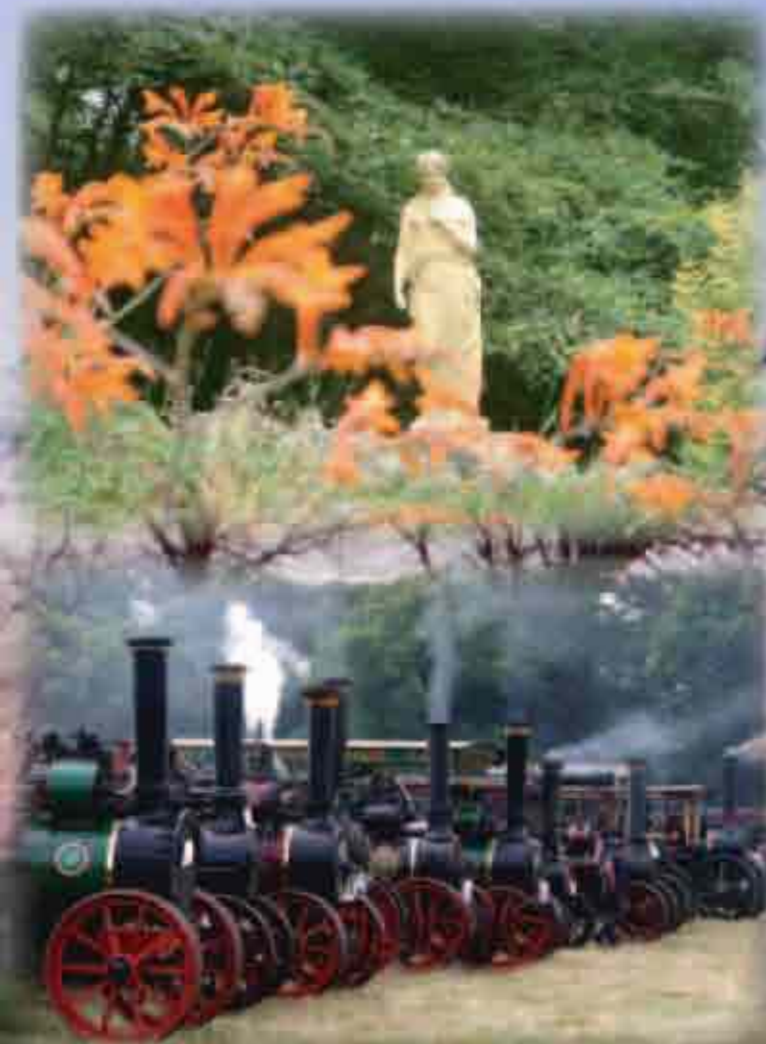

















Laois County Council Annual Report 2006



Í bPáirt leis an bPobal



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Cathaoirleach's Statement

I am delighted as Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council to introduce the Annual Report detailing the activities of the Council during 2006.

In the past year, Laois County Council has continued to be central to the development of the social, economic and cultural life of the County and the adoption of the new County Development Plan will guide the future development of the County for the period 2006- 2012.

The year 2006 saw a number of tremendous achievements within the County with a continued focus on the promotion of County Laois as an excellent place to live, work and enjoy leisure pursuits.

The Enterprise Centre in Portarlinton was officially opened and approval secured from the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources for Broadband Projects in Mountmellick and Portarlinton. The Laois Tourism Strategy was adopted and two international events were secured for Laois for Summer 2007- the International Garden Festival to be held at Emo Court and the World Fleadh which will take place in Portlaoise.

Two Leisure Centres at Portlaoise and Portarlinton were brought to construction stage and the re-development of Durrow Courthouse as a community facility commenced. Construction also commenced on new library facilities at Mountrath and Abbeyleix. This Council's commitment to the provision of children's facilities was also evident in the provision of playgrounds at Abbeyleix and Mountrath and a skatepark in Portlaoise.

With regard to provision of infrastructure within the County, the shortlisting of tenders for the M7/M8 Motorway project was completed. The Contracts for the Main Drainage Network and Treatment Plant for Portlaoise were awarded and under the Council's housing programme, a total of 165 Social and Affordable housing units were provided.

Laois County Council will continue to support the objectives of the National Development Plan to ensure that our County develops in a sustainable manner and that the people of Laois continue to enjoy a secure and healthy living environment.

I would like to thank the elected members for their co-operation and support throughout the year and also to recognise the great work and commitment of the County Manager, Mr Peter Carey and all his staff.

Finally, I would like to offer my sincere sympathy to the wife and family of our colleague, the late Councillor Laurence Kavanagh, R.I.P., M.C.C. who sadly passed away in March, 2007.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Michael Lalor,
Cathaoirleach





County Manager's Foreword

It gives me great pleasure as County Manager to welcome the publication of the Annual Report for 2006.

During 2006, County Laois continued to experience rapid population growth. While this unprecedented level of growth is welcome in terms of achieving the necessary critical mass to allow the County to expand and develop on an economic basis, it has resulted in additional pressures on key infrastructure.

Notwithstanding this fact, significant progress was made in 2006 in advancing critical major infrastructural projects such as the Portlaoise Main Drainage Scheme, the M7/M8 Motorway south of Portlaoise and many other key projects.

Furthermore, Laois County Council has played a major role in the delivery of social infrastructure as part of our Social Inclusion Strategy. In 2006, the Council advanced a huge capital programme including two leisure complexes in Portlaoise and Portarlington, a number of libraries, playgrounds, sports and community facilities. These projects will make significant contributions to the quality of life in County Laois.

The County is also progressing very well in terms of economic development and tourism. The Inland Port development at the Togher Interchange is under construction and the Council is also facilitating indigenous industry through the provision of enterprise centres and opportunity sites at various locations in the County. The Government decentralisation projects for Portlaoise & Portarlington were also progressed in 2006 and ultimately will provide a much needed boost for the local economy. Encouraging progress is also being made on tourism and the Council is providing the required leadership which will result in major tourism projects and festivals coming to Laois over the next few years.

In 2006, Laois County Council again met many challenges posed by a rapidly changing working environment. I wish to pay tribute to the Council's Management Team and staff for their dedication and commitment to improving services. I also want to thank the elected members for their support and assistance. I am confident that as we continue to work in partnership with other public agencies and local communities, we will succeed in developing the potential of County Laois for economic, social and cultural growth.

Peter Carey
County Manager



MISSION STATEMENT

"We will provide leadership, develop, promote, protect and regulate our County and deliver quality public services so as to enhance the quality of life for the community."

Mandate

Laois County Council is the Primary Democratically Elected Authority in County Laois.

Laois County Council provides an extensive and diverse range of services which impact upon the County's economic, social, environmental, infrastructural and tourism, industrial and cultural activities. These services include the provision and maintenance of houses, roads, water supplies and sewerage schemes, planning and development services, waste management, environmental protection, recreational activities, libraries, cultural and community development, including recreation and sport.

The Council is serviced by a large workforce, including the County Manager, professional, technical, legal, administrative, financial and outdoor employees and contractors.

Council Membership and Meetings

Laois County Council consists of 25 Elected Members - four members each from Mountmellick, Emo and Luggacurren Electoral Areas, six members from the Portlaoise Electoral Area and seven members from the Borris-in-Ossory Electoral Area. Council Meetings in 2006 were usually held on the last Monday of each month in the Council Chamber at Áras an Chontae. There was no meeting in August.

Corporate Policy Group (C.P.G.)

The Corporate Policy Group is designed to enhance the democratic mandate and policy making role of the elected members. The C.P.G. is supported by the County Manager and comprises of the Cathaoirleach of the Council and the four Chairs of the Strategic Policy Committees. The main function of the C.P.G. is to co-ordinate the work of the different S.P.C.'s and provide a forum where policy decisions affecting the whole Council are agreed for submission to the full Council for decision. The C.P.G. met on 12 occasions in 2006.



Laois County Council Members

. : Mountmellick Electoral Area : .



David
Goodwin
MCC



Michael
Moloney
MCC



Paddy
Bracken
MCC



Seamus
McDonald
MCC

. : Emo Electoral Area : .



James
Deegan
MCC



Paul
Mitchell
MCC



Raymond
Cribbin
MCC



John D.
Turley
MCC



. : Portlaoise Electoral Area : .



William
Aird
MCC



Mary
Sweeney
MCC



Tom
Jacob
MCC



Catherine
Fitzgerald
MCC



Brian
Stanley
MCC



Jerry
Lodge
MCC



Laois County Council Members

. : Borris-in-Ossory Electoral Area : .



Bill
Delaney
MCC



Brendan
Phelan
MCC



John
Bonham
MCC



Michael
Lalor
MCC



Marty
Phelan
MCC



John Joe
Fennelly
MCC



Council Chamber
Áras an Chontae



Larry
Kavanagh
MCC

Sadly, Councillor Larry Kavanagh passed away on 7th March, 2007.
Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

. : Luggacurren Electoral Area : .



Dick
Miller
MCC



James
Daly
MCC



John
Moran
MCC



Michael
Rice
MCC



Director of Services
Senior Executive Officer
Corporate Affairs
Senior Executive Officer
Human Resources
Head of Information Systems

Anna Marie Delaney
Gerry Gillen

Don Culliton

Christy Crawford

Corporate Affairs

Corporate Plan 2004 – 2009

The present Corporate Plan covers the period 2004 to 2009. The Council continues to pursue the detailed strategies for the achievement of the objectives listed in the Plan. An annual Progress Report is submitted to the Members.

Customer Charter

Laois County Council has a Customer Charter which sets out the way in which the Council endeavours to deal with its customers. The document is on display in all public Council Offices and on our website at www.laois.ie.

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

Highlights

- o 3rd May, 2006 - Civic Reception in honour of Mr Pádraig Walshe on the occasion of his election as President of the Irish Farmers Association.
- o 17th May, 2006 - Civic Reception in honour of the All-Ireland winning Teams 2005/2006 from St. Fergal's College, Rathdowney - All Ireland Post Primary Colleges, Senior B Camogie and All Ireland Vocational Schools Senior A Hurling.
- o 29th May 2006 - Civic Reception in honour of the Arts Council and the Laois School of Music.
- o 13th October, 2006 - Launch of Rex, the Civil Defence Search and Rescue Dog.
- o 18th October, 2006 - Civic Reception in honour of the 50th Anniversary of St. Abban's Athletic Club, 1955 - 2005.

- o 20th December, 2006 - Reception in honour of the Harps Camogie Club
- All- Ireland Junior Camogie Winners 2006.

Higher Education Grants

Laois County Council awards Higher Education Grants under the Local Authorities (Higher Education Grants) Act 1968-1992 on behalf of the Department of Education and Science. To be eligible for a grant under the Scheme, a candidate must satisfy the requirements as laid out in the Scheme. The Scheme is advertised annually and the closing date for receipt of completed applications is 31st August of each year. Details of the Scheme and application forms are usually available in July from the Higher Education Grants Section or on our Website at www.laois.ie/heg. Under the 2006 Grants Scheme, Laois County Council awarded 168 new grants and 271 grants were renewed. The maximum maintenance grant available was €3,110 and Registration fee was increased to €800. The Special Rate of Maintenance Grant payable increased to €5,970. 11 new awards and 42 renewal awards qualified for payment of this grant. The total amount paid out in 2006 amounted to €1,956,562.06.



Presentation by
the late Cllr. Larry Kavanagh, R.I.P., Cathaoirleach to
Mr. Pádraig Walshe, President of the I.F.A.



Guests at the Civic Reception in Honour of the 50th Anniversary of
St. Abban's Athletic Club, 1955 - 2005

Health & Safety

Safety Advisor Jim Bolger

Laois County Council appointed a fulltime Safety Advisor in January, 2006. The remit of the Safety Advisor is to ensure that the Safety, Health and Welfare of Laois County Council employees and others who may be affected by the diverse range of activities of the Council is protected to the maximum possible extent. In addition, Safety Consultative mechanisms were re-established with a view to proactively managing Safety Health and Welfare issues.

