

Comhairle Chontae Laoise
Laois County Council



Tuarascáil Bhliantúil
Annual Report 2018

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JOINT ADDRESS BY THE CATHAOIRLEACH AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

We are very pleased to present Laois County Council's 2018 Annual Report. The Annual Report outlines the scale, scope and diversity of programmes provided by the Council and demonstrates the commitment to providing high quality, accessible and inclusive public services.

A particular highlight of 2018 was the delivery of 141 homes to members of our community under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. It is satisfying to note that Laois County Council far exceeded its Government set target of 76 homes in this regard. The opening of 33 newly constructed homes at Conniberry Way, Portlaoise was also a very positive and welcome development.

The Business Support Unit continued to market and promote the J17 National Enterprise Park at Togher and other prime locations in the county. It was very pleasing to be associated with two major job announcements for Laois in 2018 - Glanbia Cheese EU announced its plans to construct a €130 million manufacturing facility at the J17 Enterprise Park and SkOUT Secure Intelligence announced its plans to base its European Headquarters in Portlaoise. One would hope that these and other developments will herald a new era of investment confidence and job creation in Laois.

The Portlaoise Town Team which was established in 2017. Comprising representatives from a number of sectors it conducted a health check of the town which in turn helped them to identify the requirements to achieve their aim of promoting Portlaoise as a great place to live, shop and do business. This team with the support of the Business Support Unit has taken its first steps toward achieving this goal with the production of a new Portlaoise logo and the launch of a new Portlaoise Me2you gift card which has been a huge success.

A number of high profile projects were successfully implemented across the various departments of the Council such as national and local road improvement schemes, the development of tourism and the provision of environmental services many of which are described within this report.

In 2018, Laois made significant progress in developing tourism in Laois with the commencement of the construction of the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail. This is a collaborative project between Laois and Offaly County Councils and Coillte to promote the region as an attractive tourist destination.

We are satisfied that 2018 has been a very successful year and that the achievements of the Council in its role of leading economic and community development and delivering efficient services will make Laois a better County for everyone.

Finally, we would like to thank the elected members of Laois County Council for their ongoing co-operation and support and their commitment to serve the people of County Laois. We wish also to acknowledge the outstanding and professional performance of the staff of this Council in delivering a wide and expansive range of services in 2018. Míle buíochas don foireann go léir.



MISSION STATEMENT

“The Council will lead the sustainable economic, social, cultural and community development of our County and deliver quality public services to the communities we serve”

Mandate

Laois County Council is the Primary Democratically Elected Authority in County Laois which provides an extensive and diverse range of services that impact upon the county’s economic, social, environmental, infra-structural, industrial, tourism, and cultural activities. These services include the provision and maintenance of houses, roads, planning and economic development, waste management, environmental protection, recreational activities, libraries, cultural and community development, including recreation and sport. Laois County Council act as agents for the delivery of water and waste water services. The Council is serviced by a large workforce, including the Chief Executive, professional, technical, legal, administrative, financial and outdoor employees.

Council Membership

Laois County Council consists of 19 Elected Members - six members each from the Borris-in-Ossory-Mountmellick and Graiguecullen-Portarlinton Municipal Districts and seven members from the Portlaoise Municipal District. On the 30th July 2018, Cllr Pauline Madigan was co-opted to fill the casual vacancy arising from the death of Cllr. J. Lodge



Elected Members with the County Manager at Laois County Council AGM in June, 2014

Council Meetings

Council Meetings in 2018 were usually held on the last Monday of each month in the Council Chamber at Áras an Chontae. There were fifteen meetings held in 2018 with no meeting held in August.

Corporate Policy Group (C.P.G.)

The Corporate Policy Group is designed to enhance the democratic mandate and policy making role of the elected members. The C.P.G. is supported by the Chief Executive and comprises the Cathaoirleach of the Council and the four Chairs of the Strategic Policy Committees (S.P.C.'s). The main function of the C.P.G. is to co-ordinate the work of the different S.P.C.'s and provide a forum where policy decisions affecting the whole Council are agreed for submission to the full Council for decision. The C.P.G. met on 11 occasions in 2018.

Municipal Districts

The following are the details in relation to the number of Municipal District Meetings held in 2018:

Borris-in-Ossory/Mountmellick Municipal District - 12 meetings

Graiguecullen/Portarlinton Municipal District - 11 meetings

Portlaoise Municipal District - 12 meetings

MEMBERS OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

The following are the elected members of Laois County Council at the 31/12/2018

MEMBERS OF BORRIS IN OSSORY-MOUNTMELICK MUNICIPAL DISTRICT



Patrick
Bracken
(F.F.)



John
King
(F.G.)



Brendan
Phelan
(Non-Party)



David
Goodwin
(F.G.)



Seamus
McDonald
(F.F.)



James
Kelly
(Non Party)

MEMBERS OF PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT



Mary
Sweeney
(F.G.)



John Joe
Fennelly
(F.F.)



William
Aird
(F.G.)



Noel
Tuohy
(Labour)



Catherine
Fitzgerald
(F.F.)

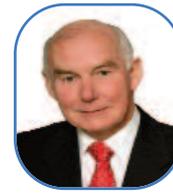


Caroline
DwaneStanley
(S.F.)



Pauline
Madigan
(F.F.) (co-opted
for J. Lodge)

It was with great sadness that the Council learned of the untimely passing of Cllr. Jerry Lodge on the 3rd April 2018. Cllr. Lodge served for many years in local government having first been elected in 1967 and successfully contesting each election thereafter. Jerry gave of his time selflessly and was described by all who knew him as a true gentleman. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasail



Jerry
Lodge(F.F.)
R.I.P.

MEMBERS OF PORTARLINGTON-GRAIGUECULLEN MUNICIPAL DISTRICT



Tom
Mulhall
(F.G.)



John Robert
Moran
(F.G.)



Padraig
Fleming
(F.F.)



Ben
Brennan
(Non Party)



Aidan
Mullins
(S.F.)



Paschal
McEvoy
(F.F.)

Director of Services: Donal Brennan

**Senior Executive Officer
Human Resources:** Carmel McNicholl

CORPORATE AFFAIRS

Corporate Plan

Laois County Council's Corporate Plan 2014 – 2019 was adopted by the Members of the Council in December, 2014.

The Corporate Plan provides the framework for the implementation of a coherent strategy for the development of the county for the period 2014-2019 and was prepared following consultation with employees, elected representatives, community, voluntary and environmental interests, external stakeholders and other public bodies operating at local level.

An update on the implementation of the Corporate Plan was considered by the Elected Members at their meeting held in January 2018.

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. The Charter also includes a Customer Complaints Procedure which may be availed of by any person not satisfied with the quality of service received.

Highlight

- 25th January 2018 - Civic Reception in honour of Aoife McNicholl & Emer O'Sullivan, Irish Team Players FIPFA Powerchair Football World Cup 2017
- 22nd March 2018 - Civic Reception in honour of St Abban's Athletic Club Ladies Team, AAI National League Premier Division Winners
- 26th April 2018 - Civic Reception in honour of Garda Michael Clerkin, R.I.P., Detective Garda Thomas F Peters, R.I.P., Detective Garda Ben Thornton, Garda Gerry Bohan and Sergeant James Cannon, Recipients of Gold Scott Medals



- 31st May 2018 - Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of the Laois Active Retirement Groups
- 6th June 2018 - Civic Reception in honour of Laois Kettlebell Clubs in recognition of their success at the World & European Championships, their achievement in securing the European Championships for Portlaoise in 2018 and their success at these championships.
- 8th June 2018 - Civic Reception in in honour of Kiln Lane Residents Association in recognition of their success at the 2017 I.P.B. Pride of Place Competition.
- 16th August 2018 - Civic Reception in honour of T. J. Doheny, winner of the International Boxing Federation World Super Bantamweight Title

The total cost of the above was €4,473.44

Irish Language Scheme

Laois Local Authorities Irish Language Scheme was confirmed by the Minister for Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and came into effect on 1st December, 2009. The scheme is available to view on our website, www.laois.ie. A new scheme is being prepared.

Laois Local Authorities recognise 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.

If you wish to contact the Council in Irish, please send an e-mail to gaeilge@laoiscoco.ie.

Annual Service Delivery Plan

The Members at their meeting of the Council held on the 29th of January 2018 adopted the Annual Service Delivery Plan for 2018. The implementation of the Plan will be reviewed early in 2019 as part of the process of developing the 2019 Plan. The performance of the Council in relation to the performance indicators as specified by NOAC will also be taken into account.

Health & Safety

Health & Safety Officer: Jim Bolger

The Council continued to develop the Safety Management System (SMS) ensuring compatibility as appropriate with the CORE Health and Safety module. The Council's initiative relative to cross-county safety auditing within the region was continued and enhanced. Locally the cross-directorate safety inspection programme was implemented in keeping with the Council's programme of work. The Water Services department continued to measure safety performance through Irish Waters' Health, Safety, Quality and Environmental (HSQE) auditing programme.

Many new employees were engaged over the year accordingly, there was a significant increase in the provision of safety induction training. The provision of 'manual handling' and 'safe pass' training was prioritised to ensure that the Council met the statutory obligations in this regard.

The legislative database is available to all employees that have internet access which serves to ensure that Laois County Council keep up to date with legislative developments.

The Council's inoculation programme continued during 2018 and was implemented and monitored as appropriate.

Partnership

The following were the members of the Workplace Partnership Committee as at 31st December, 2018.

Management Nominees

Kieran Kehoe
(Joint Chair)
Michael Rainey
Bernie Foran
Michael O'Hora
Susan Grant

Union Nominees

Anne Marie Maher
(Joint Chair)
Rosa Bray
Deirdre Alexander
Tom O'Carroll
Edmond Kenny

The Partnership Committee held 3 meetings during 2018.

Freedom of Information (F.O.I.)

The Freedom of Information Act 2014 was enacted on 14 October 2014. It introduced significant changes to the Freedom of Information regime repealing and replacing the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003 and expanding the scope of FOI to a number of further bodies. It also consolidated, modernised and updated the legislation generally.

Applications received/processed in 2018

Applications on hand at 31st Dec. 2017	9
Applications received in 2018	98
Decisions taken during 2018	99
Applications not continued with	5
Applications dealt with outside of FOI	1
Applications on hand at 31st Dec. 2018	2

Nature of Information sought

Personal (to applicant)	26
Non personal	71
Mixed	1

Appeals

There were 2 appeals to the Information Commissioner in 2018.

Source of Requests

General Public, Solicitors & Others	61
Journalists	37

Performance Indicators

Section 126c of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 sets out the functions of the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) which includes examination of the performance of local government bodies against thirty two indicators.

The report in respect of 2017 was published by NOAC in April 2018.

Laois County Council's performance in each area in 2017 is included in this report in each of the relevant sections.

Reporting of Protected Disclosures

No disclosures were received by the Designated

Officer for Protected Disclosures during 2018.

Property Management Section

The Property Management Section carries out the day-to-day property management functions of the Council while also maintaining the Property Interest Register system. Acquisitions and disposals of prop-

erty and land are administered through this section in cooperation with the relevant sections along with any Leasing arrangements. Land Registry searches were also all carried out in 2018 together with the mapping and recording of historical land and property assets of Laois County Council. Work is ongoing on updating the Fixed Assets Register to reconcile with Property Interest Register database.

Register of Electors

The Council is responsible for the compilation of the Register of Electors for County Laois which comes into force on 15th February each year. To be eligible for inclusion in the Register of Electors, applicants must be at least 18 years of age on the day that the Register comes into force and must have been ordinarily resident in a Constituency on the 1st September

Register of Electors 2019/2020

Dáil Constituency	Presidential Electors	Dáil Electors
Laois	58,007	58,819
European Parliament Constituency	European Electors	Potential European Electors
South	59,541	649
Local Electoral Areas	Number of Electors	Postal and Special Voters
Borris In Ossory - Mountmellick	20,150	Gardaí 0
Graigucullen - Portarlinton	20,133	Defence Forces 224
Portlaoise	<u>21,162</u>	Diplomats 3
Total:	61,445	Physically Disabled 13
		Occupation 2
		Special Voters 6

HUMAN RESOURCES

Recruitment Statistics

A total of 520 people were employed by Laois County Council at 31st December 2018.

During 2018 Laois County Council held 34 competitions, in relation to which the following statistics have been extracted:

Total Applications received	1005	
	Male	Female
Applicants	466	539
Successful Applicants	140	130

Permanent Appointments/Promotions 2018

	Male	Female
Appointments	34	36
Promotions	6	11

Work Life Balance Initiatives

Laois County Council continued to implement work/life balance initiatives for staff during 2018. At year-end 8 employees were availing of the Career Break Scheme, 41 employees were availing of the Work Sharing Scheme, 44 employees availed of the Parental Leave Scheme, 23 employees availed of the Shorter Working Year Scheme and 7 employees availed of Unpaid Leave Scheme.

National Performance Indicators

Performance Indicators in this document are extracted from the National Oversight and Audit Commission Report No.19, published in September 2018, relating to 2017. This is the most recent data set available.

In relation to the national performance indicator on the number of working days lost to certified and uncertified illness the following statistics apply.

Total no of wholetime equivalents (WTE) staff in LA at 31/12/2018	401.17
Certified	3.81%
Uncertified	0.34%

The national target for absences on certified and un-

certified illness leave is set at 3.5%.

Industrial Relations

Laois County Council continued to maintain good industrial relations during 2018 with no major disputes arising. The Council continues to operate in accordance with the Public Service Agreements in consultation with the relevant Unions.

Employee Training and Development

Laois County Council is committed to the training and development of all our employees in the context of securing the goals and objectives of the Council and for the skills development of employees. Laois County Council is committed to continuous improvement in service delivery through the personal development of its employees.

The annual training programme is primarily based on the individual training needs identified through staff Personal Development Plans as part of the Performance Management Development System process. The Programme also incorporates Health & Safety requirements, National FETAC Programmes, Third Level Open Learning Programmes and various Seminars/Workshops as they arise.

Total expenditure on training was €326,986 (inclusive of expenditure for Fire Services). A comprehensive training programme was delivered throughout 2018. A sample of the training programmes provided is as follows:-

- Safepass
- Health & Safety Staff Briefings
- General Data Protection Regulation Briefings
- HR Core Personnel Training
- Occupational First Aid
- Electrical Verification and Certification Course
- Wastewater Treatment Plant Operations
- Ride on Roller Training
- Certificate in Road Management Programme
- Workshop Built Heritage, Architectural Policy and Strategic Infrastructure
- Good Governance of LA: Enhancing the Control Environment
- Bridge Inspection Course
- Capital Works Management Framework Training
- Manual Handling
- CPC Training
- VDU Assessor Training
- Dignity at Work designated contact persons

- Confined Spaces
- Sludge Handling
- Road Safety Auditor Training
- Road Opening and Reinstatement
- Abrasive Wheels Training
- Performance Management Development training
- Safety Representative Training

Open Learning Programme

Laois County Council endeavours, subject to available resources, to facilitate and support employees wishing to pursue Third Level Open Learning Courses that are relevant to and contribute to the business development of both the Council and the employee's role and responsibilities. Samples of the Open Learning programmes facilitated during 2018 are as follows:-

- IPA – Certificate/Diploma in Local Government
- IT Carlow - Degree in Business Management
- IT Carlow - BBS Emergency Services Management
- IPASS – Certificate in Payroll Techniques
- Law Society - Diploma in Construction Law Studies

Staff Policies

In line with best practice in Human Resource Management, Laois County Council has developed a suite of HR staff policies - the following were introduced/revised during 2018:

- Secondment Policy
- Dignity at Work
- Work Sharing Scheme

Equality and Supporting Diversity

Laois County Council is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to a broad range of policies, practices and procedures which aim to recognise individual contribution and performance, develop each individual's capability and give everyone an equal opportunity to use his/her talent and realise his/her potential.

Community, Social, Cultural and Heritage Strategic Policy Committee

Director of Services: Donal Brennan

Chair: James Kelly, M.C.C.

Members **Sectoral**

Padraig Fleming, M.C.C.	P. J Phelan (PPN Community/Voluntary)
Tom Mulhall, M.C.C.	Bobby Delaney (PPN Environment)
Brendan Phelan, M.C.C.	Donald Scully (Farming Pillar)
	Michael Gorman (PPN Social Inclusion)

LAOIS LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (LCDC)



Laois Local Community Development Committee was established in September 2014 for the purposes of developing, co-ordinating and improving a coherent and strategic approach to Local Community Development.

The Local Community Development Committee comprises representatives of both public and private sectors and has primary responsibility for co-ordinating, planning and overseeing local & community development in the County.

The LCDC oversees the implementation of:

- Social Inclusion Community Action Programme (SICAP)
- Community objectives in the Local Economic & Community Plan
- Implementation of the Laois Local Development Strategy operated under the LEADER Programme 2014 - 2020 in partnership with the local authority (financial partner) and local development company (implementing partner).

- SICAP Programme 2018-2022 – Laois Partnership Company are the implementing partner.
- Healthy Ireland – Strand 2 Grant in the sum of €75,000 received from the Department of Health in 2018.
- Laois LCDC approved funding in respect of 94 applicants totalling €284,032 in respect of the DRCD Community Enhancement Programme in 2018. The LCDC funded a further €10,145 under a separate strand of this funding to 7 Men’s Sheds Projects in Laois.
- LEADER Programme 2014–2020 – Laois Local Action Group (LAG) approved 42 projects up to the end of 2018 under the current programme. Closed calls up to the end of 2018 included - Rural Towns (completed), Social Inclusion in Rural areas (completed) Training (across all themes) (completed); Rural Environment (completed) and Festivals and Events (completed).

LAOIS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORK



Laois PPN continues to grow its network with 477 groups currently registered. The PPN has a Secretariat consisting of 12 members and 29 representative positions. PPN Representatives represent the PPN on local authority and other decision making committees in Laois. A dedicated PPN Resource Worker works at the PPN office at Lyster Square Carpark, JFL Avenue, Portlaoise, County Laois.

