

Ardfert Community Council

Strategic Plan 2012



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1. Introduction

Ardfert Community Council was established over 20 years ago with the purpose of developing facilities and services for people living in Ardfert and the surrounding area. One of the central responsibilities of the Community Council is to manage and develop the Community Centre in the village. Over the years the centre has developed into a multi-purpose facility providing a range of services for the local community including, childcare, sports facilities, gym, meeting space and laundry.

In 2011 the Board of Directors stepped down and a new Board was elected. The main aim of the board is to progress the development of the Ardfert Community Centre. There were a number of outstanding issues to be addressed by the new Board after it took over responsibility for the Community Centre. The Company secured grant aid to contract consultants to provide advice and support on the best way forward for the Company. JL Consultancy was contracted to facilitate the Board and review the Company Structure, HR Management and Finance. Following this process O'Leary & Associates was assigned to develop a strategic plan for the centre focusing on areas such as marketing and finance.

A strategic review was carried out with a number of Directors. The result of this strategic review is the drafting of the following strategic plan.

The main focus of the plan is to focus on consolidating the existing services within the centre and strengthen the foundations on which existing services can be expanded and future projects and services can be developed.

Given the location of the centre and the site layout, future development of the physical infrastructure is limited therefore limiting the capacity to develop or expand new services. The short term recommendations therefore are concentrated on developing existing services and increasing numbers of people using the services.

More ambitious potential projects are outlined in the plan but these require cooperation from other organisations/groups and the wider community. They are also dependent on the availability of grant aid or other finance.

The new board is made up of dedicated local members of the community who are overseeing the development of the centre on a voluntary basis. It is important that paid staff have the skill set and supports to manage the centre at an operational level. The role of the voluntary board should be an overseeing role as opposed to involvement in the day to day management of the centre.

The Company structure also needs strengthening so as there is not an over-reliance on the existing officers.

2. Company Structure

2.1 Legal Structure

Ardfert Community Council is registered as a Limited Company by Guarantee without Share Capital. It has a board of 5 Directors and there are currently no formal committee structures in place.

The Board has a Chairperson, Maurice O Driscoll, Secretary, Barbara O Grady, and Treasurer, Angela Ryan. There are no assistant officers on the Board.

2.2 Employees

- 1 Full Time Manager – Salary Pat Murphy
- 1 Part-Time Administrator – Salary Bernie Kearney
- 8 CE Workers

Julia O'Halloran, Lorraine O'Brien, Margaret Looney, Tara O'Halloran, Aisling O'Donoghue, Helen O'Connor, Lisa McCarthy, Siobhan Fitzgerald.

- 1 RSS worker (funded through NEKD)
- 1 general worker (funded through HSE budget) Christy Hanafin

There is no one person responsible for marketing the activities within the centre. The various services are operated as stand-alone business units with individual management of each unit. Ideally the centre would have one general manager/coordinator with responsibility for the management and development of the centre. However in the absence of core funding and without sufficient revenue to cover a salary it is not viable to have a full time manager/coordinator. Therefore it is important that the key staff who have a management or supervisory role within the centre are skilled and are given additional responsibility for developing the services within the centre.

2.3 Finances

Ardfert Community Centre unlike other community centres is not core funded under programmes such as the Community Services Programme (CSP). The majority of the centre's operational costs are financed by income generated through fees.

The centre receives childcare funding, some HSE grants and has secured miscellaneous once off grants in the past.

There is no dedicated fundraising strategy in place.

3. Overview of Services

(i) Community Crèche

The Centre offers full day crèche facilities to parents in the local community and surrounding areas who cannot afford commercial childcare rates.

(ii) After Schools

An after schools programme is also available in the centre.

Target Market:

- Parents of young children who are unable to seek work due to the cost of childcare or lack of affordable childcare in the Ardfert and surrounding areas. There is no Community Based Childcare facility within 6 miles.
- Parents of young children who are struggling to afford childcare but are unable to give up work.

Social Benefits:

- Providing an opportunity for people to seek employment.
- Providing training for unemployed people in a childcare business
- Provision of an educational and social environment in which Children can develop.

Economic Benefits

- Affordable childcare for people who have to work.
- Opportunities for people to go and work or attend courses.
- Income generated for the company.

(iii) Sports Hall

The Centre has a large Sports Hall, which caters for sports, drama and other recreational events. It also has dressing rooms and showers. There is a small gym on the first floor.

