



Comhairle Contae Lú
Louth County Council

Cruinniú Míósúil Chomhairle Contae Lú Louth County Council Annual Budget Meeting

Minutes of the Annual Budget Meeting of Louth County Council hosted in the Council Chamber of Co. Hall, Dundalk on Monday, 17th November 2025, at 2:00p.m.

In Attendance:

Presiding: Councillor, Seán Kelly – Cathaoirleach

Members: Councillors: Marianne Butler, Kevin Callan, Emma Coffey, Eric Donovan, Ciarán Fisher, Anne-Marie Ford, Michelle Hall, Rachel Kerley, Sionainn McCann, Debbie McCole, Pearse McGeough, Shane McGuinness, Andrea McKevitt, Paddy McQuillan, Fiona MhicConchoille, Kevin Meenan, Dolores Minogue, Robert Nash, Ejiro O'Hare Stratton, Declan Power, John Reilly, John Sheridan, Pío Smith, Jim Tenanty, Antóin Watters, Maeve Yore.

Apologies: Councillors James Byrne, Bernie Conlon,

Officials: David Conway, Chief Executive
Thomas McEvoy, Director of Services
Joanna Kelly, Acting Director of Services
Bernadette Woods, Director of Finance
David Hanratty, Acting Director of Services
David Jones, Director of Services
Ger Murphy, Director of Services
Sinéad Dooley, Meetings Administrator
John O'Hagan, Senior Engineer
Willie Walsh, Senior Executive Officer
Susan Deery, Administrative Officer
Mark Johnston, Senior Engineer
Finbar Gethins, Senior Executive Officer
Gavin McLaughin, Communications Officer
Aine Roddy, Assistant Communications Officer
Eileen McDermott, Senior Executive Librarian
Brian Lynch, Financial Accountant
Roisin McAuley, Financial Accountant
Colette Moss, Senior Executive Officer

Minute No. 265/25

Chief Executive Mr. David Conway presented the Draft Budget for 2026 and outlined the key considerations in its preparation. It was noted that:

- The total budget for 2026 is €203.7 million, representing a 10.7% increase on 2025. Significant allocations are directed towards Housing, CALF – Payment and Availability, Croí Cónaithe Grants, and Fire Services. Rising operational costs and pay increases continue to exert pressure on resources.

- While social housing targets are being exceeded, the provision of affordable homes remains challenging due to rising property prices and infrastructure constraints.
- Decarbonising Council operations and achieving climate targets will require substantial investment and ongoing monitoring.
- Potential changes in U.S. trade and tax policy may impact pharmaceutical exports, employment, and corporate tax competitiveness, with possible implications for local revenue.
- The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) continues to address poverty and inequality, particularly among marginalised groups, with demand for services remaining high.
- Several legal cases anticipated in 2026 will require additional financial and staffing resources. Cybersecurity remains a significant organisational risk, necessitating vigilance alongside the adoption of new technologies such as AI, with appropriate safeguards and governance.
- The three-year capital budget is extensive at €1.442 billion, supporting major capital projects, urban regeneration, and public realm improvements.

Director of Services, Ms. Bernie Woods, provided an overview of key elements within the proposed Draft Budget including proposed funding of the capital balance of €1.2m relating to the Fleadh Cheoil Festival 2018/2019, commencing with €100k allocated in the 2026 Draft Revenue Budget. It was noted that the ongoing issue of the Fleadh Cheoil Festival Balance had been raised by NOAC in addition to the Auditor.

It was also noted that the rates income had increased by €4.04m from 2025 to 2026, due to updated valuations and a 2% increase in the Rate.

Minute No. 266/25

Consideration of Draft Annual Budget 2026

Members considered the Draft Annual Budget for 2026 and raised queries across the following programme areas:

Housing and Culture Delivery

- Confirmation was sought regarding future acquisitions of land banks for housing development and assurances that lands will be serviced. The Executive confirmed compliance with obligations under the Housing Activation Plan.

Economic Development

- Additional funding for taking-in-charge was welcomed; the Executive advised that a 10-year plan is in place.
- Clarification was provided on the reduction in the Social Inclusion budget, noting however, that previous Ukrainian-related costs are no longer included.

