Information Note

February, 2023

Development of new Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP)

As the development of new LECPs continues, it is important to keep in mind some key aims:

- The LECP Guidelines, issued in November 2021, and have been developed to support integrated planning for both the community and economic sector at a local level, planning which will ensure that communities grow in a strong and inclusive way.

- The new guidelines will assist with the development of the LECPs for local areas, where they should be a key focus on sustainability, consultation and engagement with local communities and businesses.

- Local Authorities/LCDCs will use the guidelines to develop effective and inclusive LECPs for their areas, ensuring full participation by communities and business people alike.

- It is important to recognise that the LECP is an important planning document which sets out how local government and other stakeholders can work together to ensure that all initiatives, programmes and projects support an improved quality of life for people living and working in the county.

- A key function of LCDCs is to ensure consistency and alignment of the LECP with existing policies, strategies, priorities and to ensure that they are agile in order to respond to emerging needs. These are particularly important in development of relevant, aligned and effective LECPs.

As the LECP is a statutory requirement, all LAs should prioritise this important work. LAs are expected to have LECPs in place in 2023. The LECP Guidelines, which are available in both English and Irish, plus the recording and presentations from the various events/training webinars can be found on the Gov.ie website here. Should you have any queries in relation to the above, please contact us at lcdcsupport@drcd.gov.ie

LCDC Review

Recommendation 4

The new LCDC Support SharePoint site was launched in late 2021 and invitations to the site were issued to all LCDCs. To date, the LGMA have added 63 members/ local authority staff to the portal.

DRCD has made arrangements to make the Sharepoint site available to up to three staff members per LA and have asked each Chief Officer to revert to the Department with these details or any updates as soon as possible.

Recommendation 9

The Department has recently commenced a review of the ASR Funding currently paid to local authorities. On 31st August, a survey issued to local authority Chief Executives and Chief Officers for completion by Wednesday 21st September 2022.

The surveys will allow us to gain a better understanding of the LCDC support function within each area and the manner in which the funding is currently utilised. When the analysis of the survey data is complete, it is proposed to hold a number of regional Focus Groups which will give stakeholders an opportunity to help share their experiences and shape ASR funding support going forward. Said Focus Groups will take place in the coming weeks with dates yet to be confirmed. Whilst the Department is committed to continued financial support to assist the LCDCs, at present the Department cannot give any commitment as to the mechanism for payment nor the individual allocations from 2023 onward.

Support for Local Community Development Committees

Chief Officer Fora

DRCD representatives continue to attend regular Chief Officer Meetings and provide Departmental updates which are sent to the Chair for circulation to all Chief Officers in that region.

Information sharing

The LCDC Support team can be contacted at LCDCSupport@DRCD.gov.ie to answer queries. Further information is provided in the form of DRCD press releases and other relevant updates from the Department and beyond.

Other updates

Safe Ireland are the national development and co-ordination body working to eradicate Domestic Violence and are key partners in advancing the D/Justice-led 'Third National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy 2022-26', agreed by Government in June. Safe Ireland are Advisors to D/Justice on this work.

In this context DRCD met recently with Safe Ireland to discuss the on-going work around the 3rd National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV) Strategy. At this point we just wish to raise awareness of this new strategy and to draw attention to the fact that this is moving to a more regulated space with a working group established to look at the establishment of a statutory agency to oversee and discussions on-going as to how the strategy can be brought from the national to local level. In time there is likely to be statutory obligations at both a national and local level. Safe Ireland in their work with the Department of Justice as advisors on the Strategy continue to highlight the need for an integrated national response, with a focus on developing community support for the new refuges. They see an engagement with LCDCs (as well as other relevant local structures) as a possible way to advance this work. Safe Ireland are aware that the next iteration of LECPS (2022-28) are currently being developed and as such may be in touch directly with Chief Officers in some areas over the coming weeks.

Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities

The 2023 work plan has now been agreed by the Cross-Sectoral Group on Local and Community Development. The focus for 2023 will include:

- *Objective 2: Training Needs/Capacity Building in the Community & Voluntary Sector*

Research on the Training Needs of the C&V sector is currently being finalised. Once completed, the resultant research reports will inform recommendations and an implementation plan will be agreed.

- *Objective 3: Support the participation of marginalised communities in Decision-Making Structures*

Work will continue on this Dormant Accounts Funded project in 2023. As one aspect of this work DRCD supported Pobal and civil society organisations to collaboratively co-design an engagement good practice guide. 'A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making' was launched by Minister of State Joe O'Brien on 2nd February at the IHREC Centre in Dublin. This guide is designed to support local consultation and engagement processes, including: planning, implementation (putting processes in place) and review. It focuses on engaging marginalised communities and the organisations that represent them.