2018 was another active year for Laois PPN. Two County Plenaries were held, one of which included a Funding and Resource Workshop with presentations on how to write a successful funding application. The Laois Age Friendly Information Afternoon held in association with Laois Older Persons Forum had over 150 people in attendance with 32 stands providing advice and information to the older people within our

communities. Both events proved very successful and this was evident by the large attendance on both occasions. July 2018 saw Laois PPN host a Poster Free Zone debate, with 75% of those present in favour of Laois being a Poster Free zone. As a consequence Laois PPN made a submission to the Draft Litter Management Plan 2018-2020. Laois PPN also developed a number of documents in 2018 which included a Secretariat Terms of Reference and a Representatives Charter to name a few. All documents are available to be downloaded from our website which was re-designed in December 2018 (www.laoisppn.ie). Laois Community and Voluntary Awards were held in association with Laois PPN in November 2018 to celebrate the major contributions made by Community/Voluntary Groups in Laois. Laois PPN issue a monthly newsletter to member organisations and are very active on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

During 2018, Laois PPN also held a training session for PPN Representatives. Next steps in development of the PPN include rolling out a training course for PPN members aimed at building the capacity of members to influence policy and engage with decision makers.

LAOIS CONNECTS



Laois CONNECTS Mental Health Awareness Week took place from Saturday 6th October, 2018 until Saturday 13th October, 2018 and coincided with #WorldMentalHealthDay. This year’s highly successful events focused on young people and mental health in a changing world. Supports were highlighted through a number of events, including a series of walks and physical activity events, public speaking events, workshops, and information talks across the country.

Laois County Council collaborated with Laois Sports Partnership, Laois Partnership Company, Mental Health Ireland, HSE, Laois/Offaly ETB in addition to youth and sports representatives across the county. The group coordinated this event and published the Laois Connects brochure which detailed the many activities that took place during the week, all of which were free of charge.

LAOIS COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY AWARDS 2018

The heroes of local communities across the County were celebrated by Laois County Council in association with Laois Public Participation Network on 20th November 2018 with over 280 people gathered in the Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise for the 9th Annual Community and Voluntary Awards. The Awards are hosted to recognise the tremendous contribution made by community and voluntary groups to life in County Laois.

All nominees were recognised as having made a significant difference within and beyond their local community, through giving of their time, co-operation, their imagination and their hard work to achieve rewards of successful clubs, events and fundraising within the community. Each group and individual was congratulated on the night and presented with a certificate acknowledging their contribution to the community and voluntary effort in Laois.

All group winners received €500, while runners up received €250. Prizes were kindly sponsored by Laois Public Participation Network, Laois Sports Partnership, the Environment and Sports Section of Laois County Council and the Business Support Unit.

The winners and runners up in 2018 were:

ENVIRONMENT CATEGORY - 7 NOMINEES

WINNER: Abbeyleix Bog Project
 Runner Up: Mountrath Development Association

CHILDREN & YOUTH CATEGORY – 8 NOMINEES

WINNER: 7th Laois Camross Scouts
 Runner Up: Saplings Parents Committee

ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE – 5 NOMINEES

WINNER: Durrow Scarecrow Festival Volunteers
 Runner Up: Mountrath Youth Theatre

HEALTHY & ACTIVE CATEGORY – 8 NOMINEES

WINNER: The Thomas Hayes Trust CLG - Teac Tom
 Runner Up: Parkrun Vicarstown & Junior Parkrun

SOCIAL INCLUSION CATEGORY – 10 NOMINEES

WINNER: Down Syndrome Ireland Laois Branch
 Runner Up: Kiln Lane Committee

UNsung HERO AWARD (22 NOMINEES)
WINNER: Carmel O'Connor



2018 ALL ISLAND PRIDE OF PLACE COMPETITION

Laois was represented in the 2018 IPB All Island Pride of Place Competition by two entries, Killeshin Community and the SVT Activity and Wellness Hub. Pride of Place recognises initiatives taken by local communities to create pride in their area and celebrates the vital contribution that community groups make to society.

Killeshin have focused on the transformation & reinvigoration of their village centre. With local agency and Council support, this vibrant community hub now employs 63 people in a range of employments in their community organisations and local businesses, and provides space for pre/after-school services, sports and social and parish gatherings. 800 community heroes from across the country attended the Awards Night in November where Killeshin were pronounced as worthy prizewinners.

The SVT Activity and Wellness HUB promotes all physical activities in Stradbally, Vicarstown and Timahoe and is funded by Laois Sports Partnership through Sports Ireland Dormant Account Funding, and is supported by Laois County Council.



COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY PROJECTS FUND 2018

The Community & Voluntary Projects Fund provides financial assistance to groups/organisations county-wide via applications recommended by an elected member of Laois County Council. 69 applications under this Fund were submitted in 2018.

COUNTY LAOIS JOINT POLICING COMMITTEE

The County Laois JPC met 4 times in 2018. A 5-year JPC Strategy was adopted by the Committee in March 2016 and a corresponding Annual Implementation Plan was agreed and progressed by all stakeholders during 2018.

COMMUNITY SMOKE ALARM SCHEME

1500 smoke alarms were purchased under the auspices of this national scheme in 2017 and were distributed in 2018 with the expertise and assistance of Laois Fire & Rescue Services. An application was made in 2018 and expected delivery date is early 2019.

TOWN AND VILLAGE RENEWAL SCHEME

During 2018 the Department of Rural and Community Development awarded a total of €870,094 in funding under Town and Village Renewal 2018 for 11 projects/areas in County Laois. The projects awarded under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2017 progressed and some completed during 2018 with the remaining due for completion in early 2019. A total of €983,407 was received under the 2017 scheme.

RURAL REGENERATION DEVELOPMENT FUND

During 2018 Laois County Council submitted applications for Durrow, Portarlinton and Mountrath to the Department of Rural and Community Development for funding under the Rural Regeneration Development Fund. Successful applicants will be notified early 2019.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS/SOCIAL INCLUSION

Laois County Council partnered with stakeholders in respect of projects during 2018:

- Community Coaching Programme
- Laois Sports Partnership Social Inclusion Disability Programme
- Laois Integration Network

- Laois Asylum Migration Integration Service
- Integration supports for new communities, e.g residents of the Direct Provision Centre at Emo.
- Development of the Laois Integration Strategy led by Laois Partnership

LAOIS AGE FRIENDLY PROGRAMME

The Laois Age Friendly Programme is a local implementation of the WHO Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme. The programme strives to create an inclusive, equitable society in which older people can live full, active, valued and healthy lives.

In December 2018, the Laois Programme became an official member of the WHO Global Network. As a member, Laois will be part of a growing global movement of communities that are striving to better meet the needs of their older residents.

The Laois Age Friendly Alliance, an interagency committee tasked with delivering the Age Friendly Programme, continued to meet throughout 2018 implementing objectives set out in the Laois Age Friendly County Strategy 2016 - 2021.

The Laois Older People’s Forum, comprising of 20 volunteers, representing older people, monitor the agency delivery of the Age Friendly Strategy and ensure that it will effect appropriate changes. Actions in the strategy commenced to-date by Laois County Council in partnership with the Older People’s Forum include Age Friendly Parking, an Age Friendly Business Recognition Scheme, Message in a Bottle and a Directory of Services for Older People.



Laois Comhairle na nÓg

Laois Comhairle na nÓg strives to represent young people in Laois and aims to make their voices heard, in a real way among the adult decision makers in our county, allowing the future generation to help to make our county a better place to live, work and visit. Co-ordinated by Youth Work Ireland Laois, in association with Laois County Council, the 25 young members of Laois Comhairle na nÓg met over 32 times in 2018.

They completed their project “Life in Your Pocket” App and was launched on 8th December, 2018. The Comhairle is tasked with the provision of feedback to the young people across the county and does this in a number of ways, including through its links with the 8 secondary schools and Youthreach, youth groups and at its AGM, which was held on the 7th November, 2018. The AGM was attended by over 80 young people from across Laois. Laois Comhairle was also represented in 2018 by 15 delegates who attended the National Comhairle na nÓg Showcase. The 2018 national executive representative Cian MacGearailt attended 12 meetings in his role where they are working on a project “Equality in Schools”. During 2018, Comhairle members made a presentation to the elected members, represented young people at several public consultations/meetings, became youth representatives on a number of committees and met with Oireachtas members to raise issues around youth service funding in Laois.



YOUTH SUPPORTS

Support for young people in Laois was continued in 2018. The Council is represented on the Rathdowney Youth Café Consortium and both Garda Youth Diversion Projects in Portlaoise and Portarlington.

Educational Partnership

The Schools Business Partnership programme “Skills at Work” is aimed at 5th year students and aims to encourage school completion as well as the importance of considering third level education as a viable option for all students, by partnering the school with a business/employer organisation. In the 2017/2018 school year, 22 Portlaoise College students were introduced to several members of Council staff with varying work and education backgrounds. They also visited Portlaoise Fire Station. They were given advice regarding CV preparation and mock interviews were held. The programme is facilitated by the National Schools Business Partnership and the Dept of Education and Skills.

Performance Indicators 2017

Percentage of local schools involved in the local Youth Council/Comhairle na nÓg scheme	77.78%
No. of Organisations on the County Register at 31/12/2017	404
% of Organisations on the County Register that opted to be part of the Social Inclusion College with the PPN	12.62

TOURISM

In 2018 Laois County Council continued to promote the county of Laois supporting a range of festivals and events and supporting the Board of Laois Tourism.

The Tourism Grants Scheme 2018

A total of €60,750 was allocated to festivals/events and parades through the Laois County Council Tourism Grant Scheme in 2018 including: The Old Fort Festival, Durrrow All Ireland Scarecrow Festival, The Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run, Ramble in Eireann High Nelly Heritage Cycle, The National Steam Rally and Vicarstown Beat the Barge Festival. The Council also supported a range of smaller festivals including Rosenallis Festival of the Mountain, Laois Fleadh and Laois St Patrick’s Day Parades throughout the county.

The “Buds & Blossoms” Laois Garden 2018

For the third year running the Laois Garden Festival took place on Sunday June 10th in Spink Community Grounds with garden experts Bob Brown, Paul Smyth and Dermot O’ Neill, giving talks. A wide range of plant, food and crafts were on display. Specialist nurseries from around Ireland were also present at the event which is growing each year.

The Laois International Golf Challenge

The 2018 Laois international Golf Challenge was held on Tuesday 22nd and Wednesday 23rd May 2018 at Portarlinton Golf Club and The Heritage Golf Club. A change in format from a two-person team event to a 4-person team event went down well with all the players. The travelling players were delighted with the accommodation and the entertainment.

The Old Fort Festival 2018

The 3rd Annual Old Fort Festival took place between the 23rd June and the 25th June in Portlaoise Town. Great crowds attended the three day event which included entertainment for all age groups and families. Activities included heritage talks, comedy, live music, archery, armoury, birds of prey, shield making, crafts, cookery and historic tours.

Scarecrow Festival 2018

The 9th Annual Scarecrow Festival took place in Durrrow from Sunday July 29th to Monday August 6th in Durrrow. Large crowds attended the event again this year with plenty of activities for families, including arts & crafts, workshops, music and the scarecrow collection.

The Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run

The Classic Car weekend was another great success with over 70 Vintage Cars and their owners participating in what is now a highlight of the Festival Year in Laois. Three days of journeying across the county and to neighbouring counties was enjoyed by all with visitors from various parts of the UK & Northern Ireland.

The Folly Festival, Cullohill

Cullohill Community organised and ran the first ever gender balanced Music, Comedy and Culture Festival in Cullohill on the weekend of 20th & 21st July. The first ever annual Irish Porridge Making Championships was one of the highlights of the event along with farmers markets and food stalls.

Animation services for the County Tourism Development Strategy 2018 – 2022



Following the launch of the new Tourism Strategy in February, Laois Tourism tendered for the appointment of suitable contractor to provide Strategy Animation

for the Laois Tourism Strategy and other services to the Board. Big Idea Consulting was awarded the contract for 12 months. The Consulting Company have started working with the Board and promoting the County.

Launch of Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail

On Friday April 27th, Phase 1 of the Laois /Offaly Mountain Bike Trail was officially launched by the Minister for Equality and Justice, Charlie Flanagan on site in the Slieve Bloom Mountains. This is a collaborative project between Laois and Offaly County Councils and Coillte. Phase 1 will involve the construction of 35kms of off-road, cross-country cycling trails on Coillte-owned forest lands, with approximately half in county Laois at Baunreagh and half in county Offaly at Kinnity.

ARTS SECTION

Music Generation Laois

2018 was a seminal year for Music Generation Laois, when along with partner organisation Laois School of Music, a permanent premises for music education was secured in Portlaoise town centre in August 2018, led by Laois County Council, and supported by Laois Offaly Education and Training Board. The former Scoil Mhuire building now houses all evening and weekend activities, including a range of classes, ensembles, bands, groups, choir and orchestra.

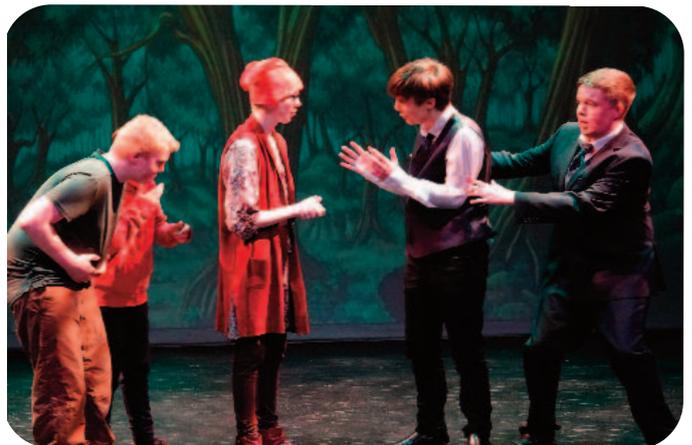
In 2018, over 3500 young people participated in Music Generation Laois programmes. There are six programme strands and there were 20 musicians working on these programmes on both a part and full-time basis. Highlights in 2018 included a series of now annual music events – a shared student Festival with Laois School of Music in March, a 3 day festival in Stradbally in April – ‘Music at the Malt House 2018,’ a large-scale singing event in June with over 400 young singers ‘Schools Out for Summer 2018’, summer programmes in July, National Harp Day in October and the 3rd annual Tionól (gathering) for harp and pipes with young people from all over Ireland in Portlaoise in November. There were many memorable performances by young musicians including performances and workshops at Edinburgh International Harp Festival in March, Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann in Drogheda in August, a performance for His Esteemed Highness Prince Albert of Monaco in October in Monaco. In 2018, Music Generation Laois delivered weekly programmes in 29 schools/centres across Laois.

Laois School of Music

Enrolment increased from September 2018 to 360 pupils and 16 part-time tutors with the introduction of additional classes in piano, guitar and singing. On the 10th February 2018 the Laois School of Music Youth Orchestra performed at the annual IAYO’s prestigious Annual Festival in the National Concert Hall to great success. LSM String students Masterclass with the RTE ConTempo Quartet & Classical Guitarist Redmond O’Toole in association with Dunamais Arts Centre took place on Thursday 15th March. Over 100 students sat exams through Royal Irish Academy of Music and Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music during the month of May with excellent results including 2 High Achievers Awards for Cello. The new premises for LSM and MGL has hosted several events and exam sessions and has established itself as a centre of excellence in the Midlands.



Laois Youth Theatre



Laois Youth Theatre has 2 groups in Portlaoise. Youth Theatre is supported in Portlaoise in association with the Portlaoise Afterschools Group and in Mountrath in association with the Mountrath Development Association. The programme includes weekly workshops for up to 80 children and young people led by qualified drama tutors. Performances in May 2018 at the Dunamais Arts Centre included ‘Grimm Fairy

Tales' and 'The Black Eyes' and new co-ordinator Louise White was appointed as LYT Co-ordinator in September.

Dunamais Arts Centre

Laois County Council continues to support the Dunamais Arts Centre as one of the main Arts venues in Laois. The Laois Arts Office continue to work collaboratively with the Dunamais Arts Centre on numerous programmes enriching both programmes.

The Laois Arthouse Stradbally

In 2018, the Arthouse Gallery hosted 5 individual exhibitions, as well as artist residencies, art workshops, tours and talks. Highlight events included "The Stradbally Six", an exhibition of work by six resident artists from the Arthouse. Other highlights included an exhibition and master classes for adults in botanical art with artist Mary Dillon in July. 2018 was one of the busiest years since the facility opened. The apartments and studios were fully occupied throughout the year.



The Artists in Schools Scheme

The Artists in Schools Scheme ran in nine schools in 2018. This Scheme allows students to have an in depth experience with the professional artist and gives them the opportunity to experience different art mediums. Schools included:

- Ratheniska N.S.
- Scoil Bhride N.S., Mountrath
- Camross N.S.
- St Fintan's Boys N.S., Mountrath
- Portlaoise College, Portlaoise
- Scoill Mhuire N.S., Abbeyleix
- Newtown N.S.,
- Scoil Tighearnach Naofa N.S., Cullohill,
- Rosenallis N.S.

Bealtaine Festival – for Older People

The Arts Office presented a full programme of events for older people in community and care settings during the month of May.

Midland Collaborative Projects

Two Midlands Arts and Culture magazines were published in 2018 and distributed nationally and throughout the Midlands region.

Townscape Exhibition

"Townscape" exhibition by artist Mary Burke completed a nine-month tour in 2018. Paintings depicting 12 Stradbally homes opened at Dunamais Arts Centre in March and included a seminar 'A Dialogue with Architecture: Reinterpreting the Irish Town'. It was exhibited over the summer at the Irish Architectural Archive, Merrion Square, Dublin 2, where a lunchtime series of talks 'Town Talks' took place. It then toured to Maynooth University and closed with a seminar at the library on the theme of the arts and community engagement. The finale to take place at Laois Arthouse in January 2019.

