



Comhairle na nÓg
Young Voices. Local Issues.



Evaluation Report: Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2008-2009

FEBRUARY 2010
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS





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Development Fund
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Foreword



My Office, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA), takes the lead role in ensuring the development of structures that enable participation in decision-making by children and young people, such as Dáil na nÓg and Comhairle na nÓg, as outlined in the National Children's Strategy (2000).

Dáil na nÓg is the national youth parliament and is overseen and funded by my Office. It meets once a year and provides young people, elected through their local Comhairle na nÓg, with the opportunity of feeding their concerns into public policy.

The 34 City and County Development Boards (CDBs) are responsible for implementing the National Children's Strategy at local level and for establishing Comhairle na nÓg to give children and young people an opportunity to influence local policy, planning and services. The effective development of Comhairle na nÓg is named as a Government priority in *Towards 2016*.

The Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund was established by my Office in 2007 to support CDBs in running effective Comhairle na nÓg. Applications under the scheme are obliged to meet criteria that ensure effective engagement by members of the Comhairle na nÓg with key adult decision-makers and decision-making bodies. As part of this scheme, an independent evaluator was appointed to measure success in improving the operation of Comhairle na nÓg and obtaining value for money.

This report of the independent evaluator highlights that in its second year, the Development Fund has resulted in significant improvements in the operation of many Comhairlí na nÓg. The impact of the increased funding over the last two years is that there has been a significant positive impact, most notably the fact that almost all Comhairlí are conducting meetings on a regular basis throughout the year and there is renewed emphasis on the delivery of the core objectives of Comhairle na nÓg. There have also been a number of instances where Comhairlí na nÓg have made contributions resulting in positive changes for young people at local level. Some CDBs have established regular sessions of Comhairle na nÓg that link with the adult County Council and interact with policy-makers to ensure that the views of young people are included in shaping policies and services. The development of local partnerships with external agencies, such as youth services or other organisations engaged with 'seldom heard' young people, has been pivotal in ensuring broad access to Comhairle na nÓg. It is evident from the report that many Comhairlí na nÓg have established 'steering committees' comprised of decision-makers in key local agencies, such as the county/city council, youth organisations, the HSE, the VEC, sports partnerships, non-governmental organisations and young people.

As a result of the success of the second year of this initiative, the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund will continue in 2010. This funding scheme is part of an ongoing strategy to enhance the effectiveness of Comhairle na nÓg and to develop good practice in participation in decision-making by children and young people.

Barry Andrews, TD

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs



Acknowledgements

The successful development of Comhairle na nÓg involves the efforts of many dedicated people at national and local level. The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) and the author would like to acknowledge this significant input into the Comhairlí and this evaluation report. City and County Development Boards and their staff, youth services and their staff, and a host of other key stakeholders work assiduously and in partnership to ensure Comhairle na nÓg is the important structure in youth participation in Ireland that it is today. Particular thanks should be extended to the young people who make up the vibrant Comhairlí na nÓg nationwide.

Special acknowledgement is afforded to the young people and staff of the four Comhairlí na nÓg who contributed to the in-depth evaluations conducted by the author, namely:

- Cork City Comhairle;
- Donegal Comhairle;
- Dublin City Comhairle;
- Offaly Comhairle.



About the author

Olivia McEvoy, Cnag ar an Doras, was appointed as the independent evaluator of the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund in December 2007 and produced last year's *Report on the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2007-2008*. She is also the independent evaluator of the OMCYA's Inclusion Project and the Children and Young People's Forum. She has written a number of reports for the OMCYA, including the report on *Teenage Mental Health: What helps and what hurts?* (2009), the report on *Teenagers' views on solutions to Alcohol Misuse* (2008) and the *Report on the consultations with teenagers on the issues to be considered by the Minister for Children when examining the age of consent for sexual activity* (2006), as well as the youth-friendly versions of *Teenspace: The National Recreation Policy for Young People* (2007).

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Executive Summary

The Comhairle Development Fund was assessed by an independent evaluator to determine whether it was achieving its aim of supporting Local Authorities to develop Comhairle na nÓg as a forum for structured input into decision-making on policies and services by children and young people. The second year of the Development Fund (2008-2009) has resulted in much success, continued improvement and, for the most part, money well spent. While last year's grants were used for a diversity of projects by different Comhairlí, this year's spending has been more uniform and concentrated on the successful delivery of the 'regular' Comhairle programme. The core objectives of this programme are to provide a safe, accessible, creative space for a diversity of young people to meet on a regular basis to consider and discuss issues of interest and concern to them in their lives or pressing local matters. The young people are then facilitated, advised and ultimately empowered to conduct further research, engage in surveys, gather information or involve other young people to develop their own ideas on these issues before working in partnership or in discussion with local decision-makers to bring their ideas to reality, make improvements and have a positive impact in the local community. Each Comhairle also acts as a reference panel or 'voice for youth' for decision-makers in the local area.

The direction and focus of the Comhairle in 2008-2009 was on the development of the key priority areas identified in the evaluation of the programme in Year 1 (2007-2008), in particular (1) the creation of formal and sustained links with adult decision-makers and (2) ensuring that the membership profile of the Comhairle was representative of all age groups between the ages of 12 and 18. The criteria for the grant reflected these two key priority areas, as well as others such as the inclusion of 'seldom heard' young people in the programme and keeping the Comhairle na nÓg website up to date. In light of this, the evaluation of the programme in Year 2 was focused on these areas of priority.

An assessment of the impact of the funding over 2 years concludes that there has been a significant positive impact, most notably the fact that almost all Comhairlí are conducting meetings on a regular basis throughout the year and there is renewed emphasis on the delivery of Comhairle's core objectives. There have also been a number of significant 'wins', where Comhairle has made a contribution at local level resulting in a positive change for young people. However, there are still a number of challenges remaining for the Comhairle na nÓg programme, including the need to **improve the gross under-representation of young people aged 12-15** and, most importantly, to **improve and formalise links between young people and local decision-makers** so that this process is absolutely embedded in the local decision-making system and not reliant on any one 'champion' or agency. While this has been the focus for this year, it is essential that every Comhairle now *commits to ensuring that this focus translates into reality* and that young people are afforded a meaningful opportunity to impact on the local decision-making process.



The young people report again this year that Comhairle na nÓg is a hugely positive experience for them and an opportunity to be involved, have a voice, improve their skills and, where possible, make a difference in achieving change. However, Comhairle members also aspire to further involvement in organising and directing meetings, increasing the membership and status of the Comhairle and, most importantly, generating better connections with decision-makers to improve their chances of having a real impact.

Based on this direction from young people and the outcomes of this report, the focus must remain on the fulfilment of the core objectives of the Comhairle programme rather than any new innovative practices or change. If the membership changes on a 2-yearly basis, the programme will benefit most from being built on a robust sustainable system, with little need to change dramatically. There are many Comhairlí already delivering on fulfilling the core objectives and much more. However, there is also a small cohort of Comhairlí that are not reaching even basic 'minimum standards' and need to be supported to achieve these standards and beyond. The establishment of two new structures in 2008 will help them achieve this, i.e. the Children and Young People's Participation Partnership Committee, who set the strategy for Comhairle, and the Children and Young People's Participation Support Team, who help implement this strategy.

2

It is vital that funds continue to be provided to maintain and improve Comhairle na nÓg. In this current economic climate, dedicated funding for this initiative is especially important since without it, few Comhairlí would be in a position to continue to meet on a regular basis. Indeed, the evidence from the evaluation reports of the last two years is that, without this funding, the majority of Comhairlí would cease to exist. Suggestions for the next steps to be taken in the development of the Comhairle na nÓg programme are made, based on a number of recommendations under the following headings:

- **participation** of and impact on young people;
- **membership** profile, including age profile and meaningful inclusion of 'seldom heard' young people;
- **structure** of the Comhairle na nÓg programme, including delivery partners, steering committees, links to decision-making structures, term of office, links with student councils, and branding and promotion of Comhairle;
- **other key issues**, including child protection policy, youth work and youth participation, training and capacity-building, and exchanges between Comhairlí.

The report concludes that Comhairle na nÓg is a vibrant and unique youth participation initiative that has the capacity to engage and involve young people in local decision-making and has enormous benefits for both the young people involved and the communities they live in. Moreover, it is largely as a result of the Comhairle Development Fund that this considerable improvement and increased positive impact has resulted over the last two years.

1. Context and Methodology



Comhairlí na nÓg are local youth councils that give children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies. A Comhairle na nÓg was set up in each of the 34 City and County Development Boards around the country to help deliver Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy (2000), which states that '*Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity*'. The Comhairlí also help fulfil Ireland's commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that '*Every child has the right to have his or her voice heard*'.

The evaluation report on last year's Comhairle Development Fund (Year 1, 2007-2008) concluded that the grant scheme had made '*an enormous difference for the better*' to the Comhairle na nÓg programme. Stemming from this success, funding for a further year was secured by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) and administered to 32 participating Comhairlí. It was made clear to them that the grant was designed to develop, support and enhance the core objectives and key activities of the Comhairle programme.

This evaluation report on the Comhairle Development Fund in Year 2 (2008-2009) is designed to build on the information gathered in Year 1 and to focus on some of the areas that emerged then as priorities, including:

- membership numbers, age profile and term of office;
- development of formal links between Comhairle and decision-making structures;
- the meaningful participation of 'seldom heard' young people;
- links with student councils.

Particular emphasis is given to two key areas, communicated to all City and County Development Boards (CDBs) earlier in the year, namely:

- the creation of formal and sustained links with adult decision-making bodies/ individuals in the county/city;
- ensuring that membership of Comhairle na nÓg represents all age groups between 12 and 18 years.



Methodology

The methodology for assessing the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund was four-fold:

1. Familiarisation with all relevant background information, including all original application forms.
2. An analysis of information from the 'Comhairle na nÓg Final Reports', which are submitted to the OMCYA annually by all participating Comhairlí na nÓg.
3. An analysis of information arising from the in-depth evaluation of four Comhairlí na nÓg (Cork City, Donegal, Dublin City and Offaly), each of which included:
 - a site visit and attendance and observation of a Comhairle meeting;
 - semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, such as the Administrative Officer in the CDB, the Youth Service providers involved and the youth workers directly involved in the coordination of the programme;
 - a focus group with the Comhairle members, or a sample selection of members, to assess and discuss their experience and assessment of the programme.
4. Evaluator's membership of the Comhairle Implementation Group (CIG) and of the subsequent Children and Young People's Participation Partnership Committee.

4

The template for the 'Comhairle na nÓg Final Reports' (referred to in (2) above) was changed from previous years, merging the report on the annual grant and the Development Fund together. This was completed to reflect the fact that the Comhairle Development Fund is designed to enhance the core objectives of the Comhairle na nÓg programme throughout the year, rather than additional projects or activities.

Structure of report

This evaluation report provides an analysis of the main findings under the headings of:

- participation of and impact on young people (*Chapter 2*);
- membership profile (*Chapter 3*);
- structure of the Comhairle na nÓg programme (*Chapter 4*);
- other key issues (*Chapter 5*).

This analysis is followed by:

- a general assessment of the overall impact of the funding and improvements made over the last two years (*Chapter 6*);
- key recommendations for Comhairle, remaining challenges and suggestions for next steps (*Chapter 7*).

The report is also designed to showcase and learn from some of the numerous examples of good practice that exist in many Comhairlí. Besides the case studies mentioned throughout the report,

- a number of innovative projects by Comhairlí around the country are described (*Chapter 8*).

2. Participation of and impact on young people



The participation and engagement of young people is of critical importance to the success of Comhairle na nÓg. It is also important to assess *the experience* of young people participating in a Comhairle.

Participation of young people

Table 1 compares the numbers of young people involved in their Comhairle's AGM and meeting on a regular basis for the years 2008-2009 and 2007-2008. On average, some 95 young people attended a Comhairle AGM in 2008-2009, compared to 75 in 2007-2008. How AGMs are organised and consequently the numbers attending varies considerably across different Comhairlí (see *Chapter 4 for further detail*). In two instances, as few as 16 young people attended the AGM, whereas Dublin City Comhairle catered for 318 young people across 5 different electoral areas. In other instances, an AGM has not been held because the Comhairle committee are serving a 2-year term of office or because the election process does not include an AGM. The Comhairlí of Laois, Wexford and Kilkenny (the latter run as a youth conference) had the largest cohorts of young people at a single AGM sitting.

On average, 20 young people met regularly during 2008-2009 at their Comhairle committee meeting, although in some instances this was as high as 53 and as low as 5. There is a value in electing a significant number of young people at the AGM to meet on a regular basis. Inevitably there will be some drop-off in numbers so it is useful to have an 'over-subscribed' Comhairle at the outset to ensure the dynamic and energy of the group is maintained when a number of people no longer attend. In order to ensure young people progress their own projects and become an integral part of the decision-making process, it is recommended that a minimum of 12 young people, but ideally more, are elected to form the Comhairle's committee and meet on a regular basis.



Table 1: Comparison of participation of young people during 2007-08 and 2008-09

Comhairle	2008-2009		2007-2008	
	No. of young people at AGM	No. of young people who meet regularly	No. of young people at AGM	No. of young people who meet regularly
Carlow	No AGM (since 2-year term)	13	48	12
Cavan	70	20	60	15
Clare	81	5	86	14
Cork City	37	10	64	3
Cork County	132	22	<i>No comparable data</i>	
Donegal	No AGM held	36	34	34
Dublin City	318 (in 5 electoral areas)	46	484	30
Dun Laoghaire	30	30	17	16
Fingal	66	24	24	24
Galway City	75	10	39	13
Galway County	<i>Data not available</i>	30	117	60
Kerry	82	13	107	107
Kildare	111	No regular meetings	106	20
Kilkenny	177	18	120	10
Laois	183	20	175	26
Leitrim	No AGM held	No regular meetings	<i>No comparable data</i>	
Limerick City	64	15	53	18
Limerick County	53	No regular meetings	50	No regular meetings
Longford	20	15	27	15
Louth	16	15	<i>No comparable data</i>	
Mayo	90	15	<i>No comparable data</i>	
Meath	16	8	35	12
Monaghan	No AGM (since 2-year term)	15	60	15
North Tipperary	125	15	82	15
Offaly	83	30	51	15
Roscommon	88	25	52	30
Sligo	77	13	62	15
South Dublin	49	20	26	26
South Tipperary	116	9	16	10
Waterford City	23	11	28	15
Waterford County	40	No regular meetings	36	8
Westmeath	135	32	85	14
Wexford	168	20	110	10
Wicklow	159 (in 5 electoral areas)	53	80	51
AVERAGE NO.	95	20	78	22

Impact on young people

When the young people in the focus groups were asked '*What was good*' about their Comhairle and what impact it had on their lives, the outcome was exactly the same as last year, namely:

- involvement;
- having a voice;
- making a difference and achieving change;
- improved skills.

What could BE IMPROVED?

In order to improve on this impact, young people participating in the in-depth evaluations were asked '*What could be improved*' about their Comhairle. Their responses are arranged under the following headings:

Youth-led meetings

- want to be more involved in the running of the meeting;
- we don't even get to vote on when the meetings are held;
- we should choose the agenda – the topics shouldn't be just given to us;
- we should be told the topics for the next meeting in advance so we can do our own research;
- sometimes there are meetings about meetings.

Status

- need more recognition and status so that other people will get interested and join;
- need to have more information in the media so that we get our opinions out there;
- we have no website and we need a Bebo page.

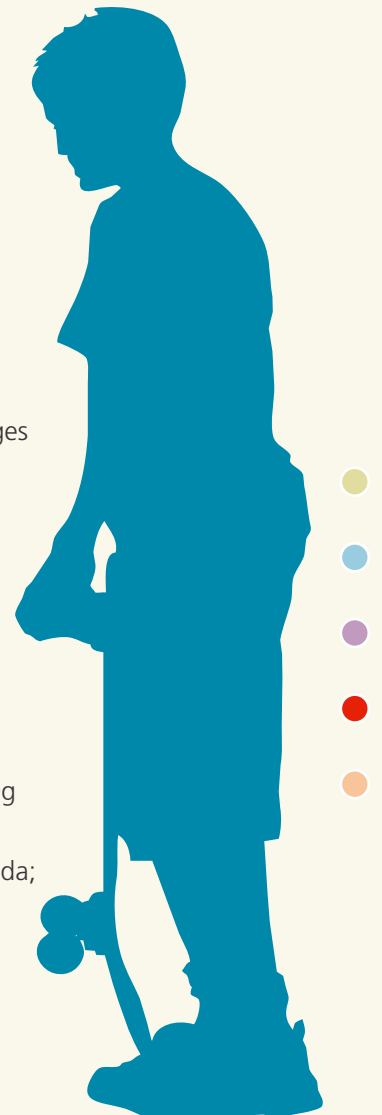
Lack of impact

- want to do more at local level;
- we promised our schools in the elections that we would make changes for them and we don't really have much of an opportunity to do that;
- nobody knows about us;
- nothing has really changed;
- we need to be more connected to what is going on in the area and to the people who actually make the decisions.

