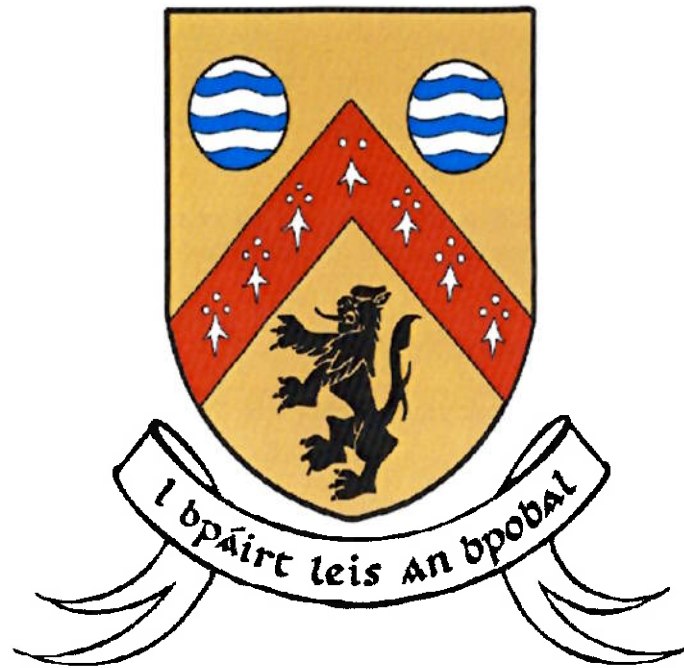


LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL
COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE



MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT
JANUARY 2024
TUARASCÁIL BHAINISTÍOCHTA
EANAIR 2024

To: Each Member of Laois County Council
 Do: Gach Ball Comhairle Chontae Laoise

Section 136(2) of the Local Government Act, 2011 as inserted by Section 51 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, requires the Chief Executive to prepare monthly management report. The report for January 2024 is as follows:

FINANCE & ALLOCATIONS NOTIFIED

The Annual Financial Statement for 2023 is currently being prepared. It is expected that it will be finalised for the March meeting of Laois County Council.

Allocations Notified

Department of Rural & Community Development - Measure 1 of the 2023 Clár Programme Tranche 2	€202,410
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HOUSING

SOCIAL HOUSING DELIVERY

Annual Social Housing Delivery Targets under Housing for All

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Units	200	79	80	87	88	534

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Social Housing completions to date	229	286	-	-	-	515

Social Housing Schemes completed in 2023

Location	Total No. of Houses	House Types	Constructed by	Comment
Market Square, Portarlinton (Vignoles Gardens)	18	15 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 2 No. 2 Bed Apts 1 No. 3 Bed Apt	LCC (Turnkey)	Tenanted.
Ballymorris Green, Portarlinton (Ph 1)	34	34 no. 3 bed 2 storey houses	Cluid Housing	Phase 2 (12 units) to be completed in early 2024
South Dublin Road, Kilminchy (Dunamais View)	36	13 no. 2 bed houses 23 no 3 bed houses	Cooperative Housing	Tenanted

Ashwood Walk, Portlaoise	4	4 no. 3 bed houses	LA Part V	Tenanted
Goldencroft, Portlaoise (Old CBS lands – Ph 1 and 2)	54	24 no. 3 bed houses	Cluid Housing	Tenanted
Harpur's Crescent, Portlaoise	44	20 no. 2 bed houses 16 no. 3 bed houses 4 no. 1 bed apt 4 no. 2 bed apt	Respond	Tenancing commenced w/b 9 th October
Church Avenue, Stradbally (Phase 1)	20	20 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	Completed – Tenant to commence w/b 27 th November
Sruth na Gleanna, Killeshin	4	1 no. 4bed house 3 no 3bed houses	LA Part V	Complete – Tenancing to commence Q1 2024.
Mount Stewart, Summerhill, Portlaoise	4	1 no. 4bed house 3 no 3bed houses	LA Part V	Complete – Tenanted December 2023
The Meadows (old Midland Dairies site), Portlaoise	48	19 no. 3 bed houses 9 no. 4 bed houses 20 no. 2 bed apts	Cluid Housing	Complete – Tenancing Commenced
Harbour Court, Mountmellick	6	6 No. 2 Bed bungalows	LCC (Construction)	Tenanted
St. Kieran's Errill	14	6 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 8 No. 3 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Build complete. Utility connections to be completed and tenancing to commence in Q1 2024
TOTAL	286			

Social Housing Schemes Under Construction in 2023

Location	Total No. of Houses	House Types	Constructed by	Comment
Moore St, Rathdowney	6	6 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q2 2024
Mooreville, Rathdowney	7	3 No. 2 Bed bungalow 4 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q2 2024
Church Avenue, Stradbally (Ph 2)	11	9 No. 4 Bed 2 Storey 2 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	On site – phased delivery To be delivered by Q2 2024
Bruach Na Habhainn, Killeen	1	1 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	On Site – Phase 1 (1 unit) delivery Q2 2024
Carraig Glas, Stradbally	26	15 no. 2 bed houses 9 no. 3 bed houses 2 no 4 bed houses	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q2 2025
The Orchard, Ballylynan (Phase 3)	1	1 No. 3-Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	On Site – Phase 3 (1 unit) delivery Q2 2024
Sruth na Gleanna, Killeshin	1	1 no. 3 bed house	LA Part V	Delivery Q1 2024
Oldcourt, Ballylinan	1	1 No. 4 bed 1 storey	LCC (Renewal)	On site – expected delivery Q2 2024
Townparks, Rathdowney Rd, Borris-in-Ossory	26	4 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 12 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey	LCC Turnkey	On site – expected delivery Q4 2024

		10 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey		
Shannon Street, Mountrath	20	13 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 4 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey	LCC Turnkey	On site – expected delivery Q4 2024
Townparks, Mountmellick	49	28 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 11 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 8 No. 1 Bed 2 Storey 2 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey	LCC Turnkey	On site – expected delivery Q4 2025
Ballymorris Green, Portarlinton (Ph 2)	12	12 no. 3 bed houses	Cluid Housing	Currently on site – Last phase of scheme – advised that these units will be delivered in early Q2 2024.
Clonrooske Abbey, Portlaoise	18	18 no. 3 bed 2 storey	Cluid Housing	Advised Delivery of 12 units Q1 2024 (subject to snags remedied) and 6 units in Q2 2024
Ard Branagh, Portlaoise	6	6 no. 3 bed houses	Circle Housing	Currently on site – expected delivery by Q1 2024
Derryounce, Portarlinton	7	7 no. 3 bed houses	Oaklee Housing	Currently on Site – Expected Delivery Q3 2024
Wallis Street, Mountrath	11	9 no. 2 bed Bungalows 2 no. 2 bed Apts.	Co-Operative Housing	Currently on Site – Expected Delivery Q2 2024
An Lochán, Summerhill, Portlaoise	32	20 no. 1 bed maisonettes 8 no 3 Bed duplexes 4 no 2-3Bed apts	Respond	Currently on site. Phased delivery – social housing is across Phases 3 and 4 overall scheme. Likely total delivery by end of 2024.
Rockview, Portlaoise	47	9 no. 2 bed houses 35 no. 3 bed houses 4 no. 4 bed houses	Oaklee Housing	Currently on site - 3 phases of social housing delivery commencing Q2 2024
TOTAL	282			

Social Housing Schemes at Planning, Design or Tender Stage – LCC & AHB

Location/Scheme	No of units	House Types	To be constructed by	Comment
Clonrooske (Knockmay), Portlaoise	12	8 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 3 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 3 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 submitted in Q4 2023.
Iona, Portlaoise	7	2 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 4 No. 1 Bed Apt	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 submitted in Q4 2023.
Doonane	12	12 no. 3 bed 2 storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 to be submitted Q1 2024.
Derry Road, Durrow	24	9 No. 1 Bed 1 Storey 4 No.1 Bed Apartmts	LCC (Construction)	Stage 2 submitted in Q4 2023.

		1 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 7 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 3 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey		
Ballyadams	1	1 no. 6 bed bungalow	LCC (Construction)	Tender for construction closed 12 th Jan - to be evaluated and Stage 4 to be submitted in Q1 2024.
Stradbally Road, Portlaoise	21	Tenure mix - numbers and house types - to be confirmed in detailed design	LCC Social and Affordable	Meeting of the MD members completed on 7/11/23. Part VIII to be progressed. Funding mechanism for mixed tenure scheme to be advised by Dept of Housing
Bracklone St, Portarlington	15	15 no. 2 bed houses	LCC (Construction)	Site investigation surveys on-going and Stage 2 to be progressed in Q1 2024
Rushall Mountrath	3	3 no. 3 bed 2 storey	LCC (Construction)	Site investigation surveys on-going and Stage 2 to be progressed in Q1 2024
Maryborough School, Stradbally Road, Portlaoise	11	2 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 7 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 2 No. 1 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted in Q1 2024.
Main St, Ballinakill	3	2 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 1 Bed Apt	LCC (Construction)	Site investigation surveys on-going and Stage 2 to be progressed in Q1 2024
Moanbaun, Mountrath	15	4 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 7 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 4 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Site investigation surveys on-going and Stage 2 to be progressed in Q1 2024
1 New Road, Portlaoise	1	1 No. 4 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Renewal)	Tender evaluation on-going.
6 Emmett Terrace, Mountmellick	1	1 No. 4 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Renewal)	Tender evaluation on-going.
13 and 14 Lakeglen, Portlaoise	2	1 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 4 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Renewal)	Demolition works commenced on site.
Beladd, Portlaoise	5	1 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 3 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 4 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Design Team to be Appointed and Stage 1 to be submitted in Q1 2024. Demolition of existing properties to commence in Q1 2024.
French Church St. Portarlington	2	2 no. 2 bed apts	LCC (Renewal)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted in Q1 2024.
Convent Lands, Portlaoise (CAS)	52	33 no 2 bed apts 15 no 1 bed apts 4 no. 2 bed houses	Sophia Housing	CAS Stage 4 submission with Dept for approval.
County Hotel, Portlaoise (CAS)	10	8 no. 1 bed apts 2 no. 2 bed apts	Cluid Housing	Stage 1 approved under CAS. Layout currently being finalised to inform S179A planning notification currently being prepared. An in-committee meeting

				with MD members will be arranged as part of S179A notification process in February 2024.
"Radharc Darach" Hepburn Court, Portlaoise	54	8 no. 2 bed bungalow 12 no. 2 bed 2 storey 34 no. 2 bed 2 storey	Cluid Housing	Tender for design/build contract closes on 9 th February. Demolition of remaining structures and ESB cable diversion works on site are being progressed by Cluid.
Curragh na Mona, Abbeyleix Rd, Portlaoise	39	5 x 2 bed fully accessible apts 12 x 2 bed bungalows 6 x 3 bed house with downstairs bedroom 2 x 4 bed house with downstairs bedroom 2 x 2 bed apts – accessible (ground floor) apts 2 x 1 bed 1 st floor apts 4 x 3 bed 2 storey. 6 x 2 bed 1 st floor apts	Respond Housing	Revised CALF application currently under review by Dept; notification expected in the coming weeks.
TOTAL	290			

AFFORDABLE HOUSING / COST RENTAL

Minimum targets for Laois issued by Dept of Housing in relation to the delivery of Affordable Purchase / Cost Rental housing by the local authority are as follows:

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	TOTAL
LA Affordable Purchase & Cost Rental Delivery Target	5	7	10	8	8	38

Discussions ongoing to progress potential affordable units as follows:

Affordable	<i>AHF approved in principle by DHLGH</i>	<i>AHF Application submitted to DHLGH – Potential no of unit yield</i>	<i>Advance Turnkey Purchase EOI's under consideration</i> Potential No of unit yield	<i>Part V – Potential No of Unit Yield</i>	<i>LCC Construction Potential No of Unit Yield</i>
Affordable	40	0	*60	8	40 minimum
Cost Rental			28		

**Expressions of Interest received for proposed units across potential schemes, under consideration from the perspective of demand, price affordability and feasibility of subsidy funding from DHLGH. Not all units may be realised.*

- 13 units approved for Affordable Purchase in Stradbally. Currently working with developer regarding their Local Authority Subsidy Agreement with LCC. Construction of units not yet commenced.
- 16 units approved for Affordable Purchase Scheme at Kilminchy, Portlaoise. Subsidy agreement signed by developer of scheme and units advertised on the 12th December 2023. The scheme is comprised of 2- and 3-bedroom homes. Application portal opened on the 4th January 2024 for three weeks. Applications will then be assessed in accordance with Scheme of Priorities.
- 11 units approved for Affordable Purchase Scheme at An Lochan, Summerhill, Portlaoise. Subsidy agreement signed by developer of scheme and units advertised on the 19th December 2024. The scheme is comprised of 3-bedroom homes. Application portal opened on the 11th January 2024 for three weeks. Applications will then be assessed in accordance with Scheme of Priorities.
- Advertisement of both schemes in December ensures that LCC's Affordable target for the Housing For All period being exceeded by 2 units.
- Priorities agreements with all Pillar Banks are now agreed, signed and sealed.
- Design has been finalised for social (21) and affordable (46) housing on Council owned landbank on the Stradbally Road, Portlaoise. Funding mechanism for this developing this site as a mixed tenure scheme is still to be determined – Dept of Housing to advise on how this can be progressed.