The purpose of the sports hall & gym are;

- To provide a facility for the youth in the area to develop in terms of sport and fitness
- To provide a facility to everyone in the community who have not accessed similar facilities in the past due to cost, fear etc.
- To generate an income from the rental of these premises to sporting organisations and clubs. This income would help maintain the overall cost of the centre.

Objectives

There is no other indoor facility available within 6 miles of Ardfert village. There are no other facilities in the area for the youth population. Many people in the area cannot afford the rates been charged in other Commercial Gyms.

Social Objective

To provide a recreational facility for clubs and individuals in the area. The Council over the years have been anxious to promote youth activities in sport and drama.

For the general public, providing a sporting and training facility in the absence of any other in the area. This should lead to a healthier community.

Economic Objective

As the facility will be available to local sporting clubs income can be generated through the rental of the gym and hall.

A percentage of the usage of the hall and gym will be for local sports clubs.

(iv) Laundry Service

The Centre currently houses a laundry room. This is the only laundry service in Ardfert. It is providing a much-needed basic service to the people living in the community.

The centre also has a contract with Rusk Dry Cleaners in Tralee as a collection point for their dry cleaning service.

(v) Elderly/Day Care

The Community Centre offers a recreational facility for the elderly in the area. The Centre provides activities, meals and a social outlet for the elderly in the area.

(vi) Other Services

Other services and events available in the centre include:

- Weekly Bingo
- Youth Space
- Training and Meeting Room
- Venue for shows and events
- Indoor Sunday Market

4. SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated Board of Directors • Well established centre • Newly renovated crèche • Well established services • Central location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor financial base. • No core funding. • No manager/coordinator with overall responsibility for the centre. • No marketing strategy or marketing coordinator. • Layout of the site prevents future expansion • Limited meeting space. • Limited space to expand and modernise the gym. • Limited parking
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location across from Ardfert Cathedral provides opportunities to develop heritage and tourism projects. • Develop Ardfert as heritage village and generate tourism potential. • Develop sports facility in partnership with local clubs. • Develop the sports hall as a venue for other events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further reduction in funding. • Competition from other centres (Banna Leisure Centre, Ballyheigue Community Centre). • Poor relationship between groups within the community. • Reduction in fundraising potential in current economic climate. • Over-reliance on key directors. • Increased costs.

5. Strategic Plan

5.1 Vision

A proposed vision for the Centre is:

Ardfert Community Centre and will be a focal point for community activity and interaction and the provision of affordable services to people within the community.

5.2 General Aims

- Having a centre with facilities to meet community needs and expectations.
- Coordinating various activities in the centre to meet community demand.
- Promoting the activities and services to the wider community and communicating with external stakeholders (funders, Kerry County Council, HSE, Local Development Companies etc.)
- Provide employment and volunteering opportunities in the centre.
- Undertaking activities to attract and cater for visitors to the area.
- To maintain the viability of the centre through prudent management and good governance.

5.3 Organisational Aims

- Strengthen Board membership and committee structures
- Identify training needs and skills requirements of staff and recruit graduates under the Job Bridge Programme.
- Develop and implement policies and procedures for finance, human resource management and governance
- Develop partnerships and network with other local groups to investigate the development of initiatives around enterprise, tourism and alternative indoor sports facilities.

5.4 Marketing Aims

- To develop the Community Centre Brand
- To provide excellent customer service and a client centre approach in service delivery
- To increase membership of gym
- To increase laundry and dry cleaner customers
- To increase childcare places
- To promote the hall as a venue for parties and activities
- To develop and brand fitness programmes

5.5 Financial Aims

- To reduce costs and increase revenue to target at a minimum breakeven across the Company Finances (This may be achieved through profit generating services subsidising loss making services).
- To identify opportunities for increasing revenue through 1) improving and increasing customers (new and existing) across all services 2) targeting new and existing customers for new services
- To develop and implement an annual fundraising strategy
- To monitor potential access to grant aid and actively pursue relevant (to the Company's aims) grant aid.
- To network with potential funders and North & East Kerry Development

5.6 Potential Business Development Opportunities

As stated earlier in this document, the opportunities to expand and develop facilities and services are limited due to the design of the building and site layout. The hall space which accounts for most of the floor area, is redundant for much of the time during the week. The limited options to develop this space without impacting on sporting activities results in reduced options to develop internal facilities which may or not be viable within the centre e.g. Tourist Information Office, Permanent Market and Cafe, Dedicated Youth Space, Meeting Space and potential office space.

