

**Minutes of Meeting of Longford County Council**

**held in the Council Chamber and via Microsoft Teams on**

**Wednesday, 13 December 2023 at 4pm**

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**PRESIDING**: Councillor Colm Murray, Cathaoirleach

**MEMBERS PRESENT**: Councillors – John Browne, Seamus Butler, Mick Cahill, Colin Dalton, Gerry Hagan, Paul Ross, Pat O’Toole, Garry Murtagh, Peggy Nolan, Gerard Farrell, Uruemu Adejinmi, Martin Monaghan, Mark Casey, PJ Reilly, Gerry Warnock and Turlough McGovern, Paraic Brady

**IN ATTENDANCE:**  Mr. Paddy Mahon, Chief Executive

Ms. Barbara Heslin, Director of Services

Ms. Samantha Healy, Director of Services

Mr. John Brannigan, Director of Services

Mr. Michael Nevin, A/Director of Services

Mr. John McKeon, Head of Finance/Director of Services

Mr. Ciaran Murphy, Senior Executive Officer

Mr. David Barden, Administrative Officer

Ms. Nicole Lanphier, HubSpot Planning

Ms. Nora O’Farrell, Senior Executive Officer

Ms. Janine Bartley, A/Administrative Officer

**APOLOGIES:** Ms. Claire McNabola

**MEETINGS**

**ADMINISTRATOR**: Mr. Gerard Dennigan

1. **ADOPTION OF MINUTES**
2. On the proposal of Councillor Paraic Brady seconded by Councillor Peggy Nolan the Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Longford County Council held on the 8 November 2023, as circulated, were confirmed and adopted.
3. On the proposal of Councillor Mick Cahill seconded by Councillor Padraic Brady the Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting of Longford County Council held on the 27 November 2023, as circulated, were confirmed and adopted.
4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES**

None.

1. **DECLARATION OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS**

None.

1. **CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT**

The Chief Executive Report for November 2023 was noted.

Councillor Gerry Warnock raised his concerns with the ongoing issue of waste at Weaver’s Hall and adjacent car park and Annaly Court, Longford. Councillor Warnock requested that engagement would be made by both the Environment and Planning departments in LCC with the relevant management company in relation to this concern and, if necessary, enforcement procedures be instigated.

1. **MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY GROUP MEETING HELD ON THE 10 OCTOBER 2023 – AS CIRCULATED**

The adopted Minutes of Corporate Policy Group Meeting held on the 10 October 2023, as circulated, were noted.

1. **HOUSING, PLANNING, REGENERATION AND CAPITAL PROJECTS**
2. **Noting of Signage Policy – Erection of Advertising and Directional Signage – as circulated**

The Signage Policy – Erection of Advertising and Directional Signage, was noted.

1. **Consideration of Part VIII No. 113 – Construction of Industrial/Commercial building at Knock, Lanesboro - Report in accordance with Section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and Part 8 of the Planning & Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) – as circulated**

On the proposal of Councillor Paul Ross, seconded by Councillor Peggy Nolan, the members unanimously agreed to approve the Part VIII application in accordance with Section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and Part 8 of the Planning & Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

1. **COMMUNITY, LIBRARY AND CULTURAL SERVICES, CORPORATE AND HUMAN RESOURCES**
2. **Noting of Adopted Minutes of the Placemaking Strategic Policy Committee held on 4 December 2023 – as circulated**

The Adopted Minutes of the Placemaking Strategic Policy Committee held on 4 December 2023, were noted.

1. **CE Report on Implementation of the Corporate Plan**

Chief Executive Paddy Mahon provided the elected members with a comprehensive update on the implementation of the Corporate Plan. He explained that the Corporate Plan informs the Service Deliver Plans for the organisations which in turn guide the Team Plans and ultimate Individual Performance Development Plans.

The report recognised the contribution of employees and Elected Members in delivering the strategic objectives of the Corporate Plan.

Paddy highlighted the achievements under the four pillars of the Corporate. The four pillars are:

* A Thriving County
* A Safer County
* A Greener County
* A County for Everyone.

Cathaoirleach, Colm Murray complemented the report and recognised the efforts of the employees, elected members and executive in what was a very productive year for the council. He reflected on some of the highlights of the year including the various events hosted by the Council and the award winning Health and Safety Management System.

1. **Electoral Commission – Overview and Draft Research Programme 2023-2026 – as circulated**

Senior Executive Officer, Nora O’Farrell delivered a presentation to the members on the Electoral Commission Research.

