

Minutes of the Annual Statutory Budget Meeting of Galway City Council held in the Council Chamber, City Hall and Online via MS Teams on Monday, 24 November 2025 at 3.00p.m.	
Presiding:	Mayor Cllr. M. Cubbard.
Elected Members Present:	Councillors: A. Cheevers, M.J. Crowe, A. Curran, S. Forde, C. Higgins, E. Hoare, P. Keane, D. Lyons, J. McDonagh, D. McDonnell, N. McNelis, Ms. H. Ogbu.
Elected Members Online:	Councillor(s): A. Burke, J. Forde, E. Seoighthe.
Absent:	Councillor(s): F. Fahy, T. O'Flaherty.
Executive Present:	Chief Executive L. Cleary, Director of Services: P. Philbin, P. Greene, H. Kilroy, D. Pender, A/DoS: L. Fanning, Senior Executive Officer: A. Rohan, Administrative Officer: M. Duddy, Clerical Officer: M. Biggins, M. McCarthy, Financial Management Accountant: L. Hynes.

The Meeting commenced with a statement of intent to conduct the business of the meeting in line with Standing Orders.

The Mayor noted apologies from Cllr. T. O'Flaherty. Sympathies extended to Cllr. T. O'Flaherty and her family on the passing of her nephew Mr. Gary O'Flaherty which was followed by a moment of silent reflection.

1. Consideration of Draft Annual Budget 2026 and adoption of Annual Budget 2026 - Circulated 17 November 2025.

The Mayor invited the Chief Executive Mr. L. Cleary to introduce the 2026 Draft Budget.

Mr. L. Cleary presented the theme of the budget as centring on “going back to basics” with a focus on essential services that residents and business communities rely on. Mr. L. Cleary noted the Draft Budget is reflective of the financial realities of demand and increasing operational costs.

Through the Councillors reserved function Mr. Cleary highlighted the opportunities for Councillors to protect frontline services, to enhance core operations based on a budget where value for money is prioritised and establish a solid foundation for immediate and long-term needs.

Outlining a proposed 13% increase in the rate (from 0.23 to 0.26) to yield €5.8m annually for reinvestment in city projects, Mr. Cleary affirmed the ambition must be matched by commitment to deliver reliable services.

In 2026, Galway City Council propose initiatives to include Shopfront Enhancement, tourism development, increased outdoor crews for maintenance of public spaces and street cleaning, housing maintenance and retrofitting, enhanced homeless supports, focus on corporate communications and marketing, address derelict and vacant

properties, alongside commitment to the Galway City Council Strategic Workforce Plan.

Mr. Cleary thanked Members for their cooperation and engagement in recent weeks and acknowledged the work and input from the Finance Team in preparing the draft budget.

Ms. H. Kilroy, Director of Finance thanked Members for their engagement across the workshops, various meetings and thanked the staff in Finance Team for their contributions. Ms. Kilroy stressed the need to safeguard finances while continuing investment in services stating the Budget proposed revenue expenditure will rise by €20m to be reinvested into services.

The proposal is for members to increase the ARV by 13% (from 0.23 to 0.26) which would generate €5.8m annually. The proposed parking income increase, the first since 2022 would continue to fund investment, without which strategic priority projects will be scaled back. Ms. Kilroy informed the members of a new scheme to offer ratepayers a 5% rebate subject to conditions.

Mayor Cubbard invited queries from the Members.

Councillors individually and collectively expressed thanks to the Chief Executive, Ms. Kilroy and the Finance Team for the time they made available to Members working on the Draft budget.

Cllr. P. Keane informed of a proposed amendment to the Draft Budget.

Members expressed concern about rising costs impacting businesses, including energy, labour, auto-enrolment, wage increases, and a potential 13% increase in commercial rates. It was noted some businesses have seen additional increases through the national revaluation, on top of last year's rise.

Members agreed costs are unsustainable and emphasised the need to protect jobs, workers, and local initiatives such as shopfront enhancements, festivals, and Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) spending. It was noted that a €20m burden cannot be placed solely on ratepayers while acknowledging a zero percent increase is not considered progressive, an inflationary adjustment should be explored.

There was broad consensus on the need for an inclusive budget that protects jobs, businesses, and community initiatives. Key discussions included maintaining footfall, competitive parking rates in comparison to other towns, increasing Cairde grants and Local Improvement Scheme funding, supporting the Galway International Arts Festival and the importance of the Disability Access Officer role for inclusivity.

Concerns were raised about housing maintenance costs, transport funding gaps, and the importance of enhanced litter management and street cleaning serviced by longer hours along with sustaining opening hours of community centres. Suggestions included a waiver system for ratepayers and exploring EU funding and loans to reduce reliance on local revenues.

