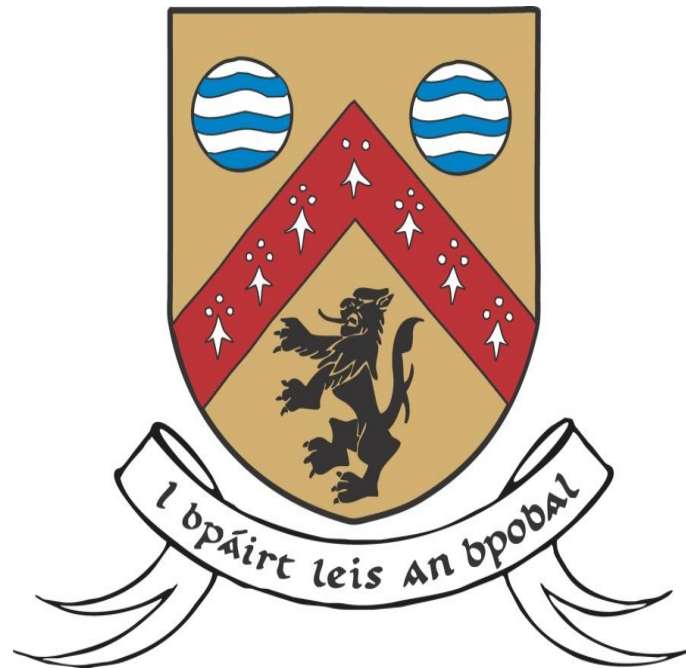

LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL
COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE



MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT
DECEMBER 2020/JANUARY 2021
TUARASCÁIL BHAINISTÍOCHTA
NOLLAIG 2020/EANAIR 2021

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

Section 136(2) of the Local Government Act, 2011 as inserted by Section 51 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, requires the Chief Executive to prepare monthly management report. The report for December 2020/January 2021 is as follows:-

Covid-19 Restrictions

The Level 5 Covid-19 restrictions introduced at the turn of the year continue to impact our operations and public facing services as follows:-

- All our offices and libraries are closed to the public for walk in services. Instead a remote or appointments based service is in operation for planning, library services motor tax and payments services.
- Construction activities on roads restoration and construction ceased from Friday 8th January afternoon except for winter maintenance (gritting), essential road maintenance, emergency call outs, flooding, traffic and public lighting.
- Construction on the County Library has again been suspended for a period.
- Construction of social housing has stopped except for the following schemes;
 - Ballymorris, Shannon Street, two turnkeys at Borris in Ossory and Clonaslee and
 - AHB schemes at Ballickmoyler Road, Clonrooske Abbey, Borris Meadows, Bellingham, The Glen Kilnacourt, Killeshin, Doirin Alainn, Holdbrook and Lake Drive, Kilminchy.
- Work will continue on voids, pre-lets, retrofits and housing adaptation works
- Activities will cease on rental inspections and housing estate management and other high risk activities where close contact may arise,
- The vast majority of staff are now working from home and are available in the normal manner via phone or email to attend to service requests.

Community Response Forum and Covid-19 Helpline

The Forum convened on two occasions over the Christmas period to review, plan and prepare for an escalation in demand for voluntary and emergency services and to roll out the “Keeping Well” winter campaign.

The helpline remains open for calls on six days per week. As of 10th January 2021, the helpline received 738 calls since its inception on 31st March 2020. The calls received to date in 2021 is 16.

Finance, & Allocations Notified

Expenditure and income to the 31/12/2020 is summarised below:

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Expenditure to 31/12/2020
Housing and Building	13,464,000	14,293,898
Road Transportation and Safety	24,353,000	19,949,304
Water Services	3,295,000	3,308,837
Development Management	6,221,000	14,522,597
Environmental Services	7,298,000	6,671,011
Recreation and Amenity	3,818,000	3,437,456
Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare	869,000	789,624
Miscellaneous Services	9,355,000	13,837,823
Central Management Charge	9,709,000	8,691,135
Total	78,382,000	85,501,685

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Income to 31/12/2020
Housing and Building	15,269,000	15,491,058
Road Transportation and Safety	20,126,000	18,334,091
Water Services	4,297,000	4,354,376
Development Management	3,830,000	14,009,679
Environmental Services	1,453,000	1,696,625
Recreation and Amenity	542,000	833,925
Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare	382,000	285,830
Miscellaneous Services	7,815,000	13,152,290
Superannuation	740,000	671,356
Local Property Tax	9,054,133	9,054,132
Rates	14,095,376	7,589,522
Capital transfer	778,491	0
Total	78,382,000	85,472,884

These figures are subject to change due to year end amendments

Allocations Notified

Slaintecare/Healthy Ireland– Community Resilience Fund	€67,225
Covid-19 Emergency Fund Round 2 (to LCDC)	€46,811
Town & Village Renewal Scheme 2020	€383,375
Oris Funding (Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme)	€141,045
TII Allocations	€2,033,674

Housing & Regeneration

Rebuilding Ireland Construction Programme

Scheme	Units	Progress
Shannon St., Mountrath	6	Contractors on site. Expected delivery date Q1 2021.
Ballymorris, Portarlinton	22	Contractors on site. Expected delivery date Q1 2021.
Hillview, Portaoise	2	Complete
Gleann naGlaise, Ballyroan	10	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions. Expected delivery date Q4 2021.
25-30 Moore St., Rathdowney	6	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions. Expected delivery date Q4 2021.
Pattison Estate, Mountmellick	10	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions. Expected delivery date Q4 2021.
Sean Doire, Durrow	22	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions. Expected delivery date Q4 2021.
Coolroe, Ballybrittas (Rural)	1	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions. Expected delivery date Q4 2021.
Harbour Court, Mountmellick	6	Single Stage documents to be submitted to Department in February 2021. Expected delivery date Q2 2022
Mooreville, Rathdowney	7	Stage 3 documents to be submitted to Department in February 2021. Expected delivery date Q2 2022
St. Kierans Park, Errill	14	Tenders returned on 23 rd December. Evaluation on-going. Expected delivery date Q2 2022
Clonrooske, Knockmay	11	Stage 2 application to be submitted to the Department in January 2021. Expected delivery date Q3 2022

