

Report on the review of

Co. Kildare Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021

1. Introduction

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 outlined the requirement for all Local Authorities to develop a six year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). In line with requirements Co. Kildare agreed its' first LECP 2016-2021. Due to delays, as a result of COVID 19 and the Ukrainian Crisis, the development of the second updated plan, commenced in February 2023. This is in line with the national experience. It is expected that this plan, 2023-2029, will be finalised later this year.

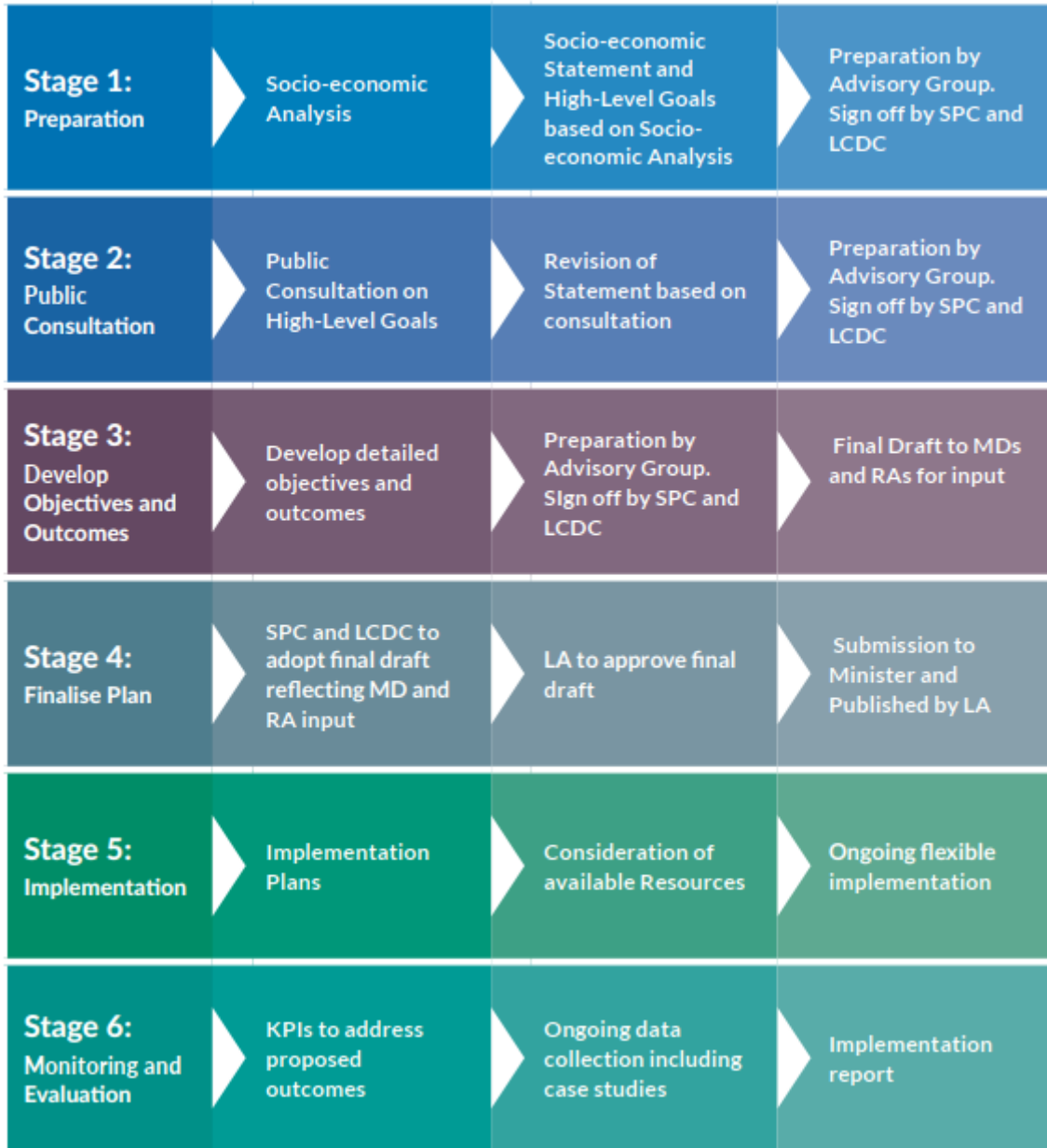
The purpose of the LECP is to set out for a six-year period the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of County Kildare, both by itself directly, and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders. There are detailed national guidelines to underpin the LECP which consists of two parts:

- i) The development of an overall **LECP framework** outlining High Level Goals and sustainable Community and Economic objectives and high-level indicators for the six-year period. (Strategic part of the LECP process)
- ii) The development of an **Implementation Plan** to develop the inputs, actions and resources required for the implementation plan period. This will include specific key performance indicators. (Implementation part of the LECP process).

