway is, however, treated as having a surplus in local property taxes (see Appendix 2) when additional funds are being distributed by the National Exchequer, notwithstanding the development expectations of the Government. In effect Galway is funded at a lower level than small rural councils while confronting development pressures that are more akin to the other Cities in the State.

Consequently, Galway is, on the one hand treated as a Council with an LPT surplus, while on the other as a Council of similar scale to the most rural of Counties. In this it is effectively penalised for its high density restricted functional area whilst also meeting an inappropriate national expectation of maximising its own resources.

The LPT is collected nationally by the Revenue Commissioners. It is distributed back to the relevant local authority, based on several criteria, which from 2024, are based upon the following indicators and weighting set by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage:

- Population 10%
- Area 35%
- Achievement of National Policy Priorities 7.5%
- Deprivation levels 20%
- Local Authority locally raised income 27.5%

Every local authority is entitled to receive a minimum amount of funding under the LPT allocation process and in the case of Galway City Council this minimum allocation was set for 2026 at €5,099,723. This is the lowest basic allocation in the State.

It is evident however, that the weightings above do not underpin national or regional policy in planning, economic development, housing, among other policy arenas. This will be examined in later sections of this report. It is however clear that for policy such as Housing for All, the more recent Delivering Homes, Building Communities, the Revised National Planning Framework, etc. an examination of the above weightings needs to be undertaken to ensure better alignment between said policies and fiscal support for local government.

More generally, clearer consideration of the resourcing of exchequer supports for Galway City and indeed, on a less detailed examination for Galway County, needs to be examined given recent national policy objectives and the legacy of inadequate resourcing of both over past decades.

Key regional/national responsibilities for Galway City

The City Council plays a central role underpinning the socio-economic development of the Northern and Western Region of Ireland. It also collaborates closely with Galway County Council through shared services such as those addressing homelessness, fire and emergency response and library provision, among others. Recent joint efforts regarding economic development, provision of development lands as well as contributions to tourism and other regional related developments are also a feature of the role of the Council.

In addition, there are specific responsibilities delivered through the Council that do not apply to similarly tiered councils. These include the management of the Corrib Catchment where the Council leads catchment management in association with the County Councils in both Galway and Mayo, homelessness, etc. Such responsibilities are not factored into the current approach to financing either the City or County Council, resulting in a significant under weighting of both but particularly the City Council relative to other neighbouring Councils such as Clare and Limerick.

The Council is unique as the only city council outside of Dublin and Cork and, with the demands placed upon it as an urban unit, is effectively carrying the full weight of urban governance in planning, housing climate and economic development, and, perhaps most notably, tourism. It is further unique in that it is expected to provide similar levels of service to other major urban centres in areas such as arts and culture, which in Dublin and Cork are provided within the framework of the national cultural institutions. There is, consequently, a greater service demand relative to population size than is the case in rural authorities having a similar status as the City.

This reality is reflected in current national policy most notably through the National Planning Framework and Delivering Homes, Building Communities, but also in relation to transportation (including active travel), leisure and amenity provision, management of commuting and inflow of tourism, being the economic centre for the West and North West as well as its commercial, healthcare, educational, and cultural infrastructure roles.

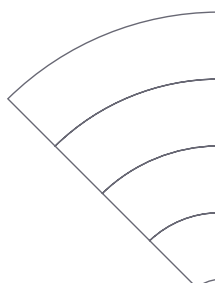
The City as an international city

The City has long been acknowledged for its international arts/cultural role while in more recent years its role in underpinning the Irish Language provides potential based on its two urban Gaeltacht areas. In addition, being a Gaeltacht Service town on the edge of Conamara, it is an urban centre that is unique in the State. Galway City Council's ambition to promote and develop this resource for locals and visitors alike is laid out in its Scéim Teanga policy ambition to make Gaeilge highly visible in all communications and in service provision. In addition, the City is also playing a leading international role as a SMART Leader and, in the broader context, underpinning the capacity to underpin regional innovation.

National Policy Objective 39 of the NPF highlights the leadership role of the Council regarding protection and development of the Irish language in terms of service provision, visibility and promotion. The use of the language is an ongoing feature of all aspects of the Council's local leadership role, but it brings expenditure obligations not normally found in other local authorities. This expenditure, again, is not used as a weighting criterium for exchequer purposes.

The City, given its growth over the past two decades, is moving from having been a large town to a mid-sized European City. This is occurring at a pace that has few parallels within the OECD. However, unlike urban centres across the OECD, its funding has been more restricted and largely unchanged as the City developed. Failing to address this consideration will undermine Galway as it grows with the City already being subject to critical international commentary.

