

# LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

## COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE



BUISÉID 2019

BUDGET 2019

## LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

### 2019 BUDGET

#### *To An Cathaoirleach and Each Member of Laois County Council*

Dear Councillor,

The attached Budget for the financial year 2019 has been prepared in accordance with statutory format for consideration by the Elected Members. The Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government by Circular Fin 05/2018, dated 23/08/2018 determined the period November 1<sup>st</sup> to November 28<sup>th</sup> as the prescribed period for County Councils to hold their 2018 Statutory Budget Meetings.

Laois County Council's statutory budget meeting is scheduled to take place on Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2018 at 11.00am. The process of considering and adopting the Budget must be concluded before November 25<sup>th</sup> 2018.

The process of compiling the budget involves a number of stages including:

- Consultation within the Corporate Policy Group to consider budget strategy, local property tax rate and high level budget considerations.
- The consideration by the elected members of the impact of a variation of the Local Property Tax rate.
- Detailed review of all aspects of the Budget with Directors of Services, Head of Finance and all budget holders.
- The consideration and adoption of General Municipal Allocations by the three Municipal District memberships at their meetings of October 17<sup>th</sup> 2018 (Portlaoise), October 18<sup>th</sup> 2018 (Borris-in-Ossory/Mountmellick) and November 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 (Portarlinton/Graigucullen)

The final stage of the budget process is the consideration by the Elected Members at the Annual Budget meeting on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

Laois County Council is required by law to adopt a budget that is sufficient to meet the proposed expenditure for the year ahead. Total expenditure must be matched by total estimated income from commercial rates, local property tax, government grants and charges for goods and services. Furthermore, Section 16 of the Local Government Act 2001 requires the Council in discharging its functions to have regard to the resources available to it, the need to maintain essential services and to ensure that a reasonable balance is achieved across its functional priorities and service areas.

In addition to adopting the budget, the Elected Members must also determine the annual rate on valuation to be levied on commercial properties. Members are aware that an owner assisted revaluation process was conducted by the Valuation Office in County Laois in the current year. Accordingly it is to be noted that the ARV will be expressed in a different manner for 2019 in comparison to our understanding of how the ARV has been expressed over many decades.

### **RESERVED FUNCTIONS OF ELECTED MEMBERS**

The members have a number of reserved functions in relation to the budgetary process as follows:

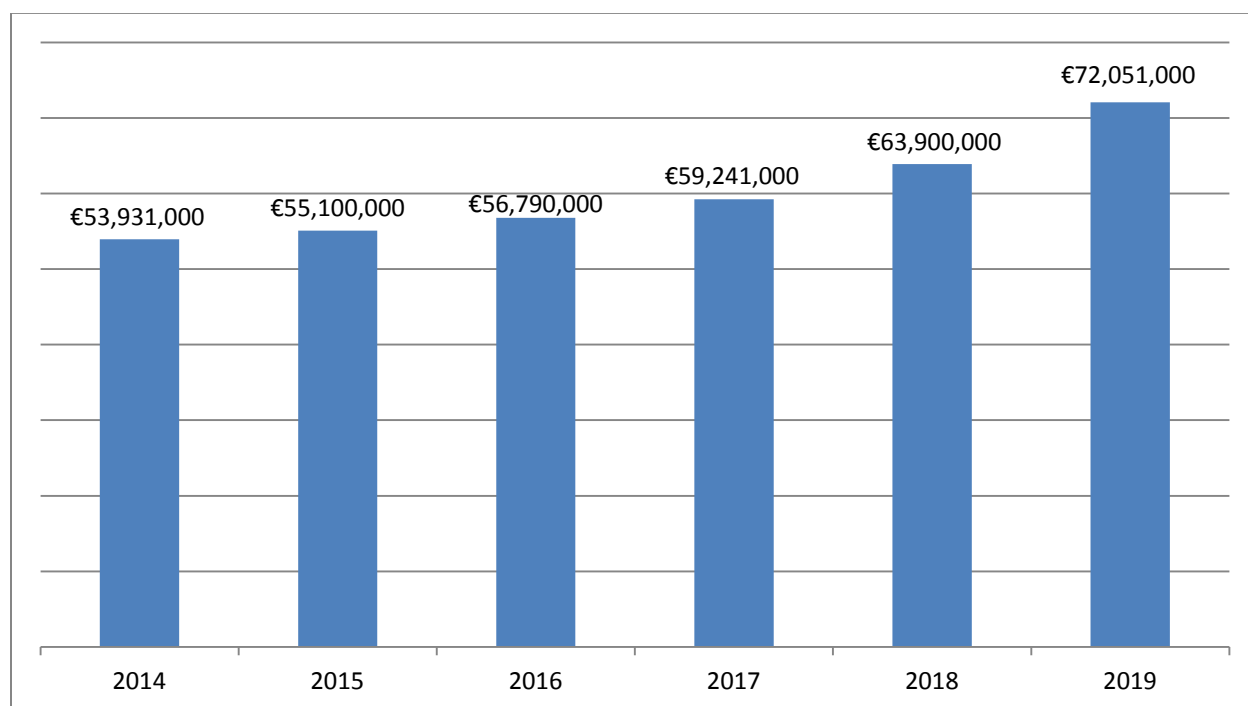
- (i) The members have the power to vary the Local Property Tax Rate (LPT) by a factor of plus or minus 15%. At the September 10<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting of the Council the Elected Members made a decision not to change the LPT as it applied in 2018.
- (ii) The adoption of allocations at Municipal District Level.
- (iii) The Members may adopt the Laois County Council budget with or without amendment and must approve the amounts provided to for transfer to the Council's Capital Account.

- (iv) The determination of the Annual Rate on Variation (ARV) must be decided by the Elected Members at the Annual Budget Meeting.
- (v) In accordance with the provisions of Section 31 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, the Members have the power to set the proportions of rates refunds applicable on vacant commercial premises.

### **BUDGET CONTEXT 2019**

Following a long period of austerity and from a low point in 2014 at which time the Laois County Council budget stood at €53.9 million, the last five years has witnessed a steady increase in revenue expenditure and investment back into services in the County. This trend is continued in 2019 and the revenue Budget for members' consideration now stands at €72.05 million, an increase of €18 million over the period.

### **Budget 2014-2019**



The decisions of the Members over the last number of years have resulted in Laois County Council exercising prudent budgetary oversight and sound financial management to the extent that the anticipated deficit going into 2019 will stand at approximately €100,000.

The main factors that shape the drafting of the 2019 budget are:

1. Buoyancy in income from commercial rates, plus €400,000.
2. Retaining an increased income from the Local Property Tax, as in 2018, in the amount of €493,916.
3. An increase of €200,000 from rents on Council owned houses.
4. Increased allocations to Laois County Council under the non-national roads programme.
5. A requirement to provide matched funding, €188,000, to support a number of projects and initiatives including, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, The Rural Regeneration Development Fund applications for Portarlinton, Mountrath and Durrow, The Urban Regeneration Fund Application for Portlaoise and the Council's application for EI Regional Enterprise Development Fund.
6. The continuing requirement to address housing maintenance matters and regeneration at O Moore Place and Hepburn Court/Knockmay.
7. The requirement to meet targets and develop actions to comply with Public Sector Energy efficiency requirements ( including replacement LED lamps), Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Measures and Decarbonisation measures.
8. Taking in charge of private and unfinished housing estates.
9. The requirement to ensure resilience in the Council's IT System.

