

# **Minutes of Meeting of the Environmental Protection and Agriculture Strategic Policy Committee held on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2026 at 11 a.m. (Online via Microsoft Teams).**

## **Members in attendance:**

Cllr. Karey McHugh, Chairperson  
Cllr. James Charity  
Cllr. Geraldine Donohue  
Ms. Karina Finn  
Mr. Kevin O’Crowley

## **Apologies:**

Cllr. Andrew Reddington  
Cllr. Cillian Keane  
Cllr. Dermott Connoly  
Mr. Noel Finnegan  
Ms. Elaine Murphy

## **Oifigigh I láthair:**

Ms. Eileen Ruane, Director of Services  
Ms. Ann Dolan, Senior Executive Scientist  
Ms. Hilda Robinson, Executive Scientist  
Mr. Brendan Goode, Executive Scientist  
Ms. Tara Harrington, Assistant Scientist  
Ms. Mary McGann, Administrative Officer  
Mr. Felix Chimedza, Assistant Staff Officer

## **1. Confirmation of Minutes of Meeting of the Environment Protection and Agriculture SPC held on Monday 6th October 2025, and Matters Arising.**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2025 were proposed by Cllr. Geraldine Donohue and seconded by Mr. Kevin ÓCrowley.

## **Matters Arising:**

Mr Kevin ÓCrowley asked for an update on his request that the Committee propose a downgrade to the water quality grading of Lough Corrib to ‘Moderate’ and review the current monitoring and management systems including a national review of current farming methods. Mr. O’Crowley enquired if a representative from LAWPRO would make a presentation to the next Environment Protection and Agriculture SPC meeting and Ms. Dolan advised that she would engage further with LAWPRO in this regard.

## **2. Adopted Standing Orders for Strategic Policy Committees.**

Ms. Mary McGann stated that revised Standing Orders for SPC's (Strategic Policy Committees) had been adopted by the Plenary Council in November 2025 and were circulated and on the agenda for information purposes and noting. Ms. McGann stated that the updated Standing Orders made formal provision for such measures as hybrid and remote meetings and submission of items for agendas which were not heretofore incorporated.

## **3. Presentation on National Enforcement Priorities (NEP's) Progress Report 2025.**

Ms. Dolan introduced the members of her team to the Committee and made a presentation on the NEP's (National Enforcement Priorities) Progress Report for 2025.

Ms. Dolan advised the Committee that this reporting is done under an EU-based framework that sets minimum standards for how environmental inspections should be planned, carried out and reported which is known as RMCEI (Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections). Ms. Dolan stated that the EPA requires local authorities to prepare an annual RMCEI Inspection Plan for submission each year and to complete and submit a comprehensive progress report for the previous year.

Ms. Dolan confirmed that there were 19 NEP's (National Enforcement Priorities) covering four key areas – waste, water, agriculture, air & noise. She advised that the returns are used by the EPA to assess and compare local authority enforcement performance nationally and noted the improvement in the overall rating of Galway County Council over recent years.

Ms. Robinson outlined key activities for 2025 as follows:

### Waste Enforcement - Household and Commercial Waste

- 308 household waste inspections under Waste Presentation Byelaws with 76% compliance rate
- 31 commercial food waste inspections carried out in 2025 with 43% compliance at first inspection which was an improvement on the 2024 rate of 31%.
- Increased use of alternative court strategies to secure long-term compliance
- Development of new enforcement tools (34C Register, Reverse Register).

### Waste Enforcement - Illegal Waste & Multi-Agency Activity

- Continued decrease in illegal dumping, with some persistent blackspots remaining
- Strong multi-agency enforcement (Gardaí, Revenue, WERLA)
- Approximately €97,000 spent on clean-ups of illegal dumping in 2025

### Waste Enforcement - Construction & Demolition Waste

- High compliance across C&D sites, soil recovery sites, and Article 27/28 operations
- Significant reduction in illegal C&D activity due to withdrawal of problematic operators
- Shift from the traditional infilling of waste at permitted soil recovery sites toward increased movement of materials to Article 27 registered sites
- 12 inspections carried out for Article 27 movements

#### Waste Enforcement - Plastics & Producer Responsibility

- Inspections carried out under WEEE, batteries, tyres, farm plastics, packaging and Deposit Return Scheme, with non-compliant producers actively followed up including legal action where required
- Case study on our enforcement of the farm plastics levy was presented at the Waste Conference in March where we had a multi-agency inspection of an operator carried out by GCC, Revenue and IFFPG.

#### Water Enforcement – Agriculture

- 73 GAP inspections completed (up from 47 in 2024)
- Compliance rate: 63% from 75% (reduced due to more complaint-driven inspections)
- Targeted catchment work (e.g. Headford Stream, Failmore)
- Enforcement: advisory letters, Section 12 Notices, cross-reports to Department and prosecutions

#### Water Enforcement - Discharge Licences & Misconnections

- 126 of 144 licences inspected
- Steady improvement in compliance since 2022. 69% in 2025
- High Risk Licences prioritised with active enforcement, and 9 high risk unlicensed discharges were recorded with enforcement ongoing.

