

Laois County Council Annual Report 2023

Selected extracts from the Annual Report with connection to the Council's Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

The purpose of this short document is to list selected extracts from the Laois County Council Annual Report 2023 which link to the Council's duty under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 -which is referred to as the Council's Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. The extracts are listed below.

Customer Charter

Laois County Council's Customer Charter sets out the way in which the Council endeavours to deal with its customers. The document is on display in all public Council Offices and on our website at www.laois.ie. This Charter includes a commitment to equality in service provision and a recognition of the diverse nature of the community we serve

Irish Language Scheme

Laois County Council recognises that our customers have the right to choose to do business with us in their preferred language and they are facilitated in their dealings with us as far as practicable, whether that is through Irish or through English.

Laois County Council is committed to achieving the targets related to Irish language promotion as outlined in the Official Languages Act 2021. These targets include:

Placement Requirement: The Act mandates that 20% of advertising should be in Irish. In 2023, the Council achieved a 33% placement rate.

Budgetary Requirement: The Council are also committed to allocating 5% of our advertising budget to the Irish language media. In 2023, the Council achieved a rate of 5.1%.

Work Life Balance Initiatives

2023 saw the continuation of the official blended working initiative offering employees the opportunity to avail of remote working options where applicable.

The Council also continued with its existing work life balance initiatives including Career Break, Work Sharing, and Shorter Working Year.

Equality & Supporting Diversity

Laois County Council is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to a broad range of policies, practices and procedures which have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect human rights of staff and people availing of its services.

December 2023 saw the publication of the Councils Gender Pay Gap Report which is accessible on our website at <https://laois.ie/wp-content/uploads/Gender-Pay-Gap-Report-for-2023.pdf> This report was compiled based on available data up to 30th June 2023.

Collaborative Projects/Social Inclusion

Laois County Council partnered with stakeholders in respect of projects during 2023, including:

- Laois Integration Network
- Integration supports for new communities.
- CYPSC
- Laois Connects 2023 Promoting Positive Mental Health & Wellbeing

Laois Connects 2023 took place from the 9th to the 15th of October 2023. The programme featured online, indoor, and outdoor programmes and events and one central day at the Dunamais Arts Centre called “*Mind Yourself Day*”, targeting students, parents, and grandparents.

- Laois Age Friendly Programme

The new Laois Age Friendly County Strategy was launched at the Older Peoples Council AGM in Castletown in October 2023. The inaugural Living Well Expo was held in April 2023 and was attended by over 1000 citizens in Portlaoise College. The event featured cooking demos, expert talks and more than 70 exhibitors from healthcare, community, technology sectors were in attendance.

- Laois Africa Day

Laois Africa Day 2023 was held on Saturday the 3rd of June 2023 on the grounds of Laois Leisure, Portlaoise. It featured and showcased the sights, sounds, crafts, and food of Africa and celebrated the contribution of the African community to Laois.

- Laois Pride

Midlands LGBT+ Project is a Laois based service that provides services and supports to LGBT+ people in the Midlands. The Project ran a weeklong programme of events to mark Laois Pride 2023, culminating in a Pride Parade on Saturday, 17th September 2023, which was supported

by Heathy Laois funding. These events promoted opportunities to support those within the community, whilst encouraging acceptance.

- Menowell

Menowell was a collaborative programme with Laois Sports Partnership. It provided participants with a 6-week physical activity and health education programme, (for women in all stages of menopause) and was also facilitated online. All exercise classes are designed by clinical exercise physiologists specifically for all fitness abilities and those living with clinical conditions.

- Musical Memories

Musical Memories saw the expansion of weekly Ukulele and singing sessions in Laois Men's Sheds. The men took great pride in learning a new skill with their friends and peers, in a sociable and encouraging environment. They worked on a common set of songs, suitable to their skill level.

- Laois Traveller Action Group

This collaboration was formed to help support children and adults in the travelling community, to make healthier food and nutrition choices. A series of cooking classes were enjoyed by the mothers and the children look forward to planting and harvesting produce from their new Polytunnel.

- Light Up Laois

A series of Wellness Workshops were held in Youth Work Ireland Laois premises in Portlaoise, 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.

- Make Way Day 2023

Healthy Laois, Age Friendly Laois and a Make Way Day Working group from Laois County Council, led a number of Make Way Day events on Friday 22nd September 2023 in Portarlinton, Portlaoise, Mountrath, Vicarstown and Mountmellick. The aim of Make Way Day is to bring the disability and wider community together to “consider the needs of people of all abilities and allow them to share the spaces we all take for granted.”

- Age Friendly Library 2023

All 8 branch libraries have been awarded the “ Age Friendly Library “ status . This has been awarded on successful completion of the National Age friendly Library recognition Programme in each library .

- **Library of Sanctuary**

Laois libraries continued to implement the Library of Sanctuary in all service points. The Library service secured Integration Funding through CYPSC & DCEDIY to deliver 16 events for 270 children and their families, aimed at supporting families living in International Protection Accommodation Service centres in integrating into their local communities.

Social Housing Build Delivery

Laois County Council is tasked with delivering 534 new social housing units by 2026. To date under the 'The Housing for All' plan, the Council has delivered 515 new build units, or 96% of the target to 2026.

Laois County Council's Strategic Plan for People with Disabilities 2021 – 2026

Laois County Council's Strategic Plan for People with Disabilities 2021 – 2026 was adopted in December 2021. This Strategy forms an integral part of the Housing Service Delivery Plan and will promote and support the delivery of accommodation for people with disabilities using all appropriate housing supply mechanisms. In 2023, 146 households with a person or persons with a disability were allocated housing by Laois County Council and the various Approved Housing Bodies in the county. This figure accounts for 29.79% of the total allocations by Laois County Council in 2023.