

Involvement Centre planned for Roscommon town as part of plan



Pictured at the launch of Roscommon LEADER Partnership's (RLP) Strategic Plan 2022-26 in Ballaghaderreen recently were (l. to r.): Bridie Duffy, Administrator; Marketta Finnegan, Roma worker; Kara Reynolds, Family Support Worker Family Resource Centre (FRC), Linda Devine, Manager, Ballaghaderreen FRC; Lucy Guerin, Family support Worker, FRC and Patricia Madden SICAP Co-Ordinator, RLP, Ballaghaderreen. Front row: Michéal Frain, Chairman, Roscommon LEADER Partnership; Minister of State Joe O'Brien and Ann McGreal, Board member, RLP. Pic. Gerard O'Loughlin

By Darragh Kelly

The establishment of an Involvement Centre in Roscommon is one of the goals of Roscommon LEADER Partnership's Strategic Plan.

Speaking at the launch of the Roscommon LEADER Partnership (RLP) Strategic Plan 2022-26, CEO Martina Earley outlined the aims and objectives of the plan, which was launched by Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development and Charities at the Department of Rural and Community Development, Joe O'Brien.

Ms Earley said the main goals of the plan would include the establishment of an Involvement Centre in Roscommon Town along with the RLP going on a 'digitalisation journey' to include the development of a new RLP website.

The core strategic objectives of the plan were revealed as the building of thriving communities; building a rural future for people; the creation of capability, resilience and well-being for all; the development of opportunities and strengthening the organisation itself.

The plan was devised following a review of all relevant RLP programmes and government plans, the development of planning frameworks, workshops with RLP board members and staff, interviews

with external stakeholders and the adoption of that strategy with the RLP board.

Coupled with this process, the organisation reaffirmed its vision, mission, purpose and values. Its vision is described as being a leading European Community Development organisation delivering exceptional service, predicated on effective collaboration and innovation to enable the people it serves reach their full potential.

Ms Earley said the plan would create "a social entrepreneurial mindset and a new chapter for the company's evolution." She said RLP had survived for the previous thirty years "on a number of short to medium sized contracts" but that future was a very bright one for the organisation.

The Kilkenny native said Government was beginning to see the importance and return on investment to community led groups and initiatives with funding for SICAP (the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme) delivering on the ground for people.

The launch of the plan also coincided with the official opening of the new Family Resource Centre (FRC), located on the site of the old Brothers School on Main Street. Manager of the centre Linda Devine said the project was the culmination of a 2018

Needs Analysis by Sandra Quigley, which identified the need for such a facility.

The service, Ms. Devine said, began in Market Square and "is needs led and works to meet the needs of the community. We have three big rooms providing a wide range of services. Over forty women alone have used our Women's Group services.

"Every day we have different events. We have six staff presently. We are one of twenty-one FRC's and are a very close-knit community. We learn and share from each other. This building is going to allow us to expand. We have drop-in clinics whereby persons come in with a problem and leave with a plan," she remarked.

Other speakers included Claire Carty, Manager of the An Bealach Regeneration Project who spoke of the various projects that have developed in the town, including the Men's Shed. She said efforts were continuing to develop a derelict site at the Fairgreen for further social economy projects.

RLP Chairman Michéal Frain said the Old Brothers School where the launch of the strategic plan was taking place was one of three sites being redeveloped for community or social economic projects with a focus on people working in small communities.

Minister praises

By Darragh Kelly

An "ambitious" strategic plan for Roscommon LEADER Partnership, which has five key goals, was launched in Ballaghaderreen by Joe O'Brien, the junior minister with responsibility for community development and charities at the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Mr O'Brien was in Roscommon for an extensive itinerary of engagements during a day-long visit. He began at the former Brothers School in Ballaghaderreen, where he launched Roscommon LEADER Partnership's strategic plan.

While there, he was also given a tour of the building, which houses the new community Family Resource Centre, supported by the social inclusion and community activation programme (Sicap).

Mr O'Brien concluded his engagements in the town by opening a new childcare centre, which will support the childcare needs of families living in the community and was renovated with the support of the rural social scheme (RSS).

Later he visited the An Fáilte Centre (formerly the Cuisle Centre) in Donamon, which is being used as a reception centre for Ukrainian families who have fled their besieged country. This initiative is also supported by Sicap.

Mr O'Brien completed his visit by travelling to Castlecoote, where he met members of the local



Tidy Towns committee, who demonstrated the important impact their biodiversity plan was having on the village.

Mr O'Brien launched two projects funded by EU Erasmus+ that focus on the circular economy and biodiversity.

Addressing those present at the launch of Roscommon LEADER Partnership's strategic plan, Mr O'Brien noted that there was "a passion and commitment bursting through these walls today".

