

Opening Statement from Joe O'Brien TD, Minister of State for Community Development and Charities.

Department of Rural and Community Development.

I appreciate the opportunity to present this request for a technical supplementary estimate for the Department of Rural and Community Development.

It will facilitate the allocation of additional funding of €10 million for the Covid-19 Stability Fund, increasing the total value of that fund to €45 million.

It will also finance a Community Resilience Fund to will assist community groups to continue to operate and provide services in a Covid-19 environment. It will also encourage involvement in the 'Keep Well' campaign, which focusses on; keeping active, staying connected, switching off and being creative, eating well, and minding your mood.

As noted, this is a technical supplementary, with no net increase to the vote. The €10 million is to be recouped from the Dormant Accounts Fund, with the Community Resilience Fund financed through current savings identified on DRCD's vote.

Covid Stability Fund – Additional €10 million

With regard to the planned additional funding of €10 million for the Covid-19 Stability Fund, this will see the total fund increase from €35 million to €45 million.

The original €35 million allocation was shared across three Departments, with €22 million for my own Department, €10 million for the Department of Health and €3 million for the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. This funding split was based on the sectors that grantees operated within.

However, for ease of administration at this stage of the year, the proposed additional €10 million would be allocated to the DRCD vote, and see the DRCD provision increase from €22 million to €32 million.

The purpose of the Covid Stability Fund is to provide grants to charities, community and voluntary organisations and social enterprises that provide critical services to the most vulnerable in society and which have seen their revenue drop significantly due to the pandemic.

Pobal are administering the scheme on behalf of my Department, and, to date, four tranches of grants have been announced allocating funding of €30.1 million to 568 organisations.

Full information on the grants made to date is available on gov.ie – however I think it is worth mentioning a few organisations that have benefited. There has been

- €200,000 for Mayo-Roscommon Hospice Foundation
- €85,000 for Killorglan Family Resource Centre
- €34,000 for Galway Autism Partnership
- €19,000 for Corduff Community Resource Centre.

These examples demonstrate the broad range of organisations benefiting, and the services that can be maintained due to this funding.

The pandemic is continuing to weigh heavily on the sector, challenges remain such as the level 5 restrictions entered into over recent weeks. The logic for the additional €10 million is to mitigate these impacts. The additional funding will further support organisations assisted under the first round so they can continue their important work in assisting the national response to the pandemic.

I am certain that the funding to date, and this additional funding, has been a vital support so that these and similar organisations can continue their work and help those in need during these challenging times.

I would finally note that this is technical supplementary as the measure is being financed through the Dormant Accounts Fund. The funding is recouped from the

Dormant Account Fund, managed by the NTMA, rendering this expenditure exchequer neutral.

I think the use of the Dormant Accounts Fund has been central to ensuring that these supports for the broad C&V sector have been of such a significant scale, and I am delighted that, given the source of this money, it is being put to such a practical and important use.

Covid-19 Community Resilience Fund

The second technical supplementary is seeking movement of current savings into the B.11 Community Enhancement Programme sub-head to enable a Community Resilience Fund for small grant supports to community facilities and organisations at local level.

These proposed supports will:

- Assist local community and voluntary groups to adapt their services and operations to fit the new COVID-19 reality. This is consistent with an action assigned to our Department under the Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19. Examples of measures supported could be funding consumables necessary to support public health guidelines including social distancing; offering on-line activities; providing social supports and friendly calls by phone etc.
- It will also help to animate community groups to enable them to become more involved in the Government's 'Keep Well' campaign. It will seek to assist their participation in all five themes of the plan (covering keeping active, staying connected, switching off and being creative, eating well, and minding your mood), but particularly the staying connected theme.

Funding will be allocated to each Local Authority area, and the fund will be administered by the LCDCs. Sufficient flexibility under the fund will be granted to support community groups with day to day running costs if needed.

The savings identified initially for this proposal amount €770,000, with €570,000 from A.4 Rural Supports and €200,000 from B.5 LCDC supports. This forms the basis for one element of the technical supplementary before you today.

The proposal is to open a current element under the B11. Community Enhancement Programme subhead. It is from this subhead that the proposed

Community Resilience Fund will be disbursed to LCDCs for onward distribution to local community and voluntary groups as part of Government's pandemic response.

We continue to assess whether other small current savings can be identified across the Vote and would like to be in a position to supplement this fund further – possibly enabling a fund in the range of €1.5 million to €2 million in total. If further current savings can be identified, and the Committee is in agreement with the supplementary estimate today, any further funding would be subject to sanction by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Overall, the Community Resilience Fund will provide significant practical funding supports at local level with local flexibility and decision making ensuring the impact on the ground is maximised.

As noted, this technical supplementary is required as the B.11 Community Enhancement Programme sub-head contains only capital funding, and so a vote is required to enable current expenditure. Again this measure is net expenditure neutral given savings elsewhere are funding the proposal - but it will ensure that our current funding is put to best use in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Closing

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for taking the time to consider the supplementary estimate and I am happy to answer any questions that might arise.