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University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Core Strategy of the Cork City Development Plan (CCDP) (2022-2028): A Health Impact Assessment

Briefing

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Acknowledgement in creating this Briefing

In preparing this briefing summary for the Report on the HIA carried out of the Core Strategy of the Cork City Development Plan (2022-2028), we used a framework used by Public Health Scotland (PHS) for HIA briefing summaries including its *Community Wealth Building Health Impact Assessment Briefing* (PHS, 2024) and *Road space reallocation in Scotland: A health impact assessment Briefing* (PHS, 2022).

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Members of the HIA Team and the Final HIA Report

The HIA team included a Steering Group and Working Group. All members contributed to the final report. Members of the team undertook the HIA and guided the process. Members are listed below with their affiliations. Jeanette Fitzsimons (Department of Planning, UCC) wrote sections on the 15-minute city and the Irish planning system for the final report.

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Introduction

Cork city's built environment encompasses the spaces where people live and interact, such as homes, workplaces, schools, streets, shops, healthcare facilities, parks, and neighbourhoods. The design of our built environment shapes our daily lives and is associated with population health outcomes, for example, good quality housing has a positive impact on a person's health and wellbeing. Creating a "resilient, healthy, age-friendly and sustainable compact city" for residents in Cork is part of the strategic vision of the Cork City Development Plan (CCDP) (2022-2028) (CCC, 2022: 9). As a designated WHO Healthy City since 2012, Cork City Council is committed to embedding health considerations across all policies and sectors. This HIA is the first one carried out on a statutory development plan in Ireland. Cork City Council is the first local authority in Ireland to engage in carrying out such an assessment as part of a HIA Team on a city development plan. The HIA used the Institute of Public Health HIA guidance to navigate the process (Pyper et al. 2021) whilst also drawing on learnings from HIA practice from Wales and Scotland.

What is a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and why did we do it?

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is an approach used to assess how a project, programme, or policy might affect public health, considering both positive and negative impacts. It also examines how these health effects are distributed among different population groups, aiming to enhance benefits while minimizing risks (Pyper et al., 2021; WHO, 1999). HIAs are widely applied in spatial planning across the world, helping to guide decision-making for healthier and more equitable urban development (Fischer et al., 2021). This HIA was on the Core Strategy planning policies contained in the Cork City Development Plan which informs Council's decision-making on proposals for development by the public and private sectors.

The CCDP indicates the city will have a projected population growth of 50% by 2040 with €10 billion investment in public infrastructure including housing, public spaces, active travel routes and climate resilience initiatives (CCC, 2022). We also know that Cork city is experiencing a widening of health inequalities, with a stark increase in the number of people living in extreme disadvantage in Cork city (Pobal, 2024). Both the projected population increase and the worsening of health inequalities in Cork city provided us with a rationale to undertake this HIA. Also, we carried out this HIA as part of a research project called HIA-IM, funded by the Health Research Board, which is tasked with creating a model to enhance the practice of HIA in Ireland.

What was the focus of the HIA, and why?

In order to inform the next iteration of the CCDP, which will run from 2029 to 2039, we focused on the Core Strategy (chapter 2) of the Plan. The Core Strategy forms the foundation for the next city development plan. One of the CCDP's strategic objectives is detailed in the Core Strategy chapter, which is Compact Liveable Growth. The aim of Compact Liveable Growth in the CCDP is to "deliver compact growth that achieves a 15-minute city of scale providing integrated communities and walkable neighbourhoods, docklands and brownfield regeneration, infill development and strategic greenfield expansion adjacent to the existing city" (CCC, 2022: 30). A central component of delivering Compact Liveable Growth is to implement the 15-minute city by creating walkable neighbourhoods composed of diverse house types and tenure, accessible workplaces, amenities and public spaces, connected by active travel routes. All of these core components of the 15-minute city, which are also determining the health of people living in the city, are key areas of action throughout the entire CCDP (2022-2028).

An important part of doing a HIA is deciding within the HIA team which determinants of health will be focused on, and which population groups will be assessed according to potential vulnerability in the implementation of the CCDP. For this HIA, we decided to focus on Safe & Cohesive Communities, and within that, focused specifically on the following determinants of health, which align with implementing a 15-minute city in Cork:

- Housing
- Neighbourhood design
- Access to public spaces
- Modes of Travel
- Walkability
- Accessible workplaces

The people we focused the HIA on included older people (65 years +), young people (aged 5 to 18 years) and people living on low income, as we know these groups of people are vulnerable to changes in city planning.