Iona, Abbeyleix Road	9	Draft layout submitted and Stage 2 documents to be submitted to Department in February 2021. Expected delivery date Q4 2022
Oak Park Halting Site	4	Part VIII approved in December 2020. Tenders due to be advertised in Q1 2021. Expected delivery date Q4 2021
Carraig Glas, Stradbally	26	Stage 2 application submitted to the Department in January 2021. Expected delivery date Q1 2023

Urban Regeneration Programme

Scheme	Units	Progress
Former C.B.S. Site	67	Part VIII granted. Detailed design is currently underway and ground investigations will resume when current Covid19 restrictions are lifted. CALF funding application to be submitted in Q2 2021.
Hepburn/Knockmay	60	Cluid Housing Association are progressing this development. Stage 2 tender was advertised mid-December 2020 for the shortlisted modular contractors. Tender return date had to be pushed back to mid-February as site visits couldn't be carried out due to Covid19 restrictions.
O'Moore Place Regeneration	34	The Council is progressing the resolution of the access issue in respect of Doran's Field prior to development.
Convent Site, Portlaoise	51	Stage 2 submitted to the Department for approval on 17/9/20.
County Hotel, Portlaoise	11	Stage 1 approval for 11 units granted on 4/9/20. Discussions on-going with Department of Heritage.
Vacant Homes Office		<p>Laos County Council's Vacant Homes Action Plan prioritised actions to address vacancies arising in the private housing stock and in particular, properties that are in areas of high need and are having a negative social and visual impact on the community.</p> <p>A total of 245 properties have been investigated by the Vacant Homes Officer following reports of vacancy by Council Members and other Elected Representatives, members of the public or via www.vacanthomes.ie and applications under the Repair & Leasing Scheme and Buy & Renew Scheme.</p> <p>The Vacant Homes Officer has carried out an initial inspection on 220 vacant dwellings to date. Following this inspection, no further action has been deemed necessary in 97 cases due to the properties being found to be occupied, undergoing works by the owners or in a location of low housing need and unsuitable for social housing.</p> <p>70 vacant houses have been identified to date as being suitable for social housing due to the type of house and location and further action may be taken in these cases. 37 properties have been identified as having potential for use as development sites for social housing and these sites will be examined further.</p> <p>12 vacant properties have been acquired by CPO and 5 properties are currently going through the CPO process.</p>

Turnkey Projects

Scheme	Units	Progress
Expressions of interest		The Council has invited expressions of interest from the public in respect of the supply of newly completed homes as turnkey projects.
Main St., Borris-in Ossory	11	Contractors on site. 6 units complete with allocation in Q1 2021 and Phase 2 (5 units) in Q3 2021.
Clonaslee	7	Contractors on site. 7 units complete with allocation in Q1 2021

Approved Housing Bodies Delivery

Scheme	Units	AHB	Progress
Borris Road, Portlaoise	36	Tuath	Contractor is on site. Phase 1, 2 and 3 (27 units) complete and tenanted. Final Phase 4 (9 units) expected delivery in February 2021.
Bellingham, Portlaoise	30	Cluid	Contractor is on site. 15 of the 30 units have already been delivered. Phase 4 (9 units) expected delivery in February 2021. Phase 5 (6 units) expected delivery in Q1 2021.
Ballickmoyler Road, Graiguecullen	20	Co-Operative Ireland	Contractor is on site. 20 units complete with occupation of units in Q1 2021
Doirin Alainn, Ballylinan	12	North & East	Contractor is on site. Phase 1 and 2 (6 units) are completed. Final Phase 3 (6 units) expected delivery in February 2021
The Glen (Phase 2) Kilnacourt Portarlinton	18	Co-Operative Ireland	Contractor is on site. Expected delivery in February 2021.
Wilton Lawns, Portarlinton	2	Respond	Contractor is due to commence on site when current lockdown is lifted
Lake Drive Kilminchy	10	Co-Operative Ireland	Contractor is on site with expected delivery in February 2021
Holdbrook, Portlaoise	20	Cluid	Contractor is on site. Phase 1 (10 units) to be delivered in February 2021. Phase 2 (10 units) to be delivered in Q3 2021.
Clonrooske Abbey, Portlaoise	32	Cluid	Contractor is on site. Phase 1 (14 units) expected delivery in February 2021

			Phase 2 (6 units) expected delivery in Q2 2021 Phase 3 (12 units) expected to follow thereafter
Spa Street, Droughill, Portarlinton	26	Oaklee	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions. Expected delivery in December 2021

From the above tables it can be noted that there will be 253 new homes delivered under our New Build programme in 2021. In addition, Members will note that 261 homes were allocated to social housing applicants in 2020.

In addition to the units outlined in the above tables the Housing Department are also in discussion with various AHB's regarding the delivery of further Social Housing units throughout the county. The total number of units currently under discussion in the county is **546** broken down by MD area as follows –

- Portlaoise MD – 341
- Borris in Ossory/Mountmellick MD – 111
- Portarlinton/Graiguecullen MD - 94

Refugee Resettlement Programme

There is currently 1 family remaining to be housed under our Refugee Resettlement Programme. This tenanting will take place as soon as the current government guidelines allows and this will see us completing our overall Refugee Resettlement Programme to house 22 families.

Housing Loans, Grants , HAP & Private Rented Inspections

Since 1st February 2018, 94 Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans have been approved. 87 applications have been declined. Some of the reasons for negative outcomes include:

- Don't have the deposit required
- Repayment on the mortgage would exceed 30/35% of their income
- Already sufficiently committed (i.e. already are at capacity with other loans)
- Credit rating issues

There are currently 1,060 active HAP tenancies, 288 of which have transferred from rent supplement.

To the 31st December, 2020 the following grants for privately owned houses were paid:-

- 70 Housing Aid for Older People Grant Applications in the sum of €248,320
- 64 Mobility Aids Grants have been paid in the sum of €230,790
- 35 Housing Adaptation Grants have been paid in the sum of €401,900

470 Private Rented Inspections were carried out in the period to 31st December, 2020.

Housing Maintenance

Month	Work Orders Raised	Work Orders Closed	Work Orders Open
January	517	517	0
February	341	341	0
March	228	228	0
April	120	120	0
May	205	205	0
June	278	276	2
July	287	279	8
August	286	279	7
September	359	342	17
October	369	324	45
November	286	242	44
December	296	116	180
TOTAL JAN to DEC	3,572	3,269	303

NOTE: 77% of the open work orders are routine with 23% classified as essential and no emergency work order currently open.

