

Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Offaly County Council
Held on 27th March 2023 at 2pm, in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road,
Tullamore and via Zoom

The Meetings Administrator carried out a roll call to confirm attendance

Present

Cllr. Tony McCormack, Leas Cathaoirleach

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

Apologies

Cllr. F. Moran

Officials in Attendance

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S.; Ms. S. Kennedy, D.O.S.; Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S.; Mr. M. Connolly, H.O.F.; Mr. B. Lennon, S.E.; Mr. E. Fennell, S.E.O.; Mr. G. Bruton, Meetings Administrator and Ms. L. Carbery, C.O.

Suspension of Standing Orders

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Owens, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey, the members resolved to Suspend Standing orders to hold a minutes silence to honour the passing of retired Councillor Michael Fox, Local Business Man and Health Campaigner Mr. James O' Connor, and Offaly Senior Football Manager, Mr. Liam Kearns.

Following the minute silence, the members paid tribute to retired Councillor and former Cathaoirleach Michael Fox for his service to Offaly County Council and the people who elected him. Cllr. J. Clendennen paid tribute to the former Fine Gael Councillor and noted he was also a long-serving Chairman of the Commercial Cattle section and an experienced cattle judge in agricultural shows and mart events across Ireland. The members expressed their condolences to his family and friends.

Cllr. T. Mc Cormack led tributes to Mr. James O'Connor, a mental health advocate who, drawing on his own experiences, set up the community counselling service ACT in Tullamore to help many people suffering with mental health issues. He noted his dedication to his family and to County Offaly. He also noted that he was a fantastic tradesman. The members remembered him as hard working, humble and kind. They expressed their sympathy to his wife Lisa, mother Dolores, and extended family.

The members joined with Cllr. R. McDermott in expressing the shock and sadness in Offaly following the untimely death of Mr. Liam Kearns, GAA Senior Football Manager. He stressed the importance of living life to the full and that Liam Kearns was a gentleman, devoted family man and passionate about GAA. He noted he served his time as a Garda and he had previously managed Limerick, Laois and Tipperary senior footballers. He had made most progress with Tipperary, leading them to the All-Ireland senior football semi-final in 2016. He was a former member and player with the Austin Stacks club in Tralee and he won an All-Ireland minor football medal with Kerry in 1980. The members expressed their deepest condolences to his family, the GAA community and the Offaly Senior Football team.

Votes of Sympathy

Votes of Sympathy were unanimously extended to the following:

Nuala Hourihane and the Fox Family, Kilmurry, Tullamore, on the death of her partner Michael;

Lisa Guing and the O'Connor Family, Knockowen Road, Tullamore, on the death of her husband James;

Angela Kearns and the Kearns Family, Mount Catherine, Clonlara, Clare, on the death of her husband Liam.

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

On the proposal of Cllr. L. Quinn, seconded by Cllr. N. Feighery, the members resolved to adopt the Minutes of the Ordinary meeting of Offaly County Council held on Monday 20 February 2023.

2. Minutes for Noting

The members noted the following minutes:

- Minutes of the Climate Action, Environment, Water & Transportation Strategic Policy Committee meeting held on 29 September 2022
- Minutes of the Housing Strategic Policy Committee meeting held on 7 December 2022
- Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group meeting held on 13 January 2023

3. Pride of Place 2022

M. S. Kennedy welcomed the Pride of Place community groups to the meeting to recognise their achievements. She noted the IPB Pride of Place is an all-island competition that recognises improvements made by local communities to create civic pride in their area. She complimented the committee's organisation and commitment. She looked forward to further success as Offaly's community groups have a great track-record in this competition. She noted it is a privilege for Offaly County Council to engage with the groups and to share in celebrating their success.

Cllr. T. Mc Cormack welcomed the guests and acknowledged the impressive achievements of the three groups in bringing home national awards. These awards are the results of their hard work over a number of years and they show the importance of community organisations providing invaluable supports to their communities. He congratulated the three groups and wished them success in the future.