Summer Arts programme

A series of workshops in July included Circus Art, Print and Collage, Go Fly Your Kite, Art in our Environment and Pottery as well as projects in Mountmellick and Mountrath.

National Culture Night



Culture Night 2018 in Laois was a great success with 30 separate free events happening in the county on Friday 22nd September with Circus Street Theatre performances, open studios, workshops, exhibitions, music, readings, song, dance, film, literary events, food displays and free guided tours.

Leaves Literature Festival

Leaves Festival of Writing and Music in November, delivered a rich and diverse programme with readings, discussions, music, spoken word performances, workshops and book launches. A highlight included a wonderful evening of conversation, music and readings with Helen Cullen, Brian Keenan, and Dermot Bolger and music by Seán Ryan and Kathleen Loughnane. Other highlights included an Irish event at the Laois Shopping centre, Gaeilge Tamagotchi a performance installation by Manchán Magan.



Other activities included

- Arts Act Grants Awards
- Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary
- Exhibitions
- Support of Festivals and community arts events

Laois Creative Ireland Programme

The Arts Office was delighted to deliver the following in 2018 funded by the Creative Ireland Programme.

- **Cruinniú na nÓg**
Took place on 23rd June as part of the Old Fort Festival in Portlaoise. It included a variety of free child-centered activities from circus skill performance and workshops to cup cake decorating, shield making as well as in tercultural dance, drama and music performances, storytelling, try-out an instrument, a drumming circle, dance performances as well as a rap workshop and performances.
- **The Bog Road** – a follow on from the 2017 project with Barry Keegan, the creator of the graphic novel, The Bog Road. A Laois launch was held in Áras an Chontae and a series of workshops held in Secondary Schools in No

member on the work.

- Spoken Word and music at the Dunamais Arts Centre during the Leaves Festival in November showcased work by Stephen James Smith and some of the young people he worked with during the programme.
- **Creative Ireland Grant Programme**
MGL Music Commission - A new commission for the Laois harp orchestra was premiered for National Harp Day on 20th October 2018.
WALKING Portlaoise- Film Project an independent film documentary produced in Portlaoise by Ann Marie Kelly was supported to bring it to the final stage of production. Saluting the Brave, a show produced by Emer Dunne, commemorating the unsung heroes of World War 1, in the form of music, song, drama and dance at Mountmellick Arts Centre.
Cua A Follow on from 2017 assistance to bring Cua’s show to rural communities in county Laois, was expanded to Scotland at the end of October
Free Market, Ireland at Venice 2018 funding to include Mountmellick into the global architecture showcase the Venice Architecture Biennale along with 9 other Irish towns in order to highlight the myriad of challenges facing smaller Irish towns.
100 Snow White Horses - following on from the 2017 programme with MGL and Laois Schools, the composition ‘100 Snow White Horses’ was recorded in Laois by singer John Spillane and included the senior harp ensemble.

The Creative Ireland Programme funded by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht will be delivered over 5 years 2018-2022.

Performance Indicators 2017

No of Arts Grants allocated	55
per 1,000 population	1936
No of Youth Theatre Groups`	3
Summer Art Workshps	11
Laois School of Music No of students	360
Music Generation Laois	3701

SPORT & LEISURE SECTION

The Sport and Leisure Section continued to deliver a successful series of events and activities during 2018. Highlights included;

Leisure and Play facilities

Both Portlaoise and Portarlington Leisure Centres continue to deliver excellent public leisure services in county Laois. Additionally, Portarlington Leisure Centre achieved the Ireland Active National Quality Standard Leisure Health and Fitness Award 2019. Laois County Council continues to manage twenty community play facilities which require a significant annual maintenance and a repair programme to maintain a high quality of service.

Bike Week

Funding of €5,500 was secured by Laois County Council from the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport to deliver the 2018 Bike Week Programme. This funding was used to co-ordinate 18 events with the assistance of community groups countywide. Bike Week is a national programme which encouraged people to use their bicycles for travel and leisure during 9th to 17th June. Events included Mountrath Bite-Cycle, Family Fun Cycles, 8 School Cycling Events and Workplace Cycles including Laois County Council Bikes 'n' Bites.

Children and Young People Activity Programme

Summer Brochure

The Sport and Leisure office produced its annual guide to summer activities for families and 10,000 copies were distributed throughout schools and public buildings in County Laois.

Parks Tennis

Laois County Council organised and delivered a very varied summer programme in 2018 throughout the county. Parks Tennis was delivered in Abbeyleix, Mountmellick, Portlaoise and Portarlington with 140 children participating in this programme.

National Play Day

Laois County Council delivered a free event in St. Fergal's College, Rathdowney. The main activity of the day was Rathdowney and Errill's Fun Fittest Family. This fun filled event challenged families to exercise team work, co-ordination and problem solving skills

amongst others. Funding towards National Play Day was provided by Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

National Recreation Week

National Recreation Week is a joint initiative between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and Local Authorities. National Recreation Week is aimed at young people aged 12 to 18 years. The overall purpose of the event in 2018 was to highlight the importance of recreation for young people and to encourage them to try an activity in the outdoors. Laois County Council's Leisure Section delivered a week long programme, that included a survivalist training day in Kyle Wood, Wolfhill, an adventure hike in the Slieve Blooms and Stand Up Paddle Boarding and kayaking on the River Nore in Castletown.

NGB Partnership

Laois County Council expanded its successful partnerships with the Football Association of Ireland, Ladies Gaelic Football Association, Leinster Rugby and Leinster GAA & Athletics Ireland to fund the delivery of a community sports programme that will meet the following aims;

- Increase participation in physical activity, build capacity and improve community cohesion with emphasis on populations in new communities/newer housing areas, disadvantaged populations/communities, areas with reduced access to participation in sporting activity.
- Ensure equality of gender participation in sport and physical activity.
- Encourage greater use of public sport and recreational facilities owned/managed by Laois County Council

One of the key programmes delivered was Games on the Green delivered in Ballylinan, Mountrath, Mountmellick, Abbeyleix, Rathdowney and Durrow. In total 292 children participated in the programme over 12 weeks.

Chess Development Programme

The Sport & Leisure Section and Library Service once again worked together to encourage children to take up chess and support the development of chess clubs in branch libraries. In November, the second annual Laois County Council Junior Chess Tournament was

held in Portlaoise College with 114 children participating. Cllr. Willie Aird presented the prizes to the winning school, club and individual players.

Special Projects 2018

Urban Outdoor Adventure Programme



Laois Sport & Leisure Section commenced delivery of the Urban Outdoor Adventure Programme, an initiative funded from dormant accounts via Laois Sports Partnership. The objective of the programme is to increase access to outdoor adventure activities for young people in urban areas. The programme was delivered in partnership with schools, youth groups, homework clubs and local service providers.

Paddles Up

Laois County Council received funding from Waterways Ireland to deliver a new Canoeing programme "Paddles Up" in partnership with SVT Kayak/Canoe Club. 30 participants took part in a 20 hour programme of instructing and Vicarstown hosted a regional finale event attended by over 100+ people.

Outdoor Recreational Infrastructural Scheme

Slí na Sláinte Development



With funding from the Sport & Leisure section three new Slí na Sláinte walking routes were launched. Slí

na Sláinte ("Path to Health") is a unique Health Promotion initiative of the Irish Heart Foundation designed to encourage people to walk for health and leisure by creating mapped measured walking routes in workplaces, communities and schools. The 3 routes which were opened in October and November 2018 were in Portlaoise, Portarlington and Mountmellick.

Active Community Hubs

The Sport and Leisure Section continues to work with Laois Sports Partnership and local communities to provide support for Stradbally/Vicarstown/Timahoe Hub and the new Rathdowney/Errill Hub. The aim of the active community hubs is to encourage and support local communities being more proactive in planning & delivering physical activity programmes at local level. The Sport & Leisure Section provided support & programmes during 2018 to SVT Community Sports Hub in their preparation for the All Ireland Pride of Place competition.

Healthy Ireland Projects 2018 Funding

Healthy Ireland provided funding for the following projects in 2018;

- Enhancement of Physical Activity and Recreational Provision, Peoples Park Portarlington Funding leading to the Green Flag Award in July 2018.
- Delivery of Park Activity Programmes in 3 parks; Portarlington, Portlaoise and Mountrath
- Installation of hoist to increase accessibility to the swimming pool at Portarlington Leisure Centre.

Support of Clubs/Community Groups

During 2018 the Sport & Leisure Office continued to work with clubs, schools and community groups to apply for and draw down funding to develop their facilities including;

- Sports Capital Grant Scheme
- Town and Village Renewal Scheme
- Outdoor Rural Recreation Infrastructure Scheme.

LIBRARIES

The Library service continues to play a pivotal role for all communities in county Laois. They offer an efficient frontline service for all members providing them with access to books, media, online services and internet/wifi. In 2018 our libraries had over 10,000 members, while the number of visits for the year was recorded at over 239,000. The continued investment in adult and juvenile stock has resulted in the issue of approximately 225,000 items including books, audio-books, periodicals, DVDs and local history material.

Library Services

The libraries work with many groups within their communities and offer varied events and an exhibitions programme. In 2018, there were 1,894 events hosted across the county with over 19,200 people in attendance. Highlights include author visits, knitting groups, ciorcal comhrá and book clubs, while the art galleries in both Mountmellick and Abbeyleix remain very popular venues for hosting art, cultural and educational exhibitions.

The public libraries offer more than just books and have wide ranging services in all branches. These include audio books, DVDS, music, online resources, daily newspapers and magazines, free events and clubs, printing, photocopying, scanning facilities, free WIFI for members and broadband internet services at very reasonable rates. Modern libraries offer a rich cultural and educational environment that provides a space and access for those wishing to enrich their day to day lives.

Summer Reading Challenge

Laois County Library Service organised a summer reading challenge and in 2018 participated in the national Summer Reading Programme supported by the LGMA Libraries Development Unit. This initiative was funded by Laois County Council. The event is for primary school children to promote literacy development and encourage non readers to engage with books. It has gone from strength to strength and 1194 children registered for the competition.

Service Development

The new national library strategy “Our Public Libraries 2022 Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities” was launched nationally in Dublin in June. It is a progressive strategy which aims to improve access, use and visibility of the library as a community hub, and develop the library as a focal point for com-

munity and cultural development. Following on from the launch of the national strategy, a new Library Services Plan for the county is currently in preparation to assist in the delivery of the objectives in the national strategy.

In keeping with the national strategy for libraries “Opportunities for all”, a number of initiatives were advanced in 2018, particularly the shared Library Management System, Sierra.

Under the strategy, free membership is available to all citizens in Laois and they are also able to avail of free e-books and e-resources via www.laois.ie

Library Headquarters and Local History

There are almost 4,000 volumes housed in this section consisting of books, journals, newspapers, photographs, maps, slides, microfiche and microfilm. This appeals to a wide range of visitors ranging from students to people researching their local area, Americans and Australians searching for their Laois roots, local historians and others availing of primary source material for future publications and works. Staff continue to improve and add extra content to the local history website www.askaboutireland.ie including narratives about Laois, the local customs and the folklore of the county. Further information can be found on the library webpage <http://www.laois.ie/departments/libraries/services/local-research/local-studies/>

Capital Development

Portlaoise Library

The design work has taken place during the year in preparation of tender documentation for the new county library at Portlaoise. It is hoped that construction could begin in Spring 2019, subject to final departmental approval. It was very heartening to receive news in October 2018 that the Department of Rural and Community Development had announced an additional €1.35m in funding for the library, bringing the total national funding for the project to €3million.

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

In 2018, Laois County Libraries held a large variety of events and activities in all Branch Libraries throughout the county. Children and Adults enjoyed the numerous events and activities organised by library staff. The Library Service has continued with a strong programme of activities for children, including Science week, computer classes, chess clubs, Lego workshops and storytelling sessions. A series of Lego animation classes were held in the Abbeyleix and Durrow libraries during

the year and the children were assisted to produce a series of animated videos where the children wrote the stories, produced the scene sets in Lego, created animated videos using technology and provided the voiceovers to the video characters. The completed films were screened to a public audience in the Dunamais theatre on Saturday October 13th.

The highlights of the year include Bealtaine, Seachtain na Gaeilge, Heritage Week, Summer Reading Challenge and Children's Book Festival.

Creative Ireland

Creative Ireland has strengthened the county library programme to date by supporting children's activities and promoting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) events in libraries. These include planned workshops for Science Week and monthly events that promote numeracy and learning skills such as computer classes, chess clubs and Lego workshops. Free cultural events have been held in all Laois libraries throughout 2018. These comprised of art and craft classes, author visits and plays.

Mountrath Library

Mountrath Library had another very successful summer programme hosting a wide variety of events. Children attended O.W.L.S. Harry Potter Potions Class, Story time 'Under the Bed Monsters' with Gary Ward and 'Gringer the Whinger' with Jane Landy. They participated in themed art and crafts sessions and also enjoyed a Circus Treasure Hunt. The sessions were fully booked and feedback for all was extremely positive. Heritage week was a huge success with great attendance at Irish History Live 'Women in Irish History' and a Straw Craft workshop for children. Mountrath Historical Society had a Heritage Week Display in the library.

Children's Book Festival brought much excitement to the library and highlights included a visit by author Helena Duggan. At Halloween and Christmas children's activities included: Storytime and Crafts and an 'I Love Animal Series' book display. During the year classes from Scoil Bhríde N.S., St. Fintan's Boys, Castletown N.S., all came to the library as did LCA Students from Mountrath Community School. Adult groups continue to meet regularly at the library. The Knitting Group met every Friday morning from 10.30-1pm, the Adult Book club met 1st Thursday of the month) at 6.15pm; the Local Historical Group met (2nd Thursday of the month) at 6.15pm and Ciorcail Comhra (Irish Conversation Group) met (3rd Thursday of the month) at 6.15pm.

Abbeyleix Library

Abbeyleix Library continues to hold weekly chess classes for children and monthly Art classes. The Art Gallery, with its impressive road frontage, continues to be a premier location in the county for art exhibitions. The Adult Knitting club is still a huge success while the Children's Chess Club has gone from strength to strength. The Lego Club established in 2016 has grown in popularity and also held a competition this year with a Lego Building Competition. Over 150 competitors took part with many different entries and there was a massive turn out on the day. A radio interview on Midlands Radio about the various Lego projects also took place. The Abbeyleix Lego Classes have become very successful, with libraries in other counties using the template for classes competitions and animated content online.

Once again, summer in the library was a hive of activity as record breaking numbers of children signed up for the 'Summer Reading Challenge'. Building on its success from previous years, the library played host to a 'Mario Makers Club' during the summer months which continues to be a huge hit with children throughout the County. Author Helena Duggan visited the library during Children's Book Festival and European Storytelling with Simone Schuemmelfeder. All of this activity, coupled with regular class visits from local schools and 2nd level students availing of study facilities, ensures that Abbeyleix Library remains an integral part of the community.

Portlaoise Library

Portlaoise Library continues to be an important hub in a growing community providing a full schedule of clubs and events along with book and media loans, study space and busy IT facilities. The Classic Film Club continues to grow in popularity. A Baby Book Club was started in Portlaoise in 2018 and this monthly club averages around 50 participants. Both the Summer Reading Challenge and Children's Book Festival brought huge excitement to the library with visits from authors such as Jane Landy and Gerry Hanberry, discussing their books and writing style with visiting children. Numerous art and crafts sessions, book clubs and mindfulness colouring events took place for adults and children alike throughout the year. The monthly Genealogy Club is going from strength to strength. Other miscellaneous events of interest in 2018 were the Harpettes Music Generation performance in December, Healthy Eating at Christmas Talk with Caitriona Bolger, a Parenting Seminar with Eddie Murphy of Operation Transformation fame, European Consumer Rights Talk, Science Week Poetry and

Ecology Talk, Essay Writing Tutorials, the Brownies Group visit in June, a History Lecture on the Revolutionary Women of Laois, Gardening Tips Talk, David Delaney Poetry Day Reading in April, the Oíche Gaelach for Seachtaine na Gaeilge and a CAO talk with Karl Hegarty in January. The visit of the Lithuanian Ambassador to the library in February was another noteworthy occasion.

Mountmellick Library

Mountmellick library had another exciting year with a large number of events taking place for both adult and children alike. Popularity of ongoing events continues to grow especially the Book clubs, Adult Colouring Groups, Crafty Angels Crocheters, Art Gallery launches, Storytime and Quick crafts for Kids. In 2018 Mountmellick introduced weekly Baby Bookclub meetings which are proving extremely popular.

August was an extremely busy month with numerous events being held in conjunction with Creative Ireland and Heritage Week. Events included a Dogs Trust Workshop Visit, Mountmellick Heritage Society Exhibition Opening, a Mountmellick Heritage Society Children's event on Measuring Systems, a Tom Joyce Talk on Glenbarrow, a Genealogy Clinic and Dale Threadwell Wildlife Drawing session for children. Once again, the Summer Reading Challenge proved to be a great success this year as was Children's Book Festival. During the festival Laois Connects held a Public Speaking Competition for TY students. The event attracted an audience of over 130 people. A Well Being and Self Care Talk for parents was also held in October. Finally, 2018 finished up with a visit from Santa Claus, Christmas Crafts and storytelling.

