

Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Offaly County Council

Held on 19 May 2025 at 2.00pm, Birr Library, Birr Civic
Offices, Wilmer Road, Birr. In-Person only.

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

Present

Cllr. Audrey Hennessy Kennedy, Cathaoirleach	
Bryant, Ollie	Masterson, Aoife
Clendennen, Eleanor	McDonnell, Fergus
Cribbin, Noel	Murray, Shane
Egan, Hugh	Murray-Smale, Claire (FF)
Fitzpatrick, Eddie	Ormond, Peter
Leahy, John	Harvey, Declan
Maher, Sean	Quinn, Liam
O'Brien, Sean	

Apologies

Cllr. N. Feighery, Cllr. F. Moran, Cllr. C. Murray (SF)

Suspension of Standing Orders

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey, the Members resolved to suspend standing orders to allow the meeting to start later than the scheduled time.

Cllr. A. Hennessy Kennedy, Cathaoirleach, welcomed the Elected Members, her family and the media to Birr Library. She expressed gratitude to Offaly County Council staff, Ms. AM. Kelly and Library staff for their assistance in organising the meeting.

Officials in Attendance

Ms. AM. Delaney, Chief Executive; Ms. F. Millane, D.O.F.; Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S.; Mr. B. Lennon, A/D.O.S.; Mr. P. McLoughlin, D.O.S.; Mr. A. Murray D.O.S.; Mr. E. Fennell, S.E.O. Meetings Administrator; Ms. AM. Kelly, Administrative Officer; Ms. P. Hctor, S.E.O.; Ms. E. McGinn, County Librarian; Mr. D. Lillis, Executive Librarian; Mr. J. Cunningham, Senior Engineer; Ms. S. D'Arcy, Librarian; Ms. C. Dempsey, S.E.O.; Ms. O. Cummins, Town First Manager; Ms. J. O'Brien, Communications Officer; Ms. E. Sutton, C.O.; Ms. L. Watkins, C.O.

Votes of Sympathy

Votes of sympathy were unanimously extended to the following:

Cllr. P. Ormond, on his own behalf and on behalf of the Members of Offaly County Council, extended sympathy to Cllr. A. Hennessy Kennedy and the Browne Family on the sad passing of her cousin Natalie Browne, Demesne View, Birr, Co. Offaly.

1. Confirmation of Minutes

On the proposal of Cllr. F. McDonnell, seconded by Cllr. L. Quinn, the members resolved to adopt the minutes of the ordinary meeting of Offaly County Council held on Monday 28th April 2025.

2. Minutes for Noting

The Members noted the minutes of the meetings below:

- Minutes of Corporate Policy Group Meeting held on 10 March 2025.

3. Library Services Update Presentation

Ms. A. Dillon, Director of Services, welcomed members to Birr Library & Civic Offices in what was previously and historically known as St. John's Convent. She provided members with a brief history of the convent highlighting the following: The Convent was built by the Sisters of Mercy between 1846 and 1856. Founded under Catherine McAuley, the convent's establishment was influenced by Fr. Mathew to heal divisions from the Crotty Schism. The convent was built on land donated by the Earl of Rosse, with construction coinciding with the Irish Famine, and provided local employment. The neo-Gothic design was by architect Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin.

She outlined when Offaly County Council acquired and renovated the property in 1996, and opened the property in 2006 to house the library and civic offices. The renovation, designed by McCarthy O'Hara Architects, won awards in 2008 and 2009. She informed the Members of the project team which included key council members and architects, with restoration work by various contractors, including Emerald Stained Glass and Frank Murray & Sons.

She provided members with details of the library features including the Violet Doolin Room, named after the long-serving librarian, Violet Doolin. She detailed different displays the library houses including the Leinster Regiment Collection. Additionally, the library displays a facsimile of the MacRegol Gospel Book, a significant early medieval manuscript from the Birr monastery, highlighting the area's historical importance.

