

**Report on briefing to Representative Group of Councillors
Wednesday, 15th April 2020 at 10.30 a.m. via WebEx Video/Teleconferencing**

PRESENT/ I LÁTHAIR
Councillors/Comhairleoirí

Niall Kelleher (Cathaoirleach)	Michael Cahill	Fionnán Fitzgerald
Jim Finucane	Cathal Foley	Michael Gleeson
Donal Grady	Jackie Healy-Rae	Maura Healy-Rae
Sam Locke	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.
Ms. A. McAllen, Head of Finance	Mr. J. Kennelly, A/Director of Service
Mr. P. Corkery, Meetings Administrator	Ms. D. Griffin, SO Corporate
Mr. O. O'Shea, Press Officer	Ms. C. Fitzgerald, SO Corporate
Mr. J. Griffin, County Tourism Officer	Mr. T. Hayes, Local Enterprise Officer

1. 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.

Kerry County Council is continuing to work to support the COVID-19 response as part of the One Public Service initiative. 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. Any such assignments will be in accordance with requests received through PAS (Public Appointments Service). The Chief Executive pointed out that high levels of activity have been experienced on the community support helpline. 65 staff have been assigned to the community support helpline, which was operating on a 7-day basis from 8.00am to 8.00pm, while an additional 53 staff have been relocated 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.

Details of the Mortgage Payment Break, which can be applied to Kerry County Council mortgage accounts for three months have been received by the Housing Department.

The Chief Executive referred to a business and tourism sectoral briefing she is hosting on 16 April 2020. The briefing is to provide a communication forum for those sectors and interests. The essential nature of the Local Authority's services and how we communicate and move through this pandemic will be discussed. This will provide a structured means of communicating with these sectors and allow for a valuable exchange of information in relation to the issues arising.

It is expected that the changes to the Planning code signed by the Minister on Sunday, 29 March 2020, which added 23 days to the statutory time periods for processing planning applications within the Planning Acts, will be extended to 5 May 2020.

National guidance has been sought regarding maintenance of public spaces such as grass cutting as this has been raised as an issue in a number of areas. Elected Members will be further advised on receipt of this guidance.

The Department has advised that community health and wellbeing, will be a significant area of focus nationally over the coming weeks and reference was made to significant uptake in online activities through the libraries as examples of what can be achieved in this regard. Local radio had also an important role to play in this area relating to items of general interest in the arts / museums and it was hoped to build on such initiatives going forward.

The Chief Executive pointed out that work was on-going in relation to the assessment of the financial implications arising from COVID-19 while cash flow is being monitored carefully. This matter was also being assessed on a sectoral basis at national level.

The Chief Executive referred to the on-going regular meetings with the Regional Emergency Co-ordination Group with the HSE as the lead agency. The Garda representatives had expressed their satisfaction at the response from the general public to the restrictions in access to beaches etc with relatively few issues arising across the region. There had been a strong garda operation in place to prevent unnecessary travel around the weekend. This will continue over the coming week. Closure of carparks at the county's beaches will continue following consultation with An Garda Síochána and in light of the Government decision to extend the lockdown for a further three weeks.

Community Fatality planning continues with the development of national protocols.

In response to a query regarding the list critical services, it was pointed out that this list was included in a report to Elected Members issued on 24 March 2020 and includes:

- (a) Fire and Emergency Services
- (b) Water supply under our SLA with Irish Water
- (c) Our Information and Communication Technology systems
- (d) Critical Housing Services, particularly for homeless and vulnerable persons
- (e) Other emergency services, including responding to RTAs, severe weather events and salting of roads.
- (f) Waste disposal
- (g) Burial grounds
- (h) Community Fatality Planning
- (i) Community Support Line

In response to queries, it was pointed out that only emergency or critical works were currently being carried out in the roads area and the clarity in relation to the overall roads programme and the Local Improvements Scheme works would not be available until further guidance on the lockdown was received from central government at the end of the three week period. 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.

In response to a query it was acknowledged that many rate payers will be significantly affected and there would be calls for national assistance for councils in relation to loss of rates and other income.

In relation to a query regarding a primary care hub being developed in Castleisland, it was pointed out that this was a matter under the responsibility of the HSE, and the only information to-date had come through the members on the Regional Health Forum by way of press release. It was agreed that a request for an update for the members on this development will be sent to the HSE.

It was noted that there has been a significant reduction in gorse fires, but there was need for continued vigilance in this area with the current weather conditions

The 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, and 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 during the current crisis.

Local Enterprise Office Supports

Mr. T. Hayes, Local Enterprise Officer, outlined the following supports which were introduced recently and are available through the Local Enterprise Office:

- a) 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.
- b) 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.
- c) 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 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.