Midlands Housing Retrofit Programme

Laois has been notified that it can proceed with the inspections of 160 homes as part of a pilot initiative under the above programme. The scope of eligible works includes:

- a) Attic Insulation
- b) Flat Roof Insulation
- c) External Wall Insulation / Dry Lining / Pumped Cavities
- d) Windows & Doors
- e) Heat Pumps
- f) LED Lighting

Houses must achieve a minimum BER rating of “B2” (or Cost Optimal Equivalent). It is proposed to carry out the inspections and subsequent works in two phases.

Survey inspections commenced in September 2020 on the first phase. Feedback to date has been positive from residents. Tenders for Phase 1 (62 houses) were advertised in December 2020.

Homeless Presentations

Time Period	Homeless Presentations	Emergency Homeless
November 18 th 2020 – December 31 st 2020	11	3
Year to Date	194	76

Individuals Accessing	Emergency Accommodation as of 31 st December 2020	Transition Accommodation as of 31 st December 2020
Adults	1	1
Children	0	2

Housing Allocations Year to 31st December, 2020.

Method of Housing Delivery	Numbers allocated
1 st allocation including new builds LCC	56
2 nd and subsequent allocations LCC including refurbished stock	70
Nominations to Approved Housing Bodies	135
Total Allocations	261

Planning, Development and Heritage

FORWARD PLANNING REPORT

COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Draft Plan 2021-2027 has been advertised and is on public display from the 12th January 2021 until 23rd March 2021 and is open for submissions/observations. Members of the public can view it on <https://consult.laois.ie/en/consultation/draft-laois-county-development-plan-2021-2027> (Laois Consultation Portal) and can make a submission via the portal or by email to cdp@laoiscoco.ie. Hard copy submissions are also acceptable.

Masterplan for Tyrrells Landbank

Consultation concluded on the initial public consultation on the Masterplans for the Stradbally Road project. 149 submissions were made through survey completion and submissions. This will now inform the drafting of the strategy. The Council will consult with the Portlaoise elected members once the consultants have progressed with their consideration of the relevant documentation.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT REPORT

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMPARATIVE FIGURES FROM 2020

Year	Valid applications from 01/01/2020 – 31/12/20	Valid applications for same period in 2019
No of applications	571	576

2020 PERFORMANCE

The following table gives a breakdown of valid planning applications received and decisions made during 2020:

2020 PERFORMANCE	
Number of valid applications received:	571 (Valid Applications)
Number of decisions made	530 (Decisions Made)
Number of applications granted:	511 (Decisions to Grant)
Number of applications refused:	19 (Decisions to Refuse) 3.3% refusal rate
Invalid applications returned to applicant:	151 (2020 Invalid Applications) 20.91%
Referrals to Area Offices (working days):	within 14 days achieved
Applications appealed to An Bord Pleanála in 2020.	15

311 pre-planning meetings were held up to 31st December 2020, at which members of the public had an opportunity to discuss planning matters with a planner prior to submitting a planning application. Pre planning resumed from the 11th January 2021.

2021 PERFORMANCE	
Number of valid applications received:	(Valid Applications) 9 REPORT ATTACHED
Number of decisions made	(Decisions Made) 15
Number of applications granted:	(Decisions to Grant) 15
Number of applications refused:	(Decisions to Refuse) % refusal rate 0
Invalid applications returned to applicant:	(2021 Invalid Applications) 3
Referrals to Area Offices (working days):	within 14 days achieved
Applications appealed to An Bord Pleanála in 2021.	2

Enforcement

<u>Service Review</u>	<u>2020</u>		<u>2019</u>	
	Dec-20	Jan - Dec 2020	Dec-19	Jan - Dec 2019
Total number of new cases subject to complaints that were investigated	5	94	5	191
Number of Warning Letters served	14	270	0	349
Number of Enforcement Notices served	0	63	1	103
No Of cases referred for legal proceedings	0	5	0	16
Number of cases in Court(incl adjournments)	8	46	7	63
Number of cases Resolved in Court	1	4	2	12
Number of Files Closed	9	129	16	131
Number of cases on system	165	165	201	201
Enforcement Costs recouped	€ 300.00	€5,941.93	€ 939.60	€9,433.55
Number of Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	6	35	4	36
Fees received through Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	€27,282.00	€59,033.48	€631.75	€14,157.35
Legal fees paid	€246.00	€7,447.65	€0.00	€11,151.68

HERITAGE REPORT

Funding for Conservation Grants 2021 has been announced and application details are on the laois.ie website. Closing date for both schemes 29th January 2021.

Details of the Community Monuments Fund 2021 are likely to be announced in late Dec/Early Jan.

Just Transition

An application to the Just Transition Fund jointly with Offaly County Council for a project to conserve medieval churches in both counties, has received preliminary approval. The funding amounts to €748,000 over three years, with match funding for Laois and Offaly County Councils. The project will involve conservation of three medieval churches in each county, with actions for biodiversity and pollinators in the surrounding graveyard. Laois County Council is the lead authority and a series of financial details are required by 15th January.

Masonry Conservation Projects

Conservation projects were carried out at the following sites this year:

- Killabban Medieval Church – complete
- Kilmanman Church – Complete
- Ballylusk Famine Mortuary – Complete
- Old St Peter’s Graveyard Portlaoise – Complete

Climate Change

Creative Responses to Climate Change – Abbeyleix

Abbeyleix Climate Action Project with Science Communicator Dr Niamh Shaw, working with Abbeyleix Tidy Towns. This project will involve engaging with all elements of the community and will run until March 2021.

Portlaoise Plane

Plans are underway to commemorate Col Fitzmaurice and the Portlaoise Plane on April 10th, 2021.

BROADBAND REPORT

National Broadband Ireland (NBI)

Surveying is continuing throughout the county. This involves surveying of poles, lines and manhole chambers of existing Telecom infrastructure.

Surveying in the Ballylinan DA commenced November 2020.