Call remains open for Expressions of Interest in respect of:

- a. Appropriately zoned land for housing development
- b. Advanced Turnkey Purchase arrangements for un-commenced residential developments in respect of social/affordable housing.

Queries regarding affordable housing should be emailed to affordablepurchase@laoiscoco.ie

PRIVATE RENTED INSPECTIONS

Laois County Council is responsible, through inspection, for determining if a property meets the standards for rental accommodation in accordance with the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019.

Target for number of inspections in 2023 was 874.

	1 st Jan – 31 st December 2023
No of properties inspected	976
No of notices of works issued	813

The Housing Inspections team can be contacted via email at propertyinspections@laoiscoco.ie.

SERVICED SITES FOR SELF BUILDERS

Laois County Council is actively considering the development of **serviced sites** over the coming years at a number of locations in the county.

In the first instance, eligibility will be determined by criteria as set out under the **Croí Conaithe (Towns) Fund – Ready to Build Scheme (Serviced Sites for New Homes) Scheme**. Under the scheme, local authorities are supported to make serviced sites in towns and villages available to potential individual purchasers. These sites will be available at a discount on the market value of the site for the building of a property for

occupation as the principal private residence of the purchaser. The level of discount to the individual will depend on the level of servicing cost incurred by the local authority before the sale of the site with discounts up to a maximum of €30,000. The amount of such discount will be reflected in the sale price of the site to the purchaser. The following locations are currently under consideration for serviced sites and/or have advertised sites for sale. Sites to be a minimum of 0.25 acres in size.

Location	No. of Sites	Comment
Ballacolla Road, Durrow	4	4 offers accepted and conveyancing ongoing.
Gleann na Glaise, Ballyroan	4	4 offers accepted and conveyancing ongoing. All services/utilities in place on site.
Doonane	2	Stage 1 approved as part of larger housing scheme Part VIII and Stage 2 to be progressed in Q4 2023
Derry Road Durrow	4	Stage 1 approved as part of larger housing scheme Part VIII and Stage 2 to be progressed in Q4 2023
Castletown	9	Proposal. Detailed design currently on-going
TOTAL SITES UNDER CONSIDERATION	23	

Queries regarding serviced sites should be emailed to servicedsites@laoiscoco.ie

HOUSING STOCK

Housing Re-Lets

Month	LA Keys Surrendered	Properties Acquired	Works Completed
January 2023	5	2	9
February 2023	2	2	1
March 2023	4	5	16
April 2023	7	5	10
May 2023	11	2	14
June 2023	5	1	2
July 2023	4	2	6
August 2023	9	0	9
September 2023	6	3	1
October 2023	13	0	4
November 2023	8	1	9
December 2023	3	0	10
TOTAL (YTD)	77	23	91

NOTE: There are currently 27 vacant units from our existing stock and a further 12 units that the Council acquired. Works are either ongoing on these properties or specifications are being prepared for works to be carried out.

Housing Maintenance

Month	Work Orders Raised	Work Orders Closed	Work Orders Open
January 2023	504	504	0
February 2023	378	378	0
March 2023	464	464	0
April 2023	357	357	0
May 2023	440	440	0
June 2023	325	325	0
July 2023	274	274	0
August 2023	409	409	0
September 2023	412	412	0
October 2023	460	437	23
November 2023	496	399	97
December 2023	280	65	215
TOTAL (YTD)	4,799	4,473	335

Energy Efficiency/Retrofitting Programme:

The Midlands Retrofit Programme (MRP) was rolled into the Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme (EERP) in 2022. A summary of both programmes is outlined in table below.

PROGRAMME	COMMENTS
MRP – 159 Units	159 units completed.
EERP (2021) – 29 Units – (O'Moore Place)	27 units completed.
EERP (2022) – Phase 1&2 – 41 Units (Thornberry, Church Ave, Slieve Bloom Park) EERP (2022) – Phase 3 – 21 Units (St. Fintan's Tce, Old School Road, St Johns Sq.)	Tender evaluation for the 2022 Retrofit Programme comprising 62 houses has been completed. It is now proposed to commence works in phase's set out below. Phase 1 1) Thornberry, Abbeyleix – 20 units. • Works completed in Q4 2023. Phase 2 1) Church Avenue, Stradbally – 12 units. 2) Slieve Bloom Park, Clonaslee – 9 units. • Works to be completed in Q1 2024. Phase 3 1) St Fintans Terrace – 6 units 2) Old School Road, Ballylinan – 8 units 3) St. John's Square, Portlaoise – 7 units. • Works to be completed in Q2 2024.
EERP (2023) – 53 Units (St. Brigid's Place, Fr. O'Connor Cres., Erkindale Dr, Rossmore View)	Phase 1 1) St Brigid's Place – 16 units. • Works to commence in Q3 2024. Phase 2 1) Fr O'Connor Cres – 11 units. 2) Erkindale Drive – 6 units. 3) Rossmore View – 10 Units • Works to be commence in Q4 2024.

HOUSING NEED

Notices to Quit/Social Housing Acquisitions

All NTQ's are examined on a case-by-case basis and tenants are being dealt with using all social and other housing options available.

From 1st January – 31st December 2023:

Acquisitions completed	17
Acquisitions currently in progress	6
No. of above that have Tenants in Situ	15
Acquisitions under consideration from EOI's submitted	11

Queries regarding acquisitions should be emailed to housingdelivery@laoiscoco.ie

Homeless Presentations

Time Period	Homeless Presentations	Breakdown of Household
1 st December 2023 - 31 st December 2023	307	166 singles 96 families

Homeless Accommodation

	Emergency Accommodation Households booked at 31 st December 2023	Social Housing allocated from homelessness in December 2023
Families	7 (1 hostel)	3
Single Persons	18 (3 hostel)	1
TOTAL	25	4

Homeless related queries should be emailed to homeless@laoiscoco.ie or housinglcc@laoiscoco.ie

Social Housing List at 31st December 2023

TOTAL No of Social Housing Applicants on waiting list	1554
Proportion of SH applicants availing of HAP supports	720

RAS/Leasing Statistics at 31st December 2023

Active RAS tenancies	65
Active short-term leasing tenancies (Social Housing Leasing Scheme)	24
Active Repair & Leasing Scheme tenancies	1
Active long-term leasing tenancies with private landlords/investors	11
Active long-term Mortgage to Rent leasing tenancies with a private company	34

Tenancies Created during the period 1st January – 31st December 2023

Method of Delivery	No. housed
First allocation of New Build/Acquired unit	84
Relet / Refurbished Stock Allocation	79
Housed via leasing	7
AHB Tenancies created (via new build and relet)	320
TOTAL	490*

*146 of these tenancies were allocated to applicants with a disability.

Queries regarding Housing Allocations should be emailed to housingallocations@laoiscoco.ie

LOANS AND GRANTS

Loans

Local Authority Home Loan (LAHL) at 31st December 2023

No of Loan Applications received since scheme commenced in January 2022	113
No of Applications approved since scheme commenced in January 2022	41
No of Applications refused since scheme commenced in January 2022	26

**Predominant reasons for refusal are "Repayment Capacity not demonstrated" and "Insufficient Savings Record/Source of Equity", i.e., applicant not showing that they can afford to meet the monthly repayments on the prospective mortgage, and/or they have not proven that they have consistent, regular savings, and/or the deposit is made up of lump sums lodged that cannot be verified.*

PRIVATE GRANTS

Housing Adaptation Grants at 31st December 2023

Allocation €1,421,438 (€1,137,150 Exchequer + €284,288 LA Own Resources)

	No. of applications received	No. of applications paid	Value of applications paid	No. of applications currently at work stage	Value of applications currently at work stage
HOP	200	135	623,895	20	119,050
MAG	16	12	36,749	2	11,200
HGD	179	81	575,828	38	325,232
TOTAL	395	228	1,236,472	60	455,482

Disabled Persons Grant for Social Housing

DPG works at 31st December 2023:

Allocation 2023 (including LA funded portion)	€641,100
No of new applications received to 31/12/2023	34
No of Works approved to date (incl 2 extensions*)	46
Value of approved works to date	€523,778.66

** It should be noted that extensions costing over €75,000 will only proceed subject to Dept approval and planning if required. Should planned extensions not complete in 2023, it will not be possible to draw down allocated funding in the current year. Currently, 2 extensions have commenced in 2023.*

Queries in relation to Housing Grants should be emailed to housinggrants@laoiscoco.ie

REGENERATION TEAM

Laois County Council has established a multi-disciplinary Regeneration Team, comprising staff from Housing, Planning sections and the Town Regeneration Officer, aimed at addressing vacancy and dereliction in the county.



This team aims to achieve targets set, by gathering data via:

- Geodirectory exercise (set out below)
- Continued engagement with property owners
- Engagement via derelict sites legislation where appropriate
- Action objectives of the Town Centre First Plan for Rathdowney and other town/village plans.

Town Centre First

In relation to the Town Centre First Programme, the Town Regeneration Officer has a focused remit on the following Towns where town regeneration strategies and Town Centre First Plans have been approved :-

- Rathdowney
 - The Town Centre First Plan for Rathdowney has been finalised and the official launch of the plan took place in December 2023 at an event that was very well attended.
 - Rathdowney Town Team submitted an application under the 2023 Town and Village Renewal Scheme.
 - The Commercial Vacant building scheme for Rathdowney was launched on 28th November.
 - Free WI4EU points have also being installed in Rathdowney and the scheme was launched in December with free WIFI now available in 2 locations in the town
 - The TRO is liaising with the derelict sites staff to issue notices in respect of vacant and derelict buildings that have been identified as causing concern in the respective towns.

Sites identified with TRO - Rathdowney



- **Mountrath**

- Mountrath Town Team are submitted an application under the 2023 Town and Village Renewal Scheme.
- The Commercial Vacant building scheme for Mountrath was launched on 31st October.
- A landscape plan for the town was finalised at the end of November.
- The TRO is liaising with the derelict sites staff to issue notices in respect of vacant and derelict buildings that have been identified as causing concern in the respective towns.

Sites identified – TRO - Mountrath



Derelict Sites

The Derelicts sites register is maintained by the Planning Staff. In conjunction with the TRO, the Derelict sites team are working on sites in both Rathdowney and Mountrath as indicated on the maps above.

Currently

- Total No of Derelict sites entered onto Register in 2023 – 30
- Total No of Files on hand: 93
- 22 new files in 2023
- 16 files closed in 2023

The Derelict sites Team also works along side the Business Support Unit in advising in relation to the incentives available through the BSU and LEO office in relation to the reuse of derelict and vacant commercial properties.

Vacancy Surveys

In 2023 the Vacant Homes Team carried out a survey of properties identified as being vacant in data supplied by GeoDirectory (via a Dept of Housing 2022 initiative). The app has shown the following data so far - of the **919 properties surveyed** (residential and commercial), **551 properties were found to be vacant**, with 37 of those also found to have some elements of dereliction. The Housing Section will endeavour to contact the owners of the vacant residential properties and outline the schemes available to return these properties to use for social housing. Where ownership cannot be established, local enquiries will continue in relation to ownership, vacancy history, etc. Where all other means of returning the properties to use have been exhausted, use of the CPO process to acquire properties deemed to be suitable for social housing may be considered.

