

**COMHAIRLE CATHRACH AGUS CONTAE PHORT LÁIRGE
WATERFORD CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL**

COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 10TH FEBRUARY 2022 BY MS TEAMS

Present

Cllr. Ger Barron	Cllr. Jason Murphy
Cllr. Donal Barry	Cllr. Pat Nugent
Cllr. Liam Brazil	Cllr. John O’Leary
Cllr. Joeanne Bailey	Cllr. Lola O’Sullivan
Cllr. Declan Clune	Cllr. Thomas Phelan
Cllr. Joe Conway	Cllr. Jody Power
Cllr. Tom Cronin	Cllr. Seanie Power
Cllr. Conor D. McGuinness	Cllr. John Pratt
Cllr. David Daniels	Cllr. Eamon Quinlan
Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald	Cllr. Frank Quinlan
Cllr. Damien Geoghegan	Cllr. Mary Roche
Cllr. Jim Griffin	Cllr. Seamus Ryan
Cllr. John Hearne	Cllr. Eddie Mulligan
Cllr. Joe Kelly	Cllr. James Tobin
Cllr. Cristiona Kiely	

Apologies: Cllr. Declan Doocey, Cllr. Seamus O’Donnell, Cllr. Adam Wyse

Officials in Attendance

Mr. Michael Walsh, Chief Executive
 Mr. Ivan Grimes, Director of Services, Housing, Community & Emergency Services
 Mr. Fergus Galvin, Director of Services, Roads, Water & Environment
 Mr. Michael Quinn, Director of Services, Economic Development and Planning
 Mr. Bernard Pollard, Head of Finance
 Ms. Honor. Dunphy, Meetings Administrator
 Ms. Jane Cantwell, City Librarian
 Mr. Dave Mitchell, Corporate
 Mr. Conan Power, Communications
 Mr. Jon Hawkins, Information Systems

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

1. Confirmation of Minutes

Minutes of Plenary meeting held on the 13th January 2022 proposed by Cllr. Daniels, seconded by Cllr. Fitzgerald and agreed by all.

2. Matters Arising

Cllr. Conway asked about progress with a confidential briefing on the North Quays for the members.
 Cllr. J. Power enquired about the application for funding for the Decarbonisation Initiative which was approved by the members last month.

M. Walsh, CEO, stated that he was happy to have a workshop in the coming weeks on the North Quays and could include Michael Street and the Airport. He also stated that the applications for Climate Neutral and Smart cities had been submitted on 31st January and the council was engaging at national and EU Level. The results should be known by the end of March. Advertising for the team to be recruited has commenced.

3. Land Disposals

J. Cantwell, A/DoS, listed the proposed disposals for consideration.

Proposed by Cllr. Nugent, seconded by Cllr. Phelan and agreed by all. Both members also complimented the staff in the Property Section for their support and assistance on the Clashmore land disposal.

4. Monthly Management Report

Cllr. E. Quinlan asked if a Homeless Hub was needed like the Energy Hub to get information on the new housing offerings out to the public. He also enquired if consideration could be given to a Greenway Points scheme for visitors to collect and exchange for discounts at local businesses along the Greenway. He requested a list of estates that had not been Taken In Charge and expressed his fear that the council could be taken to court as had occurred elsewhere recently.

Cllr. Clune noted that in the survey of councils nationally Waterford had one of the lowest rates of unoccupied council dwelling in the state at 1.5%. and he wanted to commend the Housing Department. He also asked how the allocation of the €24m for Active Travel was made and how the 23 specific projects were selected. Additionally, he noted that there had been a €2.1m overspend on The Square in Dungarvan some years ago and asked if there were controls in place now for overrunning work. He wanted to know what the situation was on the overrunning Tramore public realm works and how much that would be together with an explanation as to how it would be paid for.

Cllr. Barry asked if the offerings on CBL are all long-term leases as these would be taking from the properties available to other people. He also wanted clarification on the part Waterford Port might have with offshore windfarm assembly and maintenance as he has seen reports that the Government was looking to Rosslare for this work. Additionally, he enquired about the Failte Ireland tourist office moving to the Museum of Treasures and only opening for 5 months a year. He wanted to know would they be paying rent or were they getting free space.