The community component of the LECP is prepared by the Local Community Development Committee (LCDDC), with the economic component prepared by the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) of Kildare County Council (KCC). An overarching Advisory Steering Group is responsible for the integration of both elements and to prepare the plan for final adoption. The final LECP is approved by the elected members of KCC.

The LECP guidelines outlines six distinct stages that all LECP processes must follow. The first stage **Preparation** includes a review of the LECP 2016-2021. This short report outlines the key findings from this review process. The stages for the development of the LECP are outlined below:

Figure 6



2. Co. Kildare LECP 2016-2021

Co. Kildare LECP was agreed in December 2015. The All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) worked with KCC/LCDC to identify, analyse and collate data sets to establish a detailed evidence baseline of the socio-economic characteristics of the county. This helped to inform the consultation process and the final high-level goals with supporting objectives and actions. The LECP 2016-2021 has twelve high level goals, 48 objectives with 163 actions. These are outlined below as part of section four of this report. The Department of Rural and Community Development were very satisfied with Co. Kildare LECP and invited a small delegation from KCC to a cross sectoral meeting to present the plan, to the Interdepartmental Group at a meeting in the Customs House in 2017.

3. LECP 2016-2021 review process

While the LECP formed part of the agenda of the Local Community Development Committee, there was no nationally agreed mechanism to monitor the progress of the plan. The LECP was agreed at the early establishment phase of the LCDC. This was a time of significant change in the structure of national programmes e.g., SICAP, LEADER and the introduction of new programmes e.g., Healthy Ireland. In addition, functions such as the administration of community grants such as, the Community Enhancement Programme, became part of the LCDC function. A clear mechanism to provide funding to staff LCDCs is not in place and therefore there are variances nationally. In parallel, clarity regarding the monitoring systems and structures of the SPCs in relation to the plan were not clearly defined.

Since the LECP was agreed, significant economic, societal and community changes have occurred. This has resulted in the current buoyant economy with full employment, increased funding available to communities and sense of economic optimism. However, during this period, the housing crisis escalated with record levels of homelessness, the COVID 19 pandemic emerged and ongoing war in the Ukraine continues.

It was agreed that the LECP review 2016-2021 would focus on:

- If the vision of LECP 2016-2021, or elements of the vision are still relevant for LECP 2023-2029?
- If the twelve high level goals and objectives are still relevant for LECP 2023-2029?
- What objectives had progressed?
- What challenges existed to making progress?

The process to carry out this review was based on:

- Reviewing LCDC minutes
- A review held with elected members in 2019.
- Completion of a detailed review template by all sections within Co. Kildare County Council at senior/operational levels, LCDC members and the Children and Young Peoples Services Committee (March 2023). Detailed responses were received from: KCC Corporate Services, Healthy Ireland, Parks, Libraries, Age Friendly, Environment, Internal Audit, Housing, Human Resources, Roads and Transportation, Planning – Future Planning, Public Realm, Biodiversity, Heritage, Economic Development, Kildare Wicklow ETB, Tusla, Children and Young Persons Services Committee (17 members)

4. Review Outcomes

4.1 Vision

The Governing Thought (Vision) of the Co. Kildare LECP 2016-2021 is as follows.

“Working in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders across civil society in order to build stronger businesses and communities based upon economic achievement, sustainable development, and social inclusion.”

Review outcome

Overall, the review highlighted that the vision is still largely relevant. However, a number of respondents outlined that a stronger reference to climate change should be included. In addition, it was proposed that words such as “civil” is too bureaucratic and that the term “stakeholders” is not commonly understood. It was also suggested that the vision would benefit from some adaption to capture the resilience of communities, the innovation of the county and the need to develop further community infrastructure. Consideration of the framework for the human rights and equality public sector duty was also proposed.

Next steps

The draft vision for the LECP 2023-2029 will be adapted to reflect the feedback given and the evidence emerging from the analysis of data and policy review to inform the socio-economic profile.