County Librarian, Ms. Eimear McGinn, welcomed attendees and expressed her pleasure in hosting the Offaly County Council meeting in Birr Library. She acknowledged the library staff's preparations, thanking Mr. D. Lillis, Executive Librarian, Ms. S. D'Arcy, Librarian, and Mr. D. McCabe. Ms. McGinn provided a detailed presentation on the programmes and activities of the Library Services.

She brought the Members attention to the Library Development Plan (Creating Space) that was adopted by council this time last year and she updated the Members on the work achieved in the first year of this plan.

Ms. McGinn noted the following in particular:

- Four My Open Library Branches with 8am – 10pm access, 365 days a year
- Three Sensory Offaly Spaces
- Offaly Archive Facility
- Virtual Tours Available for each library on offaly.ie/libraries
- Library Polices
- Grant Application Successes in 2024
- Community Engagement and Social Inclusion actions
- Highlights, Festivals and Events
- Local and National Collaborations
- Cultural Programmes, Right to Read and literacy events

She emphasised the work undertaken to improve Library access, facilities & services noting technological improvements that had been implemented and recently increased opening hours in Kilcormac Library, where staffing hours increased by 6 hours per week (now open Tuesday & Thursday mornings).

Ms. McGinn highlighted the 2024 performance figures:

- 10% Increase in Visitor numbers
- €80,000 Book Fund Increase
- 10,787 Newsletter Subscribers
- 3,453 Events
- 42,555 Attendees

She gave an overview of regular events for example Monthly Book Clubs, Weekly Knitting Groups, Weekly Chess Club to name just a few and detailed new collections, reader supports and online resources for all ages.

Members thanked Ms. A. Dillon for her introduction on St. John's Convent and acknowledged Ms. E. McGinn's impressive presentation. The Members thanked the library staff for their work and recognised the variety of programs being delivered.

Cathaoirleach A. Hennessy Kennedy joined with the members in thanking Ms. McGinn, remarking on the 10% increase in visitor numbers. The members commended the Local Authority for the investment in St. Johns Convent. The Members acknowledged the library visitor numbers and the ongoing library innovation and advancements that are available for the people of Offaly, emphasising the Library Services' impact on all ages, both locally and nationally.

4. LPT Projects Update

Mr. A. Murray, Director of Service, presented the members an update on the status of the Local Property Tax Supported Projects.

Mr. Murray gave a summary of the LPT projects 2020-2024 breaking down the funding figures for the three Municipal Districts and the total figure for Council LPT Funding (15%) for 2020-2024, which was €3,611,520.

He outlined the 2020 supported projects, including Birr Tourism Destination Town, Edenderry Regeneration Phase II – Blundell Avenue, and Tullamore Urban Regeneration Projects Phase I.

He advised the members on the 2021 supported projects, including Kinnitty ORIS 2020, Edenderry Regeneration Phase 2, Tullamore Street Enhancement and Just Transition - Ferbane Regeneration.

He outlined the 2023/2024 supported projects, including Banagher Rural Regeneration Development (RRDF), Portarlinton RRDF, Clara RRDF, Tullamore Urban Regeneration & Development Fund (URDF) - Call 2 and Just Transition – Supported Ferbane RRDF

He then provided the members with details of the expected Local Property Tax Projected Funding 2025-2029 - Estimated total of €3,740,000.

He updated members on the new projects/grants secured which require LPT match funding.

In regard to EU Just Transition Fund 2021-2027 he outlined the following:

Action 1:1 Failte Ireland, Regenerative Tourism, Funding confirmed of €218,274 (75% award)

Design Team for:

- Plaza on vacant site in Shannonbridge.
- Feasibility of a floating walk over the Shannon Callows.

Tender process complete.

LPT supports the 'match funding' element of 25% = €72,758.

Action 1.2 POBAL, Employment generation.

Funding confirmed at €1 Million for the upgrade of the Dalton Centre, Shannonbridge. This will not cover full extent of works. Balance / 'match funding' is required totalling €295,035.

A long- term lease to be offered for enterprise / replacement employment use.

A Part 8 planning procedure will also be required.