### **WIDER LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTEXT**

The gradual realignment of responsibilities and reporting arrangements relating to certain local government functions from the Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government has continued over the past couple of years. The current reporting relationships with State Departments are summarised as follows;

1. Department of Housing Planning and Local Government; Matters relating to social housing, rents, housing grants, County and Local Area Plans, Planning Policy, Urban Regeneration, Local Government Fund, Emergency Planning , Rural Water and Register of Electors and Workforce Planning
2. Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport: Matters relating to Rural Roads and public transport, Non National Roads Funding, Sports and recreation grants.
3. Department of Communications Climate Action and Environment. All matters involving reporting on broadband, waste management, climate change, energy efficiency, waste and litter grants.
4. Department of Rural and Community Development. Matters relating to Towns and Village renewal funding, Clár, Library Development and funding, Rural Regeneration
5. Department of Justice and Equality: Matters relating to the Coroners Service and Community CCTV
6. Department of Finance, Public Expenditure and OPW: Matters relating to flood relief and flood defence capital projects.
7. Department of Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht; Matters relating to Biodiversity, Creative Ireland, Natural and built landscape, structures at risk funding.
8. Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation: Matters relating to the LEO and enterprise support
9. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Matters relating to animal welfare and veterinary inspections
10. Department of Defence relating to Civil Defence

Laois County Council has taken these changes in its stride and the Council has adapted well to the current multi reporting and accounting structure. It must also be borne in mind that in addition to Government Departments, the Council operates service level agreements with:

- Irish Water
- The Food Safety Authority of Ireland

- Music Generation Ireland
- The Local Authority Sector in relation to MY PAY
- Enterprise Ireland, in relation to the Local Enterprise Office
- The Sports Council

and works in very close collaboration with Transport Infrastructural Ireland (National Primary & Secondary Roads, Motorways) the Office of Public Works, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Sustainable Energy Agency Ireland and the Heritage Council of Ireland.

The evolving changes in government programmes and shift in national priorities as well as the further development of the Council's role in leading local economic and social development have been thoroughly considered and are provided for in so far as practicable in the Council's Annual Service Delivery Plans and in turn in the 2019 Budget.

### **LOCAL AUTHORITY BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2019**

The Annual Budget for 2019 provides for a significant and continued level of investment in the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of County Laois. It sets out to deliver on a number of core objectives as follows:

1. To continue our investment in Housing and Community Services.
2. To develop and implement the economic and community plan for Laois that supports job creation, tourism and sustainable communities.
3. To maintain our level of investment in providing quality public services.
4. To protect the environment, to meet the challenges posed by climate change and to ensure public safety.
5. To deliver improvements for quality of life in the County's main towns and villages.

The gross revenue expenditure required to run public services in Laois on a day to day basis is €72.05 million representing an increase of 12.7% in comparison with 2018.

The following areas of increased expenditure are of particular note:

- An additional sum of €218,000 towards the provision of window replacements, window restrictors, fire blankets and carbon monoxide alarms in the Council's housing stock in order to comply with the Rental Standard Regulations.
- An increased provision of €50,000 for maintenance and repairs to Council housing.
- An additional sum of €115,000 to assist in the provision of emergency accommodation.
- €180,000 in additional funding for local roads maintenance and €817,000 extra by comparison to 2018 in respect of Local Improvement Schemes and Community Involvement in Road works.
- Increased support for tourism in the County in the amount of €7,000.
- An increase in the library book fund of €5,000.
- Provision of an additional €7,000 in respect of the maintenance/ replacement requirements in the County's playgrounds
- Provision of an additional sum of €89,500 for the maintenance of parks and open spaces.
- Continued and expanded support for small businesses through the rates incentive scheme, paint the shops scheme and vacant property incentives.
- Funding of an additional €90,000 for music tuition and performance
- Provision of €60,000 in respect of repairs to cemeteries (*with additional funding in the capital programme of €180,000*)
- An additional €84,000 towards river drainage maintenance programme on the Barrow and Nore bringing the total budget for 2019 to €367,000
- Provision of an additional €71,000 for street cleaning

## **THE FUNDING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN LAOIS**



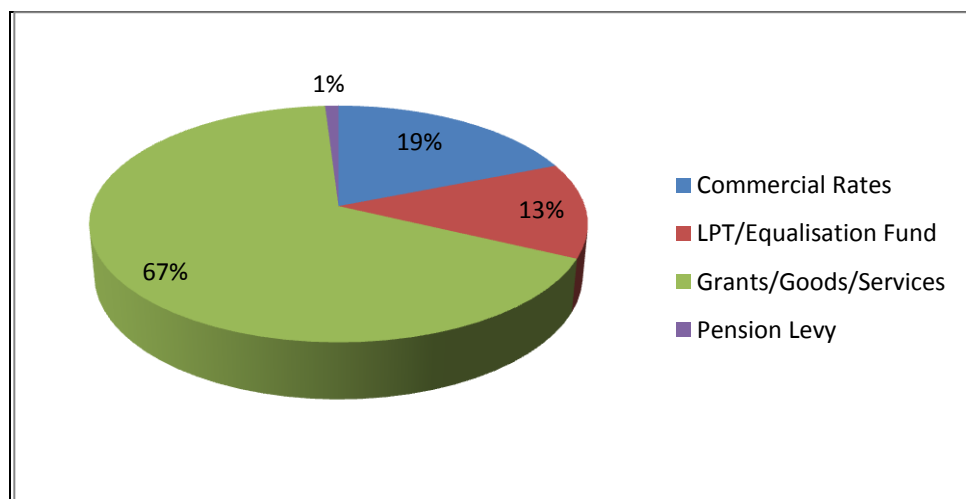
The combination of the retained Local Property Tax and the distribution of the Equalization fund amount to €9,052,793 for Laois County Council in 2019.

Members at municipal level have decided the detail of General Municipal Allocation apportionment in the 2019 municipal works schedule and a sum of €437,000 has been included between the three districts. Members also have a role in the discretionary maintenance of non national roads and the amount under this latter heading will be made known by the Department of Transport and Transport Infrastructure Ireland early next year.

Commercial rates remain our most important source of locally generated income and are budgeted at €13,443,543 for 2019. The increase in rates income, at €403,543 for 2019, is due mainly to the occupation and valuation of new properties in the past 12 months. It is critical to the budget arithmetic for the year ahead and will be of significant support in the provision of essential public services.

### **Sources of Funding for 2019**

The following chart shows the principal sources of funding in the 2019 Budget.



### **COMMERCIAL RATES AND SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS**

There is effectively no change to the commercial rate but 2019 will be the first year to which the new valuation method will apply and individual commercial property owners and entities may see variations in their future rates bills in comparison to previous years.

In an effort to support small business, the small retail and hospitality sectors who together employ roughly 5,000 people, and in order to incentivise the revitalisation of town centres I am recommending the following to the Elected Members:

- The continuation and expansion of the rates payment incentive scheme introduced in 2016 so that all rate payers liable for an annual rate payment of €10,000 or less will receive a benefit of a 4% rebate in 2019 where rate bills are paid promptly and in full. The ceiling for the incentive scheme was previously agreed by members at €8,500 per annum.
- The retention of the incentive scheme for business start ups in vacant properties introduced in 2014 where vacant units lie idle for six months or more and whereby the owner can avail of a rate rebate of 75% down to 25% over three years.
- The retention of the “Shop Front” scheme whereby property owners can avail of a €750 grant.