Partnership

Management Nominees

John Daly Joint Chair
Anna Marie Delaney
Denise Rainey
Ian McCormack
Gerry Maher

Union Nominees

John Culleton Joint Chair
Michael O'Loughlin
Bill Devoy
Wes Wilkinson
Valerie O'Reilly

Activities 2006

Welfare Facilities

The programme to provide welfare facilities for road workers in each of the areas was continued. New units were provided in Portarlinton and Abbeyleix and work was ongoing to identify an agreed location for facilities in Mountrath, which is expected to be finalised early in 2007. Work also commenced on the refurbishment of the roads depot at Maidenhead in the Eastern Area. It was agreed to then assess the facilities at the Water and Waste Water Treatment Plants with a view to drawing up a programme of works to be commenced in 2007.

Handling Significant Change Through Partnership

A Handling Significant Change Through Partnership Committee was established comprising of Senior Union Officials and Senior Management Team to assist Laois County Council in handling significant changes with confidence. This Committee meet twice yearly to address issues such as changes in work organisation, developing human resource policies, PPP and career paths for employees but to name a few.

Policy Documents

The following Workplace Policies were agreed through Partnership:

- o Mobility Policy
- o Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy
- o Induction Policy
- o Mobile Phone Policy

PPP/DBO Consultation Guidelines

Consultation Guidelines for Stakeholder Consultation for Employees and their Representatives with regard to PPP/DBOs were drafted by the Partnership Committee and agreed by Management Team for implementation.

Funding

The following LANPAG funding was agreed for 2006 projects:-

o	Staff Integration	€3,000
o	Newsletter	€2,500
o	Irish Language Project	€2,500
o	Equality Awareness	€3,500
o	Junior Achievement Ireland	€3,500
o	Welfare Units	€6,000

Performance Verification Group

The Partnership Committee participated in the presentation to the Performance Verification Group in April 2006 giving



County Manager, Mr. Peter Carey with staff members John Culleton, Denise Rainey and Dom Reddin who made presentations to the Performance Verification Group during their visit to Laois

ing details of progress made in the work of the Partnership Committee during the previous two years.

Area Partnership Committees

All three Area Partnership Committees continued their work during 2006. Many issues were addressed including health & safety, PMDS, welfare issues, policy documents. These committees meet every 6 weeks and work closely with the Workplace Partnership Committee. A joint meeting was held between the members of each of the committees and the Joint Chairs of the Partnership Committee in December 06 to review progress to date.





BE GREEN KEEP IT ON THE SCREEN

Greening Committee

A presentation was made to Management Team for their support to encourage all employees to reduce, reuse and recycle where possible. The Greening Committee continued to promote the importance of minimising waste.

PANG

PANG (Physical Activity Nutrition Group)

Activities organised by PANG during 2006 included a walking programme, Health Focus Day and a Lifestyle Challenge for all employees. A group of employees also took part in the Women's Mini Marathon. Corporate Membership to the local Leisure Centres was also encouraged and subsidised for 2006.

Freedom of Information (F.O.I.)

The Freedom of Information Act 1997 has applied to Local Authorities since 21st October, 1998.

The following show the level of activity in relation to requests for 2006:

Applications received/processed in 2006

Applications on hand at 31/12/2005	5
Applications received during 2006	27
Decisions taken during 2006	29
Decisions refused	1
Applications withdrawn	1
Applications on hand as at 31/12/2006	1

Nature of Information Sought

Personal (to applicant)	8
Non-Personal	19

Appeals

Appeals to Information Commissioner	1
Appeals to High Court	Nil

Source of Requests

Journalists	Nil
Business	1
Oireachtas Members	Nil
Local Authority Members	Nil
Others/General Public	26



Register of Electors 2006 / 2007

Register of Electors

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

Dáil Constituency	Presidential Electors	Dáil Electors
Laois - Offaly	49,002	43,319
Total:	49,002	43,319
European Parliament Constituency	European Electors	Potential European Electors
Leinster	49,382	57
Total	49,382	57

Local Electoral Areas	Number of Electors
Borris-in-Ossory	14,025
Emo	8,179
Luggacurren	8,205
Mountmellick	7,015
Portlaoise	12,331
Total	49,755
Borough Council or Town Council	Local Government Electors
Mountmellick Urban	2,505
Portlaoise Urban	7,144
Total:	9,649

Postal and Special Voters						
Dáil Constituency	Gardaí	Defence Forces	Diplomats	Physically Disabled	Occupation etc.	Special Voters
Laois -Offaly	6	150	5	22	0	6
Total	6	150	5	22	0	6



Members of Harps Camogie Club, All Ireland Junior Camogie Winners 2006 at a Civic Reception in honour of their achievement.



The Members of Laois County Council attended the following Conferences during 2006

<p>hColmcille Heritage Trust Showcase Ireland Merriman Winter School Media Skills Northern Tourism Conference Anti-Racism & Diversity Plans Association of Municipal Authorities Association of City & County Councils Death on Your Roads Nuclear Free Conference Kinnock on Europe I.P.A. Training Programme Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools The Law of Defamation Libel & Slander L.A.M.A. Conference Rattoo Heritage Drogheda Cross Border Focus I.C.T. Expo Sherkin Island Annual Environment Conference A New Approach to Ageism Listowel Arts Conference Confederation of European Councillor Annual Partnership Conference The Westport Experience Architecture in the Public Sector Regional Policy Conference Public Affairs Conference Byrne Perry Summer School The Role of the Community & Voluntary Sector Syngé Summer School The Local Government Planning Services John Hewitt Society Magill Summer School Local Government & Environment Services</p>	<p>Letterkenny Dublin Westport Clarinbridge Antrim Dublin Letterkenny Dundalk Ennis London Dublin Tullamore</p> <p>Killarney Tralee Kilkenny Ballybunion Drogheda Dublin</p> <p>Cork Dublin Listowel Donegal Cork Westport Westport Mullingar Dublin Wexford</p> <p>Dundalk Wicklow Baltimore Armagh Donegal Youghal</p>	<p>24th - 26th February 2006 25th January 2006 27th - 29th January 2006 28th January 2006 3rd & 4th February 2006 9th February 2006 10th - 11th February 2006 9th - 11th March 2006 22nd - 24th March 2006 23rd March 2006 24th March 2006 28th March 2006</p> <p>30th March - 1st April 2006 8th April 2006 20th - 21st April 2006 26th - 29th April 2006 27th - 29th April 2006 4th - 5th May 2006</p> <p>4th - 5th May 2006 6th May 2006 11th - 12th May 2006 12th May 2006 18th - 20th May 2006 18th - 19th May 2006 8th - 9th June 2006 23rd June 2006 29th June 2006 23rd - 25th June 2006</p> <p>15th June 2006 2nd - 8th July 2006 6th - 8th July 2006 24th - 28th July 2006 16th - 21st July 2006 21st August 2006</p>	<p>Local Government & The Arts Sport & Leisure Development Merriman Summer School Humbert Summer School Parnell Summer School Carleton Summer School Greystones Town Council Future for Our Waters Youghal Through The Ages Benedict Kiely Literary Weekend Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland Climate Change & Energy Supply Getting A Grip Confederation of European Councillors Hidden History Neil T Blaney Autumn School Reform of Public Administration Douglas Hyde Anti-Social Behaviour Freedom Licence or Liberty Association of Irish Festival Events Local Authority Members Association Shannon Development Community & Enterprise Directorate Les Recontres Local Authority Members Association 18th National Tourism Conference Roscommon County Development Board Newmarket County Development Association Confederation of European Councillors The Local Government in Budget</p>	<p>Donegal Kilkee Listoonvarna Mayo Wicklow Clogher Greystones Cork Youghal Omagh</p> <p>Cavan Sligo Killarney Derry Cork Letterkenny Belfast Roscommon Carrick-on-Suir Clare Ennistymon Arklow Milltown-Malbay Cork Belfast Arklow Ennistymon Roscommon</p> <p>Mallow Enniskillen Wexford</p>	<p>24th - 26th August 2006 31st August 19th - 26th August 2006 17th - 20th August 2006 13th - 18th August 2006 7th - 11th August 2006 29th September st October 2006A 28th - 29th September 2006 22nd - 24th September 2006 15th - 17th September 2006</p> <p>14th - 16th September 2006 8th September 2006 5th - 6th October 2006 12th - 13th October 2006 12th - 13th October 2006 13th - 14th October 2006 18th October 2006 20th - 22nd October 2006 27th - 28th October 2006 7th - 8th November 2006 9th - 11th November 2006 10th - 11th November 2006 14th - 15th November 2006 14th - 16th November 2006 23rd - 26th November 2006 10th - 11th November 2006 24th - 25th November 2006 28th November 2006</p> <p>31st November - 2nd December 2006 8th December 2006 9th December 2006</p>
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Human Resources

Recruitment Statistics

A total of 511 people were employed by Laois County Council at 31st December 2006. During 2006 Laois County Council held 78 competitions, in relation to which the following statistics have been extracted:

Total Applications received	1433	
	Male	Female
Applicants	494	939
Successful Applicants	127	130
Permanent Appointments/Promotions 2006:		
	Male	Female
Appointments	23	14
Promotions	8	13

Expenditure on training was €309,000, a very comprehensive training programme was delivered throughout the year. A sample of training programmes provided were:-

Course	Training Provider
Safepass	Kieran Devery
Signing, Lighting & Guarding	Roscrea RTC
Interviewing Skills	Des Doyle Associates
Interviewer Skills	IMI
Managing Safely for Construction Supervisors	IOSH
Abrasive Wheels	Roscrea RTC
Disability Training	ORBIS
Child Protection Training	Health Service Executive
ECDL	Portarlington Computer Centre
Expert Witness	La Touche Bond Salon



A number of employees benefited from assistance under the 3rd level Employee Education Schemes.

Employees attended Conferences and Seminars relating to their area of work. Our first annual "Presentation of Certificates" Ceremony was held on 19th December, 2006.

Work Life Balance Initiatives

At year-end 2 employees were availing of the Career Break Scheme, 30 employees were availing of the job/work sharing scheme, 22 employees availed of the Parental Leave Scheme and 9 employees availed of Term Time.

Industrial Relations

Laois County Council continues to be characterised by good industrial relations. No days were lost due to industrial action in 2006..



Presentation of Certificates for Managing Safely for Construction Projects Supervisor, December 2006

Employee Training & Development

Training and development of our employees is a strategic focus for Laois County Council. During 2006 the Council rolled out the Performance Management Development System (PMDS). The training programme was developed based on the Training Needs Analysis forms submitted in conjunction with the Personal Development Plans (PDP's) of employees.

Excellence Through People

The Excellence through People accreditation is Ireland's National standard for human resource development. Its two main objectives are:

to act as a business improvement tool as well as being a driver for change and innovation,

to encourage the learning and development of employees to their full potential so as to maximise their contribution to the specific needs of the organisation and involvement in line with the organisation's goals.

The award is achieved by organisations that have best practice Human Resource Systems in place, particularly in the area of employee training and development, communication, and employee involvement in the decision making processes in the organisation.



Excellence Through People Award 2006

Laois County Council achieved this Award in 2005 and retained the Excellence through People Award in 2006 under the revised standard. This prestigious Award is a great achievement on behalf of employees. It is an external validation conducted by FÁS and highlights the commitment and effort of all employees to their own learning and development as well as their involvement, as individuals and as part of a team, in the continuous improvement of the operation of the organisations services and goals.



Equality

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

An Equality Action Team, representative of management and employee interests, is in place to examine equality issues, monitor progress and ensure achievement of equality objectives.



Presentation by the late Cllr. Larry Kavanagh, R.I.P., Cathaoirleach and County Manager, Mr Peter Carey to Mr Louis Brennan, Director of Services, on the occasion of his retirement from Laois County Council



Benny Grady, (centre) with work colleagues Patrick Dunphy and Fintan Lalor on the day of his retirement as General Operative from Laois County Council



Larry and Kathleen Kavanagh on the occasion of Larry's retirement as a General Services Supervisor from Laois County Council

NATIONAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Council exceeded the 3% National Performance Indicator for expenditure on training and development as a percentage of total payroll costs in 2006. The out-turn in Laois County Council was 4.6%.

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

Percentage of working days lost to sickness absence through	2006	2005
Certified Leave	3.61%	3.47%
Uncertified Leave	0.44%	0.5%

	2006	2005
Expenditure on Training and Development as a percentage of total payroll costs	4.6%	4.43%



Information & Communications Technology Department

In 2006, the ICT Department continued to push Laois County Council to the forefront in the use of modern technology and retained its position as one of the leading local authorities in this area in the country. The main projects that the ICT Department was involved in are grouped below under three headings i.e. Geographic Information Systems, Software Development and Network Administration.