Broadband Connections Points (BCPs)

The BCPS were launched officially on the 17th December at Vicarstown Community Centre. The following locations are now live as BCP Locations. ~

Vicarstown Community Centre	LAOIS	SCP0098
Oisín House Rossmore	LAOIS	SCP0100
Emo Community Centre	LAOIS	SCP0757

The following BCP will be fully installed in the next few weeks.

Donaghmore Workhouse and Famine Museum, Donaghmore	LAOIS	SCP1075
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Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2020:

Funding has been approved for the provision of ICT equipment, furniture and screening to the 4 BCP locations in Vicarstown, Emo, Killeslin, Donaghmore.

The DRCD allow for 90% funding of the overall cost under the 2020 scheme, total project cost in this case is €40,000, therefore the remaining 10% / €4,000 to be made up as follows; Laois County

Council to provide match funding in the sum of €2,400 (60%) and a community contribution in kind of €1,600 (40%) . In kind contributions can be provided in the form of voluntary labour (by the groups involved) which must be based on the time spent working on the project.

Local Enterprise & Economic Development

2020 was a very productive year for LEO/BSU, some highlights include::

- €431,990 approved in grant aid to 23 businesses with potential to create 62 new jobs
- 254 Trading online voucher applications submitted of which 175 were approved to the value of €405,935.
- 224 applications received under the Business Continuity Voucher Scheme, of which 183 were approved to the value of €331,841
- 9 Laois businesses applied for funding under the Micro Enterprise Assistance Scheme of which 7 were approved to the value of €7,000
- 27 Laois Businesses eligible for funding under the Refundable Aid Stimulus Package to the value of €200,229.
- A total of €832,654 paid out to Laois businesses in financial support
- 71 training courses delivered with 1,100 participants
- Over 400 mentoring sessions assigned
- Supported 10 Laois companies in making applications to Micro Finance Ireland
- 7 companies participated in the Lean for Micro Programme
- Over 300 one-to-one business advice sessions delivered
- 8 Laois Schools participated in the Student Enterprise Awards
- 10 Laois Companies took part in Midlands Management Development Programme
- 5 Laois companies participated on the Midlands Food & Drink Programme
- 8 Laois Companies participated in the Midlands Going Green Programme
- 6 Laois Companies participated in the Midlands First Time Exporters Programme
- Over 100 companies availed of Brexit supports
- 23 Shop Front Grants approved to the value of €16,313
- 4 businesses approved under the Business Incentive Scheme
- 39 premises painted under the Façade Enhancement Scheme

BUSINESS RESTART GRANT SCHEMES AND WAIVER SCHEME

Since the introduction of the Business Restart Grant and the Restart Grant Plus Schemes Laois County Council has paid out €7,356,946, to 1,710 businesses affected by Covid-19 closures.

The commercial rates waiver schemes also provided further supports to businesses. Commercial rates were waived for the period 27th March 2020 to 27th December 2020. The total value of the waiver is €5,974,704 and has been applied to 1,311 rate accounts.

We are awaiting details of a further waiver scheme to assist businesses through the current lockdown period.

J17 National Enterprise Park

Laois County Council has substantially executed an infrastructure provision contract at the J17 National Enterprise Park including transportation, sanitary, telecommunications, electricity and gas services. Laois County Council is now in the process of awarding contracts for the completion of the final road surfacing layer, roadmarkings and traffic route lighting.



Roadworks Scheme

The 2020 Roadworks Programme has been progressed across all three Municipal Districts and is complete.

Work has commenced in preparing the priority roads for the 2021 Roadworks Programme. This will be further developed and brought before councillors once funding allocations are confirmed by DTTaS

TII Funding:

TII funding allocation has been received for National roads within the county in the following amounts;

- National Road Maintenance - €482,717
- National Road Improvement - €1,550,957

N80 Maidenhead Realignment Scheme

Traffic has been diverted onto the new section of roadway that has been constructed and remaining construction items are being progressed to conclusion. The Final Account was agreed with the contractor before Christmas.



TII Funded Projects

Whilst the majority of TII funded works under the 2020 Roadworks Scheme are complete there are a number of specific National Road Schemes being progressed, as follows;

- **N80 Stradbally Road Portlaoise Pavement Renewal (Church to Ballymacken)**; Tender documents for the delivery of this Scheme have been finalised and agreed with Transport Infrastructure Ireland. This tender has been published and subsequently awarded. The estimated value of the Scheme is €2.0M. Works will commence in Q1 2021.

- **N77 Abbeyleix Road Portlaoise Pavement Renewal (JFL to M7):**
 - o A sum of €900k has been previously advised to Elected Members to fund a pavement renewal scheme on this stretch of the N77.
 - o Approval has also been received for safety works along this stretch of the N77 from TII in the amount of €495k.
 - o Additionally HD15 Safety Scheme discussions are ongoing with Transport Infrastructure Ireland whereby other improvements to provide enhanced pedestrian connectivity, enhanced provision for cyclists and landscaping are being sought for this important approach to Portlaoise Town. Formalities for the appointment of a design team are being finalised.

- **HD28 Road Resurfacing (Phase 2)** This programme of resurfacing re-establishes skid resistance to the road network. The locations where works were completed in Q4 2020 include Main Street, Abbeyleix, Main Street, Ballylynan, Coolberry, Durrow, Castletown, Ballylynan, Colt, Abbeyleix, Graigue, Mountmellick, Clonreher, Portlaoise.

River Drainage Maintenance

Surveys are currently underway to seek consents for the 2021 programme of works and full details of that programme will be presented to Elected Members later in Q1 2021.

Environment & River Basin Management

1. Kyletelesha Landfill & Civic Amenity Site:

Normal services continue at the Kyletelesha Landfill & Civic Amenity Site following the takeover of operations at the facility by Laois County Council.

2. Portarlington Civic Amenity Site:

A contract for the operation and management of the Portarlington Civic Amenity Site was awarded to AES (Ireland) Ltd for a period of one year with the option of extending the contract for a further 12 months with a maximum of two such extensions. This contract commenced on the 01st January 2021.

3. Bring Banks:

There are 42 Bring Bank sites provided in the county.

2020 has seen an increase of 43% in use of the Bring Bank network throughout the county. Table 3 below sets out the annual tonnages collected.

