

# SUBMISSION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO THE PREPARATION OF THE DEPARTMENT'S STATEMENT OF STRATEGY 2021-2023

October 19 2020

## 1. Introduction

As Ireland's national association of charities, community and voluntary organisations and social enterprises, the Wheel warmly welcomed the establishment of the Department of Rural and Community Development in 2017 as an opportunity to foster greater partnership between Government and the community and voluntary sector and thereby prioritising and strengthening the communities they serve. The Department's current Statement of Strategy published in March 2018 served as a road map by which positive steps have been taken in relation to community development, local development and the community and voluntary sector in recent years, not least of which, the development by the DRCD of a suite of policies for the charity, community and voluntary, and social enterprise sector.

The Department's current Statement of Strategy outlined the mission of the Department as follows:

***"To promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland"***

While The Wheel believes this mission to be enduring in its relevance and importance, particularly in today's complex operational environment, dominated by COVID-19 and its long-term implications for community and voluntary services and the country as a whole, we are suggesting that the community and voluntary sector be explicitly recognised in an augmented mission as follows:

***"To promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities and a thriving community and voluntary sector throughout Ireland"***

The retention of the Department and the development of its new strategy comes at a critical time. Ireland is characterised by both concern and hope regarding an economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 crisis which brought about a host of extraordinary challenges that have impacted every community, business, family, and individual in every section of our society. There is a challenge now to lay foundations for a long-term inclusive and sustainable recovery that extends into every community across the country, particularly those that are disadvantaged, socially excluded or made more vulnerable by the impacts of COVID-19.

A new Departmental Strategy should maintain the support of ***community development, vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities and explicitly focus on supporting a***

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*thriving community and voluntary sector* at its core. This focus is even more important in the new strategy ahead as Ireland's community, voluntary, and charitable sector has had and will continue to have a critical role to play in the recovery and wellbeing of communities in Ireland, and to our economic and social lives.

## 2. The Community and Voluntary Sector — A Vital Resource and Integral to the Social Fabric of Ireland

Ireland's community and voluntary sector is an integral part of our social infrastructure and a very significant player in Ireland's economy. Charities, community and voluntary organisations, and social enterprises provide essential services in every constituency in Ireland. These include health and disability, social care, education, housing, poverty relief, the arts, and sport, as well as international development. The sector is the unseen force powering our communities, driving positive social change, and giving people a voice, while providing vitally important supports and services.

Additionally, the community and voluntary sector constitutes a major social economy within the wider economy. It comprises **32,842** community, voluntary and charitable organisations, involves over 86,481 volunteer directors and trustees, directly employs **165,000 people**, and manages a **€14.2bn** turnover per year. These organisations raise over half of this income (**more than €8.3bn**) themselves, majorly subsidising the cost of public services in Ireland.

The sector mobilises hundreds of thousands of **volunteers**, and delivers the majority of our social and community services at a saving to the state. It constitutes a major social economy that drives employment while simultaneously meeting the national demand for essential services. It also progresses social inclusion, equality, and the health and wellbeing of communities.

## 3. The Sector's Response to COVID-19

Ireland reacted swiftly to the new challenges of COVID-19; the country's first response was to prioritise public health and wellbeing, deprioritising the immediate needs of the economy to bring the virus under control. Ireland's national network of community and charity organisations played a key role in this response; they were well-connected, trusted, and ideally placed to provide flexible and immediate support where it was needed most. The importance of established services — those already embedded within their communities — was clearly evidenced in the crisis, and both Government and the public have widely acknowledged the vital role charities played throughout the period. Thousands of organisations mobilised, adapted and collaborated with each other and local and national Government to ensure services continued to reach the most vulnerable in every part of the country.

A significant part of the coordinated sector response was the **COVID-19 Community Outreach (CCO) initiative**, a national response to the societal impact of the coronavirus outbreak, coordinated by The Wheel and **Irish Rural Link**, and funded by the **Department of Rural and Community Development**.