Geographic Information Systems

GIS has become an increasingly important technology in local authorities in analysing data with a geographical aspect. Up to 80% of information used in a local authority is geographically related.

2006 saw the first introduction in a local authority of the enhanced gPlan System. This displays the location and details of all planning applications received in Laois County Council. This enhanced version allows additional searches by townland and applicant name.

It is available under the Planning Section on the main website or at www.laois.ie/gplan.

The GIS department implemented a Property Management System in 2006 called the Property Interest Register (PIR). The function of this project is to provide a digital record of all current property transactions completed by the Council as well as historic data. It will ensure efficient and effective management of the Council's property portfolio with distribution of the data to relevant staff via a web browser. Nine local authorities are currently using this system.

Software Development & Internet / Intranet

In 2006, the Software Team continued to develop and implement software with the commencement of a number of major projects.

The H.O.M.E. package (Housing Operations Made Easy) now provides Housing Staff with a fully integrated system covering most aspects of the housing function, giving timely access to all relevant information and also providing a reporting facility for decision makers in the housing area.

In planning the team continued to improve the Enquiry Systems on the website and is currently putting the finishing touches to a Self Service PrePlanning System that will be available on laois.ie in early 2007. This system lets the user draw their proposed development site boundary. It then issues them with an instant Report on Council and Government policies which might impact on their proposed development. Another system (Handheld Water Meter Collecting Management System) developed by the team improves internal processes and accuracy of data collection

for the Water Services Department. This system will now be used by all water meter readers.

Customer Service is an area where Laois County Council has given a commitment to provide the highest possible standards of customer care. Towards the end of 2006, the software team implemented and tested a Customer Relationship Management solution. This solution provides support to "front office" business processes, including queries, complaints and service delivery. Each interaction now with a customer will be added to a customer's contact history, and staff can retrieve information on customers from the system as necessary. When fully implemented in 2007, the customer will have direct interaction with the Council through a variety of channels, such as internet, email, automated phone / interactive voice response (IVR).

Laois County Council's website was totally redesigned in 2006. The new look site is now fully compliant with the standards of accessibility and usability. Apart from the introduction of new categories of information, a number of enhanced features have been added, such as the addition of more facilities to pay for services online. These have improved the level of online services available and increased the popularity of the website. Visits to the website have now increased to an average of 22,000 unique visitors per month and over 200,000 page views.

Laois County Council has been actively involved in the promotion of Broadband Services throughout the County, both through the Group Broadband Scheme and the Metropolitan Area Network Programme. Broadband was rolled out to the following areas in 2006 - Rathdowney, Ballacolla, Ballybrittas, Emo, Killenard, The Heath, Kilminchy, Durrow and Clonaslee.

In March 2006, an Information Night was organised in Portlaoise to encourage the business community to avail of the Portlaoise Metropolitan Area Network. Furthermore, in co-operation with the midland counties, the ICT Section published a Guide to Broadband in the Midlands which is available on www.midlandbroadband.ie

Network Administration

The Support desk processed almost 2,500 support calls from Users during 2006. The Computer Hardware Replacement Programme continued during 2006 with a further 50 latest specification Desktop computers being rolled out. In addition to a number of Servers, Laptops, Printers & ancillary equipment, a new internal Telephone System was installed at the Portlaoise Branch Library and new Data and Telephone links were provided at the new Housing Maintenance Department Offices at Mountrath Road, Portlaoise. Broadband Internet access for the Public was provided at Stradbally Library, while the Libraries at Timahoe & Clonaslee were automated. The data link from Portlaoise Library was also upgraded.

New high performance Wireless Links were installed at a number of local Offices in the Portlaoise Town area. In an effort to achieve increased efficiencies and cost savings, the Council's mobile phone contract was reviewed during the year and following this review, the Contract was awarded to O2.

To reduce paper wastage and paper handling, a new Pressure Paper Sealing Machine was introduced early in 2006 which processes payslips, invoices, etc., more efficiently than heretofore.



Chair: Brian Stanley MCC

Members: **Sectoral:**

William Aird, M.C.C.	Mary Wheatley
Larry Kavanagh, R.I.P., M.C.C.	Pat Culleton
Paddy Bracken, M.C.C.	John Grace
Seamus McDonald, M.C.C.	Mick Dowling
Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C.	
Marc Connolly, T.C.	

Director Of Services:	Declan Byrne
Senior Executive Officer:	Carmel McNicholl
Senior Executive Engineer:	P.J. Dempsey
Senior Social Worker:	Fionnuala Daly
County Librarian:	Gerry Maher

Housing Services

Laois County Council's key objective is to maximise the availability of accommodation to meet different categories of need and to promote the full range of housing options.

Highlights during 2006

- o MasterPlan prepared for Knockmay Development Project
- o Implementation of the Rental Accommodation Scheme
- o Adoption of a Sale of Sites Scheme for the County in March 2006
- o Adoption of a revised Scheme of Sale Priorities for Affordable Housing in March 2006.
- o Adoption of a revised Scheme of Letting Priorities in June 2006

Report on SPC

During 2006, the Housing, Social and Cultural S.P.C. met in January, March, June, September and December. At these meetings, Reports and recommendations were received and considered from the Housing Section, Arts Section, Heritage Section, Sports & Leisure Section and the Library Section. The meeting held in January was a Special Meeting convened to consider the proposed Knockmay Development Project. The meeting held in March considered, among other things, a policy on Sale of Sites and a revised policy for the sale of Affordable Houses. The June meeting considered the revised Scheme of Letting Priorities for Social Housing. All these policies were agreed by the Members and adopted by the Council. The S.P.C. is working satisfactorily.

Rental Accommodation Scheme

The Rental Accommodation Scheme which commenced in Laois in September 2006, is a new government initiative to cater for the accommodation needs of persons who are in receipt of Rent Supplement for more than 18 months and who have a long term housing need. The scheme is intended to provide an additional source of good quality rented accommodation for eligible persons and to enhance the response of Laois County Council in meeting long-term housing needs. There are approximately 150 people in Laois who are currently in receipt of Rent Supplement for 18 months or more and work has commenced on accessing their suitability for inclusion in the Scheme. In addition, a number of landlords have been contacted with a view to participating in RAS. Further information with regard to the scheme is available on www.laois.ie

Housing Construction & Acquisition

During the year, 78 houses were completed under this Programme. The breakdown is as follows:

Rural dwellings	6 units
Bracklone St Portarlinton	1 unit
The Swan	18 units
Newline Close Mountrath (Pt V)	2 units
Ashbrook Gdns, Portlaoise (Pt V)	2 units
Bridle Walk, Kilminchy (Pt V)	3 units
College Court, Portlaoise (Pt V)	1 unit
Davitt Court, Mountmellick (Pt V)	2 units
De Vesci Hill, Abbeyleix (Pt V)	2 units
Stradbroom Portlaoise (Pt V)	1 unit
Sleaty Road, Graiguecullen (Pt V)	7 units
Maryborough Crescent, Portlaoise (Pt V)	4 units
Purchases	27 unit
Demountables	2 units
TOTAL	78 units



Maisonettes at Borris Court, Borris Road which were under construction in 2006

The total amount received from the Department for the Capital Programme in 2006 was €21.1m.

Summary Of Programme	
Houses under construction at 01/01/06	194
Houses commenced in 2006	158
Houses completed in 2006	78
Houses in progress at 31/12/06	274

(The above summary includes demountables, second-hand purchases and Part V acquisitions.)

Knockmay Development Project

Laois County Council are undertaking a multi-million euro re-development of Knockmay Estate in Portlaoise.

The Knockmay area of Portlaoise covers approximately 30 acres of land and comprises of six individual local authority estates containing a total of 217 houses, built and occupied over a 17-year period from 1980 to 1997.

A Masterplan has been prepared and agreed following extensive consultations with all relevant stakeholders and approved by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. It was presented to the residents at a special meeting held on 3rd July, 2006. It is hoped to commence the Phase 1/Pilot Programme at Oakleaf Place early in 2007.

It is hoped the proposed Knockmay Development Project will address many of the problems with the original design of both the estates and the individual houses. A provisional phased timeframe of four years has been calculated for the implementation of the project, beginning with the pilot scheme in Oakleaf Place.

The proposed physical works will include improvements to the exterior of the houses, the construction of a neighbourhood centre and crèche, demolition and replacement of some dwellings, removal of alleyways, redesign of open spaces and the construction of boundary walls.

Laois County Council is very positive about this project and is assigning dedicated staff resources on site, to deal with all aspects of implementation and to work with the local residents to ensure that resources are used wisely and that maximum benefits are derived for the community from the re-development.

Planned Maintenance Programme

A programme of works was prepared for Planned Maintenance Phase 4. It is proposed to carry out double glazing & fascia work to approximately 244 houses and electrical work to 149 houses. In addition approximately 285 houses will be provided with mains smoke alarms. The estimate cost of Planned Maintenance Phase 4 is €1.3m and work is to commence early 2007.

Central Heating Initiative

In 2004, a new central heating programme was made available by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The funding available is €5,600 per dwelling or 80% of expenditure, whichever is the lesser.

In 2006, a total of 231 houses have been provided with central heating. The total cost of the 2006 programme was €1.57m of which €1.18m was recouped from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Maintenance of Local Authority Stock

At 31st December 2006, the Council had 1,611 dwellings in its rented stock. Out of this, a total of 54 vacant dwellings were referred to the Maintenance Section for repair prior to re-letting during the year.

Turnkey Developments

Works are continuing on the Turnkey developments at Station Road, Portarlinton (20 apartments), 40 units at Ballycullenbeg, Mountmellick, 4 units at Shannon Road Mountrath and 4 units at Portlaoise Road, Mountrath. It is the Council's intention to avail of Turnkey Housing Developments and the Council regularly advertises to invite proposals from Building Contractors or Developers for the supply of Turnkey Housing Schemes in Co. Laois. All proposals are considered subject to local requirements.

Part V- Housing Strategy

In accordance with Part V of the Housing Strategy, 87 housing units (24 social and 59 affordable) were completed around the County in 2006. 158 units (80 social and 78 affordable) are currently in progress in Abbeyleix, Mountrath, Mountmellick, Portlaoise and Portarlinton. In addition, a number of Agreements are in place for the provision of more Part V units in these towns. Negotiations are also ongoing under the Housing Strategy for the provision of additional units at a number of locations around the County.



Social and Affordable Housing at Imleach, The Swan, which was officially opened in May 2006

Voluntary Housing Sector

The Voluntary Sector continues to play a vital role in assisting to meet the accommodation needs in Laois. In 2006, Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Association officially opened their new housing development consisting of 24 units and a Community Centre at Wolfe Tone Street, Mountmellick. Respond! completed work in Balladine, Abbeyleix on 54 units and The Sisters of Charity of Jesus & Mary completed an 11-bed complex at The Green, Stradbally. In 2006, Cluid Housing Association commenced work on 47 houses at Colliers Wood, Portlaoise and Respond! commenced work on 20 units in Mountrath and 21 units in Graiguecullen and are continuing work on 10 units in Balladine, Abbeyleix.

Affordable Housing

During the year work commenced on the following schemes:

o	Cooltederry Portarlinton	36 units
o	Arderin View, Camross	4 units
o	St Kieran's Errill	4 units
o	Castletown Phase 2	4 units
o	Graiguecullen	10 units
o	Part Vs	103 units
	Total	161 units



Affordable Housing Developments completed in 2006 include:

o	The Swan	-	6 units
o	Cork Road, Durrow	-	10 units
o	Balladine, Abbeyleix	-	32 units
o	Part Vs	-	59 units
	Total	-	107 units



Affordable Housing at The Meadowbrook, Rosenallis, under construction 2006

Housing Rents

The Council reviews its Differential Rent Scheme on an annual basis. The latest Scheme was implemented on 14th October, 2006. The average weekly rent, under the 2006 Scheme, was €34.50. A total rental income of €2,456,311 was received.

Traveller Accommodation

The Four Year Traveller Accommodation Programme 2005-2008 was adopted by the Council in April 2005. Significant progress in relation to the accommodation of the Travelling Community has been made in County Laois.

