



Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Offaly County Council
Held on 16th January 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. Mark Hackett
Cllr. Clare Claffey	Cllr. Declan Harvey
Cllr. John Clendennen	Cllr. John Leahy
Cllr. Noel Cribbin	Cllr. R. McDermott
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. Ken Smollen

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.; Ms. O. Martin, H. of LEO; Dr. S. O'Leary, Arts Officer; Dr. Colm Reilly OCO Global, Mr. Kilian Cawley, OCO Global; Mr. G. Bruton, Meetings Administrator; Mr. C. Kelly, S.O. and Ms. L. Carbery, C.O.

Votes of Sympathy

Votes of Sympathy were unanimously extended to the following:

Mrs. Connie Hanniffy, Doon Cross, Ballinhowan, on the death of her husband Kieran;

Mr. Leo Delaney and the Delaney Family, 36 Arden View, Tullamore, on the death of his wife Theresa;

Mr. Kieran Daly and the Daly Family, Banagher Street, Cloghan, on the death of his wife Sadie;

Mrs. Bridie Kenny, St. Conleth's Terrace, Carrick Road, Edenderry, on the death of her husband Eddie.

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. D. Harvey, seconded by Cllr. N. Feighery, the members resolved to adopt the Minutes of the Ordinary meeting of Offaly County Council held on Monday 12 December 2022.

2. Minutes for Noting

The members noted the following minutes:

- Minutes of the Housing Strategic Policy Committee held on 25 May 2022
- Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group Meeting held on 11 November 2022
- Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group Meeting held on 18 November 2022

3. Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2021

On the proposal of Cllr. N. Feighery, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey, the members resolved to adopt Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001 to sell Plot A 9.097 Acres in the amount of €454,850.00 and Plot B 10.41 Acres in the amount of €416,400.00, Clonminch, Tullamore to William Grant and Sons (Irish Manufacturing Ltd.)

4. Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2021

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Clendennen, seconded by Cllr. P. Ormond, the members resolved to adopt Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001 to dispose of land at Clareen and Tubrid to Liam Hynes and Michelle Houlden, Tubrid, Shinrone in the amount of €500 plus Offaly County Council legal fees.

5. Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001

On the proposal of Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, seconded by Cllr. N. Cribbin, the members resolved to adopt Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001 to lease the Old Fire Station building at Townspark, Daingean to Daingean Grand Canal Wheelers Cycling Club for 5 years at €1.00 per annum.

6. Offaly Draft Arts Infrastructure Strategy 2023 - 2028

Ms. S. Kennedy, D.O.S. advised the members that Ms. Sally O'Leary, Arts Officer, will provide a presentation on the Draft Arts Infrastructure Strategy and the final strategy will be brought to them for approval later in 2023. She acknowledged the importance of Arts in the county and the necessity to have strategic direction in order to access and target funding. She noted that Offaly County Council has invested significant sums in the Arts, currently in Esker Arts, Tullamore and the design costs for Edenderry Library and Arts Centre. She welcomed the collaboration with Bord Na Mona in relation to the Lough Boora Sculpture Park. The members joined with Ms. S. Kennedy in congratulating Ms. S. O'Leary, Arts Officer, on obtaining her doctorate degree.

In opening the presentation, Dr. S. O'Leary provided the members with the background to the Draft Strategy and she acknowledged the huge experience provided by the consultant Caoimhín Corrigan.

She advised the members that the Arts Office of Offaly County Council has within its remit, the role of supporting and developing a number of Arts Infrastructure organisations within the County. The goal of the County Offaly Arts Strategy 2018 – 2022, has been to:

‘Support the development of concepts and models for spaces, existing and potential that align with innovative art production and presentation, with local enterprise and civic engagement.’

The Draft Arts Infrastructure Strategy AIS seeks to build on that goal taking account of the current context for arts infrastructure locally and nationally. She highlighted the aim of the AIS is to feed into the overarching Arts Strategy of Offaly County Council and importantly to inform the next Arts Strategy which will be in development from early 2023. In addition, to develop a framework that will outline the objectives of Offaly County Council’s support to Arts Infrastructural organisations.

The AIS sought to consider the potential for the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre; Edenderry Library and Arts Space; Esker Arts; and Lough Boora Sculpture Park. She noted the approach to the strategy also included consultation with key people engaged with each of the four projects, including Offaly County Council staff, and staff from the Arts Council.

Dr. S. O’Leary outlined the range of policies and the considerations for each project and she noted a SWOT analysis of each project was also undertaken. She outlined the various considerations for each project.

She updated the members on the recommendations, including investment, the strategic and enabling role, the alignment with Arts council policy, a unified leadership role and establishment of a partnership initiative.

The members joined with Cllr. T. McCormack in thanking Dr. S. O’Leary for her comprehensive presentation. They agreed on the importance of having an Arts Infrastructure Strategy and the community, economic and revitalisation benefits it will bring. They acknowledged the work of staff, the board and the community over many years in finally bringing Esker Arts to Tullamore and Offaly. They welcomed the collaborative approach for all the Arts centres in Offaly and in particular for Lough Boora Sculpture Park.

