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INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

COVID-19 INNOVATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: CASE STUDY SERIES

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CONTENTS

These four case studies form part of a research study into local government innovation in response to Covid-19 being undertaken by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA). Further research is being carried out by the IPA during 2020 to establish lessons learned and implications for future policy and practice.

The IPA and the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) have worked collaboratively to develop these case studies, building on an innovation survey conducted by the LGMA in April. An overview report of local authority Covid-19 innovations, based on this survey, has been produced by the LGMA and can be accessed here.

Answering the 'Community Call': A case study of the establishment of community support initiatives during Covid-19

Laura Shannon

Local emergency response will be led by Local authorities who will bring together all the state agencies, as well as local community groups, charities and volunteers, to ensure that all of our citizens get the help they need at this exceptional time (Leo Varadkar, 27th March 2020).

On March 27th 2020 strict public health measures were announced in response to the outbreak of Covid-19 in Ireland. This effectively resulted in a lockdown of our country; everyone was urged to stay at home and to exercise within 2km from their home, only essential business remained open and public transport was restricted to facilitate these essential workers. Those who are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 were asked to 'shield' or 'cocoon'. This means they were asked to stay at home as much as possible and avoid face-to-face contact.

Over the course of the following weekend, following guidance from the Government, local authorities successfully put in place support structures for the community, particularly for those most vulnerable who had been asked to cocoon. Community support forums and helplines were established by all local authorities, and are collectively referred to as the 'Community Call' initiative.

This case study draws on examples provided by local authorities in a survey carried out by the LGMA in April 2020. Interviews with key stakeholders and document analysis supplemented this information and allowed for an initial analysis of lessons learned. Further research and review of the Community Call initiative is merited.

The issue – establishing supports for vulnerable members of the community

All 31 local authorities were asked, over the course of a weekend, to establish community support helplines and forums to lead the coordination of Covid-19 community supports and resilience within their local areas. National guidance and templates were provided to local authorities to ensure vulnerable members of the community were appropriately supported as the country faced the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of the most vulnerable members of our community are older people, people with underlying health issues and those living in poverty.

The solutions – localised approach with national guidance

Each local authority in Ireland successfully established a community response forum and a community support helpline. A national dashboard collates all the statistics and information from all local authorities (see Table 1) demonstrating the services that continue to be provided. The following section outlines some of the challenges faced during the establishment and implementation of the support structures, and the solutions achieved.

Table 1: Community Call statistics, between 31st March 2020 and July 1st 2020.

Calls Received	Forum Meetings
51,116	**414**
Category of calls	*Number received*
Collection and Delivery Calls	11,280
Social Isolation Calls	10,392
Meals Service Calls	4,032
Other Health Service Calls	2,745
Follow-up calls	19,830
Other Requests Calls	21,096

Source: Government of Ireland, 2020, https://community-call-covid-19-geohive.hub.arcgis.com

Coordination and collaboration – establishing the 'Community Call Forum'

Community call forums were established in each local authority, following guidance from national government. Each forum was chaired by the Chief Executive of the local authority, with membership including:

- Relevant local authority staff (e.g. Directors of Service, senior staff from community departments, Chief Officer of the Local Community Development Committee, GIS officers etc.).
- Community Champions.[1]
- Representatives of local and regional organisations, and state agencies (such as the Health Service Executive (HSE), An Post, Community Welfare Service, An Garda Síochána, Tusla, Local Volunteer Centre, Local Development Companies, Red Cross, Civil Defence, GAA, Irish Farmers Association

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[1]See https://www.wheel.ie/covid-19-community-outreach for further information

(IFA), Public Participation Network, Age Friendly Network, Local Link, Citizen's Information, Alone, Migrant Forum, religious organisations.).

The purpose of the Forum, as specified in the framework document, is to lead the co-ordination of Covid-19 community supports and resilience, including:

- Working with the HSE, An Post, local community groups and the local Community Welfare Office service to identify vulnerable groups and individuals in each local authority area;
- Ensuring delivery of targeted social care supports and assistance to those vulnerable groups and individuals;
- Identifying issues arising through Older Persons Councils, PPNs [Public Participation Networks], community groups and helpline calls;
- Providing assistance to vulnerable individuals in isolation;
- Ensuring the resilience of existing community services;
- Harnessing offers of assistance from enterprises/businesses generally; and,
- Collecting and mapping information on services and voluntary groups across the Country to help direct requests for assistance and identify gaps in service.

Survey responses and follow-up interviews with key local authority staff highlight that the forum worked effectively to capture the breadth of information and knowledge required, and to enable coordination across such a diverse range of stakeholders. Kerry County Council, for example, noted that their early work on establishing a response forum, building on existing structures such as the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), Joint Policing Committee (JPC) and the Public Participation Network (PPN), proved crucial to their response.

Some local authorities reported adding to the forum membership as the work progressed based on local knowledge and volunteer capacity available on the ground. For example, in Monaghan a representative from a local family resource centre, Teach na nDaoine, who had set up a food hub, was added to the forum. Another local authority interviewed reported a gap in service provision where food hubs were not in place in the local area, and where food poverty was identified as a particular issue.

Establishing the support structures – the role of ICT

As mentioned, each local authority successfully established a range of support structures within a few days. Each organisation had to assess its existing information and communications technology (ICT)

infrastructure, and either adapt or implement new solutions. Some local authorities effectively started from scratch, others had been planning for the introduction of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems and some had to adapt their existing systems. Regardless of the baseline, innovation was required to establish the bespoke solutions needed. As a result, the systems implemented varied, but all local authorities successfully established helplines, with CRM systems in place to track and respond to calls and to provide updates to a central database (see above).