Throughout the three-month period **CCO supported 134,811 people** through a network of **14,877 community and voluntary organisations** and **36,821 mobilised volunteers**. The programme was a success, in no small part, due to the leadership of the champions in local and rural communities, the collaboration of community and voluntary organisations with local authorities and agencies, and the support of Government departments.

The CCO programme serves as a living example of how collaboration between charities, community and voluntary organisations, social enterprises, and the Department empowers communities where it is most needed. This partnership approach mutually benefits state, sector and communities through coordinated and successful service delivery. We wholly support the statements in the Programme for Government recognising these learnings, and call on the Department to integrate collaborative, partnership working as a key component of its new strategy.

*“In striving together against something which threatens us all, we have shown we can surprise ourselves - **adapting quickly, building new alliances and collaborating** in ways we never expected. All to realise a common purpose: our common future. This is a Programme to recover our economy, rebuild our society, renew our communities, and respond to the challenges we face both nationally and internationally. **We must take the good things we have learned from the pandemic and apply them towards a resilient future.**” - Programme for Government*

## **4. The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on the Community and Voluntary Sector**

As noted above, the community and voluntary sector responded to the challenge of COVID-19 with an extraordinary surge of effort to support people and communities impacted by the disease. The sector responded in this way in the face of the single greatest ever reduction in earned/fundraised income.

Information from Benefacts (a part-Government funded non-profit data analysis service) and 2into3 (a fundraising consultancy) indicates that the loss in earned and fundraised income reported by charities to date will amount to a total loss of approximately €1.5bn if current losses continue for the whole of 2020. This amounts to a projected €379m loss of earned/fundraised income per quarter of the crisis.

As approximately 42% of a charity's costs are non-pay it is estimated that the sector is facing a €160m un-recoupable loss (which will not be made up from the Wage Subsidy Scheme) in generated income (from fundraising and earned income) per quarter.

The Wheel, in collaboration with a coalition of sector bodies, sought financial support for the sector from Government in response to the COVID-19 emergency, which was answered by way of the €35m Stability Fund. We, along with the wider community and voluntary sector, warmly welcome the additional €10m expansion of the fund announced in the 2021 Budget, bringing the total funding support from the Stability Fund Scheme to €45m. This scheme, however, is primarily designed to enable the worst-hit charities to remain operational in the short term, helping them to cope with urgent cash-flow and liquidity needs after the collapse in fundraised and earned income. Further needs remain.

There is the projected un-recoupable loss of €160m per quarter. This leaves an outstanding income gap of €115m unfilled by the Stability Fund and The Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme, that charities urgently need addressed for Q2 alone, in addition to a projected gap of €160m for Q3 and Q4, totaling to a projected total gap of €435m for 2020 if charities are to continue to provide their essential supports and services to year-end.

In addition to the major funding losses, a recent member survey conducted by The Wheel, found that charities reported an overall 64% reduction in volunteers as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. 65% of respondents reported that COVID-19 restrictions reduced their ability to deliver services and 50% of respondents experienced an increase in demand for their services.

Within this restricted and complex operational environment, it is more important than ever to map a strategy that addresses these issues, so that facilitation and support of the community and voluntary sector to deliver essential social services, is possible.

## **5. The Department's Existing Strategic Goals 2017-2020**

The current Strategy sets out the following strategic goals of the Department:

1. Work across Government to advance the economic and social development of rural areas in order to enhance the quality of life for people who live in rural Ireland.
2. Contribute to enhanced regional development, with a view to strengthening the potential of all regions to contribute to economic recovery.
3. Support local communities to develop, empowering them to identify their needs and aspirations and providing them with the opportunities, skills and confidence to influence, shape and participate in decision-making processes which affect them.
4. Support the Community, Voluntary and Charity Sector to strengthen its capacity to contribute to civil society and support the growth and development of philanthropy .

