



Irish Rural Link
Nasc Tuaithe na hÉireann

Irish Rural Link Submission to Review of Community Services Programme

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**Department of Rural and
Community Development**

*An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail*

Introduction

Irish Rural Link represents the interests of locally based rural groups in disadvantaged and marginalised rural areas by highlighting problems, advocating appropriate policies, sharing experiences and examples of good practice. It has a membership of nearly 600 rural community groups dedicated to sustainable rural development and represents rural communities at a local, national and European level.

IRL welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Review of the Community Services Programme (CSP). The CSP is a key programme supporting the work of community and voluntary organisations and social enterprises across the country. The funding allocation for the programme in 2018 was €44 million and in 2017, it supported 400 organisations and 2,000 jobs. As a member organisation, the majority of our members are involved in the Community and Voluntary sector, many of whom rely on the CSP programme to provide a range of essential services to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of people in our society and living in some of the most remote areas of the country. Without the programme many of these services would not exist.

IRL and its members are concerned about the focus in recent times on the theme of social enterprises in the CSP and that after three years on the programme, organisations should begin to be able to generate an income and reduce their reliance of funding on the programme. IRL recently made a submission to the Department of Rural and Community Development on the new Social Enterprise Strategy and expressed our concern about '*Deficit Demand*' organisations that will more than likely never be able to become self-sufficient.

The impact of the CSP on the wider community

As outlined in the introduction, many of IRL members are involved in the community and voluntary sector and provide essential services to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society and in rural areas to some of those who live in the remotest parts of the country. Without the support of the CSP, some of these organisations would not exist and the services would not be available to people and communities most in need of them.

The CSP also helps create employment in the local area for those who may have been unemployed for long periods or looking to get back to employment. In rural areas, it can be particularly difficult to access people to hire and the programme gives these opportunities to those from marginalised communities.

The nature, range, diversity and scale of CSP funded organisations

IRL's CSP funded member organisations offer a wide range of services to people in the local communities. The services range from Community care, social care and health care, services to older people, people with disabilities, meals on wheels, education, training, transport, childcare, after school care, local facilities such as community centres, playgrounds, sporting facilities – all of which are essential to help build communities, especially in rural areas. The Department of Rural and Community Development in its Action Plan for Rural Development have an ambition to build sustainable communities and CSP plays a key role in achieving this ambition.

IRL established a Network of Meals on Wheels providers across the country in 2015. The majority of these groups are on the CSP. The service they provide is invaluable to the people who receive it and their families as they have peace of mind that they are getting a nutritious meal each day. It allows people to remain in their home and community as the age and reduces the stay in hospital. With the publication of Sláintecare and the move from hospital centric to community and primary care based healthcare, meals on wheels, through the support of the CSP has an important role to play in this.

The range of eligible services and part-funded staff

The range of services eligible under the programme is wide and diversified but all have a common goal in that they are providing a service to marginalised groups of people and helping them become more involved and included in society. Whether the services provided help older people, young people, people with disability, migrants, traveller community, men, women, they are all contributing to the creation of sustainable communities and ensuring that people can remain in their local community.

The funding of staff through the CSP must be increased in line with the national minimum wage levels. Many staff members are doing work below the minimum wage, decreasing their own sense of value. They are providing services that would not otherwise be provided and workers themselves must not be made worse off or not be able to afford a decent standard of living. In a lot of cases Employees go above and beyond what is expected of them in their job, making sure the needs of the people they serve are met.

The manager's salary must now also be reviewed. This was increased in 2008 to €33,147 and was reduced in 2010 to €32,000 and has remained unchanged ever since. This compares to the average industrial wage of approx. €37,000. The current salary is not reflective of the qualifications a manager needs to do the job or the work they do.

Another issue that CSP funded organisations face is if a person who is funded or part-funded under the CSP goes out sick. The organisation cannot replace this person and so

the work must be divided up among other staff members in the organisation, increasing their workload.

