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meath county council

Chief Executive's Report for Elected Members

Monthly Management Report
April 2020

This Monthly Management Report is prepared in accordance with Section 136(2) of the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, and provided to the Elected Members for consideration and information.

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Introduction by the Chief Executive

To Members,

This Monthly Management Report gives an overview of the on-going governance of Meath County Council at a very challenging time for the Council, the county and the country more generally. The extraordinary period of uncertainty that we are currently facing has very significant implications for the Council and the public services we deliver. The full extent of these implications will only be clearer in the weeks and months ahead.

This report is being provided for your consideration and information and gives an overview of how the Council has responded to the significant public health measures that were introduced last month. Since the first announcement by An Taoiseach on March 12th, I have endeavoured to keep you all informed of developments by issuing a series of email bulletins (7 in total), which gave an overview of the key issues during a very fast-moving and ever-changing two-three weeks.

As Chief Executive, I have been conscious of the need to keep lines of communication open during this crisis. This includes with the staff of the Council, with the national authorities shaping the response, with the other local authorities and agencies at regional and national levels and with the general public through our website and social media accounts. As a Council we will continue to do this as best we can.

I also want to thank the Cathaoirelach and other members for their support during this difficult time for working with us in putting the right responses in place and for reinforcing the key messages, as we try to deliver essential public services at a time of national crisis. I must also thank our excellent staff, many of whom are on the frontline, for their energy and commitment over the past four weeks. They will be vital in the coming months, as we move through the next phases of this situation.

As you will see in this report, we have tried as a Council to strike the right balance between maintaining public services, whilst at the same time reinforcing the key objectives of the public health measures and protecting the health and wellbeing of our staff and the general public. To date, I believe we have achieved this and our future actions as a Council will be very much guided by the medical advice and latest national guidance.

Thank You,

Jackie Maguire
Chief Executive

Response to the Covid 19 Situation

Phase One - First Series of Public Health Measures

On Thursday, **March 12**, An Taoiseach introduced the first in a series of measures that closed a number of public services and facilities, such as schools and public libraries, and restricted gatherings of people. The announcement had a direct impact on the way the Council did its business and in response, the Council had to:



Service Provision:

- Identify its essential services and the key personnel to deliver these, as part of the Council's Business Continuity Plan;
- Keep public counters open in Buvinda House, but with restrictions. Members of the public could receive customer service, conduct planning searches, lodge planning applications and continue to tax their vehicles and make other payments.
- Put in place measures to discourage people attending the Council offices in person and encourage business by phone and email in order to protect staff and minimise the social interactions of citizens;
- Curtail a number of services and non-essential meetings were re-scheduled;
- Close all library branches with immediate effect ,as were a number of other facilities.
- Liaise closely with contractors of works contracts to ensure compliance with the restrictions.

Council Meetings:

- Cancel the scheduled Trim and Navan MD meetings, following consultations with the Cathaoirleach of the relevant MDs on March 13;
- Cancel meetings in April following discussions with the Party Whips on March 23, who expressed a clear consensus that people's health took precedent at this time..

Implications for Workforce:

- Keep staff informed of on-going developments as the guidance evolved and was clarified on staff leave and other entitlements;
- Introduce new flexible working arrangements, enable a significant number of staff to work from home and implement a new Monday-Saturday shift roster for indoor staff;
- Maintain outdoor staff work schedules but introduce necessary modifications to ensure physical distancing;
- Manage on a case-by-case basis the situation of a number of staff being tested, self-isolating on medical advice or restricting movements following travel abroad.

Deal with On-going Challenges

- Help enforce Social Distancing guidelines by putting place some measures and additional signage at a number of amenity locations such as beaches, parks and playgrounds;

- Reach out to the OPW to support whatever measures it had planned for its sites and liaise with An Garda Síochána on these public health measures.

Phase Two – Further Measures and More Restrictions

On Friday, **March 27**, the Government introduced additional and tighter measures to prevent the spread of the Covid 19 virus. These measures had further impacts on Council services but also placed the Council at the centre of coordinating the response to this emergency at a county level. In response to this announcement, the following was undertaken:

Essential Services: Critical services were broadly identified for the sector at national level, with some local discretion. A list of these critical services is set out under each Service Department in this report.

