

Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment Strategic Policy Committee
Minutes of Meeting – Thursday 25th April 2024 in County Hall, Wexford & Remotely

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Mary Farrell.

Present: Cllr. Donal Kenny, Cllr. Maura Bell, Cllr. Jim Moore, Cllr. Oliver Walsh (Remotely), Mr. Danny Forde (PPN Member), Carolyne Godkin Director of Services, Gerry Forde Senior Engineer, Clare Kelly Climate Change Officer, Rory O' Mahony Senior Executive Engineer, Cliona Connolly Environment Education & Awareness Officer (Remotely), Eoin Kinsella Agricultural Scientist, Mary O'Neill Assistant Scientist, Eddie Bolger Assistant Scientist, Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer, Melissa Goff Senior Staff Officer, Nichola Gahan Clerical Officer

Apologies: Mr. James Brennan, Ms. Ann Marie Neville, Mr Kevin Molloy & Mr. Joe Ryan.

1. Confirmation of Minutes of SPC Meeting held 8th February, 2024

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8th February, 2024 were noted and proposed by Cllr. Donal Kenny and seconded by Cllr. Jim Moore.

2. Climate Action Plan Update

Claire Kelly, Climate Action Officer gave an update on the Climate Action Plan and the following was noted:

- Wexford County Council CAP 2024-2029 had been adopted by elected members at the Meeting held on 12th February 2024.
- Enniscorthy was established as WCC's first Decarbonisation Zone.
- Wexford County Council to take on a role to facilitate other people to reach targets for increased energy efficiency and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- Funding for Wetlands Phase 2, Pond Restoration and Ecological Survey in Killurin had been approved.
- 52 applications had been received in respect of the CCAP and recommended projects were forwarded to the Dept. of Environment, Climate & Communications for Appraisal.
- Claire Goodwin was offered the position of Biodiversity Officer.
- Farmers to be encouraged to attend sustainable farm visit.
- Cliona Connolly, Environment Education & Awareness Officer is organising a food waste event.
- The Committee Members acknowledged recent work carried out by Clinton Donovan in relation to the Community Grant Scheme,

Following the update the SPC Members had some queries and observations that received the following responses;

- A query was raised in relation to the grants being assessed and what the expected date was for their allocation and whether the grants had to be vetted.
- With regards to the Climate Action Plan (CAP), who determines the order in which actions take place? There is nothing mentioned with regards to the natural environment and coastal management, how is this going to be incorporated into CAP?
- There was a discussion regarding these queries and an observation was made that the Chair of an advisory group had recently spoken strongly on Coastal Management.

It was stated that she was very impressed with Wexford and the funding. She mentioned that the title "Climate Change" and said that change was a gentle word compared to possible future climate events. It was advised that the Department of Environment, Climate & Communications expect to make an announcement in June with regards to the Community Grants. An external board had gone through the applications and made recommendations as to what should go forward. Although 52 applications were received there was only enough funding for 16 and the remainder were to be set up with an appendix.

- It was mentioned that much work went into the natural environment with significant input from the Coastal Engineer and that coastal erosion would get priority. It was noted that Wexford is one of 5 counties that will suffer from the extreme end of coastal erosion and that the reality was that serious policy changes were needed. It was stated that the OPW are open to assisting the Council look at key areas of risk and that changes could be expected.

3. Coastal Management Update

Gerry Forde, Senior Engineer gave an update to the Committee and his presentation covered;

- The severe damage caused by Storm Kathleen (6-4-2024), in particular at Carne Beach & Ballyhealy Beaches.
- Areas of erosion, including Rosslare Coastal Erosion and Flood Relief Scheme.
- Cost benefit analysis and the environmental reasons that determines if a proposed scheme might proceed.
- Seaview – beach access lost and 14 properties currently at risk, emergency works were carried out in 2022 were now gone, plans to extend the rock armour, planning permission had been applied for, works to commence at the start of the summer and finish before the winter storms.
- Blue Flag has been lost from Ballymoney Beach due to water quality issues.
- Hopes for a Blue Flag for Baginbun Beach.
- Collaboration with Maynooth University regarding coastal erosion studies.

