

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on 5th June, 2015 at 3.00p.m.

Chair: Cllr. P. Millea

Cllrs: M.H. Cavanagh, M. Shortall, J. Brennan, M. McCarthy, P. Fitzpatrick, A. McGuinness, P. Cleere, M. Doyle, P. O' Neill, D. Kennedy, M. Doran, J. Malone, M. Noonan, P. McKee, D. Fitzgerald, P. Dunphy, F. Doherty, E. Aylward, T. Breathnach, G. Frisby.

Officials: J. Mulholland, P. O' Neill, S. Walton, S. McKeown, K. Hanley, B. Tyrrell, M. Delahunty & A.M. Walsh.

Apologies: K Funchion , M O Neill.

Cllr. Millea opened the annual meeting and welcomed the public to the meeting. Cllr. Millea outgoing Cathaoirleach addressed the meeting as follows:-

Council Members, members of the executive, members of the press, colleagues one and all, I welcome you to this Annual Meeting of Kilkenny County Council.

I suppose the first thing that comes to mind today is how quickly a year passes, and indeed how quickly a busy year passes.

By any standards I think it can be said that the past year has been challenging in many ways.

We, as elected members have been through what I sincerely hope has been our most difficult period and that the experience gained over the past twelve months will stand to us as we prepare for the second year of a five year term.

When I reflect on the year gone by I recall my own initial address to you when you honoured me by selecting me as the first Cathaoirleach of a unified Local Authority structure, under the latest phase of Local Government reforms.

I said at the time that we will require a strong focus on the development of Kilkenny City, the port of Belview, and the principal county towns.

I said that the promotion of agri-business and tourism will remain central to our recovery, and that it goes without saying that every village and town and local community has a lead role to play in this work. Nothing will be achieved by the Council alone – it will be a collective responsibility and enterprise

To be present then at the opening of the new Glanbia plant in Belview was a particular highlight for me, not to mention the opening of a modern butter production facility in Ballyragget shortly afterwards.

I also set out my stall in relation to the Central Access scheme, saying that it will add significantly to the employment creation potential of Kilkenny City Centre.

I suggested that towns such as Urlingford, Johnstown, Freshford, Ballyragget, Castlecomer and the many small villages that comprise North Kilkenny, are suffering from lack of investment and inadequate planning.

Now as I look back on the past year it is a time for reflection, a time to take stock.

Personally, I am satisfied with the progress on the Central Access Scheme. I deeply regret the degree of obstruction which will ultimately cost Kilkenny into the future.

I remain convinced of the merits of the scheme and look forward to the completion of the project for the good of Kilkenny.

Ireland appears to be on the verge of an upswing, economically. It is heartening to see the range of renewal schemes in Ballyragget, Thomastown, Callan and Graiguenamanagh. These schemes can only augur well for the social fabric of these towns and put them in a position to take advantage of the recovery, and to try to ensure that the recovery takes hold in the County and City of Kilkenny.

Kilkenny is attractive to all forms of business. It also attracts many visitors and consequently the tourism industry and hospitality sector are particularly vibrant here. These businesses are reliant on maintaining a pristine environment.

Kilkenny identifies as a clean and green place producing the finest foods and affording the best in accommodation and entertainment.

The award of the Repak Recycling Centre of the year to the Dunmore Recycling Centre is in clear recognition of the part it plays in keeping Kilkenny clean and green.

In yet another clean sweep for Kilkenny it established a record three in a row by again achieving overall winner status in the Irish Businesses Against Litter (IBAL) litter league.

We adopted the new County Development Plan in 2014. The lifetime of this Plan is from 2014 to 2020. The objective here has been to ensure the continuity of proper planning and development throughout the County of Kilkenny.

This is a working document which enables us to identify the challenges facing Kilkenny in terms of demographics and land-use. It also allows us to embrace the opportunities currently available and likely to emerge within the lifetime of the Plan.

Economic regeneration is at the centre of our ambition for the former Brewery Site at St. Francis Abbey. The extent and quality of public engagement in proposals for this key site is testament to the commitment of all those involved in the planning process.

I have been fortunate to have been invited to events throughout Kilkenny during the past year, and I am always impressed by the local community activists and volunteers who strive to improve their native place and the grant awards night in the Rivercourt Hotel demonstrated the strength of our local communities, and indeed the range of Council activity supporting those communities.

Since I started my term as Cathaoirleach I have received unstinting support from the Executive of Kilkenny County Council. I won't mention all of the names but I have thanked them personally.

During the year we said goodbye to Joe Crockett, retired County Manager. We recently said farewell to Director of Service John McCormack and we will shortly say farewell to his fellow Director Philip O'Neill.