Staffing: All staff members were contacted immediately after the Government's announcement and were advised as to their role in the delivery of the critical services. Those staff that can work from home continue to do so, with a number of staff working from Buvinda House and the MD offices. Outdoor staff are working a new shift roster, in line with the critical service requirements.

Buildings and Facilities: In line with Government direction, the Council's public offices and other facilities were closed to the public, from March 27. The offices are still in use by some staff for the provision of critical services.

Community Resilience: A Community Resilience Forum of representatives from agencies, sports clubs and community groups was established and a Community Support Line was put in place to handle calls/requests and coordinate suitable responses to the needs of vulnerable people.

Regional Coordination: Senior Management continues to participate in regular teleconferences with colleagues from the other local authorities, the HSE and An Garda Síochána in the North East Region. This is the established network for Major Emergencies in the region and the response to the Covid crisis is HSE led. The overall role of this group is to help plan and coordinate the roll-out of the national response at a regional level. Over the last three weeks there have been a significant number of meetings that have addressed issues such as: Covid Testing and Test Centres; supporting the HSE Live network; the establishment of Assessment Hubs in the region; a regional response to Covid Clusters; and the planning for Mass Fatalities.

These meetings continue and will do so for the foreseeable future, as the situation develops and the national response evolves.

Corporate Services

Corporate Service – Critical Services

The following have been identified at national level as critical services for Meath County Council during the current lockdown period of the public health measures:

Critical Services	
Customer Service	Facilities Management
Human Resources (<i>Separate Dept in MCC</i>)	Information Systems (<i>Separate Dept in MCC</i>)
Payroll (<i>part of Finance Dept</i>)	Procurement (<i>part of Finance Dept</i>)
Communications	Legal Services
Corporate Services	Health and Safety

Corporate Services

Various corporate services, such as Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Customer Complaints continue to operate, but with some restrictions at this time.

Customer Services

The Council's Customer Service team continues to operate under the new restrictions. While the public counters are currently closed, the Customer Service Team continues to manage phone and email calls. The volume of calls to the Council's contact centre has increased in recent weeks with an average of 450 calls a day in the first week of April. Members Representations continue to be received and responses issued.

Community Call Support Line: Customer Services led on the establishment of the new Community Call Support Line, which was operational from Monday, March 30. Members of the Customer Service team and other staff handle the calls to the support line, from 8am-8pm, Monday to Sunday.

Communications

As a critical service during an emergency situation, the Communications Unit was active in using the Council's website and Social Media Accounts to provide daily up-dates to the public on Council services and facilities. The Unit continues to monitor social media as the situation unfolds and provides responses or up-dates, where relevant to do so.

The Unit was also active in using radio and local print media in the promotion of the new Meath Community Call support line. These local promotion activities complement the national advertising campaigns.

Women in Politics Project: The Women in Local Government project concluded with two events in Kells and Navan on March 5th and 6th, in advance of International Womens' Day. The project, which was developed by the Communications Unit and part-funded by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, sought to increase the visibility of local elected women and to highlight the importance of women's participation in politics generally.

Both events saw a total of over 360 female students from local schools participate in a discussion with female Council members on politics and respond to issues raised in a video. The video was produced by the Council and features 10 Meath Councillors and their experience of getting involved in politics. The video will be shared widely across the Council's social media channels in the coming weeks.

Seanad Elections – Casual Vacancies

Corporate Services facilitated the voting process for the Seanad Elections 2020 in advance of the March 30 deadline. Under the legislation, the vote by the Elected Members is witnessed and sealed by an Authorised Person. For this election, local TDs and Senators were also facilitated, given the current restrictions in place in Leinster House.

Two Meath Councillors were successful in the elections, with Councillors Annie Hoey (Agricultural Panel) and Sharon Keogan (Industrial and Commercial Panel) elected to the 26th Seanad. Pursuant to the provisions of section 19(2) of the Local Government Act 2001, two casual vacancies have therefore arisen on Meath County Council.

