



Slí

ISSUE 3- MARCH 2022

A VERY HAPPY EASTER TO YOU ALL

'Slí' A newsletter to inform and report on matters which are relevant to island residents around our coast

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Comhar na nOileán serving the communities of the Islands, the Gaeltacht and Peripheral Communities.



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Future



The Train stopped with a jolt and didn't start again stated Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív T.D. at the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands

After an address delivered by Aisling Moran Chairperson of Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann in which she describes the shocking population statistics to the Joint Oireachtas Committee whereby Islands population has gone from 34,219 in 1841 to 2,627 in 2016. No other community has experienced such a dramatic decline, as pointed out in *Our Rural Future*. These figures have not improved, and some islands have moved closer to the edge. Serious and continued government support is needed to ensure the long-term viability of our offshore islands.

Aisling and her fellow Comhdháil participants, John Walsh from Bere Island and Simon Murray from Inishbofin went on to highlight four areas of particular concerns for the Islands i.e. Housing, Connectivity, Infrastructure, Life Line Services and Capital funding and Energy.

Deputy O'Cuív went on to say that he was appalled at the lack of progress in the last 12 years. From 2000 to 2010 for example, 128m was spend on infrastructure on the islands. In the 11 years since then a mere 12m has been spent. In Aisling Moran's address to the committee, she outlined the issue of **Housing on the Islands** as follows.

Updated laws on planning policy limit islanders from building on their own islands. Ireland has seen an increase in second home ownership: this demand has driven the price of island housing outside the reach of islanders. Islands are finite spaces. Islanders therefore need to be able to build or buy homes on their islands. Alternative mainland housing options are not solutions to the island housing crises.

The housing situation on the offshore islands is urgent. It is an area where there has been very little research carried out to date. University College Cork are currently engaged to conduct a comprehensive housing survey on all offshore inhabited islands. The outcomes of this survey will

result in a report with housing recommendations for the offshore islands. The main theme of the Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann AGM in September 2022 will be based on housing and the outcomes of this report. Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann is hopeful that the report will input into *Our Rural Future 10 - Year Plan* and the Islands Policy document.

In addressing this issue Deputy Ó Cuív, the raconteur of the Committee put the following questions to the committee.

1. Should everybody who lives permanently on an Island and doesn't have a home automatically be considered as having a housing need for planning permission purposes on the island whereon they live?
2. Should local authorities be obliged to house island applicants in local authority houses on Islands rather than putting them on a list on the mainland against their wishes?
3. Do we require affordable housing schemes on islands?

Connectivity was another issued raised by the group.

One of the main results of the COVID-19 pandemic is that people want, and sometimes must, work from home. There is a new age of remote working already building in Ireland and Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann considers this a major opportunity for islanders and to attract both emigrant islanders and new residents to the islands. To do this, not only do we need sufficient housing but also a reliable, high-speed broadband system in place. Broadband is happening but slowly, Broadband plans promises 30MB but the issue for the Islands is that it does not specify Fibre optic cable. This is not acceptable especially as the 30MB may not be adequate into the future and we will be right back to the drawing board or rather the begging bowl again. The answer is that the Island Division needs to step in here as under the National Broadband

Plan, there is no obligation to put fibre into every Island.

Infrastructure, Lifeline Services and Capital funding

The Island Capital Budget Programme, funds infrastructure projects, lifeline services and capital works. According to “*Our Rural Future*”: “The Government will invest in vital infrastructure on the islands over the lifetime of this policy, to ensure safe access for islanders, service providers, and visitors alike.” Infrastructure is not only about safe access; it is about the everyday lives of islanders and the future sustainability of their islands. Comhdháil would like to see a consistent budget that could meet the needs of the offshore islands, working in conjunction with the interdepartmental committee, Island interagency and local authorities. However, as Deputy Ó Cuív stated we are not getting delivery. His proposal to the Joint Oireachtas Committee was that there is a very efficient way of dealing with Capital deficits on Islands and that is that the capital funds of the Island division is significant and that the Minister has freedom with that fund when it comes to essential services such as Fibre cable, sewage systems, water supply, new electricity connections, telecommunications, health facilities, piers, roads and anything else.

The idea proposed was that when a capital investment by a state Department is involved which involves a comprehensive cost/benefit analysis which will naturally mitigate against the Islands, that the fund is matched, or that the Island Division makes up any shortfall that may arise over and above an equivalent investment on the mainland.

This would overcome cost/benefit issues. An example of this is if 1,000 houses for example in a mainland town needs a water connection, and an island needs the same infrastructure, obviously the 1,000 houses on the mainland will win out and the Island will go to the bottom of the list but if the Islands division of the Department could match fund with other Departments, that would bring equity into the situation.

A good example of this is the Health Centre on Inis Oírr with two self-catering apartments for locum nurses and doctors. The Island division part funded the construction with the HSE at the time. The Island division needs to have the freedom to support any deficits in funding from other

Departments when the cost/benefit analysis does not justify the expenditure.