What this means is that per the Revised National Planning Framework the City should now be thinking in terms of being a European scale City as set out in the following figure. This means in national policy terms that a city like Galway needs to be planning for a wide range of services, much of which is outside the direct mandate of the City Council but all of which is subject to support and enabling by the City Council.



- Cities
- Large Towns
- Smaller Towns & Villages
- Smaller Settlements & Rural Areas

Source: Derived from Strategic Invest Board Limited, 2008

Future planning for Galway

The Revised National Planning Framework, and its predecessors the initial NPF and previously the National Spatial Strategy, identify the City and its environs as a key development centre to underpin balanced regional policy in Ireland. Along with the Cities of Cork, Limerick and Waterford the objective of growing the population of the City by at least 50% over 2016 levels up to 2040 indicates a focus on investment in public infrastructure, quality of life and climate transition underpinned by advancing more housing, economic opportunities and public amenity. For Galway and environs the NPF envisages a growth of over 36,000 people (to a total of at least 122,000) by 2040 with 50% of new city housing development occurring within the existing Galway City and suburbs footprint.

Across most of the National Policy Objectives of the revised NPF, objectives underpinning the future role of the City are clearly set out and these will inform local and regional policy over the coming decades with most immediate attention being on public investment over the course of the Revised National Development Plan. The NPF, reflecting on the regional role played by the City, identifies “Key future planning and development and place-making policy priorities” to include:

“-Implementing the metropolitan area strategic plan for Galway city, to enable its continued strategic development in a transformational and urban rejuvenation focused manner, with a special focus on capitalising on the potential of underutilised and publicly owned and centrally located sites and activating their potential to boost the population and economic output levels of central areas.”

What the above indicates is that for Galway to reach its potential, it must address “...recent legacy issues arising from urban sprawl and reliance on private cars and... build on key strengths, contribute to a positive national reputation. At a metropolitan scale, this will require a focus on the delivery of critical infrastructure required to meet the ambitious compact growth targets expressed in the NPF, including improved public transport and sustainable mobility options. It will be necessary to focus on regeneration and redevelopment projects within the existing built up footprint, and develop a more compact urban form, facilitated through well-designed medium and higher density development. It will also be necessary to identify sustainable greenfield development sites that can be integrated with the existing built up footprint of the city and serviced by high capacity public transport.”

Key future growth enablers for Galway are also highlighted by the NPF and, consequently, it is reasonable to assume these enablers will be included in the implementation of the revised National Development Plan. They include:

- Implementation of the Galway Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy;
- Delivery of several regeneration projects to extend and intensify the City Centre, including the Station, Docks, Headford Road and Sandy Road areas;
- Identification of infill and regeneration opportunities to intensify housing and employment development throughout inner suburban areas;
- Progression of the sustainable development of new brownfield and greenfield areas for housing and the development of supporting public transport and infrastructure, such as at Ardaun;
- Improvement of access and sustainable transport links to, and integration with, the existing employment areas to the east of the City at Parkmore, Ballybrit and Mervue;
- The continued expansion of the city's third level institutions and integration with the city and region;
- Development of strategic regeneration and development projects and proposals for the City including:
 - Galway Public Spaces and Streets Project;
 - Galway Innovation and Creativity District;
 - Galway Airport Site;
 - Provision of a Citywide public transport network, informed by the development of the Galway Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy with enhanced accessibility between existing and proposed residential areas and the City Centre, third level institutions and the employment areas to the east of the city;
 - Public realm and urban amenity projects, focused on streets and public spaces, particularly in support of an extended;
 - City centre area and where residential and employment areas can be linked to pedestrian routes;
 - Measures to enhance and better link the existing network of green and blue spaces, in line with the County and City Biodiversity; Action Plans, subject to carrying out a routing study and any necessary environmental assessments;
 - Development of a strategic cycleway network with several high-capacity flagship routes;

- Delivery of the Galway City Ring Road;
- Delivery of the Galway Wastewater Strategy (GWWS);
- Ensuring that water supply and wastewater needs are met by new national projects to enhance Galway's water supply and increase wastewater treatment capacity;
- Improving sustainability in terms of energy, waste management and resource efficiency and water, to include district heating, water conservation, water reuse and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), and the circular economy.

The above will require a considerable investment by the Council in terms of project and policy management along with the use of arm's length resources if the above ambitions are to be delivered.

