

Drogheda: Creating a Bridge to a Better Future



Community Safety & Wellbeing: Report of a Scoping Review for the Department of Justice

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1. Report Introduction and Summary

a. Introduction

While rates of recorded crime in Ireland generally have been at relatively low levels recently, some categories of crime, in certain parts of the country, have given continuing cause for concern, as well as heightening fear of crime and its knock-on effects in local communities. The present project and report were commissioned by Minister for Justice, Ms. Helen McEntee TD, in response to rising concerns regarding crime, and specifically drug-related crime, as well as feuding between organised crime groups (OCG) in the Drogheda area. In recent times, violent crime, and specifically such drug-related crime and feuding involving organised criminal groups, has led to considerable generalised fear of crime in and around the Drogheda area, as well of course as having traumatic impact on the individuals, families and communities directly involved, targeted and victimised. This criminality reached a particularly horrific low point with the abduction and brutal murder of a local teenager in January 2020. In the aftermath of the public outcry against this specific incident, and real concerns that significant additional action needed to be taken to stop the enduring and escalating negative impact on the people of Drogheda, the present project was initiated and commissioned by the Minister for Justice in response. The scoping exercise was to assess the current issues in the round, exploring the relevant challenges as well as local strengths and resources, identifying measures that could be taken to improve the situation and others that could chart a path to improved community wellbeing and related outcomes in and around Drogheda.

b. Drogheda: The Context

Drogheda is one of the oldest urban centres in Ireland, with a history stretching back to its founding in 1194. Drogheda is North of Dublin on Ireland's East coast, on the so-called Dublin-Belfast corridor. The town straddles the boundaries of Counties Louth and Meath, with consequent implications for local government and administration. The 2016 national census found that Drogheda was the largest town¹ in Ireland with a population of 40,956. It was also the sixth largest urban settlement (including cities) in Ireland by population.²

Drogheda has an historic town centre with narrow streets, heavy traffic and limited open public spaces. The town can point to recent collective successes like its hosting of the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 2018 and 2019, but these good news stories and successful community initiatives in Drogheda have been overshadowed by the level of drug-related offending and the violence and other incidents linked to the activity of organised crime groups.

¹ The CSO defines a town as an urban settlement with a population of over 1,500 and under 50,000.

² The others being Dublin city and suburbs, Cork city and suburbs, Limerick city and suburbs, Galway city and suburbs and Waterford city and suburbs.

c. Demographics

The 2016 census carried out by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) recorded that Drogheda had a population of 40,956 inhabitants, an increase of 6.2% since the 2011 census. 19,993 residents were male and 20,963 were female. Drogheda had a younger population than the nation as a whole. Almost 24% of Drogheda's population were aged 0-14 years old, compared to roughly 21% in the rest of Ireland. Drogheda had more inhabitants in the 25-44 age range, around 32% compared to the national average of roughly 30%. Drogheda has a correspondingly lower proportion of older people: around 22% of residents were aged 45-64 compared to the national average of almost 24%, and a little over 11% were aged 65+ compared to a national average of around 13%.

In terms of education, Drogheda had a higher proportion of residents aged 15 years and over whose highest level of education completed was at primary-school level (16%) in comparison to the national population (13%). Likewise, the proportion of those aged over 15 years of age in Drogheda who had a third-level education (30%) was below the national average (36%). A higher proportion of women (26%) than men (23%) had a third-level degree qualification.

Patterns of private household composition were mostly similar to national patterns. However, the proportion of one-parent households in Drogheda (13%) was higher than the national figures (11%). Within Drogheda, the electoral divisions of West Gate (31%) in the centre and west of the town and Fair Gate (29%) in the northern part of the town had the highest proportion of one-parent households. Turning to nationality and ethnicity, in 2016, non-Irish nationals made up almost 16% of Drogheda's inhabitants, compared to a national average of 13%. It should be noted that this is in line with the patterns seen in other Irish urban settlements with more than 10,000 inhabitants. Reflecting national trends, the two largest groups of non-Irish residents in Drogheda were Polish citizens and Lithuanians, and each group accounted for approximately 3% of Drogheda's population.

As with other sizeable urban settlements in Ireland, Drogheda had a lower proportion of residents who described their ethnicity as "White Irish" (75%) than the national average (82%). The second largest ethnic category after "White Irish" was "Other White", accounting for 12% of Drogheda's population. Compared to the figures for the country as a whole, Drogheda had a higher percentage of people who self-described as "Black or Black Irish" (almost 4% as opposed to roughly 1% nationally) and "Asian or Asian Irish" (approximately 3% compared to just over 2% nationally). Drogheda's "White Irish Traveller" population was 0.4% of the population, just 151 people, which was below the national average of 0.7%.

Of note, at almost 18%, the unemployment rate in Drogheda was notably higher than the national figure of roughly 13%. The median gross household income in Drogheda was €38,876, compared with a national median gross income per household of €45,256.

d. Deprivation

In the Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID) programme which launched in 2001, seven smaller areas within Drogheda were selected for Strand 1 of the programme on the basis of their levels of deprivation: Marian Park, Ballsgrove, St Finian's Park, Rathmullen,

Moneymore, Pearse Park and Yellowbatter. Looking at more contemporary indicators, the HP Pobal Deprivation index uses census data to measure deprivation in Ireland, using indicators relating to Demographic Profile, Social Class Composition and Labour Market Situation. Based on the 2016 census data, the electoral divisions of Fair Gate, West Gate, St Laurence Gate, St Mary's (Louth Pt.) and St. Peter's (Pt.) were all classed as marginally below average, while towards the south, St Mary's (Meath Pt.) was classed as marginally above average. Between them, these electoral divisions cover all of Drogheda's urban settlement, including the former RAPID areas, as well as some of the surrounding area.

e. Executive Summary

*Drogheda is a huge, positive challenge.
With the right leadership, we can transform this town.*

Drogheda is described as the largest town in the State, with a growing, as well as diverse, population. The town has a number of areas where the residents collectively experience significant socio-economic disadvantage. In recent years, certain types of offending, particularly drug-related crime, including organised criminal group activity, 'feuding,' violence and intimidation, have escalated to an extent that many Drogheda residents report generalised fear when going about their daily lives. In recent times drug-related violence has escalated and following a number of murders and attempted murders, reached an all-time low point early last year, with the abduction, brutal torture and killing of a Drogheda teenager. This succession of violent events, and the fallout from them, has had a traumatising effect on the town and the people in it, especially children and young people, and has in turn given rise to the present scoping exercise.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact recently in terms of helping to decrease criminal and related activity to a certain extent. This fact, allied to the accumulating law enforcement successes of An Garda Síochána in particular, seems to have provided a unique opportunity to stabilise, and ultimately improve the situation for the people of Drogheda as a whole. While appearing to slow down some opportunities for criminal behaviour, at the same time the pandemic, and resulting restrictions on movement, appear to have led to increases in certain offending such as domestic abuse and violence. There are also increased levels of anxiety caused, especially among younger people, and it has become more difficult to provide certain social and other services, in Drogheda as much as anywhere else in the country, as a result.

There is a certain sense of frustration evident in the views of those individuals and organisations reflected in this study. There was a widely held perception that Local Government reorganisation and the impact of county boundaries have not served Drogheda well, as well as a sense that Drogheda has been 'neglected by officialdom,' in various ways and for various reasons. Other things that were evident to the researcher included the goodwill and hard work being done by many at local level, in the statutory, non-statutory and community and voluntary service sectors in the area. There is also a collective pride in Drogheda, coupled with a sense of pain and frustration at the negative impact of crime and offending on local communities. These feelings are coupled with concerns for the future, particularly in relation to the experience of children and young people and the impact of this on their collective future

In terms of analysis of what could be done better to help the situation, and specifically to improve outcomes, along the lines of the issues identified in the project's terms of reference, these seemed to fall under two general headings: The first, which emerged as a consistently strong and recurring theme, and referred to by virtually everyone with whom the researcher engaged, was the need for improved interagency cooperation, in the crime and drugs areas, as well as more widely in the administration and delivery of services in the Drogheda area. After that, it was also apparent to the researcher that

increasing resources for some services – either to augment current ones or make provision for additional service provision – would also potentially help a lot.

On that basis, regarding the specific terms of reference of the present scoping exercise, there are a number of service gaps and needs that need to be addressed. These fall broadly under two headings, those of: (1) coordination needs and (2) gaps or other needs in individual services themselves. The Section that follows this one will summarise the researcher's recommendations for action. These are made in the context of a recognition of the need for *ongoing* local engagement and consultation, as well as action. The present report represents the *beginning* rather than an end of a journey. In addition, the researcher recognises that there is a clear need for some positive actions to happen as a matter of particular priority and also to be seen to be progressed as a matter of urgency. This is in order to give the local community in Drogheda some tangible reasons for real hope and to build positive momentum for further positive change.

While there are some existing structures aimed at maximising coordination of strategic approaches as well as service delivery in relation to crime and drugs, there is a need to further develop such coordination. This should be achieved by a number of cross-cutting coordination bodies (set out below). Crucial to those bodies will be an ability and mandate to make decisions, to call individuals and organisations to account, and to allocate certain resources including funding, under agreed headings. Such coordination and service provision generally are currently inhibited by a number of factors. These include the administrative area divisions, staff shortages, the dormitory nature of the Drogheda town and population and even the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. More importantly though, there is a need for a real will at senior organisational level to do things in a better and more joined-up way. This will also require an injection of strong and decisive leadership, to legitimate and establish effective structures and processes that will ensure that the required positive action is taken.

In terms of the specific areas of crime and drug use, there needs to be an increased focus on ensuring that appropriate services are both resourced and available in a timely manner. Even more specifically, regarding young people already involved in or at risk of becoming more involved in serious crime, there is a need for a focused and differentiated response from criminal justice and other services, to interrupt that criminal involvement. For those involved in a more serious or 'senior' or entrenched way, the full rigours of the justice system must be brought to bear, to actively and effectively disrupt the offending and the offenders. For those at lower levels (and these are increasingly involving younger people), the individuals and the organised criminal networks in and around which they are involved need to be identified and targeted individual and family-focused services offered on an intensive basis, to break their cycle of offending and disrupt the networks around them. Such approaches are based on proven research and practice, led out of 'homegrown' Irish initiatives in the field. While specific bodies will need to take a lead with particular categories and individuals involved, it will be vital that all relevant organisations 'buy in,' cooperate and play their role in full, as required and planned.

The researcher has had the benefit of the time, the experience and the insights of numerous people living and working in the greater Drogheda area in preparing the present report. Many of those people reflected their shared frustrations, as well as an enduring commitment to making things better for

their town and those who live there, especially the young people of Drogheda and the future generations. From that perspective, the time is now right for positive, decisive and coordinated action.

It should be borne in mind that the present report reflects the work of a *scoping* exercise. In that sense, what follows in terms of this report as a whole is a relatively limited data gathering and analysis of the situation in and around the Drogheda area, focusing in the main on the crime and drugs issues. However, in discussing community safety and wellbeing, it must be kept in mind that the services that impact on these aspects of local life are much wider than those of the criminal justice system alone. The issues involved and the responses required cut across all areas of central and local government, as well as community development and wider civil society and all of these need to be taken into account. In that context, while the recommendations in this report are intended to respond to important needs identified in the Drogheda area, and are based on specific lines of exploration, the researcher recognises that there may well be other ongoing activities more widely that may also assist in current and future efforts to respond to issues impacting on Drogheda and its environs.

Specific recommendations for action are summarised in the following Section.

f. Recommendations

Recommendations arising from, and referenced through, the body of the report include the following:

(i) **Cross-Agency Coordination:**

Recommendation:

A coordination structure for improving community safety and wellbeing – and to generally replace a number of previous/current overarching coordination bodies and networks – to be established in Drogheda, as follows:

- 1. Drogheda Safety & Wellbeing: High-Level Oversight Group:** Led by (i) Department of Justice and comprising senior representatives of other relevant Departments: (ii) Health; (iii) Housing, Local Government and Heritage; (iv) Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; (v) Education; (vi) Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; (vii) Rural and Community Development; (viii) Social Protection; and (ix) Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

(Membership of the above to be entirely senior representatives from Government Departments. Agency representatives can be invited to specific meetings as required. Meet quarterly, to ensure strategic direction and action planning, and receive reports on progress on action plan. All of the above Departments to be involved to begin with, until an agreed plan of action signed off. After that, the Oversight Group might conceivably be reduced in size, if agreed and deemed appropriate).

- 2. Safety and Wellbeing Implementation Board:** The core driver and coordinator of change. With an independent chair, small support team (headed by a fulltime coordinator) and own budget (to resource the coordination itself, as well as to provide ‘priming’ funds to innovative projects and initiatives) – the team to be hosted, resourced supported by Louth Local Authority or Louth Leader Partnership, but located in Drogheda. Other central Government departments and local bodies to provide proportion of the funding for this as agreed).

Board comprised of senior (‘decision making’) representatives from relevant agencies, including, at least: (i) An Garda Síochána; (ii) Probation Service; (iii) Local Authorities; (iv) HSE; (v) TUSLA; (vi) LMETB (vii) LLP; (viii) IYJS/DoJ.

Board membership needs to be tight enough to be effective and just wide enough to cover necessary range of services and decision-makers. Target and outcome-focused, meet monthly, with priority on completing action plan items. Work done in ‘business as usual’ context, unless specific new resources identified and agreed.

3. Four Sub-Groups/Working Groups:

- a) Policing and Drugs
- b) Family Support, Children, Young People and Education
- c) Employment, Business, Enterprise and
- d) Area/Community Development, Arts, Culture and Sport.

Sub/working groups to have identified chairs (some could be rotated), representatives from relevant agencies and bodies. All sub-groups to include representatives from relevant bodies in the C+V sector; sub-group (d) to include wider definition of 'community' representatives, on a rotating basis, as required. Sub-group work focus to be on agreed/clear action plans. To report in at appropriate intervals, through identified representatives, to the Implementation Board. The sub-groups could also identify new or added resourcing needs, and prepare business cases for consideration by the implementation.

(ii) Addressing Crime – Specific Measures:

Recommendations:

1. For those involved at a very serious or 'senior' level in the drugs trade and related organised crime in the area, the current approach by AGS of targeting and disrupting their activities to be continued and resourced accordingly.
2. Implement, as a matter of urgency and priority, an intensive, wraparound service for vulnerable children and young people exposed to and involved in organised crime groups, as well as their families, with a view to facilitating their disengagement from such criminal networks.
3. Continue – and increase, where appropriate – resourcing (e.g., staff, training, minibus/es) to the two Garda Youth Diversion Projects (CABLE and BOYNE GYDPs), to facilitate their work.
4. Ensure continuing/strengthening of community policing – particularly in the town centre and suburban areas.
5. Consider the implementation of a Joint Agency Response to Crime (JARC) project in the Drogheda area.
6. Allocate additional Probation Service resources (1-2 probation officers, as well as community service and community-based organisations, where and as needed) immediately to the Louth team, to allow adequate focus on and resourcing of responses to drug-related offending, young people involved in crime and related projects, as well as in the event of any expansion of the JARC programme, youth justice, community service and restorative justice programmes.

In addition, consideration needs to be given, and decisions made, around the following issues, which were raised repeatedly with the researcher:

6. In spite of the constraints Proceeds of Crime legislation, explore and decide how to demonstrate to local communities in a visible and practical way that money and other

resources seized from organised criminals is, in effect, used to provide funding for community and other services in the same geographical areas.

7. Explore the provision of appropriate multi-disciplinary responses (including out-of-hours) to incidents (e.g., with mental health components or factors, such as suicidal or self-harming behaviour) currently managed by 'frontline' AGS members.
8. Explore how to address the previously raised and discussed issue of the impact of the county boundaries of Louth and Meath, and the corresponding delineation between Garda Districts/Divisions, specifically in relation to the policing of the Laytown-Bettystown area of East Meath.
9. Explore ways in which the timeliness of criminal justice responses to offending and offenders can be improved where possible.
10. Explore the practicality of implementing the Community Crime Impact Assessment (CCIA) process in Drogheda.
11. Explore the implementation of a 'See It. Say It' scheme in Drogheda, particularly in relation to anti-social behaviour.
12. Continue to provide training and awareness raising in relation to the impact and implications of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) for all relevant bodies in Drogheda.

(iii) Drug Use:

Recommendations:

1. The Red Door project should receive urgent additional funding for the provision of drugs outreach work (as a particular priority), counselling, family support, client progression pathways, Court-related and prisoner support and additional harm reduction services in the Drogheda area. Specifically, €150,000 additional for a full year, should be allocated to the Red Door, for provision of these additional services.
2. Explore the possibility of utilising the Red Door facility as more of a 'one-stop-shop' for drug treatment and related services.
3. Review the State funding (approximately €7,500 p.a.) provided to the Family Addiction Network (FASN) – providing family support, especially in the context of drug-related intimidation work and wider family support for addiction-related issues.
4. Commission/carry out an urgent review of the organisation of drugs (statutory and community and voluntary) services in the Drogheda area, similar in focus – but perhaps on a smaller scale – to the *Service Review of the Dundalk Addiction Services (2015)* carried out by the HSE³, with a view to ensuring improved effectiveness and efficiency as a matter of urgency.
5. Reinstate/continue the local Drug Court, with appropriate funding and other resourcing and formally evaluate its operation over a period of say one to two years, before deciding on its longer-term future.

³ The authors of this report pointed to its applicability to Louth County as a whole, and its recommendations would appear to be still valid, as well as a number of them being outstanding at present.

6. Agencies working in the substance use field in Drogheda should look at practical ways of improving interagency cooperation, including the identification and implementation of appropriate gateways to treatment and progression routes for service users, as well as reducing or eliminating overlaps and duplication, providing joint (cross-agency) training, developing shared language and even greater cooperation on assessment and intervention methods.
7. Ensure full implementation of all appropriate harm reduction measures, as mandated by the National Drugs Strategy, including Needle and Syringe Programmes (NSP) and availability of Naloxone,⁴ in Drogheda.
8. Explore and implement the most appropriate way of ensuring a best-practice response to drug using clients with identified dual (drugs and mental health issues) diagnosis. This could include interagency co-location of staff and joint training.
9. Provide further interagency training workshops on responding to drug-related intimidation for relevant staff in statutory agencies as well as those in the community and voluntary sector.

(iv) Youth and Community Development and Facilities:

Recommendations:

1. The Northside/Moneymore community hub facility should continue to be progressed, as it currently is, by LLP on behalf of all stakeholders. This facility should accommodate the provision of services currently provided by bodies forming the Moneymore Consortium, as well as providing a hub for a wider array of community services, provided by statutory as well as community and voluntary agencies.
2. It would greatly boost morale in the area if, at an appropriate point, clarification could be provided by LCC and LLP to relevant stakeholders in Moneymore/North Drogheda on the likely direction of travel and timeline for the proposed centre, as soon as practicable.
3. The relevant bodies should commence, as a priority, exploratory moves including local consultations, to provide a similar facility on the Southside of the Town, in the general Rathmullan area.
4. Progress, as a priority, the funding and development by LMETB of the sports and community changing/meeting block at DIFE (cost estimated at approximately €1 million).
5. Agree an action plan for enhancing youth and community development capacity, particularly on the South side of Drogheda.
6. Generate an agreed strategic plan for the development of youth and community work and the development and training of such leaders in Drogheda.
7. Include appropriate actions in relation to the training and development of local youth and community workers in this strategic plan; and specifically, education, training and career progression routes, linked to pre-university and university-level programmes, as well as incorporating 'on-the-job' training elements.

⁴ See Section 2.g, at p.36 below.

8. Build on previous initiatives to increase community capacity for responding to violent critical incidents at local level.

(v) Specific Services for Children and Young People:

Recommendations:

1. Ensure that the good work initiated and under way recently, to coordinate child protection and welfare and other children's services, is maintained and further developed, specifically through the overarching strategic and service coordination proposals recommended above.
2. An exercise has already been commenced, by LLP/CYPSC, to 'map' the services for children and young people in Drogheda. This valuable service 'audit' initiative, stalled because of Covid-19, should be re-started, prioritised and completed as a matter of urgency.
3. Urgent consideration should also be given to how the various youth services could be more coordinated and supported.
4. Ensure the completion of the review of Strengthening Families Programmes already provided and follow through as appropriate.
5. There does appear to be certain gaps in some specific service provision for young people. These include mental health and suicide prevention, among others. Ensure these are prioritised in future planning and delivery.