Portarlington Library

2018 was a busy year for Portarlington Library as it cemented its position in the heart of the community. Regular events such as the Knitting Club, Adult Colouring and the Classics Book Club have continued with ever increasing success. The library hosted a Healthy Ireland Event, a talk on Nutrition and Fitness by Dr. Diane Cooper in January. In February a Healthy Ireland event Yoga for Kids took place. Other Healthy Ireland Talks included a Biodiversity Talk for Coláiste Isogáin with Ricky Whelan as part of the school's Green Flag Scheme, Creative Dance Movement for Kids and a 'Power of Positive Parenting' talk. The summer months were also action-packed with a vast array of events taking place for both children and adults alike. Computer Classes, Art Classes and Heritage talks were greatly attended and the Summer Reading Challenge proved to be a massive success

with 130 children awarded medals for completion. People also flocked to the library during Heritage week for Irish History Live with Michael Moylan, Naturally Wild with Dale Threadwell and the Lea Castle Heritage talk. Library staff member, Thomas Scott, held an Essay Writing Workshop in November. In September the library hosted a Puppet Show with Julie McCormick and a Graphic Novel Illustration Workshop for teens with Barry Keegan (author of 'The Bog Road'). The year ended just as hecticly as it started with Christmas crafts, wreath making and storytelling sessions topping off December.

EU Direct Centre in Portlaoise Library

Portlaoise Library is now one of 8 EU Direct (EDIC) Information Centers in the Country. The information Centre which is based in the public area of the library acts as a one stop shop for people who want information about the EU, such as policies, information or citizens rights. The centre also hosts EU events and related activities. In 2018 the centre held many EU themed events and talks in Portlaoise library promoting the centre and Europe.

WIFI

WIFI is available in Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Abbeyleix, Portarlington and Rathdowney Libraries.

BOOKFUND

The Bookfund for 2018 was €85,000

Performance Indicators 2017

Library Visits

No. of library visits per head of population	3.54
No. of items issued to borrowers in the year	189,854

Cost per Capita 25.48

HERITAGE

The Heritage Section continued to deliver a successful series of projects, events and activities on the heritage of Laois in 2018. Highlights included:

Historic Portlaoise Projects

The conservation of the historic heart of Portlaoise continued in 2018, with Portlaoise selected as one of just five towns in Ireland to participate in the Historic Towns Initiative. Funding was allocated for works to conserve the wall of the 16th century Fort Protector, to improve the public realm at Fitzmaurice Place through improvement of landscaping and paving and removal of street clutter. Work also continued at Old St Peter’s Graveyard with a full laser measured survey of the site to allow for precise planning of conservation works to the grave markers, walls and bell tower. During the year in co-operation with Laois Heritage Society, a Heritage Interpretation Plan for historic Portlaoise was commissioned and will be published with the Conservation Plan for the Fort in 2019. The Historic Towns Initiative was funded by the Heritage Council and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

These works will be continued in 2019, under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund.

Mapping Laois Book

Following extensive research across Ireland and the UK over three years, the book on the historic maps of Laois “Mapping Laois in the 16th to the 21st Century” by Arnold Horner. The project was managed by Laois County Council and funded by the Heritage Council. The book is now available in all local bookshops and online from the publisher Wordwell.



Action for Swifts in Laois

The Heritage Office worked closely with Bird Watch Ireland in 2018 to complete a full survey of swifts in

Laois. These increasingly rare birds are mostly found in urban areas where they nest in the eaves of houses and buildings. As buildings are renovated, many traditional nest sites are being lost. Now that we have a full picture of which areas are important for swifts, a programme of nest box installation will commence in 2019. An important aspect of swift conservation is also outreach and education and to this end a booklet on how to look after our swifts was published in 2018, with funding from the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

Commemorations



Our programme of commemorating important events and people from Laois continued in 2018, with the commemoration of the first East West Transatlantic flight in 1928 and the involvement of Portlaoise man Col. James Fitzmaurice in same. The 90th anniversary was marked in Portlaoise and in Bremen, with a delegation from Laois visiting the German city in April. Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council Cllr. Pdraig Fleming was a guest at these commemorations, speaking about Fitzmaurice and Portlaoise. A return visit was paid by the German delegation in October, when an exhibition on Fitzmaurice and the flight was curated by artist Brendon Deacy and hosted at the Dunamais Arts Centre.

The end of World War I was also commemorated throughout Laois in 2018, with ceremonies held on Remembrance Sunday in Portlaoise, Mountrath and Mountmellick, addressed by Cathaoirleach John King MCC.

Timahoe Conservation Plan



A conservation Plan for the early Christian monastic site at Timahoe was published in association with the local community in 2019. This plan contains actions to conserve and promote the site and will be implemented from 2019.

Ballyroan Schoolhouse

Stage II of the project commenced in 2017 to conserve Ballyroan Schoolhouse and was completed in 2018 in partnership with Ballyroan Development Association. The old one-room schoolhouse was conserved in 2017 and in 2018 a small extension was added to allow the installation of toilets, heating and a new fully-accessible entrance to the building. This was funded through the Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

Killabban Church

Conservation of the medieval church at Killabban in South Laois continued in 2018 and the Chancel Arch, the east gable and part of the South wall were secured. The project was supported by the Heritage Council and the Municipal District and will continue in 2019.

Heritage Awareness

A project to promote the heritage sites of Laois to visitors and residents alike was published in 2018 in association with Laois Offaly Education and Training Board. The "Passport to Laois" is a booklet with information on seven Laois heritage sites. Visitors can get their passport stamped at each of the sites and receive a certificate when the passport is completed. The booklet has been distributed through Scoil Bhríde Portlaoise and other local schools, as well as Portlaoise Tourist Office and the Laois Education Centre and at the sites themselves.

In addition to the programme of commemoration, her-

itage awareness events and projects in 2018 included:

- A workshop for teachers and home-school groups in Laois and Offaly, to promote the Heritage in Schools Scheme. All the Laois-based Heritage experts on his scheme for primary schools presented on their activities to the educators.
- A week-long programme of over 70 family events, guided walks, talks, slideshows and fun days was organised for national Heritage Week in August;
- The Heritage Office assisted with the development of the Laois Heritage Society Schools Heritage Project, a competition for primary and secondary schools, organised in association with the Laois Education Centre;
- Science Week in November was very successful with a range of events and public talks. School and Library workshops were held, supported by Discover Science and Engineering and the Heritage Council, and delivered as part of the Midlands Science Festival.
- Support was provided for the publication of the Laois Heritage Society Journal.
- Laois Heritage Office was runner up in the National Heritage Week Awards in the "Cool for Kids" category, for our Pollinator Party in Portlaoise Park in 2017.



Transportation, Environment & Emergency Services Strategic Policy Committee

Directors of Services: Donal Brennan
Kieran Kehoe

Chairperson: Seamus McDonald, M.C.C.

Members	Sectoral
Ben Brennan, M.C.C.	John Judge, I.C.T.U. (Trade Union)
John King, M.C.C.	John Fitzpatrick, Farming
Noel Tuohy, M.C.C.	Chris Callaghan (Development/ Construction)
Pauline Madigan, M.C.C.	Kitty Creighton (Environment/ Conservation) Ger Mulhall (Business/ Commercial)

ROADS

Senior Engineer: Philip McVeigh, Roads

In 2018 the Roads Department received road grants and budget funding of €16.8m. This comprised funding from a number of sources including the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTaS), Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII, formerly National Roads Authority) and from Laois County Council’s own resources in revenue and capital funding to advance maintenance and capital projects throughout the county. This included funding of €257,799 in two tranches, by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTaS) for 10 Local Improvement Schemes and a Special Maintenance Grant of €956,000 for flooding repairs to flood damaged areas in the Western Area. An allocation of €300,000 was also allocated to 6 Community Involvement Schemes.

Roads Area staff supported by Roads Design carried out pavement strengthening and surface dressing of regional and local roads under the roads programme. 26.25 km of our road network was strengthened while 26.1 km of the network was surface dressed. This in total represented 2.3% of the road network in the County.

Road Design Office



Safety Improvement Schemes

Safety Improvement Schemes were progressed at seven sites across the county: Alley Cross, Golf links Road Rathdowney, R426 Bends at Glenfield, Portlaoise, R425 Capoley Bends, Kilmullen and Trumera Crossroads. Funding of €155k was provided by the DTTaS for these schemes. Works varied across the sites but included enhancements to signage and line markings as well as pavement works together with installation of bollards, public lighting, and junction improvement works.

In addition Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) HD15 Safety schemes were carried out at 2 sites located on the N80 at Irishtown and Clonaghadoo to a value of €500,000. Works carried out across the sites included junction improvement works, drainage improvement works and construction of a new roundabout, pedestrian crossings, footpaths and upgrade of signage and public lighting.

Pavement Surfacing



Road Design and Kildare National Roads Office progressed surfacing works for 1km of the N77 in Durrow under the PARR scheme funded by TII.

National Secondary resurfacing schemes to specifically enhance the skidding resistance of the road

pavement were also carried out in 2018. Nine sites (HD28 sites) on the N80, N78 and N77 had skid resistance improvement works carried out through mechanical abrasion. The total length of road treated was 3.25km. A further seven sites were resurfaced on the N80 and N77 to improve skid resistance. Funding was provided by TII and the total length of road resurfaced was approximately 3km.

Capital Maintenance Schemes on National Roads



This allocation provided an opportunity for Roads Design to target areas of pavement defects that in recent years have been too costly to undertake given the very limited maintenance budgets but were below the typical threshold for the pavement capital programme. Funding was provided by TII and the total length of road resurfaced was approximately 6km carried out at ten locations on the N80, N78 and N77 at a cost of €1.1m as follows:

- N77 Abbeyleix
- N77 Colt
- N80 Ballyadams – commencing in April
- N78 Glosna
- N80 Graiguecullen
- N80 Kyletalesha
- N80 Laught or Commons
- N80 Mountmellick
- N80 Oughaval - commencing in April
- N80 Kyleclonhobert

Roads Signage

The Road Design Office progressed with the installation of new speed detection signs with variable message displays at 4 locations indicating motorists' speeds within 60km/hr and 50km/hr zones. These have proved to be very effective in alerting motorists to their speed and encouraging them to slow down.

Road Safety Inspections



Road Safety inspections are actions undertaken to improve the safety of the existing national road network. €535,000 of funding was provided by TII for such schemes. Road Design carried out works such as undergrounding of overhead cables, new pedestrian crossing and associated public lighting, installation of new public lighting, upgrades to existing public lighting, upgrades to existing pedestrian crossings at the following locations:

- N80 Chapel Street, Mountmellick/Tullamore Road
- Vicarstown Rd/N80 junction in Stradbally
- N80 Kyletalesha
- N80 in Portlaoise at the Stradbally Road Roundabout
- N77 Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise
- N80/Bay Road, Mountmellick

CLÁR Schemes

The CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) is a targeted investment programme which provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in rural areas that have suffered the greatest levels of population decline. The aim of CLÁR is to support the sustainable development of identified CLÁR areas by attracting people to live and work there. The funding works in conjunction with local funding and on the basis of locally identified priorities. Road Design received an allocation of €551,472.10 and carried out works such as pedestrian crossings and associated public lighting, digital speed safety signs, road markings, upgrade existing lighting to LED lighting, provision of multi-use all inclusive safe games areas, provision of all weather playing surface with associated fencing, provision of new car parking and footpaths, provision of flashing amber lights on approach to schools, at the following locations:

- Tobair an Leinn (Raheen National school)
- Errill National School

- Paddock National school
- Scoil Mhuire Mhuigheo National School
- Wolfhill National school
- Ballyadams National School
- Killadooley National school
- Camross
- Gaelscoil an TSlí Léinn (Ballaghmore N.S.)
- Ballyadams
- Clough
- Knock National school
- Trumera National school
- Scoil Mhuire Mhuigheo National school (Mayo) – yet to commence, subject to agreement with local community.
- Scoil Naomh Abban (Newtown)

Public Lighting

Public lighting upgrades to LED lanterns were carried out on 75 lights in Mountmellick on the N80. These upgrades were funded by TII at a cost of approximately €72,500. Maintenance works also continued on the stock of over 8,800 public lights across the county.

Winter Maintenance

Call-out operations were carried out on 102 occasions during the 2017/2018 winter season treating 468km of the salted network in Laois.

Portlaoise Southern Circular Route Extension

Tender documents were completed by Road Design's Consulting Engineers and were submitted to the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport in December 2017, for approval to proceed to tender. The Prior Information Notice (PIN) was published in the Supplement to the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) on 10th November 2017.

Tender requests for the scheme was published on eTenders on 16th March 2018 with a closing date of 26th April 2018. After the assessment of the tender submissions, the lowest compliant tenderer was selected and approval to proceed to appointment was requested from the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport on 31st May 2018. Approval was granted and the letter of intent was issued to the preferred Contractor, Total Highway Maintenance Ltd on 11th June 2018. The letter of acceptance was issued to THM Ltd on 29th of June and the Contract for the works formally signed on 20th July 2018. THM commenced works on site on 31st July 2018 working at the Timahoe Road Roundabout under a road closure.

Through the Autumn and Winter works have progressed well on the main section of works through the green field section of the site between Abbeyleix Road and the Timahoe Road. Works completed to date include, bulk excavation, drainage, ducting, placement of the capping layer for the road and construction of boundary walls.

Upcoming works in early 2019 will include kerbing, construction of the footpaths, erection of street lights as well as the works on the Abbeyleix Road Roundabout (N77). Surfacing works, fencing, erection of signs, roadmarking and completion of the tie-ins will take place into the Summer of 2019 with expected completion in Q3 of 2019.



N80 Maidenhead Realignment Scheme

Kildare National Roads Office issued a copy of the contract documents to Linesight and Stavelys for review Q1 of 2018 where several issues were identified in relation to quantities and drainage. KNRO amended the RPS documents to take account of these issues identified during the summary review of the documents requested by TII.

Approval to publish the documents on eTenders was sought by KNRO in August 2018 and the documents were published on eTenders on the 14th of September 2018 with a close of Tender Date set for 22nd of October 2018. Approval was also sought for the procurement of site supervision services for the main works contract. This procurement is currently in progress.

An advance works contract for the drilling of 3 boreholes and the insulation and monitoring of the ground water at these locations was completed between March and April 2018. The drilling works were carried out by Doran Ground Engineering Limited and the monitoring and reporting which is ongoing is being

carried out by Aqua GeoServices.

The Stage (i to iv) Archaeological Services Contract for the N80 Maidenhead Realignment Scheme was awarded in February 2018 to Irish Archaeological Services. Stages (i to iii) were carried out on site between March 2018 and September 2018 and the Stage (iv) Services are to be completed within the next year. The stage (i to iii) Services on site included test trenching, coring, test pitting and the test excavation of the main site at Maidenhead.

To date 11 of the 14 landowners affected by the scheme have had their claims settled and the remaining 3 outstanding compensation claims are currently being negotiated.

The main works contract is expected to be awarded in Q2 of 2019 and to be completed by Q4 of 2020. TII announced in December 2018 their allocations for 2019 which included an allocation of €3,500,000 for the N80 Maidenhead Realignment Scheme.

Graigucullen-Portarlinton Municipal District ('Eastern Area')

In the Eastern Area, there was a total road surfacing length of 8.2km completed by Restoration Improvements Works (Strengthening).

There was also a total road surfacing length of 8.5km completed by Restoration Maintenance Works (Surface Dressing).

Bridge rehabilitation/repair works were carried out on several bridges, most notably Mayo Bridge. General masonry repairs and river bank reinstatement Works were carried out on Killeen Bridge,



Safety Improvement Works were completed at Alleys Crossroads on the R419. These works included verge realignment, installation of post and rail fencing and accommodation works.

Under the 'Community involvement Scheme' new car parking facilities were provided to the Arles and Moyanna cemeteries. This project involved installation of a new footway from the N80 into the car park, new kerb lines, surfacing works, bottle bank facilities, line markings and associated drainage and accommodation works.

Under the 'Towns & Villages Renewal Scheme' new car parking facilities were provided at Ratheniska School. This project involved the removal of an existing hedgerow and installation of a new footway and parking facilities and associated drainage and accommodation works.

Also under the 'Towns & Villages Renewal Scheme' a new pedestrian crossing was installed on the R428 in Stradbally to provide safe access to pedestrians coming from Cill Beg housing estate. Line markings are not yet completed due to weather conditions.

Significant Barrow Drainage works were completed in 2018, including vegetation and silt removal for approximately 6 kilometres on both the Douglas and Barrow Rivers.

Footpath works were completed in Stradbally and Portarlinton. On Main Street, Stradbally approximately 220m of concrete footway was reconstructed and 75m of macadam footway works were completed.

Under the Local Improvement Schemes, 9 schemes were completed.

Borris-in-Ossory/Mountmellick Municipal District ('Western Area')

In the Western Area, a total road surfacing length of 12km was completed by Restoration Improvements Works (Strengthening).

A total road surfacing length of 12.2km was completed by Restoration Maintenance Works (Surface Dressing).

Significant bridge rehabilitation works were completed at Canon Delaney Bridge, Mountrath. A new floor was constructed in the centre arch and repairs and cleaning were carried out to the other two arches. The external walls of the main arch were underpinned. The bridge was repaired with lime mortar pointing on both sides of the bridge.



Footpath Programme

Footpath improvements were completed in Mountrath, Durrow, Rathdowney, Mountmellick and Clonaslee.

Bridge Rehabilitation Works

In addition to Cannon Delaney Bridge, repairs were also carried out on several other bridges in the Area including Clontyglass Bridge and Rosconnell Bridge using traditional techniques.

Safety Improvement Works

Road safety improvement works were carried out at Trumera Cross and Golf Links Road, Rathdowney.

Towns and Villages Renewal Scheme

Under the Towns and Villages Renewal Scheme, improvements were carried out in Donaghmore Village and in Errill. These works provided improved safety and also enhanced the area.



Clár Schemes

A new set down area and car park was provided adjacent to Paddock N.S. to eliminate on-road parking

and traffic movements.

Portlaoise Municipal District ('Central Area')

In the Central Area, a total road surfacing length of 6.1km was completed by Restoration Improvements Works (Strengthening).

A total road surfacing length of 5.4km was completed by Restoration Maintenance Works (Surface Dressing).

