

Report on briefing to Councillors
Wednesday, 29 April 2020 at 10.30 a.m. via WebEx Video/Teleconferencing

PRESENT/I LÁTHAIR Councillors/Comhairleoirí

Cathaoirleach Niall Kelleher

Tom Barry

Patrick Connor-Scarteen

Deirdre Ferris

Fionnán Fitzgerald

Michael Foley

Jackie Healy-Rae

Dan McCarthy

Norma Moriarty

Michael O'Shea

Johnnie Wall

Robert Beasley

Brendan Cronin

Jim Finucane

John Francis Flynn

Michael Gleeson

Maura Healy-Rae

Jimmy Moloney

Terry O'Brien

Mikey Sheehy

Michael Cahill

Charlie Farrelly

Breandán Fitzgerald

Cathal Foley

Donal Grady

Sam Locke

Marie Moloney

Niall O'Callaghan

Aoife Thornton

IN ATTENDANCE/I LÁTHAIR

**Ms. M. Murrell, Chief Executive
Marine**

Mr. J. Breen, Director Water Services

Mr. C. O'Connor, Director Corp. Servs.

Mr. J. Kennelly, A/Director of Service

Ms. D. Griffin, SO Corporate

Ms. C. Fitzgerald, SO Corporate

Mr. D. Ginty, A/Senior Planner

Mr. C. O'Sullivan, Dir. of Rds, Transp'n &

Mr. M. Scannell, Dir. Job Cr/Sust. ED

Ms. A. McAllen, Head of Finance

Mr. P. Corkery, Meetings Administrator

Mr. O. O'Shea, Press Officer

Mr. L. Quinlan, SEO

Ms. N. O'Sullivan, SEO Community

1. Chief Executive's Report

The Update Report from the Chief Executive dated 29 April, 2020 had been circulated to Elected Members.

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.'

May Bank Holiday Weekend

In accordance with the continuing restrictions on travel, car parks to beaches and a number of other amenity areas remain closed over the May Bank Holiday weekend. In relation to same there will be on-going patrols of these area by Council personnel with a possibility of further closures if requested by Gardaí. The need for adherence to the 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

As advised to the members, 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 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

As outlined to Members previously a large part of Housing Department activities have 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 has been notified to Members 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 to Social Housing constructions site. 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 direct Council sites meet this requirement and therefore they will not be recommencing under current restrictions.

A number of AHB 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 Project

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

Rose of Tralee

The announcement was made on Monday, April 27th 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 hugely disappointing.

I have 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 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 May 21st, 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 work at a sectoral level. We are engaged with the Department of Planning, Housing and Local Government to assess the likely impacts on our finances with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is difficult at this point to have full clarity as to what the impact is. However, a high level of planning is going on across the organisation and this is something I will continue to brief the members on.

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-Community & Voluntary Groups

Details of COVID-19 Emergency Fund were circulated to members 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.

Update on Co-ordination of Economic Inter-Agency approach

Planning

Changes to the planning system to cater for the COVID-19 restrictions have added 42 days (up to and including 9th 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 5-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 of February and the 29 March 2020, the decision cannot be made until after 9th of May 2020 to ensure that the public participation element has been completed; (the remaining period for public consultation will be added after the 9th 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 9th of May 2020.
- This legislative amendment will result in approximately 110 – 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 10th of April, thereafter, returning to normal levels of activity. Early indications this week point towards a marginal decline over the coming weeks.

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/>
- 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 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 & 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 & Development.

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

Update on Rent Pressure Zones

Members were advised last week that the Minister for Housing, Planning & Local Government had designated five new Rent Pressure Zones, which included the Local Electoral Area (LEA) of Killarney,

The Designation of the Killarney LEA as a Rent Pressure Zone came into effect on Wednesday, 22nd April.

There was a general welcome from the members to the comprehensive report and to the holding of the briefing to accommodate all members by way of the Webex teleconference.

In relation to queries regarding the impact of the pandemic generally, the CE referred to the importance of the leadership role of the Council in promoting the strong message of the need for adherence to the public health guidelines at this time. She pointed out that there had been a strong focus on business continuity by the Council making sure the Local Authority is fit for purpose during this pandemic and this will continue with a focus on how services would operate going forward when restrictions are eased but the continuing threat from COVID-19 requires new ways of operating

In response to a query regarding the Housing Construction Programme, the Chief Executive pointed out that Kerry County Council must follow the public health advice. Only schemes that could be completed in six weeks were allowed continue. Kerry County Council's schemes were not at this stage and so did not meet the requirement. The design phases of the Housing Construction Programme are being progressed to be ready for the Part 8 stage. The revised planning time limits in relation to consultation apply in relation to Part 8 projects. The revised limits also applied to the County Development Plan and Local Area Plans. Members would be updated at MD level in relation to projects for their areas.