The existing strategic goals of the current strategy for the Department have informed much of the progress made in recent years. In light of the, Budget 2021 Allocations relevant to Charities, Community and Voluntary Organisations and Social Enterprises, we welcome several of the measures introduced which have the capacity to facilitate the objectives of the

new strategy to support the community and voluntary sector and shape the future of our communities.

The 2021 allocation of €341 million to the Department of Rural and Community Development in 2021 represents a 7 per cent increase (in our Pre-Budget Submission called for an across the board 5% increase in the department's budget so we are pleased to see this increase).

Compared to the 2020 allocation, an additional €8 million in current expenditure and an extra €15 million in capital expenditure is being allocated to the Department of Rural and Community Development in 2021.

According to Government, the additional funding allocated by the Government in its 2021 Budget and Estimates decisions provides a response to the objective of ensuring a **fair and balanced economic recovery and supporting resilient communities across the country.**"

### **We would suggest that the Strategic Goals above be augmented as follows for the period 2021-2023**

1. Work across Government to advance the economic and social development of rural areas in order to enhance the quality of life for people who live in rural Ireland.
2. Contribute to enhanced regional development, with a view to strengthening the potential of all regions (including urban areas) to contribute to economic recovery.
3. **Support local communities to develop, empowering them to identify their needs and aspirations and providing them with the opportunities, skills and confidence to influence, shape and participate in decision-making processes which affect them.**
4. **Support the Community, Voluntary, Charity and social enterprise sector to strengthen its capacity to contribute to social and economic progress and support the growth and development of philanthropy**

## **6. Recommendations Regarding Objectives for the Department's New Statement of Strategy**

The department's strategy should contain commitments under augmented goals 3 and 4 above to:

1. **Comprehensively resource the implementation of the new strategies for the community and voluntary sector and social enterprise.**

The DRCD Statement of Strategy for 2017 – 2020, as part of its strategic actions to progress the sector, set out to develop and publish a suite of policies for the charity, community and voluntary, and social enterprise sector.

These comprise;

– *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024 (published August 2019);*

– *The National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland (published July 2019); and*

– *The National Volunteering Strategy (which is currently in development).*

As stated previously, we warmly welcomed the Government’s crucial decision to re-appoint a senior cabinet minister and continue the Department for Community and Rural Development (DRCD). This ensures that the department may now continue with its work to empower and develop communities through the full and resourced implementation of the strategies for the sector and the publication of *The National Volunteering Strategy*, which is currently in development.

We are encouraged to see these same objectives reflected in the commitments in the Programme for Government:

*“Publish a strategy to support volunteering, including the development of a comprehensive supporting infrastructure and measures to disseminate best practice.”*

*“Fully implement Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland up to 2024.”*

The announcement of €23m additional funding or an overall 7% increase in funding for the Department, including an additional boost of €1.6m for volunteering supports is warmly welcomed. In light of this, we call on the Department to ensure that the allocation of sufficient resources to fully implement the suite of strategies supporting the sector, is an integral part of their new statement of strategy.

## **2. Develop a coherent long-term funding model to support the work of the sector.**

Despite carrying out essential and ongoing work on behalf of the state, many sector organisations in receipt of statutory funding face serious financial precarity problems. Much of this is related to uncertainty of income streams beyond annual allocations.

The benefits of multi-annual funding are outlined in the Department’s 5-year strategy to support the sector; *‘A better use of resources, underpinned by a more strategic approach to planning and service provision and multi-annual funding models, will also contribute to better outcomes for disadvantaged communities. Annual funding approaches are less efficient and significantly limit the effectiveness of community development, for example, which requires*

*long-term support and approaches to build effective local relationships between community workers and communities.'*

Multi-annual funding arrangements are employed for several current funding schemes and for capital funding schemes for physical infrastructure. Many private-sector and international funding bodies also recognise the importance of forward-planning for charities engaged in delivering vital services and supports to the public, and provide funding in this way. A coherent, long-term funding strategy for the sector is required.