7. Draft Offaly Economic Strategy and Action Plan

Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S. noted that the members have been briefed on the consultation process with OCO Global in 2022 and that broad consultation has taken place with industry, SMEs and other stakeholders, led by Ms. O. Martin, Head of LEO.

As chairperson for the Land Use, Planning and Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee, Cllr. E. Dooley welcomed Dr. Colm Reilly and Mr. Kilian Cawley, OCO Global, to the meeting and he thanked the LEO team and members of the SPC for their input to the strategy and action plan. He noted the strategy sets out 6 areas to focus on and the final strategy will come before council later in 2023.

Ms. O. Martin advised the members the strategy and action plan have been developed to re-evaluate, build resilience and to provide a road map for the county’s economic future.

Dr. Colm Reilly updated the members on the background analysis, noting that Offaly disposable income performance is stagnating compared to the national average. He highlighted the challenges around

workforce, education and attracting foreign direct investment. He noted that the indigenous/new companies are performing above the norm nationally; however, certain industries do not always reap huge economic benefits. He reported high levels of invention and innovation in the county. He noted that in all cases there was positive feedback from stakeholders about what Offaly County Council is doing, especially the LEO. Disparities are apparent in sectors where GVA could be increased. These sectors represent high-value, skilled jobs. Attracting employers and jobs in these sectors will help to increase GVA. From an overall place attractiveness perspective, County Offaly ranks low among Irish counties.

Dr. Colm Reilly outlined the results from Stakeholders and SWOT analysis. He noted that all stakeholders participated and they highlighted the strengths for Offaly including natural resources, cultural hub, accessibility, history of science and discovery, engineering experience, future clean energy opportunities and tourism.

He pointed out some of the weaknesses that were identified such as no third level institution in the county, lack of accommodation, no economic resilience, skill base out-dated and dependency on Bord Na Mona / ESB .

He outlined the opportunities and challenges for the county, including remote working, developing new industries, new roles for universities in regional development, dispersal of offices to locations where cost, time and quality meet, engineering core is a skill for the future if modified and applied correctly, Governance of all initiatives and engagement with the Diaspora.

He identified threats the county could face, with too many agencies with different plans & strategies and continued disconnect between parts of County Offaly.

He noted the stakeholders highlighted some key points including stakeholder collaboration, more emphasis on tourism, food and creativity and a more ambitious and confident mind-set.

He outlined the vision for the economic future for Offaly to become a national leader in the next 5 years and focus on Cleantech Enterprises, with national and international reputation for building and anchoring technology companies that address climate change across multiple sectors, enhance competitiveness and deliver sustainable prosperity. This is to support quality jobs and to attract investment into the county. This strategy and plan is to support the Irish and EU journey to net zero economy and to position Offaly as a leading centre for innovation. The activities of the plan are collaborative with industry, SMEs, Academia, investors and government. The three pillars of the strategy are to become a national leader in innovation and creativity, to take full advantage of our national connections and assets and to create stronger conditions for growth.

He outlined the roadmap for each sector and the need for all stakeholders to synchronise and galvanise with Offaly County Council as the fulcrum driven by the sectors such as Construction & Engineering, Medtech & Wellbeing, ICT & back office functions, including Big Data & Data Centres and Government Services Concierge.

The members joined with Cllr. T. McCormack in thanking Dr. Reilly for his comprehensive report and they agreed there are many positives that can be further developed. They welcomed the roadmap for the future economic development of the county. They queried if enough jobs will be created in the cleantech and energy generation industry. They voiced their concerns about education and the emigration of young people from the county.

Dr. Reilly outlined the job percentages solar, wind energy provide, and he stressed that although less jobs are created, they are better paid and more technical. This should provide better prospects for young people in the county and he reiterated that carbon neutral is the future. He noted that other industries will be attracted to data centres creating more spin off jobs. He advised that Offaly presents itself as self-contained and the county needs to look at being part of the midland region that can draw from many areas.

He noted that the hospital is a core part of pillar for health & wellbeing and a National/European project is due to start will be located in Tullamore. He noted the lack of third level education can be overcome with research projects led by a primary institutions, such as I-LOFAR in Birr in conjunction with Trinity College. He advised the members of the lack of infrastructure in rural areas of the county.

Ms. A. Delaney, C.E., thanked OCO Global and the LEO office for their work to date and the members for their feedback. She acknowledged the need for a plan of action, to identify niche areas and position Offaly nationally and internationally.

8. Draft Schedule of Meetings 2023

On the proposal of Cllr. N. Feighery, seconded by Cllr. J. Carroll, the members resolved to adopt the Schedule of Meetings 2023.

9. Draft Annual Service Delivery Plan

Mr. M. Connolly, H.O.F. informed the members that it is a requirement of Section 134a of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended by the Local Government Act 2014) to prepare an Annual Service Delivery Plan. This plan outlines the services Offaly County Council intends to provide for the year ahead.

Cllr. K. Smollen voiced his disappointment on the number of social housing units planned for construction by Offaly County Council.