Suitability for social housing will depend on the need and housing typology of need in particular locations. Queries regarding vacant properties should be emailed to vacanthomes@laoiscoco.ie

CPO Activation Programme

Circular 14/2023 provides details on the launch of the CPO Activation Programme. Laois target has been set for properties to enter the Compulsory Acquisition process, where engagement with the owner has not resulted in the vacant or derelict property being brought back into use, to be subsequently used for social housing or made available for sale on the open market.

A target of **60 vacant and derelict properties** to enter the Programme and **16 CPOs / Compulsory Acquisitions** to commence/complete in 2023 has been set for Laois County Council.

Properties are counted as entering the CPO Activation Programme where they have been identified as being vacant or derelict as part of the vacancy survey and where efforts are being made to contact property owners. Properties approved/approved in principle for a Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant are also counted as entering the Programme. The Derelict Sites Team and the Vacant Homes Officer have cross referenced any common properties from both register and survey in an effort to determine the number of properties activated for the purpose of potential CPO.

11 properties are under consideration for CPO in a range of locations, however there are ongoing discussions in relation to potential acquisition by agreement under way. CPO of these properties will be for a number of reasons :-

- For use a social residential unit
- For use as an affordable residential unit
- For commercial or community purposes

At 31 st December 2023	Target	Actual
Vacant and derelict properties that have entered the CPO Activation Programme	60	172 *
CPO's / Compulsory Acquisitions commenced/completed in 2023	16	4 **

(* 85 Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant Approvals/Approvals in Principle, 52 Vacant Homes Office correspondence, 35 Derelict Sites correspondence)

(** 3 CPO acquisitions completed in 2023 and 1 CPO commenced)

Vacancy / Regeneration Funding Schemes

A Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant is available for up to a maximum of €50,000, including VAT, for refurbishment of vacant properties for use as a principle private residence or to be made available for rent, including the conversion of a property which has not been used as residential heretofore. A top-up grant of up to €20,000 is also available for properties which are derelict. To qualify for the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, properties must be:

- Vacant for over 2 years
- Built before 2008

Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant Applications at 31st December 2023

Number of grant applications received	121
Number of applications APPROVED	65
Number of applications APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE	20
Number of applications REFUSED	5
Number of applications WITHDRAWN	4
Number of grants paid to Applicants	6

Of the 121 applications received to 31/12/2023, 65 properties are in rural locations and 56 properties are located in a town or village. 103 of the properties were for use as the applicants principal private residence and 18 properties were to be made available for rent (the option to make a property available for rent is available from 01/05/2023 only).

ADDENDUM TO MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT ON HOUSING

It may be helpful, two years into the timeline of "Housing For All" to review, at a summary level, the progress being made by Laois County Council in the provision of social housing. The intercensal period 2016 to 2023 is examined and the information is presented in chart format.

The social housing delivery target for Laois County Council under "Rebuilding Ireland – Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness" was 627 over the period 2018 to 2021.

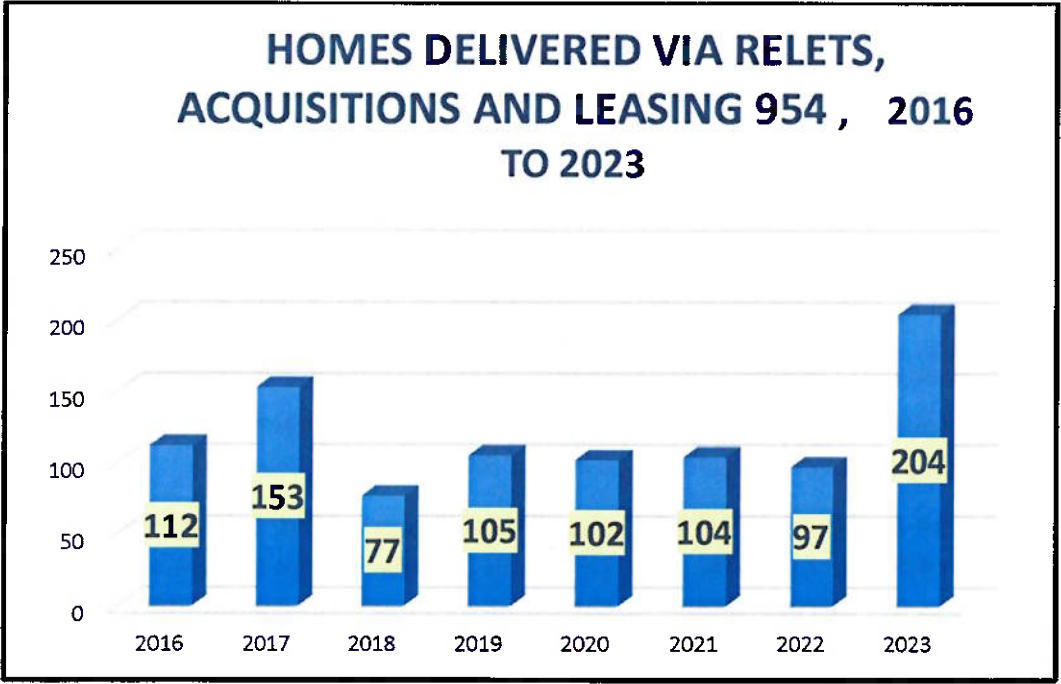
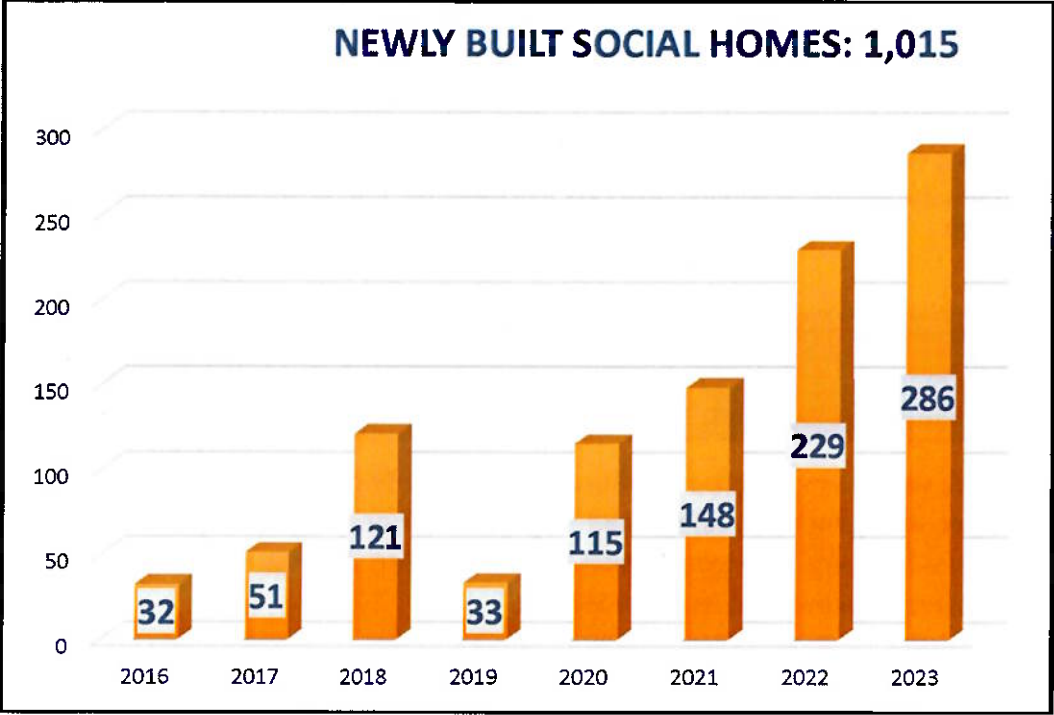
The number of homes delivered was 589, i.e. 94 % of target.

"Housing for All - A Housing Plan for Ireland" sets out a target of 534 new houses for Laois County Council over the period 2022 to 2026.

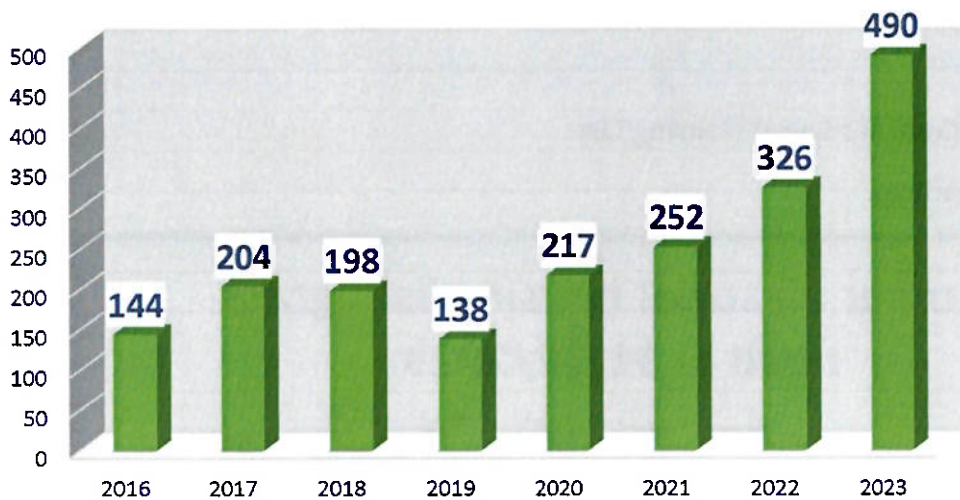
At the end of year two the number of new social homes delivered in Laois is 515 , that is, 96.4% of the five year target.

This short report also sets out the number of homes allocated to persons with a disability in each year over the period 2019 to 2023.

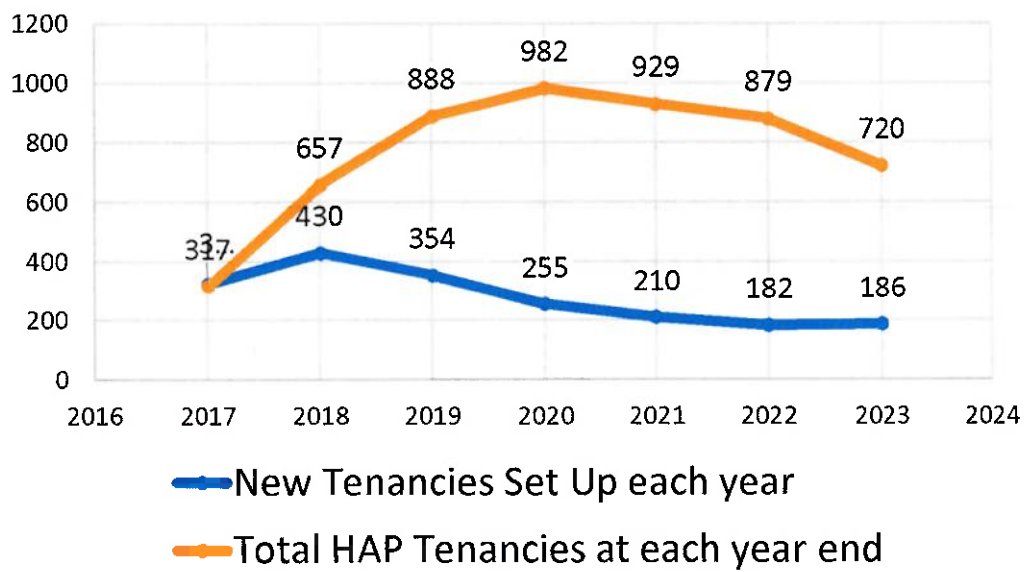
Information on the Council's current housing list is also provided. It is noted that the delivery of record numbers of social homes is impacting on the list but that factors such as the increased income threshold and increasing population will continue to stretch social housing construction activity.