Geographical Information Systems (GIS) were central to the response, for example using Ordnance Survey Ireland's GeoHive infrastructures (https://geohive.ie/). Monaghan County Council explained how crucial these systems were in aiding the response, and how their GIS officer, together with Cavan County Council, collaborated to anticipate the challenges and develop bespoke solutions. One example provided was the ability to map community volunteer organisations e.g. Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) clubs to see where there may be gaps in the volunteer network on the ground (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Monaghan County Council's GIS interface showing GAA clubs in each municipal district.
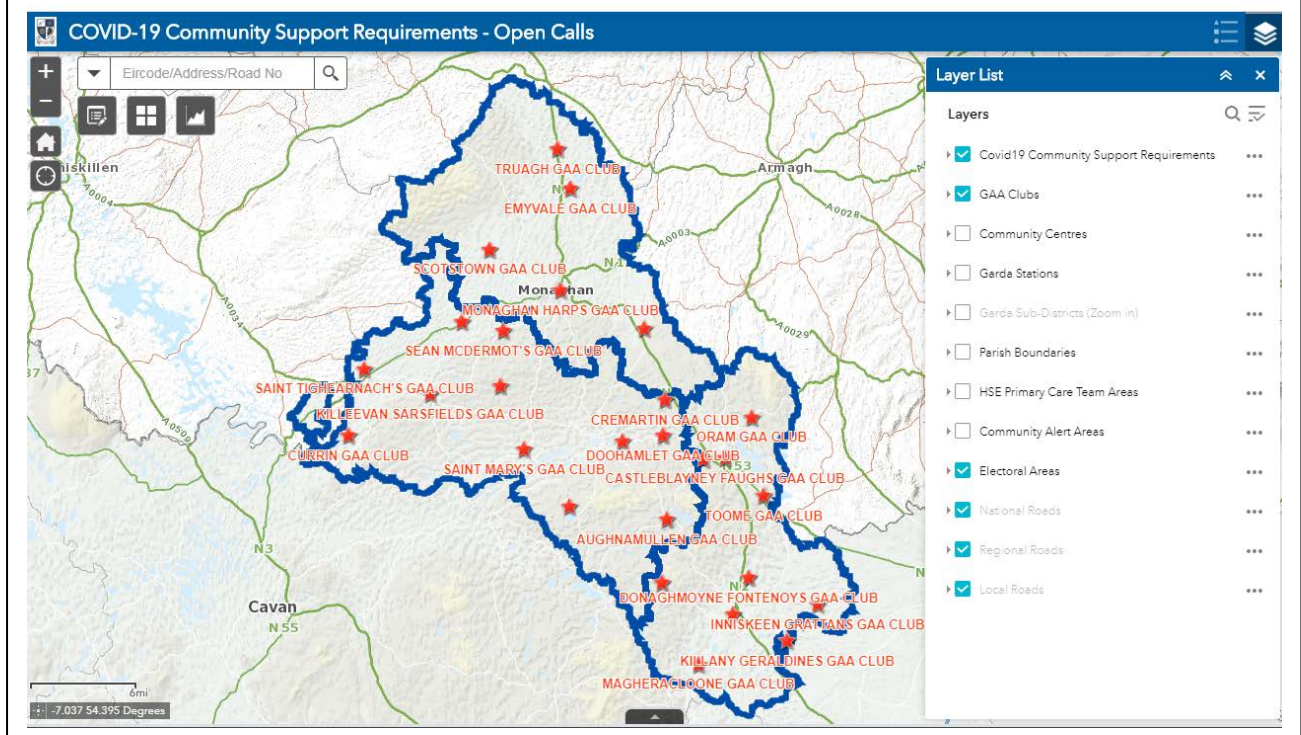
Governance and staffing

Aside from ICT, which was deemed a crucial element of the response, local authority staff members demonstrated their agile and cooperative nature by temporarily adapting their working practices and hours to meet the exceptional circumstances required. Staffing solutions were quickly put in place to enable helplines to be open from 8am to 8pm, seven days a week and to ensure the health and safety of all involved.

In terms of internal governance, the survey of local authorities showed that 48 per cent of governance solutions relied on existing formal governance structures (e.g. senior management teams) while 38 per cent involved the establishment of new or ad hoc structures such as working groups or teams to deal with particular challenges (LGMA, 2020). In Wicklow, for example, an Information Systems Emergency Response Working Group was formed on 28th of March and tasked with identifying the role of IT in the creation of their call centre.

Lessons learned

Local government as a leader

Local government has proved its capacity to act as a leader and coordinator in the face of a crisis. The Community Call Response Forums, led by local authorities, facilitated coordination and collaboration between a diverse range of stakeholders, who were required to work together to respond to the crisis. Interviewees commented on the importance of existing relationships and structures, such as LCDCs, JPCs and PPNs, in addition to bringing on board other organisations with local expertise and knowledge, or volunteer capacity. As one interviewee noted, this experience can be built upon to enhance community partnerships and engagement in the local area, particularly in anticipation of future crises e.g. climate-related events such as flooding.

The establishment of the community response forum and its impact in responding to the pandemic merits further research and review. This should be carried out within the context of existing participatory networks and decision-making structures within local authorities.

Capacity of local authorities to adapt and respond

In the face of a crisis, local authorities showed their capacity to adapt and rise to the challenge. Staff were willing to temporarily adjust and provide support where needed across the organisation. ICT teams worked tirelessly to ensure that adequate systems and support were in place, initially within a

very short time-frame. While this level of response is not sustainable in the long-term, it demonstrates immense potential for what local authorities can achieve.

While ICT capabilities have proved crucial, so too has the capacity of local authority staff involved in all aspects of the response. Interviewees commented on their learnings from this experience, which were diverse, but many focused on the need to build on what has been achieved, with the proper resources and funding in place.

Concluding remarks

Local government answered the Community Call in the face of Covid-19. They could not have done this without the support of the all of the stakeholders involved – the volunteers, community organisations, state agencies, health providers and countless others. This case study has looked at how local authorities responded to the challenge of providing supports to vulnerable people in the midst of a pandemic. This preliminary research has found that there was an extremely high level of support and cooperation, from within and from outside the councils. Further research is required to adequately capture the invaluable lessons that have been learned, and to document the outstanding response to this crisis.