The expansion of the 4% incentive scheme to those ratepayers paying less than €10,000 can be seen as easing the burden on approximately 1,476 smaller businesses and rate payers in the county and in line with this Council’s policy to support small business through difficult trading years and to mitigate against the ever increasing impact of on line purchasing.

I am not proposing any increase in parking charges in the Portlaoise, Portarlington or Mountmellick urban areas.

### **THE GENERAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK**

The year to date has seen continued growth in both the local and national economies. Year on year Ireland has added 45,000 new jobs in 2018 and 60,000 new jobs are expected to be added in 2019. The national unemployment rate is now 5.4% <sup>(ref CSO Oct 18 Report)</sup>. However while there has been some improvement the unemployment rate in the Midlands remains higher than the national average at and 4,200 people remain on the live register in Co Laois.

These largely favourable national outcomes have been driven by forecasted national GDP growth of 7.5% this year <sup>(Dept of Fin)</sup> allied to continued growth in consumer spending (3.5%) in 2018 and positive figures in exports (7%). This trend is expected to remain positive in 2019 with predicted growth in GDP of 4.2% <sup>(Dept of Fin)</sup> and further progress towards effective full employment in the short to medium term.

There are however some challenges facing the local and national economy. In less than six months time Ireland's most important trading partner will leave the European Union. There are also rising trade tensions on a global scale. These combined threats in addition to currency exchange rate movements have the potential to adversely impact some of our key economic clusters in County Laois, namely, the agri-food sector, manufacturing, technology and services.

It is apparent therefore that ongoing policy vigilance and agility is required in the current environment. It is also to be noted that our Local Enterprise Office and Business Support Unit have been to the fore in providing training and awareness to the business community in preparing for Brexit in particular.

Despite these challenges the overall outlook for Laois remains positive and announcements during the year of new investments in jobs and enterprise in our county very much underpins this positive outlook.

## **THE STIMULUS EFFECT OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL'S BUDGET 2019**

The Revenue and Capital Budget programmes provide services and investment that aim to improve the county as a place in which to live work and invest. In 2019 the Council is projected to spend €72.05 million in Revenue expenditure and €31million in Capital expenditure. Revenue expenditure funds the day to day operations of the Council and assists numerous communities, associated companies and voluntary organisations by way of direct financial support. Capital expenditure funds many once off Capital projects such as libraries, new social housing and new roads.

The economic impact of the Council's budget is a function of the level and types of spend by the Local Authority. The expenditure over the year accrues some benefit to those business and suppliers/contractors that provide goods and services to the Council as well as the economy indirectly through increased consumption and employment in secondary business. At a basic level there are direct, indirect and induced impacts and conservatively the multiplier effect is estimated at 1.6 so that the total local impact is in the order of €160 million.

While such expenditure related impacts are very important to the local economy in Laois, the real economic and social impacts of the Council's Budget go away beyond this. Selected examples of the downstream knock-on impacts are:

- The National Enterprise Park at J17, Togher: Research shows that the provision of Industrial and Enterprise Parks can provide a major boost to local levels of economic and employment activity. While yet in its infancy (as regards the Council's ownership of part of the Park) it is very encouraging to note the level of interest in the location and the decision by Glanbia Cheese to invest €130 million in Portlaoise thereby creating 78 jobs. In nearby Clonminam 30 new jobs have been created by Heart Ambulance Service and another 30 jobs are to be provided by SkOUT at the IDA Business Park on the Mountrath Road.

- Tourism and Hospitality Promotion: Significant work is being undertaken by Laois Co Co in partnership with the Laois Tourism Board, Laois Leader Partnership, OPW, Coillte and Failte Ireland in attracting tourists and visitors to the County through the provision of amenities, festival support, walks cycling trails and developing the Ancient East product. The combined impact of the Electric Picnic, the Scarecrow Festival and the Fort Protector Festival, for example, is estimated to draw around 100,000 visitors to the County yielding an economic contribution of € 6 million locally. Around 1,100 jobs are sustained in the County through tourism, hospitality and recreation.
  
- Promoting and Supporting Indigenous Employment: The Laois Local Enterprise Office in partnership with the Council's Business Support Unit supports the development of SMEs in the County. A full programme of advice, training, mentoring, education in addition to financial supports and making available on line trading vouchers helps to stimulate and grow local business and sustain an entrepreneurial spirit in the county. In 2018 to date the LEO has provided €261,00 in grant aid to support 46 new jobs and provided training to over 650 business people. The number of jobs supported by LEO is now over 560.
  
- Measures to enhance the Quality of Life: LCC devotes a considerable resource to matters relating to quality of life in the community. In partnership with Laois Leader, the LCDC, Tidy Towns Groups, Voluntary Organisations and the associated companies of the Council, the Local Authority is to the forefront in promoting local and community development, in promoting the arts , heritage, music, culture and sports and in supporting social enterprise, social capital and community integration.

## ECONOMIC AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT IN LAOIS

Laois County Council carries out important economic development functions in its own right and on behalf of Enterprise Ireland under a service level agreement. The Council will continue to collaborate with IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland in Laois so that the County can realise its full employment and investment potential.

The Council's Business Support Unit and the Local Enterprise Office work hand in hand from their shared base at County Hall in promoting business activity in the County. The BSU and LEO will continue to provide support for micro enterprise, SME's and economic and tourism development generally as well as exploring and pursuing opportunities for foreign direct investment into the County. The operational cost of the LEO continues as a contra item in the 2019 budget and a sum of €1,190,000 is allocated to support enterprise, training and business innovation in Co Laois

In the course of 2018 the Elected Members agreed to the disposal of lands at Togher to the Glanbia Cheese JV. This followed a decision by the Council to purchase roughly 80 acres of land at the location in 2017. The purchase of the site provides a clear opportunity for Laois to set its own strategic direction for employment types and land uses at one of the prime locations on the M7 inter urban motorway. Members are advised that the Council granted planning permission for the €130 million development in September 2018 and works in developing the new access road and associated services will commence in a matter of weeks. On foot of the making of the Portlaoise Local Area Plan and the Togher Area Masterplan the 2019 Budget provides resources to allow the Council to embark on a Marketing Campaign for the balance of the site through local, national and digital media. This continues to be one of the Council's main goals for the Council in 2019 and will be a significant component of the established "**Connect2Laois**" business promotion and marketing strategy launched in October 2017 and the "**Invest in Laois**" campaign to be run jointly by LCC and IDA.

The Local Community Development Committee (an independent committee of the Council) was established in mid 2014 and from 2016 is also designated as the Local Action Group (LAG) with responsibility for delivery the LEADER programme in Co Laois and in partnership with Laois Partnership Company and Laois County Council as financial partner.

The committee is statutorily responsible for the planning and co-ordination of local and community development programmes, in accordance with the 5 year Local Economic and Community Plan that was adopted by Laois County Council in early 2016. The LCDC also works in an oversight and partnership role with the Laois Partnership Company in delivering the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in the County.

Laois County Council therefore occupies a significant and pivotal role in economic development locally and must structure itself to respond to new demands on Local Government, must work in partnership with IDA and Enterprise Ireland and must identify opportunities as they arise to stimulate economic development and create the environment for job creation.

