



**OFFALY  
SPORTS  
PARTNERSHIP**

— SPORT IRELAND —

# Active Offaly

**[2021-2025]**

Strategic Plan and Long Term Framework  
guiding the work of Offaly Sports Partnership











# OFFALY SPORTS PARTNERSHIP

— SPORT IRELAND —

## Contents

## Page

Foreword

4

1. Introduction

6

2. About Offaly Sports Partnership

7

3. The Broader Context

12

4. Our Strategic Plan

21

Appendix

25





I would like to congratulate Offaly Sports Partnership on the development of their latest strategic plan. Sport Ireland has always stressed the importance of ensuring sport is inclusive and attracts participants from every corner of Ireland, from every age group, of all abilities and from all social backgrounds. Sport Ireland has always promoted the health benefits and positive social impact of sports participation for all individuals, families and communities, and I am delighted to see the emphasis Offaly Sports Partnership have placed on this throughout their strategy.



The culture of sport and physical activity participation varies within different communities. Offaly Sports Partnership have identified the need for diverse opportunities to be available and have highlighted the value of life long sports participation and the benefit of physical activity at all life stages. As people grow, age and develop, their physical activity preferences change. In order to sustain their participation, there must be appropriate opportunities available for them to discover and enjoy.

The National Sports Policy 2018-2027 highlights the significant contribution Local Sports Partnerships make to the sustainable development of sport at a local level. Their consistent presence and perseverance ensures people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities have access to sport in their local area. Since 2006, the contribution of Offaly Sports Partnership to this widely held assessment has been noteworthy and I hope that the development of this latest Offaly Sports Partnership strategy will continue to deliver similar results. The Sport Ireland Participation Plan 2021-2024 further highlights the important role which Local Sports Partnerships can play by being key advocates in the strategic planning, development and promotion of sport and physical activity at a local level. I look forward to Offaly Sports Partnership continuing to make a meaningful contribution to reaching the aims of this plan.

The long-term implications of COVID-19 on community sport and physical activity will become more apparent throughout the implementation of this strategy. I am pleased to see that by aiming to be innovative, solution-focused and collaborative, Offaly Sports Partnership's resilient and optimistic approach will ensure that alternative opportunities are made available to all sections of society when needed.

As with all strategic planning processes, the published document is only one part of an important and complex procedure. I commend Offaly Sports Partnership on the extensive consultation, evaluation and research carried out during the development of this strategic plan, during a period when such work became more challenging than ever. This process produces a strategy that meets the needs of the communities in Offaly and has buy in and support across the county. I would like to thank, in particular, the staff and management committee of Offaly Sports Partnership, as well as all stakeholders and partner organisations who were involved in developing this strategy and who will contribute to its successful delivery.

**John Treacy**  
Chief Executive  
Sport Ireland



Offaly County Council is very proud of the prominent role it has played in establishing and hosting a Local Sports Partnership for the county. For over 17 years, Offaly Sports Partnership has served as a one-stop shop for all things relating to sport and physical activity.

The Sports Partnership has delivered national education and training programmes locally. It has provided information and support to clubs applying for grants, including capital grants to enhance sports infrastructure in Offaly. It has reached out to people of all ages, all abilities, and all backgrounds. It has ensured opportunities were created for people who never envisaged partaking in physical activity. The improved physical and mental well-being realised by so many cannot be under-estimated.

This new strategic plan was developed against the very difficult background of the Covid-19 pandemic when conventional face-to-face consultations could not be held. Nonetheless, comprehensive reviews of past work as well as online consultation gave direction to this plan. The executive and management committees of the Sports Partnership considered a number of drafts before agreeing this final document. We want to thank Frank Fahey of Fizzical Ltd., for his time and patience in facilitating the entire planning process.

Very evident in this plan is a love of county and love of sport by the people and stakeholders involved in its formulation. The plan is both ambitious and forward looking. It is underpinned by commitments to inclusion and diversity, gender equality, good governance, and the application of practices to reap the benefits of participation while reducing the carbon footprint of the sector.

Offaly County Council is extremely grateful to John Treacy and his team in Sport Ireland for their support over many years. We look forward to continued cooperation of mutual benefit with Sport Ireland long into the future. We are also grateful to all other organisations and agencies that have supported and funded the work of our Sports Partnership.

We want to pay tribute to Matt Connor, patron of the Sports Partnership, and to everyone who has served on the management committees across the past three strategic plans. Thanks also to those who have volunteered themselves to sit on the committee to oversee delivery of this new plan. We would also like to acknowledge the work of previous committees and especially the outgoing one who's contribution to Offaly Sport Partnership has been immense. All members sit on the committee in a voluntarily capacity and all bring a wealth of knowledge, experience, and commitment to their roles.

We are also confident of a high level of commitment and enthusiasm among the staff and tutors of Offaly Sports Partnership. Through their work, participation opportunities for all should continue to increase.

We fully endorse this plan, and we anticipate that sport will grow stronger in Offaly in the coming 5 years through the dedication and commitment of all.



*Councillor Declan Harvey  
Cathaoirleach*



*Anna-Marie Delaney  
Chief Executive*



# 1. Introduction to Our Plan



*Ann Dillon – LCDC Chief Officer*



*Matt Connor – Patron*



*Robert McDermott – Chairperson*



*Eamonn Henry – Coordinator*

## Active Offaly 2021-2025

- is Offaly Sports Partnership's fourth strategic plan since its establishment in 2006 and follows our third plan which guided our work from 2016 to 2020.

- is a five-year framework which aspires to increase participation levels in sport and physical activity across the county and realise the many contributions that they make to many aspects of life. These contributions are best outlined in Chapter 1 of the National Sports Policy (2018-2027) as follows;

- physical health
- mental wellbeing
- social and community development
- economic activity
- educational performance; and
- life-long learning.

- has been prepared in consultation with the Management Committee, professional staff, key stakeholders (from the community, sport, and education sectors), and partner agencies. As the process took place during 2020 it was made difficult because of restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and much of the consultation involved online communication.

- sets out the Partnership's strategic goals and objectives for the 2021-2025 period. These are informed by
  - the remit of the Sports Partnerships as set out by Sport Ireland
  - a review of our past work
  - priorities articulated through the consultation process
  - the wider local and national context within which we operate
  - consideration of resource constraints.

- will be implemented through a series of FIVE annual Operational Plans with specific targets, results based performance indicators and timelines.

- will be monitored on an ongoing basis through
  - reports to each Management and Executive Committee meeting.
  - Annual Reports produced by the staff and available through the website
  - Progress Reports made annually to Sport Ireland.
  - a Mid-Term Review carried out at the end of 2023

- will be evaluated through a detailed review of the overall strategy and five Operational Plans which will be undertaken prior to developing the next strategic plan.

- is presented over the next three sections as follows;

- Section 2 presents an overview of the role and work of Offaly Sports Partnership.

