



Joint Oireachtas Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment Presentation by the County and City Management Association (CCMA) on Facilitating the Reactivation of Enterprise, Trade and Employment following the Pandemic Restrictions

Wednesday 23 June 2021 @ 9:30am

Opening Statement

Introduction

Chair and members of the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment, on behalf of the County and City Management Association (CCMA) I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present on the role of Local Government in the 'Reactivation of Enterprise, Trade and Employment following the Pandemic Restrictions'. My name is AnnMarie Farrelly, Chief Executive of Fingal County Council and Chair of the CCMA Business Enterprise, Innovation and Urban/Town Economic Renewal (BEIUER) Committee. I am accompanied by my colleagues Pat Daly, Chief Executive, Limerick City and County Council, Anna Marie Delaney, Chief Executive, Offaly County Council, Richard Shakespeare, Assistant Chief Executive, Dublin City Council and Padraic McElwee, Chair of Local Enterprise Offices (LEO) Network and Head of LEO, Clare County Council.

Local Authorities provided a range of social and economic supports throughout the Pandemic appropriate to the level of restriction in place for the economic sectors and across our communities. The rollout of supports was implemented with pace, agility and efficiency with the aim of maintaining as much business confidence as possible during this time of unprecedented economic and societal change. The following supports are managed directly by local authorities:

- **107** Urban Regeneration and Development (URDF) Projects approved to a value of **€1.6b**
- **164** Rural Regeneration Development (RRDF) Projects approved to a value of **€338m**
- **€633m was paid to 108,000** businesses through the Restart and Restart plus Grants in 2020.
- **€1.2b Rates Waiver was processed and the waiver continues now for quarter 3**
- **€85m** direct funding to local businesses including **€38m** for online trading to 16,000 businesses.
- **€60m** funding provided for Small Business Assistance Scheme (SBASC)

- More than **22,000** businesses supported with 1:1 mentoring through the Local Enterprise Offices
- Almost **110,000** people have participated in upskilling training events organised by the LEOs.
- There are now **35,000** jobs in **7,500** LEO supported Client Companies.
- In excess of **20,000** outdoor dining spaces have been facilitated for the hospitality sector on the public realm. This includes local authority provision of more than **1000** Parklets and Café Style Options for business.
- More than **1000** hospitality businesses have also benefited from in excess of **€4m** Outdoor Dining Grants so far.
- Almost **3000** new benches and public seats provided.
- Greatly enhanced litter prevention and cleansing regimes are in place.

Local Government Leadership

As is demonstrated Local Authorities play a key role in the democratic, social, economic and cultural development of local areas. City and County Councils across Ireland provide infrastructure, amenities and services designed to improve local areas as places to live, visit and invest. From an economic perspective Local Authorities play a critical role in putting in place initiatives to stimulate the local economy and to support business in creating employment. Never has this role been more critical than in the past 16 months. Local Authorities work closely and in partnership with Government Departments and key state agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Fáilte Ireland, Arts Council and on a local level with Chambers and business representative bodies. This collaborative and partnership approach has been essential to navigating the challenges faced for business due to the impact of COVID-19. The Community Call was one such action led programme to provide services to vulnerable individuals during the COVID-19 lockdown. Co-ordination at local level by the local authorities was critical, the sector immediately responded to the call to mobilise community networks across the country over the space of a single weekend. At local level, local authorities established a Local Authority Response Forum which coordinated the work of Community Call, this involved frequent engagement through the National Oversight Group which included CCMA representation in its membership.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) play a key role and are an integral part of each local authority, supporting start-up businesses, entrepreneurs and in general assisting businesses to scale up, innovate and develop their market potential.

LEO's are recognised as a one-stop-shop providing enterprise advice, coaching, management development and expertise. The financial supports available through the LEO network have proven to be a critical contributory factor in the success story of many of Ireland's high performing start-ups. It has been widely recognised that in the face of unprecedented challenge the LEO's managed to pivot and adapt quickly to assist businesses to endure the crisis of the pandemic.

In addition, Local Authorities play a pivotal role in supporting Tourism and the development of destinations and attractions across the country. Working in collaboration and partnership

with the National Tourism Authority, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Taskforces have been established across the sector. The Tourism industry has been one of the most affected industries by the pandemic, the impact on a national, regional and local level has decimated the industry. However, throughout this time local authorities have been active and responsive in ensuring tourism on a local, regional and national level will survive and build back stronger.