Impact on Workforce

A workforce Plan, prepared within the context of the NPF and other related national policies and the priorities of the elected members, identifies the need to grow the current workforce from 634 to 942 employees by 2030 — a 49% increase. Doing so will allow the Council to meet rising service demands across all departments including housing, operations, climate action, infrastructure development, economic development, cultural development, digitisation, and support services.

The projected growth reflects a detailed analysis of future service pressures, internal capability gaps, and strategic priorities, and is accompanied by financial modelling that forecasts salary expenditure to increase from €32 million to €50 million by 2030. This increase will partially be met from the now committed increases in local resourcing by the elected members. However, and all other things unchanged, the current weighting applied in regard to the Local Government Fund, including the fact that the Council is unable to retain local generated incomes as well as access other Local Government Funding, undermines the capacity of the Council to co-finance this growth which is required to underpin the capacity of the Council to deliver on its obligations set out at national level.

The Council's sectoral responsibilities

Housing

The Council is highlighted, under National Policy Objective 43 of the revised National Planning Framework and associated objectives, 44-47, as a critical location for the delivery of up to 50% additional housing over the lifespan of the NPF. The Framework states that future housing will "... be located in places that can support sustainable development – places which support compact growth, innovation and the efficient provision of infrastructure, are accessible to a range of local services and can encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling, and support the transition to a lower carbon society; be delivered in our cities and larger towns (where large scale housing demand exists), where homes and the appropriate supporting services can be delivered more efficiently and effectively at less cost to the State in the long-run."

In the case of Galway City significant investment in resourcing the housing function will be required to meet these expectations and while the Council's Housing Delivery Planning acknowledges the need for structural reconfiguration and advance planning to meet these requirements, the Council's Housing Section remains under resourced and in need of upscaling.

This is acknowledged in the workforce plan.

Additionally, however, is the reality that housing approvals are restricted by the lack of access to adequate roads, water/wastewater treatment and electricity utilities and waste management. Clearly, the national utilities will be expected to deliver on their obligations but they in turn are dependent upon the Council in delivering in planning terms but also the physical infrastructure such as roads and amenities.

In addition, there is growing evidence of planning appeals being used to prevent housing development within the Galway urban context. These appeals are successful on the grounds that, with the inadequacy of existing local road network, such developments are premature notwithstanding the actual need to produce housing to meet growing demand. For Galway to meet the housing targets of social, affordable and private development envisaged in the National Planning Framework, utility planning will need to be better resourced, and this includes delivery of important infrastructure such as fit for purpose transport networks and servicing utilities, the coordination of which, and the delivery of much, rests as a responsibility of the City Council.

In no instance, despite the priority of such policies, are these a factor in the determination of financial resourcing of the Council by the National Exchequer.

Roads and transport

As noted above, there are clear patterns of planning disruption and limiting of consent capacity due to the lack of investment into the road network across the City. Effectively city development is being constrained by:

- High car dependence
- Junctions over capacity
- Unviable bus licences – no turning circles, unreliable journey times due to congestion.
- Difficulty to get a cultural shift without infrastructure being in place

These factors will continue to severely limit the capacity to deliver the housing targets envisaged in the NPF. Significant land acquisition, beyond current resources of the Council is required, both for the transport networks to be made fit for purpose as well as actual land for social, economic and cultural investment.

The Council has identified the key corridors for growth, including for development of public transport, walking/cycling as well as private transport capacity and the overall need for resourcing has been submitted to the Department for Transport.

It is also worth acknowledging that the patterns of use in Galway City are urban in nature resulting in much higher levels of use relative to rural Councils. This means that the cost of design and maintenance of local roads is greater than is the case for counties having a bigger road network but much lesser levels of use, wear and congestion alongside greater traffic control needs. These factors do not receive any weighting regarding the distribution of LGF.

Port of Galway

The Port of Galway, while under separate management arrangements, remains dependent upon the Council to act as a guarantor for its borrowing as well as for its strategic planning. This is a functional responsibility only found in those local authorities having a responsibility for non-tier 1 or 2 ports. It is a cost to the Council which does not apply to the existing tiered councils and similarly designated rural councils under the LPT application of funds process. National Policy Objective 50 of the NPF also applies to the Council regarding development of the Port, its proper planning and development having regard to the core city strategy.