What exactly DO YOUNG PEOPLE WANT from the Comhairle?

Young people reported an extremely positive experience of Comhairle na nÓg when interviewed at the in-depth evaluations, but they are also pushing for:

- further involvement in the running of meetings and setting the agenda;
- increasing the status of the Comhairle in the media and using new technologies, particularly in the quest to attract additional members;
- having better connections with decision-makers and the local community;
- having a greater impact in achieving change.



To help achieve these requirements and involve young people more in the organisation of the meetings, the young members will need to be trained on how to run a meeting and how to set an agenda. Many Comhairlí report that having specific positions (such as chairperson, secretary, PR officer) and ensuring everyone has a responsibility greatly aids this process. This is clearly working for Sligo Comhairle na nÓg (see below).

EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

SLIGO Comhairle holds youth-led meetings. One member is elected as chairperson, while another is elected to record the minutes of the meeting. The Comhairle Project Worker acts as facilitator and advisor, enabling the young people to direct the meeting themselves. Members give input directly by setting the agenda for meetings and arranging dates. Projects undertaken are agreed on by the young members and their ideas are used to guide the course of the project. Responsibilities are shared and jobs are delegated, enabling the young members to enhance their personal development and also work as a team.

To empower the young people, training was organised for them to develop their skills as council members. During the training, they revisited their roles in the council, took part in team games, explored the structure of the council and received training in decision-making, team work, structure of meetings, media skills and PR. This has proved to work well and the group now puts this training into practice at meetings.

Formal relationship between Comhairle and decision-makers

The evidence suggests that it is vital that a formal relationship exists between the Comhairle and local decision-makers, most notably the County/City Council and other decision-making bodies within and outside the City and County Development Board (CDB). The documented experience of successful Comhairlí indicates that forging this formal relationship will help the Comhairle members have a greater impact and increase their status (see also Chapter 4, 'Links to decision-making structures').

Media presence

Ideally, each Comhairle na nÓg should have its own website, which members can update regularly. In instances where this is currently happening, it ensures that young people from the area, especially those who were at the AGM, can keep up to date on the progress of the Comhairle's activities. Writing articles for local newspapers or taking part in interviews on local radio also aids this process, as evidenced by Kerry Comhairle na nÓg (see below).



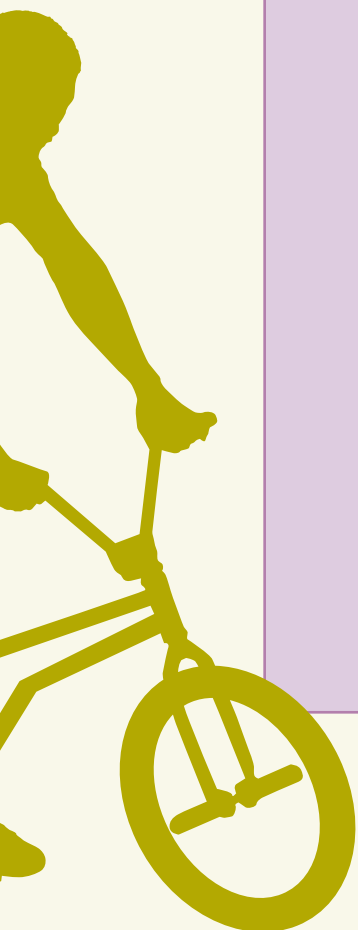
EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

KERRY Comhairle has been very successful in establishing a media presence locally, with young people writing articles and conducting interviews on radio on a regular basis. To ensure young people were enabled to do this, a media skills training workshop was organised for delegates involved in the Comhairle. The training included communications skills, writing press releases and radio techniques. Policy documents were also considered, including the local Development Plan and the document on 'Recreational Activities for Young People'. The training workshop was a residential activity, with Comhairle members spending two full days together with team-building activities built in. This media training has enabled the young people to deal with public speaking, prepare press releases for the media and communicate with their peers on issues that impact on their lives.

In summary, significant numbers are involved in Comhairle na nÓg, both annually and on a regular basis. While the young people report a very positive experience of the programme, they have also called for structural and practical improvements which would result in a more youth-led initiative with greater status, formal connections to decision-makers and impact in achieving change. The suggested measures to help achieve these improvements should be implemented at the earliest opportunity.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- An AGM should be held on an annual basis, with a significant number and diverse group of young people attending.
- A minimum of 12 young people, and ideally considerably more, should be elected at the AGM to form the Comhairle committee, which will meet on a regular basis throughout the year.
- It is useful to 'over-subscribe' the Comhairle committee at the outset in order to counter-balance the inevitable drop-off in numbers during the year.
- Comhairle members should be more involved in setting the agenda for meetings and in running them. To this end, they should receive suitable training to empower them to do so, including training in decision-making, team work, structure of meetings, media skills and PR.
- Formal links to decision-makers should be established and maintained to enable dialogue and discussion between them and the young people on issues of relevance.
- A media and web presence (particularly the Comhairle na nÓg website) should be established and maintained, preferably by the Comhairle members themselves.



3. Membership profile

The membership profile of any one Comhairle na nÓg is of interest in evaluating what is working well and what could be improved. However, the membership profile of the 34 Comhairlí na nÓg as a collective is of paramount importance in this evaluation because it was identified as a priority area for development in last year's evaluation report. In particular, there was concern over the increasing trend to limit membership to 15-18 year-olds. Table 2 gives a breakdown of membership of all 34 Comhairlí na nÓg by age profile and the percentage of 'seldom heard' young people who attended the AGM.

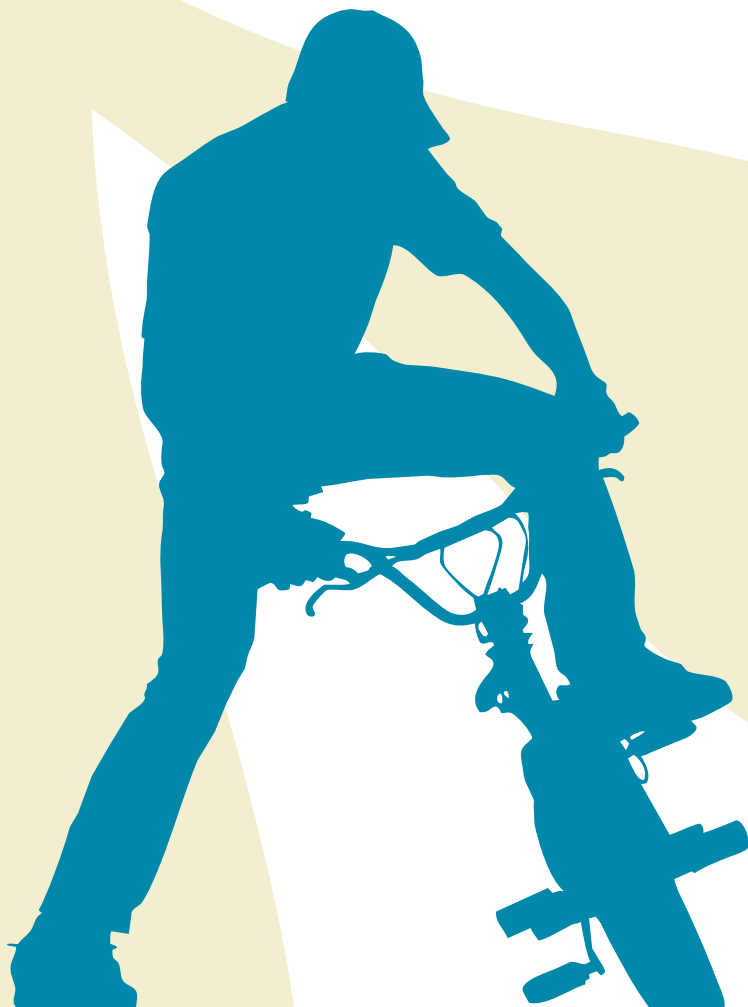


Table 2: Membership profile of all 34 Comhairlí na nÓg (2008-09)

Comhairle	% of 'seldom heard' young people at AGM	Age profile
Carlow	25%	Data not available
Cavan	19%	12-18 years
Clare	6%	11-17 years
Cork City	0%	12-17 years
Cork County	Data not available	14-18 years
Donegal	Data not available	15-18 years
Dublin City	Data not available	7-17 years
Dun Laoghaire	0%	15-18 years
Fingal	33%	12-18 years
Galway City	20%	12-18 years
Galway County	Data not available	Data not available
Kerry	7%	14-18 years
Kildare	19%	12-18 years
Kilkenny	3%	12-18 years
Laois	2%	16-17 years
Leitrim	Data not available	Data not available
Limerick City	30%	14-18 years
Limerick County	8%	12-18 years
Longford	10%	15-18 years
Louth	6%	15-18 years
Mayo	71%	15-18 years
Meath	13%	12-17 years
Monaghan	Data not available	10-18 years
North Tipperary	Data not available	12-18 years
Offaly	17%	12-17 years
Roscommon	23%	12-18 years
Sligo	33%	12-18 years
South Dublin	0%	12-18 years
South Tipperary	9%	12-18 years
Waterford City	35%	12-18 years
Waterford County	10%	13-17 years
Westmeath	47%	12-18 years
Wexford	33%	13-18 years
Wicklow	15%	12-18 years
AVERAGE %	21%	



Age profile

It had come to the attention of the OMCYA and to the evaluator that many Comhairlí na nÓg did not involve young people between the ages of 12 and 15. Because Comhairle na nÓg is designed as a programme to hear the voices of *young people aged between 12 and 18*, a letter was issued to Comhairlí na nÓg organisers in 2008 asking each organisation to make every effort to include young people aged 12-15 and to avoid a policy of restricting Comhairle na nÓg to young people in Transition Year or over the age of 15.

Benefits of having a wide representation of ages

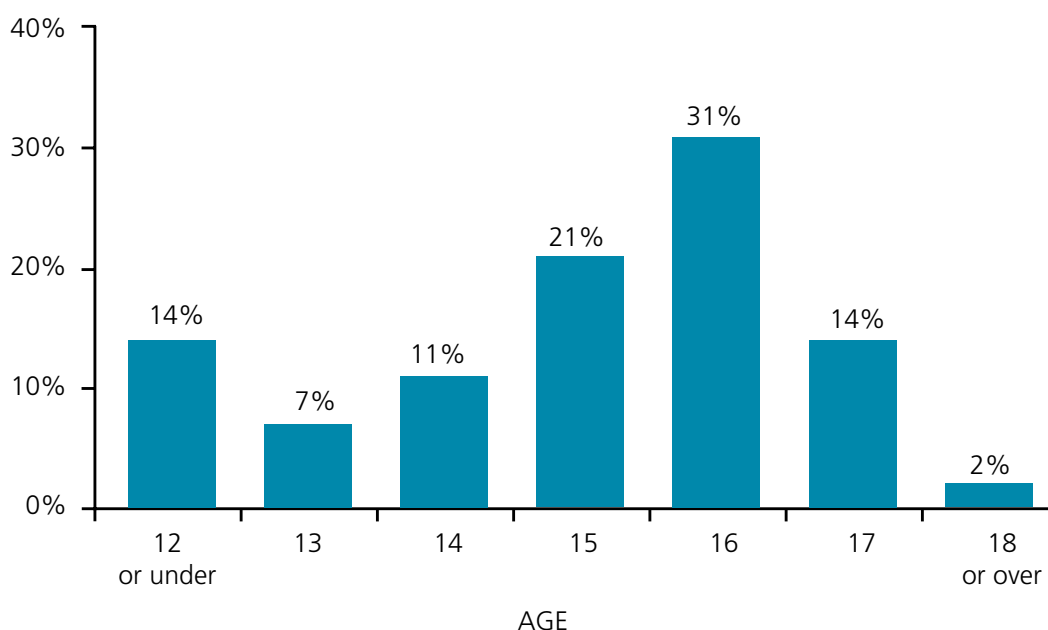
Based on the experiences of Comhairlí to date, it is evident that having a wide diversity of ages represented on the Comhairle is extremely important. It provides for:

- engaging with and hearing the voice of younger young people;
- hearing differing perspectives from young people;
- learning to listen to other points of view;
- ensuring the Comhairle na nÓg is catering for and driving the agenda and interests of all young people aged between 12 and 18.

12

The 'Comhairle na nÓg Final Reports', submitted to the OMCYA each year by all participating Comhairlí, show that there were 6 instances of Comhairlí where the explicit practice was to restrict access to 15-18 year-olds (4) and 14-18 year-olds (2); the majority of these Comhairlí have stated that this practice will now cease. Most Comhairlí are open to recruiting young people aged 12-18, and indeed some Comhairlí accept young people below this age. However, the Final Reports demonstrate that while it is the policy of many Comhairlí to recruit 12-18 year-olds, the reality of the actual age profile is somewhat different. As Figure 1 shows, the age profile of the young people involved in the 23 Comhairlí that responded indicates that 52% are either 15 or 16 years of age, and a further 16% are aged 17 or 18. This means that some 68% of members are over the age of 15, while only 32% are aged 15 or under.

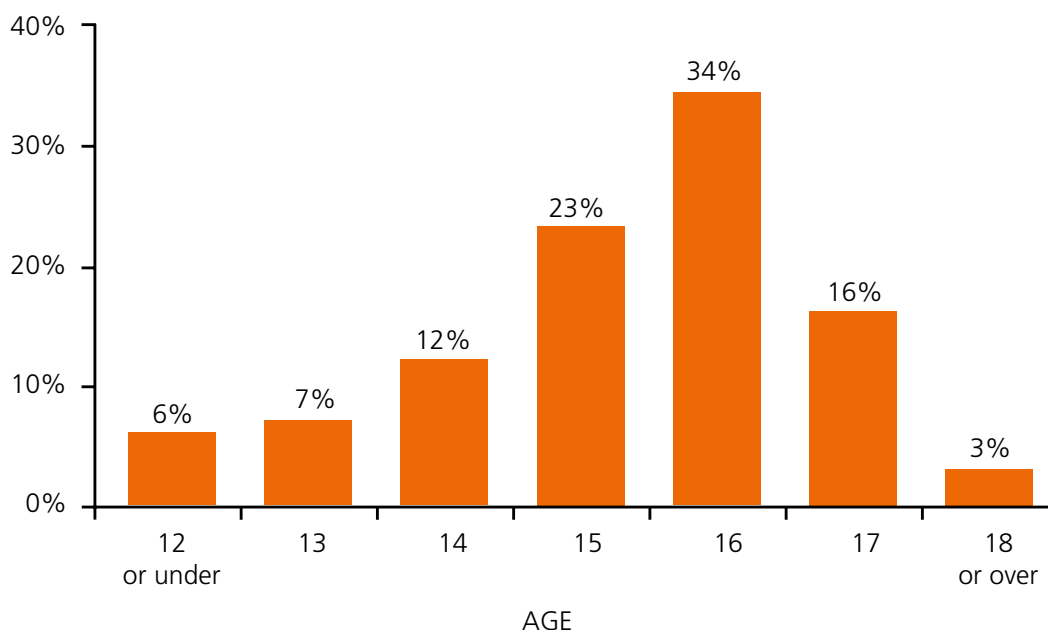
Figure 1: Age profile of Comhairlí* (2008-09)



* 23 Comhairlí provided this information; some Comhairlí did not respond, while others did not record the information.

While these figures are stark enough, they become even starker when the equation is considered *without Dublin City Comhairle*, which accounts for 200 out of the 316 young people aged 12 or under (see *Figure 2*). Excluding Dublin City, some 76% of those involved in Comhairle are aged over 15, while a mere 24% are aged 15 or under. Not surprisingly, this not only affects the Comhairlí themselves, but this trend is also reflected in attendance at Dáil na nÓg and on the Dáil na nÓg Council.