Estate Management

The year 2006 saw the continued development of the Council's policy on resident participation in Estate Management addressing issues such as: Estate Management, General Maintenance, Traffic Calming Measures, Anti-social behaviour

Pre-tenancy courses and tenant handbooks were provided for all new tenants.

Best Estate Competition 2006

Category A

1st Place: Riverview Apartments, Portlaoise. 2nd Place: Woodview Stradbally.

Category B

Joint 1st Place: Old Forge Crescent, Mountrath- Joint 1st Place: Ballymorris Manor, Portarlinton. A special award went to Oakleaf Place, Portlaoise.

A Tenant Liaison Officer and a mobile Caretaker for the Aged and Disabled continue to work in the Housing Department. In 2006, there were 47 Residents' Associations supported by the Housing Department.

Building Control

There were 333 inspections of buildings to ensure compliance with Building Regulations. Our level of monitoring is consistently meeting the standards set by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Activity under various schemes

Extensions to Local Authority Dwellings:	
Commenced	2
Completed	5
Improvement Works in Lieu of Local Authority Housing:	
Commenced	5
Completed	4
Disabled Persons Grants:	
Applications Received	215
Total No. of Grants Paid	150
(Totalling)	1,951,843
Essential Repairs Grants:	
Applications Received	113
Total No. of Grants Paid	88
(Totalling)	543,980
Tenant Purchase Scheme:	
Applications Received	76
Houses Sold	30
Shared Ownership Loans:	
Applications Received	39
Transactions Completed	
Mortgage Allowance Scheme:	
Applications Received	6
House Purchase Annuity Loans Advanced	NIL
Home Improvement Loans Advanced:	NIL

SERVICE INDICATORS - Housing Vacancies	31.12.06	31.12.05
Total Number of Dwellings in Local Authority Stock	1611	1519
Overall % of dwellings that are let	97	97.8
Overall % of dwellings that are empty	3	2.2
% of empty dwellings subject to major refurbishment schemes	0	0
% of empty dwellings unavailable for letting	45	33.33
% of empty dwellings available for letting	55	66.7
Average time taken to relet dwelling available for letting in weeks	37 Days (5 Weeks)	5.3
Number of repairs completed as a % of the number of valid repair requests received	89.06%	83.2%
Average time taken to inform applicants of local authority's decision on applications for		
Shared Ownership Housing Scheme	9.8 Days	4
Housing Loans Scheme	1 Day	4
Local Authority	6 Days	5
Traveller Accommodation		
Total number of Traveller Families accommodated as a % of the targets set in the Local Traveller Programme	171.43%	188.9%



The Arts

Laois School of Music

Enrolment in the School of Music was maintained at 300 pupils and highlights of 2006 included the School Orchestra trip to Colouneix-Chamiers, France on St. Patrick's Weekend as part of Portlaoise Town Twinning 10th Anniversary Celebrations. In May, 73 students took exams from the Royal Irish Academy of Music and the Associated Board of the Royal Colleges of Music. Laois County Council accorded the School of Music a joint Civic Reception with the Arts Council for providing a valuable service which is unique among Local Authorities in the country'. An End of Year Gala Concert was held in the Dunamais Arts Centre in June. Kindermusic classes commenced on an Outreach basis in Portarlinton and Durrow. Singing student Heather Fogarty launched her first CD and won a scholarship to further her studies as a boarder in St. Finian's School, Mullingar.

The culmination of 5 years of the School of Music to date came in October when The RTE National Symphony Orchestra held a week long residency in Laois. Jointly organised by the Arts Office and the Dunamais Arts Centre, this highly successful Residency included Primary and Secondary Schools Workshops, Hospital and Nursing Home visits, a Masterclass for Laois School of Music Orchestra, a workshop in the Midlands Prison and an evening Concert for the public. Over 6000 people benefited from the NSO's visit and it had a very positive impact on music awareness in the county.



Laois School of Music Co-ordinator, Nuala Kelly being presented with the National Award from Chambers Ireland - Excellence in Local Government Awards by Minister Dick Roche, T.D.

Laois School of Music ended the year as the well deserved recipient of a National Award from Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards in the Arts, Culture and Recreation Category. The awards were presented in November in Dublin.

Laois Youth Theatre

Laois Youth theatre recommenced in Portlaoise, Mountmellick and Rathdowney and Stradbally and a new group was set up in Mountrath in January 2006. Laois Youth Theatre enables young people to avail of the very best drama training. Portlaoise Youth Theatre played a leading role in Shell Connections, one of the worlds' largest celebrations of youth theatre with performances of the play "Shut Up" by Andrew Payne in the Dunamais Arts Centre in March and in the Everyman Palace in Cork in May. Mountmellick Youth Theatre performed a play by Maeve Binchy entitled "First Day Last Chance" as part of an Amnesty International project called Voice Our Concern and also found time to take part in the Mountmellick St Patricks Day Parade. They concluded their year with a play entitled "Taster", performed in Mountmellick in December. Stradbally and Rathdowney Youth Theatre wrote and performed their plays in the Dunamais Arts Centre in May and Mountrath Youth Theatre presented their first play "The Real Twelve Days of Christmas" in Mountrath in December.

The Laois Arts Plan 2006-2011

The Laois Arts Plan 2006-2011 was officially launched on 1st March in Áras an Chontae by the Director of the Arts Council Mary Cloake. Entertainment was provided at the event by the Laois School of Music Orchestra.

Laois Artists' Symposium Book

A celebratory book on the Laois Artists Symposium in Emo Court was launched on Wednesday 1st March in conjunction with the new Laois Arts Plan. "The Laois Artists' Symposium 2005" is a commemorative booklet which chronicles the three-week artists' residency which took place in Emo Court.

The Great Book of Gaelic visit to Laois

As part of the Seachtain na Gaeilge celebrations in March 2006, The Arts Office hosted the internationally acclaimed exhibition entitled 'The Great Book of Gaelic'. A celebration of contemporary Celtic culture featuring more than 200 visual artists, poets and calligraphers from Scotland and Ireland. It was exhibited in the Dunamais Arts Centre, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise and Heywood Community School. The event included an evening of poetry and song in the Dunamais Arts Centre with poets and musicians from Ireland and Scotland. They were joined on stage by students from Heywood Community School, Camross National School, Ballyadams National School, Scoil Mhuire NS, Portlaoise and Clonaghadoo N.S who participated in poetry and calligraphy workshops organised as part of the exhibition. A calligrapher worked with the students demonstrating skills which would have been used by poets long ago. The fruits of this exciting initiative "An Leabhar Bheag" will be published in 2007. The Arts Office also accompanied a group of the young Laois poets to the Dublin City launch of the "Great Book of Gaelic" in the LAB in October.



Artists in Schools Scheme

Each year, the Arts Office offer schools in the county the opportunity to apply for an artists' residency to cover all art media. A total of 11 schools took part in 2006 and they had the opportunity to work in Film/animation, Patchwork, Graphics, Sculpture, Textile art, Music, and Photography. The Schools included St. Colmcilles NS Errill, St Fergal's College Rathdowney, Rathdowney C of I, St Josephs Mountmellick, Killanure NS Mountrath, Scoil Bhride Knockmay, Scoil Aonghusa Stradbally, Emo NS, The Heath NS, and Scoil Mhuire Abbeyleix. The artists taking part included Orlagh McDonagh, Sarah Stevens, Mary Anne Browne, Ray Murphy, Kathy Taylor, Seamus O'Connor, Patricia Bennett, and Hilary Kelly. Some wonderfully creative work from the students taking part in this years programme has been created.

Exhibitions

- o The Great Book of Gaelic ;The Dunamaise Arts Centre, Áras an Chontae and Heywood Community School.
- o Exhibition of Peace Poster competition in partnership with the Lions Club
- o Exhibition of paintings by artist Sarah Delaney entitled "Memories of Summer"
- o The "Portrait of Laois Artists" exhibition made up of photographic portraits of the artists taken by photorapher Andy Mason and also included a signature artwork from each of the artists.

Awards & Bursaries

At a special awards event in Áras an Chontae grants were presented to 35 groups and 7 individuals to further their artistic endeavours. The Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary was awarded to Emo based artist Lisa Fingleton and the Scholarship for the Drama League of Ireland Residential Summer School was awarded to Helen Delaney a drama student from Rathdowney.

The Patronage Award is a new initiative that was instigated as part of "The Laois Arts Plan 2006-2011". It gives financial support of €7,000 to an artist, giving them time to focus on their practice. The recipient of the award for 2006 was Portlaoise born writer Pat Boran.

Public Art

The Arts Office was involved in an advisory capacity on two new public art projects. The Percent for Art commission for the new VEC premises, Portlaoise College and the Percent for Art commission for Killenard NS.

Midland Collaborative Projects

The Music in Healthcare Project is a collaborative project between Laois, Offaly, Westmeath and Longford. Six musicians worked in Residential and Day Care Centres for older people in the region in Autumn 2006 and the programme will continue into 2007. The Midlands Journal is a collaborative publication of a quality artistic regional arts overview. Two editions of the journal were published in 2006.



National Symphony Orchestra Master class with Laois School of Music Orchestra

Summer Arts Programme

Very successful summer arts workshops for children and young people took place over the month of July in a number of areas in Laois. The workshops included pottery, printmaking, film, drama, kindermusic, creative writing and Art.

Other activities

- o Artists Mentoring
- o Book Launches
- o Storytelling in Hospitals
- o Writers workshops
- o Composition workshops
- o South East Arts Network Initiative
- o Hosting of Arts Council Meeting



Sport and Leisure

The Sport and Leisure Section of Laois County Council delivered a highly successful calendar of events and activities in 2006. Most notable were:

Play Provision

Two new playgrounds were opened in 2006, the first of which was officially opened in March in the Amenity Park, Mountrath by the Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, the late Councillor Larry Kavanagh, R.I.P., assisted by Ms Laura Bergin, fifth class student at Castletown Primary School whose entry was chosen to name the playground "Sli na bPaisti", *The Way of the Children*.

A second playground was officially opened in Abbeyleix in April by Mr. Dick Roche, T.D. Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, assisted by first class students of Scoil Mhuire, Abbeyleix whose entry was chosen as the name for the playground following a competition for local schools. "Sult na Mara" - Seaside Fun, which reflects Abbeyleix's link with the infamous Titanic and is located on the grounds of the Heritage House in Abbeyleix.

A skatepark 'Rothai an Spraoi' - Wheels of Fun Skatepark was also officially opened at Church Avenue, Portlaoise on 30th May, 2006.



Face painting at National Play Days



Children enjoying the facilities at the playground in Abbeyleix.

Children's Activity Programme

Laois County Council organised and delivered a very successful Easter and Summer activity programme in 2006 throughout the county. Parks Tennis programme was delivered at Mountrath, Portlaoise, Portarlinton & Abbeyleix. National Play Days for children were held in July at Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountrath and Abbeyleix playgrounds, which proved a huge success.

Playground Markings

School Playground Markings was further developed in 2006 with a further eleven schools in Laois availing of funding. Training was provided to teachers and children on games to play on their new markings.

Walking Routes

Two new Sli na Slainte walking routes were officially opened in May 2006 at Emo and Stradbally, bringing a total of five Sli routes within the County. These routes continue to be used extensively by local people and visitors alike.

Club Development

The Council's Club Development Programme continued in 2006 promoting and supporting the development of new and existing clubs in County Laois delivering workshops/seminars and providing assistance to secure funding through the Sports Capital Grant Programme. The total allocation for Laois in 2006 Sports Capital Programme was €768,000.



Track & Field

Provision of a new 8-lane athletics track, playing pitch and field event areas commenced in 2006 on a site adjacent to the new Portlaoise College. These facilities will be used by students of Portlaoise College, North Laois Athletic Club and other community and sporting groups.



Camp CoCo - Portlaoise 2006

Leisure Centres

Contracts were signed for both leisure centre developments at Portlaoise and Portarlington.

Portlaoise

The Contractor for Portlaoise is Nevin Construction, Waterford. Work on the refurbishment of the swimming pool along with the provision of learner and toddler pools, gymnasium & classes studio, soccer pitches and jogging / walking trail began in May 2006.

Portarlington

The refurbishment of the swimming pool commenced by the Contractor - Dunnes Building Services Ltd., Portarlington - in March 2006.