Climate

The Council has adopted its climate action plan that sets out an extensive range of actions which will need to be implemented on decarbonisation of the City. This factor is not included in any weighting given to the calculations of financial support and the minimum level in terms of the property tax. Transition to a decarbonised city is also a key policy challenge which will be resource demanding. The NPF declares:

“Our transition to a zero carbon energy future requires: A shift from predominantly fossil fuels to predominantly renewable energy sources; Increasing efficiency and upgrades to appliances, buildings and systems; Decisions around development and deployment of new technologies relating to areas such as wind, smartgrids, electric vehicles, buildings, ocean energy and bio energy; and Legal and regulatory frameworks to meet demands and challenges in transitioning to a zero carbon society.”

For the City the NPF says “The imperatives of meeting the decarbonisation targets heighten the importance of achieving more sustainable growth patterns in the regions and cities. Within each region, the cities in particular play a key role in giving effect to the large-scale transition to net zero required by 2050 and can support a move towards reduced carbon living e.g. through better energy demand management and alternative energy solutions, sustainable mobility and lower carbon buildings. Regional development goals must also ensure a just transition to carbon neutrality, within the wider statutory framework of climate action, supporting alternative employment in place of traditional industries, and supporting persons and communities that may be negatively impacted by the transition.”

It sets out several bespoke outcomes on urban living all of which apply to Galway and its metropolitan environs under National Policy Objectives 12 to 14, as well as alignment to the UNSDGs as set out in NPO 21 and 22.

On health

The Council is working with the HSE to forward plan for a wholesale renewal and development of regional hospital services within the City. The Regional Hospital will require major expansion over the coming decade if the national objectives of the NPF, and national health policy, are to be met. In addition, the Council is taking on additional responsibilities in regard to public health under the Healthy Ireland Initiative and the National Physical Activity Plan, as well as placing a priority on delivery of safe spaces, cycling facilities and physical activity through its amenities, all of which require upscaling to cater for the bigger City population as well as the wider regional requirements.

On diversity

Galway has historically been a diverse city, and in the past decade has become more diverse with an international residency of over 20%, higher than the national average. In addition, the needs of the Traveller Community and People with disabilities remains to the forefront of local policy as envisioned under National Policy Objective 38. Galway has higher need for supporting the diversity of its urban community with additional social inclusion and diversity requirements that do not apply to most other local authority areas. While there is a limited weighting given in the case of social disadvantage within the LGF criteria the extent of the weighting for urban centres needs to be re-examined in light of continuing in migration to Ireland's urban centres generally and Galway City specifically.

Age Friendly Galway

The City is ageing whilst also is the target of an increasingly expectant young population in terms of services, amenities and the need for retro fitting of much of the public realm to comply with universal design standards. These are features confronting Galway and other urban centres such as Ireland's major cities and their surrounding urban environs. The NPF, under National Policy Objectives 40 and 41 requires additional focus on the part of the Council along with a more sustainable funding platform in order to meet the diversity of costs arising from such demographic characteristics.

Renewable energy, public lighting, flooding and environment

The City has latent energy potential, which is being studied currently but will likely be based upon the natural resources of the City's waterways as well as on the retrofitting of the Council's buildings and other assets. In line with NPF objectives 73-93 the Council will have extensive additional costs it will have to provide for, and which are primarily urban in nature and so not fully applicable to other authorities currently on the same designation as the City Council.

It is also worth acknowledging that as a City the cost of delivering an urban public lighting is far greater than that applicable to rural counties. Galway City Council has a total of 10,342 public lights across the city. The total annual consumption of public lighting system for Galway City is 2,228.70 MWh. This cost, among others, is not weighted into national exchequer funding and falls effectively completely onto the Council.

Amenities

The Council, as a fast-growing urban centre, is expected to deliver urban standard services in amenities and recreation spaces. These are not costs associated with rural areas, further highlighting the lack of alignment between its designation as an urban growth centre with that of its effective designation in financial terms as a 'small rural authority'. The Council has had to invest in a level of strategy making in areas as diverse as: Green Spaces Strategy, Biodiversity Action Plan, The Sportskey Project, Litter Management Plan, Road Safety Plan and Parking Byelaws to give examples of the planning and policy undertaken by the Council in recent years. Implementation capacity, however, remains constrained due to the current financial weighting and in the event of this remaining as is these key building blocks to meeting the objectives of the NPF will be undeliverable.

Cultural Infrastructure

Galway City Council provides cultural infrastructure including event space, theatres (4), an Arts Centre and a museum for regional national and international audiences. Something not required by Urban Local Authorities in Dublin City where such provision is undertaken by national institutions.



