

Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment Strategic Policy Committee
Minutes of Meeting - Thursday 14th September, 2023 in County Hall, Wexford & Remotely

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Jim Moore (for Meeting).

Present: Cllr. Maura Bell (Remotely), Cllr. Leonard Kelly (Remotely), Mr. Danny Forde (PPN Member), Mr. James Brennan (Agriculture), Mr. Kevin Molloy (PPN Member) Carolyn Godkin Director of Services, Frank Burke, Climate Change Co-Ordinator, Clare Kelly, Climate Change Officer, Clinton Donovan Community Climate Action Officer, Catherine McLoughlin Heritage Officer, George Colfer, Coastal Engineer, Lillie O'Brien, Jodi Somers.

Apologies: Cllr. Mary Farrell, Cllr. Donal Kenny, Cllr. Oliver Walsh, Cllr. Tom Forde, Ms. Mary B. Walsh (Business & Commercial), Mr. John Somers (Construction) Mr. Allen Holman (PPN Member), Mr. Joe Ryan (Trade Union), Gerry Forde,

Cllr. Mary Farrell, Cathaoirleach sent her apologies and Cllr. Jim Moore was nominated to chair the meeting by Cllr. Leonard Kelly and seconded by Mr. Kevin Molloy.

1. Confirmation of Minutes of SPC Meetings held 29th June, 2023

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29th June 2023 were noted and proposed by Cllr. Maura Bell and seconded by Cllr. Jim Moore.

It was proposed to proceed with Wexford County Council's membership of KIMO. In regard to the offer made inviting the Council to hold the AGM in Wexford, Captain Phil Murphy had been in contact with KIMO and they had already scheduled a venue for next autumn but are in a position to host the Spring meeting here in Wexford scheduled for around April/May. Discussions are ongoing in relation to the matter and it is hoped that they may be successful in engaging other Member Local Authorities to participate.

2. Draft Climate Change Plan

Clinton Donovan was introduced as the new Community Climate Action Officer and he was welcomed by the Committee.

Frank Burke gave a presentation on the Draft Climate Action Plan covering the following items:

- Statutory Requirements
- Mitigation & Adaptation measures
- What will it achieve?
- Timeline for Plan
- Deadlines to be met
- Decarbonisation zone
- Meetings held
- Thematic Areas A, B

Clare Kelly briefed the Committee on the following elements:

- Weather Risks
- Baseline Emissions
- Energy Users
- Thematic Areas C, D & E

The following queries were raised and responded to;

- It was stated that the focus was on getting the Plan completed and adopted and F. Burke advised that an extra 2/3 days are given for queries/feedback on action.
- It was asked if the Risk Assessment carried out by RPS was available? It was advised that it will be put up during Public Consultation process (6 weeks and 1 day) and all documents will be on the Council's website and portal for October 10th.
- A question was asked on how will the Climate Action Plan (CAP) actions will be tracked and is it feasible? The response was that actions will be tracked and for example, the Council could map E.V. charging points and other data when it becomes available as time progresses. After the Climate Action Plan is adopted, data capture will be a priority.
- A point was raised that agriculture seemed to lack measurement data and there are different opinions on the emission data for the sector. What is the view of the Climate Action Co-Ordinator? The Response was that the Agricultural Scientist is actively involved with farming communities. As new technologies and new information come to hand, he would be up to speed with that to give new updated information as it emerges. The Council's the Agricultural Scientist has good stakeholder engagement relations such as engagement through the EIP Project in Duncannon.
- A query was raised about the responsiveness of the Council in terms of data gathering and analysis in relation to extreme rain events that could happen here or is the Council reliant on fixed data only? The reply was that Adaptation data is being updated all the time with Climate Ireland, Met Eireann data and local knowledge. People mainly want to know impacts at local level so part of that is facilitating people to state the risk they have had in their own municipal district, and this would be considered when Risk Assessment is done.
- If data shows a difference from national levels, can we apply this at a local level? The response was that would like to think that consultants involved in any report preparation would be constantly updating their hydrological modelling. This will be further investigated that out, in relation to all climate actions coming from staff in our organisation and their expertise.
- Met Eireann forecasting is ongoing and for predicted rainfalls so isolated and intense that a huge amount of background information is needed. Fast response and recovery is the main focus for infrastructure in storms.
- A presentation showed that of 40% of carbon emissions stemmed from Agriculture and a question was asked if it is possible to get some form of graph for comparison with the other southeastern counties, a case needs to be made to expand the EIP funding for other projects.
- It was noted that 2 Agricultural Scientists new positions have been advertised for Climate Change and Environment Section with a focus on water quality.
- There were some queries on the Public Consultation Process. The CAP will go to full County Council meeting on 9th October and go to public consultation for 6 weeks with drop-in sessions in the libraries. The next SPC meeting will consider submissions to the CAP before going to Council for February, 2024.
- A question was asked if it was necessary to include water quality in the Climate Action Plan. The response was that it was felt necessary to include it and it will be important to report back on all actions in the Plan.
- A point was made that potential problems may arise in the county as the Plan proposes mainly proposed hard engineering solutions. There doesn't appear to be sufficient focus on natural water retention solutions. It was suggested that a submission to the Draft CAP could be made in this respect.
- There will be an SPC meeting before the adoption of the Plan next February and the Committee will have an opportunity to discuss the Plan before making any recommendations.

