

MINUTES OF MONTHLY Meeting OF ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCIL
COUNCIL Chamber, Áras an Chontae, Roscommon
MONDAY, 24TH MARCH, 2025 AT 2.15 pm.

PRESENT:	Councillor Paschal Fitzmaurice	PRESIDED
MEMBERS:	Cllr V. Byrne, Cllr L. Callaghan, Cllr T. Crosby, Cllr L. Cull, Cllr N. Dineen, Cllr V. Duffy, Cllr L. Fallon, Cllr M. Frain, Cllr E. Kelly, Cllr J. Keogh, Cllr S. Moylan, Cllr M. McDermott and Cllr T. Ward.	
OFFICIALS:	Shane Tiernan, Chief Executive Caitlín Conneely, Director of Services Mark Keaveney, Director of Services Sean Mullarkey, Director of Finance Fiona Ni Chuinn, A/Director of Services Greg O'Donnell, A/Director of Services Karen Hanley, Meetings Administrator Claudette Collins, Staff Officer Michaela Fallon, Assistant Staff Officer	
Apologies:	Cllr D. Connolly.	

30.25 DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST (SECTION 177 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2001 AS AMENDED)

There were no Disclosures of Conflict of Interest declared by Members.

31.25 ADOPTION OF MINUTES

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Crosby

SECONDED by Cllr. McDermott

It was **AGREED** to adopt the minutes of the Plenary Meeting of 24.02.2025

32.25 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

33.25 MANAGEMENT REPORT

- Management Report for February was noted.

34.25 DISPOSAL OF LANDS - ASSETS

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Callaghan

SECONDED by Cllr. Frain

It was **AGREED** that the Council consent to the disposal of property pursuant to the provisions of Article 206 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, Section 211 of the Planning and Development Act,

2000 (as amended) and Section 183 of the Local Government Act, 2001 of particulars of property which it is proposed to dispose of at the location in County Roscommon and to the persons set out in the schedule hereunder. Particulars of the property which the County Council proposes to dispose:

The Property: Site comprising 0.86 hA (2.12 acres) at Ballaghaderreen Td., Co. Roscommon

The person(s) from whom the land was acquired: Unknown

The person(s) to whom the land is to be disposed of: Alan Regan (A+ Welding and Fabrication)

The consideration proposed in respect of the disposal: €35,000

35.25 OPENING DOORS TO NEW HOMES - FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES

Following on from a request by Elected Members, A/Director of Services Fiona Ní Chuinn delivered a presentation outlining information on financial programmes that assist the purchase or renting of a property:

- Help to Buy (HTB) Scheme
- First Home Scheme
- Local Authority Home Loan (LAHL) Scheme/Local Authority Purchase and Renovation Loan (LAPR) Scheme
- Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant (Croí Conaithe Grant)
- Local Authority Affordable Homes (AHS) Scheme
- Cost Rental Homes Scheme

The HTB scheme is an incentive for first-time buyers to help with their deposit for purchasing or self-building a new home.

The First Home Scheme (FHS) is a shared equity scheme, designed to help bridge the gap for first-time buyers and other eligible homebuyers between their deposit and mortgage, and the price or build cost of their new home.

The LAHL scheme is a Government backed mortgage for creditworthy first time buyers and fresh start applicants who cannot get funding from commercial banks - available through Local Authorities.

The LAPR scheme is a loan for the purchase and renovation of derelict and non-habitable homes. The property must be eligible for the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant (Croí Conaithe), whether derelict, non-habitable or simply vacant.

The Croí Conaithe/Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant is a max grant of €50,000 for the refurbishment of vacant and derelict properties.

The AHS helps to bridge the gap between what you can afford to pay and the price of your new home.

The Cost Rental Homes Scheme is based on the cost of building, managing, and maintaining the homes. Cost Rental Homes can be provided by Local Authorities, Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) and the Land Development Agency. The provider for each development will be responsible for assessing all applications. Roscommon currently does not have any Cost Rental properties opportunities.

A/Director of Services Fiona Ní Chuinn advised that an Affordable Housing Officer has been appointed and thanked the Chief Executive and Director of Services Caitlín Conneely for their approval same.

In relation to the AHS, the A/Director advised that there has been a substantial amount of work to get the scheme across the line including meeting with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and discussions with neighbouring Local Authorities. An expression of interest survey is currently being created to show proof of need to the Department. Currently, Roscommon Town and Monksland are being explored as areas for this scheme. The survey will be advertised through social media and online. The Elected Members will be notified when the survey is live.

