

Appendix B Annual City Council Meeting 26/06/2017

Appendix B – Speech of newly Elected Lord Mayor

A chairde,

Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le gach comhairleoir a thacaigh liom sa vóta don Ardmhéara.

Is onóir iontach é a bheith ainmnithe mar iarrthóir ó mo pháirtí, agus tofa mar Ardmhéara ag ionadaithe an phobail ar an gComhairle seo.

Geallaim go ndéanfaidh mé mo dhícheall sa phost, ag obair le comhairleoirí uile agus le oifigigh agus foireann uile an Chomhairle, ar son muintir na Cathrach.

Sincere thanks to all Councillors who voted for me. It is a tremendous honour to be nominated for this position by Sinn Féin and to be elected by a majority of the elected representatives of the people of our City.

Gabhaim buíochas ach go háirithe le Comhairleoir Críona Ní Dhálaigh a d'ainmnigh mé agus le Comhairleoir Larry O'Toole a chuidigh leis an rún.

Thanks to my comrades and friends Councillors Críona Ní Dhálaigh and Larry O'Toole who proposed and seconded my nomination. If I do half as good a job as Críona did so brilliantly as Ard Mhéara in 2015/2016 then I will be doing very well indeed. And if I can be a fraction of the public representative and political and community activist that Larry O'Toole has been for over 30 years I will be very satisfied with my work. Buíochas libh, a chairde.

It is a tremendous honour to be only the second ever Sinn Féin Ardmhéara of Dublin City. I thank Sinn Féin Bhaile Átha Cliath, especially my comrade councillors here, for their support and for entrusting me with this honour.

I pledge to be an Ardmhéara for all the people of this City, for all communities, regardless of political affiliation.

I want to thank the Councillors in the City Alliance who supported my nomination. In 2014 we formed the City Alliance which was open to all groups on the basis of a policy platform and a shared approach to the positions of Ardhéara and Leas-Ardmhéara. In taking office today I want to renew our commitment to the priorities set out in that agreement.

I strongly believe that it is a huge honour to be elected by the people to represent them. Whatever our political affiliations, our first duty is to those who elect us and elected office deserves respect on that basis.

We have always been a diverse city, an international city as well as the proud national capital of Ireland. I look forward to celebrating that diversity. On 18 June I laid a wreath on the grave of Wolfe Tone in Bodenstown on behalf of Dublin republicans, and as a republican I follow Tone's lead in encouraging unity and inclusivity and opposing sectarianism and bigotry in every form.

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To paraphrase Tone, let us replace denominations of division with the common name of Dubliners and people of Ireland, and let us foster equality and solidarity in our city and our country.

As the national capital and main economic driver of the country we have a special concern for the political, social and economic consequences of Brexit. Dublin City should take a lead in opposing anything that would re-impose a frontier dividing us from our sister city of Belfast, and I intend to play my part in continuing our shared journey towards greater co-operation, genuine reconciliation and unity by agreement on this island.

We could have no greater aspiration for our city than that it would be worthy of the motto City of Equality.

Sadly, as we know all too well, Dublin City is deeply divided by social and economic inequality. Nowhere is that more evident than in the ongoing housing crisis.

As Ardmhéara my main priority will be to work with this Council, with all our communities, with those in housing need, and with central government to address this crisis.

My first act as Ardmhéara will be to request a direct meeting with Housing Minister Eoghan Murphy. I will also be requesting that he fulfils his predecessor's commitment to report back to a full meeting of this City Council on his Department's programme to address the dire shortage of housing.

I know I speak for the members of this City Council and the vast majority of our citizens when I say that there absolutely has to be a step-change in Government housing policy. This City Council must be given the resources and the support – financial, legal, logistical – to build homes, to purchase homes, to refurbish and extend homes – to meet the housing needs of the people. I commend the efforts of City Council officials and staff who are doing their best within the confines of central government policy and allocated resources. But much, much more is needed.

This City Council has not been found wanting in coming up with solutions towards ending the housing crisis. Some of us on the Council have facilitated means of supplying housing, such as the land initiative, which would certainly not be our first choice if we were in Government. We have shown flexibility because we know the priority is to get the flow of new housing started, to supply homes as soon as possible. But this is not a blank cheque. We will continue to point out that the priority approach should be the construction by the Council of Council housing on Council land. This remains our preferred and proven option.

I take this opportunity to call on Housing Minister Eoghan Murphy and his Cabinet colleagues to release the funding needed for Dublin City Council and the other Dublin local authorities to develop Council housing in sufficient quantity. The capital funding for housing in this State in 2017 is €732 million, a drop of nearly €100 million on the 2010 allocation. This clearly shows the mountain the City has to climb.

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As well as greatly increasing funding, the Minister must end the stifling bureaucracy in the Department of Housing that is causing seemingly endless delay. To meet an arbitrary deadline to empty hotels and b&bs, a deadline that will not now be met anyway, we have seen huge energy put into the provision of yet another emergency measure – hub accommodation in this City. We need to see the same energy and urgency put into developing permanent homes for people.

As an example of delay, note that the deadline for completion of housing in O'Devaney Gardens and St. Michael's is 2020. It will have been nearly four years since we agreed these developments. It took seven years to deliver 70 units of senior citizen accommodation in Ballyfermot's Annamore Court. All this is on Council land.

The procurement and approval process is overly bureaucratic and takes far too long. The sense of urgency is not being felt by many in positions of authority. This attitude must change.

