

**Minister Catherine Byrne opening address at the
Community Conference**

Riverbank House Hotel, Wexford

Saturday, 8th April, 2017

Speaking notes

- Good morning all, I am truly delighted to be here in the sunny South East with you today and I would like to thank Wexford Local Development Company for the kind invitation to give the opening address at this Community Conference.

- As Minister of State for Communities and a lifelong community volunteer, I know first-hand how important it is to identify core issues affecting communities and to work together to address them.
- I believe there is a collective responsibility on all of us to contribute to the development of our own communities and it is vital that programmes and processes are put in place to facilitate and encourage that contribution.
- I know the importance of investment in communities and I have personally seen the positive results of both money and time invested.

- The theme of today's conference is *Strengthening the Voice of Communities and Increasing Community Participation in Co. Wexford.*
- This Government has a great belief in the value of communities and in the importance of community and voluntary groups based on the hard work and dedication of volunteers throughout the country.
- The Programme for Partnership Government gave a commitment to develop a new Community Development Scheme which would fall under my remit as Minister of State for Communities and I was

delighted recently to announce the launch of the national €2 million Communities Facilities Scheme.

- The Communities Facilities Scheme is targeted at disadvantaged urban and rural areas. The Scheme will fund projects that seek to enhance communities, address disadvantage and improve social cohesion at a local level.
- It will operate in a complementary manner with other schemes or programmes being operated in communities adding value to those and other front-line schemes.

- It will also seek to address some of the difficulties local community groups face in terms of accessing very often small scale levels of funding to match their own fundraising efforts, in order to get community projects off the ground.
- The Scheme is being managed at local level by the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in conjunction with the Municipal Districts, under the remit of the Local Authorities (LAs) on behalf of the Department.
- I am delighted with the role of the LCDCs and Municipal Districts in delivering this Scheme as I believe that they are ideally placed to identify the

applications which most suitably address the Scheme's target groups and the issues and needs within communities in their own administrative areas.

- The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) which was rolled out in April 2015, and will run until 31 December 2017 aims to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders.

- Co. Wexford has the second highest SICAP allocation in the country, due to high levels of deprivation experienced.
- Community development is an integral part of SICAP and underpins the entire Programme. The SICAP design was open to consultation with representatives of the community and voluntary sector who fed into the design process. This approach allowed communities to have their voice heard while encouraging their participation in order to shape the Programme to their needs.

- Groups within the sector have commended elements of the Programme design with respect to the underlying community development principles and the three cross cutting horizontal themes which are: collaboration, equality and community development.
- The current SICAP cycle will end on 31 December 2017 and the Department is committed to providing a successor programme to provide for the continued delivery of local development and social inclusion services. While a large scale re-design of SICAP is not envisaged, rather a fine tuning of the current programme, the Department has undertaken to consult with a broad range of stakeholders on the design of the successor programme. The consultation process is currently under way and I urge you all to

take this opportunity to participate in that process if you have not already done so. While we are not undertaking a major overhaul of what is still a relatively new programme, we do believe that important and needed changes can be made as part of the process in order to enhance the existing model.

- The Programme for a Partnership Government gave a commitment to launch a recast RAPID programme and the Department is currently drafting the structure of that Programme with the intention of launching in Q2 2017.
- The Public Participation Networks (PPNs) which are collectives of environmental, social inclusion, community and voluntary organisations in a county

or city were set up specifically to facilitate the participation and representation of communities and to strengthen the capacity of communities to contribute positively to the community in which they reside/participate.

- When I received the invitation to speak here today, Clare Ryan and her team in Wexford Local Development also sent on some information about the purpose of the Community Conference and some issues which will be discussed such as:
 - Why should communities participate in decision making structures?

- What opportunities really exist for community participation and what would be the benefit of getting involved?
 - What can be the impact of attempting to have your voice heard?
 - Will it make any difference to our lives?
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- The title of today's Conference is "Who's listening?"
I hope from my examples of just some of the community programmes and processes in place to help strengthen your community voice, and encourage increased participation in your communities, that this question is answered, in some part at least!

- I would like to think that these programmes and processes as well as others might feature in the workshop discussions this afternoon.

- Last but not least, I would again like to sincerely thank Wexford Local Development for the invitation to address this Community Conference and I have no doubt that it will be a great success by starting the discussion as to how to build a participatory culture where decisions are being influenced from the bottom up.

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