The following activities could be developed within the hall:

(i) Fitness and Activity Programmes

By using a system of partitioning the hall could be sub-divided into 'workout rooms' for various fitness programmes (Pilates, yoga, zumba etc.) Space would be rented to individual trainers with marketing support from the centre.

Junior golf classes

(ii) Function Room

Rent the hall for trade seminars, talks, enterprise activities (e.g. craft fairs), and product demonstrations.

Exhibitions

Hall for kid's parties

(iii) Social Functions for visitors

Summer camps and kids activities targeting holiday makers in Banna and Ballyheigue.

Social activities, Trivia nights, Bingo, poker nights etc. for Holiday makers

(iv) Internet and Information Point

Suite of computers with Internet Access

(v) Festivals

Art festivals, drama, music, cultural and heritage events (in partnership with local publicans and businesses)

5.7 Longer Term Development Opportunities

Indoor Sports Facility

Based on the number of existing clubs and sports organisations within the community there seems to be a demand for a suitable indoor sports facility that would accommodate the needs of clubs and provide an opportunity for the local community to get involved in sports activity.

The existing hall is not suitable for many sports and is limiting the development potential of the community centre.

It is recommended that a forum be established with representatives of all clubs to investigate the feasibility of developing an indoor sports facility in the village. A site would need to be identified and Kerry County Council should be consulted re potential zoned sites and planning issues. North & East Kerry Development should be consulted with in relation to funding and a fundraising plan should be identified. Funding would normally consist of a mix of grant aid, social finance (loan), sponsors and donors. A joint partnership approach would be the best way to maximise potential finance. The Community Council as an independent legal entity would be best positioned to be the lead partner on any project proposal.

Ardfert – A Heritage Village

Another forum should be established to investigate the potential to have Ardfert designated as a Heritage Village. Full guidelines on developing a heritage town is available from Fáilte Ireland (<http://www.failteireland.ie/Marketing-Opportunities/Expand-Your-Marketing-Toolkit/Attract-Cultural-Tourists.aspx>)

Cultural tourism is one of the fastest growing areas of tourism internationally – growing significantly faster than mainstream tourism. Heritage and culture have been identified through research as broad motivators and key elements of both general holidays and specialist holidays in Ireland. Fáilte Ireland's *Tourism Product Development Strategy 2007-2013* identifies Ireland's historic cities, towns and villages as a cultural heritage asset with significant tourism potential.

The Community Centre could be central to the development of Heritage Initiatives including venue for talks, lectures, performances, display area for archives, audio-visual displays, cafe etc.

5.8 Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	Cost	Time Frame
Establish Finance and Marketing Sub-Committee	Board	Nil	September
Implement HR and Finance Policies and Procedures	Board	Nil	September/October
Recruit Marketing Graduate through Job Bridge Programme	Board	Nil	September/October
Develop brand and develop marketing materials	Marketing Sub-Committee Marketing Graduate External Designer/Printer	€1500 approx	October
Develop Website and Social Media	Marketing Sub-committee Marketing Graduate	Free (Through Grow Your Business Online)	October
Launch of website and marketing plan	Marketing Sub-committee Marketing Graduate	€500	November
PR and Advertising Campaign	Marketing Sub-committee Marketing Graduate	€500	November/December
Research Funding Opportunities	Finance Sub Committee	Nil	September
Prepare Generic Business Proposal (to support potential grant applications)	Finance Sub-Committee	Nil	October or earlier if applicable
Research opportunities to develop fitness programmes.	Gym Manager Marketing Graduate	Nil	October/November
Research Opportunities to utilise the hall for parties etc.	Board Marketing Graduate	Nil	October/November
Preliminary investigation on developing sports facility and heritage projects.	Board Representative from NEKD Other identified local interested parties	Nil	January/February 2013
Develop summer programme of activities targeting visitors.	Marketing Sub-Committee Marketing Graduate	Printing costs of brochures	April/May 2013

6. Implementation

6.1 Organisational Structure

Board

Increase Board Membership at next AGM, through elections and targeting representatives from various community organisations and if possible agencies. (Agency representatives maybe members rather than directors)

Committee Structure

Once the Company membership is expanded the following sub-committees should be established:

Executive – responsible for financial management and human resources

Fundraising and Marketing – responsible for developing and implementing fundraising initiatives and implementing marketing plan.