A development, funded by the Community Centre Investment Fund was outlined:

- CCIF Funding of €1,407,659 for a new build Moneygall Community Centre, which will require match funding of €117,305

Mr. Murray outlined the Large Scale Sports Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF) 2024 for Edenderry Swimming Pool explaining the existing pool in Edenderry closed in January 2024, but the RRDF has already funded the purchase of a new site. He advised the LSSIF funding call was in July 2024, and a successful application secured €8.9 million for the new pool, with tender documents for stage 1 advertised on 13th May 2025.

He provided an update on the Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF Cat 1) Edenderry Regeneration Phase III – Construction phase. He highlighted that €12.3m was secured in funding with OCC providing match funding supported by the LPT. He advised that phase III would start once Tender documents for construction are issued. He explained construction is due to start in Q4/Q1 2025/2026.

He provided the members with ongoing, pending and possible future applications consisting of potential future projects being progressed:

- Birr Court House – Development of Part 8
- Development of Clara TCF Plan
- Birr Rectory Meadows Masterplan
- Derryounce 10-year Plan
- Daingean Town Hall Development
- Banagher Marina & Environs Masterplan

He highlighted potential Future Projects in Tullamore, consisting of:

- Hidden Bridge Garden
- Development of Tullamore Harbour Master Plan
- Development of Church Street Properties

Cathaoirleach A. Hennessy Kennedy thanked Mr. A. Murray for his presentation, noting its value in particular to newly Elected Members and the positive impact of LPT-funded projects.

Cllr. J. Leahy also acknowledged the success of the LPT-funded projects, emphasising their positive contribution to the community and the county.

He highlighted the need to develop the Offaly Camogie training facility at Crinkill, Birr, emphasising the importance of this for the county. He brought the members attention to the current difficulties faced by Offaly Camogie Players, who lack dedicated training grounds and often experience last-minute changes to their training locations.

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. P. Ormond, the members resolved to provide financial support of €200K to match an approved Sports Capital Grant for the development of an Offaly Camogie Training Facility at Crinkill, Birr.

Members supported the need for the development of an Offaly Camogie training facility with Cllr. E. Clendennen and Cathaoirleach A. Hennessy Kennedy outlining the numbers of participants and advising that Offaly Camogie is going from strength to strength. However, they emphasised the difficulties faced by players having limited training facilities.

Cllr. D. Harvey raised a question with regards to the Harbour Masterplan in Tullamore i.e. if the Youth Club Gym would be affected? Mr. A. Murray stated he would confirm this later to Cllr. Harvey, but believes the Youth Club Gym is not part of the Masterplan.

Members thanked the Regeneration team for their significant work and the number of projects being undertaken. Cllr. N. Cribbin thanked Ms. AM. Delaney, Chief Executive for her contribution on helping get funding for Edenderry Swimming Pool and Edenderry Library. Cllr. L. Quinn joined the members in acknowledging the success of the projects in Edenderry and he advised that they would improve the town's quality of life significantly. He was also hopeful that these projects would attract further investment into the town. He proposed that a promotional video be produced showcasing the projects and how the LPT funds are spent.

Cllr. L. Quinn also suggested that ringfenced funding from renewables should be channelled to support Offaly projects and it was proposed that a meeting is arranged with the Department to discuss allocation and distribution of grant support for same.

Cllr. S. Maher acknowledged the Regeneration Team's hard work, thanked the staff, and noted that LPT is a tax with distribution implications. He requested a report on minority sports funding and advocated for a Boxing Club Sporting Facility in the County.

Mr. Murray stated the proposals would be taken on board and he would collaborate with the members on upcoming projects, ensuring their progression.

Ms. AM. Delaney, Chief Executive, acknowledged the considerable work of the regeneration team and thanked the members for their support of the LPT and the match funding that this generated. She highlighted projects of scale, including the Edenderry Library and Swimming Pool.

Ms. Delaney agreed that creating a promotional video to showcase completed projects would be beneficial. She introduced Ms. Janice O'Brien, the Council's new Communications Officer, who could help assist with this. Ms. Delaney emphasised the improvements to the quality of life for residents, communities, investors, and visitors, achieved through LPT funding, and again acknowledged the members support for same.

