



Kerry County Council

COVID-19 Update

30th April 2020

Coronavirus
COVID-19

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Public Health
Advice

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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 (NPHET) 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.'

May Bank Holiday Weekend

In accordance with the continuing restrictions on travel, public car parks at beaches and a number of other amenity areas will remain closed over the May Bank Holiday weekend. There will be ongoing patrols of these areas by Council personnel with a possibility of further closures if requested by Gardai.

The need for adherence to the travel restrictions has been raised at central level over the past number of days and has been reiterated strongly by the Southern Region Major Emergency Management Group, of which Kerry County Council is a member.

Grass Cutting/Maintenance

The Department of An Taoiseach indicated that Government will allow minimum maintenance to be carried out to open spaces, including grass cutting and litter picking. Given the restrictions that are in place at the moment, any such programme will be tightly restricted and kept to a minimum, with priority being given to areas where there is a public health and safety issue, and in areas which are heavily trafficked and consequently prone to litter dumping. This means simple grass-cutting of and litter collection in common areas, popular walkways etc, and does not refer to more extensive maintenance works.

In order to ensure very strong compliance with the advice, a schedule of works is now in place, and work has commenced. These works will be managed carefully to ensure strict compliance with social distancing and public health advice.

Housing

A significant part of Housing Department activities has been deemed essential and continue to operate, albeit electronically, by post or over the phone. There continues to be a very large number of daily contacts with Housing staff. A very limited number of face-to-face interactions have been facilitated by appointment where no other alternative is available.

The Homeless Service continues to be an area of high risk. Services continue to be provided under protocols developed on an inter-agency basis and are managed closely in conjunction with the HSE.

The details of the Housing Loans forbearance have been notified to the Council and the Council has written to all loans customers advising them of the process. A total of 11 applications have been approved to date. Housing rents continue to be payable as normal and we are dealing with tenants on a case-by-case basis where income changes may have occurred.

Grants and maintenance continue to operate on the basis of emergency/critical cases assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Arrangements have been agreed nationally for the granting of certain exemptions in terms of works on Social Housing construction sites. This is not a blanket exemption however and it applies only to sites which can be completed and ready for occupation by the end of May 2020. None of our Council sites meet this requirement and therefore they will not be recommencing under current restrictions.

A number of Approved Housing Body sites are close to completion and applications have been made for exemptions in these cases through the established process. To date no approvals have been granted for sites in Kerry in the Social Housing Programme, but Kerry County Council is monitoring this very closely.

COVID-19 Business Continuity

Kerry County Council is preparing both its offices and operations for a time when services and operations will return to normal, albeit on a phased basis. This involves the development of protocols and practises that ensure safety of offices and public areas, both for staff and public.

Rose of Tralee

The announcement was made on Monday that the Rose of Tralee is to be cancelled for the first time in its 61-year history. Given the significant amount of global publicity that the Festival provides to Kerry, as well as the significant boost to the county's economy, this news, while not unexpected, is disappointing.

Kerry County Council has been in discussion with the Rose of Tralee organisers and Kerry County Council is committed to working closely with them to ensure the Rose Centres continue to remain connected to the Festival and Kerry over the intervening period.

Tidy Towns Competition

Notification has also been received that the national Tidy Towns Competition has been cancelled for 2020. In a statement issued on 21 May, Minister for Rural and Community Development Michael Ring, TD announced the cancellation. Minister Ring cited the current restrictions around public gatherings, travel, and adherence to social distancing, stating that

it would not be appropriate to ask voluntary groups to work on Tidy Towns projects in their communities at this time. However, he did state that if the restrictions did ease later in the year, there may be an opportunity for the Tidy Towns Committees to undertake some work when it is safe to do so and in a way that is manageable later in the year.

Financial Matters

Kerry County Council continues to be engaged with the Department of Planning, Housing and Local Government to assess the likely impacts on our finances of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is difficult at this point to have full clarity as to what the impact is. However, a significant level of planning is going on across the organisation in this regard.

The Community Call / Community Response Helpline

The Community Support helpline has to date, received over 1,400 calls for assistance. The number of calls directly to the helpline have marginally reduced. Indications are that that relationships have been built between the community and local response agencies. This has resulted in individuals who are seeking assistance now making direct contact with local agencies in preference to ringing the community helpline.

The majority of calls over the past week relate to (a) collection and delivery of medicines, food & basic necessities, and (b) advise and information. The Community Call/Community Response Helpline continues to operate on a seven-day basis from 8am-8pm, and is staffed by Council staff, while Pierse & Fitzgibbon of Listowel also provide support on a pro-bono basis.

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 Emergency Fund for Community and Voluntary Groups

Details of COVID-19 Emergency Fund were circulated last week, along with guidelines. This is a grant programme to provide funding to groups that are directly and actively involved in the Kerry Community Call response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and administered by the local authority in each area.

Of the €2.5m fund, Kerry County Council has been allocated €79,468. The recommendation from the Department of Rural and Community Development is that the majority of the funding should be ring-fenced for grants up to a maximum of €1,000. The funding covers mainly capital type work, but some current or operating expenditure related to the response to COVID-19 will also be considered.

The grant is available to those groups and organisations actively involved with the Kerry Community Support Helpline, who have incurred costs on the direct delivery of frontline services to people impacted by this crisis. These services include delivery of meals and groceries, medicine, fuel and other similar activities.

Planning

Changes to the planning system to cater for the COVID-19 restrictions have added 42 days (up to and including 9 May 2020) to the statutory time periods for processing planning applications within the Planning Acts. If a planning application was lodged before 21 February 2020, the five-week public participation phase has been completed a planning authority can make a decision within the extended deadline.

If a planning application was lodged between the 21 February and the 29 March 2020, the decision cannot be made until after 9 May 2020 to ensure that the public participation element has been completed (the remaining period for public consultation will be added after the 9 May)

If an application is lodged after 29 March 2020, it cannot be decided by the Planning Authority until the five-week period for public consultation on the application commences, which will now begin after 9 May 2020. This legislative amendment will result in approximately 120 planning applications falling due for decision on the 29th of June.

The number of planning applications lodged experienced an initial spike up to the week ending 10 April, thereafter returning to normal levels of activity. By comparison during the period January – end of April 2019, a total 454 planning applications were received. For the period January – end of April this year the planning department are on course to receive approximately 430 applications.

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/Submissions/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 advised by the HSE and the Department. The pre planning application form is available at <http://www.kerrycoco.ie/planning/development-management/planning-applications/> and can be submitted electronically to plan@kerrycoco.ie.

Kerry County Development Plan 2022 - 2026 and Local Area Plans

The commencement of the review of the Kerry County Development Plan 2022-2026 and the review of the Listowel Municipal District and An Daingean Municipal District Local Area Plans have been impacted by the *Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020*, specifically, Part 3, which refers to the calculation of Time Limits relating to Planning and Development.

Progressions of these plans, and other statutory business will be conducted in line with the measures outlined in the Act, and the timeframe and restrictions as prescribed by Government.