COMHAIRLE CHONTAE UÍBH FHAILÍ

MINUTES OF OCTOBER MONTHLY MEETING OF OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL

HELD IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, CHARLEVILLE ROAD, TULLAMORE ON MONDAY 18TH OCTOBER 2021 AT 2.00 P.M.

PRESENT:	Cllr. D. Harvey, Cathaoirleach, Cllrs. J. Carroll (R); C. Claffey (R), J. Clendennen (R), N. Cribbin(R), E. Dooley (R), N. Feighery (R), E. Fitzpatrick (R), J. Foley (R), M. Hackett (R), J. Leahy (R), T. McCormack (R), R. McDermott (R), F. Moran (R), S. O'Brien (R), P. Ormond (R), D. Owens (R). and K. Smollen (R)	
APOLOGIES:	Cllr. L. Quinn	
IN ATTENDANCE:	Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S. (R); Ms. S. Kennedy, D.O.S. (R); Mr. S. Duclot (R); Mr. M. Connolly, H.O.F.; Mr. G. Bruton, Meetings Administrator, Ms. M. Cleary, S.E.O., Mr. J. Cunningham S.E.E., Mr. T. Moran, Manager ESB, Mr. D. Phelan, Senior Manager ESB and Ms. L. Carbery, C.O. (R)	
VOTES OF SYMPATHY	Vote of sympathy was unanimously extended to the following: Margaret McManus, Harbour Road, Banagher on the death of her mother Mary Rigney. The Chief Executive, on her own behalf and on behalf of the staff of Offaly County Council, joined with the members in this vote of sympathy.	
CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES	 On the proposal of Cllr. N. Feighery, seconded by Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, the members resolved to adopt the minutes as listed below: Minutes of the Special Meeting of Offaly County Council for Consideration of the Draft County Development Plan 2021-2027 held on Monday 10th May 2021 Minutes of the Special Meeting of Offaly County Council for Consideration of the Draft County Development Plan 2021-2027 held on Monday 24th May 2021 Minutes of the Special Meeting of Offaly County Council for Consideration of the Draft County Development Plan 2021-2027 held on Friday 28th May 2021 	

MINUTES FOR NOTING	 Minutes of the Special Meeting of Offaly County Council for Consideration of the Proposed Material Alterations to the Draft County Development Plan 2021-2027 held on Friday 10th September 2021 Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Offaly County Council held on Monday 20th September 2021 The members noted the following: Minutes of the Community, Cultural and Emergency	
SECTION 183 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2001, OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL PROPOSES TO DISPOSE OF 0.001 ACRES OF LAND AT BEECHGROVE ESTATE, BRACKNAGH TO THE ESB FOR THE SUM OF €1	On the proposal of Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, seconded by Cllr. J. Foley, the members resolved to adopt Section 183 of The Local Government Act, 2001, to dispose of 0.001 acres of land at Beechgrove Estate, Bracknagh to the ESB for the sum of €1.	
SECTION 183 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2001, OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL PROPOSES TO DISPOSE OF 0.001 ACRES OF LAND AT BLUNDELL PARK, PARK VIEW, EDENDERRY TO THE ESB FOR THE SUM OF €1 FINANCE OVERDRAFT ACCOMMODATION 2022	On the proposal of Cllr. N. Cribbin, seconded by Cllr. M. Hackett, the members resolved to adopt Section 183 of The Local Government Act, 2001, to dispose of 0.001 acres of land at Blundell Park, Park View, Edenderry to the ESB for the sum of €1. On the proposal of Cllr. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. F. Moran the members resolved to adopt the Overdraft Accommodation 2022	
HOUSING PRESENTATION	in the amount of €15m. Ms. S. Kennedy, D.O.S. advised the members that an update with regard to housing services progress and the new national policy will be presented to them.	