Operations and Environment Delivery

- The delivery of Dunleer Fire Station was confirmed as part of the Capital Delivery Programme.
- An increase in inspections of Road Opening Licences was requested with the Executive indicating that the NOAC KPI is 50% and staffing resources can sometimes be an issue.
- Funding in excess of €700k for the 3-year Peace Plus Coastal Climate Adaptation project was welcomed; recruitment of a dedicated staff member to be recruited in due course.
- An increase in the budget for Climate Action (€1.6m) was acknowledged.

- Update provided on Market Square, Dundalk confirming fountain upgrade works in 2026.
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- Update provided on Market Square, Dundalk, confirming fountain upgrade works in 2026.

HR, Corporate & Community Delivery

- Members queried Gaeltacht Scholarships and potential funding increase; the Executive confirmed a budget exists for Irish Language promotion.

Major Capital Delivery

- Discussion on Linear Park, North Drogheda; Members requested expenditure profile be advanced and a presentation at the next Borough District meeting.
- Provision for renovation works at Millmount, in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland was confirmed.

Finance and System Support

- Concerns were raised regarding the €1.2m debt arising from the Fleadh Cheoil Festival and the resulting financial burden on taxpayers of the county. The Executive confirmed a plan to clear the debt and the implementation of policies to prevent recurrence of such circumstances.
- The reduction in funding under the operation of piers and harbours was queried with the Executive confirming that this is due to loan repayment.

Minute No. 267/25

Rates Waiver Scheme

Section 15 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019 provides for local authorities to make schemes to support local and national policy objectives, by waiving rates in certain circumstances.

The intent of the proposed scheme is to provide an incentive for new businesses to locate in premises that have been vacant for a period, exceeding 1 year, and encourage diversity of retail opportunities within a designated area (Details of areas in main report).

The scheme allows for the following:

Year 1:	100% waiver
Year 2:	50% waiver
Year 3:	25% waiver
Year 4:	Full Rates are payable

Cllr. Watters requested the inclusion of Carlingford and Omeath in the list of eligible locations, while Cllr. Callan indicated that the Whips had discussed a number of further areas for inclusion. Members were advised by Director of Services, Ms. Bernadette Woods, that the Scheme had already gone to public consultation, but that no difficulty was envisaged with the inclusion of additional locations. It was further indicated that the Scheme would be brought back to Members during the year, noting that it is subject to annual review in any event and could be amended for the next year.

As recommended in the Chief Executive's Report, the Scheme was adopted on the **Proposal** of Cllr. Kevin Callan, **Seconded** by Cllr. Antóin Watters and carried by roll call vote.

Name	For	Against	Abstain	Absent
Marianne Butler	1			
James Byrne	1			
Kevin Callan	1			
Emma Coffey	1			
Bernie Conlon				1
Eric Donovan	1			
Ciarán Fisher				1
Anne-Marie Ford				1
Michelle Hall	1			
Seán Kelly	1			
Rachel Kerley				1
Sionainn McCann	1			
Debbie McCole	1			
Pearse McGeough	1			
Shane McGuinness	1			
Andrea McKeivitt	1			
Paddy McQuillan	1			
Fiona MhicConchoille	1			
Kevin Meenan	1			
Dolores Minogue	1			
Rober Nash	1			
Ejro O'Hare Stratton	1			
Declan Power	1			
John Reilly	1			
John Sheridan	1			
Pio Smith	1			
Jim Tenanty				1
Antóin Watters	1			
Maeve Yore	1			
Total Votes	24	-	-	5

Minute No. 268/25

Rates Abatement Scheme

Section 9 of the Local Government Rates & Other Matters Act 2019, as amended by the Historic and Archaeological Heritage & Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023, provides for the abatement of rates in respect of vacant properties.

For 2026, as a result of the Economic Development and Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee proposed introduction of a Rates Waiver Scheme, discussions at the budgetary workshop and the submissions received from the public consultation (see appendix 1 main report) it was proposed to set the level of rates abatement on vacant premises for 2026 at Zero percent (0%).

As recommended in the Chief Executive's Report, the Scheme was adopted on the **Proposal** of Cllr. Pio Smith **Seconded** by Cllr. Emma Coffey and carried by roll call vote.