Legislation and the Standing Orders of Meath County Council determine the filling of a casual vacancy to the Council. In accordance with section 19(4)(a) of the Local Government Act 2001, the filling of the casual vacancies will be made at the next meeting of the full Council.

Housing Services

Housing Service – Critical Services

The following have been identified at national level as critical services for the Housing Services section during the current lockdown period of the public health measures:

Critical Services	Emergency Situations Only (Call out)
HAP	Anti-Social Behaviour
Homeless Services	Housing Maintenance
Travellers	Applications/Allocations
Social Workers	RAS/Leasing

Current Service Provision

Essential Housing services that continue to operate uninterrupted are Homeless Services, HAP, Homeless HAP Place Finder Service and supports to members of the Traveller community. In addition, emergency repair requests continue to be addressed and should be reported in the normal way. Social housing applications and allocations continue to be monitored and progressed in urgent cases.

Covid-19 Measures: Homelessness

Provisions have been made within our own housing stock in the event that a homeless client requires to self-isolate and/or members of the Traveller Community who reside in caravans/mobile homes. A number of units have been earmarked and have been fully kitted out for the purposes of isolation and/or confirmed cases. Furthermore, access has been secured with a number of guesthouses in the County for the same purpose, should the need arise. A clear process for the placement of homeless clients or members of the Traveller community into self-isolation has been developed and is now operational.

Covid-19 Measures: Traveller Community

As noted above, Meath County Council's Covid-19 Isolation encompasses provision for members of the Traveller community.

In addition, the Housing Section has reviewed its Traveller specific accommodation and has identified St Patrick's Park Halting site, Navan, as a priority site that requires certain additional measures to lessen the risk of Covid-19 infection. Eight temporary WC (toilet and wash hand basin) units are to be installed for the unauthorised households currently located on the green area, who do not have direct access to sanitary facilities. Funding has been secured for this measure (€37,500) from the Traveller Accommodation Unit, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Covid-19 Measures: Victims of Domestic Violence

Self-isolation requirements emanating from Meath Women's Refuge also fall under the scope of Meath County Council's Covid-19 Isolation Plan. Two kitted out units are to be temporarily leased to the Refuge in order to facilitate service continuity on behalf of the Refuge to victims of domestic violence.

Capital Programme

All construction sites are now closed. In terms of Meath County Council's direct construction projects, this has impacted on the following sites; Carlanstown, Kells, Bettystown Phase 2 and Lagore Road, Dunshaughlin. The cessation of construction activity under the current restricted movement measures will impact on the anticipated timelines for 2020 delivery, in respect of direct construction, Part V and Approved Housing Body delivery.

For those direct construction projects at design phase, liaison continues with the respective design teams in order to advance to the next approval stage.

Planning Services

Planning Service – Critical Services

The following have been identified at national level as critical services for the Planning Services section during the current lockdown period of the public health measures:

Critical Services
Planning Administration – Acceptance and validation of planning files
Building Control

Current Service Provision

Following the enactment of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid 19) Act 2020, the following services have been identified by the Government as essential services with regards to planning and development;

- Accepting, registering and validating files. Please note that only desktop validation can be done as site visits to inspect site notices are prohibited. These site notice inspections will be carried out once the current measures are lifted.
- Building Control – including processing of Disability Access Certificates, Fire Certificates and compliance in relation to commencement notices, certificates of completion and Seven Day Notices.

Development Control (overview)

As a result of the current measures, no enforcement inspections are being carried out. The Planning Enforcement Team continues to register complaints which will be inspected once measures are lifted. Should a serious breach of planning arise a decision will be made on whether it warrants immediate action.

Overview of County Development Plan Review

In line with the emergency legislation, all statutory planning timeframes, including development plans have been paused. The timetable will be reviewed by the Planning Department once the current measures are lifted and a revised timetable will be issued. Approximately 2,400 submissions were received as part of the public consultation process. Such a volume of submissions was not anticipated when drafting the original timetable and therefore this would have had to be reviewed regardless of the emergency legislation, in order to give the Planning Department sufficient time to consider each submission appropriately.