References

Local Government Management Agency. (2020). *Overview of Local Authority Covid-19 Innovations.* Retrieved from: https://www.lgma.ie/en/publications/local-authority-sector-reports/overview-of-local-authority-covid-19-innovations.pdf [Accessed July 1 2020]

An overview of cultural life in Limerick during the COVID-19 pandemic

Fergal O'Leary

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on culture in Ireland has been sharply felt. On 9 March, the government cancelled St Patrick's Day festivals across the country. Several days later, all cultural institutions were temporarily shut, and restrictions placed on mass gatherings. Whilst some semblance of normal cultural life has since returned as amenities reopen, and events are organised, much uncertainty remains.

Culture, in the context of Ireland's local government, broadly relates to the performance and visual arts, festivals and heritage. Local authorities, through their arts and culture office, play a key role in fostering the cultural life of communities. They organise and sponsor a programme of events throughout the year and manage public amenities. A thriving cultural scene can greatly boost tourism and the local economy. Of course, its contribution to public well-being and social inclusion has long been acknowledged.

The disruption caused by the pandemic to local events has been unprecedented. Despite this, many local authorities have tried to salvage their 2020 cultural programme to some extent, with the intention of having a stronger offering next year. Indeed, the organisation of local cultural activities during the COVID-19 emergency is seen as central to the government's mental health campaign – #InThisTogether.

Limerick's cultural scene

In recent years, Limerick's cultural landscape has witnessed something of a revival, owing to its status as the National City of Culture (2014) and its bid for the title of European Capital of Culture (2020). Last year, over 100 festivals and concerts were organised in the county. Limerick City and County Council's (LCCC) cultural strategy sets out its approach for the development of the local sector. Its objectives include placing culture at the heart of economic growth and regeneration, and engaging citizens through involvement in culture. Forging working partnerships is considered a key factor to achieving the strategic vision. The strategy acknowledges the council's need to adopt an innovator

role to successfully develop 'new ways of working, new business opportunities and supporting growth' (p. 17).

Like with all local authorities, however, the COVID-19 restrictions have severely affected LCCC's ability to promote the sector. This case study, based on desk research and communication with local authority staff, gives an overview of the innovative response of the council, and its partners, to the disruption caused to Limerick's cultural life.

Innovation, in this context, is taken to simply mean a new way of doing something. Therefore, an innovative approach that a local authority takes, does not necessarily mean that it is unique within local government, others may be doing something similar.

The issue – cancellations and closures

Whilst the public safety imperative for the restrictions was clearly understood, naturally, there was some disappointment around the impact on Limerick's cultural schedule. The St Patrick's Day parade, and Ireland's only international band championship, were the first major cancellations. The annual parade attracts in the region of 50,000 spectators and the band championship around 2,000 musicians. Limerick's sixteen public libraries were forced to close from 12 March, as was the Limerick Museum and Limerick City Gallery of Art. The restrictions also forced smaller events to be called off such as the lunchtime concerts at St Mary's Cathedral. Local events for the summer were also hit. For example, Riverfest, Limerick's largest festival with over 120,000 attendees last year who contributed nearly €7 million to the local economy (Limerick Leader, 11 July 2019), had been planned for the May

bank holiday weekend. Likewise, several high-profile concerts had been organised – with LCCC's support – as part of the city's vibrant music scene.

The Council's role

LCCC has a statutory duty to 'make adequate local provision for cultural activities, to stimulate public interest in, and promote knowledge of, the appreciation and practice of cultural activities' (LCCC, 2016 p. 16). Performing this role in the context of a public emergency presented a big challenge. Rather than organising and sponsoring events in the usual way, LCCC and its partners had to cancel some of its scheduled programme and close cultural amenities. How to mitigate the effects of the restrictions and still deliver a cultural experience required fresh thinking.

Solutions – innovative thinking

Culture, by its nature, is innovative, it continuously evolves to reflect societal change. Furthermore, cultural forms – such as a concert, exhibition or festival – essentially seek to connect people through a shared experience. The need for innovative approaches to connect people was therefore the starting point for Limerick's cultural response to COVID-19.

Online audience engagement and virtual festivals

Despite the initial disappointment around the cancellation of the St Patrick's Day parade, the council were keen not to let the national holiday pass without celebrating it in some way. With very little time to organise a virtual event/festival, it was instead decided to have an online celebration using social media. LCCC asked locals what they would be doing for St Patrick's Day instead? The message was simple: 'don't let the cancellation stop you from celebrating at home'. The public were encouraged to virtually share their St Patrick's Day celebrations in lockdown, whether it be face painting or hair dying, by using the #LimerickStPatsFestival to post photographs and videos on social media. To add another dimension, locals were invited to take 'a trip down memory lane' with the council's archives team who would share photographs of parades from yesteryear.

Limerick's award-winning Riverfest has gone from strength to strength to become an important driver of local economic and creative growth. Its cancellation therefore dealt a big cultural and economic blow to Limerick. But having established itself as a popular fixture in the cultural calendar, the organisers were determined to provide an alternative solution. In collaboration with an events company, LCCC instead organised a two-day virtual Riverfest. This involved recasting the traditional

festival as a virtual experience for online viewing. Social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) was leveraged to market and broadcast live music, fashion and food events online. Despite the public restrictions, this online version of Riverfest was deemed a success, reaching local audiences and those from further afield. For instance, the live concert broadcast on Facebook had over 66,000 views and 38,000 engagements.