Figure 2: Age profile of Comhairlí excluding Dublin City Comhairle (2008-09)



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There is a common perception that it is difficult for 12-year-olds and 18-year-olds to work together. However, this perception tends to be held among those who do not commonly have younger and older young people working together. There is no doubt that a broad age range, such as from 12 to 18, poses some challenges in relation to facilitation, staffing and resources. More importantly, different approaches, methodologies, structures and forums can sometimes be required to engage effectively with different age categories, as well as with different abilities and communities. However, these methodologies tend to be more creative and therefore popular with all age ranges.

Three out of the four Comhairlí where an in-depth evaluation was conducted have a very wide age spread in their membership. On being asked about the 12-18 age range, they felt that:

- there was no problem being involved when 13-15;
- it has nothing to do with age – it is more about maturity and whether you are interested in being involved or not;
- while there is a huge gap between 12 and 18, it is totally possible to work together.

One group of young people felt that there was a big difference between being 12 and 13, or more whether you were in primary or secondary school. However, while the group concluded that *'You should definitely have to be in secondary school'*, they felt that *'It totally depends on the maturity of the individual'*. Interestingly, one 18-year-old member remarked that *'If adults can work with us, I don't see why 18-year-olds can't work with 12-year-olds'*.

In addition to the notion that younger and older young people cannot work together, many Comhairlí reported that even though they were open to recruiting and did advertise for young people under the age of 15, very few chose to get involved. In places where the Comhairle has always been (or perceived to have been) aimed at Transition Year students and beyond, this perception was hard to change. Guidance was sought by Comhairlí organisers from the OMCYA on how best to attract young people to the Comhairle in the first instance. However, there are numerous examples of good practice in Comhairlí where younger and older people are working together effectively (see *below*).

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

DUBLIN CITY Comhairle does not discriminate against any age group from the target cohort for the Comhairle na nÓg programme. Accordingly, the programme is rolled out to all age demographics (7-17 years of age) through schools and youth and community groups at the Local Area Seminars stage. The average age of current delegates is 13.6 years and some 75% of the Comhairle's membership is aged 15 or under.

WESTMEATH Comhairle has never had a problem in securing youth in the 12-15 age group since it targets 6th class in national schools and also recruits through the youth services. Some 43% of its membership is aged 15 or under.

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In summary, the current age profile of Comhairlí na nÓg provides statistics that are both stark and alarming, despite there being no evidence to support the perception that it is impossible for 12-year-olds and 18-year-olds to work together. Efforts to ensure that Comhairle is a youth participation initiative for *young people of all ages between 12 and 18* need to be increased without delay.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The practice of restricting the Comhairle to Transition Year students or those over the age of 15 should be abolished.
- Comhairle members should represent all ages between 12 and 18.
- Guidelines on how to recruit the younger cohort of young people should be provided to the Comhairlí by the OMCYA and might include:
 - ensuring that all information in publications, websites or other materials clearly states that Comhairle na nÓg is a programme for young people aged 12-18;
 - providing information to 6th class in primary schools;
 - conducting presentations with CSPE teachers and youth services who cater for a younger cohort;
 - ensuring that elections for the Comhairle and Comhairle committee are structured to cater for age balance, as one might cater for gender or geographical balance;
 - recruiting existing members to actively encourage younger members to join;
 - using methodologies during the Comhairle AGM and committee meetings that are engaging and suitable for a younger audience.

Meaningful inclusion of 'seldom heard' young people

There has been a concerted effort by many Comhairlí to better include the more 'seldom heard' young people from their communities. 'Seldom heard' young people is a term used to describe young people who tend not to have many opportunities to have their voices heard, including young people with disabilities; those from an economically disadvantaged or culturally different background; young people in care; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people; and those from more rural backgrounds and ethnic minorities.

An average of 21% of the young people attending Comhairle AGMs throughout the country were from the 'seldom heard' group as defined above (see *Table 3*). This was as high as 71% in Mayo and 47% in Westmeath. However, there were instances where no seldom heard young people were represented at all (e.g. Cork City, Dun Laoghaire, South Dublin).



Table 3: Percentage of 'seldom heard' young people at AGM (2008-09)

Comhairle	No. of young people at AGM	% of 'seldom heard' young people at AGM
Carlow	No AGM (since 2-year term)	25%
Cavan	70	19%
Clare	81	6%
Cork City	37	0%
Cork County	132	<i>Data not available</i>
Donegal	No AGM held	<i>Data not available</i>
Dublin City	318 (in 5 electoral areas)	<i>Data not available</i>
Dun Laoghaire	30	0%
Fingal	66	33%
Galway City	75	20%
Galway County	<i>Data not available</i>	<i>Data not available</i>
Kerry	82	7%
Kildare	111	19%
Kilkenny	177	3%
Laois	183	2%
Leitrim	No AGM held	<i>Data not available</i>
Limerick City	64	30%
Limerick County	53	8%
Longford	20	10%
Louth	16	6%
Mayo	90	71%
Meath	16	13%
Monaghan	No AGM (since 2-year term)	<i>Data not available</i>
North Tipperary	125	<i>Data not available</i>
Offaly	83	17%
Roscommon	88	23%
Sligo	77	33%
South Dublin	49	0%
South Tipperary	116	9%
Waterford City	23	35%
Waterford County	40	10%
Westmeath	135	47%
Wexford	168	33%
Wicklow	159 (in 5 electoral areas)	15%
AVERAGE %		21%

The inclusion of seldom heard young people is working best where the process of recruiting and supporting these young people is embedded in the Comhairle programme and structure, and using a 'partnership of agency' approach. In some instances (e.g. Fingal and Westmeath), representatives from organisations representing seldom heard young people sit on the main steering committee responsible for advising and assisting the Comhairle Coordinator to organise Comhairle na nÓg. In other instances, a special committee of organisations representing seldom heard young people advises the Comhairle Coordinator. These systems assume that such organisations exist in the area and are reliant on the representing organisations being interested and willing to assist in ensuring their young people are involved in Comhairle. As one Comhairle organiser remarked: *'The Comhairle links with and relies upon structures and groups being in place to provide services to hard-to-reach young people. These structures and groups are the main vehicle for targeting and recruiting young people for Comhairle na nÓg. Where these structures are weak, this translates to weak representation. Conversely, where they are strong, access to young people, representation and capacity-building is much easier.'*

What WORKS WELL to include 'seldom heard' young people?

There is no precise or set model that guarantees the inclusion of seldom heard young people in the Comhairle. However, evidence from site visits and reports over two years indicate that there are some factors that better ensure their more sustainable and systematic inclusion:

- **Developing a 'partnership of agency' approach:** The support of the organisations that represent seldom heard young people is essential. Ideally, these organisations should be represented on the steering committee, or at least a committee that helps drive the process to include this cohort of young people.
- **Capacity-building and training:** In some instances the capacity-building and support is conducted by the organisations, whereas in other instances the Comhairle Coordinator or other staff member conducts this training. Either way, it is vital that seldom heard young people are supported with confidence, self-esteem and skills useful to a meeting setting, as well as information on the workings of Comhairle and the issues being addressed.
- **Retaining a certain percentage of seats for 'seldom heard' organisations and young people:** This facilitates an election or co-option process that ensures seldom heard young people are represented. While this method has been successful in a number of Comhairlí (e.g. Wexford and Westmeath), it is not always necessary if seldom heard young people are supported to come through the regular process (e.g. Cork County).

The evidence also suggests that it is essential to ensure that seldom heard young people are not labelled or identified as such. On the other hand, it is important that the process of their inclusion is transparent and not ignored or 'unspoken of' with the young people who come through the regular process. Where a transparent process has not been followed, this has led to some division between elected members and young people from the seldom heard group. Where the process has been open and transparent, young people appear to have been very accepting of the circumstances when explained – that there are reserved places for 'special interest groups' or 'youth organisations' in the Comhairle and an election or co-option process will be run on that basis.



What are the CHALLENGES to include 'seldom heard' young people?

The inclusion of seldom heard young people is not without its challenges. Organisers of Comhairlí have identified and reported some of these:

- cultural differences, including Traveller girls, were cited as especially difficult since meetings often occur in the evenings and Traveller girls are sometimes not allowed out at night and are also fearful of attending a committee where they would not know many other young people;
- transport issues to attend meetings;
- resource-intensive nature of work;
- behaviour management issues;
- topics discussed can require after-care support;
- involving young people who are not connected to any existing service.

Despite these challenges, and while it is essential to acknowledge that the successful inclusion of seldom heard young people is resource- and time-intensive, there is overwhelming evidence that there has been remarkable progress since 2007-2008 in achieving this priority aim. In addition, where seldom heard young people have been successfully included, the Comhairlí involved are better off for the diversity, inclusivity, representativeness and differing viewpoints that seldom heard young people bring to the group. Although some Comhairlí have yet to properly embed structures for the successful inclusion of seldom heard young people, the majority are making significant efforts and with results to reflect that effort. Although we are not yet in a position to pinpoint the exact model of best practice for including seldom heard young people, there are numerous examples of systems that are working extremely well, as seen in the case studies below.

CASE STUDIES

CAVAN Comhairle na nÓg: When organising its AGM, the Cavan Comhairle decided to target specific seldom heard groups and to ask these groups to nominate members to join the new Comhairle na nÓg committee. Although two young people from these seldom heard organisations were elected at the AGM, further presentations were conducted by Comhairle members to three other organisations that did not attend the AGM or have representatives elected. These presentations, which were a great experience for the Comhairle members involved, resulted in the co-option of another seldom heard young person to the Comhairle committee.

FINGAL Comhairle na nÓg: Fingal Development Board actively pursued structures in their attempts to ensure inclusion of hard-to-reach young people in the consultation process, including the Board's own 'Social Inclusion Measures' Committee, Pavee Point, the National Disability Association, Fingal LEADER Partnership and Blanchardstown Area Partnership. In addition, Youth Services Blanchardstown and Swords/Baldoyle actively sought the participation of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including the Traveller community.

(continued)

The Irish Association of Young People in Care worked with the HSE to seek nominations for the consultation process. All agencies are represented on the Comhairle's steering committee. Preparation work and support for nominees included a 'buddy system' between an existing Comhairle member and a new nominee. In Fingal Comhairle, 33% of those at the AGM and 25% of those on the Comhairle committee were seldom heard young people.

LIMERICK CITY Comhairle na nÓg: The AGM has been adapted to ensure the event is more flexible and friendly for a range of youth groups and backgrounds. These changes include the use of technology, media and creative tools. Efforts have also been made to create links with the LGBT community, leading to representation on the Comhairle. Targeting youth projects, youth groups and Youthreach has led to involvement of disadvantaged young people in the AGM, on the ongoing committee (City Forum) and at Dáil na nÓg. In Limerick City Comhairle, up to 30% of those at the AGM and on the Comhairle committee were from designated disadvantaged backgrounds.

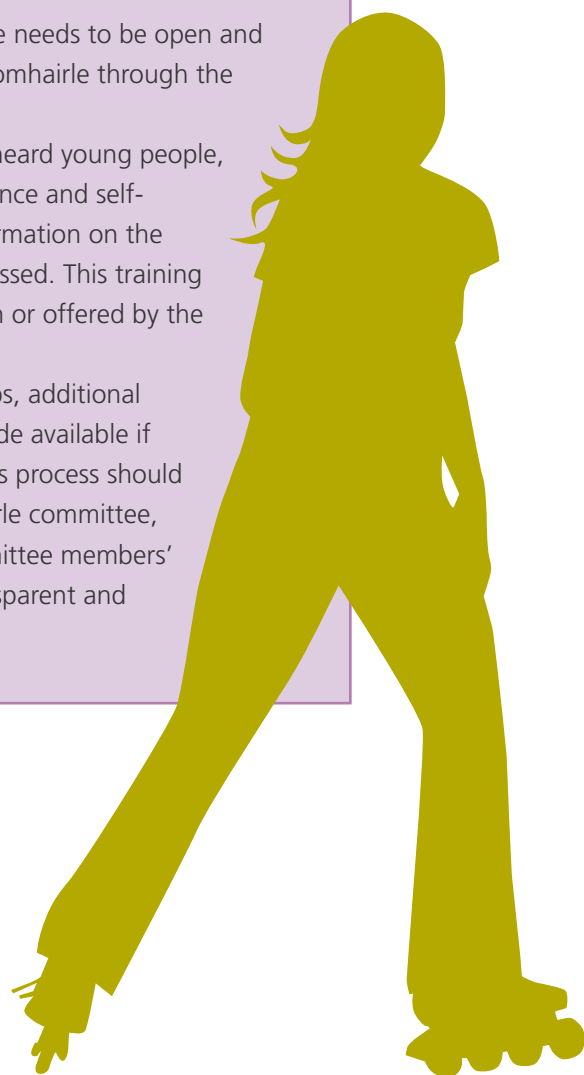
WESTMEATH Comhairle na nÓg: Many of the organisations representing seldom heard young people (7 listed) have representatives on the Comhairle na nÓg Agency Support Structure, which meets about twice a year to give advice and guidance to Comhairle na nÓg members. Other agencies are actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of each Comhairle meeting, providing staff and where necessary premises to facilitate the Comhairle meetings and sessions. The Education Action Research (EAR) programme actively encourages young early school-leavers to attend the Comhairle. Athlone Youth Information Centre actively promotes the Comhairle and its work. 8 places are allocated to the hard-to-reach groups and these places are proactively targeted, resulting in members from the Traveller community, early school-leavers, youth at risk of offending and settled Travellers. There is also representation from young people with disabilities and there are further plans to be more active by targeting all disability organisations and projects that cater for young people with disabilities in order to encourage greater attendance. In Westmeath Comhairle, 47% of those at the Comhairle AGM were seldom heard young people.

WEXFORD Comhairle na nÓg: 33% of AGM attendees were seldom heard young people. This resulted from a dedicated 'inclusion programme' and many agencies representing seldom heard young people sitting on the organising committee and supporting their young people to attend. The Comhairle committee (referred to as a 'Youth Cabinet' in Wexford) has two seats reserved for youth projects per year, resulting in at least 4 seats (20%) for seldom heard young people. One person from the youth project was also elected to attend Dáil na nÓg.

In summary, although not without challenges, there has been considerable progress and success in the inclusion of seldom heard young people in the Comhairle na nÓg programme, with an average of 21% represented at each Comhairle AGM. Although the precise model of best practice is still being developed, it is apparent from reports on more successful instances that including organisations representing seldom heard young people on the Comhairle's steering committee is essential for sustainable success.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Comhairlí should embed the process of including seldom heard young people into their structure through their steering committee or other dedicated committee. All organisations representing seldom heard young people in the area should be invited to sit on this committee to create a network and advisory panel of people who can support the successful inclusion of seldom heard young people. Examples of these organisations might include:
 - local youth services;
 - schools;
 - the local Vocational Education Committee (VEC);
 - organisations such as Barnardos, Belong To, Inclusion Ireland, Irish Association of Young People in Care, ISPCC, Irish Wheelchair Association, Pavee Point and Youthreach.
- The process to include seldom heard young people needs to be open and transparent for young people who come to the Comhairle through the regular election process.
- Capacity-building should be provided for seldom heard young people, with training to include support with their confidence and self-esteem, skills useful to a meeting setting and information on the workings of Comhairle and the issues being addressed. This training can be provided by the representative organisation or offered by the Comhairle Coordinator or another staff member.
- To secure representation from seldom heard groups, additional places on the Comhairle committee should be made available if necessary for an election or co-option process. This process should take place before the first meeting of the Comhairle committee, so that all young people start as 'Comhairle committee members' at the same time. The process should also be transparent and without labelling these young people as different.



4. Structure of Comhairle na nÓg Programme: Organisation and supports



Delivery partners

Findings in the 2007-2008 evaluation report indicated that structures and practices varied considerably from Comhairle to Comhairle. While it was acknowledged that the 'delivery partners' (agencies who deliver the programme) of Comhairle na nÓg were part of an organic process and contingent on many local factors, there was benefit in adopting a 'partnership approach' to deliver Comhairle na nÓg. This approach worked even better when there was a dedicated Comhairle worker, either part-time or full-time.