Name	For	Against	Abstain	Absent
Marianne Butler	1			
James Byrne	1			
Kevin Callan	1			
Emma Coffey	1			
Bernie Conlon				1
Eric Donovan	1			

Ciarán Fisher				1
Anne-Marie Ford				1
Michelle Hall	1			
Seán Kelly	1			
Rachel Kerley				1
Sionainn McCann	1			
Debbie McCole	1			
Pearse McGeough	1			
Shane McGuinness	1			
Andrea McKeivitt	1			
Paddy McQuillan	1			
Fiona MhicConchoille	1			
Kevin Meenan	1			
Dolores Minogue	1			
Rober Nash	1			
Ejiro O'Hare Stratton	1			
Declan Power	1			
John Reilly	1			
John Sheridan	1			
Pio Smith	1			
Jim Tenanty				1
Antóin Watters	1			
Maeve Yore	1			
Total Votes	24	-	-	5

Minute No. 269/25

Transfer of Councillors conference allowance to Councillor Allocations

In advance of finalising the Draft Budget for 2026, Members were afforded the opportunity to declare their intention to transfer their conference allocation of €700 to the Councillor Allocations fund.

On the **Proposal** of Cllr. Maeve Yore and **Seconded** by Cllr. Emma Coffey a total of €14,900 was approved for transfer from Councillors Conference Allowance to the Councillor Allocations Fund.

Minute No. 270/25

Adoption of Draft Budget for 2026

Following consider of the Chief Executive's recommendations the Draft Annual Budget for 2026 was adopted on the **Proposal** of Cllr. Maeve Yore and **Seconded** by Cllr. Emma Coffey and carried by roll call vote.

Name	For	Against	Abstain	Absent
Marianne Butler	1			
James Byrne	1			
Kevin Callan	1			
Emma Coffey	1			
Bernie Conlon				1
Eric Donovan	1			
Ciarán Fisher				1
Anne-Marie Ford				1
Michelle Hall			1	
Seán Kelly	1			
Rachel Kerley				1

Sionainn McCann	1			
Debbie McCole	1			
Pearse McGeough	1			
Shane McGuinness	1			
Andrea McKeivitt	1			
Paddy McQuillan	1			
Fiona MhicConchoille	1			
Kevin Meenan	1			
Dolores Minogue	1			
Rober Nash	1			
Ejiro O'Hare Stratton	1			
Declan Power	1			
John Reilly	1			
John Sheridan	1			
Pio Smith	1			
Jim Tenanty				1
Antóin Watters	1			
Maeve Yore	1			
Total Votes	23	-	1	5

Minute No. 271/25

Annual Rate on Valuation

In accordance with Section 6 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019 (as amended) and further to the adoption of the Budget for 2026, Members considered the Annual Rate on Valuation applicable under Section 3 of the Act.

The Annual Rate on Valuation for Louth County Council for the year 2026 at €0.250 (representing a 2% increase on the previous year), for the purpose of calculating commercial rates was adopted on the **Proposal** of Cllr. Seán Kelly and **Seconded** by Cllr. Maeve Yore and carried by roll call vote.

Name	For	Against	Abstain	Absent
Marianne Butler	1			
James Byrne	1			
Kevin Callan	1			
Emma Coffey	1			
Bernie Conlon				1
Eric Donovan	1			
Ciarán Fisher				1
Anne-Marie Ford				1
Michelle Hall	1			
Seán Kelly	1			
Rachel Kerley				1
Sionainn McCann	1			
Debbie McCole	1			
Pearse McGeough	1			
Shane McGuinness	1			
Andrea McKeivitt	1			
Paddy McQuillan	1			
Fiona MhicConchoille	1			
Kevin Meenan	1			
Dolores Minogue	1			
Rober Nash	1			
Ejiro O'Hare Stratton	1			
Declan Power	1			

John Reilly	1			
John Sheridan	1			
Pio Smith	1			
Jim Tenanty				1
Antóin Watters	1			
Maeve Yore	1			
Total Votes	24	-	-	5

Minute No. 272/25

Capital Programme 2026-2028

Members noted the Capital Programme 2026-2028 presented in accordance with Section 135(2) of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

There being no other business, the meeting concluded.

The Minutes were confirmed at a meeting of the Council held on:

Date: 15.12.25

Cathaoirleach: 

Meeting Administrator: 