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive, expressed her delight in welcoming the Pride of Place groups and acknowledged their impressive work in the community, their huge voluntary contribution and she paid tribute to all voluntary work in the county. She highlighted the beauty of Geashill village, noting their active heritage and biodiversity work and their many awards achieved over the years, in particular winner of the national Super Valu Tidy Towns awards. She highlighted the creative aspects of the village with artist Luke Carson in developing a very engaging sculpture to mark the famous Geashill Pig Fairs, and she acknowledged the support of Creative Ireland and the role of the Edenderry Municipal District staff in delivering this programme. She acknowledged further creative projects, such as the partnership with the National School and poet Edward Egan, archive services, and works by the Stonemason Ciaran Byrne. She wished them every success in the 2023 competition.

Ms. A. Delaney highlighted the growing population in Mucklagh and the work of the local community development committee established in 2009 in securing a site from Mr. David Hutton Bury to provide a community centre to the village. She acknowledged their work in successful fund raising and their forward thinking resulting in a community centre that provides suitable facilities for diverse groups. She highlighted the Centre was used by Offaly County Council for the local elections in 2019 and as a vaccination centre by the HSE throughout the Covid-19 pandemic period. Community development is at the heart of what they do, and she noted that further development is planned and she wished them well in the future.

She congratulated Pullough as an inspiring community group and their reaction to the closure of local amenities such as the post office and shop. She welcomed the local community shop run by volunteers as an inspiration to other small communities. She welcomed the development of the greenways giving access to Pullough's unique attractions including Harry Clarke stained glass and the Michael Casey bog altar in the church.

Cllr. T. McCormack, Leas Cathaoirleach, presented Certificates of Achievement to Geashill Tidy Towns, representing the Edenderry Municipal District as winner in the Creative Place category; to Mucklagh Community Development CLG, representing Tullamore Municipal District, runner up in the population 1k to 2k category; and to Pullough Village, representing Birr Municipal District, runner up in the Community Resilience category.

The members congratulated all the groups and they joined with Cllr. T. McCormack in thanking Mr. B. Pey and the staff of the community section in Offaly County Council for their support to the groups.

4. Roads Programme 2023

Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S., introduced Mr. B. Lennon, Senior Engineer, who joined the Roads Section last year. He noted the Roads Programme had been developed through the MDs and he acknowledged the member's contribution. He welcomed the increased allocation to €29.5m for 2023 and he noted the increase in allocations for capital projects such as the greenways and Edenderry Inner Relief Road. He welcomed the allocations previously for peat roads of €800k and €1m in 2022 and a further €1m in 2023, acknowledging that the allocations are small but that the Department have recognised the issues Offaly face with the level of peat roads in the county. He highlighted the on-going challenges faced in maintenance and capital projects with inflation and contractors availability. He advised that further investment in EV charging will be rolled out.

Mr. B. Lennon, Senior Engineer, provided the members with an overview of the Roads Programme 2023 noting it is targeted at both maintaining and improving current roads assets across each of the Municipal districts while also delivering on new strategic links and targeted improvement to deliver on the outcomes outlined in the programme.

He outlined the funding allocations for 2023:

• Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TFI) - National Roads & Greenways	€ 8,761,012
• Department of Transport	€ 15,539,300
• National Transport Authority (NTA)	€ 3,009,382
• Offaly County Council own resource for local roads	€ <u>2,246,269</u>
Total	€29,555,963

He updated the members on the TFI allocation consisting of Protection and Renewal Schemes on the N62 across a total of 5km with an initial allocation assigned of €4,000,000, with works to start onsite in Q3 of 2023, and €3,880,000 allocated to complete the remaining 16km of the Grand Canal Greenway from Turraun to Shannon Harbour and associated Links.

He updated the members on the Department of Transport Allocation including the Edenderry Inner Relief Road Stage 2, Birr North Distributor Road and R400 Peat Pilot Scheme.

He brought the members attention to the NTA funding and stressed that schemes approved for Offaly County Council are all on a predominantly 18-24 month delivery programme timeline. There are some schemes with a potentially broader delivery timeline such as the new Tullamore Area Based Transport Assessment and the Spollenstown Bridge Crossing of the Railway Line. All of these delivery timelines are subject to a myriad of dependencies that can potentially extend the scheme delivery timeline. Due to the Multi Annual Nature of the program delivery and the fact that the majority of Active Travel Schemes are now at Construction or Tender Award Stage approximately 30% of the 2023 allocation is spent. He stressed that scheme costs are increasing due to inflationary pressures, availability of contractors and materials.

