

LOCAL SPORTS PARTNERSHIPS ON THE RIGHT PATH

With Sport Ireland investing in excess of €6m in local sports partnerships around the country, its chief executive John Treacy told councillors at this year's AILG Conference that local authorities have a key role to play in developing more sports clubs and training programmes, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Report by Grace Heneghan.

One thing we always say is that the recession

was good for sport because people had more time to look after their physical wellbeing. And as we say within a sporting context – your health is your wealth! We want everyone to be involved in sport because in terms of quality of life sport is so important to us all.”

And according to the CEO of Sport Ireland, participation numbers are continuing to increase very substantially in walking, cycling, swimming and running, across all age groups. “We need to create an environment in Ireland which lends itself to these kinds of activities, and the local authorities continue to play a key role in doing that right across the board.

“Sport Ireland views local authorities as the key partner and we are working with them in providing support through the local sports partnerships, which drives a lot of the programmes in getting more people involved in sport.”

At this year's AILG Conference in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, John Treacy had this advice for councillors to ensure that they include local sports partnerships (LSPs) in their local plans:



“We’re lucky to have a fantastic environment on our doorstep, and we should be tapping into it to ensure that we make it a safe environment for people who enjoy walking” – John Treacy, CEO, Sport Ireland

“When doing your local plans don’t forget the sport element and the importance of the environment that lends itself to this activity. The National Planning Framework (Project Ireland 2040) has addressed the quality of life and it’s really important, and will become more so as our society ages. There is a whole network of local sports partnerships now linked to local authorities around the country.”

With Sport Ireland investing about €6.6m in LSP programmes around the country, he described this as “one of the best

investments we can make". And Treacy added: "To a large degree the funding levels have remained static, but we have some new funds coming in with support from our community development officers at a local level, so we're making progress again."

TARGETING DISADVANTAGED AREAS

The new core funding model has seen the appointment of sport inclusion development officers, whom he described as "the people who knock on doors to get people out and about and involved in sport".

He said that Sport Ireland was delighted to be driving that forward again after the recession, adding that most communities now have these development officers in place. "One of the issues that we want to highlight is that we're rolling out multi-sport development officers at a local level to support all of the sports clubs in the community.

"We have secured €2.5m through crowd-funding that will benefit the local sports partnerships, and as part of that we're targeting disadvantaged communities, through developing sports clubs and training programmes.

"This is proving to be a very successful exercise. Most of the projects underway are a great example of the community, the local authorities and the schools working together in disadvantaged areas, and are proving to be good investments."

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport is currently compiling its own policy statement, and one of the areas highlighted are the facilities available. "In terms of funding going forward, local authorities will need to get as many clubs and schools to submit their applications for capital funding, as this is definitely the way to go."

With a major increase in the numbers of people now out walking on a regional basis, this is again something that local authorities and local sports partnerships should continue to encourage, he noted. "We're lucky to have a fantastic

ABOUT JOHN TREACY, CEO, SPORT IRELAND

Irish Olympian and former world-class athlete, John Treacy was a keynote guest speaker at this year's AILG Conference in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, not a million miles from his birthplace of Villierstown in the west of the county.

Treacy was appointed as the first CEO of Sport Ireland (the new organisation which resulted from the merger of the Irish Sports Council and the National Sports Campus Development Authority in July 2015).

Treacy, who was appointed initially for an interim one-year period to facilitate the transition to the new agency, had been CEO of the Irish Sports Council (ISC) since 1999. Sport Ireland now performs relevant functions previously undertaken by the Council and the Authority, in line with the Government's programme for the rationalisation of State agencies.



The numbers who participate in walking, cycling, swimming and running, across all age groups are continuing to increase very substantially, according to Sport Ireland.

environment on our doorstep, and we should be tapping into it to ensure that we make it a safe environment for people who enjoy walking.

"Our trainers' office in Sport Ireland lends support and guidance to local authorities and local community groups to put in place a number of trainers who will train 'walking leaders'. Our current campaign is to advise councillors to put training and culture at the local authority level into their local plans."

TOWNS ON ROUTE REVITALISED

In paying tribute to Michael Walsh, chief executive of Waterford City and County

Council, as “the driving force behind the Waterford Greenway” Sport Ireland’s CEO described the Greenway as “a fantastic example of what can be achieved at local level, tapping into local resources, and to have a facility that’s there for everyone in the community”.

“I understand that cyclists now have to get out very early in the morning because there are so many people on that 46km route. This is the type of vision that we need around the country. I would love to see more local authorities creating these types of environments and greenways. The trick will be in linking all of these trails, and this is the initiative that will attract a lot of people into the country.

“A lot of the towns along the Waterford Greenway trail have also been revitalised, which is equally important. It’s been a great success and as a Waterford man I’m very proud of what has been achieved in the county and the vision which Waterford City and County Council has in place.

“Obviously we want to continue to work closely with local authorities as key partners with Sport Ireland, who can deliver for us at the local level. We need to ensure that we’ll create an environment that lends itself to all types of sport activity.”

SUCCESS AT LOCAL LEVEL

In response to comments and queries from AILG delegates during a special Q&A session, Treacy said he was delighted to hear that the LSPs were being recognised by councillors. “From our perspective, LSP was the brainchild of the Irish Sports Council and it’s proving to be very successful at local level.”

However, in relation to one query about the closure of community colleges, he said that the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport was currently doing its own policy document on this. He suggested that councillors write to the Department as part of the consultation process around this particular issue.

An Offaly councillor who is a member of the Offaly Sports Partnership said he knew “first-hand” the work undertaken by these sports partnerships around the country, mainly for the disadvantaged. He thanked John Treacy and Sport Ireland for their help in rolling out these partnerships, adding that much of the work being done was “unheralded”.

€6M INVESTMENT FOR LOCAL SPORTS PARTNERSHIP NETWORK

The investment package of over €6m from Sport Ireland to support the national network of Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) was announced by Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, Brendan Griffin in March.

A total of €6,074,333 will be allocated to support the core work of the 29 LSPs; including the delivery of National Programmes, Education & Training initiatives, Strategic Development, Community Sports Development Officers, the Sports Inclusion Disability programme, Women in Sport Programmes and general participation programmes.

Minister Griffin said that the role of the LSPs in increasing participation, particularly among those sectors of society that are underrepresented in sport, cannot be overstated. “The significant government investment will allow sports partnerships to continue to provide many sporting opportunities for people in local communities across Ireland,” he added.

The key aims of the LSPs are to increase levels of participation in sport especially amongst specific target groups such as older people, girls and women, people with disabilities, unemployed people, and those who live in identified disadvantaged communities.

To ensure that people with disabilities are provided with an opportunity to participate in sport and physical activity, 21 LSPs will be supported with Sports Inclusion Disability Officers.

Twenty five LSPs will be supported with Community Sports Development Officers, to strengthen the capacity of the LSPs to further develop locally-led plans and more long-term sustainable physical activity programmes under the National Physical Activity Plan.

John Treacy, Chief Executive of Sport Ireland, commented: “In 2017, Sport Ireland successfully secured €5m in Dormant Accounts Funding, with over €2.5m directly benefiting Local Sports Partnerships projects across Ireland. Sport Ireland will continue its work to increase participation across the country through a range of programmes and initiatives implemented by the Local Sports Partnerships.”

Sport for the disabled

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