Ms. M. Cleary, S.E.O. provided the members with a comprehensive presentation on housing services. She outlined the current the figures for each of the service areas as below:

- Social Housing Support List 522
- HAP Supported Tenancies 800
- Homeless 15 single people & 4 families being supported, Progressing Housing First units with Peter McVerry Trust supports
- National Social Housing Needs Assessments Qualified Applicants notified and the forms due back by 15th October 2021
- Rent Review of 1,813 LA Tenancies concluded and revised rent effective from 9th October 2021. It was noted that the national differential rent scheme has not been reviewed since 2010.
- Housing Maintenance Requests 2,602 to end of September 2021. The Clerk of Works are working through them having been held up with Covid-19 restrictions at the start of the year.
- Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans 2021- received 23 (6 approved, 9 declined, 4 not qualified/withdrawn, 4 in process)
- Housing Grants (HAGs, MAGs & HOP) additional funding was sought and approved in September bringing allocation to €1.6m
- Disabled Persons Grants In September additional funding was requested and increased to €932,453 for 2021, including 10% provided by Offaly County Council. She stressed that final works need to be submitted from applicants in order to claim from the Department.
- Retrofit Programme 28 homes completed. Retrofit Design Ltd. are commencing 35 units in Birr MD; and tenders being prepared for 85 further units
- Private Rented Inspections a contractor has been appointed and inspections will re-commence following lifting of Covid-19 restrictions
- Traveller Accommodation midterm review has commenced and there are 2 new initiatives:
 - o Traveller Tenancy Sustainment Officer post
 - o Established Offaly Traveller Interagency Group
- Anti-Social Behaviour New policy adopted by members last year. The Estate Management Interagency Steering Group is under the aegis of County Offaly Joint Policing Committee
- Housing & Disability Steering Forum Offaly A new national policy has been re-initiated - Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2022 – 2027 to be finalised.

She advised the members of the delivery constraints, including increased prices, delays in receiving goods, and limited availability of contractors.

She updated the members on the Rebuilding Ireland housing projects, noting that Offaly County Council projects are well in excess of the targets set. She outlined the overall build target of 128 through Offaly County Council, Approved Housing Bodies, Turnkey, Part V, Acquisitions and Buy and Renew schemes. She noted the leasing target is 66. The projected build delivery is 128, consisting of 102 new builds and 26 acquisitions. There are 82 projected leasings.

She informed the members that Turnkey will all be delivered by end of next year totaling 101 houses and that a further 74 new houses are in the pipeline. She outlined the schemes in the construction pipeline for 2022/2023 resulting in 120 units and 185 Approved Housing Bodies units. She noted this will bring total new build homes for Offaly's social housing waiting list to 406 by 2023.

She provided the members with an outline on the governments Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland published in September 2021. She noted there are four strands to the plan with multiple action items in each strand of the programme. The strands are 1) to support home ownership and increasing affordability, 2) eradicating homelessness, 3) increasing social housing delivery and supporting social inclusion, 4) increasing new housing supply and addressing vacancy and efficient use of existing stock.

She highlighted that Offaly County Council is in a good starting position in achieving the plan and will work with Approved Housing Bodies to ensure delivery of the targets set out for the county. She noted that 17th December is the deadline to submit the housing delivery action plan to the Department and of the need to expand opportunities, including acquiring land for future development. She advised the members that expressions of interest for sale of land to the council will be advertised in the coming weeks. Management have had a number of meetings with the housing agencies and the Department to discuss the potential for affordable housing. She informed the members that the Part V percentage has increased from 10 to 20% and that addressing homelessness is an important feature. She updated the members on the reporting arrangements for housing, noting that they also have to submit returns to the Department, they are audited and service indicators are compiled and monitored.

Ms. Cleary brought the members attention to the email addresses now used to help streamline their services and she thanked the members for their co-operation and support.

Ms. S. Kennedy thanked Ms. M. Cleary and Mr. J. Cunningham and housing staff, noting the challenges facing housing services and she expressed her hope with regard to housing supply pipeline. She noted that new Housing for All plan focuses on

delivery of new houses and moving away from leasing and highlighted that the targets for Offaly represent 25% of our current total stock.