Town Renewal Portlaoise

In conjunction with the vision statement for Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy/Vision Statement, Laois County Council established the structures and mechanisms outlined in the "Framework for Town Centre Renewal" published by the Retail Consultation Forum.

The "Town Team", a group that is representative of all stakeholders in the town, has now completed its first year of activity.

The Town Team has drafted a Town Centre Plan which sets out seven key objectives for development of Portlaoise town. The Plan clearly expresses the vision for the town, the actions required, and who is responsible for each action.

Work to carry out the actions will commence in early 2019.

River Nore – Removal of vegetation, deadwood and debris

In its examination of the River Nore channel in South Laois, the Portlaoise Municipal District Office concluded that deadwood/debris within the watercourse and overhanging trees on the river banks are contributing to upstream flooding. The Portlaoise Municipal District Office, in conjunction with the South Laois Drainage Group, applied for and obtained funding from the Office of Public Works (OPW) in 2017 to carry out works on the River Nore in South Laois.

Further remediation works were carried out in 2018, with Laois County Council also securing additional funding in 2018 under this scheme.

Footpath Programme

Over €130k of footpath works were carried in the towns of Portlaoise, Abbeyleix and Ballyroan in 2018.

Portlaoise Town Planting

The Portlaoise Municipal District maintains containers and beds at over 100 locations around Portlaoise Town. These locations are planted with winter bedding in November and with summer bedding in May each year. The Portlaoise Municipal District Office also works closely with Portlaoise Tidy Towns with the planting and maintenance of over 120 hanging baskets in the Main Street and Lyster Square in the town. The hanging baskets are on display from June to October each year.

Community Involvement Schemes

Road surfacing, footpaths and drainage works were carried out in Ballymacken and Parnell Crescent in 2018.

Local Improvement Schemes

Road surfacing works were carried out in Bondra, Derrykearn and Ballyclider in 2018.

Road Safety Schemes

Works to enhance road safety were carried out under a range of funding schemes. The locations for these works included Raheen National School (CLÁR Funding Scheme), Capoley (DTTAS Funding) and Glenfield (DTTAS Funding).

Towns & Villages Renewal Scheme

A new raised pedestrian crossing was installed on lower Main Street in Ballyroan. This controlled crossing greatly enhanced the connectivity between the residential area on the Abbeyleix Road and the local Primary School.

Traffic Calming

€15k of traffic calming works were carried out in the town of Portlaoise in 2018. The majority of these works related to the installation of traffic calming ramps in residential areas around the town.

Other works

The Portlaoise Municipal District Road Office also carry out other tasks on an annual basis such as;

- Maintenance and development of Pairc an Phobail and the Triogue Linear Park
- Street cleaning and litter collection
- Renewal of road markings
- Drainage maintenance, cleaning and repairs

- Verge trimming at junctions on regional roads
- Control of invasive plant species in public areas
- Grass Cutting and weed control in Portlaoise town centre
- Tree Surgery works in public areas
- Road surface repairs
- General maintenance of infrastructure such as railings and barriers.

The Portlaoise Municipal District Road Office also work with groups such as Tidy Towns, Downtown Traders, Farmers Market, Christmas Market and Christmas Lights Committees.

Road Safety

Cycle training continues throughout the county in primary schools, under the Cycle Right Program. This program provides on road training for pupils. In 2018, 60 additional secondary school pupils participated in the Drive for Life Program, which delivers a road safety and awareness program.

A National Bike Week workshop took place with children from a local After School Project. This event was run in partnership with Knockmay After School Project, Laois Sports Partnership and Laois Partnership.

The Road Safety Officer continues to visit primary schools to promote road safety education regarding general road safety issues with pupils and parents.

Site inspections took place at schools, following concerns raised by principals, teachers, parents and members of the public.

Hi-visibility vests, arm bands, stickers and school bag danglers were distributed to children during school visits and to various organisations during the year including cycle clubs, playschools, scouts and girl guides.

Performance Indicators 2017

PCSI Rating

Ratings in pavement surface condition Index (PCSI)

Road Class	1-4	5-6	7-8	9-10
Regional	10%	28%	32%	28%
Local Primary	14%	32%	28%	10%
Local Secondary	13%	32%	26%	7%
Local Tertiary	14%	19%	16%	12%

Regional Road Grants Works

Regional Road Strengthened using Road Improvement Grants 3.7km

Road improvement grant amount spent on Regional Roads Strengthening €870,340

Regional Road resealed using Road Maintenance Grants 9.6km

Road Maintenance Grant amount spent on Regional Roads (Resealing) €589,612

Local Road Grants Works

Local Road Strengthened using Road Improvement Grants 17.3km

Road improvement grant amount spent on Local Roads Strengthening €1,964,569

Local Road resealed using Road Maintenance Grants 10.6km

Road Maintenance Grant amount spent on Local Roads (Resealing) €342,579

ENVIRONMENT

Director: Donal Brennan

Senior Engineer: Michael O’Hora

Litter Management

Laois County Council issued 119 litter fines in 2018 and commenced legal proceedings on a number of cases for non-payment of the fine.

Clean up Laois Week

Our largest and longest running annual anti litter initiative, Clean Up Laois week was held in April 2018 in association with our sponsor, AES.

Clean up Laois Week, run in conjunction with An Taisce’s – National Spring Clean, represents a partnership approach to tackling the ongoing litter problem. It plays a vital role in improving the quality of life by empowering people to take responsibility for and have pride in, their local areas. Approximately 150 groups registered last year and in excess of 900 volunteers took part in the initiative, which resulted in a total of 49.08 tonnes of waste being collected.

During the year the Council also appointed a contractor to clean up a number of major litter/waste black spots around the county, including bog areas and approximately 162 tonnes of waste was disposed of.

Anti-dumping initiative 2018

A number of projects were completed under the Anti-Dumping Initiative funded by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA) to support illegal dumping clean ups, complete awareness and education programmes and assist enforcement. The five projects included Forrest Lower Bogland, the three bogs of Errill, a dashboard dining initiative, clean up of drug related waste at Bellgrove and improvement works in Portarlinton at the Bottle Banks. In addition to clean ups the initiatives included the installation of CCTV cameras, school visits to Irish Peatland Conservation Council, a mobile billboard deterring the use of unauthorised waste collectors, environmental awareness campaigns on radio, promotion of reusable beverage cups, landscaping to deter illegal dumping on verges and sharps and drug waste training.

Matress Amnesty

Laois County Council received €20,000 from the Department towards a Mattress Campaign, where members of the public could bring their old, dry mattresses to specified locations around the county to be recycled, free of charge. A total of 822 mattresses were collected during this period for recycling.

Community Grant Schemes

Under the Community Grant Scheme 2018, funding was awarded to 85 groups for projects to benefit the environment and enhance local amenities.

Environmental Awareness & Community Initiatives

Environment Awareness initiatives continued to be delivered throughout 2018 and saw new complementary partnerships developing with Dogs Trust and Tidy Towns groups on the topic of responsible dog ownership, as well as focusing on high profile waste prevention and reuse initiatives held throughout the year. Successful local campaigns included the hosting of a household hazardous waste collection in Rathdowney as well as 4 mobile collection points for mattresses recycling in Portlaoise, Portarlington, Graiguecullen and Rathdowney.

Additional supports (e.g. grants, workshops as well as training and networking events) were offered throughout the year to schools and other community groups, including Tidy Towns. Such supports complement national awareness initiatives and are tailored for a local delivery.

Waste Enforcement

The Waste Enforcement Section is committed to maintaining and improving the high quality environment it has provided for the people of County Laois through the enforcement of Waste Legislation and Regulation. This Section has had a successful year in resolving waste complaints and working closely with colleagues in the Planning Enforcement Section. In 2018, 133 waste related complaints were successfully dealt with.

The Waste Enforcement Section is responsible for reviewing and issuing new Waste Facility Permits and Certificate of Registrations. In 2018, 14 Waste Facility Permit and Certificates of Registration were registered in County Laois.

Waste Enforcement worked with the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authority (WERLA) in tackling

national waste enforcement priorities in 2018 and will be focusing on national waste enforcement priorities for 2019 as directed by Eastern and Midlands Region WERLA. The 2019 National Priorities include:

- Tackling illegal waste activities (illegal dumping and unauthorised movements of waste)
- Construction & Demolition Waste Activities
- Continued Brown Bin roll-out
- Dealing with sites containing illegally deposited waste.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Environmental Protection staff are involved in the implementation of legislation and policy regarding river water and groundwater quality, air quality and noise pollution as they apply in County Laois.

Water Quality

Laois County Council continued in 2018 to implement the national 'River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021'. This plan aims to improve water quality over the period 2018-2021, with a focus on 726 specific water bodies in 190 prioritised Areas for Action. The Council collected 415 river water samples for the EPA Surveillance and Operational monitoring programmes and took 129 investigative river water samples in 2018.

47 Nutrient Management Plans concerning the spreading of Sewage Sludge in the county were submitted to the Council for approval in 2018.

The Council continued to monitor discharge licences to rivers and groundwaters in 2018 under Section 4 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts 1977 to 1990. A total of 50 samples were taken and analysed to ensure compliances with licences. Ten licences were operational in 2018.

The Council also inspected septic tanks in accordance with the EPA's National Inspection Plan 2018 – 2021: Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems. A total of 24 inspections were carried out in 2018, as required by the Plan. 11 Advisory Notices were issued in 2018, as a result of these inspections.

Laois County Council investigated all complaints received concerning water pollution in the County. 29 water complaints were received in 2018.

Air Quality

There was 1 active Air Emissions License in the county in 2018. 27 complaints were received and investigated in 2018 concerning air quality. The nature

of these complaints included agricultural odour problems and smoke nuisance. 1 notice under section 26 of the Air Pollution Act, 1987 was served in 2018. Eighty smoky coal inspections were carried out in 2018.

Noise Pollution

11 noise complaints were received in 2018. Some of these complaints were domestic in nature and in these cases the Council encourages neighbours to discuss the problem between themselves and to come to an agreed solution. Other complaints concerned commercial activities in the County.

Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

A draft Climate Change Adaptation Plan was prepared for Laois County Council in 2017 and is currently undergoing internal review. The plan seeks to improve the resilience of the Council in providing services in the face of future climate risk.

Midlands Energy Agency

Overview of Energy Usage in 2018

The main energy users in Laois County Council are public Lighting and buildings. The remainder of energy consumption relates to natural gas, oil and fuel for fleet vehicles.

The SEAI Annual Report 2018 on Public Sector Energy Efficiency Performance reports that Laois County Council made a 36.9% saving by the end of 2017 against their 33% target by 2020.

Actions Undertaken in 2018

- Continued to work with Carlow, Kilkenny Energy Agency as our Energy advisors to the Midlands Energy Program
- Participated in the Better Energy communities Programme 2018 in such projects as

(1) At Kyletalesha landfill offices

- Installation of 10 Glen Dimplex Q-Rad150 (1.5kW) with smart controls (timer & thermostat integrated) to replace old heaters to be timed for occupancy/heating as required and room maintained at set temperature

(11) At Abbeyleix Tennis Club

- Installation of 16 x 250W LED flood lights,

5000K, 5050 Philips LED chip, 460LUX

(111) At Portlaoise Leisure Centre

- Install 10m3 buffer tank & new controls to tie into the new BMS system
- Install new Controller upgrades, BMS interface upgrade, with new Cylon graphics for user-friendly interface. Review and upgrade of all controls strategies to optimise energy efficiency.
- Install plug fans to AHU & new controls. Tie back controls to the new BMS system
- Install meters on the SEU's & tie back all equipment to the new proposed BMS system:
 - AHUs (meters in place capable of providing pulse output)
 - Chiller
 - Pumps
 - CHP Electricity generate
 - CHP Gas
 - Boiler 1, virtual

(iv) At Portlarrington Leisure Centre

- Replace the existing boilers with 2 No. 250kw high efficiency (95%) condensing boilers that can modulate based on demand, in conjunction with the 2 No. existing twin coil 1000 lt. Calorifiers
- Install new Controller upgrades, BMS interface upgrade, with new Cylon graphics for user-friendly interface. Review and upgrade of all controls strategies to optimise energy efficiency.
- Install plug fans to AHU & new controls. Tie back controls to the new BMS system

These projects had a capital cost of €205,500 ex vat and were granted funding of €101,650

In 2018 Laois County Council replaced streetlights with 72 LEDs, which will contribute to a saving of 34,068 kWh

Laois County Council participated in the OPW Optimising Power at Work Programme at County Hall. Gas and Electricity Meters have been installed to monitor energy usage and ongoing energy awareness programme is running

Performance Indicators 2017

No. of households availing of a 3 bin service at 31/12/2017 6,862

% of households availing of a 3 bin service 23.66

Total No. of Pollution cases that were the subject of a complaint during 2017	817
Total No. of Pollution cases closed during 2017	793
Total No. of Pollution cases on hand at 31/12/2017	24

% Local Authority Area within the 5 Levels of Litter Pollution

% area unpolluted or litter free	11
% area slightly polluted	84
% area moderately polluted	5
% area significantly polluted	0
% area grossly polluted	0

WATER SERVICES

Senior Engineer: Michael O’Hora, Water Services

Capital Investment Programme

Irish Water continues to fund all Water Services Capital Projects.

Networks

The framework contractor for Network Improvements and Water Conservation completed water network upgrade works in Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountrath, Castletown, Luggacurren and Ballylinan. Extensive First Fix, Find and Fix, Lead replacement and DMA validation works continue throughout the county. The Netbase (leakage management system) was launched in November with Laois as one of the early adopters.

Programs

Design, procurement and land acquisition underway, to bring into production additional borewells in Portlaoise (Coolbanagher) and Durrow (Fermoyle). Plant upgrades completed at Kilminchy WTP, Mountmellick WwTP, Castletown WwTP and Ballinakill WwTP. Design is on-going on the Laois Disinfection Program, Ballyroan WwTP upgrade, NCAP WwTP upgrades, Bobs Bar pump station decommission, Treated Water Storage upgrades, Lead mitigation works, Water

Source Classification and Protection works. Investigative works continue with Portlaoise Drainage Area Plan and Countywide Sewer Rehabilitation programme.

Irish Water New Connection and Developer Services

Irish Water introduced an online connection application service in 2018 for all water and wastewater connection. www.water.ie/connections. Eight contractors were appointed across the country to carry out connections on behalf of Irish Water. Coffey Northumbrian Ltd is the appointed contractor for the midlands region, including Laois.

Rural Water Multi Annual Programme 2016 - 2018

2018 was the final year of the Multi Annual Rural Water Programme 2016 -2018. Over that period Laois group schemes across the county received a total of €1,036,885 in grant aid. The total expenditure for 2018 was €346,703 and the following works were carried out:

- Heath GWS - Pumphouse and reservoir sites improvement, installation of loggers, installation of meters and upgrade to automatic meter reading system.
- Attanagh GWS - Installation of boundary boxes and chlorine standby tank.
- Moyadd 2 GWS – Pumphouse & UV system upgrade.
- Errill GWS – Upgrade of mains at Castlefleming Road and reservoir.
- Cullohill GWS – Nitrate plant site upgrade works.
- Barrowhouse GWS – Upgrade of chlorine system.
- Ballacolla GWS – Mains upgrade at Clough village and Four Roads.
- Ballypickas GWS – Upgrade of mains commenced.
- Derrynaseera GWS - Upgrade of mains commenced.

The following schemes were taken over by Irish Water in November 2018:

1. Ballyadams 1 GWS
2. Ballyadams 2 GWS
3. Monascreebhan GWS
4. Ballycarnan GWS

Ballacolla GWS celebrated 50 years service to the local community and now supplies water to over 550 houses, 185 farms, 3 primary schools and 4 community halls.

€364,667 was processed in respect of subsidies to Group Water Schemes.

€58,378 was paid to 31 applicants in respect of Well Grants.

Review of the Local Authorities Service Delivery for Rural Water

The Business Case was completed by the Project Team and was approved by the Public Service Oversight Review Group and forwarded to the Working Group on Rural Water established by the Minister for Housing Planning and Local Government. The preferred model for delivery of the service is a National Shared Service and is currently under review by the Working Group.

Dangerous Structures and Places

A Register of Dangerous Structures and Places is maintained in the Water Services Section. There are 14 open files on this Register at 31st December 2018.

Water Services Laboratory

Laois County Council’s Water Services Laboratory is an INAB accredited facility and continues to conduct testing and sampling of drinking water, wastewater and river water within County Laois and for Offaly County Council’s Private Drinking Water supplies in accordance with relevant legislation.

National Service Indicators 2017

Drinking water in private schemes in compliance with statutory requirements	97.38%
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LAOIS WATER SAFETY

WATER SAFETY AWARENESS

Laois County Council in conjunction with Laois Water Safety Area Committee delivered a number of key events to promote Water Safety Awareness in 2018. Schools and community group visits were conducted, whereby basic water safety awareness talks and ring buoy demonstrations were delivered.

Water Safety Classes

Laois Water Safety successfully delivered Spring and Autumn Water Safety Classes during 2018 at Portlaoise Leisure Centre. 130 adults & children participated in Irish Water Safety Classes throughout the year.

Paws Programme

Laois County Council in association with Laois Water Safety and Portlaoise Leisure Centre continued to successfully support and deliver the Primary Aquatic Water Safety Programme (PAWS). Primary schools were visited in County Laois during 2018.

Ring Buoys

During 2018 Laois County Council continued to inspect, maintain, erect and replace ring buoys at open water locations countywide.

LAOIS COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Chief Fire Officer: Declan Power

The Fire Service continued to provide a quality service in the areas of Fire Prevention, Fire Brigade Operations, Community Fire Safety Awareness and Major Emergency Planning.

Laois County Fire & Rescue Service attended 769 emergency incidents consisting of 486 fires, 254 special service incidents and 29 false alarms. Laois County Fire & Rescue Service was heavily involved with the responses to Storm Emma in March and the extensive forest and wild land fires in the summer.