He outlined the Pathfinder Projects that will proceed to Part 8 in 2023, such as Edenderry Harbour to the Grand Canal Greenway, Ferbane Secondary School to the Grand Canal Greenway and the Tullamore Train Station to the Grand Canal Greenway.

He advised the members that Council funding will help deliver localised improvements within each Municipal District while also providing additional financial support to service delivery programs partially funded from the TII (Winter Services) and the Department of Transport.

He updated the members on the Public Lighting Stock and advised that the public lighting system is maintained in collaboration with the specialist contractor. There are approximately 3.1% faults across the network or 292 lighting units that require an intervention, 182 or 62% of the current outages are on ESB poles. He informed the members that the PLEEP programme will be complete by October 2023.

The members thanked him for his presentation and the consultation process that had taken place with the MDs. They welcomed the increase in funding and raised concerns on public lighting, potholes and commissioning of lighting at the Daingean Road car park. Cllr. J. Clendennen highlighted the LIS two year waiting list in Birr and he sought re-allocation of funding from Tullamore and Edenderry to reduce this list. The members sought further clarification on the EV programme.

They expressed their disappointment that there was no funding allocated by the Department for the N52 Killbeggan to Tullamore link, noting the safety concerns at the Durrow junctions. Concerns were also raised about dangerous junctions in some areas of Birr. The members highlighted the volume of heavy machinery traffic in the Edenderry area due to the development of wind turbines and energy parks. They sought funding and an overall plan from all stakeholders to develop the required infrastructure in this area. They also sought clarity on the timeline for active travel projects, the North Distributor Road Birr and speed ramps in villages / towns.

In response, Mr. T. Shanahan advised that the preferred route option for the N52 link is ready to be published and he invited the members to a meeting on Thursday 30 March, where a design team will provide them with a presentation on the route. He agreed to continue to engage with the Department to secure funding for this project. He suggested that, as the LIS has been agreed, the Cathaoirleach for each MD to discuss re-allocation of funding for Birr LIS.

He noted the members concerns in relation to public lighting. He advised that that there are genuine reasons for the delay in repairs to public lighting and the three year maintenance contract is due for renewal later this year. He confirmed the funding for peat roads allocated across each MD with Edenderry receiving the largest amount. He advised he would investigate the delay with commissioning the lighting at Daingean Road car park and would revert to members.

Mr. B. Lennon acknowledged there has been a decrease in quality of service for lighting as the contract is for 1% max outages, issues with other stakeholders and pole replacement are having an impact. However, the contractor is actively engaged to reduce the outages. He advised that PLEEP will be completed by October 2023 providing 90% LED lighting.

He noted their disappointment on funding for the N52, but welcomed the route report and he advised that maintenance will be carried out in the area to improve safety in Durrow. In response to their concerns about potholes, he advised that two new state of the art velocity patchers are being delivered in next few weeks, one for Birr MD and one between Tullamore and Edenderry MDs.

He confirmed that only fast 50KW EV chargers are being installed in Offaly and work is ongoing to identify additional locations with available power sources. He advised that phased specific improvement grants for the Birr North Distributor Road will be implemented, on-going maintenance

to improve safety would be carried out at dangerous junctions and a site-specific approach is considered for speed ramps in towns and villages.

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Carroll, seconded by Cllr. J. Leahy, the members adopted the Roads Programme 2023.

5. Just Transition

Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S. advised the members that the application for Start Technical assistance was successful, with 75 days approved, to begin this week. She informed the members that a series of meetings, in partnership with TUS, LOETB and OLDC are organised and she invited them to the official welcome on Wednesday 29 March in the Áras at 2pm, followed by overview presentation by EMRA.

She informed the members that meetings with various stakeholders, such as TUS, Comhairle na Nóg, BNM will be held to assist community capacity building. She invited the members to meet directly with the delegation on Friday 31 March where an update will be provided by the Midlands Regional Transition Team. She welcomed the engagement and she looked forward to the information sessions, as outcomes from last Midlands visit were very worthwhile in providing assistance on JT applications.