5. Midland Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2025-2029

Mr. B. Lennon, Acting Director of Service, introduced the Midland Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2025-2029 to the members. He advised the Members of the legislation for same namely the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009 which states that a Housing Authority is required to prepare a Homelessness Action Plan.

He introduced Ms. P. Hctor who provided the members with an overview of the process for drafting the Homelessness Action Plan which consisted of the following:

- Westmeath County Council as Regional Homeless Lead for Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly are responsible for leading the process for preparing the Plan.
- A formal notification was issued by the Chair of the Statutory Management Group (Director of Services, Westmeath County Council) to the Local Authorities in the Region,

the Joint Consultative Forum and other relevant Agencies/Bodies for consideration in February 2025.

- The Draft Plan was referred to the relevant SPCs in the four Local Authorities for consideration and approval.
- The plan now must be presented to each of the Local Authorities for formal adoption.

She advised members of the definition of Homelessness for the purposes of this plan, explaining that Homelessness is defined in accordance with the Housing Act 1988. A person shall be regarded by the Housing Authority as being homeless if:

- There is no accommodation available which, in the opinion of the authority, they together with any other person who normally resides with them or who might reasonably be expected to reside with them, can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation of; or
- They are living in a hospital, county home, night shelter, or other such institution and are so living because they have no accommodation of the kind referred to in paragraph (a); or
- They are, in the opinion of the authority, unable to provide accommodation from their own resources.

She highlighted understanding the causes of homelessness which can be complex and can be interconnected, encompassing areas including economic hardship, mental health challenges, addiction and domestic violence. Addressing these root causes is critical to implementing effective long-term strategies that prevent homelessness and support sustainable housing solutions.

She outlined the Policy Context mentioning The Lisbon Declaration, agreed by EU member states in June 2021, which aims to work towards ending homelessness by 2030 and The Programme for Government 2025 – Securing Ireland’s Future and The Midlands Regional Homelessness Action Plan.

She provided an overview on Objectives & Strategic Actions to address the challenges:

- 1.Prevention and Early Intervention
- 2.Emergency Response
- 3.Housing Solutions Housing First Approach
4. Support Services Case Management, Wraparound Services
5. Data Collection and Analysis
6. Policy and Advocacy

She outlined the Homelessness Services in The Midlands Region and conveyed The Midland Region Joint Homeless Consultative Forum (MRJHCF), established in 2010, is managed by a Statutory Management Group (SMG), chaired by the Director of Services (Housing) from Westmeath County Council, which is responsible for establishing key interventions and outcomes across the region.

Key Interventions included:

- Emergency Accommodation Facilities
- Private Emergency Accommodation
- Regional Resettlement Service
- Complex Case Workers via Housing First
- Housing With Supports
- Out of Hours Services
- HSE Supports / Domestic Violence Services / Other Agencies

She outlined the number of people who are homeless and relying on emergency homeless accommodation support in Offaly as of April 2025.

She brought members through the key actions within the Plan highlighting the following:

- Prevention of youth homelessness
- Addressing rough sleeping
- Improve and Increase Interagency Collaboration
- Multi Agency Support for those exiting Prison
- Tailored Support for those exiting Institutional Care
- Provide Gender Specific Support Services
- Tailored Support for those exiting Direct Provision
- Implement the Traveller Accommodation Programme
- Expand Housing First Initiatives

She advised that the Midland Region is dedicated to fostering dignity, independence, and sustainable solutions for all individuals and families facing homelessness.

Through collective efforts, the region aims to reduce homelessness by 2029 and lay a strong foundation for a future free from housing insecurity.

Members thanked Mr. B. Lennon and Ms. P. Hctor for the detailed presentation and they acknowledged all of Offaly County Council Housing staff for their hard work in difficult circumstances.

Cllr. N. Cribbin chairman of the SPC, advised this plan has gone before the SPC and there was a robust and in-depth debate on this document. It was supported by the SPC in effort to address homelessness.

