



# Kerry County Council

## COVID-19 Update

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020

Coronavirus  
**COVID-19**

Coronavirus  
**COVID-19**  
Public Health  
Advice

**LATEST**

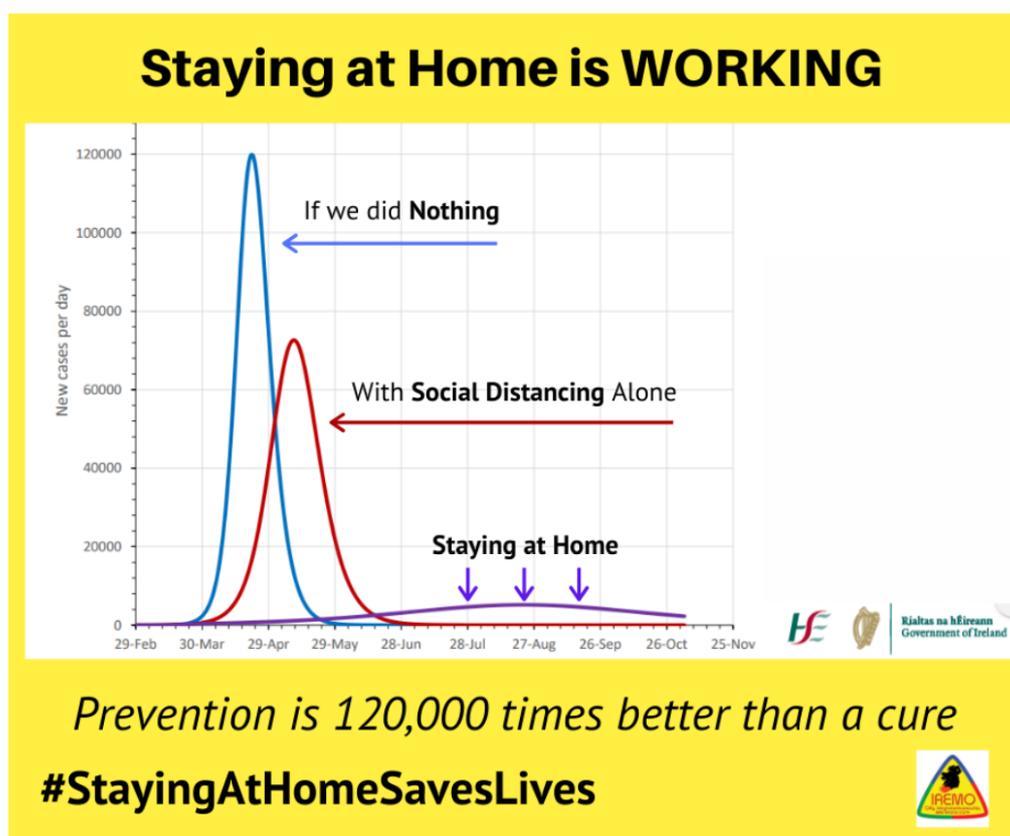
 **Kerry**  
County Council

# Kerry County Council Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

## Introduction

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus in Ireland, and as the country responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, Kerry County Council, as the local government authority for Kerry, has been actively involved in the response to the crisis. The Health Service Executive (HSE) is the lead agency in responding to any public health emergency and the council's response and approach has been guided by a strong ambition to support the HSE response and that of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) in their response to the situation.

Throughout the current emergency, the central aim of the local authority has been to do all in its power to help to limit the spread of the coronavirus and to contribute effectively to the national effort to 'flatten the curve.'



1: Example of inter-agency messaging on 'Flatten the Curve'

The following is an overview of the council's response to the crisis thus far.

## **Business Continuity**

Following the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kerry County Council activated the Business Continuity Planning process for Kerry County Council and established a specific project team, involving key senior personnel and reporting to the Senior Management Team, to plan for potential impacts on Council services.

The role of the team is to ensure that the organisation is in a resilient position to continue to provide critical services to the public, while at the same time ensuring the optimal health and safety of the staff of Kerry County Council. The Project team continues to work closely with each section and with the Senior Management Team (SMT), developing plans and responses as the situation in relation to COVID-19 evolves.

From the outset, Kerry County Council has been part of the public sector response to the pandemic with the various agencies and government departments and particularly the lead agency in this instance, the HSE. In the initial phase of Business Continuity Planning, the critical services as set out by the Department and in accordance with Government guidelines have been the focus of the Council response over the past number of weeks. The key personnel associated with these critical tasks, and support staff to provide cover in the event of any staff absences due to COVID-19, were identified and arrangements were put in place for the provision of cover for critical and emergency services during a lockdown situation.