A number of queries were raised regarding litter picking and grass cutting in parks and open spaces which were important in relation to the general appearance of areas and well-being of citizens. In response while acknowledging the points made the CE pointed out that the Council must operate under public health advice and work only on what are defined essential and critical works. As a Local Government sector this matter was raised with Government and the updated advice provided for such minimal works at this time. Outside of that only emergency/critical works can be done. In relation to more general road works after the restrictions were lifted proposals in relation to such works would be brought to each of the Municipal Districts for consideration once the approval for works to commence was given nationally.

In relation to comments regarding the cancellation of the Tidy Towns competition and small groups undertaking litter picking, the Chief Executive referred to public health advice, which should be adhered to and so any such works by tidy towns committees should not be carried out at this time.

Mr. J. Kennelly, A/Director of Service, outlined the general advice in relation to health and safety procedures regarding litter picking which was being fully adhered to by Council staff.

In response to a query regarding the COVID-19 Emergency Fund, Mr. M. Scannell gave an outline of the activities and types of expenditure that would be eligible. He pointed out that it was hoped to have all applications assessed within approximately two weeks.

In response to a query regarding the Community Support Fund, Mr. M. Scannell said at this point a re-assessment of all funding of the Local Authority is being undertaken and it is hoped to assess the Community Support Fund over the coming weeks in order to provide a comprehensive response.

Concerns were raised by a number of members in relation to access for fishermen to lakes and rivers, but it was pointed out that this was a matter for the Inland Fisheries.

Elected Members commended the work of the Community Helpline and referred to the positive feedback from users of the service. In response to a query, the Chief Executive stated the Community Helpline continues to experience high numbers of calls and will remain in place as long as it is needed.

2. Update on Co-ordination of Economic Inter-Agency Approach

a. Research

Mr. M. Scannell, Director of Service, outlined that the Economic Development Unit is conducting an analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy of the county. This involved taking existing data that is in place and carrying out additional surveys across the business community to have the most up to date information available. Kerry as a county is highly dependent of the tourism industry both from the accommodation and

food / beverage sectors but also other sectors such as the financial area who are heavily involved in supporting this area. The Tourism Contribution to Kerry's Economy in 2018 saw revenue of €661m. The Kerry Tourism Survey Preliminary Findings indicate that this will be significantly impacted. It is expected that the peak season for tourism June / July / August would be lost to the county for 2020. The statistics from this research give an indication that the economy of the county, at best, will perform at 75% in relation to output for 2020. Over the next few days the data will be further analysed by an Economist retained by the Council to put together a full analysis of the projected impact on the county. This analysis will be done in conjunction with Kerry County Council, I.T. Tralee and various sectors within the county on how the models will most accurately reflect how the county will move forward. It is expected this information will be available in the coming week.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the excellent work of the Economic Development Unit on the survey. The research results provide a definitive view of how the county is impacted. The results will be used as part of the Local Authority's case to Government for funding. The inter-agency partners across the county, Chambers Alliances, Hotels, etc., as well as various community sectors and interests, will also be informed by this research. This will help to provide a standardised message from the county. The presentation today is an early draft of the research results and work will continue to finalise the report, which will then be made available to Elected Members. It could then be discussed as a singular agenda item at a briefing with all Elected Members.

b. Inter-Agency Collaboration and Business Support Services

Ms. N. O'Sullivan, SEO Community, said the development of relationships with organisation, employers and businesses will be vital to support the economic recovery. Kerry County Council's economic recovery team has been working on an inter-agency response to support businesses in this difficult time. On foot of the success of the Community Call and as part of the inter-agency response, a freephone Business Support Line will be established. It is expected it will operate five days a week from 9am – 5pm. It is hoped the line will go live on 5 May 2020. The main function of the line is to direct queries to the relevant support agency. Businesses will be given full information on the supports available to help them. Support will be provided through a dedicated inter-agency structure, training gaps identified, and businesses prepared for challenges ahead in which there will be immediate needs, medium- and long-term needs. Not all sectors will come back to work at the same time and business models will have to change. Engagement with Kerry Education & Training Board will be critical in identifying training gaps, which will help businesses get ready to open. The essential work of the response will be the containment of COVID-19 and working in line with public health guidance. She acknowledged the inter-agency involvement in this development work over the last two weeks. The membership of the inter-agency group will grow as the role of that committee expands over the coming weeks.