#### Water Enforcement - Septic Tanks & Private Water Supplies

- 195 DWWTS inspections; 47% compliance on annual NIP inspections
- 56 advisory notices issued with 74 of these closed out by year-end and 15 to be followed up
- Significant reduction in historic open cases

#### Air & Noise Enforcement - Solid Fuel Enforcement

- Strong focus on enforcement of online fuel sales - turf listings on Facebook dropped significantly: 67 listings in 2024 → 13 listings in 2025
- Social Media campaign on burning of clean fuels delivered in conjunction with a door-to-door solid fuel burning awareness exercises conducted in Loughrea and Clifden
- Inspection of 4 Air Pollution licensed facilities with non-compliance issues followed up
- Noise Action Plan is still in progress and working in collaboration with the Roads Department.

Ms. Robinson concluded that work was focused on targeted risk-based activities, a strong focus on inter-agency collaboration, and a committed to follow-through on non-compliance issues. She stated that the end goal was positive environmental outcomes and the 2025 progress laid a strong foundation for 2026 priorities and forward planning.

Cllr. McHugh thanked Ms. Robinson for the comprehensive and detailed presentation.

Cllr. Geraldine Donohue queried if those who failed the septic tank inspections could avail of a grant, and in response, Ms. Robinson advised they would as they were part our inspection programme. Ms. Dolan further advised that the Department had specific criteria for accessing the septic tank grants and if households were outside these criteria they would not qualify for the grants. Ms. Dolan referenced the SPC proposal to the Department to

widen access to the grants and the Departmental response which reinforced the existing policy.

Cllr. Donohue stated that roads are getting damaged because of flooding and enquired if there is something the committee can do to encourage drains to be maintained and suggested collaboration with Road Engineer's to have water redirected. In response Ms. Ruane explained that in a County the size of Galway it is certainly a challenge to get all the roads done, however she acknowledged the suggestion and advised that she will redirect the issue to the Roads department.

Mr. O'Crowley enquired regarding the use of Construction & Demolition rubble transported under Article 27 movements and Ms. Robinson stated that it could be used in driveways but not for foundations.

#### **4. Presentation on Inspection & Compliance Plan under the RMCEI (Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections) 2026.**

Ms. Robinson noted that the RMCEI (Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections) Plan for 2026 Includes routine and non-routine inspections, complaints handling, enforcement actions and supporting activities. Ms. Robinsons stated that the Plan provides a detailed breakdown of inspection types, numbers and the staff time allocated, and is an intelligence-led environmental programme whereby all regulated sites are assessed by risk category with intensified follow-up for higher-risk sites.

Ms. Robinson outlined the key elements of the 2026 programme of activities:

- Total inspections planned: 5,318
- Routine inspections: 3,580
- Non-routine inspections: 1,068
- Outstanding complaints & enforcement actions: 670

Under the Waste category, Ms. Robinson stated that routine inspections would cover inspections of waste facilities, waste collectors, inspections of households and commercial premises under the Waste Presentation Bye-Laws, construction & demolition sites, and inspection of sites under producer responsibility regulations such as those covering WEEE, batteries, plastics, tyres, etc. The number of non-routine inspections was estimated and covered those related to fly-tipping and illegal dumping investigations, unauthorized waste facilities, unauthorized collectors, and other dumping-related incidents.

Under the Water and Wastewater category, inspections would be carried out on Discharge Licences, Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (DWWTS), Farm Inspections, Bathing Waters, and non-routine inspections would relate to pollution complaints.

Ms. Robinson also outlined the initiatives being undertaken in relation to litter enforcement, air & noise pollution, pre-planning assessments, and improvements in governance processes.

Ms. McGann updated the members on efforts to engage with communities to remove adverts by illegal waste collectors which did not contain a valid Waste Permit Number which was legally required to be displayed on any advert referring to waste collection services.

Ms. Ruane thanked the staff members for their presentations and acknowledged the extensive work being done by the staff to aid environmental enforcement.

Cllr. McHugh thanked Ms. Robinson and Ms. Dolan for the presentation and mentioned that she has learnt a lot through the SPC and the work systems in place and gave credit to the staff on behalf of the committee.

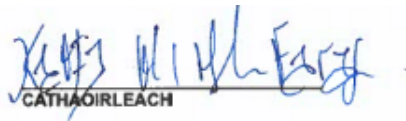
**5. Agenda / Date of Next Meeting.**

Ms. McGann confirmed that the date of the next meeting will be Thursday 28th of May 2026 in the Council Chamber and the Cathaoirleach advised that this date could be subject to change depending upon availability of LAWPRO to make a presentation.

**6. Any Other Business**

No issues were raised.

Signed:



KATHY WILKINSON  
CATHAOIRLEACH

Date:

28<sup>th</sup> May 2026