

**Minutes of Environment, Biodiversity & Climate Action SPC Meeting**  
**held on 11<sup>th</sup> October 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, Ms. Laura Forbes O'Brien, Ms. Obianuju Ekedozie.

**Officials:** Mr. Fergus Galvin, Director of Services, Mr. Raymond Moloney, Senior Executive Officer, Mr. Anthony Russell, Administrative Officer, Mr. Niall Kane, Senior Executive Engineer, Ms. Grainne Kennedy, Climate Action Co-Ordinator, Ms. Ella Ryan, Environmental Awareness Officer, Ms. Siobhán McCarthy, Staff Officer.

Cllr. Fitzgerald welcomed the members and thanked them for attending. Cllr. Fitzgerald noted the recent resignation of Brid O'Hehir from the Biodiversity & Climate Action SPC and she thanked her for her service and wished her the best.

Cllr. Fitzgerald also welcomed new Environment staff members Anthony Russell, Administrative Officer and Grainne Kennedy, Climate Action Co-Ordinator. He then proceeded with the business of the meeting.

**1. Minutes of Meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Geoghegan seconded by I. McKenna and agreed.

**2. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

**3. Draft Prevention and Control of Litter Byelaws 2022 – Report on Public Consultation**

The Chairperson noted that the Draft Prevention and Control of Litter Byelaws 2022 – Report on Public Consultation was received by members on the morning of 11<sup>th</sup> October and he proposed to defer discussion of the report to the next SPC meetings to allow members sufficient time to consider the report. This was agreed by members.

**4. Annual Progress Report on Implementation of Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019 – 2024**

G. Kennedy, SEE presented an update on Implementation of the Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019 – 2024. She said all different departments within the Council completed various actions which resulted in a 5% – 6.5% carbon reduction last year. There are 78 actions in total. Under half of the actions had not commenced in 2021 however this has now reduced to 20%. A thorough review of the actions will include an updated Climate Action Plan in the new year.

R. Moloney, SEO advised the report circulated forms part of the overall report for the Local Government sector. Cllr. P. Fitzgerald asked if there is a league table for local authorities? R. Moloney, SEO advised a league table does not exist. Other actions will need to be completed which will be constantly occurring. It will be a rolling programme of actions.

F. Galvin, Director of Services noted a change of focus from funding departments such as Department of Transport road grants to include measures to adapt and mitigate against climate change. T. Hogan asked if the development of two greenways through the city are ongoing? F. Galvin, Director of Services said the Waterford – Dungarvan greenway section from Bilberry to the city centre is at construction and due to be completed in 2023 and Tramore to the city greenway is currently at the planning phase and it is intended that it will be presented as a Part 8 proposal to Council in 2023.

Cllr J. Kelly enquired about the carbon footprint of roads maintenance machinery and diesel vehicles using bitumen products. How is it taken into account or is the carbon footprint offset by something else? F. Galvin, DoS noted that the Council had a large fleet of vehicles including heavy road making plant, the vast majority of which was diesel powered. The Council is developing a strategy to decarbonise the fleet over the next few years and currently has a small number of electric vans on order to replace existing diesel vans and also commenced a HVO trial on a number of the larger 26 tonne trucks. Cllr J. Kelly asked in relation to private contractors and F. Galvin, said there is an increasing focus on procuring new products and services, etc. which will include a green assessment.

T. Hogan asked that cycle lanes would be included as part of any road resurfacing project where possible and asked if it being looked at. F. Galvin stated that this would be done as opportunities arose and he also agreed to table a presentation on Active Travel for a future meeting of the SPC.

Cllr. P. Fitzgerald raised the issue of cutting roadside hedgerows and enquired if we can implement a programme of cutting roadside hedges even if only around towns and villages? People in town and villages will be afraid to walk on roads with the volume of traffic and it is much safer to drive. F. Galvin said the onus is on landowners to ensure hedges are kept trimmed and do not cause a nuisance. Over 100 notices were sent out last week to landowners instructing them to cut roadside hedges on their land with more to issue this week. He noted that hedgerows may not be cut during the nesting season unless there was an urgent traffic or public safety issue.

Cllr. C. Kiely noted great work is ongoing with the development of greenways. An active Travel presentation would be welcome. She enquired in relation to the programme of footpaths on the outskirts of villages and where are we at with that programme? F. Galvin, DoS stated that there was significant ongoing work in many small towns and villages across the County and would revert with an update. Cllr. J. Bailey enquired if there could be an Environment section on CRM that councillors could feed into? R. Moloney advised that CRMs are directed to the relevant section based on both the topic and location of the query or complaint.