Subsequently, following the announcement by An Taoiseach on 27<sup>th</sup> March in relation to an escalation in restrictions on movement, additional work was carried out by Kerry County Council to increase the number of staff who could work remotely. The Council also provided increased flexibility in relation to working hours for staff with personal/caring requirements. There are temporary re-assignments to the HSE or other Government Departments to support those agencies in carrying critical tasks under the 'One Public Service' Initiative.

Other works and changes include:

- In relation to staffing, significant work was carried out in relation to splitting business units and setting up teams in different locations around the county. Finance, Planning, Housing, Human Resources, Water Services, Road Design, Community, Fire Services, Environment and IT all have seen their teams split and staff relocated. If one team cannot operate, the work of the business unit can continue in the alternative location.
- For staff remaining in County Buildings or other offices, workplace assessments were carried out by the Health and Safety Team in relation to ensuring office layouts and social distancing requirements could be achieved.
- Significant work in relation to cyber security and utilisation of technology to provide for remote working by staff, where possible, to assist in achieving social distancing and separation of teams to provide for continuity of service in critical areas in the event of a COVID-19 positive case in any particular area or team.

In addition, work was carried out prior to the escalation of the lockdown to address issues with outdoor staff including travel arrangements in relation to responding to incidents as staff vehicles would not provide the required social distancing and ensuring that health and safety advice for staff working in construction / maintenance projects was provided.

### **Essential Services**

Following the announcement on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> March of an expanded lockdown, all Council buildings and public offices closed to the public in the interests of public health and all works other than essential works were suspended for the period of the closure. This period has now been extended to Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May. However, a significant number of services provided by the Council are deemed by Government to be 'essential services' and these are continuing to operate. Council staff continue to provide these essential and emergency services to the public.

- Fire & Emergency Services
  - Community Response phonenumber
  - Water and Wastewater Supply and Maintenance
  - Rural Water and Group Water Schemes
  - Burial Grounds
  - Waste Collection/Disposal
  - Civic Amenity Centres - domestic waste only
  - Housing Services - including Homeless and Urgent Housing repairs
  - Roads- Emergency Maintenance
  - Emergency Public Lighting/Traffic Lights
  - Veterinary Inspections linked to the food chain
  - Emergency Environmental Monitoring
  - Finance
  - Communications
  - Legal Services
  - Health and Safety
  - Community Fatality Planning
- Motor Tax (online and post)

## The Community Call / Community Response Helpline

Kerry was the first county to establish a COVID-19 Community Phone-Line Service on Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> March. The freephone service operates on a seven-day basis from 8am-8pm, and is staffed by Council staff, while Piers & Fitzgibbon of Listowel also provide support on a pro-bono basis.

The free, confidential phonenumber service brings together a wide range of statutory, community, sporting and voluntary organisations who are part of the COVID-19 Kerry Community Response Forum. They have come together to assist in the coordination of the community and voluntary response to the current crisis, particularly in responding to the needs of older or vulnerable households and individuals and allowing them to access non-emergency and non-medical supports during the current public health emergency.

The **FREephone** number **1800 807 009** is supported by a text number (text **'SUPPORT'** followed by your NAME to **50555**) for those who are hearing impaired or those who require a call-back from the service, while requests can also be e-mailed to **covidsupport@kerrycoco.ie**.

## COVID-19 /CORONAVIRUS Kerry Community Response Forum

The COVID-19 Kerry Community Response Forum has been established to coordinate the community response to the current public health emergency. A confidential **freephone** service has been set up to deal with requests for non-emergency supports such as the **delivery of food, fuel and medical supplies**.



# FREephone: 1800 807 009

TEXT **'SUPPORT'** followed by your NAME to 50555  
EMAIL: [covidsupport@kerrycoco.ie](mailto:covidsupport@kerrycoco.ie)

Available 8am to 8pm seven days a week

The support of dozens of community and voluntary agencies and groups across Kerry is gratefully appreciated



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

The objectives of this helpline are to:

- Signpost and refer callers to the appropriate agency supports, local and national helplines as required (e.g. Gardai, ALONE, the Samaritans, Citizens Information etc)
- Coordinate and assist in the delivery of food, fuel and medicine to vulnerable people where their usual sources of support are unavailable, through community structures

such as the GAA, Local Link Kerry, Community Meals on Wheels and the Local Development Companies.