4.2 High level goals

There are twelve high level goals outlined in the LECP 2016-2021 as follows:

1. Population	2. Urban/Rural Mix	3. Economy and Employment
4. Sustainable Transport	5. Housing	6. Education
7. Health and Wellbeing	8. Safe Communities	9. Children and Young People
10. Community, Recreation, Heritage, Arts and Culture	11. Environmental Quality	12. A Sustainable Community

4.2.1 Positive progression

The following is a snapshot of the key progress that has taken place since 2016.

- This plan was firmly rooted in an evidence-based approach. Working with AIRO in Maynooth University provided a very solid basis from which to plan. The ongoing work with AIRO since the development of the LECP, such as, the Census 2016 profiles, supported the County Development Plan and other planning processes. This has built on the work commenced as part of the LECP. The evidence-based approach was strongly noted by a number of respondents as helping to inform successful funding submissions, identify priorities and provide clarity on the nuances of the county.

- It was also highlighted that Local Government Reform and the associated change such as the establishment of the LCDC and Local Enterprise Office as part of Local Authority functions, has benefited Co. Kildare. The increased collaboration changed the role and function of KCC and has benefited local communities, businesses and maximised opportunities with other organisations.
- There has been a significant increase in the number of collaborative plans to scope out and agree on the priorities across a number of areas e.g., Age Friendly, Childcare, Traveller/Roma, Integration, Economic Development, Barrow Blueway, Play Strategy, Open Space Strategy, Housing, Heritage plan, Arts plan, Library plan, Healthy Co. Kildare Plan, Co. Kildare Sports Partnership Plan, etc. This mirrors the development of collaborative structures such as Age Friendly, Children and Young Peoples Services Committee (CYPSC), Integration Networks, Comhairle na nÓg who work closely with Co. Kildare LCDC and KCC to respond to priorities identified.
- The development of a clear, comprehensive Kildare 2025 Economic Development Strategy for the county, agreed by all stakeholders is a very positive development. In 2016 this was not in place and significant actions are progressing under the guidance of this plan.
- Co. Kildare's economic base has developed and strengthened since 2016. It continues to attract large multinationals which are a strong powerhouse locally, nationally and internationally. However, Co. Kildare has also developed a strong indigenous economic base with 92% of all active businesses in Co. Kildare small to medium.
- There has been greater recognition and support of social economy organisations in the county which play a significant role in promoting inclusive and sustainable economic models at local level.
- Progress has occurred to respond to the increasing urban nature of many towns across the county through street scaping, public realm works, outdoor spaces since the development of the LECP.
- Working with LEADER funding has helped to support a range of positive projects such as walkways, community facilities, environmental initiatives and training targeting rural communities.
- Co. Kildare has continued to increase housing provision and attained the third highest housing completion rate in 2022 (Dublin City and Dunlaoghire Rathdown were higher). The energy efficiency of buildings was improved through the delivery of new buildings to A rated standards.
- Two dedicated refuge housing facilities are available for people experiencing domestic abuse and that while challenges exist, work is progressing to respond to more vulnerable people in need of housing. This is evident in the progress to establish the Tenancy Sustainment Team and increased Homeless Outreach resourcing since 2016.

- It was also noted that KCC have established a Sustainable Transport Section within KCC, to progress the implementation of Active Travel Schemes across the county.
- There is now an established Community Policing structure in place in Co. Kildare.
- The Right to Read National Programme has been implemented in Co. Kildare, in addition to digital skills training which became a priority targeting older people during the Covid 19 pandemic.
- The first Age Friendly Primary Care Centre nationally was opened in Athy. This is an example of increased awareness and collaborative responses to the needs of older people in Co. Kildare.
- Since 2016 the Heads-up (formerly Mojo) programme has become established and runs a number of programmes across the county responding to the needs of people with mental health issues in a practical evidence-based way.
- A collaborative Youth Mental Health plan led by the Children and Young Peoples Services Committee (CYPSC) has resulted in increased funding being made available for youth counselling, psychologist posts in North Co. Kildare and a new Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team in South Co. Kildare.
- There are increased community services including the establishment of two additional Family Resource Centres (FRCs) in Co. Kildare Town and Athy, new community centres and the development of the Bawnogues in Kilcock, new library services including the new library in Athy and planned library in Naas, skatepark in Newbridge and playgrounds across the county in urban and rural areas.
- Athy has increased service provision, which includes the designation of Athy as Slaintecare Healthy Community and Creative Places in 2021, and the Empowering Communities Programme in 2023. This is positive and builds on collaboration in Athy.
- There has been very positive progress in the delivery of local heritage projects. This includes audio guides, promotional video as interpretive signage and conservation management plans. A number of heritage surveys took place and the conservation of structures monuments such as the Castledermot Walls, St Michaels and Johnstown Churches.
- There has been very positive progression in increasing film development in Co. Kildare, with over 40 films receiving support under Short Grass Films commission and bursary awards.