##### **5. Report on Bathing Water Quality at Dunmore East**

F. Galvin, DoS outlined the issues that had arisen in Dunmore East over the Summer and noted that it was primarily a conflict between the protection of public health and the potential impact on the ecology of the streams. The streams in question are the subject of diffuse pollution from a variety of sources including agricultural run-off, septic tanks, surface water runoff etc. Approximately 20 years ago and following a spate of gastro illnesses from people bathing in the stream, the Council commenced micro dosing of chlorine to deal with high levels of e-coli present. The Council carried out a significant amount of work in tracing and dealing with the pollution sources but some of the sources were extremely difficult to identify and high e-coli levels were still evident in the streams. The Council has continued with low level chlorine dosing the summer months only. The Council does intend undertaking further investigations on the stream and will be considering alternatives.

Cllr. J. Kelly noted there was negative commentary from other local authorities regarding the practice and asked how are they dealing with the issues and have we contacted them and asked what they are doing to resolve the problems?

F. Galvin, advised that Dunmore East was unique in respect of both the topography and the ever growing population of the village which was creating a set of pressures that would not be present on many other beaches. The use of chlorine would be relatively common in many areas particularly in storm water outfalls.

Cllr. J. Hearne stated that there is a serious issues with spreading nitrates on farm land and that it should be cut back. F. Galvin said new nitrates regulations are to come into force shortly aimed at cutting down on the use of nitrates. There are a lot of good farmers out there and milk processors are now engaging with farmers. Incentives need to be introduced to promote good practice. Change takes 1 – 2 years before we get a real impact.

Cllr. P. Fitzgerald is familiar with the apparatus used for chlorine micro-dosing and it is a minute amount of chlorine that is used. 30 years ago a child almost lost their life from pollution in the stream. The water has to be of a high standard in the bay to get blue flags and the threat to marine life is minute.

##### **6. Reduce Your Use Campaign – Draft Energy Saving Booklet**

R. Moloney, SEO presented details of a new booklet on household energy efficiency measures that the Council intends to distribute to households across Waterford before the Winter months. Liam Fleming and Graham Keeffe from the Climate Action Team had developed the booklet with the intention of getting it designed with infographics and to have it translated to Irish. It will be made available online, in libraries and on social media. Energy poverty has increased because of the increase in the price of electricity and gas. People are spending more on electricity and gas and are in danger of falling into energy poverty. The booklet will make homeowners aware of how to switch energy providers each year.

I. McKenna said Waterford City & County Council do a lot of good but are not great at publicising what they do. The booklet could be used to publicise what the Council do. The booklet needs better presentation and infographic presentations would be welcome. The format of the booklet is very important. In relation to fuel poverty I. McKenna also said that it would be useful if a list of supports could be provided that people may be entitled to from the Department of Social Protection. R. Moloney, SEO said the booklet does need to be designed with infographics and supports for people in fuel poverty will be included.

Cllr. P. Fitzgerald said the booklet provides good practical information. It provides great information and links to useful websites and information on heat pumps, solar panels.

T. Hogan agreed with Cllr. P. Fitzgerald and that publication of the booklet is timely. The current cost of living crisis ties into the climate crisis. Social Justice Ireland estimates that 43% of people could be in fuel poverty with the current rate of inflation. R. Moloney, SEO advised the booklet must be translated to Irish first and must be designed which could take a month. The booklet would be printed on English on one half and on Irish on the other half.

## **7. Notice of Motion from Thomas Hogan – Progressive Tendering Arrangement for Waste Disposal**

*The Environment, Climate Action and Biodiversity SPC proposes, that Waterford City and County Council should seek to adopt a progressive tendering arrangement in respect of waste collection services. Such a system would ensure that the successful provider would need to meet quality service standards, including decent terms and conditions for workers, provision of community bins and allow for a subsidised service for people who cannot afford to pay the commercial rate.*

In proposing the Motion, T. Hogan stated that he was not certain if legislation exists to allow Waterford City & County Council to do what is proposed in his motion. He stated we are the exception in Europe in relation to waste collection by having side by side collections between various waste operators. It is possible for up to 4 bin companies to be collecting waste from one estate each week. He proposed that the ideal solution would be for waste collection to be re-municipalised and taken back under local authority control. The local authority would adhere to standards and provide decent terms and conditions for workers. He also said the idea of community bins should be looked at where people can deposit waste. A lot of people cannot afford the commercial rates for waste collection. He is asking the SPC to refer the motion to plenary Council to have a single provider for waste collection in local authority areas with quality standards, decent terms and conditions for workers, communal bins and a subsidy provided for people. T. Hogan then read the text of his motion and stated that when he initially submitted the motion he inadvertently omitted two words in the text of the motion. The updated wording of the motion was noted by members.

