**Draft Minutes of Galway City Council Economic, Community and Cultural Development SPC Meeting held via Zoom on 4th September 2020 at 2.00pm** 

**Presiding:** Cllr. Neil McNelis.

**Present:**

**Councillors:** Cllr Donal Lyons, Cllr Eddie Hoare, Cllr Declan McDonnell,

Cllr John Connolly, Cllr Clodagh Higgins, Cllr Michael Crowe.

**Sectoral**

**Representatives:** Ms Geri Slevin, Mr Dominick Whelan, Mr Dave Hickey.

**In Attendance:** Mr Brian Barrett, A/Director of Services, Galway City Council

Mr Conor Kelly A/Senior Executive Officer Galway City Council

Mr Gary McMahon, A/Senior Executive Officer Galway City Council

James Harrold, Arts Officer Galway City Council

Ruairi Lehmann, Tourism Officer Galway City Council

Caitriona Morgan, Administrative Officer Galway City Council

Theresa Donahue, Staff Officer Galway City Council Angela Breslin, Assistant Staff Officer Galway City Council

**Apologies:** Cllr. Noel Larkin

1. **Confirmation of the minutes of the Economic Community and Culture Development SPC meeting held on 22nd May 2020.**

**Proposed:** Cllr Donal Lyons

**Seconded:** Cllr Eddie Hoare

**And agreed by the members**

**2. Matters Arising**

Cllr Neil McNelis informed the members that the Market at St Patrick’s school is fully open again. Mr Ruairi Lehman confirmed this and stated that Galway City Council have provided additional funding to facilitate the reopening of the market.

**3**. **Update on Covid Response Forum**

Ms. Caitriona Morgan gave a verbal update on the above since the last SPC meeting, noting that the collaborative Community Response Forum continued to meet fortnightly, to lead the co-ordination of COVID-19 community supports and to ensure that there is a co-ordinated community response across the City. She advised that the Community Call Helpline was operating from 9am – 5pm, 7 days a week and to date had dealt with over 720 requests. She referred to the COVID-19 Emergency Fund and the allocation under this in the amount of €65,694 which had been approved to 39 projects across Galway City.

Ms. Caitriona Morgan also advised members that Galway City LCDC had received an allocation of €109,412 under Community Enhancement Programme 2020 fund for Community Centres and Community Buildings. This fund has being made available under the Government’s July stimulus package to stimulate the local economy while enhancing facilities in disadvantaged areas. The Fund is currently open for online applications with a closing date of Friday 18th September 2020.

Ms Caitriona Morgan informed the members that Galway City Community Network has produced a very useful and resourceful document in partnership with Volunteer Galway. This “return to work, return to community activity” document has been launched and is available on line. She also added that the Covid-19 Health Communications Stakeholder support group continue to communicate new measures at a national level to stop the spread of Covid-19 and that they have also launched a new TV Add and Radio Add nationally.

Caitriona Morgan also noted that “Bike week” is happening along with the “Age and Opportunity Grant Scheme” with the deadline for this being the 2nd October 2020. Also, the HSE are running the National Lottery Grant and the closing date for this is 18th September 2020.

**4. Presentation on July Economic Stimulus programme**

Mr Brian Barrett, Director of Services, gave a presentation on the July Economic Stimulus Programme which is set out with 4 objectives. He outlined the main interventions in place prior to the launch of July Stimulus and presented the new measures that the Government have introduced in the July Stimulus. These are targeted to help businesses protect jobs and to create new jobs by introducing a new Employment Wage Support Scheme. The scheme is expected to support around 350,000 jobs into the beginning of 2021.

The Restart Grant for Enterprises is being extended to a broader base of SMEs bringing the total funding to €550 million and details some businesses, such as B&BS, not previously included in the scheme, will now be eligible.

Mr Brian Barrett stated that all businesses will be granted a waiver of commercial rates for six months and the Government will provide an 80% guarantee for a wide range of credit products from €10,000 to 1 million up to a maximum term of 6 years.

A package of liquidity and enterprise investment measures worth 55 million will be put in place to support small and micro companies through additional resources for Micro Finance Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices. This will include measures to reduce interest rates on lending for micro and small businesses, including grants equivalent to 0% interest on the first year of SBCI and MFI loans.

The “Future Growth Loan Scheme” is being expanded from €200 million €500 million with the

European Investment Bank Group, so businesses with up to 499 employees can invest for the

longer-term at competitive rates.

