

ANNUAL REPORT
FOR
MEATH LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
(LCDC)
2023

1.0 Chief Officer's Statement

LCDC's are required under Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2014 (S128B of the Local Government Act 2001) to prepare, adopt and submit an annual report to the Local Authority no later than the 31st March each year in respect of the performance of its functions in the previous year.

This report outlines progress in respect of the various LCDC functions during 2023.

Since the submission of the last report, Meath LCDC have had a successful year which saw the adoption of the Meath Local Economic & Community Plan 2023-2029, the adoption of a new Healthy Ireland Strategy 2023-2025 for the county and the continued processing of claims under the LEADER and Transitional LEADER Programme.

The current Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2023 is ongoing with Meath Partnership as the Programme Implementer. There was continued engagement with and assistance provided to Ukrainians who are living in Meath. While the priority for 2022 was meeting the immediate needs of the Ukrainians, the focus for 2023 has been the integration of the Ukrainians into local communities and assisting them to move into employment. Despite the challenge, the actions set out in the 2023 Annual Plan were completed and significant progress was made with the relevant groups. The sub-committee continue to work constructively in its review and monitoring of the SICAP programme. A procurement process also took place for the operation of the 2024-2029 SICAP programme however the process was not completed during 2023.

The LCDC acts as the Local Action Group (LAG) for the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 in Meath. The LEADER programme has added to the already significant role played by the LCDC in the oversight of public funding to bring about the improved social, economic and community development of the County.

During 2023, the focus of the LEADER programme has been the completion of projects and the payment of submitted claims. Decommitted funds became available during 2023 and the LAG approved 2 projects which utilised this funding. Claims continued to be paid out to the applicants, thirty-two claims were processed during 2023.

Meath LCDC was appointed as LAG to deliver the 2023-2027 LEADER Programme with Meath Partnership as the Programme Implementer. The Local Development Strategy for LEADER 23/27 was prepared by Meath Partnership following extensive consultation. The LDS was approved in July by the Department of Rural and Community Development. The programme is due to commence in early 2024.

The LCDC managed, implemented and collaborated in relation to a number of public-funded programmes under its remit which included the Community Support Fund and the delivery of Round 4 of the Healthy Ireland Fund. The LCDC ensured that these schemes complied with and were compatible with the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP).

October 2023 saw the adoption of the Meath Local Economic and Community Plan by Meath County Council.

The Meath LCDC has 19 members and during 2022 there was 5 changes in membership with

- Johann McKeever from the Health Service Executive (HSE) replacing Lorraine Flynn. Johann's first meeting was 15th December 2023.
- Kieran Kehoe, Chief Executive of Meath County Council replaced Jackie Maguire and Fiona Lawless with his first meeting being 15th December 2023
- Sean Ó'Coisdealbha filled the vacancy for Údarás na Gaeltachta with his first meeting being 24th March 2024
- Colin Ludlow, Meath Partnership filled the vacancy created by the retirement of Michael Ludlow. Colin's first meeting was 24th March 2023
- Ciara Burke representing the business sector filled the vacancy created by the resignation of Donna Farrell and Ciara's first meeting was 28th April 2023

I would like to sincerely thank the outgoing members for their contribution to the LCDC during their tenure.

The Membership of the LCDC at 31st December 2023 was:

- Kieran Kehoe, Chief Executive, MCC
- Cllr Yemi Adenuga
- Cllr Elaine McGinty
- Cllr Mike Bray
- Ms. Sharon Curran, Dept of Employment Affairs & Social Protection
- Ms Sadie Ward McDermott, Louth / Meath Education & Training Board
- Ms. Johann McKeever, Health Service Executive
- Mr. Sean Ó'Coisdealbha, Údarás na Gaeltachta
- Mr Joe English, Local Enterprise Office
- Mr. Colin Ludlow, Meath Partnership
- Mr Gareth O'Brien, Community Sector
- Vacant (Community Sector)
- Ms Susuana Komolafe, Social Inclusion Sector

- Ms Shola Yahya, Social Inclusion Sector
- Ms. Ciara Burke, Business Sector
- Ms Suzanne Brady, Environmental Sector (Chairperson)
- Mr Seamus McGee, Farming Sector
- Mr Noel Maguire, Trade Union Sector
- Ms Geraldine Hogarty, Youth Work Ireland Meath

During 2023 a total of 10 LCDC meetings were held. Dates of the meetings are listed below:

- 27th January 2023
- 24th March 2023
- 28th April 2023
- 26th May 2023
- 30th June 2023
- 28th July 2023
- 22nd September 2023
- 20th October 2023
- 24th November 2023
- 15th December 2023

As set out in the Standing Orders, the quorum for LCDC meetings is 11 and for LAG meetings is 10. All meetings that took place in 2023 met the requirement for the quorum. No meetings during 2023 had full attendance and the meeting in February (LCDC & LAG) had to be cancelled due to lack of a quorum.

I look forward to supporting the LCDC in carrying out its functions during 2024 which will include the implementation and delivery of the newly adopted LECP, commencement of the new LEADER programme and the conclusion of the procurement process for the SICAP programme and commencement of the new programme.

Fiona Fallon
Chief Officer

2.0 Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)

The comprehensive consultation process on the high-level goals led to revising the wording of the goals and creating a 7th goal. Extensive engagement with stakeholders helped identify actions for the two year implementation plan.