The value added to services being delivered to vulnerable communities that would not be delivered otherwise

CSP's are delivering work on behalf of the government at a fraction of the cost to the state were they to engage state agencies to deliver same. In some cases, especially in the delivering of Meals and other services to people living in remote areas, the state would unlikely deliver such services.

The job opportunities and/or career advancement for part-funded staff from marginalised communities

CSP funded staff are more constant when compared to CE or TUS staff, particularly in rural and isolated areas where it is difficult to attract staff and where it is now becoming more difficult to get participants for CE Schemes and TUS with more employment available. All staff regardless if they are on CSP, CE, RSS, TUS receive training and so when a CE Scheme worker or TUS worker finishes their placement, they system has to start again. This is reduced in CSP funded staff. Providing training for staff so they can advance their career will also benefit the people they serve and the community as it could allow for additional services to be provided or more effective ways of delivery current services.

Ensuring that additional funding can be made available for training and education must be included in the review.

The complementarity and/or overlap with other Government-funded programmes and schemes

As mentioned in earlier sections, the CSP complements the objections and targets of Government policies and strategies, especially in Rural and Community Development, health and social care, social inclusion etc. Without CSP funding, organisations who provide complementary services to public services at community level, would not be able to exist and the people and communities they serve would be further removed from essential services that they need to ensure an inclusive society.

While some may see the CSP programme and the new Social Enterprise Strategy as overlapping in some parts, IRL would like to emphasise again that not every CSP funded organisation is or ever will be a self-sufficient social enterprise, or break-even. There will be always Deficit Demand Social Enterprises and it can be argued if these in fact should be classed as a social enterprise. We would be concerned that if the CSP went down the route of having two streams - one for Social Enterprise and one for those groups - community groups - that social enterprises will be looked upon more favourably in the application process.

The programme evaluation criteria (across the programme strands, Pobal and the Department)

While CSP funded organisations acknowledge the importance of Pobal audits, there is a discontent with the overly robust manner and language used in some Pobal audits. There should be a more supportive approach to audit results.

The application, re-contracting and appeals processes

The window for application is very limited, with applications open for a minimum of 3 weeks, once a year. It can also be laborious for small community groups and especially for those applying for the first time. Supports to groups must be given and a longer time period given.

Appeals should be dealt with in a timely manner as groups are waiting on the funding and will need to explore other sources of funding if application is still not successful after the appeal.

Conclusion

This review on the Community Services Programme is very timely, with the new Social Enterprise Strategy being finalised and due to be published in the coming months. While there may be some overlap between the new strategies, there needs to be clear distinction between Social Enterprises and Community groups that will never have the ability to become a social enterprise but the service they deliver are even more important as they reach the most vulnerable and isolated. The CSP must not favour organisations that can generate an income over those who never will when these groups rely more heavily on funding supports from the state.

Irish Rural Link are available and are happy to be involved in any further discussions of this review.

Irish Rural Link the Organisation

Irish Rural Link (IRL), formed in 1991, is a national network of organisations and individuals campaigning for sustainable rural development in Ireland and Europe. IRL, a non-profit organisation, has grown significantly since its inception and now directly represents over 600 community groups with a combined membership of 25,000.

The network provides a structure through which rural groups and individuals, representing disadvantaged rural communities, can articulate their common needs and priorities, share their experiences and present their case to policy-makers at local, national and European Level.

Irish Rural Link is the only group represented at the national social partnership talks solely representing rural communities' interests.

'Our vision is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities that contribute to an equitable and just society'

Irish Rural Link's aims are:

- To articulate and facilitate the voices of rural communities in local, regional, national and European policy arenas, especially those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and the challenge of change in the 21st century.
- To promote local and community development in rural communities in order to strengthen and build the capacity of rural community groups to act as primary movers through practical assistance and advice.
- To research, critique and disseminate policies relating to rural communities including issues such as sustainability, social exclusion, equality and poverty
- To facilitate cross-border networking between rural communities

'Our mission is to influence and inform local, regional, national and European development policies and programmes in favour of rural communities especially those who are marginalised as a result of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.'

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