Mr Brian Barrett advised the members that under the July Stimulus the Pandemic unemployment Payment is being extended by 7 months until 1 April 2021, giving those on emergency income support greater security as the country recovers and job opportunities return. He added that between now and April 2021, there will be a gradual reduction in payment level, linked to previous incomes, bringing payments in line with existing social welfare levels over time.

The Government has also introduced a €200 million training and education, skills development, work placement schemes, recruitment subsidies, and job search and assistance measures. The measures will help those who have lost their jobs find a new one, retrain, or develop new skills, in particular for emerging growth sectors.

To build confidence and solidarity in consumers and communities the Government has introduced a “Stay and Spend Incentive” and any taxpayer spending €625, on accommodation, food and non-alcoholic drinks are able to recoup €125 through a tax credit. Mr Barrett also highlighted and welcomed “€10 million Restart Fund” for the Tourism sector.

Early carry back of trading losses will be allowed, leading to an immediate refund of some or all of corporation tax paid, he added that an income tax relief for self-employed individuals who were profitable in 2019 but, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, incur losses in 2020.

A 6-month reduction in the standard rate of VAT from 23% to 21%, has been introduced and effective from September 2020 and enhanced levels of support will be made available under “Help to Buy” scheme until December 2020. He also added that Legislation to confirm the previously announced warehousing of tax liabilities which will allow for businesses affected by Covid-19 to delay payment of their PAYE and VAT debts in part of in full for a set period with no interest or penalties.

Also support will be provided to taxpayers experiencing difficulty with tax liabilities. The interest rate applying to agreed repayments of all tax debt will be reduced to 3%.

Mr Barrett informed the members that the Government have provided Investment in Communities and Jobs with a further €500 million will be provided to accelerate capital works across a wide range of areas. This includes:

* €75m for minor works for primary and secondary schools
* €113 million for active travel, public transport and renewal of transport infrastructure some allocations have been made
* Over €40 million for investments in a range of heritage, arts, tourism and Gaeltacht related projects
* €20 million investment in courts, prisons and Garda projects
* 10 million in fishery and on-farm renewable energy investments
* €15 million in peatlands rehabilitation
* €100 million investment in the Energy Efficiency National Retrofit Programme
* €60 million for returning vacant local authority housing to use and investment in water infrastructure
* €10 million for town and village renewal also the work on the harbour at Clones on the Ulster Canal will be progressed, and planning of the Sligo-Enniskillen Greenway.

The Government is also committing to increase capital expenditure in 2021 to €9.1 billion. This level of capital expenditure represents an increase of almost €1 billion or 12% on 2020 levels.

The Government announced that to start preparing for a greener, more sustainable economy in the future a lot of schemes have been introduced to aid businesses in green research, development and innovation. A €25m investment in the “Covid Life Sciences Products Scheme” to aid the research, development and production of medicinal products in Ireland that are used in the fight against Covid -19.

As part of the substantial investment in training and skills development, 19,000 places on the Government Skills to compete programme will be provided which supports people develop skills and attain qualifications for emerging growth sectors and occupations.

Also to help businesses adapt to the green economy, € 10million will be provided to support businesses engaging in green research, development and innovation, capital investment, and capacity building, through the first phase of a new Green Enterprise Fund.

An increase of €10 million in funding for the Seed and Venture Capital sector through Enterprise Ireland as a top-up to existing funds and leveraging a combined additional pool of €55 million, as part of our commitment to innovation driven enterprises. A further €10 million is set out to support IDA promotional and marketing initiatives targeting job-rich FDI projects which will be an essential part of our economic recovery.

Businesses will also be supported to develop their online presence through a further funding call of the Online Retail Scheme of €5.5 million through Enterprise Ireland and an expansion of the Online Trading Voucher Scheme from the Local Enterprise Offices of € 20 million.

A €20 million Brexit fund to help SMEs involved in exporting and importing with the UK and further afield to put in place the staff, software and IT systems to be ready for new customs arrangements from 1 January 2021.

The expansion of the Enterprise Ireland € 180 million Sustaining Enterprise Fund scheme to include direct grant support to viable businesses, in addition to equity and repayable advances. Mr Brian Barrett’s presentation was followed by some questions and discussions on the July Stimulus from the members.

**5. Update on Tourism Task Force and Tourism Supports in Galway City**

Mr Ruairi Lehmann, Galway City Council Tourism Officer, reiterated to the members that tourism is going through its toughest year yet. He advised the members that Galway City Council established a Tourism Recovery Taskforce as a response to this crisis and stated that the task force for the immediate 12 months will provide the direction for a recovery. It will initially look into the immediate recovery of the tourism sector and also the long term tourism development and promotion for the City. Mr Ruairi Lehmann told the members that in June the councillors agreed to support the tourism sector following on from this €25,000 was funded to support a “Dine in Galway” campaign and a “Shop Local” campaign which will be promoted leading into Christmas. These initiatives are aimed to return the footfall into Galway City which has dropped significantly this year. €40,000 of funding was allocated to a “Staycation” campaign which started off this week to attract visitors for the Autumn Season.

