

Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment Strategic Policy Committee
Minutes of Meeting – Friday 4th April in County Hall, Wexford

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Barbara Anne Murphy

Present: Cllr. Vicky Barron, Cllr. Pat Kehoe, Cllr. Lisa McDonald, Cllr. Catherine Walsh, Joe Ryan, John O'Mahony (Construction), Eamonn Hore Director of Services, Abraham Dunne Senior Engineer, Claire Goodwin Biodiversity Officer, Rory O' Mahony Senior Executive Engineer, Cliona Connolly Environment Education & Awareness Officer, Mick Mahon Marine Officer, Brendan Cooney Senior Executive Scientist, Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer, Nichola Gahan Clerical Officer.

Apologies: Mr. Jer O'Mahony & Cllr. Leonard Kelly

1. Confirmation of Minutes of SPC Meeting held 24th April, 2024

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24th April 2024, involving the previous SPC, were noted by the new Committee. Cllr. Barbara Anne Murphy opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and introducing herself and advised that she had been elected as SPC Chair in June 2024. All attendees were then briefly introduced to the Committee

2. Introduction & Overview of CCBDENV Department

Abraham Dunne, Senior Engineer provided an overview of the CCBDENV Department which covered the following Service Areas.

- Water, Air & Noise
- Waste Management Enforcement
- Environmental Education & Awareness, School & Community
- Biodiversity
- Pier's, Harbours, Marina's & Port's
- Provision & Maintenance of Public Conveniences
- Animal Control
- Climate Action
- Environmental Administration
- Beach & Coastal Management

Following the presentation from Abraham Dunne the SPC Members had some queries and observations

- Cllr. Lisa McDonald thanked the SPC Chair and Senior Engineer for the introduction & overview, advising that it was very informative and that there was a significant amount of work being carried out by the CCBDENV. She raised a matter that the coastal protection scheme being carried out at Seaview, Kilmore did not cover Ballyhealy Beach and explained that this was causing concern for residents. She requested that extending coastal protection to Ballyhealy be examined.
- Cllr. Vicky Barron had a query regarding how much leeway there was when Map Alert texts were sent out with regards to slurry spreading – are we guided by National Policy?

Brendan Cooney, Senior Executive Scientist advised that the closed period dates were dictated by National Policy and that legislation sets out the minimum storage space required but due to climate change farmers are advised to have extra storage space for slurry as this provides more leeway so that they aren't caught short.

- Cllr. Pat Kehoe maintained that slurry spreading was a real issue for tillage farmers and that the Department have not kept pace with changes in the weather. He suggested that the current 16-week storage period could become a 24-week storage period in the future. Cllr. Barbara Anne Murphy suggested that the Committee consider putting a motion to Wexford County Council at a future meeting on this topic.
- Eamonn Hore, Director of Services stated that although litter was still a huge problem, Wexford Co Council had seen a significant reduction in recent years. He advised that Wexford had the busiest dog pound in Ireland whereby Cllr. Murphy replied that two full time Dog Wardens were now required due to the high volume of dog related incidents. Cllr. Murphy told the Committee that she had received many calls from members of the public regarding dogs attacking other dogs when out walking with their owners. Cllr. Murphy & Hugh Maguire, Administrative Officer then discussed the number of XL Bullies that had been registered in Co. Wexford (around 50).
- Cllr. Murphy & Brendan Cooney discussed smoky fuel inspections – Brendan advised that most of the towns in Wexford now had reasonably good air quality with the exception of Enniscorthy. He said that people selling solid fuels had to meet certain standards and that samples were taken for testing to ensure standards were being adhered to. Cllr. Murphy queried how people selling fuel illegally could be caught. Brendan advised that most illegal fuel was being brought down from Northern Ireland but that the majority of people who sold fuel legally were very vigilant and notified Wexford Co Council when they were aware of fuel being sold illegally.
- Mr. Joe Ryan and Hugh Maguire had a brief conversation regarding licensed and unlicensed dog breeders. Hugh Maguire confirmed that Wexford Co Council had 29 registered Dog Breeding Establishments and confirmed that the County Council have received reports of illegal breeding premises which are subsequently investigated and closed down where necessary. Hugh followed this by stating that Wexford CoCo had also received inaccurate reports of illegal dog breeders.
- Cllr. Murphy asked Claire Goodwin, Biodiversity Officer if there were upcoming Biodiversity pilot projects. Claire confirmed that in the first instance she would be developing the Biodiversity Action Plan for the County and from that there would be actions identified for which funding would be sought. Claire advised that she had no dedicated budget and that currently the NPWS were the only source of funding and that funding was dependent on successful grant applications. Cllr. Murphy stated that members of the SPC had to remember that alongside coastline Wexford also had Mountains – she then queried whether there were any upcoming projects to protect the wetlands and mountains.