Emergency Legislation and its Implications

Under the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid 19) Act 2020, a new provision (Section 251A) has been inserted into the Planning & Development Acts 2000 (as amended). The Government has made an order under Section 251A(4), to the effect that the period from March 29 to April 20, 2020, inclusive, may be disregarded when calculating any appropriate period, specified period, or other timelines in the following Acts, or provisions, or any regulations made under those Acts or provisions,

- The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended;
- Part 2 of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act, 2015 (which relates to the vacant site levy);
- Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act, 2016 (which relates to the Strategic Housing Developments);
- The Derelict Sites Act, 1990

It is important to stress that the activation of this provision does not freeze the planning system, rather it extends the timelines within which decisions can be made. Where appropriate public consultation timelines are extended also if they had not exceeded the 5 week period prior to the introduction of the legislation.

Transportation

Transportation Service – Critical Services

The following have been identified at national level as critical services for the Transportation Services section during the current lockdown period of the public health measures:

Critical Services	Emergency Situations Only (Call out)
Emergency Callouts	Road Maintenance
Public Lighting/ Traffic lights	Flood Defence Maintenance
Winter Maintenance	Piers and Harbours

Current Service Provision – Outdoor Services

Following the announcement of the COVID-19 measures on March 27, from Wednesday April 1, the Transportation Operations list of Essential Services is as follows:

- Street Cleaning, Bins and Street Cleansing, as required;
- Administration of cemeteries in Ashbourne, Duleek & Navan;
- Road Crews on standby for emergency repairs and callouts;
- Winter maintenance until the end of the Winter Service Period (end of April);
- Support to Environment Section for removal of illegal dumping;
- Public lighting – essential repair;
- Traffic Signals – essential repair.

Roads Contracts – Overview and Current Situation

Design work and preparation of contract documents for the annual road works programme is being advanced to commence the procurement process to appoint contractors for the works. However, in accordance with the advice from the LGMA, the current requirements to maintain social distance and to limit works to essential services only, the Council is not proceeding to the Contract Award stage pending further advice from Government and discussions with suppliers.

Consultants employed by the Transportation Department on all projects have indicated that they have put arrangements in place so that work on schemes in the design process can continue. All works contracts at construction stage have ceased for the time being

Parking

For the duration of the current emergency period the revised role of the Council's warden services will be to ensure that parking for essential businesses is maintained and that:

- There is no illegal parking such as would restrict or prevent access to any of these essential services by customers or key workers;

- Parking is generally available for people using or providing these essential services;
- There is no improper use of disabled parking bays such as would prevent access for people with disabilities to these services;
- There is no illegal parking that could constitute a danger to other road users or pedestrians;
- Loading bays are kept clear for the delivery of supplies to these essential services.

Environment

Environment Service – Critical Services

The following have been identified at national level as critical services for the Environmental Services section during the current lockdown period of the public health measures:

Critical Services	Emergency Situations Only (Call out)
Waste Collection/Disposal	Parks
Burial Grounds/Mass Fatalities	Horse Control
Vet Services	Dog Control
Water Quality Labs	Environmental Enforcement
	Street Cleaning

Environmental Services -Impact of Covid 19 Situation

A number of environmental functions fall under headings of essential service contained in the public health guidelines including Waste Collection / Disposal, Water Quality/Labs, Burial Grounds and Veterinary Services.

Illegal Dumping: There has been a noticeable increase in the extent of illegal dumping, including waste from garage clear outs, etc. The Council's community wardens are operating as normal in investigating such activity, as well as, any increases in waste building up in people's gardens and also burning of household waste in back gardens.

Anti-Dumping Initiative: Applications for this fund will be submitted to the Department on April 15th. The MDs are currently finalising list of potential projects for same.

