

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC POLICY
COMMITTEE COUNCIL CHAMBER/ZOOM MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 11th September 2023**

Present: Cllr. Vincent Blake, Cllr. Melanie Corrigan, Cllr. Gail Dunne (GD), Caroline Fox (CF), Margaret Burchall (MB), Michael Nicholson (MN), Jenny Sherwin (JS), Sile Stewart (SS), Clodagh Whelan (CW), Niamh Wogan (NW), Colm Moules (CM), John Mullen (JM), Aisling Hubbard (AH).

Apologies: Cllr. Anne Ferris (AF), Mai Quaid (MQ), Lynda Stopford (LS), Máire Halvey (MH) Brendan Martin (BM)

In Attendance: Karen Quinn, Philip Gardiner, Sol Royo Erasquin, Lia Reynolds on behalf of Máire Halvey

Cllr. Vincent Blake opened the meeting and welcomed everyone and gave the list of apologies.

The minutes of the last meeting held on the 26th of June 2023 were adopted. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

Matters discussed:

Presentation on telecoms infrastructure and government policies:

(BD) gave a presentation on the 'Proposal of telecom to build telecommunications in sports hubs. There needs to be a reversal of the decision, as this is greatly needed and will improve coverage in the county. The government are strong in supporting existing networks. Tower companies need more capacity. 4G and 5G require more infrastructure to boost signal. The government are in a position to support the roll out of building telecom masts on the ground. For example: the mobile task force, Department of Environment, and the Department of Transport. However, there are a lot of issues around planning approval. Other government policies such as digital connectivity and strategy of Ireland (2021 – 2025) encourage commercial investment. The overall target is that all Irish households and businesses will be connected by 2028.

It's not only about 5G, but it's part of a policy, a 5th generation technology, a 5G action plan to improve technology and to improve a denser signal. The safety concerns are equal to mobile phone usage and the EPA/WHO will continue to monitor this public use. Infographic from the EPA are in the middle of the spectrum at higher frequencies, but this is less concerning that UVA effects have on people. A case study based on St. Patrick's GAA Club showed that there was a request made 2 years ago to build a tower on their grounds. Vodafone are looking for sites in the Wicklow area where antennas need to be replaced such as Ballyguile Golf Club, Wicklow Gaol and the Wicklow Train Station. Other sites that were considered were the 'Blackwater GAA Club'. Consumers need better coverage and the likes of Vodafone, Eir and Three are of poor quality.

(JM) I'm very surprised that Wicklow Co Co didn't issue a letter to support the club? This should be covered in our policy. This opportunity is a positive step. What's the procedure now? Can the lease be extended? A decision was made by the management team, but this should have been made by the Councillors, as it has an impact on the sports organisation. Sports Organisations should come before Councillors.

(MN) There are recommendations for the SPC to review leases to sports facilities on Wicklow County Council land. Leases would allow these masts to go up, but it would be necessary to re-word our lease agreements firstly.

Project Ireland 2040 Rural Regeneration Programme policies:

- **CLÁR**

(CW) The CLÁR programme provides funding under several different measures for small-scale infrastructural projects in designated rural areas. It is a targeted capital investment programme for designated rural areas which have experienced significant levels of depopulation. The 2023 CLÁR programme was launched on 29th March 2023 with a total budget of €7.85million, this was an increase of €0.85 million on the 2022 allocation. Only applications for Measure 1 are made via Local Authority. Applications for Measures 2 and 3 are made direct to the DRCD.

- **Town and Village Renewal Scheme**

(CW) Following the launch of Our Rural Future, and subsequently the Town Centre First Policy, there has been some amendments to the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. Our Rural Future will see increased investment out to 2025 in remote working infrastructure to provide an opportunity for people to continue to live in rural communities while following their career ambitions. It will also see continued investment to support town centre living. It will ensure cross government investment to support rural towns and villages as hubs of economic and social activity.

