



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

Coiste Polasaí Straitéiseach Gnóthaí Forbairt Eacnamaíochta & Fiontraíochta

Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Cruinniú/Meeting

Tuesday 30th June, 2020 - Dé Máirt 30 Meitheamh

Council Office, Galway County Council, Galway

Members in attendance:

Cllr Karey McHugh (Chair)	Galway County Council
Cllr David Collins	Galway County Council
Cllr Declan Geraghty	Galway County Council
Cllr Gerry Finnerty	Galway County Council
Cllr Thomas Welby	Galway County Council
Cllr Mary Hoade	Galway County Council
Dave Hickey	Business Representative
Dan Dowling	Community Representative
Marian Spellman	Trade Union Representative
Paul Carey	Business/Construction Sector Representative

Present:

Alan Farrell	Galway County Council
Kieran Coyne	Galway County Council
Diane Gallagher	Galway County Council
Breda Fox	Galway County Council
Ciaran Wynne	Galway County Council
Eimear Dolan	Galway County Council
Ruth Mulhern	Galway County Council

Minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development & Enterprise SPC held on 19 May 2020

Cllr Karey McHugh welcomed everyone to the meeting. The minutes of the meeting held on the 19th May 2020 were approved on the proposal of Dave Hickey and seconded by Cllr Mary Hoade.

Cllr McHugh introduced the first of today's speakers Breda Fox Head of Enterprise, Galway County Council

1. Local Enterprise Office

Breda Fox welcomed all the members and conveyed her apologies for not being available to attend the meeting held on May 19th.

Ms. Fox outlined the supports available through the Local Enterprise Office due to Covid, these supports are largely extensions of the existing supports such as, advisory support, mentoring and Trading Online Vouchers. All these supports are rolled out by all the 31 Local Enterprise Offices and full details of the Covid supports on offer can be found by visiting www.localenterprise.ie/response. The main activity of the Local Enterprise office is that they are a first stop shop for anyone looking to start up a new business.

Since 16th March and throughout lockdown the Local Enterprise Office have had 540 participants on 27 programs and have had 254 people partake in individual 1:1 business advisory sessions. Ms. Fox outlined some of the support schemes on offer from the Local Enterprise Office.

Business Continuity Voucher Scheme:

During lockdown the Business Continuity Voucher Scheme was announced by Minister Heather Humphries. Under the Scheme Businesses employing up to 50 staff were eligible to apply for a Business Continuity Voucher to the value of €2,500 towards third party consultancy costs to assist with developing short-term and long-term strategies to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the voucher is to provide contingency planning advice to assist businesses to continue trading through the crisis. The Scheme opened on the 26th March until 15th May. There have been 815 applications with an almost 80% approval rate. Unlike the Trading Online Voucher Scheme the Business Continuity Voucher Scheme was open to all Sectors including Tourism, Hospitality, Retail and Construction. The 20% of businesses that did not qualify for the scheme have been offered other supports such as advisory sessions and mentoring.

Trading Online Voucher:

This is a grant scheme that was brought in by Denis Naughten in 2015. Business can apply for up to €2,500 for ecommerce and digital marketing activities (70% - 30% split). Match funding for clients has been reduced from 50% to 10%. 2nd applications for a Trading Online Voucher are now permitted for ecommerce system upgrades. The volume of applications so far this year have trebled. In 2019 70 Trading Online Voucher applications were approved, so far in 2020 215 have been approved. One of the main challenges facing the Local Enterprise Office now is administrative. They are currently out of funds to process any further applications but hope to get allocated further funding from Enterprise Ireland.

Microfinance Ireland:

Business loans of up to €50,000 are available for eligible micro-enterprises i.e business of less than 10 employees and up to €2 million turnover that are currently trading. Businesses that are struggling to get finance from a bank can apply to Microfinance Ireland for a loan through the Local Enterprise Office. Pre Covid businesses could apply for a maximum of €25,000, this has now increased to €50,000 with an interest rate of 4.5%. Loans may be used for working capital and required business changes as a result of Covid 19. Loan terms are typically up to 3 years. Since 16th March there have been 7 approvals to the value of €195k.

