

**MINUTES OF THE APRIL MEETING OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON  
THE 25<sup>TH</sup> OF APRIL 2022 IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE**

**PRESENT:**                      Councillor              Conor Bergin              In The Chair

   Councillors              James Kelly              John King  
                        Seamus McDonald      Ollie Clooney  
                        Willie Aird              John Joe Fennelly  
                        Paschal McEvoy        Caroline Dwane Stanley  
                        Noel Tuohy              Catherine Fitzgerald  
                        Thomasina Connell    Aidan Mullins  
                        Pdraig Fleming        Ben Brennan  
                        P.J. Kelly              Aisling Moran  
                        Barry Walsh

**APOLOGIES:**              **Councillor**              Paddy Bracken

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

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

**38. VOTES OF SYMPATHIES**

On the proposition of Councillor Conor Bergin, Cathaoirleach, the Members unanimously passed a vote of sympathy to Kelly family, Sweetview, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois on the recent death of Mr. Gerry Kelly.

On the proposition of Councillor Conor Bergin, Cathaoirleach, the Members unanimously passed a vote of sympathy to the Duggan family, Cnoc Dhoire, Clonohill, Ballacolla, Co. Laois on the recent death of Mr. Sean Duggan, father of Ms. Therese Duggan, My Pay Department.

On the proposition of Councillor John Joe Fennelly, the Members unanimously passed a vote of sympathy to the McGrath family, Rathmoyle, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois on the recent death of Mr. Michael McGrath.

On the proposition of Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley, the Members unanimously passed a vote of sympathy to Farrell family, Marian Avenue, Portlaoise, Co. Laois on the recent death of Ms. Maura Farrell.

On the proposition of Councillor P.J. Kelly, the Members unanimously passed a vote of sympathy to the Doonan Family, Bellgrove, Ballybrittas, Co. Laois on the recent death of Mr. John Doonan.

On the proposition of Councillor Willie Aird, the Members unanimously passed a vote of sympathy to the Conroy Family, Rath Gailine, Potlaoise, Co. Laois on the recent death of Mr. Martin Conroy.

On the proposition of Councillor Willie Aird, the Members unanimously passed a vote of sympathy to the Fingleton Family, Munny, Stradbally, Co. Laois on the recent death of Ms. Angela Fingleton.

On the proposition of Councillor Ben Brennan, the Members unanimously passed a vote of sympathy to the Murphy Family, Monavea, Crettyard, Co. Laois on the recent death of Mr. Paddy Murphy.

On the proposition of Councillor Ollie Clooney, the Members unanimously passed a vote of sympathy to the McEvoy Family, Gurtnagruie, Clough, Ballacolla, Co. Laois on the recent death of Mr. Canice McEvoy.

### **39. VOTE OF WELL WISHES AND CONGRATULATIONS**

On the proposition of Councillor Willie Aird seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly, the Members unanimously passed a vote of congratulations to Ms. Martina Bracken, former Administrative Officer with Laois County Council on her recent retirement.

### **40. MINUTES OF THE MARCH MONTHLY MEETING HELD ON THE 28<sup>TH</sup> OF MARCH 2022**

On the proposition of Councillor Seamus McDonald seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell, the minutes of the March monthly meeting of Laois County Council held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 were confirmed as circulated.

### **Notice of Motion No: 18/2022**

Councillor Aisling Moran proposed that Notice of Motion No: 18/2022 be brought forward on the agenda for discussion. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. Councillor Paschal McEvoy proposed the agenda items remain as outlined on the agenda as issued and this proposition was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. Following a discussion on the matter, it was agreed that Notice of Motion No: 18/2022 would be taken as the first Notice of Motion.

### **Emo Court**

Councillor PJ Kelly raised concerns in relation to recent fencing which was erected in the grounds of Emo Court and Gardens and requested that Laois County Council confirm the position with regard to same. A number of other Members supported Councillor Kelly on the matter. It was agreed that Laois County Council seek clarification on the matter.

Ms. Angela McEvoy, Director of Services confirmed that Laois County Council had not been consulted in relation to any proposed changes to Emo Court or gardens. The Members requested that a letter issue to Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Mr. Patrick O' Donovan with responsibility for the Office of Public requesting clarification on the matter. Mr. Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance and Director of Services with responsibility for Tourism and Manager of the Graiguecullen/Portarlington Municipal District agreed that he would also seek clarification on the matter.