Energy

Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann presentation to the committee stated that sustainable Energy is a key consideration for the whole country. Islands are keen to be at the forefront of these new developments. The offshore islands are already working at European Level through the EU Clean Islands Secretariat. Through the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications there is potential for the offshore islands to work at a local and national level. The recent SEAI National home retrofit scheme was welcomed, however this initiative will not translate due to islands due to higher costs of works and the requirements on contractors. Island proofing would aid in the understanding of these nuances. It would be hopeful that through the interdepartmental committee and Ministers engagement we can get a resolution to this. Islands are ideal test beds for energy pilot projects.

A meeting is requested with Minister Ryan to request that the upper limits on grant-aid would be higher to the Islands, that the percentage grant-aid would be increased and that island-based contractors would not have to show a turnover of 1m per annum to be eligible to apply to carry out work.

The areas highlighted is by no means a comprehensive list of areas of concern for the offshore Islands. Comhdháil would welcome expansion of the discussion to include policies surrounding health, education, agriculture, the marine, access, childcare, enterprise and employment, fire and emergency services, waste management, tourism, youth, and older persons. We recognise that there are great opportunities to be achieved by working together. Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann understand the that work on the islands policy document is central to *Our Rural Future*. Comhdháil are requesting that a draft version of this document be presented to the Island Communities for review prior to publication. Comhdháil would also like to recognise the importance of the Interdepartmental Committee in the process of writing the Islands Policy document and delivering on *Our Rural Future*.

CLÁR Funding



Minister Humphreys launches €7 Million Fund to develop community facilities & amenities in rural areas and we are particularly delighted that the Minister introduces specific CLÁR measure to support Island communities for the first time.

- **Applications invited under the 2022 CLÁR Programme**
- **Focus on developing local facilities and amenities in rural areas**
- **Grants of up to €50k available for wide range of projects including Youth Clubs, Handball Alleys, Community Gyms, Walking Tracks & more**

The measures being funded under the 2022 CLÁR Programme are:

- Measure 1: Developing Community Facilities and Amenities (via LA)

IMPORTANT DATES BELOW:

Cork Application Deadline March 25 @ 16:00

Mayo Application Deadline March 29 @ 17.00 (please note this application has to be submitted online)

Donegal Deadline for Applications April 5 @ 12:00 noon

Galway Application Deadline April 20 @ 00:00 midnight

- Measure 2: Mobility, Cancer Care and Community First Responders Transport (direct to DRCD)
- Measure 3: Our Islands (direct to DRCD)

Measure 3 “Our Islands”- (New)

Our Rural Future commits to progressing vital infrastructure development for our island communities. An ambition of this policy is to ensure our offshore islands continue to support sustainable and vibrant communities, connectivity is enhanced, and that visitors have an opportunity to experience and appreciate the unique culture, heritage, and environmental richness the islands have to offer. This Measure will provide funding for Island specific projects.

(i) **Island Community Transport** – will provide up to 90% of the total cost of a community bus/vehicle with an electric charging point which is powered by solar PV panels.

(ii) **Island Outdoor Community Recreation Amenities** - will provide up to 90% of the total cost, of Outdoor Community Recreation Amenities – benches, picnic tables/areas, toilets – subject to a maximum grant of €50,000. All newly developed community facilities and amenities funded under the programme must be disability friendly.

Full details of the scheme are published on

www.gov.ie/drcd



Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

The Rural Regeneration and Development fund is a commitment of €1 billion by government to be invested in rural Ireland over the period 2019 to 2027.

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund can fund projects including (but not limited to):

- infrastructure that may be needed to support town centre housing and/or commercial development
- measures to address building vacancy including building refurbishment, redevelopment and/or demolition
- the development of community or public facilities infrastructure including improvements to roads, bridges, and car parking facilities
- infrastructure that improves telecommunications connectivity
- projects that support job creation, entrepreneurship, and innovation in rural areas (for example: development of Digital Hubs, Enterprise Hubs, Creative Hubs, or training facilities)
- enhancement of heritage and/or other community assets including the provision/enhancement of recreational or leisure facilities.

There are opportunities here for Islands for large-scale regeneration projects that are ready to commence.

That aim to drive economic growth, combat dereliction, and breathe new life into villages and a strong focus on converting old buildings into remote working hubs, libraries, e-learning, cultural, enterprise, youth and community spaces.

Comhar na nOileán are willing to assist any group on the Islands who wish to explore the potential of applying for the fund. The calls are announced every year and you must be ready to commence so we urge communities to have the planning in place, the business planning done, and the support enlisted from other agencies. Feasibility and business planning is essential as the application

process is very competitive and a stringent Cost-Benefit Analysis is carried out during the assessment stage.

Preparing for application can take up to a year or more and will involve expenditure on professionals.

However, this is where grant-aid from the LEADER Programme could be accessed for Analysis and Development.