Employees and Volunteers

The Company is not in a position to recruit salaried employees so therefore it is recommended to recruit a graduate under the either the Job Bridge programme or Work Placement programme. This person would be working on marketing and supporting the administrator. Their role specifically would be to gather information from customers, build database of contacts, manage website content, organise flyer drops and poster campaigns, update social media pages and edit community notes etc.

External Consultation

An informal external panel of supporting organisations should be identified, which can provide ongoing advice and support. This would include representatives from NEKD, HSE, County Childcare Committee, Kerry County Council etc.

6.2 Governance

As a Company bound by Company Law it is important for the Board to implement good governance policies within the organisation. A new website outlining the new governance code is an excellent resource to assist in developing policies and procedures within the Company. The 5 key principles outlined in the Code are provided below for reference and should be adopted by Ardfert Community Council. The complete draft code and guidelines can be downloaded from <http://www.governancecode.ie/code.php>

Governance Principles (Source www.governancecode.ie)

1. Providing leadership for our organisation by

- Agreeing our purpose, vision and values and ensuring that they remain relevant and valid.
- Developing, resourcing, monitoring and evaluating a plan to make sure that our organisation achieves its stated purpose.
- Managing, supporting and holding to account staff, volunteers and all who act on behalf of the organisation.

2. Exercising control over our organisation by:

- Identifying and complying with all relevant legal and regulatory requirements.
- Making sure that there are appropriate internal financial and management controls.
- Identifying major risks for our organisation and deciding ways of managing the risks.

3. Being transparent and accountable by:

- Identifying those who have a legitimate interest in the work of our organisation (stakeholders) and making sure that there is regular and effective communication with them about our organisation.
- Responding to queries or views of stakeholders about the work of our organisation and its governance.
- Encouraging and enabling the engagement of those who benefit from our organisation in the planning and decision-making of the organisation.

4. Working effectively by:

- Ensuring that our governing body, individual board members, sub-committees, staff and volunteers, where applicable, understand their role, their legal duties and their delegated responsibility for decision-making.
- Making sure that as a board we exercise our collective responsibility through board meetings that are efficient and effective.
- Making sure that there is suitable board development, recruitment and retirement processes in place.

5. Behaving with integrity by:

- Adhering to high standards of honesty, fairness and independence
- Understanding, declaring and managing conflicts of interest and conflicts of loyalties.
- Safeguarding and promoting our organisation's reputation.

6.3 Financial Procedures

A financial policy and procedures document needs to be prepared after consultation with all Funders re reporting criteria and with the Company Accountants re Revenue obligations and Company Law.

As a Company, Ardfert Community Council must adhere to the contractual arrangements and conditions of all grant aid awarded. The Directors will need to carry out all reporting functions and financial returns as outlined by Funding Organisations and any Government Department.

All matters in relation to purchasing, procurement of services should be done in accordance with the public tendering procedures. All such procedures should be done in an open and transparent way.

Full guidelines on grant criteria, draw down procedures, tendering policies and dual funding restrictions (di-minimis funding) should be sought from all potential funding organisations.

6.4 Financial Strategy

It is a key role of the Directors to only plan and develop initiatives that can be core funded and that will not require debt only in circumstances where this debt can be sustained through some level of income generation.

Financial Planning should be undertaken annually to identify the operational costs of the centre and other Company costs and the maintenance costs of the facilities and projects under its management.

Full financial analysis including cost-benefit analysis and value for money appraisals should be carried out on all new initiatives.

The ideal financial model for any community group is that each project should be self sustaining through initial grant aid, specific fundraising or sponsorship for that project or in some cases income generated through the project.

A fundraising strategy and plan outlining timelines for various fundraising activities should be prepared annually. This plan and the income raised should be evaluated at year end to determine if targets were achieved and if fundraising could be improved.

Options for Funding

Fee Income

- Review of pricing structures (increase where possible).
- Increase fee paying customers through 1 improving quality of services and facilities and 2 marketing and promotion.
- Identify new services and activities that will generate additional revenue.

Fundraising

- Implement an annual fundraising strategy – series of smaller seasonal events.
- Bi-annual large fundraising event e.g. race night.

In-kind support

- Identify sponsors for one off events and to contribute towards costs such as printing, web development, equipment, stock etc.
- Identify key people with business, financial, legal and marketing expertise who would be willing to provide advice and support.