### **HOUSING SUPPLY AND ACCOMMODATION**

The provision of new social housing and accommodation remains a top priority for Laois County Council for 2019 and beyond.

While the capital investment in the provision of social housing is contained in the Council's Capital Programme, the revenue budget also plays a significant part in the delivery and support of social housing under the five pillars of "Rebuilding Ireland".

The Council's housing programme aims to deliver over 800 homes in the period to 2021. This is in excess of the target of 627 homes set by the Dept of Housing, Planning and Local Government over the same period. The resources available to the Council's housing department have been increased significantly in the past year and the task in hand is to deliver much needed housing through a blend of direct build, leasing, turnkey, Housing Assistance Payment, RAS, Part V and direct acquisitions. The Council continues to make steady progress under this programme and is on course to provide homes to 137 families in the current year, thereby exceeding the target of 76 units set by DHPLG for 2018. In addition the Council will have assisted over 400 applicants to source and secure accommodation through HAP by the end of the year. Accordingly, the Local Authority is on course to provide solutions to the housing needs of over 630 families in 2018 alone. This includes the re-letting of 90 properties.

The housing authority will continue to operate at a high level of activity in the next twelve months to achieve further progress over the following selected areas:

- Purchase of sites and lands in Portlaoise, Mountmellick and other high demand locations through the use of Compulsory Purchase if and where appropriate.
- Provision of more homes to accommodate smaller family units and single person applicants reflecting the fact that 67% of those on our housing list totalling 1,053 are in this category.
- Work closely with Approved Housing bodies in the delivery of more homes with particular emphasis on the former Convent site Portlaoise, O' Moore Place and Knockmay/Hepburn Place.
- Prepare a number of scheme layout plans/master plans for consideration by the members in advance of the statutory public consultation process.

In the area of preventing homelessness, the Council continues to prioritise this matter and expenditure of €325,000 is provided for this purpose in 2019. A HAP Place Finder will commence employment in late November 2018. A Vacant Homes Officer will also be appointed.



The Rental Accommodation Scheme, the HAP Scheme and Long Term Leases remain important sources of housing provision with expenditure recoupable from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government.

The 2019 Revenue Budget provides additional financial resources for the maintenance and upkeep of its approx 2,200 housing units by way of the revenue budget and a sum of €3,093,000 is provided in this regard for 2019.

### **THE REGENERATION OF OUR TOWNS AND VILLAGES**

The great work of all communities in Co Laois and the commitment to high standards by the Laois Tidy Towns Federation is extremely encouraging and all those voluntary groups as well as the staff of this Council must be lauded for their outstanding efforts. There were a number of notable achievements throughout the county in 2018 not least the attainment of gold and silver medal status by Abbeylaxey and Portlaoise in the 2018 National Tidy Towns competition. There were also sterling efforts by communities in Timahoe, Vicarstown, Stradbally and Killeslin in the IPB/Co-operation Ireland Pride of Place competition. The town of Mountmellick also came to the fore in the Bank of Ireland Enterprise Towns Awards in addition to attaining an Endeavour Award in the Tidy Towns competition.

Over the past two years Laois County Council, with significant support from the Department of Rural and Community Development, has invested heavily in rural regeneration through such programmes as the Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS), CLÁR, Tidy Towns Grants, Community Enhancement Scheme, Tourism Grants, Better Energy Communities, Sports and Recreational Grants , Cemetery Grants etc to the order of €4.5 million.

During the course of 2018 the Government launched the National Planning Framework (NPF) Project Ireland 2040". The Plan includes an objective for a pilot Demonstration project for urban regeneration in Portlaoise, the purpose of which will be to deliver on components of the "Vision Statement for Portlaoise" prepared by the Council in 2017 in collaboration with the Portlaoise Town Team. At the same time the NPF commits to a renewed focus on activating the potential for the renewal of smaller towns and villages. Taking advantage of these opportunities and the funding streams announced subsequently, I can confirm that Laois Co Council has applied for financial assistance under both the Urban Regeneration Development Fund and the Rural Regeneration Development Fund competitions. Our applications relate to

- Portlaoise, (cultural quarter, public realm and laneways, low carbon town, Market Sq, Main Street, housing regeneration) in total value of €20.1 million, and
- Portarlinton, Durrow and Mountrath in total value of €4.5 million.

While the Council awaits the outcome of the applications it is considered prudent to provide a matching sum of €1.81 million in the Capital Budget for 2019 to 2021.

Having regard to the making of the Portlaoise Local Area Plan and the forthcoming Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and in order to position Portlaoise as a true economic driver in the region it will be necessary to:

- (i) plan for a more cohesive and connected urban centre having regard to the needs of business, heritage and to cater for pedestrian comfort, safety and accessibility ,
- (ii) pursue solutions for urban renewal and urban dereliction through adaptive use of building to accord with the principle of living cities initiatives
- (iii) pursue the provision of much needed additional parking in the vicinity of Portlaoise Railway station to cater for existing and future rail travel between Portlaoise and Dublin.

- (iv) advance measures to ensure the Town can increase business and economic growth while reducing carbon emissions and achieving better energy efficiency in the urban environment

### **TOURISM , HERITAGE , TIDY TOWNS**

Laois Tourism, supported by Laois Co Council and Laois Leader Partnership developed a new Tourism Development Plan for Laois. The plan was launched in early 2018 and its main objective is to develop the visitor attractions of Emo House and Gardens, the Rock of Dunamaise and the Portlaoise Fort Protector under the Ireland Ancient East branding. While Laois Tourism currently retains the services of an animator the Council will continue to provide significant tourism services and support in collaboration with Laois Tourism and Failte Ireland. The 2019 budget provides a sum of €176,000 to assist and support the further development of the tourism product and to improve tourist information facilities and online information for visitors to the County.

Construction work on the first phase of the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail (35km) has seen substantial progress by Coillte with a view towards having a world class trail available to visitors by the end of next year. However this is contingent on further capital grant assistance for the project and to this end a sum of €380,000 is provided in the capital budget for 2019 to 2021.

The Council will continue to support festivals and community events and will work closely with the Laois Leader Partnership to assist community groups to promote festivals and events of a larger scale to attract bigger national attendances.

The protection of the natural and built heritage is an important function of Laois County Council, a countywide asset that is valuable in its own right but also to the tourism and visitor experience in the County. To this end and in acknowledging the value of built heritage to the tourism industry and local communities a sum of €23,000 is provided in

respect of Borris in Ossory Courthouse, the Fintan Lalor Homestead and further work on Fitzmaurice Place.

A sum of €680,500 has been provided in the budget for street cleaning, parks, landscaping and maintenance of open spaces. This is a critically important function for the local Authority particularly as we try to attract more visitors and economic activity to all parts of the county.

In addition the community grant aid scheme, so important to local community groups, tidy towns grants and community projects is to be increased from €135,000 to €138,500 in 2019.

### **CLIMATE ACTION, ENVIRONMENT AND FLOOD RELIEF**

The establishment of four Climate Action Regional offices during the course of 2018 marks the beginning of a new approach to the preparation of Climate Adaptation and Mitigation planning by Local Authorities in the State. In this regard it follows that Laois County Council must play its part in achieving statutory targets set under various international agreements and national law.