TENANCIES/KEYS PROVIDED TO SOCIAL HOMES: 1,969



HAP Tenancies 2017 - 2023



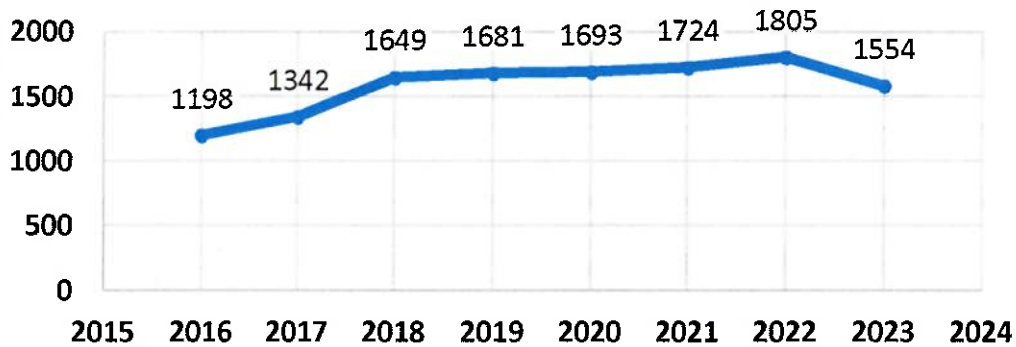
Allocations to persons with a disability

Year	%	No of houses
2019	24	33
2020	15	78
2021	37	104
2022	31	67

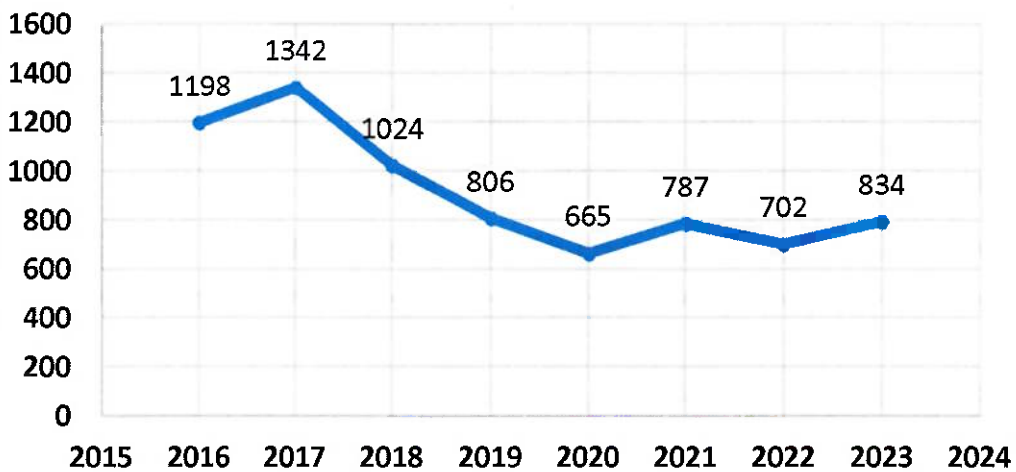
Laois County Council's Social Housing List

Trends and features

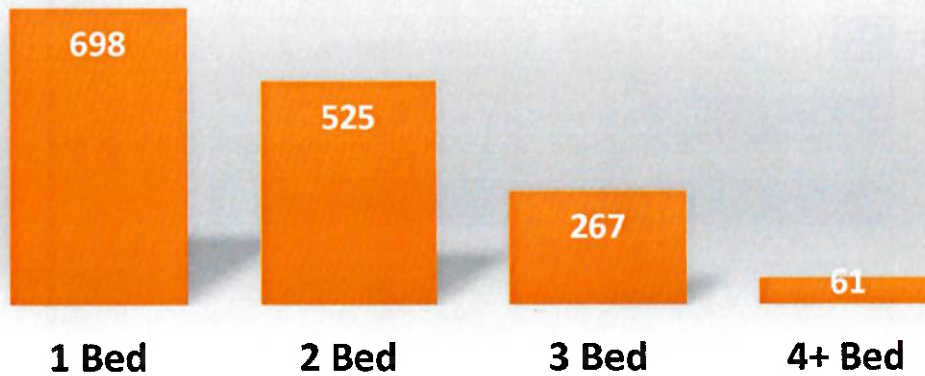
Number on social housing list ..gross need at 31/12/2023



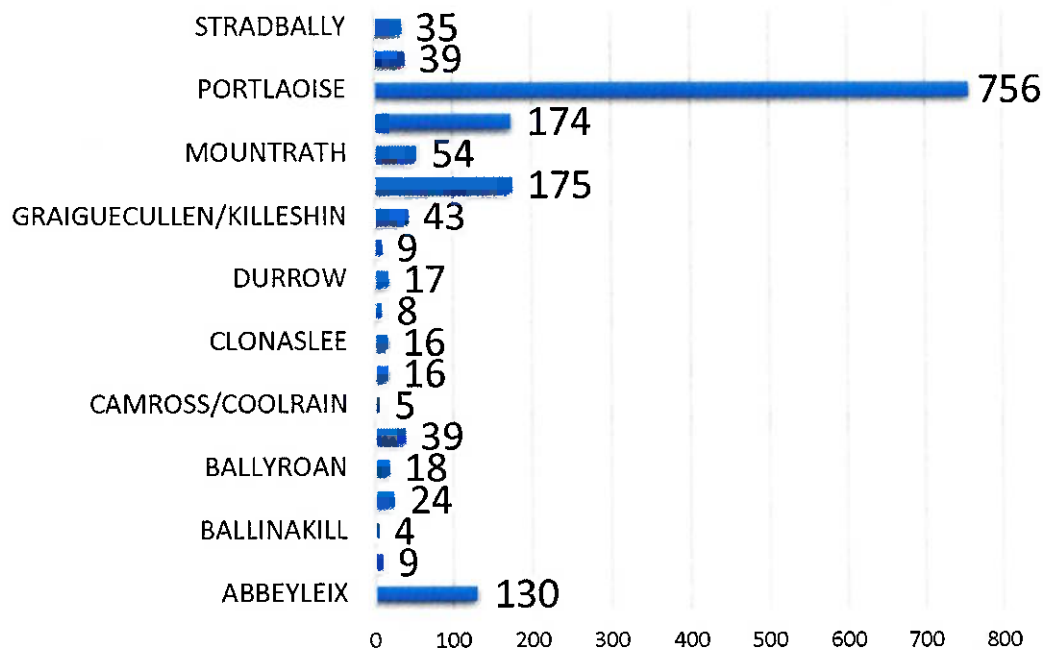
Number on social housing list..net need at 31/12/2023



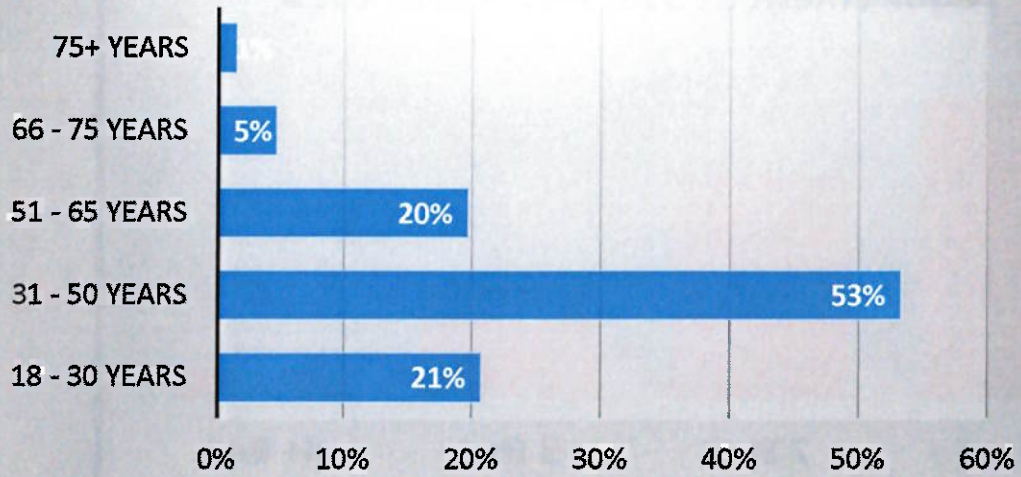
No of applicants by bedroom requirement at 31st December 2023



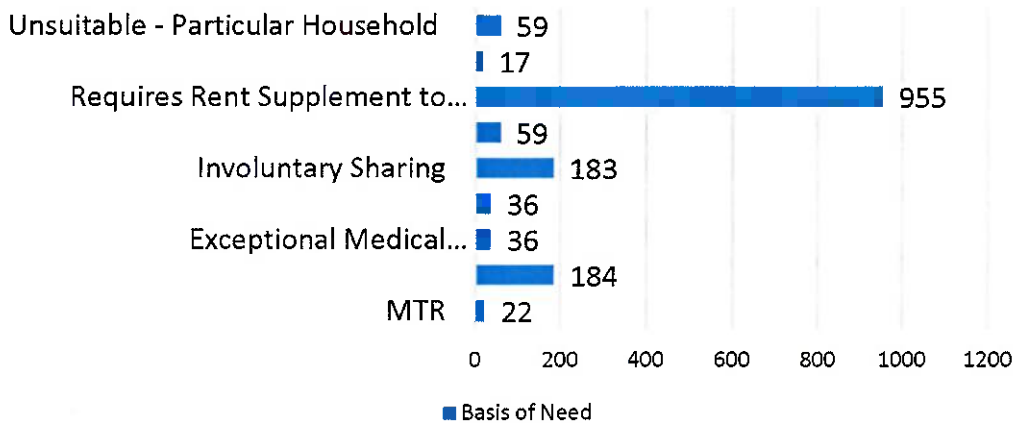
Applicants' Area of Choice (by first area of choice)



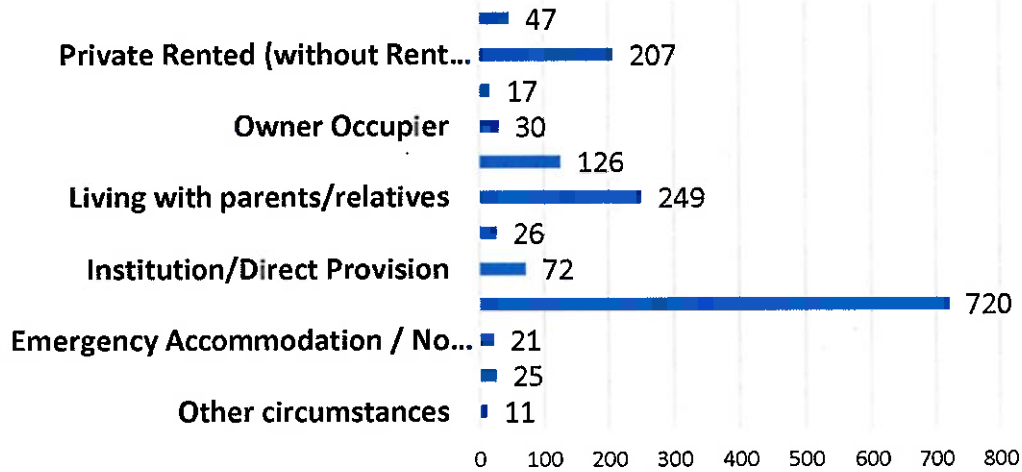
Age of applicants (categorized)