She advised the members that the goal for Offaly County Council is to exceed the targets set out in the new programme and to continue to develop good relationships with the Members, Approved Housing Bodies and the Department. She stressed that it is incumbent on Offaly County Council to purchase more land and that with the County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 adopted, expressions of interest for housing land will be sought. She referred to the issues in the current pandemic world with increasing costs and limited availability of contractors. She brought the members attention to the nomination of Killane Court, Edenderry in the housing for families category of the Community Housing Public Choice Award 2021 and that Park View, Edenderry was also nominated.

Cllr. D. Owens, Chairman of Housing Strategic Policy welcomed the housing presentation acknowledged the huge amount of work carried out to provide housing services. He commended Ms. S. Kennedy, Ms. M. Cleary and the housing staff noting their demanding roles and their excellent work rate. He welcomed the projected delivery of over 400 houses in next few years and noted that the Housing for All plan is at an early stage. He thanked the housing staff for their regular reports to the Housing Strategic Policy Committee and he acknowledged the delays on the Retrofit Programme due to Covid-19 restrictions. He informed the members that the Housing Adaptation Grants are being looked at to increase maximum limits. The differential rent scheme is being reviewed. The Disability Strategy is also being reviewed which will adhere to the national strategy.

The members thanked the housing staff for their informative report and their on-going work in difficult circumstances. They voiced their concerns in relation to the increasing rise in construction costs, the limit on the adaptation grants, DPG funding, the level of acquisitions, mortgage arrears and the increase in rents.

Cllr. F. Moran sought clarification on the serviced sites at Cluain Fia, Clara and he queried if the council could build on these sites. He queried the level of refusals on the tenant purchase schemes and if there are any plans to allow Part V or Approved Housing Bodies tenants to purchase their homes. He voiced his concerns that some applicants for social housing have been refused as they are living with family and are considered adequately housed. He sought clarity on how tenants in private rented houses are protected. He welcomed the development in Raheen, Clara but voiced his disappointment at the time it has taken to get to the construction stage.

Cllr. K. Smollen welcomed the appointment of a contractor to carry out private rental inspections, but he voiced his concerns that DPG funding urgently needs to be increased, tenants in HAP have no security of tenure, and many families are on the verge of mortgage stress and social housing income limits need to be increased.

Ms. S. Kennedy thanked the members for their appreciation and noted that this will be shared with the housing team. She shares the members concerns and responded that the tenant purchase review is being carried out nationally and that selling assets is a challenge when also trying to ensure Offaly County Council gets good value for money. She acknowledged the delay on private rental inspections, which was due to Covid-19 and lack of resources. However, a company has now been appointed to carry out inspections but she pointed out that internal resources are also needed and this is being looked at. She agreed to look at the serviced sites at Cluain Fia, cautioning that they have to be respectful of the tenants in the estate also. She acknowledged the slow progression on schemes, but pointed out that a good strong pipeline should help speed up the delivery of social housing. She noted the threshold limits are set at National level.

Mr. J. Cunningham responded that while the site in Raheen was initially considered for an Approved Housing Body scheme, the site is not straight forward and there was a lot of public consultation which all contributed to slowing the process down. He noted that the new legislation in regard to Part V is being clarified. He advised that in the past acquisitions were targeted and in the Housing for All plan there is a huge effort on not buying units unless they are for special needs or traveller housing.

Cllr. P. Ormond voiced his concern that villages and small towns are reliant on acquisitions as generally there would be limited Part V or turnkeys available and he queried if a new internal design office could be investigated.

Cllr. S. O'Brien queried if the Housing for All plan will affect the length of process.

Cllr. N. Feighery pointed out that mortgage arrears are falling steadily since 2013, Ireland has the lowest repossession rate across Europe and great supports are available such as the Abhaile service.