A programme of work to be undertaken in the short term includes;

- ❖ The replacement of the existing stock of street lights with efficient LED lighting *(note that LCC has already exceeded its public sector energy efficiency target of 33% set for 2020)*
- ❖ The preparation of a Climate Adaptation Plan and Renewable Energy Strategy
- ❖ The implementation of flood relief works in Mountmellick, Portarlinton, Clonaslee and Rathdowney
- ❖ The provision of a town bus service for Portlaoise using energy efficient transport
- ❖ The roll out of further better energy community projects in collaboration with SEAI

The past year also witnessed the establishment of River Basin District Management offices throughout the country with additional scientific staff assigned towards meeting the requirements of the Water Framework Directive and achieving good ecological status in our rivers and water bodies. The Local Authority Water Consultation Offices together with Teagasc, Department of Agriculture and major dairies will target high priority water bodies in the current year. In addition the Environment Department of LCC will continue to provide advice as to the necessary programme of measures necessary for good nutrient management and environmental protection.

Members should note the inclusion of €2,000 in the Budget in respect of the Cathaoirleach's Award for good environmental practice in the farming community.

### **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2019 TO 2020**

The elected members are obliged to consider a three year capital programme at the statutory Budget meeting of the Council. The revenue budget 2019 makes provision for repayment of portion of capital deficit balance incurred on a number of capital projects over the past 7 years. The total value of capital works included in the revised programme amounts to an estimated €128 million but the delivery of such works is entirely contingent on funding becoming available to the Council through state grants, development levy income and contributions from other sources.

### **Development Contributions**

At this point in 2018 just over €700,000 in development charges has been collected. The scheme was revised and approved by the Members in late 2017 so that added stimulus could be provided to the housing construction sector. The workings of the new scheme will be monitored in 2019.

## **LOCAL AUTHORITY GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Audit Regime**

It is fundamental to the management and operation of Laois County Council that a sufficient level of control and oversight is in place at all times. Good governance is a key factor in attracting new business to Laois as well as engendering trust and transparency for the people of Laois.

The Laois Internal Audit Committee has been in place for over 10 years and I wish to thank the members of the Committee including Cllr John Moran and Cllr Pauline Madigan for their work in this important area of local government scrutiny. I am to reserve special mention to the sterling work done by the late Cllr Jerry Lodge on the Audit Committee and to acknowledge in the process of preparing this Budget the outstanding contribution of Jerry to public service in County Laois for over five decades.

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for the establishment of the National Oversight and Audit Commission to examine local government performance. The Council is also scrutinized by the Local Government Audit Service, by Transport Infrastructure Ireland, by the Department of Transport, by the Environmental Protection Agency, by the Department of Housing Planning, Community and Local Government and by the Health and Safety Authority. This level of oversight is essential in the delivery of a wide array of services provided by Laois County Council.

Members should note that Laois Co Council continues to report to the EU on a quarterly basis in relation to financial performance.

## Strategic Policy Committees

The Councils four Strategic Policy committees, Committee 1, Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning, Committee 2, Housing, Committee 3, Community, Social, Cultural and Heritage and Committee 4, Transportation, Environment and Emergency Services have addressed major strategic issues facing the County under the Chairmanship of Councillors Seamus Mc Donald, Jimmy Kelly, Mary Sweeney and Paddy Bracken.

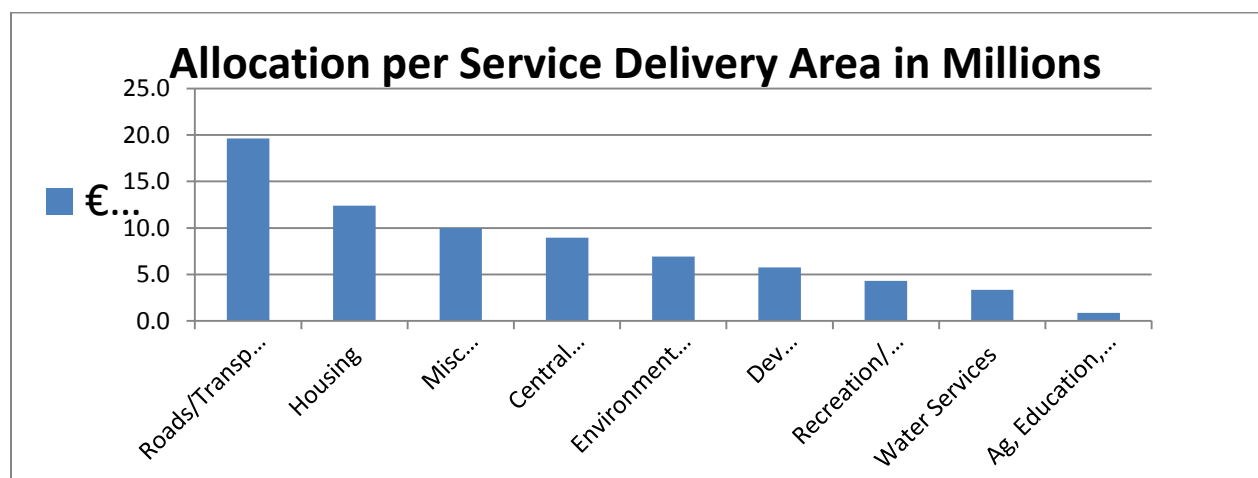
The SPCs are an important part of the Councils policy development process and they dealt with a very significant range of policy matters during 2018.

## Municipal District Committees

The Council's three district committees of Borris in Ossory/Mountmellick, Portlaoise and Graiguecullen/Portarlinton under the current Chairmanships of Councillors Paddy Bracken, Catherine Fitzgerald and John Moran, respectively, met to deal with issues relating to service delivery on an area basis and to agree programmes of works to be included in the new municipal works schedules. The municipal committees have addressed a range of road, traffic management, village renewal, community, environmental improvement and service issues for their localities in 2018.

## Service Divisions

The expenditure and income arising in each of the service divisions is shown hereunder:-



## **Conclusion**

I wish to thank all the members of the Council, Cathaoirleach Councillor John King and his predecessor Councillor Padraig Fleming for their continuing work in advancing the development and interests of the County.

The members through their actions have ensured that significant positive development will take place in the county and that every community in Laois will further benefit as economic circumstances improve.

I wish to include in my thanks the SPC chairs, and the chairs of the Municipal Districts.

I wish to acknowledge the members of staff who retired in 2018 and to thank them for their outstanding public service to the people of Laois.

I also wish to remember all those associated with the Council who have sadly passed away in the last year.

I wish to record my particular appreciation to Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance, Kieran Kehoe, Donal Brennan, John Forde, Director of Services for their work in preparing the 2019 Budget and for their unstinting commitment and hard work over the past year. I also wish to acknowledge the work of all the staff of Laois County Council over the past twelve months.

**I recommend to the Council the formal adoption of the Budget and that the General Annual Rate on Valuation of .2217 in respect of the financial year 2019. This equates to the €66.57 adopted in 2018.**



**I also recommend that Council approves the amendment of the early rates payment incentive scheme so as to extend the upper ceiling to €10,000 per annum and to retain a rebate of 4% on early or prompt payment of the annual rates bill.**

Mise le meas,

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***John Mulholland***  
***Chief Executive***

**6<sup>th</sup> November, 2018**

## **SERVICE DIVISION - HOUSING & URBAN REGENERATION**

The official opening of the 33 houses at Conniberry Way, Portlaoise by Minister Eoghan Murphy took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2018. The Council continues with its housing acquisition programme which will see up to 30 units being delivered in 2018.