Four pilots are currently running in Galway City, Clare, Wicklow and Fingal as part of this project. The learnings from these pilots will be shared in due course, including through a revised version of the Guide referred to above.

Community and Voluntary Energy Support Scheme (CVESS)

The Community and Voluntary Energy Support Scheme (CVESS) was launched on 21st November to provide for a once-off payment to eligible charities and community and voluntary sector organisations towards their energy costs for 2022. The application process has now been streamlined for organisations with multiple facilities or branches and will remain open until 24th February 2023. The first tranche of 180 successful organisations was announced in December with further announcements expected shortly.

Note: Full scheme details are available here on the Pobal.ie website.

Public Participation Networks

Funding in 2022

Each PPN will receive an increase of €10,000 to its core funding in 2023. This will issue with the first tranche of funding in 2023. Total funding issued by DRCD to each PPN in 2023 will therefore consist of Core funding of €60,000 and Ring-fenced support worker funding of €25,700.

National PPN Advisory Group

The next meeting of the National Advisory Group will take place in the first quarter of 2023.

The Group includes one representative each from the Community and Voluntary, Environmental and Social Inclusion sectors, three PPN Volunteers – one each representing the three different sectors, three PPN resource workers and two Local Authority staff (one at Director of Service level and one directly supporting a PPN). A PO from the DRCD chairs the Group with the Department providing the secretariat also.

National Public Participation Network Annual Conference 2022

This year's Annual Conference will be hosted by Wicklow PPN in October 2023.

PPN Annual Report 2021

The PPN Annual Report 2021 has been distributed to all PPNs and stakeholders.

PPN Communications Campaign.

A sub group of the National Advisory Group has been set up to deliver a Communications Campaign for PPNs. Stakeholders recommended the need to increase the visibility of PPNs on a National Level promoting the PPN across Government departments, LAs and within communities. A contract has been signed with Alice PR & Events, and work on the project is underway.
The PPNs voted to keep their original logos and they also voted on a national logo. Alice PR are currently working with PPNs as all logos will now share the same typeface.
A number of audience testing focus groups were conducted in December to gauge responses to the existing visuals and slogans and a report on the audience testing process was circulated to the subgroup.
The next meeting of the Communications sub-group will take place on Monday the 23rd of January.

PPN Structural Review

Mazars carried out an extensive review of PPN structures in 2021. The final report from the review has now been published on the DRCD website. A Working Group of stakeholders (including LA personnel) is being set up to oversee and progress the Implementation Roadmap as a follow-up to the review.

The next meeting of the Implementation working group will take place on the 31st of January.

Additional Supports
The Wheel in conjunction with Adare HRM are offering PPNs support with HR Issues, a dedicated helpline has been set up and PPNs can make contact if they have issues they would like to address.

The Wheel have also set up two webinars for PPNs taking place in December. The first webinar will be on- ‘Basics of Employment and HR Practice’. The second webinar will look at ‘Successful communications for community and voluntary groups, with a focus on the roles of volunteer committee members.' All PPNs have been invited to sign up for both webinars.

PEACE PLUS

PEACE PLUS is a new cross-border EU funding programme for the period 2021-27, which will succeed both of the current (2014-20) PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes. The combination of the PEACE and INTERREG type activities in a single programme represents the inclusion of wider economic, social and environmental activities.

The PEACE PLUS Programme Area includes Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth). However, in a change from previous PEACE programmes, activities can involve partners and activity outside the programme area, as long as the projects being funded are making a contribution to the objectives of the programme and benefit citizens within the programme area.

The value of the new PEACE PLUS programme is €1.145 billion (indicative value) and this programme represents an opportunity to continue to fund peace building interventions alongside activities which help to make the region a more prosperous, healthier place to live through funding areas of mutual interest on a cross-border basis.

The Special EU Programmes Body, or SEUPB, which is the Managing Authority for both the PEACE and INTERREG programmes, has engaged with representatives from key organisations and Government Departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland Government Departments since July 2019 on the development of the PEACE PLUS Programme and to gather views on framing the new programme.

The SEUPB reviewed all the submissions received under the consultation process and this feed into the revised draft programme document which was finalised and submitted to the Irish Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the North South Ministerial Council for approval.

The SEUPB and relevant Government Departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland have finalised the PEACE Plus performance framework.

The draft programme document was recently approved in both jurisdictions and the draft programme was submitted to the EU Commission for its consideration.

The Commission has adopted the PEACE Plus programme, however, there are formal processes that are required to take place prior to the programmes official launch, which is likely to be Q1 2023.