- The primary focus is to support the vulnerable and elderly and those most affected by current measures/restrictions.

In addition, the calls take significant pressure off other agencies like the HSE and the Gardaí. To date over 1,000 calls have been received and responded to.

Kerry County Council has established call centres in the Council Chamber in Áras an Chontae, the Ashe Memorial Hall, Tralee, and the Killorglin Area Services Centre. Organisations involved include:

Health Service Executive, Kerry County Council, An Garda Síochána, Kerry Red Cross, Kerry Civil Defence, Kerry Volunteer Centre, North East and West Kerry Development, South Kerry Development Partnership, IRD Duhallow, Kerry GAA, Kerry Public Participation Network (representing around 700 community groups in Kerry), Kerry Age Friendly Network, Local Link Kerry, St Vincent de Paul Society, Citizens Information Service.

This coordination of these groups, ensuring they are vetted and trained, is arranged through the help and support of the Kerry Volunteer Centre.

### ***COVID-19 Emergency Fund-Community & Voluntary Groups***

The Department of Rural and Community Development has established a €2.5m COVID-19 Emergency Fund to support community and voluntary groups involved in the delivery of COVID-19 community response efforts. The aim is to provide flexibility to local authorities, so that funds can be used appropriately in response to what is needed locally, and funding will be targeted at groups participating in the 'Community Call' initiative. Generally, grants up to a maximum of €1,000 can be made from the fund. There may be some exceptions to this, based on local need. Applications are being dealt with through Kerry County Council's Community Department.

### **Financial impacts**

The unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic poses a significant challenge to Kerry County Council's finances. Income streams have reduced significantly. For example, there is currently a moratorium on rates for businesses which have closed. Other income streams will also be impacted.

Kerry County Council's Finance Unit is currently assessing the impact on Council finances, both in the medium and long-term. A Finance Project team has been put in place to assess the financial impact on the organisation during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

While understanding the wishes of many sectors for a break in commercial rates in order to help businesses to recover following the COVID-19 crisis, there will be a requirement for support for local authorities at a national level to take account of the reduction in income at

this time. Analysis of the situation is being carried out at Council and Local Government Sector level and will be brought back to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

### **Public Service Temporary Re-Assignment Scheme**

Following the escalation of the COVID-19 related lockdown, the focus turned to the delivery of essential and emergency services. Due to the importance of the essential and emergency services provided by the Council it was necessary to plan for the continuation of these services during the pandemic in the context of staff absences due to self-isolation or illness.

At this point, a significant number of staff have been reassigned from non-critical areas to provide back up to critical and essential services. Any staff not required for essential services, or, for example, the Community Response helpline or business supports are being made available for temporary re-assignment to the HSE or other Departments through PAS (Public Appointments Service) to support their work.

The Council is co-operating with the HSE as part of the Southern Regional Emergency Co-ordination Group (within which the HSE is the lead agency), and they have asked for support to fill administrative and technical staffing needs. This request is being facilitated through the Public Appointments Service (PAS) who are managing this process. There is a structured process in place in relation to how assistance is sought and provided, and the Council will continue to support the HSE and other agencies in relation to requirements identified as directed under the One Public Service initiative.

To date, a total of 132 staff have been identified under the Temporary Assignment Scheme as available to provide support as required for tasks arising in other public service areas at this time which are considered critical as part of the overall response to the pandemic. As outlined above, such assignments will be in accordance with requests received through PAS (Public Appointments Service).

Staff have been assigned to the community support helpline, which is operating on a 7-day basis from 8.00am to 8.00pm, while an additional 53 staff have been reassigned from their normal roles to support other critical areas. The movement of staff has happened in a structured and planned way and the support and co-operation of the management and staff of those areas is acknowledged.

### **Economic recovery in Kerry**

A dedicated team has been established to assist in dealing with the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on the Kerry economy. The economic recovery locally will require a sustained collaborative effort over a prolonged period and the challenges and requirements will evolve both with national government initiatives and local co-ordinated responses.

Locally, this is being led by Kerry County Council and involving all the support agencies of the state at local and regional level including the IDA , Enterprise Ireland, Local Development Companies, Udarás na Gaeltachta, Fáilte Ireland, the higher education sector across the region, and also the wider business community including the various tourism groupings, Kerry

Scitech, Chamber Alliances and the wider business sector in the county. The coordination of this effort will require a great deal of work to ensure that agreed messages emanate from the county and appropriate and timely plans are in place and are realistic and actionable when the time is right.