With grant aid from the Dept. of Arts, Sport & Tourism and investments by Laois County Council, the new centres will undoubtedly reinforce Laois Council Councils philosophy of "Working in Partnership with the Community". It is appropriate to acknowledge the hard work, dedication and commitment by both swimming pool committees down through the years.

It is anticipated that both facilities will be open to the public in July / August 2007. Work is progressing on the Portlaoise Swimming Pool project.

Ballinakill

The open air swimming pool in Ballinakill enjoyed an excellent year due to the great improvements to the facility carried out in 2006 and the extra fine weather during the Summer months. The dedication and hard work of the voluntary committee should also be noted at this time.

Laois Sports Partnership

Laois Sports Partnership completed another very successful year in 2006.

Disability Activities

"Come and Try" Cycling Event

Cycling is a lifelong activity that can be done individually or in a group and Laois Sports Partnership organised a cycling "Come and Try it Day" for people with disabilities.



Some of the bicycles at the "Come and Try It Day" in Mountmellick suitable for people with physical or visual impairment

Teenscene

Teenscene is a new programme from Laois Sports Partnership and the HSE aimed primarily at 12-17 year old girls. The programme incorporates 16 weekly, 1 hour sessions of indoor aerobic/exercise activities with chosen music. Novelty is added to the sessions by incorporating activities such as Boxercise, Yoga and other current trends.



Pupils from St. Aengus Post Primary School, Mountrath taking part in the Teenscene Programme



Heritage

The Heritage Office of Laois County Council aims to ensure conservation and to promote awareness and understanding of the built, natural and cultural heritage of County Laois. This is undertaken through the implementation of specific actions as detailed in the Laois Heritage Plan, as well as through awareness-raising with staff and Elected Members of Laois County Council, as well as the wider community.

Protect & Enhance Laois Heritage

The Laois Heritage Plan aims to identify and conserve the built, natural and cultural heritage of County Laois. The first Heritage Plan for County Laois, adopted in 2002, was completed in 2006. In addition to undertaking final actions from the first plan, the second Heritage Plan for Laois (2007 - 2011) was written during 2006. Following extensive public consultation, the plan was adopted by Laois County Council in December 2006 and will be published and launched in early 2007.

During 2006, with the support of the Heritage Council, a range of actions from the Laois Heritage Plan were undertaken to protect and enhance Laois heritage. These included the Durrow Courthouse project, for which, in partnership with the local community, funding was sourced during 2006. Planning is now at an advanced stage for this project which when finished will house the library and community facilities, as well as showcasing best practice in the conservation of an historic building.

Promote Sustainable Development.

The Heritage Office has committed to ensuring that the development of the County proceeds in a way that meets the needs of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Towards this end, the Heritage Officer is involved with the Local Agenda 21 Committee and a Sustainability Plan for the Heritage Office has been produced. This will feed into a wider organisation-wide sustainability plan.



Discovering the Wildlife of the Grand Canal during Heritage Week

Collect information on the Heritage of County Laois

The collection of sound scientific data on the heritage of Laois is a necessary first step in the conservation and highlighting of this heritage. A number of heritage surveys were carried out during 2006:

- o Phase II of the field-by-field survey of habitats in the County,
- o Survey of the Industrial and natural heritage of the Mountmellick Canal,
- o Audit of all existing data on the biodiversity of Laois, which will be used to identify gaps in our knowledge and target future research,
- o Market research study of heritage awareness among the public in the county, with an analysis of how this can be improved in the future,
- o An oral history project recorded memories and stories associated with traditional crafts and crafts-people, including blacksmiths, thatchers, stone masons and carpenters.



Participants in the Traditional Crafts Recording Project, pictured with the Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, Michael Lalor at the launch of the CD collection in Mountmellick Museum, November 2006

Promote pride and awareness of the heritage of Laois

The Heritage Office works to ensure that all residents of Laois are aware of the invaluable heritage resource of the county and to promote pride in this heritage among all members of the community. During 2006, the Heritage Officer worked with numerous individuals, community groups and the County Community Forum to plan heritage projects and provide advice on accessing grant aid and project support. In order to ensure wide dissemination of heritage information, all reports and publications produced during 2006 have been lodged in the local studies section of Laois County Library and made available to download on the Laois County Council website. Actions undertaken during 2006 to raise awareness of heritage issues included:

- o The annual *Celebrating Laois Heritage* Conference was held in Mountmellick Museum in November, to inform the public of actions undertaken during the year.
- o In partnership with Laois Federation of Tidy Towns, participation in Heritage Week by Laois communities was greatly increased in 2006, with over 20 well-attended events organised to celebrate the built, natural and cultural heritage of the county.



- 0 Dawn walks in Clonaslee and Durrow were organised to celebrate annual Dawn Chorus Day in May.
- 0 A series of Radio programmes on heritage topics were recorded and broadcast on Midlands 103 local radio.
- 0 *The Golden Mile of Laois* competition was held in association with Laois LEADER to raise awareness of the wildlife importance and cultural value of hedgerows.
- 0 Seminars and workshops on the topics of hedgerow management and conservation of historic buildings were held, to provide specialist advice.
- 0 Publications on the Laois Heritage Trail and the walking heritage trail of Portlaoise were produced
- 0 Laois Heritage Office contributed to the production of information on the Slieve Bloom Eco-Walks, in partnership with Slieve Bloom Rural Development Association and Offaly County Council.
- 0 Entries from Laois were very successful in the national Pride of Place competition, which celebrates community activity, with Durrow winning their category, Stradbally winning a special projects prize and Clonaslee and Ballacolla both short-listed in their categories.



Prize winners at the Golden Mile of Laois Competition Awards Night

Performance Indicators	2003	2004	2005	2006
No. of Arts Grants Allocated Per 1,000 population	24	29	26	43
No. of Youth Theatre	3	4	5	5
Summer Arts Workshops	8	8	10	15
Drama Workshops	3	2	2	1
Laois School of Music No. of Students	330	332	279	300

Performance Indicators	Indicators Set	Indicators Achieved 2006
Numbers of Training Courses Organised	12	13
Number of Trained Leaders, Coaches & Admins.	110	160
Number of participating communities in Summer Camps & other programmes	12	14
Number of children participating in programme	850	1200
No of clubs/groups assisted with Sports Funding Applications	35	39
Facilities	2	2
Laois Sports Partnership		
County Facilities Audit	1	Completed
County Play Strategy	1	Completed
Walking Routes		
Sli na Slainte	2	Completed
Sliabh Bloom Way	1	Work ongoing on upgrading

	Position at 31.12.06	Position at 31.12.05
Number of children's playgrounds per 1,000 population:		
- directly provided by the Local Authority	4	0.000034
- Facilitated by the Local Authority	0	0
Number of visitors to local authority facilitated swimming facilities per 1,000 population	5,892	0.19%



Libraries



Children pictured at the "Design a Bookmark" competition prizegiving Ceremony in Portlaoise Library

Introduction

The public library service performs an essential role in our communities by providing access to information, knowledge, lifelong learning and leisure reading in an inclusive manner. The Laois library service is delivered through a network of eleven part-time branches and one full-time branch. The service is currently engaged in a major infrastructural development programme.

Library Development Plan 2007-2011

In July the Council adopted a five year Development Plan for the library service. The plan deals with infrastructure, social inclusion, links with other agencies and information technology. This plan is currently being prepared for publication.

Abbeyleix Library

In August, the contract for the refurbishment of the Market House in Abbeyleix was signed and work commenced at the end of the month. The building programme is for 13 months with an expected completion date at the end of September 2007. The cost is €1.965m and the building when complete will consist of a library space of 300 square metres operating from three floors. The Council will receive a grant of €1.56m from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.



Overall "Design a Bookmark" winner 2006, Leona Duff, with the County Librarian Mr. Gerry Maher

Mountmellick Library

In March approval in principle was granted by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government for a new library in Mountmellick. The library project will involve the refurbishment of the rear half of the Courthouse and an extension to the rear and side of the existing structure giving a total area of 700 square metres approximately. Detailed drawings and cost (Stage 2 application) are now with the Department awaiting sanction to proceed to tender stage.

Mountrath Library

In April the contract for the acquisition of a new library under a design, build and buy back scheme at Shannon Street, Mountrath was signed. The contract price of €831,130 includes the fit-out of the building. Construction is complete and fitting out is currently being undertaken. The overall library area will be 200 square metres.

Portarlinton Library

In August, Stage 1 application (approval in principle) was submitted to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government for a new library in Portarlinton. The library, which will measure 600 square metres approx. will form part of general Council offices for the town.



Irish History Live

Durrow Library

Plans were drawn up during the year for the relocation of the library from its present premises to the Courthouse as part of a community facilities development project.

Delivery Van

The County Library acquired a new delivery van for the service in December and recruited a driver/assistant to operate it. It is the first such vehicle for Laois and is used for delivery of bookstocks, etc. from headquarters to branch libraries and exchanges of stock between branches. The vehicle was fully grant-aided by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Automation

The library service continued its programme of automating the library systems in branch libraries during the year with the automation of the Timahoe branch in October which will go live to the public in early 2007.

Bookfund

The bookfund for 2006 was €184,538 an increase of €13,538 on the previous year. The Department of Education and Science contributed €33,462 for the purchase of books for primary schools within the local authority area.



Comóradh Leabhar na bPáistí

Tionóladh ócáidí éagsúla sa Leabharlann Phoiblí i bPort Laoise i rith na féile chun páistí a spreagadh leabharlanna áitiúla a úsáid.

I measc na n-imeachtaí a bhí ar siúl bhí scéalaíocht do pháistí óga. Thug an t-údar cáiliúil Tom McCaughren cuairt ar an leabharlann agus léigh sé sliocht as a chuid leabhair, chomh maith leis sin thug údar eile David Donohue cuairt ar an ionad agus bhain na páistí an sásamh as a chuid léitheoireacht.

Freisin, tugadh duaiseanna do pháistí ar fud an Chontae a ghlac páirt i gcomórtas Leabhar Mharc "Design you own bookmark".

Tá Comhairle Leabharlann Laoise ag súil go mór na himeachtaí seo ar fad a chuir chun cinn ionas go mbeadh na buntáistí seo ar fad le fail do na daoine óga.

Primary Schools

The provision of a library service to the primary schools of the county continued during the year with the purchase of books specially targeted at the needs of this age group. Laois County Library received a grant of €33,462 from the Department of Education and Science for this purpose. Teachers of the county are invited to the Library Headquarters at Áras an Chontae where they can select books from a central collection for their classrooms.

Prison Service

Laois County Library administers and maintains the library in the Midlands Prison, Portlaoise. The library, measuring approximately 150 square metres, is fully stocked and its system is automated. In December, the Council recruited two staff, an Assistant Librarian (Grade 5) and Library Assistant (Grade 3), who will manage the running of the service within the prison. The salaries of these two staff will be recouped to the County Council by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. In 2006, the Department of Justice contributed €6,000 for the purchase of bookstock for the prison.

Archives

During the year, former County Librarian Helen Roe's manuscript titled "Notes on the placenames of Laoighis" was published with the assistance of funding from The Heritage Council, Laois Leader and the County Library.

Work began on putting an information pack together which will eventually be used for archives workshops.

The need for a policy on records retention was identified and it was agreed that a particular section of the Council should be chosen as a pilot scheme which would inform future development of records retention.



Jessica Quinn Prize Winner at the "Design a Bookmark" competition
in 7 - 9 Age Category
with Walter Lawlor, Portlaoise Librarian

Statistics

Membership	6,912
Issues	170,864
Internet Sessions	7,789

Public Opening Hours		
	31.12.06	31.12.05
Average number of opening hours per week for full-time libraries for part-time libraries	35 hours 9.7 hours	35 hours 9.7 hours
Number of registered library members as a percentage of the local population	6,912	12.5%
Number of items issued per head of population (county/city wide) for: - books 156,462 2.8% - other items 14,402 0.25%		
Percentage of libraries that offer Internet access to the public	83%	77%
Number of Internet sessions provided per 1,000 population	7,789	102.6%



Chair: James Deegan M.C.C.

Members:

John Bonham M.C.C.
Martin Phelan M.C.C.
Paul Mitchell M.C.C.
Tom Jacob M.C.C.
Michael Moloney M.C.C.
Brendan Phelan M.C.C.
Rotimi Adebari T.C.