Recycling Centres: As Waste collection and disposal is designated as a critical and essential service agreement was reached that Civic Amenity sites remain open, in order to facilitate the acceptance of essential waste and for households that are not in receipt of a kerbside/door-to-door collection service. The Civic Amenity Sites at Navan, Kells and Trim will therefore remain open Monday to Saturday (8.30am to 4.45pm). However, the public is advised to use the sites only if essentially required and alternatively to store materials where possible at this time.

In order to eliminate cash handling the Council decided that from April 1st the €2 entry charge would be waived to the three sites for the period of the current health protection measures being in place. There is a contactless trial currently underway at the Trim Recycling Centre to ascertain the feasibility of all sites becoming cash free.

It is anticipated that with signage in place and the Covid 19 restrictions being fully observed, activity at these sites will be significantly reduced and social distancing will be more easily achieved.

However, the operations at the three sites are being monitored on an ongoing basis and changes will be made where necessary.

Burning of Agricultural Waste: In responding to concerns from the Fire Service Bodies, the Council has suspended issuing permits issued under the 2009 Regulations to burn agricultural waste during the current crisis.

Dog Fouling: There has been a significant increase in the amount of complaints relating to dog fouling, prompting the Council to engage in an extensive social media campaign as well as the putting in place of signage at locations that members of the public are still using for exercise purposes.

There is a Dog Fouling Awareness Campaign on LMFM running from March until June, the planned Billboard and Cinema adverts have been postponed for the current period.

Current Service Provision

The Regional Waste Management Offices who have responsibility for monitoring waste capacity issues have indicated that in early April primary waste activities including disposal, recovery, processing and collection of waste are continuing uninterrupted.

The indications are that domestic waste generation has increased significantly while commercial waste generation has decreased. Close contact is being maintained by the Offices with all waste collectors to ensure business continuity and hospital waste management is being addressed.

Water Quality/Labs: While the normal weekly water framework directive sampling has not been designated as one of the essential services and has been suspended, staff are continuing to respond to complaints received in respect of illegal discharges to water bodies and particularly where such discharges are liable to create an environmental risk.

Veterinary Service: The Veterinary service provided by the Council which has been designated as an essential service during Covid 19, is the subject of a service contract with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and primarily in respect of the enforcement of food legislation as it applies to slaughterhouses, meat plants, cold stores and food vehicles (wholesaling meat). Inspections of such premises will be the main priority of the Veterinary Officer in the current climate and other normal duties such as in relation to Dogs and Horses is only being dealt with on an emergency basis.

Burial Grounds: Notwithstanding the current restrictions on movement efforts are continuing to identify suitable lands for replacement burial grounds or extensions to existing ones, particularly in Dunboyne and Trim.

Community

Community – Critical Services

The following have been identified at national level as critical services for the Community section during the current lockdown period of the public health measures:

Critical Services	
Community Resilience	SICAP

Current Service Provision

All Community Department staff continue to answer any queries that arise. Contact can be made through: community@meathcoco.ie, communitygrants@meathcoco.ie or individual staff email accounts.

Community Grants – Overview

The closing date for receipt of community grants and the regional festival grants scheme has passed and all grants are currently being assessed.

The applications for the Community Amenity Project Scheme are currently being assessed.

Under the Town & Village Renewal Scheme works are ongoing by the groups under the 2018 scheme which must be completed by April 2020. Works to some projects are suspended during the current emergency. The six projects approved under the 2019 scheme have commenced with design work ongoing.

The project completion date for all projects approved under the Healthy Ireland Fund has been extended to June 30, 2021.

ORIS - Three projects under Measure 1 were approved, design work is ongoing and it is hoped to commence construction once restrictions are lifted. There was no success for projects submitted under ORIS Measure 2 however under Measure 3 a grant of €500,000 was awarded to Phase 1 of the Greenway Project from Navan to Wilkinstown.

Parks and Community Facilities

In line with National guidelines, all playgrounds and outdoor exercise equipment are closed. Blackwater Park in Navan also remains closed. All other parks are open, however, social distancing must be observed by those using them. This is being monitored by An Garda Síochána.

