

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE UÍBH FHAILÍ

**MINUTES OF APRIL MONTHLY MEETING
OF OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**HELD IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, CHARLEVILLE ROAD, TULLAMORE
ON MONDAY, 20TH APRIL 2020 AT 2.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:	<p>Cllr. P. Ormond, 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), D. Harvey (R), J. Leahy (R), T. McCormack (R), R. McDermott (R), F. Moran (R), S. O'Brien (R), D. Owens (R), L. Quinn (R) and K. Smollen (R)</p> <p><i>[(R) denotes remote access]</i></p>
IN ATTENDANCE:	<p>Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S. (R); Ms. S. Kennedy, D.O.S. (R); Mr. T. Mawe, A/H.O.F. (R); Ms. A. Dillon, A/D.O.S. (R), Mr. G. Bruton, Meetings Administrator, Ms. O. Martin, Head of LEO (R), Ms. A. Pedlow, Heritage Officer and Ms. L. Carbery, C.O.</p> <p><i>[(R) denotes remote access]</i></p>
CATHAOIRLEACH ADDRESS	<p>Cllr. P. Ormond welcomed the members and the press joining the meeting remotely and thanked the Staff of Offaly County Council, the community and all the volunteers for their contribution during the Covid 19 pandemic. He praised the Information System department for their excellent work in facilitating the staff and members to work remotely. He advised the members that no statutory items would be dealt with in accordance with Department guidelines and proposed that a meeting would be facilitated in the near future to deal with all statutory items.</p>
VOTES OF SYMPATHY:	<p>Votes of sympathy were unanimously extended to the following: -</p> <p>Mrs. Josie Maher, Rathmore, Edenderry, on the death of her husband Mr. Tommy Maher;</p> <p>Mrs. Caroline Hynes, Coolville Killure, Rhode on the death of her mother Mrs. May Glennon;</p> <p>Mrs. Lil Lynch, 43 Greenwood Park, Edenderry on the death of her brother Ed Slevin;</p> <p>Mr. Jimmy O'Grady, 31 Gilroy Avenue, Edenderry on the death of his mother Maisie O'Grady;</p> <p>Mrs. Patty Maloney, Castleview Park, Edenderry on the death of her husband George Maloney;</p> <p>Mrs. Elizabeth Farrell, St. Teresa's Terrace, Edenderry on the death of her husband Sean Hooper Farrell.</p>

	<p>Mr. Evan Fennell, Offaly County Council on the death of his sister Darragh Fennell.</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES:</p>	<p>Cllr. R. McDermott brought the meetings attention to an error in the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 17th February 2020 referring to the Presentation Convent lands in Edenderry. He advised that the lands are in Portarlinton and it was agreed the minutes would be amended.</p> <p>On the proposal of Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, seconded by Cllr. R. McDermott, the members resolved to adopt the amended minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Offaly County Council held in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly on Monday 17th February 2020.</p>
<p>MINUTES FOR NOTING:</p>	<p>The members noted the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minutes of Corporate Policy Group Meeting held in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly on Monday 20th January 2020; • Minutes of Housing Strategic Policy Committee held in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly on Tuesday 17th December 2019; • Minutes of Climate Action, Environment, Water & Transportation Strategic Policy Committee held in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly on Thursday 5th December 2019; • Minutes of Community, Cultural and Emergency Services Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly on Friday 8th November 2019; • Minutes of the Briefing Meeting of Offaly County Council held in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly on Wednesday 8th April 2020.
<p>COVID 19 UPDATE</p>	<p>Ms. A. Delaney noted that the members had been briefed on the 8th April and proceeded to outline the current Covid 19 situation. She advised the members that risk assessments had been carried out to ensure essential services and staffing levels are fully compliant with Covid-19 safety measures. She noted that essential services have been agreed nationally through the CCMA and following a review Local Enterprise Offices and Motor Tax were included. She advised the members that the Motor Tax Office is encouraging online applications, while continuing to process postal applications and there is no backlog at present. She highlighted that the business of the Council has continued with CPG, Edenderry & Tullamore Municipal District meetings having taken place and the Birr Municipal District scheduled for later in the week. She informed the members that options to hold a meeting to deal with statutory items are being explored. She advised the members that a ministerial order has issued to extend the</p>

planning deadlines to 42 days. She noted that Offaly County Council is working with the HSE, Gardaí and that the CCMA are holding weekly meetings remotely.

