

# Wavelength

Advertisement

NEWS &amp; INFORMATION FOR THE COMMUNITY &amp; VOLUNTARY SECTOR

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## Voluntary Sector – pay attention!

**N**EW laws on charities will come into effect next year. Our Chairperson went along to Hotel Kilkenny, last week to an information day to find out what is being proposed.

The session was organised by the Wheel, an independent advice group for the community and voluntary sector. Over 60 groups from all over the South East took part.

Sheila Nordon of Irish Charity Tax Research gave an overview of the government consultation paper "Consultation Paper on Establishing a Modern Statutory Framework for Charities".

### How will this affect you?

Most charities and voluntary bodies are run by dedicated, honest people. But when someone we don't know comes up to us with a grubby unlabelled tin asking for money for something we've never heard of, or we see a flood

of professional fund raisers with no tracing or overseeing of their activities, we may worry should we give or not?

At the moment -

- No one body is responsible for regulating charities.
- Nobody maintains a complete register of charities.
- There is no legal requirement for charities which are not companies to provide regular accounts to any supervisory body.
- There is no legal requirement for registration of professional fundraisers.

The main focus of the draft new laws is to give a definition of a charity, to modernise and to ensure protection against abuse of charitable status. It will set out which groups can become registered charities.

**Why should we worry?**

Most people would agree that better control is needed. But too many regula-

tions and controls could strangle the vitality and flexibility that makes voluntary organisations tick. There are fears that registration charges could be introduced. Too much paperwork could be a serious burden to some groups.

It seems that every single group with a "community benefit" purpose, from the Tidy Towns to Whist drives for the elderly, will be forced to register and to comply with all the requirements of the new law.

In their overall policy aim they state that they recognise the essential voluntary nature of charity and identify that there is a need to get a right balance between proper accountability and vigorous intervention.

This is a paper that the voluntary sector needs to pay special attention to, as in the future we may end up paying to be volunteers. We all want transparency, accountability and protection against fraud but we

need to be crystal clear in what we don't want, which is, duplication of paperwork, registration fees in fact no levy at all on organizations, as we don't need to have to fundraise to become volunteers in the first place.

The current position is not clearly set out in law definitions of charities are used by the Revenue to determine tax exemption status.

The Revenue's Categories are: Relief of poverty, advancement of education, advancement of religion. Other purposes beneficial to the community not falling under any of the first categories.

The new proposals are to introduce a statutory definition of charity to replace the current common law interpretation.

New proposed definitions are:

- The advancement of health which includes the prevention and relief of sicknesses disease or

human suffering, the prevention and relief of poverty, distress or disadvantage, the care support and protection of children and young people.

- The advancement of education,
- The advancement of community welfare which includes the promotion of community development.
- The advancement of religion.
- The advancement of the natural environment and other purposes beneficial to the community, this includes the prevention and relief of suffering to animals.
- The promotion and fostering of culture and the preservation and protection of the Irish heritage.

This is a complex document well worth the attention of the voluntary sector.

There is a healthy attitude to most issues by the Government in this Consultation Paper. But what

we don't need is to discover one year down the road is that there are laws in place which place a burden on the Voluntary Sector. We need to study the Paper and respond with our own

suggestions, and submit our findings before the May 28.

Kilkenny Community Forum would like your views. Groups are invited to send any thoughts by

letter to Nellie Brett at Main Street, Gowran, County Kilkenny or email to [info@newground.ie](mailto:info@newground.ie).

Best of all, send ideas direct to the Government at the Department of Com-

munity, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs at 43-49 Mespil Road, Dublin 4 or by email to [eolas@pobail.ie](mailto:eolas@pobail.ie). You can read the paper yourself on page seven of the government website [www.pobail.ie](http://www.pobail.ie)

### Local people making decisions on the big issues



Left to right ... Afra Cronin, Suzanne Wenman members of the South Kilkenny Confederation of Community Groups and Katharine Larkin Community Support Worker with Kilkenny Community Forum at the meeting for the Community Sector in the Rising Sun in Mullinavat.

**O**n a cold and dark November night about 40 people came to an open debate and workshop at the Rising Sun, Mullinavat. The meeting was to inform and consult all community and voluntary groups in the South Kilkenny electoral area about the new role of local voluntary sector representatives in Local Government.

Thomas Breathnach, Chairperson of the South Kilkenny Confederation of Community Groups, in his opening speech gave a profile on the organisation and what its members have achieved.