Claire Goodwin confirmed that she had been in contact with Carlow County Council Biodiversity Officer regarding same. Cllr. Catherine Walsh stated that she has concerns in relation to Climate Change, Biodiversity and protection of the Environment. She queried whether funding was being wasted fighting fires and fixing damage that had already been done. Cllr. Walsh asked whether the Government were going to do anything with regards to the excess packaging that companies were using. She followed this by asking whether as an SPC we could start putting down Motions to the Government about the need to reduce packaging. Cllr. Murphy replied by stating that as an SPC, their real job was to concentrate on Wexford and come up with policies that would help on the ground. Hugh Maguire highlighted that the deposit return scheme was found to be helping by placing a value on packaging. He advised that the EPA were trying to minimise packaging and that packaging regulations were in place in relation to businesses. Mr. Joe Ryan asked whether there was any data available to show how successful the DRS was in Wexford and also whether data was available as to how successful it was in rural areas and motorways.

- Cllr. Walsh confirmed that one of her priorities was the protection of the Black Stairs Mountains with the involvement of NPWS, Carlow CC & landowners. Another priority was illegal dumping & fly tipping. She stated that previous WXCC amnesties like the mattress and paint amnesties helped the situation and that we needed to continue to hold these on an annual basis.
- Cllr. Walsh advised that local Bye Laws were needed in order that CCTV could be implemented. She advised that very few prosecutions were ending up in Court compared to the amount of dumping being carried out. Hugh Maguire stated that Wexford Co Council could only take action against offenders when it had prosecutable evidence, he followed this by advising that Wexford Co Council were issuing as many fines as possible with the evidence found. Hugh confirmed that currently black refuse bags were the most common item being found dumped, whereby 15/20 years ago Wexford Co Council would have been dealing with larger scale dumping. Cllr. Murphy queried whether a date had been given for the implementation of CCTV use, whereby Rory O' Mahony advised that for CCTV to be used, Wexford Co Council had to prove that every other method of litter control actions had failed. Cllr. Kehoe finished this discussion by stating that it should be a simple process to get CCTV installed where members of the public continuously dump where there are no dumping signs.
- The committee then moved on to discuss septic tanks – Cllr. Pat Kehoe advised that people wanted to improve their wastewater treatment but the inspection process was proving to be a real issue. Cllr. Kehoe stated that people should be able to have their septic tanks inspected but currently were restricted from doing so as they didn't have the funds to proceed without a grant. Cllr. Walsh noted that while the current grant of €12K was a big jump from the previous grant of €3K it still may not be enough.

3. KIMO International Report

Hugh Maguire briefly outlined the purpose of KIMO and gave an overview of the International Board Meeting that was hosted by Wexford Co Council in 2024. He advised that Cllr. Barbara Anne Murphy was the current representative for Co. Wexford at KIMO meetings but that the Committee needed to nominate a new representative.

Cllr. Murphy confirmed that she was the current KIMO representative for Wexford and shared that she had attended a conference in The Netherlands in October 2024. She advised that KIMO was a very busy international group and that they held an on-line meeting every month. Cllr. Murphy advised that while she found KIMO very interesting and enjoyed her time as a representative for Co. Wexford she was stepping down from the role due to her busy schedule. Cllr. Murphy suggested that the new representative be from a coastal area of Wexford. Cllr. Catherine Walsh nominated Cllr. Lisa McDonald and this was seconded by Cllr. Vicky Barron. Cllr. Lisa McDonald stated that she was very interested in this area and was happy to accept the position. Cllr. Murphy advised that this needed to be ratified by Monday April 14th as Kimo were holding an International Board Meeting in Denmark in May. Cllr. Murphy also suggested that Mick Mahon Marine Officer also attend the meeting in Denmark.

4. Any Other Business

Hugh Maguire advised that a Motion in relation to having designated areas for election posters in Co. Wexford had been referred to the SPC for consideration by Cllr. Tom Forde & Cllr. Aoife Rose O'Brien. A discussion followed whereby Cllr. Vicky Barron stated that Wexford Co Council had an opportunity to lead on this issue and that our SPC could be the first to approve the banning of election posters. Cllr. Pat Kehoe advised that election posters had been proven to be effective and stated that he was in agreement with putting a cap on the number of posters that were allowed to be erected per candidate but thought that it would be difficult to enforce this. Eamonn Hore stated that Wexford Co Council needed to go further with the motion and claimed that there would be no point in pushing it if we knew it was not going to be passed. Cllr. Walsh and Hugh Maguire agreed that the matter should be deferred for discussion at a future meeting and that Cllr. Forde & Cllr. O'Brien be invited to discuss same.

Rory O'Mahony in his role of Co-Ordinator for RMCEI distributed a copy of the 2025 RMCEI Inspection Plan and went through the report. He explained that under performance in a number of areas was due to current staffing levels. Cllr. Lisa McDonald stated that an Irish Times article reported that Wexford County Council had not received a Strong/Excellent recommendation from the EPA. She queried whether the new report would get us to this level whereby Rory replied that he was hoping it would.

Cllr. Vicky Barron asked if there was a way to distribute more durable reusable glasses at the Fleadh. Cliona Connolly explained how much work had gone into trying to organise reusable glasses at the 2024 Fleadh but stated that unfortunately reusable glasses didn't work at last year's Fleadh due to its scale and the huge logistics involved. Cliona also advised that to make Eco Friendly Cups a workable alternative in Ireland, more infrastructure and investment was needed.

The following dates were agreed for the next 3 meetings – Friday 27th June, Friday 26th September & Friday 29th November. All meetings to commence at 9.30am

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.

Signed:

Cathaoirleach

Date:

July 4th 2025