Tenders have been invited for the refurbishment and extension of 2 Harpers Lane, Portlaoise and for the construction of 6 houses at Shannon St, Mountrath. Tender documents are being finalised for 2 houses at Hillview, Portlaoise.

The elected members of the Council approved the Part VIII on the 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018 for 6 houses in Rathdowney. A Stage 3 application is being finalised. The Part VIII is on display since the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2018 for 10 houses at Pattison Estate, Mountmellick.

The Part VIII for 10 houses at Gleann na Glaise, Ballyroan will go on display later this month.

A Stage 3 application is with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government for the construction of 22 houses at Ballymorris Road, Portarlington. Stage 2 applications are being prepared for 8 houses at Mooreville, Rathdowney and 6 houses at Harbour Court, Mountmellick. A Project Brief is being finalised for lands at Stradbally. The preliminary design for 54 housing units has been completed at Hepburn Court / Knockmay, Portlaoise. The regeneration of O' Moore Place, Portlaoise and the construction of 34 houses in the adjoining field is at preliminary design stage. The Sophia Housing Association / Co-operative Housing Ireland have appointed a Design team for the development of 47 units at the Old Convent Site in Portlaoise.

The Council continues to work with Voluntary Bodies in the provision of housing in Portlaoise, Portarlington, Abbeyleix, Mountmellick, Graiguecullen and other areas of the County.

## SERVICE DIVISION – COMMUNITY, ENVIRONMENT, WATER SERVICES, HUMAN RESOURCES AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS

### **Environment**

This year has continued to be another busy year for the staff of the Environment Section. The new *Waste Management (Storage, Presentation and Segregation of Household and Commercial Waste) Bye Laws 2018* were adopted by the Council on the 24<sup>th</sup> September and came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> November. The *Litter Management Plan 2018-2020* was also adopted at the September Council meeting.

This year the Council operated a Mattress Amnesty with the help of a grant from the Department of Communications Climate Action and Environment; a total of 827 mattresses were collected free of charge over four locations.

The Council continues to be active in waste and litter enforcement; in the first nine months of 2018 the Council collected 148 tonnes of illegally deposited material, a considerable increase on the previous year. The practice of using mobile CCTV camera to detect and deter illegal dumping has continued and the Council will continue to prosecute offenders whenever it finds sufficient evidence for prosecution.

The Council continues to work with community groups in keeping the County clean and tidy. This year a provision has been made in the budget for a scheme to recognise good environmental practices in the farming sector, through a special Cathaoirleach's award.

Once again significant progress was again made by the local Tidy Towns groups that submitted applications to the national competition. Among the successful entries were Abbeyleix where was awarded a Gold Medal, Portlaoise Silver) and Ballacolla and Mountmellick (Endeavour Award).

The Council continues to make good progress on investment in energy efficiency measures. The government has set a target for state bodies of a 33% improvement in the efficiency of energy use (compared to historic use) by 2020. The latest report from the

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland puts the improvement for Laois County Council at 37%; nevertheless further improvements are planned both in relation to LED lights and in relation to energy use with Council buildings.

## **Water Services**

Laois County Council will continue to provide public water and wastewater services to the people of Co. Laois, in collaboration with Irish Water, through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and in accordance with an agreed Annual Service Plan (ASP).

In terms of strategic capital investment it is important to note that Irish Water in conjunction with Laois County Council is bringing 3 additional boreholes in Coolbanagher Portlaoise into production augmenting the supply by 4,800m<sup>3</sup> per day; this will provide significant additional headroom capacity (of the order of 40%) in the public water supply in the county town.

The Local Authority however remains the Water Services Authority in connection with Group Schemes (GWS), Private Wells, and Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems (Septic tanks). Funding is provided each year to administer a grant and subsidy scheme under the Rural Water Programme and to provide advice and support to Group Water sector in the county to continue to maintain a high quality water supply in line with the EU drinking water quality standards. Some Highlights in Rural Water in 2018 were:

- Water Quality in Group Water Schemes is compliant with the EU (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, as amended.
- Capital grants were allocated in 2018 to Private GWSs in Ballacolla, Ballypickas, Cullohill, Derrynaseers, Errill, Heath and Moyadd 2.
- Taking in Charge Private GWSs: Ballyadams 1, Ballyadams 2, Ballycarnan and Monascreeban have been taken over in 2018.

Laois initiated a programme of sampling and monitoring PrGWSs that are exempt under the EU (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014 as amended. The programme has been completed and 15 group schemes have been tested.

## **Human Resources**

There has been a high level of recruitment activity during the year arising from retirements, resignations and some centrally funded positions. This is reflective of increasing work programmes, and a high degree of mobility within the local authority sector generally.

33 recruitment competitions have been held year to date in 2018. This resulted in a total of 962 applications received, with 618 candidates to date being called to interview (including shortlisting interviews). Further recruitment will continue to year end.

A total of 80 staff appointments have been made to date in 2018.

## **Corporate Services**

### **Receptions**

The Members of Laois County Council accorded Receptions to the following during 2018:

### **Civic Receptions**

25 <sup>th</sup> January 2018	Powerchair Football World Cup participants- Aoife McNicholl & Emer O'Sullivan
22 <sup>nd</sup> March 2018	St Abbans Athletic Club Ladies Team
26 <sup>th</sup> April 2018	Gold Scott Medal Recipients
6 <sup>th</sup> June 2018	Laois Kettlebells Clubs
8 <sup>th</sup> June 2018	Kiln Lane Residents Association

### **Cathaoirleach Receptions**

31 <sup>st</sup> May 2018	Laois Active Retirement Groups
21 <sup>st</sup> September	International Boxing Federation World Super Bantamweight Champion- T J Doheny

### **Annual Service Delivery Plan**

The Annual Service Delivery Plan for 2018 was adopted by the Members at their meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Work will commence on preparing the 2018 Plan in the coming weeks.

### **Library Services**

The Library service continues to play a pivotal role for all communities in Co. Laois. They offer an efficient frontline service for all members providing them with access to books, media, online services and internet/wifi.

The libraries work with many groups within their communities and offer a varied events and exhibitions programme. By the end of this year, we expect that there will have been over 2000 events hosted across the County in different libraries. 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 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 Dunamaise theatre on Saturday October 13<sup>th</sup>.

### **Summer Reading Challenge**

Laois County Library Service has organised a summer reading challenge and this year we 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 this year 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 community 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.

### **Capital Development**

#### Portlaoise Library

Detailed 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 on the site 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.

### **Community Development**

Laois Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) continued in 2018 to have a major impact on communities across Laois through a number of programmes and schemes, including the Community Enhancement Programme, from which 91 applicants were awarded a total fund of €284,032. Other initiatives Laois LCDC has spearheaded during the year include the publication of the Healthy Laois Plan under the national Healthy Ireland Framework. The Committee also had successful applications in both rounds of the Healthy Ireland Fund, working with agency partners to implement health

and well being initiatives in the county. The Committee also continues to monitor the community element of the Local Economic and Community Plan.

Under the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme, Laois LCDC monitored the implementation of actions in the 2018 Annual Plan with a budget of over €586,000.

Under the LEADER Programme, Laois LCDC has to date approved over 90 project applications and up to 20 claims for payment will be processed by year end.