Sectoral:

John Finlay
Margaret Ryan
Eddie Phelan
William Moylan

Director of Services: Anna Marie Delaney
Senior Executive Officer: Ian McCormack



Portlaoise Enterprise Centre

Report on Strategic Policy Committee

The following policy documents were produced and discussed by the Committee and agreed by the Members of Laois County Council in 2006:

- o Tourism Strategy
- o Management and Maintenance of Industrial Estates
- o Signposting in Industrial Estates
- o Draft Policy Document on Allotments

Economic Development

Laois County Council is actively involved in, and has a pivotal role to play in the economic development of the County. The Council is committed to attracting inward investment fostering a climate of self sustaining development and it is eager to ensure that balanced development takes place throughout the County. The Council continues to participate actively with all local and national development agencies to promote the social and economic development of the County.

Portlaoise Interchange

The development of a 250 acres site at Portlaoise Interchange seeks to exploit the Economic Development potential of the key transport corridor which runs through the County. This project is as a direct result of the National Spatial Strategy which puts Laois and Portlaoise at a distinct advantage in designating it as a Transport Node and Inland Port. Works are at an advanced stage on a number of developments on site.

This project will harness the potential of Portlaoise's geographic position in the centre of the Country and transform it into a major Inland Port and Transport Hub. Portlaoise will subsequently become an economically vibrant centre in its own right.

Enterprise Centres

Portarlington Enterprise Centre

The Portarlington Enterprise Centre opened its doors in November 2005 with the purpose of providing locally based entrepreneurs with modern "incubator" space within a supported framework while encouraging the development of self sustaining micro industry within the Portarlington area. Mr. Michael Martin, T.D Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, announced on Wednesday, 14th June 2006 that a sum of € 400,000 has been granted to Portarlington Enterprise Centre Ltd under Enterprise Ireland's Community Enterprise Centre (CEC) Scheme, 2006. Plans are being prepared for the new extension (10,000 sq. ft.) at present.

Portlaoise Enterprise Centre

Work is at an advanced stage on this project. There will be a mix of office accommodation and incubator units at this location with an overall size of 20,184 sq.ft. This is a turnkey development, which will be delivered to Laois County Council early in 2007. Laois County Enterprise Board will be the anchor tenant in the new Enterprise Centre. Laois County Council is also committed to progressing the development of Enterprise Centres in Durrow and Mountrath in 2007.

Broadband (MAN Networks)

Local Authorities have been given a central role in the implementation of Ireland's Broadband Strategy with the Metropolitan Area Network (installation of fibre optic network) providing the essential infrastructure for heavy broadband users, in order to have the services they require.

Mountmellick & Portarlington Projects

Both projects have been approved by the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources. Offaly County Council who are the Lead Authority for these projects in the Midlands Region is in the process of appointing a Project Co-Ordinator and are drafting documentation re: the appointment of design / construction consultants in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

Industrial Sites

Laois County Council continues to maintain its direct role in facilitating economic development / job creation through the ongoing disposal of sites throughout the County. The Council continues to acquire land for industrial development given the County's potential for further development and capacity for new enterprise. It is anticipated that serviced sites will be provided by Laois County Council in Abbeyleix, Durrow and Portlaoise in 2007.

Skills Database

Laois County Council have been revamping its skills database for commuters who leave the County to work in other Counties. It also focuses on school leavers and third level students. The objective of this initiative is to document the skills profile of the labour pool that is available to an enterprise choosing to set up in County Laois. The

Tourism

Skills Database will be formally launched early in 2007.

The Tourism section of Laois County Council works on strategic projects to encourage more visitors to the County. The Tourism Officer liaises with local interests, state agencies and the business sector regarding the identification of suitable projects for County Laois. The Tourism Officer provides advice and assistance to tourism providers within the County. Trade Shows and other promotional shows are attended during the year. The Tourism Officer also works closely with the Board of Laois Tourism in the overall promotion and marketing of the County.



Gardens at Emo Court

Tourism Strategy 2006-2010

The five year Tourism Strategy was completed in 2006. A large number of workshops and public consultations took place in 2005 / 2006. The ambitious 5 year plan intends to raise tourism overnight stays in the County. The Strategy is a joint project between Laois Tourism, Laois Leader and Laois County Council. The Tourism Strategy can be downloaded from www.laois.ie or www.laoistourism.ie

A number of Task Groups were set up as a result of the Strategy and the following objectives were implemented:

Website Task Group

The Laois Tourism website has been completely redesigned and is being promoted widely. The Website is seen as the most important tool in promoting tourism. Ezine Newsletters are forwarded on a monthly basis to the Laois



Tourism database and include new products, special offers or interesting features for Laois.

Activity Task Group

This group completed the 'Top Things to do in Laois' publication which is now available from Tourist Offices, activity providers and from the Tourism section, Laois County Council. This handy guide gives details on what to do in the County and appeals particularly to school groups, families and corporate groups.

Public Relations

A P.R. Consultant has been appointed for Laois Tourism and members of Laois Tourism have been featured in a number of press / magazines. This Public Relations Strategy will run throughout 2007.



Budweiser International Golf Challenge 2006

This challenge took place from 22nd to 25th May. It was a great success with participants from Belgium, Wales, U.K., Scotland and Ireland. The Challenge was supported by Budweiser, Laois County Council, Failte Ireland and Laois Tourism. The prizes were produced locally by designer, Franz Caffrey. For details on the 2007 event, please contact Tourism Officer, Laois County Council Tel: 057 86 64132 Email: hdeevy@laoiscoco.ie



Co. Manager Mr Peter Carey with the Winners of the 2006 Budweiser International Golf Challenge



Picnic area at "The Cut" in the Slieve Bloom Mountains





Launch of the Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run at Áras an Chontae

Gordon Bennett Historic Signposted Trail

In 1903, the Gordon Bennett Cup Motor Race took place in Ireland through counties Laois, Kildare and Carlow. The 1903 race drew the world's attention to Ireland as the foremost drivers of the era travelled from France, England, Belgium and the U.S. to race the roads of the three counties. This event was the precursor to the Grand Prix Race.

The Gordon Bennett Group have worked over the past year to signpost this historic route and to highlight tourism attractions along it. The signposting has been completed and a booklet which gives history on the route and portrays the tourism amenities and attractions along it is now available.

Check out the new website www.gordonbennetroute.com which is a valuable asset.

The Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run Event took place on the June Bank Holiday weekend. The number of entrants doubled in size with most of the entries from the U.K. The participants were delighted with the new signposted route and it is hoped that over the coming years, this event will become a major International Event



Festival Goers at "Electric Picnic", Stradbally, Co. Laois

Events & Festivals

One of the key components of the Tourism Strategy is to promote Laois as a major event centre.

Due to its strategic location, the County is the perfect venue for hosting high profile events as it is easy to get to from most parts of Ireland.

Events such as the Electric Picnic in Stradbally has proved this and more events are planned for 2007.

For any queries on tourism in Laois, please contact: Tourism Officer, Laois County Council, Aras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Tel: 057 86 64132 Email: hdeevy@laoiscoco.ie Web: www.laoistourism.ie



Children Playing at Steam Rally at Stradbally



Chair: Mary Sweeney, M.C.C.

Members

James Daly, M.C.C.
Ray Cribbin, M.C.C.
John Moran, M.C.C.
William Delaney, M.C.C.
Dick Miller, M.C.C.
Denis O'Meara, T.C.

Sectoral

Ger Lynch.
Donald Scully.
Christy Mooney.
Chris Uys.

Director of Services
Senior Engineer, Water Services
Senior Engineer, Environment

John Daly.
Mary White.
John O'Donoghue.

Report on Strategic Policy Committee

The Environment & Water Services Strategic Policy Committee (S.P.C.) held four meetings during 2006. Discussions included issues such as the Water Services Investment Programme, Water Services Pricing Policy, Draft Bye-Laws for the Presentation of Waste and Local Agenda 21. The following policies were recommended by the S.P.C. and adopted by full Council:- Bring Banks, Burial Grounds and Bye-Laws for Parks and Open Spaces. The committee also visited a "Biogas" treatment plant at Camphill Community and the Kyletalesha Landfill & Recycling Centre.

Environment

Community Initiatives

Clean Up Laois Week

A very successful Clean up Laois Week took place from 3rd - 7th April. In excess of 26 tonnes of litter was collected. Laois County Council provided €25,000 to fund this very worthwhile initiative. Free collections of household hazardous waste were also held during April and December.

Tidy Towns

National and local tidy towns results continued to improve during 2006 with an increase of 10 marks or more recorded in many towns and villages while *The Summer Wheelie Bin* and the *Tidy Town* Grant schemes continued to assist committees in the county.

Grants

Community Grants were awarded to 71 groups throughout the County for various projects to improve our environment and enhance our local amenities. A total of 7 groups received financial assistance under the Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund which is a joint initiative between Laois County Council and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government that aims to contribute to environmental awareness and sustainable development. The Community Project Fund allocated €1,000 to each elected Member of Laois County Council to finance worthwhile projects in their own areas.



Presentation to Errill Tidy Towns
Inter Community Litter Challenge, 2006
Overall Winner (Village Category)

Competitions

34 entries were received in the Art from Waste competition which is organised annually by Laois County Council in association with the Laois Federation of the I.C.A. and 34 entries were received from schools who were invited to make "My favourite animal".

Parks and Green Open Spaces

During the year, upgrading works on the two town parks in Portlaoise were carried out. New walls were erected at the vehicle entrance to the People's Park allowing better access for service vehicles into the park. Repair work was carried out on the gate to the River Triogue Park and a new gate was erected at the Riverview Apartments entrance. Bye-Laws for Parks and Open Spaces were prepared and adopted by the elected members to help protect and encourage enjoyment of the parks and green open spaces of County Laois. Sponsorship of the two roundabouts of J.F.L. Avenue, Portlaoise was secured to help maintain these landscaped roundabouts which received favourable mention in the National Tidy Towns report for 2006. Towns and villages throughout the county availed of advice to help them make better use of their own public open spaces and features and the county was "blooming" with colour during the summer months. Forward Planning Section and the Environment Section continued to work closely in relation to National Tree Week and village design statements and other issued relating to trees, shrubs etc.



Presentation of Green Flag Award by An Taisce to the 8 successful Primary Schools in Laois at Tailor's Hall, Dublin

Environmental Awareness & Education

2006 saw the number of Awarded Green Schools jump from 11 to 18! Congratulations to all involved. Also this year the Tidy Primary Schools Competition was held for the first time.

Each school was awarded marks on the presence/absence of litter. This was a very successful anti-litter initiative as 10 schools achieved litter free status and a prize fund of €4,000 was distributed between numerous schools in the competition based on their overall results.

Laois County Council's Environment Section continued to work closely with the Mountmellick Environment Group and the National Race Against Waste Team on the pilot RACE Mountmellick Project. This project set out waste reduction and recycling targets for the whole community in Mountmellick. This work will continue in 2007.

In the area of Business Waste Management, Laois County Council held two seminars for large and small-medium size organisations. Participants were advised how to carry out a waste audit and how to implement sustainable waste management practices within their company by reducing, reusing and recycling their waste. The "Turn Spoil into Soil" Compost Booklet received its debut at the Composting and Wildlife Gardening Seminar held in Heritage House, Abbeyleix as part of Heritage Week 2006. These booklets are distributed countywide as part of Laois County Council's Waste Management Information Pack. They are also available to download from www.laois.ie

(under Environment pages). Compost bins were made available for collection from Portlaoise Recycling Centre.

Environmental Protection

Environmental Protection staff work in partnership with the farming community, industry and other government bodies to improve water quality. They also monitor and protect the rivers and groundwater in County Laois. Works carried out include farm surveys, site inspections and compliance investigations, water quality monitoring and enforcing pollution licences and Notices under the Water Pollution Acts, 1977-1990.

Section 4 Discharge Licence is a pollution control licence that may be issued to businesses or rural housing developments that discharge treated trade or sewage effluent to surface waters. Three Section 4 Licences were issued by Laois County Council in 2006 and each must be monitored to ensure compliance with conditions. Enforcement Notices require information to be submitted or require certain work be carried out to stop pollution or to reduce the risk of pollution occurring and 24 Enforcement Notices were issued during 2006. In accordance with relevant legislation a total of 981 samples were analysed in the laboratory in order to monitor water quality. In accordance with the Water Framework Directive, training was provided by the South Eastern River Basin District (SERBD) to assist staff in carrying out assessments to identify at risk streams in County Laois. A total of 144 complaints varying from noise and odour complaints to landspreading and fish kills, were received and resolved in 2006.