Mr. T. Mawe, A/ H.O.F. advised the members that finance services are continuing to operate. He noted that there is a moratorium available for businesses affected by Covid 19 and that the finance team are working with its customers. He informed the members that currently there is a moratorium but a national solution is being explored. He advised the members that a three-month mortgage payment break is available for clients and this will be decided on a case by case basis. He cautioned that the impact of the lockdown is only emerging and it may be necessary to review the budget.

Ms. A. Delaney agreed that due to the acute financial situation, the CCMA are reviewing the situation nationally and she will inform the members as information becomes available.

Ms. S. Kennedy updated the members on the community forum, which is meeting weekly remotely and she welcomed an emergency fund in the amount of €65.5k which has been provided to fund capital and current projects for community groups assisting in the Community Forum. She informed the members that approximately €1k would be available to relevant groups and gave examples such as Meals on Wheels, St. Vincent de Paul, travellers and disability groups. She informed the members that an assessment committee has been established consisting of Cllrs. P. Ormond and D. Harvey, Offaly County Council staff, Mr. Martin Daly, Mr. Brian Pey, Ms. Bride Costello Hynes and Roisin Lennon of Offaly Local Development Company.

The members thanked the management for their update and acknowledged the many challenges they faced. They raised a number of queries in regard to payment of rents and rates. They raised concerns that many businesses will close for good and rates cancellation may be required. They acknowledged the work of the Community Forum and noted that it will be required for a long time in the future to help sustain and support community groups. They queried the costs of running the scheme and if there is any allowance for motor tax for people that are not using their vehicles. They acknowledged that many businesses while remaining open are just providing a service and may be operating at a loss. Cllr. F. Moran requested that the rate demands be held until government clarification is received and that the community application forms be issued to all members. Cllr. K. Smollen highlighted the community spirit in particular he noted the buntings in O'Molloy Street. Cllr. J. Clendennen highlighted that connectivity is important, in particular for the older generation and queried if an iPad scheme could be funded.

Ms. A. Delaney, C.E. thanked the members for their support and assistance in getting the information to the community. In responding to their queries she agreed that job losses and business closures would be a challenge and that a national

	<p>response would be required. She noted the challenges already faced in Offaly with the impending closure of the Shannonbridge Power Station and cautioned that budget adjustment may be required with possible reduction of services. She highlighted that planning is ongoing for the recovery stage, including business supports and the roads programme on a phased basis, cautioning that social distancing will still be required and that the members would be kept informed on any developments.</p> <p>Mr. T. Mawe noted that there is a lot of uncertainty in this early stage and that the situation is changing daily making it difficult to quantify the cost. He advised the members that letters are being issued in the next few weeks to rates customers, these will include information about rates referral and rebate. He advised the members that the operation of the Rates Rebate Scheme would have to be reviewed by the members. He informed the members that court actions have been suspended, rents are being reassessed with tenants, but local property tax is collected by Revenue and therefore is a national issue. He advised the members that motor tax have a facility to declare a vehicle off the road.</p> <p>Ms. S. Kennedy advised the members that the community funding is subject to government guidelines and is available to groups directly involved in the community Covid 19 response.</p> <p>The members responded that the community funding was small and more would be required to ensure support for the community groups. They expressed concerns that services could be reduced and that rate demands would put pressure on businesses.</p> <p>In response to the members queries Ms. A. Delaney advised that Offaly County Council have been faced with challenges with regard to the rates and noted that national funding may be required and she will revert to the members on this issue. She highlighted that social housing is capital funded and that projects nearing completion may be permitted to progress in the near future. Mr. T. Mawe advised the members that the rates demands are being reviewed with the Revenue Collectors.</p>
<p>LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE UPDATE</p>	<p>Ms. A. Dillon informed the members that the presentation was deferred from the March meeting and that the Local Enterprise Office have been working tirelessly to support many businesses that they deal with.</p> <p>Ms. O. Martin provided the members with a detailed presentation on the Local Enterprise Office, noting that it is a very difficult time for all businesses dealing with issues such as cash flow, HR, technical, safe working environment and stock levels. She informed the members that many businesses have benefitted from BREXIT preparedness and that Management Development has helped and that there are variations within Sectors, such as Engineering, Food, Retail, Technology & ICT.</p>