Ireland's first drive-in concerts

Likewise, the cancellation of live music concerts in the city was met with a creative solution. LCCC partnered with a local music promoter to organise of Ireland's first ever drive-in gigs for July at the city's old racecourse. LCCC's festival innovation fund was important in this regard as it enables the council to respond to new ideas for local events. The idea for drive-in concerts involved a vigorous planning process, both internally and with stakeholders, to ensure compliance from a health and safety perspective. A specially erected stage and large screens enabled concert goers enjoy the music from their car and thereby comply with the social distancing rules. Capacity was limited to 300 cars with a maximum of four people per car. To cater for the high-level of interest, a matinee and evening concert were scheduled and a second date was later added. Limerick's local mayor, Councillor Michael Sheahan, praised this 'truly innovative' event for Limerick. According to Sheahan, 'We already had a very successful virtual Riverfest and it's fantastic that we can still enjoy entertainment in the new normal … The local authority is working hard to programme bespoke activities unique to Limerick this summer' (Limerick Leader, 26 May 2020).
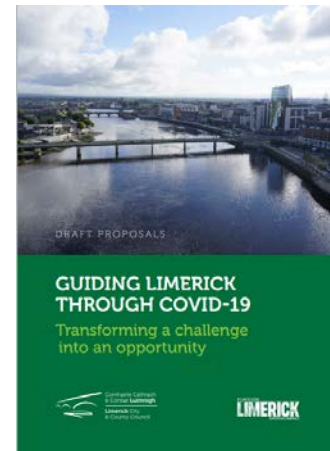
Smaller events and cultural participation

This move towards connecting virtually with audiences has been replicated for other local events. For Cruinniú na nÓg's national day of creativity for children and young people, LCCC's Culture and Arts office teamed up with a local film group as part of Limerick's programme and offered a day of screenings, storytelling and workshops, all delivered online. Limerick's Pride Parade 'goes virtual' for 2020, and this year's Fusion Dance Fest will become an online experience. The Hunt Museum started to offer 'great ways to engage and entertain us from the comfort of our homes' via virtual tours.

Smaller cultural events and venues often attract loyal audiences and patrons. Therefore, in the context of a pandemic, a virtual event allows cultural participation to continue, so important from a social inclusion perspective.

A roadmap to recovery?

Cultural activity as a means of reinvigorating the local economy is emphasised in LCCC's draft *Guiding Limerick Through Covid-19* plan. Notwithstanding its challenges, the crisis is seen as an opportunity to 'bring about positive change in Limerick' by creatively using public spaces to aid economic recovery (2020, p. 2). Speaking on the plan, councillor Joe Leddin confirmed, 'some new cultural and innovative offerings as well [in addition to public realm works] that we're planning to put in place over the summer months as the restrictions are lifted' to attract visitors to Limerick (RTE Radio 1, 26th May). Outdoor activities and events are proposed for the remainder of 2020 in a tourism, culture and arts recovery programme. A phased approach, in line with official guidance, is taken by LCCC; the programme includes animations, drive-in movies and concerts, food markets, and pop-up museum events. To support this programme, the council has announced a funding call for proposals to 'animate Limerick during the summer months'.

Covid-19 and the associated public health measures will cast a shadow over Limerick's cultural schedule for the foreseeable future – like everywhere else. Contingency planning in this uncertain environment is therefore vital. The Culture and Arts office has factored the Covid-19 risk into its assessment process for its festivals and grant scheme 2020–21. Applicants have been asked to consider the digitisation of elements of their programme 'to help mitigate against the risk of complete cancellation of a festival/event'. Applications must demonstrate consideration of COVID-19 guidelines and health and safety procedures.

Conclusion – likely implications for the foreseeable future

So far, 2020 has been challenging to say the least for Limerick's cultural sector. The introduction of public restrictions meant that it was never going to be business as usual. The initial response was to cancel events. Cultural practitioners and promoters, however, have since displayed great adaptability in the face of crisis. As Fiona McCormack, from LCCC, has noted: 'the arts and culture sector, like many, was dealt a huge blow with the restrictions imposed to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. During that time, the value of the sector was immeasurable as it found new ways to connect with audiences and help in sustaining people's wellbeing'.

How culture is consumed has changed, for the short term at least. Many organisers moved their events online in some shape or form, and this trend will continue. Technology is seen as a vital means to promote cultural inclusion during the crisis. It helps an activity or an event, be it a performance, exhibition or a workshop, reach new audiences and thereby broaden levels of participation.

But the response to COVID-19 has not just been to move everything online. There is a danger of offering too much digital content. For instance, while most of Limerick's programme for the national Culture Night (September 18th) will be delivered online, LCCC is mindful of not overloading it. Some viewers can find it somewhat off-putting or overwhelming if they are presented with too many online events. Therefore, physical events will also be organised where it is safe to do so.

An easing of public restrictions means that outdoor cultural activities can resume, albeit in a reconfigured form. Future events will require careful planning as COVID-19's ongoing threat ensures that social distancing will remain part of daily life for the foreseeable future. With this in mind, LCCC have devised a roadmap to creatively use public spaces to allow for the organisation of outdoor activities in line with the regulations. And its modified funding process, which encourages originality, may lead to further innovation in the delivery of Limerick's cultural programme.

Cultural life cannot return anytime soon to how it was before the pandemic. However, the creative and resilient nature of the sector – supported by local authorities – means that audiences will continue to have opportunities to enjoy culture in different and relatively safe ways.

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A case study of social inclusion in Cork during the Covid-19 pandemic

Sarah Conway

Responses to the Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted the capacity of local authorities to engage different groups from across the community. Restrictions imposed by the national government to safeguard the population from the virus have altered the daily routines of most citizens. Those asked to 'cocoon' in their homes and teenagers were among the groups particularly affected.

The term cocooner is used to refer to those over the age of seventy and those who are at increased risk from Covid-19 on account of underlying illness.[2] From mid-March, cocooners were asked to self-isolate in their homes. Teenagers, like other students, did not return to school. Cork County Council (CCC) has engaged outreach initiatives and networks to cater to their recreational and well-being needs. Responses have been conditioned by restrictions and recommendations made by the government, especially around gatherings and social distancing.

Case study background: Social inclusion in Cork during Covid-19

Established in 2018, the 'Teen Talks' initiative engages a series of public figures to speak to Transition Year students from across the county about health and well-being, with an emphasis on mental health. This spring, some 1,500 transition year students were expected to attend 'Teen Talks' events in Charleville, Little Island and Bantry (Cork County Council, 2020a). A parallel talk series was also planned. This second series would target 'Generation Z' (the parents and teachers of teenagers) and emphasise effective communication between the generations (Browne, 2020).

