

**Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Offaly County Council**  
Held on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2022 at 2.00 pm, in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road,  
Tullamore and via Zoom

The Meetings Administrator carried out a roll call to confirm attendance

**Present**

Cllr. Frank Moran Cathaoirleach

Cllr. John Carroll	Cllr. Declan Harvey
Cllr. Clare Claffey	Cllr. John Leahy
Cllr. John Clendennen	Cllr. Tony McCormack
Cllr. Eamon Dooley	Cllr. Sean O'Brien
Cllr. Neil Feighery	Cllr. Peter Ormond
Cllr. Eddie Fitzpatrick	Cllr. Danny Owens
Cllr. John Foley	Cllr. Liam Quinn
Cllr. Mark Hackett	Cllr. Ken Smollen

**Apologies**

Cllr. Noel Cribbin, Cllr. Robert McDermott

**Officials in Attendance**

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S.; Ms. S. Kennedy, D.O.S.; Mr. S. Duclot, D.O.S.; Mr. M. Connolly, H.O.F.; Ms. A. Pedlow, Heritage Officer; Mr. E. O'Ceilleachair, C.F.O.; Mr. C. Duke, S.A.C.F.O.; Mr. N. Smith, S.A.C.F.O.; Mr. G. Bruton, Meetings Administrator; Mr. C. Kelly, S.O. and Ms. L. Carbery, C.O.

**Votes of Sympathy**

Cllr. F. Moran, Cathaoirleach, joined with the members in extending Votes of Sympathy for Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive, and the Delaney family on the death of her father Mr. Jim Delaney, and to Mr. S. Duclot, D.O.S., and the Duclot family on the death of his father Mr. Jean-Claude Duclot.

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive, Cllr. F. Moran, Cathaoirleach, and the members expressed their sympathy to Cllr. L. Quinn and the Quinn family, on the death of his mother, Mrs. Colette Quinn.

Votes of Sympathy were also unanimously extended to the following:

Seamus Walsh, Screggan, Tullamore, on the death of his mother Mrs. Mary Walsh;

Mary Gaughran, Whitehall Estate, Tullamore, on the death of her father Mr. Tony Gaughran;

Frank Condrón, 25 Marian Place, Tullamore, on the death of his father Mr. Frank Condrón Senior.

The Chief Executive, on her own behalf and on behalf of the staff of Offaly County Council, joined with the members in these votes of sympathy.

### 1. Confirmation of Minutes

Matters arising from meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2022:

“Cllr. M. Hackett noted that the members had resolved to adopt his motion to the July Council meeting regarding Hybrid meetings subject to a minor amendment. He advised the Cathaoirleach that, subject to the Cathaoirleach’s approval, he was submitting the following amended motion regarding hybrid meetings- ‘That Offaly County Council commits to maintaining hybrid style Council meetings, in keeping with family friendly work practices and in an effort to reduce barriers to inclusion and diversity’.

The Cathaoirleach agreed that the minutes would reflect this amendment.

On the proposal of Cllr. L. Quinn, seconded by Cllr. J. Leahy, the members resolved to adopt the minutes of the Ordinary meeting of Offaly County Council held on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2022.

### 2. Minutes for Noting

The members noted the following minutes:

- Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group Meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2022

### 3. Offaly Heritage Plan 2023 - 2027

Ms. A. Pedlow, Heritage Officer, provided the members with a presentation on the Offaly Heritage Plan 2023-2027. She outlined the process of developing the plan and the engagement with over 220 people to draft the plan in conjunction with Offaly Heritage Forum. She noted the areas listed in the 1995 Heritage Act including buildings, heritage objects, habitats, parks and gardens. She updated the members on the membership of the forum, some of which include Bird Watch Ireland, Coillte and the Offaly Local Development Committee.

Ms. A. Pedlow outlined the actions contained in the plan involving Creative Ireland, Biodiversity, Partnering and Enabling groups, Built Heritage, Vernacular Architecture, Documenting Heritage, Conservation and Management of Sites and Access to Heritage. She sought the member’s approval for the Offaly Heritage Plan 2023-27.