- Section 3 outlines the context for this strategic plan including other policies and plans which are likely to impact on our work.

- Section 4 presents our goals, objectives and proposed actions under our five agreed five thematic pillars.





## 2. About Offaly Sports Partnership

### Who We Are

Designated by Sport Ireland in 2006, Offaly Sports Partnership is one of a network of 29 Local Sports Partnerships supported by Sport Ireland across Ireland. We are an inter-agency and multi sectorial sub group of Offaly's Local Community Development Committee. We are hosted within the Community and Culture Section of Offaly County Council.

### Our Management Committee and Staff

#### Management Committee

At the end of 2020, the Management Committee comprised of nineteen committed people from various sectors including

- sport sector (6)
- education sector (1)
- Public Participation Network (PPN) (1)
- Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) (1)
- private sector (3)
- locally elected Public Representatives (3)
- the statutory sector (4)

[Offaly County Council, Health Services Executive, An Garda Síochána, and Laois/Offaly Education & Training Board]

#### Staff Team

Our team of staff comprises

- a Coordinator
- an Administrator
- a Sports Inclusion Development Officer
- a Community Sports Development Officer
- a Healthy Offaly Coordinator

### Our Remit

In 2018 the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (changed in 2020 to the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media) published The National Sports Policy (2018-2027) setting out a long term vision and 57 actions to transform the sporting landscape.

The policy document states that the achievement of its ambitions will require the active engagement of three key groups namely;

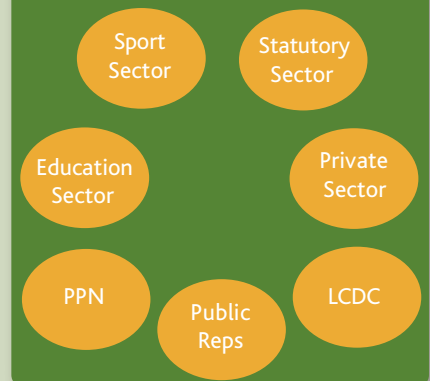
- the National Governing Bodies of Sport
- the various Representative Sporting Organisations; and
- the national Local Sports Partnership Network.

The policy tasks Local Sports Partnerships, in particular, with

- increasing participation levels in sport and physical activity (especially among those sectors of society that are currently under-represented in sport).

- removing barriers and ensuring that opportunities for participation in sport are progressive, innovative and fully inclusive at a local level.
- supporting a sustainable level of development within the local sport infrastructure, through support to clubs, groups, coaches and volunteers.

#### Offaly Sports Partnership Management Committee





## Our Work

In our 15 years of operation we have helped lead local delivery of national objectives in sport and physical activity and have made significant progress in a wide range of areas, in particular;

### Local Structures

A strong inter-agency group of relevant stakeholders is in place. These are consulted on the plans of the Partnership, and support and oversee its work.

### Coordination

We have played a pivotal role in bringing various agencies together to work on identified priorities of a sporting nature. Locally we also coordinate a number of national initiatives such as National Bike Week, National Play Day, National Recreation Week, and the Operation Transformation national walk. We also have a supporting and representative function on a number of local forums such as the Slieve Bloom Outdoor Recreation Partnership, and have built international relationships from research of good practice that we have sought to replicate in Offaly.

### Investment

#### Core Funding

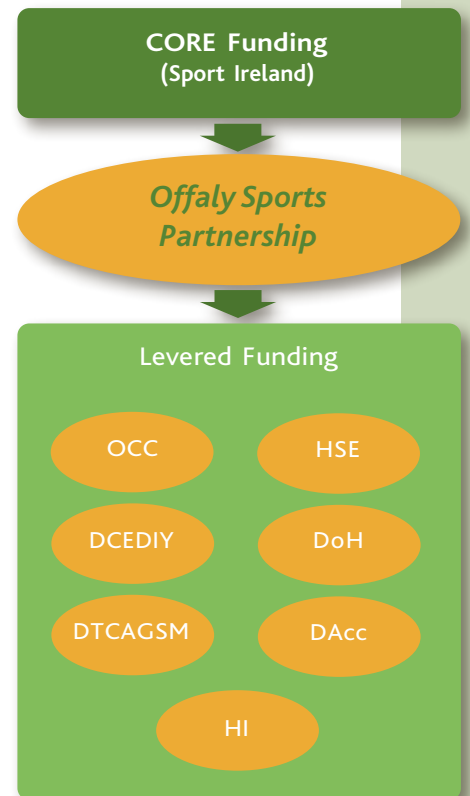
We receive annual core funding from Sport Ireland towards the realisation of its national participation objectives at a local level. The funding is allocated to

- staff employment
- delivery of Sport Ireland programmes
- support funding for local programmes.

#### Other Funding

In addition to Sport Ireland's core funding, we continue to lever additional financial and in-kind support from a wide range of agencies at both local and national level for various programmes, campaigns, etc. These include;

- Offaly County Council (OCC)
- Health Services Executive (HSE)
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth (DCEDIY)
- Department of Health (DoH)
- Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM)
- Dormant Accounts Disbursement Fund (DAcc)
- Healthy Ireland Fund (HI)





## Main Achievements 2016-2020

The main achievements of Offaly Sports Partnership in the period 2016-2020 include:

### Financial Investment

We have been successful in sourcing investment in the order of €1,848,360 in financial contributions and €1,072,036 of benefit-in-kind contributions through a range of agencies including;

Dormant Accounts

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth

Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

Healthy Ireland

Health Services Executive

Sport Ireland

### Increased Staffing

We have increased our staff complement from three (Coordinator, Administrator, and one part time Sports Inclusion Development Officer) to five.

Funding from Sport Ireland enables the employment of a Coordinator, Administrator Sports Inclusion and Community Sports Development Officers.

A *Healthy Ireland Offaly* Coordinator has also been attached to the Sports Partnership.

### Increased Support for Under-Represented Groups and Disadvantaged Areas

Through the employment of the Sports Inclusion and Community Sports Development Officers we have been able to significantly increase supports for under-represented groups including

- people with disabilities  
On average, 500 people with disabilities have participated in physical activity and sport programmes annually.
- older adults
- women and girls.
- people in disadvantaged communities across West Offaly.

Financial support provided by Offaly County Council enabled the employment of a Football Association of Ireland Football Development Officer and the roll out of Leinster Rugby's Community/Club Rugby Programme.

We worked closely with both FAI and Leinster Rugby in the delivery of their grassroots programmes for under-represented groups across the county.

We have been a key proponent in the promotion of the Federation of Irish Sport's 20x20 *If She Can't See It, She Can't Be It* campaign.

### Recreational Running

Recreational running programmes were delivered with the support of Healthy Ireland funding and Offaly Athletics. These resulted in Offaly having the highest rate of registered adult membership within athletics clubs per head of population in 2019.