Annual Quantities (Tonnes)				
Year	2017	2018	2019	2020
Tonnage	1164.73	1244.14	1315.15	1884.33
% Increase from Previous Year	-----	6.80%	5.70%	43.00%

Table 3

The Bring Banks are being inspected and maintained by a member of the landfill staff which has seen a major improvement in the appearance and cleanliness of the sites. This regular maintenance of the sites has also increased public awareness that the sites are being monitored resulting in a reduction of other waste material being left at the sites. The number of complaints received has also reduced.

A campaign to combat dumping and littering at bottle banks in County Laois due to capacity issues was launched to remind patrons “if bottle banks are full, avoid a fine and go to another site or take them home for another day.” With the tag line “Don’t Bottle it this Christmas. Use bottle banks wisely” banner ads were placed on landing pages of local news websites over the festive period.

Laois Today



Leinster Express



Laois People



Midlands 103



4. Waste Enforcement & Litter:

Environmental Complaint Register

Complaint Type	Litter	Abandoned Cars	Waste Enforcement	Management & Infrastructure (Bottle Banks)	Air	Water	Noise	Vet	Total
Complaints 2020	245	61	570	85	48	49	25	24	1107
Complaints Jan 2021	3	1	17	0	1	1	1	0	24

- 2020 – 1,107 complaints logged for investigation.
- 2021 – 24 complaints logged for investigation to date.
- 2020 – 163 fixed penalty notices issued to date, for breaches of Litter Pollution Act, 1997
- 2020 – 2 fixed penalty notices for breaches of Management (Storage, Presentation and Segregation of Household & Commercial Waste) Byelaws 2018.
- Notices - 10 Section 55 Notices, 3 Section 56 Notice and 3 Section 9 Notices has been issued to date in 2020.
- The 2020 Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections was reviewed taking into account of Covid-19 and its effect on the programmed schedule of inspections etc.

5. Litter/Waste Awareness/Additional Supports:

Mutt Mitts and Anti Dog Fouling signs still being distributed to Tidy Town Groups.

New No Dumping signs “Don’t be a Tosser - Dispose of your Rubbish Responsibly” are being placed in problem areas around the County.

Local Groups and Resident Associations continue to participate in litter picks and some local schools such as CBS Portlaoise have completed litter picks as part of their TY curriculum. Environment Staff in consultation with TY staff provided assistance through the delivery of litter pickers, gloves, bags and collection/disposal of bagged rubbish. Each student was given a gear bag and sports bottle displaying LCC and the reuse logo.

Litter Anti Graffiti Project

Environment Section in conjunction with the Sports Officer and a Local Secondary School are working on an Anti Litter Anti Graffiti Project. The children of the Secondary School will be designing and making a mosaic at Portlaoise Leisure Centre and Skate Park with an Anti-Litter /Anti-Graffiti message. To date the artist and students have agreed a design, materials are purchased and workshops were arranged to have the mosaic completed by the end of Jan 2021. However this is delayed with Covid 19 restrictions.

Illegal Dumping

Illegal waste was removed during the months of December & January, with a marked increase of rubbish being collected from various areas, such as Springhill, Killeshin; Fanning Pass Slieve Bloom; Canal Rd, Portarlinton; Corrig; Spindlewood, Glendine Camross, St. Fintans Terrace, Mountrath, Clonminan, Jessop Street and Redcastle Mountrath. this possibly is as a result of the holiday period.



Large Dump at Springhill Killeshin causing serious danger to road users

6. Environmental Awareness

- Catherine Fulvio’s Seven Secrets to Stop Festive Food Waste Campaign comprised of a series of videos which ran on Laois County Council facebook pages from 18th December to New Year’s Day featuring clever ideas and hacks to reduce food waste this Christmas. Laois County Council was the lead on this initiative and linked with 8 other local authorities to spread message to wider audience and reduce associated costs. Radio interviews to promote the campaign were featured on Newstalk and iRadio.



Laois Federation of Tidy Towns hosted two webinars for Tidy Towns facilitated by Environment Awareness Officer on Creating and Managing Meadows and Woodland in Community Spaces with Brian Gaynor and Pollinator Friendly Planting with Dr. Fiona MacGowan, Botanist and Tidy Towns Adjudicator.



7. Environmental Protection:

- a) **Protect the Water Quality status in all water bodies.**
 - i) On site investigations of complaints in relation to water pollution have ceased by Environmental staff in compliance with Health and Safety and Covid-19 control measures. Only inspections relating to complaints which pose a risk to human health are authorised for site inspections until restrictions are lifted. All complaints are recorded and dealt with remotely if possible or will be inspected as soon as restrictions are lifted.
 - ii) Preparation of RMCEI report to include planning for inspections under different levels of COVID restrictions in 2021.
 - iii) Inspection and enforcement of existing and new Section 4 Discharge licenses has ceased due to COVID Restrictions. Currently reviewing licenses and corresponding with License applicants virtually in preparation to resume inspections when restrictions are lifted
 - iv) Corresponding in writing and by telephone with all premises in Kyletalesha following the investigation of polluting matter in the Triogue River.
 - v) Planning applications: Assessing and reporting on planning applications from a water quality aspect. Currently not carrying out site inspections due to COVID restrictions.

Emergency Planning, Fire Services & Flood Relief

- In 2020, Laois County Fire & Rescue Service attended 724 emergency incidents consisting of 310 fires, 301 special service incidents & 113 false alarms.

