

Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Offaly County Council

Held on 19 February 2024 at 2.00pm, in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road,
Tullamore and via Zoom

The Meetings Administrator carried out a roll call to confirm attendance.

Present

Cllr. Eddie Fitzpatrick, Cathaoirleach

Cllr. John Carroll	Cllr. Declan Harvey
Cllr. Clare Claffey	Cllr. John Leahy
Cllr. John Clendennen	Cllr. T. McCormack
Cllr. Noel Cribbin	Cllr. R. McDermott
Cllr. Eamon Dooley	Cllr. F. Moran
Cllr. N. Feighery	Cllr. S. O'Brien
Cllr. J. Foley	Cllr. Peter Ormond
Cllr. Mark Hackett	Cllr. D. Owens
	Cllr. L. Quinn

Apologies

Cllr. S. Feehan Smollen

Officials in Attendance

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S.; Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S.; Mr. T. Mawe, A/H.O.F.; Ms. J. Ryan, A/D.O.S.; Mr. A. Murray, A/D.O.S.; Ms. M. Cleary, S.E.O.; Mr. J. Cunningham, S. E.; Mr. J. McNally A/S.E.E.; Ms. L. Mitchell A/S.P.; Mr. E. Kelly, A/S.E.P.; Ms. L. Giles, A/S.E.O.; Mr. G. Bruton, Meetings Administrator, Ms. L. Carbery, C.O.; Mr. P. Scully, Chairperson of Audit Committee; Ms. L. Tynan, Director of Schools (including Youth and Music), LOETB; Mr. J. Thompson, Youth Development Officer, LOETB; Ms. A. Enraght-Moony, Resource Worker Youth Services, LOETB

Suspension of Standing Orders

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, Cathaoirleach paid tribute to former County Councillor and Fianna Fáil TD Mr. Ger Connolly and to former Taoiseach and leader of Fine Gael Mr. John Bruton. On the proposal of Cllr. J. Clendennen, seconded by Cllr. L. Quinn the members resolved to suspend standing orders to hold 5 minutes repose to commemorate both men.

Comhairle na nÓg

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, Cathaoirleach, welcomed Comhairle na nÓg members Anna, Karen, Laura and Olivia to the meeting following their presentation at the Community, Culture and Emergency Services SPC in December. He also welcomed Laura Bennett, Lead Contact for Comhairle in Offaly County Council and Hazel Daly, Comhairle Coordinator from Offaly Local Development Company.

He noted the importance of Comhairle na nÓg as it gives young people a voice in the development of local services and policies and allows their input into the decision making that affects their lives.

In 2023 the Comhairle na nÓg members put in a significant amount work into chosen topic – ‘Disability’. Members liaised with Offaly County Council IS Department, Offaly Libraries, Offaly PPN and ODEN (Offaly Disability Equality Network) among others. They successfully increased awareness and understanding of disability in all forms through workshops designed for schools, interviewing people with a disability for a podcast and designing a bookmark.

He highlighted that this year the group are focusing on Mental Health as their topic and are in the early stages of formulating their work action plan. They are being supported by the Steering Committee, which is made up of a number of representatives from relevant agencies and organisations including County Councillors and Local Authority Staff.

Cllr. J. Clendennen acknowledged the value of the input and views of young people on development of relevant services and policies and he looked forward to continuing to link in with Comhairle members on what is important to them.

LAMA Awards

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, Cathaoirleach joined with the members in congratulating the VEX Robotics programme on their win in the LAMA awards for Best Communications Initiative and Innovation Award. He noted the LAMA awards recognise and celebrate community and councils working together and the submission was chosen as it made the most significant communications innovation for a local product or service during the previous year.

He acknowledged the work and dedication of the staff in the Council’s ICT department and Offaly Libraries and the collaboration with Munster Technological University, Local Enterprise Office Offaly, Offaly County Council Library Service, and Engineering & Information Technology Departments. He highlighted other partners including Primary and Post Primary Schools in Offaly, Department of Rural and Community Development, Department of Education and Skills & Professional Development Service for Teachers, Offaly Local Development Company, as well as Athlone and Laois Education Centres.