Members noted the need for changes to the tier status for Galway and urged TDs to represent Galway's interests at national level.

Cllr. A. Curran proposed that, following the presentation of the budget amendment, the meeting be adjourned for 30 minutes to allow Members time to review and make an informed decision. The proposal was seconded by Cllr. C. Higgins and agreed by the Members.

Questions were raised regarding long term plans for Ardaun, Murrough, Castlegar and queries on traffic and transport projects, noting concerns about gridlock and the need for additional transport funding. Members expressed concern over significant housing maintenance costs and questioned ratio of office based and outdoor staffing.

Ms. H. Kilroy responded to maintenance and improvements to housing units, noting significant expenditure with a detailed breakdown available within the budget document.

The proposed amendments to the Draft Budget were circulated.

Councillors Budget Adjustments for Budget Meeting 24 November 2025

Reduction in ARV		4,469,966
Reduction in parking charges	B0903	302,564
		<u>4,772,530</u>
Increase in income		€
Derelict sites	E1004	1,200,000
Newly rated properties	H0303	500,000
Increase in income from commercial services	F0501	150,000
Port dividend	H1199	100,000
		<u>1,950,000</u>
Decrease in expenditure		
Leisureland	F0103	307,000
Castles	D1101	350,000
Retrofitting targets	E1501	465,000
Shopfront	D0501	200,000
Local area plan	D0101	100,000
Museum budget	F0503	100,000
Economic strategy	D0905	264,000
Galway branding	D0905	100,000
Planning control	D0201	55,000
Rec & amenity	F0301	46,530
Payment incentive scheme	H0303	835,000
		<u>2,822,530</u>
		<u>4,772,530</u>

The balanced alternative budget amendments were presented by Cllr. P. Keane.

Cllr. Keane summarised where savings of €4.72m were achieved through a 10% reduction in the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV), equating to €4.469m, and adjustments to parking charges, including an uplift of €2.50 for the minimum charge and a €10 day rate at Dyke Road and Cathedral car parks, maintaining the monthly ticket at €100. Identified increased income for newly rated premises and commercial services along with a proposed €100k dividend charge to the Port of Galway under the Harbours Act 2015.

Expenditure reductions of €2.8m included measures to sustain facilities, feasibility for retrofitting castles, reductions in economic strategy and branding, changes to planning control and empowering clubs and communities to enhance facilities. The amendment proposes the removal of the payment incentive scheme.

The meeting adjourned at 4.02p.m. and resumed at 4.30p.m.

A discussion followed and several clarifications were raised by Elected Members.

Members expressed concerns regarding the reduction in funding for Leisureland and the absence of a capital sinking fund, noting that the pool requires steady investment to avoid future financial strain. Questions were raised about retrofit targets under the Climate Action Plan and whether matching funding from Transport Infrastructure Ireland will be secured. Clarification was sought on the economic strategy between city and county and the potential impact on the Salthill Local Area Plan.

Councillors requested details on the projected income from derelict sites and the likelihood of achieving this target, as well as confirmation that funding for Menlo Castle is allocated for structural works.

Individual Councillors expressed disappointment at the proposed reductions in the Shopfront Enhancement Scheme. Concerns were raised regarding rate income pressures on small businesses and loss of SEAI match funding.

The Chair referred Members to a motion proposed by Cllr. A. Curran and invited comments.

Cllr. A. Curran recognised the proposals main theme is to protect businesses and workers while emphasising the Council should not compromise commitments to climate action and expressed the need for a change in tier status.

Cllr. A. Curran proposed the following amendment to the Draft Budget.

Proposed by: Cllr. A. Curran
That this council will approve the budget for 2026 with the following amendments:
That Galway City Council will increase the ARV to 0.265, providing a graduated grant payment dependent on level of rates, with the grant varying from 1% to 12% of the 2026 rates bill. The amount of the 2026 grant payable to qualifying ratepayers will be calculated as follows:

Rates Demand	Discount
Rates ≤ €10,000	12%
€10,001 > Rates ≤ €20,000	8%
€20,001 > Rates ≤ €30,000	6%
€30,001 > Rates ≤ €40,000	4%
€40,001 > Rates ≤ €50,000	2%
Rates > €50,001	1%

I propose to finance the balance as follows:

Income

Parking Charges:

Increase in Hourly rate from €2.50 to €3	€ 300,000.00
Reduction in Daily Rate from €12.60 to €10	€ (283,000.00)

Expenditure

Tourism Website	€ 100,000.00
Eyre Sq Tourist Office	€ 100,000.00
Tourism Promotion D0501	€ 300,000.00
Town Twinning D0903	€ 50,000.00
Other Expenses H0905	€ 50,000.00
Increase in Housing Maintenance	€ (166,000.00)

Net gain/loss against proposed budget € 104.00"

The Mayor called for a seconder to the proposal, which was not was received. The Motion fell due to no seconder.