Cllr. T. McCormack pointed out that other housing bodies will also provide housing and a full housing report will be presented at next meeting.

On the proposal of Cllr. E. Dooley, seconded by Cllr. J. Clendennen, the members resolved to adopt the Annual Service Delivery Plan 2023.

10. Just Transition

Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S., informed the members that EMRA had given permission to present the members with their update. She noted the adoption of the Programme and Plan by the Cabinet on 29 November 2022 and by the European Commission on 15 December 2022. She outlined the main features of the EU Just Transition Fund, with the new EU fund 2021-2027 as part of the EU cohesion policy “family”. This is to be delivered on the basis of a Programme and Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP). Irelands allocation is €84,5M and this is to be matched by the Exchequer totalling €169M. EMRA were appointed Managing Authority in December 2021.

She noted the objectives of the EU Just Transition Fund to support territories facing serious socio-economic challenges deriving from the transition towards a climate-neutral economy, and to provide support to actions listed as eligible in the EU JTF regulations. This will be closely aligned and focus on the most impacted Territory as identified in the Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)

She outlined the territory identified as the most impacted including all of Laois, Westmeath, Offaly, Longford and Roscommon and areas in Ballinasloe, Carrick on Suir, Thurles, Athy, Clane and Maynooth. She pointed out the other regions in Europe included in the EU JT fund. Ms. A. Dillon advised the members the Article 8 eligible actions prescribed in the EU JT Fund Plan are available for their information.

She noted the 3 Programme Priorities, 1. generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy, 2. supporting the restoration & rehabilitation of degraded peatlands & regeneration & repurposing of industrial heritage assets and 3. providing former peat communities with smart & sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition.

She outlined the further details for each programme as P1 Generating employment by diversifying the local economy (Approx. €87m), P2 Restoration of degraded peatlands and regeneration of industrial heritage assets (Approx. €57m) run by parklands, and P3 Smart and sustainable mobility options (Approx. €18.2m)

She updated the members on the next steps for the Plan:

- Further development of actions with Partners:
- Work with Fáilte Ireland, DAFM, Pobal, NPWS and Dept. of Transport to agree on parameters of actions, selection criteria, timeline and draft agreements with the MA
- Setting-up the Programme Monitoring Committee in Q1 2023
- Official launch of the Programme: Launch Event in Q1 2023
- Further development of EMRA's capacities as MA: management and control system, IT system, communications plan, evaluation strategy

She directed the members to information websites: EMRA: <https://emra.ie/eu-jtf/> with access to all relevant documents, Queries: eujtf@emra.ie and subscribe to the mailing list to receive future updates: <https://emra.ie/jft-subscribe/>

The members thanked her for her update and they sought clarity on the funding amounts available. They expressed concerns about Offaly position as the most impacted county due to de-carbonisation, the affordability of clean energy and electric vehicles, and the re-wetting of bog lands.

In response, Ms. A. Dillon agreed that a lot of clarity is still required, the fund should be viewed as an opportunity and the council is determined to engage with agencies in order to maximise the funding for Offaly's benefit.

11. Monthly Management Report

Ms. A. Delaney brought the members attention to the monthly management report. She welcomed the allocation of €1.2m under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and she highlighted the update on the improvement works for the Lloyd Town Park. She advised the members that the Road Works Programme is being prepared and will be reviewed at the Municipal Districts and then brought to the

full council. She welcomed the signing of the EU Mission Charter on Climate Adaptation. She acknowledged the volume of work carried out by the LEO and advised that the whitepaper on Enterprise released in December will expand the role of LEO to assist larger businesses. She informed the members of the community programmes, library services, finance and Chief Executive Orders updates in the report.

12. Corporate Policy Group Report

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

13. Notices of Motion

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Clendennen, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey, the members resolved “that Offaly County Council collaborate with all public transport agencies serving the county to identify locations and introduce Bus Stops and physical timetables and/or QR Codes at every Town & Village served with public transport, with the objective of encouraging greater public transport usage, improved safety and service for passengers, and reduced carbon emissions”.

Cllr. M. Hackett brought the members attention to his motion, “that Offaly County Councils accepts all of the recommendations of the Report of the Subgroup of the JPC on Safety of Women and Girls and all at risk of Gender Based Violence in Public Spaces and acts on those recommendations under their remit”. The motion was seconded by Cllr. Clare Claffey. In response, the members requested a presentation on this JPC report. Cllr. M. Hackett agreed to provide a presentation on the JPC report at the next meeting.

14. Comhdhálacha / Conferences

No training or conference reported for this meeting.

15. Comhfhreagras / Correspondence

The members noted the correspondence issued with the agenda.

16. Any Other Business

Cllr. K. Smollen raised concerns about the national ambulance service, Midoc, loss of Irish nurses to other countries and the lack of access to GPs

On the proposal of Cllr. K. Smollen, seconded by Cllr. S. O’Brien, the members agreed to write to the Minister of Health and the HSE requesting them to address their concerns.

MINUTES CONFIRMED:

CATHAOIRLEACH

RUNAÍ



20th February 2023