This year has proved to be another strong year for Laois Public Participation Network (PPN). The PPN has added over 60 new groups registered with Laois PPN bringing the total number to 460. Over that period, in addition to regular newsletters to all PPN members, the PPN website was developed and successfully launched. A range of support and information events were organised by Laois PPN throughout the year including a Crime Prevention Advice session in association with An Garda Síochána, an Age Friendly information event held in association with Laois County Council's Age Friendly Programme and the Community & Voluntary Awards, which are also held in partnership with Laois County Council.

This year has seen further progress under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme with the majority of the previously funded projects approaching completion. On October 5<sup>th</sup> this year the Department of Rural and Community Development announced a further tranche of funding totalling €870,094 for 11 community projects throughout the County.

Applications were also made in respect of Portarlinton, Mountrath and Durrow in 2018 under the new DRCD Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and an outcome is awaited.

Laois Age Friendly Alliance, the interagency committee tasked with delivering the Age Friendly Programme in Laois, delivered a range of initiatives including the Information Guide for Services for Older People, the launch of a number of Age Friendly Parking Spaces in County Laois and the introduction of the Age Friendly Business Recognition Scheme Workshops attended by over 70 businesses in the county.



Coordinated by Youth Work Ireland Laois, in association with Laois County Council, the members of Laois Comhairle na nÓg made a presentation to the members of Laois County Council and were involved in consultations regarding the Midlands HSE Connecting for Life Suicide Prevention Plan, Hospital Closure, Portlaoise Local Area Plan and the Strategy Plan for Youth Work Ireland Laois.

Laois County Council supported two entries in the 2018 IPB All-Island Pride of Place; Killeshin Village (population category) and Stradbally/Vicarstown/Timahoe Community Wellbeing Hub (community wellness category). Judging took place in July and results will be announced in November.

### **Arts Office**

Laois County Council, through its Arts Office, continues to support a broad range of artistic programmes throughout the county, including the Artists-in-Schools and Summer Arts programmes and events such as Bealtaine Festival, Culture Night and Leaves Writing and Music Festival. The Arts Office coordinates the development of Youth Theatre in Laois, by coordinating a group in Portlaoise and providing assistance to groups in Portarlinton and Mountrath.

In 2018, Laois County Council signed a Framework Agreement with the National Arts Council which will see them support the arts in Laois to 2025.

Laois Arts Office also launched its programme as part of the national Creative Ireland programme, which will encompass a number of events and programmes celebrating our Irish culture and creativity over the next 5 years.

Laois Arts Office also presented the SPC members with a copy of the new 5 year Arts Plan in September 2018.

Laois Arthouse in Stradbally is now at full capacity with artists in residence and a full programme of exhibitions to the end of this year.

Music Generation Laois and the Laois School of Music are two organisations which are supported by Laois County Council, and over 3800 students get the opportunity to participate in music education through these organisations

A significant development this year has been the decision to purchase the old Scoil Mhuire site in Portlaoise. The school building will provide a long term home for the music education programmes of the Laois School of Music and Music Generation Laois, while the overall site will provide opportunities for enhancement of the interpretation of the Old Fort itself.

### **Tourism**

This year saw the launch of the Laois Tourism Strategy 2018-2022 by the Laois Tourism Board. This strategy will inform tourism development in the county by all interested bodies over coming years. Laois County Council continued its Tourism Grants Scheme assisted in the promotion and support of local festivals and events which delivered a social, cultural and economic benefit to the County. This includes large scale festivals and events including the Old Fort Street Festival and the Scarecrow Festival, Durrow. Laois County Council continued to work with Failte Ireland to promote Laois under Ireland's Ancient East Initiative; in turn Failte Ireland have organised a number of training initiatives for tourism interests in the county during the year.

Another welcome development is the construction of the first phase Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail by Coillte, in association with Laois County Council and Offaly County Council; applications have been made for further funding from Department of Rural and Community Development by Laois County Council, Offaly County Council, Coillte and Failte Ireland. For 2019 it is planned to open a Tourism Information point within the Dunamaise Arts Centre, which will draw tourists to this important cultural venue within the county.

## **Sports**

Programmes promoting physical activity through recreation continued in 2018, including National Bike Week, Games on the Green, National Recreation Week, Active Parks programme and the Outdoor Urban Adventure Programme, in association with Laois Sports Partnership.

Portlaoise and Portarlington Leisure Centres continued to deliver excellent service to the people of Laois in 2018.

Recreation and amenity infrastructural development in Laois continued in 2018 under a number of schemes. Under the 2016 Rural Recreation Funding, Slí na Sláinte walking routes in Portlaoise, Portarlington and Mountmellick have been installed, Funding was also awarded in 2018 of €12,000 for the replacement of play pieces in Abbeyleix playground, under the DCYA Play and Recreation Capital Grant Scheme. During 2019 we will continue with the upkeep and maintenance of playgrounds; in addition in delivering on Sport & Recreation programmes we will develop a further focus on groups with lower participation levels including persons with disabilities.

Under CLÁR 2018 Measure 2, funding was awarded to Ballyadams and Mayo National Schools to develop play infrastructure for students. In addition, over 100 sporting organisations were supported to make applications under the 2018 Sports Capital Grant Scheme.

Parks in both Portlaoise and Portarlington were awarded the Green Flag in July 2018.

SERVICE DIVISION – ROADS, TRANSPORTATION & EMERGENCY SERVICES,  
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Roads

Road Schedule, MAPROAD, Pavement Management System

The public road network for County Laois is summarised in Table 1 below:

Road Category	Kms
Motorway	63.0
National Secondary	100.2
Regional	348.4
Local	1,845.4
Total Network	2,357.0

Table 1 Road Network Categories

Map Road/Pavement Management System

All DTTAS grant allocations, from 2014 onwards, are governed by a Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating System. This provides for a consistent approach to the evaluation of pavement conditions across the state. In turn the pavement evaluation and rating system enables the prioritisation of schemes for inclusion in works programmes etc.

Such evaluation and rating systems form part of an overall road management system that will include for maintenance of the road schedule, project details, bridge management data, road opening licences and administration of state grants associated with the maintenance and improvement of the road asset.

In terms of the Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating System I confirm that surveys have been conducted in County Laois since 2014 associated with the Local Primary and Local Tertiary Network.

Ratings can be described as:

- Rating 1-4
  - Road Conditions are ranging from poor to very poor and road needs reconstruction.
- Rating 5-6
  - Road Conditions reasonable with only localised repairs and routine maintenance required.
- Rating 7-10
  - Road Conditions good to excellent with only routine maintenance required.

The Table below summarises the condition ratings across the Road Network for County Laois.

