

Minutes of Meeting

Climate Action and Community Strategic Policy Committee

Monday, 11th September at 9.30 a.m. in Council Chamber and via MS

Teams



Present

Cllr Padraig Fleming (Chairperson)
Cllr. John King
Cllr. James Kelly
Cllr. Ollie Clooney
Ms. Ann Fingleton, Business/Commercial
Mr. Bobby Delaney, Laois PPN, Environmental Rep
Mr. Michael Gorman, Laois PPN, Social Inclusion Rep

Apologies:

Mr. Donald Scully, Agriculture/Farming

In Attendance:

Mr. Donal Brennan Director of Services
Ms. Pamela Tynan, A/Senior Executive Officer
Ms. Anne Marie Kirrane, A/Administrative Officer
Ms Rose Doolin, Assistant Staff Officer
Ms. Suzanne Dempsey, Climate Action Co-ordinator
Ms. Karen Moore, Climate Action Officer
Ms. Ann Marie Maher, Sports & Leisure Officer
Mr. Tom Curran, Age Friendly Officer
Ms. Denise Rainey, Town Renewal Officer

Cllr Padraig Fleming, Chairperson, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Confirmation of Minutes

Upon the proposal of Cllr John King and seconded by Cllr Ollie Clooney, the Minutes of the SPC Meeting held on Monday 12th June 2023 were confirmed.

Matters Arising

Mr Bobby Delaney stated that he was to meet a member of staff from Laois County Council regarding broken headstones at St Joseph's Cemetery in Mountmellick. Ms Pamela Tynan advised that she would follow up on this matter.

Sports Capital Grant – Update

Ms Ann Marie Maher, Sport and Leisure Officer, LAois County Council gave a brief update on the recent Sports Capital Grant. The Sports Capital & Equipment Grant opened in July

2023 with a closing date of September 8th . This deadline presented a disadvantage to many groups and schools as the applications were advertised during peak holiday time, which has resulted in a low number of schools making an application. Laois PPN in conjunction with the Sport & Leisure Office, held a workshop on how to complete an application which was attended by 43 people. Ms Ann Marie Maher assisted several groups that attended the workshop and made direct contact with more than 50 groups. Laois County Council made 2 applications for funding.

1. Funding to update pool hall facilities in Portarlington Leisure Centre
2. Replacement of moveable floor Portlaoise Leisure Centre.

With regard to the draw down of the last round of funding. Ms Ann Marie Maher continues to assist these organisations. Applications have also been submitted to the Department of Rural & Community Development for CLÁR and ORIS funding for 2023. She also advised that Trees on the Land will supply native Irish whips to groups to plant at little or no cost and Laois County Council have benefited from this in their playgrounds around the county.

She advised that the Department are considering changing Bike Week to Bike Month and asked members if they were in favour of this, as there are up to 50 events in Laois and 1 week to 10 days is not long enough to deliver all events planned. The members supported the change of Bike Week to Bike Month, if nationally approved.

The members thanked Ms Ann Marie Maher for her update and supported her comments regarding the short timeframe available to complete Sports Capital & Equipment applications. It was proposed by Cllr James Kelly and seconded by Cllr Ollie Clooney that this matter be brought to the Council Meeting at the end of the month asking the Council to write to the Department of Sports to consider changing the application timeframe for this funding.

Laois Age Friendly Strategy 2023-2027

Tom Curran gave an overview of the Laois Age Friendly Strategy 2023-2027.

- The strategy plans for an aging population in Co Laois, ensuring older people are to the forefront when building the county for the future as people are living longer and remaining healthier for longer.
- The population of Ireland is expected to grow by up to 33% by 2050 and this will lead to an increase in people over 80 by 250%. This will affect policy and drive funding for age friendly building.
- He gave an overview of how the strategy was formed with a review of the old strategy, research, surveys and consultation with older people.

- The main findings were that access to transport, services, supports and facilities is still a problem as well as access to information. Social isolation and the need for participation as well as independent living and the skills and supports required to do so also continues to be a problem.
- Some Age Friendly Initiatives were outlined:
 - Make Way Day – highlighting accessibility issues and working with the Council to address these.
 - Age Friendly Train Stations – highlighting accessibility issues and working with Irish Rail to achieve Age Friendly Status.
 - Ice Cards – information cards in case of emergency.
 - Eircode Awareness Campaign.
 - Living Well Expo with Healthy Laois – This was held in April. There were 70 stands attended by 1,000 people. It was great to have everything in one place. There were 97 health screening on the day and 20 people were advised to attend their doctors.
 - Mind Yourself Day- HSE talk with Q and A. Re-imagining Ageing through outdoor adventure talk and nutrition for older adults.
 - Healthy Age Friendly Homes Programme – The Healthy Age Friendly Homes Officer is expected to be in position in Laois County Council by October. This initiative will allow people to stay in their homes longer.

