

Wicklow County Childcare Committee

2022 Annual Report for AGM

2022 turned out to be another surprising year where Wicklow CCC (WCCC) delivered on the planned pieces of work within the LIP/SOW which involved working intensively with services and also supported childminders and parents. There were also a considerable number of unplanned and unprecedented actions. The introduction of Core funding and the ERO was a significant development. Covid continued to be an issue but to a lesser extent, however the war in Ukraine and the subsequent re-location of refugees to Ireland led to a considerable number of unplanned actions. WCCC continued to support and advise services in relation to Covid 19 in areas such as actual and potential cases, staff shortages, length of isolation and so on. In relation to the Ukrainian crisis Wicklow CCC joined and played a significant part with three community response committees, one county wide which was facilitated by the local authority, one in north Wicklow under the auspices of Bray Area Partnership and a third in West/South Wicklow convened by Co Wicklow CYPSC. WCCC also collated and submitted information and statistics to DCEDIY which were required throughout the year in a timely manner. Notwithstanding this, WCCC achieved a great deal and outlined below are the main actions we were involved in:-

Progress and achievements

1. Worked intensively with services in relation to Core Funding
2. Worked with services in relation to compliance
3. Supported services with regard to applying for the re-opening grants
4. Supported and advised services regarding sustainability particularly in light of Covid 19 and the implications of same
5. Administered and processed Learner Fund applications
6. Supported 2 services who closed and also 9 who opened in 2022
7. Promoted AIM in a more flexible way due to Covid
8. With ECCE moving to The Hive this impacted on the work of WCCC as intensive support had to be given to some services particularly those who had not attended any previous training on using the EYP - Hive
9. Considerable support was given to services and parents regarding all childcare schemes
10. As the Manager of WCCC was a member of PPOP she was heavily involved in programme readiness for 2022
11. WCCC had 27241 hits on the website in 2022
12. WCCC had a total of 7483 enquiries and interactions during 2022

Significant changes and obstacles

1. The majority of training resumed - EDI, Aim Information sessions, Always Children First and NSAI workshops. However as a result of Covid some of the courses took place online and some face to face. There was a reluctance from some people to return to face to face training

2. WCCC were available to support providers, parents and all agencies Monday to Friday 9 to 5 and outside hours when required which it has been during 2022, this was particularly needed in early Autumn when services needed intensive support when applying for Core Funding.
3. Misinformation which circulates on social media and as a result WCCC has to dispel and clarify this misinformation
4. While WCCC have limited access to The Hive it is difficult at times to support and advise services and parents

Highlights/Successes

1. Implementation of the LIP/SOW and the completion of the vast majority of the actions albeit in a more flexible/adaptable manner.
2. Weekly updates to the sector is an effective communication process
3. Experienced, effective and supportive Board
4. The revision of a considerable number of policies and procedures
5. The work which was done in relation to the significant number of Ukrainian and asylum seeking children and families who have come to live in the county

Collaboration with other agencies

WCCC collaborates very effectively and has very good working relationships locally with the following:

1. Co Wicklow CYPSC - on various sub groups and supports with the delivery of actions
2. Wicklow County Council - through the Community Response Forum and also supporting and assisting planning department with queries and working closely with the County Library Service
3. Wicklow County Partnership and Bray Area Partnership - promotion of childcare schemes and working with Ukrainian families and also families in direct provision
4. KWETB - liaising regarding FETAC training
5. SETU Carlow - liaising regarding HETAC Levels 7, 8 and 9
6. ABC Project Bray - supporting preschools with quality
7. CCI/DCEDIY/Pobal - collaboration with regard to the implementation of LIP actions and other requests as necessary and also PPOP issues/queries
8. Liaising with neighbouring CCC's
9. Working with regional childminding development officer promoting childminding

Additional Actions

1. Collaborating with CYPSC in the delivering of actions, held workshops on self-regulation with 135 attendees
2. WCCC continues to work closely with the ABC project in Bray in promoting quality within early year's services and providing supports to vulnerable families during the closure of the early years and school age services
3. All the additional actions which were still necessary due to Covid 19
4. The Manager is involved in a number of CCI working groups – National Representative Group, Policy, Planning Operations and Programmes, Tusla oversight working group and Communications working group

Governance

The Board held 8 meetings including the AGM which took place in July. Two members resigned from the Board, a PPN rep and a Partnership rep and both organisations nominated two people to take their place.

Staffing

The staffing of Wicklow CCC remained unchanged in 2022. The Manager linked in with the staff working both in the office and remotely on a daily/weekly basis and more often if required. Staff also attended all webinars/information sessions delivered by Pobal and DCEDIY throughout 2022.

Financial Management

WCCC had an under spend in the Core Funding Supports of €302, Equality Diversity and Inclusion Training of €1,800 (as training did not take place) and €2,060 in Parent & Toddler grants in 2022. All spending and budgets have been approved by the Finance subcommittee and signed off by the Board.

Conclusion

2022 was another year where ultimately it was necessary to 'expect the unexpected' and as such WCCC had to be flexible, adaptable and available to meet the considerable needs to DCEDIY, Pobal, providers and parents. The need for a local presence representing the DCEDIY was very evident in 2022 when CCC's were the first point of call for services. The CCC's also had to source information and data from all services locally and feed this back to DCEDIY and Pobal on a regular basis. The introduction of Core Funding was a very significant change within the sector and also the announcement of the NCS universal subsidy increasing very significantly. It is perceived that this will impact significantly on services and indeed parents in a positive way. It will hopefully achieve its aim of making childcare more accessible and affordable for parents and children. The introduction of the ERO is also a very significant change and hopefully this will encourage practitioners to remain and indeed join the sector. The Review of Structures is obviously a very big sectoral change which will influence future planning and policy delivery and this will obviously impact on WCCC staff and Board. How this will manifest in reality remains to be seen but WCCC are reassured by the open communication which DCEDIY are having with the sector in relation to the ongoing developments.