Local Authorities have also been instrumental in the provision of enterprise hubs. A national **Digital Hub Network** of **400** Digital Hubs is now established, providing **15,000** Workspaces and **270** Broadband Connection Points. **WiFi4U Schemes** are also being rolled out nationally. All of these services are integral to future remote working strategies.

The #LookforLocal and staycation tourism campaigns had significant success in 2020, further campaigns for Summer 2021 are underway. More than **4,500** local companies have participated in the Look for Local Campaign which covered every business sector, right across the Country.

Local Authorities continue to lead, deliver and finance city and town centre rejuvenation projects, economic activations and other direct business supports in line with the following Government Initiatives.

1. Urban Regeneration and Development Fund
2. Rural Regeneration Development Fund
3. Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2021
4. Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Programme
5. Rural Active Travel Investment Programme
6. Creative Ireland Programme
7. Reimagining Outdoor Spaces Fund
8. Outdoor Seating and Accessories fund / Outdoor Dining Enhancement Scheme
9. Local Live Performance Scheme
10. Local Authorities Urban Animation Capital Infrastructure Scheme
11. Creative Climate Action Fund
12. Enhanced litter prevention and cleaning programmes to support Outdoor Summer 2021
13. Community Enhancement Programme

The projects include largescale urban regeneration investments and town centre public realm improvements and revitalisation projects

Town and City Recovery Taskforces

Town and City Recovery Taskforces have been established to work in partnership with An Garda Síochána, Licensed Vintners Association, Retail Excellence Ireland, Chambers of Commerce, Local BID companies and other relevant stakeholders. Dublin, Cork and Limerick City Councils along with most other local authorities have been very active in this regard and further information is provided in our submission.

Active Travel

The restrictions on travel and the reduction in the capacity of public transport accentuated the necessity to accelerate active travel initiatives in cities, towns and local areas throughout

Ireland. Local authorities implemented and continue to implement a series of measures to support walking and cycling. Active travel measures being delivered by local authorities primarily involves the improvement and expansion of cycling and walking infrastructure. These measures were supplemented by a suite of supports designed to enhance the safety, security and comfort of cyclists and pedestrians such as the pedestrianisation of streets, installation of benches and parklets to accommodate rest, segregation of cycle lanes and roadways, provision of quiet spaces and installation of temporary and permanent toilets. In addition to facilitating mobility, these active travel measures play an important role in supporting physical and mental wellbeing of people through the pandemic. These measures also helped foster a greater appreciation of the natural and built heritage of local areas while connecting local communities. The CCMA would like to acknowledge the considerable support of the Department of Transport and the National Transport Authority who have committed €393million investment for multi annual active travel plans, with more anticipated. The rollout of this is supported by creation of 248 active travel posts. Local authorities will play a key role in achieving the Government's objective of delivering 1,000 km of cycling and walking infrastructure by 2025.

Economic & Community Sustainability Initiatives to Support the Reactivation of Business

Local Government economic plans for the coming months will build on our efforts over the past 16 months. In November 2020, a 'Framework for Development of Local Economic Sustainability Initiatives' was developed by the Local Government sector. The framework was centred on significant measures and activities that were underway across the sector, to support businesses at that critical time.

Over the coming weeks and months, a robust suite of initiatives will underpin economic growth at local level and provide confidence for communities, as we move forward into a period of rebuilding. Local Authorities are committed to supporting and facilitating an agile and appropriate response to business and community needs, working collaboratively with business communities and representative groups across the country. New Regional Enterprise Plans are now being developed to encourage development of new and existing businesses and to increase employment in every region. Local Authorities are a key partner in this process.

The CCMA and the local government sector acknowledge the extensive and far-reaching support provided by central Government during the pandemic crisis and on a continuing basis. Local Authorities have and will continue to respond to the needs of their local areas, assist business recovery and help get people back to work.

Submission

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment Submission by the County and City Management Association (CCMA) on Facilitating the Reactivation of Enterprise, Trade and Employment following the Pandemic Restrictions

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In addition, Local Authorities play a pivotal role in supporting Tourism and the development of destinations and attractions across the country. Working in collaboration and partnership with the National Tourism Authority, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Taskforces have been established across the sector. The Tourism industry has been one of the most affected industries by the pandemic, the impact on a national, regional and local level has decimated the industry. However, throughout this time local authorities have been active and responsive in ensuring tourism on a local, regional and national level will survive and build back stronger.