Ms. A. Delaney joined with the members in congratulating VEX Robotics on their achievement. She noted that this project will ensure that students are qualified for the jobs of tomorrow, she acknowledged the role of the teachers and parents and staff and STEM innovators, including Ray, Dean in ICT and Offaly Libraries Staff including Jackie, Megan, supported by Thomas Mawe, A/DOS.

IFA Protest

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick acknowledged the presence of the IFA before the meeting to highlight the issues in relation to Agriculture, in particular the Nature Restoration Law and he called on members to support them.

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 15 January 2024.

2. Minutes for Noting

The members noted the minutes of the meetings listed below:

- Minutes of the Housing Strategic Policy Committee meeting held on 29 November 2023
- Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group meeting held on 11 December 2023

3. Audit Committee Annual Report 2023

Mr. P. Scully advised the members that the committee was supported and assisted in 2023 by Ms. Anna Marie Delaney Chief Executive, Mr. Thomas Mawe A/Head of Finance, the directorate, Mr. Barry Loughlin Head of Internal Audit & Ms Tammy Dunne Staff Officer and Mr. Colm Kelly.

Regarding the Annual Financial Statements, he welcomed the progress that has made over the last number of years in reducing the revenue deficit, despite the macroeconomic challenges faced by the Council and he urged the continuation of this process to its conclusion.

The committee met on 4 occasions and considered and received briefings on:

- Offaly County Council's Annual Financial Statement 2022
- Offaly County Council's Annual Report 2022
- Quarterly updates on Local Government Audit Service Statutory Auditor's Reports
- Quarterly updates on Internal Audit Plan progress
- Internal Audit Reports
- Internal Audit Recommendation Tracking System.
- Internal Audit Charter 2023
- Internal Audit Risk register
- Internal Audit Strategic Plan
- Audit Committee Annual Report 2022
- Internal Audit Plan for 2023/2024
- Audit Committee Work Plan 2023/24
- Offaly County Council's Public Spending Code Quality Assurance Report 2022
- Monthly Management Reports to Council

He noted that unfortunately, due to the complexity of the Cybersecurity Audit and the need to acquire an independent expert, the audit will need to be carried into the 2024 Audit Plan. Internal Audit also noted that while both the Midland Retrofitting Scheme and Greenway audits were completed the presentation of the reports was delayed due to the restructuring of the management team. These reports are on the agenda for the management team meeting in February and the first audit committee meeting in March 2024. At their meetings, the Committee received progress reports on the plan, and were kept informed of any deviations as they occurred throughout the year.

The Internal Audit unit completed both non-discretionary audits during the year; Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme audit and the Public Spending Code. As part of their work programme Internal Audit staff also reviewed the Internal Audit Charter, Internal Audit manual procedure and the IA functions compliance with the IIA standards set out by the Institute of Internal Auditors. The Function monitored the Internal Audit Risk Register which was shared and approved by the Audit Committee.

The Audit Committee considered the following Internal Audit Reports/reviews in 2023:

- SICAP 2022 Review
- Motor Tax stock Review
- Midland Retrofit Programme
- Greenway
- Development Contributions Review
- Follow up audits (LVP Cards, Burial Grounds, Cash audit & Machinery Yard)
- Public Spending Code Quality Assurance Report 2022
- Public Spending Code Quality Assurance In-depth Check Reports:
 - Revenue Programme – Roads – Homelessness Services
 - Capital Project – Clara/Raheen Housing Development

On the proposal of Cllr. N. Feighery, seconded by Cllr. L. Quinn the members resolved to adopt the Audit Committee Annual Report 2023.

Mr. P. Scully advised that the committee deliberated on the Annual Financial Statement and Local Government Auditor's Statutory Report 2022 and highlighted the following areas:

- Recommend provision for continued reduction of the deficit and urge the Elected Members to see the process through to its conclusion.
- Caution future running costs of associated companies and their potential financial exposure to Offaly County Council. They appreciate the significant positive impact they have on the wider community, Offaly County Council should ensure to adopt a prudent approach regarding funding so that there are no potential future impacts on the Councils Revenue budget.
- Concern with the level of unfunded capital balances, the committee noted that the Local Government Auditor has raised concerns that the unfunded balances may place strain on the finances of the council in the future. As such the audit committee would recommend that the management team discuss options regarding the clearance of such balances as detailed by the LGA.