She informed the members that Paddy Mathews, Fáilte Ireland, will attend the April meeting to provide the members with an update.

She brought the members attention to recently released update by POBAL outlining their programme for the € 29m Just Transition funding. She outlined the three strands consisting of Strand 1 €15m for Local Authority projects, with a call for applications scheduled for May 2023. Strand 2 with €9m allocated to regional transformative projects with expressions of interest scheduled for June 2023. The final strand of €5m will be allocated to community grants with an open call in November 2023, with funding grants between €50k to €200k per group, covering approximately 30 groups and with a deadline for completion by June 2026. She welcomed the detail for the funding streams starting to emerge.

The members thanked her for the update and they acknowledged the work that it has been undertaken to date. They raised concerns with the current JT projects, in particular by community groups and the over runs in costs and time they are facing. They acknowledged the huge amount of work that will be required both by Local Authorities and community groups in getting applications submitted for the next round of funding, and in meeting the timelines in the POBAL programme and they queried if match funding would be required.

Ms. A Dillon confirmed that sessions will be available remotely and she acknowledged the over runs faced with current JT projects. She agreed to update the Department with concerns on current JT projects and she encouraged groups facing difficulties to write to the Department individually to inform them of the over runs to request extensions for time and funding. She acknowledged their concerns on timeframes, noting this is part of criteria of funding and she hoped supports will be forthcoming and she agreed to update members as further details emerge.

6. Monthly Management Report

Ms. A. Delaney, C.E., brought the members attention to the March monthly management report and she encouraged as many members as possible to attend the upcoming JT start team sessions. She welcomed the soft opening of the Esker Arts Centre on 14 April next. She informed the members that the Biodiversity Officer has been appointed and will provide them with a presentation at a future meeting.

She welcomed the recently announced greenway route for Athlone to Galway, encompassing Shannonbridge and she encouraged the members to attend public information sessions in Portumna Town Hall on Thursday 30 March at 3-8pm and Ballinasloe Shearwater Hotel on Friday 31 March at 3-8pm. She brought the members attention to the resumption of tourism events and the success of the Local Enterprise Week. She congratulated Tubber National School on their two national award wins at the All Ireland primary school final of the Vex IQ competition and she wished them well as they go on to represent Ireland in the Vex IQ Robotics World Championship Finals in Dallas later this year.

7. Corporate Policy Group Report

Cllr. T. McCormack advised the members that at the Corporate Group Policy meeting, the agenda for the council meeting was reviewed.

8. Notice of Motion

On the proposal of Cllr. K. Smollen, seconded by Cllr. S. O'Brien, the members resolved that "Offaly Co Council calls on the Government to extend the Eviction Ban for all 'No Fault' tenants who face eviction until meaningful action is taken, to include measures that will ensure that thousands of children and their parents around the country aren't added to the growing Homeless List."

Cllrs. K. Smollen and S. O'Brien sought an increase in funding for the purchase of properties where tenants have been given notice to quit and for more homeless accommodation in Offaly. They voiced their concerns with the government current initiatives and with measures recently announced, stressing the measures should be tested before lifting the eviction ban. Cllr. S. O'Brien suggested tenants with notice of termination should remain in the accommodation.

A number of members objected to this advice, deeming it unlawful. Cllr. J. Leahy voiced his concerns on extending the eviction ban as private landlords as this restricts their jurisdiction over their properties and in rent freeze zones some landlords are struggling to re-pay mortgages on those properties. Cllr John Clendennen noted the lack of supply of housing is very challenging and is being tackled by Government.

Cllr John Carroll, said the failure lay with Government policy for many years and the decision to take house building away from the council over many decades. Cllr Harvey said that huge work had been done by the council in providing housing and he agreed that the council should return to direct building of houses, a move which would also boost apprenticeships.