Ms. O. Martin informed the members that there has been a co-ordinated response with supports from National Government, Local Government, and State Agencies. The local LEO are networking nationally, partaking in weekly conference with the Department and are included in a national advertising campaign. She advised the members on the key supports available consisting of the following:

- Free COVID Mentoring
- Business Continuity Voucher - €2,500
- Microfinance Loan Fund – up to €50,000, 4.5% interest rate, first 6-months interest free
- Trading Online Voucher - €2,500 with 10% matched funding, second voucher available
- Free online training and webinars

She highlighted that businesses can avail of mentoring, guidance, business modelling and relevant supports. The Local Enterprise office are advising them to use this time wisely and if possible to transform their businesses and/or position themselves for recovery. She advised the members that the Birr remote working hub is closed but Tullamore and Edenderry are operating on a limited basis. The Local Enterprise Office are tracking usage of the hubs, a 3-month moratorium is available for rent and a time extension is available for grants. She advised that the demand for remote working hubs will increase. She advised the members that both the Shop Front Scheme and the new branding are almost finalised.

Cllr. P. Ormond thanked Ms. Martin for her excellent presentation and noted the importance of supports for small businesses. The members acknowledged the hard work and dedication of the staff of the Local Enterprise Office and in particular their online mentoring sessions. They raised a query with regard to the eligibility for the micro loans and acknowledged the importance of the remote working hubs and the possibility of expanding these services. They suggested the possibility of promoting Offaly Tourism packages and the need for improvement of broadband services and apprenticeships. They raised concerns about the challenges under Just Transition.

Ms. O. Martin acknowledged that the Just Transition is a huge challenge. She agreed that there is potential capacity to expand the remote working hubs and to include community centres. She also agreed that there is an opportunity to promote Offaly under the Space to Grow branding. She noted the demand for broadband has accelerated. She confirmed the micro loan financing is open to businesses with up to 10 employees with €2m yearly turnover. She informed the members that some businesses are being cautious due to the on-going Covid 19 situation and they do not want to borrow at this time. She highlighted that new opportunities are being developed in conjunction with Laois Offaly Education Training Board and Midland Regional Skills. She thanked the Information Systems and the Finance section for their assistance in providing the Local Enterprise Services.

