

Minutes of Environment, Biodiversity & Climate Action SPC Meeting

held on 14th January, 2020

Conference Room, Civic Offices, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.

Present: **SPC Members:** Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, (*Chair*), Cllr. Breda Brennan, Cllr. Damien Geoghegan, Cllr. Joe Kelly, Cllr. John Hearne, Ms. Laura O'Brien-Forbes, Mr. Tom Hogan, Cllr. Marc O'Cathasaigh, and Mr. Alan Walshe.

Officials: Mr. Fergus Galvin, Director of Services.
Mr. Raymond Moloney, S.E.O.
Mr. Luke O'Brien, A.O.
Mr. Niall Kane, S.E.E
Ms. Siobhán McCarthy, S.O.
Ms. Deirdre Moore, A.S.O.
Ms. Ella Ryan, Environmental Awareness Officer

Apologies: Cllr. Jim Griffin, Cllr. Ger Barron, Ms. Obianuju Ekedozi and Ms. Brid O'Hehir

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked the members for attending and apologies received were noted. The business of the meeting then proceeded.

1. Minutes of Meeting held on November 28th, 2019

The Minutes of November 28th, 2019 meeting were proposed by Cllr. B. Brennan, seconded by Cllr. D. Geoghegan, and agreed.

• Matters Arising

No issues arising from previous meeting.

2. Climate Adaptation Strategy

R. Moloney, SEO presented the Climate Adaptation Strategy which had been postponed from the previous SPC meeting. He outlined the effects and impacts of climate change on our environment, society and economic and natural resources and outlined the goals, objectives and actions required by the local authority.

A. Walshe queried where the local authority was with Climate Change and said it appeared very broad. He asked who was responsible and what the involvement of the community/voluntary groups was. R. Moloney advised that there was an internal Climate Action Team involving all departments. All actions in the strategy were broken down by Department and assigned to the relevant person, who reverted back when completed and/or what action was being taken. This would feed back into the PPN.

Cllr. O'Cathasaigh queried why Waterford Council did not apply for the partner offices. F. Galvin, Director of Services stated this decision was taken by the Chief Executive and Management as it was felt Waterford should be aligned with Cork as our issues are coastal and more in common with Cork, where Kilkenny/Kildare have a different set of issues. R. Moloney, SEO stated each CARO is aligned to a third level college and WCCC can work with WIT at local level.

Cllr. Hearne raised the EU directive on burning/cutting of gorse and the detrimental effect on wildlife. R. Moloney, SEO said he was unaware of this but would speak to the Heritage Officer. F. Galvin, Director of Services stated this was a Department of Agriculture issue. Cllr. Fitzgerald stated grants were given which had burned and destroyed wildlife. A. Walshe stated that the removal of plants was further adding to coastal erosion.

Cllr. Kelly asked if this policy was still in place. Cllr. Fitzgerald said not for burning but there were track machines to take off the gorse, but you needed to have acreage before claiming grant. Cllr. Kelly requested that the SPC write to the relevant Minister advising him of the negative effect this practice was having on wildlife. A grant to return the gorse should be given to restore the wildlife. F. Galvin, DoS said he would speak with the Biodiversity Officer and see what policies are in place and if the committee are agreeable would make the SPC and Council's views known on the issues. This was agreed.

Cllr. Hearne raised the sulky issue in particular the safety for the public and the cruelty to the animal. He requested that a letter be sent to the Department of Transport. F. Galvin, DoS stated the legal opinion received and that there was nothing in the current framework to change this.

(b) Climate Action Charter

R. Moloney SEO outlined the detail in the Climate Action Charter. Following a brief discussion on the Charter, he advised the members that the Minister for Communications, Chief Executive and Mayor of Council had signed the Climate Action Charter.

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked R. Moloney, SEO for the informative presentations.

5. Notices of Motion referred from Plenary Council

It was agreed to take Item No. 5 – Notice of Motion from the Plenary Council next on the agenda as it was part of climate change, which had been deferred from the last meeting as Cllr. O’Cathasaigh was absent. This motion was initially referred by the CPG who decided the appropriate forum for discussion was this SPC. Cllr. O’Cathasaigh, proposing motion, stated that a climate emergency had been declared at plenary level in other local authorities and felt there was value in Waterford declaring also. He stated as climate change is part of everything and impacts on all SPC’s, there should be an over arching committee for the Council and not just one group. He called on elected representatives to be involved in an executive level committee of the Council as they had garnered the votes of the people they represent. Climate Change should be the main focus of people for the next 10 years.