The SEUPB have appointed consultants to support the Local Authorities on the development of the Local Authority Action Plans. The consultants have commenced engagement with the Local Authorities and relevant Government Departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland, in particular in relation to community planning approaches, relevant strategies and polices to be considered during the development of the plans.

The Department are currently working with the SEUPB and relevant NI Departments on guidance documents and calls for applications under the PEACE Plus Programme, which will open shortly after the launch of the programme, once approved by the Programme Monitoring Committee. As with previous PEACE Programmes, it won't be possible to open all Calls together at the start of the Programme and so the SEUPB are currently developing a Schedule of Calls and Implementation Plan.

Investment Area 1.1 Local Authority Community Led Peace Action Plans and 3.3 Victims and Survivors have been identified as two of the initial calls to be launched, with Investment Area 1.4 Reimaging Communities and Investment Area 1.3 Building Positive Relations expected to launch shortly afterwards. It is anticipated that Investment area 2.4 – Smart Towns and Villages and Investment Area 4.2 Rural Regeneration and Social Inclusion will be launched during Q2 – Q3 2023, with pre application support workshops anticipated for these investment areas in March 2023.

Pre application support workshops have commenced since July 2022, the first of which took place on 8th July for Investment Area 1.4 Reimaging Communities, followed by Investment Area 1.1 Local Authority Community Led Peace Action Plans on 22nd September and Investment Area 1.3 Building Positive Relations on 28th September. These workshops focused on an overview of the PEACE Plus Programme, the relevant Investment Area, guidance on concept notes and policy interests from a Northern Ireland and Ireland perspective. Full details on the development of the PEACE Plus Programme and pre application support workshop recordings are available on the SEUPB website.

Rural Schemes

National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (no update)

Minister Heather Humphreys launched the new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (NORS) '*Embracing Ireland's Outdoors'* on the 28th November in Castlecomer Discovery Park, Co Kilkenny. **Link here**

The new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors 2023-2027*, is a stakeholder-led, cross governmental strategy that will bring about cohesive and sustainable development of the outdoor recreation sector and ensure a coordinated national approach to outdoor recreation. It provides a vision and an overarching framework for the growth and development of outdoor recreation in Ireland, drawing together the many strategies, programmes, agencies and elements in Ireland's outdoor recreation sector around a shared vision.

We would welcome the support of the RCTCH Committee in informing all Local Authorities that the NORS has now been launched.

There are six strategic objectives that underpin the strategy: Leadership, Awareness, Environment, Access, Expertise and Opportunities. The strategy has a detailed Action Plan, containing 95 Actions, which have been agreed with all the relevant Departments. In the same manner as the Our Rural Future, the Action Plan will be used to monitor the implementation of the Strategy.

Along with DRCD, Sport Ireland will assume a co-leadership role for the implementation of the Strategy. The Strategy aims to increase the number of people active in the outdoors, especially young people and under-represented groups and also how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly.

The delivery of the Strategy will be overseen by a Comhairle na Tuaithe through the establishment of a Strategy Oversight Group with an Annual Implementation Plan and regular Progress Reports.

An action in the Strategy is the establishment of County Outdoor Recreation Committees (CORCs). It also sees a key role for the Local Sports Partnerships in the strategic coordination of outdoor recreation at a County level. The CORCs will be made up of the various outdoor recreation stakeholders e.g. Fáilte, LDCs, Coillte, community trails management groups etc. The CORCs will be established by the Local Sports Partnership (LSPs). Commencing on a pilot basis (c.2-3 areas) funding will be provided to the LSPs for an Outdoor

Recreation position (grade to be determined following consultation with Sport Ireland, CCMA and DHLGH).

County Outdoor Recreation Committees will develop County Outdoor Recreation Plans identifying the amenities that are in the county and also any gaps. This will create a more strategic approach and ensure that available funding and resources are better aligned with national and county priorities.

Walks Scheme

Minister Humphreys published a review of the Walks Scheme in September 2021. A copy of the report is available here. It sets out a number of recommendations aimed at enhancing the Walks Scheme and the role of Rural Recreation Officers, and it will be implemented in consultation with key stakeholders.

In addition, Minister Humphreys also announced 31 new walking trails under the Walks Scheme and funding for 8 new Rural Recreation Officer posts. All 8 new Rural Recreation Officers have now been recruited and are engaging with the landowners on the new trails so that they commence receiving participant payment under the scheme.

There are currently 55 trails on the Walk Scheme with 2,246 participants/landowners. Four new trails are joining in Q1.

When the new trails are brought into the scheme there will be 79 walks in total on the Scheme and the number of participants /landowners to over 2,400. We expect a further expansion of the Walks Scheme once all the approved walks have been brought on to the scheme.

