

**MINUTES OF THE MARCH 1 MEETING OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON THE  
30<sup>TH</sup> OF MARCH 2020 BY MEANS OF CONFERENCE CALL**

PRESENT:	Councillor	William Aird	In The Chair
	Councillors	Conor Bergin	Paddy Bracken
		Ben Brennan	Ollie Clooney
		Thomasina Connell	Caroline Dwane Stanley
		John Joe Fennelly	Padraig Fleming
		John King	Seamus McDonald
		Paschal McEvoy	Aisling Moran
		Tom Mulhall	Aidan Mullins
		Mary Sweeney	James Kelly
		Catherine Fitzgerald	Noel Tuohy

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Messers John Mulholland, Chief Executive, Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance, Donal Brennan, Director of Services, Simon Walton, Director of Services, Joe Delaney, Director of Services, Ms. Irene Delaney, A.O., & Ms. Michelle McCormack, S.O.

**42. AMENDMENT TO STANDING ORDERS**

On the proposition of Councillor James Kelly seconded by Councillor John King, the Members unanimously agreed to the amendment to Standing Orders in light of the global pandemic in relation to the COVID-19 Outbreak declared by the World Health Organisation on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. The Members in particular were advised of the amendment at 34(f) of the Standing Orders for the duration of the COVID-19 as follows:

- (i) Council meetings may be held by means of conference call among the members of the Council for the purposes of dealing with statutory, urgent or priority agenda items**
- (ii) Following consultation with the Cathaoirleach the Meetings Administrator shall inform members that the meeting is to be held by conference call**
- (iii) The conference call shall be organised and facilitated by the Meetings Administrator.**

**43. VOTE OF SYMPATHY**

On the proposition of Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald, the Members unanimously passed a vote of sympathy to the Cathaoirleach, Councillor Willie Aird on the recent death of his Uncle, Mr. William Aird, Dublin Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.

**44. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY MEETING OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON THE 24<sup>TH</sup> OF FEBRUARY 2020**

On the proposition of Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley seconded by Councillor James Kelly, the Members unanimously agreed to the minutes of the February meeting of Laois County Council held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2020.

**45. DISPOSAL OF LAND UNDER SECTION 183 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2001 AT 22 LORD EDWARD STREET, MOUNTMELICK, CO. LAOIS.**

On the proposition of Councillor Paddy Bracken seconded by Councillor Seamus McDonald, the Members unanimously agreed to the disposal of freehold interest comprising 0.08627 hectares at 22 Lord Edward Street, Mountmellick, Co. Laois in the townland of Ballycullenbeg for a consideration of €300.00

**46. DISPOSAL OF LAND UNDER SECTION 183 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2001 AT 34 BELADD LOWER, STRADBALLY ROAD, PORTLAOISE, CO. LAOIS**

On the proposition of Councillor Noel Tuohy seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald, the Members unanimously agreed to the disposal of freehold interest comprising 0.0511 hectares at 34 Beladd Lower, Stradbally Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois in the townland of Maryborough East for a consideration of €300.00

**47. DISPOSAL OF LAND UNDER SECTION 183 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2001 AT THE ELMS, STRADBALLY, CO. LAOIS.**

On the proposition of Councillor Paschal McEvoy seconded by Councillor Aisling Moran, the Members unanimously agreed to the disposal of freehold interest comprising 0.0654 hectares at The Elms, Stradbally, Co. Laois., in the townland of the Stradbally Area for a consideration of €300.00.

**48. DISPOSAL OF LAND UNDER SECTION 183 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2001 AT 2 MILLVIEW, RIDGE ROAD, PORTLAOISE, CO. LAOIS.**

On the proposition of Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly, the Members unanimously agreed to the disposal of 0.03417 hectares of land at 2 Millview, Ridge Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois in the townland of Borris Little for a consideration of €300.00.

#### **49. ROADWORKS SCHEME 2020**

Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services briefed the Members on the Roadworks Scheme for 2020. It was noted that the scheme sets out the programme of roadworks to be undertaken throughout the County in 2020. It was noted that the Municipal Districts have considered the contents of the scheme. However, formal approval by Elected Members has still to be given to the Annual Schedule of Municipal District Works (ASMDW) in each of the three Municipal Districts.

