

Meeting with Representative Group of Councillors
Wednesday, 1st April 2020 at 10.30 a.m. via WebEx Video/Teleconferencing

PRESENT/ I LÁTHAIR
Councillors/Comhairleoirí

Niall Kelleher (Cathaoirleach)	Norma Moriarty (Leas Cathaoirleach)	
Brendan Cronin	Jim Finucane	Breandán Fitzgerald
Cathal Foley	Michael Gleeson	Maura Healy-Rae
Dan McCarthy	Jimmy Moloney	Terry O'Brien
Michael O'Shea		

IN ATTENDANCE/ I LÁTHAIR

Ms. M. Murrell, Chief Executive	Mr. C. O'Sullivan, Dir. of Rds, Transp'n & Marine
Mr. J. Breen, Director Water Services	Mr. M. O'Donoghue, Director Housing
Mr. M. Scannell, Dir. Job Cr/Sust. ED	Mr. C. O'Connor, Director Corp. Servs.
Mr. P. Corkery, Meetings Administrator	Ms. D. Griffin, SO Corporate
Mr. O. O'Shea, Press Officer	Ms. C. Fitzgerald, SO Corporate

1. Update on COVID-19 - Kerry County Council position

Updates "COVID-19 Pandemic – Essential Services" and "Changes to the planning system by the Minister in relation to COVID-19" dated 31st March 2020 have been circulated to all Elected Members.

The Chief Executive outlined that following the statement from An Taoiseach on Friday, 27th March 2020, Kerry County Council offices have been closed to the public. The focus is now on 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 projected high absence rates.

To take account of this, staff have been reassigned from non-critical areas to provide back up to critical and essential services. In addition, the Community Response helpline which was launched on Monday would require a high level of staff support, as the service would be in operation from 8am in the morning to 8pm in the evening on a seven day basis. Outside of these services there was a requirement to support the work of the HSE in accordance with national protocols. Any staff not required for essential services, or the Community Response helpline or as back-up to both areas were required to be made available for redeployment to the HSE through PAS (Public Appointments Service) to support their work. In this regard, requests had been received from the HSE for both administrative and technical support and arrangements for re-deployment would be facilitated in respect of these requests through PAS as directed under the One Public Service initiative.

The Chief Executive pointed out that Homelessness has been identified nationally as a risk area and the Council is working closely with the relevant agencies to address the significant challenges arising in this area.

The Chief Executive referred to the high incidence of gorse fires over the past week. The capacity of the Fire Service was being significantly stretched due to these fires with 16 more call-outs in the last 24 hours. In response to a request from Elected

Members, the Chief Executive undertook to issue a strong press release on social media referencing Councillors' condemnation of the present gorse fire situation. In response to queries regarding Fire Service personnel, it was pointed out that 15 recruits, had recently completed their training programme and were in place since Thursday, 26th March. Reference was also made to the support role of Civil Defence and to the arrangements in place with regard to same.

The Chief Executive referred to the importance of rates support from Central Government to take account of the projected financial issues arising as a result of the pandemic. Analysis of the situation was being carried out at Council and Local Government Sector level and would be brought back to the Department.

The Chief Executive outlined details of the services categorised as Essential Services, details of which were set out on the "COVID-19 Pandemic – Essential Services Update" which has been circulated to Elected Members and which was now the focus of the Council work programme during the current period.

Members referred to the need to ensure that the Civic Amenity sites remained open to cater for domestic waste from households and requested that clear messaging be put in place in this regard. Following queries in relation to pothole repairs, it was pointed out that staff are currently focussing on emergency repairs only. Normal works have been suspended to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Responding to queries in relation to housing issues, Mr M O'Donoghue pointed out that homelessness was a critical area and the interagency group are meeting several times per week regarding protocols for this area. Council tenants can make direct contact by phone to the Housing Department regarding concerns in relation to rents and loans. Requests for repairs are being risk assessed with only emergency works being undertaken, while inspections for housing grants were also curtailed. However everything possible was being done to facilitate any critical cases outstanding. As the voids programme and Capital housing programme have been suspended, only emergency housing allocations would proceed to prevent homelessness, however due to the current restrictions on evictions it was considered that such allocations may not arise.

