

# **Water Services and Environment S.P.C.**

## **Minutes of Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

### **In attendance:**

#### **Elected Members:**

Cllr. Suzanne Doyle (Chair), Cllr. A. Breen, Cllr. I. Cussen, Cllr. V. Liston, Cllr B. Wyse, Tom O'Connor, Evan Arkwright

#### **KCC Staff:**

Joe Boland (JB) Director of Services, Ken Kavanagh (KK) Senior Executive Officer, Colm Flynn (CF) Senior Executive Engineer, Mark Byrne (MB), Fiona Smith (FS)

#### **Apologies:**

Cllr. B. Dooley, Emer Conway

#### **In Attendance:**

Sean Reilly & Paul Reilly of Oliver Reilly Funeral Directors)

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1. The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming all and wishing a good Christmas. The chair noted the retirement of Pdraig O'Lunaigh from his position as Sectoral Interest (Community / Voluntary) on the SPC and thanked him for his commitment to the Committee. She noted that news on his replacement is awaited.
  2. The Chair opened the floor to any declarations of pecuniary or beneficial interests under section 177 of the Act. No declarations were made.
  3. The minutes of the meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022, previously circulated, were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. V. Liston., seconded by Cllr. S. Doyle
  4. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

KK reported on the number of active cemeteries in the county and summarised the current costs for standard, columbarium wall niches and ash plots in council cemeteries.

He outlined a number of challenges facing the council including future capacity issues and the capital costs and sourcing of suitable lands for new / extended cemeteries.

He also provided information on existing crematoria nationally, all of which are privately owned and operated. He outlined that the build cost of the most recently opened facility (i.e., a privately owned facility in Shannon) was estimated to have cost in the region of €2.4m excluding staffing and ongoing operational costs.

A general discussion followed during which Cllr. Cussen voiced concern regarding over the proposed extension of Leixlip cemetery, noting that a columbarium wall was to be erected in Celbridge and requested a timeframe for completion. Cllr Cussen acknowledged positively that no fee is charged with respect to burial plots of neonatal births and hopes this will remain in any potential consideration of fee changes. Cllr. Cussen separately expressed appreciation of the caretaker at Celbridge cemetery and commends the excellent work being carried out there.

Cllr. Wyse queried if plans were considered for smaller graveyard plots with respect to ashes in place of Columbarium walls and if not, could consideration of same be taken into future planning. KK replied that ash plots were already provided in a number of council cemeteries, and this could be replicated throughout the county.

Evan Arkwright and Cllr. Doyle raised queries on whether any proposed crematorium will be a private/public partnership and whether any data was available on predictions for future capacity requirements. They acknowledged that extensions are not always feasible, but expressed concern on future capacity given the population figures of the recent Census, showing a large increase in the County.

Mr. Boland advised that a site had been identified for a new cemetery in the Leixlip area, and that this was subject to ongoing local area plan related issues.

KK & CF advised that KCC has recently tendered for completion of columbarium walls at Rathangan & Crookstown Cemeteries. A tender will be issued early in the New Year for 6 Columbarium Walls in Athy, Donaghcumper, Newbridge, Confey, Monasterevin & Derrinturn.

CF advised that locations for Columbarium Walls were selected on a variety of reasons, e.g., local population numbers, suitability of ground conditions, space constraints, available finances etc. correspondence with caretakers and consideration given to some areas that were under pressure over time. CF noted that columbarium walls are considered during any cemetery upgrades/works.

The Chairperson noted the comments from Mr. Reilly on a growing trend in the population for cremation options. Mr. Reilly noted that, based on his experience of dealing with crematoriums and funeral directors directly, location depending, the percentage of people that take up cremation options can be in the region of 35-50%. On a national level, more cremations would happen closer to Dublin, but with the recent crematorium opened in Shannon, he anticipated that numbers would rise in that area in line with accessibility to such facilities. He also commented that a distinction should be made with the process of cremation and the “resting place of the ashes”, be it at homes, in a columbarium wall or ash burial plot.

Mr. Reilly remarked that the Columbarium wall at Laraghbryan (Maynooth) is well regarded as one of the finest in Ireland, and that the design /aesthetics can play an important role when a person is deciding on burial options. He suggested that this should be a factor with regard to future policy considerations.

Cllr. Doyle raised concerns on cremations and the future of end-of-life services resting in the sole remit of the private sector and commented that location of a crematorium was key in consideration with the motorway network throughout the county. She asked if there was a cost benefit analysis could be available on the feasibility of public/private partnership.

Cllr Doyle suggested that the discussion might be brought to full Council if a feasibility study could be first be carried out by an external agency, assessing the cost-benefit analysis on the investment, strategic location, market feasibility for the County of Kildare and surrounding counties.

Mr. Boland expressed concern that the council might be getting involved in something that was best served by the private sector as current market experience would suggest. He also reminded the committee that funding would have to be identified for such a study.

5. A presentation on EPA Guidelines on Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems was made by Colm Flynn. The presentation highlighted the functions of DWWTS as well as some key differences in the Code of Practice, 2009 & 2021.

6. A panel discussion followed the presentation, with a focus on methods used in assessment of site suitability. Cllr. Wyse queried to reliability of the “Mottling” method as it is his held opinion that historical data is not factored sufficiently in line with the findings of a mottling assessments. He also highlighted some alleged flawed data on the EPA website with regard to water bodies.
7. CF clarified that mottling is just one of many factors that is taken into account when inspectors are carrying out assessments on site suitability, including types of systems proposed. He also noted that under the EU Water Framework Directive, the Council is currently in its third stage of the River Cycle Management Plan.

Cllr. Doyle queried that in light of changes in the Code of Practice 2021, would a linear analysis of data reflect more files meeting a pass criterion.

Cllr. Liston expressed a view that any review of data on passing / failure criteria is moot as each planning file is unique and based on its own merits.

JB highlighted that genuine attempts are made at earliest available opportunity to look at alternatives but that in some cases, there is no alternative to a refusal of planning.

CF stressed that Planning files are in the remit of the Planning Department, and echoed Cllr. Liston’s view that linear analysis would not be accurate given the details on each planning application are unique. He added that all available data is taken into account when considering each planning application whilst adhering to Code of Practice and County Development Plan.

CF advised that the Council’s inspectors have a responsibility to ensure that the site is properly assessed and ultimately that the environment and human health is being protected. The Council Planners have a responsibility to consider the application, the rural housing policy, submissions received, technical reports from the various departments, the policies of the CDP etc. to formulate a recommendation to the DoS for consideration. In cases of refusals, there is an appeals process available to the applicant as they retain the right to appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

CF offered to give the committee a presentation on Water Catchment Studies at one of its forthcoming meetings. These studies contain a large volume of data which contributes to formulating decisions on planning applications and highlight impacted areas in water bodies.

Cllr. Liston would like to see the data being made available through the OpenData Portal system, which is being established by KCC. CF noted that this data is available through the EPA Portal, owned and operated by the EPA.

The Chairperson proposed that discussion on the data be tabled on the agenda for the next SPC meeting. All members present were in agreement.

8. The date of the next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2023 at 2.30pm in the Council Chambers, Áras Chill Dara.

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