I thank them for their service to Kilkenny and for their support to all current and former elected Councillors.

I thank John Mulholland most sincerely Acting Chief Executive for his ongoing energetic support and his wise counsel during my year as Cathaoirleach.

I also wish to thank my friends and my immediate family: Mary Marguerite, Siobhan and David, for their help and support during the past year.

In conclusion Members, I will leave you with a message for the coming year:

You are representatives of all the people of County Kilkenny, democratically elected at the wish of the people who vote.

You are responsible for the local government of Kilkenny for your term of office. I would encourage you to become leaders as well as representatives.

My challenge to you is to become leaders of your communities, to use the trust placed in you to provide leadership for Kilkenny for our term in office.

Finally, I thank you for your support during the year, which I thoroughly enjoyed, and I wish my successor every best wish for the year ahead.

Tributes were paid to Cllr. Millea by Cllr. Doran, M.H. Cavanagh, D. Kennedy, P. McKee, M. Noonan and M. Shortall. Members complimented and congratulated Cllr. Millea on his year as Cathaoirleach. Members referred to the difficult challenges that the Council faced since the local election and how he as Cathaoirleach dealt with these as first citizen. Members stated that Cathaoirleach carried out his role with integrity and was fair to everyone.

Mr. Mulholland paid tribute on behalf of the staff and congratulated Cllr. Millea on how he dealt with the changes arising from the alignment of both local authorities. He acknowledged his humanity and his passion for the people of Kilkenny. He thanked him for his support to him and the staff.

(1) Election of Cathaoirleach

It was proposed by Cllr. P. Dunphy, seconded by Cllr. M. Doran: - "That Cllr. M.H. Cavanagh be Cathaoirleach for Kilkenny County Council for the ensuing year".

Cllr. Dunphy spoke of Cllr. Cavanagh's commitment as an elected member for over 41 years, has served on many committees over the years including the VEC and WIT.

She has also been chair of the Council on 2 previous occasions. He referred to her work ethic in serving the people of Kilkenny. There were no other proposals for the election of cathaoirleach.

Therefore, Cllr. P. Millea declared that Cllr. M. H. Cavanagh be elected as Cathaoirleach for the ensuing year.

Cllr. M. H. Cavanagh took over as chair for the remainder of the meeting. Cllr. Cavanagh addressed the meeting as follows:-

Fellow Councillors, Acting Chief Executive John Mulholland, Members of staff, ladies and gentlemen:

I am greatly honoured to be elected as Cathaoirleach of Kilkenny County Council.

I thank Pat and Matt for their kind words in proposing and seconding my nomination and I thank you the members for your support.

I had the honour of twice being Cathaoirleach of the County Council in the past. However, with the recent amalgamation of the two Local Authorities the Office now bestows even a greater honour and privilege on the Cathaoirleach as the first Citizen of our great City and County. I greatly cherish that honour even if it's just for the year.

At home recently I was discussing with my family what life was like the first time I was elected Cathaoirleach in 1983, nine years after I first entered the Council Chamber. My baby daughter, Anne Marie was just a few weeks old and demand feeding was, out of necessity, replaced by feeding before and after meetings and functions. During the various meetings, her Dad, Eddie, minded Anne Marie in the car-park and without his endless support and the help of his late mother Madge, I could not have coped with the demands of public life, teaching and raising a family, let alone the post of Cathaoirleach of the County Council. Regrettably, facilities for mothers and babies have not changed despite our moving from the historic Courthouse to more modern surroundings of County Hall. I mention this personal story to illustrate both the unique challenges facing women in politics and the absolute necessity of supportive families for those hoping to continue to put themselves forward to serve. So I'd like to take this rare opportunity to publicly thank my husband, Eddie, for his tremendous support for me for all of my political life.

My children have had to share me with the electorate of North Kilkenny throughout all of their lives but they never complained, indeed, as they got older, they began to help out. Happily, they were past the age of child-minding during my second term as Cathaoirleach in 2004-2005. Like their father, they have been unstinting in their support and encouragement and I am delighted that they are all here today with Eddie and some of our friends.

It has been a unique privilege for me to serve on this Council for 41 years and I would like to thank my voters for maintaining their faith in me to represent them since 1974. My great grandfather, John Harte, was a member of the first ever Kilkenny County Council and it means a great deal to me to continue that tradition of public service.

I think it's fair to say I am rarely characterised as a shrinking violet but I believe I have put my willingness to speak up and speak out to good use on behalf of the people I represent. My fellow councillors are well aware that an important part of our role is to advocate for those who are not always sure how to access their rights and to promote initiatives that will benefit the whole community. There is no greater feeling than making a contribution, however modest, to improving the life of a person or the lives of a family or a community.