Financial Supports:

There have been 2 Evaluation Committee Meetings so far in 2020. On the 24th June the Local Enterprise Office will be holding the first virtual Evaluation Committee Meeting. To date in 2020 there has been €145k approved to support 20 new jobs in 3 projects. The Local Enterprise Office are on track with their overall budget for 2020.

Breda Fox then concluded her presentation and asked if there were any questions from the members.

Dan Dowling asked if someone could apply for 2 loans?

Breda Fox stated that once they can show their eligibility to repay there is nothing to stop them from applying for a second loan.

Cllr Declan Geraghty asked how many businesses are there in Galway?

Breda Fox advised that there are currently 8,300 Micro Enterprises in Galway including the self-employed with up to 10 employees.

Cllr Declan Geraghty asked if those operating as a one-man business can apply for the Microfinance Loan.

Breda Fox advised that yes, they could apply as long as they can show their ability to repay.

Dave Hickey asked what learnings have come from the Covid 19 crisis regarding business preparedness?

Breda Fox stated that she was surprised at the lack of knowledge that small businesses have about their businesses. She stated that the value of the Business Continuity Voucher is to help businesses put a key management system in place.

Dave Hickey asked if for the rest of 2020/2021 there will be programmes put in place to look at ways of helping businesses learn more about business management?

Breda Fox advised that Lean for Micro intervention will be an option for businesses looking for practical help.

Cllr Thomas Welby asked how someone can go about becoming a mentor for the Local Enterprise Office?

Breda Fox advised that opportunities to join the mentor panel are advertised every 2 years and that the next round of applications will be in 2021. Ms Fox advised that in order to join the panel applicants need to have a core skill set in Micro-Enterprises. The panel is set up across all technical aspects of running a business.

Cllr Declan Geraghty asked how the Local Enterprise Office were coping with regard to staffing levels?

Breda Fox stated that administrative support is currently a challenge but that Alan Farrell has been supportive in providing her with temporary administrative staff and that there is a request into Enterprise Ireland for funding for 3 additional staff.

Cllr Declan Geraghty stated that a lot of businesses are not aware of the grants and supports on offer from the Local Enterprise Office and asked if going forward could business Accountants be made more aware of the offerings of the Local Enterprise Office as they would be best placed to advise their clients. Cllr Geraghty wanted to know if there is anything the SPC can do to get the word out to the public and asked the members for their suggestions?

Breda Fox acknowledged that there is a lack of knowledge out there in particular with businesses like Accountants who are dealing directly with the small business owners.

Cllr Thomas Welby suggested that the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) hold a seminar on the supports on offer from the Local Enterprise Offices. Cllr Welby advised that on most of these seminars there are up to 1/3 of all Council members and that this could be a good way of getting the word out to small business owners.

Breda Fox advised that she has been on webinars organised through the Galway Chamber of Commerce that advise of the services on offer from the Local Enterprise Office.

Cllr Mary Hoade stated that she was concerned that a lot of business are not associated with the Chamber of Commerce.

Alan Farrell advised that the Council will be looking at how they can promote the Local Enterprise Office schemes and raise awareness of what is on offer.

Breda Fox stated that one of the main problems is that some business owners don't think they qualify for the supports on offer and that is important for them to make contact with the office.

Paul Carey stated that he knows of a few small businesses that have applied to various sectors for financial support and got their Accountants to complete and submit the applications, by the time the applications were completed most of the funding received ended up being paid to the Accountant for their work in submitting the application.

Cllr Declan Geraghty expressed his disappointment with the Galway Chamber of Commerce and said that he felt they forget about the small businesses.

Cllr David Collins stated that huge investment is needed to go into the Local Enterprise Office. Cllr Collins stated that he had spoken with a lot of people that have gotten support from the Local Enterprise Office and were extremely grateful for the help received.

Dan Dowling stated that all companies should have a risk assessment carried out and know how to future proof their company.

This concluded the Local Enterprise Office Q&A

2. Regeneration

Cllr Kary McHugh introduced Ciaran Wynne, Head of Regeneration Team

Ciaran Wynne welcomed the members. Mr. Wynne gave an update on the work of the Regeneration Team to date.