To enhance equipment standards the programme for replacement and updating of equipment was continued in 2018. New breathing apparatus sets & cylinders, gas-tight chemical protective clothing, thermal imaging camera & specialist rescue equipment was provided.

An extensive program of training for operational fire fighters was completed involving over 480 person days.

To enhance Safety, Health and Welfare for fire crews the Standard Operational Guidelines program to implement a set of fire brigade operations continued in 2018. In addition, a Health, Safety & Welfare Management Programme was approved by Senior Management and was reviewed 32 times throughout the year.

54 fire safety certificate applications and 55 licensing applications were received, with 123 planning applications also referred to the fire service during the year. 41 premises were inspected.

Extensive planning and liaison was carried out with the organisers of the Electric Picnic Music Festival in Stradbally (approx 65,000 attended) to ensure the safety of all involved. An extensive programme of in-

spections was put in place for this music festival.

The Fire Safety Primary Schools Programme was carried throughout the county between October and December 2018. All eight fire stations were involved. 64 primary schools were visited and fire safety advice/information was received by 1833 students.

The program for National Fire Safety Week was held in October. All fire stations held open nights which included presentations on fire safety attended by the public and groups from the local communities, advertising in local newspapers and local radio, use of social media sites facebook and Twitter and leaflets.

Laois County Fire & Rescue Service took part in the 2018 National Extrication and Trauma Challenge held in Nenagh in April, winning in every category, including best trauma team and best extrication team.

All Major Emergency Management facilities were maintained and all relevant plans, sub-plans and procedures were updated throughout the year.

Performance Indicators 2017

Cost per capita of the Fire Service

Cost per Capita	€43.69
Average time taken in minutes to mobilise fire brigades in full-time stations in respect of fire	N/A
Average time taken in minutes to mobilise fire brigades in part-time stations (retained fire service) in respect of fire	5.42
Average time taken in minutes to mobilise fire brigades in full-time stations in respect of all other (non-fire) emergency incidents	N/A
Average time taken in minutes to mobilise fire brigades in part-time stations (retained fire service) in respect of all other (non-fire) emergency incidents	4.40

Percentage of attendances at scenes

% of cases in respect of fire in which first attendance at the scene is within 10 minutes	35.96%
% of cases in respect of fire in	

which first attendance at the scene is after 10 minutes but within 20 minutes	52.68%
% of cases in respect of fire in which first attendance at the scene is after 20 minutes	11.36%
% of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the scene is within 10 minutes	33.78%
% of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the scene is after 10 minutes but within 20 minutes	50.67%
% of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the scene is after 20 minutes	15.56%

Laois Civil Defence

Laois Civil Defence is a volunteer based organisation whose members are proud to serve as a high quality back-up service, supporting the primary response agencies and the local community

Volunteers are multi-skilled and the main programmes of activity undertaken by the organisation are:

- **First Aid**
Provision of first aid and ambulance service.
- **Rescue Skills**
Urban rescue, open country search for missing persons with Laois being one of the counties providing drones for aerial search
- **Fire-fighting**
Pumping floodwaters and supplying water to the community.
- **Radio Communications**
Operation of four independent radio systems U.H.F., V.H.F., Marine Band Radio and Tetra. These systems are operated from our alised Operational Support Unit.

Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning

Director of Services:	Kieran Kehoe
Chairperson:	Mary Sweeney, M.C.C.
Members	Sectoral
John Moran, M.C.C	Harry Vanston (Farming Sector)
John Joe Fennelly, M.C.C	Pat Culleton, (Development/ Construction)
David Goodwin, M.C.C.	Michael KIELTY, I.C.T.U. (Trade Union)
Aidan Mullins, M.C.C.	Noel GAVIGAN (Environment/ Conservation)

ECONOMIC AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

The established Business Support Unit of Laois County Council incorporates the Local Enterprise Office and the Economic Development Team to form a central point of contact for existing and prospective businesses. The Business Support Unit aims to nurture a pro-business environment which supports enterprise and promotes Laois nationally and globally as a location of choice for business and investment. Two major job announcements were made for Laois in 2018 - Glanbia Cheese announced its plans to construct a €130 million manufacturing facility in J17 National Enterprise Park creating 78 jobs initially and SkOUT Secure Intelligence announced its plans to base its European Headquarters in Portlaoise creating 30 jobs.

Food Futures 2030 – March 2018



In March 2018 Connect2Laois held the first Food Futures 2030 event in The Heritage, Killenard. Organised by the Council’s Business Support Unit in collaboration with Laois Partnership the event brought together a host of food service operators, producers and buyers under one roof. Over 100 people at-

tended the event which also boasted an impressive line up of speakers including Darina Allen from Ballymaloe Cookery School, Domini Kemp, Olivia Duff and many more.

Food Futures 2030 was organised as part of the Connect2Laois for Food Programme. The aim of the Connect2Laois for Food Programme was to support and nurture start-up and established businesses in the County and provide them with a programme of supports to improve their businesses. Over 12 months local food producers & food service providers availed of specialist training and mentoring from James Burke & Associates, Ireland’s leading Food Consultants and Retail Advisors culminating in the Food Futures 2030 event.

Official Opening of Portarlinton Enterprise Centre Innovation Hub and Fab Lab – 22 June 2018

On the 22nd of June, Portarlinton Enterprise Centre officially opened its Innovation Hub and Fabrication Lab. The project was a co-ordinated initiative by the Business Support Unit, Laois Partnership and IT Carlow, made possible through funding from the REDZ and Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

The Innovation Hub offers state of the art facilities including a conference and training area, shared learning space/Fab Lab, hot desks and a fully equipped kitchen. The hot desks offer a unique opportunity to Laois commuters with flexible work patterns the convenience of working close to home either full or part-time, while the Fab Lab offers access to a wide array of high grade fabrication tools and materials. The Portarlinton Fab Lab is fully equipped with laser cutters, CNC routers and 3D printers with new generational tools being sourced as they become available. The primary focus of the lab is to create a space for learning and early stage prototyping with experts in their fields volunteering their time and knowledge to participants that want to learn how to apply their coding skills in a practical environment.

Portlaoise Town Team

In October 2017 the Business Support Unit co-ordinated the establishment of the Portlaoise Town team. The Town Team is made up of representatives from a variety of sectors; business and retail, local authority, residents, heritage and tourism, Gardai, Charities, Community groups and local politicians. Over the past year, the Portlaoise Town Team has conducted a health check of the Town which has helped them to identify the key strengths and weaknesses of Portlaoise which they are now addressing in their Town

Team Action Plan. Thanks to the health check the Town Team now have a clear idea about what they need to do to achieve their aim of promoting Portlaoise as a great place to live, shop and do business in.

The Town Team with the support of the Business Support Unit has already taken its first steps towards achieving this goal with the production of a new Portlaoise brand logo launched in September 2018 and the launch of a new Portlaoise Me2You gift card in October 2018. The gift card has been a huge success with over 40 local retailers currently signed up.



The National Enterprise Town Awards 2018

Mountmellick took part in the Bank of Ireland's National Enterprise Town Awards in September as the Laois entrant for 2018. The Mountmellick Development Association co-ordinated the event with support from the Business Support Unit as well as a host of community groups, businesses and volunteers.

The awards were held in the Lyrath Hotel, Kilkenny in November. 83 towns, cities and villages were represented each hoping to be named National Enterprise Town of the Year. Mountmellick was successful in taking home a €2,500 prize in the Town Initiatives category for the work that has been carried out in respect of the Mountmellick Community Arts Centre.



Facade Enhancement Scheme

On the 12th of October 2018, the Business Support Unit launched the new Facade Enhancement Scheme for Portlaoise Town which is an initiative developed from the Portlaoise Town Team, the group established by Laois County Council to implement the town centre renewal strategy for Portlaoise. The first phase of the Facade Enhancement Scheme will focus on Lower Main Street, Bridge Street and the Well Road in Portlaoise and will assist property owners to improve their premises by painting the exterior of both commercial and residential dwellings. The scheme is being introduced in association with Crown Paints who have developed a bespoke 42 colour paint palette specifically for Portlaoise.

Laois Commuter Survey

In February 2018 the Business Support Unit launched the Laois Commuter Survey with the aim of building a commuter profile detailing the skills, education and employment sectors of our 11,477 outbound commuters. The survey was a huge success and has enabled Laois County Council to build a comprehensive profile of our commuter workforce. The survey revealed that of the 11,477 outbound commuters 77% (8847) have a third level degree or higher with the majority of workers commuting to Dublin, Kildare, Carlow, Kilkenny and neighbouring Offaly. Our commuters have a wide variety of skills and are involved in a number of key industries. 6,033 of our highly educated workforce are employed in Business and IT (1,671), Healthcare (1,443), Training & Development (1,084), Manufacturing (944) and Retail/Wholesale Services (891) alone.

Town & Village Renewal Scheme 2018

Work progressed in 2018 on the Digital Hub in Mountrath and the Beale Centre (Digital Hub) in Mountmellick due to funding received from the Department of Rural & Community Development through the Town & Village Renewal Scheme. Both digital hubs will offer co-working and hot desk facilities as well as training and networking opportunities to start up and established companies in these towns.

Urban Regeneration & Development Fund

Portlaoise, one of the successful towns to be allocated funding under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) securing over €3.3 million for the development of a new cultural quarter and the Low Carbon Town Project. The Business Support Unit over saw amalgamation of both proposals which were

then compiled by consulting company GVA. The Cultural Quarter will centre on this historically significant area of the original Portlaoise settlement. The plans for the area are already well underway with the remodelling of Fitzmaurice Place. The Fort protector will be the central attraction in this re-imagined space where it will be restored with historically accurate methods and fitted with a new viewing tower that will be open to the public. The Low Carbon Town will remove the dominance of cars within the Portlaoise town centre and address the poor pedestrian experience of the area. Both projects represent an instrumental step forward in realising the vision for Portlaoise as outlined in the document '2040 and Beyond; A Vision for Portlaoise'.

Incentives and Supports for 2019

2018 was a busy year for the Business Support Unit with a large volume of businesses applying for the Shop Front Grant Scheme, Business Incentive Scheme and Rates Reduction scheme. 14 businesses were approved for the Shopfront Grant Scheme which gives businesses the opportunity to improve/repair their shop facade.

J17 National Enterprise Park

The J17 National Enterprise Park is a strategic land bank which occupies approximately 192 hectares to the South West of Portlaoise Town. In 2017, Laois County Council acquired approximately 32 ha of these lands and in 2018 ARUP Consultant Engineers completed an updated masterplan for the Enterprise Park. This masterplan will ensure the integrated and co-ordinated development of land at this location to ensure it is a viable economic zone which will be a major boost to the economy of Portlaoise and will contribute to the growth of the county and the region as a whole. Two companies have already acquired sites at this location in 2018 – Glanbia Cheese and Robinson Distribution Ltd. The Business Support Unit will continue to market and promote this location to national and international companies in 2019.

Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) acts as a "First Stop Shop" for anyone seeking information and support on starting or growing a business in Laois. Our role, as LEO Laois, is to drive the development of local enterprise, putting local micro and small business at the heart of job creation. We support business start-ups and work to increase the job potential of new and existing micro and small businesses with information, advice, training, mentoring, seminars and selective financial support. The LEO plays a key role

in supporting entrepreneurship and enterprise development along with other key stakeholders in the county to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to enterprise support.

2018 was a very productive year for LEO Laois. A total of €535,441 in developmental grant aid, trading online vouchers and technical assistance for micro export grants was approved for 49 businesses with the potential to create 131 full-time jobs. 2018 saw an increase in participants on training courses and there was a higher demand for mentoring. All of these supports were promoted to, made available for, and tailored specifically towards the needs of small, micro and start-up businesses in Laois.

Supporting our clients

LEO can provide different types of grant assistance to eligible Laois businesses to help fund start-up costs, expansion plans, entry into new markets and job growth. In 2018, €457,872 was approved in grant aid to 14 Laois companies with potential to create 72 additional full-time jobs.

Business training is one of the most important supports we offer local enterprises which are tailored to meet specific business requirements. In 2018, a total of 52 training programmes were delivered with 560 participants.

A total of 291 mentoring assignments were managed between experienced mentors and client companies in specific areas such as finance, social media, marketing, health & safety, strategic planning, etc.

Informal networking with other business owners is one of the most important supports entrepreneurs can avail of. In recognition of this LEO held a business networking event in 2018 which saw over 80 Laois business owners meet, share ideas and listen to some engaging speakers.

Promoting Entrepreneurship

During the year LEO co-ordinated a series of enterprise programmes and events that promote entrepreneurship across all sectors which included:

- Local Enterprise Week

This initiative features a series of activities designed to support the ambitions of aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners. As part of our on-going commitment to enterprise in the county a series of free seminars/one-to-one mentoring clinics were held during Enter

prise Week from the 5th – 10th March, with over 100 local entrepreneurs taking part in the various events.

- Local Enterprise Village

31 small businesses were supported by their Local Enterprise Office to exhibit their products and services inside the Local Enterprise Village at the National Ploughing Championships in Tullamore, Co. Offaly. The 3 day event in September 2018 attracted almost 300,000 visitors. LEO clients were also supported with specialist training and photography services to enable them to maximise selling and marketing opportunities during the ploughing championships. Laois was represented by Le Skinny Chef who is based in Portlaoise and makes pesto/sauces/soups etc.



- National Women’s Enterprise Day

National Women’s Enterprise Day is an annual date recognising the important role of women in business. Over 120 female entrepreneurs from Laois, Offaly, Longford & Westmeath attended National Women’s Enterprise Day on Thursday 18th October in Longford. Nationally 1,420 female participants attended events around the country.

- National Enterprise Awards

The National Enterprise Awards Competition is designed to recognise and reward the commitment, dedication and entrepreneurial spirit of small businesses at local and national level. Cyc-lok Limited from Graiguecullen represented Laois at the National Enterprise Awards in May 2018 and was awarded the National Innovation Award. Cyc-lok Ltd is a Laois based start-up company owned by Stephen and Louise Murphy. The business was es-

tablished in 2014 to develop a global network of secure bicycle parking facilities in response to the dramatic surge in cycling for recreation and especially for transport in urban commuter zones.



Building for the Future

An important part of our work is the fostering of an enterprise culture in county Laois and encouraging people to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career option. LEO strongly encourages youth entrepreneurship through various programmes to support and nurture the next generation of business owners and leaders.

- Student Enterprise Awards

Over 300 students from 7 Laois second-level schools took part in the 2017/2018 Student Enterprise Programme. This programme encourages students to research, set-up and run their own business with the help of a student enterprise co-ordinator. The county final was held in March 2018 with Alice Carew, from Mountrath Community School, being selected to represent Laois at the National Finals in Croke Park in May 2018. Alice developed a sound solution designed to lessen the effects of sound sensitivity on children with autism.



- Ireland’s Best Young Entrepreneur

Aimed at 18 to 35 year olds, Ireland’s Best

Young Entrepreneur (IBYE) is a €2 million investment competition run by the network of Local Enterprise Offices. The competition is an initiative of the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation and supported by Enterprise Ireland. 71 local entrepreneurs entered the 2018 competition with 3 companies representing Laois at the Regional Finals held in Kildare in February – Declan Dunne, Crate Studio (Best Idea); Jonathan Bracken, Bracken Enterprises (Best Start Up) and Gary Cobbe, Polymer Extrusions (Best Establish Business)



Collaborating with Stakeholders

Collaboration is the key to enterprise success and LEO worked closely with many stakeholders in 2018, including:

- Microfinance Ireland

In 2018 LEO assisted a number of client companies with their Microfinance loan applications. Microfinance Ireland was established to deliver the Government’s Micro-enterprise Loan Fund. It provides loans up to €25,000 to commercially viable businesses that employ fewer than ten people, with an annual turnover of less than €2million.

- Trading Online Vouchers

Designed to assist small businesses to trade more online under the National Digital Strategy, the Trading Online Voucher Scheme offers companies training and advice, along with financial assistance of up to €2,500. The scheme is funded by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, and delivered by the Local Enterprise Offices nationally. 22 approvals were secured by LEO Laois under the Trading Online Voucher Scheme, supporting the creation of 44 new jobs in 2018.

BREXIT SUPPORT

A key issue for LEO going forward will be assisting small businesses that are impacted by Brexit. Working in partnership with Enterprise Ireland, Local Authorities and other state agencies, LEO offers a range of supports to help micro-enterprises and small businesses prepare for the challenges posed by Brexit.

In 2018, these supports and programmes were focused on innovation, export market diversification, competitiveness and information sharing as follows:

- Technical Assistance Grants for Micro Exporters

Technical Assistance Grants for Micro Exporters (TAME) provides an incentive for LEO clients to explore and develop new market opportunities. These grants, with a maximum value of €2,500, are used to part-fund expenditure to investigate and research export markets and to increase the number of LEO clients developing new export opportunities. 15 Laois companies were approved for assistance under TAME in 2018 totalling €26,183 with potential to create 15 additional full-time jobs.

- Brexit Seminar

Enterprise Ireland, in collaboration with LEO Laois, organised a Brexit seminar in the Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise in February 2018. The purpose of this seminar was to enable small businesses, start-ups and micro-enterprise to learn about the potential impacts and opportunities posed by Brexit, and to engage in a process of strategic planning to ensure their companies have a robust strategy in place. Over 80 LEO clients attended this event.

- Brexit Advisory Clinic

One-to-One mentoring was availed of by a number of Laois companies seeking advice on the best way to prepare for Brexit.

- Lean for Micro

The Lean for Micro Programme helps LEO clients to adopt ‘lean’ business principles within their businesses to increase performance and competitiveness. LEO supported 6 Laois companies through this programme in

2018.

• Going North Initiative

4 Laois companies travelled to Northern Ireland as part of our Going North Initiative which was a joint initiative with Westmeath & Offaly LEOs with the objective of giving participating companies the opportunity to explore new export markets.

