

**MINUTES OF THE JULY MEETING OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON THE 27TH OF JULY
2020 IN THE DUNAMAISE ARTS CENTRE & THEATRE**

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

APOLOGIES:	Councillor	Mary Sweeney	Ben Brennan
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IN ATTENDANCE:

Messrs John Mulholland, Chief Executive, Donal Brennan, Director of Services, Simon Walton, Director of Services, Joe Delaney, Director of Services, Ms. Julie Bergin, A/Head of Finance, Ms. Evelyn Brownrigg, A/S.E.O., & Ms. Michelle McCormack, S.O.

64. VOTE OF SYMPATHY

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Cathaoirleach & Councillor Willie Aird proposed a vote of sympathy to the Delaney Family, Cherrygarth, Portlaoise on the recent death of Mrs. Bridget Delaney.

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald, Cathaoirleach proposed a vote of sympathy to the Milner Family, Lough, Portarlinton on the recent death of Mr. Mick Milner, father of Mr. John Milner, Water Services.

Councillor Tom Mulhall proposed Votes of Sympathies to the Phelan Family, Avondale, Portarlinton on the death of Ms. Goretti Phelan & also to the Malone Family, Coolbanagher, Emo on the death of Mr. Edward Malone.

65. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE JUNE MEETING OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON THE 29TH OF JUNE 2020

On the proposition of Councillor Seamus McDonald seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly, the Members unanimously agreed to the minutes of the June meeting of Laois County Council held on the 29th of June 2020.

66. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON THE 29TH OF JUNE 2020

On the proposition of Councillor Willie Aird seconded by Councillor Paddy Bracken, the Members unanimously agreed to the minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Laois County Council held on the 29th of June 2020.

67. REPORT ON C.P.G. MEETING HELD ON THE 22ND OF JUNE 2020

On the proposition of Councillor John King seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell, the Members unanimously agreed the report on the C.P.G. meeting held on the 22nd of June 2020.

68. MINUTES OF THE S.P.C. MEETINGS HELD FROM MARCH – JULY 2020

On the proposition of Councillor Conor Bergin seconded by Councillor Tom Mulhall the Members unanimously agreed the minutes of the following S.P.C. Meetings:

- (i) Climate Action and Community Strategic Policy Committee held on the 10th of February 2020
- (ii) Housing, Regeneration & Planning held on the 4th of March 2020

69. PART VIII OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS, 2001 IN RESPECT OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF

- (i) 67 Voluntary Housing Units
- (ii) Public Car Park and
- (iii) Associated Site Development works at Station Road, Portlaoise

On the proposition of Councillor Thomasina Connell seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly, the Members unanimously agreed to the proposed development consisting of the construction of a residential development of a total of 67 dwelling units, consisting of 30 houses and 37 apartments over 3 Blocks at Railway Street, Portlaoise, Co. Laois with a new access road from Railway Street at the existing entrance to Maryville House and a new pedestrian access path at the existing entrance to Maryville House from Millbrook. The development will also include a new 94 space public car park.

Cost rental and affordable housing were among some of the queries raised also and it was agreed that these items would be considered in conjunction with a planned national affordable scheme.

70. DISPOSAL OF LAND UNDER SECTION 183 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2001 IN RESPECT OF THE LEASE OF THE LAOIS MUSIC CENTRE FORMERLY SCOIL MUIRE BUILDING

On the proposition of Councillor Willie Aird seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell, the Members unanimously agreed to lease of the Laois Music Centre, formerly Scoil Mhuire Building, Church Avenue, Portlaoise in the townland of Maryborough for a consideration of €25,000 per annum for a period of three years.

71. RATIFICATION OF MR. JOE THOMPSON – LAOIS/OFFALY EDUCATION & TRAINING BOARD ON TO THE LAOIS LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

On the proposition of Councillor John Joe Fennelly seconded by Councillor John King, the Members unanimously agreed to the ratification of Mr. Joe Thompson to represent the Laois/Offaly Education & Training Board on the Laois Local Community Development Committee.