Under Project Ireland 2040, funding has been provided for the Department of Rural and Community Developments Rural Development Investment Programme of which a key element is the RRDF (Rural Regeneration Development Fund).

The Rural Regeneration Development Fund was established in 2019 and seeks to provide investment to support urban renewal, strengthen and build resilience in rural communities and assist in the regeneration of towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000.

To date there have been three funding calls for a mix of Category 1 (shovel ready) and Category 2 (detailed development of projects to enable achievement of Category 1 readiness).

Mr. Wynne advised that to date funding has been received for the following projects:

- Athenry Bia Innovator and Town Centre renewal
- Tuam Masterplan
- Dunmore
- Kinvara
- Loughrea Town Hall (Category 2)

Tuam Masterplan:

Hogarths Consulting were appointed in January 2020 to oversee this project. The first public consultation was held in March and a draft conceptual masterplan was presented at a steering group in June. Further engagement with public groups is underway with an expected final Masterplan to be completed in September 2020.

Dunmore:

This project involves the development of a detailed design for the removal of derelict properties from Dunmore to create an improved aesthetic for Bridge Street and to enhance the remaining buildings in terms of accessibility and visibility. It is currently at public consultation stage where route options have been identified.

Kinvara Boardwalk:

The Kinvara Boardwalk project involves the development of detailed designs and bringing to planning stage a boardwalk/walkway to assure safe pedestrian access from Kinvara village to the National heritage site on the N67. Discussions are currently ongoing with the NRDO office regarding realignment of the N67.

Loughrea:

This project will regenerate Loughrea Town Hall, which is a derelict heritage building in the centre of the town, to provide a cultural, enterprise and tourism hub. The project will help drive growth in Loughrea and place a historic asset back into everyday use in the town centre. This project is currently out to tender.

Mr. Wynne informed the members that Galway County Council have been successful in the most recent RRDF funding call. They have received funding in the sum of €1,192,855 for Portumna and a further €792,030 has been allocated to Clifden.

Mr. Wynne concluded his presentation. Alan Farrell stated that he is conscious of the need for geographical balance and that the Regeneration team are now in place to put together applications and to drive projects for County Galway towns, while also guiding the work of the Economic Rural & Community Development schemes e.g. CLÁR and ORIS for smaller towns.

Mr. Wynne asked the members if they had any questions in relation to Regeneration.

Mr. Dan Dowling asked if it was the case that towns around Ballinasloe have received funding but that Ballinasloe has not?

Mr. Alan Farrell stated that the town enhancement works in Ballinasloe must be acknowledged.

There were no further questions from the members.

3. Rural & Economic Schemes

Cllr Karey McHugh introduced Eimear Dolan, Rural & Economic Section

Eimear Dolan welcomed the members and gave them an overview of the work of the Rural & Economic Section. Ms. Dolan advised that this presentation would focus mainly on the current schemes that are open for application.

Supports for Economic Development & Enterprise:

Ms Dolan advised that In the Service Supports the Economic Rural & Community Development unit work under the Vision and Objectives of the Regional AEC, County Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) and County Development Plan. Sustainable Development to make areas attractive to live work and visit.

This work has a strong Rural Development Focus in smaller town and village and dispersed rural areas – linking it to the regenerative approach of RRDF for larger towns, rural tourism, broadband, re-use and connectivity of local assets. The Services target Community and Business Organisations. Individual Businesses are engaged with but mainly as part of our Consultative Processes, Strategies, Networks, Collectivised Projects rather than direct grants or supports. Individual Artists/Creatives may interact with Arts Service which is integrated with our Department. A key focus right now, is maximising opportunities under the Rural Development Investment Programme for County Galway, In particular - Department of Community & Rural Development Schemes and assisting areas to pivot to new challenges presented by COVID_19, including Soft Supports and Capital.

Ms. Dolan gave an outline of the schemes currently open for applications with closing date of 13th July.

Town & Village:

Ms. Dolan advised that in 2020, the Rural Development Investment Programme, including the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, is being tailored to address the emerging challenges associated with COVID-19, including a new Accelerated Measure.