Turnout by Station*:

Portlaoise – 287	Portarlinton - 144	Stradbally – 99	Mountmellick – 105
Abbeyleix - 100	Mountrath – 75	Durrow – 84	Rathdowney – 56

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

Fire Services Capital Programme

- Work is almost complete on the Mountrath Fire Station upgrade, a €130,000 project, which consists of a new 4x4 garage & the erection of a fire service drill tower. This is being funded by the NDFEM. The garage has now been completed and the drill tower has been delivered & was expected to be erected in Q4 2020 once the ESB enabling works are complete, with the entire project complete by year end. An unforeseen issue arose with ESB networks requiring the relocation to underground of a nearby overhead cable for safety reasons. The ESB was unable to complete the works in December 2020 & have scheduled it to be completed by 28th Jan 2021, with the tower erected thereafter, depending on Covid-19 restrictions being relaxed to enable the construction sector to return to work & complete the project.
- Work is nearly complete on a new trench rescue training facility in Abbeyleix - €30,000 & will be complete by the end of 2020. This is being funded by the NDFEM. Additional work has also been carried out to provide welfare facilities for LCC Roads section staff to improve social distancing requirements due to Covid -19.
- Planning & design is underway for the Mountmellick Fire Station upgrade, a, €150,000 project, which consists of a fire service drill tower & new concrete yard to the rear of the fire station.
- In recent months Elected Members were advised of an allocation of €140,000 for the acquisition of a new Water Tanker to support Fire Services operations in County Laois. The

tender competition has closed & the order has been placed with HPMP Fire. Delivery is expected in mid -2021

- A tender competition for new PPE has also closed & the order has been placed with Hunter Apparel Solutions for an initial order of 140 sets of fire kit.
- **COVID-19 Report update**
- Laois County Fire & Rescue Service continues to provide a full emergency service. In addition Covid – 19 Contingency Planning is still a key focus for the Fire & Emergency Service.
- In parallel the Civil Defence have provided key assistances, servicing requirements of the HSE, the Community Forum Call Centre and other local agencies. Civil Defence taskings have been scaled back due to volunteers returning to work & operations being scaled back nationally.

WATER SERVICES AND RURAL WATER

Public Water and Wastewater

Covid 19

Essential services continuity plans, as agreed with Irish Water, remain in place, so as to ensure the ongoing, day to day operation of all water and waste water treatment plants in County Laois. All such services have been retained successfully in the period since the restrictions were put into place.

Focussed find and fix measures in **Portlaoise, Portarlington, Rathdowney, Mountmellick & Graiguecullen** have reduced leakage and supported ongoing, adequate supply.

Capital

The following capital works have been approved by Irish Water:

- **Ballyroan** –upgrade pumps in Meelick and install booster pump in Ballyroan – works have been completed.
- **Ballyroan WwTP** – 2nd Sequential Batch Reactor under installation & due for completion by the end of 2020. PE from 600 to 900. There is delay on delivery of actuated valves. These are now expected mid January. Once these are installed it will take approximately 3 weeks to complete and commission the second SBR.
- **Durrow** – bring an additional production borewell into service in Fermoy – M + E works substantially complete, bringing of new borewell into supply ongoing.

Minor Capital

- Portlaoise WS Improvement Scheme – provision of 3 no. wells in Coolbanagher – Report issued to Irish Water. Some progress with Irish Water regarding this project towards the end of 2020.
- Wastewater Capital Maintenance - Minor civil, CCTV and lining works completed in 2019 in Portlaoise and Mountmellick. Contractor not active on the ground at present.
- Castletown WwTP – Storm & Sludge tanks are scheduled to be installed within 2020/21 - planning permission required. Some site investigation works carried out on site in 2020. Operations are looking for money from IW to commission the old Ballyroan WWTP tank as a sludge wasting tank. This tank is already on site. Replacement of problematic fixed decanter with a moving decanter is scheduled for mid February.
- Portlaoise Drainage Area Plan –This project has now progressed to the Portlaoise Infrastructure Development Plan stage with 2no. workshops having taken place between IW/LCC/RPS towards the end of 2020.
- NCAP sites – Percolation tests completed on discharge to groundwater sites and surface water discharge sites. Site Assessment and Site Options reports complete. Workshop review of Site Option Reports with IW, LCC and the Consultant is next step to be completed.
- Bob's Bar, Durrow – Site investigation works now bundled with 2 sites in Offaly. Ecofact to carry out revised ecological report due to new route of proposed gravity sewer pipe.

- Water Storage Program – 1 site - Five Wells to proceed. Screening, invasive species and topographical checks now done. Land acquisition discussion in progress.
- Disinfection/Ph Control Program - The Strand WTP now included in 2021 programme.

Laboratory

Regulatory monitoring of public water and wastewater supplies has re-commenced in consultation with IW. Regulatory monitoring of Small Private Supplies (SPSs) has re-commenced based on a case by case Risk Assessment approach. To comply with Covid-19 social distancing rules the laboratory currently operates from 8.00am to 11.00pm and on Saturdays. There was a total of 3,500 samples tested in 2020.

Rural Water

Multi Annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021

Works delayed due to Covid-19 are now progressing:

Measure 2 -Public Health Compliance

- **The Heath GWS:** Chlorine Control System & Upgrade - Contract being progressed.
- **Derrynaseera GWS:** Tenders for pumphouse and water treatment upgrade received. Recommendation for the appointment of the contractor due.

Measure 3 - Enhancement and Water Conservation

- **Ballypickas GWS:** Installation of a precast concrete storage tank: This project is planned for 2021.
- Mains Upgrade – Tender award recommendation received from consultant – preparation for works to commence in progress.
- **Barrowhouse GWS:** Upgrade of Water Storage Tanks – Size of storage tank to be confirmed. Consultant & GWS discussions on-going.
- **Heath GWS:** Network upgrade – advertised & tenders submitted. Recommendation of the Consultant due.

Measure 4 - New Group Water Schemes

- New GWS at Shanbo, Borris-in-Ossary. Submission made to DHPLG, some queries raised, WS dealing with same.

Measure 5 - Transition of Existing Group Water Schemes to Irish Water –

- **The Rock GWS:** contractor appointed to carry out the upgrade works required at the pumphouse. Takeover of The Rock GWS is being progressed.
- Dereen, Kilbride, Ullard and Ballylethane: delayed due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Measure 6 - Community Water and Wastewater Connections

- **Waste Water Community Connection at Goodwin Estate:** Grant allocation of €90k or 75% of the cost of the works has been provided. Local contribution is 25%. Site investigation works complete. Tender documentation prepared for procurement process.

Railway Mews, Portarlinton Surveying for misconnections started prior to Christmas and found that a small number of connections are blocked with grease. Surveying was to recommence immediately after Christmas but is paused now in keeping with public health guidelines and works/surveys will recommence as soon as the guidelines allow.

Corporate

The Draft Register was published on 1st November 2020. A total of 672 claims were presented to the County Registrar at the Claims Court held on the 2nd December 2020. All claims have been actioned on and the 2021/2022 Register of Electors is due for publishing on 1st February 2021.

