

# FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY TO ASSIST LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

*The Irish Local Development Network's five-year strategic plan aims to enable the local development sector to build and deliver for rural and urban communities. It has also taken account of the Covid-19 challenge, which has seen over 2,200 individuals daily seeking the assistance of local development companies nationwide.*

**T**he support of the local development sector to rural and urban communities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic has been acknowledged by Joe O'Brien TD, Minister of State for Community Development and Charities at the Department of Rural and Community Development.

"Given their presence in every community rural and urban, the response has been rapid and widespread assisting the statutory services in reaching people it may not otherwise reach," the Minister noted as he launched the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) Strategic Plan for 2020-2024 last November.

The five-year strategy entitled 'Supporting Local Development Companies to Build Vibrant, Inclusive Communities' sets out the role of the ILDN in facilitating Ireland's local development companies to deliver services such as social inclusion, education

and training, employment services, urban and rural development, climate change and just transition.

"This plan positions the network as a critical partner in terms of the delivery of these important objectives. It will also build upon my department's five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector," the Minister noted.

## SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE

According to ILDN Chairman Jim Finn, the network provides a channel for stakeholders locally, regionally and nationally to engage with ILDN's 49-member Local Development Companies who directly assist over 170,000 individuals and 15,000 communities and community groups annually, as a collective.

"As we proceed through the challenges posed by the Covid-19



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**Tipperary's Jim Finn, who was appointed ILDN Chairperson in January 2020, is also Chairperson of North Tipperary Development Company and broadcasts extensively on rural and community affairs for Tipp FM. ILDN Manager Joe Saunders has worked in community and local development for 35 years as a youth worker, community worker, trainer, researcher, consultant and manager, having started in 1985 in the Community Department of Dublin City Council, then known as Dublin Corporation.**

pandemic, the ILDN through this strategic plan, further empowers Ireland's local development companies in building a more just, inclusive and sustainable society. The plan is focused on giving a coherent voice to the local development sector and those who depend on it, such as individuals, families and communities most at risk of poverty and social exclusion," he noted.

ILDN members deliver over €300m worth of Government-funded programmes, in addition to philanthropic sources, supporting and empowering communities and enabling the State to reach people it would not otherwise reach, thus ensuring effective use of taxpayers' funds, according to ILDN Manager Joe Saunders.

"In supporting our members, the ILDN facilitates research, policy development, networking opportunities, group procurement and advocacy. The strategic direction as detailed in this plan is vitally important not just to the ILDN and its members but also to Irish society generally," Saunders pointed out.

The ILDN Strategic Plan sets out key

objectives for 2020-24 and primarily it is intended that the network establishes itself as a leading voice in policy development in the context of local development. It seeks to build strategic relationships with key stakeholders across all sectors.

"The ILDN will become a platform for its members to network effectively and share experiences. Finally, the network aims to build structurally from a communications and resource perspective to best serve the needs of the network's membership," Saunders said.

#### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

The Irish Local Development Network is the representative body of Ireland's 49 Local Development Companies (LDCs), which have been in existence for 28 years (under various names such as Partnerships, LEADER companies) as a delivery arm to provide state programmes in rural and urban development, labour market activation, social inclusion and social enterprise services.

ILDN is the largest Community Development/Anti-Poverty Network in the

state, with 2,100 employees and 9,800 Tús and Rural Social Scheme (RSS) workers on the ground in communities, supporting 15,000 community groups and 173,000 individuals annually through State-funded programmes, worth in excess of €300m.

As active members of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) across the country, ILDN's member companies work with these committees in the delivery of the LEADER Programme and the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) as well as other schemes.

"As key providers of Department of Social Protection schemes such as Tús, RSS, Local Employment Service and 'Back to Work' Enterprise Allowance, LDC staff and scheme participants interface with local authorities and their staff on an ongoing basis both formally and informally in the areas of social inclusion, community development and community response," noted Joe Saunders.

"From a governance perspective, local authority members frequently sit on the boards of our member LDCs as well as LDC representatives sitting on LCDCs. In recent

times all of our LDC members participated in the Government’s ‘Community Call’ initiative. ILDN has recently been included as a nominating body for Seanad Éireann,” he added.

**EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES**

There is now a statutory strategy for the community, voluntary and local development sectors entitled ‘Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities’. This strategy recognises that *‘policy developments and funding reductions during the recession impacted the capacity of community development, local development... sector to support communities’* and that a *‘renewed community- statutory partnership is essential to bring about better outcomes for communities... partnership underpinned by strong, autonomous community development and local development structures’* (Government of Ireland, Sustainable, Inclusive & Empowered Communities, 2019, p.16)

According to Joe Saunders, this statutory strategy is more urgent than ever, given the challenges of Covid-19. “The response to the pandemic from the local development sector has been immense, putting into focus our best attributes – agility, commitment, person-centred, value-for-money, connected to and trusted by the most vulnerable in our society.

“The socially excluded have sought out their Local Development Company – these people and groups have been hit hardest by the crisis, as they have been in every downturn and emergency. They have turned to our members at this time and it been the proud duty of LDCs to respond to their needs.

“How we serve them in an increasingly digital future will be a huge challenge given the digital divide that many of our groups already experience. Nevertheless, we will use all our capacity and influence to herald the digital dividend that has eluded many of our communities to date,” he pointed out.

**MAIN LESSONS LEARNED**

During the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, ILDN members fielded up to 2,200 calls per day and reached out to over 170,000 individuals to offer assistance. Both members and staff adjusted their usual services to ensure that their local communities were supported throughout the restrictions.

ILDN members continued to offer a diverse range of supports for local communities at this time and were part of the ‘Community Call’ initiative in conjunction with local authorities across the country. Some popular supports ILDN members have offered throughout the pandemic include the following:

- Friendly call services
- Employment services
- Online training services
- Mental health and well-being classes and activities
- Critical Home delivery services for food and medicine
- Food bank and food distribution

“ILDN believes it is critical to prioritise social inclusion throughout these difficult times, and our members deliver the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) which supports many of the important Covid-19 response measures provided by LDCs.

“Furthermore, as providers of state-supported labour activation schemes (Tús, RSS and CE) ILDN members were adaptable in providing the services of scheme participants, vans, equipment and premises for deployment at community level into the Covid-19 response where safe to do so,” concluded the ILDN manager.



**FOUR KEY OBJECTIVES OF STRATEGIC PLAN**

*The ILDN Strategic Plan 2020-2024 has identified four key objectives:*

1. *Secure an Enabling Policy Context for the Irish Local Development Network’s Vision for Local Development*
2. *Build Strategic Relationships and Partnerships with Key Stakeholders across all Sectors*
3. *Serve as a platform for Irish Local Development Network Members to network and share experiences.*
4. *Strengthen the potential and processes of the ILDN Network.*

*This plan also sets out ILDN’s role in facilitating Ireland’s 49 LDCs in the delivery of important services such as social inclusion, personal development and well-being, early years and family support, education and training, employment services, enterprise and social enterprise, urban and rural development, climate change and just transition.*

**For further information visit [www.ildn.ie](http://www.ildn.ie)**