	Rating 1-4	Rating 5-6	Rating 7-10
Regional (R)	33.3	101.15	170.6
Local Primary (LP)	90.6	219.4	197.9
Local Secondary (LS)	87.7	192.3	194.9
Local Tertiary (LT)	89.1	123.5	174.0
TOTALS	300.7	636.35	737.4

Table 2

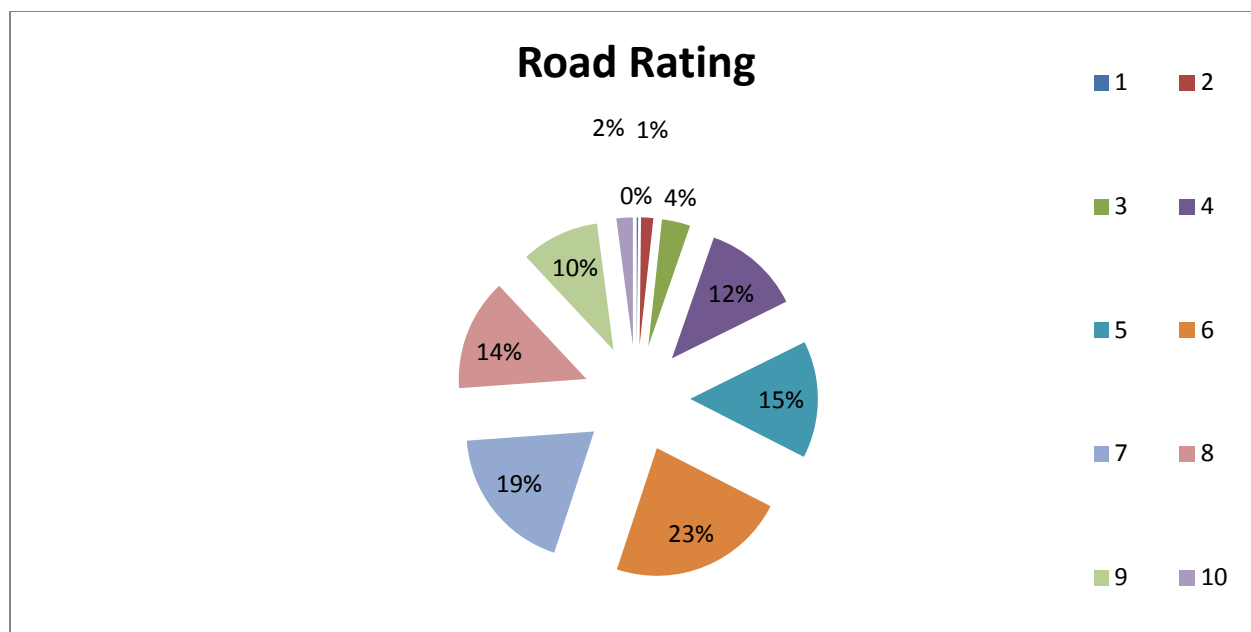


Table 3

#### 2017 Budget Allocation & 2018 Planned Works

The following points are worthy of note:

- 2018 Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) Grants for National Road Improvement and Maintenance total 2,710,000 compared to € 1,144,438 in 2017, a €1.6M increase. We have tendered the N80 Maidenhead realignment Scheme with a commencement envisaged for Q1 of 2019 – The overall value of this scheme is €6.5M.
- Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport grant allocations for the Non-National Road Network total €11,421,308 for 2017 as compared to € 7,688,729 in 2017, an increase of almost €4M – much of this increase relates to the costs incurred with the advancement of the Portlaoise Circular Route. This scheme will be substantially complete in mid 2019.
- Laois County Council own funds are provided under our County Roads Maintenance heading, 2019's allocation for County Roads maintenance is proposed at €1,200,000 and this includes for the recruitment of 3 General Operatives.
- Laois County Council own funds of €150,000 are allocated to the upgrade of junctions across the County.

- In relation to Regional and Local Road Strengthening & Maintenance we will endeavour to carry out 30km of strengthening works and 30km of surface dressing resurfacing works across the road network in accordance with the road ratings as mentioned above.
- Public Lighting costs are increasing due to the increased PSO levy for 2018 and the increased costs of materials. Laois County Council will also continue to engage with the National shared services plan to upgrade all our lighting stock to high efficiency LED lights.
- Community Involvement Scheme funding was reintroduced in 2018 to the value of €756,000 – We anticipate similar levels of funding in 2019.
- Bridge Improvement Works are funded under DTTAS Specific Improvement Grant of €200k. We have made an application for similar funding for 2018.
- A special Storm Damage Grant of €956,000 was allocated to Laois Co Co in October 2018 and it will address necessary repairs to Roads and Drainage infrastructure as a results of the storm events in the last year.
- Funding to the value of €565,000 has been received from the DRCD in relation to the Local Improvement Schemes in Laois in 2018 – we would expect similar funding in 2019.
- Laois County Council allocated €280,000 to River Maintenance & Drainage works form our own funds in 2018 and DTTAS allocated €228,000 towards roadside drainage works as well.

## 8 Laois County Fire & Rescue Service

With 8 Fire Stations and total numbers at 81 across all ranks we will continue to maintain and improve our service to the public. We propose the following improvement works at the following stations:

4 new vehicles (“Class B Fire appliances, incident Response unit and 4x4 Jeep) were grant 100% aided by the NDFEM in 2018 to the total value of €400,000

### Civil Defence

We received substantial support from the Department of Defence Capital Allocations in 2018 including €53,000 for 2 new 4x4 vehicles and €4,500 towards a new mapping system to enhance search capabilities.

### Planning Development and Control

#### National Planning Framework

“Project Ireland 2040”, The National Planning Framework was launched in 2018 and we also made submissions to the preparation of the RSES for the EMRA region.

LAPs for Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Mountmellick were all adopted in 2018 and we have been advised by DHPLG that we must commence the review of our CDP in 2019 following the adoption of the RSES in each region.

As part of Portlaoise LAP a master plan for lands at Togher was also developed and adopted.

### Unfinished Housing Estates

It is expected that 8 estates will have been taken in charge by the end of 2018. It is anticipated that the Council will bring forward a similar number in 2019 for taking in charge.

### Heritage

As part of Budget 2019 the Heritage section has included proposals around the following initiatives:

- Further enhancements to Old St. Peter’s graveyard, Portlaoise
- Completion of Historic Town Initiative
- Complete works on Kilabban Monastic Site
- Architectural Conservation Report and carry out works on Borris-in-Ossory Courthouse
- Maintenance and Repairs to Donaghmore Workhouse



## Economic Development

The Business Support Unit are currently working on the following:-

1. Strategy for increasing Diaspora Network.
2. Marketing strategy using Commuter Statistics.
3. Review of Business Incentives Schemes.
4. Extension of Shopfront scheme (Age Friendly Accessibility).
5. Development of Property Database.
6. Development of Portlaoise Farmers Market & Laois Food Trail.
7. Opening of Renovated Mountrath/Mountmellick Enterprise Centres under Town & Village Renewal Scheme.
8. Signage & Landscaping of Clonminam Industrial Estate.
9. Marketing of Junction 17 National Enterprise Park.

## Local Enterprise Office

The following is a summary of the progress to date in 2018:

- €260,703 approved in grant aid with potential to create 46 new jobs
- €28,690 approved in Export Assistance Grants
- €12,779 approved in Trading Online Vouchers
- 46 Training courses delivered with 676 participants
- 177 Mentoring Sessions assigned
- 4 companies participating in the Lean for Micro Programme
- Owner Managers from 20 Laois Companies took part in Management Development Programmes
- 123 one-to-one business advance sessions delivered
- 1 Laois Company successful in securing funding under the LEO Innovation Fund (Regional Fund)

- 8 Laois Schools participated in the Student Enterprise Awards with over 300 students
- 80 Laois businesses attending a workshop/mentoring on GDPR
- Hosted Regional Women in Business Conference in conjunction with Offaly, Longford & Westmeath LEOs