F. Galvin, DoS, clarified that the Active Travel projects were needs based in locations where there were known deficiencies and further details would be provided at the district meetings.

M. Quinn, DoS, stated

- He would refer the suggestion for a Points app for Greenway users to the Trails Officer for consideration while warning that any such scheme was dependant on the level of local business supporting it.
- Regarding Taking in Charge, he confirmed that there was a process in place with the Roads Department to manage it. There is a list of estates they are progressing but many of which have legacy issues slowing the process. There has also been increased activity in recent years with Planning and Roads allocating more resources in that time to Taking in Charge.
- Approval had been given for additional spending on the Tramore public realm works. He was not aware of any need to have additional funding. Some of the issues that were encountered were the responsibility of utilities like Irish Water. He said the assigned council engineer managed and specified the work and there are occasionally unforeseen circumstances that must be managed. He said that there would be a final account in due course but additional funding was granted and spend was within the broader parameters for the project.
- He confirmed that the Port of Waterford were working with Rosslare Port on the potential work on wind farms and that some activities were more suited to Rosslare given the facilities available there.
- He stated that our preference was for a 12 month a year manned Failte Ireland office. He confirmed that Failte Ireland were paying the Museum for the space they were taking. He clarified the 5-

month period at the Mayor's request stating Failte Ireland had done a study and they determined that the service was only needed for 5 months. He added that our own staff may be able to help tourists who are looking for assistance outside the 5 months opening time given that the visitors would be in the Museum.

I Grimes, DoS, replied as follows

- He indicated he didn't believe that a dedicated Hub for the new Housing mortgage schemes is required.
- He accepted the thanks of Cllr. Clune for the efficient turnaround of vacant stock.
- He clarified that all the units on CBL go to those in need on the housing list. Some of the properties had come through from the council's repair and lease scheme. It included properties that had been vacant including former commercial units, for up to 10 years.

Cllr. Griffin asked if further consideration could be given to a housing summit for stakeholders across the city and county.

Cllr. J. Power noted from the Management Report that the homeless HAP service had processed over 300 cases and 81 assessments. He wanted to know if there were sufficient staff in the area, He asked why all the Housing Loan applications had been deferred. Lastly, he asked if the Smarter Travel to work Programme for Council staff would extend to the members.

Cllr. McGuinness stated that rents in Waterford had increased by 13.2% and that there were no units available in Waterford for working families on the open market especially if they were above the social housing income thresholds. He also enquired why housing applicants now had to get a form completed by their GP instead of the letter previously required.

I Grimes provided the following responses

- He noted there was a Hosing Summit previously and will revert with additional plans. There was a workshop on housing scheduled for early March and it might be assessed there.
- Homeless HAP recorded all those that came into the service and assessments were only done for those at clear risk of homelessness which is not the case with all customers.
- The Housing Loan deferrals are usually to allow applicants to show a record of savings before putting applications through for consideration.
- He confirmed that he had still not had a response from the Dept on the letter re HAP Rents limits.
- He agreed to talk to the grants team regarding the medical forms now required but he said that the application forms for these schemes were done nationally by the department.

F. Galvin, DoS, clarified that Smart Travel in the Workplace was starting with staff and that the results would be looked at before considering extending it to members.

Cllr. Conway enquired how many responses were received to the ITT for Age Friendly Cities. He also wanted confirmation when tender responses were opened and if it was still done in the presence of a member as it had been done in the past. He added his agreement to the Taking in Charge issue raised by Cllr. E. Quinlan and stated that he had asked the SPC chair to take action on this matter.

Cllr. Kiely referred to the retrofit scheme that the government announced the previous day and asked if the libraries from the Southeast bid for Community Energy Hub one stop shop could include this. She asked if the council approached property owners who might potentially be able to use the repair and lease scheme. Enquired if the Homeless Services Hub could be renamed to something that would reflect the house finding activity that people were going through. Additionally, she asked if all councillors would be allowed to attend the scheduled Community Safety Partnership (CSP) workshop and when the safety audit and workshop she previously requested might occur. She also asked if there a timeframe for the works on the Plaza.