For the 2023 Scheme, the minimum grant which is available is €20,000. The maximum level of grant funding available is remaining at €500,000 in respect of one application from each Local Authority. A maximum of €250,000 will apply in respect of 4 applications. 1 application must be in respect of Towns/Villages that have not previously received funding under the Standard Town & Village Renewal Scheme in the last 3 years. The maximum grant level has been set at 90% of the total cost of a project under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. The remaining 10% match funding must be contributed by the Local Authority and/or the community and/or Philanthropic contributions. As in previous years, in order to apply, community groups must fill out an Expression of Interest form (available to download [here](#)) which should be submitted by email to townandvillage@wicklowcoco.ie

Selection of projects is a competitive process. Five Expressions of Interest will be selected by the local authority for development into detailed applications, to be submitted to the Department of Community and Rural Development by 10th November 2023. All Expressions of Interest will be assessed based on the priorities contained in the 2023 Scheme Outline (available to download [here](#)). The closing date for receipt of 'Expressions of Interest' is Monday 2nd October at 12 noon.

- **Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme**

(CF) The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) supports the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure and the necessary repair, enhancement, or promotion of existing outdoor recreational facilities in countryside areas across Ireland. The scheme is funded under 'Our Rural Future' which specifically prioritises the growing outdoor activity tourism sector as part of a long-term vision for a vibrant and sustainable rural Ireland. Seven funding applications were made under Measure 1 on the 5th of September 2023, with a project timeline of around 18 months. (Please refer to report given in advance of meeting)

- **Community Enhancement Programme**

(LR) There are 171 projects that were successful in receiving funding through the 2022 Community Support Fund (under the Community Enhancement Programme). The total allocation for Wicklow was €308,834 including ring-fenced funding for Women's Sheds of €3,880.00. Payment of the funding to the successful applicants is currently underway subject to receipt of letter of acceptance as required under the terms of the grant funding and up to date club information where required. The status is as follows:

- Number of groups awarded a grant: 171
- Number of grants paid as of 1st September 2023: 83 (€152,395)
- Number of grants awaiting further information from recipient: 88

- **Community Awards Scheme**

(LR) informed the committee that there were over 270 local groups and organisations who were awarded grants by Wicklow Co Co as part of the Community Awards Scheme 2023. This is an increase of almost 21 per cent on the number of grants awarded in 2022. The notification letters were sent out in early June. The payment process began shortly afterwards, and the status is as follows:

- Number of groups awarded a grant – 274
- Number of grants paid as of the 1st of September 2023 – 211 (Approx €59,550)
- Number of grants awaiting further information from recipients – 63

- **Urban Regeneration & Development Fund (URDF)**

(MN) Applications for the Urban Regeneration & Development Fund are expected to start during the year, these are being formalised by the department. There were 3 submitted. Bray was already approved but the applications for Wicklow and Arklow were both rejected. (See report)

- **Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF)**

(MN) The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) aims to deliver more compact and sustainable development, as envisaged under Project Ireland 2040. It does this by part-funding regeneration and rejuvenation projects in Ireland's five cities and other large towns. Wicklow Co Co has been given a €2.5 million boost to tackle vacant and derelict homes in the county's towns and cities, following the third round of funding from Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF). Applications were submitted at the beginning of the year; we're waiting for these to be formalised by the department. Bray town have already received an approval.

- **Community Recognition Fund**

(CF) Wicklow Co Co will receive €1.6 million to develop seven community projects across the county under the Government's Community Recognition Fund. The Community Recognition Fund is a major initiative designed to specifically support communities across the country that are hosting people from Ukraine and other countries. This funding has been allocated across all five municipal districts based on the number of new arrivals located there. Details on the seven projects we are currently working on include: Bray Community Centre, Baltinglass Community Park, Bray Parish Centre, Wicklow Town Placemaking Project and Arklow Playing Pitch.

Strategy Updates:

- **Greenway Strategy**

(CF) Planning documents were submitted to An Bord Pleanála under Section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act, with a deadline of the 4th March 2022. On the 16th March 2023, WCC received a request for further information from An Bord Pleanála. The board had sought a response to this RFI request by the 8th June 2023. However, due to the significant information sought by ABP, an extension to the 29th January 2024 was granted by ABP. WCC staff, in conjunction with Aecom, the consultants, are continuing to prepare a full comprehensive response to this RFI to meet this new deadline.

- **Play & Recreation Strategy - Playgrounds**

(LR) Works are ongoing to address any of the issues that have arisen from the inspections and are due to be carried out again in early 2024.

(JM) I thought there was a proposal coming from this committee from Cllr Dunne and yourself (VB) that might involve getting a central group to maintain playgrounds because some of these playgrounds are so vastly different?