As Cathaoirleach for the next twelve months, there are a number of areas where I'd like to focus particular attention.

First, I would highlight the need to maintain focus on the continued development of the former Diageo site, which will provide a significant employment and regeneration boost to our city and county. I am confident the site will be the catalyst for a brand new education, innovation and research Centre where third or fourth level educational institutions can collaborate effectively and productively with the agri-food sector among others. I have recently discussed this proposal with the President of Waterford Institute of Technology, Mr Willie Donnelly, and he has indicated his willingness to address this Council in the near future. I very much look forward to hosting the President in our Chamber and I believe it is important for Members here to have an opportunity to engage with Mr. Donnelly about how our county can play a strong role in providing new educational opportunities which would complement the strong standing of Kilkenny in the agri-food production sector. These discussions will complement the ongoing contact between our Chief Executive and senior officials in WIT and Carlow IT on these very important matters for Kilkenny.

I intend to work tirelessly with local and national stakeholders, including Rural Development Minister Ann Phelan, towards sustainable recovery for rural towns and villages across our county and to maximize all available opportunities for rural regeneration.

I also wish to focus on building closer links with Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce, through our Economic Development Unit and Local Enterprise Office, to ensure that jobseekers and local businesses in Kilkenny can benefit to the fullest extent as the country pursues social and economic recovery.

Maintaining a vibrant city centre is essential so that Kilkenny keeps its distinctive character. I hope that the Kilkenny Municipal Members will consider parking incentives in the Market Yard - particularly from Monday to Thursday from 9.00 am to 11.00 am - to encourage shopping on what is a very quiet time at the moment.

Another area I've worked a lot on over the years is housing and I want a renewed focus on social housing with new investment to help families on the housing list.

I hope that under my stewardship this Council will have a far greater and sharpened focus on environmental protection and on tackling illegal dumping in particular. I'd like to examine our options for incentives and innovations to renew our commitment county-wide to protecting our beautiful environment here in Kilkenny. I am also determined with the support of my fellow elected Members to continue to assist the many community groups and volunteers who, week in week out, give their time to community work and to maintaining an attractive and cared for local environment.

I look forward to working together with elected members and officials to advance those priorities. Finally I would like to thank my fellow councillors and to pay a special tribute to the Council officials that I have worked with over the years – their unfailing courtesy and constructive and collegiate approach to problem-solving have certainly helped me to better discharge my responsibilities as a Councillor.

I feel compelled to say that both John McCormack and Philip O'Neill are a great loss to the Council, that they have served with great distinction and I wish them well in their retirements.

I pledge to do my very best as Cathaoirleach over the next 12 months.

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir.

Cllr. M. Doran, D. Kennedy, M. Noonan, P. McKee, P. O' Neill, T. Breathnach congratulated Cllr. Cavanagh on her election and offered her their full support for the coming year. Mr. Mulholland on behalf of the staff wished her every success and offered full support for her initiatives which were outlined earlier.

(ii) Election of Leas Cathaoirleach

It was proposed by Cllr. P. Dunphy and seconded by Cllr. E. Aylward: -“That Cllr. F. Doherty be elected as Leas Cathaoirleach of Kilkenny County Council for the ensuing year”.

Cllr. Dunphy spoke about Cllr. Doherty work ethic for her community since she was first elected in 2009 and referred to the various committees that she served on including JPC, Internal Audit and SPC. She is also involved in a number of school management boards. As there were no other proposals for the election of Leas Cathaoirleach, Cllr. M. H. Cavanagh deemed Cllr. F. Doherty as Leas Cathaoirleach of Kilkenny County Council for the ensuing year.

Cllr. F. Doherty thanked her proposer and seconder and stated that she was delighted to serve as Leas Cathaoirleach for Kilkenny County Council.

(iii) Fix dates for Ordinary Meetings of the Council

It was proposed by Cllr. M. Doran, seconded by Cllr. M. Noonan and agreed: - “That the dates for Ordinary Meetings of Kilkenny County Council are as follows:-

15th June, 2015

20th July, 2015

21st September, 2015

19th October, 2015

16th November, 2015

21st December, 2015

18th January, 2016

15th February, 2016

21st March, 2016

18th April, 2016

16th May, 2016

20th June, 2016

Cllr. M. H. Cavanagh congratulated Cllr. P. Millea on his election as Chair of the Castlecomer Municipal District and Cllr. P. Dunphy on his election as chair of the Piltown Municipal District.

Meeting then concluded.