### Fit Class School Intervention

We delivered a comprehensive *Fit Class* intervention in primary schools across the strategic period. The intervention included spring and winter fitness programmes, an end-of-year testing programme and the development of school resources.

On average, 34 schools and 3,625 pupils participated in the programme annually. Initial analysis of the data collated suggests that the intervention achieved significant improvements in *maximum speed* and marginal improvements in *speed endurance*



### Establishment of Community Hub

With support received from Dormant Accounts funding we established the South Offaly Sports Hub, operating out of the Crinkle Sport and Recreation Centre.

The Hub provides an outreach programme of physical activity across Birr and South Offaly. Further funding has been secured to support the Sports Hub concept in the 2021-2025 period.

### Education and Training

We have delivered a comprehensive education and training programme for sports volunteers and coaches, addressing aspects such as child protection and coach development.

### Sports Leadership Training for Young People

A total of 830 young people have completed Sports Leadership Training for Young People and a further 30 have been supported to gain qualifications in a variety of sporting disciplines.

A number of these new leaders have

- provided support to local clubs and organisations in the delivery of grassroots programmes for children
- supported Offaly Sports Partnership and other local organisations in the delivery of summer camps

### Celebration of Sport Awards

As part of our *Integrate and Celebrate* pillar we have organised

- the Sports Achievement of the Decade (2006-2016) Celebration (2016) at which athletes from 15 sports were recognised for their achievements. Shane Lowry was named the Offaly Sports Achiever of the Decade.
- the Sports Volunteers Awards (2018) at which 13 volunteers were recognised for their long term voluntary contribution to their chosen sport.

### Integrated Academy for Athletics Performance

This was our flagship *integration* programme designed to promote the integration and performance of migrant children in athletics. The project has resulted in participants continuing to participate in sport in secondary school, and striving for third level academic and sport scholarships.

The Academy has created a pipeline of children transferring to established athletics clubs, and has resulted in support from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, formerly the Department of Justice and Equality to host three annual diversity games days in conjunction with Athletics Ireland and the Athlone International Arena.

In addition, a total of 54 national medals have been won by participants on the programme between 2012 and 2020 while three participants have also gone on to represent Ireland at international level.



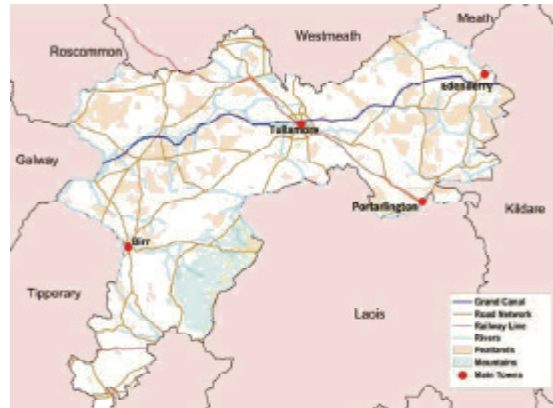




## 3. The Broader Context

### County Offaly

- is centrally located and borders the seven counties of Galway, Roscommon, Tipperary, Laois, Westmeath, Kildare and Meath.
- has a population (Census 2016) of nearly 78,000 people with approximately a 45% urban, 55% rural split. Nearly 80% of the rural population reside in countryside or small settlements.
- has a well-developed network of moderately scaled towns and attractive villages. Tullamore is the county town and the administrative centre of County Offaly. There is good road connectivity and a rail line with stations in Tullamore, Clara and Portarlington.
- has an approximate area of 2,000 km<sup>2</sup> comprising
  - primarily flat, undulating lands, with the exception of the Slieve Bloom Mountains in the south west.
  - large expanses of peatland (nearly one fifth of total) including Clara Bog and Lough Boora Discovery Park.
  - two notable waterways in the River Shannon which flows along the western boundary of the county; and the Grand Canal which traverses the county.



#### Overall Population

77,961 persons  
female 50.2%  
male 49.8%

#### Rural/Urban Breakdown

56% rural  
44% urban

#### Marital Status

Single 52%  
Married 39%  
Separated/Divorced 5%  
Widowed 4%

#### Disability

11,154 (14.3%)  
state they have  
a disability

Carers  
3,357

#### Health Status

Good /Very Good (88.9%)  
Fair (9.2%)  
Bad /Very Bad (1.9%)

#### Education

Higher than average  
early school leavers.  
Lower than average rate  
of participation and  
completion  
of Third Level

#### Age Profile

0-4	7.2%
5-12	12.4%
13-19	10.0%
20-39	24.9%
40-64	31.8%
65+	13.7%
Children	19.6%
Young People	10.0%
Adults	56.7%
Older Adults	13.7%

average age  
37.2yrs  
(up from 35.7  
in 2011)

#### Broadband

53% of  
households  
have access to  
broadband.

#### Economic Status

47% of population  
are at work  
21.5% of labour force  
are unemployed  
High level of youth  
unemployment

**Other Nationalities**  
Most common  
other nationalities include  
Poland  
United Kingdom  
Lithuania  
Other EU  
Rest of World

[Source Census 2016]



## Other Policies Impacting on our Plan

Active Offaly 2021-2025 is framed by a number of important national and local policies and plans, the most significant of which include:

- *National Physical Activity Plan (2016-2025) [Healthy Ireland]*
- *National Sports Policy (2018-2027) [Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media]*
- *Participation Plan (2021 - 2024) [Sport Ireland]*
- *Corporate Strategy (2017-2021) [Sport Ireland]*
- *Policy on Sport & Physical Activity in the Outdoors (2020) [Sport Ireland]*
- *Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities (2017) [Sport Ireland]*
- *Women in Sport Policy (2019) [Sport Ireland]*
- *Offaly County Development Plan (2021-2024) [Offaly County Council]*
- *Corporate Plan 2019-2024 [Offaly County Council]*
- *Local Economic and Community Plan (2016-2021) [Offaly County Council]*
- *Healthy Offaly Plan (2018+) [Offaly County Council]*



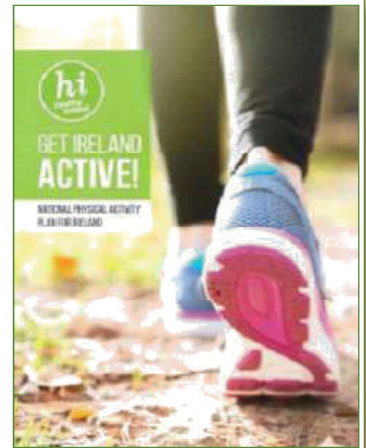


### National Physical Activity Plan 2016-2025 [Healthy Ireland]

The National Physical Activity Plan (Get Ireland Active) aims to increase physical activity levels throughout the Irish population, and specifically;

- to increase the proportion of the population meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines by 1% per annum; and
- to reduce by 0.5% per annum the proportion that are sedentary.