In response to the members queries Ms. S. Kennedy advised that while a certain level of acquisitions will still be required, the plan also includes a new Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund for the provision of serviced sites for housing to attract people to build their own homes and support the refurbishment of vacant properties, enabling people to live in small towns and villages in a sustainable way. She noted the balance of housing between

Offaly County Council and Approved Housing Bodies is good and the expressions of interest for land will only be in zoned areas. She acknowledged the call for a new design office and that this is being looked at national level. This will look at provision of supports for LA capital teams, which will require recruitment, and it will take time. She advised the members that the DPG funding increased on previous years and this level of funding may not be provided next year. With regard to the impact of the Housing for All plan on the timeline to deliver houses she noted that design and construction always takes time but they will keep progressing to ensure timely delivery. She noted the housing team also engage with and assist people in mortgage arrears.

Cllr. T. McCormack raised concerns about housing for disabled and issues for Approved Housing Body tenants. Cllr. M. Hackett sought clarity on the location of the Retrofit Programme works. Cllr. J. Carroll, queried if council loans are still available and how long is the waiting list for DPGs

Ms. S. Kennedy responded that the draft Disability Strategy is being formulated through the Housing Forum and this will be brought to the Council, when it has been reviewed by the Housing Strategic Policy Committee. She pointed out that all new houses being built are suitable for special needs tenants. She highlighted the development in Raheen as having a good mix of units and this will be the case for all new developments. She confirmed some Turnkeys were provided in smaller towns and villages and Rebuilding Ireland Loans scheme is still available.

Mr. J. Cunningham outlined the Midland and National retrofit schemes noting that 28 houses that have been completed are evenly distributed across the county and consideration for this scheme is given to vacant houses as retrofitting is a disruptive process. He advised that it is possible to pick up houses in the smaller villages and they will consider using Offaly County Council land in Bracknagh and Shinrone.

Ms. M. Cleary responded that time had been lost on completing Disabled Person's Grants applications due to Covid-19 and that they are allocated on basis of priority as advised by the Occupational Therapist. She agreed it is challenging to administer all the applications as the schemes are over proscribed and that they are looking to raise limits and are discussing this with the Department.

Cllr. N. Cribbin welcomed the new housing estates built in Edenderry, and he thanked Minister Peter Burke for the additional funding provided for the Disable Persons Grants.

Cllr. J. Leahy welcomed the housing targets set for Kilcormac and that affordable housing is still on agenda. He queried if it is difficult to recruit staff currently.

Cllr. D. Harvey welcomed the recommencement of house inspections for all houses including HAP. He noted the work carried out on the rent review and that most housing tenants are housed for reasonable rent. He highlighted that the tenant purchase scheme is important for families that want to remain in the family home.

Ms. S. Kennedy noted the income limits issue has been raised previously with the Department and she agreed to follow up on this. She agreed to look into the income limits for affordable housing and she advised that Offaly County Council will be able to attract additional staff. She agreed that tenure is important and that work will continue on private rented housing inspections, rent reviews and the finance section have continued to improve the rent arrears. She noted the Tenant Purchase Scheme includes a tenancy succession clause with certain rules and a number of these are instigated every year. She agreed the work on Disabled Persons Grants will continue.

Ms. A. Delaney, C. E. acknowledged and thanked the members and the Department for their support noting that it has been a difficult period for the housing section and they will continue to deliver the programmes.

Mr. D. Harvey, Cathaoirleach thanked the Housing staff for their work and for their comprehensive presentation.

JUST TRANSITION – ESB PRESENTATION

Mr. Tom Moran, ESB Generation & Trading provided the members with a presentation on the Shannonbridge – West Offaly Power Site update. He explained the background starting with a decision by an Bord Pleanala in 2019 that effectively ruled out continued operations as a thermal power plant and the Environmental Protections Agency requirements which limited the use of the Shannon for thermal power generation. He noted that the sites are only suitable for industrial or commercial use. He advised the members of the ambition of the ESB to develop energy system services to facilitate the greater use of renewable energy on the Grid and their plans to harness the important infrastructure available on site. He noted the ESBs commitment to Just Transition and to review the Community Benefit on the sites at an appropriate time.