Community

Covid Impact and Response

Covid Community Helpline - 1800 832 010

The Laois Community Call Helpline continues to operate 6 days a week to support the most vulnerable in our community. All calls to the helpline are directed to call the main council switch and re-diverted to the Community Section of Laois County Council (Monday – Friday 9am to 5pm) as required. Library Staff operate the Helpline on Saturdays between the hours of 10am and 1pm, and 2pm to 4pm.

The **Community Forum** was convened on Monday 11th January 2021, this being the 17th meeting of the group since its formation on Sun 28th March 2020. The forum is co-ordinated by Laois County Council, with representation from multiple statutory and voluntary agencies. The core aim of the Forum is to contribute to the community-wide effort to limit the spread of COVID-19. Laois County Council, through this Forum, ensure that a wide variety of groups working across the county assist those in need, and did so in an organised, collaborative and targeted way.

Community

Public Participation Network Report:

Laois PPN have had a busy schedule of events/programmes since the last meeting. Laois PPN organised events that would appeal and be of benefit to the Member Groups of the Community, Environmental and Social Inclusion Pillars of Laois PPN. The programme included:

➤ **Community & Voluntary Awards 2020**

Laois County Council in partnership with Laois PPN held the Community & Voluntary Awards 2020 on 11th December 2020. The awards were held online for the first time. The feedback from PPN Members to the C&V Awards 2020 was positive.

➤ **5 Ways to Wellbeing for the Festive Season-Laois PPN organised an online training event with Finola Colgan, Mental Health Ireland to assist and support members.**

➤ **Municipal District Plenaries**

Laois PPN held its 3 Municipal District Plenaries in December. The Plenaries were held online. The Portlaoise MD Plenary was chaired by John Oxley. The Graiguecullen/Portarlinton MD Plenary was chaired by Donal O'Shea. The Borris-in-Ossory/Mountmellick MD Plenary was chaired by Paddy Buggy. At each meeting Dan Bergin, Laois PPN Resource Worker gave a detailed Power Point presentation highlighting the work of Laois PPN in 2020. Attendees at all Plenaries were then requested to fill in a short online survey which Laois PPN will be taking into account when planning its programme of training and events in 2021.

➤ **County Plenary**

Laois PPN are required to hold two County Plenaries a year. The First Plenary took place in February. The Second County Plenary took place online on 17th December and was chaired by John Oxley. The Plenary started with a funding opportunity presentation by Gillian Cunningham of LOETB. Dan Bergin, Laois PPN Resource Worker gave a detailed Power Point presentation highlighting the work of Laois PPN in 2020. Attendees were then requested to fill in a short online survey which Laois PPN will be taking into account when planning its programme of training and events in 2021.

➤ **Mick Dowling Walkway Signage**

Laois PPN Secretariat have approved to sponsor Mick Dowling Walkway Signage in honour of Mick Dowling. Mick was a proud Laois man and in particular loved the Slieve Bloom Mountains. The signage will be located at one of his favourite walks at Monicknew.

➤ **LCDC Vacancy-Election**

Vincent Booth has resigned his seat on the LCDC on 4th January 2021. Laois LCDC formally requested that the vacant LCDC position be filled from the Social Inclusion pillar in order to ensure representation across all 3 pillars (Community/Voluntary/Social Inclusion/Environmental). Laois PPN have commenced the election process

Comhairle na nÓg

A Comhairle na nÓg Steering Group Meeting was held Tuesday 14 December 2020 at 2.00pm via Zoom. The members were advised that Youth Work Ireland had won the contract to facilitate Comhairle na nÓg for the period 2021/2022.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth had given approval for funding in the sum of €5,869.16 under the Comhairle na nÓg Capital Grant for ICT Hardware Scheme 2020. Covid 19 has meant that a number of services have moved to a blended model of service provision. With this funding Laois County Council have purchased 13 iPads and 13 headsets for use by Laois Comhairle na nÓg. This funding is to help and support the development and implementation of a blended and in person approach in keeping with government guidelines. It is also to enable a potential increase in the numbers who participate and improve the reach and retention of Comhairle members.

Age Friendly Programme

The Laois Age Friendly Alliance met in late November 2020. Items discussed included:

- The establishment of an Age Friendly Crime Prevention Ambassador initiative. We are working with An Garda Síochána and Muintir na Tír on this initiative.
- The Midlands 103 radio show “Chatters and Matters” is proving to be a success and is scheduled to run until at least the end of March.
- Both Creative Laois initiative “Musical Memories” and the “Band Wagon” have proved successful and will continue to run into 2021, subject to Covid restrictions.
- Laois Sports Partnership are delivering online Activator Pole Classes with an Age Friendly Focus. We have supported this initiative by supplying participants with their own Activator Poles.
- We have taken delivery of 2,000 Age Friendly and Healthy Ireland branded face coverings. These will be distributed through our Libraries, Locallink and our many partners.
- We are continuing to work with Laois Chamber of Commerce to reinvigorate the Age Friendly Business Recognition Scheme in Laois. Laois has been chosen by Age Friendly Ireland and Chamber Ireland to take part in a national launch early in 2021.

Community Funding

- 9 Applications were submitted under **TVRS Main Scheme 2020**. Funding approval was given for 5 applications in early January totalling €383,375.
- **Community Resilience Fund** - launched in November 2020, the Keep Well Campaign is aimed at helping people - individuals & communities - to keep up their resilience & wellbeing through an especially challenging winter and through to spring. People are being encouraged to plan some “self-care” every day or week to get them through the winter and will be supported with information and resources to help them to do so. The campaign is focussed on five major themes 1. Keeping Active, 2. Keeping in Contact, 3. Switching Off, 4. Eating Well and 5. Minding Your Mood. A programme of activities has been developed by relevant stakeholders across the various themes and is being implemented. €67,225 has been allocated to the Council via Healthy Ireland.
- **Covid Emergency Fund- Round 2** €46,811 was allocated in December 2020 under this scheme. The closing date for applications is 22nd January 2021.

- **Community Grant Scheme (Environmental):** Grants were issued to 81 groups via the 2020 Community Grant Scheme with 61 groups having completed their projects to date. The deadline for completion and the return of completion reports was 27th November 2020.