Cllr. Phelan welcomed the progress with the decarbonisation project and the advertising of the team. He wanted to know the governance arrangements for the project. According to a newspaper report there was no Vacant Homes Officer in Waterford and was this still the case. Enquired if the council is aware of all vacant properties within the boundaries. Page 10 of the report stated that -14 HAP tenancies were set up.

It also stated that all HAP and half LT lets failed inspections. He wanted to know if the LT lets were Repair and Lease properties. He asked if the council could look at Bike Repair Stations in the Greenway like those at the Fairlane Park in Dungarvan. Additionally, he asked about litter prevention on approach roads.

Cllr. Daniels asked about the restriction on house buying with councils only allowed to buy houses second hand only plus one bed apartments. He wanted to know on what grounds an application for Tenant Purchase could be refused. He also asked if the Safe2 Schools programme was open to all schools. He enquired if the JC Decaux Active Travel project was just for areas of the city or if it extends to the county also.

I Grimes, DoS, responded by stating:

- There were 5 suppliers invited to tender for the Age Friendly review but only one submitted a response. The contract will be awarded in the next few days.
- He confirmed that the Council has a full time Vacant Homes Officer, and they work at identifying potential properties that could be used as part of their role. They do approach owners of long-term vacant properties.
- Changing the name of the Homeless service would not be appropriate as it is not an estate agent service.
- There are 7 councillors on the CSP and they are free to attend the workshop. He will ask the CSP if they might brief the council members.
- Inspection failures are usually minor and older houses will always have issues. All inspection failures are followed up to ensure remediation.
- The scheme restricting the type of dwelling referred to by Cllr. Daniels is not one used by Waterford City and County Council. The buy and renew scheme that is used here is not impacted by these restrictions.
- There are many reasons for refusing a Tenant Purchase application and some dwellings cannot be sold. An appeals mechanism is in place should anyone wish to use it.

M. Quinn, DoS, replied as follows:

- There was a TIC process in place and there is a backlog at the moment. He suggested it was a topic that the SPC should discuss.
- The planned works on the Plaza are due to start in March for a period of 6-9 months it is a service diversion project rather than a development project. It is not the development work and installation of the new bridge.
- Regarding Bike Repair Stations he would be happy to look at having them at the major nodes on the Greenway but would like to see how successful the one in Dungarvan is first.

F. Galvin, DoS, gave the following responses

- The Safe 2 School programme was closed to new applicants until the existing schools had completed the programme.
- The JD Decaux bike hire project was confined to the city only and was financed by the NTL.
- He would look at hiring a vacuum sweeper for the approach roads litter issue as it proved successful last year.

B. Pollard, HoF, confirmed that tenders are now submitted electronically using the Office of Public Procurement e-Tenders platform so there was no paper submission to be opened.

M. Walsh, CE, stated that the governance of the decarbonisation project was not yet framed but it will be via the council with some sub committees for the other stakeholders. It would be established over the next few months.

Cllr. Bailey asked what progress had been made on plastic bottle recycling and if machines might be used. She asked if the HAP rent limits could be extended. She was concerned that the council did not provide grass cutting on estates that have been Taking in Charge.

Cllr. Fitzgerald was concerned that when grant aid is provided for disabled people in local authority housing only those with the highest priority seem to benefit. Those with lesser medical priority apply year after year but never get to the top of the list before the funds are exhausted. At the same time the fund for people in private housing is seldom fully drawn down. He wanted to know if there was any way to get the funds transferred from the private scheme to the local authority one to reduce the waiting list.

Cllr. Ryan enquired if the executive were aware of any approach from Vulture Funds in Waterford, he asked that properties that were built in poor condition could be prioritised for correction. He commended the Library Service and Jane Cantwell on the C-Pens that had been acquired and asked when they might be available to the public. He also asked if the Homeless Hub could be made more welcoming to customers.