(vi) Education and Training:

Recommendation:

1. Due to the unique position and situation obtaining in St. Brigid's and St. Patrick's NS, St. Joseph's CBS, and Presentation NS, an increase in DEIS status – from Band 2 to 1 – should be granted to the three schools immediately, at least on an interim emergency basis, at a minimum until (a) the passing of the worst impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, *and* (b) improvement in the overall crime and related social situation in Drogheda, *and* (c) completion of any formal update review by the Department of Education. Alternatively, or at least pending the outcome of any DEIS review, it is recommended that at a minimum some alternative way to provide equivalent additional supports to these schools and their students should be found and implemented, to address the needs identified.
2. Explore the potential for more apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programmes in Drogheda, and specifically through DIFE.
3. Explore the potential for implementing an 'Operation Encompass' approach as part of the responding to domestic abuse and domestic violence incidents.
4. Explore the potential for locating a 'branch' of DKIT in Drogheda, and also for the development of DKIT 'feeder' programmes – particularly those related to vocational and professional education and training – operating in Drogheda.
5. Continue to develop training in and application of Restorative Practice aimed at dealing with conflict and addressing issues such as school suspensions, expulsions and refusals.

(vii) Arts, Culture, Sport and Recreation:

Recommendations:

1. Develop a strategic plan for the development of opportunities in the arts, culture and sports in the Drogheda area, specifically those aimed at and involving young people.
2. Explore opportunities for developing a centre of sporting excellence in Drogheda.
3. Explore potential for increased use of the Boyne river, the sea and other local amenities that could lend themselves to development of different sporting disciplines and opportunities.
4. Explore the possibility of making the Aura Leisure Centre available to the public as a community facility in the Drogheda area.
5. Consider ways in which local sporting and cultural role models can be identified and employed in initiatives to engage more young people in particular in healthy and prosocial activities and implement as appropriate.
6. Explore ways in which existing facilities in Drogheda (e.g., Lourdes Stadium, or DIFE – as described above) can be used to maximise their potential for the benefit of the local community.

(viii) Local Authority Organisation and Services:

Recommendation:

1. While central Government/Departmental oversight of the present proposals is recommended, the two Local Authorities (Louth and Meath), as well as other bodies under their auspices (such as LLP) to continue their important local coordination work and responsibilities.
2. As a matter of urgency and priority, Louth and Meath County Councils to agree an appropriate mechanism or 'vehicle' for the generation, agreement and implementation of a joint local development plan for Drogheda Town in its entirety, and including the appropriate area of East Meath, particularly the Laytown-Bettystown area of County Meath.
3. LCC to consider ways to ensure greater Council presence, visibility and engagement in Drogheda.
4. Local Authority to explore and decide on an effective way of responding to and managing the impact of anti-social behaviour by its tenants and others, as appropriate.
5. Local Authority also to put in place effective ways of responding to estate management issues that can assist in addressing anti-social behaviour (e.g., closing off alleyways, cutting back or removing hedging, installing lighting or speed ramps on roads etc).
6. Local Authority to explore and implement appropriate ways of speeding up implementation of the policy and practice of dealing with social housing 'voids.'
7. Louth County Council to engage as a matter of urgency with residents of Moneymore and Castlemanor (and any other stakeholders as appropriate), with a view to closing off the offending 'gap' (referenced at Section 2.m below) and taking other measures arising; or else finding a mutually acceptable and reasonable resolution to this issue.

(ix) Local Infrastructure and Assets:

1. Local Authority to clarify, for the relevant governance and oversight bodies, the potential value and specific contribution that the PANCR and other similar strategic local developments can add to the combined efforts at improving community wellbeing in Drogheda.
2. Local Authority (and others as appropriate) progress the West Gate Vision plan for Drogheda Town centre.
3. Local Authority clarify what the Fáilte Ireland 'Destination Town' designation can bring to Drogheda, and how this can be progressed accordingly.
4. As part of this (3 above) establish Fáilte Ireland presence/tourist information office in the Town.
5. Local Authority (and others as appropriate) explore and clarify the potential for future use of the Dominican Church and Priory in Drogheda Town (being acquired by LCC).
6. As part of strategic planning for the development of the Town, explore ways in which to develop and promote Drogheda as a healthier and welcoming town.

(x) Employment, Enterprise and Local Development:

1. Local Authority and other relevant stakeholders - consider possibility to develop a new business and technology park on the North side of Drogheda.
2. Explore ways to develop productive links – in terms of promoting employment opportunities – with appropriate third level institutions.
3. Explore potential for enterprise initiatives and job creation in the agri-food sector.
4. Consider ways to reduce the impact of crime and antisocial behavior on business and employment in the Town.
5. Explore ways to attract or facilitate at least some of the estimated 15,000 people from Drogheda who commute to other locations for work every day back to work in the Town.⁵
6. Ensure that community Garda foot patrols in the town centre and more widely are maintained.

(xi) Ethnic and Racial Issues:

1. All stakeholders – consider the practical implications of the recently (2020) launched Louth Meath Joint Migrant Integration Strategy and implement actions arising accordingly.
2. Explore and identify any existing or emerging issues of racial tension in the area and agree steps to deal with these.
3. Plan at oversight group level how to engage with and involve the traveller and Roma communities in the area to a greater extent than currently, and to include specific actions.

⁵ There may be opportunities in this regard arising from the fact that more people are currently working from home as a result of Covid-19 restrictions on movement and travel.

4. LLP to progress actions already identified to engage and build development capacity in the traveller and Roma communities.
5. HSE and other partners - build on positive engagement made with travellers and Roma during the course of the public health response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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h. Glossary of Terms

ABC	Area Based Childhood (programme)
ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience/s
AGS	An Garda Síochána
ASU	Armed Support Unit
CAB	Criminal Assets Bureau
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CCIA	Community Crime Impact Assessment
CCTV	Closed Circuit TeleVision
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CYPSC	Children and Young People's Services Committee
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DEASP	Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DIFE	Drogheda Institute of Further Education
DKIT	Dundalk Institute of Technology
DoJ	Department of Justice
DRI	Drug-Related Intimidation
ETB	Education and Training Board
FASN	Family Addiction Support Network
GYDP	Garda Youth Diversion Project
HSE	Health Service Executive
IDA	Industrial Development Authority
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IYJS	Irish Youth Justice Service
JARC	Joint Agency Response to Crime
JLO	Juvenile Liaison Officer
JPC	Joint Policing Committee
LAG	Local Action Group
LCC	Louth County Council
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LLP	Louth Leader Partnership
LMTB	Louth Meath Education & Training Board
MACE	Multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences
NEIC	North-East Inner City (Dublin)
NE-RDATF	North-East Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force
NVR	Non Violent Response
OCG	Organised Crime Group

NSP	Needle and Syringe Programme
OST	Opioid Substitution Treatment
PANCR	Port Access Northern Cross Route
PS	Probation Service
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development
RDATF	Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force
SFP	Strengthening Families Programme
SOSAD	Save Our Sons And Daughters
SPS	Strategic Policy Committee
SUST	Substance Use Support for Teens
ToR	Terms of Reference
TUSLA	The Child and Family Agency
UL	University of Limerick

i. Acknowledgements

The researcher acknowledges the many individuals and organisations in Drogheda, as well as more widely in Counties Louth and Meath, too numerous to name individually, that contributed to the research and data gathering undertaken in the preparation of this report. In addition to the support of senior Department of Justice leadership, Amy Shields, Kate Oliver and Fiachra Byrne in the Department were particularly helpful and provided invaluable assistance to the project in administrative and other support, facilitating engagement with relevant Departments, agencies and other bodies, as well as in the generation and compilation of relevant background data and information.

j. Methodology

The full Terms of Reference (ToR) of the present project are at the Appendix to this report. In summary, the present scoping exercise, was to be carried out in response to issues arising from criminal activity in and around the Drogheda area, and in the context of the impact and implications of this activity, with a view to mapping a productive way forward. The exercise was to gather and assess information relating to the ongoing challenges and needs experienced at community level in Drogheda, and identify opportunities to connect, support and strengthen services, including particularly those for young people, in the area. This was to involve engagement with relevant bodies in the Drogheda area, including services, organisations, businesses and other stakeholders in the community, to explore and identify actions that can be taken to support the community, particularly under a number of headings:

- Community safety, policing, and other responses to offending behaviour, including: community impact of substance use and abuse; drug-debt intimidation; and the impact of criminal networks, particularly on young people;
- Community development needs;
- The physical/built environment, infrastructure and facilities;
- Education and employment of young people;
- Children's and young people's services; and
- Coordination of service provision.

The resulting report to the Minister for Justice, would make recommendations in relation to short-term and long-term responses to the above, and to any other significant issues and challenges faced by individuals, families, groups and communities in this area. The original target date for completion of the project was mid-November 2020, i.e., ten weeks from the start date of 2nd September. There were some subsequent delays experienced in gathering data, which ran on into December 2020. On foot of these delays, as well as other factors, an interim report was submitted to the Department of Justice on 3rd December, with the final report being submitted in January 2021.

The local engagement process of the exercise involved meetings and consultation with almost seventy individuals, representing over thirty bodies, including discrete national and local organisations working

in Drogheda; interagency groupings and networks; business, commercial and enterprise bodies and networks; Government Departments; statutory and non-statutory agencies and services; community and voluntary organisations; schools and colleges; as well as a number of local TDs and Councillors, researchers, academics and individual citizens. In addition, the researcher consulted with a number of Dublin-based community development and drugs services bodies on matters where it was believed they might assist the process. The researcher made contact with identified contact persons in the relevant bodies on the basis of an engagement process agreed with the Department of Justice. In addition to those with whom the researcher made contact, a number of individuals and organisations who became aware of the scoping exercise made contact themselves – either directly with the researcher or through third parties, including the Minister’s Office and/or through the Department of Justice. The researcher made contact with all this latter group too, to arrange consultation meetings. A very small number of all those contacted did not take up the offer of engagement with the process. The researcher does not believe that this had any adverse effect on the overall process but rather that the number and wide range of those actually consulted and who gave of their time so generously, represent a more than adequate representative sample for the purposes of the exercise. The researcher is also extremely appreciative of the positive way in which all those consulted engaged in the process, as well as for the considerable investment of time and energy made.

In the context of the limited nature of the exercise, and the time available, it was not possible to issue a general call for engagement and inputs from local stakeholders. In addition, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and restrictions on movements and contacts between persons, somewhat limited the level and nature of engagement locally. As a result, meetings with some groups and individuals consulted as part of the engagement process were held face to face, while others were held online, through virtual meeting platforms, mainly Zoom and Microsoft Teams. In all the circumstances, as well as considering the requirements and context of the task involved, it is suggested that the range and number of individuals and organisations engaged, as well as the diversity of perspectives they brought to the process, comprised an appropriately representative group of key stakeholder areas and interests.

Other appropriate research and data sources were also utilised. These included documentary sources such as various reports and information gleaned from relevant websites for example. Some of these were provided by individuals and organisations with whom the researcher interacted. Others were accessed directly by the researcher. In addition, the researcher’s own direct, personal observations while he was in and around the Drogheda area contributed to the process. Following the direct engagement and consultation phase of the process, research notes from the collection of meetings with individuals and organisations, as well as all the relevant documentation and data, were reviewed and analysed under the headings as set out mainly in Section 2 in the report. For convenience and clarity, those with whom the researcher engaged, and whose inputs are reflected in the report, are referred to as ‘respondents.’

The report is laid out in two substantive sections: the first (Section 1) includes introductory, background, methodological and summary information, as well as recommendations. Section 2 outlines and describes information on the relevant services and issues identified by the researcher under appropriate headings. Section 3 – the Appendix – contains the Terms of Reference of the scoping exercise. Through the main body of the report, the author includes appropriate direct

quotations from respondents to the scoping exercise, where these serve to summarise or illuminate views expressed. These quotations – highlighted and italicised, where they are used – are not attributed in the text of the report to the individuals who made them, nor to their organisations.

k. Limitations to the Exercise

From the outset, this project was defined as a limited scoping review and was not seen as, nor intended to be, an exhaustive nor conclusive examination or analysis, let alone resolution, of the relevant issues. The target timescale for the completion of the project was ten weeks from 2nd September 2020.⁶ It was obvious and clear from the outset that there was a limit to the extent of the engagement process that could be achieved in this limited timescale. Added to this, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, throughout the period of the scoping exercise, restricted the researcher in terms of the ability to visit and meet respondents face to face, given that the country moved through a number of levels of restrictions on movement over the lifetime of the project. That said, those who were contacted by the researcher, and who were requested to participate in discussions generally did so readily and gave generously of their time and in expressing their views on the relevant issues. Management of all and any limitations are ultimately the responsibility of the author.

l. The Geographical Area Covered in the Scoping Exercise

The scoping exercise was focused on the relevant issues impacting on the town of Drogheda. Nevertheless, it was clear from the outset that Drogheda, no more than any similar-sized municipality in Ireland, is very much connected for various reasons to its wider hinterland and a significant number of other such settlement and administrative units relatively close-by. In particular, Drogheda is both connected to and separated from a number of other townships and cities by such short distances and through connections necessitated by employment, education and commerce for example, as well as for more negative reasons including drug supply chains and similar factors related to organised crime group networks and other offending-related factors. As things stand, in terms of the ‘pure’ geography of the area alone, Drogheda town, while predominantly being situated in County Louth, has a growing part of its South side ‘suburbs’ in County Meath.

One way or another, Drogheda, as with many other towns, is not a discrete and self-contained ‘island.’ This has to be accepted as the reality, and is not in itself unusual, as is discussed in the following parts of the report. Many respondents referred to the connection to East Meath in particular as a factor in many issues considered as part of this scoping exercise. So, while Drogheda town is the central focus of the present exercise and report, it is important to also acknowledge the need to maintain a number of surrounding areas – particularly the East Meath areas of Laytown-Bettystown, as well as other parts of Louth, Meath and Dublin for example, including how they interact with matters in Drogheda – in the ‘peripheral vision’ of how we view the specific issues addressed here.

⁶ The date the researcher met with Minister McEntee and Departmental officials, to finalise the Terms of Reference and agree the plan of action and initiation of the project.

2. Services and Issues

a. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination of Services

It's surprising what is available in Drogheda; but there is no overall, interagency plan. There is vast room for improvement in how we all provide our services together.

From the researcher's engagement and interactions with stakeholders living and working in the Drogheda area, a number of issues emerged strongly and consistently as requiring action, if things were to improve. Respondents spoke passionately and with insight about a range of issues regarding existing services and how these might be improved. Nevertheless, the overarching issue identified by respondents was the imperative for improved cooperation and coordination of services and approaches to the needs and challenges identified locally. Where interagency networks or forums have been put in place, they have been seen generally as a good idea but only if positive and productive actions are the outcome. There is a view that a lot of committees start with the best intentions but can lose momentum without appropriate actions following. So, there is a need to see *action* arising from any cooperative or coordinating initiatives.

We need a structured interagency approach, evidence-based approaches and a comprehensive plan, with investment of resources that follows the cooperation.

The need for better interagency cooperation and coordination was almost universally identified and emphasised by respondents as a particular need in Drogheda. It is apparent that there have been some efforts – previous and ongoing, as well as more recent – initiatives aimed at establishing or developing better interagency cooperation and coordination. It is clear though, that knowledge or insight about the need for such cooperation is insufficient to ensure that it is put into practice. Various reasons were advanced as to why cross-agency collaboration has so far been inadequate. One respondent put the challenge simply and bluntly, asserting that everyone *knows*, is aware of the need for interagency cooperation, and even agrees that it should happen, but that they just don't do it; "they work on their own." The same respondent said that it was their experience that some agencies in particular do not take constructive criticism very well, resulting in their 'pulling back' from cooperation efforts. Others suggested that some interagency coordination efforts and initiatives have "gone around in circles," with some senior managers being mainly concerned with "ticking the boxes."

It needs to be pushed on more. We need to stop being concerned with stepping on toes, or stepping outside our remit.

There have been a number of initiatives to improve interagency cooperation at local level. These include an interagency group, comprising about thirty participants, chaired by a Tusla manager and focused in the first instance on the impact of crime and violence and related issues on children. The North Drogheda Working Group, a forum of practitioners, meets three times per annum. The last meeting – at the time of the scoping review – had been in January 2020. This group includes

representatives from statutory and voluntary bodies, including teachers, school principals, public health nurses, social workers and others.

In January 2019, Louth County Council established an Interagency Committee (referred to locally as a “taskforce”) in the wake of increase of drug-related OCG violence in Drogheda. The committee heard from community representatives who detailed the concerns of the resident population of the Moneymore area of Drogheda in particular. Since then, the Interagency Committee has sought to implement a range of measures to address concerns raised. In January 2020, the Chief Executive of Louth County Council wrote to An Taoiseach on behalf of the Interagency Committee seeking the establishment of a Ministerial Taskforce to recommend specific measures leading to the social and economic regeneration of Drogheda. This request was subsequent to statements reportedly made by An Taoiseach in mid-January 2020 concerning the possible launch of a number of task-forces similar to the initiative in the North East Inner City.

There is a number of coordinating bodies, operating in Drogheda and referred to elsewhere in this report, that do good work in their respective fields. Nevertheless, the existing structures, as well as the more recent coordination initiatives taken to address specific problems, while promising in themselves, are insufficient as things stand, to address and turn around the serious challenges facing communities in Drogheda, and to get interagency cooperation to the required and optimal level of effectiveness. Respondents consistently emphasised that it is vital to have decision makers ‘at the [interagency] table.’ Organisational structures at local level, among other issues, seem to militate to some extent against achieving effective interagency cooperation. That said, there is huge potential for and indeed onus on local structures to respond to local issues, including where improved interagency cooperation is required. Unfortunately, the structures of some large organisations do not seem to always lend themselves to cooperation at local level. This will have to be overcome, though. So, there is a need at least in the first instance to include central government departmental involvement, while maintaining local input and responsibility for delivery of any interagency plan. Also, there is a need for dedicated coordination resources, including a ring-fenced budget, parts of which could be ‘released’ for specific and approved innovative projects.

*There needs to be a meaningful, cohesive, joined-up interagency taskforce.
It needs political will – not ‘half-hearted’ – and money.*

A final point in relation to the issue of improving coordination of service delivery in the area: many respondents pointed or at least alluded to the issue of a certain longstanding North-South divide in Drogheda. A number related how residents on the North *and* South side of the river refer to their counterparts on the opposite side as occupying ‘the far side’ of the town, almost as if they were two totally distinct and separate – almost *alien* – geographical or administrative units. It could be argued that such a phenomenon is a feature of many cities, towns and villages, particularly where there is an obvious physical division, such as a river, as is the case in Drogheda. Without wanting to overstate this issue, which probably exists at an almost subconscious level to an extent, it does seem to impact on where people see themselves socialising, accessing facilities and engaging with services, for example, this being managed as far as possible without having to cross to ‘the far side,’ as each sees it. The division in question in Drogheda may also be reflected and reinforced in terms of some of the OCG-related groupings, positionings, alliances and consequent violence, which can at times reflect a North-

South divide. It is important to be clear that this was not something presented as an inter-community rivalry or conflictual issue as such. Where it arose in discussions, the point was made in an almost light-hearted or humorous way. Nevertheless, it seems to be something that will need to be kept in mind and managed in any initiatives aimed at improving awareness and inclusion, and especially in improving coordination and cooperation in Drogheda as a whole.

Drogheda is a disjointed town, it's like two towns.

In the context of the present scoping exercise, it seems clear to the researcher that there will need to be a coordination effort with regard to crime, criminal justice and drugs in the first instance. At the same time, it will be difficult if not impossible to address these issues adequately without also including measures to improve coordination in relation to local authority services, child and family services, education, youth work, art, culture and sport and various other services, in addition to wider training, employment, commercial and other responses, as outlined in the various sections in the following parts of this report.

b. Crime

The criminal gangs have been running [in Drogheda] for a long time.