Acknowledging the disposition of Members in favour of the Scheme Elected Members agreed the Scheme as presented and acknowledged that formal resolutions in respect of the ASMDWs will follow. This approach, it was agreed, facilitates preparation for the commencement of an extensive programme of enhancements to the road network in County Laois. It was noted that the overall proposed expenditure in the Scheme is in the region of €27 million and provides for a progressive programme of works for the year ahead.

Councillor King enquired if there is any funding allocated for Local Improvement Schemes – Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services confirmed that an allocation of €250,000 had been given to Laois County Council for the purpose of Local Improvement Schemes and this will be divided amongst the three Municipal Districts.

For the duration of the Covid-19 restrictions, emergency work only will be carried out such as essential roadworks and the deployment of the winter maintenance crews if required.

#### **50. UPDATE BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ON THE BUSINESS AND ACTIVITIES OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Mr. John Mulholland, Chief Executive referred to his report issued on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 in relation to the closing of physical access to libraries and public offices of Laois County Council on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 following the Government's announcement on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. Since the issuing of this report a further announcement was made by An Taoiseach, Mr. Leo Varadkar, T.D. on the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2020.

The Chief Executive indicated that this announcement necessitates implementation of aggressive social distancing measures. There will be restricted access to the offices of Áras an Chontae. Essential services will be maintained and given priority such as water supply & waste water, housing & homeless services, fire & emergency services, road maintenance and traffic safety. It was noted that the Motor Taxation Office & Cash Office will operate by post and online only.

The services areas that are temporarily discontinued until further notice are all public libraries, housing and planning services counter, operation of waste and recycling facilities and all community events supported by the Council. The Chief Executive urged all Elected Members to regularly refer to the website of Laois County Council which will be updated on a regular basis. Members of the public are encouraged to use online services for business with the Council through email or phone encouraged all members of the public to act in the interest of public health.

There may also be a requirement for Laois County Council to re-assign staff and resources from less critical to more critical services. Laois County Council have also been working with the HSE to support them with our Civil Defence and Fire Services who have been transporting samples from the test centre in Emo to National Laboratories. Mr. John Mulholland, Chief Executive acknowledged the contribution of the local media for maintaining updates.

A Covid-19 Community Response Forum has been established in County Laois and is being co-ordinated by Laois County Council. With representatives from various statutory and voluntary agencies the core aim of the forum is to contribute to the community-wide effort to limit the spread of Covid-19. Laois County Council will ensure that the wide variety of groups working across the County will have the supports necessary to respond to the needs of vulnerable people living in the community where their usual sources of support have become unavailable due to Covid-19. The helpline number will be circulated over the next few hours and will run from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days per week. The Members complimented Laois County Council on same.

The Members expressed concern in relation to businesses and the payment of rates, mortgages and flexibility with payment and rent payments by Council tenants. Mr. Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance confirmed a rate deferral for a period of three months until the end of May for the most immediately impacted businesses – primarily in the retail, hospitality, leisure and childcare sectors. He advised that businesses, mortgagees and tenants should contact the Council where they foresee difficulties with payment. In relation to loans, Departmental notification of a Payment Break is expected shortly. The Chief Executive, Mr. John Mulholland, also indicated that the Department of Enterprise have introduced schemes with a view to having supports available to businesses. There will be work carried out on this on a week to week basis with Government.

The Members expressed concern regarding the closure of the waste and recycling facilities. Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services indicated that, over the last two weeks, there has been a significant increase in the use of the Civic Amenity Site and this gave rise to additional risks when considered against public health advices. has caused

difficulties due to the aggressive implementation of social distancing. The Members enquired if reopening of the centres could be considered to which Mr. Walton replied that the closure would be reviewed in 2 to 3 weeks taking account of public health advices and requirements at the time.

It was confirmed by Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services following a query that the controlled burning of bushes is strictly prohibited until further notice. This is further to an instruction issued by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management.

In relation to housing maintenance it was noted that there has been a decrease in the demand for services due to Covid-19. The Council is only dealing with emergency calls currently and is logging all other calls. A screening process is undertaken at the time of call to determine if the call is an emergency.

The Councillors complimented the Taoiseach, Mr. Leo Varadkar, T.D., & the Tanáiste, Mr. Simon Coveney, T.D. on the recent leadership shown to the Country, Laois County Council and all outside agencies and communities and in particular the frontline staff in our hospital and prison service.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

**SIGNED:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**CATHAOIRLEACH**

**CERTIFIED:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**DIRECTOR OF SERVICES  
CORPORATE AFFAIRS**