Cork's Older People's Council represents older people's needs to CCC. Both councils work in conjunction with Age Friendly Ireland, and Cork hosts four Age Friendly Towns. The Age Friendly Initiative seeks to foster social and physical environments which are conducive to the 'health, wellbeing, and ability to age in place' of older people (Shannon, 2018). Demands made by the

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[2] For further information on cocooning: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/923825-guidance-on-cocooning-to-protect-people-over-70-years-and-those-extr/

government around 'cocooning' and social isolation, however, challenged the traditional working of this initiative.

This case study examines steps taken by CCC to continue services to teenagers and older people during the pandemic. It highlights lessons learned by the Council that may serve Cork County and other local authorities while restrictions are reduced, and into the future. For this research, understanding of the steps taken by CCC to adapt to new circumstances was enriched through a survey conducted by the Local Government Management Association (LGMA, 2020), and an interview given by Noelle Desmond, Age Friendly Programme Manager for Cork County.

The Issue: engagement in uncertain times

Teen Talks

The 'Teen Talks' initiative is funded by Healthy Ireland through the Local Community Development Committees. Restrictions on gatherings introduced to combat the spread of coronavirus prompted the 'Teen Talks' series to be postponed. The parallel 'Generation Z' series was also postponed.

CCC and Niall O'Callaghan, Cork's Healthy Ireland Coordinator, recognised the continued urgent need to provide support to teenagers and adults in 'uncertain times'. The importance of teaching teenagers the skills required to maintain good mental health was further highlighted by the unprecedented context. However, the events could not proceed as planned in light of the risk to public health. An innovative new model to reach the targeted populations was required.

Age Friendly

The needs of cocooners were impacted by the request to stay at home, self-isolate and avoid physical contact with people from outside the household. Age Friendly Ireland reported work by Older People's Council members nationally, which identified some of the problems faced by older people on account of the pandemic. Many of these issues related to logistical concerns: renewing driving licenses, accessing the fuel allowance and use of telecommunications. Age Friendly Ireland promoted local and regional support for 'cocooning' and other lockdown measures through Older People's Councils (McGuigan, 2020). Moreover, many volunteers involved in the provision of services such as Meals on Wheels were affected by the request to 'cocoon' and their absence added to pressures on service delivery (Cork Age Friendly Programme, 2020). The supports provided by CCC to cocooners in the county are examined below.

Solutions

'Teen Talks'

The 'Teen Talks' series was moved online. Use of technology permitted the recording and distribution of interviews with those public figures who were initially scheduled to speak at the three postponed events.

Niall O'Callaghan, Director of Services, conducted a series of remote interviews with the relevant speakers. Participation was encouraged by inviting the audience to submit questions to interviewees before recordings. The interviews were conducted with the intention to appeal to a broader audience than the 'Teen Talks' series initially targeted, incorporating topics and advice relevant to teenagers and adults alike. Recordings were distributed via the council's Youtube and Facebook accounts, and advertised across social media, with a reach of approximately 40,000 and 3,500 views.

CCC is now considering adapting 'Teen Talks' to the podcast format. This may provide ongoing support to teenagers and adults, providing them with the skills to improve their mental and physical health and wellbeing.

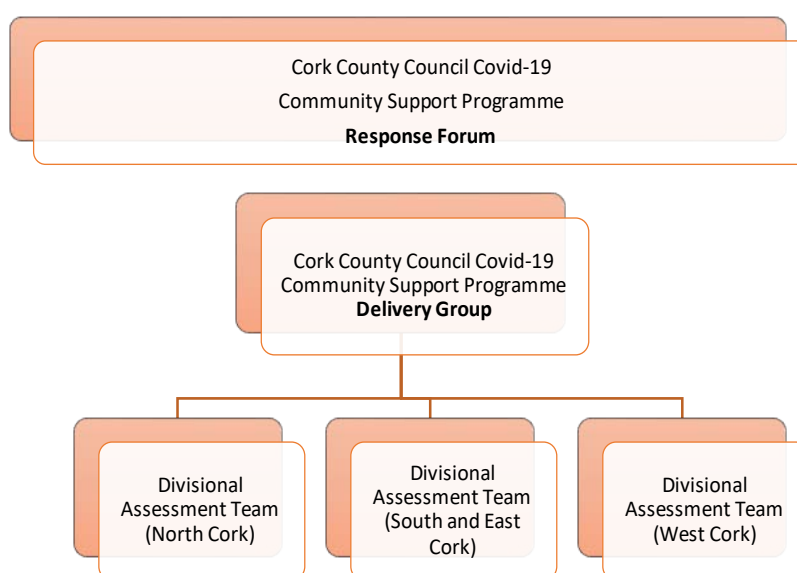## Catering to the needs of Cork's older people

The immediate response

CCC convened a special meeting of the Age Friendly Alliance on March 30th. Some representatives participated via conference call and others in person at the Council Chamber. The meeting was intended to raise awareness of the government's response measures, to relay the outcomes of the first meeting of CCC's Community Response Forum, and to identify the needs of the older population.

Concern for cocooners' mental health was raised at this special meeting. A book service for the house-bound was established, providing entertainment to those 'cocooning', with books delivered from council libraries to older and vulnerable people. The county also shared a wellbeing programme and mental health resources online. When poor mental health was flagged as a key issue by the Older People's Council, a dedicated sub-committee was established. The local churches were engaged to disseminate information about vital mental health resources through parish newsletters and radio-broadcast masses and services. Information was also distributed on local radio stations (N. Desmond, personal communication, June 22, 2020).