A mini housing needs demand assessment is also being complied, once completed, it will go before the Housing, Integration, Community and Culture SPC for approval.

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Fitzmaurice thanked Ms. Ní Chuinn for the informative presentation and noted there have never been more housing schemes available yet housing remains a huge issue. He also expressed hope that the AHS would not be exclusively explored in just Roscommon Town and Monksland, as towns such as Castlerea, Boyle, Strokestown and Ballaghaderreen also have a need for housing and would benefit hugely from the scheme.

He also enquired what the turnaround time is for a Declaration of Exempted Development and proposed that all towns in Roscommon be considered for the AHS and expression of interests should be sent to all towns

Members broadly thanked Ms. Ní Chuinn for her presentation and discussed the following points:

- The Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant has had a great impact on the county and reduced the number of derelict properties in towns and villages. It is also a great financial return in comparison to the price of building one housing unit.
- Concerns were expressed that there is only one Vacant Homes Officer (VHO) in the Council dealing with and inspecting every application. It was asked if there would be any chance of drafting more staff into this area temporarily. There could be many more applications and the aim should be to process as many applications as possible.
- Further concern was raised regarding the restrictive timeframe that the applicants have to complete the works in and the sparse supply of trades.
- It was enquired if the blanket requirement for a Section 5 Declaration of Exempted Development on every property, if the works do not require Planning Permission, could be abolished. This is putting pressure on the staff within the Planning Department and causes delays to applicants. It was stated that most applications are for internal works only which do not require Planning Permission.
- It was asked if the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant could be paid in instalments to take financial pressure off applicants.
- It was enquired if the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant could allow for full demolition of a house and start from scratch.
- It was asked if someone has returned from outside the country for two years, but have paid a substantial amount on income tax are they eligible to qualify based on actual tax paid or does the tax paid have to be spread out across the 4 years.
- It was also asked why the Cost Rental Scheme is not active in Roscommon, high rents areas,

particularly Monksland could benefit from this scheme and it was recommended that it should be considered.

- Concern that only Monksland and Roscommon Town are being considered for the AHS as there is demand throughout the county.
- It was asked if the Council have property available for the AHS or will there be a reliance on private contractors to build and supply same.
- In relation to the LAHL scheme, it is restricting in terms of the margin of €75,000 for a single person and €85,000 for a couple, and the maximum valuation of the house is €275,000. It was enquired if this could be broadened out to €150,000 for a couple and the maximum valuation of the house increased to €400,000.

A/Director of Services, Fiona Ní Chuinn, responded as follows:

- In relation to the AHS, it is not feasible to commit to all towns in the first instance. The AHS is at a very early stage and while Roscommon Town and Monksland are the key priorities, other towns will not be ruled out. It was outlined that there are other schemes to be availed of in these areas, not to be reliant on AHS. These two towns have been identified as the higher demand areas, and the Council needs to approach this prudently from a demand perspective.
- The housing section are not in a position to take on more staff to deal with the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant. The Council is the 3rd fastest nationally for processing applications and measuring well against other local authorities across all statistics.
- The requirement for a Declaration of Exempted Development (DED) on every property engaging with the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant will not be abolished as it is good planning practise for the two departments to work together to avoid a Planning Enforcement issue down the line. She advised that the application is not delayed while a DED/application for full Planning Permission is being sought.
- A/Director of Planning, Greg O'Donnell, added that while someone may interpret that planning permission is not required, often there will be an element that materially alters the property which does require full planning permission, e.g moving a chimney, installing a septic tank, altering the façade etc. In relation to the timeline of a DED, it often is comparable to the timeline for full planning permission, as it requires the same level of scrutiny. If an application is found to require planning permission, if a DED was already submitted, this can reduce the time as planning staff will be familiar with the application.
- The Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant cannot be paid in instalments as this is national policy.
- 50% of the property must be retained in order to avail of the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, this is national policy and the Council are not in a position to change this.
- While applications given approval in principle must have the works complete within 13 months, there is a liberal approach taken to applications who have significant works completed within the 13 months.
- The HTB scheme is a Revenue scheme and all individual cases should be directed to Revenue Services.
- There has been no demand to engage with the Cost Rental Scheme in Roscommon. While the scheme is running in other Local Authorities, it is mostly carried out through AHBs and housing agencies who have not yet shown interest in delivering this scheme in Roscommon. Delivering on capital housing projects remain the key priority for the Council at this time. If the Council were to engage in building property for the Cost Rental Scheme, this would have an effect on the amount of land available for social housing.
- The supply of houses for the AHS will come from both private developers and from the

requirement for developers to allocate 20% of Part 10 Planning Permission applications for social and affordable housing.