City/Metropolitan Area

One of the more challenging aspects to regional policy in Ireland is the uneven levels of development across the Republic. There is a clear gap with Dublin dominating growth and far outpacing other urban centres. Galway provides one of the few examples where growth in the City and surrounding environs has the potential to be a counterweight, at least in part, with Dublin.

Latest results from Census 2022 estimate that the population of the Galway MASP area is 102,107. The population in the area has increased by 8.5% (+8,032) since 2016 and by +35% (+26,504) over the last twenty years (2002). Galway City accounts for 82.7% (84,414) and Galway County accounts for 17.3% (17,693) of Galway MASP population.

Notwithstanding this significant role for Galway, underpinned by the Regional Economic and Spatial Strategy for the Northern and Western Region, the level of exchequer investment through the City Council has been insufficient to meet legacy gaps in utility services as well as in the day to day provision of services. The funding model currently in place is not aligned to, as evident from the above, with the role Galway City and indeed County are expected to play in the overall development of the Republic.

In the context of the NPF “The (Galway) Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) prepared as part of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy process for the Galway Metropolitan area sets a strategic framework to guide development in the wider city region.”

However, despite this there is limited evidence of an underpinning funding model for both Authorities, one which matches the aspirations of both the National Spatial Strategy and the original NPF, not to mention the Renewed NPF. It is also clear that there is a mismatch with other national and regional policies.

As a consequence, a renewed focus on underpinning the objectives of the NPF and the National Development Plan is required as well as a re-configuration of the funding of day to day services through the Councils across the State but especially in the case of Galway which has clearly suffered from the application of the current LGF regime.

The Framework has set out 10 national outcomes and underpinned these with 10 investment priorities. Such an approach is significant as it suggests where Exchequer spending should be focused over the course of the next 20 years, i.e. in the major urban areas and their environs if the objectives of the NPF are to be achieved as envisaged under National Strategic Objective 15.

National Planning Framework and its National Strategic Outcomes and Priorities of the National Development Plan



Encouraging population growth in strong employment and service centres of all sizes like Galway, means addressing ‘*the legacy of rapid unplanned growth, by facilitating amenities and services catch-up, jobs and/or improved sustainable transport links...*’ particularly so in Galway. There is a presumption in the Framework under National Policy Objective 20 of resources being made available to allow for development that can encourage more people and generate more jobs and activity within existing cities, towns and villages, subject to development meeting appropriate planning standards and achieving targeted growth.

This presumption cannot simply be applicable to capital investment but must necessarily underpin the forward planning and design of projects and their on-going financing and maintenance. The current LGF regime does not adequately allow for this and therefore there is a reasonable expectation that generally the funding arrangements for high growth centres such as Galway and environs must be aligned to the NPF and funded appropriately if the housing units, transport services, amenities etc are put in place alongside the regional planning of the NWRA Area.

Furthermore, the continuing model for management of resources under the LGF undermines the political bravery of Councils that have sought to maximise their local resourcing through the LPT and ARV platforms. Both alongside the challenges above, if continued, will likely reinforce the challenge of implementing the policies of the NPF with consequent impact upon local service delivery, added congestion and an inability to avoid the legacies of non-delivery of infrastructure including, most notably roads and local public transport networks.

Key needs to regrade the City to meet policy expectations

1. It is recommended that a comprehensive review of the national funding model used by the Department to allocate resources from the Local Government Fund (LGF) to local authorities be undertaken. The review needs to address the policy objectives of the Renewed National Planning Framework (RNPF) and how these should be applied to the funding model. Such a review should also include consideration of the specific RNPF objectives applying to Galway City and environs to ensure the objectives of the RNPF are fully aligned to the funding model of the Department. In addition, the review should also consider the weightings to be applied to renewed criteria for the LGF having clear regard to the objectives of the NPF, Galway's status as an economic driver of the North-West Region and the specific policy objectives set out in Appendix 1 to this Report.
2. Regard should also be had to the alignment of local funding provisions to the political commitments to raise local income having regard to the priorities of the NPF and to ensure consistency across local authorities the per cent requirements of individual funded programmes such as the Urban and Rural Regeneration Programmes, among others.
3. Effectively the City Council and, where relevant, the County Council have in place a comprehensive policy platform to underpin the objectives of the Renewed National Planning Framework and associated national policies across Government. What is missing is a comprehensive funding review highlighted in the above recommendations which would provide a strategic basis for advancing implementation if the investment required to deliver the NPF objectives for the City and its environs.