Establishing the response forum and ensuring representation

The newly-established response forum[3] (see Figure 1) facilitated representation from the Older People's Council. The Council was also represented on the Steering Group and the Delivery Group. Nineteen community support groups were established, based out of library branches. Support groups were tasked with producing quick, locally-targeted outputs. Initial responses targeted those issues raised by the Older People's Council, concerned with the logistics of life during lockdown - collecting prescriptions and groceries, attending medical appointments. The Red Cross assisted in bringing people to and from appointments.

Figure 1: Representation of the community response forum organisational structure

Cork County Council Covid-19
Community Support Programme
Response Forum

Cork County Council Covid-19
Community Support Programme
Delivery Group

Divisional Assessment Team (North Cork)

Divisional Assessment Team (South and East Cork)

Divisional Assessment Team (West Cork)

The Age Friendly Office worked with the HSE and Gardai to produce a 'heat map' that estimated how many older people are resident in each local area. This 'heat map' was prepared using census data and 'clusters of cocooners' were thereby identified. Estimates helped inform service providers if they were successfully serving the needs of all older people in a given area (N. Desmond, personal communication, June 22, 2020).

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[3] A separate case study published as part of this series provides further detail on the establishment of response forums, known as the Community Call Forum, across the country.

A Friendly Call service was established to support older people and identify medical or mental health needs. Older people can schedule a call from a member of the local community for a chat. Some volunteers availed of training from Alone and the Age Friendly Alliance.

On the ground, local Age Friendly Town Committees tried to respond to the needs of their communities (see example provided below). Many of their services were moved online. These committees moved into a new role, acting as liaison between the County and the people of the town, reporting issues up and down from town to council. Committee members were also invited to represent their groups at county level.

Age Friendly Committees in Action

In Mitchelstown, the Age Friendly Committee used Zoom to promote physical activity and wellbeing. Online meetups allowed for communication between older people despite the limitations of 'cocooning'. In Bandon, the Age Friendly Committee supported the work of other community groups based out of St. Michael's Community Centre. Colette O'Connor, a coordinator there, praised the Age Friendly Initiative for providing a network of Garda-vetted volunteers and businesses and organisations serving the community. This network has permitted the extension of services for the elderly, including the Bandon Meals on Wheels service and the town's Care Ring Conversations (Graham, 2020).

Activating County Towns with 'CARE'

Project ACT, the Council's initiative to 'activate the county's towns', consulted with the Older People's Council around the return of older people to their daily lives with the reduction of restrictions. In consultations, the Older People's Council stressed the sacrifices taken by older people and asserted that the older population did not seek to be further 'segregated' (N. Desmond, personal communication, June 22, 2020). To this end, other sections of the population have been targeted by communications encouraging them to consider, assist, respect and empathise with older people as they leave their cocoons. These four actions, which can be taken by all population groups to the benefit of cocooners, are being advertised under the term 'C.A.R.E'. Advertising of these 'C.A.R.E' guidelines can be seen across Cork, with signage in car parks and public parks, and in local newspapers. Community organisations, the GAA and An Garda Siochána have supported the campaign.

As lockdown restrictions are eased, CCC will continue to support the older population. The Council twice extended deadlines for applications for Age Friendly Town funding, allowing community groups whose work was delayed by the coronavirus to submit applications (Graham, 2020). The Council received eight applications and will support four new Age Friendly Towns during this funding cycle (N. Desmond, personal communication, June 22, 2020).

Lessons Learned

Overcoming the digital divide

Both 'Teen Talks' and the Age Friendly Initiative availed of the internet and related technologies to disseminate information on the availability of local supports and resources during the period of restrictions. There were concerns around the efficacy of digitally sharing resources as the intended audiences may lack internet, computer or smartphone access. Extending use of communications beyond the digital by availing of radio services and partnering with the Church, the Age Friendly Initiative had a much greater reach than might otherwise have been possible.

Utilising networks

The efficiency of the community support networks in response to the pandemic has been beneficial to CCC. These networks have facilitated the transfer of information both bottom-up, by trouble-shooting and reporting the needs of older people, and top-down, through dissemination of policies and resources. The local Age Friendly Committees have proven themselves in a new role as liaison between local and council level. Maintaining and enhancing these networks should be prioritised.

Staying connected for health & wellbeing

Poor mental health was flagged as an urgent issue earlier than anticipated. Whilst there was an early recognition that older people would 'need to feel connected to others' (Cork Age Friendly Programme, 2020), the escalation of this issue by members of the Older People's Council highlights the importance of balancing care for physical health against care for mental health. The house-bound book service, 'Care Ring' conversations and Friendly Calls were imperative to the wellbeing of older people and emphasise the importance of social needs.

Representing the older population

The Older People's Council has been very proactive in representing the needs of older people during Covid-19 restrictions. In consultations for Project ACT, it highlighted that this group did not seek to be

'segregated' on a prolonged basis from the community but reintegrated (N. Desmond, personal communication, June 22, 2020). The perspective offered by this Council should be acknowledged and responded to.

Concluding Remarks

Cork County Council's work with teenagers and older people has continued despite complications imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The adaptation of existing services to the 'new normal' was conducted through the engagement of new and existing networks, and with use of technologies that were not previously employed by the council in its social inclusion work. The role of the Older People's Council as a representative for older people permitted better understanding of the issues facing the community.

There are many lessons to be taken from the manner in which the County Council dealt with implications of the national request for cocooning and social distancing. The importance of using a variety of media to communicate a message, the strength of new-found and existing networks and community groups and the balancing of public health and mental health needs, are among just some of these. Continued focus on social inclusion for all citizens and population groups will help to ensure a fair and just recovery for all.

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Transport mobility during Covid-19:
A case study of national and international responses.

Seán Keane

Background: The impact of Covid-19 on transport mobility

Covid-19 restrictions over the past few months have brought unprecedented changes to the way in which people work, socialise, interact and travel – both in Ireland and beyond. Transport systems have been massively impacted worldwide with everyone but essential workers required to stay at home. This has led to a significant decrease in the number of people travelling daily. In order to limit the spread of the virus, cities and companies have been forced to adopt remote working policies to keep employees at home. Post-Covid-19, these changes have the potential to 'build a new normal' in cities, reducing the vulnerability of economic, social and environmental systems. However, they might also improve people's lives and stimulate innovation: 'from extensive use of digital innovations, to decentralised production, remanufacturing and restructuring of supply chains to respond to goods shortages' (OECD, 2020).