- The figures in relation to the margins within the LAHL are restricting, but this issue would need to be raised by Elected Members to the Government. If the maximum amounts were to be increased significantly, this could bring applicants into a threshold that could indicate that they do not need financial assistance, from a lending institute's perspective.

A further question was raised in relation to the number of Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant applications currently under review by the housing department, A/Director of Services Fiona Ní Chuinn indicated that this would be circulated by email.

36.25 CORRESPONDENCE

Noted as circulated in advance of the meeting.

37.25 STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEES - APPROVAL OF SECTORAL REPRESENTATIVES

The Meetings Administrator stated that approval is sought for the appointment of sectoral nominees to the SPCs as circulated.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Fallon

SECONDED by Cllr. Kelly

It was **AGREED** to confirm the following Sectoral Nominees for the SPCs.

SPC	Pillar	Nominee
Roads, Planning, Emergency Services SPC	Business/Commercial	Emma Healy
Housing, Integration, Community, Culture SPC	Business/Commercial	Ann Marie Kelly
Climate Action, Environment, Rural Water SPC	Business/Commercial	Ray Gannon

38.25 LCDC - APPROVAL OF SECTORAL REPRESENTATIVE

The Meetings Administrator stated that approval is sought for the appointment of a sectoral representative to the LCDC committee as circulated.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Keogh

SECONDED by Cllr. Moylan

It was **AGREED** to confirm the following Sectoral Nominee for the LCDC committee.

Committee	Pillar	Nominee
LCDC	Business/Commercial	John Bergin

39.25 NOTICES OF MOTION

39.25a CLLR. MOYLAN - M7:25 PROPERTY BOYLE

Notice of Motion from Cllr. Moylan

I would like to call on the Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth, to explore the possibility of purchasing F52 XD37 (formerly Dr. Fallon's House), Elphin Street, Boyle, which is currently for sale. It is in the middle of town, and an ideal location for the much needed Community Childcare Centre under the auspices of Boyle Family Life Centre.

There is no community childcare facility in Boyle, a town of 3000 people, the local childcare group are struggling to find a suitable location for this centre.

The Meetings Administrator read the following reply:

This Motion requires a Resolution of the Council.

Moving the motion Cllr. Moylan discussed the ongoing issue of no community childcare facility in Boyle and the frequency of which it was raised while canvassing last year. He advised that there is a two year waiting list for childcare in the area which is putting huge strain on parents and often prevents them from engaging in full time employment. He stated that there is a childcare committee in place to try and rectify the issue and the main problem is finding a suitable building. He mentioned that several attempts have been made to purchase buildings in the past, but none were successful. Cllr. Moylan emphasised that if the Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth were to purchase this building, which is very suitable for these services, it could provide up to 50 places for preschool children under the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme for 52 weeks of the year, including after school services. The national benchmark for childcare spaces is 20 spaces per 75 households however Boyle is currently operating at 20 spaces per 1,043 households which is hugely unacceptable.

Members made the following points in support of the motion:

- The issue of a lack of childcare is prevalent across the county and was the most frequently raised topic while canvassing.
- The link between childcare and enabling parents to engage with employment is vital.
- If the Department do not engage with purchasing this building, then the Council should look at providing any council owned building for this purpose.
- Boyle is too huge an area not to have a community childcare facility and everything should be done to find a solution to this issue.
- Acknowledgement for the committee in Boyle for their work on this issue.
- A community childcare facility would have a great impact on the overall community spirit in Boyle.

The Cathaoirleach supported the motion.

Cllr. Moylan thanked the members for their support, and added his positive personal experience of these community childcare facilities in Tulsk and Four Mile House. He also indicated he will discuss the issue with his colleagues in the Oireachtas.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Moylan

SECONDED by Cllr. Frain

It was **AGREED** to call on the Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth, to explore the possibility of purchasing F52 XD37 (formerly Dr. Fallon's House), Elphin Street, Boyle, which is currently for sale for the purposes of providing a much needed Community Childcare Centre under the auspices of Boyle Family Life Centre.