Responding .I Grimes, DoS, stated the following:

- He confirmed that he had previously written to the department on income limits for social housing and can write again regarding the HAP limits. He believes the minister is looking at them currently and there may be a discretionary limit put in place similar to Dublin.
- He has already asked the Department if the unused private disability grant funding could be used to reduce the numbers waiting in social housing and he will continue to seek approval.
- The structural issues with build were being pursued with developers.
- He has not had any dealing with vulture funds and is not aware of any operating in Waterford.
- He will speak to staff regarding the situation at the Homeless Hub, but its current configuration was required to protect the staff from Covid.

F. Galvin, DoS, confirmed that the Deposit Return Scheme referred to by Cllr. Bailey was a national one and he was expecting some direction on it later in the year. There was ongoing discussion between the department and industry. He also stated that the Council had installed its own recycling points in urban areas. He further confirmed that the council do not cut the grass in private estates and would not have the resources to provide such a service.

J, Cantwell, A/DoS, explained that the C-Pens allowed text to be read to people with special needs and the would be delivered in the coming days. There would also be a lending scheme for members of the public or people training others. She also clarified that the application by the southeast libraries with the energy agency to raise climate awareness would be decided in April. Any links to one stop shops would be welcomed.

Cllr. Murphy enquired if there could be a monthly report for the total numbers on the housing waiting list in future. He asked if there was any way that some CBL properties could be ear marked for people with mobility issues. Additionally, he enquired if a mobility footpath audit could be conducted to ascertain the cost to fix them.

Cllr. Mulligan stated that he would prefer if the Tourist office was in the middle of an urban area rather than in the museum. He asked how long it takes for an Occupational Therapist to visit applicants for Housing Adaptation Grants. He was concerned that some residents who had to park on footpaths outside their homes were getting tickets and what was the policy on parking on footpaths overnight when there is no adjacent car parking. He also raised an issue where further information is requested from a developer, people who have already made an objection to planning permission are sent a letter with these observations and invite further submission. There is a two-week window to respond but it is unclear from the letter when this commences and when the actual end date would fall. Is it possible to get the actual end date included on the latter to provide transparency.

Cllr. Tobin asked if cobble lock footpaths were an insurance risk for the council. He also asked of there would be constant communications between the new active travel team and the roads department to coordinate activities.

I. Grimes, DoS, responded as follows:

- Housing list numbers are calculated annually, and it is not practical to do monthly as some people were on multiple lists.

- He would consider Cllr. Murphy's suggestion regarding the ear marking of some CBL dwellings for people with additional needs.
- There was no set period for OT assessments as it was based on availability. The council was doing its best to keep waiting period down but there is an OT shortage, and the council is competing for a scarce resource.

M. Quinn, DoS, provided the following responses:

- He will flag the concerns regarding the location of the tourist office with Failte Ireland. There is a benefit in that our own staff could assist in the off season in the Museum. The tourist office in Ireland was an information only centre it did not do event or venue bookings as might happen in other countries.
- He would check and see if anything could be done regarding the planning notices and the dates regarding responses to observations as they were generated from an IT system.

In response to his enquires directed to him F. Galvin, DoS, stated the following:

- There was a Walkability Audit being carried out on footpaths at the moment in some urban areas but it was not extensive. He said specific cases could be added to the list for attention.
- He confirmed that parking on footpaths was an offence under the Road Traffic Act and it would be enforced particularly where it was obstructive. If there are areas that residents cannot park near their home, then the traffic management in the area needs to be re-examined.
- Cobble Lock paths were acceptable if properly maintained but an expensive solution as the maintenance requirements were very high.
- The Active Travel Team are working closely with the Roads Department.

Cllr. O' Leary asked what portion of the National Retrofit Scheme could be used for the council's own stock.

Cllr. Pratt asked about the progress with the signage in playgrounds for autistic children. He wanted to know what the progress was with the Greenway extension into West Waterford. He also asked how many dog wardens there were.