CLÁR:

Eimear Dolan advised that under the CLÁR scheme there is a new Community Safety and Outdoor Recreation Space category, this is a new measure post COVID, allowing for 10 projects up to a maximum of €50,000. Ms. Dolan advised that the CLÁR applications are only open to towns/villages in the designated CLÁR areas.

ORIS:

Eimear Dolan advised that the Outdoor Recreation Scheme measure 1 is now open, with a closing date of 13th July, measures 2 & 3 will remain open until 16th October. Ms. Dolan outlined that the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme is primarily for the upgrade of trails and the use of outdoor spaces with a sharper focus on this area post COVID. Ms. Dolan advised that projects approved under the Outdoor Recreation Scheme can now get up to 90% funding.

AEC Hub Outreach Scheme:

Eimear Dolan outlined that the Hub Outreach Scheme is Currently open with a closing date of July 14th. This is a grant of up to €5,000 for hubs to prepare for re-opening after Covid-19 (90% funded). There are 12 operational hubs in Galway and each of these have been contacted by AEC Officer Mr. Brian Leonard to inform them of the scheme.

Eimear Dolan acknowledged that the window to get applications submitted is tight but that the Council will be working closely with the Municipal Districts to prioritise projects under the various schemes.

Ms. Dolan concluded her presentation and asked the members if they had any questions.

Cllr Declan Geraghty made an observation that there is no funding for the maintenance of facilities/projects that are granted under these schemes after they are completed e.g. playgrounds that are in need of maintenance. Cllr Geraghty asked that the Council look into a way that additional funding can be applied for by groups for maintenance of these facilities where the community cannot afford the costs. Cllr Geraghty also noted that he is in favour of the hubs and thinks they are a great facility and need to be supported.

Cllr David Collins asked how groups can go about getting planning for walkways/trails if it goes through a few different landowners property?

Ms. Eimear Dolan advised that there are good national systems in place through the national trails office and that if any group has a specific query that the ERCD Section can look into it for them. Ms. Dolan advised that landowner agreement is needed.

Cllr Mary Hoade asked if the Hubs are aware of the Hub Outreach Scheme and also that there is confusion within the communities regarding CLÁR, Town & Village and ORIS applications:

Ms. Eimear Dolan advised that the AEC Officer Brian Leonard has spoken to each of the Hubs about the scheme. Ms. Dolan informed the members that a guideline has issued today through the Public Participation Network giving guidance on the application process for all 3 schemes. Ms. Dolan advised that the Economic Rural & Development Unit will assist any groups that are unsure which scheme they should apply for and encouraged people to make contact with the office.

Restart Grant:

Mr. Kieran Coyne gave a brief outline of the Restart Grant which is currently being rolled out through the Finance Section.

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation has approved a restart grant aimed at helping micro and small businesses with the costs associated with reopening and reemploying workers following COVID-19 closures.

To avail of the Restart Grant, applicants must be a business that has a commercially rateable premises and:

- Have an annual turnover of less than €5m and employ between 1 to 50 people;
- Have suffered a projected 25%+ loss in turnover between start of April and end June 2020;
- Commit to remain open or to reopen if it was closed;
- Declare the intention to retain employees that are on The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme and re-employ staff on the Pandemic Unemployment Payment as business recovers.
- Is a rateable and trading commercial business
- The grant will be equivalent to the rates bill of the business in 2019, or a minimum payment of €2,000, whichever is the higher, and will be subject to a maximum payment of €10,000.

Eligible businesses who have stayed open throughout the crisis, as well as those who are reopening are encouraged to apply now for the Restart Grant. These applications will be prioritised for payment by Galway County Council. Up to Monday June 22nd Galway County Council received 1,208 applications of which 854 were valid applications of which 584 applications have been processed to date and €1.956m has been paid out.

Breda Fox advised that the Restart Grant is a self-declaration application and that it can take in to account the cost of purchasing PPE.

Cllr Thomas Welby stated that queries have been raised by non-rateable businesses who are not eligible for the scheme e.g. tour boat operators.