Waste Management

Portlaoise Recycling Centre was officially opened by Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr. Dick Roche, T.D. in April. This facility has already proved to be a huge success with approximately 60,000 visits to the facility in 2006 and recycling levels were up over 300% at the site. Laois County Council also provided new offices and welfare facilities at the landfill site which incorporate a reception area where customers can update their keyfob account online. Remediation works were completed on old landfill Cell nos. 1-5 and cell 12 in compliance with EPA requirements. A new flare system was also commissioned in November for dealing with the landfill gas generated at the site. In addition construction was also completed on a new landfill cell which will provide landfill capacity for at least 3 years. New bring bank facilities were installed at St. Abban's Athletic Club and Raheen increasing the total number of bring bank locations in the county to 39.

Litter Management

The Council's three full-time Enforcement Officers (Litter Wardens) exercise their functions and duties under Litter/Waste Management legislation by way of education, increased awareness and enforcement. In 2006, a total of 506 on-the-spot fines issued and 228 prosecutions were initiated resulting in 22 successful convictions. In addition, 17 warning letters (Section 9 notices) issued to landowners for failing to keep outside their premises clean and litter free.

A total of 48 litter bins incorporating cigarette receptacles were purchased. This exceeded the recommended target for 2006 in the Policy Document for the provision of litter bins adopted for the years 2005-2008. The P.A.L. (Portlaoise Against Litter) Committee held their third successful annual competition for traders in the town of Portlaoise between August and October and the presentation of prizes took place in November.



This hard working Committee organised and participated in a number of clean-ups of specific blackspot areas around the town and will continue their efforts to improve the towns rating in the National I.B.A.L. anti-litter league in 2007. Work also continued with our participation in the litter pollution monitoring system which monitors levels of litter pollution on a nationwide basis. The survey results also form the basis for pollution percentages in the National Service Indicators.



Volunteers giving a helping hand during Laois Clean-Up Week 2006

Inter-Community Litter Challenge

The first ever litter-league between participating towns/villages took place over a three month summer period. This competition was very successful with all Residents Associations, Voluntary Groups & Tidy Towns Committees coming on board to tackle the litter problems in their own areas. The Environment Section continued its proactive anti-litter campaigns during this time by providing additional support and erecting anti-litter signage and promotional materials. This partnership approach resulted in one litter-free town and seven litter-free villages.

SERVICE INDICATORS Recycling Facilities				Position at 31.12.06
Category	Number of Bring Sites	Number of Civic Amenity Sites	Total Number of Facilities	Tonnage of waste collected for recycling per 5,000 of population
Glass	38	1	39	756.52
Cans	38	1	39	11.36
Textiles	8	1	9	184.54
Batteries		1	1	65.46
Oils		1	1	24.94
Others		1	1	5,589.77

Recycling Facilities				Position at 31.12.05
Category	Number of Bring Sites	Number of Civic Amenity Sites	Total Number of Facilities	Tonnage of waste collected for recycling per 5,000 of population
Glass	37	1	38	58.4
Cans	37	1	38	1.3
Textiles	8	1	9	7.6
Batteries		1	1	4.3
Oils		1	1	1.1
Others		1	1	356.3

SERVICE INDICATORS		
Litter Prevention and Environmental Enforcement		
	Position at 31.12.06	Position at 31.12.05
Total number of full-time litter wardens	3	3
Total number of part-time litter wardens	2	2
Number of litter wardens (both full and part-time) per 5,000 population	0.4	
Number of on-the-spot fines	570	474
Number of prosecution cases taken because of non-payment of on-the-spot fines	169	
This figure does not include returned summons (63 sent to Council's legal advisors)	(59)	39
Number of prosecutions secured	21	
This figure does not include:		
- Out of court settlements (128)		
- Cases struck out (20) 11		
(Of the 63 cases referred to Council's legal advisors:		
	-12 prosecutions secured	
	- 12 Cases Struck Out	
	- 22 Fines paid prior to Court	
	-17 Cases cancelled "Offendant Gone Away")	
Court Hearing		
% of areas within the Local Authority that are:		
- unpolluted (i.e., litter-free)	5%	3%
- slightly polluted with litter	41%	60%
- moderately polluted with litter	46%	18%
- significantly polluted with litter	8%	8%
- grossly polluted with litter	0%	13%
Environmental Complaints and Enforcement		
	Position at 31.12.06	Position at 31.12.05
Total number of cases to complaints concerning environmental pollution (relating to waste, litter, water pollution, noise pollution, air pollution)	560	448
Number of complaints investigated, and number dismissed	541	296
Number of enforcement procedures taken	69	71
Percentage of Schools participating in environmental campaigns		
	Position at 31.12.06	Position at 31.12.05
- primary schools	58%	43%
- secondary schools	52%	80%
% of households provided with segregated waste collection	N/A	N/A
%/tonnage of household waste recycled	24% (4,534.6t)	23.2% (3677t)
% of household waste going to landfill	76% (14,390.2t)	76.8%(12207t)



Laois Civil Defence

Laois Civil Defence is a volunteer based organisation whose members are proud to serve as a high quality back-up service supporting the primary emergency services and the local Community.

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

Casualty: Provision of a first-aid and ambulance service.

Rescue: Urban rescue, open country search for missing persons with Laois having the only K9, H.R.D. Search and Rescue Dog within the organisation, and water based search and recovery.

Auxiliary Fire Service: Pump and ladder drills, pumping floodwaters and supply water to the Community.

Warden Service and Radiation Monitoring: Radiation detecting and monitoring.

Welfare: Provision of hot meals, drinks and psychosocial support.

Communications:

The two independent radio systems U.H.F., V.H.F. and Marine Band Radio are operated from the specialised Operational Support Unit.



Laois Civil Defence K9 Unit,
Rex and Marcel Steenkist at coastal search in Waterford

The 1st K9, H.R.D. Search and Rescue Dog, Rex, was officially launched in the Council Chambers on Friday, 13th October, 2006 and the event coincided with the RTE programme, Nationwide being televised from Laois. The programme interviewed various Civil Defence personnel in Laois.

Over the year the team assisted Laois Hospice, the St. Patrick's Day Parade, Stradbally Chernobyl Children Project, Electric Picnic, Oxygen Festival, Durrow Carnival, Search and recovery operations, Local Gardai, Midlands Music Festival, and any civic functions held by the Laois Local Authorities.

Training centres are located at Stradbally, Durrow and Mountmellick. If you are interested in the above and are aged between 16-65, contact us to find out more on 057 8664000 or email lpreston@laoiscoco.ie or visit our web-site at www.laoiscivildefence.org.

Fire and Rescue Service

Work commenced in 2006 on the Fire Services Change Programme. This programme resulted from the Farrell Grant Sparks Report 2002: a National Report on the fire services in Ireland.



It entailed four areas of development:

- o A Community Fire Safety Programme.
- o A Safety Health and Welfare at Work enhancement programme for fire crews.
- o A Risk Based Approach to Emergency Cover.
- o A Competency Based Approach to Retention and Promotion of Fire Service Personnel.

The "Framework for Major Emergency Management" was launched nationally by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in September. Initial measures for its implementation in Laois have been undertaken.

Construction of the new fire station in Abbeyliex was completed. The design of the new fire station for Portarlinton was completed and the project brought to tendering stage.

Fire crews responded to a total of 920 fire and other emergency calls. Of these, 203 were road traffic accidents and 583 were fires.

SERVICE INDICATORS - FIRE SERVICE	31.12.06	31.12.05
Average time, in minutes, to mobilise fire brigades in:		
- full time stations N/A	N/A	
- part time stations	4.9 mins	5.1 mins
% of attendances at scenes where:		
- first attendance is at scene within 10 minutes	37.10%	34%
- first attendance is at scene within 20 minutes	47.36%	51%
- first attendance is at scene after 20 minutes	15.54%	15%
Fire Prevention		
- total number of fire safety certificates applications received	184	139
- total number of fire safety certificate applications processed	180	136



Water Services

The Water Services functions are divided into four sections;

- o Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of Water and Wastewater Schemes
- o Capital Investment Programme
- o Rural Water Programme
- o Provision and maintenance of Cemeteries

Ongoing Operation and Maintenance

The Water Services Section is responsible for the provision and maintenance of adequate water supplies and wastewater treatment and disposal facilities which comply with both the EU Drinking Water Directive and EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive.

Laois County Council currently supplies approx 24,500 cubic metres (6.47 million gallons) per day to approximately 19,700 properties throughout the county. The cost of the provision of water for 2006 was €2.265m.

Approximately 14,900 properties in the County are connected to the public waste water system and the cost of maintaining same in 2006 was €2.345m. The installation of four Temporary Treatment Plants gave additional treatment capacity to Mountrath, Abbeyleix, Durrow and Rathdowney.

Water Quality

Laois County Council has statutory functions with regard to the monitoring of drinking water supplies in the County as laid out in the EC (Drinking Water) Regulations, 2000.

In the EPA Report for the year 2005 overall compliance by Laois with the drinking water standards in public water supplies was above the national average at 98.2%. The microbiological quality of public water supplies was excellent during 2005. There were no incidents of E. coli contamination in public water supplies in Laois. The overall rate of compliance with the chemical standards in public water supplies was satisfactory. In general, compliance with the majority of indicator parameters was satisfactory.

Water Conservation

In accordance with the Water Pricing Policy Framework document, the programme of installing water meters continued in 2006. In addition a Leak Detection Team was recruited, comprising of a Senior Leak Inspector and four Leak Inspectors. They are employed in the detection, location and reporting of leaks, which will ultimately lead to a reduction in the level of unaccounted for water.

The Council adopted the Laois County Council Bye-Laws for the Management of Water Supplies and the Conservation of Drinking Water in 2006.

Discharges to Sewers

Under the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977 and 1990 and its regulations, a Licence is required by any Company that discharges trade effluent (including cooling waters) to a sewer. Ten new licences were issued in 2006.

Water Services Capital Investment Programme

To provide for existing infrastructure gaps and future needs, the Council undertakes Capital Projects throughout the County through funding made available under the Water Services Investment Programme.

Capital Project Office

Following approval from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, a dedicated Water Services Capital Projects Office was set up in July 2006. The Capital Projects Office is responsible for delivering the major Water and Wastewater schemes, approved under the Water Services Investment Programme.

Portarlinton Water Supply Scheme

The drilling of ten new production boreholes was completed in 2006. An advance Contract was completed to supply a significant amount of water to Portarlinton from one of these new boreholes. The detailed scheme design will be completed in early 2007 following tests to assess the water quality and production capacity.

Portlaoise & Mountmellick Water Supply Improvement Scheme

The Design Review for this scheme was completed in 2006. The Production Drilling Contract was signed in 2006 with drilling to commence early 2007.

Portlaoise Main Drainage Network

Murphy International Ltd. was awarded the Sewerage Improvement Works (Network) contract in April 2006 and construction commenced in May 2006. Construction has progressed very well with 9.6km of new sewers completed.

Portlaoise Main Drainage DBO

The Design-Build-Operate (DBO) contract for the Portlaoise Waste Water Treatment Plant was signed with the EarthTech-Bowen Construction Consortium in December 2006. Construction is due to commence in early 2007.



Preparing for pipe laying - Portlaoise Main Drainage

Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme

Contract Documents were completed for the Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme in 2006. The documents have been reviewed by Laois County Council. Part VIII Planning for a number of the Treatment Plants is complete, with the remainder to be completed in February, 2007.

Laois Grouped Villages Sewerage Scheme

The Preliminary Report for the Laois Grouped Villages Sewerage Scheme was completed in 2006. Laois County Council is currently reviewing the Report. Approval was granted by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to include Timahoe in the Scheme.

Mountmellick Sewerage Extension

In November 2006, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government approved the preparation of Detailed Design and Contract Documents for the Scheme which includes refurbishment and performance improvements to the existing network.



Removing rock from deep excavations
Portlaoise Main Drainage

Portarlinton Emo/Ballybrittas/Killenard Sewerage Scheme

Following the submission of a revised Brief to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2006, approval was granted to the inclusion of Emo, Ballybrittas and Killenard in the Preliminary Report for the Portarlinton Sewerage Scheme Upgrade. The new Brief for the appointment of Consultants to the Scheme will be completed in January 2007.