Cllr. Geoghegan wanted to add his congratulations to Jane Cantwell and the Library Team on acquiring the C Pens which he said were life changing.

Cllr. F. Quinlan noted that there was an imbalance in the allocation of 2 and 3 bedroom dwellings for family units with mixed gender children in the household versus those that were single sex who seemed to have a longer wait. He supported Cllr. Mulligan concerns regarding the issue of residents parking on footpaths and the potential requirement to make some streets one way needed to be addressed.

Cllr. Hearne wanted to know if goats were protected from being shot. He was also concerned about the protection of wildlife especially hares. Additionally, he was worried about the level of top ups being paid by HAP tenants was not monitored. He wanted to express his thanks to Colette O'Brien for the great help she had given applicant in completing forms. The Mayor and all present wanted to add their thank to Collette O'Brien.

F. Galvin, DoS, responded as follows:

- He confirmed that the new signage for nonverbal children in playgrounds was in procurement and he hoped to get them installed in the Spring.
- There are two dog wardens authorised to fine in Waterford and there is currently a vacancy to be filled.
- The Council has no remit with regard to the protection of goats and hares as this is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine.

I. Grimes, DoS, provided the following responses:

- The deep Energy Retrofit scheme last year was €1.7m and involved 59 houses. He had not been notified of the 2022 allocation but hoped it would be higher.

- The Housing SPC need to propose changes to the allocations scheme priorities with regard to household gender mix and then bring it to the Plenary for ratification.
- Housing staff do ask to be informed of Top Ups paid to landlords, but the majority of tenants are not always willing to provide any information.
- He would pass on the members appreciation of Collette O'Brien's work helping with application forms.

M. Quinn, DoS, thought that a workshop for the Greenway extension was scheduled. H. Dunphy, MA, confirmed that it had been rescheduled to occur in the next fortnight.

5. Arts Practice & Festivals Grants

This was introduced by M. Quinn, DoS, with the recommendation from the executive that it should be adopted, and the funds made available.

Cllr. Tobin proposed and Cllr Pratt seconded. The Mayor commented that it was a very positive move with more than €1.35m being made available. He also thanked the officials for the work they had contributed to it.

Cllrs. Geoghegan, Pratt, Griffin, Barry, Ryan, S Power and Kiely added their support and appreciation of the work done by all in getting to this stage.

The Arts Practice and Festival Grants were approved unanimously.

6. Report from SPC: Environment, Climate Action & Biodiversity

F. Galvin, DoS, provided an overview of the report.

Cllr. Fitzgerald as chair of the SPC proposed the report which was seconded by Cllr Phelan. Acceptance was agreed by all.

7. Presentation by National Broadband Ireland

A presentation to the members was made by Donal Hanrahan Chief Operating Officer of NBI deployment and was followed by a question-and-answer session. The Mayor thanked Mr. Hanrahan for the interesting and informative update and to know that the members can approach NPI directly if they need to follow up on the issues raised.

8. Correspondence

Proposed by Cllr. Pratt, seconded by Cllr Fitzgerald and agreed by all.

An addition was made to the attendance list for the AILG training event on 19th February with Cllr. Tobin being proposed by Cllr. Conway and seconded by Cllr. O' Sullivan.

Cllr. Ryan requested that his voice be added to the request by Sligo County Council to have Medical Cards given to all cancer patients.

9. Notice of Motions

The motions listed have been referred to the SPC for consideration and can be dealt with at a future plenary when the SPC reports back.

10. A.O.B.

The Meeting administrator reminded the members that their Ethics Declarations needed to be returned urgently.

Cllr. McGuinness informed members of an event in Dungarvan on 5th March to mark the Centenary of the takeover of the Castle from British forces requesting rsvp on attendance.

Cllr Griffin stated his agreement with I. Grimes that the name of the Homeless Hub should not change as it shows the severity of the housing crises.

Cllr. Kiely clarified that she was not trivialising the Homeless Hub but was just concerned about the welfare of people that were visiting it and the pressure they might be under.

Signed: _____
Mayor

Dated: _____