Mr C O'Sullivan DOS advised the Members that Liebherr have a ship arriving into port at Fenit Harbour in the coming week. He pointed out that a strong protocol was in place regarding advance notice of such arrival and the management of the process while in port. Security arrangements were in place at Fenit Harbour and the Gardaí will provide additional security while the ship is in port.

In relation to on-going queries from the Elected members or the general public in relation to issues arising the Chief Executive pointed out that telephone support for customers and online services were available during normal working hours and an emergency phone line was in place for out of hours service. In relation to support for the elected members the following contact persons are in place:

Pádraig Corkery, Meetings Administrator	0873488733
Ciara Fitzgerald, SO Corporate Services	0874059506
Davina Griffin, SO Corporate Services	0874052125

2. Community Support Service

Mr. M. Scannell, Director of Service, advised that a new telephone helpline was launched on Monday, 30th March 2020 to assist members of the public in accessing non-emergency and non-medical services and to provide support and advice to people during the current public health emergency. The free, confidential phonenumber service has been established by the new 'COVID-19 Kerry Community Response Forum' which includes over a dozen agencies and organisations who have come together to mobilise and coordinate the community and voluntary response to the current crisis, particularly in responding to the needs of vulnerable households and individuals. The FREEPHONE number 1800 807 009 is now up and running and is available from 8am to 8pm seven days a week. A text line (text 'SUPPORT' followed by your NAME to 50555) is also available for the hearing impaired or those who require a call-back from the service while requests can also be e-mailed to covidsupport@kerrycoco.ie. Since Monday the helpline has received 100 calls per day, and it is expected the number of calls will increase as people become familiar with the process.

Kerry County Council has been charged with issuing permits to travel to volunteers on behalf of the Kerry Community Response Forum. The Forum is dealing with established voluntary organisations who are registered with the Kerry Volunteering Bureau and governance arrangements are in place. Voluntary organisations must have appropriate screening methods in place and appropriate management of their volunteering work in place. It is essential that all the HSE recommended measures are taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Any information as part of the process must be treated as confidential and with appropriate GDPR requirements applying.

The Chief Executive advised that clarification has been received from the Department that the function of volunteers will not include the transfer of people to testing centres.

In relation to a query regarding support for people experiencing stress or isolation, the Chief Executive stated that the matter would be considered in conjunction with the Council's Health and Wellbeing officer and engagement could be undertaken with Radio Kerry on this area.

3. Community Fatality Planning

Mr. C. O'Sullivan, Director of Service, outlined that the Department of Health has indicated that the number of cases having contracted COVID-19 is likely to peak during the 3rd/4th week of April. The number of fatalities has been increasing in the country over the last week. Capacity issues for carrying out postmortems and holding remains in University Hospital Kerry have been identified. Kerry County Council has been working with the HSE, Gardaí, Coroners and a Representative of Funeral Directors regarding protocols to be put in place.

4. Update on Planning Process

Mr. M. Scannell, Director of Service, referred to the report "Changes to the planning system by the Minister in relation to COVID-19" dated 31st March 2020 which was circulated to all Elected Members. He highlighted that:

- changes to the Planning code signed by the Minister on Sunday 29th March 2020, will add 23 days to the statutory time periods for processing planning applications within the Planning Acts.

- Planning applications can continue to be made by post. All applications will be available for inspection on line 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 Bord 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.
- The extended time frame 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 LAP and the commencement of the Dingle & East Iveragh LAPs are deferred.

The Members expressed their satisfaction and support for the actions being taken by Management in response to the pandemic. They paid tribute to the work of the HSE, Council staff, An Garda Síochána, Fire Service, Civil Defence, the Defence Forces and the broader public services.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the meetings with the Representative Group of Councillors would be held on a weekly basis, (subject to review at each meeting), facilitated through the utilisation of remote connections to ensure physical distancing requirements are met. It was noted that the Cathaoirleach's / Mayor of each of the MDS was now included on the group ensuring coverage for each MD. It was also agreed that the Cathaoirleach / DOS Corporate Services would engage with the nominated Independent members representatives to provide for feedback to the independent members.

This concluded the meeting.