The focus in the coming period will include:

- The articulation of the economic impact of COVID 19 on the county, including scenario planning for a number of possible alternative levels of continuing disruption to economic activity over a prolonged period
- The development of a co-ordinated response to the immediate needs of the business community, including the range of supports that are currently in place and will become available – including financial, training, mentoring, and other associated structural supports.
- The development of a number of initiatives that will support economic recovery at county level and achieving support across the business community for these initiatives – including short-term and longer-term marketing strategies, positioning the county to the fore in the emerging post-COVID-19 landscape.
- Sectoral engagement with the business community – dealing with the particular requirements of individual sectors including tourism, retail, construction and the wider business community, including the specific needs of particular locations including the various innovation hubs in the county.

### ***Local Enterprise Office Supports***

The following supports for businesses have been introduced recently and are available through the Kerry County Council Local Enterprise Office:

- Business Continuity Voucher – a national scheme which provides a voucher to the value of €2,500 for external consultancy supports, e.g. planning for the future. The Local Enterprise Office is dealing with businesses and working through issues or problems they have. Where necessary a mentor is appointed to work with the business. All business types can apply for this voucher. 37 applications have been received to date and they are being assessed.
- COVID-19 Business Loan Scheme administered through Micro-Finance Ireland. The Local Enterprise Office has been working with MFI over the last number of years. The loan limit has increased from €25,000 to €50,000 with a 4.5% interest rate. The Local Enterprise Office assigns a mentor to work with businesses in preparing their loan applications for assessment by MFI. The lending contract is between the business and MFI. Seven applications have been dealt with over the last week.
- The Trading Online Voucher Scheme has been amended. In this regard the co-funding requirement has been reduced from 50% to 10%. The voucher amount remains at €2,500. Previous applicants can reapply again. A webinar for businesses was held on 8 April 2020. A further webinar is being planned.

Additionally, the training programme of the Local Enterprise Office has been converted to online training, short term programmes on issues such as cash flow and business viability, etc. The Local Enterprise Office is providing a lot of support to businesses, who are seeking assurances and advice regarding future planning in terms of viability.

### **Housing**

Significant work has been carried out by Housing staff in relation to tenants and customers, with the Housing Unit experiencing a large volume of calls.

Where Council tenants are experiencing reduced income/loss of employment, they are advised to make direct contact by phone with the Housing Department of Kerry County Council. Subsequent to this contact, each tenant's case will be examined on a case by case basis by the staff in that department.

On Tuesday, 15<sup>th</sup> April, it was confirmed that arrangements are now in place for home loan borrowers who may be struggling to make repayments as a result of income reductions due to the COVID- 19 emergency.

A mortgage payment break of up to three months is now available to those who need it, following a directive by the Department. Under the arrangement, borrowers will not have to make mortgage payments for up to three months. Additional interest will not accrue during the payment break, ensuring that no increased cost will arise.

The monthly repayment following the break will be increased to facilitate the repayment of the loan over the remainder of the existing term. This facility applies to all local authority home loan products.

### ***Homeless***

The homeless sector has been classified as a priority nationally and significant work has been carried out by the Homeless Information Centre based at Denny Street, Tralee. A process has been put in place to cater for vulnerable groups such as homeless persons in conjunction with the two NGO homeless centres in the county.

### **Water Services**

The provision of water and wastewater services is considered an essential service and in conjunction with Irish Water, an extensive Business Continuity Plan regarding water supply, water quality and water treatment is in place for the county.

### **Waste and Civic Amenity Sites**

The five Civic Amenity Sites (Kenmare, Killarney, Milltown, Lios Póil and Cahersiveen) are open and operational, with physical distancing arrangements in place. In addition, extra signage and messaging has been circulated outlining that only domestic refuse only is being accepted from households without an existing waste collection service.

Co-ordination of the business continuity planning for waste collection is on-going at a national level to provide for the continuation of this essential service. Notices have been issued to householders outlining the need for all householders to provide for the presentation of bins in a clean manner.

Direct contact has been made with the waiver customers of the Killarney Town Waste Collection Service regarding the options in relation to the ongoing service.

### **Essential maintenance**

Having regard to the need to maintain some public areas in the interests of public health and road safety, for example, overgrowth on roundabouts or at junctions, or in areas prone to littering, Municipal District staff will carry out a basic level of essential maintenance works of this nature while observing social distancing and health and safety requirements.

