

Minutes of Meeting Environmental Protection and Agriculture Strategic Policy Committee

Tuesday 12th November 2024

I Láthair:

Baill: Cllr. James Charity, Cathaoirleach
Cllr. Karey McHugh
Cllr. Dermot Connolly
Ms. Martina Finn
Cllr. Cillian Keane
Mr. Henry Walsh
Cllr. Geraldine Donohue (online)

Oifigigh:

Ms. Jacqueline Carroll, Director of Services
Ms. Maria Flynn, Administrative Officer
Mr. Mike Melody, Senior Executive Engineer
Ms. Ann Dolan, Senior Executive Scientist
Ms. Helen Hallinan, Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies: Cllr. Andrew Reddington

The Cathaoirleach welcomed everyone to the Environmental Protection and Agriculture SPC meeting.

Presentation from Ms. Carroll, Director of Services

Ms. Carroll gave a presentation on an overview of the Environment Department. This included: -

- Environmental General Services
- Waste Management
- Pollution Control
- Public Health and Animal Welfare

The key points that were raised in Ms. Carroll presentation included: -

- The transferring of the Veterinary Services to the Department of Agriculture.
- Housing is currently managing Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs), with the Environment section collaborating with them.
- Ms. Carroll gave the members an overview of Burial Grounds, Waste Management Facilities, Waste Management Enforcement, Environmental Awareness and Education, Pollution Control and Animal Welfare and control of dogs and Beach Awards and Initiatives.

Ms. Carroll stated that the presentation will be circulated to all members of the SPC.

The Cathaoirleach asked if anyone had questions regarding the presentation. Mr. Walsh raised concerns about the need for a consistent blueprint for inspections across local authorities. He emphasised the importance of notice to farmers. He stated that there is no need for on-the-spot inspections. There is septic tank awareness amongst farmers and there is a very modest number of inspections. He stated that we need to regularise the inspections and to be open and transparent and there should be no negative trauma and fear factor. He stated that we are all here to improve our water and wastewater. Ms. Dolan highlighted the obligations under the National Agricultural Inspection Plan (NIP), including the requirement to conduct farm inspections and the engagement with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to determine inspection requirements. She stated that the local authority is set to carry out 34 farm inspections in 2024, with a notice period of 2-3 days under the plan, except, in cases of complaints where no notice is given.

She explained that Septic Tank Inspections are determined by the EPA based on vulnerability zones, with 110 inspections to be carried out per year. A person cannot ring up and request septic tank inspection. However, under HSOCA area, you can request an inspection. Mr. Walsh stated the need for a National Agricultural Inspection Plan protocol to ensure consistency in inspections and also expressed his support for a professional and cooperative approach to septic tank inspections. He stated that we need to move forward to improve water quality.

Ms. Dolan mentioned recent meetings with farming groups and Teagasc, highlighting the importance of specific training and presentations to engage and work together effectively.

Cllr. Donohue mentioned that those that are not under the radar of zoning are concerned that their septic tanks are very old, and she was delighted to see the proactive approach by Environment team to record and add these old septic tanks and inspect when possible, which demonstrates a commitment to maintaining environmental standards.

Ms. Dolan replied that Environment are keeping a register on requests for septic tank inspections. Ms. Finn asked, "What work programmes is Climate Change and greenhouse gases under?" Ms. Dolan replied that slurry spreading was a main cause of greenhouse gases and the introduction of new incentives to reduce emissions, will be affecting small part-time farmers from next year.

Cllr. Connolly stated that resources need to be delivered to areas without public water supply. He said that we need more awareness on the availability of grants for septic tank inspections. He also added that there are close to 90% septic tanks that haven't been inspected and people should be able to avail of the grant. Ms. Dolan replied that grants are funded by the Dept and the local authorities facilitate the delivery of the grants. She also emphasised that the EPA wants the Local Authorities to follow up on outstanding Advisory Notices and take legal action

The Cathaoirleach enquired as to what information is given to the farmers regarding inspections. Ms. Dolan answered that when they make enquiries the staff explain what it is about and advise what is going to happen on the day. She stated that they always work with them and give them time to deal with the issue. She explained that enforcement is the last resort. Mr. Walsh stated that protocol should be the same across all counties and have a formalised protocol. Cllr. Keane asked, "Is their standardisation on your reports?" Ms. Dolan replied that EPA is our regulator on how we conduct our work. The Department of Agriculture still do inspections and we engage with them. She explained that there is a designated Agriculture Inspector and all staff in the environment section are scientists with specific training and background in that area.

Cllr. Connolly enquired about the growth of burial grounds and the erection of oversized headstones/monuments and asked how it would be addressed. He asked when will it be regulated and implemented nationally? It was agreed to put this item in the Work Programme 2025. It will form part of the Burial Ground Byelaws and it will be discussed in 2025. Ms. Finn enquired how we are managing ragwort. Ms Dolan replied that there is Invasive Species plan put in place, but it doesn't include ragwort.

Work Programme 2025

Ms. Carroll gave an update on the extension of burial grounds, and she stated that there is a focus on prioritising those that are full. She also stated that a new Local Authority Action Plan on water is in development, which will require additional resources.

Ms. Dolan stated that Waste Management and Enforcement unit have a complaints database and all complaints are logged and investigated. Cllr. Connolly enquired regarding waste management. He said that households living in council houses ordered skips and they were left there for weeks. He outlined that the situation is shocking and the companies that delivered the skips could not be identified. He stated that it is necessary to have ID on all skips. Ms. Dolan emphasised the importance of engaging with permitted services when ordering skips to avoid liability. She said that only a small percentage of people that don't care. Cllr. Connolly suggested that more resources, such as CCTV, are needed to assist Community Wardens in identifying illegal dumping, especially in black spots in the county.

Ms. Dolan stated there they are hopeful that there will be more out of hours monitoring for example on a Saturday morning, Friday evenings and this is planned for it next year. There is a GDPR issue with bottle banks and the use of CCTV.. Cllr. McHugh stated that there is small percentage that do the dumping and all rubbish can be seen under the hedges after cutting. Cllr. McHugh and Ms. Finn both praised the education programmes in schools and the work being done behind the scenes. Ms. Carroll replied that there are excellent recycling facilities in the county. Ms. Dolan shared a successful example of recycling uniforms at Loughrea Secondary School, which reduced textile waste and supported a local charity. Ms. Dolan emphasised that RMCEI Plan for 2025 will not be available until the end of February 2025 and the next SPC meetings will be scheduled after that date.

The Cathaoirleach stated Work Programme 2025 will be circulated to all members of SPC. The Schedule for future meetings was discussed and agreed as follows:

3rd March 2025 at 2pm

19th May 2025 at 2pm

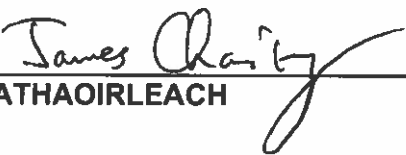
21st July 2025 at 2pm

17th November at 2pm

It was confirmed that one meeting will be in person and the remaining 3 meetings are hybrid.
The Cathaoirleach thanked everyone for attending and for their contribution.

Meeting concluded.

CHRIOGHNAIGH AN CHRUINNIU ANSIN


CATHAOIRLEACH