

**Minutes of Meeting of the Environmental Protection and Agriculture Strategic Policy Committee held on Tuesday 11th March 2025 at 10 a.m. in the Council Chamber (and via Microsoft Teams).**

**Members in attendance:**

Cllr. James Charity, Cathaoirleach  
Cllr. Karey McHugh  
Cllr. Cillian Keane  
Cllr. Dermot Connolly (online)  
Cllr. Andrew Reddington (online)  
Cllr. Geraldine Donohue (online)  
Ms. Karina Finn  
Mr. Noel Finnegan  
Mr. Kevin O'Crowley

**Apologies:**

Ms. Elaine Murphy

**Oifigigh I láthair:**

Ms. Jacqueline Carroll, Director of Services  
Ms. Mary McGann, Administrative Officer  
Mr. Mike Melody, Senior Executive Engineer  
Ms. Ann Dolan, Senior Executive Scientist  
Mr. Mark Molloy, Assistant Environment Awareness Officer  
Ms. Sabina O Connell, Assistant Staff Officer

**Also in attendance:**

Dr Bernadette White, Regional Coordinator West, Local Authority Waters Programme  
Ms. Janet Laffey, Community Water Officer, Local Authority Waters Programme

Cllr. James Charity, Cathaoirleach, thanked everyone for their attendance at the meeting and noted the apologies received. Cllr. Charity welcomed the 3 new sectoral representatives on the SPC and asked for a round of introductions to welcome them.

**1. Confirmation of Minutes of Meeting of the Environment Protection and Agriculture SPC held on Tuesday 12th November 2024.**

There were no issues arising from the Minutes. The Minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024 were proposed by Cllr. K. McHugh, seconded by Cllr. D. Connolly and agreed by all.

**2. Receive presentation on National Water Action Plan - Dr. Bernadette White, Regional Co-Ordinator, Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)**

Dr White introduced herself gave a brief background on LAWPRO which works on behalf of Ireland's 31 local authorities to protect and restore good water quality in our rivers, lakes, estuaries, ground and coastal water through catchment science and local community engagement.

The NWAP (National Water Action Plan) was launched in September 2024 setting out the Government's commitment to protecting & restoring Ireland's natural waters by complying with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. The Water Action Plan 2024 will

accelerate the identification and implementation of the right measures in the right places to both restore and protect all water bodies. The Cycle 3 stage is building on Cycle 2 with the focus on data collection, evidence base and tracking implementation and transparency on what is being done. Dr White explained some of the expected key outcomes of the plan. Uisce Éireann will have a major role to play with an investment of €2.3 billion committed for wastewater treatment plants, collection networks and related national programmes. Work with group water schemes and the farming community assisted by Teagasc will also take place as nationally, agriculture is the most significant sector affecting water quality.

Dr White explained with the aid of slides and a map that rivers classed as High Status have been in decline for some time. As a county, Galway is above the national average of 54% in the 2016 – 2021 report and detailed data on all local catchments is available at [www.catchments.ie](http://www.catchments.ie). Dr White advised that in Galway, hydromorphology is the cause of the largest pressure on water quality with agriculture in second place and anthropogenic pressures accounting for the other large pressures impacting at risk waterbodies.

Dr White explained that the Water Action Plan has 570 areas for action during the lifetime of the plan and various liaison meetings will take place between LAWPRO and the local authorities in each of the 5 regions which will support local authorities to deliver on their objectives under the plan. Governance of the Water Action Plan is the responsibility of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and a new office has been set up to provide high-level policy direction and implement and oversee project management of the Plan.

Dr White confirmed that 4 groups in County Galway were awarded funding under the Community Water Development Fund 2025 and confirmed that 4 applications had been received under the Catchment Support Fund which can support core funding for Project Officers and a decision on these is expected to be made in the coming days. A further funding option is the Farming for Water European Innovation Partnership in partnership with Teagasc and Dairy Industry Ireland.

Cllr. McHugh (deputising temporary for Cllr. Charity) thanked Dr White for the very informative presentation.