The Local Enterprise Office is proactive and has reached out to the various networks in the county regarding circulation of information.

Enterprise Ireland are rolling out a Retail Support Scheme which runs in addition conjunction with the Local Enterprise Office Voucher Scheme. Irish owned retailer enterprises that have 10 or more employees can apply to avail of €10,000-€40,000 to support online trading development and activity. Costs covered by the scheme include salary and consultancy costs. The closing date for applications is 20 May 2020.

The Members thanked Mr Hayes for the update and outlined some of the issues which were arising for local business and tourism interests and of the need for continuing support in these matters.

Tourism Supports

Mr. J. Griffin, County Tourism Officer, outlined that Ireland's tourism sector is facing its biggest challenge. Kerry is a county very dependent on tourism and will be severely impacted, as the tourism sector is worth €650m to the economy in Kerry and employs 1 in 5 of our work force and their families. Effectively the tourism industry is closed at the present time with the majority of staff laid off. Tourism is about meeting and greeting people, but to stay safe, we must stay apart. The major challenge is the uncertainty regarding when hotels, etc., can reopen and events and festivals can take place. It is difficult to plan with this uncertainty. Government is providing supports to the tourism sector also, by way of the COVID-19 payment, the working capital loan scheme and SME supports via Local Enterprise Offices, along with payment breaks of up to three months on loans. Fáilte Ireland has suspended registration fees and are preparing an overseas marketing campaign, details of which are to be announced. It is essential to ensure Kerry tourism is ready to get up and running beyond this pandemic. Government funding support will be required. Kerry tourism industry meetings have been held regarding preparing for the recovery, as the county will need to get up and running quickly. By planning, supporting and working together we can recover and grow.

The members thanked Mr Griffin for the update and referred to the need for support for the tourism industry and for a marketing campaign focused on what's available in Kerry and attracting Irish holiday makers to holiday at visit for both leisure and activity type breaks.

2. Community Support Service

Mr. M. Scannell, Director of Service, referred to the 'COVID-19 Kerry Community Response Forum' telephone helpline set up 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 helpline was particularly active in the lead up to Easter. The Easter weekend itself was relatively quiet, showing that the community calls and volunteers were able to deal with the level of activity. 900 calls have been received since the helpline opened on 30th March. Requests received via the helpline are being met largely in co-operation the voluntary organisations. Over one-third of the calls to the helpline relate to requests for information and advice. Call centres are now set up in the Council Chamber in County Buildings, the Killorglin Area Services Centre and the Ashe Memorial Hall, Tralee. The call centres are also supported by the call centre of Pierse and Fitzgibbons Solicitors, Listowel.

In response to a query, it was pointed out that social distancing has been introduced in workspaces including the call centre, additional workspaces have been made available and extended working hours are also in place which ensures a spread of staff and social distancing.

The free, confidential phone line 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. This level of consistency is a great reassurance to the public. Feedback from the public has been very positive. All cases are being closed and all asks are being met. Details on the level activity in the call centres is reported daily to the Department. The assistance of all voluntary organisations is gratefully acknowledged.

A COVID Emergency Fund was announced on 14 April 2020, which provided an allocation of €79,468 for Kerry. The maximum grant available to a voluntary group is €1,000. Discretion for the grant is at local level and will be dealt with through the Community Voluntary Forum. All voluntary groups associated with the Community Voluntary Forum will be contacted and provided with details on the application process. Applications will be dealt with as they are submitted. In response to a query, it was pointed out that this funding can be used for day to day expenses of the voluntary organisation at this time.

Community Association Ireland has also announced details of a fund to support existing groups in relation to the COVID-19 response. Grants of between €1,000 and €10,000 are available.

The Members were very supportive of the work being carried out in this area which was providing essential support to vulnerable people in the community. In response to a suggestion, it was agreed that the voluntary groups would be encouraged to make contact on an on-going basis with vulnerable people, in their areas, to keep in touch with them and address isolation issues. This matter would be raised at COVID-19 Kerry Community Response Forum for discussion.

3. Municipal District Briefings

It was agreed that COVID-19 briefings for Municipal Districts, via WEBEX/Tele-conferencing, will be held on Wednesday next, 22 April at 10.30 a.m. Details regarding access will be forwarded with the invitation to the briefing.

4. Councillors Queries/Dedicated Phone Numbers

Mr. C. O'Connor, Director of Service, pointed out that 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

5. Any Other Business

Concerns were raised by Elected Members in relation to anti-social behaviour in the Killarney area. These matters had been reported to An Garda Síochána who had

followed up, but issues are still arising. Elected Members requested that the matter be raised by Council with An Garda Síochána.

This concluded the briefing.