Cllr. S. O'Brien emphasised the crucial role of family in offering accommodation support to those in need, facilitating their path to a permanent housing solution. He pointed out that some families are hesitant to provide this support due to concerns about losing their Fuel Allowance. This fear of financial repercussions can unfortunately prevent families from offering assistance.

Cllr. P. Ormond spoke in support of the new Plan and asked if the members could be provided with a one-page document outlining the Homelessness Plan.

On the proposal of Cllr. N. Cribbin, seconded by Cllr. S. O'Brien, the members resolved to adopt the Midland Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2025-2029.

Cllr. A. Masterson commended Offaly County Council's Housing Team, acknowledging the challenging and stressful nature of their work. She criticised the funding cuts to the tenant-in-situ scheme. She added that the Government are not allocating enough funding for the HAP scheme which she said is failing the people of Offaly. She highlighted that any level of homelessness in Offaly should be a cause for concern.

In response Mr. B. Lennon advised that there is two million euro in funding for tenant in situ scheme available.

Ms. P. Hctor advised that the HAP rent contribution to the local authority, is based on the person's income and ability to pay.

Cllr. F. McDonnell agreed with members in supporting the plan but he noted the limitations relying on hotels and B&Bs to provide accommodation.

Cllr. J. Leahy supported the plan, recognising the complexity of homelessness. He enquired about the allocation of funds from the local budget versus departmental funding for this plan.

Ms. P. Hctor responded that 90% of the funding is recouped from the Department.

Cllr. D. Harvey and Cllr. J. Leahy enquired if a person needs to be on the housing list to access these services.

In response Ms. P. Hctor advised in accordance with the Housing Act 1988, a person would need to present to homeless services to be assessed.

Ms. AM. Delaney, Chief Executive, acknowledged the hard work of the housing team, and thanked Ms. P. Hctor, Mr. B. Lennon, and Mr. J. Cunningham for providing the update to the Members.

6. Monthly Management Report

Chief Executive, Ms. AM. Delaney, brought the Members attention to the May Monthly Management Report. First, she welcomed Mr. Paul McLoughlin, Offaly County Council's new Director of Services for Climate Action, Transport, Environmental Services, Rural Water, The National Waste Collection Permit Office (NWCPO) and the Municipal District of Tullamore. She noted his previous experience working in Offaly County Council.

Ms. Delaney highlighted Kenny Lyons Associates Architects winning the ICE Award for the Esker Arts Centre design noting the design transformed a derelict, vacant building into a community focused public amenity.

She brought the Members attention to National Water Safety Awareness Week, running from May 19th to 25th. She informed the Members of Water Safety Ireland's call for caution near water. Members were reminded that Mr. Denis Gibbons serves as the Water Safety Officer for Offaly County Council.

She outlined the Community Climate Action Fund – Phase 1 progress report is currently being prepared for the DECC and 8 projects have been fully completed with others in progress. She welcomed the implementation of CCTV for Waste & Litter monitoring and for the purposes of prevention, detection & prosecution of Litter & Waste offences. She highlighted the Bring Bank pilot projects that are planned for County Offaly.

She noted the Ballycommon Trailhead that is nearing completion, marking a significant milestone for the area. She highlighted some of the key features which included 52 car parking spaces and pedestrian pathways link directly to the Grand Canal Greenway providing connections to Kilbeggan Harbour in County Westmeath.

She advised that the Draft Portarlington Joint Local Area Plan along with SEA and AA Screening Determination Documents went on public display on April 10th and will be on display until 4pm May 9th. She highlighted the figure of €1 Million euro that has been secured for the upgrading of the Dalton centre in Shannonbridge from the EU Just Transition Fund.

She noted the Local Enterprise Office rebrand of 'The Junction' in Axis Business Park, advising the new brand will include a refreshed logo, updated materials, and a stronger focus on promoting The Junction as a key location for business, collaboration, and community development. She also noted the return of Offaly Job Fair on Saturday, 14th June from 10:30am to 3:00pm at the Tullamore Court Hotel.

In relation to the Community Section, she highlighted The Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). Members were provided with the Implementation Plan and Framework plan for a 6-year period 2023-2028. The new LECP will set out the objectives and actions which are needed to promote and support the economic and local community development of County Offaly.