Ms. Finn advised that the IFA had a meeting with the EPA regarding urban wastewater and it appeared that treatment plants in estates that haven't been taken in charge by local authorities was currently a grey area. Ms. Dolan confirmed that Galway County Council manage urban wastewater in estates not served by public treatment plants by issuing licences for these plants and the Council is aware of compliance issues in some of these cases and is working to address them in conjunction with local management companies. There are approximately 150 of these plants, and this monitoring and compliance work will continue pending the takeover of these plants by Uisce Éireann, and Ms. Dolan advised that if the IFA wished to discuss any specific case, they could contact her directly. Dr White added that there are 457 of these plants nationally and a Working Group is in place to progress mapping of these estates.

Cllr. Connolly stated that he was surprised that agriculture was higher than urban wastewater on the statistics regarding pressures impacting at risk waterbodies, as there are a lot of areas without treatment plants. In particular, Cllr. Connolly stated that this was at crisis stage in Ballinasloe with the treatment plant at capacity and the plant needed to be brought up to proper standard, and clarification provided on what factors were hindering this development. Dr White stated that capacity issues were unfortunately a reality in many cases, and it would be necessary to liaise with Uisce Éireann for more information regarding their capital investment plans.

In response to an enquiry from Cllr. McHugh regarding financial incentives for farmers to attain best practice standards, Dr White referred to the Farming for Water European Innovation

Programme which will have funding opportunities for mitigation measures for dairy producers, based on identification of priority pressure areas in consultation with Teagasc.

In response to a query from Cllr. McHugh regarding limestone filtering for windfarm developments, Dr White advised that LAWPRO are not involved at the planning stage but that this information would be required as part of the environmental impact assessment. Ms. Dolan added that these planning applications would be forwarded by the Planning Department to the Environment Department for review, with requests for further information where required, and a recommendation provided to the Planning Department regarding any grant of permission. In response to a query from Ms. Finn regarding the application of mandatory or voluntary derogations, Dr White confirmed that there is no designation of farmland involved in the European Innovation Programme.

### **3. Presentation from Mark Molloy, Assistant Environmental Officer, on the Litter Management Plan, 2023 – 2025**

Mr. Molloy outlined the background and objectives of the Litter Management Plan which was adopted by the Council in 2023, and the multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder approach to litter prevention and control. Mr. Molloy outlined actions to date under the four objectives of the Litter Management Plan, i.e.,

- a) Education and Awareness – these are initiatives aimed at raising consciousness about the impact of littering, dumping and illegal waste activities. Programmes are aimed at encouraging personal responsibility and engagement, for example, Green Schools, Anti-litter Ambassador Programme, Anti-Litter audio devices, Anti-Litter Poster Campaign.
- b) Partnership and Community Support – these are partnerships with Tidy Towns, Residents Associations, Public Participation Network, education sector and other environmental agencies to enable communities play a key role in tackling local litter issues. This includes National Spring Clean and other clean-ups, WEEE collections, and support for bring banks, civic amenity sites and information stands at community events.
- c) Litter Prevention and Control Measures – the Council logged and investigated 1,063 waste complaints in 2024 and take appropriate enforcement action where offences are detected. The Environment Department also address the results and recommendations arising from the IBAL (Irish Business Against Litter) league, Tidy Towns Results and the Annual National litter and Quantification Performance Indicators. The Council funded 9 projects under the Anti-Dumping Initiative during 2024.
- d) Enforcement and Regulation Measures – the Community Warden service maintain a visible presence across our towns and villages to help deter littering, with 172 fines issued under the Litter Pollution Act 1997 during 2024. The Council also enforces the Waste Management Byelaws 2019 to regulate waste collection and management within the County and take enforcement action against any illegal waste collection activities.

Cllr. Charity thanked Mr. Molloy for the excellent presentation and invited comments or questions from the members.

Ms. McHugh endorsed the excellent presentation and the trojan work being carried out by the Council and stated that education and awareness activities were a vital element into the future, referencing best practice examples of inter-generational efforts to tackle litter pollution.

In response to a query from Cllr. Donohue regarding access to litter picking supplies, Mr. Molloy clarified that groups involved in the National Spring Clean Week must register with An

Taisce, and outside of this can contact either the local Community Warden or himself to arrange a clean-up and access to supplies.