Applicant's stated Basis of Need for Social Housing

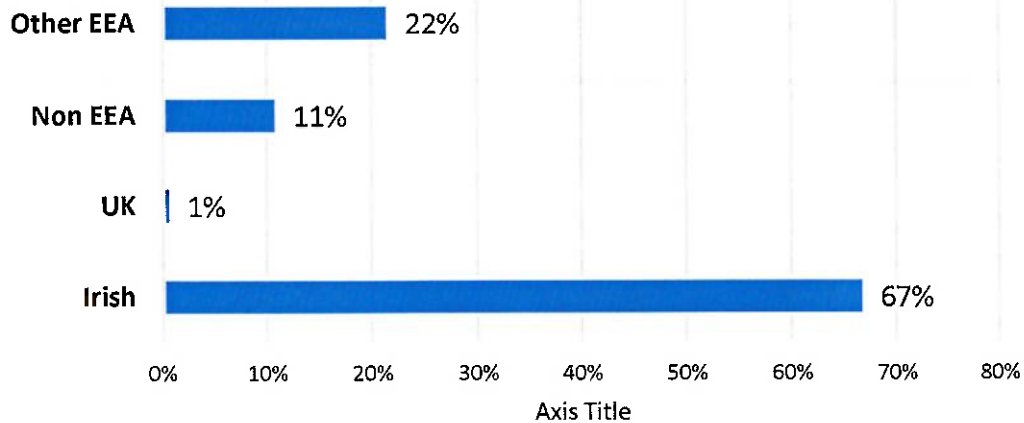


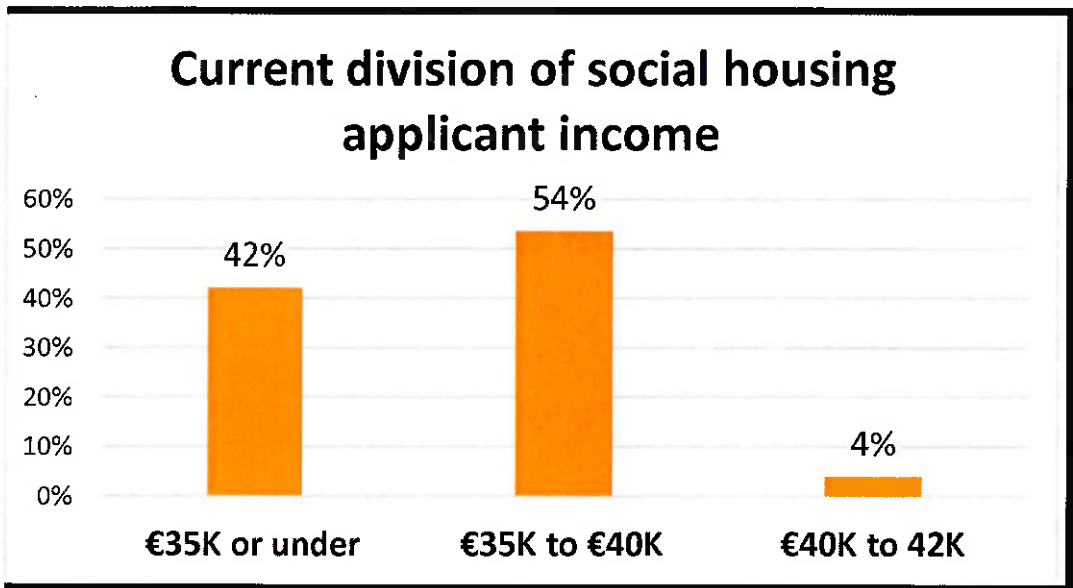
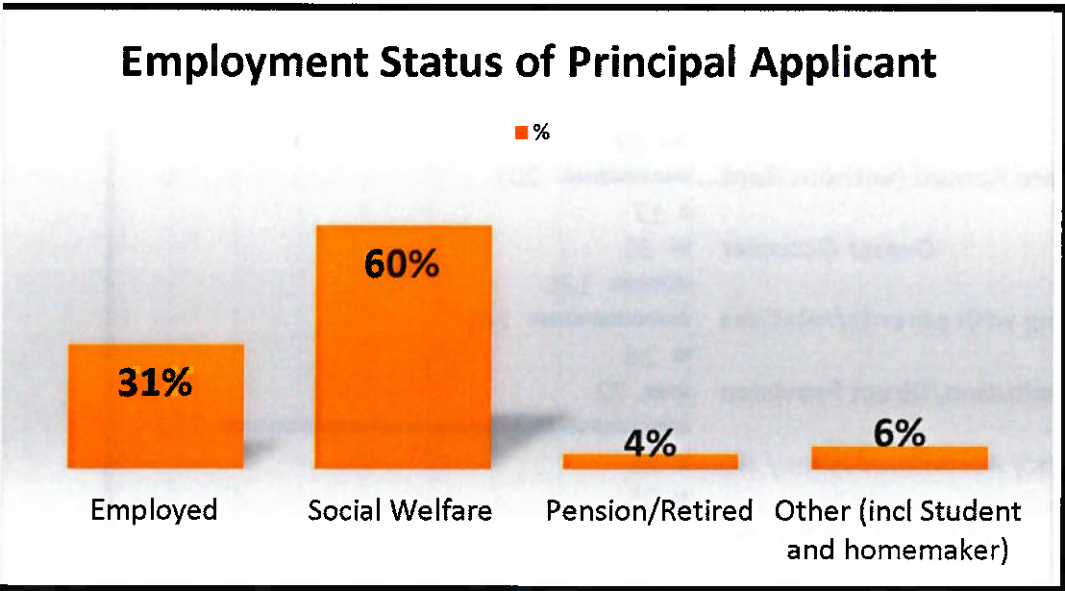
Applicant current Nature of Tenure



Other circumstances' include those living in unfit conditions, living in property with specific disability requirements, or other specific living arrangements

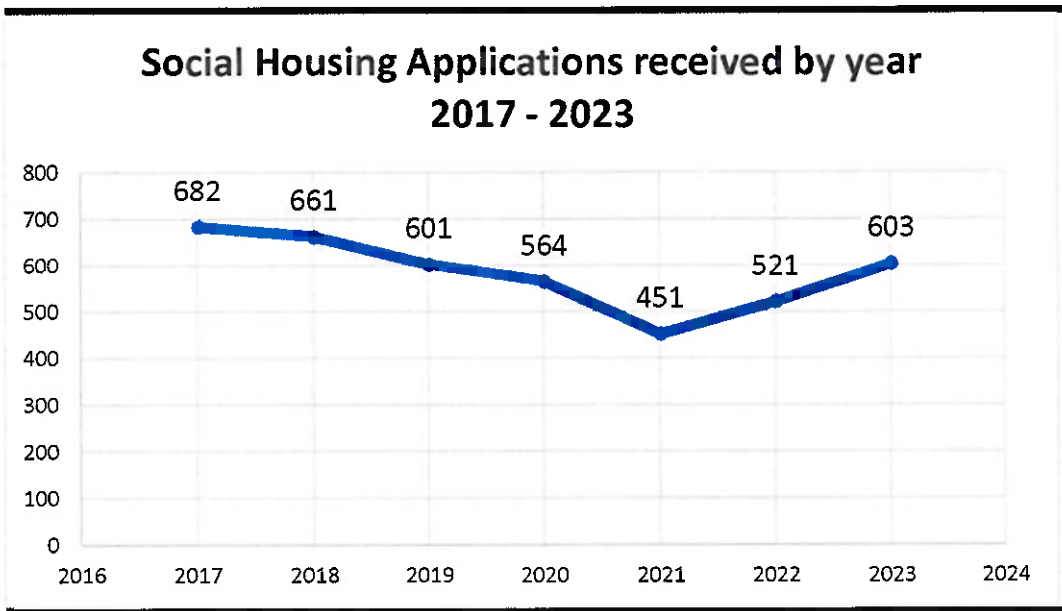
Social Housing list by Nationality Group





Over half of the Council's current housing list wouldn't have qualified for social housing in Laois before the income threshold increased (twice in 2022)

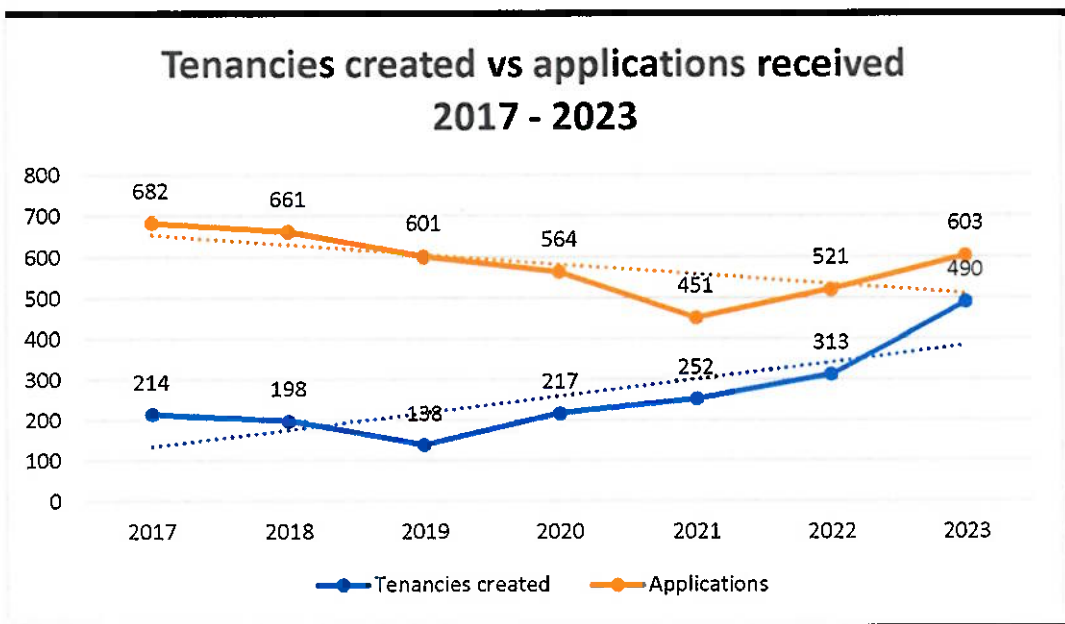
(Figures are percentages based on current housing list numbers at the time of research (w/b 14th January). This is a live list with applicants being added and deleted/housed weekly, accordingly total need figures will constantly change.

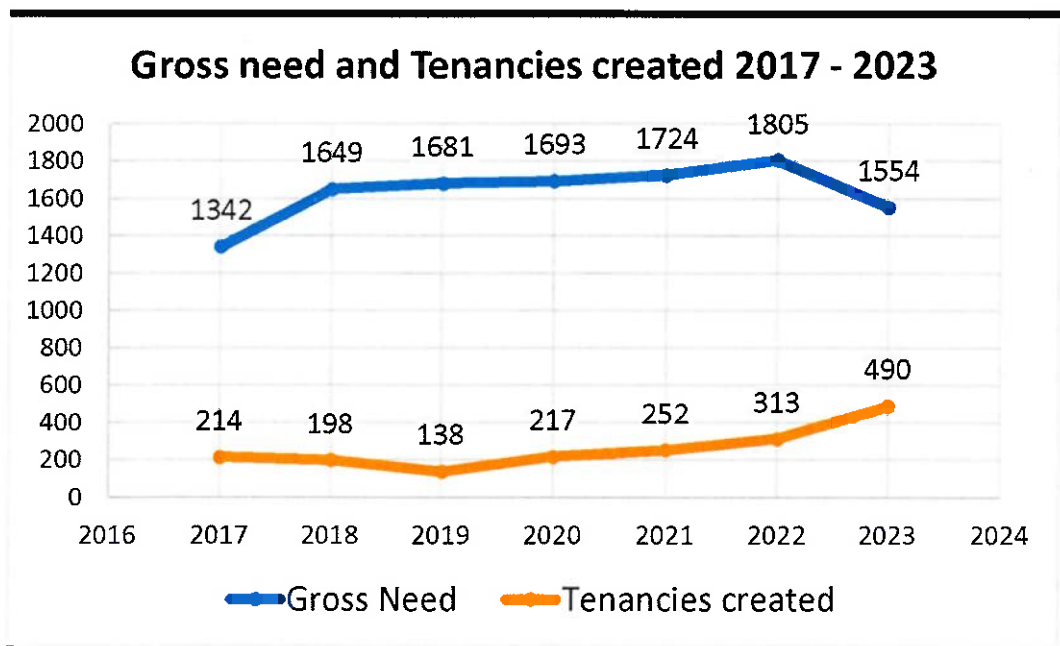


Social Housing Applications received have been on the increase in 2022 and 2023. This is due to a number of factors:

- Increase in minimum income threshold for social housing to 35K (min) and 42K (max for 2 adults + 2 or more children), previous slide refers.
- Increase in Laois' population year on year as set out previously and now the estimation of an additional 1,725 households requiring some form of housing, social or otherwise by 2027.

Supply of new social housing (286 units) in Laois, while reducing the list to a degree, is not reducing it pro rata, and therefore the list is not reducing that rate due to the number of additional applicants coming onto the list at the same time as applicants are being housed (490 house in 2023 vs 603 additional applicants)





The population of Laois continues to grow

	Persons 2002	Persons 2006	Persons 2011	Persons 2016	Persons 2022	% Change 2002-2022
County Laois	58,774	67,059	80,559	84,697	91,877	56%
Portlaoise	12,127	14,613	20,145	22,050	23,494	94%

Census 2022 has revealed that the upward trajectory in population growth is continuing.

The population of Portlaoise has now risen to 23,494 and that of the overall county to 91,877, an increase of 6.5% and 8.4% respectively on Census 2016.

In terms of age cohort data, just under half [48%] of the population is aged below 35 years of age.