She mentioned the new IPB Tidy Towns Insurance Scheme came into effect on 1st April 2025 whereby Offaly County Council provides insurance cover for Offaly Tidy Towns Groups registered with the PPN. She noted Offaly County Council's entries for the IPB Pride of Place Awards.

She brought the Members attention to the Corporate Services Team participating in National Voter Registration Day to help boost voter registration and raise political awareness, particularly among young people. She noted that further awareness raising activities are planned.

She acknowledged Ms. E. McGinn, County Librarian, for her presentation and highlighted the exceptional level of activities undertaken.

Cllr. F. McDonnell expressed gratitude to Ms. A.M. Delaney for the report, acknowledging the positive work. However, he raised concerns about the Register of Electors, specifically the long-standing issue of deceased electors not being removed, leading to inaccuracies on the register.

In response, Chief Executive, Ms. AM. Delaney addressed Cllr. F. McDonnell's concerns, informing him about the upcoming national rollout of Voter.ie, a new system designed to improve the accuracy of the Register. She mentioned that data cleansing is already in progress and that the Department has approved funding for two additional Clerical Officers. This will significantly aid in improving the completeness and accuracy of the Register.

7. Corporate Policy Group Report

Cathaoirleach A. Hennessy Kennedy informed the Members that at the Corporate Policy Group meeting held in May, the Council meeting agenda was discussed. Additional items discussed were as follows:

- correspondence from Kerry County Council,
- one conference for noting
- requests for Civic Receptions,
- Bord na Mona invite to an In-Committee meeting with the Council

She advised a Civic Reception was agreed for The Heritage Heroes/Group which will be held on 11th June next. It was also agreed that other suggested Civic Receptions for Irish dancers from Birr and the Birr Community School debating team would be more suitable for MD level as per the protocols for Civic Receptions.

She highlighted the response received from Bord Na Mona requesting an agenda and list of questions/issues to be dealt with at the proposed In-Committee meeting. It was agreed that the CPG will give consideration to same and a response will issue in due course.

8. Notices of Motion

There were no Notices of Motion on the agenda.

9. Comhdhálacha / Conferences

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

10. Comhfhreagras / Correspondence

The members noted the correspondence on the agenda.

11. Any Other Business

Cllr. S. O'Brien brought the members attention to Riada House Community Nursing Unit and Day Care Centre in Tullamore which is nominated for two awards- 'Nursing Home of the Year' and 'Day Care Centre of the Year' - at the Irish Healthcare Centre taking place on Friday 23rd May 2025.

He acknowledged the great service which Riada House has been providing for the area for the past 65 years including the day care centre that is nurse-led and provides a variety of services to older people in the community to promote social contact and prevent loneliness.

On the proposal of Cllr. S. O'Brien, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey, they resolved that the Council write to Riada House Community Nursing Unit to wish them luck at the upcoming awards ceremony and thank them for their service to the Community.

Cllr. S. O'Brien updated Members on the homecoming event for the Sacred Heart School in Tullamore and Offaly County Council VEX Robotics Team, Mr. R. Bell and Mr. D. Hodge. He congratulated the school on their all-female team's victory at the VEX Robotics World Championships in Texas.

Cllr. D. Harvey acknowledged the team's amazing achievement and expressed his honour in attending the homecoming. He suggested considering a civic reception to honour the team.

Following a proposal by Cllr. S. O'Brien, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey, it was resolved to honour this achievement with a Civic Reception.

Cathaoirleach A. Hennessey Kennedy congratulated the students on representing their school, county, and country globally and informed members that the matter would be brought to the next Corporate Policy Group meeting for consideration.

Chief Executive, Ms. AM. Delaney, advised Members that the Management Team would progress Cllr. J. Leahy's resolution, agreed by the Members, for financial support of €200K for Offaly Camogie to match an approved Sports Capital Grant for the development of training grounds at Crinkle, Birr.

MINUTES CONFIRMED

CATHAOIRLEACH

RUNAÍ

16 June 2025