This project was established in response to two main issues in the Drogheda area: crime and drugs, and the interrelationship between these two phenomena. While the criminality that gave rise to this project is specifically drug and organised crime related, it should be borne in mind that Drogheda experiences types and patterns of crime similar and comparable to any other village, town or city in the country. As well as the drug and OCG-related offending highlighted in the present report, the relevant authorities have to respond to and deal with the full gamut of 'ordinary' crime that any community experiences. In addition to all of that, An Garda Síochána (AGS) in County Louth has also had to dedicate considerable resources over several years to dealing with the investigations and other impacts locally of the murders of two AGS members – Detective Garda Adrian Donohue in 2013 and Garda Tony Golden in 2015.

Drug-related crime has existed in Drogheda, as elsewhere, for many years. As can often be the case, it appears that there was a certain level of stasis or equilibrium in the 'business' of drugs supply in the Drogheda area, up until 2006-2007. Within the space of a few months between those two years, two separate murders in Drogheda seem to have precipitated a power struggle and shift in control of the drugs trade in the town. There followed, over a number of subsequent years, a succession of relatively minor violent incidents in the area, which subsequently escalated over the past two to three years to a series of much more serious, and planned, violent incidents. These included a number of murders, at least four attempted murders, woundings, threats to kill, and upwards of twenty firing (firearms) incidents, in addition to bombing and arson attacks, as well as the full spectrum of assaults and other forms of violence.

Since the summer of 2018, two rival Drogheda-based organised crime groups have been engaged in increasingly violent attacks on each other in a dispute linked to control of the lucrative drugs trade.

This 'feud' came to national attention with the (non-fatal) shooting of a leading figure in the distribution of drugs in Drogheda in July 2018. Since November 2018, there has been an escalating pattern of reciprocal shootings, stabbings and petrol bombings between the two criminal groups, particularly impacting on the Moneymore and some other estates in Drogheda. In August 2019, an associate of one of the leading criminals was fatally shot. This was followed in November 2019 with another fatal shooting of a 39-year-old man in Co. Meath. The dispute has since widened to encompass affiliated North Dublin criminals. The abduction and murder of a seventeen-year-old from Drogheda in January 2020 underlines both the increased ferocity and recklessness of violence in this dispute. Recent events have also been characterised by escalating taunting between individuals on social media. There is no doubt that the escalations, of all kinds, have had a strong adverse impact on the sense and reality of safety in the communities affected.

Activity connected with the illegal drugs trade and in particular drugs-related intimidation are seen locally as having a serious, detrimental and widespread impact on residents' quality of life and wellbeing. An Garda Síochána launched Operation Stratus in Drogheda in July 2018 to counteract the 'feud.' This operation consists of high visibility patrols and checkpoints, days of action and covert policing initiatives, targeting specific individuals. These operations are supplemented by personnel from the regional Armed Support Unit (ASU), Drug Units and Divisional Roads Policing Units and have resulted in the seizure of considerable amounts of cash, firearms and controlled drugs. The Garda's Emergency Response Unit (ERU) and the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) have also been deployed as necessary. As of 31 December 2020, there were 152 Gardaí assigned to the Drogheda District.

Government needs to stabilise the area first [in relation to crime] and move forward from there.

Responding to crime and offenders is the responsibility of the entire criminal justice system, as well as Government and civil society more widely. A number of 'branches' of the criminal justice system, in addition to An Garda Síochána, provide direct services in or for Drogheda. These include the Court Service, the Probation Service, the two local Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDP) operating in Drogheda, the Irish Prison Service and the Oberstown Children Detention Campus.⁷ Responses to crime, other than those delivered directly by AGS are considered later below.

c. Impact of Operation Stratus

It is clear from the observations of respondents to the present exercise that, in the context of the illegal drugs trade, Drogheda (no more than anywhere else) is not an island and in relation to this issue the town must be seen in the context of its position on a North-South line of a supply chain, as well as its links to – and conflicts with – OCGs in places like Dublin and its satellite towns such as Balbriggan, as well as more widely in Counties Meath and Louth (particularly the town of Dundalk) and right up to

⁷ Although there is not a prison or children detention facility in the immediate locality, people from the area who are convicted of serious crime do spend time in Irish Prison Service custody and eventually return to the community. Similarly, children from the area who may be ordered to be held in detention as a consequence of offending, will be placed in Oberstown, and similarly return to their local community eventually.

Northern Ireland, including Belfast, for example. This is not to include related international criminal connections in these drugs and criminal activity ‘chains.’

While the decisive actions taken by An Garda Síochána to respond to the criminality described above, and their successful outcomes, are welcomed by citizens of Drogheda, a number of respondents commented on the parallel negative effect of high-profile policing, on children and young people in particular, especially where that becomes ‘normalised’ over time. This normalisation is reflected for example in the routine depiction of high-profile policing (e.g., armed patrols, checkpoints, the Garda helicopter etc) in the drawings of schoolchildren, as reported by schoolteachers, parents and others.

There were some mixed views among respondents on the issue of the increased visibility of policing in Drogheda recently. There was also virtually universal emphasis of the importance of effective community policing and community-Garda liaison. At the same time there were some differences in the views on the more ‘hard-edged’ approaches, such as the deployment of specialist Garda units including the ASU and the ERU. While most commented on the potential dangers of normalising such policing measures, others strongly welcomed them and felt for example that making the presence of the ASU a permanent feature ‘would send a positive signal’ – to the local community as well as to those intent on criminality. Others still expressed a strong belief in the overarching value of ‘normal’ community policing in the town and surrounding areas. These respondents also voiced concern that if policing moves on a long-term basis to more ‘hard-edged’ approaches, that community policing as we know it, might take a backseat and be seen to be diminished. This would be seen as a retrograde outcome. There is probably little doubt however that such high-profile policing measures, while necessary and to be welcomed in certain circumstances, will not in themselves ensure community safety and reduced offending. Outside of the special circumstances that have given rise to their deployment in Drogheda, they should not ideally be the norm here either.

Given the specific nature and level of crime in Drogheda, and drug-related offending in particular, it is recommended that a differentiated response to certain aspects and groups involved, is called for. This requires targeted law enforcement responses to the most serious and insidious offending. Nevertheless, even where the activities of OCGs must be disrupted, this does not only imply the use of criminal justice measures alone. Evidence-based research has shown that, in relation to children and young people involved in such criminal networks, intensive and focused ‘wraparound’ support and intervention programmes, aimed at vulnerable children and young people, and their families and peers, in parallel with ‘pure’ criminal justice and policing responses, can be effective in breaking the cycle of crime for these individuals. Specifically, a differentiated and multi-level response to crime and offenders is needed in Drogheda.

d. Other Responses to Crime and Offending

This is a great community, but it is being eroded.

An Garda Síochána is not the only justice agency involved in responding to offending, at all levels, and a range of statutory and non-statutory bodies contribute to these efforts, which include diversion and

management of offenders, in addition to the prevention, investigation, detection and prosecution work undertaken by AGS and others.

There are two Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDP) in Drogheda, one each based on the North side (Cable GYDP, based in Moneymore Estate) and South side (Boyne GYDP, based in St. Finian's Park) of the town. The Boyne GYDP was inaugurated twenty years ago, with the Cable project coming into existence in 2008. Clients, who are generally 12- to 17-year-olds, are referred through the Garda Diversion programme. GYDP project staff work with the young people as intensively as necessary, but at the young person's pace, to help divert them away from offending and into pro-social activities. They do deal with some people younger than 12 and older than 17. Referral sources are from AGS Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLO) in the main, with secondary referrals coming from other agencies (e.g., Tusla and schools), as well as some self-referrals. Young people in the age group and area that the two projects deal with are often typically among those targeted by OCGs for involvement in drug-related crime and related offending. Those working in both projects report increased challenges, in many respects, over the past few years, with the general deterioration in criminality and its seriousness, in the areas they serve. GYDP staff also report lack of adequate access to specialist services such as the Health Service Executive's (HSE) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)⁸ and Jigsaw⁹ mental health programmes. This can be because of long waiting lists (e.g., for CAMHS) or general service unavailability in the area (e.g., Jigsaw). Some service developments, planned by the GYDP, including more outreach and participation in Strengthening Families Programmes (SFP), have been stalled or are yet to commence because of COVID-19 restrictions. Despite the pandemic however, the projects do continue to offer services, within the COVID-19 related restrictions, to clients and their families. They work closely with partner youth work services and other programmes in the area.

From discussion with the GYDP personnel and others there is a need for more detached work with young people, and more joined-up youth work in general. Possibilities for the future include – if resources permit:

- more detached / outreach work (many young people stay in their own immediate local areas for safety reasons),
- more appropriate buildings such as a purpose-built Community Centre (North and South sides of town)¹⁰,
- a more integrated youth work model (this is difficult to achieve because work is seen to be happening anyway and there may be inertia and an attitude of 'sure you're grand'),
- dedicated transport, such as a minibus, would also be a useful resource.

⁸ More information of the HSE/CAMHS service is available at: https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/mental-health/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services/introduction-to-camhs.html?gclid=CjwKCAiAl4WABhAJEiwATUnEF1l3rMmlaY4r8_7ZmdxJKpfU7RseZgRffnN8UEQD8EBSiEW1Quw6iBoCTnwQAvD_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds.

⁹ Jigsaw Provide an early intervention mental health service for 12-25 years-olds in their communities. More information is available at: https://jigsaw.ie/?gclid=CjwKCAiAl4WABhAJEiwATUnEF5_O66wJ1W_eclutdz9IN3vfUzQ4R8iTPAyh2zoy6Fkh_BPoulcG6xoCybwQAvD_BwE.

¹⁰ Both Cable and Boyne projects operate out of re-purposed dwelling houses.

GYDP workers also identify the general need for more supportive interventions for families of the young people in question, if the cycle of negativity is to be interrupted and broken. There is also a need for a more integrated and joined-up structure for youth work generally, in Drogheda, including more supervisory grades and worker support.

The Probation Service's Louth team is based in Dundalk and has a sub-office in Drogheda, providing offender assessment and management, as well as other services in the town and wider county. The Probation team deals with offenders of all ages in the county, providing offender assessment and supervision on behalf of the Courts. Probation Officers also provide assessments for the Parole Board and supervise people from the area who are being released on parole and other types of post-custody supervision. In addition, Probation staff supervise offenders on community service orders in the area and provide specialised programmes such as restorative justice and domestic violence interventions as well as intensive, and interagency, supervision programmes for serious and prolific offenders, such as that provided through the Joint Agency Response to Crime (JARC). Through its community service programme in the area, the Probation Service has been in a position to contribute to community improvement schemes such as graffiti removal, as well as renovation of community buildings such as that used by the Red Door drug project (see below). A high percentage of Probation Service clients nationally have drug and alcohol related issues. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) also funds a Probation youth justice project – *Gaining Ground* Probation Project – based in Dundalk but providing services to young people under Probation supervision, throughout the County, including Drogheda.

It is clear from numerous respondents with whom the researcher engaged, that for young people already involved in crime or on the fringes of such activity, particularly drug-related crime, the factors at play are multi-faceted. Depending on the level and nature of their involvement in criminality and criminal networks, individual young people require a tailored response, if we are to be effective in addressing the challenges of criminality and supporting these young people to move away from offending to a better lifestyle. Mainstream services, including education, youth work and support programmes are working hard to involve and contribute to the lives of all young people and children in Drogheda. It is apparent though that where young people have already become involved in serious crime or are at risk of same, they will need a more focused response – one that recognises their vulnerability and developmental stage and status, without in any way ignoring their behaviour and their criminal associates. This includes those already in contact with the justice system, as well as those 'on the fringes.' For each, a different level of response may be required, depending on the extent to which they are involved in criminality, in combination with other relevant factors. Specifically, the relatively small number of children and young people who are involved in or being currently groomed by OCGs for serious involvement need to have a targeted and focused response and set of specialised interventions, to support them within the context of their families and communities, to move away from crime.

We now have a line of sight [on crime and offending] to make further progress.

There are more ways of reducing offending than just by 'pure' criminal justice approaches alone, or by such approaches in isolation. There is now a growing body of very positive research and practice evidence, regarding 'what works' in reducing reoffending. The development of some specific – and

'cutting edge' – programmes, aimed at vulnerable children and young people involved in crime, has been led out of initiatives taken over the past several years by the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) and the University of Limerick (UL), and supported in practice development by a range of partner agencies in Ireland. These research-led initiatives have shown themselves to be effective in identifying, targeting and working with young people involved in criminal networks, including those traditionally identified as 'hard to reach,' and effecting positive change. They are world-leading in terms of their evidence base and their proven effectiveness and if applied they can be a game-changer in Drogheda. Such specialised and targeted interventions for young people involved in offending networks have already been developed and trialled in a number of locations around the country. It is vital that priority is given to the development and implementation of a similar intensive child and family support programme in Drogheda as a matter of urgency. The evidence-informed practice and research to support the implementation of such programme in Drogheda is already available, as described above.

Such intensive programmes, operating in a focused way, targeting only the small number of those most in need and at risk, and working with the individual's wider family and peers, can be very successful. Such evidence-led programmes to help vulnerable children and young people, backed up by research evidence, and proven in the field,¹¹ have been shown to provide effective responses to such young people. The programmes in question are both rigorous and flexible, and work intensively and with strong interagency support – through provision of wraparound services – to support vulnerable young people move away from crime, at the same time as intervening at family and community levels, as well as allowing necessary disruption of criminal networks in parallel. It is essential; that this effective, cost-efficient and cutting-edge intervention and interagency approach, using a family support and community development model, is resourced and brought to bear in practice in Drogheda as a priority. The programmes developed by IYJS and UL are world-class in every sense. They have also already been stress-tested from every relevant angle and are ready for implementation.

In addition, it seems that while recorded crime in general has reduced since the arrival of Covid-19, some categories of crime, including domestic, sexual and gender-based abuse and violence incidents have increased. While to some extent, these crime categories could be described as not being explicitly within the remit of the present exercise, they cannot and should not be ignored. This is particularly so in the context where the commission of such offences can be inextricably linked to the OCG and drug-related offending which is the main focus of the present report. For example, a number of respondents to the present exercise pointed to the insidious involvement of girls and young women in various types of organised offending and how such involvement can incorporate sexual violence and/or threats. These types of crimes have been traditionally under-reported, for various reasons. Because of the criminal context within which such offences are perpetrated, which may also be serially, the women or girls are frequently even more reluctant to report the offences to anyone, for fear of reprisal. This issue will require more in-depth exploration, in the context of the wider responses recommended here, and the longer-term follow-up to the present exercise. Similarly, while domestic abuse and violence is bad enough to begin with, it can be more insidious when it is contextualised by other fear, intimidation and instrumental violence that accompanies OCG and gang-related activity. One specific suggestion in relation to responding to DV, as it impacts child members of the relevant family unit, is addressed in the Education section below.

¹¹ Including, for example, the IYJS bail supervision and supervision programme for young people, currently in operation.

There is a need for a confidential channel to the Guards.

A number of respondents raised the issue of blockages and delays in providing services to young people, which can have more of a negative impact on younger than on older people. This is because young people have more difficulty cognitively linking their actions with the consequences, where the latter is unduly delayed. Similarly, where a young person may be potentially motivated or open to change today, they may be less likely to be in a similar frame of mind tomorrow. For these reasons, it is all the more important to have necessary services of all kinds accessible within as short a lead-in time as possible. For example, some respondents cited the delays in dealing with criminal cases involving young people being brought before the Court. It was also described that there can sometimes be a kind of 'no man's land' (of delay) between someone being in a youth diversion programme and ending up on probation (potentially having deteriorated considerably, in terms of offending in the meantime) for example. At the same time, several referred to the positive aspects of engaging young people at the diversion and probation level, in terms of frequently improved access to other support services, which can be helpful.

Some concerns that emerged in the context of discussing crime-related issues with those involved in dealing with offending and offenders, including members of An Garda Síochána and other criminal justice services, reflected the absence of round-the-clock multi-disciplinary services. As a result, AGS members are frequently called upon to deal with individuals (adults and children) who may be experiencing psychological or socially related episodes or traumas, or who may be suicidal for example. Especially where such incidents or episodes take place outside 'business hours,' including at weekends, this can result in a less than optimal service to those involved. This type of situation is also something for which individual Garda members feel ill-equipped to deal with adequately and for which a more multi-disciplinary response is required.

One respondent made a practical suggestion of implementing a 'See It, Say It'¹² initiative, facilitated through the proposed launch of the use of an existing smartphone application, as has been used for reporting crime and illegal dumping for example, in other towns in the country, as well as in some other jurisdictions. The idea is that such an initiative would enable citizens to feel they were more connected to An Garda Síochána and antisocial behaviour would be reported more quickly and easily, as well as being recorded and responded to more transparently.

In conclusion, it is vital that whatever responses may eventually be implemented in respect of the issues identified in Drogheda, that they are aligned and synchronised with criminal justice and youth justice strategies, as well as with other relevant strategic plans.

¹² An example of the use of such a smartphone application, for environmental protection purposes, is available here: <http://www.epa.ie/htmldocs/seesomething/seesomethingsaysomething.htm>.

e. Joint Policing Committee

According to information made available by Louth County Council (LCC),¹³ the Council have established a Joint Policing Committee (JPC) structure that reflects comparable structures in County Louth. Its functions are provided for in the Garda Síochána Act, 2005 and the associated revised Strategy Guidelines that were published in 2014. A *Community Safety Strategy*, which is the Joint Policing Strategy, has been adopted by the JPC structure, as the Strategy to underpin the work of the Committee. The committee's Community Safety Strategy (2016-2022) is available on the Louth County Council website.¹⁴

Louth Co. Council. is divided into the three municipal districts of Dundalk, Drogheda and Ardee. Louth's Joint Policing Structure reflects this administrative division of the local authority and it has established Dundalk, Drogheda and Ardee local policing *fora* that are sometimes styled as Joint Policing Committees in their right. Regardless, these *fora* are clearly considered as essential components of Louth's JPC structure. A Joint Policing Steering Group has also been established. Its members are: Chief Executive Louth County Council, Chief Superintendent Louth Garda Division, Chairperson Louth County Council, Chairperson Drogheda Local Policing Forum, Chairperson Dundalk Policing Forum and the Chairperson of the Ardee Local Policing Forum.

A number of respondents to the present exercise view the JPC as useful but 'very formal,' with the bulk of business being taken up by reports from AGS and little opportunity to actively move issues on, or resolve anything substantive.

f. Drogheda Local Policing Forum

The Drogheda Local Policing Forum represents both the interests of the (now defunct) Borough District of Drogheda and the Drogheda Garda District. The most recent publicly available minutes for the forum date from January 2018. Its membership includes public representatives (Oireachtas Members and County Councillors), Louth County Council, An Garda Síochána, business, farming and community & voluntary representatives.

g. Drugs

Much of the crime giving rise to the present study emanates from the illegal drugs trade and is specifically linked to the struggle to control that trade and maximise profit from it. Respondents spoke of the drugs problem, as in other parts of the country, as being multi-faceted. As well as opiates (including heroin), marijuana, benzodiazepines and other substances being misused, respondents

¹³ Source: Louth County Council website:

https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/louth_county_council/committees_of_council/joint_policing_committees/.

¹⁴ Louth JPC Community Safety Strategy:

https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/louth_county_council/committees_of_council/joint_policing_committees/community%20safety%20strategy.pdf.

reported a significant cocaine problem in the area. Some respondents spoke of the changing nature of the types of substances involved, more recently featuring cocaine, various types of ‘tablets,’ as well as crack cocaine for example. While some drug use traditionally impacts on poorer sections of the community, cocaine use is acknowledged to be more widespread and a much wider societal issue, currently impacting all groups, strata and social classes.

Government policy on drugs and alcohol is contained in the strategic plan: *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery – a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017 – 2025*.¹⁵ The plan sets out an integrated public health approach to drug and alcohol use, focused on promoting healthier lifestyles within society. The four-tier model of care in relation to drug and alcohol use, is described in the national strategic plan as set out in the following chart.