It places particular emphasis on addressing inequalities in participation by gender, age, social class or disability status. Local Sports Partnerships are identified as having a role to play in seven Action Areas, namely; Public Awareness; Education and Communications; Environment; Children and Young People; Sport and Physical Activity in the Community; Research, Monitoring and Evaluation; and Implementation through Partnership.



### National Sports Policy 2018-2027 [Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media]

The National Sports Policy sets out a vision for Irish sport and actions towards its realisation. The policy prioritises *increasing participation* and sets as a key aim that 'every Irish citizen will engage regularly in some form of sport or physical activity'

The policy recognises that the expertise, knowledge and insight of the Local Sports Partnership network will be essential for the successful implementation of the policy; and commits to enhanced funding to reflect the contribution they make.

The plan proposes a locally-led, nationally supported approach and proposes an initiative to support Local Authorities in developing *Local Sports Plans* consistent with the overall vision and objectives of the National Sports Policy, in partnership with local stakeholders including the Local Sports Partnerships. It is anticipated that the concept will be piloted in a number of Local Authority areas from 2021 onwards.



### Corporate Strategy 2018 - 2022 [Sport Ireland]

Sport Ireland plays a lead role in the delivery of many challenges contained within the National Sports Policy. Its Statement of Strategy is based on three key pillars as follows;



- **participation:** where the focus is on *lifelong* and *inclusive* sport.
- **performance:** playing and competing at a level appropriate to ability
- **high performance:** reaching highest levels of international competition

In the Strategy, Sport Ireland commits to leading on the national ambition to increase the number of people participating in sport and physical activity; and to continue to invest in Local Sports Partnerships to build their capacity to continue to reach those who are excluded.



### Participation Plan (2021 - 2024) [Sport Ireland]

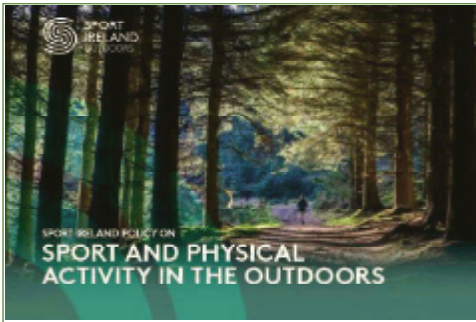
In its comprehensive *Participation Plan*, Sport Ireland outlines a vision of 'a country where everyone can regularly enjoy taking part in sport and physical activity for life'. In this regard, it states that its mission is 'to create a culture that encourages, supports and empowers everyone in Ireland to actively participate in sport and physical activity'.

The plan presents a series of actions for delivery through a range of agencies including Local Sports Partnerships, National Governing Bodies, strategic partners, clubs, communities and individuals.

The goals in the plan are built on six pillars namely;

- Active Policies    Active Principles    Active People    Active Places    Active Partners    Active Promotion





**Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors (2020) [Sport Ireland]**

In this policy Sport Ireland expresses the vision *for opportunities for everyone to participate in and enjoy sport and physical activity in the outdoors*; and sets out priorities primarily in support of the *participation and performance* pillars of its Statement of Strategy. Policy goals have been developed around four target areas;

- provide leadership
- build capacity
- support infrastructure development
- create opportunities

The policy recognises that Local Sports Partnerships have a role to play in order to realise the stated outcomes.



**Women in Sport Policy (2019) [Sport Ireland]**

In this policy Sport Ireland outlines its vision as one where *women have an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential, while enjoying a lifelong involvement in sport*. It identifies four areas which have emerged as current gaps, and future opportunities which will be targeted.

- coaching and officiating
- leadership and governance
- active participation
- visibility

**Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities (2017) [Sport Ireland]**

In this policy Sport Ireland commit to the equal treatment of people with disabilities in participation terms, and support to organisations providing opportunities including;

- National Governing Bodies catering exclusively for people with disabilities
- mainstream National Governing Bodies
- CARA (the national organisation providing a partnership platform to increase sport and physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities).
- Paralympics Ireland, the lead agency in the support of high performance athletes.

The policy identifies Local Sports Partnerships as a key partner in this area of work primarily through the work of the Sports Inclusion Disability Programme.

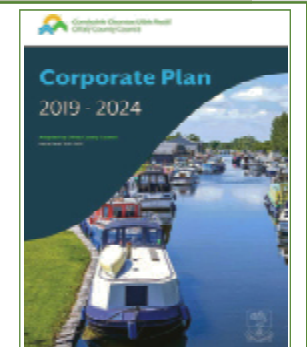


**Corporate Plan 2019-2024 [Offaly County Council]**

Under Objective 4.5 *Health and Wellbeing*, Offaly County Council outline our key role to *'create opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity at all life stages'*.

A number of supporting strategies are particularly relevant to our work and include;

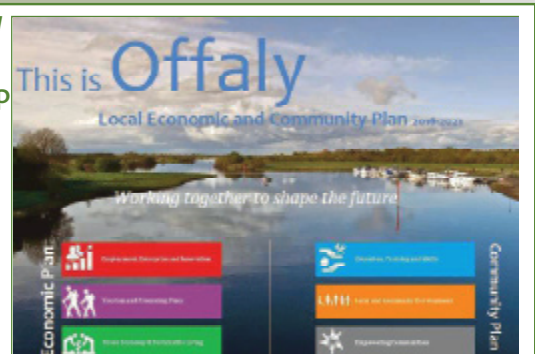
- supporting mental/physical health through the Healthy Ireland initiative.
- remove barriers to participation among socially/economically excluded groups.
- improving infrastructure (including facilities using the natural environment).
- positively promoting Offaly as a destination for play, sport and recreation.
- promoting health of older persons through the Age Friendly Action Plan.
- encouraging active citizenship, volunteering and community activity.



**Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 [Offaly County Council]**

The Local Economic and Community Plan sets out county priorities and actions for the period 2016 - 2021 with Offaly Sports Partnership named as a stakeholder agency with specific reference to;

- advice on the development of appropriate infrastructure
- services and supports to local communities (including people with a disability)
- improving the well being and quality of life for children, youth, families and older people
- the accessing and coordination (with other agencies) of multiple funding sources to stimulate local development.





### County Development Plan 2021-2027 [Offaly County Council]

County Development Plans identify land use plans, and strategies for proper planning and sustainable development in a county. During 2021 Offaly County Council commenced the review of its existing County Development Plan 2014-2020 by preparing a new plan for the period 2021-2027. The process involves three stages of public consultation; the plan will be agreed by the County Council in Autumn 2021.

The work of the Local Sports Partnership will be impacted in particular by aims and objectives proposed under the *Community, Social and Cultural Development* section on issues such as

- social inclusion
- childcare
- elderly
- community facilities
- play facilities
- sport and recreation
- education
- youth
- open spaces



### Healthy Offaly Plan 2018-2021 [Offaly County Council]

The Healthy Offaly Plan supports the local implementation of the Healthy Ireland plan under the six thematic areas of healthy weight, mental health, physical activity, sexual health, substance misuse, and spaces and places for health and wellbeing.