	<p>Ms. A. Delaney informed the members that 200 members of staff have been facilitated with working from home and the tourism plan is currently being reviewed to update its marketing plan and to include recovery plans.</p>
<p>JUST TRANSITION UPDATE</p>	<p>Ms. A. Delaney informed the members that the Budget 2020 provided for a suite of measures to support a just transition for the Midland Region, noting the appointment of a Just Transition Commissioner, provision for a Midlands Just Transition Fund, the Midlands Deep Retrofit Programme and the NPWS Bog rehabilitation programme. In addition to these actions, the Midlands Regional Transition Team in partnership with the Commissioner has progressed the technical assistance programme provided by the START Team and has developed a suite of skills / training measures.</p> <p>She advised the members that Commissioner Mulvey's first progress report has been submitted to the Department and is due to be signed off shortly. She noted that the report will detail stakeholder engagement to date and will contain a number of recommendations for the Minister and Government to consider. She informed the members that the mechanism to administer the Just Transition Fund in the amount of €6M with a further €5M from ESB is currently being considered.</p> <p>Ms. A. Delaney updated the members on the Midlands Deep Retrofit Programme in the amount of €20m to be shared amongst the 5 Counties (Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath & Kildare). She advised the members that a number of meetings have been held with representatives from SEAI, DCCA, DoHPLG, OGP, Offaly, Westmeath, Longford, Laois and Kildare County Councils to progress the Midlands Deep Retrofit scheme and that a circular is to be issued to each Local Authority outlining the parameters of the scheme which will seek to bring dwellings to a minimum Building Energy Rating of B2. She advised that the meetings held to date have indicated that the scheme would allow for the upgrading of between 150 and 200 units in each county, and would involve two stages and two procurement processes, the first is the survey/design works and the second, the construction/upgrading works. She noted the timeline is subject to Covid-19 restrictions and that this has been brought to the attention of the Just Transition Commissioner.</p> <p>Ms. A. Delaney outlined the NPWS Bog Rehabilitation Programme in the amount of €5M with Bord Na Móna appointed by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht as project managers to oversee the implementation of restoration works on 9 raised protected bogs in the Midlands region and to undertake the restoration works. She noted that NPWS have indicated that this rehabilitation programme could provide for up to 70 jobs in the Midland region across a range of professions including machine operators, engineers, hydrologists, ecologists, environmental scientists, site supervisors, community liaison personnel and in evaluating amenity development potential.</p>

	<p>Ms. A. Delaney updated the members on the START programme, a Holistic Plan for Just Transition in the Midland Region and that the START team are currently finalising the Socio Economic Profile of the Region. She advised that the START Community engagement programme was initially planned to host a number of workshops in the communities, however given the current worldwide pandemic, these must now progress through electronic means utilising existing LA networks including the PPN, LEO newsletters and Local Development Companies. The purpose of the community engagement is to identify projects for delivery in the impacted bog community areas. This will result in a prioritised project inventory, focusing on identifying key, credible, considered projects to facilitate change. This will, in turn, help to sign-post potential future funding requirements and noted that work has commenced on the Skills & Education Paper for the Region.</p> <p>Ms. A. Delaney advised the members that Ireland is required to develop a Territorial Just Transition Plan, for approval by the European Commission, which will provide the overall strategic framework for investments of the funding received. She noted that the current understanding is that DEPR will lead the negotiations for Ireland and this Fund will be part of the EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027, which still has to be finalised. She advised that the funds will not be available from this Fund until 2021 at the earliest.</p> <p>She informed the members that The Retrofit Programme and National SOLAS NZEB Training Facility were officially launched at Mount Lucas on March 11th 2020, noting that the Retrofit programme has been developed for former BnM employees and focusses on deep retrofit measures. She advised that 32 Bord Na Mona employees are currently engaged on the programme with 32 more ready to start once the Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted. She noted that LOETB will also be offering the upskilling NZEB provision that focusses on ensuring that craftspeople and site managers as well as general operatives are fully au fait with the Nearly Zero Energy Building Standard that has been introduced to the Building Regulations. She outlined the various training schemes and redeployment opportunities in development, with training being delivered at both the Mount Lucas Training Centre and on location at various Bord Na Mona Works and associated peatlands.</p> <p>The members thanked Ms. A. Delaney for her update and raised concerns about lack of funding from the ESB, the deep retrofit programme, Bord na Mona workers training and redeployment and the bog rehabilitation scheme.</p> <p>Ms. A. Delaney advised that she has no details on the bog rehabilitation scheme currently.</p>
<p>ALL IRELAND POLLINATOR PLAN</p>	<p>Ms. A. Dillon brought the members attention to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan. Ms. A. Pedlow, Heritage Officer, provided the members with a presentation on the plan. She advised the members on the policy context including the National</p>