He provided the members with photos to give them an indication of the new station, including context, a schematic of the site, highlighting the Dalton Centre as a significant building. He informed the members that the Dalton Centre was originally intended to be used as a blending bunker but has been in extensive use by ESB for storage and he noted its potential for further development. He advised the members that the ESB have started developing a scope of work to hand over the building to Offaly County Council. He outlined the various aspects of the building transfer, including clearing the buildings contents, reviewing the services, environmental ground condition surveys,

ecology assessments, interactions with the EPA, structural sign off, CAD drawings and land folio separation. He highlighted that this is a separate project that was not included in the Decommissioning and Development project and it is a challenging environment with engineering resources required within and outside the ESB. He informed the members that technologies are being considered for this site, that will add stability to the transmission grid, such as Battery Energy Storage Systems that will provide immediate short term backup power to the Grid. He outlined the timeline beginning with finalisation of the technology decisions at the end of 2021; building clear out, planning application and commencement of handover, completion of EPA engagement and finalisation of community benefit discussions with the Just Transition Office and Local Authorities in 2022.

Cllr. D. Harvey, Cathaoirleach joined with the members in thanking him for his presentation and he queried if the roof on the Dalton Centre is made of asbestos. In response Mr. T. Moran said he would find out and revert back to him.

Cllr. E. Dooley queried how many jobs will be created and he highlighted the success of the €3m funding for the closure of Ferbane power plant. He informed the meeting that at that time 70% of the funding was invested in job creation, 10% in education and training and 20% to the community. He voiced his concerns on the national Just Transition funding including match funding issues and he suggested the ESB request the Department and Just Transition commissioner to re-allocate €5m under a similar scheme as they did in Ferbane.

Cllr. J. Leahy acknowledged that the ESB has been one of Offaly County Councils biggest rate payers. He queried if the community gain projects are dependent on planning applications or could the timeline for this discussion be brought forward. He requested that the archives of Shannonbridge be given to the community or Offaly County Council for their heritage and tourism potential. Cllr. J. Clendennen acknowledged the contribution ESB has made to the county over number of decades.

Mr. Donal Phelan, ESB Generation & Trading, thanked the members for their support and reiterated that the ESB feels strongly about the two power plant stations, noting that West Offaly Power has a long tradition in these areas, but the last few years have been very challenging. He credited the commitment of Bord na Mona staff after the an Bord Pleanala decision and the EPA water issues. He advised the members that following a review it was no longer feasible to use the site for electricity generation through fuel. He acknowledged that the alternative option won't provide the same level of jobs as previously, but in a broader context a number of jobs will be created during construction phase. He acknowledged the disconnect between

the Just Transition funding and community gain benefits and the success of the funding provided previously in Ferbane. He stated that new issues have emerged since then and the €5m ESB fund has already been made to the Department. He noted he is unaware of any projects that are at a stage to bring forward community gain funding. He advised that the development of the Dalton Centre is dependent on paperwork, grid connection agreements, planning and market procurement.

Mr. Tom Moran pointed out that the ESB is still active in the community and he highlighted their contribution to angling and their interest in supporting a new facility at Pallas Lake. He also advised the members of a project they were in involved in Mayo using their archives for a visitor centre and this could be a possibility for Offaly. He acknowledged that there will be challenges in the handover of the Dalton Centre, but they don't expect too many delays and are hopeful the process will go reasonably well. He advised that the cost of handover will be reasonable.

Cllr. N. Cribbin expressed his disappointment at the Bord Pleanala decision to close Shannonbridge and raised concerns about possible black outs. Cllr. M. Hackett queried what level of rates would be paid on the development at Shannonbridge. Cllr. E. Dooley called for the ESB to write to the Department to request their €5m funding be allocated to Offaly.