In the physical activity pillar the plan commits to

- support the continued development of accessible and affordable physical activities for all ages and abilities which encourages personal and social development including healthy behaviours.
- support the development and implementation of initiatives to achieve the targets as set out in the National Physical Activity Plan (*Get Ireland Active*).
- support the partnership work of public and private stakeholders to develop a range of recreational and amenity activities.





## Activity Guidelines and Levels

In developing this strategy, consideration has been given to the current activity guidelines for, and participation levels of, different age groups. In this regard, two recent national reports give an indication of current levels and patterns.

### Current Activity Guidelines

*The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland* describe levels of physical activity for the promotion of physical health for various age groups. The table below outlines key guidelines for each of the three age groups.

#### Children & Young People (up to 18yrs)

Accumulate at least 60mins of physical activity of moderate to vigorous intensity every day.

Incorporate activities that strengthen muscles and bones, and improve flexibility at least three times a week.

#### Adults (18-64yrs)

Accumulate at least 30mins of moderate intensity physical activity on five days a week (or 150 minutes a week).

The 30min can be done in one session OR accumulated in shorter bouts of 10-15mins each at least 3 times a week.

#### Older Adults (65yrs+)

Accumulate at least 30mins of moderately intensive physical activity on at least five days a week (or 150mins per week).

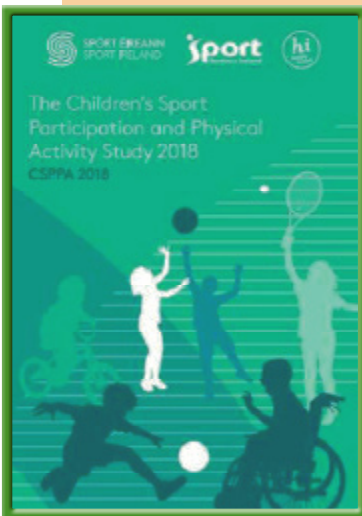
There should be a focus on aerobic activity, muscle and bone strengthening and balance.

### Current Activity Levels

#### Children and Youth

*The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2018* explored participation among children aged 10-18yrs on the island of Ireland. Some of the key findings include;

- average sedentary time was 5.1hrs/day for children (primary school age) and 6.6hrs/day for youths (post primary school age).
- only 13% met the physical activity guidelines of at least 60mins of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.
- at all ages more boys meet the guidelines than girls. Amongst youths only 14% of boys and 7% of girls met the guidelines.
- there has been a 7% increase in the proportion of children and youth partaking in community sport and 80% of children and 58% of youths participating at least once a week. 75% of children and 67% of youths belong to at least one community sports club.
- 38% of youths reported never participating in community sport. Non-participation among female youth now stands at 45%.
- gradients in active participation and sports club membership exist by gender, disability status, and socio-economic status. These gradients are strongest in the post primary school years.

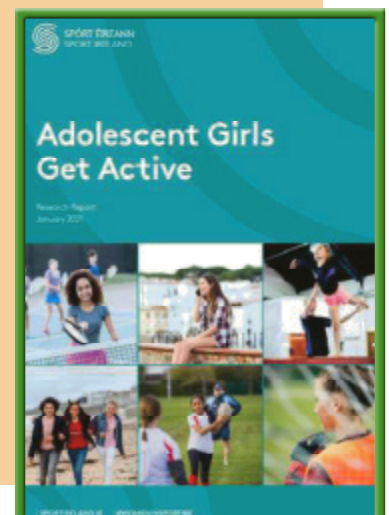


Teenage girls have long been an under-represented group in physical activity and sport; and the 2021 *Adolescent Girls Get Active Report* suggests that participation of girls plummets during adolescence. Amongst the key points arising from this research report are;

- just 7% of 14-15yr old girls meet the recommended physical activity levels
- girls who are active in their teenage years are much more likely to establish a life-long relationship with physical activity and sport in adulthood.

One of the aims of the report was to establish how to encourage teenage girls to take part in regular physical activity and, in this regard;

- outlined five key anchors to help know more about this target group.
- proposed eight important principles to engage with teenage girls, and to support them embrace physical activity and sport into their lives. It is suggested that these *Principles for Success* can be used in developing initiatives for teenage girls; and in checking existing programmes in terms of their relevance for the target audience.





### Adults and Older Adults

The Irish Sports Monitor measures adult (over-16yrs) participation in physical activity. A report has been produced every other year since 2007. Some of the key findings from the most recent full report (2019) are outlined below.

- 46% of adults regularly take part in sport and physical activity representing an increase of 100,000 participants since 2017.
- while males are more active than females, the gender gap in participation continues to decline. In 2007 the gap was 15.7%. At the 2019 mid-year point it had decreased to 3.9%.
- 34% of adults/older adults now meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines. The percentage of sedentary adults has decreased to 20%.
- individual sports account for the majority of all adult participation with the most popular being
 

walking 66%	exercise 16%	swimming 8%
running 7%	cycling 4%	dancing 3%

### Social Gradients in Participation

The Irish Sports Monitor 2019 reports that the four persistent gradients (highlighted in the diagram across) which exist in sport participation are

- age
- disability,
- educational attainment
- socio-economic status.

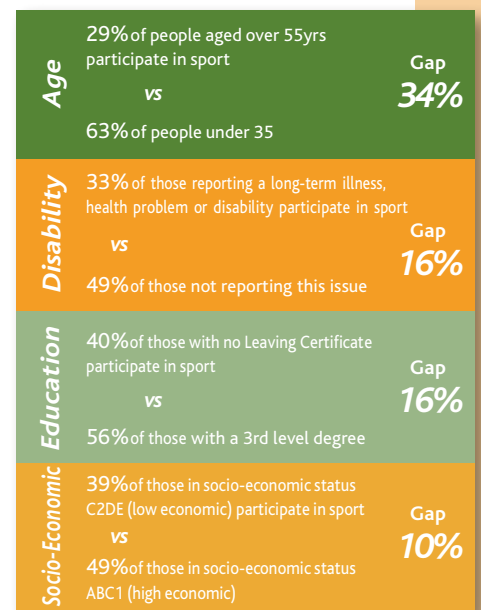
Other gradients of note include gender and ethnicity.

### Impact of Covid 19

The Covid pandemic of 2020/21 was hugely difficult for the sports sector and the restrictions imposed had an impactful change in participation rates and patterns. During 2020 and 2021 research was conducted on behalf of Sport Ireland examining the impact of Covid-19 restrictions and the findings showed;

- that many people adapted their behaviours and took up new activities. Declines in indoor sports, team sports and organised sport were offset by unprecedented increases in outdoor activities and home based exercise and training.
- there was an upward trend in the number of adults walking for recreation (up from 65% in 2019 to over 75%)
- participation in running and cycling had increased.
- a continued narrowing of the gender gap to a point where there were equal proportions of men and women participating in sport and physical activity.
- a decrease in participation across lower socio-economic groups.
- that 89% of respondents plan to return to participation in activities they gave up as a result of Covid-19.