TheDraft Research Programme 2024-2026 was published on 10 November 2023 and opened for public consultation which identifies potential research topics across 5 strands. Nora explained that the Elected Members could make a submission jointly or individually on what areas they would like the research to focus on. Nora presented the following information to the members:

* Draft Research Programme 2024-2026
* Strands of Draft Research Programme
  + Longitudinal survey research and data collection
  + Electoral law, electoral systems and electoral infrastructure
  + Integrity of electoral events
  + Education, public engagement and inclusion
* Closing date for feedback is 12 January 2024.

The members requested that a copy of the presentation would be made available to them. The members agreed to make individual submissions.

1. **Consideration of the Longford Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2029 – as circulated**

Nicole Lanphier from HubSpot Planning presented the draft LECP and Implementation Plan document to the elected members.

Longford Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), sets out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of County Longford. LECPs are the main tool for delivering actions from national and regional strategies at the local level. The LECP is designed to centralise actions and initiatives related to economic and community development in Longford into one strategy.

A set of six High-Level Goals guide the plan these are accompanied by outputs and actions.

Nicole responded to questions raised by the members. The members unanimously complimented the excellent delivery of the LECP Plan and acknowledged Nicole and the Economic and Community sections in Longford County Council for their efforts in putting the plan together. They commented that it was a very balanced and ambitious plan which will support future funding applications including Just Transition.

On the proposal of Councillor Paul Ross seconded by Councillor Gerry Warnock the Longford Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2029, was unanimously approved and adopted by the Council.

1. **Community Grant Support Scheme 2024**

Director of Services Barbara Heslin updated the members on the CGSS 2024. The Members were advised the CGSS for 2024 will be open from 3 to 31 January 2024 inclusive. The outline for the 2024 scheme was approved at the December meeting of the Placemaking SPC. Applications will be considered in February 2024 by the individual Municipal Districts.

Barbara informed the members that information sessions are to be rolled out to employees and communities in each of the Municipal Districts in relation to funding stream and grants that are becoming available. It is planned to roll out the information sessions in January 2024.

1. **Overview of ‘See Something, Say Something’**

Janine Bartley provided the members with a presentation on the new ‘See Something Say Something’ campaign, aimed to support the public in reporting anti-social, suspicious, and nuisance behaviour and activities in the county of Longford.

The campaign was unanimously supported by the elected members who complemented An Garda Siochána and the Local Community Safety Partnership (LCSP) on securing the campaign for County Longford and said it was a wonderful initiative.

The members also took the opportunity to complement the work of the Local Community Safety Partnership. They reflected on some of the great initiatives and interventions rolled out by the Partnership including the Community Houses, Dead of Night festival, engaging with diverse communities, the involvement by people in contributing to the development of the LCSP plan, increased engaging with the Partnership and the great success of the most recent public meeting. They thanked Janine for her work as Coordinator and noted the huge workload being undertaken as part of the pilot programme. They agreed that one of the key success factors with the increased presence of An Garda Siochána on the streets in Longford town.

1. **Notice of Motions, submitted by Councillors, as listed hereunder**

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Peggy Nolan and seconded by Councillor Paul Ross**

That this council set in motion plans to provide a family resource centre in our county town. This request is vital for our community.

**Response**

Longford County Council continues to advocate on behalf of the community for the provision of a family resource centre in Longford town. During the public consultation phase for the Longford Community Safety Plan and Local Economic and Community Plan, the need for Family Resource Centres in both Longford town and Edgeworthstown was clearly identified and highlighted. This value of such a resource in both communities reflects the wonderful work being carried out by the FRCs in both Granard and Ballymahon.

In 2023, Longford County Council and Longford Community Safety Partnership have carried out the following actions regarding the establishment of new FRC in Longford:

* Met with the Board of Management of a possible location in Longford town to discuss their interest in putting the venue forward as a Family Resource Centre if the opportunity arose and funding became available.
* Met with the Area Manager for Tusla Midlands, Tusla Rep on Longford LCSP to discuss the need for a FRC. They are very supportive but the decision regarding funding for FRCs rests with the National Commissioning Office.
* Together with other stakeholders, met with Minister Roderic O’Gorman to discuss the need for a FRC.
* Met with Head of Tusla National Commissioning Office and Head of the National FRC Programme Tusla to discuss the need for the FRC and to seek information and feedback on the previous unsuccessful application to enter the FRC Programme. They couldn’t confirm when the formal process for entering the FRC programme would take place again.
* Met with Board of Management to relay information. It was agreed that the LCSP and the Board would co fund a needs assessment and an initial figure of €5,000 was identified (€2,500 contribution from each). The Board confirmed they were progressing with renting the premises to another organisation, but in the contract provided for a break clause which would facilitate the venue being used as a FRC should funding become available.
* LCSP Coordinator spoke with 5 consultants in relation to undertaking a need analysis for an FRC, and it became clear that this is a much larger piece of work and for it to be robust and to support an application (in a competitive field) the commission would also need to include training and support for a professional board of management around governance, roles and responsibilities, planning FRC programmes of work, etc. Quotes for this work range from €20,000 to €25,000. Further research has shown that Tusla has fully funded this work in other areas.
* Requested a further meeting with Tusla Midlands to discuss additional funding opportunities.
* Applied to Community Safety Innovation Fund 2023 (Dept of Justice) to fund a family support worker that would be based in Longford Town, supported by Lus na Greine FRC. This was submitted with 15 letters of support from agencies including Tusla Midlands. However, it was not approved by the Dept of Justice.

Director of Services, Barbara Heslin took the opportunity to thank her entire Directorate team for their excellent work during the year in supporting the Council and Communities of the county. Some of the very positive work being carried out was highlighted during the Council meeting.

1. **INFRASTRUCTURE, CLIMATE ACTION & INNOVATION**
2. **Notice of Motions, submitted by Councillors, as listed hereunder**

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Mark Casey and seconded by Councillor Mick Cahill**

That this council completes a survey on roadside trees which are rotting due to Ash Dieback and contact the landowners to ensure that they are removed. There was no fatalities due to Storm Debi, but we must take action now to ensure safety for all road users in the future.

**Response**

In raising awareness of the need to maintain roadside trees and hedges, Longford County Council remind landowners that they are obliged, under the Roads Act of 1993, to take all reasonable care to ensure that trees, ditches, hedges and other vegetation growing on their land do not pose a danger to people using or working on a public road or public footpath. Landowners are also reminded that liability for damage, or injury resulting from such hazards, will rest with them.

Uncut hedges and trees are a serious road safety hazard and can cause substantial damage to vehicles, particularly heavy goods vehicles. Examples of hazards include dead or dying trees, ditches or hedges interfering with traffic, blocking footpaths, obscuring road signs, public lighting, or road users’ visibility.

Landowners/occupiers are required to fell, cut, log, trim or remove such trees, ditches and hedges. Particular attention should be given to damaged or weakened trees or limbs and stumps of felled trees as a result of storms and to ensure that all necessary work should be carried out while hedges are dormant from the beginning of September to the end of February.

Landowners who have concerns regarding ash dieback should contact the Forestry Division of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine for further advice.

Cathaoirleach Colm Murray informed the meeting contact would be made with the department to source additional advice and determine if that department can conduct a survey in relation to this topic.

1. **ENTERPRISE AND UKRAINIAN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE**
2. **Consideration of Draft Tourism Strategy – as circulated**

A/Director of Services Michael Nevin provided the members with a detailed update on the Draft Tourism Strategy. This County Longford Tourism Strategy 2023—2027 represents a road map for tourism in the county aligned with an exciting five-year vision for Longford and a county-wide commitment to sustainable tourism. Central to the approach is the development of a sustainable destination, an important element of Ireland’s Hidden Heartland’s, delivering a unique destination and unique Longford experiences.

On the proposal of Councillor Paul Ross seconded by Councillor Mark Casey the members unanimously approved and adopted the Draft Tourism Strategy 2023-2027.

**Proposed amendment to the Occupation of Vacant Commercial Premises Incentive Scheme – as circulated**

A/Director of Services Michael Nevin updated the members on the proposed amendments to the current vacant commercial premises incentive scheme. The members unanimously showed their support for the scheme and the proposed amendments.

On the proposal of Councillor Seamus Butler seconded by Councillor Paul Ross the members unanimously approved and adopted the amendments to the Occupation of Vacant Commercial Premises Incentive Scheme.

1. **Notice of Motions, submitted by Councillors, as listed hereunder**

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Uruemu Adejinmi and seconded by Councillor Seamus Butler.**

I call on Longford County Council to introduce a Retail Incentive Scheme to address the issue of vacant retail units throughout the County. The scheme if introduced for 2024 would incentivise occupancy of vacant retail units in our towns and villages and would help address urban dereliction and the high percentage of commercial vacancy that exists at present. It would support our urban regeneration and town centre efforts, helping to revitalise and re-energise our Town Centres, encouraging more visitors and improving footfall in our towns.