On the proposal Cllr. D. Owens, seconded by Cllr. E. Dooley the members resolved to adopt the Annual Financial Statement and Local Government Auditor's Statutory Report 2022

On the proposal of Cllr. N. Cribbin, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey, the members resolved to adopt the Audit Committee Charter 2024.

Mr. P. Scully noted the Committee's term of office will finish in June with the council.

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Clendennen, seconded by Cllr. N. Cribbin the members resolved to adopt the Audit Committee Work Plan 2024.

Mr. T. Mawe acknowledged the progress on reducing the deficit. In relation to concerns regarding associated companies, he advised that these companies are subject to the provision of normal corporate governance and are operated on a commercial basis, with Offaly County Council members and staff being appointed to the boards. They are subject to annual external audit and all external regulatory requirements. Emerging risks are constantly monitored through the normal governance channels in these entities and are considered annually as part of the Offaly County Council audit. At present these companies are kept under constant review and no material risk has been identified in these companies that deliver very necessary public service.

In regard to unfunded capital balances he advised the balances are a mix of historic land acquisitions for housing and industrial development uses and are being constantly monitored for development potential. The value of these will have decreased in the 2023 AFS, as assets are partially developed or disposed of. It is hoped that the full value of these can be recovered in time, but this may be uncertain in some cases. He thanked the committee for their work.

Cllr. L. Quinn sought an update on the re-valuations for commercial rates.

In response Mr. T. Mawe informed the members that Tailte Éireann is the state agency providing state valuation service and that while there is a backlog, revaluation interactions are improving.

4. Presentation – Youthwork Funding, Laois Offaly Education & Training Board

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, Cathaoirleach joined with Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive in welcoming Ms. Linda Tynan, Director of Schools (including Youth and Music), Mr. Joe Thompson, Youth Development Officer, Ms. Ailbhe Enraght-Moony, Resource Worker Youth Services, Laois and Offaly Education Training Board, LOETB to the meeting.

Ms. L. Tynan thanked the members and the executive for the opportunity to speak at the meeting and she acknowledged the long history of partnership with Offaly County Council. She outlined the statistics from census showing that youth work in Offaly is under funded. She highlighted that Laois /Offaly are the lowest funded Education Training Board for young people in 2021. She is asked for support from the members to highlight that universal youth work is significantly underfunded and in order to provide a base of open-access universal services to all children, from which targeted services can grow, funding needs to be significantly increased.

Ms. A. Enraght-Moony outlined the two streams of funding that are currently available- Local Youth club grant scheme and UBU (your place your space). She advised members on the population breakdown, diversity figures and the spread of funding across the county.

Mr. J. Thompson informed the members that Offaly has a very high youth population and the Youth Work Act 2001 states that:

“A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary involvement, and which is

complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations”

He noted that youth work is above all an educational and developmental process, based on young people’s active and voluntary participation and commitment. It is often defined as ‘non-formal education’. Youth work is for all young people, with particular focus on those aged 10 to 25 from all aspects of Irish life, urban, rural, all nationalities and social classes. He stressed that youth work is provided primarily by voluntary organisations, with statutory support from the Department of Education and Skills and the Education and Training Boards.

He outlined the values of youth work and the challenges facing young people. He advised the members that young people have clearly articulated the need for youth-focused spaces, mental health services, access to transport and choices of activities within their community. He highlighted the gaps in services and the LOETB goals and priorities to increase capacity for UBU Funded projects by 50%.

Ms. L. Tynan requested the members support to seek more funding and to highlight that Offaly and Laois have one of the highest levels of youth population in the country, one of the highest levels of diversity and the lowest levels of funding and UBU projects of all ETBs. She advised that they have met with local Oireachtas members to make them aware of the issues regarding youth funding and are attending Laois and Offaly County Council meetings to present details of the Youth Work Plan. They have written to Minister Roderick O’ Gorman and have met with the Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth senior staff. She advised the members that the funding model is being reviewed and she stressed that services are over reliant on volunteers.

The members thanked the LOETB for their presentation and voiced their shock and concerns at the poor level of funding. Cllr. L. Quinn noted as an employee of LOETB, he knows that engagement is vital and there is a good network of people in LOETB that work hard at keeping young people engaged to help them avail of opportunities. He highlighted the value of having the construction skill centre in Mountlucas.