- A number of initiatives took place to promote and protect biodiversity such as reducing grass cutting, heritage surveys and 23 biodiversity plans in towns and villages across Co. Kildare.

4.2.2 Challenges to progression

- The responsibility for implementation of the LECP was not clear. A clearly agreed adequate funding model of LCDCs did not accompany their establishment. In addition, increasing large programme oversight and substantial administration associated with community grants became the priority for the resources available. This detracted from establishing a coherent implementation system and structure for the initial LECP at LCDC level. The role of the SPC in relation to the LECP was also not clear. The absence of a systematic review, monitoring and adaptation process to oversee the implementation of the LECP impacted on the ability to assess progress, adapt the plan and agree current priorities.
- The unimaginable COVID 19 pandemic throughout 2020 to 2022 impacted on progression. Co. Kildare as a county experienced even more severe restrictions at some of the most vulnerable times than were encountered nationally.
- The unanticipated war in the Ukraine, impacted substantially on staffing resources across a number of agencies and this crisis, following the COVID 19 crisis, impacted on progressing LECP actions.
- There is an ongoing perception at national level that does not recognise the scale of growth, gaps in services and need for investment in Co. Kildare. This results in inadequate funding versus needs.
- The continuing growth in the population of Co. Kildare continues to outstrip the availability of services available. This is evident in ongoing challenges in securing housing, childcare, health, schools, recreation/sports facilities generally. Specific targeted services are even more challenging to attain resulting in vulnerable cohorts such as people with disabilities, mental health issues, experiencing domestic violence, immigrants, Travellers, low skilled etc are even more disenfranchised.
- As Co. Kildare continues to grow economically, challenges exist in a society of full employment to attract and retain staff given high costs associated with housing, lack of housing, low levels of service generally (as outlined above).
- While funding is available for community and voluntary sector organisations this is increasingly attained through an increasing variety of grant schemes. These schemes require substantial detail, compliance and application skill. More disadvantaged groups are often left behind, and there is general confusion and lack of cohesive national planning in relation to community grants.

- As climate considerations become more urgent, gaps in infrastructure particularly accessible, frequent public transport become more notable.
- Community engagement, participation and positive leadership in many parts of Co. Kildare is weak. This is linked to rapid growth, diversity and competing pressures on people's time. While COVID 19 rejuvenated community spirit generally, it also resulted in people reassessing their time and volunteering.
- The increasing emphasis on the use of technology to access almost all daily functions is resulting in a digital divide. Parts of the county cannot access broadband sufficient to engage- impacting on economic development in addition to issues of digital literacy and affordability of the technology required to participate fully in society.

5. Conclusion

This high-level review of the LECP concludes that:

- The LECP 2016-2021 provided an important framework to inform economic and community actions in recent years. This resulted in a better collaborative understanding of the key issues that exist, opportunities to be pursued and challenges to overcome. The evidence-based approach to developing the plan, supported a positive change in how priorities are agreed, and work is informed in Co. Kildare.
- A number of actions progressed very positively resulting in economic and community success.
- Stronger inter and intra agency working contributed to this progression.
- However, the lack of clear resourcing for LCDCs, competing demands on its' focus and general lack of implementation guidance impacted on progress.
- In addition, the lack of clearly agreed systems and structures to oversee the implementation and ongoing monitoring of economic and community elements of the LECP by the SPC and LCDC was a key gap.
- National perception, lack of services and investment versus the county's growth is a real concern. This affects all- economic development interests, local people and communities especially the most vulnerable in Co. Kildare.

- The COVID 19 pandemic, and Ukrainian crisis impacted on progress and resulted in a range of new priorities that required urgent response.
- The vision, high level goals and associated objectives are largely still relevant but adjusting them to respond to current data, policy and trends is important to ensure that the new LECP 2023-2029 remains responsive to the needs in Co. Kildare.
- The importance of building on the consultation and work of recent plans such as the County Development Plan, Co. Kildare 2025- Economic Development Strategy, Children and Young People Services Committee Plan, Age Friendly plan and upcoming plans such as Climate Action Plan is important to ensure complementarity and to avoid consultation fatigue.

Finally, this review will play an important role in informing the next LECP. While significant achievements occurred, there were lessons particularly in relation to the need for stronger implementation and monitoring systems and structures for the next plan.