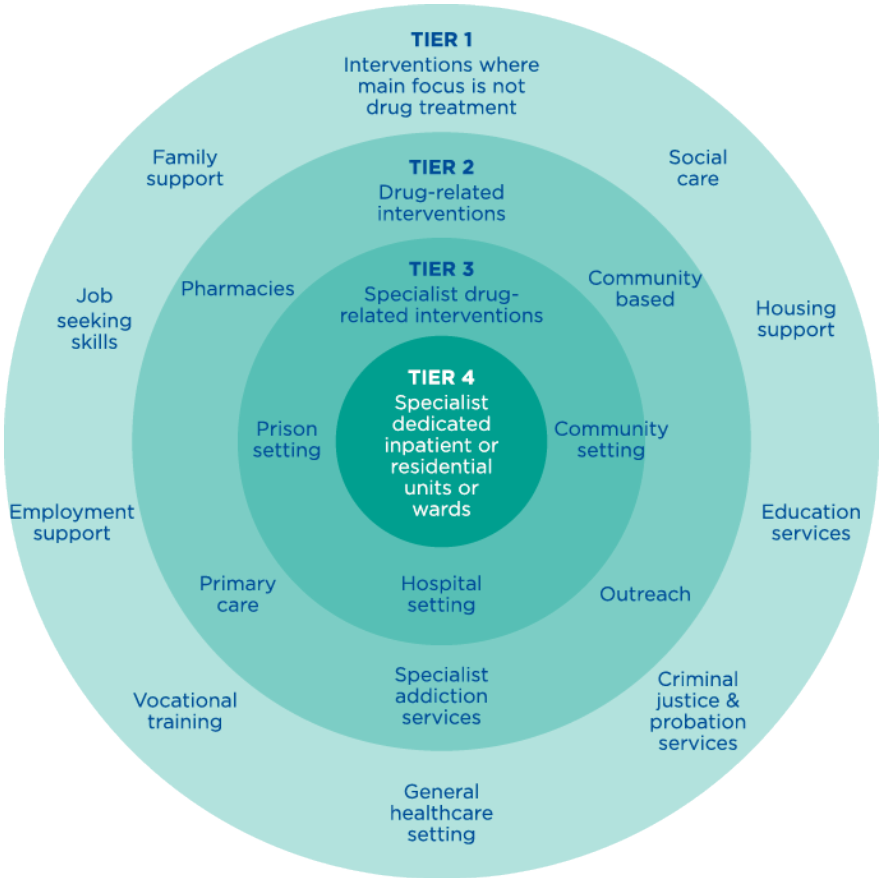


Figure 1: The Four-Tier Model of Care (Drug and Alcohol Use).

For the purpose of the present scoping exercise, the researcher met with representatives of the Health Service Executive, the Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force (RDATF) and community addiction services, as well as services offering family addictions support, and others whose work is impacted by issues of substance use. In addition, virtually all respondents expressed views in relation to drugs and alcohol, and their relationship with crime and criminality in the area, based on their own personal views and professional experience of working in Drogheda and elsewhere. It should also be pointed

¹⁵ Strategy available at: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/14571/c22d1dd1756440f8946717a80ad2ffc3.pdf#page=1> .

out that while alcohol is now included for consideration in relation to harm caused by the use of psychoactive substances, the present scoping exercise did not include consideration of alcohol to any great extent, focusing instead on the use by individuals of illicit substances. This is not to negate or ignore the clear harm caused to individuals, families and communities by consumption of alcohol in many cases.

Regarding drug issues generally, and appropriate responses, service integration and coordination has long been widely recognised as critical to success. In Drogheda and the surrounding area, there are a number of bodies and strategic instruments that seek to coordinate responses to drug and alcohol use. These include the North Eastern Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force (NE-RDATF),¹⁶ Louth Drug and Alcohol Forum¹⁷ and the Louth Community Development Committee's drug and alcohol actions, the latter two responses falling under Louth County Council's overarching remit as a part of the County Louth Local Economic Community Plan 2016 – 2022.¹⁸

The HSE describe the addiction services provided in Louth and Meath area as including the following:

- one HSE opioid substitution treatment (OST) medical practitioner, who holds clinics in Drogheda and Dundalk,
- one Clinical Nurse Manager Grade 2,
- one Registered General Nurse,
- one senior counsellor,
- two addiction workers (working in the Substance Use Support for Teens [SUST] programme) for under eighteens,
- one administration worker,
- one General Assistant, as well as a provision for
- two outreach workers.

A number of the addiction services for adults, which operate under the HSE's Social Inclusion structure, report having waiting lists. The HSE's SUST team operates under the HSE's Primary Care structure and comprises two workers, based in Drogheda and providing counselling and other services to under-eighteens in Louth and Meath, with Drogheda plus Laytown-Bettystown providing the majority of referrals to this service. SUST sees itself very much as a *health* service and reports receiving few criminal justice (Garda, GYDP, Probation, Court) referrals, nor school referrals. Most SUST referrals are from parents and families, child protection and mental health services and some self-referrals. SUST does not have a waiting list.

In addition, a needle exchange programme (also referred to as a Needle and Syringe Programme [NSP]) is provided. There are also a number of community-based services in the area funded by the HSE. These include Turas in Dundalk and the Red Door project in Drogheda. The HSE also provides a small

¹⁶ See <https://nedrugtaskforce.ie> or <http://www.services.drugs.ie/directory/view/north-eastern-regional-drugs-and-alcohol-task-force> for information.

¹⁷ The *Louth Drug and Alcohol Forum Strategy 2019 – 2025* document was made available to the researcher.

¹⁸ *County Louth Local Economic and Community Plan 2016 – 2022* is available at: <https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/services/economic-development/plans-strategies/local-economic-community-plan-lecp-/local-economic-community-plan-final.pdf> .

amount of funding to the Family Addiction Support Network. Alcohol counselling is provided within the local mental health/psychiatric services. It is acknowledged that the addiction services directly provided by the HSE have been under pressure, for various reasons, including increasing demand, vacant posts and absences of some staff, including on sick leave. There has been an ongoing absence of outreach workers, which is highlighted by many respondents as a major deficit, particularly during the pandemic, when access to treatment and other static facilities has been restricted. Other harm reduction initiatives including the NSP in Drogheda have gone through challenging times over the last six to seven years at least. The NSP has been provided by a number of bodies, including two Dublin-based community organisations during that time. Although there is some level of NSP available – through pharmacies – in Drogheda currently, it would appear to the researcher that the NSP provision issue is not in a fully resolved situation right now. Apart from the specific harm reduction service provided by NSPs themselves, such programmes also provide a valuable pathway into drug treatment and counselling and other worthwhile programmes for people using drugs. The absence or inadequacy of such provision in Drogheda is consequently a significant gap.

Apparently the HSE has plans to provide needle exchange directly and that this programme would incorporate an “assertive outreach” component. While needle exchange is provided through pharmacies, and is to be welcomed in that regard insofar as it goes, it is seen by many respondents as not providing an adequate level of service to people who use drugs intravenously. For example, the point was made that pharmacies will not provide needles and syringes for those who inject into their femoral ‘groin’ area. This can lead to very serious health consequences for those involved. The point was made by some respondents that take-up of needle exchange services in Drogheda as assessed over a number of years has been relatively low, and therefore its provision characterised as ‘uneconomical.’ Nevertheless, the researcher is convinced that there is a demand and need for such service in Drogheda, which must be addressed on the basis of ensuring maximum access to and take-up of this health promotion and harm reduction service. NSP is such an important harm reduction and health-related response, with significant negative consequences if not available and accessible, that a way must be found to deliver this service locally that makes it available to those in need, and particularly to the most vulnerable and at-risk. Various NSP approaches have already been trialled and evaluated. Implementation of a maximalist rather than minimalist service should now be addressed. Some respondents also referred to Drogheda having a relatively high level of drug-related deaths. This was not clarified by the researcher. Particularly if it is true, but in any event, all appropriate harm-reduction and life-saving measures, including availability of opioid substitution, adequate NSP and the widespread availability of Naloxone (medication to reverse the effects of opioids such as heroin in the event of overdose) should also be ensured, to reduce the incidence of drug-related deaths.

From the early 1990s, through to the present, has seen a strengthening of drugs networks and gangs [in Drogheda].

Some aspects of how drugs issues are addressed in Drogheda were reported and presented to the researcher as being well organised and delivered. Specifically, the addiction service to under eighteen-year-olds – SUST – presents as well run and effective and was highly regarded by respondents to the scoping exercise. Similarly, The Red Door project, in Drogheda Town Centre, was universally lauded, by research respondents, for the invaluable work it does in the area, despite having a very small annual

budget of €149,000 of State funding. One respondent described the Red Door as ‘soaking up all the [drug-related] referrals in the town.’

Red Door¹⁹ is a community-based project, founded in 2009, and funded mainly by the HSE and NE-RDATF, as well as through other grants and fundraising. Based on a harm-reduction approach, the project provides confidential assistance and services in response to individuals, families and the community that are affected by drug and alcohol use. Located since 2015 at St. Mary’s Convent School on the Dublin Road in Drogheda, that premises has been undergoing a process of renovation and renewal, with the assistance of the Probation Service from the outset. The project’s objectives include providing support to individuals who are struggling with addiction issues, as well as providing assessments, psychosocial educational group work, one to one key working and counselling support, drop-in service and family support for the over-eighteens age group. Red Door also provides information on drug and alcohol use and related issues to the wider community. A rehabilitation Community Employment programme has been established in the project since 2013. Red Door is seen to offer services to the most vulnerable in the area. Because of high demand for its services, waiting times due to a mismatch between resourcing and demand, and a lack of outreach services,²⁰ Red Door has described frustrating delays in accessing and serving the most vulnerable in a timely way and when the opportunity for appropriate and effective intervention may be ‘fresh.’ The size and location of the Red Door’s current premises would potentially lend itself to the development of a one-stop-shop or treatment hub, including the provision of the needle exchange service, in Drogheda and would be worth exploring.

The lack of drugs outreach workers was highlighted by a number of respondents. Estimates of how many outreach workers – who are even more important/relevant in the pandemic, when people cannot attend office or clinic-based services so readily – vary from a minimum of two up to five, to be effective. The value of outreach drugs workers ties in with the important issues of providing options and progression routes linked to when and where people are at and when they are ready for change. According to the HSE, there are plans to augment or introduce such workers. But there is a clear need for such service provision as a matter of urgency. Various respondents emphasised the need to have access to drug treatment and related services as quickly as possible, to be effective.

You have to have something positive to offer. You need progression routes [for clients].

Another issue raised by a number of respondents working in different agencies is that of dual diagnosis – that is, co-occurring substance misuse and psychiatric issues. While some commentators suggest that it is not correct to describe *dual diagnosis* as a phenomenon or an issue *per se*, the reluctance or failure of either addiction or psychiatric services to accept clients presenting with such comorbidity, on the basis that the other service should take primary responsibility for case management, is not sustainable. It is in fact unjustifiable, on any basis. The appropriate response in the eyes of some respondents is for both addiction and psychiatric services to take respective responsibility and to work together for the good of the client. The bottom line would appear to be agreement on a shared and

¹⁹ Information on the Red Door project is available at their website: <http://www.thereddoorproject.ie/history/>

²⁰ While not being resourced for outreach workers *per se*, Red Door report that they have ‘pivoted’ services flexibly, because of pandemic restrictions, to effectively provide outreach during the pandemic, so as to reduce the numbers of persons in their Dublin Road facility at any one time.

effective approach to those service users presenting with dual diagnosis. A number of respondents pointed out that in relation to dual diagnosis, government policy on the matter is clear and that those presenting with dual diagnosis are in the first instance the responsibility of mental health services. Having said that, one practical measure that might help the situation would be to have more mental health professionals based in drug services.

A review of addiction services in the Dundalk area was carried out on behalf of the HSE, with the resulting report being completed almost six years ago.²¹ The report was commissioned in response to concerns raised in the Louth-Meath area regarding clinical and non-clinical governance and other issues related to addiction services. Although, as the title of that report states, the study was undertaken in relation to the Dundalk addiction services, the authors also clarify at various points that the findings, while focused on Dundalk, are applicable to the wider Louth-Meath area, including Drogheda. The report makes findings regarding shortfalls in services and their organisation and makes a range of recommendations for improvements. It would seem prudent to the present researcher that this report might usefully be revisited, with a view to establishing how many of its recommendations that impact the Drogheda area, are still applicable and potentially outstanding. That would be a good place to start in terms of ensuring good service delivery in this area.

There was an overall level of dissatisfaction evident among respondents with the level and accessibility of drug treatment services in Drogheda. Some respondents hold the view that there appears to be at least reasonable coverage of the medical service requirements in this area. They felt though, that the wider outreach, social care and harm reduction aspects of responding to people who use drugs at all levels, including those with dual diagnosis, leaves a lot to be desired in addressing the various tiers of services that should be in place. Similarly, this researcher is persuaded that community-based addiction services funded by the HSE are not adequately resourced in Drogheda. This should be specifically addressed in the Drogheda area by the provision of increased funding to the Red Door project which currently receives €149,000 State funding *per annum*. This annual provision should be doubled to enable provision of adequate services.

Drug services overall did not impress as sufficiently integrated or coordinated, much less ‘wraparound,’ linking with mental health and criminal justice services for example, as seems to be the goal of many. Neither did there appear to be optimism among services impacted by drug issues in Drogheda that drug-related services and related responses show any signs of dramatic improvement in the near future. In this regard it would seem critical to take whatever steps can be made in the short term to improve the level of drug services and access to them as a matter of urgency, so that appropriate responses are provided across the four tiers identified in the national strategy (see Figure 1 above). In the first instance, a two-pronged approach i.e.:

- (a) bolster existing services, especially where there are identifiable gaps, while at the same time,
- (b) carry out a short, specialised review or audit of drug and alcohol services in the area, linked back to the 2015 review referred to above and benchmarked against current standards, should be undertaken, with a view to work on from there.

²¹ The report – *Service Review of the Dundalk Addiction Services* (2015) by Dr. C. Cassidy, Dr. M. Bourke and Dr. A. Coyle, on behalf of the HSE, was accessed by the researcher.

A key element of the illegal drug trade and the wider offending and particularly violence associated with it, is the Drug-Related Intimidation (DRI) it involves.

h. Community Intimidation and Its Impact

There is huge distress [in Drogheda] over drug-related threats and intimidation; and some people involved you would never have expected.

A large part of the crime-related trauma experienced at individual, family and community level in Drogheda arises from drug-related intimidation (DRI). This intimidation can be targeted at young and old alike. Indeed, the researcher heard numerous anecdotes of young people who got involved – ‘willingly’ or unwittingly, through pressure, ‘grooming’ by established offenders, or otherwise – in assisting drug dealers and who subsequently ended up on the wrong side of the dealer. This can be for real or perceived drug ‘debts’ as well as for other reasons. Typically, it results in retaliatory action being taken against the young person and their family. One of the features of this DRI activity in Drogheda is the common use of arson and bombing property as the violence of choice in such incidences. Other forms of violence, damage to property (e.g., breaking house windows), or threats, are also used, often with horrible consequences. A number of respondents recounted real-life examples of the impact of DRI on individual families and particularly on children and young people. Some parents of at-risk children have resorted to sending their children to live with relatives in other parts of the country, or even outside the jurisdiction, for periods of time, to avoid their exposure to such intimidation and violence. In other cases, families have uprooted and left their homes.

There are many recorded incidents of actual or attempted use of improvised explosive devices (IED) such as petrol bombs or pipe bombs being used, particularly in certain housing estates, as part of the so-called feuding. In some instances, houses have been burned out or severely damaged, as well as victims being injured, in such attacks. Because they generally take place in relatively built-up areas, neighbours of the intended target/s can be and often are directly affected by such attacks. The Defence Forces Bomb Disposal Team has been called in to assist in dealing with IEDs in Drogheda on a number of occasions. In other incidents of DRI, physical violence, including what might only be described as physical torture, as well as threats, are used.

People are afraid to look out their windows. People are afraid to be seen talking.

An Garda Síochána is aware of the impact of this insidious phenomenon, where it occurs, across the country and has designated a Garda Inspector in each Garda Division to respond to the issue of DRI locally.

*There’s often huge stigma.
Family members [of drug users] can feel guilty by association.*

Many respondents cited the impact of drug-related intimidation on those using drugs and their families in the context of it giving rise to a critical area of service delivery, albeit one that can be ‘under the

radar’ for various reasons. This relates to supporting the families involved to address the problems they face arising from being on the receiving end of DRI. ‘Official’ responses or measures in place, include a local authority anti-social behaviour officer, as well as the Garda Inspector nominated to respond to DRI. In addition, there is at least one specific community-based body that works to support and help the families impacted. The Family Addiction Support Network (FASN)²² is a peer-led, community and voluntary organisation, which is part of a national network of such support groups. FASN was established in the North-East in 1998 and sets out to assist families in the region to achieve a greater understanding of addiction, empower them to improve their quality of life and fulfil a positive role in the recovery of their loved one should they choose to take it. FASN provides a telephone information, support and helpline and five peer-facilitated family support groups in Navan, Drogheda, Cavan, Dundalk and Castleblayney, County Monaghan, each week. The family support groups are led by peers who are trained in facilitation and work to best practice guidelines and standards.

The researcher was provided with a copy of the report of research on a study of how families in the North-East Region are affected by substance abuse.²³ FASN uses the Five Step method of brief intervention,²⁴ along with peer support, one-to-one, family, education and groupwork approaches and other responses, to support and help family members of those impacted by drug or alcohol use. FASN works through the voluntary efforts of its facilitators and receives a small funding grant from the HSE.

Families are not victims. They are a resource.

Other specific responses to drug-related intimidation have included a half-day workshop hosted by the Children and Young People’s Services Committee (CYPSC) in the Red Door project premises in 2019 for organisations, workers and service managers, including the Probation Service and community projects. This was found to be very useful by those involved and could usefully be replicated at this stage.

i. The Intersection of Drugs & Crime: The Drug Court

There has been a longstanding tension, in policy and practice terms, between the health and criminal justice approaches to responding to illicit drug use. There is also a current debate, in the context of seeking to adopt a more health-focused response to substance use, in relation to the criminalisation or decriminalisation of people who use illegal drugs. Leaving that debate aside for now, there are always people who commit criminal offenses connected with or for the purposes of maintaining their drug habits and the need to fund them for example. In that regard, there will most likely always be people who appear before the criminal Courts for offending linked in some way to their drug use. Nevertheless, there have long been concerted movements both in Ireland and elsewhere to seek to address the underlying issues of people appearing before the Courts with drug problems. Such other options have been acknowledged for example in the Misuse of Drugs legislation here. They have also been acknowledged in various efforts to divert drug using offenders from the criminal justice system

²² Information on FASN in the North-East region is available at: <https://fasn.ie/>.

²³ Information on this research report is available here: <https://fasn.ie/2019/09/15/fasn-press-release-report-launch-how-families-are-affected-by-substance-misuse/>.

²⁴ Information on the Five Step Method for family intervention is available at: http://www.drugs.ie/features/feature/family_intervention_the_5_step_method.

and into appropriate treatment, where that may assist in progressing health-related responses to their drug use. One such initiative, where people do end up in the criminal justice system, for whatever reason, is the Drug Court.

Drug Courts began as a movement and criminal justice option in the United States about thirty years ago and have spread to many jurisdictions since, with varying degrees of success. The only 'official' Drug Treatment Court in Ireland has operated in Dublin for the past two decades. A District Court Judge who had presided over the Dublin Drug Court, initiated a similar venture in County Louth in 2018, following assignment to that Court District. This followed a phase of local consultations, initiated by the same Judge, in 2017. All relevant agencies, except the HSE apparently, became involved, with a positive response. The focus of the Court was to be on rehabilitation rather than punishment. There was apparently no funding available for drug screening, which is a part of Drug Court processes. Louth County Council gave some money for this in the end. The Court process was set up for adults, with an interagency protocol. It would deal with twenty people at any one time. Having started to operate in practice in May 2018, the Louth Drug Court is still operating. The Drug Court is held within the civil court day at Dundalk District Court, one day per month.