We are calling on the Department to work with statutory funders and ensure budgets meet the full costs of services and provide financial certainty in an uncertain and complex environment. To address these issues The Wheel proposes:

**Introduction of multi-annual (three- to five-year) funding arrangements**, initially on a three-year basis. As the default approach, this will facilitate better services, enable longterm planning, and assist effective staff recruitment and retention. Multi-annual funding is a framework objective contained in the State's strategy for the community and voluntary sector (Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland), which Government has committed to fully implementing in the new Programme for Government.

**Funding services and supports on a full-cost-recovery basis.** For the nonprofit sector to continue to deliver high-quality services and supports we need a funding model that allows for a realistic assessment of costs. Innovative funding should take into account the need for organisations to fund core costs, pay staff adequately, train and develop staff, and make provision for pension contributions where appropriate. In addition to the COVID-19 related projected €435m gulf in earned/fundraised income, many state-funded/part-state-funded organisations have borne very significant additional COVID-19-related costs such as PPE, the cost of redesigning and relocating services to be consistent with creating safe, socially distanced work environments, and the costs of providing staff with IT and remote-working equipment. It is essential that these costs are included in Departmental and Agency (HSE, Tusla, etc.) budget lines to support community and voluntary sector partners.

### **3. Ensure “all commissioning for human, social and community services takes place in a societal value framework”.**

Many of the charities, community and voluntary organisations, and social enterprises that deliver essential services for the State receive funding through commissioning processes. For these organisations to continue playing their key role in health, community and social services, we need to ensure that commissioning models fully support the community-based, nonprofit approach.

To achieve this outcome, commissioning needs to be understood by funders as a strategic approach to meeting identified needs, and not as an instruction to procure or competitively tender for services. We need to ensure that all statutory funders understand that the Public Procurement Directives permit a high level of discretion in how funders allocate funds. When commissioning models are used, they should aim at delivering the most responsive outcomes for the people and communities concerned rather than simply the lowest cost.

If and when competitive tendering approaches are used:

- Contract-awards need to be small enough in scale to enable community and voluntary organisations to bid for and deliver the service*
- The setting of the outputs/outcomes to be commissioned/procured needs to be done very carefully and in partnership with charities, community and voluntary organisations, and social enterprises and the communities concerned.*

The Wheel proposes the establishment of a dedicated working group, comprising equal representation from The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and the charity, community and voluntary, and social enterprise sector, to explore and deliver recommendations on delivery of positive procurement and commissioning initiatives during the lifetime of the next government.

#### **4. Extend all business support packages to social enterprises.**

In a 2013 Forfas report there were an estimated 1400 social enterprises operating in Ireland employing between 25,000 and 33,000 people with a total income of around €1.4 billion. Social enterprises are a vibrant and vital part of the wider economy that make a valuable contribution to the social and economic progress of Ireland. They are innovative and entrepreneurial and contribute to economic growth through the creation of jobs whilst addressing social, societal, environmental and inclusion challenges, elevating and empowering communities.

Despite the delivery of a broad range of services in areas such as homecare, child care, employment activation, retail, hospitality and catering, environmental services, and social housing, social enterprises are often excluded from accessing the type of supports that are available to other enterprises on the grounds of displacement and deadweight.

We are requesting a support programme for Social Enterprises such that they are treated equally with SMEs, and that current approaches to deadweight and displacement are reviewed/eliminated to ensure that they do not prevent social enterprises from accessing supports targeted at SMEs

#### **5. Support a Human Capital Development Strategy for the Community and Voluntary sector**

We are requesting that the department work with all relevant departments and agencies to ensure that additional resources be applied through the NTF to support the crucial training and development needs of the Community and Voluntary Sector to enable it to both create learning opportunities for the existing 190,000 strong work-force to upskill to respond to the new remote-working and socially distanced working environment AND to enable the sector to create training/work experience opportunities for the increasing number of people who will be seeking work as the crisis fully manifests in the economy.