### **Planning**

Changes in respect of the planning system were announced on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and were subsequently extended up to and including the 9<sup>th</sup> May, which added 42 days to the statutory time period for processing planning applications under the Planning Acts.

Planning applications can continue to be made by post. All applications will be available for inspection online at:

<http://www.kerrycoco.ie/planning/online-planning-enquiry/>

Submission/observations on planning applications can continue to be made by post. The extended timeframes will also apply to planning appeals, which An Bórd Pleanála will continue to receive by post.

Pre-planning (under Section 247) will continue online and by telephone. Face-to-face meetings will not be facilitated until otherwise advised by the HSE and the Department. The pre-planning application form is available at:

<http://www.kerrycoco.ie/planning/development-management/planning-applications/>

These forms can be submitted electronically to [plan@kerrycoco.ie](mailto:plan@kerrycoco.ie).

The extended timeframe also applies to the review of the County Development Plan. This review was due to commence at the end of April. This will not now commence until the extended period commenced by the Minister has ended.

The completion of the statutory process in relation to the Listowel Local Area Plan and the commencement of the Dingle and East Iveragh Local Area Plans are deferred.

### **Fire & Emergency Services**

There is an on-going requirement to ensure that gorse fires do not divert the Fire Service from other essential tasks. While there had been a high level of gorse fires at the outset of the

current emergency period, these were reduced significantly following strong Council media communications and a social media campaign.

### **Arrangements for Increased Mortality Rates**

#### ***Community Fatality Planning***

Kerry County Council has been working with An Garda Síochána, the HSE, the Defence Forces and the Coroners Service regarding the development of a Community Fatality Contingency Plan for the county, which includes the establishment of a temporary facility with the capacity for the storage of remains if required.

#### ***Guide for the Bereaved***

Guidance and protocols for the families of persons who passed away during the COVID-19 pandemic were prepared and issued by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government on 8th April. The guide covers the period from the time a death occurs up to the burial or cremation and provides clear advice as to what bereaved families might expect as they make funeral arrangements. It also outlines the changes that have become necessary to the traditional removal and funeral practices and rituals.

### **Public Spaces**

Ahead of the Easter Bank Holiday weekend, and in consultation with An Garda Síochána, Kerry County Council took the decision to close the public car parks to beaches and public in order to prevent mass gatherings. The decision followed the issuing of clear national public health advice that members of the public should not visit or congregate in public places such as beaches, apart from individuals or households which are resident within two kilometres of a beach. An Garda Síochána has confirmed that the closure of the car parks together with the increased level of garda patrols to restrict non-essential travel worked very effectively and the arrangements will continue in place for the duration of the current lockdown. These car parks remain closed until at least 5<sup>th</sup> May.

### **Communications**

#### ***Internal communications***

Kerry County Council's Senior Management Team has been meeting on a very regular basis since the beginning of the emergency to ensure that the Council is in a position to continue to provide critical and emergency services and to assist, where necessary, under the 'One Public Service' initiative.

Weekly briefing meetings are also held with senior staff to ensure that staff are up to date with the changing work requirements and demands. Weekly briefings have also been provided to a representative group of councillors and updates from these briefings together with other important information has been circulated to the elected members on an on-going basis since the commencement of the COVID-19 outbreak by Corporate Services.

#### ***External/public communications***

The Council's Communications and Customer Relations Office has provided detailed updates to the media and general public in relation to issues arising during the current emergency and the Council's role in dealing with the crisis. As well as updates in relation to the Council's own response, the council has been reiterating and sharing messages from the HSE and other agencies in an attempt to help flatten the curve.

There has also been on-going co-operation with the other agencies in the Southern Region through Kerry County Council's Communications Office and co-ordination with the other members of the Southern Region Communications Group, as well as on a sectoral basis with the Local Government Management Agency. Regular press releases and information are disseminated through local news outlets, social media channels and to relevant community, voluntary and business groups.

### **Southern Region Major Emergency Management Group**

Kerry County Council is part of the Southern Region Major Emergency Management Group. The lead agency is the HSE and the other members are An Garda Síochána, Cork County Council, Cork City Council and Kerry County Council. Regular meetings of this group are held to ensure a unified approach in response to the pandemic across the region.

The Major Emergency Planning structures in place across the country have provided the framework within which the HSE, An Garda Síochána and Local Authorities can work together in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and acts particularly as an important forum through which the HSE can secure any assistance required from other agencies like Kerry County Council.

ENDS