An interagency steering group was established, chaired by the local Senior Probation Officer. This group meets every quarter to oversee the implementation of the relevant policies and procedures. It includes management representatives from the Courts Service, the NE-RDATF, AGS, the local authority and the community addiction services, as well as Probation. An interagency operational team takes responsibility for the client case management processes, for assessing client progress and reporting back to Court. This team meets on a monthly basis and is attended by Probation Officers, key support workers in the addiction services, addiction managers, and is also chaired by the Senior Probation Officer. Probation Officers refer Drug Court clients to the HSE for OST/methadone. Some Court 'poor box' money has been given to Red Door and Turas – the two community and voluntary bodies participating in the Drug Court programme – in respect of services provided to those on the Court programme. All Louth District Court hearings have been held in Dundalk during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Potential Drug Court clients are identified by the Court and referred to the probation service for assessment. A pre-sentence report is prepared by a Probation Officer and presented to the Court. If deemed unsuitable, the case remains in the 'regular' Criminal Court and proceeds in the normal fashion. If deemed suitable, the client enters the agreed process and appears before Drug Court sittings after that. The client is referred by the Probation Service for appropriate addiction supports including drug screening with monthly reports being provided to the Drug Court. The focus is on the process of recovery, adopting a motivational approach, emphasising harm reduction and supporting progress towards a goal of abstinence or at least stability on a methadone programme for example. Support and other interventions are tailored to the specific needs of the individual client. An initial process review was completed in late 2019, the year after the Drug Court commenced. The resulting evaluation report²⁵ on the Drug Court pilot in County Louth was compiled by the local Senior Probation Officer for the Court Service and the Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force in October 2019. By that point, fifty persons had been referred to the Drug Court, with ten of these being deemed unsuitable

²⁵ The Drug Court review and evaluation, as well as the interagency operational protocol document, were both made available to the researcher.

due to failure to meet the entry criteria. Seven had successfully graduated from the Drug Court and had their charges struck out. Three had been removed from the process and returned to the main (Criminal) District Court due to non-compliance.

One of the acknowledged benefits of the Drug Court approach was that clients could be linked in with support services that they may not have previously accessed or been aware of, facilitating a practical progression route into treatment and away from offending. In general, very little funding was required or indeed available for the Drug Court pilot. Funding for drug screening was initially secured from the NE-RDATF, who provided some funding for screening kits, which were administered by the community addiction services. If the initiative is to continue, a longer-term source of funding for items such as this would need to be identified. Similarly, a small amount of staffing resource is required, specifically for the Probation Service in the area, as well as ensuring access to drug treatment services (see above, in relation to the Red Door project, in particular), would need to be explored.

The real key here and positive measure involved is the use of the criminal justice system and the prosecution and Courts process to facilitate speedier access to drug treatment and related services.

j. The Proceeds of Crime and Resourcing Local Services

There should be a direct link between [proceeds of crime] seizures and services locally, especially for communities that have lost most.

An issue that was raised by a number of respondents was in relation to what happens to money and other resources, which are the ill-gotten gains of drug-related organised crime, seized by the authorities. This has previously been the subject of Dáil Questions and other queries, suggestions and proposals by public representatives and others. While it is understood that the legal and policy position is that resources seized by AGS and other authorities must be and are lodged to the exchequer under the relevant legislative provisions, it is a source of great frustration to people locally who see the current process as a lost opportunity to demonstrate in a very public way that crime will not pay. By way of comparison, the argument here is similar to that sometimes advanced in relation to motor and fuel tax for example, where motorists sometimes wish to see a connection between what they pay in such taxes and the subsequent investment in roads.

Otherwise, there is a perception, justified or otherwise, that the money and other resources seized just disappear into a general exchequer 'pot' and do not benefit the local community that has been harmed by the drug-related crime and other activities in the first instance. While it is understood that as things stand what is suggested may not be legally or otherwise possible. Equally, it is understood that the same exchequer provides the funds for whatever services *are* provided across the country and that our current system ensures an accountable, transparent, equitable and lawful means of disbursing public funds, benefitting communities where there are few such criminal asset seizures as much as communities where there are more seizures. Nevertheless, if some move could be made in this direction, perhaps by the institution of what one respondent described as a type of justice trust fund or subhead that might be established, and whereby there was some element of payback to communities that have been hurt or damaged, it would probably go some considerable way to

demonstrating to those who are law-abiding in such local communities that crime indeed does not pay and that in fact money generated illegally in a community is used to address the problems that the activity behind that criminality has caused in that community.

The proceeds from drugs crime that are seized in the area should be ring-fenced for use in the area – for youth projects, addiction, mental health and other services.

k. Local Authority and Administration

The urban settlement of Drogheda straddles the boundaries of Counties Louth and Meath. This is not an unusual issue for large and particularly expanding urban developments, although the expansion of urban settlements beyond their former administrative boundaries can result in significant challenges for local administration. The core Drogheda settlement is largely located within the Drogheda Urban Local Electoral Area (LEA) (see Figure 2 below). Some of Drogheda’s northern suburbs fall within the Drogheda Rural LEA. Drogheda Rural and Drogheda Urban LEAs form the Drogheda Municipal Borough District of Louth County Council. Of the 29 members of Louth County Council, 6 are elected from the Drogheda Urban LEA and 4 from the Drogheda Rural LEA. Some of Drogheda’s suburbs to the south fall within Co. Meath (see Figure 3 on the following page).

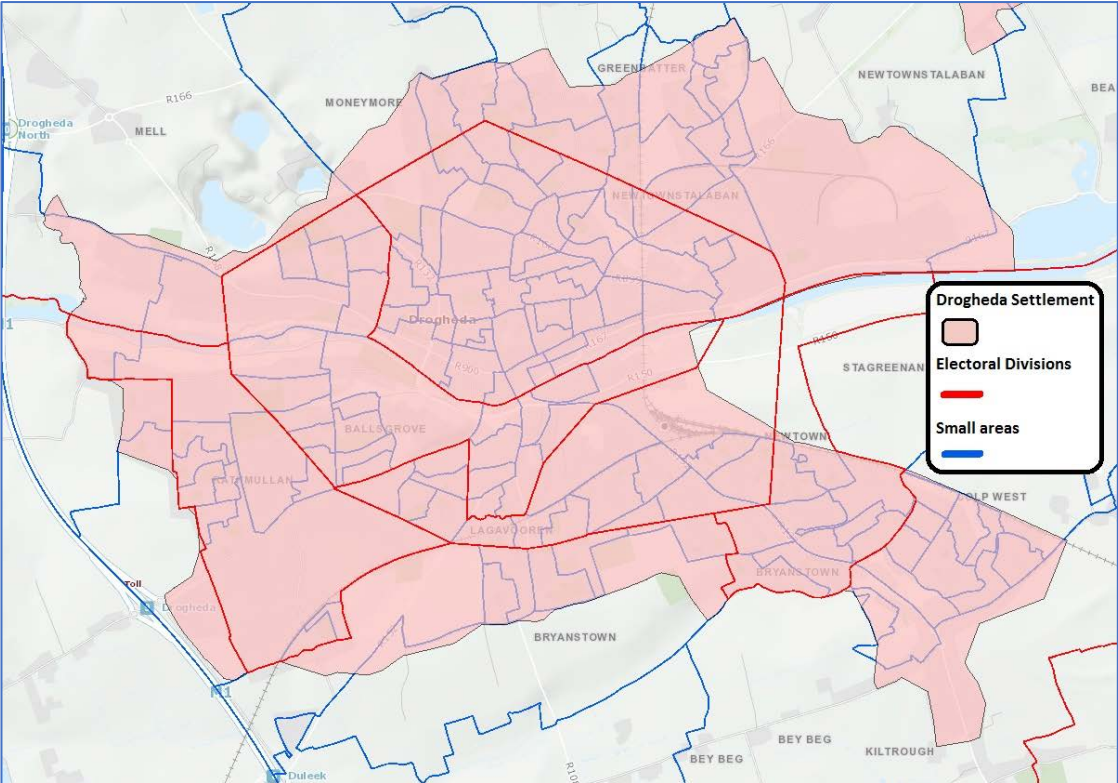


Figure 2: Drogheda Urban Settlement as defined by the CSO

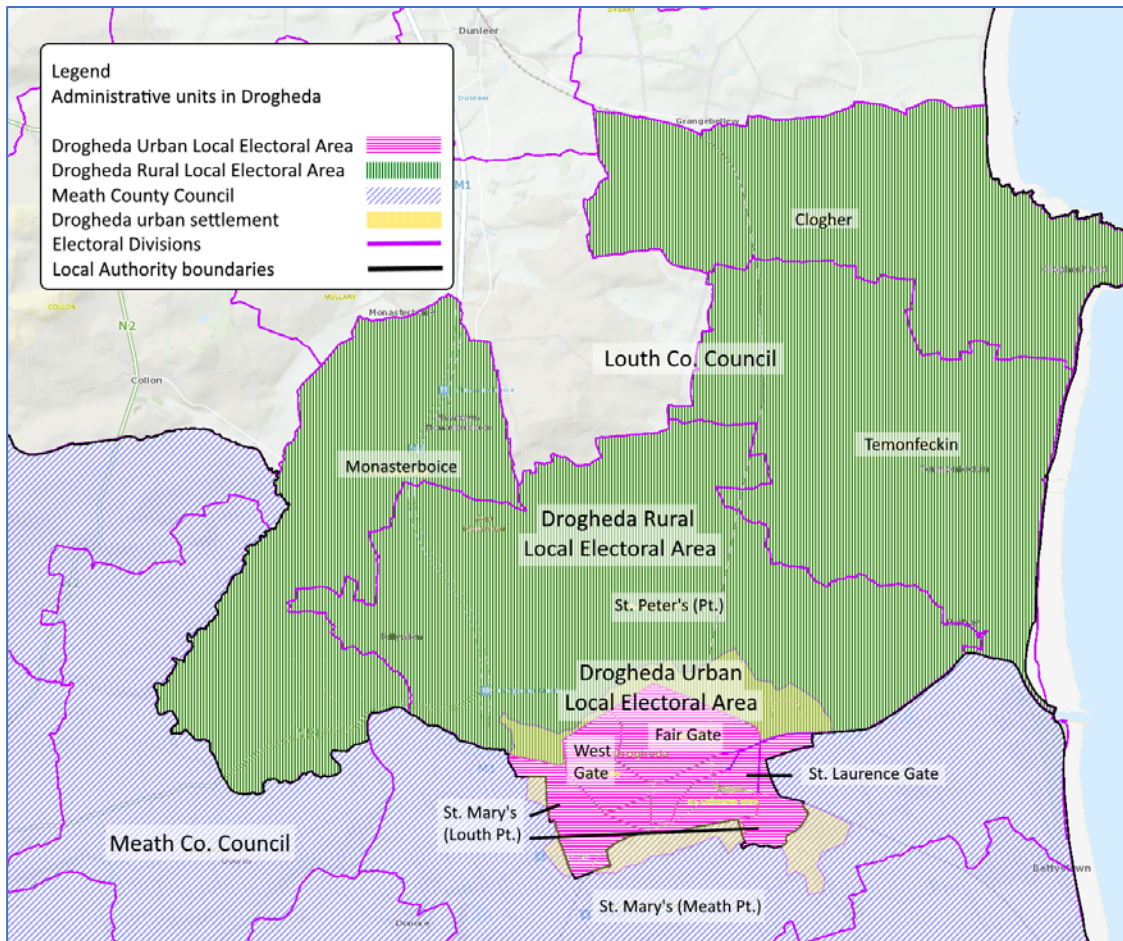


Figure 3: Drogheda administrative units

I. Local Authority, Service Delivery & Structures

The Drogheda flag doesn't fly here [in Drogheda] as it should.

Local Authorities provide a comprehensive and complex array of services at local level across the country. The Local Authority in question here (i.e., Louth County Council [LCC]) is a key player in the organisation, coordination and delivery of services in the Drogheda area. The 'reach' of the local authority, in terms of the range of services delivered, and activities coordinated, is hugely significant. Since 2014, Dundalk has been the County Town for Louth. Because of the layout of Drogheda town, and the fact that the southern parts of the town are in County Meath, this leads to added challenges in the organisation of services in the area. This is complicated further because of the connections that Drogheda has, for various reasons, with urban settlements in other towns and counties, especially including East Meath. Approximately 1,500 houses in South Drogheda are in the Meath administrative area. Dundalk and Drogheda have two of the longest waiting lists for social housing in the country and Drogheda is a recognised (accommodation) rental pressure zone. Local authority officials are conscious of the need to deliver major housing development in Drogheda, as well as the range of other services for which the authority is responsible.

The reorganisation of local government [in 2014] has distanced Louth County Council from the issues in Drogheda.

One of the issues in relation to local coordination of services, from a local authority perspective, is a view that there is what one respondent described as “pure local authority business,” in addition to other issues of local importance and impacting the local authority, but which are provided in part or in full by other Government Departments and agencies. The former would be seen to include the panoply of responsibilities and services delivered directly or commissioned on behalf of the local authority, and include for example local planning, housing, roads, parks, water supply and so on. Local authorities also have other statutorily mandated responsibilities in relation to the coordination of the strategic approach and planning for service delivery more widely, including in respect of economic development and community safety. In terms of the ‘pure local authority business’ alone in the Drogheda area, there are a number of significant workstreams and projects in the planning, development and housing areas alone.

In terms of wider responsibility for coordinated approaches to strategic service delivery at local (be it county or town) level, an obvious question relates to whether this should be taken on at central Government Department level or more locally, and specifically under the local authority structure. There is an argument in having this done under the auspices of the local authority. Two significant influencing factors at play in Drogheda are:

- (a) the severity of the recent and ongoing drug and crime-related challenges, and
- (b) the existing challenges of service coordination, particularly in the context of the county boundary issue in and around Drogheda.

A significant number of respondents to the scoping exercise, representing different organisations and interests, reflected the view that for any interagency coordination group to be effective means having the appropriate decision makers at the table. Where the local challenges are particularly severe and acute, and involve quite literally matters of life and death, as has been the case in Drogheda, the understandable tendency can be for coordination functions to be taken on centrally. This has been the case in Dublin’s North-East Inner City (NEIC), for example, as highlighted in a recent newspaper opinion article²⁶ by the *Irish Times* Political Editor (Leahy, 2020). In the piece, Leahy lauds the NEIC project as “...an example of how the State can make a real difference in people’s lives and also how the State can learn from its failures in tackling social disadvantage and deprivation,” specifically through the “political and administrative backing” and the strong leadership of the NEIC Implementation Board’s independent chairperson, which is “...driven by engagement with the community and by immersion in their lives, needs and concerns.” Leahy concludes that, while there is not a Minister for Finance in every constituency, nor a Departmental Secretary General, nor a strong business leader to act as project chairperson available everywhere, “...the model might be replicable, even on a limited basis” and, using the NEIC “template,” that “a similar infrastructure could be set up for, say three or four more of the country’s most underprivileged areas.”

²⁶ Leahy, P. (2020) ‘Dublin inner city project punches well above its weight,’ *Irish Times*, 26 December 2020, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/dublin-inner-city-project-punches-well-above-its-weight-1.4444954> .

It is the researcher's view that it is difficult to argue with this conclusion, particularly given the acknowledged success of the NEIC project to date. It was coming from just such a perspective that the researcher included a proposal for a similar coordinating structure and approach in the interim report on the scoping project at the beginning of December 2020. In a recent paper by Forde (2020)²⁷ on centralisation and participatory governance structures at local level, that author has discussed the implications of different forms of governance, local and centralised, in Ireland. At the same time, considering the wider strategic, national view, it would seem to make sense, at least in the short term to adopt the type of approach used by the NEIC, but with a view to ensuring the embedding of appropriate local governance and coordination systems in the area. Centralising governance does not in itself guarantee success in this type of project. Bradley (2020)²⁸ has also identified a "...need to apply 'whole of sector' or cross-sector partnership approaches to deliver more ground-breaking, holistic and enduring solutions to complex problems," emphasising "...innovation and collaboration as ways to think and work differently to deliver better outcomes for citizens" – specifically in the Criminal Justice arena. Such innovation and collaboration are not necessarily guaranteed at central level either, without specific measures being taken, as described by Bradley, to nurture them. Finally, a critical aspect of what will be recommended here is for a strong local implementation group, to drive maximum service coordination locally.

The issue of whether the town boundary of Drogheda should extend southwards into what is currently part of County Meath, was raised by some respondents. It has also been explored in the past but not progressed. Realistically, it most likely has to be accepted now that such a change is not a runner. Nevertheless, there is no excuse for not having sufficiently joined up development and planning for the benefit of Drogheda town as a whole. While boundary change is not on the agenda, interagency cooperation which is goal-driven and with appropriate buy-in from the relevant bodies, can overcome the County boundary issues and should lead to the generation, agreement and implementation of a joint area action plan for Drogheda Town, under appropriate headings and actions.

m. Local Estate Management and Anti-Social Behaviour

Numerous respondents brought up various issues associated with housing allocation and management, anti-social behaviour and related matters, in Drogheda. Many also highlighted the part played by the 'broken windows theory'²⁹ regarding how degradation of the physical and built environment, including building neglect and dereliction, can contribute to 'dragging neighbourhoods down,' in terms of lowered community morale and increased criminality. Some also described the phenomenon of local housing estates being 'hollowed out' as they described it, when local authorities sell housing units to tenants, some of whom may then sell them on, with a view to moving to new accommodation in different neighbourhoods.

²⁷ Forde, C. (2020) 'Participatory governance in Ireland: Institutional innovation and the quest for joined-up thinking,' *Administration*, Vol.68, No.3, pp.1-20.

²⁸ Bradley, S. (2020) 'Building collaboration capability in the public sector,' *Administration*, Vol.68, No.3, pp.45-54.

²⁹ The *broken windows theory* is a criminological theory that states that visible signs of crime, anti-social behaviour, and civil disorder can create an urban environment that allows if not encourages further crime and disorder, including relatively minor as well as more serious crimes.

Respondents highlighted the frustration as well as the negative practical knock-on effects of abandoned housing units, vandalism and other visible damage to property and public spaces, where these occur in Drogheda. The question was posed regarding how the local authority might better use funding it receives to deal with housing 'voids' so that that money could be used, and properties restored and reoccupied in as short a timeframe as possible. The point was made forcefully that delays in rehabilitating such housing units and getting them back into use has a multiple negative impact. For example, the longer the properties were left unattended, the more damage they tended to attract, resulting in escalating costs to the local authority for the eventual refit, as well as delays in housing a family unit in need of accommodation. This is in addition to the ongoing negative impact on morale among other residents in the area. It would significantly improve matters, on all fronts, if the response to voids could be fast-tracked.

Similar frustration was expressed at the slowness in taking steps aimed at so-called situational crime prevention and target hardening in Drogheda. Such measures include practical steps to make criminality, including vandalism and anti-social behaviour 'unattractive,' such as through the use of improved security measures, including CCTV, or making access more difficult to property that might otherwise be a potential target for crime. Frustration was also expressed that CCTV funded through the Department of Justice scheme, in two parts of Drogheda, was out of action for over two years, until eventually upgraded and reactivated in Summer 2020. Such delays, in relation to what should be resolved relatively easily, adds to local frustration and reduces confidence in the local authority and other State bodies. Some also felt that previously effective estate management schemes, including jobs initiatives and amenities grants, had fallen away somewhat in more recent times and should be re-energised because when they work, they are very effective.

As part of the consultation process for the scoping exercise, the researcher engaged with representation from the Castlemanor housing development, adjacent to Moneymore and to Boyne Rugby Football Club, on Drogheda's North side. The Castlemanor residents wished to make representations in relation to issues arising in relation to a 'gap' in hedges and other boundaries between Moneymore and Castlemanor, which facilitates pedestrian access between the two estates and adjacent areas. The 'gap' itself, which was also visited by the researcher, is an unpaved, unlit, rough walkway through undergrowth and incorporating a steep (two metres or so, in level differences) embankment, which during winter weather is wet and muddy. It would be difficult to describe it as anything other than unsatisfactory and unsafe, as a pedestrian thoroughfare. The gap is used for legitimate purposes, including for children making their way, from Moneymore for example, to and from the schools in the Ballymakenny Road area, rather than taking the alternative, and longer, paved route. Because of various aspects of the situation and nature of the gap, it is also used for illegal and criminal purposes, specifically providing an escape route or so-called 'rat-run' for criminals carrying out drug-related, OCG activity, including 'drug drops,' and violent crime, as well as criminal damage, burglary, public order and other criminality in the area. The gap also provides a ready escape route to evade lawful apprehension, following criminal escapades. It has also apparently been itself the focus of criminal activity, with vehicles being burned out and contraband (including weapons and illegal

drugs) 'stored' there. At the centre of complaints about the gap though, is the acknowledged issue that it provides a ready line of escape for offenders moving between Castlemanor and Moneymore.