### **Turf Cutting**

Councillor John King requested the support of Laois County Council in relation to seeking a ban on turf harvesting in County Laois and in particular its implications for people, particularly older people on low incomes. The Members supported Councillor King and it was agreed that correspondence issue to the Minister for Climate Action, Communications, Networks & Transport, Mr. Eamon Ryan, T.D.

### **Dog Fouling**

Councillor Noel Tuohy expressed concern in relation to increased dog fouling in estates around the County which was noted as a general nuisance and a public health risk, particularly for children. Members agreed that responsible dog ownership prevents such risk and urged that Laois County Council continues to promote responsible dog ownership.

#### **41. REPORT ON CPG MEETING HELD ON THE 21<sup>ST</sup> OF MARCH 2022**

On the proposition of Councillor Thomasina Connell seconded by Councillor John King, the Members unanimously agreed the report on CPG meeting held on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2022 as circulated.

#### **42. REPORT ON MUNICIPAL DISTRICT MEETINGS HELD IN MARCH 2022**

On the proposition of Councillor John Joe Fennelly seconded by Councillor Ollie Clooney, the Members unanimously agreed the report on Municipal District meetings held in March 2022 as circulated.

#### **43. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2021**

The Members were circulated with a copy of the draft Annual Report 2021. Mr. Donal Brennan, Director advised that Section 221 of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended provides that a draft of the Annual Report be submitted to the Elected Members no later than April 30<sup>th</sup> each year. On the proposition of Councillor Seamus McDonald seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly, the Members unanimously agreed to the draft Annual Report for 2021. Mr. Brennan advised the Members that the final report will be listed for consideration at the June meeting of the Council.

#### **44. CONSIDERATION OF A CIVIC RECEPTION TO MR. MIKE DUNPHY, LAOIS ASSOCIATION NEW YORK AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CORPORATE POLICY GROUP ON THE 19<sup>TH</sup> OF APRIL 2022**

On the proposition of Councillor Conor Bergin, Cathaoirleach seconded by Councillor Padraig Fleming, the Members unanimously agreed to accord a Civic Reception to Mr. Mike Dunphy, Laois Association New York in honor of his tremendous contribution to promoting County Laois in New York. It was noted that this was recommended by the CPG at their meeting held on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2022.

It was further noted that a Cathaoirleach's Reception would be accorded to the National Ploughing Association in September in recognition of the success of the Competition and in particular the hosting of the World Ploughing Championships scheduled for later this year.

#### **45. MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT FOR APRIL 2022**

The Members were circulated with a copy of the Monthly Management Report for April 2022 and the Directors of Services responded to the various queries raised by the Members.

Following a lengthy discussion in relation to Housing, it was agreed that the following matters be brought to the attention of the Minister for Housing, Local Government & Heritage, Mr. Darragh O' Brien:-

- (i) Income thresholds pertaining to Laois for social housing applicants;*
- (ii) The change to legislation which requires social applicants to provide evidence of income over a 12 month period;*
- (iii) The need for regular income reviews for HAP tenants;*
- (iv) The need for the construction of additional social housing to meet the current needs.*

On the proposition of Councillor John Joe Fennelly seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald, the Members requested a meeting with the Minister together with the three Laois T.D.s to discuss these matters of concern as a matter of urgency which could be held in Dublin at a time and date convenient to the Minister.

During a discussion on the LIS funding, whilst acknowledging the allocation of €351,880 for 2022, it was requested that additional once off funding be sought to enable further schemes to be undertaken. It was agreed that a letter would issue to the Department of Rural & Community Development in this regard.

#### **46. TRAINING AND CONFERENCES**

The Members were circulated with a copy of the conferences and training for ratification and same was agreed on the proposition of Councillor Ollie Clooney seconded by Councillor John King.