Cllr. C. Higgins proposed that the Council take one week to review the proposals and be given the opportunity to bring forward alternative budget proposals. This was seconded by Cllr. E. Hoare.

Cllr. E. Hoare asked if the Executive received correspondence and engagement from the community and asked for comments on the amendments from the Director of Finance and the Chief Executive.

Mr. Cleary acknowledged the constructive feedback received and noted ongoing engagement with the Chamber and business owners. He further highlighted input from community groups across sports, recreation and amenities, as well as feedback from the disability sector.

The Director of Finance addressed queries regarding the proposed budget adjustments, noting that the reduction in ARV reflects an inflationary adjustment and highlighted the current proposal does not fully capture potential revenue from larger ratepayers. The Director cautioned that the proposal overlooks the intent of the payment incentive scheme and leaves Galway's rates significantly behind other cities.

Further clarification was provided on income streams, including derelict sites, where ownership issues and probate requirements may delay collection and may require a long-term strategy. Regarding the Port of Galway, the Director noted that discussion with the Board will be required.

The Director emphasised that Galway City Council has provided support for Leisureland as a going concern and its subvention requirement and warned that removing energy retrofitting funding would be short-sighted, resulting in the loss of SEAI grants requested by both Galway City and County Corporate Policy Groups. Key strategic areas such as Ardaun, Murrough, and Castlegar were identified as critical for housing provision and wrap-around services, with concerns that proposed changes could hinder housing growth. If amendments are approved, the Director advised that significant adjustments will be required in 2026 to deliver on these commitments.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the role of Elected Members and the importance of the Reserve Function. The Executive took the opportunity developing a Draft Budget to capture a high level of ambition for the benefits of the city and community groups. To reduce from 13% to 3% recognises the democratic role of the Elected Members however, the level of ambition and timeframes will be with less financial resources available meaning an adjustment in timescales and adjustments to services and projects. In summary, Mr. Cleary expressed disappointment that the 13% ARV proposed increase would appear not to be supported but the executive will continue to deliver on ambition as best they can in the years ahead.

The Chair referred to the proposal from Cllr. C. Higgins to adjourn for seven days to review proposals.

Ms. A. Rohan, Meetings Administrator proceeded to take a Vote as follows:

Proposed by: Cllr. C. Higgins		Seconded by: Cllr. E. Hoare		
That this Council adjourn for 7 days so that all Councillors can work together to put forward an alternative budget.				
Present: 16	In Favour: 6	Against: 10	Abstain: 0	Absent: 2
Result: The motion was defeated.				

The Chair referred to the proposal from Cllr. P. Keane and Seconded by Cllr. D. McDonnell and Ms. A. Rohan, Meetings Administrator proceeded to take a Vote as follows:

Proposed By: Cllr. P. Keane	Seconded By: Cllr. D. McDonnell
That Galway City Council approve the Draft Annual Budget 2026 subject to the	

amendments outlined in the table circulated at the meeting.

Present: 16	In Favour: 11	Against: 5	Abstain: 0	Absent: 2
Result: The motion was carried and the Budget 2026 was adopted.				

- 2. Determination in accordance with the Annual Budget adopted of the Annual Rate on Valuation to be levied for the several purposes specified in the Annual Budget for the financial year ending 31 December 2026.**

Proposed By: Cllr. D. McDonnell	Seconded By: Cllr. J. McDonagh
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Determination in accordance with the Annual Budget adopted of the Annual Rate on Valuation of 0.2369 to be levied for the several purposes specified in the Annual Budget for the financial year ending 31 December 2026.

Present: 16	In Favour: 11	Against: 5	Abstain: 0	Absent: 2
Result: The motion was carried for the ARV of 0.2369 to be levied for 2026.				

- 3. That Galway City Council considers 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 the provisions of Section 9 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019, as amended.**

Ms. H. Kilroy confirmed based on amendments to the budget that no scheme was recommended for abatement of rates.

There were no proposals, thus the item was not considered.

- 4. To consider the adoption a Commercial Rates Incentive Scheme 1 January 2026 – 31 December 2026, in accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by Section 43 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014:**

- The Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Scheme – 5% reduction in rates for businesses with rates bills < €30,000 who meet certain criteria**

The Mayor confirmed that due to the amendments adopted in the 2026 Budget that this agenda item no longer applies. This was noted by Members.

Mayor Cubbard thanked all for their input into achieving an adopted Budget.

The meeting concluded at 17:09p.m.

Minutes Confirmed & Signed

Mayor of Galway