The implementation plan clearly set out lead partner and supporting agencies together with a given timeframe for delivery. There were a number of stages in the LECP approval process:

- Presentations were made at all Municipal District meetings for confirmation of compliance with the County Development Plan
- The economic section of the LECP was approved at the July meeting of the Planning, Economic, Enterprise Development and European Affairs Strategic Policy Committee
- The community section of the LECP was approved at the July meeting of the Local Community & Development Committee
- The draft LECP was considered at the September meeting of the Eastern Midland Regional Authority meeting for confirmation of alignment with the Regional Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES)
- Finally the LECP was adopted by the Full Council of Meath County Council at the October 2023 meeting.

The process of engagement with the lead partners on the delivery of the LECP actions has commenced and it is intended during 2024 to put in place a system to track the delivery of the actions.

3.0 Implementation, Management & Oversight of Public-Funded Programmes

- **LEADER (RDP) 2014 – 2020 and Transitional LEADER Programme**

During 2023, the focus was on processing claims for payment to the project promoters following 100% commitment of the Transitional LEADER Programme including EURI funding.

At the end of 2023, an additional 2 projects were approved by the LAG following the decommitment of funding. Thirty-two claims were submitted by the promoters and paid during 2023. In total 80% of approved grants (LEADER & Transitional LEADER programme) have been drawn down by the end of 2022. Submission of claims will be on-going but all must be drawn down by 30th June 2024.

The Rural Development Programme monitoring committee met twice during 2023 to review the strategic objectives and associated actions for the new Local Development Strategy 2327.

- **Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022**

SICAP is a national programme which aims to tackle poverty and social exclusion through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. The aim of SICAP is to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality through local, regional and national engagement and collaboration. The 2023 SICAP Budget saw an increase in the budget for Meath to €764,991.

Following the war in Ukraine, approximately 2,900 Ukrainians have made Meath their home. There was continued financial support through SICAP to provide assistance to Ukrainians with a particular focus on their integration into the local communities. The main supports continued to be related to language, employment and wellbeing. The DRCD provided additional funding of €318,352.60 specifically for the Ukrainian response.

The SICAP sub committee met a number of times in 2023 with the programme implementer (PI) to review mid-year progress, budget spend and progress for the year. The targets set under Goal 1 (groups) and Goal 2 (individuals) were exceeded in 2023. There has been very good engagement between the SICAP sub-group and the PI in raising issues that should be addressed or progressed. However, transport and housing continue to be the two main barriers facing those participating in SICAP programmes with beneficiaries in Meath encountering a greater number of barriers when compared to the national average. It should be noted that clients of Meath's SICAP programmes have an 89% chance of having one of more barriers to Social Inclusion with no access to transport and living in a jobless household being the two most common. The national average is 70%.

The Department of Rural and Community Development have provided additional funding for the Meath Wellness Hub which is linked to the SICAP programme. 2023 was the final year of funding for this initiative. Meath Wellness Hub continued to support the culture of a modern recovery community orientated mental health system and worked with various organisations that represent and engage with the client groups that will benefit from the Hub services.

- **Funding Schemes**

A number of funding initiatives were made available to the LCDC in order to recommend funding allocations to applicant groups.

Community Support Fund

The Community Support Fund (CSF) was announced at the end of 2022 with an allocation of €331,722 to Meath LCDC. This scheme was to support groups with their running costs such as utility bills, insurance, rental and to carry out necessary repairs and improvement to their facilities, purchase equipment. An allocation of €3,144 was ringfenced for Women’s Sheds. Grants to the successful recipients, 214 in total, were approved at the March LCDC meeting. This ongoing funding has been a welcome investment in the communities at a time when traditional fund-raising options were still curtailed.

Heathy Ireland Fund Round 4

In January 2023, the approved the Meath HI Strategy 2023-2025. Following consultation two outcome indicators were selected – positive mental health and premature non-communicable disease mortality. Details of the target groups, outcomes and outputs for each of these indicators were presented to the LCDC and subsequently approved. The total allocation of funding to Meath under Healthy Ireland for 2023 was €75,000.

4.0 Joint Louth Meath Migrant Integration Strategy

The Migrant Integration Forum met on a quarterly basis throughout 2023 with meetings taking place on 19th January, 30th March, 29th June and 7th December. At the January meeting it was agreed that the strategy would be extended for 12 months due to the impact of Covid on the delivery timeframe and during 2023 the focus of the strategy would be on the delivery of three main actions:

- training for Elected Members
- Provide information in relation to voting – how to register to vote and how to vote
- Organise an event to showcase the work of the forum

Diversity and Inclusion training course took place in May 2023 with Elected Members from both Louth and Meath attending.

Information was widely circulated on the voter registration process and voting. Presentations were also given at events to circulate the information and encourage as many members of the migrant/new communities to register to vote.

A Migrant Information event took place on 8th November in the Glenside Hotel showcasing a range of services and support available to migrants.

There has been substantial progress in delivering on the actions as set out in the strategy however challenges remain in receiving updates from all the agencies involved. The next meeting of the Forum will take place on 30th March 2023.

In my final year as Chairperson of the LCDC, there have been some key achievements not least in the preparation and adoption of a new LECP, the successful completion of the LEADER programme, the approval of the next Local Development Strategy and the positive impact the SICAP programme has had on the beneficiaries. I look forward to seeing County Meath flourish with the delivery of the LECP and its related programmes throughout the County.

Suzanne Brady, LCDC Chairperson