

**Report on briefing to Representative Group of Councillors  
Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2020 at 10.30 a.m. via WebEx Video/Teleconferencing**

**PRESENT/ I LÁTHAIR**

**Councillors/Comhairleoirí**

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

**IN ATTENDANCE/ I LÁTHAIR**

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

**Update on COVID-19**

The Chief Executive gave an overview of the ongoing process in relation to the monitoring and measurement of the levels of activity across the organisation, with high levels of activity across all the critical areas. In this regard the Business Continuity Planning for critical and essential services continues. One significant body of work has been putting in place the physical infrastructure for a temporary fatality storage centre in Ballymullen Barracks, Tralee. Protocols to be developed in accordance with national guidance.

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

The Chief Executive pointed out that high levels of activity have been experienced on the community support helpline. The Kerry Community Response Forum has strong governance in place which must be adhered to. Voluntary bodies are requested to work under the remit of this structure as the Local Authority is the body that has been charged with issuing permits to travel to volunteers on behalf of the Kerry Community Response Forum. National helplines are also being put in place that will increase referrals to the local helplines.

The homeless service has been identified nationally as a risk area and work continues with the Department, the HSE and other bodies to relation to this area of activity.

The Department of Justice is the responsible agency in relation to the operation of any Direct provision Centres around the country and for the protocols and contingency plans associated with the centres.

Residential care homes have also been identified as a risk area due to incidence of clusters in a number of such facilities around the country which are being monitored closely by the HSE.

The Chief Executive stated that work was continuing in relation to the assessment of the financial implications arising from COVID-19. This matter was also being assessed on a sectoral basis at national level and would require input from each local authority.

The Chief Executive referred to the potential for visitors to the county over the Easter weekend even though there were strong travel restrictions in place. The Members called for a strong message to issue from Kerry County Council that people not travel to the county this weekend and that government guidance on travel be adhered to.

The possibility of closing council car parks at beaches was raised to curtail persons travelling to these areas and it was agreed that this matter would be examined further. Reference was made to the additional specific powers given to the Gardaí which will be implemented by them in relation to adhering to government guidance on travel and public spaces. The issue of large gatherings of people is also a matter for the Gardaí and any such gatherings should be reported to the Gardaí.

In response to a query regarding a primary care hub being developed in Castleisland, it was pointed out that the Council did not have any specific information in relation to this matter, but this may come through the members on the Regional Health Forum South. The Cathaoirleach pointed out that a press release had recently issued in relation to this matter and it would be forwarded to the Director of Corporate Services for circulation to the members.

In response to a query it was pointed out that the sites were open, but that monitoring was continuing as some sites had been very busy. Social distancing measures have been put in place at the sites.

In relation to a query regarding council meetings it was pointed out that national guidance regarding statutory meetings was being finalised and was due to issue shortly.

In relation to queries regarding road works it was pointed out that such works will only be carried out on an emergency basis. Similarly, housing grant applications works would only be carried out on an emergency basis as the focus of council business in accordance with the national guidelines was on essential and emergency works only.

## **2. Community Fatality Planning**

Mr. C. O'Sullivan, Director of Service, referred to the Community Fatality Planning Report which had been circulated dated 7th April 2020. It is important to note that as COVID-19 is an infectious disease, cases are notifiable to the Coroner and they may

require a post mortem. Kerry County Council has been working with the HSE, Gardaí, Coroners and a representative of Funeral Directors regarding protocols, procedures and requirements for community fatality planning. Clarification has been received from the Coroners as to when postmortems may be required. It is a judicial process which is solely in the hands of the Coroners. The Local Authority may be involved should there be a need for additional storage capacity to support the HSE and An Garda Síochana in the context of the post mortem process. The Council has engaged with the defence forces regarding the use of the Ballymullen Barracks, for the location of a temporary holding facility and nationally with the Department in relation to the protocols etc. He referred to the revised arrangements for burials / cremations at this time taking account of the current issues and pointed out that a leaflet for bereaved families was being prepared by the HSE to explain the public health advice / requirements for each stage of the post-death process.

### **3. Community Support Service**

Mr. M. Scannell, Director of Service, referred to the 'COVID-19 Kerry Community Response Forum' which includes over a dozen agencies and organisations who are mobilising and coordinating the community and voluntary response to the current crisis, particularly in responding to the needs of vulnerable households and individuals. The Forum is meeting via video conferencing on a regular basis in relation to governance of the process and any issues arising.

Kerry was to the fore in setting up a telephone helpline 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. Many of Kerry's protocols have been adopted nationally. The free, confidential phonenumber service is available from 8am to 8pm seven days a week on FREEPHONE number 1800 807 009. 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](mailto:covidsupport@kerrycoco.ie).

The call centre was initially set up in the Council Chamber in County Buildings. A second call centre has been set up in Killorglin Area Services Centre and another is to operate from the Ashe Memorial Hall, Tralee. The support and assistance of Pierse and Fitzgibbons Solicitors who have provided their call centre pro bono is also acknowledged. More than 600 calls have been received since the helpline opened on 30<sup>th</sup> March. Calls cover a wide range of issues, e.g. delivery of groceries, fuel, medications, pensions, meals. Social isolation has also arisen as an issue and the helpline provides people with someone to talk to and if necessary calls are transferred to the ALONE, or other appropriate helplines.

Strong governance is in place regarding volunteering. People who wish to volunteer must be associated with an organisation which has the necessary protocols and vetting as part of the county response in place and is registered with the Kerry Volunteering Bureau. Voluntary organisations must have insurances in place, have supports in place for their volunteers, have issued advice regarding social distancing and volunteers are under the age of 70.

Training has been provided to GAA groups via a webinar. Similar webinars can be organised for other groups if necessary. There will be a long-term commitment

required of organisations to deliver volunteering across the county to assist the process. Organisations will have to have volunteers in reserve over the coming weeks and months. The service has been received very positively by the general public.

Elected Members expressed their satisfaction and support for the actions being taken by management in response to the pandemic. They commended the work of the staff on the Community Response helpline. 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 concerns raised in relation to representation / feedback to the Independent Elected members, it was pointed out that feedback from the briefings was being given by the members attending. The Cathaoirleach stressed that these were briefings to a representative group of Elected Members and no statutory business was being conducted. Following discussion, it was suggested that the issues arising could be addressed by the attendance of 3/ 4 of the independent members on a rota basis for the meetings. It was agreed that Mr. C. O'Connor, Director of Corporate Services, would liaise with the relevant members in relation to such an arrangement for the future. The importance of Representatives attending the meetings briefing their groups / other members was again stressed.

The next meeting with the Representative Group of Councillors will be held on Wednesday, 15 April 2020 at 10.30 am facilitated through the utilisation of remote connections to ensure physical distancing requirements are met.

This concluded the meeting.