Covid Community Response Forum

The Meath Community Response Forum has been set up. It's role is to bring together all the stakeholders to put in place a co-ordinated response to ensure that vulnerable individuals can be identified and that vital supports are provided to all those who need it. There are a wide range of members on the Forum including An Garda Síochána, the HSE, An Post, Tusla, GAA, IFA, Local Volunteer Centre, Local Development Companies, the PPN, Local Link - Flexibus, the Age-Friendly Network, Citizens Information, Navan Traveller Workshop, ALONE and Udaras na Gaeilge. The first meeting took place on Monday, March 30, with a subsequent meeting taking place on April 3. The next meeting is scheduled for April 9.

There is also a Community Champion on the Forum. The role of the champion is to work closely with the community and voluntary groups in their areas and linking in with all other agencies to ensure there is no one left behind.

A dedicated Community Support Line, 1800 808 809, has been operating since March 30. The support line is open from 8am – 8pm seven days a week. Information is provided to callers on groups in their area who can provide the service that they need, e.g. delivering shopping, collect prescriptions, etc. There is also a specific email address covidsupport@meathcoco.ie set up and queries for help will also be responded to.

All groups who are offering help in their communities have been mapped on the PPN website, <https://www.meathppn.ie/meath-community-response-to-covid-19/>. This is updated regularly as further groups offer to provide assistance in their communities.

FREE-PHONE 1800 808 809

Monday to Sunday, 8.00am to 8.00pm

Are you an **older person** or a **member of a vulnerable group** and have been asked to cocoon and stay indoors during the current period of this national emergency?

Meath County Council is working with a range of other state agencies, local groups and sports clubs to provide you with assistance:

- Do you need medication collected?
- Do you need food or other essentials delivered to your home?
- Do you need transport to a health appointment?
- Or do you have other needs at this time?

Call our dedicated support line: 1800 808 809 or Email covidsupport@meathcoco.ie

Meath County Council – we're there to help

Supporting Communities across Meath



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meath county council

Age Friendly Ireland (AFI)– National Shared Services

Like all sections Age Friendly Ireland Shared Service has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to our annual service delivery plan and anticipated timelines. Given the age category of the older people's councils all local OPC meetings and gatherings, workshops and events have been deferred until the measures have been relaxed. Some meetings are gradually being introduced using video conferencing calls and the core team based framework of 31 Programme Managers is continuing to progress this way.

Community Response Fora: The Age Friendly Programme Managers and the wider local Age Friendly Network (Alliance members, OPC's) are a key member of the Covid Community Response Fora across all 31 local authorities and are playing various roles in the roll out of the local co-ordinated response. The Shared Service is capturing specific local innovations and practices and sharing them across the wider network to facilitate replication and scale up. We are also delivering a short age friendly communications online training module for staff answering the phone-lines particularly those that have been redeployed

The AFI is working closely with all our key stakeholders and key structures nationally to identify challenges and issues that arise daily and escalate them to the appropriate stakeholder for resolution. As a result, measures are being introduced daily that are supporting our ageing population (and those that need to cocoon), enabling them to continue living safely with access to the supports they need. Given that older people are not a homogenous group it is imperative that the voice of the diverse population of older people is heard and ensure that all challenges are responded to.

Daily Newsletter: On March 26, AFI commenced a newsletter which is a short round up of bite sized information on local, national and international responses to Covid-19 captured in a daily five minute read. This is being widely circulated across our networks and hosted on our newly established Age Friendly Ireland website. www.agefriendlyireland.ie

National Older Peoples Council Convention: It has been decided to postpone this year's annual National Older Peoples Council Convention scheduled for May 21-22. This was to be hosted by the Meath Age Friendly Programme but due to the current government measures and in the interests of safety and health of members of our Older Peoples Councils it is not feasible to continue as planned.

WHO: Age Friendly Ireland is working with partner affiliates in the World Health Organisation to collate innovative practices from across the world and are contributing to the development of International Guidance for older people and Covid-19.

Libraries Service

Libraries

All 12 libraries and the Library HQ are now closed to the public in line with national government policy.

