

The 5th meeting of the 7th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Monday, 2 February 2018, in the EPA Headquarters, Johnstown Castle Estate, County Wexford.

Members Present: Laura Burke & Gerard O’Leary (Joint Chair), Rónán Kennedy, Colette Byrne, Ina Kelly, Harold Kingston, Elaine Nevin, Cara Augustenborg, Áine Ryall, and Seán Finan.

In attendance: Matt Crowe, Micheál Lehane, Eimear Cotter, Valerie Doyle, Tom Ryan, Shane Colgan, Ciara McMahon, and Andy Fanning.

Apologies: Fiona Lyng, Frank Conlon and Seán Finlay

Secretary: Isobel Walsh

1. **Introductions**

Laura Burke welcomed the Advisory Committee to Wexford for their 5th meeting. Laura advised the Committee of the untimely death of our colleague, Matt Morgan, who was a serving member of the Hydrometric Team in the Athlone Office.

2. **Approval of the Agenda**

The adoption of the Agenda was approved.

3. **Minutes of Meeting held on 27 November 2017**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 November 2017 were approved.

4. **Emerging Issues**

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the Agency’s Budget for 2018 has not been finalised. However, it is anticipated that it will be slightly higher than 2017. Laura also advised that the C&AG Audit for 2016 accounts have been approved and a response is being prepared for the Management Letter.

The Committee were provided with an update on staffing numbers and the ongoing recruitment competitions. Laura informed the Committee that the Agency are awaiting a decision on a small number of additional priority posts from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Committee were updated on the possible new functions and work for the Agency such as: National Dialogue on Climate Action, Non-Ionising Radiation, the Radon Grant Scheme, EIA Directive, Peat extraction and Water abstraction.

Laura informed the Committee that the Service Level Agreement with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is being replaced with a new Oversight Agreement & Performance Delivery Agreement under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

The Committee were advised that there will be a mid-term review of the EPA Corporate Strategy later this year and the Agency would welcome the Committee’s input. Also the Committee were informed that the Agency initiated an external review of the Agency which is being conducted by the OECD and this is being led out by Gerard O’Leary.

Laura appraised the Committee on the recent launches and publications of; the Waste Statistics web-portal, the launch of the National Priority Sites, the research awards on Stop Food Waste, the publication of the Local Authority Environment Performance Report, the launch of the climate research reports and the Radon Day. Laura also

mentioned the upcoming activities such as; the European Heads of Agencies Network meeting in Dublin in early April on the topic of ‘Communicating Science’, the 25th anniversary of the EPA on 19th April and the annual EPA Water Conference in Galway on 21st June 2018.

Action: The Committee’s comments will be sought during the mid-term review of the EPA Strategy 2016-2020.

5. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

6. **Topic of ‘EPA and Local Authority work in Environmental Governance’**

(i) Presentation on the NIECE Network & EPA and WERLA Interactions

Valerie Doyle, Senior Scientific Officer gave a presentation on the Network for Ireland’s Environmental Compliance & Enforcement (NIECE). Valerie outlined the:

- Network’s objectives, structures and activities; and
- Measured performance of Local Authorities.

The presentation also discussed the Agency’s engagement with the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) providing details on the:

- parties interactions and the various waste topics for discussion;
- utilisation of technologies such as the ‘See it? Say it!’ Smartphone app;
- other thematic topics; and
- shared communications and supports.

Discussion

The Committee discussed the presentation. A Committee member referred to the increased trend on illegal dumping in light of the economic recovery. Valerie explained the Agency’s role in regulating the large activities, with the Local Authorities have a greater lead in this area. A member commented on the need to message the public on the various Bring Centres for waste rather than diverting Local Authority resources to clean-ups.

Another member commented on the confusion with waste bins. The Agency advised on the launch of Brownbin.ie which is Ireland’s official website for brown bin information and recyclinglistireland.ie which lists the materials you can put in your household recycle bin.

Action: No action identified.

(ii) Presentation on Local Authority Engagement through the NWPP

Tom Ryan, Programme Manager and Shane Colgan, Senior Scientific Officer gave a presentation providing an overview of the Agency’s engagement with the Local Authority through the National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP). The presentation focused on the Local Authority Prevention Network and provided details on the:

- Structures, supports and outreach resources;
- Scale and types of grant aid projects;
- Projects co-delivered with Local Authorities;
- Other partnering initiatives with Local Authorities; and
- Future opportunities to be identified through the NWPP Review in 2018.

Discussion

A Committee member suggested that small local initiatives could be scaled up similar to the success of the Smart Farming initiative. Tom Ryan advised that with the review of the NWPP the Agency will be looking to see where initiatives can have the most impact. A member queried the barriers to implementing the initiatives, to which another member advised on the resource constraints placed on Local Authorities and the burden already placed on volunteers, limited funding, and the current housing crisis. The member suggested using existing initiatives as a basis to include or incorporate new initiatives for example men-sheds.

