



To: Liam Dunne

CC: Carmel Cashin and Denis McDermott

Response to Formal Request from Celbridge Leixlip Municipal District re Comhairle na N'óg re the motion:

That the council, in partnership with schools in the Celbridge-Leixlip Municipal District, co-develop a pilot engagement framework which would aim to establish open channels of communication for young people to enhance their learning about council; increase their awareness of all opportunities through the council to actively participate in the development of their town and county; and to enable young people give their feedback on the form of engagement methods.

From Maura Littlewood Youth Area Coordinator/ Comhairle Coordinator for in sync Youth and Family Service.

Comhairle na N'óg are youth councils for children and young people aged 12 -18, that give them a voice on the development of the local policies and services. This is recognised as the key national structure for participation by children and young people in local decision making in 31 local authorities across Ireland.

Comhairle na N'óg allows young people's voices to be heard in two ways

- 1) Young people work on topics that are important to them. It is important that young people are supported to identify what is important to young people in their area and what outcome/impact can the Comhairle make to this that improves the lives of young people.
- 2) The Comhairle acts as a consultative forum for Adult decision makers in the locality

Comhairle na N'óg in Kildare

Kildare Comhairle na N'óg has a different structure to other local authorities. In Kildare, due to the management of the Comhairle by in sync Youth and Family Services, the Comhairle is not just one county wide group but it also has local Comhairle that run in the areas where in sync has projects working in the community.

One of the aims of Comhairle is to have inclusion of seldom heard young people in local communities and by having the structure of a County Panel and then 8 local Comhairle

groups in Kildare, it allows for a diverse mix of young people participating in the initiative, this includes seldom heard young people.

Pre Covid the Comhairle na N'óg structure in Kildare would have engaged with an average of 96 young people on a monthly basis over the year. This is not including 190 young people that attend the Annual General meeting in October each year from schools, youth project and clubs across the county. In 2020, this dropped to 58 on a monthly basis. This was due to challenges with access to wifi, equipment and also online fatigue. It is the aim of the the Comhairle Team and the County Panel to grow the Comhairle once restriction have been lifted.

Young people from Celbridge Leixlip MD

The County Panel has 26 members who represent their communities from across Kildare. Of the 26 members of the Comhairle there are 8 of these positions made available to young people from the Celbridge Leixlip MD. Over that last 3 years, 33% of those young people coming from the municipal district to sit on the County Panel, are identified as seldom heard and would come from local authority estates in the area.

Young people are recruited to the County Panel through the local Comhairle. Young people access the Local Comhairle through referral from the schools, clubs and projects to the AGM and then follow up communication is made with young people to gain their interest in being part of the local Comhairle. The young people who attend the County Panel update young people at a local level of the work ongoing and feeds back to County Panel any suggestions coming from Local area as well as the work the Local Comhairle is undertaking.

Pre Covid - The Celbridge/Leixlip Local Comhairle has always been one of the strongest local Comhairle. The group averages between 12 – 18 members from across the MD meeting on a fortnightly basis in Leixlip. Currently, this group is not engaging on line but it is hoped to re-establish the group in Autumn 2021. Members from the group still attend the County Panel on a monthly basis.

Some of the challenges faced in the running of this group is access to premises in the area and transport links for young people between the two towns.

Some of the work of the Local Comhairle in the MD over the last 3 years include –

- Smoking Cessation Campaign,
- Anti-Bullying Campaign with video been distributed to schools in the area and presented at Comhairle AGM;
- Raising Awareness of Diversity;
- Mental Health Awareness Programme with leaflets and posters distributed to schools and services.
- Engagement at National level in government initiatives and workshops.
- Some engagement has happened in the positive with Local Councillors, in particular the issue of facilities for young people.

Active Work of young people participating in County Panel from the MD

Over 2019 to present, the work of the Comhairle county panel where members of the MD have been involved in developing are as follows:

- Development of a Peer Education Mental Health programme that was delivered in schools in Kildare
- Development of a youth led Wellness initiative poster campaign
- Alcohol awareness campaign
- Drug and Alcohol campaign (on going in 2021)
- Green Space Consultation with KCC
- County Development Plan 2022
- Migrant integration Strategy
- National Climate change action plan
- Linking with Local authority environment department to input into Climate action plan
- Consultation on HSE Child safety statement and child/young person friendly documents
- Consultation on CYPSC 3 year plan on key topics that impact the lives of young people

Engagement with schools

Engagement with schools in the MD has always been very positive. Each year links are made with schools to submit representatives for the AGM. This equates to 4 young people from each school in the area.

Another aspect of engagement with schools is in the form of consultations/surveys or campaign ideas that the County Panel or Local Comhairle have developed. Often times it may be a select group of young people that the Comhairle target for this work. In the past this has happened with student council, TY and 2 nd years etc. The involvement is dependent on the campaign itself but also on what is suited to the school in order not to disrupt the work of students and teachers.

Engagement with Decision Makers

Each year after the AGM in October the Comhairle presents to the County Council the work they have undertaking over the year. This is an opportunity for County Councillors to ask questions of the Comhairle but also if the Comhairle have any requests of the County Councillors. This meeting did not take place in 2020 due to Covid restrictions but it is proposed to have this in place for October/November 2021.

In November 2019, the Comhairle met with Kildare County Councillors to present their work and to make a formal request that all SPC within the council should have a young person representation on them. In a response to this request a position for a young person was given for the Environment SPC's. A young person from the Celbridge Leixlip MD was identified as the first young person to take up one of the seats. Unfortunately due to issues with numbers of reps on the group, the seat for the young person did not come to fruition.

The Comhairle has also linked with Decision makers from the following services – HSE Health Promotion, CYPSC, Tusla, SWRDATF, Alcohol Forum, and Principals Association to name but a few.