We are willing to sit down with any group and assist and advise in putting a plan in place.

www.gov.ie/drcd



The 'Bulbs for Bees' thriving in the Sandy soil of Inis Oírr

Youth Forum



Club Óige Inis Óírr.

For some time now we have been working behind the scenes to try to set up a Youth Forum for offshore Islands. We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Foróige and are now affiliated with the group.

What does this mean to Island Youth? It means that the Island Youth Forum can;

- 1) Avail of Foróige's experiences and good practice in involving young people in youth participation Structures
- 2) Avail of relevant Foróige youth work resources and good practice
- 3) Access Foróige training and programmes for our staff and volunteers in Child Protection, Education, Equality and Inclusion, Youth Programmes and Youth health.
- 4) Receive advice and guidance on youth work issues arising in our youth groups and participation structures.
- 5) That staff and volunteers engaged in youth work with Foróige are Garda Vetted through Foróige
- 6) For Island Youth to have the opportunity to participate in Foróige national and regional events
- 7) To create better online and in person connectivity for young people across the Irish Islands.
- 8) To Network and collaborate through Foróige with other young people across the Islands and nationwide.

Foróige support

Foróige will provide support from a named staff person who will be the main point of contact in all joint events. As part of ongoing work, the staff person will facilitate the staff and volunteers of Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann to organise events and programmes under the programme. The staff person will provide or facilitate access to participation structure development, training, volunteer processing, Garda vetting, access to programmes, links to VR opportunities and a consultancy service on problem solving etc. S/he will not be present at all events, as is normal.

We had a very fruitful first meeting since signing the agree on the 24 February 2022 and this is the launch of the partnership. The CEO of Foróige welcomed Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann to the partnership and expressed their thanks for reaching out to them. They are excited with the development and can foresee many good initiatives arising out of the partnership. They were particularly happy to see Chloe Ní Mháille who is a graduate of their Leadership Programme and has a long involvement with Foróige. We discussed the best way to proceed, and it was agreed that the Leader shop Programme would be an effective way to start and it would be a good way to ensure that capacity was built with young people themselves and that that would have a ripple effect in attracting others.

What is the Youth Leadership Programme?

This exciting programme enables young people aged 15-18 to develop the skills and qualities necessary to be inspiring leaders. Young people are empowered to make a positive change in their community through practical actions and projects.

There is no doubt that young people need a broad skill set to help them succeed in today's world. A lot of research shows that employers value soft skills like problem-solving, relationship-building, and the ability to adapt to change.

Aim & Outcomes

The programme enables young people to:

- Identify their strengths
- Develop a leadership vision
- Understand their leadership style
- Explore the challenges and difficulties of leadership

- Develop clear communication skills
- Explore local, national, and global issues
- Apply methods of conflict resolution
- Practice problem solving and critical thinking skills as part of a group
- Identify goals and a vision for their future and develop action plans
- Complete a project

The results showed that young people who completed the programme showed significant improvements in a whole range of positive traits. When compared to the comparison group, Leadership for Life participants performed higher in measures of:

- Goal Setting
- Empathy
- Critical Thinking
- Communication Skills
- Teamwork
- Problem Solving
- Leadership Skills
- Community Involvement
- Resilience
- Sibling Support
- Social Support
- Emotional support



Throughout the Leadership for Life programme there is a focus on the acquisition of these skills. The qualities of communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, and self-awareness are developed in a fun and encouraging environment. The method is 'learning by doing'. During sessions young people are actively engaged in group

activities, but time is also set aside for individual work and reflection.

As part of module 2 and module 3 there are practical projects. These are opportunities to demonstrate the skills acquired in the programme. During their projects, young people are encouraged to look beyond themselves at their community and wider society.

On completion of all three modules of the Leadership for Life programme participants are eligible to graduate with a Foundation Certificate in Youth Leadership and Community Action, which is awarded by the National College of Ireland, Galway.

This is a unique opportunity for participants to earn a university recognised qualification, before they even consider going to third level.

Having this qualification will show prospective employers that participants have demonstrated a commitment to their own development and leadership potential.

This is a wonderful achievement to be able to include in a CV or application form.



Housing Survey



Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann are conducting an all-island survey, as mentioned earlier in conjunction with University College Cork. It is important to engage with the survey so that we can start dealing with the many issues.

The research entails a quantitative survey to ascertain the views and needs of island residents on their household's present housing circumstances and future housing requirements. It is aimed to collect 500 surveys from across the islands of Ireland. The methodology will include three main components:

1. Community forums with island residents to formulate the survey questions.
2. A multi-modal survey to ascertain the views and needs of island residents regarding their housing circumstances.
3. Quantitative analysis of the survey data.

The research will be compliant with relevant codes of ethics, data protection and data confidentiality. The research team will work in co-operation with, and under the guidance of Comhar na nOileán. The research will be conducted over a six-month period, from February to July 2022.

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