In this regard Mr. M. Scannell, Director of Services, pointed out that a nominee from the Elected Members was being sought for inclusion on the group, similar to the democratic representation on the Kerry Community Response Forum. In response to a query on representation it was pointed out that the inter-agency group was currently comprised

of Kerry County Council, Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Office, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Local Development Companies. Following discussion it was agreed that the matter would be considered further at the next briefing.

In response to queries regarding promoting a shop-local campaign in preference to online shopping, the Chief Executive said this is and matter would be considered by the Business Recovery Unit under the Director for Economic Development.

c. Co-ordinated Messaging

Mr. M. Scannell, Director of Services, outlined that part of the supports services for businesses will be the improvement of messaging around awareness of supports available. The Kerry County Council website is being developed to have a three-pronged home page with Kerry County Council, Community, and Business services available. The website will be a portal, signposting people through the process and with connections to various websites, webinars, etc. It is intended to become a vital support for information to people online to assist them in accessing services and information, including contact information for the Business Support Line. Every effort is being made to have the website information as comprehensive and accessible as possible.

In relation to calls for strong messaging in relation to travel similar to the Easter period, the Chief Executive pointed out that Kerry County Council would continue to support the efforts of An Garda Síochána with messaging regarding travel restrictions over the Bank Holiday weekend. An Garda Síochána has advised that they would be carrying out a large number of checkpoints in the run up to and over the weekend to curtail non-essential travel.

3. Financial Update

Ms. A. McAllen, Head of Finance, outlined that the scale of the impact of COVID-19 on finances will be significant. The county's reliance on tourism and the amount of businesses relying on that sector means it is more keenly felt in Kerry. One-third of Kerry County Council's budget each year is made up of rates income. In the first week of March 2020 a total of 5,706 rate demands were issued to the value of €43m. Kerry County Council continues to engage with customers on an on-going basis. The impact on other income streams is also significant. A submission is being prepared by the Local Authority Sector for the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government for a compensation package in the first instance for rates. Early estimates are that Kerry County Council will lose over €24m in rates income. In addition, the Council is working to estimate the impact on other income streams. The Finance Department is actively reviewing the situation for Budget 2020 in relation to both income and expenditure.

In response to a query, the Chief Executive pointed out the impact on rates is hugely significant for the Council, with over half of the rates base lost. As a Local Government Sector it is critical to come together to make a case to Government for all Local Authorities. It is difficult to determine the impact on other income streams at this stage; however, work continues assessing the financial impact on the organisation.

4. Update on Rent Pressure Zones

Mr. D. Ginty, A/Senior Planner, referred to the designation of Killarney as a Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ), correspondence on which has been circulated to the Elected Members. The RPZ is effective from 22 April 2020 and brings Killarney under the remit of changes to the Planning Code announced in January 2019. New regulations apply across the Killarney Electoral Area for short term letting. If a property owner wishes to let their entire property for a period of up to 90 days, they will have to register their property with the Rented Tenancies Board. Planning permission is required to let an entire property beyond a 90-day period. Short term letting of second homes is unauthorised and will require planning permission. Information will be available on the Kerry County Council website in the coming days.

In response to a query, Mr. D. Ginty advised that Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) caps are not affected by Rent Pressure Zone designations. RPZs prevent Landlords from increasing rent by more than 4% per annum. In relation to a query regarding an application for planning for a permanent change of use of a domestic property in the Killarney Electoral Area, he pointed out that if it was regarded as an area with a need for housing in an RPZ, it would be considered unlikely that planning permission would be granted for change of use of a permanent residence into a holiday home.

5. Update on Council Meetings/Statutory Business

The Chief Executive referred to correspondence issued to the Elected Members last week in relation to Council Meetings. While it was accepted that Kerry County Council will have to meet as a Council when necessary to transact statutory business the advice at this time is that this should be done on the basis of a quorum being in attendance.

A number of Members referred to the MD briefings held on the previous week via Webex and the current meeting again using Webex and expressed their satisfaction at the way these briefings had worked. It was agreed that a further COVID-19 briefing for Municipal Districts, via Webex/Tele-conferencing, would be held on Wednesday, 6 May 2020 at 10.30 a.m. Details regarding access will be forwarded with the invitation to the briefing. Municipal District briefings to be rotated with briefings to Full Council on an alternate basis or as required.

This concluded the briefing.