While there is still a diversity of arrangements in delivering Comhairle, the reports and site visits for this 2008-2009 evaluation report demonstrate that the City/County Development Board (CDB)/youth service partnership is extremely popular. The youth service brings the experience of working directly with young people and expertise on the best methodologies to use. However, it is vital that the CDB maintains a strategic link with the Comhairle, not only to garner the expertise of working with young people but to ensure that the young people and Comhairle are strategically connected to local decision-makers. An increasing number of Comhairlí are also run in partnership with VEC youth officers, many of whom also bring expertise in working with young people, making the approach more holistic in nature.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Where not already in existence, consideration should be given to developing a 'partnership of agency' approach in delivering Comhairle na nÓg.
- Funding permitting, a part-time dedicated Comhairle worker should be employed to drive the process.



Steering committees

In addition to the Local Authority, VEC and youth service involvement, more partnerships are developing and an increasing number of local key stakeholders are becoming involved in the direction of the Comhairlí na nÓg. In particular, more Comhairlí are establishing steering committees, designed to advise and assist the Local Authority and/or Comhairle Coordinator in organising the Comhairle throughout the year. Depending on the agencies that exist in the local area, the steering committees are made up of representatives and organisations such as:

- young people;
- county councils;
- youth services;
- schools;
- the Vocational Education Committees (VECs);
- the Health Service Executive (HSE);
- Children Services Committees;
- childcare committees;
- organisations representing 'seldom heard' young people, e.g. Barnardos, Belong To, Inclusion Ireland, Irish Association of Young People in Care, ISPCC, Irish Wheelchair Association, Pavee Point and Youthreach;
- Local Partnership Committees, including Sports Partnership Committees;
- An Garda Síochána, including Garda SAFE Projects, Garda Youth Diversion Projects and Garda Youth Liaison Officers;
- National Learning Network;
- CSPE teachers from local schools;
- community support groups.



Benefits of having a steering committee

Based on evidence from Comhairlí with steering committees already up and running, the benefits of having such a working group include:

- the Comhairle Coordinator is supported and working in partnership with key stakeholders in the area;
- the key stakeholders, many of whom are local decision-makers, are much more likely to engage with the Comhairle programme and with the young people;
- organisations representing seldom heard young people are engaged in the process and can contribute to all aspects of the programme.

The experience of Comhairlí with steering committees demonstrate that they do not have to be complex or elaborate in style, but rather a structure that actually enhances the Comhairle na nÓg programme. Examples of such models are given in the case studies below for Cavan and Cork County Comhairlí.

CASE STUDIES

CAVAN Comhairle na nÓg: The Cavan Comhairle is guided by an Intercounty Steering Committee. This committee has a cross-representation of agencies, comprising Cavan County Council, Foróige, Cavan County Childcare Committee, Breffni Integrated Ltd, Gardaí Youth Liaison Officer, VEC, FÁS, Youthreach and Comhairle na nÓg members. The Steering Committee meets every quarter and the Youth Development Officer gives an updated progress report. Discussions take place on the direction of the Comhairle, any remaining training that needs to be undertaken with the group and events being organised. All Comhairle members offer their expertise, guidance, assistance and feedback on these topics to the Youth Development Officer.

CORK COUNTY Comhairle na nÓg: Cork County decided not to put a steering committee together until the priority actions of the Comhairle were actually known. This meant that in addition to regular key stakeholders, such as youth work providers and the VEC, stakeholders directly related to the two themes chosen ('Healthy lifestyles' and 'Taking action') were also invited onto the committee for the year. This ensured that these stakeholders could provide relevant information and advice on these issues.

In summary, the partnership approach to delivering Comhairle na nÓg continues to be the most popular, but having a dedicated Comhairle worker (either part-time or full-time) can be important in driving the process forward. Establishing a Comhairle Steering Group is now considered a pivotal and strategic element for the successful development of the Comhairle programme.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

- Where not already in existence, a steering committee should be established to assist and advise the Comhairle Coordinator/CDB.

Links to decision-making structures

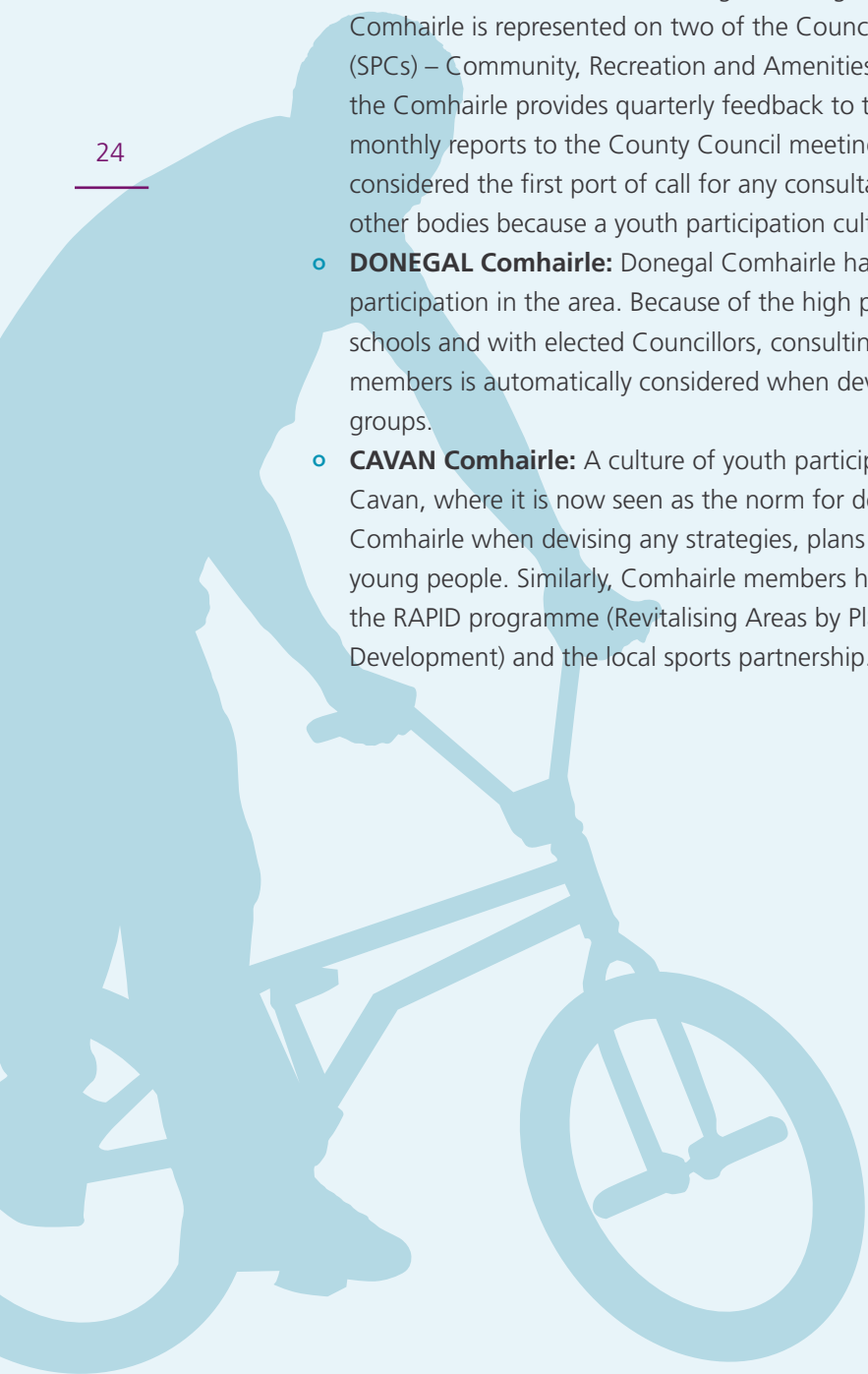
Although there are many factors involved in creating a successful Comhairle, ultimately success will be measured by the involvement of young people in local decision-making structures and the impact they have on decisions that affect the local area. **Young people themselves have made it very clear that it is not enough for them to be involved, but that they also want to 'to be heard' and 'to make a difference'.**



Comhairle, and the youth participation structure as a whole, has been fortunate with the number and quality of 'champions' of young people and their right to have their voice heard in the decision-making process. However, although the evidence suggests that it is enormously beneficial to have a champion of young people driving the process, that person cannot be responsible for delivering success on their own. To ensure sustainable change, it is evident from the development of various Comhairlí over the years that **(1) a youth participation culture needs to be fostered** and **(2) the Comhairle na nÓg programme needs to become embedded in the decision-making process**, so that the success of Comhairle is not dependent on any one person or 'champion'.

There are a number of examples that provide evidence of this change taking place:

- **FINGAL Comhairle:** While Fingal Comhairle has had a number of champions over the years, it has also created structures and systems that have ensured its sustainable progress and success. These include a diverse steering committee and a committed interest and resourcing from Fingal County Council. As a result, Fingal Comhairle is represented on two of the Council's Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) – Community, Recreation and Amenities, and the Environment. In addition, the Comhairle provides quarterly feedback to the Fingal Development Board and monthly reports to the County Council meetings. Moreover, the Comhairle is considered the first port of call for any consultation by the Local Authority and many other bodies because a youth participation culture has been fostered.
- **DONEGAL Comhairle:** Donegal Comhairle has also helped foster a culture of youth participation in the area. Because of the high profile nature of the Comhairle in schools and with elected Councillors, consulting with young people and Comhairle members is automatically considered when developing new strategies and working groups.
- **CAVAN Comhairle:** A culture of youth participation has also been developed in Cavan, where it is now seen as the norm for decision-makers to consult with the Comhairle when devising any strategies, plans or policies that may affect young people. Similarly, Comhairle members have important links with the RAPID programme (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) and the local sports partnership.



Conversely, the need for a youth participation culture is also evidenced by the experience of one Comhairle where an avid champion had developed an extremely well-organised Comhairle, which was an example of good practice. However, because the Comhairle was not embedded into the system or a youth participation culture was not developed, this Comhairle effectively collapsed when that champion was no longer involved.

All around the country, Comhairle na nÓg has made a significant number of links with local decision-making bodies. Some 16 Comhairlí have now established 'formal links', with formal meetings or presentations scheduled on an ongoing basis with the local County Council or other CDB agencies. Table 4 outlines these links to decision-making structures on a Comhairle by Comhairle basis, under the headings:

- **SPC/JPC:** Used to indicate if Comhairle members have seats on a Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) or a Joint Policing Committee (JPC) and/or make scheduled and regular presentations to same.
- **Formal links with City/County Development Board (CDB)/County Council:** Used to indicate if the Comhairle or Comhairle members have scheduled formal meetings on an ongoing basis (e.g. quarterly or at the very least annually) with the CDB or County Council in order to present their issues of concern or views on a particular issue. One-off presentations are not included in this section.
- **Consultations, inputs and submissions:** Used to indicate any consultations, one-off or otherwise, conducted with the Comhairle members or any inputs, submissions or presentations made by the Comhairle to particular bodies.
- **Impact:** Used to indicate actual change or influence that the work of the Comhairle has had on policies or matters important to young people in this Comhairle period.
- **Other:** Used to list any other links with decision-makers that do not fall under any of the categories above.



Table 4: Comhairlí and their links with decision-makers (2008-09)

COMHAIRLE	SPC/JPC	FORMAL LINKS WITH CDB/COUNTY COUNCIL	CONSULTATIONS, INPUTS, SUBMISSIONS	IMPACT	OTHER
Carlow	No	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people meet with decision-makers throughout the year to discuss issues relevant to young people in Carlow. <i>Consultation:</i> Carlow Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) Working Group has undertaken the process of producing a Local Anti-poverty Social Inclusion Strategy (LAPIS). One of the actions included in the strategy is to ensure that Comhairle na nÓg, as the representative youth body, will be consulted by SIM as a whole and member agencies when they are drawing up their yearly plan of action. 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representation on the Vault Youth Centre Steering Committee.
Cavan	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation made twice annually to Cavan County Council. Cavan Sports Partnership/ Cavan County Council and consultation on their Strategic Plan for the county. Cavan RAPID/Cavan County Council and consultation on the new youth facility opening in the county. Cavan VEC and consultation on drugs and education awareness among young people in the county. 	See 'Formal Links'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggestions on RAPID youth facility were taken into account. 	None
Clare	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation to Social Inclusion Measures committee at end of each year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Findings on health theme at AGM submitted to HSE. 	None	None
Cork City	No	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submission made to Cork City Transport Strategy. Presentation to CDB on Transport Strategy. Report of survey on bullying presented to City Mayor, CDB and Education officials. 	None	None
Cork County	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cork County Council has identified Comhairle na nÓg as one of its 9 priorities in a new 3-year Development Plan. 	None	None	None

COMHAIRLE	SPC/JPC	FORMAL LINKS WITH CDB/COUNTY COUNCIL	CONSULTATIONS, INPUTS, SUBMISSIONS	IMPACT	OTHER
Donegal	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Electoral Area Committees. Road Safety Working Group. Sports Partnership. 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involvement of young people in key projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inishowen Family Action Network. Finn Valley Alliance for Positive Mental Health. Crisis Pregnancy Agency.
Dublin City	No	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Input into the Dublin City Development Plan. Established connection and ongoing consultation between the Comhairle and Dublin Libraries. <i>Consultation:</i> Hugh Lane Summer Arts Programme. Survey on Youth Well-being. Input into the National Play Policy (<i>Ready, Steady, Play!</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey on Youth Well-being is being used to inform the work plan of the Dublin Children's Services Committee. In the Youth Zones in Dublin Libraries, Comhairle members are affecting the choice, design, use and management of dedicated areas within the libraries. In the Hugh Lane Summer Arts Programme, Comhairle members have given explicit advice, direction and input into the design of the programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headspace, a mental health initiative.
Dun Laoghaire	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interaction with Community and Enterprise Department of County Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transport seminar involved interaction with CDB and main transport providers. Articles printed in newsletter of Community & Voluntary Forum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transport providers promised to consult with Comhairle on future plans. Formal links between the Youth Café Steering Committee and Comhairle established. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links with youth café.
Fingal	Yes – on SPC and JPC	<p>Representation on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SPC for Community, Recreation and Amenities; SPC for Environment; quarterly feedback to CDB; monthly reports to County Council; links to Children's Services Committee; links to Joint Policing Committee through Youth Safety and Crime Sub-Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request for submission to County Development Plan. Submission to Arts office on young people and the arts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authority more receptive to the views of young people. Local authority's website being changed to become more youth-friendly as a result of submission. County Manager has encouraged all senior management to seek the views of young people through Comhairle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request for membership of LEADER Youth Sub-Committee.



COMHAIRLE	SPC/JPC	FORMAL LINKS WITH CDB/COUNTY COUNCIL	CONSULTATIONS, INPUTS, SUBMISSIONS	IMPACT	OTHER
Galway City	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Development sub-group of CDB is updated quarterly on activities of Comhairle (by adults). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation on transport DVD to Health Promotion Research Centre at NUI Galway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating awareness of issues of concern for young people. 	None
Galway County	No	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentations to Town and area councils. 	None	None
Kerry	No	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation to JPC. Presentation to CDB. 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth representation on local Sports Partnership.
Kilkenny	No	None	None	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representation on St. Luke's Hospital's Patient Forum.
Laois	No	None	None	None	None
Leitrim	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comhairle has been formally recognised as the voice of young people, with a presentation to be made annually. 	None	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grants are available to groups from the Community Forum to help facilitate the inclusion of young people on decision-making structures.
Limerick City	No	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation with the CDB on the County Development Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increase in the profile of young people as decision-makers and recognition of their role as decision-makers by groups. Affirmation for young people and Comhairle participants. More innovative programmes and services for young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representation in two local youth cafés. Links with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> youth service; Community Forum; City of Learning; Volunteering initiative; Sports Partnership.
Longford	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports are given at SPC meetings. Reports are given at Social Inclusion Measures Working Group (SIMWG) meetings and meetings of the CDB. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultations on Sports Strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports to SPC have informed the Joint Policing Committee's discussions on volunteers for the Community & Voluntary Forum. Reports to SIMWG and CDB have informed decisions on drugs and alcohol, and involvement of young people in the Integration Plan for Co. Longford. 	None

COMHAIRLE	SPC/JPC	FORMAL LINKS WITH CDB/COUNTY COUNCIL	CONSULTATIONS, INPUTS, SUBMISSIONS	IMPACT	OTHER
Louth	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified by the Louth Peace Partnership to monitor Activity 3 of the Louth Peace Strategy, i.e. 'Youth Programme'. Identified as a task group within the Culture Pillar of the Louth County Development Board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of Comhairle's student card proposal to a full meeting of Louth County Council (April 2009). Input into Local authority's Disabilities Strategy. Attendance at Louth Age Friendly County Initiative seminars to identify the objectives of the Louth Age Friendly County Strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Garnered buy-in from the retail sector in Drogheda and Dundalk in relation to student card discount scheme. Comhairle representation at the Louth Age Friendly County Initiative seminar resulted in inclusion in the Louth Age Friendly County Strategy. The Louth Age Friendly County Initiative will work with the Older People's Forum, Third Age Foundation and others to design a programme with a number of locally based initiatives providing intergenerational activities. Comhairle to monitor Youth Programme in the Louth Peace 111 Plan. Feedback from the Peace 111 Youth Programme will include primary data to be used in the forthcoming Children's Services Strategy, which will be evaluated by Comhairle na nÓg. 	None
Mayo	No	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Made presentation to Mayo County Development Board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater awareness of the work of Comhairle. 	None
Meath	No	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Input into consultation for a local youth café. Opportunity to express opinions and have voice heard when meeting and interviewing local MEP, Mairead McGuinness. Input into type of material used by the Samaritans to target young people. Input into the new Play Policy for Meath County Council. Input into an arts exhibition on young people's perception and understanding of the Traveller community. 	<i>Specific outcomes from the numerous inputs and consultations not listed.</i>	Links with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts Office; Pride of Place office; RADID (Play Policy); HSE Jigsaw Programme; Navan Travellers' Workshop; HSE: Traveller Healthcare Project.