On 10th August, Minister Humphreys announced funding of almost €1 million to support and improve some 446 walking trails across the country. Under the initiative, grants of €1,000 - €3,000 was made available to 175 community trail management organisations who are responsible for the management of trails throughout rural Ireland. The groups will be able to use the grant to maintain and improve their local trail and promote its use to visitors. 131 applications for grant funding have been processed and funding of €826,319.80 has been paid to date. Any remaining applications are currently being assessed.

<u>CLÁR</u>

The CLÁR programme provides funding under a number of different measures for small-scale infrastructural projects in designated rural areas. The 2022 CLÁR programme was launched on the 24th February last with a total budget of €7 million, this was an increase of €1.5 million on the 2021 allocation.

The measures to be included in the CLÁR programme are reviewed and revised each year, if appropriate.

The measures funded under CLÁR 2022 were:

Measure 1: Developing Community Facilities & Amenities (Grant Amounts: Up to €50,000.);

Measure 2: Mobility, Cancer Care and Community First Responders Transport (Grant Amounts: Up to €100,000.);

Measure 3: Our Islands (Grant Amounts: Up to €120,000.).

Successful applicants under all Measures of the 2022 CLÁR programme have been announced. Details as follows:

- €1.62 million of funding awarded to support the purchase of a record 32 vehicles in rural communities throughout Ireland.
- €412,534 of funding awarded to support 11 various projects under 'Our Islands' a new Measure introduced for 2022.
- €10.1 million awarded to support 249 projects under Tranche 1 and 2 of Measure 1 in support of the development of community facilities and amenities nationwide.

In total almost €12.2million was approved for 292 projects under the CLÁR 2022 programme.

The full list of successful CLÁR 2022 projects and the successful projects from previous years are available on the Department's website at www.gov.ie/drcd.

The Measures for the next launch of the programme are currently being considered.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) for 2022 was launched by Minister Humphreys on Friday the 18th of February with an overall fund of €15 million secured under Budget 2022. Applications were invited under the following Measures:

- **Measure 1:** Small Scale Repair/Development/Promotion and Marketing (Grant Amounts: Up to €30,000);
- **Measure 2:** Medium Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Trail/Amenity Development (Grant Amounts: Up to €200,000);
- **Measure 3:** Strategic Large Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Strategic Trail/Amenity Development (Grant amounts: Up to €500,000);
- **Project Development Measure:** Development costs for Strategic large Scale Projects (Grant amounts: Up to €50,000).

Successful projects under all Measures of the 2022 Scheme have been announced.

Details as follows:

- €4.3 million of funding awarded under Measure 1 of the scheme to improve 163 outdoor amenities across the country.
- €7.5 million invested under Measure 2 to support 45 medium scale projects nationwide.
- €6.4 million of funding awarded under Measure 3 to support 14 strategic large scale projects.
- €1.7 million invested under the Project Development Measure to support 37 outdoor projects that are currently at the early stage of development.

Further details are available on the DRCD website.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme & Town Centre First

The Programme for Government included a commitment to bring forward an expanded Town and Village Renewal Scheme to bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use and to promote residential occupancy.

Our Rural Future places a particular focus on enabling remote working in rural communities and revitalising town centres.

A budget of €22 million was allocated under the 2022 Scheme:

- €17 million for the standard Town and Village Renewal Scheme
- €5m for a ring-fenced Connected Hubs call for proposals.

The standard ***Town and Village Scheme*** supported the repurposing of vacant or derelict buildings as ***new remote working hubs.***

The ***Connected Hubs*** call aimed to add capacity to ***existing hubs***.

Successful projects are selected following a competitive process. The successful projects under the 2022 Town and Village Scheme were announced on the 15th December 2022.

Aligned with Our ***Rural Future***, the 2022 scheme prioritised tackling vacancy and dereliction and supporting efforts to bring vacant properties back into use as multi-purpose community spaces. Administered locally, local authorities invited Expressions of Interest for qualifying projects from local groups in towns and villages within their respective County.

Subsequently, up to 9 proposals were developed into detailed applications.

These were submitted to the Department for competitive assessment in respect of the following funding ranges:

- 5 applications for grant funding of €20,000 to €250,000
- 1 application for grant funding of €20,000 to €500,000
- 2 application for grant funding up to €50,000 (Project Development Measure)
- 1 application for grant funding up to €50,000 (Marketing Scheme Measure)

There was an extremely high level of interest in the main Scheme with 138 applications received to the value of €30.4m. Following assessment 75 projects were awarded funding of just over €17m.