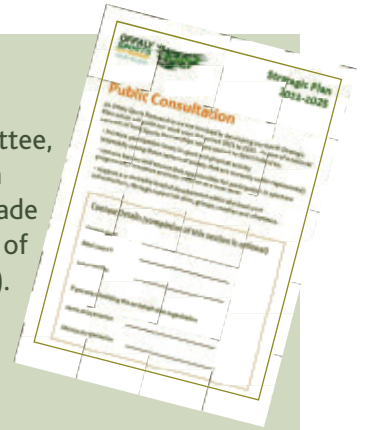
There is now a need to address the impact that Covid-19 has had on the community and support required for innovative, inclusive and collaborative programmes, which will address the challenges posed and increase participation in the long term.





## Public Consultation

This strategy has been prepared in consultation with the Management Committee, professional staff, key stakeholders (from the community, sport, and education sectors), and partner agencies. As the process took place during 2020 it was made difficult because of restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic; and much of the consultation involved online communication (submissions, workshops, etc).



### Outdoor Activity

further develop, promote and support growth in interest in outdoor / adventure recreation (walking, running, canoeing, cycling, equestrian, futsal, greenway/blueway).

explore possibilities to link with proposed Grand Canal development.

### Focus on Fundamental Skills

continue to focus on development of fundamental skills in inputs into Primary Schools.

extend understanding and appreciation of fundamental skill acquisition to parents.

expand coach education and continuous professional development of teachers

### Building of Community Capacity

consider opportunities for innovative health-related activity provision at community level

support community developed / led initiatives

celebrate and reward 'active communities'

### Climate and Biodiversity

in recognition of the Climate and Biodiversity emergency declared by the Government in 2019 Offaly Sports Partnership should strive to conduct their work in the most carbon neutral means they possibly can. This requires that consideration be given to activities promoted, transport, energy requirements, events and programmes, etc.

### Lifetime Activities and Lifelong Sports

prioritise 'lifetime activities' which can be introduced and promoted to participants at any age - and continue to be enjoyed.

### Adults

explore potential to involve more adults in planning, programming, leader training, coach education, career development, etc.

invite adult sportspeople/teams to promote their sports in schools and communities.

### Prioritise Social/Mental Health Benefits

focus on promoting social health aspects and mental health benefits of participation.

### Develop Provision for Older Adults

expand *activity menu* for retired persons / older adults providing opportunities to sample and test new activities (e.g. paddling, walking football, walk/run)

large scale social sessions

explore potential for peer organised / led provision

support leadership training, coaching, further education, and career training for retired / older adults

### Utilise Services of NGB Development Officers

utilise expertise and resources of National Governing Body Development Officers

### Communication and Information

maintain strong regular linkage with individuals, groups and clubs through a variety of methods including accessible website, social media platforms, bulletins, etc.

support communication and networking opportunities for providers in all sectors

publicise and showcase achievements by clubs and groups in all sports and activity

increase awareness of local stars, talent, and our brand.

### Inclusive Participation for/by all

continue to prioritise aim of participation by all and focus on provision for least active.

enable the least active (older people, people with a disability, lower socio-economic groups, etc) to find longevity in sports clubs.

### Support and Facilitate Club Development

-facilitate club networking

support and provide training for club development issues (e.g. governance, administration, etc.)

encourage and advise sports organisations and clubs to conduct their sporting activities with consideration of climate and biodiversity issues.





# 4. Our Strategic Plan (2021-2025)

## Scope of Our Work

Our remit is to *achieve sustained increases in participation levels in physical activity, sport and active living in County Offaly* - in previous plans we adopted the following definitions.



## Our Commitment to Equality

*Offaly Sports Partnership believes that all people, irrespective of ability, age, cultural background, educational attainment, ethnicity, family status, gender, marital status, physical, mental and intellectual capabilities, religious beliefs or sexual orientation are entitled to enjoy the benefits of improved physical and mental health derived from their participation in sport and physical activity.*

*We recognise that not all people have equal opportunity to participate in sport, and we commit ourselves to ensuring that our programmes reach out to under-represented groups, and to advocate for a society where inclusive participation is the norm.*



## Our Commitment to the Environment

*Offaly Sports Partnership believes that the protection of our environment is essential for the realisation of the health benefits to be derived from participation in sport and physical activity.*

*We recognise that the climate and biodiversity emergency will, if ignored, have profound and irreversible negative impacts on all our lives and on the lives of future generations.*

*We commit ourselves to developing a greater understanding and awareness of the crisis, to work with local partners and the wider sports sector in protecting our local environment, adopt work practices to reduce our carbon footprint protect biodiversity, and integrate the use and care for our natural environment into our work programmes.*



## Our Vision

*is of a county with a vibrant sports culture which is inclusive of all people.*

## Our Mission

*is to actively support inclusive measures to increase and sustain participation in sport and physical activity in County Offaly*

## Our Key Values

The key values which govern our work are

- **inclusion** We seek to be people-centred in our work in order to ensure that our interventions are both responsive to, and accepted by the maximum number of people that we target
- **partnership** We seek to collaborate in partnership with all stakeholders committed to increasing participation; and with the wider community in order to maximize impacts for our county
- **respect** We will be respectful of all people with whom we work, for the advancement of our goals
- **acknowledgement** We recognise and acknowledge that the task of maintaining and increasing participation levels in sport within our county is huge and is something that we cannot do alone. We are therefore very appreciative of the efforts of all volunteers and organisations that contribute to this
- **equality** We are committed to a culture of equality to advance participation opportunities for all, in line with our equality statement.
- **environment** We will conduct our operations in the most climate and biodiversity friendly manner possible.

## Our Pillars, Goals and Objectives

We have agreed five thematic pillars that will form the basis for our work in achieving our vision as follows;

1. **Instil Fundamentals and Improve Youth Fitness**
2. **Increase Adult and Older Adult Participation**
3. **Include the Least Active**
4. **Integrate and Celebrate**
5. **Improve Capacity and Inform the Sector**

Under each pillar we set out a general goal and a number of more specific objectives. While these themes, goals and objectives will guide our work over the next five years, it is recognised that external factors such as Covid-19 restrictions, financial constraints, or new funding opportunities may evolve.