COMHAIRLE	SPC/JPC	FORMAL LINKS WITH CDB/COUNTY COUNCIL	CONSULTATIONS, INPUTS, SUBMISSIONS	IMPACT	OTHER
Monaghan	Yes – on JPC	Formal links include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two members sit on the Monaghan Sports Partnership. Two members sit on the Joint Policing Committee. Two members were involved in the Three-Year Strategic Plan for Monaghan CDB. One member sits on the Community Forum committee. Comhairle makes a presentation to County Council twice annually, which allows members the opportunity to highlight their work and directly ask questions on issues or concerns that may be affecting young people in the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation to Monaghan Town Council on the need for a youth café in the town. Subsequent creation of a sub-committee of senior Councillors to meet with Comhairle to pursue this issue. Consultation with Monaghan Museum/ Monaghan County Council on their Five-Year Strategic Business Plan. A consultation day was held with representatives from each of the student councils in the local secondary schools to get feedback from young people about what they felt was needed in a youth café, how to promote it and what types of activities and events would encourage young people to use it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation report on youth cafés from student councils presented to the Town Council, resulting in the Council establishing a sub-committee to meet with the Comhairle and other interested youth organisations to pursue the issue. 	None
North Tipperary	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administrative Officer responsible for making Comhairle reports to the County Development Board, Social Inclusion Measures Working Group, Community & Enterprise/Planning & Development SPC and North Tipperary County Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members of Comhairle have been invited to attend County Council meetings and have addressed the County Council. The Mayor and other Councillors have attended Comhairle committee meetings, addressed the Comhairle and answered questions from members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Comhairle was invited to participate in the drafting of the North Tipperary Play and Recreation Strategy for the County Development Board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member of the Play and Recreation Multi-Agency Advisory Committee.
Offaly	No	None	None	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comhairle members meet local Councillors on a regular basis. Councillors are invited to area meetings of the Comhairle group. Comhairle group is informed of what is happening at SPC level and is welcome to submit ideas for policies as relevant.

COMHAIRLE	SPC/JPC	FORMAL LINKS WITH CDB/COUNTY COUNCIL	CONSULTATIONS, INPUTS, SUBMISSIONS	IMPACT	OTHER
Roscommon	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal links have been made between the Comhairle and the Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) Working Group of Roscommon CDB. Members of the Comhairle attended a SIM meeting at which they made a presentation on their committee and their future plans and ideas. As a result, the work of the Comhairle is now an item on the agenda of all SIM meetings and the Comhairle has been asked to attend on a regular basis to give an input into the work of the SIM Group and to inform the agencies and organisations around the table in relation to youth matters. Two members of the Comhairle will be elected to the Board of Management of Youth Work Ireland (Roscommon) in November 2009. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roscommon CDB consulted with the Comhairle when deciding on its priorities for 2009-2012, which ensured that the voices of younger people were taken into account in the development of aims and objectives. The Comhairle made a presentation to a meeting of the Housing, Social, Cultural and Community Strategic Policy Committee (SPC), detailing its future plans and ideas. A poll or survey is carried out every month through the Comhairle website and it is envisaged that the results of these polls will be fed into the SPC, if relevant. It is also hoped that the SPC would from time to time request the Comhairle to undertake polls or surveys in relation to specific policy issues which may be developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links with the Rural Transport Programme in the county resulted in the concerns and needs of younger people being taken into account in the development of the Rural Transport Plan for 2009. 	None
Sligo	Yes – on SPC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An Expert Youth Advisory Group was established by Sligo County Development Board to link Comhairle na nÓg and the CDB as well as other agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Input into the County Development Plan. Submission to Northwest Regional Drugs Task Force. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributions made to the Drugs Task Force were taken into account. 	None
South Dublin	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comhairle na nÓg has secured a place on the South Dublin Community Forum. 	<p>Presentations have been made to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> County Development Board; Sport, Recreation, Community and Park's Strategic Development Committee; Arts, Culture and Libraries Strategic Policy Committee. 	None	None
South Tipperary	No	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Comhairle na nÓg group had a facilitated session on the Local authority's Teenspace Strategy and the Playground Strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Input and suggestions on the Teenspace Strategy were presented to the Corporate Affairs SPC and the SIM group of the CDB. Views on the Playground policy were also presented to the Corporate Affairs SPC. 	None



COMHAIRLE	SPC/JPC	FORMAL LINKS WITH CDB/COUNTY COUNCIL	CONSULTATIONS, INPUTS, SUBMISSIONS	IMPACT	OTHER
Waterford City	No	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two Comhairle members made a presentation to the City Council. 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organised 'political speed dating' between Comhairle members and elected representatives. Represented on the committee of Waterford Youth Bank.
Westmeath	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comhairle to make presentation to and receive a response from the County Council on an annual basis. Comhairle will be represented when the VEC is developing its new structures. Two representatives to be elected to the Community Forum on request of the Athlone Primary Health Care Team. 	None	None	None
Wexford	No	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Comhairle's Youth Cabinet has met with the Economic and Social SPC of Wexford County Council twice to discuss youth issues and act as a collective voice for young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gorey skate park developed. Youth arts bursary developed. Youth café established in New Ross. Consultation forum established to organise a 'Youth Day'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FDYS board member meets with Comhairle Youth Cabinet. CDB reports on Comhairle circulated at meetings. Chairman of Council opens Comhairle Day and elected members are invited to attend.
Wicklow	Yes – Greystones Comhairle on JPC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greystones and District Youth Council have a seat on the Joint Policing Committee (JPC). Bray Junior Council has established links with the Arts Office (Mermaid Theatre). Arklow Council has two seats on the Arklow Youth Strategy Group. Two places have been reserved on Co. Wicklow VEC Youth Committee for Comhairle na nÓg members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Comhairle Coordinator made initial presentations to all Town Councils. Once established, the Youth Councils made presentations to Bray, Wicklow, Greystones and Arklow Town Councils. Town Councils have actively consulted the Youth Councils on issues such as skate parks and play spaces. Youth voices are heard when devising programmes for the Mermaid Arts Centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people have a direct impact on the development of youth strategy in Arklow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Councillor has been present at most Youth Council meetings. Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council chaired the first meeting of Co. Wicklow Comhairle na nÓg. Many candidates and Councillors signed up to the Youth Manifesto developed by the Youth Councils and also attended the official launch of same.

Benefits of meetings between Comhairle and decision-makers

The evidence from the formal links outlined in Table 4 demonstrates that meetings between Comhairle and local decisions-makers have enabled Comhairle members:

- to present the issues that they have been working on and/or consider important for young people locally;
- to interact with Councillors and CDB staff in a meaningful way;
- to receive formal feedback and advice on the issues;
- to establish methods and mechanisms to work together in partnership;
- to progress issues of importance;
- to learn about what issues the CDB/Council are working on and to make comments on same;
- to receive requests from the CDB/Council to work on or prepare surveys/submissions on particular issues.

While only Fingal, Monaghan, Sligo and Wicklow Comhairlí have actual representation on a Strategic Policy Committee or Joint Policing Committee, many other Comhairlí have made presentations or submissions to these committees. Comhairle members have also been consulted on or made submissions or inputs on a great array of issues during 2008-2009, including:

Strategic and City/County plans

- well-being
- disability strategy
- age-friendly strategy
- youth strategy
- transport strategy
- arts strategy

Policies

- play policy
- recreation and facilities

Other plans and issues

- sport
- mental health
- physical health
- family planning
- youth cafés
- bullying
- libraries
- the arts
- Traveller care
- drugs and alcohol
- Teenspace

Impact of having links with decision-making structures

In addition to the numerous consultations and submissions outlined in Table 4, the 'Comhairle na nÓg Final Reports' indicate that there have also been a number of specific 'wins' or changes that have resulted because of the influence of various Comhairlí. These include:

- improvements in youth facilities;
- introduction of student cards for young people locally;
- development of a youth café;
- development of a skate park;
- development, design and planning of youth arts programmes;
- development, design and planning of libraries;
- improvements to and/or youth-friendly arrangements in transport strategies/plans;
- more youth-friendly websites;
- a call for all senior management in Local Authorities to consult with young people from the Comhairle;

- improved integration of young people in city/county;
- more innovative programmes for young people;
- an increase in the profile of young people as decision-makers;
- recognition of the role of young people in decision-making;
- involvement in key projects.

The impact of Comhairlí na nÓg is thus not to be underestimated. Not only are young people working on specific projects of interest, such as campaigning for additional or improved youth facilities, but the Comhairlí ensure that there is a specific mechanism for young people to be integrated into the process of the development, design and planning of any programme or event that has relevance for young people. Increasingly, it is becoming the case that when Local Authorities or other bodies are planning a programme or event specifically for or simply inclusive of young people, the Comhairle is considered the obvious body to consult with and to seek feedback from. More importantly, where Local Authorities are open to consulting with young people on strategies, plans and policies for the future, the Comhairle is also considered the obvious consultative body – the ‘youth sounding board’ for the locality.

There have also been a number of other interesting developments, which will be worth monitoring over the coming years, including:

- **Increased number of consultations with Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) working groups:** A considerable number of Comhairlí have been contacted or consulted by the SIM working groups. It seems that there is a natural connection between the work of the SIM and the Comhairle, and links with these groups should be explored.
- **Sligo Expert Advisory Group:** An Expert Youth Advisory Group was established by Sligo County Development Board specifically to ensure the linkage of the Comhairle to the adult decision-making structures. This group is jointly chaired by the Mayor of Sligo and Cathaoirleach of Sligo County Council. The chairs of the SPCs and CDB are also members, along with other relevant members from Sligo VEC, the HSE, An Garda Síochána, Sligo LEADER Partnership, RAPID AIT, the community and voluntary sectors, and relevant youth agencies. Support from the SIM Working Group for both the development of Comhairle na nÓg and its Expert Youth Advisory Group is reflected in the CDB’s Social Inclusion Action Plan for 2009-2012.
- **Priority action in Cork County Development Plan:** Cork County Council has identified Cork County Comhairle as one of its 9 priorities in a new 3-year Development Plan. This greatly strengthens the position of the Comhairle – it is now a formal strategic action, which increases the opportunities for development, makes it easier to devise formal links with other key CDB committees and is subject to regular reporting procedures on development.



In addition to these formal links, there are also numerous examples of good practice and innovation, some of which are outlined below.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

CAVAN Comhairle members were consulted by Cavan RAPID and Cavan County Council on the youth facility to be opened in the county. Comhairle members were then invited to the opening of the new facility, only to discover that many of the suggestions they had made (e.g. Internet access, a tea/coffee-making machine and a private room for counselling) had been taken into account.

DUN LAOGHAIRE Comhairle held a transport seminar with invited transport providers, during which concerns were outlined about adult fares for over-16s and the inflexibility of tickets from one mode of transport to another. The transport providers suggested various schemes for young people in response, but also admitted that they had not known about Comhairle as a consulting agency for young people. Also attended by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews, TD, the presentations were followed by a Questions and Answers session, chaired by Anne O'Donnell of the OMCYA. The seminar resulted in the transport providers having to identify their own strategy for young people and listen to their views on 'fair fares' for young people. All transport providers made a commitment to consult with young people from Comhairlí when devising future strategies.

LOUTH Comhairle members wanted to work on the issue of student cards because young people aged between 16 and third-level age were not able to access discounts or reduced admittance charges to businesses and services. A survey was carried out in the respective schools by the student councils and collated by the Comhairle. From the survey, a list of preferred businesses was prepared and meetings were set up with two main shopping centres in both Dundalk and Drogheda, together with the Ice Dome, the Bowling Alley, Dundalk Football Club and Subway. A business plan was prepared to present at the meetings, outlining the benefits for the businesses concerned, together with a costing of the IT hardware and software needed to process the student cards. Sponsorship is now being sought from businesses and schools to install the equipment to produce the cards. The scheme will be launched in September 2009.

DONEGAL Comhairle has also worked on a student travel card scheme.

Fingal, Monaghan and **Roscommon** are also examples of good practice where links with decision-makers are embedded in a systematic manner (see *Table 4*).



In summary, significant numbers of formal links have been established between Comhairlí and local decision-makers all around the country (see *Table 4*). In addition, there has been increased impact, with specific 'wins' or changes that have resulted from these links and Comhairle influence. The input into and the impact on the decision-making process is the ultimate goal and success barometer of Comhairle na nÓg. While it cannot be expected that input will always result in influence or impact, it is essential that every Comhairle na nÓg develops a system that embeds young people into the decision-making process so that their voices become a consistent influence that is more likely to result in appropriate impact.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

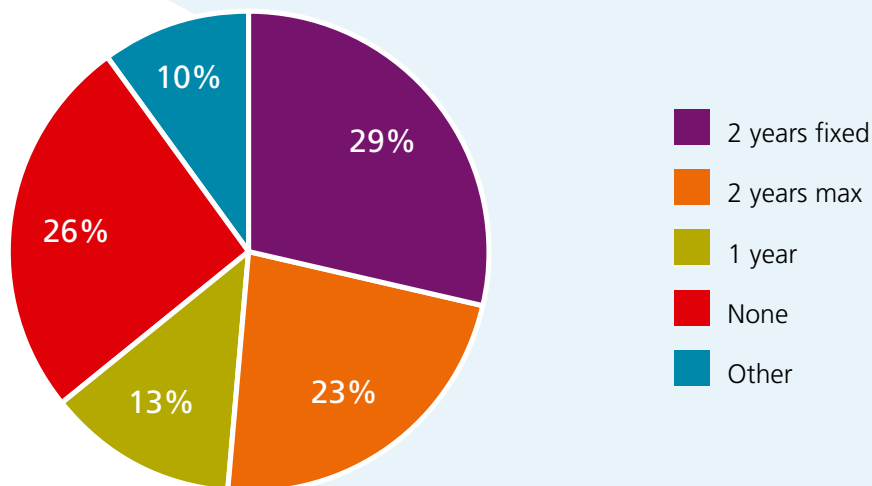
- Where not already established, formal links need to be established between Comhairle na nÓg and the local CDB, with scheduled and ongoing meetings (e.g. quarterly or at least annually) taking place between the two organisations. These meetings are an opportunity for young people to present the issues important to them to the CDB and receive formal feedback. Similarly, young people should also be made aware of the issues of importance being discussed and considered by the CDB.
- Comhairle meetings should be held in the Council chamber, where possible and appropriate.
- Young people, where possible, should deliver any presentations instead of adults.
- Young people should be included in discussions in a meaningful way, develop relationships with the Council representatives, interact and receive formal feedback. It is not enough for an adult staff member to present the views of the Comhairle at various meetings or to be limited to sporadic presentations or meetings where they simply observe the Council in action.
- Links with Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) working groups should be explored.
- A culture of youth participation needs to be fostered and the Comhairle programme embedded in the decision-making process so that individual Comhairlí are not dependent on any one 'champion'. Where at all possible and relevant, decision-makers need to consult with Comhairle on policy, strategies or any other plans relevant to the local area and young people's lives. These same decision-making bodies should also be open to hearing directly from young people on issues deemed important by them.