These issues are borne out by local residents, public representatives and An Garda Síochána, who acknowledge the area around the gap as a 'particular hot spot of criminality' giving rise to the public order and policing challenges described above and leading to support for the closure of this gap. Locals simultaneously point to the successes of a number of measures taken locally by LCC, including improved lighting, reactivation of CCTV and closing off alleyways that previously provided opportunities for anti-social behaviour and quick lines of escape from the authorities, while at the same time decrying the failure to address the similar issues caused by the 'gap' in question.

This issue is well known to local residents, agencies and other bodies, and public representatives in Drogheda and seems to have been running and unresolved for some years now. While there seems to be some official support for the Castlemanor residents' view on the matter, nothing substantive has been done to respond to their specific request to have the access point or pedestrian through-way in question closed off. It appears that the position of Louth County Council on this matter is to hold off on making any substantive decision until other issues in the immediate locality are decided. These include decisions on the future of a proposed local community centre (including where that might be located), as well as proposed new housing in the area, and finally the implications of providing appropriate, alternative, paved pedestrian/cycle access from Moneymore to the Ballymakenny Road.

It was suggested by respondents that it should indeed be possible to address the issues presented by the gap or alleyway, in conjunction with other developments in the area. These include possible plans for more housing in the vicinity, as well as the possibility of providing a proper alternative foot/cycle path, which would allow ease of access of people to local services, and children to get to and from school. Either way, what is frustrating locals the most seems to be the perceived inertia in decision making and action on the part of the relevant authorities, while local residents and An Garda Síochána in particular are left to deal with the ongoing fallout of antisocial behaviour by some, which is too readily facilitated by the gap as currently used.

Given its small physical scale and features, and the existing steep gradient at the gap, in practical terms the opening could be closed off quite easily. It has been estimated that approximately thirty metres of appropriate fencing and some earth works would be required. Such a move would undoubtedly help the cause of policing and public safety in this area. The main argument against such a move would seem to be related to concern for how local people, particularly children, would safely and easily travel from Moneymore through to the Ballymakenny Road area. It would seem not to be beyond the limits of the stakeholders involved to arrive at an appropriate solution in relation to this. It is recommended that meaningful engagement take place on the relevant issues with local residents and that a solution be found as a matter of urgency, with a view to closing off the existing and unsatisfactory gap between Castlemanor and Moneymore.

Respondents did point to work undertaken by LCC and others to improve the local infrastructure, including the recent 'retrofitting' improvement of social housing units in some estates. Such initiatives are appreciated and do boost community morale. Nevertheless, many also pointed to the need for

more to be done and the fact that some remedial measures (e.g., the provision of speed ramps in places) seem to take so long to get done, is a cause of frustration.

There was a perception among some respondents that in some housing estates in Drogheda, there has been a certain tolerance by officialdom of an often-escalating level of anti-social activity or 'unruly behaviour' resulting in a 'breakdown' of societal norms and an increase in unacceptable behaviours. This in turn can lead to a significant deterioration of quality of life for the wider community. Respondents questioned the perceived failure to respond adequately to incidents of anti-social behaviour and specifically a perceived failure to evict the worst wrongdoers, even though 'everyone knows' who they are. At the same time, as with so many aspects of the issues considered in the scoping exercise, this one is more complex – and requires a more nuanced response – than appears to be the case at first. For example, targeting an individual family member who may be involved in anti-social behaviour, could result in that individual's whole family being evicted, if matters were to be taken to their logical conclusion. It must be borne in mind too that any local authority evicting such a family would still have ultimate responsibility for rehousing the family unit. Nevertheless, there has to be a way of dealing with the issues involved. This should be on a multi-agency, and case by case, basis. In some parts of the country, different measures have been trialled, including for example interagency initiatives to seek Court orders that exclude specific individuals from being in or at specific locations, on the basis of proven anti-social behaviour there. Either way, some practical – and perhaps creative – steps need to be taken, to address this thorny issue.

If the place looks well, people take ownership.

Some respondents reported that 'graffiti used to be everywhere' in some housing estates and expressed satisfaction that this has been much reduced because of the action of the local authority and others, including the Probation Service, to remove graffiti. More generally, frustration was expressed in perceived delays in getting quick action to what are perceived as 'obvious' infrastructural problems which, if acted upon, could make for significant positive changes. Examples include delay in getting 'alley-gating' completed, anti-graffiti and planting and clean-up initiatives, and getting hedges that may give 'cover' to illegal activities cut back.

n. Local Authority Boundary Issues and the Areas around Drogheda

East Meath, and specifically Laytown-Bettystown, is a growing area in terms of housing and related development and has included migration of families into the area from Greater Dublin and Drogheda, as well as from other areas, as well as its own organic growth. This has put the usual strain on education, families and children, policing and other services. Some expressed the view that given the growth in population in South Drogheda and Laytown-Bettystown, that the latter will eventually 'agglomerate' into the former. Laytown-Bettystown in particular has experienced the direct fallout from OCG and drug-related offending. This included the execution of one man outside his home in the area in 2019. It appears from respondents' comments that the development of services has not kept pace with the population growth in the area. They also described a lack of family and youth facilities, resources and services in the area, with some exceptions where local people and public representatives have taken what steps they can to make provision for family, child and other supports.

But a certain sense of ‘swimming against the tide’ was voiced. Some services that do operate in the area are described as doing so out of less than adequate buildings. A recurring point made by these respondents was the lack of a fulltime Garda Station in the Laytown-Bettystown area. They felt that at least Laytown station should be a ‘sub-station’ of Drogheda, given the connections between the two areas.

At a more strategic level, the issue of county boundaries and how these impact on the ways in which crime and related matters are addressed is perceived as a major challenge. Some respondents suggested that there is a need to incorporate part of East Meath, including the Southern suburbs of Drogheda town, and the Laytown-Bettystown areas, into County Louth, or at least to designate Drogheda Town in its entirety, plus part of East Meath, as some sort of administrative entity in its own right, or to create a legal relationship between the cross-border areas, to manage local planning, and other functions, while providing a consultation process with the existing two local authorities (Louth and Meath). As already discussed above, boundary changes are not on any realistic agenda currently. Nevertheless, issues arising will have to be addressed and resolved, as highlighted through this report.

o. Louth Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)

Under the Local Government Act 2014, each Local Authority is obliged to develop a Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP). Its integrated high level economic and community goals and objectives will have a six-year life span and will guide policy until 2021. The economic actions will periodically be monitored and reviewed by the Economic Development & Enterprise Support Strategic Policy Committee (SPC). The Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) will oversee the implementation and monitoring of the community actions.³⁰

The relevant LCDC was established as part of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 and commenced in Louth County Council in April 2014. The committee is statutory and has specific functions with regard to the preparation and adoption of the ‘Community’ element of the LECP. Louth LCDC was selected as the Local Action Group (LAG) for County Louth, having the ultimate responsibility for the delivery, implementation and financials for the LEADER Programme in County Louth. Along with the LEADER Programme, the Louth LCDC also has a significant oversight role with regard to the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in County Louth.

County Louth Leader’s:

...vision for County Louth seeks to deliver through the planning process, in partnership with the community and other stakeholders, a prosperous and thriving county where no individual or social group is excluded from the benefits of development. It also enshrines the principle of environmental, economic and social sustainability including protection of the county’s resources, heritage and the natural and built environment.³¹

³⁰ Source: Louth County Council website: <https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/services/economic-development/plans-strategies/local-economic-community-plan-lecp/> .

³¹ Source: County Louth Leader website: <https://www.countylouthleader.com/lcdc> .

Membership of Louth LCDC includes representation from Louth County Council officials, elected representatives (County Councillors), Louth-Meath ETB, DEASP, HSE, Louth Leader Partnership, Social Inclusion, Environmental, Farming, Business and Community & Voluntary Representatives.

p. Community Development and Community Facilities

Louth Leader Partnership (LLP) is established under the Leader Programme³² 2014 to 2020. LLP manages eight publicly funded programmes on behalf of various Government Departments and agencies, providing communities and local partners with the resources to actively engage and direct the local development of the area through community-led local development. The Louth Leader Partnership's core objectives relate to promoting social inclusion, supporting and encouraging economic development in County Louth. The programmes supported and coordinated by LLP in Drogheda and more widely in County Louth, include rural and community development, social inclusion and community activation programme, employment activation programmes, Genesis (the ABC Child Poverty Programme) and the Changing Lives initiative.

Through the County Louth Local Community Development Committee, LLP is the Implementing Partner for the Rural Development Programme, delivering on the Local Development Strategy 2016-2020 and the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022. The Rural Development Programme promotes social inclusion, poverty reduction and the economic development of rural areas, based on a bottom-up approach to rural development whereby rural communities and people identify their own needs and propose solutions. SICAP is a national social inclusion programme. Its aims are to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies.

LLP works closely with Louth County Council and a range of other bodies, statutory and voluntary, in the area. One of the projects that LLP has been working on in recent times is the proposed development of a new community facility building in the Moneymore area of Drogheda. There has been some exploration and debate in Drogheda regarding a proposal to build and operate a community centre or community 'hub' facility on the Northside of the Town, specifically in or around the Moneymore Estate. This 'bottom-up' proposal has moved through a number of phases, including the development of a project business plan. Louth County Council has been proactive in the provision of a number of social housing units for use by community groups in Drogheda. This is particularly noticeable in the Moneymore estate for example where, over the past three decades, three houses have been allocated for community use. These allocations followed local activism and the identification of specific needs in the area, as well as a proven sustainability for the initiatives, which in turn has clearly been borne out over the intervening years. These local authority sponsored facilities are known locally as 'community houses' and are acknowledged as having been excellent additions to the community development infrastructure in the area. Nevertheless, there is a strong view that the community houses, while welcome additions as community facilities, are not really fit for purpose.

³² Information on the Leader Programme is available at: <https://www.pobal.ie/programmes/leader-programme-2014-2020/> .

This is because they were built as family dwellings, with very limited adaptability for other purposes. Consequently, while their value is proven and appreciated, there is a need for a more appropriate space out of which to work for the groups using these facilities.

A number of background explorations of need and feasibility had been carried out in relation to this by different people, initially on behalf of the Moneymore Consortium³³ – a network of community bodies working locally – as well as more recently a business plan and consultancy report on behalf of LLP and LCC. The Artherton³³ study highlighted the deprivation levels in Moneymore, the context of crime in the area, concluding that there is a need for a purpose-built but flexible community facility in the area, as well as identifying some key features of the proposed centre and possible funding sources. Another report (by Walsh³³) explored professionals' view on how children in the area have been impacted by crime, with a focus on how improved community facilities and especially those providing for improved child and family supports, among other measures, could lead to greater safety for children there. LLP has now taken this entire project on and invested resources, including construction and project management expertise, with a view to plotting a way forward. The next phase of the project would require the establishment of a project development board, which would need to be in a position to see any agreed project through to conclusion and ensure sustainability. In terms of the agreed project, there will be a number of key components of this, including the need for agreement on the size, layout and purpose/planned use for the facility, 'anchor' tenants and other users and the use of space in general, as well as the location of the facility, and development and governance.

Having said all that, it is proposed here that this is a very worthwhile development proposal and should be progressed with urgency as well as with appropriate care and diligence, to ensure long-term viability. The initiative is currently being managed and progressed, in an appropriately considered way and in accordance with best practice, with a view to ensuring maximum viability and sustainability, through Louth Leader Partnership and should be seen through to conclusion. While appropriate funding streams may well need to be identified and clarified, and an appropriate oversight, governance and project management structure put in place, the development of the new community hub facility should be prioritised as a flagship development in Drogheda and be one of the first initiatives to be taken on in any new coordinated development in the area.

There is a great community in Drogheda, but it is being ripped apart.

While seeming to be less vocal, and less organised on this issue, there is a similar need for a community services hub facility on the Southside of Drogheda, specifically in or near the Rathmullan area of the Town. The researcher was struck by the relative lack of facilities on this side of town. There may well be therefore a need first to build community development capacity and explore the range of local community needs in this area, ahead of establishing the real need and specific requirements for hub-type facilities here and how to take such an initiative, on the South side of Drogheda, forward.

³³ (1) Artherton, V. (2019) *A Feasibility Study to Determine the Need for a Community Centre in the Moneymore Area of North Drogheda, County Louth*, report commissioned by and carried out for Moneymore Consortium (five community-based organisations based in Moneymore); and (2) Walsh, L. (2020) *Report: Exploring the Impact of Community Crime & Violence on the Welfare of Children in Moneymore, North Drogheda, Co. Louth*, report carried out by Ms. Walsh, while pursuing a Masters in Social Work, for the Moneymore Consortium.

Drogheda Institute of Further Education (DIFE), which is adjacent to the Moneymore Estate, has excellent sporting (indoor and outdoor), as well as educational, facilities. Extended access by the local community to the sporting facilities would be enabled by progressing a DIFE proposal, apparently supported by LCC and LMETB, to build changing facilities, small meeting rooms and kitchen, beside the all-weather football pitch at DIFE. Planning for this is advancing and should also be progressed as soon as possible, as it would add considerable value to the existing community facilities in the area.

q. Families, Children and Young People's Services

Those who shout the loudest are heard, but underneath, many young people are hanging on by the skin of their teeth.

The researcher visited the Boomerang Youth Café and centre in the centre of Drogheda and met there with a range of representatives of organisations working with young people in the town. Boomerang is an impressive facility and clearly encourages a strong collaborative, interagency approach in youth work in Drogheda. A recurring theme there, as well as among virtually all those who engaged with the researcher throughout the scoping review was concern for the children and young people in Drogheda. In the absence of positive opportunities, some young people can be attracted to the material lifestyle opportunities offered by drugs and crime. Specific groups affected negatively by criminality in its various forms include those young people directly involved in crime or impacted and traumatised by it, including younger children, older teens and especially those already deprived or marginalised. The negative impact of crime and offending is also described as affecting children and young people more generally. These children and young people should be able to live the lives, and access services they need, to enable their healthy development. There was also a sense of some services for children and young people, and those working with them in various services, operating frequently 'on a shoestring' in terms of resourcing and support, and becoming exhausted as a result, in a context and environment marked by the enduring toxicity that results from criminality in the area.

We need a pathway, a future, for our youth.

The children and young people of Drogheda and surrounding areas have collectively been traumatised to a greater or lesser extent by the crime and drug-related activities of a minority. The nature of some of the criminality, and drug-related intimidation in particular, has been insidious and has frequently had the shocking feature of the involvement of children, some of a very young age. This should not distract from the fact that such individuals, whatever activity they have been or are involved in, may themselves be children and deserve the full protection of the relevant Departments of State and their agencies. While there can appear to be a wide range of children's and youth services in certain respects, at the same time, individual children can sometimes appear to 'fall through the cracks' of the various services and only be 'discovered' when things are too late.

The Louth Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC)³⁴ was established by the HSE under the auspices of the (then) Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), in September 2010.

³⁴ Information on Louth CYPSC is available at: <https://www.cypsc.ie/your-county-cypsc/louth.244.html> .

Its membership is drawn from a number of key agencies, both statutory and voluntary. Louth CYPSC is responsible for improving the lives of children, young people and families at local and community level through integrated planning and working on service delivery. The CYPSC role is to ensure that professionals and agencies work together so that children and families receive better and more accessible services, in line with relevant national strategic plans.³⁵ It provides for interagency planning and coordination and is now the key planning infrastructure for children's and young people's services in the county. In addition to the overarching CYPSC interagency committee, there are six sub-groups, focusing on a range of relevant outcomes and issues.

The Louth CYPSC was described during the scoping exercise by one manager in a children's service as "very vibrant." It does seem to be very successful in drawing those local bodies working with children and young people together to coordinate their activities, improve practice and address relevant needs. Louth CYPSC has also been proactive in working with local organisations to identify needs and gaps in services and to proactively progress service provision in these areas, which include addiction support, and drugs and alcohol programmes, among others. It would appear that the level of activity and success of Louth CYPSC is due, at least in part, to the dedicated resources including a coordinator post, in addition to the buy-in and commitment of the agencies and other bodies involved.

The Area Based Childhood (ABC) programme supports services for children and families living in areas of disadvantage where outcomes are significantly poorer than they are for children and young people living elsewhere in the State. The programme also aims to embed effective practices in mainstream services and ensure that services being delivered have the most impact, are timely and accessible, and have the potential to become mainstreamed. Having been initially funded by the DCYA and Atlantic Philanthropies, from 2013 to 2017, the ABC programme is more recently (since 2018), and now, funded exclusively by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

The ABC programme is delivered in thirteen designated areas across the State, led by consortia who coordinate the planning and delivery of services in their area. These areas include Dundalk and Drogheda in County Louth, where the ABC programme for the County, including Drogheda, is delivered by the Genesis programme. Genesis is hosted by Tusla and with the two Genesis workers being employed by Louth Leader Partnership. The overall goal of the Genesis³⁶ programme is to measurably improve the social and emotional well-being and developmental outcomes for children aged 0-12 years of age in the targeted areas. Genesis has supported and resourced a range of initiatives in Drogheda to achieve this. These include the Changing Lives initiative (for responding to 3–7-year-olds presenting with symptoms of ADHD), Incredible Years programme, KiVa school-based anti-bullying programme, Language Development programmes, Drogheda parents' forum, production of a services directory, parent and child home visiting programme, Infant Mental Health initiative, and research projects, as well as providing coaching and helping develop the relevant community infrastructure and service capacity in the area.

³⁵ Including: *The Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020* at <https://assets.gov.ie/23796/961bbf5d975f4c88adc01a6fc5b4a7c4.pdf> and the DCYA strategy (2019-2024) for CYPSCs nationally, at - <https://assets.gov.ie/38536/8b1c7844c61c40758f28975a22218648.pdf> , as well as other relevant strategic plans.

³⁶ More information on Genesis is available at: <https://genesislouth.ie/> .

The ABC programme nationally has been evaluated³⁷ (in 2018) and found to have made a positive contribution to improved outcomes for children and families, in positive changes for practitioners and service managers participating in the programme, as well as changes to service planning and delivery.

Some respondents stated that while there has been an increased focus by services in Drogheda on children in general, there is a relative lack or at least a shortage of facilities for teenagers, particularly but not exclusively those teenagers from more socio-economically deprived areas. This challenge includes indoor facilities such as youth clubs, sports and leisure centres or youth cafés, but also outdoor areas to play (e.g., playgrounds for younger children, and skateboard parks, five-a-side and basketball courts and even safe, well-lit open spaces to just ‘hang out’ safely, as well as having wi-fi freely available.

There is an attitude of - ‘hide the children away’ - among some people.

Given the impact of the drug-related criminality and associated violence and intimidation, much of it perpetrated *on* as well as *by* some young people, many respondents raised the issue of the traumatic effect of this on children and young people, including on their mental health and wellbeing. There is a perceived shortage of services for young people in need of acute and other mental health services because of depression, anxiety or other disorders, with some difficulty and delay in accessing HSE child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) because of reported waiting times to access professionals. The SOSAD (Save Our Sons And Daughters) charitable and community-based organisation has an office in Drogheda and provides counselling and 24-hour helpline services to over sixteen-year-olds. Any under-sixteens presenting to SOSAD with mental health issues are referred if possible and appropriate to the Jigsaw service, although Jigsaw does not operate in County Louth. CYPSC has been working with the Boomerang project to generate a business case for a small Jigsaw programme hub in Drogheda.

In terms of child protection and welfare in Drogheda, those working in the field report particular issues and challenges, many related to criminality and violence, as well as more general deprivation and poverty. There was anecdotal evidence of relatively high levels of domestic violence, of other types of incidents that threaten child protection and that are likely to be more serious and requiring immediate intervention, and also more teenagers involved in intrafamilial and other violence, compared to other parts of the country. At the time of the engagement process for the scoping exercise, there were 417 children from Louth-Meath in State care. Some serious issues faced by children only seem to emerge when they actually end up *in* care. In addition, social workers in Drogheda seem to stay involved with particular children and their families over unusually extended periods of time, or else have ongoing engagement because of recurring referrals of the same children and tend to involve themselves in a wider range of services, compared to those in other Tusla ‘patches.’ This is because as one respondent put it: “The level of [e.g., family support] services available in Drogheda is comical” and social workers end up having to do more themselves. Tusla has two child protection teams in Drogheda, which present as being under continuing pressure over extended periods of time because of a number of

³⁷ Report of the ABC evaluation, carried out by the Centre for Effective Services (CES), is available here: https://www.effectiveservices.org/downloads/ABC_Summary_Report_Final.pdf .

factors, including vacancies and challenges getting social workers to work there. This is at least in part because Drogheda is seen as a difficult posting.