F. Galvin, DoS stated climate change could get pigeon holed as it is not the sole responsibility of the Environment department and it reaches across all departments in the local authority – planning, development plan, roads etc. He said that if the members wished, the motion as is, can go to the Plenary Council requesting a Climate Action Committee. However it would need to present a structure for the committee i.e. what would its remit be; internal workings – inclusion of broader society, its powers etc.? Cllr. O’Cathasaigh stated that a committee had been formed in Cork, and perhaps this model could be looked at. This is an opportunity for one body to be aware of the work being carried out and required.

Cllr. Kelly agreed with the concept of Cllr. O’Cathasaigh and said motion should be revert back to the Plenary Council. It was important to start somewhere and requested F. Galvin, DoS to liaise with Cork City Council to review their committee’s structure and parameters. A. Walshe asked Climate Action be a priority and queried if this can be done in other SPC’s and have interaction and feedback from the other SPC’s. Cllr. Fitzgerald requested that policies be referred back to the Environment SPC for review, with A. Walshe agreeing that an option should be there to review. R. Moloney, SEO stated this was not feasible as it would be taking away the other SPC’s autonomy.

T. Hogan said this motion would impact on this SPC, and asked should a recommendation be made to the other SPC’s to appoint an individual from their SPC to liaise with the Chair of this SPC. F. Galvin, DoS said he would work on this issue and while climate change is high on the local authority agenda, it was important to engage with staff at large. This was the beginning of the journey and the focus is about heightening awareness.

Cllr. Fitzgerald requested both presentations be circulated to all council staff as it is important to get the organisation to think green. F. Galvin, DoS advised all policies go back to Plenary Council.

A. Walshe requested that the presentations be made to the other SPC’s with R. Moloney, SEO advising that meetings are held with senior management who are advised on climate requirements and proposals.

Cllr. O’Cathasaigh proposed amended motion go back to the Plenary Council with the deletion of the last line. This was agreed by all.

3. Single Use Plastics Policy

R. Moloney, SEO presented the proposed Single Use Plastics Policy stating it was important to lead by example and Waterford City & County Council had commenced by ceasing the use of plastic water bottles at all Council meetings and single plastic usage at their events. In outlining the policy which E. Ryan had drafted, he detailed the various other ways plastics would be removed in the local authority events – whether organised/facilitated/licensed or funded, and how the community groups/organisations would also be required to do so when availing of grants.

In issuing Council grants to community groups, the submission of a waste management plan would be criteria for funding. Ella Ryan stated West Waterford Athletic Club, in consultation with WCCC, at a recent event had purchased reusable bottles and arranged to collect and sanitise for reuse at other events. When WCCC hold in-house events it is easier to control, however she acknowledged for community groups/organisations there would be elements of difficulty but she would work closely and assist the groups. Cllr. Kelly said it was a great idea and should be implemented as soon as possible. He queried how it would be enforced and if all marathons etc must submit a plan. F. Galvin, DoS stated that all groups would be required to submit a plan, as the local authority were picking up bottles etc. 6 months after events and this was not sustainable. West Waterford Athletic Club was an example of how this issue can be resolved. Cllr. Hearne stated society, particularly children, are more aware and conscious of climate change and the local authority will be criticised if they do not lead by example. Cllr. Fitzgerald said many organisations were going down this route. A discussion followed and all members were committed to the single use plastics policy as it was important to:

- Ensure the elimination of use of plastics and encourage the use of reusable materials.
- Assist community/voluntary groups in the introduction of reusable items at their events.
- A clear message to suppliers and manufacturers of the requirement to produce compostable or reusable materials.

Cllr. Fitzgerald asked the members if they were happy to refer the Single Use Plastics to the Plenary Council for approval, and this was agreed by all.

4. Report on Re-municipalisation of Refuse Collection Service

F. Galvin, DoS referred to a Notice of Motion referred to this SPC for review of the re-municipalisation of the refuse service and the report which had been circulated to the members. He stated National and legislative policy would prevent the local authority from going back to being the service provider. Local authorities' role was more as waste regulators with private sector being the service provider. It would be cost prohibitive and the introduction of the private sector wiped out the local authority collection system as it was not able to compete with their pricing. He stated Dublin City Council was currently preparing a report on this issue and was costing in excess of €75,000.