Mr. Donal Phelan agreed the station closed as planning expired in 2020 and that the PSO contract which ended in 2019 was renegotiated with Bord Na Mona to allow the plant to stay open for 1 more year. He acknowledged the current grid problems, advising that faults developed in two private electricity stations and it will be 3 weeks when the first station will be back in operation. In response to the query on rates he advised that he does not know how they are calculated but it will be less than was previously paid. He informed the members that the Just Transition Commissioner Mr. Ciaran Mulvey brought the members concerns to the Department and he agreed to bring their request for €5m funding to ESB Chief Executive.

Ms. A. Delaney, thanked the members for their input and she noted that there are on-going discussions with Just Transition and ESB, and the issue of match funding for community projects continues to be raised. She advised the members that the Just Transition Commissioner has sought €1m for Offaly and Longford and there will be further discussions. She welcomed the €1.7m additional funding from government for 2022 and committed to look for a permanent solution to offset the deficit in rates. She advised that an initial meeting had taken place in Tullamore to investigate if the power for generations fund could provide funding for particular types of community projects. She informed the members that development of the archives and ESB heritage require a plan to be worked out with engagement of the

	Heritage Officer and she advised members that the County Archive is due to be launched soon. Cllr. E. Dooley extended an invitation to the ESB to visit the Ferbane Business Park.
MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT	Ms. A. Delaney brought the members attention to the monthly management report. She advised the members that the public consultation for the N52 link road between Kilbeggan and Tullamore is closing on 29th October 2021. She noted the Encore Conference held virtually was a success with a wide range of stakeholders involved. She pointed out the 31% growth in planning applications and that resources will be an issue. She informed the members that the Greenway works to Daingean will be complete by the end of the year and the Roads Programme is progressing. She highlighted the climate action site visit to Pollagh, launching the Connecting Communities with Peatlands. She noted that works are continuing on the Tullamore Living River Project with the first phase carried out in conjunction with Tullamore Tidy Towns, Shannon Sub Aqua, Club, Tullamore MD and Offaly County Council. She advised the members that the LCDC continue to meet and approve projects and actions. She noted that the Library, Arts and Sports continue to provide programmes and that Minister Frank Feighan had visited Healthy Offaly projects in Moneygall, Kilcormac and Tullamore at the end of September. She commiserated with the owners of Glenisk on their recent fire and advised the members that the Local Enterprise Office are engaging with them. Cllr. K Smollen queried if works at Kilcoursey cemetery would include the removal of rubble over 3 graves and if this work will
	begin before the end of year . In response Ms. A. Delaney advised that it is hoped to appoint a contractor before end of year, and the rubble removal will be followed up.
CORPORATE POLICY GROUP REPORT	Cllr. D. Harvey, Cathaoirleach advised the members that at the Corporate Policy Group Meeting they discussed the proposed Civic Receptions but no dates have yet been set until after the announcement of Covid-19 restriction changes. He expressed his sympathy to the owners of Glenisk and welcomed the ESB presentation to the members.
COMHDHÁLACHA	Local Authorities Members Association (LAMA) are holding an Autumn Training Seminar on the 03rd and 04th of November 2021 both dates inclusive at the Sligo Park Hotel, Pearse Road, Sligo ,P91Y762 It was agreed Cllrs. N. Cribbin, E. Fitzpatrick, N. Feighery, D. Harvey, F. Moran, P. Ormond and S. O'Brien would attend
	OPR Publication - Case Study Paper on Traveller Accommodation and the Local Authority Development Plan and

Clayton Whites Hotel, Wexford, on	
ghery would attend	
as sought for Cllrs. S. O'Brien and F.	
ning Module 1 Ballinasloe, 07/10/21	
vas sought for Cllrs. N. Feighery, N. 10 attend:	
al Health and Well-being, Clonakilty,	
lr. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. E. pproved the training and conferences.	
orrespondence issued with the agenda.	
Cllr. D. Harvey confirmed that he had organised the photo shoot at Esker Hills for Shane Lowry.	

This concluded the business of the meeting.

MINUTES CONFIRMED:		
	CATHAOIRLEACH	RUNAÍ

15th November 2021