Cllr. F. Moran, Cathaoirleach, joined with the members in thanking Ms. A. Pedlow for her comprehensive presentation and they acknowledged the enthusiasm and passion brought to the Heritage Office by all the staff and Rachel McKenna, County Architect.

Cllr. E. Dooley, Chair of Land Use, Planning and Economic Development SPC, commended the plan and the members of the Offaly Heritage Forum. Cllr. M. Hackett queried the time line for the appointment of a Biodiversity Officer. The members raised queries on the Protected Structures Grant and Just Transition funding.

In response to the members queries, Ms. A. Pedlow advised that the protected structures grant is 100% funded and it provides expertise from conservation architects to develop bespoke plans, including annual maintenance requirements for protected buildings.

She welcomed the approval of a Biodiversity Officer for Offaly and she advised that the criteria for the appointment would be sought from the Heritage Council.

On the proposal of Cllr. E. Dooley, seconded by Cllr. D. Owens the members resolved to adopt the Offaly Heritage Plan 2023-27.

#### 4. Certification I.S. ISO 45001:2018 - NSAI

Cllr. F. Moran, Cathaoirleach, presented the Certificates for I.S. ISO 45001:2018 awarded to Offaly County Council Fire & Rescue Service by NSAI to the representatives from the Fire Services, Mr. Eoin O’Ceilleachair, C.F.O., Mr. Clive Duke, S.A.C.F.O. and Mr. Nick Smith, S.A.C.F.O.

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive, acknowledged the achievement noting it officially recognises the high quality service provided and she thanked the fire services staff for their hard work. She highlighted that ISO certification will help to monitor, improve and develop the framework for Fire Services.

Ms. S. Kennedy, D.O.S., acknowledged the achievement in being awarded ISO certification and the input from the Health and Safety team. She welcomed the certification and noted its importance in developing the Fire Services training centre and the importance of paying tribute to fire fighters and sub-station fire officers.

Cllr. F Moran, joined with the members in thanking the Chief Fire Officer, the Senior Assistant Fire Officers, and the Fire Services staff.

#### 5. Local Property Tax 2023

Mr. M. Connolly, H.O.F., provided the members with a presentation on the 2023/2024 Local Property Tax rate decision. He advised the members on the statutory requirements involved and the public consultation that had taken place. He updated the members on the estimation of the budget, balance sheet and of the latest financial position.

He outlined the three written submissions received following public consultation objecting to an increase and of the various funding opportunities that maintaining the 15% would generate. Maintaining the LPT at the current level, will generate a new funding stream of circa €6.61m for capital infrastructure projects and urban and rural regeneration projects. He updated the members on the LPT funding model 2020-2024 that will result in total additional funding of projects of scale of €16,017,765.00.

Mr. M. Connolly, H.O.F., highlighted the funding challenges without maintaining the current LPT levels, noting it would provide little or no scope in the expenditure budget to fund additional local projects. He noted that given the effect of the cost of living crisis a deficit for 2022 is a distinct possibility and the continued effect of successful revaluation appeals are likely to impact significantly on the rates income for 2023. He advised that there is limited additional rates income buoyancy expected in framing the 2023 rates budget.

He outlined further challenges including decline in other income lines, all of which are likely to significantly reduce discretionary income in 2023. He emphasised that most Government funding initiatives are on a match-funding model and there is no scope currently in the 2023 draft budget to allocate additional match funding for schemes like the Urban and Rural Regeneration development fund, which is potentially worth significant monies for Offaly County Council.

He noted that the decision is a reserved function and the additional LPT income generated from maintaining property tax rates in Offaly will be ring fenced for match funding purposes with the unspent balance carried forward from year to year. Progress on same will be reported to the members. He cautioned that the 2023 LPT variation is a key decision in the drafting the 2023 budget and it is clear from the current budgetary outlook for 2023 that resources are going to be very stretched to maintain the current level of services within the county.

Mr. M. Connolly outlined the progress to date on LPT projects since 2020 and proposed maintaining the 2022 LPT rate in 2023 and 2024 for Offaly, to continue to provide much needed match funding for capital projects of scale in the County.

