

Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Offaly County Council

Held on 21 October 2024 at 2.00pm, in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road,
Tullamore and via Teams

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

Present

Cllr. Tony McCormack, Cathaoirleach

Bryant, Ollie	Maher, Sean
Clendennen, John	Masterson, Aoife
Egan, Hugh	McDonnell, Fergus
Feighery, Neil	Moran, Frank
Fitzpatrick, Eddie	Murray, Claire (SF)
Harvey, Declan	Murray-Smale, Claire (FF)
Hennessy-Kennedy, Audrey	O'Brien, Sean
Leahy, John	Ormond, Peter
	Quinn, Liam

Apologies

Cllr. N. Cribbin

Officials in Attendance

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S.; Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S.; Ms. F. Millane, D.O.F.; Ms. J. Ryan, A/D.O.S.; Mr. A. Murray, A/D.O.S.; Ms. A. Pedlow, H.O.; Ms. D. Hunt, A/S.E.O.; Mr. J. Cunningham, S.E.; Ms. L. Giles, A/S.E.O. Meetings Administrator; Mr. G. Bruton, A.O; Ms. L. Carbery, C.O.

Votes of Sympathy

Votes of sympathy were unanimously extended to the following:

Mrs. Mona Caulfield and the Caulfield Family, High Street, Belmont, on the death of her husband Kieran.

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. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. F. Moran, the members resolved to adopt the minutes of the Ordinary meeting of Offaly County Council held on Monday 16 September 2024.

2. Minutes for Noting

The Members noted the minutes of the Corporate Policy Group meeting held on Monday 8 July 2024.

3. Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended, Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 as Amended, Birr Courthouse – Howley Hayes Cooney Architects

On the proposal of Cllr. P. Ormond, seconded by Cllr. J. Leahy, the members agreed that the development of Birr Courthouse proceed as set out in the Chief Executive's Report presented to them and in accordance with Planning and Development Act 2000 (as Amended), Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

4. Planning and Development Act 2000 (as Amended), Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) - Clara Bus Stops and Shelter

On the proposal of Cllr. F. Moran, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey, the members resolved in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as Amended), Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) to proceed with the proposed development of Clara Bus Stops and Shelter with amendment to re-locate the proposed bus shelter away from outside Mr. Kelly's property. The new position of the proposed shelter will be sited outside / opposite the property of the St., Brigids Parish Centre building, also on Church Street.

5. Planning and Development Act 2000 (as Amended), Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) - Bury Bridge New Road Layout

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Harvey, seconded by Cllr. S. O'Brien, the members resolved in accordance with Planning and Development Act 2000 (as Amended), Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) to proceed with the proposed development of Bury Bridge New Road Layout.

6. Planning and Development Act 2000 (as Amended), Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) - Coxes Bridge New Road Layout

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Harvey, seconded by Cllr. S. O'Brien, the members resolved in accordance with Planning and Development Act 2000 (as Amended), Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) to proceed with the proposed development of Coxes Bridge New Road Layout.

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

On the proposal of Cllr. N. Feighery, seconded by Cllr. S. O'Brien, the members resolved in accordance with Section 11 of the Roads Act 1993 and Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended to proceed with the Taking in Charge of Estates - Carriglea, Tullamore.

8. Bank Overdraft Facility 2025

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, the members resolved to approve the Bank Overdraft Facility 2025 for €15m.

On the proposal of Cllr. O. Bryant, seconded by Cllr. N. Feighery, the members resolved to approve continued terms and conditions applicable to the term loan facility with AIB in respect of Tullamore Swimming Pool.

On the proposal of Cllr. N. Feighery, seconded by Cllr. C. Murray Smale, the members resolved to approve Anna Marie Delaney, Chief Executive and Fiona Millane, Director of Finance, as joint authorised signatories in respect of any authorities, documents or instructions that is applicable to the term loan facility with AIB in respect of Tullamore Swimming Pool.

9. Housing Presentation

Ms. D. Hunt, A/S.E.O. provided the members with a presentation on Housing Services. She outlined the current data for social housing support and allocations for 2024. She provided information for homeless services, estate management, disability and domestic violence supports. She updated the members on the Traveller Accommodation Programme, housing loans and grants and the Tenant Purchase Scheme 2024.