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Carroll, seconded by Cllr. N. Feighery the members agreed to write to the Minister of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to voice their shock to learn that while Offaly had the highest youth population, the highest level of diversity in the country, the county has the lowest level of funding and UBU projects of all the ETB’s in the country and to request that the Minister use the powers of his office to address this imbalance in the immediate future.

5. Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) - Section 37E(4) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) - -- Cush Wind Limited

Mr. A. Murray advised the members that as per the Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) - Section 37E(4) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) - Cush Wind Limited application, it is a requirement to present and seek views of the members to submit to An Bord Pleanala. He acknowledged the work of Ms. Una McCafferkey with applicant.

He outlined that the application is to construct 8 turbines, approximately 4k from Birr consisting of 10 year build and 35 year operation plan. He advised the members that it is recommended to seek further information in regard to roads, cumulative visual impact, noise and community gain funding.

The members queried had I-LOFAR, Birr been consulted in relation to the application. They raised concerns that developers are not adhering to planning conditions to re-instate roads appropriately following works and with end of life requirements for wind farms. They sought clarification on the community gain funding.

Mr. A. Murray advised the members that I-LOFAR has submitted a report to the developer, they may make a submission directly to An Bord Pleanala. He noted the issues with roads, however several bonds will be attached to the conditions to ensure roads are repaired and maintained. He advised that the developer funds any adaptations required for roundabouts and is subject to a road opening licence for these works. He noted that Community Gains funding is not index linked, but this point can be brought up when the guidelines are being reviewed. He informed the members that they met with SEAI in June 2023 to explore ways to pool community gain to invest in better projects. He advised that in relation to end of life, a lot of wind turbines are re-powered.

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Clendennen, seconded by Cllr. J. Carroll, the members resolved to adopt the Chief Executive recommendations for the Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) - Section 37E(4) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) - Cush Wind Limited application, An Bord Pleanala reference number 318816-24. The CE's report was adopted subject to the following elected member recommendations which were passed as resolutions:

- That the near neighbourhood scheme would extend to 2 kilometres as opposed to the 1km that was specified in the EIAR.
- An Bord Pleanala should ensure that the proposed development would not impact on the I-LOFAR telescope in Birr Castle Demesne and it was recommended by the members that an Bord Pleanala contact the operators of i-lofar to confirm this.

6. Taking in Charge of Estates - Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended and Section 11 of the Roads Act, 1993

On the proposal of Cllr. N Feighery seconded by Cllr. S. O'Brien the members resolved to adopt the Taking in Charge of Estates - Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended and Section 11 of the Roads Act, 1993 for the estates:

- Frankford Park, Kilcormac
- Limefield, Tullamore
- Glenkeen, Tullamore

7. Climate Action Plan - Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021

Mr. T. Shanahan advised the members that following public consultation and review of submissions, the Climate Action Plan Climate Action, under the Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 is required by to be adopted 23 April 2024.

Mr. J. McNally informed the members that following 18 months of work, the plan showcases 6 pillars of the National Plan and 16 out of 17 UN sustainable development goals, omitting no. 14 as it relates

to marine. He highlighted the Offaly Community Climate Action Fund of €444,000 (phase 1 over 18 months), covering 5 themes of Community & Energy, Travel, Food & Waste, Shopping & Recycling and Local Climate & Environmental Action. The funding is 100% for projects and applications close on 6 March 2024. He noted that information events were organised in person & on-line to assist potential applicants.

The members welcomed the plan and they queried if local organisations/ communities are aware of the funding available and they sought clarification on EV infrastructure plans.

In response Mr. J. McNally advised that Public Participation Network have provided details of groups that the Climate Team liaise with. The Transportation section is currently developing their EV structure plan, a submission has been made by the Climate Action Team and the Climate Action Plan will be considered in the EV plan.

On the proposal of Cllr. T. McCormack, seconded by Cllr. M. Hackett, the members resolved to adopt the Climate Action Plan 2024-2029.