Cllr. J. Clendennen proposed maintaining the LPT for 2023 and 2024 at 15%. He brought the members attention to the many projects in various towns across the county that have benefitted from this funding and that projects in rural communities and small villages can benefit in the future. He pointed out that the number of households now in the lower bracket has increased to 60% and he requested a progress report by the end of the year.

This proposal was seconded by Cllr. T. McCormack, citing that the funding has been of great success to projects such as street enhancement and greenways.

Cllr. S. O'Brien brought a counter proposal, seconded by Cllr. K. Smollen, to revert to the baseline LPT as in 2019 with no increase. Cllr. S. O'Brien expressed his concerns about the cost of living crisis and the pressure on households to pay the LPT.

A vote was called on reducing the LPT for 2023 and 2024 by 15% as proposed by Cllr. S. O'Brien and seconded by Cllr. K. Smollen.

In favour: Cllrs. C. Claffey, S. O'Brien and K. Smollen.

Against: Cllrs. J. Carroll, J. Clendennen, E. Dooley, N. Feighery, E. Fitzpatrick, J. Foley, M. Hackett, D. Harvey, J. Leahy, T. McCormack, F. Moran, P. Ormond, D. Owens and L. Quinn.

Apologies: Cllrs. N. Cribbin and R. McDermott

Cllr. F. Moran, Cathaoirleach, declared the motion defeated.

A vote was called on maintaining the Local Property Tax for 2023 and 2024 at 2022 levels as proposed by Cllr. J. Clendennen and seconded by Cllr. T. McCormack.

In favour: Cllrs. J. Carroll, J. Clendennen, E. Dooley, N. Feighery, E. Fitzpatrick, J. Foley, M. Hackett, D. Harvey, J. Leahy, T. McCormack, F. Moran, P. Ormond, D. Owens and L. Quinn

Against: Cllrs. C. Claffey, S. O'Brien and K. Smollen.

Apologies: Cllrs. N. Cribbin and R. McDermott

The members of Offaly County Council resolved to maintain the variation to the Local Property Tax adjustment factor applied in 2022 for 2023 and 2024, meaning the Local Property Tax charged to households across Offaly will be maintained at the same level in 2023 and 2024 as it was in 2022.

## 6. Just Transition

Mr. S. Duclot, D.O.S., provided the members with an update on Just Transition, noting that the Draft Just Transition and Operational plans have been submitted to the European Commission. He advised the members on the key priorities including generation of employment diversification, up-skilling of workers affected by the exit from peat, investment in research and innovation, and development of technology for systems and infrastructure for clean energy.

The members thanked Mr. S. Duclot for his update. The members raised concerns about the number of jobs that have been created and the deadline for completion of the projects in relation to the National Just Transition Fund. They queried if there would be a further call for Just Transition applications and they requested a list of projects that have received funding in Offaly.

Mr. S. Duclot agreed to write to the Department to request an update on the progress of projects in Offaly.

## 7. Monthly Management Report

Ms. A. Delaney brought the members attention to the monthly management report. She highlighted planning services, the heritage update and she advised the members that a Town Centre Re-Generation Officer has been appointed. She welcomed the recent signing of the contracts for the Edenderry Library upgrade. She informed the members that the roads programme is substantially completed, and a housing report will be presented to them at the October meeting. She informed the members that mid- term review by the Traveller Consultative Committee was held, and it was agreed that no changes were required to the final plan as significant progress has been made in this area. She acknowledged the Pride of Place entries and she advised that the LEO, CE Orders and financial report are available for their information. She concluded by advising that the financial situation is being monitored closely.

Cllr. F. Moran, Cathaoirleach, thanked her for the comprehensive report.

## 8. Corporate Policy Group Report

Cllr. F. Moran, Cathaoirleach, advised the members the CPG meeting was held on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and the agenda for the Council meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> September was discussed.

## 9. Notice of Motion

### **Motion 1 –Proposed by Cllr. C. Claffey, seconded by Cllr. K. Smollen**

"For Offaly County Council to provide funding in the 2023 and subsequent budgets to allow employment of 2 full time lifeguards at the outdoor swimming pool in Banagher during the months of

July and August to ensure that the public can safely swim at this popular and well promoted bathing spot"

Cllr. P. Ormond requested that the cost is examined and funding of the community pools should not be impacted.