#### **47. CORRESPONDENCE**

The following correspondence received since the last meeting was circulated and noted by the Members:-

- (i) Circular Letter LG 03/2022 dated the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2022 from the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage in relation to attendance requirements for Elected Members
- (ii) Correspondence received on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage in relation to the All-Ireland Pollinator Cycle
- (iii) Correspondence dated the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from Clare County Council in relation to wait time for gynaecology appointments
- (iv) Correspondence dated the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from Clare County Council in relation to proposed legislation to criminalise the use of the 'Z' symbol as a way to publicly support Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.
- (v) Correspondence dated the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from Clare County Council in relation to an independent review of the grossly under resourcing of the National Ambulance Service
- (vi) Correspondence dated the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from Westmeath County Council in relation to a call on the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications requesting permission for Bord na Móna to allow Contractors to harvest turf due to the urgent need for fuel in light of the war in Ukraine
- (vii) Correspondence dated the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from Westmeath County Council in relation to a call on Government Departments to request a further reduction on taxes on fuel

- (viii) Correspondence dated the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from Galway County Council in relation to a call on all banks to assist in setting up cashless transaction and issue debit cards at low cost fees to all OAP and Credit Unions
- (ix) Acknowledgement dated the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth in relation to Notice of Motion No: 11/2022 in relation to Ukrainian Refugees
- (x) Acknowledgement dated the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from the Minister for Education, in relation to Notice of Motion No: 12/2022 in relation to the Kolbe National Schol

#### **48. NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

##### **Notice of Motion No: 18/2022**

Councillors Aisling Moran, Ben Brennan, Aidan Mullins & Padraig Fleming raised the following Notice of Motion:

***“That Laois County Council request Eirgrid to carry out a fully Independent Risk Assessment on the site at Coolnabacky in conjunction with the RTS group and Laois County Council”***

It was further agreed that the word ‘immediately’ be included in the Notice of Motion to read as follows:-

***“That Laois County Council immediately request Eirgrid to carry out a fully Independent Risk Assessment on the site at Coolnabacky in conjunction with the RTS group and Laois County Council”***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Padraig Fleming. The Members proposing the Notice of Motion outlined the background to the issue and details of same. Following a lengthy discussion on the matter, it was agreed that a letter issue to Eirgrid requesting them to indicate their intention to undertake an independent Risk Assessment and an indicative timeframe for the carrying out such an Assessment.

##### **Notice of Motion No: 14/2022**

Councillor Barry Walsh proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***“That Laois County Council request the Department of Transport to provide subsidised access to public transport for Ukrainian refugees living in rural areas”***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. It was agreed that a letter issue to the Department of Transport in this regard.

### **Notice of Motion No: 15/2022**

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***“That Laois County Council outline the plans to put in place a Tourism Office in Portlaoise for the coming season and what are the delays in same”***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that Laois County Council is currently liaising with the Laois Chamber of Commerce and Laois Tourism in relation to a merger of both Boards in order to develop a common vision, strategy and plan to form a new organisation for Laois and to unlock its unique potential for all stakeholders. This process is at an advanced stage and will result in a permanent presence of a Tourism Office at the Laois Chamber offices at Lyster Square, Portlaoise. A discussion ensued during which Members expressed concern and disappointment that the Tourism presence wasn't currently in place.

### **Notice of Motion No: 16/2022**

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***“That Laois County Council call on Irish Water to please put in place a timeframe as to when new sewerage lines will be laid that services each house individually where there are currently combined drains”***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. It was agreed that a letter issue to Irish Water in this regard.

### **Notice of Motion No: 17/2022**

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***“That Laois County Council, following on from the recent successful Festival of Flight, request the Chief Executive to outline what plans are proposed to house the Portlaoise Plane”***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that Laois County Council entered into an agreement with the Laois Heritage Society for the purposes of housing the Portlaoise Plane in The Granary. The Council is currently exploring options for both short term and longer term renovations to the Granary that will enable the ongoing accommodation of the Portlaoise Plane, provide suitable public access to view the Plane and also

provide for a broader display/interpretative space depicting the industrial heritage of County Laois.

**Emo Court and Gardens**

Councillor Connell indicated to the meeting that the following clarification was received from Minister Patrick O’ Donavan who has responsibility for the Office of Public Works. The Minister’s office confirmed that access to Emo Court and gardens will remain available free of charge and there are no plans to introduce a charge in respect of same. The office of the Minister also confirmed that the issue regarding the fence is being investigated at the moment and a meeting has been sought with the Head of Heritage Services on the matter. In the meantime, the Office also advised that the fence improves the security of the house and enhances the visitor experience. The measure also provides for improved access control to the Tranquil gardens where events such as music performances, poetry recitals, drama, lectures will be hosted in the future. The two gates in the trellis remain open during the day to access the Tranquil Garden through the Visitor Hub and through a gate at the north of the Clucker”

This concluded the business of the meeting.

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

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