	<p>Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021, Offaly County Council Corporate Plan 2019-2024 and the Offaly Heritage Plan Key Actions for 2017-2021. She updated the members on the work achieved to date with Birr winning the National Pollinator Award in 2016, Geashill's win in the Midland Regional Pollinator Award 2019 and again their national win in 2017 and 2019. She also noted that Tullamore Lloyd Town Park achieved the Green Flag Pollinator Award in 2017. She updated the members on the work carried out, including staff workshops held in 2018, support for Tidy Towns to plan and introduce pollinator projects noting that 6 towns received support for pollinator plans in 2018. She highlighted the Midlands 103 infomercials with ideas about how to support pollinators commissioned jointly between Offaly, Westmeath and Laois County Councils. She recommended the adoption of the All Ireland Pollinator Plan and highlighted the 30 actions to choose from within the plan.</p> <p>The members thanked Ms. A. Pedlow for her detailed presentation. Cllr Claffey and Fitzpatrick noted that this was an excellent initiative and Cllr Fitzpatrick noted the work carried out by the local community in the Garryhinch area.</p>
<p>MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT:</p>	<p>Ms. A. Delaney brought the members attention to the March monthly management report as circulated with the agenda. She advised that Roads have maintained essential services and that the Local Improvement Scheme allocation of €278,871 has been approved for 2020. She informed the members that due to the current Covid 19 crisis the National Spring Clean week was postponed and that all civic amenity sites have remained open, with all reporting increased usage. She advised that there have been a number of reported dumping sites investigated during the Covid-19 crisis, and each individual case will be fully investigated as normal under the powers available to the Local Authority. She informed the members that water quality sampling has been suspended due to current restrictions. She advised the members that the contract for the Tullamore Community Arts Centre has been signed but works have been suspended. She welcomed the Fáilte Ireland funding for Regeneration project in Birr in the amount of €412,500.</p> <p>Ms. A. Delaney advised the members that Offaly County Council in partnership with the Offaly Independent launched the Cathaoirleach's Community & Sports Awards 2020 at Áras an Chontae, Tullamore. Michael Duignan, Chairman of Offaly GAA formally launched the event but unfortunately the Awards Ceremony will be deferred until Covid 19 restrictions are relaxed.</p> <p>Ms. A. Delaney updated the members on the excellent online Library Services currently available during the Covid 19 crisis and advised that the Library may give a presentation at a council meeting in the near future.</p> <p>Mr. T. Shanahan informed the members that the Local Improvement Scheme will be advertised next week, the bottle</p>

	<p>banks are being cleared and pick-ups will be organised for illegal dumping.</p> <p>The members thanked the Chief Executive for her comprehensive report. They acknowledged the clearing of the bottle banks and queried if extra signage or sensor cameras with audio could be installed to dissuade dumping around the bottle banks. They also raised concerns about outstanding LIS projects from 2018. Cllr. C. Claffey praised the Library services noting their contribution to mental health and wellbeing in the current situation. Cllr. K. Smollen acknowledge the clean-up works of the local community at Cloncollig and Esker Rí.</p> <p>In response to the members queries Mr. T. Shanahan advised that the LIS projects would be progressed and increased surveillance at bottle banks could be investigated.</p>
CORPORATE POLICY GROUP REPORT:	Cllr. P. Ormond, Cathaoirleach informed the members that the Corporate Policy Group met earlier that day and discussed the Council Agenda, Just Transition, the protocol for visiting dignitaries, branding and Section 40 of the Data Protection Regulations.
COMHFHREAGRAS	The members noted the correspondence received.
ANY OTHER BUSINESS:	None

This concluded the business of the meeting.

MINUTES CONFIRMED: _____
CATHAOIRLEACH **RUNAÍ**

18th May 2020