Cllr. Connolly welcomed the clean-up of litter blackspots and stated that further collaboration was required between the Housing and Environment Departments to adopt a more stringent approach to addressing some problem areas. Cllr. Connolly acknowledged the fantastic work carried out by Community Wardens across the county and stated that further resourcing of Community Wardens and Dog Wardens was required in a large county such as Galway. Mr. Molloy advised that clean-ups of litter blackspots were carried out when feasible, and the public were encouraged to report instances of litter blackspots, and he would seek further details of the specific areas mentioned by Cllr. Connolly.

Cllr. Charity stated that he had concerns in relation to the amount of litter on our national roads, particularly the N84 road, and while cutting of verges is welcome, unfortunately when completed it unearths a vast amount of litter at our hedgerows. Cllr. Charity acknowledged the specific insurance and safety concerns in carrying out clean-ups in this area, and in response, Ms. Dolan advised that a contractor would be hired to carry out a clean-up of the N84 while putting in place all necessary traffic management measures. In addition, all other potential preventative measures such as signage and CCTV will be investigated.

Ms. Carroll thanked Mr. Molloy for the large amount of work undertaken by himself and the Environment Team and confirmed that the current Litter Management Plan expires this year and there will be much discussion and debate in the development of a follow-up plan to commence in 2026. In relation to the issues raised regarding dog control, Ms. Carroll confirmed that funding had been received for a third post of Dog Warden and this position will be advertised in the coming months.

Mr. Finnegan expressed huge gratitude to Mr. Molloy for the huge volume of work being done and to Mr. Cunningham in the Environment Section for his help and support in addressing local Bring Bank issues. Mr. Finnegan stated that the role of National Schools is vital in terms of action and information-sharing and when children learn from an early age the potential is there to change the mindset of their parents and future generations.

Cllr. Charity requested that data and statistics on littering prosecutions taken by the Council be provided to the SPC at a future meeting as it would be most useful and informative.

#### **4. Any Other Business**

Mr. O'Crowley raised the issue of algae bloom in some of Galway's waterways, in particular, Lough Corrib and Owenriff River. Mr. O'Crowley stated that this can be triggered when the concentrations of Nitrogen and Phosphorus increase in a water body and sampling carried out by the Carra, Mask Water Protection Group since 2018 indicate there is a severe problem with phosphate in Lough Corrib which requires specialised treatment for the removal of these excess toxic nutrients. In response, Ms. Dolan advised that Galway County Council are aware of the issues regarding excessive nutrients in the waterways referred to by Mr. O'Crowley and these are being addressed as part of the local authority's function to protect waterways. This involves carrying out inspections and taking all available enforcement action, as well as working closely with farmers from an educational viewpoint. Ms. Dolan stated that some of the issues may need to be raised at national level and Galway County Council has representatives on the national Working Group and will highlight relevant issues at this level. Mr. O'Crowley welcomed the complex issues involved being raised at national level and stressed the loss of biodiversity due to the presence of these toxins. Ms. Finn stated that farmers are very aware that agriculture is a big concern in relation to water pollution, and the IFA and farmers are very aware of water quality issues and open to educational initiatives.

In relation to a query from Ms. Finn regarding timeframes for hedge cutting and if these could be amended in light of Storm Eowyn damage, Cllr. Charity advised that this is a national issue and a motion would be required to be approved at a Plenary Meeting, to agree proposal to national government in this regard.

Cllr. Charity clarified that any agenda items being put forward by any member should be submitted at least 10 days prior to the next meeting date and requested that the Standing Orders be circulated to all SPC Members.

Cllr. Charity and the SPC Members expressed best wishes to Ms. Carroll as she leaves her Director of Services post in Galway to take up position with Wexford County Council. Ms. Carroll thanked everyone stating that she had enjoyed her short but fulfilling time in Galway County Council.

The Cathaoirleach confirmed the date of next meeting as 19th May 2025 at 2pm.

**CHRIOGHNAIGH AN CHRUINNIU ANSIN**

  
CATHAOIRLEACH