72. RATIFICATION OF MR. VINCENT BOOTH – LAOIS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORK ON TO THE LAOIS LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

On the proposition of Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley seconded by Councillor Willie Aird, the Members unanimously agreed to the ratification of Mr. Vincent Booth to represent the Laois Public Participation Network on the Laois Local Community Development Committee.

73. RATIFICATION OF MR. CLIVE DAVIS – YOUTH WORK IRELAND ON THE LAOIS LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

On the proposition of Councillor Ailsing Moran seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy, the Members unanimously agreed to the ratification of Mr. Clive Davis to represent Youth Work Ireland on the Laois Local Community Development Committee.

74. RATIFICATION OF MR. HENRY BURNS – IRISH FARMERS ASSOCIATION ON THE LAOIS LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

On the proposition of Councillor Willie Aird seconded by Councillor Paddy Bracken, the Members unanimously agreed to the ratification of Mr. Henry Burns to represent the Irish Farmers Association on the Laois Local Community Development Committee.

Tribute was paid to all the outgoing Members representing their nominating bodies on the LCDC.

75. RATIFICATION OF THE CATHAOIRLEACH OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL AS A DIRECTOR TO THE BOARD OF THE PORTLAOISE INNOVATION CENTRE DESIGNATED ACTIVITY COMPANY

On the proposition of Councillor Willie Aird seconded by Councillor Paddy Bracken, the Members unanimously agreed to the ratification of the Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council as a Director to the Board of the Portlaoise Innovation Centre Designated Company.

76. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2019

On the proposition of Councillor Paschal McEvoy seconded by Councillor John King, the Members unanimously agreed the draft Laois County Council Annual Report for 2019 as presented.

77. FIX DATE IN SEPTEMBER FOR LOCAL PROPERTY TAX MEETING – NOTICE OF CONSIDERATION OF SETTING A LOCAL ADJUSTMENT FACTOR (PROPOSED DATE OF THE 4TH OF SEPTEMBER 2020)

On the proposition of Councillor John Joe Fennelly seconded by Councillor Willie Aird the Members unanimously agreed to the Local Property Tax Meeting being held on the 4th of September 2020 at 11.00 a.m.

The Members enquired if there had been any direction from Government in relation to the payment of the LPT due to Covid-19. It was agreed that an update in relation to same would be available for the meeting on the 4th of September 2020.

78. LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT FOR JULY 2020

Mr. John Mulholland, Chief Executive briefed the meeting on this matter and the report for July 2020 was circulated. The report was unanimously agreed and noted. A number of queries were raised on the report and the Directors of Services responded to the various queries raised.

79. RATIFICATION OF CONFERENCES & TRAINING EVENT

On the proposition of Councillor James Kelly seconded by Councillor Paddy Bracken, the Members unanimously agreed the ratification of conferences and training as circulated.

80. CORRESPONDENCE

It was noted that there was no correspondence.

81. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Notice of Motion No: 13/2020

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That Laois County Council be given the reason why hard plastics are being refused at the recycling centre as of Tuesday 9th June 2020”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Conor Bergin. The Members were advised that on the day in question (9th June 2020) hard plastics were not accepted at the Portlaoise Civic Amenity Site. The decision not to accept hard plastics was taken by the contractor operating the site and without the consent of Laois County Council. To retain a service for the disposal of hard plastics at Kyletelesha, Laois County Council made arrangements for hard plastics disposal at the Tipping Head Area. Customers who arrive at the Civic Amenity Site with hard plastics are directed to this area for their disposal. No additional fee to customers arises for the disposal of hard plastics when redirected from the Civic Amenity Site to the Tipping Head Area.

Notice of Motion No: 14/2020

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That Laois County Council review the Estate Management function within the Council having regard to the number of housing units already provided and to be provided over the coming years”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that Laois County Council will carry out a review of the Estate Management Service including the Tenant Liaison Service this Autumn having regard to additional houses provided and to be provided.

In seconding the Motion Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley confirmed that the work that is currently being carried out by the Tenant Liaison Officer is second to none but additional funding and resources are required.

On the proposition of Councillor Willie Aird seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley, it was agreed that the matter be raised following a review in October and if necessary as part of the Estimates process. Mr. Joe Delaney, Director of Services responded to a query on re-lets and the resources required for re-letting a property in accordance with the housing regulations.