Term of office

The term of office served by committee members varies from Comhairle to Comhairle around the country (see Figure 3). Some 29% of Comhairle committees have a 2-year 'fixed' term of office, meaning that young people sign up for and serve a 2-year period; in this case, elections are only held every 2 years. A further 23% operate a 2-year maximum term, where young people can serve up to a maximum of 2 years. In some instances, the young people need to run for election again after one year, whereas in other places, once elected, a young person can remain in office for a maximum of 2 years without being re-elected. Another 13% operate a one-year term only. 26% of Comhairlí have yet to fix or decide on any term of office. Other structures include one-year terms, where 50% of delegates can stay for 2 years and one which is an 18-month term.

Figure 3: Term of office (2008-09)



There is much to be taken into account when determining a person's term of office. It should suit the organisations delivering on the Comhairle, but more importantly it should take the views of the young people involved into account. One Comhairle indicated that a term of office is deliberately not set because it might discourage younger people from joining and participating in an effective way.

Benefits of a 2-year term

In the 52% of Comhairlí where a 2-year term is in operation, as well as in interviews with young people, the following benefits have been noted:

- o formal and improved links between young people and decision-makers are more likely to occur because more time is available to forge and develop these links;
- o young people have more time to get the necessary skills and confidence to make the most of their experience;
- o young people have indicated that they prefer a 2-year term;
- o a Comhairle is not dominated by members who have served 'longer terms';
- o young people are more likely to be interested in the activities of the Comhairle if they are committed to serving a 2-year term.

Cavan, Donegal, Fingal and Monaghan Comhairlí have all been running successful 2-year fixed terms for some time.

It is important that flexibility remains within the 2-year term structure and that if a large number of young people leave, there is the capacity to co-opt or elect substitutes during this term of office. It is also important that 2 years is the maximum number of years served so that no one person or group of people 'take over' the Comhairle and other young people are given an opportunity to participate.

Annual General Meeting

A fixed 2-year term raises the question of the need for an AGM in the year 'in between' Year 1 and Year 2 of the term. The OMCYA annual grant is distributed on an annual basis to fund the hosting of an AGM-style gathering of a wider cohort of young people from the city/county. Often one of the main functions of this meeting is to elect delegates for the smaller cohort and many Comhairlí who operate a 2-year term of office consequently do not stage an AGM in the 'in-between' year.

However, it is considered important to **stage an AGM every year**. This is supported by a number of factors emerging from this evaluation:

- The experience of young people at the AGMs is extremely positive, with attendees reporting that they enjoyed:
 - the experience;
 - the opportunity to have my voice heard;
 - putting my views across to my peers and the Councillors;
 - talking about issues that we had chosen;
 - debating topics of interest to us;
 - hearing other points of view;
 - setting the agenda for the year ahead;
 - feeding back the progress from the previous year;
 - meeting in a big group.
- An AGM provides an opportunity to get a mandate from the wider group on particular issues of interest.
- A wider cohort of young people should have an opportunity to hear about progress from the previous year.
- A wider cohort of young people should feed into any issues or ideas that the Comhairle committee wants to work on in the coming year.
- An AGM provides an opportunity to elect a new Comhairle committee or delegates for any available seats that have been vacated during the year.
- It is important to hear the voices of a wider group of young people at least once a year.



Interesting case studies in relation to this issue are outlined below.

CASE STUDIES

MONAGHAN Comhairle was in a position where members were sitting for a 2-year term of office and therefore were not due for re-election. They held a Youth Consultation Day for young people of national school age to help familiarise this younger group with local issues and the Comhairle structure. 60 young people participated on the day. The event was co-facilitated by the young people on Monaghan Comhairle na nÓg committee.

WEXFORD Comhairle found that a one-year term was not allowing its committee, called the Youth Cabinet, sufficient time to see through to completion any of the larger pieces of identified work. It was agreed that the number of Cabinet members would be increased to 20, which is made up of 10 from the previous year and 10 from the current year, each with a 2-year term (i.e. Batch A starts 2008 and finishes 2010; Batch B starts 2009 and finishes 2011). This system has the following benefits:

- a more participatory and representative structure of young people to work with;
- a 2-year term allows significant pieces of work to be completed from start to finish by the group;
- by rolling the two cohorts on alternative years (i.e. previous year and current year), there is not a situation where the Cabinet is starting from fresh each year. This gives continuity, a good lead-in time and allows experiences and models of good learning to be adopted through a peer-mentoring approach;
- ownership of the process by the young people is created by facilitating them to plan the work programme for the year.

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In summary, while local conditions and the views of young people need to be taken into account, a 2-year term of office is most appropriate for the Comhairle na nÓg programme. An AGM should still be held on an annual basis.

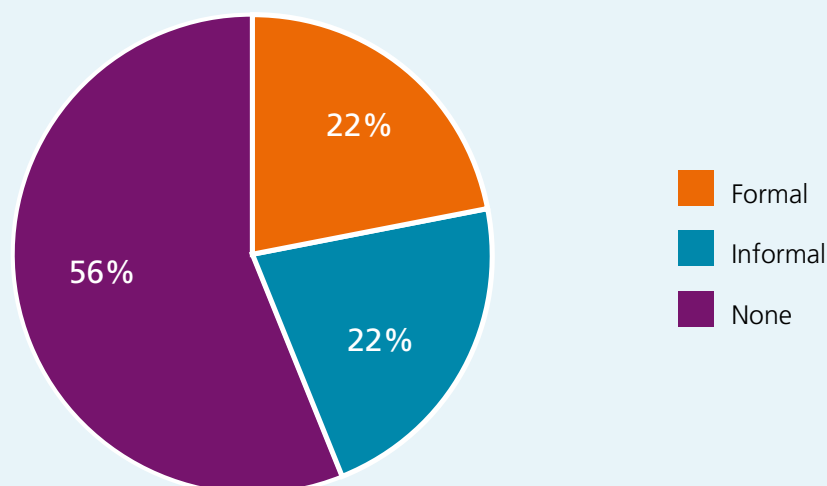
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- An AGM should be held once a year, regardless of the length of the term of office.
- The Comhairle committee should sit for a 2-year term of office, where possible.

Links to student councils

Relationships between Comhairlí and student councils are extremely varied. Over half (56%) of Comhairlí na nÓg have absolutely *no links* with student councils (see Figure 4). Some 22% have *informal links* with student councils, where there is representation from student councils or they help with exercises, such as school surveys. Another 22% have *formal links*, where members are actively recruited from student councils or they are asked to run elections for Comhairle na nÓg.

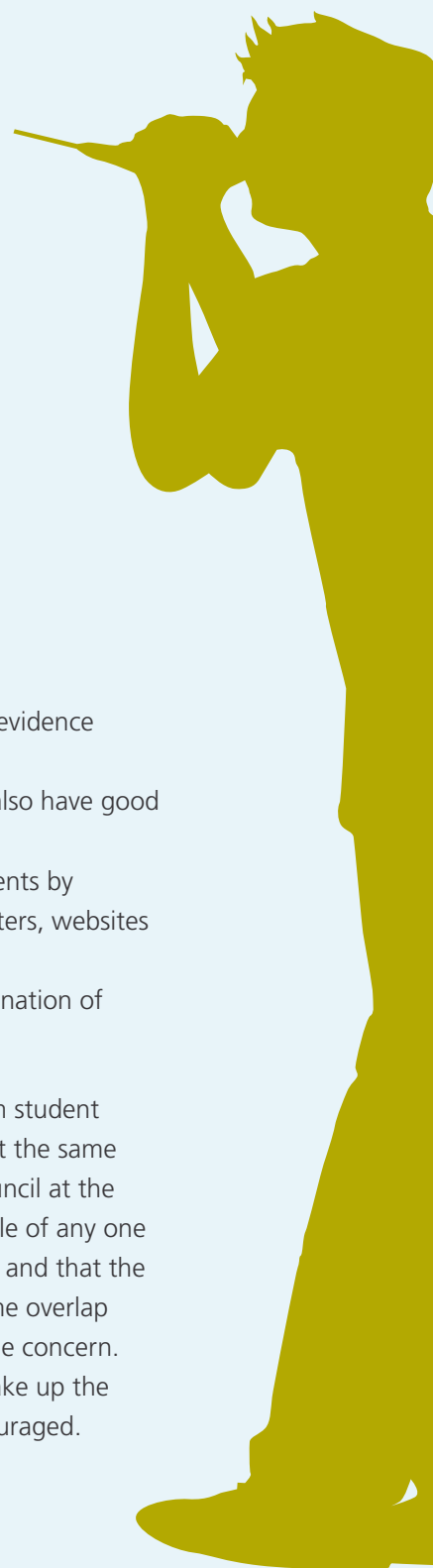
Figure 4: Links with student councils (2008-09)



Although only 22% of Comhairlí have formal links with student councils, the evidence shows several benefits from the relationship:

- where Comhairlí have good relationships with student councils, they also have good relationships with the school as a whole;
- student councils can help the Comhairle promote its meetings and events by distributing flyers and posters, or including the events in their newsletters, websites or other promotional materials;
- student councils can help the recruitment process through the dissemination of information and encouraging students to get involved.

However, it is not envisaged that Comhairlí na nÓg recruit their members from student councils. Indeed, it is preferable if a 'dual mandate' approach operates, so that the same young people cannot be members of Comhairle na nÓg *and* their student council at the same time. This approach is designed to ensure that a diversity of young people of any one age have the opportunity to become involved in decision-making at local level and that the same voices are not always being heard. It may well transpire that there is some overlap between Comhairle and student council members, which is not of considerable concern. However, there are a number of instances where student council members make up the entire membership of the Comhairle and this practice should be actively discouraged.



In summary, the links between student councils and Comhairle na nÓg need to be developed. While it makes sense that the bodies are connected and that student councils would promote the work of Comhairle and encourage students to join, it is essential that both bodies are not dominated by the same voices at any one time.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Comhairlí should develop improved links with student councils through contact with student council liaison teachers.
- Student councils should promote Comhairle na nÓg and arrange elections for members from their school.
- Student councils should be encouraged to disseminate information about Comhairle na nÓg and encourage students to become involved.
- The practice of recruiting the entire Comhairle membership from student councils should be actively discouraged. A dual mandate should operate, so that the same young people cannot be members of Comhairle na nÓg and their student council at the same time.

Branding and promotion of Comhairle

Branding

Last year's evaluation report (for 2007-2008) indicated that Comhairle na nÓg, and especially the smaller cohort of young people that meet on a regular basis, is referred to by a host of different names around the country. This confusing practice is continuing and is not in the best interests of the national Comhairle movement. More concerning is that Comhairlí themselves are beginning to brand their own groups under these names in the media and through various promotional tools, such as specially designed logos, hoodies and newsletters. On foot of last year's recommendation – that all of the relevant parties needed to meet to discuss this issue and agree a single name for 'Comhairle na nÓg' – a sub-group of the Children and Young People's Participation Partnership Committee on 'Naming and Branding for Comhairle na nÓg' was established in May 2009. The sub-group has devised a new logo and tagline – **Young Voices. Local Issues** – which has now been designed. An individually tailored logo with guidelines will be distributed to all Comhairlí in 2010.

Promotion

It was also identified last year that Comhairle na nÓg needs to be effectively promoted at national and local level:

- to ensure that decision-makers know about the existence and important role of Comhairle na nÓg, and also are aware that they can consult with the Comhairle on matters of mutual interest;
- to inform young people in the city/county about Comhairle na nÓg and encourage involvement.

It is evident from a number of reports and site visits that many Comhairlí have been innovative and inventive in promoting their Comhairle through:

- e-mails and letters;
- contacting all the schools, their Principals and student councils;
- newspaper articles;
- websites;
- Bebo pages;
- Facebook;
- newsletters;
- promotional stands at events;
- media interviews.

In an effort to address the lack of young people aged 12-15 in the Comhairle, many people have contacted the Principals of national schools to invite and encourage young people from 6th class to get involved in the AGM.

Some Comhairlí have also found it useful to have a document of some nature (e.g. website content, newsletter or poster) that details the highlights and activities of their Comhairle year. Coupled with photographs and personal stories from members, this can then be e-mailed or sent out to all schools, youth services and organisations representing young people, informing them about Comhairle's purpose and encouraging them to join. Similarly, the promotional material should be sent to all decision-makers, alerting them to the fact that the Comhairle is available for consultation on matters that are important to young people. A list of issues that the Comhairle is especially interested in could be included.

In summary, until the branding issue is addressed nationally, it is to be expected that Comhairlí will continue to conduct local branding projects. A national brand needs to be promoted at the earliest opportunity to prevent further defragmentation of the Comhairle organisation. Further promotion at national and local level is also needed.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to these 2008-2009 recommendations, a number of recommendations from last year's report and the subsequent work by the Comhairle Implementation Group (CIG) also remain relevant and are outlined below.

- Branding of Comhairle na nÓg, with an agreed name and logo, needs to be promoted at the earliest opportunity.
- Principals of national schools should be contacted to encourage 6th class pupils to get involved in the Comhairle AGM.
- Consideration should be given to producing an e-mail, newsletter, poster or document that outlines the key highlights and activities of the previous Comhairle year. This can then be used to promote Comhairle and attract others to join.
- This promotional material and other relevant material should also be sent to all local decision-makers, informing them that Comhairle is available for consultation on relevant matters, outlining particular areas of interest for Comhairle members.
- A national poster to promote Comhairle na nÓg should be devised.
- Young people should be trained and encouraged to submit articles and conduct media interviews about their Comhairle activities and issues on a regular basis.
- Existing websites, such as **www.comhairlenanog.ie** and **www.teenspace.ie**, as well as local Comhairle websites, should be maintained and developed as necessary and as resources allow.



5. Other key issues



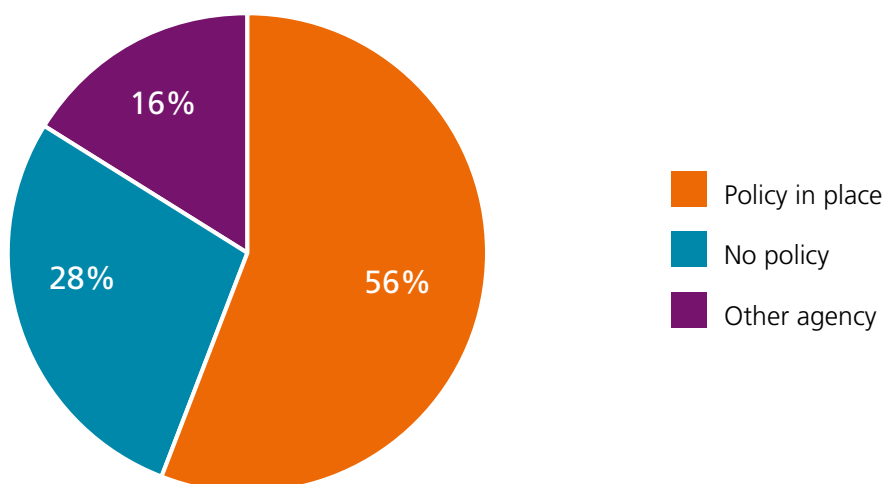
A number of additional key issues emerged as part of this 2008-2009 evaluation. These included child protection policy, youth work and youth participation, training and capacity-building, and exchanges or network visits between Comhairlí.

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Child protection

While 56% of Comhairlí have an appropriate child protection policy in place, findings from this evaluation show that an alarming number of Local Authorities do not have such a policy in place (see *Figure 5*) – 16% of Comhairlí rely on the policy of the delivering partner or ‘other agency’, while 28% of Local Authorities have stated that they currently do not have any policy in place.

Figure 5: Child protection policy in place (2008-09)



KEY RECOMMENDATION

- All Local Authorities and other agencies involved in delivering Comhairle na nÓg need to have an appropriate child protection policy in place that is in keeping with *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*.

Youth work and youth participation

In the Youth Work Act 2001, youth work is defined as ‘a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary participation’. Essentially, youth work is an educational and developmental process or ‘non-formal education’. Youth participation, on the other hand, can be defined as ‘involving young people in decisions on any matter that affects their lives’ and is an integral part of best practice in youth work. These definitions are important when considering Comhairle na nÓg, which is a *youth participation initiative* designed to give young people an opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies. Comhairle na nÓg is therefore not youth work and should not be mistaken for youth work.