The targets provide for County Laois to grow to 94,700 by 2027 [an increase of 12% from the base year of 2016] and for Portlaoise to grow to 26,366 [an even greater increase of nearly 20%] over the same plan period. For Portlaoise, this equates to a projected requirement for an additional 1,725 households over the six-year period to 2027.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO REFUGEES FLEEING CONFLICT

Laois County Council continues to lead and coordinate the **Laois Community Response Forum**. The Forum, consisting of 23 statutory and voluntary groups/agencies, meets regularly, with 22 meetings held to date, ensuring consistency and efficiency in service delivery and supports to new arrivals to our county. The most recent data indicates there are approximately 1462 displaced Ukrainian citizens in the County. Approximately 315 of these are in accommodation centres such as hotels, guesthouses, hostels and refurbished properties, a further 101 residents are currently at the Transitional site at Stradbally, 168 residents are now accommodated at 'Spring Crescent' modular development at Rathdowney, with the remainder in privately sourced or pledged accommodation throughout the county.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth (DCEDIY) Emergency Accommodation Centre at Stradbally, with a maximum occupancy capacity of 950, is expected to commence operation as a 90 day centre, once the necessary legislative requirements have been approved by the Oireachtas. The existing families accommodated here since mid December will be relocated in advance of same.

Occupation of 'Spring Crescent', Rathdowney, commenced during week of the 11th December 2023, and all 42 Modular Homes are now allocated. Tuath Voluntary Housing Association is appointed by DCEDIY for day to day management of the site, and have joined the membership of the Forum. A very successful 'Welcome Event' took place in the Community Centre, Rathdowney on 15th January last, with good attendance from the local Ukrainian community in the catchment area, and from Response Forum agencies and local community groups. The objective of same was to promote and support the integration of these recent new arrivals into the wider Rathdowney community.

The Council continues to assist DCEDIY with the temporary accommodation of Ukrainian arrivals to our county, as well as providing liaison locally in relation to vacant buildings and sites suitable for medium to long term accommodation solutions. The Council also continues to allocate privately pledged/offered accommodation to Ukrainian families, with 53 households having been provided with accommodation through these mechanisms to date.

Operation of the new Laois County Council Integration Support Service commenced in January 2024, from the Treo Nua Resource Centre, Portlaoise, where other community services and support programmes are already well established. This new service will support all newly arrived refugees with aspects of their integration including linking them in with mainstream support services, facilitating independent living, and promoting social inclusion.

Laois has a role, in common with other local authorities, under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (Unit within DCEDIY), for the resettlement of the next phase of programme refugees. This resettlement phase will run over an 18 month period, from later in 2024 through to 2025.

In light of latter developments in the area of integration supports, the role of the Community Response Forum is being broadened during 2024 to reflect a revised mandate for the delivery of supports and services to all refugee cohorts and facilitating their integration into our Laois community.

FORWARD PLANNING

DRAFT JOINT URBAN AREA PLAN FOR CARLOW - GRAIGUECULLEN

The Draft JULAP (Written Statement, including Appendices), SEA Environmental Report, AA Natura Impact Report, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, Local Transport Plan and Maps, is on display from **13th December 2023 to 5th February 2024** and available to view during opening hours at the Carlow County Council Planning Department, County Buildings, Athy Road, Carlow, Carlow Library and Laois County Council, Planning Department or online at <https://consult.carlow.ie> and <http://consult.laois.ie>

PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSIONS

Two information sessions for members of the public were held on the 11th January in Carlow and on the 18th January in Graiguecullen.

MOUNTMELICK LOCAL AREA PLAN

Notice has been given that it is the intention of Laois County Council Planning Authority to prepare a Draft Local Area Plan for Mountmellick, County Laois. Public consultation will take place from Tuesday 9th January until Monday 5th February 2024 inclusive. Laois County Council has prepared a Planning Consultation Issues Paper which can be viewed on the Councils website at <http://consult.laois.ie> or can be viewed during normal opening hours (excluding public holidays) at Laois County Council Offices. Council staff will also be available to answer general queries and provide guidance. A public consultation event was held on the 23rd January in Mountmellick Library.

DRAFT PORTARLINGTON JOINT LOCAL AREA PLAN

The pre-draft stage of the **Draft Portarlington Joint Local Area Plan** ended on 19th October 2023. A total of 38 submissions were made. A Chief Executives report in respect of the 28 submissions made to Laois County Council has been completed. Writing of the draft Plan is now commencing. It will go on public display in Q2 of 2024.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

	<u>2022 PERFORMANCE</u>	2023 Performance
Total No of Applications	840	864
Number of valid applications received:	618	534
Number of decisions made	626	554
Number of applications granted:	582	521
Number of applications refused:	44 7% refusal rate	23 4% refusal rate
Invalid applications returned to applicant:	225 36%	332 38.6%
Applications appealed to An Bord Pleanála	24	23

No of Oneoff House Granted permission	188	159
No of houses with Urban Areas (Multiple Units granted)	222	241
No of applications with an EIAR submitted	3	1
No of applications with an NIS	8	7
No of pre planning meetings held to Year End	351	324

Reasons for high invalidation rate relate to the introduction of the Digital EPlanning System which will only validate when the application is complete and correct.

ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

Current year	2023		2022	
	Dec	Jan - Dec	Dec	Jan - Dec
Service Review				
Total number of new cases subject to complaints that were investigated	9	147	5	122
Number of Warning Letters served	28	448	45	435
Number of Enforcement Notices served	16	104	11	83
No Of cases referred for legal proceedings	0	16	2	13
Number of cases in Court(incl adjournments)	8	65	10	61
Number of cases Resolved in Court	3	14	3	11
Number of Files Closed	9	147	7	158
Number of cases on system	142	142	143	143
Enforcement Costs recouped	€ 4,299.60	€13,547.50	€ 40.00	€8,912.95
Number of Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	0	34	4	52
Fees received through Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	€0.00	€45,645.61	€5,941.00	€51,962.70
Legal fees paid	€516.63	€27,452.04	€26,877.36	€82,137.80

HERITAGE: Monthly Management Report – January 2024

1. Just Transition Project Conservation and Pollination

This three-year project is nearing completion with works coming to a close on sites in Laois and Offaly, and other educational elements of the project finished.

2. Laois Heritage Plan Projects

The Heritage Officer is preparing the annual funding application to the Heritage Council for Heritage Plan projects.

3. Community Monuments Fund 2024

The Community Monuments Fund 2024 is open for applications with details on the Laois CoCo website:

<https://laois.ie/departments/heritage/archaeology/community-monuments-fund/>

Closing date for applications is 31st January 2024.

4. CONSERVATION GRANTS: [Historic Structures Fund (HSF) & Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS)]

Conservation grant funding was announced and advertised in December.

Application details and forms are available on the Laois CoCo website:

<https://laois.ie/departments/planning/conservation-protected-structures/conservation-grants/>

Closing date for both schemes is Friday 26th January 2024.

5. LBAF (Local Biodiversity Action Fund)

The Heritage Officer to prepare LBAF funding application in collaboration with staff from other sections (Environment and Roads).

6. Launch of booklet celebrating 25 years of Heritage Officer network

Project examples from around the country are featured in a new publication celebrating 25 years of the Heritage Officer Network entitled: 'Opening the door to Ireland's heritage: A collection of Local Authority Heritage Officer Projects'. The project to restore Old St Peter's Church & Graveyard, Portlaoise is featured for Laois.



Launch of the booklet in the Newpark Hotel in Kilkenny; CEO of the Heritage Council Virginia Teehan (left), Minister for Nature, Heritage and Electoral Reform Malcolm Noonan TD, Laois Heritage Officer Thomas Carolan, CEO of Laois County Council John Mulholland, and Chairperson of the Heritage Council Martina Moloney.



Front Cover of new publication celebrating 25 years of the Heritage Officer network.

ARTS

Dúlra

The Stradbally Library Painters were delighted to host their first group exhibition in the Laois Arthouse. The Arts Office facilitated the exhibition, providing the Laois Arthouse Gallery as the venue, framing advice, along with supporting the opening night and invigilation of the exhibition run. The LOETB and Laois Libraires funded a series of workshops in advance of the exhibition to cover all aspects of making, developing, and curating the work.

The nine artists in DÚLRA are, Frances Cummins, Maura Delaney, Kathleen Devoy, Margaret Devoy, Jim Kehoe, Christy Moran, Brendan Scully, Marie Walsh (Ruddy), and Siobhan Wheatley. The exhibition opened on Thursday the 30th of November 2023 at 7pm with Cathaoirleach Paschal McEvoy launching the show.

The Light Within

The screening of 'The Light Within' took place on Saturday 2nd December at the Dunamais Arts centre. It is a gothic tale about a Quaker family and the tensions between them and the local culture. The following locations were used - Glenbarrow, Capard and Roundwood House. The cinematographer, Daniel Geesen has already won the photography prize at the Waterford Film Festival. The film was funded through Creative Ireland Laois.

Grant and Opportunities

Laois County Council has announced details of grants and opportunities to support the development and presentation of creative and artistic projects in the county in 2024.

Laois County Council Arts Service held two information sessions on upcoming grants and funding opportunities in 2024 in the Dunamais Arts Centre on Thursday 18th January 2024 and online on Tuesday 23th January 2024 at 7:00pm.

The following Grants and Bursaries are open for applications – see www.laois.ie for closing dates:-

- The Arts Act Grants 2024,
- The Tyrone Guthrie Residency Bursary Awards 2024
- The Artists in Schools Scheme 2024,
- The Creative Ireland Laois Film Bursary is open for 2024.

Applications will be accepted from individuals, groups and organisations.

Expressions of interest are invited for use of the Laois Arthouse Studios and Residential Studios in Stradbally.

BROADBAND – DIGITAL PROJECTS

NBI Update

41 no. T1 Section 254 Licences have been applied for since 2021 to date in all Municipal Area to provide pole network for rollout.

A total of 275 licences including T1, T2 and T3 have been approved.

NBI are currently working on the Programme and are rolling out fibre in all MD areas of the county at present.

NBI are engaging with LCC in relation to Civils subducting, blockages, OH caballing, tree trimming and chamber building.

The total number of Premises in Laois = 12874 with 8426 Residential, 2234 Commercial & Residential, 1776 Farm and 438 Commercial.

21% of Premises (2681) - have HSB connected to date.

57% of Premises (7206) - now available to pre order connection.

12 % of Premises (1548) – Network build in progress.

2% of Premises (207) – Survey completed.

8% of Premises (1094) – Survey pending.

WIFI 4 EU

WIFI4EU was rolled out in 3 locations in Rathdowney - 2 locations in the Main Square and one at the New Garden of remembrance. These were launched on 12th December along with formal launch of the Town Centre First Plan for Rathdowney.

This brings the WIFI4EU to 11 towns including the following - Portlaoise, Portarlington, Stradbally, Abbeyleix, Ballinakill, Ballyroan, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Camross and Borris in Ossory.



Vex Robotics.- IQ Programme.

Vex Robotics IQ Program was rolled out in 4 primary schools in School year end June 2023.

2 new schools were added in December –

1. **Paddock N.S.** and
2. **Gael Scoil Sli Dala Ballaghmore.**

An additional 4 schools to be included in 2024.



The Vex IQ Robotics Competitions for primary schools in 2024 are as follows: -

A. RECF Midlands Regional VEX Robotics competition will be taking place in Mucklagh Community Centre, Offaly R35 DN02 - Thursday 8th February with all winners going forward to the All-Ireland Championships in Cork in May.

B. The Midlands LA Competitions are as follows:

- Emo National School Laois – Wednesday 6th March. (1st time ever an event will be held in Laois).
- Gallen Community School Offaly – Wednesday 20th March.
- Sacred Heart School Tullamore Offaly - Thursday 21st March.

Vex Robotics. – V5 Programme

For the 1st time Vex Robotics V5 for Senior Cycle Secondary Schools is being piloted in Co. Laois and was rolled out in Clonaslee Collage on the 18th of December 2023. The TY class are taking part in the programme with Competitions in 2024.

S.T.E.A.M Programme 2023 - 2026

Steam Programme in Secondary schools was launched on Thursday 16th Nov 2023 in the ETB Centre Tullamore. The programme provides training and equipment for teachers and students across all the LOETB schools to run lunchtime and after-school clubs that help develop skills around S.T.E.A.M. (Science Technology Engineering Arts and Maths.) The aim of the programme is to encourage significant engagement with digital and computer science activities among Junior Cycle students, with an associated rise following in numbers participating in Computer Science at Leaving Cert level. The value to each school including Equipment, Training / Support and Prize Money is €10,000.