4. Ideally an agreed investment plan, having regard to the priorities of the elected members (see appendix 1) for the Galway Metropolitan Area should be included with the National Development Plan, providing clarity on the level of proposed public expenditure for the Metropolitan Area. Implementation for such a plan should be the overriding role for the Delivery Board envisaged for the Metropolitan Area under the NPF.
5. An underpinning revision of the current exchequer led funding of the LGF in Galway should be put in place to ensure that planning and design procedures are adequately resourced to advance delivery of infrastructure generally as well as a level of service delivery commensurate with the role of the City and Environs on a national level.
6. Specific provision should also be made to allow for service responsibilities that are required of the City Council having regard to its regional role in areas such as homelessness, catchment management, amenities, tourism, arts and culture, and social inclusion and diversity. This should factor in services provided to accommodate over 30,000 students and 2.4 million visitors in addition to the City's permanent population.
7. Bespoke funding in areas such as road maintenance should reflect actual user demands rather than a simplistic weighting being given to road length. Requirement for application of road standards as expected by, for example, the planning consent process, need for road safety and active travel should also be included in the recommended Funding Model Review.



Appendix 1:

The Strategic Objectives and Priorities for Galway City

Introduction

The Members and Senior Management Team of Galway City Council met on the 5th July 2024 to examine their key priorities and objectives which will be used to inform the drafting of the Council's Corporate Plan and underpinning annual service plans and performance framework. A subsequent meeting examined a report on the workshop. This took place on the 3rd September 2024.

The following report provides an overview of the key objectives, priorities and projects discussed at the workshops.

Key Objectives

The overall objective will be to ensure that Galway is a great place to live, work, invest in and visit. It will be internationally recognised as Ireland's best City, and one of the best City's in the European Union. The City will be acknowledged for its ambition, innovation and risk leadership.

The overall objective for the Council was distilled into the following key objectives which will be used to inform on-going service delivery across the Council.

- i. Addressing the renewal of the City Centre so that Galway City Centre will be a vibrant, sustainable cornerstone of the local social, cultural, economic and environmental context.
- ii. Dereliction across the city will be addressed so that the entire city reflects the ambition of the City to be one of the best places in Ireland to live, work, get educated and be entertained.
- iii. The City will have a fully integrated public transport system based upon a combination of bus, rail and in the coming decade, light rail.
- iv. Housing options across the City will be in place to meet the housing needs of all of the people of the City as well as those coming to live in the City.
- v. A major investment into a cultural/arts facility to meet the growing needs of an expanding cultural and artistic community and the demands of a diverse and vibrant population.
- vi. The investment into cultural and artistic facility will be complemented by delivery of other community facilities so that the City can sustain a high level of amenities and recreation availability for its people and visitors.
- vii. Industrial capacity will be sustained through the development of key sites across the City and in partnership with Galway County Council.
- viii. The N6 Galway City Ring Road and underpinning infrastructure will be put in place.
- ix. Flood prevention and City Climate resilience will be achieved.

- x. The Irish Language and heritage will continue to be a cornerstone of the City's identity with increased usage of the language through the Council's services and visibility in Irish or Irish and English with at least equal prominence for Irish.
- xi. Renewal and regeneration of key urban hubs within the City will be in place and underpinned by appropriate funding mechanisms open to the Council, including local and national exchequer as well as available European Funds.
- xii. Action to address bio-diversity loss across the City will be put in place.
- xiii. Feasibility of renewable energy production will be examined given the natural resources within the City.
- xiv. Partnership with the Education Sector will be put in place to expand the Council's role in underpinning the objective of the City being a City of Learning.
- xv. The City will have a strategic land bank in place to facilitate future development.
- xvi. A Harbour strategy will be developed in cooperation with the Port of Galway.
- xvii. Galway will be an accessible city into and across its jurisdiction.
- xviii. Galway will be a city of wellbeing and good health.

Citywide Priorities

Specific priorities for the City which will require delivery within the context of the Corporate Plan include both projects that have a city-wide impact and projects that can be localised at Ward Level. In the case of city-wide priorities these include:

- a. Delivery of Housing mix across social, affordable and private units.
- b. Adoption of a City Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy in cooperation with other critical stakeholders including the HSE, An Garda, the local development sector and the city's social partners.
- c. Adoption of a renewed City Retail Strategy and supporting programmes to strengthen the vibrancy of the city and to address retail choice across the City. It should include examination of footfall loss to other urban centres. A Council Working Group to lead this should be put in place.
- d. Renewal of a Transport Strategy for the City and environs to position the City to have a fully integrated transport plan in place.
- e. Completion of walking audits across the City jurisdiction, identifying simple actionable solutions to make the City footpaths accessible to all.
- f. Transfer of the City Hall Location to be completed (including proper provision for Councillors and staff) and underpinned by a renewed customer and person-centered service framework and Workforce Plan alongside an options report for the use of the existing City Hall.
- g. A new Fire Station and Library is to be provided as well as a major events/cultural facility.
- h. A recreation and amenity Plan will be implemented.