No. of trading online vouchers approved by the LEO in 2017	11
No. of those trading online vouchers that were drawn down in 2017	7
No. of participants who received mentoring from 01/01/2017 to 31/12/2017	186

Other successes in 2018 included:

- 22 LEO companies took part in Management Development programmes run in conjunction with Offaly LEO with the objective of getting Laois companies stabilised, ready for growth and more competitive.
- 10 Start Your Own Business Courses delivered with 101 participants looking at starting their own business in County Laois.
- 94 Laois companies attended information events/mentoring on the new General Data Protection Regulations which came into force on the 25 May, 2018.
- LEO was announced as category runners up in the finals of the European Commission's European Enterprise Promotion Awards which were held in Graz, Austria in November 2018 for their innovative approach in engaging with marginalised groups in the county by adopting mainstream Start Your Own Business programmes to meet their identified needs.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

The overall objective of the Planning Department is to implement the provisions of the Planning Acts and provide appropriate support measures in order to promote the physical, social and economical well being of the county so that living standards are protected and raised, and work opportunities fostered and created, having regard to the principles of sustainability.

The Planning Department can be broken down into 5 separate areas:

- (i) Development Management
- (ii) Forward Planning
- (iii) Planning Enforcement
- (iv) Derelict Sites
- (v) Vacant Sites
- (vi) Building Control
- (vii) Unfinished estates

(i) Development Management

The number of planning applications received in 2018 was 795. However, it should be noted that 185 of the total applications received were invalid and required the applicant to submit a new application. The main reasons for invalidation of planning files were public notices being out of date, or not erected on site, previous permissions expired, agents name omitted from maps/drawings, no north point shown on maps and distances not shown on site layouts.

2018 performance

The following table gives a breakdown of valid planning applications received and decisions made during 2018:

Number of valid applications received:	610
Number of decisions made:	560
Number of applications granted:	536
Number of applications refused:	24
Invalid applications returned to applicant 23%:	185
Referrals to Area Offices(working days):	within 14 days achieved



Performance Indicator 2016

Economic Development

No of jobs ceated with assistance from the LEO with each part-time job = 0.5	55.0
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No of applications appealed to An Bord Pleanála in 2018: 14

Customer Service Initiatives

2018 saw the continuation of the scanning of planning applications as they are received by the Planning Authority. Throughout 2018, the public were able to access all planning applications on-line within two weeks of the Planning Authority receiving them.

448 pre-planning meetings were held in 2018, at which members of the public had an opportunity to discuss planning matters with a planner prior to submitting a planning application. The Planners also facilitated the public by holding a number of pre-planning meetings on site.

38 Section 5 applications were processed by Laois County Council in 2018.

The Planning website continues to be a very popular attraction with 72,332 hits last year.

Licensing of Outdoor Events

An outdoor event is defined as a public performance which takes place wholly or mainly in the open air or in a structure with no roof or a partial, temporary or retractable roof, a tent or similar temporary structure and which consists of music, dancing, displays of public entertainment or any activity of a like kind. The organisers of such events are required to obtain a licence from the Planning Authority where the audience comprises of 5,000 or more people.

Two such outdoor events occurred in county Laois in 2018 – the annual “Electric Picnic” music festival which has been held in Stradbally attracting over 50,000 people in September 2018 and the International Scouts Jamboree which catered to over 5,000 Scouts and Venture Scouts from Ireland and overseas in July 2018.

(ii) Forward Planning

Forward Planning plays a pivotal role in the physical, economic and social development of County Laois. The Laois County Development Plan 2011-2018, provides the strategic framework and policy context within which the Local Authority makes its planning decisions.

A submission was made on behalf of Laois County Council to the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan which was launched in February 2018.

A submission was also made on behalf of Laois County Council to the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly(EMRA) in relation to the preparation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) in 2018.

Local Area Plans

The following Local Area Plans were prepared following consultation

- Portarlington LAP 2018-2024 - adopted September 2018
(This LAP was prepared and adopted jointly with Offaly County Council)
- Mountmellick LAP 2018-2024 adopted September 2018
- Portlaoise LAP 2018-2024 - adopted October 2018

J17 National Enterprise Park Masterplan

ARUP and Consultants were commissioned and finalised a masterplan for J17 National Enterprise Park at the Togher Interchange in October 2018. This masterplan is a review of the previous masterplan prepared in 2010 and it re-examines and re-purposes the framework for the area to succeed in a changing economic and transportation and environmental context.

Conservation

Two separate grants schemes for Protected Structures were run by Laois County Council in 2018, with funding from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Built Heritage Investment Scheme 2018

- €50,000 allocated to Laois County Council by DCHG
- Allocated to 8 projects across the county as follows:

BHIS 18/ LS01 Infant School Durrow, Carrigan Street, Durrow, Co Laois

BHIS 18/ LS02 Sheeran's Thatch, Main Street, Coolrain, Co Laois

BHIS 18/ LS03 Oatlands, Green Road, Abbeyleix, Co Laois

BHIS 18/ LS04 St Paul's Church, French Church Street, Portarlington, Co Laois

BHIS 18/ LS05 Mountmellick Town Hall, Parnell Street, Mountmellick, Co. Laois

BHIS 18/ LS06 Abbeyleix Old Church, Abbeyleix Desmesne, Abbeyleix, Co Laois

BHIS 18/ LS07 Stradbally Hall, Stradbally, Co Laois

BHIS 18/ LS08 Tinakill House, Raheen, Mountrath,

Structures at risk fund

The following projects were successful in getting grants in 2018

- SRF 18/1 Midland House, Main Street, Portlaoise, Co.Laois - €22,000
- SRF 18/2 Roundwood House, Mountrath, Co.Laois - €15,000

Section 57 Declarations

A total of 8 Section 57 Declarations in relation to works to Protected Structures at various locations throughout County Laois were processed in 2018.

Local Authority Development (Part 8 Projects)

Part 8 consent for the following Local Authority projects was granted during 2018:

1. 8 houses, Shannon Street, Mountrath, Co Laois
2. Housing Scheme, Moore Street, Rathdowney
3. Housing Scheme, Ballymorris, Portarlinton
4. Housing project, Harpurs Lane, Portlaoise
5. Housing Project, Hillview, Portlaoise
6. Irishtown Roundabout, Mountmellick
7. Rockview / Mountrath Road Roundabout, Portlaoise
8. Togher Infrastructural Works, Portlaoise
9. Fitzmaurice Place Public Realm Enhancement, Portlaoise

(iii) Planning Enforcement

The Planning Authority, in accordance with the statutory requirements under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2018 as amended, seeks to ensure compliance with planning permissions and also to prevent unauthorised development.

Work was continued in 2018 by the Enforcement team to ensure that any breaches of planning law were investigated and followed up.

In 2018, Council Staff attended court 20 times in respect of enforcement prosecutions and while some cases are still ongoing, 9 cases have been successfully resolved during 2018.

The Planning Authority served 96 enforcement notices, 404 warning letters and investigated 134 complaints all of which highlight the active pursuit of planning non-compliance and unauthorised development by our Enforcement Section.

(iv) Derelict Sites

The Council is implementing its powers under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 targeting those properties that are on the Derelict Sites Register. Working with the owners of those properties, the outstanding issues are being dealt with and those properties that are no longer deemed ‘derelict’ are then removed from the Derelict Sites Register.

Definition of a Derelict Site

The Derelict Sites Act, 1990 defines a Derelict Site as;

“Any land which detracts, or is likely to detract, to a material degree from the amenity, character or appearance of land in the neighbourhood of the land in question because of-

- a) the existence on the land in question of structures which are in a ruinous, derelict or dangerous condition, or
- b) the neglected, unsightly or objectionable condition of the land or any structures on the land in question, or
- c) the presence, deposit or collection on the land in question of any litter, rubbish, debris or waste, except where the presence, deposit or collection of such litter, rubbish, debris or waste results from the exercise of a right conferred by statute or by common law

Total Number of Files opened for 2018: 9
 Total Number of Files closed as a result of Dereliction being addressed in 2018: 5
 Total Number of Files: 79

(v) Vacant Sites

The preliminary assessment and quantification of vacant sites commenced in September 2016 and concluded in September – November 2017. Initially 107 sites were identified, 68 sites had Section 7(1) notices served on them and following on from the recent guidance from the Department it is the intention of the Planning Authority to pursue 25 sites. This is still a deliberative assessment with opportunity for appeal by the landowners.

Town	No of sites identified and surveyed	Stage
Portlaoise	57 sites	S.7(1) Notices issued on 35 sites

Portarlington	17 sites	S.7(1) Notices issued on 15 sites
Mountmellick	18 sites	S.7(1) Notices issued on 10 sites
Graigucullen	15 sites	S.7(1) Notices issued on 8 sites

(vi) Building Control

The Building Control Section deal with all commencement notices received, and carries out inspections on the buildings to ensure they comply with the various Building Control regulations.

Number of valid commencement notices received	228
Number of commencement notices for Change of Use /Alterations/Renovations/Extensions	41
Number of Commercial Building Notices (18 No of commercial buildings covered)	18
Number of Dwellings covered by valid commencement notices: (Of which 123 no. are "one off" dwellings)	326
Number of buildings inspected	42
Number of buildings inspected as a % of buildings covered by valid Commencement notices:	12.2%

(vii) Unfinished Housing Estates

Laois County Council is responsible for the taking in charge of estates. In 2018, 9 estates were taken in charge which are listed in the table below. Traditionally this occurred when a request was received from the developer of the estate and/or the owners of the houses within the estate. However, in recent years, where the developer has failed to complete the estate, Laois County Council has intervened to complete the estate and this work, where possible, is funded from the bond. This policy of actively pursuing the developer and Bond holder will continue in 2019.

The following estates were taken in charge in 2018:

1. Rahin Wood, Ballylinan, (Jan 2018)
2. The Tiles, Abbeyleix, (Feb 2018)
3. Cross of Newtown, Ballyroan, (Feb 2018)
4. Wallis Street, Mountrath (May 2018)

5. Manor Grove, Mountmellick (June 2018)
6. Spindlewood, Graigucullen (Nov 2018)
7. College Ave, Mountmellick (Nov 2018)
8. Corrig Glen, Portarlington (Nov 2018)
9. Mill Court, Borris-in-Ossory (Nov 2018)
10. Killeen Gardens, Killeen (Nov 2018)
11. Railway Mews, Portarlington (Dec 2018)

The Planning Department endeavour to liaise with the residents of unfinished estates to keep them fully informed of progress in relation to their estates.

Performance Indicators 2017

New buildings inspected

New buildings inspected as a percentage of new buildings notified to the local authority	16.57%
No. of local authority planning decisions which were the subject of an appeal to An Bord Pleanála that were determined by the Board in 2017	8
% of the determinations that confirmed (with or without variation) the decision made by the local authority	87.50%

Performance of Enforcement cases closed as resolved

Total no. of planning cases referred to or initiated by the local authority during 2017 that were investigated	113
Total no of cases closed during 2017	105
% closed cases dismissed under Section 152(2), or statute barred or exempted development	38.10%
% closed cases resolved to the Local Authoritys satisfaction through negotiation	0.00%
% closed cases due to enforcement proceedings	61.90%
Total Number of Planning cases being investigated as at 31/12/2017	138

Housing Strategic Policy Committee

Chair: Paddy Bracken, M.C.C.

Members

Sectoral

Willie Aird, M.C.C.	Michael Kelly Jr. (Development/ Construction)
Caroline Dwane Stanley, M.C.C.	Andrew Cremin (Business/ Commercial)
Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C.	Sheelagh Coyle (Social inclusion)
Paschal McEvoy, M.C.C.	Michael Cobbe Community/Voluntary)

Director of Services: Gerry Murphy

Senior Executive Officer: Michael Rainey

Senior Executive Engineer: P J Dempsey

Senior Social Worker: Fionnuala Daly

HOUSING SERVICES

The Core Objective for Housing is to ensure that all our citizens enjoy an adequate standard of housing accommodation appropriate to their needs, and as far as possible, in a location and tenure of their choice and to provide a responsive and supportive housing service for those in need of assistance.

Highlights during 2018

- Delivery of 138 units under Rebuilding Ireland which exceeded our given target of 76.
- Opening of 33 newly constructed homes.
- Acquisition of 24 units for social housing in various locations across the county.
- Successful delivery of 198 grants for disabled and elderly people living in the county.
- Establishment of the Vacant Homes Office

Report on SPC

The Housing Strategic Policy Committee met 5 times, in February, March, June, September and December 2018 at which various issues were discussed and noted by Members.

Rebuilding Ireland Programme 2018 – 2021

The provision of housing is a core function of Laois County Council. In addition to the management of ap-

proximately 2200 units the Council is also tasked with delivering 623 new units by 2021. This will be provided through a variety of means including direct build, acquisitions, Part V units, leasing and in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs).

During 2018, construction finished on 33 new units at Conniberry Way, Portlaoise and these units were tenanted in May 2018.

- A total of 24 housing units were acquired in 2018. 17 additional housing units are currently going through the sale agreed process.
- 13 capital schemes in Stradbally, Durrow, Rathdowney, Mountmellick, Ballyroan, Ballymorris, Ballybrittas, Mountrath, Hillview and Harpur’s Lane, Portlaoise are being progressed through the Department’s Capital Stage Approval process.

Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan

The RBI Home Loan was introduced 1st February 2018 in all local authorities, including Laois.

99 RBI home loan applications were received in 2018. 40 loan applications were approved, 34 declined and the remainder are in progress.

Housing Assistance Payment

HAP commenced in Laois on 1st December 2016. The HAP office exceeded their target on a weekly basis throughout the year in 2018. There were 636 tenancies active by 31st December 2018. All HAP properties must be inspected within 8 months from the time that the first HAP payment is made to the landlord. A total of 314 inspections were made in 2018.

The new Homeless HAP Place Finder role was created in December 2018 to support homeless households in securing a HAP tenancy. In 2018 23 homeless were accommodated through HAP.

Traveller Accommodation

The Housing Section implemented the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018 during 2018. Targets under the Programme for the accommodation from 2014 to 2018 have been met. The new Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period 2019 – 2024 is currently being drafted.

Estate Management

Estate management remains a key function for the

HOUSING

Housing Section. The Housing Section provided a range of supports to various resident groups including grants where appropriate.

Private Grants

In 2018, the Department provided €1,110,130 for Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability. Through effective management of the funding available the Housing Section has been able to keep the scheme open for all of 2018.

Housing Needs Assessment

A Housing Needs Assessment was carried out during the months of May and June 2018 and was completed and signed off on the 5th July 2018. A total of 129 households were assessed. 1,036 households qualified for social housing support on the Housing Needs Assessment date of the 11th June 2018. 19 households were determined not to qualify for social housing support.

Performance Indicators 2017

H1: Social Housing Stock

No of dwellings in the ownership of the Local Authority at 01/01/2017	2117
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No. of dwellings added to the Local Authority owned stock during 2017 (whether constructed or acquired)	62
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No. of Local Authority dwellings sold in 2017	9
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No. of Local Authority dwellings demolished in 2017	0
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No. of dwellings in the ownership of the Local Authority at 31/12/2017	2170
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No. of Local Authority owned dwellings planned for demolition under a D/HPLG approved scheme	0
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H2: Housing Vacancies

% of the Total Local Authority Dwellings that were vacant on 31/12/2017	1.43
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Average Re-letting time and cost; Maintenance Cost by Unit

Average Time from Date of vacation of dwelling to the date in 2017 when a new tenancy had commenced.	8.28 wks
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Average cost expended on getting the re-tenanted dwellings ready for re-letting	€6,880.84
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Average per Unit Expenditure in 2017 on Repair and Maintenance of LA Housing	€732.73
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H5: Private Rented Sector Inspections;

Total no. of registered tenancies in the local authority area at the end June 2017	4,107
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No. of dwellings inspected in 2017	154
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% Inspected dwellings in 2017 not compliant with standard regulations	100%
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No. of Non Compliant Dwellings that became compliant during 2017	1
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H6: Long-term Homeless Adults

Number of adult individuals in emergency accommodation that are long-term homeless as a % of the total number of homeless adult individuals in emergency accommodation at end of 2017	0
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No. of Adults classified as homeless and in Emergency Accommodation on night of 31/12/2017	8
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Approved Housing Bodies

Approved Housing Bodies (AHB) provide and manage social rented housing to people who are listed on the Laois Housing List. We have a very positive working relationship with the Approved Housing Bodies who are active in the County. Laois County Council took successful delivery of 77 extra units through AHB's in 2018 bringing the total number of units being provided through AHB's to 318.

Expressions of interest will be sought from Approved Housing Bodies (AHB) in delivering construction projects on Council owned lands.

Head of Finance: Gerry Murphy

Financial/Management Accountant: David Hayde

The Finance Department is responsible for the following services:

Motor Taxation, Accounts Payable, Revenue Collection (Rates, Fire charges, Rents, Loans, Development Contributions), NPPR, Internal Audit, Preparation of Annual Budgets and Financial Statements, Financial Management and all ancillary matters

Commercial Rates

Following a re-valuation carried out in 2018, the General Annual Rate on Valuation was €0.2217

Water and Waste Water Charges

On 21st October, 2016, Irish Water assumed responsibility for the management of non-domestic water customer invoices for standard Water Services including Miscellaneous/Ancillary Water Services. Irish Water also assumed responsibility for the payments, collections and the management of customer queries in relation to non domestic invoices. Laois County Council will continue to carry out meter reading and meter operations and will provide support to Irish Water in the resolution of customer queries.

Prompt Payment of Accounts

The Council complies with the terms of the Prompt Payments Act as amended by the European Communities (Late Payment in Commercial Transactions) Regulations.

