

**COMHAIRLE CHONTAE UÍBH FHAILÍ**

**MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING  
OF OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL TO CONSIDER  
REFORM OF THE WATER SECTOR IN IRELAND.**

**HELD IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, TULLAMORE  
ON MONDAY, 30TH JANUARY 2012 AT 2.00 P.M.**

<b>PRESENT:</b>	Cllr. D. Owens (Presiding), Cllrs. N. Bourke, M. Buckley, J. Butterfield, P. Clendennen, D. Dolan, E. Dooley, S. Dooley, E. Fitzpatrick, C. Hanniffy, T. McKeigue, T. McLoughlin, J. Leahy, S. Moylan-Ryan, P. Ormond, G. Plunkett, L. Quinn and P. Rowland.
<b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b>	Mr. P. Gallagher, County Manager, Mr. D. Kirrane, D.O.S., Mr. S. Murray, D.O.S., Ms. M. Cleary, Meetings Administrator, Mr. T. Shanahan, S.E., Mr. D. Hogan, S.E., Mr. A. Murray, S.P., Mr. T. Mawe, Financial Management Accountant, Mr. J. Coleman, S.E.E., Mr. P. Devaney, S.E.E., Ms. C. Hilliard, A.O., Ms. A. Healy-Smith, S.E.E., Ms. V. O'Brien, E.E., Mr. J. Leamy, Technician.
<b>APOLOGIES:</b>	Cllrs J. Carroll, J. Foley and N. Hogan.

**REFORM OF THE WATER SECTOR IN IRELAND.**

Mr. T. Shanahan, S.E., gave a comprehensive presentation to the members on the Reform of the Water Sector in Ireland. He informed the meeting that Price Waterhouse Cooper Phase 1 Report had examined two options that could be considered for delivering water services in Ireland. The consultants were limited to considering these options under their terms of reference. Mr. T. Shanahan advised that the Government, during the period of consultation, were seeking views on:

- The development of an implementation plan for the public water utility and in particular issues arising from an organisational, human resources and environmental perspective in the transition phase, as well as boundary issues between the proposed utility and other actors involved in the water sector; and
- The proposed approach in relation to water charges and water metering.

Mr. Shanahan outlined the advantages and disadvantages of the current service and the options considered by the Government. He noted that the conclusion of the assessment had determined that the Public Utility Model had the greater merit over The Agency or Intercommunal Models under most of the evaluation criteria used. He noted that Irish Water would, by statute, be allocated full responsibility for all aspects of water services planning and delivery at national, regional and local levels. Mr. T. Shanahan advised that: Local Authorities would no longer have a role in water services provision; some key executive roles currently undertaken by the DECLG would transfer to Irish Water; the DECLG would retain policy functions; and that current Local Authorities water service support would reallocated to Irish Water.

Mr. T. Shanahan outlined the consequences of the decision for Offaly County Council. He reiterated that the period of public consultation was to explore how the transition to Irish Water could be managed most effectively.

Mr. S. Murray, DOS, drew the members' attention to various elements within the consultation documentation including a cautionary note that there may be a potential threat to the future finances of Councils should the Local Government Fund be used to support Irish Water costs.

A lengthy discussion ensued during which a number of issues were raised. A number of members expressed their disappointment at the decision to establish Irish Water, stating that the transfer of the water services function signified the greatest transfer of power away from the elected members since the establishment of the Health Boards in the 1970's. The members acknowledged the effectiveness of the Council's approach in providing a good service noting, in particular, the timely and effective response provided during the inclement weather experienced in recent years.

The members queried the rationale on which the decision to establish Irish Water was based and sought, at a minimum, that a commitment be given that elected members would be represented on the Board of Irish Water.

Concern, was expressed by some members, over the lack of consideration of how Irish Water would be financed and what regulatory body Irish Water would report to.

Members also expressed concern that there may be a disconnect between the service provider and the service user and that the price of water for householders and businesses may escalate out of control. Concern was also expressed that significant local knowledge and possibly agreements, for example with regard to rights of ways, that currently exist between landowners and the Council may be compromised.

The impact of the introduction of Irish Water on local authority personnel was noted.

The members acknowledged that for many new enterprise and employment promoters, the Council is the first point of contact. They advised that addressing infrastructural needs, e.g., roads, water and waste water, on a co-ordinated approach during the planning process allows Local Authorities to encourage and assist industries to locate in their county.

The members agreed that the Council's response should encompass all the members concerns. It was agreed that the Executive would prepare a draft submission, based on the concerns raised, for consideration and approval at the February Council meeting.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

**MINUTES CONFIRMED:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **CATHAOIRLEACH**

\_\_\_\_\_ **RUNAÍ**

**20<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2012**