Grant Aid

- A database of all relevant grants should be maintained and monitored.
- Relevant grant aid should be sought only if the effort is worth the reward
- A generic business plan supporting a potential grant application should be developed and be ready on file.

6.5 Marketing Strategy

Marketing is crucial in any business but even more so in the non-profit sector as not only are you targeting customers but you are also promoting to funders and sponsors as well as communicating to the wider public.

Typically the following are the central goals of any non-profit/community marketing strategy:

- Finding, new donors/members/volunteers/helpers/fundraisers/supporters; consolidating and improving relationships with existing contacts and reacquainting yourselves with former contacts.
- Building your 'brand' - its legitimacy, identity and unique differences that make it worthy of public support.
- Spreading knowledge about your group - what it does, who it works with, etc, through awareness raising campaigns.
- Fostering goodwill in order to gain support from the public.

6.5.1 Marketing Objectives

- To develop the Community Centre Brand
- To provide excellent customer service and a client centre approach in service delivery
- To increase membership of gym
- To increase laundry and dry cleaner customers
- To increase childcare places
- To promote the hall as a venue for parties and activities
- To develop and brand fitness programmes

6.5.2 Marketing Plan

Product

What are the key features and unique selling points (affordability, convenience etc.) of the services provided? Look at how the services can be improved. This includes service delivery and quality, programmes available, appropriateness of the facility and attractiveness of the facility.

What new activities and services can be developed which meet the needs of the community. What services can be targeted at specific segments (older people, young people, families, local groups etc.)

Price

Pricing is based on the following factors:

- Cost of running services (break even pricing)
- Value placed on the services by the customers
- Competition or alternatives in the area
- Customers' ability to pay

Place

All of the services are provided for within the centre. Place here would refer to factors such as opening times, car parking and accessibility.

Promotion

Branding

Logo

A logo for the Centre should be developed. This could be done in association with the school as part of a design competition or with a youth group. The use of a logo is important for the consistency of promoting and marketing the centre.

Image

It is important that the centre maintain a consistent image and the marketing committee will ensure that all activities and marketing are in alignment with the image of the centre. The image will reflect the Vision for the centre.

Marketing Materials

- Develop marketing materials such as letter head, complement slip, business cards, brochures, posters flyers, roll up banners, signage

Online

Develop website with information on the centre, activities, programmes, donation function, interactive area (comments, suggestions etc.)

Develop social media Face book Page, Twitter Announcements, You Tube (promotional video of the centre)

Mobile marketing – text alerts

- Develop new website and social media
- Customer database management and direct mobile and email marketing
- Local Advertising
- Flyer drops
- External Notice Board – highlighting events, offers, promotions, activities etc.

Advertising Campaigns

- Discounts vouchers on flyers
- Door to door distribution and in shop collection of centre brochure outlining all services and facilities provided including opening hours and contact people.
- Loyalty and referral programmes for the laundry and gym.
- Improved signage highlighting services provided
- Targeted flyer drop in local caravan parks and mobile homes during summer months.
- Targeted advertising on Outlook Magazine, local newsletter, Radio Kerry Community Diary.

Public Relations

- Press Releases
- Radio Interviews
- Policy Submissions
- Local Notes
- Articles
- Sponsorship – provide space for free for different charity events

Networking

- Local Groups
- Local Businesses
- Kerry County Council
- North & East Kerry Development
- HSE
- Pobal
- Tourism Groups
- Funding Sources
- Politicians

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is two-fold:

1. To measure the impact of the services and to maintain the quality of the services offered
2. To analyse the numbers of users of the various activities and services and to develop report for funders.

Evaluation should be based on quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis.

Quantitative Analysis

- Logging of all people using the gym, childcare, laundry etc.
- Monitoring of hits and visits and page impressions on website.
- Registering of people attending various events.

Qualitative Analysis

- Customer Satisfaction Surveys
- Focus Groups with service users
- Comment Cards
- Case Studies (highlighting success and demonstrating changes in attitude, opinions and actions)
- Testimonials

Communicating Evaluation results

Most funding agencies will have standard reporting systems. However it is important that all information gathered is collated in a report format that can be used internally as a management tool and externally as a support to funding requests. The evaluation reports and successes can be highlighted in Annual Reports and Press releases as well as future applications for funding.