Even parents who may lack certain skills and opportunities are generally well-intentioned and motivated. But they need help.

There was a feeling among some respondents of being “at a crossroads,” as one put it; that the next ‘layer’ or cohort of young people in the twelve to seventeen years age group ‘coming through’ in local communities in Drogheda, and who are potentially at risk of getting involved in serious offending, are already disengaging from positive activities and services, including education. In this context, engaging with this group of young people and their families in a targeted and focused way, to provide appropriate opportunities and intensive support to them, to steer them towards prosocial rather than antisocial lifestyles, is a big challenge. There is a perceived generalised shortage of counselling services for children and young people in Drogheda. Connect Family Resource Centre in Moneymore, for example, has a waiting list. Despite already having received additional funding from Tusla, the Connect Centre is seeking more resourcing for the provision of additional counselling, to meet increased demand, particularly in relation to the impact of violence and crime locally.

There have been a number of Strengthening Families Programmes (SFP)³⁸ run in the Drogheda area in recent years. SFP is an evidence-based fourteen-week family skills training programme that involves parents and their teens/children in three classes run on the same night once a week. SFP is designed to reduce multiple risk factors for later alcohol and drug use, mental health problems and criminal behaviour by increasing family strengths, children's social competencies and improving positive parenting skills. This programme could provide future positive opportunities in relation to children, parents and families in the area. Louth CYPSC and the Genesis programme have been exploring ways to put SFP on a more sustainable and available footing in the area. A review of the SFP programmes carried out up to 2019 was being written up at the time of the scoping review. It would seem logical that the further implementation of such programmes should benefit from the outcome of that review.

There is a need to audit, map and perhaps potentially rationalise youth services in Drogheda. Such an exercise had apparently been begun in 2020, by LLP and Louth CYPSC. This was to establish what services are operating and identify potential gaps in services, as well as any fragmentation, duplication or overlaps, as well as opportunities for cooperation and coordination. From discussions with a number of respondents, there is a recognised value in the provision and development of restorative practice as a means of addressing conflict and other challenges, in various children’s and youth activities, including education, youth work and criminal justice settings. Such a development would require dedicated resources to be taken forward and sustained.

There has been an interagency network organised by Tusla, aimed at child, youth and family services in the main, specifically in and around the Moneymore area, which was meeting every six months or so. At the time of the scoping exercise, it was reported that there had been no meetings of this group more recently.

³⁸ More information on the Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) is available at: <http://sfpcouncilireland.ie/strengthening-families/> .

Another practical suggestion in relation to the possibility of improving services for children and families related to the Courts system and what was described as a lack of availability of specialist child and family judges. The relevant Court sits, as part of the 'generic' Court list on a half day per week for child and family cases. As a result, it is suggested that sitting Judges do not get to fully appreciate the issues of children and families in the Drogheda area and cannot, from the perspective of service providers for example, respond as appropriately or in as timely a way as might otherwise be the case. This issue is presumably in the process of being addressed at a national level through the development of the proposal for a new Family Court Division of the Judiciary and Courts Service.

Finally, there was an awareness that there is a need for greater consultation among young people and children in and around the Drogheda area and that their voices need to be heard with regard to their reality, their needs as well as service design and delivery. The CYPSC and Genesis programme have been doing a piece of work with young people on what it is like to live in Drogheda and this will represent a good step forward in that regard.

r. Education

Many children around here are living down to the local narrative and expectations. Their developmental years are being lost. We need to think strategically.

There are twenty-one schools, at primary and secondary levels and including two special schools, in Drogheda. In addition, Drogheda Institute of Further Education (DIFE) is a post-leaving certificate and further education facility of Louth & Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB). The researcher engaged with three primary schools, and one post-primary school, as well as with DIFE, as part of the scoping exercise. It is apparent, not only from speaking with stakeholders in the education sector, but also with those in the wider spectrum of other agencies and bodies, that education at all levels is critically important in responding to children's and young people's issues and needs, including those of improving safety and wellbeing outcomes, across Drogheda. It was not intended to engage with all the schools in Drogheda as part of the scoping exercise. Three primary schools requested such engagement, and this was facilitated. In addition, contact was made with one large post-primary school in the town, as well as Drogheda Institute for Further Education (DIFE), as key 'representatives' of those education sectors.

The schools and other education services engaged with by the researcher appear to be excellent and staffed by committed and skilled staff and managers. One obvious area where improvements could be made, in terms of supporting the good work already under way, is in relation to the DEIS status of some schools in the area. Specifically, three primary level schools on Drogheda's Northside – St. Brigid's and St. Patrick's NS, St. Joseph's CBS, and Presentation NS – currently have DEIS Band 2 status. They have applied for DEIS Band 1 status and a review of this had been under way. The schools' management understandably describe situations where the reality of life for many of their students has deteriorated significantly from a qualitative perspective, over the past three to four years, because of the drug-related violence, intimidation and other criminal activity. The schools' management and staff find they are caring for student bodies who are experiencing unacceptably high levels of trauma,

fear and anxiety among the children attending them, with the schools in question sometimes being the only safe place, or 'haven,' for some of their students.

*We want the best supports to give the children the best chance.
We are swimming against the tide to support these children.*

The three schools in question have submitted 'business cases' to support their application for Band 1 DEIS status. There have also been a number of meetings with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and presentations and other documentation provided by the schools' management. Some of the measures they cite in support of their application are part of the accepted matrix of assessment measures. Others, such as the level of homelessness and family transience, as well as the unique criminality-related issues in this area, are not, but seem to warrant being taken into account. In addition, the general Covid-related closure of schools across the country last year impacted more severely on DEIS schools than the 'mainstream.' The three schools in question administered the standardised literacy and numeracy tests to their students, since school resumed in September last, and found an overall ten percent deterioration since the previous administration of the tests. In addition, because of Covid, homework clubs and other afterschool programmes are curtailed.

Furthermore, full and effective implementation of programmes such as The Incredible Years is more achievable where teaching and related resources are adequate for the situation. A move from DEIS Band 2 to Band 1 for the three schools would cost relatively little (a total of three additional teaching posts, compared to current staffing levels, across the three schools), and no additional 'capital' or infrastructure costs. For one of the schools, for example, it would apparently just involve maintaining their current staffing cadre. The positive benefit for the children and their families, and the wider community would be immeasurably positive. The researcher is convinced that the management and staff in the three schools simply want the best available supports, to go some way to redress the negative impact that criminality has on their students, and to give them the best possible chance in life. A small investment, ideally through granting enhanced DEIS status, or alternatively at least by finding some way to provide equivalent additional supports to these schools and their students, would offer a potential valuable return on that investment, in terms of the children and families involved.

*DEIS Band 1 status for three Northside [Drogheda] schools
would make a huge positive difference.*

The facilities and programmes offered at DIFE are acknowledged widely as being excellent. DIFE offers a wide range of education and training programmes across a range of subject areas, including: technology and design; business, IT and humanities; services, leisure and tourism; community and health care; and applied science.³⁹ Additional resources recently allocated to DIFE have enabled the extended provision of pre-apprenticeship courses in construction, which should in turn help more young people in Drogheda to access appropriate pathways into sustainable employment. These and other such programmes incorporate good links with employers. The Institute itself sees similar potential opportunities in the food and food science, as well as other science subject areas, particularly in the context of the nearby Boyne valley and wider rural hinterland. A number of respondents

³⁹ See: <https://dife.ie/> for more information.

highlighted that although DIFE offers excellent services to its students and to Drogheda more widely, there is a perception that more of the local young people should be encouraged to attend courses there. If this uptake could be maximised, there would be benefits not only in education, training and employment outcomes, but also more widely in terms of individual and community wellbeing.

The issue of expulsion or suspension from school, as well as school refusal by children and young people, was brought up by a number of respondents. Some expressed the view that there is a relatively high level of expulsions and suspensions from schools in Drogheda and more widely in County Louth. While the perception in relation to this issue, as provided to the researcher, was anecdotal, the Louth CYPSC did confirm that this is an issue at least to the extent that a CYPSC sub-group has been formed with a view to exploring and following the matter up further. CYPSC have also had discussions with the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI), based in Tallaght, Dublin, in the context of implementing restorative practice approaches for responding to conflictual situations involving young people in the educational context. This is an approach that could and should be followed up on the basis of what the researcher encountered. Similarly, the Genesis team, as well as staff more widely in the County LLP were being trained in restorative practice. The value and usage of restorative practice more widely, and specifically in the context of the issues addressed in this scoping review, should be explored further and implemented where appropriate.

There would appear to be an issue also for some young people where they are for example afraid of going to school on account of the adverse ways in which the criminality in the area is impacting on them. A number of youth workers and youth work programmes also came together in recent times to put in place the Turning Point programme for young people out of school, including those fully suspended or expelled from school, as well as those on half-time hours in school per week. The goal of this project is to get young people back into education or training. Apparently, the group coordinating the Turning Point programme, operating out of the Boomerang Centre in the town, has applied for funding for 2021 and would hope to increase the potential number of people involved, as well as increasing the target age range up to late teens or early 20s. This would be in addition to other services, such as Youthreach. Some respondents referenced a shortage of school completion and home liaison support at second level in North Drogheda. This was not quantified nor verified by the researcher. CYPSC has also hosted a number of Non-Violent Response (NVR) programme⁴⁰ training events in the area and would wish to see this aspect of children 's lives explored and responded to.

The demographics in Drogheda and East Meath don't do well on assessments of deprivation – for the wrong reasons. It feels poorer than the demographics would indicate.

One very practical suggestion made by one respondent, which cuts across the education and criminal justice arenas, was to consider the introduction of the Operation Encompass approach to domestic abuse/violence cases in family units with school-going children. Operation Encompass⁴¹ is an interagency protocol, used in many British police force areas, which seeks to ensure that school staff receive timely – if not immediate – information from the police where a student's family has

⁴⁰ NVR is a training approach in relation to dealing with child to parent violence and abuse, which seeks to empower parents and other adults to take positive action to stop violent and controlling behaviour perpetrated against them.

⁴¹ Information on Operation Encompass: <https://www.operationencompass.org/> .

experienced a recorded domestic abuse or violence incident. This is so that school staff can immediately be aware of such incidents and respond accordingly including providing appropriate support to the child.

Another proposal was that Drogheda take a proactive lead in relation to some specific area of professional/technical training that could attract for example an appropriate 'branch' site of Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT) to the town, linking education and training with employment possibilities in the town. One area of business that might make sense for such an initiative would be in the ICT/financial services and payments sector, given that Drogheda has been identified as being a significant site within the Dublin to Belfast fintech corridor cluster.⁴²

s. Drogheda's Infrastructure and Assets

*The Louth-Meath divide is significant.
Louth is the smallest county, with two of the largest towns.*

Drogheda is the largest town in Ireland with a population of 40,956 in 2016.⁴³ Including cities, it is the sixth largest urban settlement in Ireland by population.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, despite its size, Drogheda does not have a university campus site nor any civil service headquarters, for example. There was also some level of resentment among many respondents that Drogheda's status has not been elevated to that of a city. This is despite the view of some that the town's population might exceed that of Waterford City by the time of the next Census.

The *Project Ireland 2040* plan, launched by Government in 2018, sets out a vision and guide to the future development of Ireland, aiming at balanced regional development and improving the State's infrastructure. Its goals include enabling people live closer to where they work, thereby reducing commuting; facilitating sustainable growth and imaginative urban regeneration; bringing life and jobs back into cities, towns and villages; and coordinating infrastructural delivery. Under the Plan, Drogheda is not recognised as a developing city *per se*, but as a regional growth area, in conjunction with Dundalk, as a key part of the Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry links, and in the context of the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor.⁴⁵

Drogheda and its hinterland are steeped in history and has a range of significant capital assets and what might be described as potentialities for future development and growth. At the same time, it is suggested that the Drogheda town centre would greatly benefit from a focused regeneration. The historic town centre is characterised by narrow streets, heavy traffic and few open public spaces. Some buildings are unoccupied or derelict, with some shabby streetscapes, all of which combine to convey

⁴² Fintech Corridor, see: <https://thefintechcorridor.com/>.

⁴³ The CSO defines a town as an urban settlement with a population of over 1,500 and under 50,000.

⁴⁴ The others being Dublin city and suburbs, Cork city and suburbs, Limerick city and suburbs, Galway city and suburbs and Waterford city and suburbs.

⁴⁵ The *National Planning Framework* and related *Project Ireland 2040* documentation is available at: <https://npf.ie/project-ireland-2040-national-planning-framework/> and the *National Development Plan, 2018-2027* here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/07e507-national-development-plan-2018-2027/>.

a certain sense of neglect. In the Narrow West Street area of the town, there are upwards of twenty vacant commercial and other premises.

*Drogheda is seen as having a bad name now.
There's very little pride of place in Drogheda now but there used to be.*

There is evidently a considerable level of housing construction and other development already ongoing on the North and South sides of Drogheda, including sizeable private housing development. Some respondents raised the question of whether the development of supporting infrastructure, including community facilities, as well as pedestrian and cycleways and so on, will keep pace with the housing developments across Drogheda. A number of respondents also spoke about the promise held out by proposed major roads, transport, commercial and housing infrastructure development planned for the North Side of Drogheda – the Northern Environs Plan – as well as for the development of the Port Access Northern Cross Route (PANCR). The latter roads development would allow direct road access from the M1 motorway to Drogheda Port, taking heavy traffic bound into and out of Drogheda Port, out of the Town Centre, which can get very congested as things stand. The overall Northern Environs Plan, which would also envisage the building of several thousand houses, has been in place for over a decade but was stalled by the economic recession. The PANCR plan has not yet, apparently, received national approval. A proposal to develop a new, state-of-the-art municipal sports stadium was linked at the time to the PANCR development but has not since been progressed very far.

*There will have to be reinvestment in the town – jobs and infrastructure – if that is not done,
there will be bigger costs down the road.*

It would appear that a range of significant interconnected and inter-dependent developments for Drogheda are linked to the PANCR plan, which if completed would bring many benefits, challenges and opportunities. As well as enabling easier road access to the port area and facilitating the decongestion and regeneration of the Town centre, the plan would allow for significant development for employment, housing and other uses around Drogheda. As has been mentioned in other parts of the present report, there will be a need to coordinate the proposed developments of lands to the North of Drogheda, with existing or planned developments on the South side of Drogheda, and which may come under the County Meath local authority's remit.

There is a certain amount of frustration at the apparent lack of progress on a town centre development plan for Drogheda. Some respondents believe the lack of movement on such a plan is caused in part at least by the Louth-Meath division of responsibilities, by what are perceived by business interests as competing local authority priorities, and by the want of more effective coordination in that respect. In 2018, Louth County Council announced “details of its urban design vision for the regeneration of the Westgate area of Drogheda, focusing on Narrow West Street and its environs.”⁴⁶ The Westgate Vision document identified Westgate as “the identifiable principal entry point to the historic town of

⁴⁶ Information available at: https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/louth_county_council/latest-news/louth%20county%20council%20launches%20regeneration%20guide%20for%20westgate%20area%20of%20drogheda.html .

The *Westgate Vision* plan document is available at: https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/louth_county_council/latest-news/westgate-vision.pdf .

Drogheda and the premier gateway for visitors” and set out a bold plan for the development of this area, to include the delivery of quality homes, public realm improvements, redevelopment, re-use and adaptation of existing buildings, streetscape recovery, traffic management, as well as improved employment opportunities. These planned measures would be part of a development in an area characterised “as the vibrant heart of the wider hinterland and the gateway to Drogheda’s historic Town Centre and the Boyne Valley heritage sites.” Such development is badly needed, to revitalise the town and make visiting, as well as living in this historic town, an enjoyable and inviting experience.

In addition, since late 2019, Drogheda has been identified by Fáilte Ireland as a tourism ‘Destination Town,’⁴⁷ attracting up to €500,000 funding from the National Tourism Development Authority, through the Local Authority, to improve its tourism offering and make itself more attractive to visitors. This should include the identification of an appropriate ‘attraction of scale’ in the area. Work on this was ongoing at the time of the present scoping exercise. There is also a need for a fulltime and visible Fáilte Ireland tourist office and visitor centre in the town. Apart from anything else, the lack of such an office inhibits the gathering of statistics in relation to tourists and other visitors to the town. Some respondents pointed to the low number of hotel bed nights available in and around the town. This is likely to hamper the development of Drogheda as a destination tourist town and addressing this issue would need to be part of a wider strategic approach to development.

There are also other positive developments planned or in process in Drogheda, not all of which were explored or followed up. For example, at the time of the scoping exercise, LCC was in the process of purchasing the old Dominican Church and Priory, facing the river and close to the Drogheda Courthouse and Garda Station, “for Council projects.” While it was not clear what specific projects might be included in the development of this facility, this is a welcome initiative and should significantly add to the positive possibilities for the town centre and the population more widely.

The overarching suggestion from respondents in this study, on this general topic, was related to the need for a joint (Drogheda) urban area plan, with the commitment and resourcing of the two relevant local authorities – Louth and Meath. One suggestion as to how this might be done, was through the establishment of a Joint Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) for the governance of the Greater Drogheda area, including the parts of the town that are in Counties Louth and Meath, as well as the Laytown-Bettystown area. This SPC would be comprised of the standard representation, including relevant Councillors and other local bodies’ representatives. Either way, work on such a joint plan should be progressed as soon as possible, should not be seen in isolation to the range of issues considered in this report, nor in any way deflecting attention from the coordinated approach needed to improve the community safety and wellbeing and other issues considered here. If anything, the interconnection of the range of issues involved should spur on the commitment of all concerned to ‘get ahead of the curve’ and address the relevant challenges in a joined-up way. Otherwise, the considerable infrastructural (housing, roads etc) developments already ‘in the pipeline’ might only serve to further compound existing problems of community safety and wellbeing.

On a positive note, a number of respondents highlighted the need, through strong and proactive action across a range of fronts, to ‘rebrand’ Drogheda as a *healthier* town in every sense of the word, including

⁴⁷ See: <https://www.failteireland.ie/Utility/News-Library/Towns-across-the-country-allocated-funding-through.aspx> for more information.

by ensuring a reduction in, if not elimination of antisocial behaviour. Such progress could lead to a more vibrant and attractive, 'living' town. To achieve this, dedicated resources may well need to be committed to the the development of the integrated plan itself and would be a positive and productive investment for the future.

t. Employment, Enterprise and Local Development

For a town of its size, and despite its past history, there are now few major industrial or manufacturing employers of any scale in the Drogheda area. Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, in the town, is acknowledged as the town's largest employer, with over 2,250 employees.⁴⁸ There is a need to work strategically towards improving employment opportunities of all kinds in the Town. Respondents suggested the practical idea of having for example a professional nursing education and development pathway based in Drogheda, linked to the hospital. Such a facility could enable practitioners in development to locate here rather than in Dublin or even abroad, if the appropriate educational and other supporting infrastructure were in place.

The town has been starved of investment; the industrial estates are barren; there is no IDA park worth talking about.

Business representatives in Drogheda want more businesses, and others, to 'choose Drogheda.' They point to challenges of attracting foreign direct investment to the Town. There is an IDA business park on the Southern side of Drogheda. Some respondents identified the need for a similar campus on the North side. Apparently, although the existing IDA park had struggled to achieve capacity occupancy over some years, it has been doing much better more recently. Development of a new business and technology park, if realised, might take advantage of Drogheda's position on the Fintech Corridor (see above) and the resources of the relevant partner bodies, as well as potentially developing productive links with appropriate third-level education institutions. Aside from 'traditional' industry, there should also be employment development opportunities in the local agri-food sector, given the location of the town. For some business representatives who engaged in the scoping exercise, anti-social behaviour is seen as one of the biggest challenges facing business in the town. Similarly, some respondents also spoke of the perceived threat posed to them, their businesses and others by the illegal activities of individuals and groups carrying out criminal enterprises in their vicinity. Around the town centre itself in particular, business owners and their customers appreciate the value of visible Garda patrols, especially foot patrols on traditional-type police 'beats' around the town. Some respondents also spoke positively about recent collaborative work involving Louth County Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the IDA, some of this focused for example on global marketing of Drogheda and other similar initiatives, all of which would seem to point to the positive opportunities and possibilities in this sphere.