The following Notice of Motions were taken together:-

Notice of Motion No: 15/2020 in the name of Councillor Willie Aird

“That Laois County Council request that the Minister for Housing, Planning & Local Government, Mr. Darragh O’Brien to meet a deputation from this Council to discuss income thresholds for housing qualification”

Notice of Motion No: 17/2020 in the name of Councillor Aisling Moran

“That this Council call on the Minister for Housing, Planning & Local Government, Mr. Darragh O’Brien to put arrangements in place to review the thresholds and existing rent caps under the HAP Scheme”

These Notice of Motions were seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that the matter will be referred to the Minister for Housing, Planning & Local Government for their response.

It was also agreed to seek a deputation with the Minister and to comprise of the Chairperson of the Housing S.P.C., Councillor Thomasina Connell together with the Cathaoirleach, Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald, Councillors Caroline Dwane Stanley & Aisling Moran.

In response to a query on the various thresholds around the Country, Mr. Joe Delaney, Director of Services indicated that there are currently three zones – details of which would be forwarded to the Members together with how income is calculated for same.

Notice of Motion No: 16/2020

Councillor Aisling Moran proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council call on the Minister for Housing, Planning & Local Government, Mr. Darragh O’Brien, in light of the current increase in illegal dumping county wide to look at making property owners responsible for providing refuse collection to their tenants. This cost should be added to the monthly rent cost as it is a service similar to electricity / gas that should be the financial responsibility of the tenant. It may not alleviate illegal dumping completely,

but should help with domestic dumping. Anyone found to be dumping illegally should have a substantial financial fine / custodial sentence imposed. We need to have a more severe deterrent in place, as the current deterrents are clearly not working”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that Laois County Council has no statutory means of making property owners/ landlords responsible for providing refuse collection to their tenants. Refuse collection services are not entirely similar to other utility services in that a tenant can decide that they do not want a kerbside refuse collection service as they can legitimately manage refuse disposal by bringing it to an authorised waste facility. Nonetheless changes to existing arrangements that support a reduction in illegal dumping are to be welcomed and a national approach may bear greater results in this regard.

Notice of Motion No: 18/2020

Councillor Aisling Moran proposed the following Notice of Motion

“That this Council call on the Minister for Climate Action, Communications Networks & Transport, Mr. Eamon Ryan to address the issues with Airlines where customers that are unable to travel due to the current travel restrictions be afforded the opportunity of a refund in the form of a voucher that can be used in 2021”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor James Kelly. It was agreed that the matter be referred to the Minister for Climate Action, Communications Networks & Transport, Mr. Eamon Ryan.

Notice of Motion No: 19/2020

Councillor James Kelly proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council write to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland to express concern regarding the reduction in funding for the Laois Local Authority Veterinary Service which provides food safety controls including the inspection of all animals before and after slaughter”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John King. The Members were advised that across the state Local Authority Veterinary Inspectors provide services to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland by way of Service Level Agreements. These SLAs provide a means whereby local authorities provide veterinary resources such that FSAI can comply with its statutory obligations. The current Service Level Agreement between Laois County Council and FSAI is in place until 30th September 2020. There are ongoing discussions between local authorities and the FSAI with a view to agreeing a sustainable funding/cost recovery model for future Service Level Agreements. Councillor Kelly requested that the matter be referred to the Department of Health for their observations.

Notice of Motion No: 20/2020 & 23/2020 were taken together

Notice of Motion No: 20/2020 in the name of Councillor Conor Bergin

‘That Laois County Council contact the Minister for Housing, Planning & Local Government regarding the urgent need for funding to be allocated to the Council for the Disabled Persons Grants (DPG) scheme for 2020’

Notice of Motion No: 23/2020 in the name of Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley

“This Council contact the Minister for Housing, Planning & Local Government, Mr. Darragh O’Brien to seek an increase immediately in funding for housing adaptation grants for local Authority Houses”

These Notice of Motions were seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that Laois County Council issued correspondence in June regarding all outstanding applications to the Department requesting funding for same and the matter will be again referred to the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government for their response.