Tidy Towns

Laois Federation of Tidy Towns - The Committee have held a number of meetings and there is lively and interactive communication between Tidy Towns Groups via a chat group which facilitates instant communication and sharing of knowledge and ideas.

Cemeteries:

New phase works (paths and plinths): in Camross and Ballyadams are now complete. Works have commenced in Portlaoise and will continue once restrictions are lifted. Works in Killeshin and Ballylinan will commence when restrictions are lifted.

Risk abatement works in: Ballyadams, Raheen and Portlaoise will commence when restrictions are lifted.

Climate Action: ~

- Carbon Footprint Study of Portlaoise- The Siemens team presented the final results of the Carbon Footprint study for the Town of Portlaoise. The focus topics for this presentation included the assessment of Register of Opportunities and their impact on the overall carbon footprint in Portlaoise. The team received feedback on the report and is incorporating this into the final report which will be completed in January 2021.
- Sustainable Energy Community in Portlaoise – Meetings ongoing to move from the learn phase through to the energy masterplan phase. Community Charter has been drafted and agreed and Evaluation Comparison Tool has been completed.

Arts Update

Laois Arthouse, Stradbally:

The Laois Arthouse Studios – Staff completed a 6 week online workshop and equipment was purchased to assist in online promotion and programming for 2021 for all areas of the programme.

Arts Awards and Opportunities

Advertisements placed for Arts Act Grants, the Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary, Artists in Schools Scheme and expression of interest for Laois Culture Night 2021. Closing date for applications 26th Feb 2021.

Laois Youth Theatre

Online workshops took place with the Portlaoise YT Groups and within the Covid-19 restrictions.

Creative Ireland Laois Update

In 2020, over 21 initiatives/projects were successfully delivered with a focus on collaboration and partnership, with professional development support for the cultural & creative sectors in association with Enterprise Office Laois; Climate Action Science Communicator Residency in partnership with Midlands Science and Abbeyleix Tidy Towns; 'Home Stories' podcast series by Manchán Magan with Laois Direct Provision Centres; 'The Impossible Dream' by composer Martin Tourish, MGL Trad Orchestra, Laois Heritage office & local historian Teddy Fennelly on the achievements of Laois aviator Col James Fitzmaurice; Phase 2 of Kilmanman Church conservation with Laois Heritage office & Clonaslee Community Development Association; development of Laois County Library Service digital archive for Laois locals, academics and international interest; Cruinniu na nOg in association with Laois Dance Ensemble, Laois Youth Theatre, Laois Libraries, Dunamais Arts Centre, Music Generation Laois and Laois Offaly Wildlife Trust. €171,934 was allocated to Creative Laois inclusive of an additional €50K as part of the July Jobs Stimulus plan.

Sport & Leisure Update

- **Laois County Council managed playgrounds:** Only essential repairs and weekly inspections are being carried out at all Laois County Council managed play facilities given the current COVID 19 restrictions.
- **Playground Development:** Funding of €200,000 for allocated under LEADER programme for Ballinakill Playground and carpark. Licence agreement has been signed with all parties securing a site for Borris-in-Ossory playground and clearing the way to commence Part V111 application in the near future.
- **Healthy Ireland - Active Parks Programme** Programmes continue to be suspended due to COVID 19 restrictions.
- **Community Resilience Funding** - Winter Wonderland Experience was successfully delivered by Portarlington Leisure Centre and the effort much appreciated by the community.
- **Portlaoise Leisure Centre:** Refurbishment works are currently ceased due to COVID restrictions at Portlaoise Leisure Centre. Funding of €11,856 was secured from the Swimming Pool COVID funding for public pools via Ireland Active, part of Government €2.5m assistance to leisure industry.
- **Portarlington Leisure Centre** is currently closed in line with Level 5 restrictions. . Funding of €11,168 was secured from the Swimming Pool COVID funding for public pools via Ireland Active, part of Government €2.5m assistance to leisure industry.
- **Sports Capital Grant Scheme** opened for applications on December 11th 2020. Sport & Leisure Officer is actively advising and assisting community groups and sports clubs with applications including the delivery of on-line workshops.

Laois County Library Services

Online Services

Library Services have adapted to the COVID 19 pandemic and public health restrictions and continue to operate with our online Library services supported by staff on a remote basis. The library now is promoting and supporting the public to access all of our online material. This includes -Ebooks which has seen an increase of 200% in users during COVID 19, online newspapers , online magazines and language learning . The overall usage has seen a massive increase with now over 1500 new remote users during this period and a considerable increase of over 500% for this period.

Portlaoise New Library

Works on the new library on Main Street Portlaoise have paused due to Covid 19 restrictions.



Book Delivery to Cocooners ; The Library Services is working with Laois Partnership and Volunteer Laois on the initiative.

During Covid-19 the library services are partnering with Volunteer Laois to provide a book delivery service to cocooners and isolated persons. This service provides a direct link with those persons who are isolated and may not be able to come to the library themselves. Thanks to Laois Partnership and Volunteer Laois. A cocooning activity pack is now being developed and produced by Library Staff for distribution to nursing homes and day centres.

Digital Archive

Funded by Creative Ireland and Laois County Council the Library Services has designed and created the Laois Digital Archive website which contains and gives free access digitised local history records, workhouse books, county council minute books photographs and other archival material on county Laois - <http://laoislocalstudies.ie/>.

Sensory Library

Libraries are continuing with the introduction of sensory friendly library services .

This includes as sensory room and sensory garden space in Mountmellick library, sensory toys collections in Portarlinton, and Mountmellick libraries which can be borrowed. New interactive/magic tables have been purchased for Abbeyleix, Mountmellick and Portarlinton Libraries which can be used by children/adults with additional sensory needs . A Grant of €33,100 had been allocated to Laois County Library Services by DRCD to assist with these additions.

Rathdowney Library

As part of a recent national Small Scale Capital call for grants programme funded by DRCD, Laois County Library were approved a grant of €100,000 towards repair the roof of the library . The finalisation of the contractor appointment and the instructions to commence are paused due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Chief Executive's Orders

- ✚ A schedule of Chief Executive Orders signed during the month of December 2020/January 2021 will be circulated.

John Mulholland
Chief Executive

21/01/2021