39.25b CLLR. CROSBY - M8:25 ROOSKEY BRIDGE

Notice of Motion from Cllr. Crosby

That Roscommon County Council request the Minister's for Finance, Environment and An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, to reinstate the necessary funding for the full refurbishment of Rooskey Bridge which spans the River Shannon connecting the three counties of Roscommon, Leitrim and Longford.

Roscommon County Council incurred an expenditure of €123,513 for the design work including obtaining planning approval, preparing contract documents, arranging traffic management scheduling the commencement of works for July 2009. Despite the project being fully funded with a committed allocation of €1.4 Million the project was abruptly stopped without explanation three weeks before the 2009 Council Election.

The Meetings Administrator read the following reply:

This Motion requires a Resolution of the Council.

Moving the motion Cllr. Crosby noted that the issue of Rooskey Bridge has been an ongoing issue first raised in 1991. He argued it was the worst piece of infrastructure in the county, given its importance in joining three counties, due to its narrowness, lack of footpath and inability for two vehicles to meet safely on the bridge. He indicated that after continuously raising the issue, funding was received by the Council to carry out work on the Bridge in 2009, however it was pulled three weeks prior to the 2009 Local Election, despite public consultation and receiving full Planning Permission for the works. He informed the meeting that the latest idea, to install traffic lights on the bridge, is not suitable, as it caused pandemonium when trialled, 150 people attended a public meeting in opposition to this initiative. He indicated that he will vote in opposition of same. He reiterated his proposal to write to the Minister regarding reinstating the allocated money, in today's value, for the purpose of carrying out refurbishment work on the bridge.

Members made the following points in support of the motion:

- Agreement that the Bridge needs refurbishment including widening and the addition of a footpath, similar to the recent work in Carrick-on-Shannon.
- Agreement of opposition to the recent proposals for the bridge.
- The traffic report carried out in relation to the recent proposals for the bridge included figures of traffic movements on the bridge during a period of time when the road from Rooskey to Tarmonbarry was closed, so these numbers would not be reflective of normal traffic movements.
- Refurbishing the bridge would be hugely positive for the town of Rooksey as it has suffered in recent times from factory and hospitality closures.
- Clara bridge is also an example of a bridge that had similar refurbishment works carried out and has been successful.

Cllr. Crosby thanked the members for their support.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Crosby

SECONDED by Cllr. Byrne

It was **AGREED** to write to the Minister's for Finance, Environment and An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, to reinstate the necessary funding for the full refurbishment of Rooskey Bridge which spans the River Shannon connecting the three counties of Roscommon, Leitrim and Longford.

39.25c CLLR. FRAIN - M9:25 WATER RESOURCES

Notice of Motion from Cllr. Frain

That this Local Authority write to the IDA to request that they visit the county and explore the possibility of utilizing the potential of our vast water resources, from dairy production facilities and large river water resources, to attract data storage providers into the county.

Data storage facilities are a huge draw on electricity, renewable energy sources, such as hydro and excess water from industry could reduce demand on the grid. Data storage facilities alone are not big employers, but they will attract large tech companies who need these types of facilities, as the demand for AI and robotics grows.

The Meetings Administrator read the following reply:

This Motion requires a Resolution of the Council.

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Fitzmaurice informed the meeting that on a recent trip to New York with Chief Executive Shane Tiernan and Director of Finance Sean Mullarkey, productive meetings took place with the IDA as well as Fáilte Ireland and Enterprise Ireland. He added that they spoke about the importance of investing in County Roscommon and the success other industries have had in the county with access to skilled staff. He also indicated that the Chief Executive of Harmac, John Somers, from Buffalo in the United States, would be visiting Castlerea in the coming days and he intended to meet him.

Cllr. Frain moved the motion by advising that a feasibility study was carried out in 2017 exploring the idea to use the excess water from the Aurivo Plant for a heating system for the town. He indicated that initiatives such as this should be explored and expanded to widen the use of excess water due to the county's access to the biggest river in Ireland, the River Shannon. He advised he is actively working with companies to investigate the hydro possibilities for renewable energy and with input from the IDA, these possibilities should be investigated further. He indicated that there is an opportunity available to attract data storage facilities to County Roscommon.

Members made the following points, as well as expressing their support of the motion:

- Caution should be given to such projects as a similar project involving Apple's proposal to invest €800 million to build a data storage facility in Athenry. This was objected to by an individual environmentalist (who was named during the discussion) in relation to the Planning Permission application and subsequently prevented the project from taking place. Similar projects abroad were also discussed.
- The Cathaoirleach informed the meeting that he and the executive disassociated themselves from the naming of any individual in this matter.