Notice of Motion No: 21/2020

Councillor Tom Mulhall proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council carry out an accurate assessment of the number of vacant properties both residential and commercial in County Laois”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John King. The Members were advised that Laois County Council’s Vacant Homes Action Plan, which was compiled in 2018, identified the following levels of vacancy in County Laois:

Census 2016 Statistics

- Laois had a vacancy rate of 3,007 units identified from the Census 2016. This equated to a vacancy rate of 9.6% as compared to a national level of 12.3%. Of these numbers 2,705 were vacant houses and 302 were vacant apartments. There were 153 vacant holiday homes identified within the County

GeoDirectory Statistics - Q4 2017

- GeoDirectory is a database established by An Post that provides a full database of all 2.2 million buildings in the Republic of Ireland. It incorporates standardised postal address for every building - commercial and residential - and a GeoCode for each building.
- From the GeoDirectory Q4 2017 data, there were 1,514 vacant properties in County Laois.

Laois County Council’s Vacant Homes Action Plan prioritised actions to address vacancies arising in the private housing stock and in particular, properties that are in areas of high need and are having a negative social and visual impact on the community.

A total of 213 properties have been investigated by the Vacant Homes Officer following reports of vacancy by Council Members and other Elected Representatives, members of the

public or via www.vacanthomes.ie and applications under the Repair & Leasing Scheme and Buy & Renew Scheme.

The Vacant Homes Officer has carried out an initial inspection on 189 vacant dwellings to date. Following this inspection, no further action has been deemed necessary in 74 cases due to the properties being found to be occupied, undergoing works by the owners or in a location of low housing need and unsuitable for social housing.

62 vacant houses have been identified as being suitable for social housing due to the type of house and location and further action may be taken in these cases. 25 properties have been identified as having potential for use as development sites for social housing and these sites will be examined further.

10 vacant properties have been acquired by CPO and 5 properties are currently going through the CPO process. 4 vacant properties are currently being considered under the Buy & Renew and Repair & Leasing Schemes.

The Vacant Homes Officer will also carry out surveys of vacant properties throughout the county on a town and village basis and this process has commenced in Mountrath and Mountmellick.

Notice of Motion No: 22/2020

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley, Councillor Ben Brennan, Councillor Noel Tuohy, Councillor James Kelly & Councillor Aidan Mullins proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council contact the new Minister for Health, Mr. Stephen Donnelly, T.D., to seek clarification regarding the future of the Emergency Department of Portlaoise Hospital”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor James Kelly. Councillor Dwane Stanley referred to the meeting that was held with the Members of Laois County Council & Mr. Simon Harris, the then Minister for Health in 2017 where a clear commitment was given to carry out a review. It was agreed that an invite issue to the current Minister for Health with the support of the three T.D.s, Minister Sean Fleming, Deputy Charles Flanagan & Deputy Brian Stanley to visit Portlaoise Hospital and meet with the Members of Laois County Council & the Oireachtas Members.

The Cathaoirleach, Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald paid tribute to all frontline workers in Portlaoise Hospital for their tremendous work during the pandemic.

Notice of Motion No: 24/2020

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council call on the Minister for Justice & Equality, Ms. Helen McEntee, T.D. to allocate special responsibility for domestic violence to the Minister of State and increase the allocation of resources to this issue”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Aisling Moran. The Members were advised that the matter would be referred to the Minister for Justice & Equality for her response. It was noted in particular that there was a 42% increase in domestic violence during Covid-19. It is an area which is very much under resourced.

Notice of Motion No: 25/2020

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council undertake a county-wide review of our marketing strategy, social media plan and all of the various media platforms in order to create a master plan with a view to increasing business and tourism opportunities throughout Laois”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Aisling Moran. The Members were advised that a review will be undertaken building upon a range of existing strengths, from external organizations such as Laois Tourism, Laois Chamber of Commerce, Dunamaise Theatre etc, to the LEO office and Business Support Unit, to the range of internally based social media accounts, such as those operated by Laois Libraries and Heritage.

Councillor Connell requested that this area should be allocated resources to create a platform and looks forward to the review after the summer period.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

SIGNED:

CATHAOIRLEACH

CERTIFIED:

DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
CORPORATE AFFAIRS