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, Cathaoirleach stated that Pursuant to the provisions of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 as it amends the principle Act of 2015, Offaly County Council resolves to adopt the Offaly County Council Climate Action Plan 2024-2029, having considered the draft plan, the contents of the Chief Executives report on submissions received during the period of consultation and the SEA and AA Reports and determinations, carried out in accordance with the requirements and regulatory provisions of the SEA Directive (DIR 2001/42/EC) and Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC).

8. Arts Act Grant 2024

Ms. A. Dillon updated the members on the Arts Act Grant 2024. She informed the members that the grant offers support for a range of arts activity and practice within the community context and following a call for applications the Arts office received 19 application with total allocation of €19,966.

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Harvey, seconded by Cllr. T. McCormack the members resolved to adopt the recommended awards:

	Organisation/Artist	Proposal	MD	Recommended
1	Avista – Riverview Resources	Visual Art Project	Birr	765
2	Banagher Drama Group	Drama Project	Birr	1,200
3	Colaiste Naomh Cormac	Drama Project	Birr	1,600
4	Coolderry Central School	Dance Project	Birr	756
5	Crinkill N.S.	Musical Performance	Birr	1,400
6	Dochas Offaly	Visual Art Project	Whole County	1,400
7	Eden Chorale	Choral Performances	Edenderry	1,400
8	Gemini Players	Drama Musical Theatre	Edenderry	1,600
9	Irish Midlands Youth Orchestra	Musical Performance	Whole County	1,380

10	Irish Wheelchair Association	Music Programme	Whole County	1,000
11	Killeigh Comhaltas	Music Support	Tullamore	1,000
12	Midland Strings	Music Project	Whole County	1,190
13	Nomad Players	Drama	Whole County	N/E
14	Co Offaly Federation ICA	Visual Art Project	Whole County	480
15	Rahan Drama Group	Drama	Tullamore	1,200
16	Red Embers	Dance	Whole County	420
17	St Brendan's Community School	Animation	Birr	500
18	St Brendan's PS Birr	Dance	Birr	875
19	Tullamore Musical Society	Musical Performance	Tullamore	1,800

9. 2023 Annual Report of Offaly Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)

Ms. A. Dillon advised the members that under Section 128B of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) is required to prepare, adopt and submit an Annual Report to the Local Authority no later than 31 March each year in respect of the performance of its functions in the previous calendar year. She acknowledged the co-operation and contribution of all parties in relation to the delivery of initiatives which led to many successful achievements as outlined:

- Offaly Local and Community Development Committee continues to be a leading performer in delivering nationally funded programmes.
- To date under the LEADER Rural Development Programme 2014-2022 Offaly LCDC has approved projects in excess of €8.8 million.
- Offaly LCDC approved LEADER projects totalling €128,350.80 in 2023.
- The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) delivered a strong and focused programme engaging with local community groups and individuals from disadvantaged communities across the County. SICAP in Offaly has continued to provide support to original target groups while adapting to address crisis related concerns and delivering the Ukrainian response programme.
- The Community Response Forum reconvened in March 2022 and has met regularly throughout 2023 to coordinate the community-led response in the provision of assistance and support to Ukrainian refugees as they are accommodated around the county.
- Approval and implementation of the Community Support Fund in the sum of €283,843.
- Approval and implementation of the Community Recognition Fund in the sum of €636,206.

The members thanked Ms. A. Dillon and noted the details of the 2023 Annual LCDC Report.

10. Housing Presentation

Ms. M. Cleary updated the members on the social housing statistics and she advised that Offaly County Council are working closely with Sophia Housing in their development of Clonamore Hotel to provide 17 professionally supported beds for homeless services. She noted Peter McVerry Trust continue to support individuals allocated to Housing First units and Offaly County Council have appointed Homeless HAP Place Finder & Homeless Prevention & Support Officer.

She advised that work in relation to Estate Management continues following the adoption of the Anti Social Behaviour Strategy in 2020 and a number of cases are being progressed through the Courts. She noted that works are continuing under the Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022 – 2027 adopted plan. Offaly County Council avails of assistance from a Mental Health Tenancy Support Worker for the Midlands Homeless Region (HAIL) working across midland region for those that have been allocated a house and Offaly Healthy Age Friendly Homes Local Coordinator is due to start in March 2024.