However, there are some instances in Comhairlí where the focus is very much on the personal and social development of young people, rather than on including them in the decision-making process at local level. This is not to say that the personal or social development of young people is not important for the success of a Comhairle, but it cannot be the sole focus. Involving – indeed, embedding – them in the decision-making process in a systematic fashion must be the primary focus or core objective of every Comhairle na nÓg.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

- Comhairlí na nÓg need to be mindful that the focus of their programme is on youth participation rather than on youth work.

Training and capacity-building

The above point on youth work is not to detract from the importance of training, capacity-building and team-building for the success of Comhairle. Increasingly, Comhairlí are organising team-building and training initiatives at the outset of their Comhairle year. These initiatives are designed to provide a range of skills for members, but also have the common aim of helping the team to get to know each other better so that they can work together more successfully. The training sessions can be especially beneficial when the Comhairle is made up of people from different backgrounds who do not know each other. The two case studies below, from Roscommon and South Tipperary Comhairlí, illustrate the point.



CASE STUDIES

ROSCOMMON Comhairle delivered training on committee roles and responsibility of members. Following this training, main officers were elected, including a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Joint Treasurers and Joint PROs. Officers then received further support and training in their roles. Officers meet prior to each full committee meeting to set the agenda, date, time and venue, and to manage the budget.

SOUTH TIPPERARY Comhairle organised a residential training and planning session for the Youth Council members. This included training on committee skills and roles, explaining the role of Comhairle locally and nationally, planning and a review of the terms of reference and group contract. Team-building exercises were also conducted.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

- Training and capacity-building are important, especially at the beginning of a Comhairle year, for team-building and providing new skills for the Comhairle membership.

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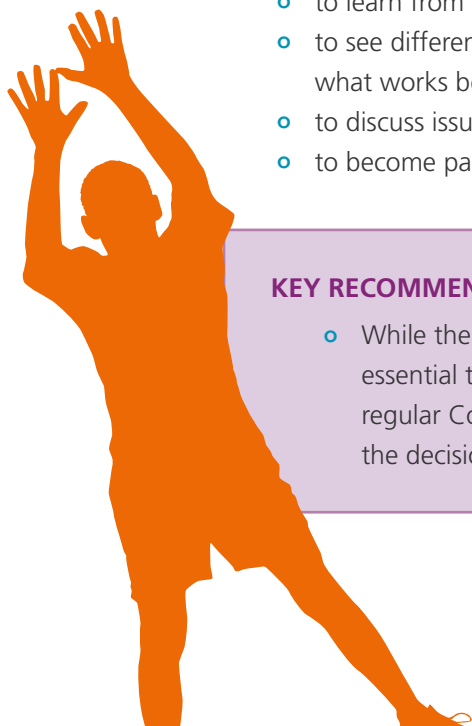
Exchanges between Comhairlí

There has been an increasing number of exchanges or 'network visits' between Comhairlí, where one or more visit another for a meeting or a specific networking event. Roscommon Comhairle, for example, visited Galway City and have plans to visit Donegal and Dun Laoghaire. Advancing on the idea of a network meeting or exchange, Fingal Comhairle staged a 'Comhairle Ard Fheis', which was a meeting of Fingal Comhairle and the surrounding Comhairlí during which young people debated issues of concern in a bid to find solutions. Such events can be useful in providing an opportunity for young people and organisers:

- to learn from each other;
- to see different structures and practices in operation so they can form an opinion on what works better;
- to discuss issues of importance with other young people;
- to become part of a wider network.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

- While there are benefits to exchange meetings between Comhairlí, it is essential that these meetings are not at the expense of delivering on the regular Comhairle programme and ensuring young people are connected to the decision-making process.



6. Impact of funding



The Comhairle Development Fund provides essential funding for the organisation and enhancement of the youth participation initiative that is the Comhairle na nÓg programme. In the current economic climate, where the numbers of youth workers are diminishing and where an embargo on recruitment in the Local Authority can mean the Comhairle organiser is involved in a host of other activities, it is even more essential that this funding is maintained.

Outputs and outcomes at LOCAL level

The outputs and outcomes of the Comhairle programme at local level as a result of the Comhairle Development Fund are numerous and varied, and include the following (see also Table 4).

Programme development: By and large, the bulk of funding is used to run and develop the Comhairle programme. Members are facilitated to develop their ideas on a particular issue or topic of interest and devise a project or campaign on that issue. Examples of these projects have culminated in surveys, DVDs, websites, youth events and seminars on issues that young people themselves have deemed important to them. The dedication of funding to the development of the Comhairle programme has resulted in:

- a more robust and sustainable programme;
- an activity-fuelled programme that is more attractive to young people;
- young people engaging in campaigns and events;
- better involvement with peers and the local community through various projects and events;
- involvement in programmes and policies that affect young people.



Regular meetings: In addition to running the AGM, meetings are now held on a regular basis in all but 4 out of the 34 Comhairlí (Kildare, Leitrim, Limerick County and Waterford County) (see *Table 1*). This marks the single greatest improvement and impact since the introduction of the Development Fund in 2007. There has been a notable shift away from the culture of Comhairle being seen as a 'one-off', one-day event and this is an enormous turnaround in two years. Increasingly, bigger and more rural counties are hosting 'regional meetings' on a regular basis and holding up to 3 meetings a year on a county-wide basis. This practice ensures that more young people have access to the Comhairle. Regular meetings are also essential for the Comhairle's programme development.

Dedicated worker: At least 10 of the Comhairlí now have a dedicated worker supplied by the Local Authority. This is a full-time person in some instances, but by and large, a part-time person dedicates a certain number of hours per week towards driving the Comhairle activities and programme. In addition, a number of Comhairlí use their funding to employ youth services or other professional support so that a team of people with expertise in working with young people are involved in driving the Comhairle programme. A further 3 Comhairlí have used some of the funds to employ a 'project intern', who might be a recent graduate or a student, to conduct the same tasks. Having a dedicated worker, in whatever form, is extremely helpful in ensuring that the Comhairle programme is effectively driven and that regular meetings take place. This dedicated worker is also often responsible for facilitating the meetings, as well as conducting some of the training. In addition, young people have reported that they like to have a '*familiar and continuous presence*' whom they can learn to trust.

Promotional materials: More and more Comhairlí are using some of the allocated funding to develop promotional materials, such as newsletters, flyers, clothing and, more commonly, dedicated Comhairle or project websites. These materials are then used to promote Comhairle in schools and youth services, but also to conduct surveys, inform young people of Comhairle activities and post outcomes of projects and campaigns. These same materials are also used to attract more young people to join Comhairle.

Capacity-building and training: At least 9 Comhairlí conducted some mode of capacity-building or training during 2008-2009. These training events sometimes took the form of residential events over a number of days, while others were conducted on a day-by-day basis. Some of the training was team-building in nature; other sessions concentrated on specific skills training, such as 'committee' and media skills. Many of the youth workers cite the training as essential in building up the confidence of the Comhairle members, developing awareness on specific issues and equipping young people with particular skills that allow them to take increased ownership of their own Comhairle programme and direction.

Increased participation of 'seldom heard' young people: An average of 21% of AGM attendees in 2008-2009 were 'seldom heard' young people, resulting from the significant efforts made during the last year to improve the process of recruiting and supporting these young people (see *Table 3*). Using a 'partnership of agency' approach, there are now numerous instances where organisations



representing seldom heard young people sit on the main steering committee responsible for advising and assisting the Comhairle Coordinator to organise Comhairle na nÓg. In other instances, a special committee of organisations representing seldom heard young people is established.

Network meetings: A considerable number of exchanges or ‘network meetings’ between various Comhairlí took place during the last year. These provide an opportunity for both young people and organisers to learn from each other’s structures and practices, and also to feel that they are part of a wider national network.

Term of office: Over half (52%) of all Comhairlí now operate some version of a 2-year term of office. While a further increase in this number should be sought, where appropriate, this marks a significant rise in one year. The benefits of a 2-year term are outlined in Chapter 4.

Outputs and outcomes at NATIONAL level

While the Comhairle Development Fund itself is used to finance Comhairlí at local level, there have been a number of outcomes at national level as a result of the funding and evaluation process, including the following.

The establishment by the OMCYA of the Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team, with the following aims:

- to provide support for the development of effective Comhairle na nÓg under all 34 CDBs, through driving implementation of actions outlined in the Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group Report and future actions to be developed by a Children and Young People’s Participation Partnership Committee (*see below*);
- to support the operation and development of the Dáil na nÓg process;
- to support other children and young people’s participation initiatives.

The establishment by the OMCYA of the Children and Young People’s Participation Partnership Committee, with the following objective:

- This committee has strategic oversight of the work of the Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team (*see above*). It will develop strategic annual plans that ensure the effective development of Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg and other children and young people’s participation structures. This committee replaces the Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group (CIG), with continued involvement of all existing members of the CIG in the new committee.

The development of a 2-year development plan (2009-2011):

- Devised by the CIG and now to be run by the Children and Young People’s Participation Partnership Committee (*see above*), this 2-year development plan (2009-2011) outlines the vision, principles and key strategic objectives of Comhairle na nÓg, as well as some of the priority areas for development throughout the period.



Hosting an 'information-sharing' event for Comhairle na nÓg organisers:

The Children and Young People's Participation Support Team organised an information-sharing event during 2009, with plans for it to be held on an annual basis in the future:

- to provide a discussion forum on guidelines, minimum standards and the future direction of Comhairle na nÓg;
- to network and share expertise, knowledge, innovative projects and best practice;
- to support new personnel;
- to provide skills and information.

Ensuring funds were used to fulfil the core objectives of Comhairle: Letters were issued to Comhairlí na nÓg organisers around the country, and face-to-face meetings organised where necessary, stressing the importance of ensuring that the additional funding was directed towards the fulfilment of Comhairle's core objectives. There is now certainly a greater realisation of the importance of fulfilling the core objectives and basics of the programme before engaging in more experimental practices.

OMCYA Annual Final Report: The reporting structure for the 'annual report' on the AGM and the report on the 'Comhairle Development Fund' were merged, ensuring that equal importance is afforded to ongoing Comhairle activity and for the purposes of efficiency.

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Development of performance indicator information for Comhairle na nÓg:

The OMCYA has worked with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to amend the CDB performance indicator to reflect the fact that Comhairle members come from youth services and clubs, as well as from schools. The amended performance indicator now reads: *Percentage of local schools and youth groups involved in the local Youth Council/Comhairle na nÓg scheme.*

Development of Comhairle na nÓg guidelines: The Children and Young People's Participation Support Team will develop a set of guidelines to include, among other things, a manual for new personnel, minimum standards and best practice in managing Comhairle na nÓg, as well as outlining key areas for development.

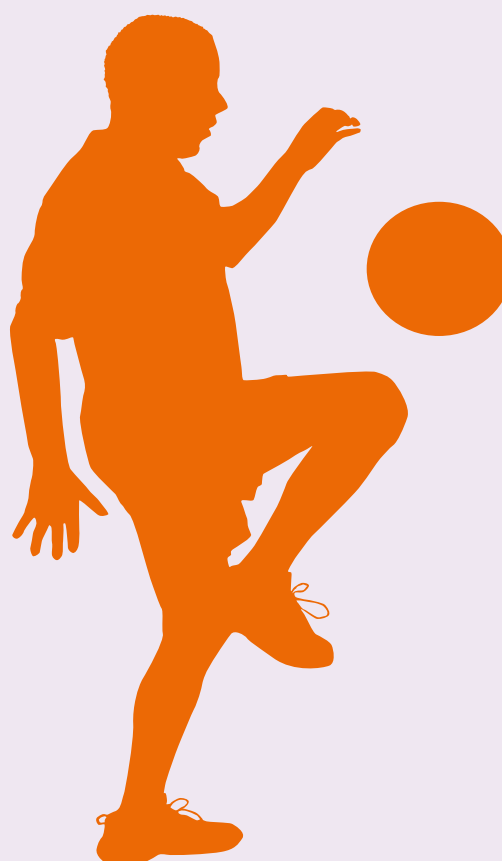
Branding: Comhairle na nÓg is currently referred to by a host of different names around the country. In order to address this confusing situation, a sub-group of the Children and Young People's Participation Partnership Committee on 'Naming and Branding for Comhairle na nÓg' was established in May 2009 to discuss the key issues involved. The sub-group has devised a new logo and tagline – **Young Voices. Local Issues** – which has now been designed. An individually tailored logo with guidelines will be distributed to all Comhairlí in 2010.

Conclusions

As a result of these diverse local and national outputs and outcomes, the Comhairle programme has had considerable achievements in the first two years of the Development Fund. The most notable accomplishments are:

- Comhairle is increasingly perceived as the 'voice of young people' by both young people themselves and adults.
- Increasingly, decision-makers consider Comhairle as a key consultative forum for young people.
- As a result of training, Comhairle members are better skilled to engage in consultative processes, projects, campaigns and the local community.
- An increased number of Comhairlí are now directly involved in policy-making.
- There is considerably better awareness of the Comhairle programme at local level as a result of the many promotional campaigns.
- Comhairle is a more robust, sustainable programme and less dependent on any one individual or 'champion', although it is still very dependent on funding.
- The Information Day and network meetings mean that Comhairle is now tapped into a national network.

Overall, the year 2008-2009 marked a welcomed re-focus on delivering the core objectives of the Comhairle na nÓg programme. Directed by the OMCYA, there is now a better understanding of the importance of delivering on these core objectives, not least on the membership profile (numbers involved, inclusion of 12-15 year-olds and term of office), as well as forging formal links to decision-makers. More importantly, the vast majority of Comhairlí now hold meetings on a regular basis and there has been a notable shift away from the culture of Comhairle being seen as a 'one-off' event.



7. Summary of key recommendations, remaining challenges and next steps



Key recommendations

The findings from the 2007-2008 evaluation report resulted in the prioritisation of several core objectives in this Comhairle calendar year (2008-2009). Consequently the focus of this year's evaluation is on those core objectives, namely:

Membership profile

- participation of and impact on young people;
- age profile;
- term of office;
- meaningful inclusion of 'seldom heard' young people.

Structure of the Comhairle na nÓg programme

- links to decision-making structures;
- links to student councils;
- branding and promotion of Comhairle;
- delivery partners/steering committees.

The upshot of the recommendations made in this evaluation is that there is a need to continue to focus on the core objectives of the Comhairle na nÓg programme. It is vital that these are implemented in full so that Comhairle can sustain itself as a key component of the youth participation structures in this country. This year has resulted in considerable focus on the core objectives, but it has been a limited timeframe since this emphasis was communicated to Comhairle and some of the objectives take some time to address. In saying this, it is also important to acknowledge that there are many Comhairlí already delivering on the core objectives in full and in style. However, particular attention needs to be paid to those Comhairlí failing to meet 'minimum standards' and in danger of being left further behind as other Comhairlí make excellent use of the Development Fund to improve. The Children and Young People's Participation Support Team has a pivotal role to play in ensuring these 'weaker' Comhairlí are supported to achieve the minimum standards and beyond.

In the coming year (2010-2011), there needs to be a shift from *focusing* on the core objectives to *actually realising* them. Efforts to improve the membership profile, especially the younger cohort of 12-15 year-olds, need to bear fruit. The plans to improve formal links to decision-makers need to be fulfilled. In addition, those plans to involve young people in decision-making processes need to become embedded in the system so that they are not reliant on the drive of any one person or 'champion'. While there is no doubting that the process behind Comhairle is very important, achieving outcomes is of equal importance. To that end, Comhairlí need to produce visible and tangible achievements, or 'wins', so that young people are motivated to stay involved, the system is sustainable and the funding can be justified.

In all of this, we must constantly remind ourselves that Comhairle na nÓg is a youth participation structure and not youth work. While the training and capacity-building is essential to provide the skills and knowledge needed, as well as creating a suitable team environment in which to work, the emphasis must remain on youth participation and involving young people in the decision-making process.

The key recommendations made in this evaluation report are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of key recommendations for Comhairle na nÓg

SUBJECT	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
Participation of and impact on young people (see Chapter 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An AGM should be held on an annual basis, with a significant number and diverse group of young people attending. ○ A minimum of 12 young people, and ideally considerably more, should be elected at the AGM to form the Comhairle committee, which will meet on a regular basis throughout the year. ○ It is useful to 'over-subscribe' the Comhairle committee at the outset in order to counter-balance the inevitable drop-off in numbers throughout the year. ○ Comhairle members should be more involved in setting the agenda for meetings and in running them. To this end, they should receive suitable training to empower them to do so, including training in decision-making, team work, structure of meetings, media skills and PR. ○ Formal links to decision-makers should be established and maintained to enable dialogue and discussion between them and the young people on issues of relevance. ○ A media and web presence (particularly the Comhairle na nÓg website) should be established and maintained, preferably by the Comhairle members themselves.