The 2022 Scheme also included funding for:

i. The Project Development Measure (up to €50,000) was retained and expanded to allow up to 2 applications per LA. It is designed to assist Local Authorities contribute to a pipeline of significant, well developed projects which might be subsequently progressed to construction stage, subject to the availability of further funding. (*The Scheme Outline should be consulted for further guidance's Town and Village Scheme Outline 2022)*€1.56m was allocated for 33 projects under the Project Development Measure.

ii. A new Building Acquisition Measure was introduced in 2022 in recognition of the urgent need to transform and regenerate town centres. LAs could submit up to 2 applications for up to a total of €400,000 in funding to purchase vacant/derelict buildings in town centres for use as multipurpose community spaces. Over €6m was paid towards the purchase of 29 buildings.

iii. A new Marketing Scheme measure was also introduced in 2022. LA's could submit 1 application for up to €50,000 in funding for a marketing campaign targeted at attracting remote workers and mobile talent to individual counties. Over €1.1m was allocated towards 23 marketing campaigns.

Grant funding of 90% of total project costs was available under the scheme with the remaining 10% match funding being provided by the Local Authority and/or the community.

2023 Town and Village Renewal Scheme

A budget of €19 million is allocated for 2023:

- €17 million for the standard Town and Village Renewal Scheme
- €2m for a ring-fenced Connected Hubs call for proposals.

The details of the 2023 Scheme have not been finalised, however the Scheme will focus on the objectives of the Town Centre First Policy and in particular on projects that bring vacant and derelict buildings and sites back into use as multi-purpose spaces.

Town Centre First

In 2021, funding of €2 million was secured to enable rural towns and villages to prepare masterplans (subsequently titled Town Centre First Plan) as a basis for their strategic development.

A Masterplan can reimagine the potential of an individual town and focus in particular on its centre and immediate surrounds. The Plan will be bespoke to each town and will identify specific interventions including tackling dereliction and vacancy, de-carbonisation, maintaining a strong local economy, creating high value job opportunities, and promoting compact growth.

Under Phase 1 of the Initiative, a town selected by the Minister from (local authority) nominated towns will be funded up to €100,000 to develop a Masterplan. At least one town per Local Authority was selected as part of this initial phase to build momentum in each county. The identification of towns in future phases will be based on an assessment of need, demand and other criteria developed alongside Town Centre First implementation.

In December 2021 Minister Humphreys announced €2.6m in funding for 26 towns for the development of, the now titled, Town Centre First Plans. Local Authorities in these towns will work closely with local community groups, retailers and the other members of the Town Teams in devising and delivering on the Town Centre First Plans.

In February 2022, Minister Humphreys launched *Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns*.

The policy contains 33 actions which will give towns the tools and resources they need to become more viable and attractive places in which to live, work, socialise and run a business. It will support Town Teams to develop their own tailored Town Centre First Plans. This will focus on charting the future direction of their towns, address issues of vacancy and dereliction and add vibrancy to the town centre.

The implementation of the actions underpinned by schemes such as the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), the Croí Conaithe (Towns) Fund and the Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

This will include funding to address the regeneration of vacant and derelict buildings as identified in the Town Centre First plans and funding for new Town Regeneration Officers who will support Town Teams and local stakeholders to tackle the individual challenges facing their town.

Some 26 towns have already been allocated funding of €100,000 to produce their Town Centre First Plans, a full list of the towns can be found here

Additional towns will be supported to develop plans as the policy is rolled out.

Connected Hubs Fund

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The primary objective of the Connected Hubs Call is to support and complement the development of the National Hub Network, which is a key action of the Rural Development Policy - Our Rural Future and the National Remote Working Strategy – Making Remote Work.

The Connected Hubs Call aims to add additional capacity to the existing remote working infrastructure in Ireland by upgrading existing hubs and Broadband Connection Points (BCPs), while continuing to support COVID-19 mitigation measures. It will provide owners, operators and managers of existing remote working facilities and BCPs with the opportunity to identify and develop their own solutions in consultation with local authorities, local business interests (e.g. Chambers of Commerce), Town Teams (or similar bodies) and community groups as appropriate.

Eligible works include the expansion of hubs, installation of privacy booths, access control and security systems, the conversion of existing open plan space to modular offices, and the provision of enhanced audio visual, networking and conferencing facilities.

On 8th June 2022, Minister Humphreys announced that 81 projects across the country were successful in securing funding via the Connected Hubs Call 2022, allocating €5 million in funding to add additional capacity to the existing remote working infrastructure in remote working hubs and BCP's throughout the country. This follows the award of almost €9M under the Connected Hubs Call in 2021.3

Streetscape Enhancement Measure 2021

The Streetscape Enhancement Measure is an additional Measure introduced as part of the Town & Village Renewal Scheme in 2021. Improving the visual appearance of our urban streetscapes increases pride and confidence in our home towns and villages, making them more attractive places to live, work and do business.