All the 9 LOETB schools - 4 in Laois and 5 in Offaly are taking part in the programme. The 4 ETB schools in Laois are – 1. Portlaoise Collage, 2. Dunamase Collage Portlaoise, 3. Clonaslee Collage and 4. St. Fergal’s Collage Rathdowney.

The Programme is being delivered in partnership with Laois and Offaly County Councils. Over 30 teachers and 250 students across nine LOETB schools will work in Teams to compete across these main areas:

- **VEX ROBOTICS and LEGO LEAGUE**: - For coding/robotics, each school will be equipped to participate in the internationally recognised Vex Robotics and First Lego League Competitions, with LOETB regional tournaments taking place in Tullamore and Portlaoise.
- **MINECRAFT**: - The hugely popular building design game Minecraft will see student teams competing to design virtual versions of their communities in the future.
- **PODCASTING**: - To help with digital storytelling, each school will be given high quality equipment to create a podcast studio, as well as professional podcast training. There will also be an LOETB wide competition focusing on telling the stories of our respective schools and their communities.

The programme competitions will be held early in the New year and a Show Case Event will take place in Portlaoise Collage on Thursday 11th of April.

Computer Science in Secondary schools.

Computer Science training for Secondary School teachers has continued with 4 modules been offered in this school year to May 24. This will allow schools to offer Computer Science to Leaving Cert students in the future.

The 4 schools in Laois are taken part this year. Portlaoise Community College, Dunamase Collage Portlaoise, St. Fergal’s Rathdowney and Colaiste Iosagain Portarlinton. This is an initiative been piloted by Laois County Council, Offaly County Council, LOETB and ATU Donegal.

STEM in Primary and Secondary Schools.

Midland ICT skills has been set up within the Midland region of County Councils through the BBO’s – Laois, Offaly, Longford, and Westmeath in association with Ericsson Athlone. (It is hoped to get other stakeholders involved in the future).

The proposal is to engage with schools primary and secondary schools to introduce and rollout STEM projects. Ericsson have built training programmes to suit both primary and secondary schools to train teachers and students in topics such as Scratch, Micro-bit and Building Websites.

This program is available to all Primary schools in Laois for the year end June 2024.

LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Despite ongoing challenges for small businesses, 2023 was a very productive year and demand continued to be high for supports, from businesses across all sectors.

- €580,780 was approved in grant aid to 55 Laois businesses.
- 75 training courses were delivered with a total of 1,137 participants.
- 280 businesses availed of mentoring in specific areas relating to their business.

- 10 companies participated in the Lean for Micro Programme, designed to encourage clients to adopt lean principles and increase competitiveness.
- 18 companies took part in the Green for Micro programme, designed to assist businesses in lowering their carbon footprint.
- 5 Laois businesses took part in the Digital for Business Programme designed to assist businesses develop a digital strategy.
- 10 businesses participated on the Export Ready Programme designed to support businesses looking at developing an export strategy.
- 10 businesses completed the Management Development Programme.
- 15 participants took part in Start Your Own Food Business workshops.
- Over 100 participants took part in Local Enterprise Week.
- Ballykilcavan Brewing Company represented Laois at the 24th National Enterprise Awards.
- Over 100 female entrepreneurs attended National Women's Enterprise Day in Castle Durrow.
- Over 500 students from 7 second level schools took part in the Student Enterprise Programme with Heywood CS taking 3rd prize at the National Finals.
- 14 businesses were approved under the Shopfront Grant Scheme to improve/repair their shop façade.
- 5 businesses applied for the Business Incentive Scheme which provides grant relief on commercial rates for eligible vacant properties.
- 32 grants were approved under the Abbeyleix Town & Village Streetscape Enhancement Scheme. to the value of €68,956.50
- The Vacant Commercial Property Incentive Scheme was extended to Portarlinton, Mountrath & Mountmellick with the aim of reducing vacancy and dereliction in town centres.

ROADS, TRANSPORTATION, DRAINAGE & PUBLIC REALM

The focus over the month of January has been on road maintenance, repairs and drainage works which are ongoing across the road network within in the county.

The Winter Maintenance Service continued with the 1st notable prolonged cold spell experienced between the 5th & 18th January. During this period road surface temperatures went as low as -6 degrees Celsius and double treatments were required on almost a nightly basis. To date there have been 39 salting runs completed.

There was a number of storm events responded to during the month with 10 storms of various warning levels experienced to date this winter.

Further updates on the Roads Works Programmes for 2024 will be forthcoming following the announcement of respective allocations for 2024 which is expected in the coming weeks.

**WASTE MANAGEMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT – DECEMBER 2023**

1. **Kyletalesha Landfill, Transfer Station & Civic Amenity Site, Portlaoise:**
Normal services continue at Kyletalesha Landfill Facility and Civic Amenity Site. Landfill monitoring and aftercare maintenance is on-going. All monitoring results are being submitted to the EPA.
2. **Bring Banks:**
Tonnes of 2023 collected recyclable material is in Table 1 below.

Month	Tonnage	Month	Tonnage	Month	Tonnage
Jan	164.24	May	156.04	Sept	105.02
Feb	129.06	June	126.87	Oct	114.38
Mar	140.63	July	116.05	Nov	145.12
Apr	119.26	Aug	165.44	Dec	129.67
Annual Total			1,612.23 Tonnes		

Table 1 – 2023 Bring Bank Tonnes

The bring bank facilities in the county are being inspected and maintained by Environment Staff.

3. **Waste Management, Complaints & Litter Management:**
 - a) **Waste Enforcement & Complaints**
Table 2 below details the number and types of complaints received in 2023.

Nature	Number	Nature	Number
Waste Management/Enforcement	521	Air	41
Litter	342	Noise	34
Water	57	Waste Infrastructure	13
Total	1,008		

Table 2 – Environmental Complaint Register

- b) **Litter Fines**

Month	Number	Month	Number	Month	Number
Jan	4	May	5	Sept	7
Feb	10	June	7	Oct	9
Mar	3	July	10	Nov	12
Apr	4	Aug	7	Dec	4
Annual Total			82		

Table 3 – 2023 Litter Fines

- c) **Illegal Dumping**
Total tonnes of material collected in 2023 is 315 tonnes.

4. **Waste Management & Enforcement:**

The Environment Section continues with its duties and responsibilities regarding facility authorisation, waste management and enforcement, producer responsibility, national waste priorities and the RMCEI environmental inspections.

5. **Environmental Protection**

a) **Protect the Water Quality Status in all Water Bodies**

- On site investigations of complaints in relation to water quality/water pollution are being carried out by Environmental staff.
- On-site investigations of complaints in relation to water pollution.
- On-going assessment of planning applications with regards to water quality protection.

b) **Air & Noise:**

- All noise and air complaints are being investigated.
- On-going assessment of planning applications with regards to air and noise protection.

6. **New Grant Schemes, Regulations & Deposit Return Schemes**

- **Domestic Wastewater Treatment System Grants**
 - Commencement Date – 01st January 2024.
 - Maximum grant amount is €12,000.
- **The European Union (Household Food Waste and Bio-Waste) (Amendment) Regulations 2023**
 - Waste collectors are obliged to provide all households with a food waste collection service and a garden waste collection service from the 31st December 2023.
 - Waste collectors are obliged to keep records of customers who are not availing of a food waste collection service and to make this information available to the relevant local authority on request.
- **The Deposit Return Scheme (DRS)**
 - Commencement Date – 01st February 2024.
 - The Deposit Return Scheme means people will be charged a small refundable deposit on certain drinks containers in shops, which can be claimed back by returning the empty container.
 - The deposit can be reclaimed by returning the relevant drink containers once they are empty and undamaged.
 - All eligible drinks containers (plastic bottles and drink cans) will display the Re-turn logo, making it easy to identify what is included in the Deposit Return Scheme. Drinks containers must be returned empty and undamaged.
 - The DRS does not include glass drink containers, all dairy products e.g. milk, yogurt drinks etc. and drink containers greater than 3 litres.
 - Any shop that sells drink containers with the Re-turn logo, regardless of where they were bought. At these shops you can either return the containers using a Reverse Vending Machine (RVM), or manually in the shop.

- Retailers operating from stores with a retail area of less than 250 sqms will be able to apply for a Takeback Exemption.
- Laois County Council will be responsible for the enforcement of the provisions of the Separate Collection (Deposit Return Scheme) Regulations within their functional area.

WATER SERVICES AND RURAL WATER

Rural Water – Multi Annual Programme 2024 to 2026

The Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage have issued a circular to Councils regarding the Multi Annual Rural Water Programme 2024 to 2026 inviting the Council to make applications for funding.

- The majority of measures in the MARWP are aimed at supporting Group Water Schemes.
- There are 9 individual funding measures available;
 - Source Protection for existing private Group Water Schemes
 - Water Treatment Provision, Improvements and Capital Replacement (existing private Group Water Schemes)
 - Amalgamation and / or Rationalisation (existing private Group Water Scheme)
 - Improvement of Infrastructure including Water Conservation (existing private Group Water Schemes)
 - Extensions to existing Group Water Schemes and the Development of new Standalone Group Water Schemes
 - Taking in charge of Group Water Schemes and Group Sewerage Schemes
 - Community Water Connections and Community Waste Water Connections
 - Innovative Demonstration Projects
 - Waste water collection and treatment needs for villages and settlements without access to public waste water services
- Laois County Council will advertise the new Programme and will contact all GWSs in County Laois, to inform them of the new multi annual-programme and invite applications for funding from them. The new MARWP will also be advertised on the Council website and social media.
- The deadline for the Council's submission to the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage is 12th April 2024.

Emergency Planning, Fire Services & Flood Relief

In 2023, Laois County Fire & Rescue Service attended 773 emergency incidents, consisting of 249 fires, 385 special service incidents and 139 false alarms.

Turnout by Station*:

Portlaoise – 340	Portarlinton - 143	Stradbally – 144	Mountmellick – 135
Abbeyleix - 97	Mountrath – 100	Durrow – 90	Rathdowney – 75

*Note – figures are higher as many incidents are 2 station turnouts as per the PDA.

**Note – Not all incident reports have been uploaded to date.

New Class B fire appliances – capital funded.

The NDFEM recently announced the 100% grant aiding of 2 new Class B fire appliances. It is expected that these appliances will be ordered early 2024, with a delivery date of late 2024 or early 2025. The total cost of the 2 new appliances is approximately €900,000 ex VAT.

The NDFEM also 100% grant aided the purchase of 3 new sets of battery-powered cutting equipment plus a trailer and ancillary equipment for LCC's Argocat 6x6 wildland fire-fighting vehicle.

Retained Fire Services in Ireland – A Review of Recruitment and Retention and the Future Sustainability of Service Delivery

Following on from the WRC Agreement, 10 prospective new fire fighters are currently in the recruitment process, having been successful at interview, in December 2023. Additional recruitment will be commenced with a view to adhering to the terms of the WRC Agreement.

New Fire Station in Stradbally

Following approval of Part 8 proposals and NDFEM approval in principle, for the construction of a new Fire Station at Stradbally, Laois County Council has identified the preferred architect-led design team and contract signing is imminent.

Mountmellick Fire Station upgrade

Part VIII documents have been prepared by Tobin Consulting Engineers and will be presented to the Municipal District Committee with a view to publication prior to the end of February 2024.

Civil Defence

Volunteers

Civil Defence continues to provide ongoing training and upskilling for volunteers. As of 19th January 2024, the unit has **53 active volunteers** and all volunteers meet the minimum training standard requirements, as required by the Department of Defence.

Activity Report January to December 2023

The unit took part in 129 duties and operations during 2023.

Activity Report January 2024

2 Community Events

1 Support to the Ukrainian Response

8 Training Courses

Facilities & Equipment

Grant funding was received from the Department of Defence for the purchase of new mapping and underwater sonar equipment to assist the unit with water-based operations. Ongoing work is underway to continue the move from the units building in Stradbally into the new headquarters building in Portlaoise.

Principal Officers from the Department of Defence visited Laois in January to audit the units progress after year one of the 3-year plan. The Department noted it is very happy with the progress of the Laois unit to date.