Mr. J. Cunningham, S.E. informed the members the current Offaly County Council housing stock stands at 2,161 units. He provided a breakdown of the Housing for All (new build) figures and highlighted that the overall target will be exceeded by 2026. He outlined the statistics for the various schemes including Turnkey Developments, Construction, Part V houses and Approved Housing Bodies. He informed the members on the Energy Efficiency Retrofit programme, noting that careful selection of units is required and to ensure a mix of high and low cost units to ensure an average of €34,000 per unit is achieved. He confirmed 37 units will be completed by 2024, this exceeds the target by 9 units. He updated the members on existing measures to provide affordable housing, including home loans, First Home Scheme, Help to Buy scheme and Affordable Purchase Scheme. He welcomed the provision of grants through Croí Conaithe and SEAI grants.

The members acknowledged the challenges that are faced by the Housing section and thanked all staff for their great work. They welcomed the progress that has been made in providing housing in the last few years and in particular the recent developments at Raheen, Clara and Beechwood Court, Daingean. They called for more focus on smaller towns and villages, dereliction and investment in infrastructure.

They sought clarity on expressions of interest for land/properties, affordable housing and retrofitting. Cllr. A. Masterson stated the targets are not high enough and she requested a quarterly report on housing services. Cllr. J. Leahy welcomed the domestic violence support units that have recently been provided. The members agreed more land is required to zone for housing. They sought further clarification on the retrofit figures for 2024 and an update on Clonamore House.

In response to the members queries, Ms. J. Ryan, A/D.o.S. agreed to look at providing more reports at Offaly County Council and Municipal District level. She advised that housing continue to liaise with Offaly Domestic Violence and Support Services and Cuan to provide further supports in this area. She confirmed that housing staff continue to work with Midlands Region Statutory Management Group, Sophia Housing, the Dept and HSE, to ensure adequate staff and resources are available to facilitate the safe opening of Clonamore House for homeless clients.

Mr. J. Cunningham clarified that the retrofit target for 2024 was 28 units. However, a further 9 units will also be completed in 2024. Approval has been sought from the Department to include the extra units for 2024, if this is not successful, they will be integrated into 2025 targets.

He noted that housing projects have been carried out in many towns and villages such as Walsh Island, Shinrone, Ferbane and Bracknagh. He acknowledged that land is required within the zoning infrastructure and previous expressions of interest for land did not get a great response.

He advised that Under the Affordable Purchase Scheme local authorities will make newly built homes (through Turnkey or Part V) available at a reduced price for first-time buyer, there will be a clawback in place if the property is sold before a certain time. This scheme can only be offered in towns over population of 10k, a survey is being carried out in Tullamore to investigate the scope for this scheme. Progress is being made on dereliction and staff are working closely with the vacant homes officer and Regeneration team.

Ms. D. King called on the members to stress the importance to social housing applicants of choosing the right area on their housing application. She noted allocation of properties are in accordance with scheme of letting priorities. She highlighted that a huge body of work has been carried out by housing staff to capture information on disability needs in the county, in line with the Housing Strategy for Disabled People.

Ms. A. Delaney acknowledged work of housing team, noting it is the most challenging area providing a range of supports through many schemes. She further acknowledged Ms. J. Ryan who is taking up a Directorate in Westmeath and thanked her for time as Director of Housing and Integration. The members joined with the Chief Executive in wishing Ms. Ryan well in her new role.

10. Election/Nomination/Appointment to Strategic Policy Committees

Ms. L. Giles, Meetings Administrator, noted that the members had adopted the Strategic Policy Committee Scheme at the September meeting.

Ms. Giles advised that Chambers Ireland had forwarded nominations for participation on the SPCs as follows: -

- Gerard McIntyre to the Housing & Integration Policy SPC
- Dominic Doheny to the Economic Development, Planning and Regeneration Policy SPC

- Seán Campbell to the Climate Action Transport and Environment Policy SPC
- Fergus Molloy to the Climate Action Transport and Environment Policy SPC

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Clendennen, seconded by Cllr. O. Bryant, the Chambers Ireland nominees were agreed by the members.