SUBJECT	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
Membership profile (see Chapter 3)	
Age profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The practice of restricting the Comhairle to Transition Year students or those over the age of 15 should be abolished. ○ Comhairle members should represent all ages between 12 and 18. ○ Guidelines on how to recruit the younger cohort of young people should be provided to the Comhairlí by the OMCYA and might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ensuring that all information in publications, websites or other materials clearly states that Comhairle na nÓg is a programme for young people aged 12-18; ○ providing information to 6th class in primary schools; ○ conducting presentations with CSPE teachers and youth services who cater for a younger cohort; ○ ensuring that elections for the Comhairle and Comhairle committee are structured to cater for age balance, as one might cater for gender or geographical balance; ○ recruiting existing members to actively encourage younger members to join; ○ using methodologies during the Comhairle AGM and committee meetings that are engaging and suitable for a younger audience.
Meaningful inclusion of 'seldom heard' young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comhairlí should embed the process of including seldom heard young people into their structure through their steering committee or other dedicated committee. All organisations representing seldom heard young people in the area should be invited to sit on this committee to create a network and advisory panel of people who can support the successful inclusion of seldom heard young people. Examples of these organisations might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ local youth services; ○ schools; ○ the local Vocational Education Committee (VEC); ○ organisations such as Barnardos, Belong To, Inclusion Ireland, Irish Association of Young People in Care, ISPCC, Irish Wheelchair Association, Pavee Point and Youthreach. ○ The process to include seldom heard young people needs to be open and transparent for young people who come to the Comhairle through the regular election process. ○ Capacity-building should be provided for seldom heard young people, with training to include support with their confidence and self-esteem, skills useful to a meeting setting and information on the workings of Comhairle and the issues being addressed. This training can be provided by the representative organisation or offered by the Comhairle Coordinator or another staff member. ○ To secure representation from seldom heard groups, additional places on the Comhairle committee should be made available if necessary for an election or co-option process. This process should take place before the first meeting of the Comhairle committee, so that all young people start as 'Comhairle committee members' at the same time. The process should also be transparent and without labelling these young people as different.
Structure of the Comhairle na nÓg programme (see Chapter 4)	
Delivery partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Where not already in existence, consideration should be given to developing a 'partnership of agency' approach in delivering Comhairle na nÓg. ○ Funding permitting, a part-time dedicated Comhairle worker should be employed to drive the process.
Steering committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Where not already in existence, a steering committee should be established to assist and advise the Comhairle Coordinator/CDB.

SUBJECT	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
Links to decision-making structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Where not already established, formal links need to be established between Comhairle na nÓg and the local CDB, with scheduled and ongoing meetings (e.g. quarterly or at least annually) taking place between the two organisations. These meetings are an opportunity for young people to present the issues important to them to the CDB and receive formal feedback. Similarly, young people should also be made aware of the issues of importance being discussed and considered by the CDB. ◦ Comhairle meetings should be held in the Council chamber, where possible and appropriate. ◦ Young people, where possible, should deliver any presentations instead of adults. ◦ Young people should be included in discussions in a meaningful way, develop relationships with the Council representatives, interact and receive formal feedback. It is not enough for an adult staff member to present the views of the Comhairle at various meetings or to be limited to sporadic presentations or meetings where they simply observe the Council in action. ◦ Links with Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) working groups should be explored. ◦ A culture of youth participation needs to be fostered and the Comhairle programme embedded in the decision-making process so that individual Comhairlí are not dependent on any one 'champion'. Where at all possible and relevant, decision-makers need to consult with Comhairle on policy, strategies or any other plans relevant to the local area and young people's lives. These same decision-making bodies should also be open to hearing directly from young people on issues deemed important by them.
Term of office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ An AGM should be held once a year, regardless of the length of the term of office. ◦ The Comhairle committee should sit for a 2-year term of office, where possible.
Links to student councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Comhairlí should develop improved links with student councils through contact with student council liaison teachers. ◦ Student councils should promote Comhairle na nÓg and arrange elections for members from their school. ◦ Student councils should be encouraged to disseminate information about Comhairle na nÓg and encourage students to become involved. ◦ The practice of recruiting the entire Comhairle membership from student councils should be actively discouraged. A dual mandate should operate, so that the same young people cannot be members of Comhairle na nÓg and their student council at the same time.
Branding and promotion of Comhairle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Branding of Comhairle na nÓg, with an agreed name and logo, needs to be promoted at the earliest opportunity. ◦ Principals of national schools should be contacted to encourage 6th class pupils to get involved in the Comhairle AGM. ◦ Consideration should be given to producing an e-mail, newsletter, poster or document that outlines the key highlights and activities of the previous Comhairle year. This can then be used to promote Comhairle and attract others to join. ◦ This promotional material and other relevant material should also be sent to all local decision-makers, informing them that Comhairle is available for consultation on relevant matters, outlining particular areas of interest for Comhairle members. ◦ A national poster to promote Comhairle na nÓg should be devised. ◦ Young people should be trained and encouraged to submit articles and conduct media interviews about their Comhairle activities and issues on a regular basis. ◦ Existing websites, such as www.comhairlenanog.ie and www.teenspace.ie, as well as local Comhairle websites, should be maintained and developed as necessary and as resources allow.



SUBJECT	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
Other key issues (see Chapter 5)	
Child protection policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Local Authorities and other agencies involved in delivering Comhairle na nÓg need to have an appropriate child protection policy in place that is in keeping with <i>Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children</i>.
Youth work and youth participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comhairlí na nÓg need to be mindful that the focus of their programme is on youth participation rather than on youth work.
Training and capacity-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training and capacity-building are important, especially at the beginning of a Comhairle year, for team-building and providing new skills for the Comhairle membership.
Exchanges between Comhairlí	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While there are benefits to exchange meetings between Comhairlí, it is essential that these meetings are not at the expense of delivering on the regular Comhairle programme and ensuring young people are connected to the decision-making process.

Remaining challenges

56

There are a number of challenges still remaining for Comhairle na nÓg, namely:

- Age profile**

Comhairle needs to be a youth participation initiative that openly recruits, supports and meets the needs of all young people aged between 12 and 18 years. The gross under-representation of young people under the age of 15 needs to be addressed.
- Formalising links between young people and decision-makers**

Although 16 Comhairlí have formalised their links with decision-making bodies and there have been significant achievements and 'wins' in this area, the greatest challenge for most Comhairlí is to ensure that links are formalised and embedded into the system so that they are sustainable and not reliant on any one person or agency.
- Establishment of steering committees**

While some Comhairlí have a steering committee, many do not. A steering committee, comprised of all key stakeholders, should be established in every Comhairle na nÓg to advise and assist the Comhairle Coordinator in organising the Comhairle programme.
- Creation of links with student councils**

There are currently very limited links with student councils, with 56% of Comhairlí having no connection with them at all. These links need to be created, but in a balanced manner that ensures the student councils promote the Comhairle and encourage students to get involved in the programme, but do not monopolise membership of both organisations.
- Child protection**

There are significant concerns about the absence of an appropriate child protection policy in 28% of Local Authorities, which have stated that they currently do not have any such policy in place. A further 16% of Comhairlí rely on the policy of the delivering partner or 'other agency'. Thus, it is essential, as a matter of urgency, to address the issue of every Local Authority having a child protection policy in place and being implemented.



o **Maintaining focus on youth participation**

Comhairle na nÓg is a youth participation initiative and not youth work. There are some instances where the focus is on the personal and social development of young people rather than on involving them in the decision-making process. The need for Comhairle na nÓg to remain as a youth participation initiative should be communicated to all CDBs.

Next steps

This year's focus on some of Comhairle's core objectives has been both welcomed and extremely beneficial. In many respects, the focus for the coming year (2010-2011) must remain on these core objectives to ensure that the Comhairlí that are getting left behind are improved and supported in realising these objectives. In addition, the challenges outlined above must also be tackled.

Thus, the next steps for the Comhairle na nÓg programme might include:

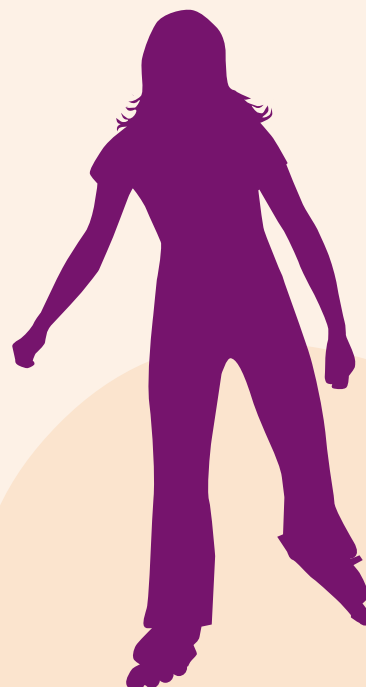
- o Additional support from the Children and Young People's Participation Support Team to help 'weaker' Comhairlí achieve 'minimum standards' and beyond.
- o Establishment of a steering committee in every Comhairle, which will provide an opportunity:
 - o to ensure that organisations representing seldom heard young people are represented;
 - o to ensure a relationship is established with the Children's Services Committees, where they exist;
 - o to ensure that all key decision-makers are represented and engaged with the process.
- o Further work on the membership profile of Comhairle to ensure that:
 - o young people between the ages of 12-18, including the younger bracket 12-15, are targeted, recruited and encouraged to participate;
 - o seldom heard young people continue to be represented, supported and embedded into the Comhairle system;
 - o a 2-year term of office is installed, where possible.
- o Formal and sustainable links between Comhairle and local decision-makers are firmly established. These links should include a process where the Comhairle and County Council meet on a scheduled basis, preferably at least twice a year.
- o Ensuring that Comhairlí are youth-led and include any training and capacity-building initiatives that allow young people to take the lead and become involved in the organisation and direction of the Comhairle programme.
- o Addressing the need for every Local Authority to have an appropriate child protection policy in place.
- o Developing links with student councils.

Other work that needs to be maintained or continued as a priority includes:

- o The employment of a part-time dedicated employee, where funds allow.
- o Each Comhairle to host an AGM on an annual basis.
- o Branding and promoting Comhairle na nÓg on a national basis.
- o Production and dissemination of 'Guidelines for Comhairle'.



8. Examples of innovative projects



In addition to some of the more traditional ideas and projects, there are many examples of Comhairlí employing creative and innovative methods of working, campaigns and general practices, some of which are detailed below.

DRAGONS DEN – CORK COUNTY Comhairle na nÓg

At the Cork County Comhairle Regional AGMs in November and December 2008, the young people came up with a number of recommendations on the issue of healthy lifestyles. The Youth Council members were given the list of recommendations to discuss in four groups at the following meeting. The idea was to prioritise the issues they felt were most important and then make a 2-minute 'pitch' – an action plan covering the objective, outcomes, timescale and resources required. This 'pitch' was made to a panel of 'Dragons' from the Health Promotion Unit (HPU) of the HSE. The presentations followed the format of the TV show and some of the language used, such as 'looking for a 50% stake'. The HPU challenged the young people on their ideas, getting them to justify and articulate their case. At the end of the presentations, the 'Dragons' gave critical feedback on the 'pitches'. Having listened to the merits and flaws of each of the prioritised recommendations, the young people then decided as a group on their preferred issue to work on, which was approved by the HSE.

HEADLIGHT – DONEGAL Comhairle na nÓg

To improve the inclusion of 'seldom heard' young people, Donegal Comhairle decided to get together a large group of young people who were interested in mental health. Following an introductory session, a sub-group of young people was formed to work on the issue. The Donegal Comhairle and another youth group, Planet Youth, supported this mixed group of Comhairle members and other young people to explore mental health and their own mental health needs. A training session in mental health began the process, followed by the development of an action plan by the young people. They are currently organising a poster competition to develop materials to publicise helpline numbers for young people throughout Donegal. These young people also opted to become full members of the wider Finn Valley Alliance for Positive Mental Health.

SEXUAL HEALTH CAMPAIGN – LIMERICK CITY Comhairle na nÓg

Participants in Limerick City Comhairle identified sexual health as the area they wanted to address in their campaign for 2009. This work commenced in March and is ongoing. The young people have researched the topic, discussed programmes with other young people, youth work staff and relevant agencies. They have designed an innovative programme based on their experiences of previous Comhairle activities. The campaign will link to other youth events, including Mind & Body and Youth Fest and the next Comhairle na nÓg Day. Elements of the campaign include a training programme for 30 young people, a sexual health pack including stickers designed by young people, and youth-led research through youth media (Internet and text). The success of the Limerick City Comhairle na nÓg has heightened the programme profile and led to links with and requests from other youth initiatives. The Comhairle's past work, as well as current work on sexual health, has led to the young people being requested to facilitate a large tent entitled 'Mind & Body' at a youth celebration festival event. This event is for youth groups and projects in Limerick city and county, with over 400 people attending.

WWW.YOUTHCONNECT.IE – ROSCOMMON Comhairle na nÓg

Following county-wide consultation, a website was designed to meet the needs of young people throughout Roscommon. Its launch received considerable media coverage. The aim of the website is to be a one-stop shop where young people can connect with other young people on social issues, as well as getting practical advice on topics and issues of concern and relevance. The website also informs young people of what is happening throughout the county and keeps them up to date on the work of the Comhairle committee. A sub-group has been set up to monitor and update the website regularly.

RECREATION DAY – ROSCOMMON Comhairle na nÓg

Roscommon Comhairle and the Roscommon County Development Board are working together to plan a Recreation Day for teenagers in 2009. The Comhairle committee has joined an interagency committee to assist with organising the event.

POLITICAL SPEED DATING – WATERFORD CITY Comhairle na nÓg

Political speed dating is a fun and light-hearted way for people to interact with their representatives. Like conventional speed dating, each session consists of a series of 3-minute 'dates' or interactions. During this time, you can ask your partner anything except their age, party affiliation and place of residence. The idea is to focus on what the person is really like. When the gong sounds, regardless of how engrossing the conversation, you move on. Members of Waterford City Comhairle decided to invite members of Waterford City Council to participate in a political speed dating session. The event took place at Waterford City Hall. In preparation for the session, the group learned about the work of the Council members and what each was responsible for. Group members chose a theme that was important to them for their interactions and investigated the current Waterford City Council policy on that theme, discussing their ideas for change with each of the Councillors. After each interaction, members took a moment to score the Councillors on a scale of 1-10. When the event was over, the Councillors were sent a copy of their scores.



ALCOHOL BROCHURE – WESTMEATH Comhairle na nÓg

With 'alcohol' as one of the themes, members of Westmeath Comhairle designed and developed an excellent information leaflet on alcohol. Made by young people for young people, every member had an input into the wording of the brochure and chose what type of images to be used in the design. The Comhairle also invited HSE staff to come and view their draft product and received valuable feedback, which was taken into account. The brochure lists facts about alcohol; the law and rules for underage drinking; advice for young people; what can happen when you get drunk; things that young people can do that do not involve alcohol; and alcohol services and further information.

YOUTH MANIFESTO – WICKLOW Comhairle na nÓg

Young people identified issues of importance to them at each of the regional Youth Councils of Wicklow Comhairle and then formulated them into 10 pledges to form a Youth Manifesto. It was decided to ask existing Councillors, MEPS, TDs and candidates in the June Local and European elections to sign the Manifesto, which frames the work of the Youth Councils for the coming year. It also helped generate publicity for and raise awareness of the Comhairle. The Youth Manifesto states:

We, the undersigned believe, and will endeavor to support, that:

1. Young people should be heard and their views valued.
2. Local Youth Councils should be supported and listened to by the adult Councils and other adult decision-making arenas.
3. The needs of pedestrians and cyclists should be given equal or greater weight than those in cars, especially in Town and Local Area Development Plans.
4. Each town in the County should have a designated Youth Centre.
5. A youth /age card should be introduced for young people who wish to have one.
6. There should be increased funding in Ireland's primary and secondary educational system.
7. There should be more public transport at times and on routes that suit young people.
8. Age discrimination against people under 18 should be included in the Equal Status Act (2000).
9. Community and political representatives should challenge negative stereotyping of young people in the media.
10. Third-level college fees should not be re-introduced.





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