- i. Purchase plan for development lands to deliver housing, advanced manufacturing and services, and amenities will be advanced and implemented.
- j. Citywide services provision for children will be addressed within a childcare strategy and a forward planned roadmap for the delivery of such services.
- k. Asset review and management of assets and stock will be addressed and underpinned by appropriate maintenance plans.
- l. The Council will access maximum resources from the national/EU exchequer and will underpin such funding through additional local resourcing across all income options.
- m. Reporting templates for the Council, on the above, will be agreed and implemented to ensure monitoring and evaluation is built into the monthly, quarterly and annual reporting on service delivery across the full extent of council services.
- n. Delivery of a Communications Plan.
- o. Examination of Ward meetings and the possible need to increase these to cover operational matters with the Plenary Council taking on strategic matters. Underpinning the relationship between staff, management and the Members will be a central feature of this examination.
- p. Completion of flood defences.
- q. Completion of a multi-modal transport studies across the City.
- r. Restoration of footpaths and a Ward based annual restitution and repair plan for roads, paths, public lighting and traffic lights.
- s. Develop a service need plan given the multiple needs of the area including provision for International Protection Applicants along with a migrant support centre.
- t. Playground Policy for the City to be developed.
- u. Delivery of facilities to support minority sports.



Ward Priorities

West

Key projects for the West Ward include:

1. Completion of the Masterplans for Salthill (having regard to flood management), Rusheen Woods and Kingston Millars and implementation of appropriate regeneration plans.
2. Feasibility study addressing the future of Lenaboy Castle.
3. Provision of additional play and amenity facilities including teenspaces and development of an additional public park amenity.
4. Delivery of a new community centre.

East

In the case of the East Ward the key projects include:

1. Development of multi-sport campus to include minority sports users.
2. Examination of new graveyard provision.
3. Provision of toilets and shower facilities at Ballyloughane.
4. Provision of swimming and supporting facilities.
5. Delivery of additional playgrounds.
6. Delivery of a masterplan for Renmore.

Centre

For the City Centre Ward the projects include:

1. SouthPark Masterplan to be completed.
2. A multimodal corridor study covering the city centre's needs to be completed.
- 3.. Flood defences in the city centre need completion.
4. Permeability study required for the centre.
5. Litter Strategy required.
6. Delivery of the Newcastle Community Centre.
7. Delivery of a reconfigured Wood Quay Park.
8. Delivery of the museum extension.

Appendix 2:

Local Authority	LPT Baseline 2026
Dublin City Council	€ 28,395,592
Tipperary County Council	€ 28,251,602
Donegal County Council	€ 27,419,850
Mayo County Council	€ 22,012,344
Galway County Council	€ 21,609,071
Cork County Council	€ 21,153,747
Waterford City and County Council	€ 20,878,971
Limerick City & County Council	€ 20,154,464
Kerry County Council	€ 16,176,761
Wexford County Council	€ 16,026,453
Kildare County Council	€ 15,255,790
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	€ 14,270,919
Meath County Council	€ 13,772,034
Westmeath County Council	€ 13,205,507
Cork City Council	€ 13,198,643
Wicklow County Council	€ 13,130,668
Monaghan County Council	€ 13,038,572
Kilkenny County Council	€ 12,773,913
Sligo County Council	€ 12,302,627
Roscommon County Council	€ 12,293,634
Cavan County Council	€ 12,183,496
Laois County Council	€ 12,020,533
Louth County Council	€ 11,966,198
Offaly County Council	€ 11,552,214
South Dublin County Council	€11,426,059
Clare County Council	€ 10,879,318
Leitrim County Council	€ 10,656,315
Longford County Council	€ 10,606,648
Fingal County Council	€ 9,424,881
Carlow County Council	€ 9,214,470
Galway City Council	€ 5,099,723
Total	€ 470,351,015

Appendix 3:

Galway City Key Statistics 2022

Galway City - Key Stats, 2022

Demographics

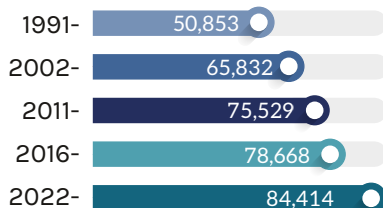


82.7%
of Galway MASP
(102k)

1.6%
of State
(5.14m)

GALWAY CITY POPULATION IN 2022

84,414



+8,885 (+11.8%) from 2011
+5,746 (+7.3%) from 2016

AGE COHORTS



15.4%
Aged 0-14
(13,032)

17.7%
Aged 15-24
(14,911)

54.2%
Aged 25-64
(45,747)

12.7%
Aged 65+
(10,724)

Economy & Jobs



ECONOMIC STATUS At Work & Unemployed

90.7% At Work
% of Labour Force
(39,618)

16% Students
% of Pop. 15+
(11,433)

9.3% Unemployed
% of Labour Force
(4,043)

13.3% Retired
% of Pop. 15+
(9,486)

Homes & Housing

HOUSING STOCK

35,436

VACANCY RATE

Residential
Vacancy **7.7%**



HOUSING TYPE

73% House
26% Apartment

HOUSING TENURE

30,872

Owner-Occupied **46%**
Rented **46%**
Private **35%**
Social **11%**

Education & Community

CITIZENSHIP



Other EU28 (4,981)

18.2% Non-Irish Citizens

Poland (2,609)

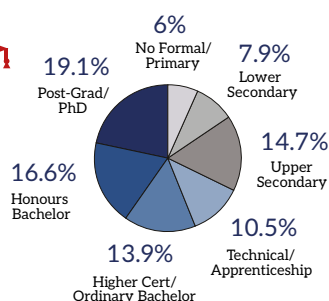
UK (1,154)

Top 3 Citizenships other than Irish

EDUCATION ATTAINMENT



(Pop 15+ in Galway City)



POBAL HP DEPRIVATION INDEX

5.9% **4,948**

of population are living in
disadvantaged areas (Small Areas)

Appendix 4:

Galway Metropolitan Area (MASP)

Galway (MASP) - Key Stats, 2002

Demographics

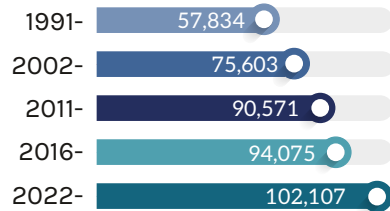


100%
of Galway MASP
(102k)

2.0%
of State
(5.14m)

GALWAY MASP POPULATION IN 2022

102,107



+11,536 (+12.7%) from 2011
+8,032 (+8.5%) from 2016

AGE COHORTS



Age Cohort	Percentage	Population
Aged 0-14	16.6%	(16,911)
Aged 15-24	16.6%	(16,926)
Aged 25-64	54.1%	(55,295)
Aged 65+	12.7%	(12,975)

Economy & Jobs



ECONOMIC STATUS

At Work & Unemployed

91.4% At Work % of Labour Force (48,241)	15.3% Students % of Pop. 15+ (13,000)
8.6% Unemployed % of Labour Force (4,552)	13.4% Retired % of Pop. 15+ (11,459)

Homes & Housing

HOUSING STOCK

42,142

VACANCY RATE

7.4%



HOUSING TYPE

76% House	24% Apartment
---------------------	-------------------------

HOUSING TENURE

36,919

50% Owner-Occupied	43% Rented
	33% Private
	10% Social

Education & Community

CITIZENSHIP



Other EU28 (5,493)

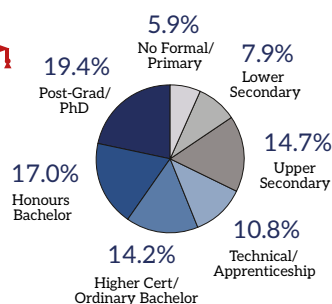
16.7% Poland (3,037)	Non-Irish Citizens
UK (1,413)	

Top 3 Citizenships other than Irish

EDUCATION ATTAINMENT



(Pop 15+ in Galway MASP)



POBAL HP DEPRIVATION INDEX

5.2% **5,323**

of population are living in disadvantaged areas (Small Areas)





**Comhairle Cathrach
na Gaillimhe**
Galway City Council

Contact

Galway City Council,
City Hall, College Road,
Galway,
H91 X4K8.

Phone: +353 91 536400
www.galwaycity.ie