The Age Friendly Strategy will be launched on 24 October by Anna May McHugh at the Older Peoples Council (OPC) AGM. It is hoped that there will be a new OPC executive by November.

The members thank Mr. Tom Curran for his report and stated that transport should be a priority in the county and that parking for the elderly is a problem as the parking spaces are not wide enough and that more Age Friendly parking spaces are needed. There is also a big issue with the provision of bus shelters in towns. Cllr John King enquired if it was possible to give older people a watch with their Eircode on the strap. Mr. Curran advised that he would investigate Cllr. King's request further.

Community Climate Action Fund

Ms. Karen Moore, Community Climate Action Officer gave an update on the Community Climate Action Fund. This fund will assist groups in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and communities in moving to a less fossil fuel dependent economy. There will be 3 project scales ranging from up to €20,000, €21,000 to €50,000 and €51,000 to €100,000 for not-for-profit organisations and projects will be 100% funded. Projects can be submitted under 5 themes, Buildings & energy, sustainable travel, shopping & recycling, food & waste, Local environment & climate action.

The members thank Ms. Moore for her presentation and enquired if the money would be spread over the 3 municipal districts. Cllr Ollie Clooney enquired if it could be used for a community garden in rural areas. Ms. Moore stated that there is no rule where a project can take place, however, in allocating funding geographical spread throughout the county would be a factor. Mr Bobby Delaney asked if she would be available to join a meeting in the Voluntary Hall in Mountmellick together with SEAI on 21 September to discuss moving away from fossil fuel. She confirmed that she would be available.

Community Climate Action Officer Update

Ms Suzanne Dempsey gave an update on the Local Authority Climate Action Plan. The plan has gone to pre consultation which included staff workshops, ongoing dialogue, and public consultations – 6 in person and online sessions were held and an online survey was also conducted. Climate projections for County Laois in 2050 predict that summer rainfall is expected to reduce by up to 11%, a reduction in snowfall and up to 50% increase in very wet days. The biggest emitters of CO₂ in Laois are Agriculture, Transport and Residential. Laois County Council have undertaken a lot of work in their buildings to improve efficiency and reduce energy use and this programme is ongoing. The Draft LACAP will be circulated to members of the SPC next week. This will be followed by a Special SPC for noting and will also be circulated to Senior Management Team on 10 October for noting and will go to the full Council Meeting on 23 October. It will then be circulated for public consultation for another 5-week period and will be listed for recommendation again at the special SPC meeting. It will be included on the Agenda for January 2024 Council Meeting for adoption by the Elected Members. The deadline for having it in place is 23 February 2024.

The members thanked Ms Suzanne Dempsey for her update and enquired about the electricity cost, on a day to day basis, of retrofitting homes with heat pumps. She explained that cost of electricity would be higher but that houses would not have to pay for other fuels to heat their homes and this would result in an overall saving to the household.

Update from Town Regeneration Officer

Ms Denise Rainey gave an update on the Town Centre First initiative. The Town Centre First policy aims to create town centres that :

- function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.

- It represents a new approach to the development of towns by putting local communities and local businesses central to reimagining and planning their own towns.

The following funding may be available for towns:

- Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF)
- Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)
- Town & Village Renewal Scheme
- Housing for All
- Crói Cónaithe (Towns) fund
- Active Travel Fund
- Climate adaptation/retrofitting
- Built Heritage supports such as the Historic Towns Initiative (HTI)

Since April the following has been achieved:

- 2 new Town Teams established in Rathdowney and Mountrath
- A Town Centre First Plan has been adopted for Rathdowney.
- The Mountrath Town Team have devised an action plan based on the Sustainable Communities Plan developed for the Town.
- Active engagement has commenced with other Towns through various funding schemes- TVRS/RRDF/BAM
- A multi -disciplinary regeneration Team has been established within Laois County Council to tackle vacancy/dereliction comprising of representatives from Housing, Planning & Town Centre First.

The members thanked Ms Denise Rainey for her report and for her work to date in relation to the development of Rathdowney and asked if consideration could also be given to the development of Ballacolla and Shanahoe. It was highlighted that for Mountrath, public realm needs to be addressed eg. Street furniture, public transport, etc.

Ms Denise Rainey advised that the Town & Village Renewal Scheme is open until 15 September, and that this could help smaller towns, as groups could benefit from up to 90% funding. She said that a new vacancy and dereliction team has been established. There is also a new App which will show vacancies throughout the county and this will be used as a base line for vacant properties in Laois.

That concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: Padraig Fleming
Chairperson

Dated: 15/12/23