

## Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Offaly County Council

Held on 28 April 2025 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. Audrey Hennessy Kennedy, Cathaoirleach	
Bryant, Ollie	Masterson, Aoife
Clendennen, Eleanor	McDonnell, Fergus
Cribbin, Noel	Moran, Frank
Egan, Hugh	Murray, Claire (SF)
Feighery, Neil	Murray, Shane
Fitzpatrick, Eddie	Murray-Smale, Claire (FF)
Leahy, John	Ormond, Peter
Maher, Sean	Harvey, Declan
O'Brien, Sean	Quinn, Liam

### Apologies

None

### Officials in Attendance

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Ms. F. Millane, D.O.F.; Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S.; Mr. B. Lennon, A/D.O.S.; Mr. M. Mahon, A/D.O.S.; Mr. A. Murray D.O.S.; Mr. F. Bourke, Executive Engineer; Mr. E. Fennell, S.E.O. Meetings Administrator; Ms. AM. Kelly, Administrative Officer; Ms. C. Darby, C.O.; Mr. Terry Connolly and Ms. Bernie Roe, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA).

### 1. Confirmation of Minutes

On the proposal of Cllr. F. Moran, seconded by Cllr. J. Leahy, the members resolved to adopt Minutes of the ordinary meeting of Offaly County Council held on Monday 25 March 2025.

### 2. Minutes for Noting

The Members noted the minutes of the Meetings below:

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

### **3. Draft Annual Financial Statement 2024 / Draft Over-Expenditures Report 2024**

Ms. F. Millane, Director of Finance, noted that the Draft Annual Financial Statement 2024 and draft Over-Expenditures report had been circulated and the audited final statements will be presented to the members later in year. Ms. Millane advised that there was an overall surplus of €401,537 (0.39% of total expenditure) in 2024. The gross excess expenditure over budget was €31,832,969. However, as in previous years, recoupments, contra income, additional unbudgeted income and cost savings, counterbalanced this excess expenditure to give a net surplus in 2024 of € 401,537.

Ms. Millane informed the members that for the twelfth consecutive year the consolidated accumulated deficit has been reduced, this year by €401,537 to €390,023. Ms. Millane requested approval of the excess expenditure in accordance with Section 104 (7) of the Local Government Act 2001.

Members commended the work of Ms. Millane and the Finance Department staff and Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive, welcomed the reduction in the overall deficit.

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. N. Feighery, the members resolved to adopt the Draft Annual Financial Statement 2024.

On the proposal of Cllr. N. Feighery, seconded by Cllr. J. Leahy, the members resolved to approve the Over-Expenditure report for 2024.

### **4. Draft Annual Report 2024**

Ms. A. Dillon, Director of Service, brought the members attention to the Draft Annual Report 2024 for their consideration, and she advised the final draft will be brought back to the members for adoption at the June meeting.

### **5. Offaly County Council Noise Action Plan 2024 – 2028**

Mr. M. Mahon, Acting Director of Service, introduced this presentation and advised that this plan was before the members for noting. Mr. F. Bourke, Executive Engineer, presented the members with the Noise Action Plan 2024 – 2028. Mr. Bourke noted that Environmental noise is a significant Health issue and that EU states are required to address same. He highlighted that in Co. Offaly road noise is deemed problematic and that only roads that have over 3 million car journeys in a year are considered in the plan. Traffic numbers were analysed using software and the software considers:

- Topography
- Traffic Numbers
- Road Surface
- Population Density

Traffic volumes are used to provide noise maps and maps are produced by county and by local area and indicate night and day noise levels. He advised that proposed noise alleviation measures include:

- Low noise road surfacing
- Maps made available to the public for consideration
- Acoustic barriers where suitable
- Noise assessments prior to and after any works

He highlighted to members the benefits of the Noise Action Plan which would lead to Traffic noise reduction, Health benefits and promote quiet spaces. One of the shortcomings of the plan is that funding is only provided for noise assessments and funding is not provided to carry out project works.

Following the presentation members expressed concern over the Noise Action Plan and how it only appears to include noise from roads. They detailed how there are other noise issues in areas that they feel should be addressed in the Plan as well. Members in addition expressed concern in producing a plan with no funding available for remediation works.

Cathaoirleach Audrey Hennessy Kennedy, and the Members thanked Mr. M. Mahon, A/Director of Service, and Mr. F. Bourke, Executive Engineer, for their presentation.

## 6. Update on the EU Just Transition Fund

Mr. T. Connolly and Ms. B. Roe from the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) provided the members with a presentation on the EU just Transition Fund. The single specific objective is that the Just Transition Fund shall contribute to enable regions and people to address the social, employment, economic and environmental impacts of the transition towards the Union's 2030 targets for energy and climate. Ireland's allocation was €84.5m and this was matched by the Exchequer giving a total fund of €169m. County Offaly received the highest funding as it was the most effected Area.

The fund includes three aspects: P1 Jobs, P2 Bogs and P3 Wheels:

- P1 Jobs: Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy.
- P2 Bogs: Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets.
- P3 Wheels: Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition.

Ms. B. Roe, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) outlined the socioeconomic situation and the midterm review:

- The transition from peat-fired power has exacerbated existing economic and social disparities, particularly in the Midlands, which has lower GDP per capita compared to national averages.
- Limited public transport options increase reliance on private vehicles, affecting accessibility to employment.
- Population growth and shifts in age demographics highlight changing regional needs, with an aging population and fluctuations in youth dependency ratios.