Cllr. Hearne stated 7 collectors coming into one estate, and in light of climate change, was it possible to restrict the number? F. Galvin, DoS stated that while they could not restrict, it was a competitive market and there would be rationalisation at both national and local level – currently seeing a reduction from 69 to 40 providers. The customer is best served by having 2 – 3 competitors. Cllr. O’Cathasaigh agreed with F. Galvin but asked that the local authority extend the number of bring to centres.

Cllr. Kelly also agreed and said we should wait until the DCC report was published, however felt the local authority would never get its market back if it returned as a service provider. He was receiving numerous representations regarding collections hours, health and safety issues of how bins being collected, alighting from lorries etc which he intended raising at trade union level. N. Kane, SEE advised that the hours are regulated by NWCP Office and can be collected between the hours of 6.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m. If they were collecting outside these hours, then a warning letter can be issued. Cllr. Kelly stated these hours were unacceptable and requested that the NWP be written to requesting more appropriate hours. Regarding the alighting from the refuse lorries, Cllr. Hearne stated that the collectors when stepping on the plate were on camera.

T. Hogan, PPN, stated that while it may be difficult to build a business case, it was highly desirable to revert back to the local authority. It had been a retrograde step with employees of private providers being denied membership of a union. Cllr. Geoghegan stated that when bin prices were introduced by the private providers, people left the local authority.

6. Date of Next Meeting

F. Galvin, DoS stated he was very conscious of the number of area meetings, etc that members were requested to attend. To reduce carbon footprint, with dual locations that the possibility of conference calls should be looked at for future meetings. It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in Waterford on April 2nd, 2020 at 3.00 p.m.

Cllr. Geoghegan stated that he had been approached by the Comhairle na nÓg Steering Committee regarding climate change and if it would be feasible to have 2 representatives from their group to attend the meetings. This was agreed by the members with R. Moloney, SEO, once nominee’s names submitted, to meet them, with the Chair to discuss their expectations on their attendance at meetings.

7. PPN Items:

Norovirus: A. Walshe stated norovirus affects our estuaries and passes through our treatments systems. There were 85 deaths recorded from norovirus. It has an environmental effect on aquaculture business and was querying Irish Waters treatment plants. Cllr. Fitzgerald stated he resided by the shores and that over the last 3-4 years its effects were visible on the mussels, lugworms, bird life on the river as it was becoming barren. It was a big problem at Creaden Beach. Cllr. O’Cathasaigh stated he had also spoken to people regarding oyster beds but did not know if there was a link to norovirus. Cllr. Kelly was unaware of this issue and stated if it posed a risk to the public health and nature, it should be addressed with a system developed.

F. Galvin advised that the local authority’s capacity was limited as it did not own the plants and it cannot treat it or put in a tertiary plant for same. It results from hospitals-nursing homes feeding into the system and from there into the sea. The EPA and the Department are investigating with a view to resolving the issue. The local authority has a role within the Water Framework Directive and he would be happy to give a presentation to the SPC on this. There is a decline in water quality in areas, with increased runoff from dairy land. He agreed to give an update at the next meeting of the work being done, giving a picture of where the local authority is.

Wind Turbines off the Waterford Coast: A. Walshe requested updates and status of applications, licences issued, etc. Cllr. Fitzgerald stated that a presentation had been given in the Tower Hotel on plans from Dungarvan along the coast, which had been poorly attended. He stated that it was informative and the turbines would have huge implications on the Port of Waterford, fishing and leisure. F. Galvin, DoS stated that this matter fell under the remit of the Planning SPC as his directorate had very little responsibility for licensing. A. Walshe queried the Wind Energy Plan with F. Galvin confirming that this will be managed by the Planning Section.

Light Pollution & Insects: Light pollution was having an effect on insects due to bird activity and was requesting dimmer technology in public lighting after 3.00 a.m. F. Galvin, DoS stated this was part of the public lighting tender and they were looking at the various options available for the different areas. R. Moloney, SEO stated it was in situ on the Ring Road with light levels changing with time.

8. Any Other Business

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked everyone for attending, and while it had been a long meeting, it had been very informative with great input. He asked if there were any items that they would like included on the next agenda with A. Walshe, PPN requesting Lyme Disease for discussion and said he would circulate a document he had prepared on it.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed:

**Chair,
Environment, Biodiversity & Climate Action SPC**

Date:
