

**Minutes of Meeting of Longford County Council**

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

**Wednesday, 13 September 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, Turlough McGovern and 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, Director of Services

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

Ms. Fema Flanagan, Financial Management Accountant

Mr. Shane Crossan, Arts Officer

**APOLOGIES:** None

**MEETINGS**

**ADMINISTRATOR**: Gerard Dennigan

**SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

On the proposal of Councillor Peggy Nolan and seconded by Councillor Colm Murray it was unanimously agreed that a letter of sympathy would be sent to the Moroccan Ambassador offering condolences and sympathy following the devastating earthquake on Friday last.

1. **ADOPTION OF MINUTES**
2. On the proposal of Councillor John Browne seconded by Councillor Peggy Nolan the Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Longford County Council held on the 12 July 2023, as circulated, were confirmed and adopted.
3. On the proposal of Councillor John Browne seconded by Councillor Peggy Nolan the Minutes of Annual Meeting of Longford County Council held on the 29 June 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 July-August 2023 was noted.

Councillor Garry Murtagh acknowledged the Longford Lights festival which was shortlisted for the Business to Arts awards.  The event took place on the 12th September 2023 in the National Concert Hall. This project was a joint partnership with Longford County Council and Tom Meskell.

1. **MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY GROUP MEETING HELD ON THE 9 MAY 2023 – AS CIRCULATED**

The adopted Minutes of Corporate Policy Group Meeting held on the 13 June 2023, as circulated, were noted.

1. **ENTERPRISE AND UKRAINIAN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE**
2. **Update on Ukrainian Response**

Michael Nevin provided the members with a comprehensive update on the Ukrainian response and the numbers currently residing in County Longford. He also updated the members on the refurbishment programme and the leases being managed by the Council. He expressed concern that the team are running out of suitable accommodation. A request to set up a Rest Centre was received but no suitable location has been identified. The Department has also requested that the Council identifies a suitable site, in private or public ownership, for modular homes. Council owned sites previously suggested by the Council were deemed unsuitable. Michael provided an update in relation to Connolly Barracks and the status of the tender and approval processes. He confirmed that a new communication process has been put in place at national level which should address some of the concerns of the Councillors.

Michael concluded by updating the members on the Community Forum with meets regularly to discuss potential issues regarding resources for Ukrainians residing in the County.

The members thanked Michael for his update and raised questions to which Michael responded. Question included: Number of residents in Bridge street, Communication issues, Integration team, Communication shared via Social Media platforms, Concerns over the future use of Connolly Barracks, percentage of Ukrainians in each Municipal District.

Paddy Mahon confirmed that the only official communication regarding International Protection accommodation referred to the property on Bridge Street. He also said that it is possible that private operators could be in contact with the Department regarding possible accommodation solutions.

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

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Seamus Butler and seconded by Councillor Mick Cahill**

That the Ancient East Failte Ireland symbol be removed from the Cathedral Square and be replaced in all the Co Longford towns with a suitable Hidden Ireland symbol in all the towns in Co Longford.

**Response**

Fáilte Ireland have notified Longford County Council that they are in the process of designing a reskim of these signs, which will then go into production and will have to be implemented. There is no exact timeframe for these works.

1. **FINANCE AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**
2. **To note adopted Minutes of meeting of the** **Governance Strategic Policy Committee held on 18 April 2023 – as circulated**

The adopted Minutes of the Governance Strategic Policy Committee held on 18 April 2023, were noted.

1. **Budgetary Process 2024**

John McKeon presented the Budget 2024 Process and Update to the members.

In his presentation John covered the following area’s:

* Budgetary Process 2024 – Important Dates & Timelines
* Schedule1 – Preliminary Estimate of Capital & Current Expenditure
* Schedule1 – Preliminary Estimate of Capital & Current Income
* LPT Baseline Review increases by LA
* LPT Baseline Review Longford Rankings
* Department Preferred Methodology
* LPT Impacts & Benefits
* Financial Challenges 2023-2024
* Lough Ree Power Station – Lost Rates Income
* Reconditioning Vacant Properties – Funding Gap

The Cathaoirleach suggested that the concerns over the funding gap on the retrofit of vacant properties should be a focus of the meeting with the Minister on Friday.

The members unanimously thanked John for the comprehensive presentation and posed questions around the following: Funding gaps, construction inflation, Regeneration projects and matched funding, Uisce Éireann stranded costs, number of vacant properties and comparison with other Local Authorities. John Mc Keon answered all questions raised by the members.

1. **Local Authority Home Loans**

Fema Flannagan, Financial Management Accountant provided the members with a comprehensive presentation on Local Authority Home Loans:

The presentation included the following:

* Background
* Criteria for Loan Application
* Reasons why LAHLs are declined
* Loan Application Process
* Appeals Process
* Statistics – Loan Applications received -2018-2022
* Comparisons with other Local Authorities
* Comparisons with other Local Authorities – Loans Analysis
* LAHL Interest Rates
* Introduction of a new pre application meeting

On completion of the presentation the members unanimously acknowledged the presentation. The members posed questions in relation to the Local Authority Home Loans, including clarification of the qualification criteria, reasons for ineligibility and eligible costs. Fema responded to all the queries raised.

1. **HOUSING, PLANNING, REGENERATION AND CAPITAL PROJECTS**
2. **To note Planning Applications received since last meeting of the Council**

The list of Planning Applications received since the last meeting of the Council were noted.

1. **To note adopted Minutes of meeting of Climate Action and Planning Strategic Policy Committee held on the 17 April 2023 – as circulated**

The adopted Minutes of the Climate Action and Planning Strategic Policy Committee held on 17 April 2023, were noted.

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

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Seamus Butler and seconded by Councillor Peggy Nolan**

That Longford County Council begin the process to revise the County Development Plan in light of the 2022 Census with a view to passing a motion to add housing Industrial zones before the end of 2023.

**Response**

The County Development Plan (CDP) has statutory timeframes prescribed by the Act which we are bound by, the 2-year review will be given to the elected members not later than 19th October 2023 this will then feed into the review which will begin no later 2 years before the end of the current plan, so no later than November 2025, this is the latest date it can commence but it is likely background work will commence well before that date.

Additionally, the Longford Local Area Plan which has been paused pending the publishment of forthcoming electoral area census 2022 material in September, which following the incorporation of the Census figures may lead to zoning changes, the addition of zoned lands and subsequently a variation to the CDP. These amendments will be dependent on the Small Areas Population Statistics released by the CSO in September

1. **COMMUNITY, LIBRARY AND CULTURAL SERVICES, CORPORATE AND HUMAN RESOURCES**
2. **To note adopted Minutes of meeting of Placemaking Strategic Policy Committee held on the 21 February 2023 – as circulated**

The adopted Minutes of the Placemaking Strategic Policy Committee held on 21 February 2023, were noted.

1. **Consideration of Arts strategy – “Art for Place, Art for People” – as circulated**

Councillor Paul Ross introduced Arts Officer Shane Crossan to the meeting. Shane presented the members with a summary of the Longford County Council Arts strategy titled “Art for Place, Art for People”. Councillor Ross recommended the strategy to the members and acknowledged the excellent contribution and ongoing work from the Arts office in Longford County Council to date.

Shane provided the following details in the presentation:

* Consultation process – November-December 2022
* Strategic Context
* Arts Policy
* Priority Investment
* Theme 1 Arts contribution to the development and promotion of County Longford
* Theme 2 Climate action and environmental sustainability in the Arts
* Theme 3 Connecting Artists and Citizens
* Theme 4 Collaboration and Engagement
* Theme 5 Infrastructure
* Theme 6 Supporting the Living artist
* Thematic Summary

The members unanimously acknowledged Shane for his excellent presentation and expressed their support for the Arts Strategy. The members posed questions and comments around the following: Requirement for a new Library in Longford town, consideration of an increased budget for the arts strategy, access to the piano in Longford Shopping Centre, the success of the Battle of Ballinamuck 225th Commemoration.

Councillor Paraic Brady thanked the Council and the Library Services for their tremendous support and funding for the very successful Battle of Ballinamuck commemoration.

Councillor Paul Ross stressed the need for increased funding for the Arts Service and this was given unanimous support by the members and will be considered as part of the Estimates process.

On the proposal of Councillor Paul Ross, Councillor seconded by Mick Cahill the Arts strategy – “Art for Place, Art for People” was unanimously adopted by the Council.

1. **Consideration of draft policy on visits by groups to the council – as circulated**

On the proposal of Councillor Peggy Nolan seconded by Councillor Paraic Brady the draft policy on Visits by Groups to the Council was adopted by the members.

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

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Paul Ross**

I call on the Minister for Rural and Community Development to Engage with the Minister for Education to ensure Schools will be able to apply for CLÁR funded projects. This follows the decision by the schools insurance in the Ardagh/ Clonmacnoise Diocese that consent will not be given for future CLÁR projects that have the requirement that they are open to the public. This decision will mean that no school will be able to apply for CLÁR funding and a workable solution to the public liability insurance issue needs to be found as soon as possible.

In his introduction, Councillor Ross updated the members on recent correspondence which he received from Allianz insurance contrary to the letter that was sent out by the Diocese to schools in the area. Having received this correspondence, which clarified the position regarding insurance, Councillor Ross proposed to amend his Notice of Motion. In accordance with the Standing Orders, the Cathaoirleach accepted the amended Notice of Motion, before the meeting, for consideration by the members.

Councillor Ross proposed his amended Notice of Motion, which was seconded by Councillor Pat O’ Toole, and the amended Notice of Motion was unanimously agreed by the members. The amended Notice of Motion:

I call on Longford County Council to facilitate a meeting of representatives of St Mel’s Diocesan Trust and representatives from the Department of Rural and Community Development to discuss the correspondence issued to schools in the dioceses and the concerns of the Elected Members.

**Response**

Longford County Council will write to St Mel’s Diocesan Trust and Department of Rural and Community Development suggesting a facilitated meeting to discuss the correspondence issued to schools in the dioceses and the concerns of the Elected Members.

1. **INFRASTRUCTURE, CLIMATE ACTION AND INNOVATION**
2. **To note adopted Minutes of meeting of Strategic Infrastructure Strategic Policy Committee held on the 17 April 2023 – as circulated**

The adopted Minutes of the Placemaking Strategic Policy Committee held on 21 February 2023, were noted.

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

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Mark Casey**

That Longford County Council suspend all paid parking in the County Town car parks until such time that the carparks/footpaths/signage/flower beds are cleaned up and made aesthetically appealing.

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Gerry Warnock and seconded by Councillor Peggy Nolan**

I'm calling for the establishment of a standalone "Parks Division" within Longford County Council. This Division would have responsibility for the Upkeep and Maintenance of our public realm areas (including planters, memorial gardens), roundabouts, walkways, and other amenities. There should be crews within each of the Municipal Districts.

Over the last number of years Longford County Council has invested millions of euros of public money on the provision of aesthetically pleasing public realm works and recreational walkways that is certainly of benefit to the public and truly welcome. However, we are falling significantly short when it comes to the maintenance and upkeep of these works. The establishment of a Parks Division would remedy this and futureproof the capital investment for years to come.

**Response**

Longford County Council are actively progressing a programme of Infrastructural Improvement Works in Longford Town and Environs. Delivery of these Works will result in enhanced connectivity, accessibility and safety for the citizens of Longford.

Works are currently ongoing. The Works do not warrant the suspension of paid parking in the County Town Carparks which is an important funding stream for the Council.

The Executive will consider options for upkeep and maintenance of our public realm areas (including planters, memorial gardens), roundabouts, walkways, and other amenities at the Municipal District level

**SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

**\*On the proposal of Councillor Gerry Warnock and seconded by Councillor Paraic Brady the members agreed to suspend the Standing orders and proceed with the meeting.\***

**Due to the commencement of the Better Estate awards at 6pm, Leas Cathaoirleach Garry Murtagh deputised for Cathaoirleach Colm Murray. Director of Services, Barbara Heslin deputised for Chief Executive Paddy Mahon.**

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

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Mark Casey**

I call on this Council to write to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien stating that Longford County Council fully supports the Fire Fighters in their current dispute and that the department should make the necessary adjustments to fulfil the basic demands of our Fire fighters.

**Response**

The industrial action is now resolved.

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Paul Ross and seconded by Councillor Paraic Brady.**

I call on The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Charlie McConalogue to reintroduce the Beef Finisher Payment Scheme to compensate beef farmers who have seen prices drop by almost €1/Kilo since May in an effort to save the struggling beef industry.

**Response**

It was agreed that Longford County Council will write to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Paraic Brady and seconded by Councillor Colin Dalton.**

I call on Longford County Council to write to Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to seek compensation for flooded landowners as weather has hampered farmers fodder collection.

**Response**

It was agreed that Longford County Council will write to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Garry Murtagh and seconded by Councillor Paraic Brady.**

Calling on Longford County Council and its members to write to the Minister for Education Norma Foley to seriously review the school transport system and implement the necessary reforms to provide transport for all students living in rural areas.

**Response**

It was agreed that Longford County Council will write to the Minister for Education.

**Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Uruemu Adejinmi and seconded by Councillor Martin Monaghan**

I call on the Minister for Finance to extend the 9% VAT rate for food related hospitality businesses to the end of 2024 to help keep businesses in the sector open and prevent closure of low margin restaurants, cafes and food led pubs in County Longford and across Ireland.

**Response**

It was agreed that Longford County Council will write to the Minister for Finance.

1. **CORRESPONDENCE**
2. The correspondence received on 14 August 2023 from Ireland East Hospital Group (IEHG) re. St. Joseph’s Care Centre Radiology Department, was noted.
3. **VOTES OF SYMPATHY**

The Members wished to extend their sympathies to the family of Ciara McKenna, who passed recently.

**14: OTHER MATTERS**

Councillor Peggy Nolan expressed her concern and disappointment at the Longford County Council meeting and the Better Estate awards ceremony taking place within a short timeframe of each other on the same date.

Councillor Gerry Warnock requested that a review of standing orders be undertaken.

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

**Gerard Dennigan**

**A/Meetings Administrator**

**Confirmed and adopted at Meeting of Longford County Council held on the 11 October 2023.**

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

**Cathaoirleach**