**Response**

Longford County Council has operated a successful Business Incentive Scheme (BIS) since 2016 that incentivised the occupancy of vacant commercial/industrial units. A revised BIS for 2024 is before the members today to link future incentive to the provision of direct employment. In relation to the Retail Sector, Longford currently offers the Shopfront Scheme that provides support of up to €700 for the enhancement of a retail shopfront. A limited scheme that incentivises occupancy of vacant retail units in the different urban centres could support urban regeneration efforts and help revitalise town centres. Consideration however needs to be given to cost of such a scheme and reaction of existing retailers who are currently paying full rates.

1. **FINANCE AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**
2. **Request for nomination for external director to sit on The Yard Hub Board of Directors**

On the proposal of Councillor Mick Cahill and Seconded by Councillor Paraic Brady the members agreed the nominated person from Longford County Council to sit on the Yard Hub CLG board of directors is Fema Flanagan.

1. **Notice of Motions, submitted by Councillors, as listed hereunder**

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Seamus Butler and seconded by Councillor Uruemu Adejinmi**

That the report on the Conditions of Sale of the former LEDCO building on the Ballinalee Road be furnished to the Members and in particular the condition requiring the creation of 40+ higher end R&D positions within 5 years.

**Response**

Panelto Foods was founded in 2004 with the support and assistance of Longford County Council and Enterprise Ireland. Panelto established a new state-of-the-art Food Manufacturing Plant in Longford town, creating 180 jobs and, generating export sales for 70% of its food products.

In 2018 Panelto approached Longford County Council with a plan for a major expansion of its business that required the acquisition of the LEDCO building enabling it to create a Corporate Campus in line with its expansion objectives.

That expansion would facilitate innovation that has helped Panelto become one of the largest and most modern bakery production facilities in Europe. The LEDCO building has allowed for the creation of different teams concentrating on Market Research, Retailer Propositions, Research on Product & Process Development and Packaging Innovation.

The expansion has also enabled Panelto to work with the 3rd Level Colleges (TUS Athlone, ATU Sligo and TUD Dublin) on Graduate & Apprenticeship Training & Development programmes.

On Wednesday, 11th April 2018 Longford County Council Passed by Resolution of the sale of the LEDCO building to Gingerhill (Panelto) in accordance with Section 183 of the Local Government Act and with the following conditions;

* That Longford County Council does everything within its powers to cater for the vacant possession timeline requests of the purchaser, while not affecting the on-going viability of the Individual Leaseholders.
* That the site reverts to Longford County Council, for equivalent consideration, in the event that it is not used for its intended purpose within three years of contracts being signed.

The conditions of sale have been complied with, the planned expansion of the Panelto Foods, Phase 2, has been implemented and the company delivered a further 125 jobs in the intervening period. There are now over 300 people employed the Panelto Foods Campus in Longford.

1. **DATE OF JANUARY MEETING**

The members unanimously agreed on the following dates for the January meetings:

* CPG Meeting-16 January 2024
* LCC Meeting-17 January 2024

1. **CORRESPONDENCE**
2. The correspondence received from the Department of Rural and Community Development re. CLÁR project requirements, was noted.

Councillor Paul Ross expressed his disappointment at the response received and indicated that he will raise the matter directly with the Minister.

**VOTES OF SYMPATHY**

Cathaoirleach Colm Murray paid tribute to his close friend and colleague Louis Belton who passed away in November 2023. Louis was member of the current audit committee since 2019 to present. Louis served as a member of Longford County Council, the Oireachtas and the Seanad. The Cathaoirleach outlined that Louis brought his own particular style to meetings and was liked by everybody. Cathaoirleach Colm Murray expressed deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Louis.

Chief Executive Paddy Mahon offered his condolence to the family and friends of the late Louis Belton. The elected members unanimously paid tribute to Louis. A minute silence was observed as a mark of respect to the Late Louis.

Councillor PJ Reilly expressed his sympathy to the Keogh Family following the recent passing of Mary Keogh. R.I.P.

Ar dheis de go raibh a anam dilis.

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

**Gerard Dennigan**

**A/Meetings Administrator**

**Confirmed and adopted at Meeting of Longford County Council held on the 17 January 2024.**

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

**Cathaoirleach**