

Minutes of Environment, Biodiversity & Climate Action SPC Meeting
held on Tuesday, 8th March, 2022 - Online meeting

Present: **SPC Members:** Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, (*Chair*), Cllr. Joe Kelly, Cllr. Jim Griffin, Cllr. Ger Barron, Cllr. John Hearne, Cllr. Joanne Bailey, Cllr. Christina Kiely, Cllr. Damien Geoghegan, Mr. Tom Hogan, Ms. Ithel McKenna and Obianuju Ekedozie.

Officials: Mr. Raymond Moloney, S.E.O.
Mr. Niall Kane, S.E.E
Mr. Luke O'Brien, A.O.
Ms. Ella Ryan, Environmental Awareness Officer.
Mr. Liam Fleming, Waterford Energy Bureau
Ms. Siobhán McCarthy, S.O.
Ms. Deirdre Moore, A.S.O.

Apologies: Mr. Fergus Galvin, Director of Services and Ms. Brid O'Hehir, PPN.

The Chair, Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald welcomed the members to the first SPC meeting of 2022 and noted the apologies received. Prior to the commencement of the business of the meeting, Cllr. Fitzgerald offered sincere condolences on his own behalf and the SPC Group to Fergus Galvin, Director of Services on the passing of his mother. R. Moloney, SEO said Fergus had requested the meeting to proceed as scheduled.

Cllr. Fitzgerald then proceeded with the business of the meeting.

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 2021

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16th December 2021 were proposed by Ithel McKenna, PPN seconded by Cllr. J. Kelly and agreed.

2. Matters Arising

R. Moloney, SE updated on Item No. 6 – Notice of Motion from T. Hogan. He advised a report had been submitted to the February Plenary Council which was considered and agreed by the members. T. Hogan was congratulated on his work on this issue.

There were no other matters arising.

3. SPC Standing Orders

R. Moloney, SEO advised the Standing Orders circulated to the members had been adopted by the Plenary Council and would apply to all Waterford City & County Council Strategic Policy Committees. He outlined the contents of the Standing Orders and the implications on future meetings, membership, quorums etc. He confirmed IFA representative, Laura Forbes O'Brien who had stepped down from the SPC in 2020 due to family commitments, would now be re-joining this SPC. Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked R. Moloney, SEO for presentation and called for questions.

Cllr. Griffin enquired if the number of meetings would increase due to Climate Action being under the remit of the Environment SPC. He queried if not, should provision be made for these additional meetings. R. Moloney, SEO advised there would be no issue holding additional meetings as the Standing Orders only had a minimum requirement i.e. 4 meetings a year. He said local authorities were awaiting the guidelines on Local Authority Climate Action Plans from the Minister and once received would then be able to review meeting requirements. He stated the SPC would be required to prepare a Climate Action Plan for submission to the Plenary for consideration/adoption for public consultation.

Cllr. Kelly while acknowledging the need for extra meetings would caution on the side of excessive meetings due to direct impact on members who were already extremely busy. He was aware of constant check of media on councillors attendance; however, members were not entitled to sick leave, holidays, bereavement leave etc as there was no qualifying criteria for missing meetings and he wanted the public to be aware of this.

Cllr. Fitzgerald, Chair queried the quarterly *Report of Chairperson and Recommendations* to be submitted by the Chair to the Corporate Policy Group and what was envisaged. R. Moloney, SEO advised the Report would highlight the main

business of the meetings of the previous quarter and a brief report could be based on the minutes previously ratified by the members. Cllr. Fitzgerald was concerned would this report create a second record of the meetings with R. Moloney, SEO advising it would be prepared in arrears of meeting after minutes adopted.

4. Draft Policy on Council Operated Burial Grounds

R. Moloney, SEO presented the policy and advised the matter arose following an internal audit which highlighted there was no formal policy in place for Council Operated Burial Grounds. He advised there are old byelaws in place for St. Otterans, Ballynaneeshagh, but none in any pre-merger graveyards in the County area and a policy must now be put in place to operate and maintain the burial grounds in Council ownership. The graveyards in Tramore and Kilbarry are new graveyards with guidelines in place. He said St. Otteran's is the only burial ground where council employees dig graves. He briefly outlined the circulated byelaws highlighting the main points:

- No advance purchase of graves only in extenuating circumstances.
- No scattering of ashes.
- Exhumations licences and repatriation of remains.
- No kerbs allowed in lawn cemeteries

Cllr. Griffin welcomed the policy and saw no issues. However, having attended a recent funeral, he was disappointed at the unkempt condition of Ballynaneeshagh, where there were strewn building blocks, and broken plinths by a digger going over them. He had spoken to the Council staff who advised there was not a lot they could do. Cllr. Kelly raised the issue of the toilets not being opened for funerals. He stated that the lawn cemetery at Kilbarry was a good idea however people do not abide by regulations and it causes conflict with the Council. He asked was it possible to resolve it amicably. R. Moloney, SEO confirmed he would take this matter on board and review and see if procedures can be put in place. He stated the toilets had been closed due to Covid SOP's in place and will now look at their reopening.

R. Moloney, SEO stated Kilbarry is a lawn cemetery where a scheme for footpaths was to be put in place for families to access their graves. While there are ongoing issues with headstones, a permit system is being introduced where undertakers will apply on behalf of the family. Cllr. Barron queried why advance purchase of graves was not permitted and queried what was allowed when scattering of ashes e.g. at sea, graveyards or public areas. He asked if a wall could be built for the interment of ashes. Cllr. Geoghegan asked what role the local authority have for graveyards under control of diocese or other group and in particular where they lead to a public health issue.

R. Moloney, SEO in response to Cllr. Barron stated no advance purchase of graves was to maintain the graveyards in an orderly manner as they could remain vacant for 20 years which would mean graves would not be filled in a sequential manner, and to allow for provision for footpaths etc. He advised there is a wall for ashes in Kilbarry.

In response to Cllr. Geoghegan he advised the local authority is not involved in Church graveyards but can offer advice. If there is a health issue, it is the responsibility of the Environmental Health Officer with the HSE.

Cllr. Fitzgerald queried why Kilbarry was not listed in schedule with R. Moloney, SEO advising byelaws already in place there. The Chair thought byelaws in place would have covered all graveyards and what their purpose now? R. Moloney, SEO advised Kilbarry was covered under pre-merger byelaws with no byelaws in other graveyards. If it was agreed by all, the Draft Policy would be referred to the CPG and if approved, be presented for adoption at the April Plenary Meeting. Cllr. Fitzgerald asked if the members were happy to proceed and all agreed.

5. Climate Action Plan 2021

R. Moloney, SEO presented the Climate Action Plan 2021 and shared the presentation online with the members. The Plan had been adopted by the government on 4th November 2021 and contained 494 actions, broken down into 1,074 sub actions and categorising the agencies responsible for their implementation - local authorities, CCMA and CARO's. The Plan set out the steps on how we move towards securing a carbon neutral country by 2050. He advised it would be updated annually and it would be a just transition to a climate neutral Ireland. The Plan would impact across all the sections of the local authority and involve public participation and engagement in:

- Transport – Active Travel Section- Development of Cycle Networks, inclusive of Public Consultation on the developing Cycle Network Strategy,
- Electrification of Council's fleet of vehicles.
- Public lighting programme – energy efficient lighting.
- Homes and Buildings: Planning, energy retrofitting of local authority homes.
- Agriculture – Implement All Ireland Pollinator Plan and advised Kilbarry had won Pollinator Green Flag Award.

In conclusion, R. Moloney, SEO said he would circulate the presentation as there was considerable detail and information in the Climate Action Plan. Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked him for the very informative presentation and asked if there were any questions. Cllr. Griffin asked how we as a local authority adapt and specifically housing. Cllr. Barron asked about National Tree Week and if details were available with Cllr. Kiely enquiring if there were any more plans for tree planting like what had been done in Cherrymount. She asked for an update on the discontinuation of the use of glyphosate. I. McKenna, PPN asked if a Climate Action Officer had been appointed.

R. Moloney, SEO in response to the issues raised stated Waterford Council will be required to draft and adopt a CAP for implementation. He stated National Tree Week is March 21st, 2022 and E. Ryan, Environmental Officer stated she was working with the Tree Council and received an allocation of 300 trees. She had contacted the schools and the trees were allocated to them. There were no trees left for community groups, however if they were not taken by a school, she would then reallocate to a group.