The issue: Public transport during the Covid-19 lockdown and thinking ahead

Transport mobility is, and will, be integral to the restoration of economic activity and a return to normalcy but the pandemic has provided city planners with an opportunity to reflect and rethink their approaches. New York has seen 100 miles of street opened up for socially responsible recreation, Paris intends to roll out 50km of emergency 'Corona cycle ways' along with a €50 incentive to repair old bikes, 50,000 square metres and a four-mile walkway have been liberated in Athens for cyclists and pedestrians alike while municipalities in Flanders can avail of a subsidy to cover up to 50% of the cost for new road markings, traffic signs, road furniture and installation costs (Connolly; Ville de Paris; Le Monde, Polis Network, 2020).

Despite their geographic diversity, cities across the planet face the same dilemma: how can public transport adapt and respond to these new challenges posed by the threat of Covid-19? Delphine Grandsart of the European Passenger Federation notes that hygiene and social distancing on public transport is vital, although the low capacity at which it is functioning would harm economic recovery and the sustainability of public transport. Some degree of social distancing needs to be combined with

the use of face masks, the optimisation of passenger flows (when boarding or queuing), occupancy information and passenger counting (Polis, 2020). How does this play out in the Irish context?

During the most restrictive phase of lockdown, car traffic in Dublin city dropped to 30% of pre-Covid-19 levels bus usage by 90% and rail usage by 97% (Dublin City Council (DCC), 2020a). A similar drop in traffic was also evident in Galway (see Figure 1). Future usage of public transport was also quickly identified as an issue, with DCC for example estimated an 80% reduction in public transport capacity over the coming months.

Source: Galway City Council
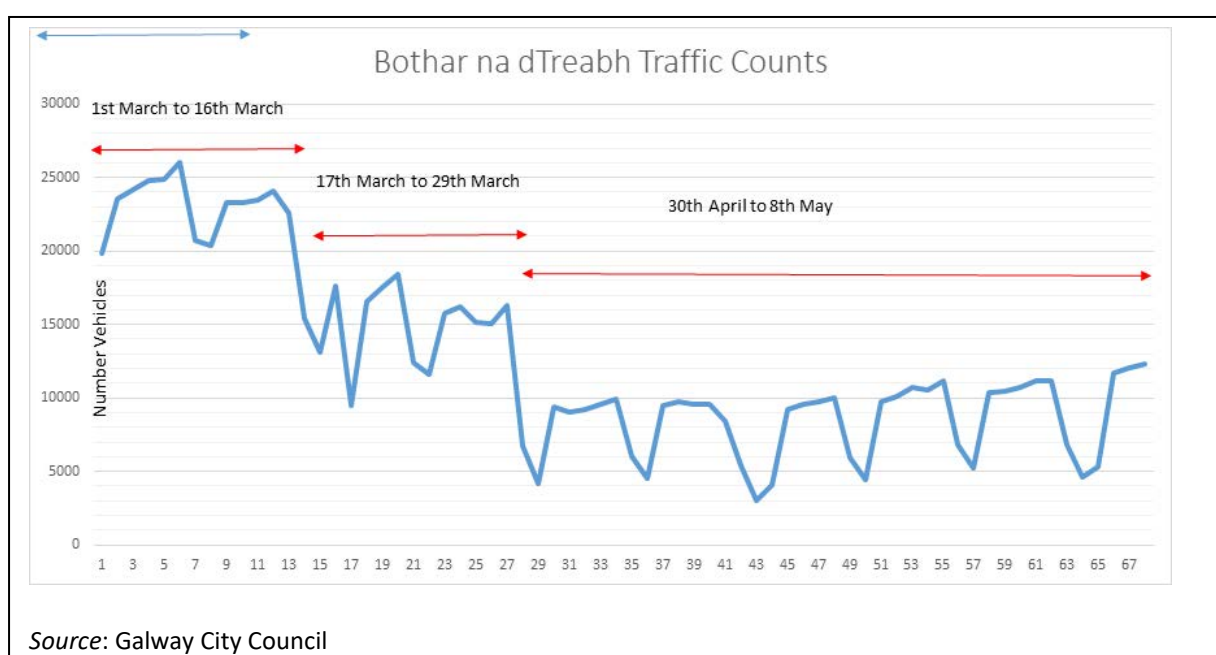
The solution: A renewed focus on mobility

Mobility initiatives have been launched by councils across Ireland in an attempt to tackle the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, such as DCC's joint mobility framework with the National Transport Authority (DCC, 2020a), Galway City Council (GCC)'s *Covid-19 Temporary City Mobility Framework Plan* (GCC, 2020) and Limerick City and County Council (LCCC)'s *Guiding Limerick through Covid-19* (LCCC, 2020). Cork City Council has launched public consultation initiatives that intend to consider short and medium-term 'practical mobility interventions'. These frameworks are very much 'live' and 'dynamic', so they will depend on consultation from all stakeholders regarding the re-allocation of roads and other public spaces in order to adhere to social distancing practices associated with Covid-19 restrictions.

DCC intends to see how 'a more pedestrian, cycling and public transport friendly centre can be set out' while Galway is focusing on 'key radical approaches into the city centre' (GCC, 2020). Cork City Council (CCC) has already pedestrianised the historic Marina riverside amenity and Oliver Plunkett, Tucket and Pembroke streets (CCC, June 2020).