Ultimately it is a question of political will and commitment. Political will and commitment are not lacking on this City Council and I urge the Minister and the Government to step up to the mark also. The Minister needs to listen most closely, not to Departmental mandarins, but to those in need of housing, to their public representatives and to people working at the front line of housing provision.

The housing crisis is a cause of huge hardship across our society. It is also adversely affecting our economy. How can Dublin be expected to develop economically if working people cannot have access to even the most modest of homes in this City?

The housing crisis can be solved. The solutions are there. I intend to use the coming year to help ensure that those solutions are put into effect.

Le linn mo thréimhse déanfaidh mé mo dhícheall chun suíomh na teanga Gaeilge sa chathair seo a fheabhsú, ag leanúint leis an obair a rinne Críona Ní Dhálaigh. Is í 2018 Bliain na Gaeilge, céad-fiche-cúig bliain ó bhunaíodh Conradh na Gaeilge i seomra beag ar Sráid Uí Chonaill, rud a chuir tús le athbheochan teanga, athbheochan cultúrtha, athbheochan náisiúnta. Tá an Ghaeilge beo inár gCathair ach tá gá le tacaíocht do phobal na Gaeilge agus tá ról ag an Comhairle. Táim ag súil le bheith ag obair leis an heagrais Gaeilge agus pobal na Gaeilge amach anseo.

Tá stair fada bródúil ag Baile Átha Cliath. Tá suim sa stair sin agam ó bhí mé óg agus táim fós ag foghlaim faoi saol agus imeachtaí na cathrach le níos mó ná míle bliain anuas. Ag croí-lár an scéal sin tá Éirí Amach na Cásca 1916 agus Forógra na Poblachta.

At the heart of our City's proud history is the 1916 Rising, the centenary of which our citizens and friends from all over Ireland and all over the world commemorated and celebrated last year. Thanks to those who campaigned over many years, including 1916 relatives, as well as members of this City Council, we celebrated the centenary with Moore Street's historic terrace still intact and the battlefield site still largely as it was in 1916.

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We must now move to the next step which is the full implementation of 'The Moore Street Report – Securing History' the Report of the Moore Street Consultative Group to the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

The people of Dublin, and people all over Ireland and abroad have spoken very clearly. We cherish our 1916 heritage; we cherish the legacy of those who, in the words of James Connolly Heron, sacrificed their lives for their country, in contrast to those who, in our own time, sacrificed their country for their lifestyles.

As Ardmhéara I am determined to do all that I can to ensure that Moore Street and the 1916 battlefield is finally and definitively saved and that it becomes the heart of an Historic Cultural Quarter, a living, thriving area and a permanent memorial to the men and women who first proclaimed and defended the Irish Republic.

I want to take this opportunity to extend our sympathy and solidarity to those communities in London who have been devastated by the Grenfell Tower fire. We recall the tragedy of the Stardust fire in our own city and I recall also that Priory Hall in my own area was first evacuated because of major fire safety breaches.

Never should any community, because of their address or their economic status, be left exposed to greater danger of fire or other accident, due to official neglect. And never should they have to wait so long for justice, as have the Stardust survivors and bereaved. In the Dublin Fire Brigade we have one of the best emergency services in any city in the world and as Ardmhéara I will play my part in helping to ensure that we fully retain and enhance that service.

There has been some debate about the retention or otherwise of the full title 'Lord' Mayor. I can see both sides of the argument. B'fhearr linn an teideal as Gaeilge 'Ardmhéara' agus bainfidh mé úsáid as sin mar a rinne Críona Ní Dhálaigh romham. Whatever is decided we should recall the words of Pádraig Mac Piarais:

*"Let no man be mistaken as to who will be **lord** in Ireland when Ireland is free. The **people** will be **lord** and master."*

Taking office as Ardmhéara is a great honour for me and I want to thank members of my family who are with us tonight, for all your support over the years. We think of those who are no longer with us, including my father Billy and recently deceased uncle and aunt, and my mother who, because of serious illness, cannot be with us. I have everything to thank them for, including my love for this city and country.

I want to thank my predecessor Brendan Carr and other previous holders of this office for all their work and for their advice to me on taking up this office.

Of course tonight is the easiest part. It remains to be seen how I'll get on in the hot seat in the next year of monthly meetings and special meetings. I'm told I have a bit of a grumpy reputation at times – though I can't think why. As you may have noticed I was employed as a kind of sweeper by the Sinn Féin group towards the end of the more robust debates in this chamber. So it will be a big change for me. But I'm sure I can rely on all councillors to help. In that regard I commend my predecessor Cllr

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Brendan Carr for facilitating more orderly meetings by introducing the clock system. It's hard to see how it can be improved. Hawkeye, maybe?

Finally, public service and social responsibility is – or should be – at the core of everything we do as a Council. James Connolly wrote that the value of a city *“is to be found in the development of self-respect and high conception of social responsibilities among a people”*. He wrote that a city such as Dublin *“ought to be, in its public activities, breadth of outlook, and comprehensiveness of ambition for the well-being of its inhabitants, a centre of pride”* for the Irish people.

Dublin is a centre of pride because much has been achieved over the last century, but much more remains to be done. We have a fine city, with great people, and a bright future, if we work together. Leanfaimíd ar aghaidh ag obair le chéile.

Go raibh míle, míle maith agaibh.