- Employment rates have improved from 2016 to 2022.
- Unemployment remains slightly higher than national averages, with long-term unemployment a key concern.
- The reliance on home heating oil remains high compared to the national average.
- Labour and skills shortages in the construction and green energy sectors create challenges for sustainable infrastructure expansion.
- The key challenges, needs and areas for development identified in the TJTP are still relevant for the region, and the use of EU JTF funding is still required to assist with alleviating these issues.

Ms. Roe mentioned the key tasks achieved to date by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly such as 91 projects for over €91m, 14 calls for funding have been run, 33 Training workshops and Capacity building events, over 220 meetings have been facilitated with delivery Partners and over 200 participants have engaged specifically in the procurement and state aid training offered.

Mr. T. Connolly, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) advised the members on some of the future projects for Co. Offaly:

- Clonmacnoise: Redevelopment of the visitor centre at Clonmacnoise to increase capacity: €7.8m
- Birr Town Enhancement: Improvements to William Street leading to the new entrance to Birr Castle: €188k
- Shannonbridge Urban Plaza and Shannon Callows Reserve Walkway project: €291k
- County Offaly: Increase the variety of the stock of bikes available to create a more inclusive visitor experience: €168k
- County Offaly: Develop fly fishing tours on the River Shannon: €41k
- The Dalton Centre: Shannonbridge, Enabling the Transition to Net Zero: €1 million
- Kilcormac Renewable Energy Centre of Excellence: This project will fund the ‘green transition’ of a community centre into a ‘hub for sustainable energy practices: 294K
- Film Offaly: Film Resource Coordinator position and mentoring and capacity building activity for film professionals and ex-peat industry workers: €253k
- TUS Just Transition Academy: The TUS-JTA is based on the concept of a ‘Communiversality’ where the community and the university operate in harmony: €768k
- Mountlucas Bioeconomy Aquaculture Initiative: This is a €5m project led by the Technological University of Shannon and will demonstrate value-chain products for new feeds/foods from cultivated-duckweed and macroalgae at scale that use fish-culture waste-streams.
- Tóchar: Midlands Wetland Restoration - €12m project run by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The projects’ focus is on the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and wetlands including: Slieve Bloom Mountains, Co. Laois and Offaly – a conservation project aimed at protecting breeding Hen Harriers and increasing wetland restoration opportunities, Clara Bog, Co. Offaly and further restoration works to preserve this internationally significant raised bog habitat and Further EOI for Community Groups planned for May.

Cathaoirleach Audrey Hennessy Kennedy and Members and thanked Ms. Roe and Mr. Connolly for their presentation.

Members expressed concern over job creation in County Offaly and that they would like to see more jobs created. Many people lost employment due to the Transition and members feel there should be a greater emphasis on employment opportunities in the County.

Members emphasised people’s reliance on peat for home heating and that many people cannot afford to change to different heating systems.

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive thanked Mr. T. Connolly and Ms. B. Roe for their presentation and for all their support.

## 7. Monthly Management Report

Chief Executive, Ms. A. Delaney, brought the Members attention to the March Monthly Management Report. She highlighted her recent trip to New York on St. Patrick’s Day. She noted that Seachtain na Gaeilge celebrations were facilitated by Offaly County Council’s Irish Language Officer, Ms. Sile Dolan.

She mentioned that a presentation was given to the Council on 24<sup>th</sup> February on the Council’s Litter Management Plan 2022-2024 and following the presentation, it was agreed to extend the current plan for a further 3 years. She noted that National Spring Clean is carried out in April and many local litter picks occurred throughout the County.

She highlighted that the Transport Infrastructure Ireland 2025 allocation includes a further €1.9m for pavement protection and renewal. Within the additional allocation two pavement strengthening projects on the N62 at Doon to the County boundary and Crancreegh were awarded funding.

She mentioned the Towns and Village Renewal Scheme for 2025 and noted the upcoming deadlines of Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> May for Building and Land Acquisition Measure and Friday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2025 for the Main Scheme and Project Development Measure.

She highlighted the Together we Thrive Conference and networking event, held on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> March at the Tullamore Court Hotel which was a tremendous success. She noted that the Offaly Local Community Development Committee held its monthly meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2025 with members welcoming new Chief Officer, Ms. Deardriu Lally, to the LCDC.

## 8. Corporate Policy Group Report

Cllr. A. Hennessy Kennedy informed the Members that at the Corporate Policy Group meeting the Council meeting agenda was discussed. Additional items discussed were the protocols for the flying of flags, protocols for dealing with complaints against elected members and a review of the Standing Orders. She noted that Mr. E. Fennell, S.E.O., Meetings Administrator will be attending the Municipal District Meetings to assist the elected members.

## 9. Notices of Motion

There were no Notices of Motion on the agenda.

## 10. Comhdhálacha / Conferences

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

## 11. Comhfhreagras / Correspondence

The members noted the correspondence on the agenda.

## 12. Any Other Business

Cathaoirleach Audrey Hennessy Kennedy informed the members that the next Offaly County Council meeting is scheduled for 19 May 2025 and will be held in Birr.

**MINUTES CONFIRMED**

**CATHAOIRLEACH**

**RUNAÍ**

**19 May 2025**