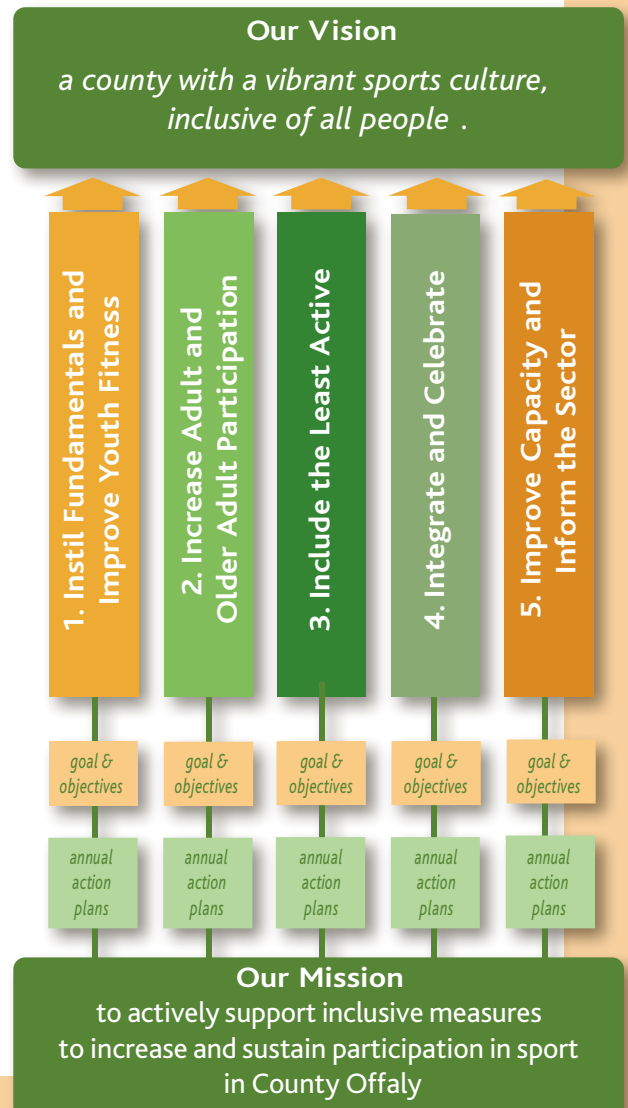
## Our Annual Plans of Action

We will produce an operational plan each year which will outline more detailed actions (programmes, events, etc) for development and implementation in that year. [See *Operational Plan template in Appendix A*]. These plans will specify

- measurable targets and indicators,
- possible partners where appropriate, and
- anticipated outcomes

Our main expectations in this regard include

- increased staffing to support greater local action.
- better interaction with sports organisations and their affiliate clubs.
- engagement of target groups by local clubs (integration, retention and sustainability).
- a new ACE (Assisting Children Excel) project promoting the inclusion of disadvantaged children in mainstream sport
- expanded number of community sports hubs.







## 1. Instil Fundamentals and Improve Youth Fitness

### Goal

To provide children and young people with a positive introduction to sport and physical activity which supports lifelong involvement.

### Objectives

To provide children with a positive introduction to sport and physical activity, learning the fundamentals in the process.

To support a culture of increased activity levels and improved physical fitness amongst children and young people.

## 2. Increase Adult and Older Adult Participation

### Goal

To promote a culture of *lifelong participation* by promoting participation in sport and physical activity by adults and older adults.

### Objectives

To reduce sedentary living among adults and older adults in line with the aspirations of the National Physical Activity Plan.

To increase the number of adults and older adults who are meeting the recommended levels of physical activity.

## 3. Include the Least Active

### Goal

To foster equality of opportunity by enabling identified low-participation groups to partake in sport and physical activity.

### Objectives

To support initiatives targeting identified gradients in participation, and facilitate low-participation groups develop their potential in sport and physical activity.

To achieve sustained increases in the participation of under-represented groups

## 4. Integrate & Celebrate

### Goal

To promote a culture of integration; and celebrate the involvement of people of all ages and abilities.

### Objectives

To foster a culture of acknowledgement, recognition and celebration of our sportspeople and volunteers.

To support greater integration and visibility of underrepresented groups.

## 5. Improve Capacity and Inform the Sector

### Goal

To build the capacity of the sport and physical activity sector in the County and develop efficient communication links with them.

### Objectives

To support the development of sustainable sport structures through capacity building measures.

To build the potential of Offaly Sports Partnership.

To support inter-agency cooperation in efforts to increase opportunities for active participation in sport and physical activity.



## Governance and Management

A number of agencies will play important roles with regard to the delivery of this Strategic Plan including;

**Sport Ireland** is responsible for planning, leading and coordinating the sustainable development of sport in Ireland. Sport Ireland's key roles in regard to the Strategic Plan include;

- assistance and advice in planning issues
- technical advice and training to the Management Committee and staff
- provision of financial support (core and programme)
- monitoring and evaluation of performance and impact

**Offaly County Council** has responsibility for local government issues including roads, planning and development, culture, environment, housing and community. The Council will play a number of important roles in supporting the successful implementation of this Strategic Plan including;

- employment of professional staff
- representation on Management Committee
- implementation of policies which govern daily operations (e.g. Human Resources, financial, Health and Safety)

**Offaly Sports Partnership** is constituted as a sub-group of the Local Community Development Committee and hosted within the Community and Culture Section of the Council. The Partnership will lead the implementation of the Strategic Plan with the support of key stakeholders and providers. There are two distinct but interrelated elements to the Partnership, as follows:

**- the Management Committee**

comprising representatives from various sectors and key stakeholders with responsibility for direction and implementation

**- the Staff Team**

Five staff members with a range of management, administrative, and sport development skills having responsibility for day-to-day management.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

### Monitoring

Monitoring the implementation of this Strategic Plan will include;

- qualitative and quantitative feedback from participants on our programmes, events and activities.
- presentation of Activity Reports at Management Committee meetings and Progress Report at our Annual General Meeting.
- production of an annual Local Sports Partnership Report by Sport Ireland to review and assess the impact of the national network; and propose areas for future focus.

### Evaluation

A comprehensive external evaluation/review of the impact of this Strategic Plan will be carried out in 2025 and the outcomes will form the basis for the period 2026 on. In seeking to measure our impact we will develop a mechanism to take account of

- our success in achieving the targets outlined in annual Operational Plans
- the outcomes of a Performance Evaluation process operated by Sport Ireland. The process is designed to appraise the operation of Sports Partnerships under headings including governance; management and staffing; planning monitoring and evaluation.
- the 'localised' results from national research into participation levels
- input from our partner agencies, stakeholders, and providers (clubs, groups, communities, etc).







# appendix A. Operational Plan Template

<b>Strategic Pillar 1</b> <b>Instil Fundamentals &amp; Improve Youth Fitness</b> <b>Goal</b> To provide children and young people with a positive introduction to sport and physical activity which supports lifelong involvement.				
Objective	Actions 2022?	Outcomes	Outputs	Partnership
1.1. To provide children with a positive introduction to sport and physical activity, learning the fundamentals in the process.	1.1.1.			
	1.1.2.			
	1.1.3.			
	1.1.4.			
	1.1.5.			
1.2. To support a culture of increased activity levels and improved physical fitness amongst children and young people.	1.2.1.			
	1.2.2.			
	1.2.3.			
	1.2.4.			
	1.2.5.			