After the presentation the Committee Members held a discussion where the following questions were asked and issues discussed:

- Coastal erosion was eventually going to be an agenda on every council meeting going forward.
- The coastal engineers were run off their feet with what is a fire-fighting exercise.
- Should we make all Wexford coastline a risk? How do we do this? The difficulty being that some of the erosion is considered natural and won't be protected. What is off the most benefit? A dedicated response strategy is needed for the County.
- Ballyconnigar & Ballynamona beaches are disappearing, dunes are disappearing along Morriscastle.
- Risk of houses falling needs to be addressed – the need to start highlighting the risks or nothing will be done.
- The OPW were still using 1920's & 1930's solutions to 1920's/30's problems – Wexford County Council are working from these solutions which is wrong.
- It was noted that we have an excellent working relationship with the OPW.

4. Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environment Inspections (RMCEI) Review 2023 and Plan 2024.

Rory O'Mahony Senior Executive Engineer outlined the RMCEI reports and went through the figures including inspections for 2024.

- 2,646 complaints received in 2023 which was down 6% on 2022- huge portion of this is illegal dumping and doesn't believe it is the true figure.
- Litter patrols were reduced in 2023 as only one Environment Warden was available. Two Environment Wardens are now fully in place.
- Planning inspections were up from 1100 to approximately 1200.
- Air & Noise inspections down due to reduced staffing resources.

Following the presentation the following was noted:

- Environment inspections are mainly unseen work and our staff are out on a weekly basis carrying out inspections.
- Water, Air & Noise priorities were set by EPA – 5 priorities have been consistent over the past few years.
- With regards to staff resources, Waste is stable but Water/Air need staff to get it functioning as it should be.

5. Draft Litter Management Plan 2024-2027 Report on Submissions

Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer circulated a brief report to everybody and advised that the Draft Litter Management Plan underwent a Public Consultation process during 13th March – 22nd April 2024. The submissions included some of the following suggestions:

- More use of CCTV – there is new legislation and guidelines involved.
- Free entry to household recycling centres.
- More plans for proactive litter patrols with plans for increased warden patrols.
- How the deposit return scheme should help with roadside litter.
- Issues using ANPR – number plate recognition
- Collaboration and comprehensive programmes with schools
- More action on Takeaway premises
- Work and awareness in disadvantaged areas.

Following the presentation, it was noted that this was a Comprehensive Plan. Hugh advised that there were a few very minor changes to be made to the Draft Plan. It was recommended by Carolyn Godkin Director of Services that if members were happy with the document it could be brought to council. This was proposed by Cllr. Maura Bell & seconded by Cllr. Donal Kenny.

6. Wexford County Council IFA Protocol for Farm Inspections

Eoin Kinsella Agricultural Scientist gave a presentation and advised of the following:

- 204 farm inspections are due to be carried out in 2024
- 14 points in the document which sets out protocol for Wexford County Council inspectors and farmers
- Inspection approach will be the same, a uniform approach to ensure fair treatment for all.
- Staff are continuously trained with more training coming up in June with EPA.
- Biggest change to local authority is notice period which is minimum of 24/48 hours – this will be made to farmers via phone or letter. We need to be flexible with regards to farmers holidays, family bereavements etc., it gives farmers a day or two to plan and a lot of Wexford farmers are one person operations.

There followed a brief discussion with the Committee and it was noted that flexibility was very important and that there had to be a level of respect on both sides. Eoin confirmed that for inspection purposes, information is given to them by the EPA and that they would be working in 4 areas in the next 2 years.

7. Review of the CCBDEV SPC Term 2019-2024

Hugh Maguire gave a presentation on the highlights of each SPC meeting during the 2019-2024 term. He invited the SPC members to the upcoming KIMO Board Meeting and hoped that they would consider being part of the new committee after the local elections in June.

It was noted that much had been achieved but that there was a huge amount of work still to be done. It was mentioned that the meetings gave a platform for people to express their views on Climate Change & Environmental Issues.

The Chair thanked everybody for their participation and contribution and passed on well wishes to those who were retiring or running in the upcoming elections.

8. Any other Business

Cliona Connolly Environment Education & Awareness Officer gave an update with regards to measures to help to make the upcoming Fleadh the most sustainable yet. Cliona outlined the following measures:

- There will be waste bin hubs with 4 waste streams
- Looking at the possibility of putting in public water fountains to reduce plastic bottle waste
- Working on a trader sustainability policy – no single use sachets, engaging with them in relation to the deposit return scheme
- How to facilitate extra collections/receptacles and use of glasses and reusable cups in pubs – there is nothing definite yet and different funding streams are being investigated.

Thanks was extended to Mary Farrell Cathaoirleach for her role as SPC Cathaoirleach of the meetings and best wishes were passed onto Cllr. Jim Moore & Gerry Forde on their upcoming retirement.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.

Signed:



Cathaoirleach

Date:

4/4/2025