R. Moloney, SEO advised I. McKenna, PPN no officer has been appointed to date. He said a Climate Action Co-ordinator will be appointed and funded by the local authority. He had been informed at a recent CARO meeting the appointment of Community Climate Action Officers for all LAs were also approved under the community Climate Action Fund with a proposed budget of €600,000 per annum inclusive of officer's salary. Formal approval is awaited.

He advised Cllr. Kiely the Council is phasing out the use of glyphosate and reducing the amount of herbicide being used. He was also engaging with an external contractor to do this and use a sustainable herbicide, which is proving to be more labour extensive, expensive, and requiring more applications. The Council uses sustainable herbicides for weed control in parks.

Cllr. Fitzgerald said trees had always been available for community groups and estates etc and queried why none given out this year. E. Ryan, Environmental Awareness Officer, advised trees received from Tree Council are 2/3 years old and not suitable for estates/open spaces but if any left over will revert to Cllr's Fitzgerald and Barron.

T. Hogan raised his November report stating time is running away and we are behind on the issue of retrofitting, grants and particularly conscious of private housing supports, considering 50% of the cost must be paid in advance and retrofitting can cost in excess of €25,000-30,000. He stated given the current climate people do not have this money, where elderly people will be required to take out of loans to fund this work, and those in private rented accommodation.

Cllr. Kiely said the requirement to pay the full costs to recoup energy efficiency grants no longer applied and that the householder only had to pay the contractor the difference between the overall cost and the grant with the grant being paid to the contractor. T. Hogan responded it was still not acceptable for the less well off.

Cllr. Fitzgerald asked what was required now of the SPC with R. Moloney, SEO advising the presentation was for information purposes. Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked R. Moloney, SEO for the most informative presentation and the members could review the content when it was circulated to them.

6. Business referred from Council

"To ask Waterford Council if they will examine land available either within existing council park area space or to identify new space and a capital and operating costs funding stream to introduce designated dog parks in Waterford City and Waterford County similar to what is in place in many areas of Dublin like St. Anne's Park and Marlay Park. The designated area would allow dog walkers to leave their dogs off the lead but still be in an enclosed area."

Cllr. Fitzgerald referred to the issue from the Plenary Council Meeting requesting a dog walking area similar to those in Dublin and asked if this was feasible. Cllr. Bailey stated the original plan was to have it in the Eco Park, however people found it intimidating, however she felt it was the ideal location as it had a car parking area as well.

Cllr. Geogheghan supported this idea as he had seen a number of these parks in New York and London. Cllr. Griffin concurred and said while it is a budgetary matter, he had seen them in the UK where the park could be booked by the dog owner, small fee for the use and it could pay for the maintenance of the park. Cllr's Barron and Kiely agree, but would not charge for the park. Following a discussion among the members, it was agreed this was a good idea and should be proceeded with. Cllr. Bailey enquired as to where the park could be placed with Cllr. Hearne suggesting land at Tramore in Council ownership.

R. Moloney, SEO stated he would look at Marlay Park and proposal and take back to the Plenary Council for review.

7. Date for next meeting

2.30 p.m., 14th June, 2022

8. Correspondence

No correspondence received.

9. Any Other Business

- Cllr. Kiely referred to a motion she had submitted for consideration to the Plenary Council – “Library of Toys – Library of Things” and proceeded to explain this idea – it has been done in other local authorities and it was important this idea be considered. R. Moloney, SEO advised this motion had been referred to the Housing, Community, Culture, Fire, Sport & Recreation SPC as this was the appropriate SPC. E. Ryan, Environmental Officer advised a similar scheme to the free libraries was in operation on Tramore beach where 2 cages were in place for children to borrow beach toys. She said if a group would like to run a scheme in their location, to contact her and a grant can be applied for.
- Cllr. Griffin raised the trees in an estate blocking light and if it would be possible to have a private contractor cut them or would it need to wait until September – the branches are blocking light. R. Moloney, SEO requested Cllr. Griffin to submit specific location and he will discuss with Horticulturist. He said due to Covid there was a considerable backlog in works.
- Cllr. Hearne raised the issue of dog fouling and the bags been thrown at the side of the road – queried if local authority issue decomposable bags. R. Moloney, SEO advised while the yellow bags are biodegradable, bags should be put in the bin or taken home, not thrown on the ground.

Cllr. Fitzgerald concluded the meeting and thanked the community members, councillors and staff for their attendance.

Signed: _____

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

Date: _____