(VB) We did put it forward, but it was rejected. My understanding was that it was felt that a better maintenance structure could be carried out at a local level. Refer to report circulated in advance of the meeting.

(MN) Just to clarify how it works: each MD gets a budget to maintain their playgrounds. We give them a certain amount each year in our budget. When it comes to the larger scale items (whole piece of equipment), these require more capital expenditure. We have a capital fund. We expect the MDs to do the ordinary maintenance, but we don't expect them to do any structural placement works, we have a capital code for that. It's important that, if it is a major piece of equipment, it doesn't come out of the maintenance, it'll come back to us in CCSD. We'll charge it to the capital budget, and we have a sinking fund for the major items. It would be better kept in the MDs, and we'll look to increase the MD budgets every year. We don't expect the MDs to carry out the maintenance budget.

We use the Rossborough report that Lia mentioned and that'll tell us about the worst playgrounds in the county and we'll try focus on these playgrounds to make sure from a health and safety point that they're brought up to speed.

(VB) There are lot of the playgrounds that we have been piloting for several years and in operation. I think there is a need to up the capital and the maintenance. There is a need for the council to have a serious look and ensuring there is sufficient funding there.

(GD) The problem is at municipal level, we don't have the staff to do a lot of the work and I accept that in fairness, there is a lot of work in the maintenance of the playgrounds and open spaces but if you just imagine 'Tinakilly Park', that's going to be massive and who's going to look after that? I know it's nothing to do with this committee, but I think it is really important that we do look at this, because we have crews going around throughout the county looking after playgrounds. I think it's a budgetary problem and I can understand that, but it is something that I don't think anybody here understands and that we should keep it at a County Council level. If it can be done, it should be done.

(MN) We are very conscious that we are expecting more and more from the MDs management and never has there been so much asked from them, as there is now. We know they are under pressure, but it all must be cut and maintained, we have to stretch our resources.

- **Leisure Centres**

(CF) There have been two applications put forward for a large-scale development for Coral Leisure Wicklow and Arklow. These will include upgrades to the area costing around €1.6 million. We are looking to replace the portacabins with a new gym.

- **Age Friendly Strategy**

(CW) Age Friendly Ireland at National level - the shared service function is operated by Meath County Council, and they provide the shared service to 31 local authorities around the country. Early this year there was an independent review of the programme, and the outcome was that the 2018 "Memorandum of understanding", included the commitment to give resources to support an age friendly technical advisor within the local authority and hosting of the healthy age friendly homes coordinator. The age friendly programme has grown over the years.

The national role of regulation is ongoing, the regional coordinators have been appointed and the national office has been set up in Kells, County Meath. The Public Appointments Service are at the stage of Garda Vetting which will proceed when those roles are filled. At a national level they are also doing a review of the programme facilitators' as well and recommendations will be going to the advisory group at the end of September.

'Beyond the Trees' in Avondale has been shortlisted for the Business Innovation category, so the judges will be visiting a shortlist of projects in September/October and the awards ceremony will be held in Clayton Whites Hotel in Wexford on the 30th of November.

The Wicklow Age Friendly County Alliance didn't meet in June due to holiday schedules, but it did meet on the 6th September to review progress on the implementation of the Co. Wicklow Age Friendly Strategy. This is a work in progress.

The Older People's Council AGM was held back in May. There was a good spread from across the county (13 members) of that group and (2 representatives) from each of the MD's. Corina Holmes, the new Chairperson is keen to connect with the broader older people's council. We are organising workshops around each of the MDs over the coming weeks to engage with older people.

- **Arts Strategy**

(JS) A lot of schemes are being advertised and are now rewarded. We hope to fund 10 projects in 2024 with the cost at over €100,000. The Seed Fund for Baltinglass was announced and 6 artists have benefitted from that. A series of funding clinics are in development in Baltinglass. We have an upcoming culture night, with live broadcast from East Coast Radio. We also have new work being launched in Wicklow Town and a real variety of things throughout the county. For Creative Places, we have a big conference event around 'Jenny Wise Power in Baltinglass', and we have commissioned a tapestry of her likeness, which is being historically checked for accuracy by artist Sarah Bracken. We also have a book commissioned by author Carmel Kelly from Wicklow Gaol for children and families. Overall, we have 26 projects being completed by the end of this year. There is a link to a heart-warming video of the children from Kippure Lodge available in our report for people to view.