He said: "The best groups are those that are connected and have a

'bottom-up, community-led' approach. This is a very ambitious plan, which has five key goals and was turned around in about two months.

"This document lays out what will no doubt be excellent work done by the partnership in future years. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those working with the partnership for all the extra work and effort during the pandemic, and the current response to the arrival of those from Ukraine."

The minister also acknowledged the work of volunteers on the RSS for

ensuring the development of the new building as well as the "flexibility and responsibility of Sicap in making the facility become a reality".

He also acknowledged the work of Roscommon LEADER Partnership and its board and the local Town Team.

Mr O'Brien then went the short distance to the opening of the new childcare centre, which is expected to deliver early education for 36 children, aged from two years, eight months to five years, six months. It is hoped the facility, which was developed at a cost of

New childcare centre for Ballaghaderreen welcomed

A new childcare centre in Ballaghaderreen is expected to deliver early education for 36 children, aged from two years, eight months to five years, six months when it becomes operational from June. It has been developed at a cost of €120,000. The centre "will provide much-needed affordable childcare to families living in the community," says Minister of State Joe O'Brien who opened the facility.

Local Roscommon LEADER Partnership SICAP co-ordinator Patricia Madden said the programme had delivered education to 23 Syrian and Afghan children since 2018. She said local childcare ser-

vices ceased in 2019, which resulted in the need for new facilities to be sourced. Ms Madden said the new service would operate three hours a day, five days a week with the intention "to give children a taste of childcare (from this June) before entering primary school".

Irene Cafferkey, Roscommon Childcare Committee said the new childcare centre "was a fine example of integrated planning."

Ms Cafferkey said the service would be compliant with Tús regulations and staff would be certified. Her comments were echoed by Yvonne Burke, manager of the new childcare facility, 'Growing Tree 1 and 2'. Ms. Burke acknowl-



Roscommon County Childcare Committee manager Irene Cafferkey, at the launch. Picture: Gerard O'Loughlin

edged the role of Tús and the Rural Social Scheme and said the facility "hoped to open in the

next couple of weeks" offering free preschool for children aged two years and over.

'ambitious' strategic plan



Back row: Roscommon Leader Partnership chair Micheál Frain, councillors John Cummins and Liam Callaghan; Front row: Claire Kerrane TD, junior minister Joe O'Brien, Roscommon County Council cathaoirleach Joe Murphy, and Partnership chief executive Martina Earley.

Pictures: Gerard O'Loughlin

He acknowledged the support of volunteer groups who worked closely with Roscommon Leader Partnership and the local authority to support those who had arrived from eastern Europe since March.

While he was at the reception centre, a number of issues were raised, including the provision of a dedicated "working kitchen" for those at the centre and the availability of a regular transport service from the centre to local towns.

Speaking at the conclusion of his visit, Mr O'Brien said he would bring back to Government the issues that had been raised.

"I think it is remarkable what people in Roscommon have been doing over the past eight weeks since the first Ukrainian

refugees arrived. What is commendable is that people have worked together in ways they have not before.

"Look, I think it is beholden on us in Government to do what we can to leverage more resources. We [the Government] support various initiatives here through Sicip, Tús and RSS. They do exceptional work.

"I'll certainly take back 'the asks' from here today and see what we can do."

The minister concluded his visit in nearby Castlecoote, where he met members of the local Tidy Towns committee, who demonstrated the important impact their biodiversity plan was having on the village.

Mr O'Brien also launched two projects that are being funded by

EU Erasmus+ and focus on the circular economy and biodiversity.

"It is fantastic to see local projects like this, which enrich the local environment. I hope to see many more similar projects nationwide," Mr O'Brien said.

"Tidy Towns groups are going to be frontline or foot soldiers in the protection of biodiversity but also in the promotion of climate action at the most local level. The Tidy Towns initiative is supported by my own department.

"This initiative is a 'ground-up' one, recognising areas that are most precious in towns and villages, in areas like the River Suck here in Castlecoote, where there is unique wildlife which people want to protect," said Mr O'Brien.

Junior minister Joe O'Brien (centre) officially launched the Roscommon Leader Partnership Strategic Plan 2022-2026.

€120,000, will become operational from June.

Mr O'Brien said the centre "will provide much-needed affordable childcare to families living in the community. I would like to thank those working with the RSS for their initiative and resourcefulness in renovating this building to enable families to avail of this service.

"The new centre will help people stay and live in the town. It has been developed with the sup-

port of Roscommon Leader Partnership and overseen by Sicip."

The minister also acknowledged the work of Tom Flannery, who has retired after 18 years of service to the community.