## **6. Develop a new framework for a cooperative approach between public bodies and the community and voluntary sector (as per the PfG commitment).**

Many charities, community and voluntary organisations, and social enterprises work in partnership with government bodies to provide essential services and supports. Increasingly, these organisations are struggling with the complex and demanding nature of partnership working, which has changed significantly in recent years. Commissioning style approaches and prohibitive Service Level Agreements can run contrary to the spirit of partnership-working approaches and generate a large compliance demand. Successful partnership working requires strong shared understandings by both voluntary and statutory partners if beneficial outcomes are to be maximised for the people and communities we serve, as evidenced during the COVID-19 crisis.

Throughout the crisis period we saw a surge in initiatives and programmes that were successful in reaching vulnerable people due to the collaboration of community and voluntary organisations with local authorities and agencies, and the support of Government departments. The **COVID-19 Community Outreach (CCO)** programme is a clear example of how collaboration between charities, community and voluntary organisations, social enterprises, and Government empowers communities. Additionally, in a recent member survey conducted by the Wheel 81% of respondents reported that statutory funders have showed flexibility and 43% of respondents have increased collaborative working or partnership working.

There is an opportunity to build on the collaborative response to COVID-19 and we call on the Department to work in partnership with the community and voluntary sector to develop principles and publish a framework for collaborative/partnership working, as well as establishing a partnership mechanism to monitor and review its effectiveness.

The Wheel endorses the findings in the report of the Independent Review Group established to examine the role of voluntary organisations in publicly-funded health and personal social services (IRG report). However, its recommendations should apply not only to the Department of Health but be extended to apply to several other areas of government policy, including community and rural affairs, education and children.

The Wheel believes that the IRG report maps out solutions for a more efficient, effective and fruitful relationship between community and voluntary services and the state.

Recommendations include:

- Simplification of service agreements;
- Avoidance of duplication in reporting;
- Multi-annual budgeting;
- A system to manage deficits; and
- Provision of governance training and supports for smaller organisations.

## **7. Reduce and streamline the regulatory compliance-burden and ensure funds are provided to enable organisations to meet the additional new costs they incur in complying with regulatory and reporting requirements.**

The Department has identified '*an appropriate cost-recovery model for public-funded programmes delivered by community and voluntary organisations, including costs of compliance and relevant overhead and administration costs*' as one of the key actions in the 5-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector, to develop capacity of organisations supporting communities to participate in community development and local development.

Therefore, as part of a comprehensive statement of strategy that supports the community and voluntary sector must ensure that regulation in all its forms, helps, and doesn't over-burden, the community and voluntary sector in its work. We call on the Department to:

- *Conduct a review of compliance and regulatory requirements to streamline procedures, reduce duplication and make better use of resources*

A streamlined compliance and regulation system would allow charities to enter their data on a 'report once, use often' basis, accessed by multiple departments as required. A streamlined system would also reduce the administrative costs to government departments in repeat processing of information and reports. Collaboration between all relevant bodies in developing a more streamlined system would ensure it meets the needs of both community and voluntary organisations and government departments, avoiding the unintended consequences of adding work and reporting for charities, community and voluntary organisations, and social enterprises. This should involve improved information sharing and communication systems between state bodies to reduce duplication of information requests and increase efficiency. The Department will need to convene with relevant departments to review, and if necessary, rationalize and streamline the regulatory and reporting demands now being made by regulatory and compliance processes.

- *Provide for the cost-of-compliance (and good governance) in funding agreements*

Many funding authorities only contribute to the marginal cost of the service they are funding, making no contribution to the general governance and compliance-costs incurred by (part) funded-organisations. Yet the work done for funding authorities would not be possible without such governance and compliance cost overheads.