Town and City Recovery Taskforces

Across the sector Local Authorities have established Town and City Recovery Taskforces who work in partnership with key stakeholders. Considerable work has been underway in many areas in this regard and in particular in Dublin City Council, Cork City Council and Limerick City and County Council.

- Dublin City Council has established an Office of City Recovery which is led by a Director of Service and reports into the City Recovery Taskforce, which is made up of 4 Strategic Policy Committee Chairs, the Chief Executive who is the Director of City Recovery and it is chaired by the Lord Mayor. The Office of City Recovery liaises on a regular basis with the already established City Centre Business Group which comprises, An Garda Síochána, Licensed Vintners Association, Retail Excellence Ireland, Dublin City Chamber of Commerce, Dublin City BID and other relevant stakeholders. This group is meeting on a regular basis and is inputting into the strategy of coordinating the delivery of all City Council services to ensure the City recovers as lockdown measures are eased.
- Cork City Council coordinates a City Centre Partnership Committee made up of Council officials, elected members, business, transport and Gardaí to oversee the implementation of the city centre strategy. This is chaired by the Chief Executive of the City Council. This group has been augmented in terms of agenda and frequency of meetings to steer the city through the COVID 19 Pandemic and it is envisaged that it will be instrumental in coordinating the recovery of the city. In addition, the executive have established a Covid City Recovery Group to coordinate the activities of the city council through Covid.
- Limerick City and County Council has established a Re-Opening Limerick Taskforce to manage the transformation and re-opening of the City centre. The group is chaired by the Mayor and includes Cathaoirleach of Limerick Metropolitan District, representation from a wide range of stakeholders, including Chambers, City Business Groups, Representative Organisations and Federations and Senior Management from the County Council. The key work of the group is to plan for reopening Limerick and improving Limerick city centre including considering and promoting proposals for pedestrianisation, buildouts, parklets, tables & chairs licencing, city centre improvement works, greening, animation, marketing, policing, promotions.

Economic & Community Sustainability Initiatives to Support the Reactivation of Business

Local Government economic plans for the coming months will build on our efforts over the past critical 16-month period. In November 2020, a 'Framework for Development of Local Economic Sustainability Initiatives' was developed by the Local Government sector. The framework was centred on significant measures and activities that were underway across the sector, to support businesses at that critical time. This was also underpinned in a commitment in Section 5 of the *'Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19'* 'to develop local area economic sustainability initiatives which support local business'. The Government's plan was revised in March 2021 *'COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021: The Path Ahead'*, Section 2.3 of the Plan outlines the unprecedented range of supports for business provided during the pandemic, many of which were administered directly by the Local Authorities or through their Local Enterprise Offices. Section 4.4.1 of the Plan also acknowledges the "community call" and the potential to apply lessons from its success moving forward.

Over the coming weeks and months, a robust suite of initiatives will underpin economic growth at local level and provide confidence for communities, as we move forward into a period of rebuilding. Local Authorities are committed to supporting and facilitating an agile and appropriate response to business and community needs, working collaboratively with business communities and representative groups across the country. New Regional Enterprise Plans are now being developed to encourage development of new and existing businesses and to increase employment in every region. Local Authorities are a key partner in this process.

As highlighted in the earlier Framework, the management of public realm in city centres, towns and villages is critically important to ensuring businesses can continue to trade safely and that the public and consumers feel assured they can enjoy amenity, recreation and hospitality facilities and shop locally in a safe way.

Summer 2021 Framework

The three key pillars which were central to the earlier Framework will remain key elements for success in the coming months:

Direct Business Supports – Helping your Business Trade in Summer 2021

- Provision of a range of funding schemes
- Training and Mentoring supports to meet changing business needs
- Permitting of extended opening hours
-

Activation measures – Keeping Safe

- Active Travel measures for workers and local communities
- Pedestrian Cycleways/greenways
- Walking routes to and from shopping/hospitality areas from periphery parking
- Outdoor attractions, public realm improvements
- Reimagining events and creating attractive public realm

- Collaboration with Arts Sector to enliven public areas.