Training

The training plan for quarter one has commenced which will see 13 training events during January and February across several disciplines.

CORPORATE, COMMUNITY, CLIMATE ACTION, CULTURE, LIBRARIES & TOURISM

Laois Public Participation Network

Laois PPN Member Groups received a warm welcome for their "Winter Wander", a guided tour of Abbeyleix. The guided tour was held in collaboration with Abbeyleix Tidy Towns. The event was part of Laois PPN's Climate Action Project 2023. The aim of the Climate Action Project is to raise awareness of Climate Action and the positive steps that Community Groups can take.

Local Enhancement Programme 2023-2024

Laois received an allocation €153,591.05 under the Local Enhancement Programme 2023. This total amount comprises:

- €127,922.54 Capital funding for use towards carrying out necessary repairs and improvements to facilities, energy efficiency type projects, purchase of equipment etc for communities.
- €25,598.51 capital funding ring-fenced for Women's Groups

The fund will be administered by Laois LCDC.

Community groups can now make applications online. Further information available here <https://laois.ie/departments/community/grants/local-enhancement-programme-2023-2024/> Closing date for receipt of applications is Wednesday 21st February 2024 at 4.00pm

Community Projects (Elected Members) Fund 2023

Over 114 community groups have received funding from the Community Projects (Elected Members) Fund 2023.

Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme 2024-2028

The contract for the new SICAP programme 2024-2028 was signed on the 20th December 2023 with Laois Partnership Company being appointed as the Implementing Partner for the new programme effective from the 1st January 2024.

Age Friendly Laois

In December, Age Friendly Laois commenced a monthly newsletter for distribution to individuals and community groups. This is distributed in hard copy to libraries and emailed to the Older Peoples Council (OPC) mailing list. A link to the newsletter is also texted to the OPC contact number database. This newsletter features article of interest to older people – security tips, articles on healthy aging, new initiatives and programmes, recipes and more. It is hoped that as it gets established that older people themselves can contribute to the newsletter.

In late November and into December, we received 1000 Eircode stickers – the demand for these was great and the initial 1000 were distributed within a week of the announcement. A further 2000 Eircode stickers have been received. The benefits of knowing your Eircode were highlighted on the website and social media. The Ice Card initiative continues to be rolled out with 6000 of these cards issued to date.



Healthy Ireland

A collaboration with Laois Traveller Action Group was formed to support children and adults in the travelling community as they make healthier food and nutrition choices. A series of cooking classes has been enjoyed by the mothers and the children are looking forward to planting and harvesting produce from their new Polytunnel installed in November.

Light Up Laois - A series of Wellness Workshops were held in Youth Work Ireland Laois premises in Portlaoise in December where young people took part in several wellbeing activities in conjunction with a walk lit by their beautifully made Willow Lanterns. This programme demonstrated several creative ways to cope with mental health and encouraged the teenage demographic to enjoy a walk and exercise outdoors.

EU Just Transition

3 applications were submitted under the EU JTF Local and Regional Economic Strategies Support Scheme as follows:

- EU JTF Local and Regional Economic Strategies Support Scheme Category 1 - Final Phase Development of the Junction 17 National Enterprise Park - €1m
- EU JTF Local and Regional Economic Strategies Support Scheme Category 2 - Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Pathway for Just Transition (seeks to accelerate the delivery of the Work Packages of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan, with the provision of dedicated resources to deliver on the sectoral ambition for the region, as we transition to a net zero economy) - €3,992,882.15
- EU JTF Local and Regional Economic Strategies Support Scheme Category 1 - Development of serviced sites at Canal Road Business Park, Portarlinton - €1m

Climate Action/Environment Awareness

Systems Innovation for Sustainable Enterprise and Communities Course

A "Systems Innovation for Sustainable Enterprise and Communities" course, which is being delivered by IKC3 Department from Trinity College Dublin was launched in December and the inaugural in- person session of this 12 week course was held in the Council Chamber on 17th January 2024.

Portlaoise Low Carbon Town Project was selected as the pilot for this course. The course was co-developed by an interdisciplinary team from Trinity College Dublin (TCD), Munster Technological University (MTU), and University College Dublin (UCD). 50 representatives were invited to participate from a range of organisations and groups in Portlaoise. The course will utilise systems innovation and design thinking to develop solutions for the advancement of Portlaoise Low Carbon Town through intensive collaboration. The course will culminate with presentations from participants and a public exhibition in Portlaoise Library.



Tidy Towns Webinar

A Tidy Towns Webinar was held on Thursday 7th December 2023 with Sharon Eastwood/Adjudicator who outlined the process of an adjudicator visiting a community and the importance of a good map to aid the adjudicators visit. The webinar contained important advice to all participants.

Book Upcycling Workshops

Book Upcycling Workshops using Brightness Entertainment were held in three libraries: Portlaoise, Abbeyleix and Mountmellick during December to promote reuse, recycling, and upcycling. Children made Christmas decorations using old library books.

Laois Education Centre Biodiversity Garden

Landscaping works at the Laois Education Centre Biodiversity Garden were completed. Laois Education Centres serves 200 schools in Laois and bordering counties providing teacher training courses. The Biodiversity Demonstration Garden will showcase a wide range of biodiversity projects that are replicable in school grounds.

Launch of Community Climate Action Fund - opening for applications

To boost awareness of the Community Climate action fund and encourage project proposals, a launch night for the CCAF was hosted on 6th December in the Council Chamber. Co-hosted by Aoife Munn, a community activator, and Karen Moore, the event attracted 27 participants. During the event, groups received valuable insights and inspiration for potential community climate action projects, At the project

workshop, representatives from various community groups across County Laois eagerly engaged in discussions and shared ideas for potential community projects. The event was a testament to the collective commitment towards addressing the challenges of climate change at a grassroots level in Laois.



Sports & Leisure

CLÁR 2023:

Two funding announcements under CLÁR 2023 Measure 1 were made in December 2023 and January 2024 as follows. All seven funding applications submitted by Laois County Council were successful.

Applicant	Project	Amount
Clogh Ballacolla GAA	Sports Wall and MUGA	€49,780
St. Joseph's GAA Ballyadams	Kellyville Walking Track upgrade and extension	€18,868

Applicant	Project	Amount
Slieve Bloom Association and Laois County Council	Capard Amenity Area Upgrade and biodiversity enhancement	€35,000
Slieve Bloom Association and Laois County Council	Catholes Amenity Area Upgrade and biodiversity enhancement	€50,000
Knock Vintage Men's Shed	Fit out of Knock Chapel House and construction of a garden	€23,850
Trumera Community Hall	Installation of new kitchen, upgrade of road entrance and biodiversity planting	€43,560
Spink Development Association	Renovation and upgrade of Knock Community Hall	€50,000

ORIS 2023 Measure 4:

Funding of €44,280 was allocated under Measure 4 (Development Measure) of ORIS 2023. The funding is allocated for the completion of a feasibility study to ascertain the potential development of the riverside Derryounce Amenity Area to maximise its potential as an amenity for both residents and visitors to the town of Portarlinton & adjacent Derryounce Lakes & Trails. The study will assess options for both land-based and water-based activities as well as the provision of ancillary services.

ANNUAL PLAYGROUND INSPECTIONS

External annual inspections were carried out during the second week of December 2023 on all playgrounds, MUGA's, outdoor gym's and skatepark. The inspection reports will form the basis of the maintenance programme commencing January 2024.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS:

A series of 7 lantern making workshops were delivered to various youth and community groups around the county in November and December, culminating in the Light Up Laois solstice event along the canal in Vicarstown on December 21st, attended by 150 people. Please see attached photos.

LIBRARY SERVICE

Grant Aid for Public Library -PCs and Laptops for public use awarded. Laois County Library Services were awarded grant aid of €40,399.35 to provide new computers, laptops and iPads in our public library networks . The investment, under the Libraries Capital Programme, was approved by Minister Heather Humphreys , DRCD and will assist our libraries in becoming more digitally inclusive. The Library service were delighted to welcome over 240,000 dedicated visits to our 8 libraries in the county during the year . In 2024 we issued over 180,000 physical items of library stock encompassing Adult and children's books, magazines, audiobooks and DVDs.Ebook . E resource usage will be compiled in February 2024

Portlaoise Library

- Laois Local Studies at Portlaoise Library continue to host monthly **FREE COFFEE MORNINGS** of 2024, most recently on Saturday, 13th January at 11:00 am.
The intention is to bring together like-minded adults of all ages to listen and share local stories of the past, ancient and recent. Whether you are descended from the Seven Septs of Laois or recently moved to the area from another county or country, come along and chat to other Laois residents over a cup of tea or coffee.
- Laois Local Studies, now housed in a spacious and dedicated room in the new Portlaoise Library, has enjoyed a big increase in visitor numbers since opening in July 2023. From people dropping in to view the Terry Redmond photographic exhibition (as seen on RTE's Marty's Big Picture Show), to those interested in browsing through the unique Laois Collection, it has become clear that there is a growing appetite here in Laois for exploring and discussing local stories and events.
- Filling in forms - both online and paper - can be confusing and frustrating for anyone. Fortunately, Laois Offaly ETB can help with their weekly **FORM FILLING CLINIC** in Portlaoise Library. This **FREE** and **CONFIDENTIAL** service will offer support with filling in forms, online queries and accessing public services. Operating on a private one-to-one basis and with the support of Portlaoise Library, the clinic be available every Tuesday will run from 10 am-12 pm.

- Is é Ciorcal Comhrá Leabharlann Phort Laoise an grúpa rialta is sine atá againn! Bíonn an grúpa ag cruinniú gach Céadaoin sa leabharlann ag 5-30 in - tá fáilte roimh chách - pé leibhéal Gaeilge atá agat!! Chun tuilleadh a fhoghlaim faoi dhul isteach sa chiorcal, seol ríomhphost le do thoil portlaoiselibrary@laoiscoco.ie
- Award-winning Irish author Gill Perdue will be visiting Portlaoise Library on Thursday 25th of January at 6pm for a talk about her best-selling book 'If I Tell' and its sequel 'When They See Me'. Gill will also be talking about her writing career, and there will be a subsequent Q&A.
- Portlaoise Library are delighted to welcome LOETB to facilitate Crochet classes taking place over 6 weeks commencing on Friday 19th January from 11am.
- Portlaoise Library was delighted to welcome historian, author and broadcaster Myles Dungan for a witty and entertaining talk on the History of Ireland. Many thanks to the 6th class groups from Holy Family Senior School and Gaeilscoil Phortlaoise who attended.

Abbeyleix Library

Art Gallery – the gallery is delighted to host an exhibition by local artist Darren Fennelly for the month of January. The paintings are predominantly completed in black and white to represent light and shade at its best – light sources and shadows are the fundamental them

Mountmellick Library

Art Gallery The Old School Art Collective consists of local artists Kevin McCann, Mike Rafter and Antoinette Breen. This exhibition showcases three distinct art styles and will be running in The Gallery at Mountmellick Library for the month of January.



January 2024

ART EXHIBITION: A GLIMPSE OF OLD SCHOOL ART



The Gallery in Mountmellick Library is delighted to host for the month of January 2024
The Old School Art Collective Exhibition "A Glimpse of Old School Art"
The Old School Arts Collective consists of artists Kevin McCann, Antoinette Breen
and Mike Rafter

Mountmellick Library, O'Moore Street, Mountmellick, Co. Laois. R32 PX61
Phone: 057 8644572 or 057 8644588
Email: mountmellicklibrary@laoiscoco.ie

Stradbally Library

"Staying Connected" Digital beginners classes commence in Stradbally Library
-this session will commence on the 5th of March 2024

Beginners Guide to Staying Connected and Improving Digital Skills


- Greater confidence using smartphone
- Connect to internet via Wi-Fi or data
- Send and receive email
- Video call and online chat using social media
- Browse the internet and research sites
- Online library resources

Booking Essential

Stradbally Library

6 Week Course

Beginning 5th March 2024

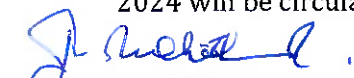


Phone: (057) 86 41673
 Email: stradballylibrary@laoiscoco.ie



Chief Executive's Orders

✚ A schedule of Chief Executive Orders signed during the month of January 2024 will be circulated.


 John Mulholland
 Chief Executive

January 24th 2024