In response, Ms. S. Kennedy D.O.S. noted there has been number of announcements on housing interventions and there will be further engagement with the Department. She highlighted the progress

that made since 2019 when there were 646 on the social housing list, currently down to 469. She further advised that in the next six months 118 new houses will become available, including a number in the Tullamore area and the council will also be allocated funding to buy houses. She informed the members that Sophia Housing is progressing with its emergency housing project in Clonamore, Tullamore. She urged the public to comply with the law and the housing staff would work with them to try to find solutions for those who are qualified applicants, or who are entitled to be qualified applicants for social housing. She updated the members on the changes in legislation for Part 8 planning for housing projects to streamline the process. She noted there are a small number of upcoming projects that may benefit from this change.

9. Comhdhálacha / Conferences

Suck Valley Way, Inspiring Rural Creativity Conference on 5-6 April 2023 in Abbey Hotel, Roscommon
It was agreed no member would attend

FREE Annual Cross-Border Trade Conference in partnership with Newry Chamber, which will focus on Future Opportunities in the Cross-Border Economy and takes place on Wednesday the 8th March in the Carrickdale Hotel from 8.30am to 1pm

It was agreed no member would attend

Rescheduled Celtic Conference - Protecting your Mental Health as a Public Representative, 21-23 April 2023, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, €100 plus travel and expenses

It was agreed no member would attend

Retrospective Approval was sought for:

Cllr. J. Carroll attendance at Armagh Observatory 12-13 January 2023

Cllrs. D. Harvey, F. Moran, R. McDermott Celtic Conference, Louth, 3-5 February 2023

Cllrs. N. Cribbin, N. Feighery, E. Fitzpatrick, AILG Module 1, Limerick 24-25 February 2023

Cllrs. N. Cribbin, N. Feighery, E. Fitzpatrick, D. Harvey, F. Moran, P. Ormond, LAMA Spring Seminar Cork, 2-4 March 2023

Retrospective approval was sought for training in 2022:

AILG Module 1 17 or 19/02/2022 Mullingar/ Cork – Cllrs. J. Clendennen, N. Cribbin, E. Dooley, N. Feighery, E. Fitzpatrick S. O’Brien and D. Owens

AILG Annual 23-25/03/2022 Donegal – Cllrs. E. Dooley, N. Feighery, S. O’Brien and D. Owens

LAMA 12-13/04/22 Kilkenny – Cllrs. N. Cribbin, N. Feighery, E. Fitzpatrick, D. Harvey, F. Moran, S. O’Brien, P. Ormond and D. Owens

AILG Module 2 13-14/05/22 Monaghan – Cllrs. N. Cribbin and N. Feighery

AILG Mod 3 16/06/2022 Athlone – Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick

AILG Mod 4 23/07/2022 Bundoran – Cllrs. N. Cribbin, N. Feighery, E. Fitzpatrick, R. McDermott, P. Ormond and D. Owens

AILG Training Audit 27 - 28.7.22 Tipperary – Cllr. S. O’Brien

Garda Centenary 27/08/2022 Dublin Castle – Cllr. Eddie Fitzpatrick

AILG Autumn 14-16/09/2022 Trim – Cllr. J. Clendennen

AILG Mod 5 26/10/2022 Sligo - Cllr. N. Cribbin, S. O’Brien and P. Ormond

AILG Module 5 21-22 Oct Killarney - Cllr. E. Dooley

AILG Module 6 25-26 Nov Navan – Cllrs. E. Dooley and R. McDermott

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Harvey, seconded by Cllr. J. Leahy, the member approved the Conferences and Training.

10. Comhfhreagras / Correspondence

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Carroll, seconded by Cllr. J. Leahy, the members resolved to write to the Department for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in support of the motion from Cavan County Council to:

1. Request further protections for family farms by writing to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine demanding him to urgently intervene and prevent Semi-State body Coillte from entering into joint venture arrangements with the Gresham Fund
2. To write to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue and Minister of State Pippa Hackett to outline that the forestry deal between Coillte and Gresham House and selling Irish lands to an outside fund is not in the best interest of the people of Ireland.
3. Call on the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to review the relationship between Coillte and Gresham House and the proper control of afforestation.

11. Any Other Business

No other business.

MINUTES CONFIRMED:

_____ **CATHAOIRLEACH**

_____ **RUNAÍ**



17 April 2023