Mr. M. Connolly, H.O.F. pointed out that the pool is located in Galway and Offaly County Council has tried to contact the relevant person in that Local Authority. He agreed to revert with a proposal and costings.

**Motion 2 – Proposed by Cllr. J. Carroll, seconded by Cllr. J. Leahy**

"That this Council call on Management to make provision in Estimates for 2023 Financial year for the employment of an Oifigeach Gaeilge ( Irish Officer) to promote the use of Irish by this Council and ensure we comply with directions from Coimisinèir Teanga"

Mr. M. Connolly agreed to give consideration to this motion in the budget 2023 and to write to the Department to seek funding. He proposed to check with staff for skills that may assist in this area.

**Motion 3 – Proposed by Cllr. K. Smollen, seconded by Cllr. C. Claffey**

"That Offaly County Council calls on the Government and the Minister for Housing to declare a housing emergency and to immediately implement emergency powers to introduce a moratorium on evictions similar to Covid emergency measures until the Minister for Housing raises the income thresholds for social housing supports and with the moratorium on evictions to be in place for a period of three months following the income threshold increase, with an option to review thereafter."

Cllr. F. Moran, Cathoirleach, agreed to raise the issue with Deputy Cowen. Cllr. J. Leahy cautioned that a moratorium on evictions can cause problems such as tenants may stop paying rent and private sector landlords may leave the market.

Ms. S. Kennedy pointed out that Offaly County Council housing stock has grown to over 2000 units, the largest to date. She advised that the Department are committed to reviewing income eligibility and the new model is awaited from the Department.

**Motion 4 –Proposed by Cllr. K. Smollen, seconded by Cllr. C. Claffey**

"That Offaly County Council calls on the Government to introduce legislation that will allow for the reopening of the power plant at Shannonbridge, even on a temporary basis until the current energy crisis comes to an end."

In response, Cllr. M. Hackett stated his opposition to this motion, that the response to the current crisis in energy costs is to move forward towards renewable energy solutions at a household, community, business and State level.

Cllr. E. Dooley advised that the re-opening of the power station at Shannonbridge is no longer a viable option. Cllr. J. Clendennen noted the increased dependency on electricity and the need for solar and other renewable energy options.

## 10. Comhdhálacha / Conferences

### Conferences

#### **Celtic Conferences Autumn Schedule**

1. A Practical Guide to Budget 2023 in Carlingford, Co. Louth, 30th September to 2nd October 2022 - €100 plus travel and expenses
2. Irish State Retirement Pensions and Benefits, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, 7th to 9th October 2022 - €100 plus travel and expenses
3. Innovation in Solar Energy Technology, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, 28th to 30th October 2022 - €100 plus travel and expenses
4. The role of Local Authorities in addressing the needs of Older People, Carlingford, Co. Louth - €100 plus travel and expenses

*It was agreed no member would attend*

### Training

AILG-OPR Webinar - 'Planning that Revitalises Ireland's Towns and Villages' 30/09/2022 10 to 11.30AM Register: email info@ailg.ie

Retrospective approval was sought for Cllrs. E. Fitzpatrick, S. O'Brien, P. Ormond, J. Clendennen, D. Harvey, F. Moran and D. Owens, to attend The Autumn training conference will take place on the 14th and 15th September in the Knightsbrook Hotel, Trim, Co. Meath.

## 11. Comhfhreagras/ Correspondence

The members noted the correspondence issued with the agenda.

## 12. Any Other Business

Cllr. D. Harvey extended his congratulations to the Tullamore Senior B Hurling team on their win in the county final and he wished the Tullamore Football team the best of luck in the upcoming County Final.

Cllr. D. Owens joined with the members in welcoming the recently announced €20m hospice fund for a Midland Hospice 20 bed facility in Tullamore Hospital and he acknowledged the huge funding efforts that have been made by the Offaly Hospice Foundation and thanked the individuals and organisations that have supported it.

**MINUTES CONFIRMED:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **CATHAOIRLEACH**

\_\_\_\_\_ **RUNAÍ**



17<sup>th</sup> October 2022