Public Realm & Outdoor Animation – Cities, Town and village centres

- Use of public space to trade, parklets, street furniture
- Outdoor space for business & communities
- Visible and active management of public realm, continuity and flow of footfall and minimising congregation
- Clear signage and messaging on face coverings, street flow and congregation and event areas

Direct Business Supports – Helping Business Trade in Summer 2021

Across the Local Government sector, there are a wide range of business supports on offer which will provide businesses with the necessary confidence during this time of re-opening and start the process of re-building during the Summer period. Some of the key supports include, but are not limited to:

Local Authority Direct Business Supports

- Dedicated Town re-opening committees & Town Teams
- Rates Waiver Scheme
- Licences to Trade on Public Areas
- Outdoor Seating and Accessories for Tourism & Hospitality Scheme
- Weatherproofing and Outdoor Dining Infrastructure Grant Scheme
- Retail and Retail Enhancement Support Programme 2021
- Mentoring & Training Programmes
- Painting/Merchandising Schemes (financial supports)
- Supports for 'Green for Retail'
- Shop Local Online Trading Platforms
- #LookForLocal Campaign (new campaign in planning stage)
- Small Business Assistance Scheme (COVID-19)
- Green for Micro Programme
- Trading-on-Line Voucher Scheme (TOV)
- Safe Destination Training Programmes
- Food academy / Food Starter Programmes
- Supports for Business Hubs
- Suspension of S254 licence fees
- Parklet Partner Schemes
- Dedicated Tourism Product Development Programmes

Continued cross sectoral and community collaboration and partnership will be key to the success of these supports. Across the sector Local Authorities continue to be active in planning and developing programmes and establishing partnerships and collaborative approaches with the business community, community groups and town teams.

Activation Measures – Keeping Safe

Building on the work which was underway last year, plans and projects focused on activation measures with a key focus on safety, have been developed across the sector. These include:

- Temporary one-way systems
- Development of new Footpaths
- Schemes to improve safety and accessibility in cities/towns/villages
- Review of Mobility Plans and Safe Streets in Summer 2021
- Review of Coastal Mobility Routes
- Development of new Cycle Routes
- Measures to Reduce Traffic Flow
- Active School Travel Programmes
- Removal of Parking in some areas to enable safer walking
- Development of Cycleways
- Street Revitalisation Projects
- Active Travel Initiatives
- Greenway Network Projects
- Walking Trail Projects
- Mobility Interventions: these include cycle lanes, increased footpath space, school zones, traffic signal changes, filtered permeability trials, buildouts and many other interventions.
- 'Light Segregation Schemes' to support safer cycling
- River Walks

Public Realm

Extensive work is currently being undertaken across the local authority areas focused on the planning and development of public realm projects. These public realm projects are a substantial capital investment for the sector ranging from smaller capital investments to multi-million-euro projects.

These projects can have a wide variation in range and scale and require significant fiscal and human resource investment. The type of Public Realm projects underway include but are not limited to:

- Creation of temporary outdoor dining spaces to include parklets, wheelchair accessible benches, and social distance markers
- Outdoor Multiuse Cultural Event Space
- Destination Towns Programme
- Projects including a plaza, landscaping, improved public transport facilities, cycle parking, and improved pedestrian access
- Town & Village improvement schemes
- Parks Improvement Schemes to make parks more visible to pedestrians, and improve disabled access
- Reconfiguration of parking facilities to allow for outdoor dining
- Provision of planter boxes and seating areas
- Back lighting of historical sites
- General mobility and accessibility works

- Pedestrianisation of key locations
- Footpath buildouts across cities and counties
- Laneway Upgrades
- Animation of Public Realm areas through Street Art
- Provision of parklets in town centres
- Provision of age friendly parking
- Upgrading of public lighting
- New playgrounds and community space
- General enhancement of streetscapes
- Provision of new seating, bins, awnings
- Provision of traders hub, shared meeting area, shared community areas.