F. Galvin noted that the waste collection industry was deregulated 15 – 16 years ago and most local authorities exited domestic waste collection in the intervening years. This is a national issue and Waterford City & County Council does not have the scope or legal remit to get back into waste collection and decide if there should be a single provider. This is a national policy issue and new regulations would be required.

T. Hogan asked how often does waste collection come up for tendering? F. Galvin, Director of Services said it does not come up for tendering. A new provider can set up in business provided they have the necessary permits as they would be operating in a deregulated market.

Cllr. J. Hearne agreed that it was a national issue and believes local services should be delivered by local authorities. Cllr. J. Kelly said that waste collection trucks are damaging kerb stones in certain estates and that the Council must pay for the cost of repairing the damage done. Cllr. D. Geoghegan agreed with Cllr. Kelly and Cllr. Griffin and said this is an issue in Dungarvan also. He said the argument regarding deregulation of the waste industry only focussed on cost and it was a pity when the market opened up in 2013 that people left the Council waste collection service.

Cllr. J. Griffin asked to be excused from the meeting as he had to attend another meeting.

Cllr. P. Fitzgerald said the members of the SPC were all in agreement with the motion and said it should be directed into correspondence to the Minister. He also asked for the issue to be brought to the attention of individual political parties and that this would be a more effective way of progressing the issue. He asked if the committee could draft a text for the next meeting and send a letter to the government and opposition parties. Cllr. P. Fitzgerald suggested undertaking a cross party approach on the issue.

T. Hogan asked members of the SPC to recommend to Plenary Council that one provider should operate in the market and he is asking the Council to write to the Minister on the issue. Cllr. P. Fitzgerald asked that members of the SPC work on the text of the letter between now and the date of the next SPC meeting.

Cllr. P. Fitzgerald said that if members agreed a text for the letter it could be circulated to all local authorities for consideration. It was agreed by members to work on the text of the letter.

## **8. Date for next meeting**

R. Moloney, SEO advised that the next meeting of the SPC would take place on 22<sup>nd</sup> November. It could take place either as an in-person meeting or online. He advised we now have technology in place to conduct hybrid meetings.

## **9. Correspondence**

No correspondence received.

**10. Any Other Business**

- Cllr. J. Bailey is bringing forward a motion about setting up a dog park to Plenary Council. She asked if a sub-committee/working group could be set up to work on the matter. She would like plans to be developed which would examine where the park could be located. Establishing a sub-committee would be positive in trying to advance the matter.
- T. Hogan said he understands the Pathfinder Project report is to be published in the next week.

Cllr. P. Fitzgerald said it would be good if the option was there where dog owners could let their dogs to run around the dog park off leash and it would be a positive step for animal welfare also. F. Galvin said he had no objection to the idea of setting up a dog park but said the issue was where to find funding to set up the park and also to fund the cost of ongoing maintenance. He stated he is happy for a sub-committee to be established to examine models of funding. Cllr. J. Bailey said she would be happy to sit on the sub-committee. Cllr. D. Geoghegan said he was supportive of the proposal from Cllr. J. Bailey and to have a sub-committee established looking at the various options. He also said he would be happy to sit on the sub-committee also.

In relation to the Pathfinder Project F. Galvin said a couple of submissions were made to the Department and were submitted in mid-September.

N. Kane, SEE advised a derogation was introduced as a result of Covid-19 in relation to permitted times for waste collection which removed the time restrictions for waste collection. This derogation ended on 1<sup>st</sup> September and he agreed to circulate correspondence on the matter to members.

F. Galvin, said that in relation to staffing of the Climate Action Unit a Community Climate Action Officer is being recruited and the recruitment process has commenced. The Community Climate Action Officer is to be in place by the end of the year.

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked the Councillors, Community Representatives and Executive for attending and concluded the business of the meeting.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_