Many respondents pointed to the fact that Drogheda has changed over the years from being an industrial centre to being now predominantly a dormer town, in terms of the employment of its residents, with 15,000+ people from Drogheda commuting (prior to Covid-19 restrictions on

⁴⁸ Hospital staffing statistics available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/our-workforce/workforce-reporting/rcsi-hospitals-group-nov-2020.pdf>.

movement) to their places of employment in another location, mainly Dublin, but also Dundalk, Navan and elsewhere. This fact is perceived as having a knock-on effect on various aspects of Drogheda's social and community life and vibrancy. For example, because people can spend so long commuting each day, with such daily journeys also incorporating dropping children off at childcare in the morning and collecting them in the evening, many Drogheda residents feel they do not have enough time to participate in local sports, leisure or community activities. They may also be reluctant to volunteer in local community initiatives.

u. Arts, Culture and Sport

A number of respondents referred to the great potential of the arts and culture for providing positive outlets for young and old alike. The main example of this, in many respects was the successful hosting by Drogheda of the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 2018 and 2019. Drogheda is rich in history and culture and undoubtedly offers many possibilities for further development in these areas. There are clearly dividends to be achieved for local residents from the promotion of arts, culture and sport in Drogheda, as well as the value added to the town through visitors visiting the area for such purposes. Greater consideration of the value of the arts and culture as platforms and vehicles for good in the Town, especially for young people, need to be explored. It would be important, in this regard, to broaden the concepts of arts and culture to incorporate all media and genres and to ensure that any investment in these areas includes the provision of opportunities for people from all parts of Drogheda. This can be achieved through the use of outreach as well as static programmes, for example.

Regular physical activity and exercise, including sport of all kinds, is linked to the achievement of improved physical and mental health. Conversely, inappropriate use of leisure time is also identified as one of the potential risk factors associated with reoffending, particularly among young people. There are a range of sporting clubs and opportunities in Drogheda. A number of respondents however commented on their perception of that range and number sporting outlets having reduced, for various reasons, in the Drogheda area over recent years. Reasons for this perceived reduction included closures or reductions in some clubs, or unavailability or inaccessibility for other reasons. Respondents also commented on the apparent reduction of numbers of individuals participating in a range of local sports clubs and how some of these clubs struggled to attract and retain participating members, particularly young people. During the scoping exercise, it was pointed out to the researcher that the Aura Leisure Centre in the Rathmullan/Marley's Lane had closed down and was reported to be in receivership. The closure of such a valuable asset is a significant loss to the local area and to Drogheda more generally. This was pointed out in the context where a number of local housing estates have few physical and sporting amenities apart from their open spaces. It was speculated that some public body might be interested in exploring options to bring the Aura Centre back into use as a public facility.

It was pointed out that young people everywhere can benefit greatly in their development when they have positive role models they can look up to. This is particularly the case in relation to sport and other such activities. Leveraging the positive benefits of such role models and opportunities for young people has happened traditionally by chance. There is also a value however in planning for it. At least one respondent suggested the need to have a dedicated strategic plan in this regard, as well as targeted funding streams to support the development of sporting outlets, linked to the development

of more positive role models in Drogheda, for young people of all ages. This is a conscious approach that has been taken by the NEIC project in Dublin for example and appears to be paying dividends.

A small number of respondents pointed to what they perceive as increased levels of obesity and related issues among people in Drogheda. This is anecdotal and not substantiated by any hard evidence, at least as far as the researcher is aware. Nevertheless, if accurate, such a view is probably reflective of aspects of modern lifestyles, which can be more sedentary, and a lack of involvement in physical exercise and sports. Such a phenomenon, where it does occur, can also be linked to food poverty and other issues, as well as lack of access to sports activities, among some groups.

The development of sports and a sports hub on the North side of Drogheda, are issues that are also being addressed and coordinated by Louth CYPSC. Some pointed to the fact that a grant of €61,000 from Louth sports partnership was made to ‘Moneymore Sports Partnership.’ There are ambitions to link such developments with the local Lourdes stadium. The existing facilities at the local DIFE institute could also contribute to such strategic development.⁴⁹ Improving access to and participation in sport also has other positive knock-on effects. For example, there is the possibility of developing more sports coaching programmes, which in themselves develop leaders and mentors of the future, for young people in particular.

A strategic planning approach in relation to sport could also open up the possibility for developing a sporting centre of excellence – either for a unique or small range of sports disciplines or alternatively a more generalised target grouping of activities – in Drogheda, along the lines of what has been achieved in other locations, for example. In addition, the Boyne River, as well as the proximity of the sea and other aspects of the natural hinterland, may well offer additional opportunities for sporting developments of the ‘non-mainstream’ variety in the Drogheda and surrounding area. While there was frustration at what is perceived as a disjointed or piecemeal approach to the development of sport of all types in the area, respondents felt that such initiatives, where they can and do take place, provide an example of the positive opportunities that sport, and leisure, provide for development in any area.

v. Ethnic and Racial Issues

We are only starting to see these issues [racism] in Drogheda. We need more interconnections, to affirm and strengthen multi-culturalism.

Ethnic and racial issues were discussed with a number of respondents. While not apparently identified as a major problem as yet, some concerns were raised by a number of respondents, in the context of current or potential challenges in the future. Last year, Counties Louth and Meath launched a Joint Migrant Integration Strategy, 2019-2022.⁵⁰ The strategy recognises that the two counties have become more diverse – each with a little over ten percent of their populations being ‘non-Irish’ – and that “it is timely for both counties to focus on integration and inclusion of new communities and to

⁴⁹ See Section 2 (p) above for more on this.

⁵⁰ The Joint Migrant Integration Strategy is available here: <https://louthleaderpartnership.ie/mdocuments-library/>.

consider what is needed to enable the areas to enjoy the benefits of diversity.” The strategy sets out its key principles and values, as well as six strategic goals, supported by an accompanying action plan to implement the goals. It is recommended that any follow-up to this present scoping exercise should consider these issues in more detail, specifically in the context of the Integration Strategy itself and how it should be incorporated into wider strategic planning. There is also a need to maximise the involvement of members of new communities, who some respondents described as being under-represented in relevant initiatives and specifically in proactively addressing any underlying tensions or areas of concern, before they might become problematic and thereby less manageable.

The County CYPSC have been considering a proposal to undertake some study in this area within the counties Louth and Meath areas. This had not been progressed so far. There is a need to explore in the coming months and years the impact of any racial tensions and related issues existing or emerging in the area. It is understood that the National Youth Council of Ireland is also undertaking exploratory work in this respect.

LLP has a shared responsibility for community development within the traveller and Roma communities in the County. This involves the establishment of a traveller and Roma interagency group with a view to this leading to a traveller and Roma support service in Louth. Work has been undertaken in this respect on a number of projects including to establish a Louth traveller and Roma movement, a youth traveller enterprise programme, a men’s shed project, and a women's group. An interagency steering group was established under the auspices of the HSE to respond to specific health-related issues posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in the traveller and Roma communities, among whom the infection rate by COVID-19 was relatively high.

It appears from information provided by a number of respondents that there are few traveller specific programmes or projects available in the Drogheda and wider County area. Statistics provided to the researcher indicate that there were 772 travellers in County Louth as of the most recent (2016) census, up 17.1% from the 2011 census. Drogheda itself was recorded as having 152 travellers living there in 2016. At least one respondent questioned whether these were accurate counts, in the context of a view that it may be higher and that not all travellers may identify themselves as such, for various reasons. There are two halting sites in Louth; the one in Drogheda is uninhabitable. There are also apparently three traveller group housing schemes in the County – in Drogheda, Dundalk and Dunleer. The researcher was informed there are around 100 traveller households on Louth County Council's waiting list for social housing / accommodation.

Louth County Council does provide a social work service for travellers. Apparently there had also been a traveller health unit in the area, which used to be based in a Health Centre and involved travellers providing peer health awareness training. The issue of traveller and Roma related initiatives is apparently also on the agenda for exploration and action by CYPSC. One respondent summed up a view that: “there is a negative view of travellers in Drogheda, there is not a representative group, there are no positive role models and there needs to be a ground-up engagement with the traveller community. Nevertheless, there is no one in that community to consult with, no representative group.” There is also apparently a high level of traveller children in State care. The interagency committee on Moneymore, meeting in July 2020 was informed by Louth Leader Partnership that the COVID-19 pandemic had interrupted the recruitment of a traveller development worker, but that there

was ongoing engagement with the traveller / Roma community by LLP and others. This engagement and developments arising will need to continue to be progressed.

w. Impact on Community and the Community Voice

One is struck, when meeting representatives of local community and voluntary bodies in Drogheda, by the levels of energy, passion and commitment evident in the area. Nevertheless, as with so much of the work done in Drogheda, by statutory and non-statutory bodies alike, there is a clear need to clarify who is doing what, coordinate the work better, address gaps and eliminate any overlaps. There is also a clear sense of exhaustion and need for renewal among those 'at the frontline' as well. One very practical response to help people deal with the fallout from serious incidents, of violence for example, has been made by Louth CYPSC. They have been proactive in the production of *Calm Cards*, which are practical aids for parents, families, community groups and other bodies locally in responding to extraordinary events. Over one thousand of these cards have been produced and distributed in the area. CYPSC has also provided self-care session for staff of services working in the area, by way of a workshop hosted by CYPSC and LLP, for those staff impacted by traumatic events in Drogheda.

In planning for a better future, there is a need to explore and take action to promote the growth and nurturing of new community development capacity. At the time of the scoping exercise, the LLP community development officer and others were in the process of coordinating and conducting a mapping exercise of services in the town, particularly in South Drogheda. This exercise, to audit and build the capacity of the community development sector, its constituent groups and workers, had been impeded somewhat by the COVID-19 pandemic. Aside from the valid need to map what is there though, there is a parallel need to encourage and facilitate more youth and community development workers coming through the relevant systems locally. A number of respondents highlighted this issue, pointing out that there had been few if any new youth and community development workers 'coming through' in Drogheda in the last ten to twenty years.

There is will, drive and passion, and excellent connections on the ground.

There was an acknowledgment locally that there is also a lack of community leadership development programmes available in the County. Leaders in youth and community work do not seem to be emerging, including those who may have lived experience as service users themselves. It would be helpful to have an NVQ/NFQ⁵¹ level programme for youth and community development available in the County, as a stepping-stone into such a career path. Such a programme, which could provide a pre-degree entry level for youth and community work, is apparently not currently available in the County. There is thus a huge potential dividend for the local community through investment in the development of local community leaders. This could be done in partnership with established educational and training institutes, including DIFE and DKIT.

⁵¹ NVQ: National Vocational Qualification and NFQ: National Framework of Qualifications – relate to competence-based training programmes where work-based skills and competences are developed, assessed, measured and certified, in conjunction with appropriate qualification frameworks and accredited educational and training institutes.

On a wider scale, one respondent observed that, in order to be successful in building up collective local community resources, individual community leaders and the bodies they represent have to be ‘good at identifying, sourcing and applying for grants and other funding.’ The point here is that it is insufficient to have a local community with an identifiable need; somebody representing or working in that area has to be capable of providing the leadership and other necessary skillsets, including governance and financial management, to access funding streams and other resources on behalf of community and voluntary bodies, for example. Furthermore, those who are already practised at accessing grant-aid can be the same ones who will always be more likely to *continue* to access it, and *vice versa*. It is also not just a question of accessing resources, but having the appropriate skillset, including vision, leadership, governance and financial management, to manage that process and all that goes with it on an ongoing basis.

In all of the actions arising from the above, how to listen to, hear and include the community voice in decision making, particularly on an ongoing basis, will be important. One practical measure that might be undertaken in this regard could be the implementation of the Community Crime Impact Assessment (CCIA)⁵² process and tool, as developed recently under the National Drug Strategy 2017-2025 and launched by CityWide Drugs Crisis Campaign in late 2020. As well as facilitating local communities affected by crime to assess that impact in a collaborative and problem-solving way and assist all stakeholders including Criminal Justice agencies and others to tackle the relevant issues, such an approach might also be productive in building local community capacity in the management of such issues. There will also need to be steps taken to ensure that appropriate community consultation is undertaken as any developments arising out of the present exercise are progressed.

x. Local Morale

There is an aggressive tone around the town.

While respondents in the present exercise expressed a very definite and strong pride in Drogheda, there was also among many a certain sense of demoralisation, frustration and tiredness, in the face of what is perceived as a high level of negativity in the Town. Drogheda and its people clearly have a lot about which to be proud. In the context of the present scoping exercise, two recent events or achievements in particular were mentioned in the context of the pride that locals have in their town of Drogheda. First of these was the *Pride of Place* award nomination achieved by Moneymore estate in the Housing Estates category, in 2017. The *Pride of Place* competition is organised by Co-operation Ireland, in conjunction with IPB Insurance and seeks to recognise, acknowledge and showcase exceptional community spirit and local innovation across the island of Ireland. The residents and the various community projects in Moneymore showcased their estate and their community development initiatives and achievements, resulting in their acknowledgement at the awards.

The other event mentioned repeatedly was Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, held in Drogheda in 2018 and 2019. Some respondents reported that there was some apprehension about the holding of the 2019

⁵² Information on CCIA is available here: <https://www.citywide.ie/news/2020/11/23/community-crime-impact-assessment-evaluation/>.

Fleadh in particular in Drogheda, given the increasing feud-related violence and associated public order incidents and other offending in and around the town in the year or so leading up to the event. However, all expressed a shared satisfaction and pride that both *fleadhanna* had been held without significant incident, and in fact – to the contrary – the two events had positively shown out Drogheda in a very positive light to the rest of the country and the world. The sense of pride in both examples was tinged with disappointment and frustration that a place producing such fine examples of collaborative community action could be tainted by the ongoing drug-related offending and OCG/feud-related violence and negativity.

There is a sense of hopelessness; it took years to get the CCTV up and running again.

The issue of morale, among residents in general, as well as those delivering health, justice, educational or other social and community services, is not just a matter of individuals feeling relatively well or poorly on any day. There is an increasing awareness in the social and psychological research and practice literature nowadays regarding the long-term impact of trauma across the lifecycle and of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in particular. The long-term impact of such trauma is most acute in those directly experiencing it but can also adversely impact on those who care for or work with the traumatised individuals. Given the chronic nature of the traumas experienced by some young people and their families in Drogheda, it might be anticipated that the knock-on effect of this would also impinge on the wider school and social services community including those working in them. It would therefore seem prudent to ensure that ACEs awareness, as well as practical measures such as training, to build community and organisational resilience, should be included in consideration of responses to those living and working in these same communities. As one respondent put it: “The terminology of wellbeing and resilience needs to be built back into the narrative [in Drogheda].”

Small changes, like early confidence-building measures, would help a lot.

Two other practical suggestions received from respondents related to the provision of critical incident planning and addressing multiple adverse childhood experiences in the area. Louth CYPSC has been working on both of these issues. Specifically, in relation to critical incident planning, this has been addressed in other parts of the country where communities experience high levels of violent crime and there is a view that such planning should be prepared in and around the Drogheda area. This is to have a coordinated local response when particular types of incidents may be perpetrated. In relation to the issue of multiple adverse childhood experiences (MACE), there is a North-South project,⁵³ initiated under the European Union’s Interreg⁵⁴ programme and managed by the Special EU Programmes Body, which seeks to identify and intervene early, providing nurturing and support to children vulnerable children and their families who are most at risk from a range of challenges and difficulties in their lives, nurturing and supporting them within their own homes and communities on a cross border basis. Louth CYPSC is working with partner bodies in the County to progress this initiative in the area.

*If someone does an internet search now for ‘Drogheda,’ they find crime reports.
We need to change that, do more positive stuff that pushes out the negative.*

⁵³ Project information available at: <https://cawt.hscni.net/projects/eu-interreg-va-programme-2014-2020/childrens-services-multiple-adverse-childhood-experiences-mace/> .

⁵⁴ More information on the Interreg programme is available at: <https://interreg.eu/> .

y. The Impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 has been a massive help. Gardaí have been freed up.

In relation to the issues considered in the present report, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the outfall from the public health measures arising from it, have been very much a double-edged sword. Nationally, as well as locally, reductions in the reported levels of many categories of crime for example, have been credited in part to the Covid-19 measures. Restriction on people's movement outside their homes, has been combined with increased Garda presence on the streets and in communities, resulting in reduced opportunities for certain types of offending. The researcher was also told that in parts of Drogheda, Covid-19 restrictions do not feel unusual for some families. This is because responsible parents keep their children indoors more than might otherwise be usual, because of fear of drug-related crime and intimidation. At the same time, where Covid-19 restrictions have included school closures, this has led to increased isolation for some, especially those who are more vulnerable and at risk already. This vulnerable group, by definition, includes a number of those attending DEIS schools for example. The vulnerability referenced is also potentially further increased in a context where in 'normal' times school attendance may offer a safe place, a positive connection and experience, and an escape from an otherwise risky and negative home situation. In addition, some bodies in Drogheda reported that plans to initiate, or continue particular services were stymied – or at least delayed, reduced or altered – by the outfall from the restrictions precipitated by the pandemic.

There is still massive drug-dealing going on, it is just that the extortion has died down, with the [Covid-19] restrictions.

z. Conclusion

While there is a feeling or sense that violent crime has quietened down somewhat in recent months, this has been attributed locally in Drogheda in large part to Covid-19 restrictions and related factors, as well as Garda actions. There was also a sense among respondents that the relative tranquillity at the time of writing is likely to be temporary and things could change for the worst again at a moment's notice. The pandemic has, among other things, given rise to what is very much a *false* sense of security as well as frustrating some positive work that had been going in the area. Nevertheless, taking the issues explored above into account in the round, all those with an interest in the future safety and wellbeing of those who live and work in Drogheda should seize the clear opportunities afforded by the current 'lull,' to initiate the change that is possible and within grasp. Time and again, respondents to this exercise showed in their engagement that they have the will and the experience of 'past campaigns' to do what is necessary to make Drogheda a better place for everyone.

*We can get Drogheda back on its feet again.
The lack so far has been the leadership.*

Notwithstanding the recent sense of frustration, not to mention trauma and some despair, experienced by respondents to this exercise, as well as by the community in Drogheda more widely, there is huge pride and mobilising energy among people who are hungry for positive change and want to be part of that change and contribute in whatever way they can. As discussed above, action needs to be taken as a matter of urgency. Some services need to be improved and gaps in others addressed. Above all, interagency cooperation is critical and central to what needs to be done. While the challenges are not inconsiderable, they can be overcome, and this is indeed a time of great opportunity and possibility for Drogheda.

There is a real possibility of doing something now that could make a real difference.

3. Appendix: Scoping Exercise – Terms of Reference

- Community Safety & Wellbeing in Drogheda - Scoping Exercise

Terms of Reference

In response to issues arising from criminal activity in and around the Drogheda area, and in the context of the impact and implications of this activity, it is proposed to engage an appropriate expert to carry out a scoping exercise, with a view to mapping a productive way forward for those concerned.

The scoping exercise will gather and assess information relating to the ongoing challenges and needs experienced by communities in Drogheda, and identify opportunities to connect, support and strengthen services, including those for young people, in the area. The appointed expert will engage with relevant bodies in the Drogheda area, including relevant services, organisations, businesses and other stakeholders in the community.

The purpose of the engagement is to explore and identify actions that can be taken to support the community, particularly in the following areas:

- Community safety, policing, and other responses to offending behaviour, including: community impact of substance use and abuse; drug-debt intimidation; and the impact of criminal networks, particularly on youth offending behaviour;
- Community development needs, including: the suitability of existing facilities for service delivery; provision for family, youth, sporting and other relevant organisations;
- Improving the physical/built environment, infrastructure and facilities;
- Education and employment of young people, including: formal and non-formal education and training needs; employment opportunities;
- Children's and young people's services, including: early intervention programmes for children; childcare services; child welfare interventions; afterschool programmes; Garda Youth Diversion and other Justice Programmes; and
- Coordination of service provision.

The expert will complete the relevant exploration, research and consultations and report to the Minister for Justice, including making recommendations in relation to short-term and long-term responses to the above, and to any other significant issues and challenges faced by communities in this area, within ten weeks of commencement of the project.

August 2020