Total number of late payments in excess of €250:
Nil

Performance Indicators 2017

5 year summary of revenue account balance

2013	€-493,027
2014	€-393,286
2015	€-297,861
2016	€-198,369
2017	€-128,095

5 year summary of % collection levels for major revenue sources

The individual % figures for each of (a) Rates, (b) Rent & Annuities and (c) Housing Loans 2015, 2016 and 2017

	2015,	2016,	2017
Rates	75%	76%	75%
Rent & Annuities	96%	95%	96%
Housing Loans	64%	65%	68%

MyPay Update

The project is currently running on schedule and within budget. There are currently 72 employees based in the shared services centre. Waves 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 have been completed on schedule with Laois, Offaly, Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath, Leitrim, Galway, Carlow, Monaghan, Cavan, Kildare, Meath, Kilkenny, Louth, South Dublin, Tipperary, Kerry, Wicklow, Sligo, Mayo, Clare and Donegal County Councils along with Limerick and Waterford County and City Councils, Cork and Galway City Councils and the LGMA are now live.

The following are the statistics on the project up to the end of December:

Value of Payments	€1,669m
Number of Payments	2,025,784
Number of Pay Groups Paid	5,457
Number of Payroll Runs	2,787

Work is well underway to bring Fingal and Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Councils live on board by the end of May 2018 as part of Wave 6. Work is ongoing with Cork County Council with a view to bringing them on board in 2018 also.

The Superannuation element of the project has commenced. The "as is" process mapping has been completed. Workshops have been held in a number of Local Authorities on the "to be" process mapping and data requirements.

- A pilot of the service was successfully completed in Laois and Carlow County Councils together with the LGMA in September 2016.
- There are currently 15 Local authorities live for pension services with a plan in place to bring the remainder on board in 2018.

MyPay successfully attained the ISAE 3402 standard in 2017. This is an internationally recognised standard for service organisations.

MyPay has been chosen to administer the new Single Public Service Pension Scheme for the Local Authority Sector. A further 12 staff have been sanctioned for the delivery of this service in 2018.

Motor Taxation

This Section provides a service for all motor tax transactions and any issues pertaining to ownership and other queries. Online taxation currently equates to 61% of overall motor tax business in Laois. A small percentage continue to utilise the postal service option. Since November, owners of small public service vehicles (taxis, hackneys & limousines) can now tax remotely on the Department’s online website www.motortax.ie. The total transactions carried out by this office in 2018 is 42,697.

Rates

Motor Tax for vehicles registered after 1 July 2008 is determined on the basis of CO2 bands or cubic capacity of engine, whichever is less. Taxes range from €120 a year for the greenest cars to €2,350 for cars with the highest emissions ratings. Motor tax rates are graduated as one moves up the CO2 emissions. The rates were last revised in January 2016 with two main changes i.e significant reductions for heavy goods vehicles with an unladen weight from 4,001kg to 12,000kg and from 12,001kg.

Vehicle Licences

Gross income for the year is €6,415,693, a reduction of €919,839 compared with €7,335,532 in 2017. The noted fall in income is expected from increased online tax renewals and less taxation on newer vehicles.

Off the Road Declarations

If a vehicle is not going to be used in a public place, a statutory declaration must be completed in advance of the vehicle being taken off the road and whilst in current tax. A vehicle can be declared off the road for a period not less than 3 months and not greater than 12 months. In 2018, 727 SORD applications were processed.

Vehicle Testing Procedures

Certificates of Roadworthiness for commercial/goods vehicles are carried out by the Commercial Vehicle Test Centres. Customers will receive a pass state-

ment at the garage and a new style CRW by post. The NDVF system is automatically updated with CRW details.

Vehicle Registration Procedures

The Revenue Commissioners appoint the National Car Testing Services (NCTS) to carry out vehicle registration functions on their behalf. Contact enquiries at 01 4135994 or for online bookings at 01 4135975/www.nct.ie/vrt.

Vehicle Testing (NCT & CVRT)

Testing of private vehicles continues to be carried out at the various test centres located around the Country. In Laois, the test centre is located at Lismard Business Centre, Timahoe Road, Portlaoise.

Changes were implemented by the RSA from May 2018 regarding the Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test System which mainly impacts vintage, converted, imported vehicles and fast tractors. Check out www.cvrt.ie for further information.

Performance indicators at 31st December 2017

% of Motor Tax Transactions conducted online	57.28%
Motor Tax transactions dealt with at the public counter	39.72%
Motor Tax transactions dealt with by post	3%
Average no of public opening hours perweek	28.3 hours
Number of vehicle licence postal applications/% of overall postal applications which were dealt with	
a) on the same day	98.55%
b) on the 2nd or 3rd day	0.72%
c) on the 4th or 5th day	0.01%
d) over 5 days	0.72%

Revenue Collection

	31.12.2017	31.12.2018
Housing Loans		
a) Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	68%	72%
b) Percentage of arrears:		
(i) Less than 1 mth	1%	1%
(ii) 1-2 Mths	1%	2%
(iii) 2 – 3 months old	2%	2%
(iv) more than 3 months old	96%	95%
Rents		
a) Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amounts due	96%	96%
b) Percentage of arrears		
(i) Less than four weeks	12%	10%
(ii) 4-6 weeks	11%	10%
(iii) 7-12 weeks	15%	15%
(iv) greater than 12 weeks	62%	66%
Commercial Rates		
Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	75%	76%

Annual Financial Statement 2018

Revenue Account	Gross Expenditure 2018 €	Income 2018 €	Net Expenditure 2018 €
Programme Group			
Housing & Building	11,975,843	13,026,932	(1,051,089)
Road Transportation & Safety	21,122,169	16,737,865	4,384,304
Water Services	4,126,226	4,177,962	(51,735)
Development Management	6,550,139	3,319,338	3,230,801
Environmental Services	7,307,541	1,759,277	5,548,264
Recreation & Amenity	4,906,566	1,239,213	3,667,354
Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare	868,257	346,577	521,680
Miscellaneous services	9,850,934	7,767,442	2,083,492
Total Expenditure/Income	66,707,675	48,374,606	

Net cost of divisions to be funded from Rates & Local Property Tax	18,333,069
Rates	12,970,376
Local Property Tax	9,051,699
Surplus(Deficit) for Year before Transfers	3,689,005
Transfers from/(to) Reserves	(3,629,244)
Overall Surplus/(Deficit) for Year	59,761
General Reserve @ 1st January 2018	(128,095)
General Reserve @ 31st December 2018	(68,333)

Capital Account

Opening Balance @ 01.01.2018	2,191,660
Expenditure	16,515,913
Income	
- Grants	12,465,491
- Loans	-
- Other	4,721,964
Total Income	17,187,455
Net Revenue Transfers	3,235,564
Closing Balance @ 31.12.2018	6,098,765

INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Director of Services: Gerry Murphy

Head of Information Systems: Pat Grassick

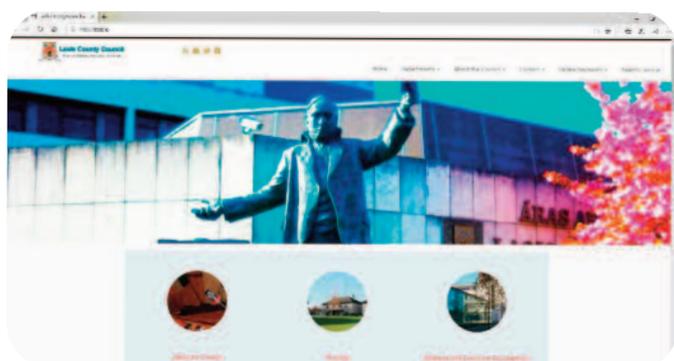
The Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Department comprises 8 staff members and manages the Council’s ICT infrastructure, software systems and websites. This includes the server Datacenter, desktop and laptop computers, mobile phones and the wired and wireless network communication equipment in County Hall, Area Offices, Libraries, and other Council locations throughout the county.



The ICT Department provides technical support to all other Council sections and to the members of Laois County Council and is responsible for the implementation, maintenance, management and security of the Council’s ICT systems. In excess of 4,200 technical support calls were handled by ICT support staff in 2018, an increase of 13% from 2017, demonstrating the growing value of ICT support in the delivery of services by the Council.

The ICT Department is committed to a policy of continuous improvement of ICT services, both within the Council itself and to the public who avail of the Council’s services.

Council Website - Laois.ie



2018 saw an increase of over 50% in page views on the laois.ie website. The total page views came to 755,699 over the year with almost half of these visits originating from a mobile phone or tablet device.

Planning again proved to be the most popular area for users of our website, with the Online Planning Enquiry facility as the most popular destination on the website. Job Vacancies, Housing and Library services also proved popular pages for visitors.

Installation of ICT Server and Storage Infrastructure

ICT completed the installation and commissioning of new server and storage infrastructure. The new architecture is based on a HyperConverged technology which has allowed a significant uplift in storage capacity and performance, and will allow for seamless cloud integration into the future where cloud storage can be seen as an additional drive or storage array on the network further extending the capacity available within the new datacenter.

ICT Security

ICT is constantly engaged in the area of cyber security and investment was made in this area again in 2018 as mitigation against the growing proliferation of cyber threats worldwide. Encryption software was procured for all laptop devices and a new Anti-Virus solution was procured and deployed.

Preventative security measures were put in place on the Council Network and connected devices to combat the increased threat of Ransomware.

Performance Indicators 2017

Total page views of the Local Authority websites in 2017	517,645
Total number of followers at end 2017 of the Local Authorities Social Media Accounts	34,579
Overall Cost of ICT provision per wholetime equivalent	€2,782.13

Social Club

2018 was another very successful year for the Social Club. Membership currently stands at 320 but this number is growing as new staff members join and enjoy the many events organized by the committee throughout the year.

Monthly Draw

On the first Friday of every month a draw for 3 prizes of €50 takes place for Social Club members. For December 2018 a very successful “losers draw” took place with 1 lucky member winning €50 each day.

Summer Barbecue

On 22nd June the Social Club hosted a very successful Barbecue in County Hall which was attended by nearly 100 people.

Theatre Outing

A group of over 40 people travelled to see the musical spectacular “Wicked” in the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre on 26th July, the Social Club provided subsidized tickets and bus transport and a wonderful evening was had by all.

Ecumenical Service

An ecumenical service was held in place of the usual mass in the Council Chamber on 14th November for deceased members and staff of Laois County Council. All retired and current staff members of the Council were invited with many attending. The change in format was very well received and refreshments were provided in the canteen afterwards.

Christmas

The staff Christmas party was held on Friday 14th December in the Abbyleix Manor Hotel. 100 staff enjoyed a casino night with dinner and dancing and the night was a huge success. The kiddies party was replaced by a trip to see the pantomime in Dublin in January 2018.

The last day Christmas draw was also a great success with the prize fund being increased again this year. It was also a Christmas Jumper Day with all monies raised donated to St. Vincent de Paul

Retired Members

Presentations were made to staff members on their retirement.

Other Events

Discounted tickets were provided for members for the following events:

Bloom

Subsidised packages to Dublin Zoo, National Stud/Japanese Gardens, National Aquatic Centre, Glendeer Pet Farm and the Galway Aquarium

Some of the other events held were:

Aintree Grand National Draw

Easter Egg giveaway

Scratch card giveaways

Valentines Day chocolates with proceeds to Muscular

Dystrophy Ireland

Halloween Social Evening

APPENDIX I

TITLE, PURPOSE AND NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF EACH COMMITTEE AND JOINT COMMITTEE AND THE NUMBER OF MEETINGS OF EACH COMMITTEE, JOINT COMMITTEE AND JOINT POLICING COMMITTEE HELD DURING 2018

COMMITTEES

Name of Committee	Members Elected	Number of Meetings
Local Community Development Committee	Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Jerry Lodge (R.I.P.)(Replaced by Councillor Pauline Madigan) Councillor John King	8
Joint Policing Committee	Councillor Pdraig Fleming Councillor Paddy Bracken Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor John Moran Councillor John King Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor David Goodwin Councillor William Aird Councillor James Kelly Councillor Noel Tuohy Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley	4
Heritage Forum	Councillor Pdraig Fleming Councillor William Aird	4
Placenames Committee	Councillor Jerry Lodge (R.I.P.)(Replaced by Councillor Pauline Madigan) Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor James Kelly Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor Willie Aird	2
Audit Committee	Councillor John Moran Councillor Jerry Lodge (R.I.P.)(Replaced by Councillor Pauline Madigan)	5
Laois School of Music	Councillor Mary Sweeney	3
Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor John King Councillor Jerry Lodge (R.I.P.)(Replaced by Councillor Pauline Madigan) Councillor Paddy Bracken	2
Kyletalesha Monitoring Committee	Councillor Paddy Bracken Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor William Aird	None

APPENDIX I

Rural Water Monitoring Committee	Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Pdraig Fleming Councillor Tom Mulhall	2
<u>OUTSIDE BODIES</u>		
Name of Committee	Members Elected	
Association of Irish Local Government	Councillor John Joe Fennelly Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor David Goodwin	
Laois & Offaly Education & Training Board	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Jerry Lodge (R.I.P.)(Replaced by Councillor Pdraig Fleming) Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor John King Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley	
Laois Tourism Company Ltd	Councillor John Moran	
AGM of Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances Ltd	Councillor Jerry Lodge (R.I.P.)(Replaced by Councillor John Joe Fennelly)	
Laois Arts Theatre Company Ltd	Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Jerry Lodge (R.I.P.)(Replaced by Councillor Pauline Madigan) Councillor Mary Sweeney	
Board of Abbeyleix Heritage Trust	Councillor John Joe Fennelly	
Local Authority Members Association	Councillor Seamus McDonald	
Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Paddy Bracken	
Laois Partnership Company Ltd	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor William Aird	
Portarlington Leisure Centre	Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Pdraig Fleming Councillor Tom Mulhall	
Portlaoise Leisure Centre	Councillor Jerry Lodge (R.I.P.)(Replaced by Councillor Pauline Madigan) Councillor William Aird Councillor Noel Tuohy	
Portlaoise Enterprise Centre	Councillor Jerry Lodge (R.I.P.)(Replaced by Councillor Pauline Madigan) Councillor William Aird Councillor Mary Sweeney	
Portarlington Enterprise Centre	Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Tom Mulhall	
Midlands Energy Agency	Councillor John Joe Fennelly	
Board of Treo Nua Ltd	Councillor Noel Tuohy	
Dublin Mid-Leinster Regional Forum	Councillor Pdraig Fleming	

APPENDIX I

	Councillor William Aird Councillor John King
Laois Advocacy Against Domestic Abuse Limited	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald
Midland Regional Drugs Task Force	Councillor Paschal McEvoy
LABEL- Laois Third Level Initiative	Councillor Jerry Lodge (R.I.P.)(Replaced by Councillor Pauline Madigan)

PAYMENTS TO MEMBERS 2018

Conferences	€ 8,148.06
Training	€ 48,120.26
Phones	€ 284.20
Monthly Expenses	€ 83,252.02
Strategic Policy Committee Chair Allowance	€ 24,000.00
Representational Allowance	€314,747.62
Cathaoirleach's Allowance	€ 20,383.22
Leas Cathaoirleach's Allowance	€ 4,076.65
Municipal District Chair Allowance	€ 18,111.98
Municipal Allowances	€ 27,720.33
Total	€548,844.34

APPENDIX 111

The following are details of the conferences and training events attended by Members of Laois County Council in 2018

Conference	Venue	Date	Delegates	Expend.
Finance Act 2017	Carlingford	5th to 7th January	7	€ 461.97
Colmcille Heritage Trust	Gartan	23rd to 24th February	9	€4,926.43
Nursing Home Support	Clonakilty	16th to 18th February	1	€ 430.31
Accessibility & Inclusion through infrastructure	Waterville	11th to 13th May	1	€ 622.00
Your Development Plan	Baltimore	19th to 21st October	1	€ 511.53
Social media and time management	Carlingford	9th to 11th November	1	€ 410.24
Entitlement to Health Services	Clonakilty	23rd to 25th November	1	€ 289.76
Entitlement to Health Services	Clonakilty	21st to 23rd December	1	€ 495.82
		Overall Total:		€8,148.06

Training	Venue	Date	Delegates	Expend
AILG				
AILG Module 1	Mullingar	22nd February	8	€1,130.79
AILG Annual Training Conference	Dungarvan	12th & 13th April	12	€5,628.34
AILG – Module 2	Lucan	15th May	5	€3,450.26
	Westport	19th May	5	
AILG – Module 3	Dundalk	23rd June	7	€3,082.90
	Bundoran	28th June	1	
AILG – Module 4	Cork	15th September	2	€1,270.19
	Carrick on Shannon	11th September	1	
AILG – Autumn 2018	Monaghan	25th & 26th October	14	€8,190.42
AILG - Module 5	Longford	11th October	5	€2,986.81
	Sligo	13th October	3	
	Limerick	18th October	1	
AILG – Module 6	Leixlip	17th November	9	€1,818.83
	Cavan	22nd November	1	

LAMA				
LAMA Spring Training	Donegal	6th & 7th April	6	€3,411.90
LAMA Autumn Training	Castleisland	28th & 29th September	13	€8,175.99
Irish Planning Institute	Tralee	18th to 20th April	5	€3,868.19
17th Annual Rural Water Services Conference	Claremorris	13th September	11	€4,656.36
EMRA - Draft Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy	Tullamore	4th December	2	€ 299.28
	Naas	6th December	1	
		Overall Total:		€47,970.26

HOW TO CONTACT US

www.laois.ie

E-Mail: corpaffairs@laoiscoco.ie

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Accounts Payable, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664117
Arts Office, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664033
Cash Office, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674308
Civil Defence HQ, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664106
Environment, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674318
Housing, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664222
Human Resources, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664075
Landfill Site, Kyletalesha, Portlaoise	Tel: (057) 8620653
Library Headquarters, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8594982
Motor Tax Office, Block 2, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674385
Planning, Block 1, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664032
Register of Electors, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664105
Roads, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674320
Sports & Leisure, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664041
Water Services, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674355