3. Biodiversity Action Fund – Catherine McLoughlin

Catherine McLoughlin briefed the meeting regarding the local Biodiversity Action Fund administered by NPWS, Department of Housing, Planning, Local Government & Heritage and this year there was an increase in funding and Wexford County Council have 3 projects ongoing under this fund.

1. Phase 2 of County Wetland survey – a survey of the entire county last year and upload on the Council's website. Consultants identified over 300 wetlands non-designated sites. Funding was secured– more detailed baseline surveys show the ecological potential of the sites. The Point of these surveys is to show the wetland cover in the County and how this needs to be incorporated into development through the county. Once the survey is completed it will be available to view.
2. Development of a Tree and Hedgerow Strategy throughout the county– the objective is to implement a training hedgerow management programme to help expand and help protect and treat our existing hedgerows. A draft report will be presented to SPC and vast work is currently undertaken by consultants through Heritage Council.
3. Third project – A Barn Owl booklet by Birdwatch Ireland. Joining forces with 5 other counties and distribute through libraries and schools.

Carolyne Godkin pointed out that the Council sought and got approval for funding for a dedicated Biodiversity Officer as at present Catherine McLoughlin is carrying out a dual role Heritage and Biodiversity at present. It is hoped to have the Biodiversity Officer in place towards end of year or early next year and will join the Climate Action Team.

Following the update report the Committee Members had some queries to which responses were given by the relevant staff at the Meeting;

- A question was asked on the timeline for the Wetlands Site Survey and are many of the wetlands SAC's? A response was given that the Survey should be completed at the start of November. The surveys started in non-SAC's and are looking to expand the knowledge of the non-designated sites which have very important habitats but would not be known about that could be turned into development land and it is very important to retain these wetlands.
- A query was raised about Japanese Knotweed – The answer was that the NPWS are responsible for regulations dealing with it. It is the owner's responsibility to deal with Japanese knotweed on private property and there is guidance available. If a person has Japanese knotweed they are legally obliged to ensure it doesn't spread. There is some information on the Council's website on the subject. The new Biodiversity Officer will have more focus on increasing awareness about the problem.

4. Coastal Management Update – George Colfer

George Clofer gave an update on Coastal management under the following headings;

- Rosslare Coastal Erosion – At Stage 1 of 5 Stage Scheme. Public Consultation on the Scheme is expected to take place early next year.
- Erosion & flood protection options
- Seaview Coastal Protection, Kilmore – A Part 8 Planning application to be submitted in next 2 weeks.
- Beach Management - 6 Blue Flag Beaches & 10 Green Coast Beaches
- Bathing Water Quality – 7 identified bathing beaches.

- Monthly rainfall at Johnstown Castle
- Piers and Harbours
- Kilmannock Drainage

Following the update, points were made, queries raised and answered to by the relevant Staff Members as follows.

- A query was raised seeking an update on Flooding Relief Schemes for Enniscorthy, Wexford, New Ross. The Committee was advised that Flooding Relief Schemes doesn't come under the CCBDENV SPC but reports are available on the Council website and are listed under Capital Projects on the Chief Executives Report. Larry McHale was appointed Project Engineer for Enniscorthy Project and he reports to the Enniscorthy Municipal District.
- The matter of the Duncannon EIP Project was raised Farming Scheme and if it will be rolled out in other areas? The response was a Project is proposed for South Wexford coast at Bannow Bay due to success of the Duncannon scheme.
- Concerns was raised about bathing prohibitions at some beaches over the summer season. The matter is being investigated particularly with streams coming on to the beaches.

5. Any Other Business

Clinton gave a brief outline of the Information Evenings in Our Lady's Island, Enniscorthy, Gorey, Wexford and New Ross about grants that are available to Community groups for Climate Action. Funding available for the county is €669,000.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.

Signed: 
Cathaoirleach

Date: 6/12/23