In relation to Domestic Violence Support, 3 Safe Homes have been delivered. Offaly County Council continue to progress with delivery of Traveller Accommodation Plan 2019 – 2024 and a Traveller Tenancy Support Officer has been appointed. The Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025 – 2029 Draft Programme is to be developed by May / June 2024 and will be submitted to members by October and to be adopted by the end of 2024.

She outlined the current housing stock totalling 2,110 and advised the members on the figures for Pre-Letting / Voids , Tenant Purchase Scheme 2022 and Housing Loans and Grants. She highlighted the Online Survey to inform Council's position, determine potential interest and, if appropriate, make application to Department for inclusion in the Affordable Housing Programme and noted there are no properties currently available under the Scheme.

Mr. J. Cunningham updated the members on the Housing for All Delivery Action Plan 2022-2026 and he noted that the targets set out should be exceeded by 2026. He advised the members that 99 new homes provided via Turnkey 2021-2024 and following further advertisement they hope to continue delivery under this scheme. He noted that due to increase in construction more Part V are becoming available for Offaly County Council. He outlined housing schemes under construction, including Raheen, Clara and Sr. Senan, Edenderry. He noted the Approved Housing Bodies continue to provide a supply line, such as Jacksons Hill, Tullamore. He provided the members with updates on Retrofit & upgrade projects and on the Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme.

The members commended the housing team for their work and they acknowledged the challenges faced on a daily basis in providing housing services. They sought clarification on the timeline to re-allocate vacant houses and raised concerns about security of tenure for HAP tenants and that homeless figures are under estimated. Further clarification was sought on the roads infrastructure for Raheen, Clara, Ballycumber and the reduction in bedrooms for a CPO house in Ballycumber. They welcomed the survey for Affordable Housing and highlighted the work of Lann Elo in Tullamore. They sought more support for housing grants and for tenants with notice to quit.

The members sought details of the Croí Connaithe scheme, development of Collins Lane and the acquisition of more land. They welcomed the provision of safe houses for domestic violence supports.

Mr. J. Cunningham confirmed that Offaly County Council is actively working with AHB in relation to Collins Lane and this will be the next large project for Tullamore. He advised that the response to

requests for the acquisition of land was disappointing, but further advertising may be undertaken. He noted the turn around times for vacant properties varies due to different reasons and some are identified for retrofitting . The lack of contractors is a factor that may be improved by widening the scope for vacant properties and DPGs. In relation to Raheen, some safety measures have been undertaken at the junction where the scheme is being built and the bedroom in the CPO house in Ballycumber had to be reduced as one bedroom was in very poor condition.

Ms. M. Cleary advised that HAP is regarded as housing support and HAP tenants are included in the social housing allocation process. She highlighted HAP finder is of huge benefit and homeless prevention and support Officer is now appointed. This will assist in keeping records of how many are presenting as homeless and identifying trends. She acknowledged that the medical form for DPGs requires two medical signatures but that most applicants attend a GP and consultant. She confirmed Housing are working with Lann Elo to provide six units for emergency accommodation and in relation to notice to quit, where at all possible Offaly County Council try to acquire these houses.

Ms. M. Cleary advised that the Croí Connaithe scheme is managed by the Regeneration section and they will provide an update to the members at a subsequent meeting. She noted that a lot of work is carried out on private grants, but funding is an issue and she looked forward to the appointment of an Age Friendly Support Officer in March.

Mr. T. Shanahan noted the members concerns with the junction at Raheen and that it needs to be assessed, some minor works carried out have reduced accidents in the last few years.

11. Offaly County Council Road Safety Plan 2023-2030

Mr. T. Shanahan brought the members attention to the Offaly County Council Road Safety Plan 2023-2030 based on the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030. It has a new ambition at its core, guiding Offaly towards 'Vision Zero'. Vision Zero, will be delivered by the Safe System approach, it is a long-term goal aimed at eradicating road traffic deaths and serious injuries by 2050 and to half by 2030.

He advised the members that Offaly have been approved one of four fully funded road safety officer funded by TII.

12. Just Transition

Mr. A. Murray advised the members that a meeting with Minister Simon Coveney had taken place in January and the items below were raised with the minister.