The focus of this measure is to support the upgrade and enhancement of shopfronts and street facades of defined areas within selected rural town/village centres. The Measure supports activity such as painting (including murals), signage replacement, shopfront improvement, and canopies.

2021 Measure

Each Local Authority was grouped into one of 3 bands and provided with a grant allocation of €320,000 (Band A), €260,000 (Band B) or €220,000 (Band C). The amount provided to each Local Authority was determined by the number of towns in each County with a population of between 500 and 15,000 people. Counties with a greater number of towns and villages receive a larger allocation.

Approximately 120 towns and villages benefitted from the funding in 2021. Improving streetscapes by painting buildings in vibrant colours, upgrading and restoring traditional shop-fronts and removing unnecessary clutter from main streets will serve to add colour and vibrancy to our rural towns and villages.

The completion date for works was extended to 31st December and Local Authorities were afforded with a wide degree of flexibility in delivering the initiative locally. Local Authorities also have the autonomy to allow some works to be completed on projects after 31st December 2021 in circumstances where it has not been possible to conclude works before this date. In particular, this refers to works such as painting/murals which may be impacted by adverse weather conditions or where there are issues with the capacity of contractors locally to deliver within required timeframe.

2022 Measure

On 19th of May Local Authorities were notified of the Streetscape Enhancement Measure 2022. The 2022 Measure is substantively changed from the 2021 Measure, based on the feedback on the operation of the 2021 Measure.

The changes for 2022 will require local authorities, in collaboration with local businesses and community groups, to develop one co-ordinated project proposal for the town centre. This change will deliver greater outputs and benefits across towns and villages in 2022.

€2.6 million will be made available to 26 towns/villages across the country. Local Authorities will nominate 1 town/village (to be approved by the Department), and then work with local groups and residents of the nominated town/village to develop one integrated Streetscape Enhancement project proposal for the nominated town. Eligible works can include painting, signage replacement, and shopfront improvements, lighting and planting. Grant funding will be provided at 80% of total project costs, with 20% matched funding required.

On 30th August the list of 26 nominated towns was announced by Minister Humphreys. LAs have until 7th October to submit an integrated application to the Department. Once approved, they have until 31st August 2023 to complete works under the Measure, and until 30th September 2023 to submit final claim to the Department.

TidyTowns

The Minister announced a €1.4 million fund for TidyTowns groups in October 2022. Pobal will administer the distribution of these funds on our behalf. This brings the total provided to TidyTowns groups since 2017 to €8.1 million.

The 2022 competition has returned to its normal delivery method with physical adjudication whilst retaining the electronic application process, which is in itself more sustainable and efficient.

Following an #Our Rural Future recommendation, a new award was introduced in 2021 to recognise the participation of young persons aged 16 to 24 in TidyTowns committees as well as on the TidyTowns work programme. This has featured again in 2022 along with other new awards including one on Bat Conservation.

The TidyTowns unit continue to build capacity among groups through social media, a monthly newsletter, webinars, and radio interviews and through the TidyTowns website. The TidyTowns Handbook last updated in 2010 has been totally rewritten and was launched in September 2021.

882 entries were received for the competition in 2022 with a very positive number of special award entries across all categories.

Results of the 2022 competition were announced in the RDS on Friday 28th October 2022. Trim in Co. Meath were named as Ireland's Tidiest Town for 2022.

The Department recruited twelve new Adjudicators to support the adjudication process in 2022. The sponsorship contract with SuperValu expired in 2022 but following an open tendering process, SuperValu have been selected to continue to partner with the Department until 2027.

President Higgins visited Ennis on May 28th and unveiled a plaque commemorating the town's success in the 2021 competition. Similar vents are expected to take place in Glaslough who won the competition in 2019 and in Trim who are the current winners.

Local Improvement Scheme (LIS)

Through the Budget 2022 discussion, the Minister secured an increase in funding for the scheme and the allocation for 2022 was increased to €11 million. Following a review of expenditure throughout the Department, the Minister allocated a further €11 million in August bringing the 2022 allocation to €22 million. This brings the total allocated under the Local Improvement Scheme since the Department was established in 2017 to over €100 million.

All works were completed by Q4 2022 and over 97% of the €22 million allocation was expended.

Work is ongoing at present reviewing the Scheme Outline for 2023 and it is expected that the scheme will launch in Q1 with an increased allocation following Budget 23 discussions of €12 million.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)

- The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund provides funding for the development and construction of capital projects in towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000 and rural areas across Ireland. It seeks to support the delivery of a number of key Government strategies, including Our Rural Future, Housing for All, Town Centre First and the Climate Action Plan.