Current Service Provision

Online Services: The libraries online services are available 24/7 and provide access to a wide range of free services

- eBooks
- eAudiobooks
- Online Newspapers
- Online Magazines
- Language Learning
- Online courses

There has been an increase of 80% in the number of users accessing the online ebook and eAudiobook services over the period January to March 2020.

Digital Content: Various library staff are delivering a regular programme of digital content via Facebook. This is over both the Meath County Council and the County Library Facebook pages. This is being delivered from branches and from home by colleagues who are working remotely. The activities include a mixture of live and pre-recorded

- Interactive story times
- Songs and rhymes
- Poetry readings
- Virtual tours of library collections
- Craft activities
- STEAM events

3D Printing: A number of library authorities including Meath are working with Engineers' Ireland and the LGMA to produce face masks. These are produced using the 3D printers acquired under the recent ICT grant.

Cruinniú na nÓg: Programming is continuing with a view to delivering an online programme of events.

Economic Development

Economic Development – Critical Services

The following have been identified at national level as critical services for the Economic Development section during the current lockdown period of the public health measures:

Critical Services
Local Enterprise Office – business advice and supports

Impact of Covid 19 Situation

Obviously the current situation is a severe shock to the Meath business community. In addition to the widely reported salary supports to employees furloughed at the moment, the Local Enterprise Office is managing two new government initiatives introduced specifically to assist small businesses along with moving all existing supports on-line, as outlined below.

Current Service Provision

Local Enterprise Office is rolling out the new initiatives. These are

- MicroFinance Ireland COVID19 loans from €5,000 to €50,000 with a six month interest free holiday.
- Business Continuity Vouchers worth up to €2,500 in consultancy costs for companies to develop short and long-term strategies to respond to COVID19

The Local Enterprise Office's services have moved on-line:

- All mentoring services are being held over Skype and other platforms;
- All project meetings grant applications being conducted via online platforms;
- All training being delivered on-line;
- New training courses have been quickly developed and rolled out on-line to assist companies manage in these changed circumstances;
- Demand for all these services continues to be high and new delivery methods are working well.

Water Services

Water Service – Critical Services

The following have been identified at national level as critical services for the Water Services section during the current lockdown period of the public health measures:

Critical Services	
Water Maintenance	Wastewater
IW Water supplies	Group Schemes
Rural Water supplies	

Impact of COVID - 19 Situation

Water and Wastewater are essential services, critical to public health and hence, the Water Services Department continues to operate largely as normal, with all indoor and outdoor staff remaining busy and determined, to ensure continued service provision.

Current Service Provision

Drinking Water and Wastewater Operation & Maintenance: Operation and maintenance of all water and wastewater treatment plants and networks continues throughout the county on behalf of Irish Water, to ensure water supply and wastewater collection for the residents, institutions (incl. medical) and essential businesses in Meath, in compliance with drinking water and wastewater regulatory standards.

Customer Service: Responds to customer complaints, unplanned service interruption, service level and asset fault repairs remains in place.

Water Conservation and Management: Management of water demand continues to help maintain service levels through a combination of active leakage detection and repair, pressure management and demand management.

Rural Water (Well Grants): Continued processing of applications, undertaking site inspections, water sampling and analysis and processing grant payments.

Capital Investment: Only essential capital construction works are being undertaken at present. However, design and planning is continuing on a range of Water Services capital projects.

Planning and New Connections: The Water Services Department continues to review and report on all planning referrals, Pre-Connection Enquiries and new connection applications on behalf of Irish Water. However, only essential new connections (for medical) are being constructed during the current period of restriction.

Finance Section

Finance – Critical Services

The following have been identified at national level as critical services for the Finance section during the current lockdown period of the public health measures:

Critical Services	
Accounts Payable	Financial Monitoring
Accounts Receivable	Motor Tax
Budget Review	

Services Impact and Response to Covid-19 Situation

Commercial Rates: Meath County Council in line with the recent Government announcement will be deferring rates payments for the most immediately impacted businesses primarily in the retail, hospitality, leisure and childcare sectors for a period of three months until the end of May.