**Strategic Pillar 2**

**Increase Adult & Older Adult Participation**

To promote a culture of lifelong participation by promoting participation in physical activity by adults and older adults.

Objective	Actions 202?	Outcomes	Outputs	Partnership
2.1. To reduce sedentary living among adults and older adults in line with the aspirations of the National Physical Activity Plan.	2.1.1. 2.1.2. 2.1.3. 2.1.4. 2.1.5.			
2.2. To increase the number of adults and older adults who are meeting the recommended levels of physical activity.	2.2.1. 2.2.2. 2.2.3. 2.2.4. 2.2.5.			

**Strategic Pillar 3**

**Include the Least Active**

**Goal**

To foster equality of opportunity by enabling identified low-participation groups to partake in sport and physical activity.

Objective	Actions 2022?	Outcomes	Outputs	Partnership
3.1. To support initiatives targeting identified gradients in participation, and facilitate low-participation groups develop their potential in sport and physical activity.	3.1.1.			
	3.1.2.			
	3.1.3.			
	3.1.4.			
	3.1.5.			
3.2. To achieve sustained increases in the participation of under-represented groups.	3.2.1.			
	3.2.2.			
	3.2.3.			
	3.2.4.			
	3.2.5.			





## Strategic Pillar 4 Integrate & Celebrate

**Goal** To promote a culture of integration; and celebrate the involvement of people of all ages and abilities.

Objective	Actions 202?	Outcomes	Outputs	Partnership
4.1. To foster a culture of acknowledgement, recognition and celebration of our sportspeople and volunteers.	4.1.1.			
	4.1.2.			
	4.1.3.			
	4.1.4.			
	4.1.5.			
4.2. To support greater integration and visibility of under-represented groups.	4.2.1.			
	4.2.2.			
	4.2.3.			
	4.2.4.			
	4.2.5.			

**Strategic Pillar 5**

**Improve Capacity and Inform the Sector**

**Goal**

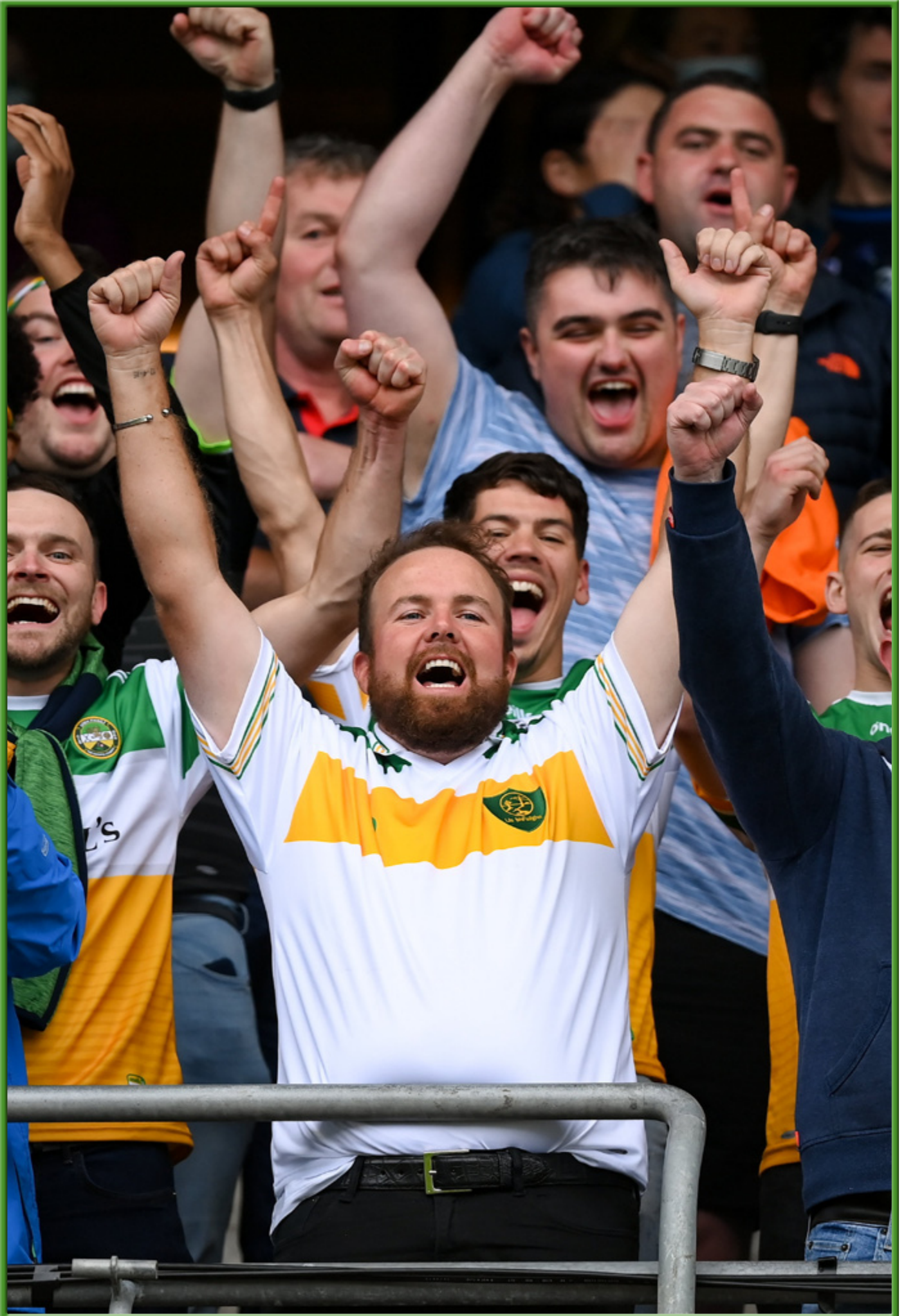
To build the capacity of providers of the sport and physical activity sector in the County and develop efficient communication links with them.

Objective	Actions 2022?	Outcomes	Outputs	Partnership
5.1. To strengthen the development of sustainable sport structures through capacity building measures.	5.1.1.			
	5.1.2.			
	5.1.3.			
5.2. To build the potential of Offaly Sports Partnership	5.2.1.			
	5.2.2.			
	5.2.3.			
	5.2.4.			
5.3. To support inter-agency cooperation in efforts to increase opportunities for active participation in sport and physical activity.	5.3.1.			
	5.3.2.			
	5.3.3.			
	5.3.4.			













**OFFALY  
SPORTS  
PARTNERSHIP**

— SPORT IRELAND —