The Irish Farmers Association had forwarded nominations for participation on the SPCs as follows: -

- Joe Daly to the Economic Development, Planning and Regeneration Policy SPC
- Enda Bracken to the Climate Action Transport and Environment Policy SPC
- Marita Phelan to the Community, Culture and Emergency Services Policy SPC

On the proposal of Cllr. O. Bryant, seconded by Cllr. H. Egan, the Irish Farmers Association nominees were agreed by the members.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions had forwarded nominations for participation on the SPCs as follows:-

- Alan Lindley to the Economic Development, Planning and Regeneration Policy SPC
- Brendan McInerney to the Climate Action Transport and Environment Policy SPC

On the proposal of Cllr. P. Ormond, seconded by Cllr. S. Maher, the Irish Congress of Trade Union nominees were agreed by the members.

The Public Participation Network (PPN) had forwarded nominations for participation on the SPCs as follows: -

- Frances Kawala to the Housing & Integration Policy SPC
- Stephen Keogh to the Housing & Integration Policy SPC
- Bernie Henry to the Economic Development, Planning and Regeneration Policy SPC
- Anna Orman to the Economic Development, Planning and Regeneration Policy SPC
- Linda Dowling to the Climate Action Transport and Environment Policy SPC
- Mary Delaney to the Climate Action Transport and Environment Policy SPC
- Linda Kelly to the Community, Culture and Emergency Services Policy SPC
- Karen Boylan to the Community, Culture and Emergency Services Policy SPC
- Breda Colgan to the Community, Culture and Emergency Services Policy SPC

She advised members that one final nominee will be brought to the Council for approval at the November meeting.

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. A. Hennessy Kennedy, the Public Participation Network nominees were agreed by the members.

11. Monthly Management Report

Ms. A. Delaney brought the Members attention to the October monthly management report. She welcomed the launch of the Age Friendly Recognition & Achievement Awards with two Offaly projects shortlisted for the National Awards to be announced on 7th November 2024. The Offaly Older Persons Council was shortlisted for a Community Felting Project in the Community Development category and Oaklee Housing Association was shortlisted for its age friendly housing development at Ashfield, Clonminch.

She welcomed the opening of the newly refurbished Killeigh Community Centre by Minister at the Department of Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys and the official opening of the Grand Canal Greenway by the Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Mr. James Lawless. She acknowledged the success of the various events that took place on Culture Night. She noted that the financial report is set out and is on target for Quarter 3 2024. The library, roads and all services are outlined in the full report.

12. Corporate Policy Group Report

Cllr. T. McCormack informed the Members that at the Corporate Policy Group meeting the Council meeting agenda was discussed, including the hosting of civic receptions. They received a presentation from Finance on the upcoming budget and met with Oireachtas members before the meeting.

13. Notices of Motion

Cllr. T. McCormack

"That Offaly County Council reviews the Offaly Older People and Disabled Persons Grant Scheme, to examine alternative sources of funding to increase the budget and to develop a feedback/communication system to keep applicants informed. Furthermore, that Offaly County Council explore the feasibility of partnering with a local financial institution to create a community fund. This fund would provide financial support to eligible homeowners awaiting their grants, helping to reduce delays in essential home adaptations for older persons and people with disabilities."

This motion was seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey

Cllr. T. McCormack informed the members that he proposed this motion to find solutions to the backlog, lack of funds and to improve communication with applicants for the Offaly Older People and Disabled Persons Grant Scheme.

A discussion took place, most members agreed that it is important to improve the provision and timeline for the older and disabled persons grants, but they felt that more consultation should be sought for the proposal. It was acknowledged that there are many constraints including costs and lack of contractors in the provision of the grants.

Ms. A. Masterson stated that underlying problems are not being addressed and she did not agree that the onus should be on the community to source funding. She proposed to write to Central Government to seek adequate funding to meet the demands for older and disabled persons grants and to stress to Government that the current situation is unacceptable.

In response the members noted that previous communications for funding had not provided a solution and it would be preferable to bring the motion to the Housing and Integration SPC to investigate their options.

Ms. J. Ryan confirmed that the housing team had delivered €1.7 in grants and they continue to work with the finance section to increase funding in the overall context of the budget. She agreed to refer the motion to the next meeting of the Housing and Integration SPC.

14. Comhdhálacha / Conferences

The members noted the training and conferences as approved at CPG.

15. Comhfhreagras / Correspondence

The Members noted the correspondence that issued with the agenda.

16. Any Other Business

None

MINUTES CONFIRMED

CATHAOIRLEACH

RUNAÍ

18 November 2024