- The projects supported by the Fund assist in the regeneration of rural towns and villages by addressing vacancy and dereliction, and positioning them for further growth through regeneration and town centre renewal. The Fund also invests in strategic projects that contribute to further economic development in rural areas.

- Calls for applications to the Fund are sought under two categories – Category 1 and Category 2.

- Category 1 relates to large scale ambitious capital projects with all necessary planning and other consents in place and which are ready to proceed. To date 111 projects worth almost €467m have been approved for funding totalling €338m. Grants awarded have been in the range of €500,000 to €14m, enabling large scale investment with long term benefits for rural economies and communities.

- Category 2 provides smaller grant funding to enable the development of project proposals suitable for future calls for Category 1 applications. To date 104 projects worth €**7**4m have been approved for funding of over €57m.

- The fourth call for Category 1 applications was announced in December 2021. The closing date for applications was the 29th April 2022. The primary focus of the fourth call under the Fund is to support capital projects which will provide the necessary facilities and infrastructure, most notably in terms of revitalising our rural towns and villages, remote working and enterprise development, which will play a part in attracting people back to live in rural areas. On the 10th of November 2022, The Minister announced funding of €115 million for 23 Category 1 applications.

- In total the Fund has now provided almost €395 million for 215 projects across Ireland, worth a total of €541 million.

SICAP Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

REVIEW of SICAP Programme

- Department of Rural and Community Development is undertaking an independent review of the current SICAP programme, as well as stakeholder consultation to inform the next programme iteration.
- KPMG Future Analytics have been contracted to carry out this work and have engaged directly with the LCDCs and LDCs to inform them of their involvement in the process. Direct consultation sessions with LCDCs and LDCs took place end April/early May and the initial findings were presented to the Department on May 18th.
- Further consultations took place with SICAP beneficiaries during August.
- Survey and consultation with Government Departments and State Agencies concluded in September.
- The final survey and consultation with Community Development Organisations was completed.
- The final report from KPMG is near finalisation and is expected in Q1 2023, with recommendations informing the new SICAP programme design for 2024 and onwards. Pobal and the Department continue to engage with KPMG on finalisation of the report.

- It is of relevance to note that only 24 of the 33 LCDCs took part in the consultation process which has been disappointing as they are the contract holders for SICAP. The Department plan to organise one final workshop for those who did not attend previously in an effort to capture the experiences of the SICAP programme and where improvements can be applied in the new programme.
- A formal LCDC Engagement Plan for the new SICAP procurement and design process has been finalised.
- The Department, along with representatives from Pobal and Greenville Procurement, held a briefing event with Chief Officers and Procurement Officers from the LCDCs at the end of November. LCDCs were given an

overview of the new procurement procedure for SICAP 2024+ (and reasons for its selection) and indicative timelines for the tendering process.

- LCDCs had the opportunity to raise queries on their role in the process, supports available and structure of various aspects of tenders. A formal engagement group will now be formed to facilitate LCDC engagement with the design and procurement of SICAP 2024. This group will be comprised of representatives from the Department, Pobal, Chief Officers and Procurement Officers from the LCDCs.
- The Department is in the process of compiling contact information for Procurement Officers/Points of Contact for each of the LCDCs, with a view to issuing invitations for future engagement before the end of January.
- The CCMA will be asked to nominate 2 LCDC Chief Officers and 2 Procurement Officers to this group.

SICAP – Additional Funding for people arriving from Ukraine

- SICAP is delivered by 46 Local Development Companies (LDC's) across 51 Lot areas. In addition to the €44.3m secured for the SICAP budget, the Department has secured further funding of €10m to ensure Local Development Companies may continue their work to support arrivals from Ukraine. This is in addition to an allocation of €5m in 2022.

- Of the €10m in additional funding, approximately €9m has been initially allocated to the Local Development Companies. Funding has been allocated proportionally to the numbers of Ukrainians recorded in each area, based upon data provided by the Central Statistics Office. Each LDC (excepting those with no Ukrainians currently present in their respective Lot) received a minimum of €40,000, approximating the cost of employing one community worker to engage with new arrivals.
- The remaining funding of €1m is being withheld by the Department to act as a contingency fund, to allow the Department to respond flexibly to the evolving requirements of LDCs throughout the year. It is intended

the Department will engage further with LDCs later in the year to review the situation and adjusting allocations as required.

Empowering Communities Programme

- The ECP was launched by Minister O'Brien on Thursday, 2 June 2022.
- The programme will focus on 14 small areas identified using the Pobal HP deprivation index which are experiencing significant disadvantage. A Community Engagement Worker will be recruited in each of the selected areas, to develop and facilitate relationships between community stakeholders, community groups and statutory agencies and structures.
- The 14 small areas selected are within the following Local Authorities areas as follows:

Local Authorities		
Dublin City (4 areas)	Kildare	Mayo
South Dublin	Longford	Wexford
Limerick City and County	Galway County	Donegal
Westmeath	Cork City	

- Meetings have been held with relevant LCDC Chief Officers and CEOs of LDCs.
- Letters of Undertaking issued to the relevant LCDCs on 25th July 2022.
- €2m Funding for the programme has been processed and issued to all the relevant areas.
- A meeting with the relevant LCDCs/LDCs was held on Thursday, 6th October, 2022 at 2pm.
- A further meeting is to be arranged for early 2023.

Funds under Community Enhancement Programme structures

Community Support Fund

Announced on 18th November 2022, the **Community Support Fund** is a new €10 million fund that will provide small grants to a wide and diverse range of local community groups to assist with their energy and running costs along with funding for small capital projects.

The aim of the Community Support Fund (CSF) will be to support groups, particularly in disadvantaged areas, with their energy and running costs such as utility or insurance bills, as well as with minor improvements to their facilities. This fund will be allocated under the Department's Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) and in order to ensure there is sufficient flexibility to allow funding to be targeted to where it is needed in each Local Authority area, it will be administered locally by the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) as in previous years.

Similar to previous years, to allow flexibility, the Department is not setting a national closing date for payments made under the fund, however closing dates should be no later than 31st March 2023. This year there will be a 5% administration fee for LCDCs, within their allocation, in recognition of the additional associated clerical and assessment work involved in administering the fund on behalf of the Department.

Similar to the Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) the funding has been allocated to each local authority area using a methodology that takes into account the deprivation and population levels in each area, and a base amount of funding to each area.

Further to a recent commitment by Minister Humphreys to support Women's Sheds (€100k nationally) LCDCs will be asked to identify Women's Sheds in their areas and to ring-fence money within the funding to provide some initial support to them, pending further work planned for 2023. Women's Sheds will also be entitled to apply for the general funding available for community groups.

Information and relevant documentation has been provided to LCDC's.

Details of successful projects from each LCDC will be available on the Department's website www.gov.ie, as LCDCs make their returns.

2022 Community Centres Investment Fund

The 2022 Community Centres Investment Fund was a capital fund with a budget of €15m to support the upgrade and refurbishment of existing community centres in both urban and rural areas.

Funding was available under 3 Categories, with grants up to €300,000 available:

- Category 1: Small scale projects/improvements to facilities – up to €25,000.
- Category 2: Larger scale projects **-** €25,001 to €100,000.
- Category 3: Major projects. €100,001 to €300,000.

Funding was available for capital works such as:

- works to improve communal facilities such as kitchen and toilet facilities
- energy retrofitting, new windows / doors / heating systems
- upgrades to lighting systems and stage areas
- works to address safety concerns, including as a result of fire safety audits
- works to improve disability access
- improvements to assist in providing additional or better services to the community such as Meals for the elderly and youth facilities
- works to develop Community Centres as Social Hubs through the development of Community Cinemas, Youth Hubs and Community Libraries
- essential maintenance works, repairs to roof, and so on

The application closing date was Thursday 14th July 2022. Over 1,000 applications were received and all applications to the Fund were subject to a competitive assessment process based on the assessment criteria, as set out in the fund guidelines.

Category 1 applicants were notified of the outcome of this process in October, and Category 2 and 3 applicants were notified in December. Details of successful applicants are available on the Department's website at www.gov.ie/drcd.

2023 Community Centres Investment Fund

€20 million in capital funding was announced in Budget 2023 for a 2023 Community Centres Investment Fund. It is intended that the 2023 fund will be targeted primarily at new build community centres.

The details of this scheme are currently being developed by officials within the Department and further details will be announced in quarter 1 of 2023.

For queries please email ccif@drcd.gov.ie.

LEADER

- On the 26th January, Minister Humphreys announced the names of 46 the applicant groups who were successful in Stage 1 of the LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) selection process for the delivery of the €180 million LEADER 2023 – 2027 programme.
- The full list of groups which are now moving forward to develop their Local Development Strategy is available on the Department's website at www.gov.ie
- All those successful applicant groups in Stage 1 of the process are being provided with funding to assist them with the costs associated with developing their Local Development Strategy in Stage 2 of the process. Each of these successful applicant groups have been advised of the funding being provided to them to develop their Local Development Strategy.

- Those applicant groups will submit their Local Development Strategies to the Department for evaluation by the Independent Selection Committee.
- The Department will issue a Guidance Document to all successful applicant groups on the process shortly.