- Lack of post peat high order employment – The minister responded he will discuss with cabinet and he advised OCC to be proactive in dialogue with IDA
- Land Use plan for Bord na Mona
- Falling level of services in towns/villages
- Renewables, peat lands rewetting, amenities
- Community benefits fund – looking for model for more enduring projects, BNM said they would engage
- Briefing on proposed energy park in Rhode
- More support for larger community energy projects
- Recreation strategy for BnM lands and detailed briefing

- Roads on peat extraction
- Long term ownership of energy sites

In response the members raised concerns about the Just Transition funding for trails, degeneration of Lough Boora and location and funding of €10m for the recently announced Bord na Mona Peatlands Centre.

On the proposal of Cllr. F. Moran, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey, the members agreed to suspend Standing Orders to continue the meeting after 6pm.

Cllr. F. Moran sought support from Offaly County Council for the OLDC and Lemanaghan group to seek assistance from Bord na Mona for a feasibility study for their project before end April 2024. Cllr. L. Quinn highlighted the public consultation for Derrygreenagh and encouraged people to make submissions.

In response Mr. A. Murray advised that the proposed trails are in line with the Midland Cycling Route. He agreed the trails will provide a high quality loop that will require significant maintenance and he will advise further when the full details of the trails become available. He noted the Bord na Mona Peatlands development will require planning permission and the proposed site is in close proximity to Lough Boora, Shannonbridge and Clonmacnoise and so should benefit Offaly Tourism. He acknowledged that he has received the brochure for the Lemanaghan project and has raised it with Bord na Mona.

Ms. A. Delaney advised that a meeting Bord na Mona at executive level had taken place and Offaly County Council are involved in several working groups. She advised that there have been significant staff changes at Bord na Mona but there is engagement with them.

13. Monthly Management Report

Ms. A. Delaney brought the members attention to the monthly management report. She welcomed the Regeneration funding to purchase the co-op building in Clara as part of the town centre master plan, more details to be provided at the next meeting. She noted an overview of the Town and Village Renewal projects are included in the report. She welcomed the progression of the Banagher Marina masterplan and Edenderry Phase 2. She advised the Derrycastle 10 year plan is due of completion end of Quarter 1 2024.

She highlighted the upcoming Local Enterprise Week and Student Enterprise Awards. She welcomed the adoption of the Climate Action plan at today's meeting and the shortlisting of Offaly County Council for Green Public Sector Organisation Awards 2024. She noted the Environment section received 79 complaints in January and its unacceptable that huge resources that are required in this area. She highlighted the introduction of the new national deposit refill scheme.

14. Corporate Policy Group Report

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick informed the members that at the Corporate Policy Group meeting the Council meeting agenda was discussed. On the proposal of Cllr. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey the members approved the upcoming St. Patricks trip to New York by the Cathaoirleach and Chief Executive.

15. Notices of Motion

On the proposal of Cllr. M. Hackett, seconded by Cllr. C. Claffey, the members resolved that Offaly County Council moves to paper free communications with exception for those without access to email or where a paper response is requested or legally required.

Several members voiced their concerns as they felt that Offaly County Council already conduct business recycling and a large amount of correspondence is now issued electronically where possible.

In response Ms. A. Dillon advised that the last two council terms have operated paperless meetings through Decision Time and this has resulted in huge reductions in paper usage. Also internal communication is paperless, planning has moved to electronic applications and funding for LEO and grants are online. Offaly County Council provide 130 services and will continue to progress with digitisation, subject to resources.

Ms. A. Delaney confirmed that digitisation is in Offaly County Council work programme for 2024.

16. Comhdhálacha / Conferences

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Harvey, seconded by Cllr. C. Claffey, the members approved the conferences and training as circulated.

17. Comhfhreagras / Correspondence

The members noted the correspondence on the agenda. Cllr. J. Carroll expressed his disappointment with the unacceptable response from the Israel Embassy.

18. Any Other Business

Cllr. C. Claffey expressed her disappointment that the HSE refused to meet with Offaly County Council to discuss the loss of respite beds in the nursing home in Birr and the closure of the register office in Tullamore. She highlighted the work of home carers saving the millions for the state.

MINUTES CONFIRMED

CATHAOIRLEACH

RUNAÍ

25 March 2024