We call on the department to ensure the strategy commits to adequately resourcing and supporting the work of community, voluntary and charitable organisations, including meeting the additional new costs they incur in complying with regulatory and reporting requirements.

## **8. Ensure that the Public Participation Networks are effective in engaging local civil society and in shaping local policies, and that they are resourced adequately.**

We note the commitments set out in the Programme for Government to:

- *Carry out a comprehensive review of Public Participation Networks and Local Economic and Community Plans to ensure they are fit for purpose for climate action and community development.*
- *Task every local authority/Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) with developing a County Integration Strategy to promote, through a participative process, the inclusion of minorities.*
- *Publish a strategy to support volunteering, including the development of a comprehensive supporting infrastructure and measures to disseminate best practice.*

We strongly welcome this intended investment in community engagement and active citizenship in the Programme for Government.

The PPNs are the primary mechanism for Local Authority engagement with communities. While this is an important step in fostering a more democratic local Government structure, there is some way to go to build real participation and partnership in local Government decision-making. Investment in community engagement is needed to support capacity building and the establishment of local dialogue forums to support participation in the development of the Local Economic and Community Plans, and the Local Authority budgets.

The Department's new Statement of Strategy should re-commit

– support increasing active citizenship through investing in participatory and democratic decision-making processes such as the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and Public Participation Networks (PPNs).

In the area of participation and engagement with LCDCs, we suggest more guidance and direction is required to improve engagement, particularly with more marginalised communities. This should be secured by improving engagement with Public Participation Networks (PPNs), linking this to the need for greater communication within and between LCDCs, as well as between LCDCs and communities. Greater engagement is needed between CYPSCs and LCDCs, especially given the importance and influence of the latter from the coordinators' perspective.

## **9. Recognise that community, voluntary and charitable organisations have a right to (and are expected by those they represent) to advocate to advance their charitable purposes**

The electoral acts as currently interpreted have had the unintended consequence of restricting advocacy by community and voluntary organisations. The acts present a threat to our culture of civic participation and to the rights of people to come together to campaign

for change. The electoral acts need to be amended (by the soon to be formed Electoral Commission) to exclude civil society groups from its provisions outside of the context of general elections and referendums.

While policy leadership on this question rests with another department, it is important that the DRCD strategy should state explicitly that community, voluntary and charitable organisations should be supported and encouraged to advocate when appropriate to advance their charitable purposes and the interests of the communities they serve – and the requirements of funding agreements should be amended to this effect.

## **10. Recognise the specific challenges and support needs required to facilitate the development and resilience of Rural and Island Communities.**

Charities, community and voluntary organisations and social enterprises provide a wide range of services to communities in rural areas. They pride themselves on being responsive to the needs of the people and communities they serve, and are flexible and innovative in their work. This has been more apparent than ever during the COVID-19 crisis.

An essential component in implementation of rural initiatives and policies is the involvement of these community and voluntary organisations that, at every level and in every townland and parish, know the issues and can assist in delivery of a better life for all those living in rural areas. The Wheel is an active partner in the National Rural Network (NRN) a membership network for farmers, agricultural advisors, rural communities and others interested in rural development, that works to maximise the beneficial outcomes of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 for rural stakeholders. The Wheel's participation significantly informs The Wheel's understanding of rural issues and support for rural communities. The Wheel calls on the Department to consider and incorporate the following key impact areas into

### **Connectivity**

We believe that access to high quality rural broadband leads to an increase in remote working, leading to greater rural renewal and community sustainability. This will achieve a better work/life balance and more personal and community wellbeing for all. We warmly welcomed the launch of the first of the Broadband Connection Points by Ministers Humphreys and Ryan as part of the Connected Communities initiative, which saw more than 50 sites connected across the country under new connected Communities" initiative and 275 sites to be connected by the end of the year. We also welcome the use of existing community infrastructure in implementing the initiative.