Outdoor Animation

Notwithstanding the difficulties in planning for public animation events in the current climate and allowing for the uncertainty that surrounded opening-up plans, various initiatives have been developed and are ready for implementation across the sector. These include:

- Street Art Projects
- Outdoor space development for multi-use cultural events
- Outdoor Library events
- Development of Village Green Infrastructure
- Arts & Theatre Productions
- Outdoor Dining Enhancement Schemes
- Festoon Lighting Initiatives
- In-depth engagements with local business communities as a means of animating outdoor projects that can help develop the economy of respective towns.
- Outdoor dance installations
- Live Music Events
- 'District Centre' improvement projects
- Animation Murals

Our Plan for the Future Moving Forward

Digital Hubs / Digital Connectivity

Local Authorities all over the country have been instrumental in the development of the infrastructure required to support a shift to remote and hybrid work patterns. We have played coordinating, facilitating & enabling roles in the development of a national network of 400 Digital Hubs offering approximately 15,000 workspaces. Many of these spaces are now ready for occupation and will have an immediate impact. Our Broadband Officers have led the rollout of 270 Broadband Connection Points and hundreds of Wifi4EU schemes throughout Ireland. The dispersed nature of these facilities promotes local economic reactivation and supports local communities and local jobs.

Our Rural Future

Local Authorities are intrinsic to the rollout of the national Rural Development Policy, Our Rural Future. Initiatives such as the Rural Regeneration & Development Fund, the CLÁR programme, the Town & Village Renewal Scheme, and the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme all play an important role in stimulating local economies and promoting real sustainability. In many cases we are leveraging our own capital assets to unlock funding under competitive calls and are leveraging community talent and energy to promote locally-lead recovery and reactivation in our smaller towns and villages. Additionally, the development of new recreational and tourism infrastructure broadens our tourism base, generates economic activity, and drives economic sustainability.

National Economic Plan

As provided for in the new National Economic Plan Government is committed to the development of a 'Town Centre First' approach which seeks to align policies and to target available resources to deliver the best outcomes for town centres. This approach will focus on utilising existing buildings and underutilised lands for new economic and residential development, and proactively regenerating rural towns and villages. It will be supported by coordinated investment including the €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and an expanded Town and Village Renewal Scheme to bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use and promote residential occupancy. The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund will play an important role in the integrated urban development of cities and larger towns.

The Plan provides for new city delivery boards being established to drive the strategic co-ordination of metropolitan public investment and transformational regeneration, with the support of national and regional agencies and Government Departments, in order to achieve the pace and scale of growth required.

The plan acknowledges that work is currently underway with local authorities on plans for short-term recovery of city centres from the impact of the pandemic. The initial focus is building on existing Government supports and initiatives to help activity return to city centres in a sustainable and safe manner during the Summer, supporting the provision of outdoor space, public amenities, active travel, and support for business.

Local Authorities leading a Town Centres First Approach

The development of the Town Centre First (TCF) Programme will play a vital role in developing a much needed, co-ordinated, action led approach to town centre re-generation and re-vitalisation around the country. The programme will be multifaceted and structured to ensure the individual character of the Town can be retained, while their USP's can be nurtured through the development and implementation of Vision Plans, supported through the co-ordination and streamlining of new and existing funding and resource mechanisms. Each individual vision plan will be informed by an initial town "Health Check" and consider keys

topics like dereliction, vacancy, heritage, employment, services, placemaking etc. The programme which will be supported by the NPF, NDP and RSES policies for compact growth and town centre rejuvenation which are then implemented in local city and county development plans.

At present, local authorities are the conduit through which almost all funding instruments are currently managed and delivered including URDF, RRDF, ORIS, Town & Village Renewal. This is complimented by the local authorities own funding of targeted town centre improvements and also by co-funding the nationally funded schemes.

Through the CCMA Working Group for TCF, the Local Authorities have been proposed to take on the lead role in the implementation and management of this programme, engaging with all stakeholders, and with an appropriate governance and support structure in place to ensure the best possible outcomes for the towns. The appointment of local authorities as the lead is considered a natural extension of its existing role that will facilitate the cohesive alignment of the programme with the existing responsibilities and services already delivered by the sector, and effectively bring the instruments and all of the partners together.

Active Travel

The restrictions on travel and the reduction in the capacity of public transport accentuated the necessity to accelerate active travel initiatives in cities, towns and local areas throughout Ireland. Local authorities implemented and continue to implement a series of measures to support walking and cycling . Active travel measures being delivered by local authorities primarily involves the improvement and expansion of cycling and walking infrastructure. These measures were supplemented by a suite of supports designed to enhance the safety, security and comfort of cyclists and pedestrians such as the pedestrianisation of streets, installation of benches and parklets to accommodate rest, segregation of cycle lanes and roadways, provision of quiet spaces and installation of temporary and permanent toilets. In addition to facilitating mobility, these active travel measures play an important role in supporting physical and mental wellbeing of people through the pandemic. These measures also helped foster a greater appreciation of the natural and built heritage of local areas while connecting local communities. The CCMA would like to acknowledge the considerable support of the Department of Transport and the National Transport Authority who have committed €393million investment for multi annual active travel plans, with more anticipated. The rollout if this is supported by creation of 248 active travel posts. Local authorities will play a key role in achieving the Government’s objective of delivering 1,000 km of cycling and walking infrastructure by 2025. Active Travel funding programmes include:

- Outdoor Infrastructure €13m
- Active Travel – Towns & Villages €72m
- Greenways €63.5m
- Greenways feasibility €4.5m
- Cities €240 (5-year plan)
- 248 staff- 218 (local) 30 (regional)

Supporting Arts & Culture Nationally

Local authorities and the Arts Council are the biggest public funders of the arts in Ireland (155m in 2020) and have a Framework for Collaboration in place which recognises this sustained investment and the shared priority areas of the investment; the Agreement sets out a shared set of values and guiding principles in how both the Local Authorities and Arts Council can work better together.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to the arts sector. The Arts Council and the County and City Management Association (CCMA) have worked more closely together in understanding and responding to the efforts required to sustain the sector and continue with important public engagement opportunities.

Local Authority Arts Offices have responded in a variety of ways to ensure that the delivery of their programmes and supports to artists and audiences have continued to be delivered. e.g., Offaly County Council Arts Office has provided training to artists and creatives in the use of digital technology, enabling support to move programming online during the restriction – thus ensuring the continuation of accessible funding – this funding has been enhanced by additional Creative Ireland project funding.

Professional Artist Supports have been provided for artists wishing to upskill or to consider expanding their practice and seek new audiences in the current circumstances – enabling artists to keep working through the pandemic, developing new works and to be ready to go back to the projects which enable direct contact with communities and groups when safe to do so. The Arts Offices are working closely with festivals in the county providing support, information or training to assist with the delivery of their programming – whether online – or physical. They are also working closely with community groups in the county providing support, information or training to assist with the delivery of their Arts Acts Grant funded programming – whether online – or physical.

Local Authorities across the country are working to deliver a new stream of funding to encourage outdoor arts and cultural programming funded through the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media's, Local Live Performance Programming scheme.

The Creative Ireland programme is cross-departmental in local authorities and allows for good collaboration, synergy and skills sharing. Local Authorities have utilised Creative Ireland in a way that's complementary to our own programmes and it boosts those programmes.

Creative Ireland funding is distributed locally on basis of expressions of interest.

Creative Ireland is administered through the local authorities have provided additional funding in support of communities to deliver projects in light of the Covid restriction e.g. Creative Ireland Programme, 200 Covid Care Concerts were delivered by the Mobile Music Machine in response to the many social challenges presented by COVID 19

New funding streams include:

- Creativity in Older Age fund designed specifically to counteract the social side effects of the pandemic
- Creative Ireland Climate Action Fund - for creative projects which can meaningfully connect people with profound changes happening in our environment, society and economy arising from climate change

Working in collaboration and as a major funder of the Arts Local Authorities are committed to ensure artists have employment, are kept in employment through the pandemic and that they have a source of income. It is worth noting that much of the funding for Arts is competitive and mainly relates to infrastructure, this is welcome in the current climate to ensure that Arts Centres remain open.

Arts Council of Ireland have introduced a number of new and enhanced funding programmes in response to COVID-19. These include:

- Enhanced commissioning, projects and bursary awards
- An Emergency Stabilisation Fund
- COVID-19 Response Award Fund
- A Capacity Building Response Award Scheme
- The COVID-19 Completion funding Scheme
- Provision of support through special projects – to enable the delivery of outdoor activity has included In the Open | Faoin Spéir, a special purpose Invitation to Collaboration round in 2021, has been developed in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Local Government Local, Regional and National Impact

Local Government has proven that it is creative, agile and flexible when responding to the needs of the business community, from soft supports such as #Lookforlocal to longer term plans for Town Centre First master planning. The drive to ensure that our towns and villages are vibrant and thriving centres of commercial activity while remaining attractive places to live and spend leisure time in is at the core of every county's Development Plan. Our energies are even more focused in this space as we emerge from this pandemic and we have demonstrated our unique ability to pivot and respond to government policy and the needs of the community in innovative and creative ways.