The commonality evident in the councils' goals is that they wish to support safe access; to provide sufficient movement capacity for changed travel patterns; while supporting the economic recovery of the cities and their surrounding regions. These aims have been translated into transport-specific objectives which include the following: improving pedestrian safety through the provision of additional space for movement and enhanced pedestrian areas enabling more people to cycle by providing safer cycling facilities; providing additional space at bus stops in order to further facilitate social distancing; accommodating certain levels of car use which should be calibrated with other transport needs, including additional parking provision on the periphery of city cores; and reassigning or alternative designating of bus routes to enable the roll-out of cycling and walking measures while still maintaining a strong public transport network.

Decisions: In praise of public consultation

DCC responded to the capital's urgent needs with the introduction of temporary measures that shall be reviewed periodically to assess their effectiveness, and can be modified as needed in response to changing needs and requirements. GCC ran a consultation period between 18 May and 12 June, during which time they received over 1,000 submissions. Limerick followed suit from 29 May until 12 June as did Cork City from 29 May until 24 June. Public consultations invite the public to provide suggestions and feedback on transport-related issues in their areas which will inform the decisions of elected members of the council and other relevant stakeholders. 'This is a defining time in our history', says CCC Assistant Chief Executive, Brian Geaney, 'with so much uncertainty we must try and do what's best and sustainable for the future and turn this challenge into an opportunity. In doing so, it is critical that we listen carefully to all stakeholders across the city and consult all communities and sectors. We are all in this together and I sincerely hope that citizens will participate in the upcoming consultation' (CCC, 2020).

The reduction of speed limits is an example of some of these transport-focused objectives, as seen with DCC's plan to introduce a 30km/h speed limit across the city and in suburbs, on most arterial routes', both north and south of the Liffey where previous speeds of 50km/h and 80km/h were allowed. Despite the temporary arrangement of Covid-19 measures, such as the removal of car traffic

from College Green, should these bye-laws be passed by councillors, they would remain in place until otherwise rescinded at a later date. These proposals have been met with strong support even prior to Covid-19, when almost 900 submissions to the council last year wished for the speed reduction to be extended to all residential areas, 700 of which supported lower limits (Kelly, O., 2020).

In order to reconcile social distancing measures and public transport capacity (which was at 20% in early June), Anne Graham, chief executive officer of the National Transport Authority (NTA), urged the general public to 'ease any potential pressure on services', by strongly recommending people not to travel on public transport at peak times, to travel to their destinations on foot or by bike. 'Some 350,000 people live within six kilometres of O'Connell Bridge, which means that if they choose to cycle, they could get from their home to the centre of Dublin in less than 30 minutes. With fewer cars and trucks on our roads, cycling and walking has become much safer, and DCC, working with NTA, is making the city centre more attractive for those opting for these active travel modes' (DCC, 2020b). Additional cycling infrastructure was introduced in College Green, in early June; these included the extension of pavements to accommodate pedestrians, clearer road markings for cyclists and 'reusing existing road space by removing on-street parking and protecting that road space for cycling via protection bollards and other cyclist measures' (DCC 2020a).

Similarly, the Galway City Mobility Team has enacted temporary measures to completely pedestrianise Cross Street 'with access controlled through signage and temporary bollards (Kelly, B., 2020). 'Time is of the essence', according to GCC's Chief Executive, Brendan McGrath, given the speed at which the economy is reopening. He adds that the CMT have processed over 1,000 submissions which has led to the widening of footpaths on Eglington and Forster streets, the latter has also been reduced to a single lane for buses and general traffic (Corrigan, 2020). The online portal through which submissions have been made can be viewed on an interactive map to see whether people's ideas have been submitted or not.

Lessons Learned: Bridging inclusivity and resistance

Limerick's 'controversial' mobility plan initially proposed to ban cars from Catherine Street, Denmark Street and from other thoroughfares into O'Connell Street, introduce temporary speed limits and abolish charges for traders who wish to place seating on the streets. Family traders and hospitality business owners have criticised this blueprint due to concern regarding the loss of parking spots. The council have since significantly altered their plans despite more than 450 submissions in favour of pedestrianisation. David O' Brien, chief executive of Limerick Civic Trust said he hoped these changes

to the strategy will be made by the community with a 'bottom-up rather than a top-down approach'. He further comments on support provided to cultural and heritage organisations throughout the city and county whose long-lasting sustainable and authentic activities, he highlights the importance of 'engaging the citizen and visitor alike while providing creative impact and a lasting legacy' (Rabbitts, 2020). This demonstrates the importance of establishing clear terms of engagement from the start. Local authorities have certainly been successful in providing an opportunity for citizen engagement during the Covid-19 crisis but consultation alone is not sufficient. Inclusivity, on the part of all stakeholders, irrespective of the number of submissions is imperative in order to balance views from any opposing sides. This should ensure that the decision-making process reflects all parties involved.

That said, these decisions are provisional in nature since the impact of these initial observations remains to be seen. Policy-change post-crisis does illustrate the way in which change can focus on a window of opportunity that may lead to lasting, long-term, positive behavioural changes in how people travel. The scale of the Covid-19 crisis could stimulate long-lasting change – building on the lessons of the past could ensure that sustainable transport behaviours persist. Transforming urban space will also allow individuals adopt positive behavioural change around active travel such as walking and cycling, which are an integral part of an effective overall urban transport system. That would allow public transport service providers concentrate on the longer trips where this is the only alternative to driving a car (Hynes and Malone, 2020).

Concluding remarks

Public trust, including all stakeholders, in the safety of public transport must be ensured. Governments must provide public transport systems with the appropriate resources to maintain reliability standards 'while also catering to commuters' perceptions of safety, through measures to maintain a level of social distancing' (IEA, 2020). Micheals and Solecki note, 'disastrous events do not in and of themselves open up broad opportunities for meaningful and pertinent policy change. Instead, societal and organisational factors play a crucial limiting role' (1994: p. 594). Policy will be crucial in determining whether mobility changes triggered by Covid-19 are positive or negative, in terms of their impacts on energy use, safety and long-term environmental and health outcomes (IEA, 2020). The role of transport mobility in Ireland in reconciling economic activity and public health is essential and the precarious nature of this balance and its impact shall be seen in time to come.

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