These are the determinants of health and population groups scoped into the HIA. We are conscious that there are likely additional determinants and population groups vulnerable to changes in city planning that we did not include into our HIA, such as migrant communities, women of all ages, LGBTQ groups, people living with disabilities, and people living with limited mobility and accessibility.

What did we find? Impacts of the Core Strategy of the CCDP

We concluded at the end of the assessment that the strategic city development plan (2022-2028) in Cork has an impact on people's health, and that it has a potentially positive and potentially unintended/ negative health impact.

In order to ensure city planning would continue to have a positive health impact across population groups, and would minimise any unintended/ negative health impact, we created eleven recommendations for action across four main categories. Eight of the eleven recommendations are to be implemented by Cork City Council, two by UCC, and one by the entire HIA team in advocating at the national policy level for improved housing standards for tenants.

Implications for Policy and Practice

In this briefing, it is essential to reflect on the findings of our Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and consider its implications for policy and practice. As demonstrated in previous HIA briefings (PHS, 2022, 2024), this reflection allows us to identify opportunities for strengthening health outcomes, addressing and highlighting challenges, and refining decision-making processes.

The HIA concluded that the CCDP has significant potential positive health impacts, in creating a connected and accessible city in working to improve health outcomes. The CCDP (2022-2028) should be viewed as a potentially beneficial public health policy in Cork city as well as a statutory strategic city plan. It outlines and provides for important and pragmatic ways for creating a vibrant and resilient city that promotes health and equity. Nevertheless, in order to maximize the potential health benefits of city development planning, it should form part of a wider approach to place-based planning and be continually supported by other local and national policies to shift worsening inequalities in health status that underpin unacceptable health inequalities in Cork, as across the country.

Continued inter-agency support with political leadership and commitment will be necessary for planning and development in Cork city to achieve its potential to protect against potential health negative impacts and to improve health and wellbeing, which includes connected and walkable neighbourhoods, improving existing housing stock, equitably designed and accessible public spaces, active travel routes, and accessible local workplaces.

The HIA concluded with eleven recommendations for action across four main categories as listed below. The recommendations are targeted towards enhanced city development planning processes for health, a strengthening of community engagement in city planning and decision-making, ongoing iterations of HIAs on subsequent city development plans, and identifying research that would be useful in informing future city development plans. The following indicates the broad topics of the eleven recommendations. The full text of the recommendations is included in the final Report (pages 95 to 98) (O'Mullane et al., 2024).

1. **Informing the process of creating future Cork City Development Plans in Cork City Council**

- Future development plans be informed by an evidence base of housing conditions across the city, and a plan is implemented by Cork City Council targets resources to upgrade local authority housing in areas of new private housing development and to prioritise enforcement action to ensure minimum standards in the private rented sector (recommendation 1).
- Consideration be given to targeted enforcement of minimum standards in private rented housing that integrates with the objectives of CCDP to address health inequalities and social inclusion (recommendation 1).
- Advocate through national public consultation processes for the Irish Government to prioritise the upgrading of existing stock managed and owned by local authorities in Ireland (recommendation 2).
- Future Development Plans are informed by a comprehensive Socio –Economic and Health Profile that integrates population health status and socio-economic indicators and also incorporates evidence from city health profiles (recommendation 3).
- Future Development Plans are informed by a green space strategy for Cork City that includes protection of existing green space in development zoning and addresses issues around security, access and management of existing green spaces and identifies opportunities for new green spaces, prioritising community green spaces and gardens in new development (recommendation 4).
- Future Cork City Development Plans should consider how to improve walkability for all ages and mobilities in existing neighbourhoods (recommendation 5).
- Continue to ensure the presence of the inclusion of green infrastructure within office complexes in the CCDP in new employment zones during the implementation of the CCDP 2029-2039 (recommendation 6).
- Healthy Work Zones across the city should incorporate health-promoting design elements including wider footpaths, dedicated cycle lanes, pocket parks, and blue health features (recommendation 7).

2. **Community and Stakeholder Engagement in Formulating and Drafting Future Cork City Development Plans**

- Engage directly with communities who live in areas where strategic developments are planned, in particular for areas classified as very or extremely deprived, in order to include the lived experience of people who will be directly affected by upcoming developments (recommendation 8).

3. **HIA and Future Cork City Development Plan**

- Consideration should be made as to whether a stand-alone HIA should be done or if HIA should be incorporated into the Strategic Environmental Assessment that is required for a Development Plan prior to it being adopted (recommendation 9).

4. **Research and Evidence base Development**

- Develop an evidence base and repository on the health impacts, based on the wider social determinants of health and health inequalities, of urban spatial planning on population health (recommendation 10).

  - Undertake further research to identify barriers to delivering the 15-Minute City in Cork (recommendation 11).

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