Businesses that can continue to pay their outstanding local authority rates should continue to do so in the normal way.

To arrange for deferral a business must contact ratesfinance@meathcoco.ie or contact your Rates Account Manager. Those sectors primarily affected and normally pay by Direct Debit and wish to avail of the scheme should contact the above immediately.

There will be a severe negative impact on the collection of Commercial Rates which is difficult to quantify as the duration of the Covid-19 situation is unknown.

Housing Rents: The Housing Rent charged by Meath County Council is based on Household income and calculated under the Differential Rent scheme. If a tenant's income is reduced as result of Covid-19 then their rent will decrease to reflect their changed circumstances – similar to normal procedure.

As the situation continues to change in the coming weeks, tenants should contact the Rents section where they will be given a revised amount of Rent to be paid. A formal rent review will follow when the Covid-19 situation improves.

If any tenant has any concerns regarding rent they should contact rentsfinance@meathcoco.ie. **Please note:** there is no such thing as a Rent Freeze – MCC rents are based on income and not fixed.

Housing Loans: All cases regarding repayment are being dealt with on a case by case basis with customers as they contact Meath County Council. It should be noted that as the Land Registry (PRA) is operating at a much-reduced capacity it is taking longer than normal for applicants to drawdown loans. Before drawdowns are finalised the applicants are required to demonstrate their current employment situation as any change may affect the ability to repay monthly instalments.

See below situation with regard to Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans:

Loans Data 1st February 2018 to 6th April 2020	
Applications Received	356
Applications Returned	16
Applications awaiting further information not Submitted to Housing Agency	3
Applications Submitted to Housing Agency for Assessment/Recommendation	337
Applications Awaiting Assessment /Recommendation by Housing Agency	0
Applications Awaiting Decision by Meath County Council Credit Committee	11
Applications Approved by the Meath County Council Credit Committee	210
Applications Refused by the Meath County Council Credit Committee	116
	337
Approvals Drawdown by Customer for House Purchase	133
No of customers in MARP	34

All our services continue to operate during these unprecedented and challenging times and will respond to queries on a daily basis where possible. Following Government advice concerning COVID-19 and guidance on working from home where possible we are implementing remote working arrangements to ensure continuation of service to our customers. We request therefore that wherever possible, communications should be sent to us electronically to ensure a prompt response.

Accounts Payable: This service continues to operate during the current restrictions and supplier payment runs are being carried out on a weekly basis.

Motor Tax: This section is still providing the same service without direct customer contact. Customers are encouraged to use the online motor tax facility: www.motortax.ie If not in a position to use the online facility, we accept all postal applications.

In a further measure to elevate any unnecessary social interaction it is no longer a requisite to have the following forms witnessed or stamped by An Garda Síochána: Form RF134 – Application for a Replacement Document; Form RF111A – Goods Only Declaration; and Form RF120 – Application for a Refund.

Most customer queries regarding motor taxation matters can be found by visiting www.motortax.ie or www.meath.ie/council/council-services/motor-tax Alternatively customers can e-mail to motortax@meathcoco.ie or contact the office by telephone on 046 9097000

Draft Annual Financial Statements 2019

Meath County Council has just published the Draft Annual Financial Statements for 2019. The financial performance in 2019 was strong and Meath County Council made a surplus of €268,000 which has further reduced the cumulative revenue account deficit to below €700,000. This is the fourteenth continuous year of reporting a surplus which is in line with the key strategic objective of reducing and eventually eliminating the deficit which peaked at over €10.8m in 2005.

In 2019 Revenue expenditure (including transfers to Capital) was €132.2m which is an increase of €8m from 2018 (€124.2).

The Council's balance sheet remains strong with Net Current Assets (*Current Assets – Current liabilities*) of €78m up from €61.2m at end of 2018.

Net Assets (*Inc Fixed Assets, Current Assets and Long Term and Current Liabilities*) at end of 2019 were €2.91bn up from €2.84bn at end 2018.