Laura excused herself from the meeting and Gerard took over as Chair.

(iii) Presentation on Local Authority Engagement on Air Quality

Ciara McMahon, Programme Manager gave a presentation providing an overview of the Agency's engagement with the Local Authority on air quality. The presentation provided details on the:

- Air quality in Ireland;
- current monitoring sites and equipment involved;
- results and trends to-date;
- data from national networks across Europe;
- human health impacts;
- new National Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme;
- implementation of the programme and governance structure; and
- future interactions with Local Authorities on monitoring.

Discussion

A member discussed the movement of data, where the Local Authority collects and shares this with the EPA. A member stated that air quality monitoring and modelling should help forecast and inform the public. Another member queried if there was a warning system for the public on poor air quality. Micheál Lehane advised on the warning system for the public and sensitive individuals. A member queried the level of information available to the public on vehicle and stoves emissions. Ciara McMahon spoke about the effects of solid fuel burning and the need for the public to make the connection that their actions have consequences. Micheál Lehane informed the Committee on the Agency's links with the Asthma Society, the forecasting of traffic and air pollution.

(iv) Presentation on Local Authority Engagement on Water Quality

Andy Fanning, Programme Manager gave a presentation on the Agency's work with Local Authorities on water quality. The presentation provided details on the:

- WFD River Basin Planning cycles and leadership of the Tiers;
- EPA's characterisation work, risk assessment outcomes and draft plan;
- Governance in the draft plan;
- Structure of the Local Authority Shared Service (LAWCO) and working together;
- 2016 & 2017 Characterisation Workshops and outcome; and EPA's focus.

Discussion

A Committee member referenced Regulations in Agriculture where air quality issues are being tagged onto water quality issues, requiring farmers to invest significantly in landspreading equipment. The member stressed that the people directly affected need to be involved in tackling the problem. Another member referred to the new advisors recently announced and queried if prosecutions would be taken. Andy Fanning advised that first engagement is critical and that Agricultural advisors would be trained as experts (Stream-walkers). The initial role

would be advisory and collaborative towards compliance. Matt Crowe further advised that initially 190 areas would be covered over a four-year period and that supports need to be continually targeted (Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme – GLAS). A member commented that farmers want to do the right thing and the focus should be on knowledge.

Gerard O’Leary gave a brief summary on each of the items presented. He then invited the Committee members for any advice they would like to offer the Agency on the topics presented. The members made a number of comments and suggestions for consideration by the Agency, namely:

- NIECE Network – to help raise awareness, pilot the publication of summary statistics on prosecutions taken by Local Authorities;
- Air Quality – EU failing to comply with air quality standards. A TV documentary’s example of a London’s child’s route to school was determined by the air quality. Resources should be focused, with a potential role for citizens. Ciara McMahan informed the Committee on the Transition Year Citizen Science programme focusing on the measurement of pollutant levels at school gates. Micheál Lehane stated that costs could be lowered where monitoring is run in conjunction with Local Authorities and the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport;
- ‘See It Say It’ app – while there are excellent facilities for collecting waste there is still an increase in fly-tipping/illegal dumping - what are the barriers? A member advised that the amount of investigations conducted are down to resources. Householders need to say what they are doing with their waste;
- An integrated framework (on waste, air quality and water), with a focus on prevention through public awareness and citizen engagement;
- ‘Can we make it easier for people to do the right thing?’ – develop a similar scheme for households to that of the Farm Hazardous Waste Collection scheme.
- Framing it as a just thing - Environmental Justice and timing;
- Working with the Tax Office to communicate with the public;
- Air Quality – piggy-backing/connecting with other Local Authority initiatives e.g. Digital Strategy, Smart Cities/towns – towns are more localised; and
- Host an environmental week similar to ‘Heritage Week’.

Action: The various Programmes to consider the recommendations, suggestions and comments for the EPA related actions.

Gerard thanked the Committee and welcomed their suggestions and comments.

7. **Any Other Business**

(i) Topics for discussion

It was agreed that the following topics will be discussed at the next meeting:

- Mid-term review of the Committee’s contribution;
- Citizen Science/public engagement; and
- EPA Strategy mid-term review.

Action: Isobel Walsh to circulate the minutes of previous meetings to the Committee.

(ii) Next Meeting

Following a Doodle poll, the next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, 24 May 2018. The meeting will be held in the EPA Regional Inspectorate, McCumiskey House, Richview, Clonskeagh Road, Dublin 14.

Gerard thanked the speakers and Committee members for their contribution, ideas and recommendations.

The meeting concluded.