- **Creative Ireland Strategy**

(JS) refer to report that was sent out in advance of the meeting.

- **Library Strategy**

(MB) Overview of the mid-year statistics of the library services – as for the LGMA stats as of January – June for each local authority based on pre covid stats as a yardstick, 6.8 million versus 6.9 million and this has a year-end suggestion of 80% compared with 2019. Wicklow's libraries recorded 301,000 visits in the first 6 months compared with 2019, which totalled 575,000, we may achieve the total grant by the end of this year (refer to report for stats). Wicklow is in second place with Cork City compared to library visits.

Ballywaltrim library update – a proposal for grant aid approval towards the Ballywaltrim library was submitted to the Department of Rural and Community Development ahead of the June 16th deadline and receipt was acknowledged. We will be competing with 20 plus local authorities for a portion of the 25 million capital fund for library projects up to 2027.

(MN) We have plans in place for the library in Aughrim. It's the last library of our 13 libraries that needs replacement. It is not fit for purpose. We are reviewing it; the construction costs have gone up exceedingly. The budget for this library will be exceeded, we can't decide yet on what we are going to do. The money is very tight, and we must be very conscious of what it is costing to build. Building a new building might not be the best option. Planning is in situ and the next stage in the process will be going to tender, but the indications are that the project is going to cost considerably more than what we thought.

(MC) We have a new librarian in Enniskerry, and I went in to welcome her, and noticed that the facilities are quite basic. She was filling her kettle in the bathroom tap. If there is any money in the pot, Michael, can we get an upgrade there? I don't want to see that library close, and I want to give her a bit of quality of work life.

Wicklow Sports & Recreation Partnership Updates

- **Wicklow Sports & Recreation Partnership**

(AH) We've recently received funding for another Grade 5 position as a European Social fund Officer. They're going through getting sanctions from the department, so hopefully towards the end of the year and the position also comes with a 40% match funding of their wages for programmes and interventions.

There were 36 events happening including 'her outdoors week' which encourages women to be outdoors. We launched it on Greystones beach on the 14th August where Ireland AM came down and did a live broadcast. It was great for us to highlight the outdoor opportunities within the county. We had skating on the Marina in Greystones, we also did hiking and kayaking, sailing with Bray Sailing Club and we also linked in with Leinster Gliding Club.

Over the summer we held a series of disability inclusion summer camps. We started this about 3 years ago. Around 100 people took part in the activities. We had 2 sections in Bray Sailing Club and a sports day with Bray Sports with clients from Sunbeam house, RehabCare and the Autism Initiatives. These were funded through Healthy Ireland and through 'SIPSI' as well.

- **Healthy Ireland & Healthy Wicklow**

(AH) We are working on decreasing those at risk of 'Poverty and Deprivation'. We are working around employing a 'Community Food Co-ordinator' for the county. Also, the 'Period Project', in 2023 they spent all the funding they received but they're after getting an additional €10,000 towards that project, which every county didn't get, so I just wanted to highlight that. On the 'Community Enhancement Fund' in Bray, the boulders have been installed in the park beside the library and the rest of the equipment is coming shortly.

Meadhbh, who is the 'Development Officer' on this project is developing a trauma training for early years services which is scheduled to take place in December, and they are also working on a project with Little Bray Family Resource Centre to tender for the construction of a new outdoor space and sensory garden. Slainte care have put €45,000 towards it, with match funding from the resource centre going through.

Disability Inclusion Steering Committee Update:

(CW) provided an update as per report circulated to committee prior to meeting. There are 2 outstanding projects on the Disability Participation Awareness Fund on the communication boards. An update from Clara is that each piece of equipment in 33 playgrounds has now been photographed but that doesn't include Baltinglass town playground or the Esplanade playground on the Bray Seafront, as the MD's advised that these were getting replaced or upgraded in 2023.

The 33 playgrounds include 6 playgrounds in the Wicklow area and the next stage is to list the final checks before sending it off to the sign companies. This will be done in batches and Wicklow MD will be the first.

Cllr Vincent Blake thanked everyone for attending the meeting and advised that the next meeting will take place on Mon 11th December 2023.

Signed:

Vincent Blake

Date:

11 Dec 2023