Ruth Mulhern Tourism Officer stated that Fáilte Ireland are currently looking at rolling out a scheme to help tourism businesses that may not be eligible for the Restart Grant but that nothing had been finalised to date.

4. Tourism

Cllr Karey McHugh introduced Ruth Mulhern, Tourism Officer.

Ms. Ruth Mulhern introduced herself to the members and stated that she looked forward to working with them.

Ms. Mulhern joined the County Council in December 2019 and gave the members a brief overview of the work that she will be carrying out

Ms. Mulhern stated that Irelands Hidden Heartlands and The Wild Atlantic Way are both hugely important for Galway as a tourist destination and that she is continuously working closely with both groups. Ms. Mulhern advised that there are tourism opportunities throughout County Galway and that learnings can be taken from larger towns such as Portumna and Clifden and be transferred to our smaller towns. Ms. Mulhern advised that journalists are now looking for articles and photos of County Galway to use in editorial pieces, an example of this was an article in last weekend's Irish Independent about Portumna, it is therefore important that we have a good photo bank of pictures to showcase County Galway. Ms. Mulhern stated that there is going to be a big push on domestic tourism for the foreseeable future due to the COVID 19 crisis. Ms. Mulhern advised that there are up to 21,000 hotel and hospitality jobs in County Galway and that 15,000 of those jobs are at risk now as a result of COVID 19,

Ms. Mulhern informed the members that Clifden has been selected for destination town funding in Galway and will receive €500,000 to develop a masterplan for the town.

Ms. Mulhern advised that Galway County Council are continuing to support festivals through the Community Support Scheme grants, these grants support both small and large festivals throughout the County. Ms. Mulhern stated that one of her primary jobs will be to work on a Tourism Strategy for County Galway which will set out actions and policies around these actions for the purpose of promoting economic growth. Ms. Mulhern stated that she will be partnering with Fáilte Ireland to carry out a survey of tourism in County Galway and that is worthwhile having a well thought out and research plan, a consultation process will be needed in order to complete a comprehensive tourism plan for County Galway. Ms. Mulhern advised that towns in the South, East and West have been flagged as tourism hotspots in County Galway such as Tuam.

Ms. Mulhern asked the members if they had any questions.

Cllr Karey McHugh stated that she was happy to see East Galway mentioned in relation to tourism in Galway and that the consultation process is a good idea and will be needed in order to see what can be done and promoted throughout the whole County.

Cllr Declan Geraghty stated that it is encouraging that we now have a Tourism Officer as Galway has so much potential, he asked that towns in East Galway not be forgotten when

promoting Galway as a tourist destination. Cllr Geraghty stated that it is important that we find a right balance e.g. when assessing the pedestrianisation of town centres.

Ms. Mulhern stated that there is great value in creating town spaces where possible.

Cllr Karey McHugh stated that trialling of pedestrianisation in town centres could be a possibility.

Cllr Thomas Welby stated that Galway has so much to sell and a good story to tell, he stated that towns such as Oughterard have so much potential and we need to be getting people to stop in these towns and spend money. Cllr Welby stated that people are worried about change but that we need to learn to adapt in order to get tourists to visit. Cllr Welby stated that it is important that we free up spaces in town centres and encourage pedestrianisation. Cllr Welby stated that he looks forward to working with Ruth Mulhern.

Cllr Declan Geraghty made an observation that in County Roscommon towns there is a one-hour free parking incentive in place and asked if this could be rolled out in County Galway towns.

Cllr Karey McHugh advised that she would ask the Roads and Transportation SPC to look at this as an option possibly after 11 am in the mornings.

This concluded the Tourism Q&A

Cllr Karey McHugh confirmed that the remaining meetings will take place on the following dates:

Tuesday 13th October at 10:30

Tuesday 1st December at 14:30

AOB

Cllr Karey McHugh highlighted that the Town Enhancement Scheme which was launched in Athenry under the Rural Regeneration Development Fund is a pilot scheme and that it can be revisited to see if it is working.

Cllr Karey McHugh asked if there was any other business.

As there was no other business to be discussed Cllr McHugh thanked all for attending and stated that the committee has a good platform going forward.

The meeting then concluded.