September was better than expected with occupancy levels at 40% which is very low but still higher than anticipated at the start of the summer.

Ruairi Lehmann told the members that the task force are working very closely with the Galway Arts Festival and Galway 2020 to attract visitors to the City. He said €150,000 was allocated to the Marketing Promotion Fund to attract additional visitors to the City and that they are currently assessing the proposals which will be brought to the CPG next week. He also said €70,000 was allocated to the Taskforce to develop a branding for tourism in Galway City which he stated is a very important objective to achieve and added that Fáilte Ireland have indicated that they will provide matching funding for this initiative.

Galway City Council will fully fund the Christmas lights in 2020, and are also looking at a ‘Galway Christmas Experience’ a lights experience to illuminate certain parts of the City. Cllr Neil McNelis asked if it will be possible to have the Christmas Market in Galway this year. Mr Ruairi Lehmann advised the members that the latest guidelines will be out on the 13th of September and we will know more at this stage but, there will be a “Christmas Lights Experience” in Galway City. Cllr M Crowe advised caution around supporting online events as people have to stay at home to attend the event we must question the value for money we get for funding invested in online events. Mr Lehman responded that the funding allocations prioritised projects and initiatives that led to increased footfall and dwell time in the City.

**6. Presentation on City Arts Strategy**

Mr James Harrold Arts Officer updated the SPC on the status of the new 5 year plan for the City Arts Strategy and invited the members to consultation and give input into the strategy. The Arts Officer advised the members that some of the consultations had to be paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic but Mr James Harrold and Ms Mary McAuliffe, the Cultural Consultant have been working behind the scenes intensely examining all policy documents for the Arts in Ireland and Galway City Cultural Documents. The Arts Council who support Galway City Council and the stakeholders have a framework agreement and have 4 principles;

* Access to and engagement with the Arts for all people,
* Value for the work of artist,
* Diversity and Context and types of participation and quality of provision,
* Equality, Diversity and human rights and Gaeilge and language is key importance for the creation of Arts in Galway City.

The Arts Officer told the members that a huge number of Consultations had taken place before the pandemic and are now resuming them again this week via Zoom. These consultations raised a lot of key issues which will feed into the strategy. The Arts Strategy has the benefit of a very sophisticated review with a huge amount of research. It was agreed that separate meeting for the SPC members would be held to facilitate further consultation and input into the Arts Strategy and told the members that they can email or phone him also. James Harrold told the members that he intends to present the Draft Arts Strategy to next SPC meeting in December for recommendation to the Council early in 2021.

**7. Update from LECP Advisory Steering Group**

Cllr Neil McNelis introduced this item and invited the Director of Services Mr Brian Barrett to present an update from the Local Economic Community Plan Steering Group.

Mr Brian Barrett gave an update on the LECP Plan which contains 9 Flagships and 10 seed projects. The review Committee met last week and got a status update on the feedback from the project leaders of these projects, we got a good response 90% of the project leaders came back. The committee met last week and interrogated the feedback and discussed they will deliver the implementation plan for the LECP. The committee have asked to seek further clarification and more detail on the responses.

The plan was launched in January pre Covid which has delayed the start of some of the initiatives and some of the projects as resources in the organisations. The group hopes to meet again at the end of October when we have received the clarification and data.

Cllr Neil McNeilis said the amount of work and input involved in the LECP shows the diversity of the City with the amount of groups and stakeholders involved in the plan. Ms Caitriona acknowledged that there will be a lot of challenges within the plan which is a two year plan and there are so many projects, she stated that some of the projects are seeds which may only be started within the two years.

**8. AOB**

Cllr John Connolly complimented the staff in the Town Hall Theatre for starting up performances again.

The members asked if Galway 2020 could be put on the agenda for the next meeting to give an update.

Mr David Hickey stated that the retail sector in the City is facing significant challenges and suggested setting up a taskforce to address the need to promote the retail sector in Galway City Centre. It was agreed that the Galway City Council Economic Development Unit and the Chamber would meet to identify the best way to progress this and report back to the next meeting of the SPC.

James Harrold informed the members that the Galway International Arts Festival is going on at the moment around the City.

**The meeting concluded.**