The Confederation of Community Groups of South Kilkenny was formed in July 1998. It is the recognised community forum from which nominations are made for the County Development

and voluntary sector is, to increase community participation in the decision-making process so that the community and voluntary sector in Kilkenny will have a united, strong, effective voice which influences future decisions in the County's Development. We are not united and are not encouraged to be united.

This time we need to remember that the Community and Voluntary Representatives chosen by the people are the only ones eligible to sit on committees and represent the views of the people and now before elections or selections there is a need for this to be understood.

The sector is there not to appease the political system but to have a voice to promote the benefits of volunteering and encourage volunteerism in the communities and to work in conjunction with other bodies and influence policy making.

The following is a brief outline of some of the activities of the Confederation:

- Development of the publication of a village profile of the eight parishes comprising the confederation is currently underway, supported by BNS.
- A research project designed to investigate child-care facilities and requirements in the South Kilkenny region, supported by BNS.
- Participation in the established structure of the Strategic Planning Committees, County Development Board and the Kilkenny County Community Forum.
- Members sat on the Working Group that undertook a comprehensive review of the Kilkenny Community Forum.

Confederation representation was made to the

proactive in the rural transport Initiative. The confederation has taken an active interest in concerns expressed throughout the county regarding the loss of the *Radio Kilkenny* franchise to a commercial consortium. Written submission was made to the BCI.

A video for the film/tourist industry was done by Realt Productions. There has been consistent growth of activity and responsible participation of members in both established and new initiatives and it is hoped that this will be strengthened and developed by the opportunity afforded by the next round of election of community and voluntary sector representatives from the South Kilkenny area.

The main reason for the session was to discuss and debate how local voluntary representatives should be chosen. New elections are coming this year for repre-

was also stated by two workgroups that only groups with officers and constitutions should be eligible to nominate representatives.

The way in which people were elected or selected to sit on the various SPCs and other committees was also queried. How can it be more democratic? There was also a strong consensus that if an elected person failed to attend three or more meetings in a row, they should be replaced, possibly by the person with the second highest number of votes, or by an elected alternate.

Another issue that has come up from the working of the present structure is that persons standing for election should be able and willing to attend SPC and Community Forum Liaison Committee meetings on a specific night e.g. second Tuesday of each month for CLC and SPCs as required.

## The heart of volunteerism

Sir,

It is said that there is nothing stronger than the heart of a volunteer. Last week I wondered about that statement as I sat in a room where a gentleman termed all volunteerism and the involvement with the local government structures as charity and the vibes I got, suggested that it was no great wild card to be displaying.

So it set me wondering should I be in some pub drinking and smoking, should I be on the golf course chasing a ball, (wonderful for the mental stability I believe) or maybe I should take up ballooning or skydiving.

I thought of all the money I had spent on phone bills, stationary, postage, petrol and various other things over the years. The fact that I could break my neck did not seem daunting; all I could think about for days was all the time in my life I wasted on projects of one kind or another, the wonderful people I met and worked with, the dreams we had - and some became a reality, the Elderly I worked with, who were a life-line when I needed to be needed.

Suddenly I saw the nub of the misconception and it is this: People who do voluntary work do not do it for the adulation, when in reality they need to work and be needed, they have a strong desire to improve the world around them for themselves and others.

There is no charity in doing for others when it is beneficial to both sides. So is it to be skydiving or voluntary work and I thought what the hell, there is room for two nuts in the world, him and me.

Yours  
Nellie Brett

**This is our first entry in our new "Wavelength" letters column. It was written by our chairperson in a pressurised moment. We are happy to announce that letters from voluntary groups will now be a regular feature of wavelength. We are asking you to start the ball rolling by sending in your funniest experience in a voluntary group. There will be an award of €50 for your group for the best letter printed.**

## Your Voice

**P**articipation in the local Government structures for the community and voluntary sector is having a voice and being heard, it needs to be understood that it is not about distributing funds. The old volunteer's cry for funding needs to be balanced with the advantage of having a voice.

Four years down the road and there is still confusion about the advantages of participation in the local government structures for the Community and voluntary sector.

And we certainly have not been using our voices to our advantage. For instant we do not have Expanded Area Committees in Kilkenny. In other Counties like Waterford these committees are in operation for two years.

In the County Development Plan, "A Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development", the vision for the community

and voluntary sector is, to increase community participation in the decision-making process so that the community and voluntary sector in Kilkenny will have a united, strong, effective voice which influences future decisions in the County's Development. We are not united and are not encouraged to be united.