- Water is a fantastic resource that is currently being underutilised and this area should be explored and a feasibility study carried out.
- Huge opportunity as Roscommon has access to the longest part of the River Shannon.
- Roscommon has the facilities to attract technology companies to the area.
- Welcomed engagement with the IDA, huge opportunity to bring more industries to Roscommon.
- The employment and hospitality sector could benefit hugely from this being explored.
- Robotics and Artificial Intelligence is a rapidly growing sector, the world's second largest commercial robotics company is located in Ballydangan and anything that could be done to assist the company to grow should be done.

Chief Executive Shane Tiernan assured members that he is in regular contact with the IDA through their regional manager and has had meetings with the Chief Executive of the IDA. He informed the members that there is huge willingness and interest from the IDA to work with Roscommon. He added that there have been significant developments and progress towards pharmaceutical investment in the Athlone area, particularly the Nova Nordisk production facility, the second largest pharmaceutical company in the world. He also added that the work being put into rejuvenating towns and villages throughout the county will also help attract foreign direct investment.

Cllr. Frain thanked the members for their support and reiterated that this could be a huge opportunity for the county.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Frain

SECONDED by Cllr. Crosby

It was **AGREED** to write to the IDA to request that they visit the county and explore the possibility of utilizing the potential of our vast water resources, from dairy production facilities and large river water resources, to attract data storage providers into the county.

40.25 QUESTION

40.25a CLLR. MOYLAN - Q3:25 LOUGH KEY FOREST PARK

The question and response were circulated in advance of the meeting.

41.25 CHIEF EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

Chief Executive Shane Tiernan advised that he recently sent correspondence through Director of Services, Caitlín Conneely to all members regarding the upcoming change of directorate structures. Mr. Chris Flynn will be joining Roscommon County Council as a Director of Services on 7th April. A/Directors of Services, Mr. Greg O'Donnell and Ms. Fiona Ní Chuinn will resume their substantive posts as Senior Executive Officers in their respective departments. Greg will be leading Climate and Environment, while Fiona will be leading Community, Integration & Culture.

The Chief Executive acknowledged both Mr. O'Donnell's and Ms. Ní Chuinn's performances as A/Directors of Services and thanked them for the help they provided to him as Chief Executive. He praised the wonderful job they have done in supporting the Council and their commitment to County Roscommon and its people. He wished them well in their roles going forward and noted that they are exemplary members of

staff.

The Chief Executive added that the Council is looking forward to welcoming Mr. Flynn next month.

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Fitzmaurice, on behalf of the Elected Members, thanked Mr. O'Donnell and Ms. Ní Chuinn for their contribution and guidance to the Elected Members, especially with regards to challenging sections such as housing, roads and the Lough Funshinagh project.

The members also thanked Mr. O'Donnell and Ms. Ní Chuinn for their service and excellent work as A/Directors of Services, and they acknowledged their commitment to their roles and their approachable nature and wished them well in the future.

Ms. Ní Chuinn thanked the members and assured them she would continue to support them in her role within the Community and Enterprise section.

Mr. O'Donnell also acknowledged the members' kind words and said he was looking forward to working with them in his new role.

42.25 COUNCILLORS CONFERENCES - PAYMENT/ATTENDANCE

This item was not for approval at this meeting.

43.25 VOTES OF CONGRATULATIONS AND SYMPATHY

Circulated at the meeting.

The Cathaoirleach Cllr. Fitzmaurice congratulated the O'Rourke sisters, Aoife and Lisa, on their silver medals at the recent Women's World Boxing Championships in Serbia. He stated that everyone in Castlerea are very proud of them and thanked Castlerea Boxing Club for their great work.

Members reiterated the Cathaoirleach's praise for the O'Rourke sisters, and also congratulated the Roscommon CBS Senior Football team on their recent All Ireland 'B' Title. Members also wished the Roscommon Senior Football team the best of luck in their Division 2 National League Final this Saturday, 28th March, and for their entire 2025 campaign.

44.25 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Cathaoirleach advised members that the Corporate Plan 2024-2029 as adopted has been circulated to members.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be on Monday, 28th April, 2025.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

The foregoing Minutes are

Confirmed and Signed:



Meetings Administrator



Countersigned



Cathaoirleach