Mr O'Brien also visited the Ukrainian refugee reception centre in Donamon, which is providing services to arrivals from Ukraine and is supported by Sicip. The Minister met a number of new arrivals from Ukraine.

Minister praises response to Ukrainian crisis



Some of the Ukrainian refugees currently resident in The Failte Centre in Donamon.

Voluntary and community groups working in partnership with Roscommon County Council and Roscommon Leader Partnership to welcome Ukrainian refugees to the county were praised by Minister of State Joe O'Brien when he visited the county. Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development and Charities at the Department of Rural and Community Development, Joe O'Brien visited the former Cuisle building (now An Failte Centre), which is currently home to Ukrainian refugees, during his day-long visit to Roscommon.

Addressing those present, the Minister said he was "honoured" to be present among the recently arrived Ukrainian people, remarking: "In my job (as Minister) I see the best of people and what they can do when they work together." He commended the work of voluntary and community groups, together with the local authority and RLP, describing the community's response to the arrival of Ukrainian people to the county as "exceptional".

Leas Cathaoirleach of Roscommon County Council Orla Leyden acknowledged the presence of Joe Saunders of the Irish Local Development Network and Tim Lehane, Principal of the Divine Word Missionaries who were both present for the Minister's visit.

"Today, we are here to welcome our new Ukrainian friends. There has been an incredible response from the community here in Roscommon. The Friday before you arrived has been described by Fr. George Ager (DWM principal in Donamon) as 'a Friday miracle.' "Love drove the work that went into making this place ready for you," said Cllr Leyden.

While acknowledging the support of community bus facilities from the Kilbride Community Centre, she urged the Minister to provide a more extensive bus service for residents at the facility.

Cllr Leyden also called for the establishment of a 'working kitchen' for residents. While acknowledging the role of The Melting Pot in the provision of food for residents, she said there was a need for dedicated food provision service to reflect the dietary needs of the community.

Director of Services with Roscommon County Council Majella Hunt acknowledged the multi-agency approach of groups who supported the development of the former Cuisle facility. "The arrival of the first group of Ukrainian people was something I will never forget. It was very emotional and very sad because of what you had left behind. We all hope that you're keeping contact with home and will be able to return soon."

SICAP lead co-ordinator Linda Sice said she was "privileged to be part of the work" supporting the Ukrainian refugees and paid tribute to RLP CEO, Martina Earley. She outlined the range of supports being provided highlighting how the organisation previously supported people from Chechnya and from Syria who had fled their war-torn countries.

Two residents at the facility, Aus and Ekele, both from Nigeria originally but both domiciled in Ukraine at the time of the outbreak of war, spoke and offered their appreciation for the support they have received while in Donamon. Tus Supervisor Helen McGinty also spoke of opportunities for Ukrainian residents to acquire work opportunities locally.

Minister launches Castlecoote biodiversity plan

By Darragh Kelly

A biodiversity plan developed by the local Tidy Towns group was launched in Castlecoote last week by Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development and Charities at the Department of Rural and Community Development, Joe O'Brien.

The local biodiversity area covers a bogland area of approximately 20 acres in the townland of Castlecoote.

The plan incorporates a survey of local flora and fauna as part of a wild bog walkway experience.

The local Tidy Towns committee and its secretary, Ann Connell, explained that as many as 43 different species of wildlife inhabit the area.

A report was compiled by Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants with the intention of creating a spur off the local



Representatives of Castlecoote Tidy Towns committee presenting Minister Joe O'Brien with its local Bog Walk Loop survey. Picture: Gerard O'Loughlin

Castlecoote walking trail and the larger Suck Valley Way.

Plans to further develop the site include the possible provision of a viewing platform, the development of appropriate signage, and the preservation and growth of further species of wildlife

in the local natural environment in the context of extending and diversifying the network of trails around Castlecoote village.

Minister O'Brien also launched the Climate Champions community programme, as devised by RLP and the Circular

Creatives initiative under the Erasmus+ programme.

The concept is to cultivate and tackle climate change and to empower local people to participate in biodiversity and climate change initiatives, such as the initiative in Castlecoote.

Delivery of the Climate Champions concept will involve providing replicable community training which will lead to climate proofing of communities as well as increasing the recognition of the role of non-formal adult education in achieving biodiversity and climate action change.

Operations manager with the Roscommon LEADER Partnership Tomás Beades said the organisation developed a biodiversity programme for community groups in 2018 which led to the creation of 15 initiatives with 15 different actions throughout Co Roscommon.

Sharon Johnston of the Erasmus+ programme said the intention is to upskill creative entrepreneurs to embrace the principles of the circular economy, reducing costs and waste while also retaining and creating new jobs.