Many community, voluntary, charitable and social enterprise organisations require improved ICT connectivity in order to carry out their work. Such organisations perform crucial social-capital, maintaining connecting roles in their communities. In developing a **long-term vision for rural development**, we recommend the inclusion of a dedicated measure to enhance, support and develop the communications effectiveness of community and voluntary organisations and social enterprises in rural areas to underpin their role in maintaining and developing social capital.

## Rural Development

We need to ensure a future where community and voluntary organisations continue to provide vital services and supports. There is an opportunity for future programmes focused on rural development to ensure that thematic priorities and programme objectives are set, and programme-delivery modes/approaches are specified within each thematic priority and programme objective, that nurture, support, and encourage locally-based community and voluntary organisations and social enterprises to thrive.

We keenly welcome the Budgetary announcement, under the Programme for Rural Development, Regional Affairs and Islands, of:

- Additional €4 million funding to increase activity under the **LEADER** programme and facilitate a transition from this programme cycle to the next.
- Support continued and enhanced investment in Rural Regeneration and Development programmes (funding increased from €78 million in 2020 to €82 million in 2021). Projects funded under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), Town and Village Renewal (TVR) and the Outdoor Infrastructure Investment Scheme (ORIS) will according to the department “rejuvenate communities, transform rural economies and create employment”.

## Social Enterprise

Social enterprises are essential to rural economies. The vast majority of organisations that apply the social enterprise approach are charities, so it will be very important that future initiatives relating to innovation and ‘smarter towns and villages’ are inclusive and support the continuum of ALL community and voluntary organisations that apply social enterprise principles to a part of, or all of their work. In this regard it is also important to note that social enterprise is a model or an approach to doing mission-focussed work, rather than a discrete identity.

## Active Citizenship and Volunteering

The Wheel would like to see active citizenship supported through rural development initiatives, by including specific measures in the programme to:

- Support initiatives to promote active citizenship and the involvement of rural communities in public-policy formation, such as around the National Climate Action Plan (*check*) and the National Implementation Plan for the SDGs, including interacting with policy makers and public administration and voter education programmes
- Support volunteering initiatives in rural areas
- Support community and voluntary organisations to host dialogues on deepening citizens’ participation in policymaking in rural areas.

- Support the development of shared facilities for community and voluntary organisations to work from, closing the urban / rural digital divide and ensuring the long-term rejuvenation of rural communities.

### **Ireland's Offshore Islands**

Community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises are critical for supporting the development of local communities on **Ireland's offshore islands**. The Wheel's broad membership includes a number of island-based organisations and we recognise that island communities face unique social and economic challenges, related to areas such as broadband and transport connectivity, employment and migration. We welcome the additional funding of €2 million in Budget 2021 to increase capital investment, and fund services, in our offshore islands.

### **11. Support community and voluntary organisations to model best community practice towards sustainable rural communities in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 11 — *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.***

In terms of sustainability, The Wheel promotes awareness and understanding of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) amongst our membership. Community, voluntary, charitable and social enterprise can play a central role in addressing sustainability challenges and special provision should be made for appropriately scaled interventions to permit smaller community and voluntary organisations to play their part in advancing the objective by securing support for their work towards programme objectives. There is a wealth of innovative practice being applied in the community and voluntary sector to advance the SDGs and The Wheel would recommend a discrete measure aimed at supporting community and voluntary organisations to model and disseminate best community practice towards sustainable rural communities.

## About the Wheel

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of charities, community and voluntary organisations and social enterprises. We are the representative body for this vibrant and diverse sector, offering leadership, advice, training, influence and advocacy. Together with our members, we shape and promote conditions in which people and their communities thrive.

We do this by:

- representing the needs of these organisations;
- supporting these organisations to do their work; and
- promoting the importance of the voluntarism and community values that power these organisations.

We passionately believe that community and voluntary action improves and enriches communities and society. Our simple but ambitious mission is to make Ireland a fair and just place for all by strengthening the capacity and capability of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises to play their part.