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## Agenda 21 - A blueprint for sustainable development

**K**ilkenny County Council has in recent times been proactive in making Agenda 21 central to the way it does business. Agenda 21 was devised at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 as a means of delivering sustainable development at local community level throughout the world. Sustainable development merges economic, social and environmental development for the benefit of all within a community while respecting the earth's resources for use by following generations.

Local Authorities are seen as key to implementing Agenda 21, the core principle of which is about giving real decision-making powers to local communities in order that they become proactive in addressing their own needs.

Uptake of the principle of Agenda 21 in Ire-

land has been poor to date, but Kilkenny County Council are one of the few local authorities to start taking it seriously with the establishment of a dedicated Agenda 21 committee. The committee comprises of County Council officers from Community and Enterprise, Environment and Heritage sectors, community and voluntary reps and commercial sectoral interests as well as some elected representatives. To date the committee has met several times to outline its objectives and on February 18 visited Cork Environmental Alliance in order to see the work that they do in lobbying and campaigning for sustainable development.

This committee will feedback to the County Development Board ideas and methods for delivering sound economic, social and environ-

mental practices across all sectors of society. The whole process of Community and Voluntary representation on County Development Boards and SPC's is central to Agenda 21, as it gives decision making powers to these groups and to communities via participative consultation.

The Agenda 21 initiative in Kilkenny County Council is being led by Agenda 21 officer, Ronan Ryan. If your group has an interest in this area, an information workshop on the principles of Sustainable Development will be held at a date and venue to be announced. It will be run jointly with Tipperary Institute and Comhar (The National Sustainable Development Partnership) and further details can be obtained from Malcolm Noonan, (056) 7723276 email: [malnoonan@eircom.net](mailto:malnoonan@eircom.net)



Community Representatives study the issues in Mullinavat.

Board, County Community Liaison Committee, Strategic Policy Committees and Expanded Area Committees of Kilkenny County Council.

The confederation has set up a company limited by guarantee - South Kilkenny Integrated Local Development Ltd. (SKILD).

The fundamental purpose of the Confederation is to work towards making South Kilkenny a place where people would want to live to allow them to achieve fulfilment in an environment that respects their values, their sense of place and their sense of community.

He stated that it was their intention to enable this through participation with respective agencies in promoting the sensitive development of the communities of South Kilkenny socially, economically and culturally, in a manner that respects the unique ethos, identity and heritage of the area.

The confederation meets each month and all members of the local community and voluntary groups in

South East Region Waste Management meetings. On production of the draft Waste Management Plan, extensive work was undertaken for the response submitted by the Confederation.

Strong interest in environmental issues was also reflected by member's attendance at meetings arranged by Kilkenny County Council Environmental Education.

Also facilitated by Confederation members, was the Hazardous Waste Collection Unit that visited Mullinavat.

Currently under review is the new Co Council Draft Litter Management Plan to which the Confederation will make submission shortly. The Confederation acted as agents in enabling the visit of the Government Mobile Training Unit for Information Technology.

It has also facilitated the recruitment and advertising of the BNS Information Technology, ten-week training course, held in Mullinavat and Mooncoin. The confederation was

representatives of local voluntary groups who want to take part in the policy committees of the Co Council.

Everyone took part in group discussion of options. There was a strong consensus to adopt a process similar to last time, that is an open public meeting with everyone present having a vote. Nominations should be from the floor on the night. If someone nominated is not present it is suggested that their agreement in writing should be produced.

The majority thought that nominees should be put forward by groups of which they are members. It

An update on local issues was compiled at the end of the meeting and will be reported on in a future wavelength.

Any group wanting to contact the Southern Federation can do so.

Thanks to Suzanne Wenman, Thomas Breathnach and all members of the Southern Federation for organising this useful meeting.

We are planning to hold similar sessions in all electoral areas in Kilkenny, over the next few weeks. Please contact us at the above address if you or your group are interested.

## Contact us

**W**AVELENGTH is produced by members of the Kilkenny community forum, elected by the community and voluntary sector. All voluntary and community groups are invited to join the Forum.

Membership allows them to take part in local government policy groups, including the County Development Board. You can contact us by email at [info@teachmhuire.com](mailto:info@teachmhuire.com) or by mail to Nellie Brett, Main Street, Gowran.



Participating at the meeting in the Rising Sun Mullinavat.