Assessment of Needs 2007-2014

In July 2006, an Assessment of Needs Report was submitted for inclusion on the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government 2007-2009 Water Services Investment Programme (WSIP). The Report outlines twelve priority water and waste water projects to be implemented over the next seven years.

Rural Water Programme

The Rural Water Programme consists of a number of measures to address deficiencies in Group Water Schemes, small public water and sewerage systems in rural villages and private individual supplies where an alternative group or public supply is not available. It also deals with improvement works not exceeding €635,000.

The Council's Rural Water Programme includes:

- o Group Water Schemes
- o Small Public Water and Sewerage Schemes
- o Grants for Individual Well Water Installations

Group Water Scheme

A Group Water Scheme provides a private water supply to two or more houses by means of a common or shared source of supply and distribution system.

In 2006, priority was given to the continued improvement in water quality in existing privately sourced group schemes in order to attain the standard required by the EC (Drinking Water) Regulations.

Group Water Schemes in the County

Schemes with public sources	67
Schemes with private sources	41
New schemes under construction	1
New schemes at planning stage	5
New schemes at preliminary stage	6
Group schemes taken-in-charge	35
Total	155

Design Build Operate (DBO) Bundle for Provision of Water Treatment

Laois County Council in association with Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Wicklow and Kildare County Councils has formed the South Leinster DBO Bundle for the provision and operation of water treatment facilities for group schemes and small public schemes. This bundle comprises of thirty eight schemes from these counties, four of which are in Laois. The schemes in Laois are Ballacolla GWS, Ballypickas GWS, Donaghmore GWS, The Swan P.S. These schemes serve 993 houses and the grant aid provided in 2006 was €912,915. The construction phase, which includes Ballacolla and The Swan has commenced.

New Group Schemes and Upgrade of Existing Schemes

Grant aid totaling €831,111 was allocated to nine new schemes and four existing schemes towards the upgrading costs. Total number of houses benefiting from this grant aid was 1102.

In addition to these works, the Council formally consented to the taking-in-charge of the following Group Water Schemes: Castlecuffe, Drimaterrill, Slatt/Wolfhill and Aghafin.



Subsidy

Subsidy grants totaling €130,938.85, were paid to Group Schemes for operation and maintenance costs of schemes in 2006

Small Public Water and Sewerage Schemes

Small public water and sewerage schemes consist of capital works for the improvement or extension of public water and sewerage schemes where the cost of the works does not exceed €635,000. The Council received an allocation of €900,000 from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2006 and this money together with Council resources of €350,000 funded the following schemes:

Clonin Hill Water Source	Portlaoise / Mountmellick W.S. Link
Rosenallis /Shanbeg Water	Abbeyleix Reservoir - Site
Ballybrophy Reservoir Site	Portarlinton S.T.P - Refurbishment
Ballyadams Reservoir	Doonane S.T.P. - Refurbishment
Ralish / Drimaterrill - Water Main Link	Stradbally Water Supply - Augmentation
Mountmellick W.W.T.P	Mountrath Sewer - River Crossing
Durrow / Ballinakill W.S. - Source Exploration	Kyle Water Source - Refurbishment
Meelick Water Source - Refurbishment	Ballylinan W.S. - Boosting
Ballyfin W.S. - Boosting	Mountmellick W.S. Catholes Source Dev
Portlaoise Sewerage - Increased Pumping Capacity	The Swan - Water Treatment
Portlaoise W.S. - Increased Pumping and Chlorine Capacity	

Grants for Individual Well Water Installations

The objective of this Grant Scheme is to assist households, more than seven years old, dependent on private individual water supplies who are incurring capital expenditure to provide a piped supply of water for domestic purposes or remedy serious deficiencies in an existing supply of water.

Grants totalling €60,063 were paid to 35 applicants in 2006.

Rural Water Monitoring Committee

The Rural Water Monitoring Committee consists of nominees of Laois County Council and Rural Organisations and is concerned with advising on policy formation with regard to rural water supply within the county and monitoring the implementation of the various water schemes for the improvement and provision of supplies to rural and village households. Meetings of this committee were held on 23rd March, 30th May, 31st August and 6th December, 2006.

Cemeteries

This section is also responsible for the provision and maintenance of twenty seven cemeteries in the county. Cemetery Registrars are employed for each Council Cemetery with responsibility for sale of plots and the maintenance of the Burial Ground Register.

Cemetery Grants

Applications for grant assistance have risen over the past number of years and this year, 103 applications were received.

In order to cope with this level of applications, a new category system was introduced:

Category A:	Council Cemeteries
Category B:	Smaller Council Cemeteries
Category C:	Non Council Cemeteries
Category D:	Cemeteries no longer in regular use

Draft Cemetery Bye-Laws 2006

The SPC for Environment and Water Services and the full Council adopted a Policy on Burial Grounds and Draft Bye-Laws were prepared to put this into effect.

Public Conveniences

Expenditure on the maintenance of the public toilets at Portlaoise, Stradbally and Mountrath amounted to €85,000 in 2006.

Percentage of River Channel Pollution (South East RBD)		
- Unpolluted - Slightly polluted - Moderately polluted - Seriously polluted	The EPA in consultation with the Local Authorities operates a river water quality monitoring programme. The EPA reports annually on these results. However, results are published in the following year. It will not therefore be possible to publish interim results for 2006 until mid-2007.	
	31.12.06	31.12.05
Percentage of drinking water analysis results in compliance with statutory requirements with regard to: - Public Schemes	This data will be available in the EPA report on Drinking Water Quality for 2006	99.13%
- Private Schemes		94.65%



Chair John Joe Fennelly, M.C.C.

Members :

David Goodwin, M.C.C.
Michael Lalor, M.C.C.
John Turley, M.C.C.
Michael Rice, M.C.C.
Jerry Lodge, M.C.C.
Jack Nolan, T.C

Sectoral:

Martin Keane
John Keyes
Brian Bonham
Bill Devoy

Director of Services:

Senior Engineer - Roads:
Senior Planner
Senior Executive Officer

Gerry Gibson
Michael O'Hora
Peter Dolan
Martin Daly

Project Engineer/ M7/M8 Motorway

Project Engineer/ Castletown to Nenagh Motorway

Adrian King
Joseph Kelly

Report on Strategic Policy Committee

There were six meetings of this Committee in 2006. The following policies were agreed and referred to the Corporate Policy Group for consideration by the SPC.

- o Integration of Public Transport in County Laois.
- o Motorway Signage Policy.
- o Traffic Calming Measures for Rural Schools/Villages.

Planning

The overall objective of the Planning Department is to implement the provisions of the Planning Acts and provide appropriate support measures in order to promote the physical, social and economical well being of the County so that living standards are protected and raised and work opportunities fostered and created having regard to the principles of sustainability. The Planning Department can be broken down into 3 separate areas (i) Development Control, (ii) Planning Enforcement and (iii) Forward Planning.

(i) Development Control

The number of planning applications received in 2006 was 2,349. However, it should be noted that 608 of the total applications received were invalid and required the applicant to submit a new application. The following table gives a breakdown of valid planning applications received and decisions made during 2006 and the comparative figures for 2005.

	2005	2006
Number of valid applications received	1,368	1,741
Number of decisions made	1,303	1,488
Number of applications granted	1,095	1,225
Number of applications refused	208	263

2006 Performance

Invalid applications returned to applicant	29.9%.
Referrals to Area Offices	21 working days.

Customer Service Initiatives

2006 saw the continuation of the scanning of planning applications as they are received by the Planning Authority. Throughout 2006 the public were able to access online all planning applications within three weeks of the Planning Authority receiving them.

Plans have been drawn up for improved customer services initiatives for the planning section and it is hoped that works will commence on the new public area for planning in 2007.

The planning website continues to be a very popular attraction with an average 60,892 hits per month. All planning applications can be viewed on www.laois.ie/eplan



Applying for Planning Permission

Validation of Planning Applications

There were 2343 planning applications validated in 2006 of which 1748 were valid and 595 were invalid. While 25% of the planning applications were invalid the main reasons were for public notices being out of date, agents name omitted from maps/drawings, distances not shown on site layout. A meeting was held with the agents to explain these problems and it is hoped that this will help to reduce the number of invalid applications.

Planning Enforcement

Introduction

The Planning Authority, in accordance with the statutory requirements under the Planning and Development Acts, 2000-2004 will seek to ensure compliance with planning permission conditions and prevent unauthorised development.

Unauthorised Development

Unauthorised development is where development is carried out without having received the appropriate permission or development not being carried out in accordance with planning permission issued.

Functions

The Planning Authority will follow up on all written complaints of unauthorised development where they appear to be well founded.

It issues a Warning Letter within 6 weeks from receipt of written representation.

This may be issued where an unauthorised development is being, may have been, or may be carried out.

The making of a decision whether to take enforcement action will follow and the service of an Enforcement Notice should take place within 12 weeks from the date of issue of the Warning Letter.

The Enforcement Notice gives a timescale for compliance and if not adhered to will result in further action such as referral to our legal advisor.

Developments in Enforcement

The public are now more involved in the Enforcement System as the Planning Authority is obliged to consider and respond to complaints from the public. The advisors identity is protected, as the Planning Authority do not release the names given.

There has been a significant increase in the fines payable and the imposition of a minimum fine where a person is convicted of an offence relating to unauthorised development.

Licensing of Outdoor Events

An outdoor event is defined as a public performance which takes place wholly or mainly in the open air or in a structure with no roof or a partial, temporary or retractable roof, a tent or similar temporary structure and which consists of music, dancing, displays of public entertainment or any activity of a like kind.

The organisers of such events are required to obtain a Licence from the Planning Authority where the audience comprises of 5,000 or more people.

Example: Electric Picnic held in Stradbally, Co. Laois in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

Notice of Registration of Quarries

Under Section 261 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, all Quarries which do not have the benefit of Planning Permission or which received Planning Permission more than five years prior to the operation of Section 261 have to apply for registration with the Planning Authority. The Planning Authority can seek a Planning Application and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement, apply conditions or refer details of the Quarry to the Enforcement Section. Laois County Council received 78 applications for registration, of which 60 quarries were registered as operating quarries.

Forward Planning

Forward Planning plays a pivotal role in the physical, economic and social development of County Laois. The Laois County Development Plan 2006 - 2012 adopted in January 2006 lies at the heart of the Irish Planning System and is intended to provide a strategic framework and policy context within which the Local Authority makes its planning decisions.

In December 2006, Portlaoise Local Area Plan was adopted by Laois County Council and Mountmellick Draft Local Area Plan was commenced which is ongoing, to be adopted in mid 2007.

The section is now pro actively involved in the preparation of land use plans at all levels down to village and master planning. The Forward Planning Section is carrying out extensive Public Consultation in conjunction with the County Community Forum during the preparation of all Plans. This allows for all interested parties to have a valued input into the development of their own area, village, town, etc. A programme for village plan preparation has been prepared for 2007.

Urban Renewal Scheme

During the year, the Forward Planning Section coordinated the annual programme for funding submission to the Department of Environment. Following Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government approval, works have commenced on providing a Civic Plaza Area at James Fintan Lalor Avenue Portlaoise, to include an open Public Amenity Space and integral new-build 2-deck car park, hard and soft landscaping with street furniture.



Town Renewal Scheme

Five towns in Laois County qualify for tax incentives under the Urban and Town Renewal Schemes. The qualifying towns are Portlaoise, Mountrath, Mountmellick, Portllington and Rathdowney.

Conservation Grant Scheme 2006

Forward Planning Section administers the Conservation Grant Scheme, which is funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government. The Scheme assists the owner or occupier of a Protected Structure to undertake necessary works to secure its conservation. The grant allocation for Laois County Council for 2006 was €138,000. Twelve valid applications were received and all of these received grants totally €138,000 which represents the total amount allocated from the Department.

Laois County Council hosted a Seminar on 'Conservation of our Built Heritage' at the Heritage Hotel, Portlaoise on Saturday March 4th 2006. It provided participants with practical advice on 'best practice' for maintaining protected structures and opportunities for conservation funding. It attracted a variety of people from owners of protected structures, planning agents developers and community groups. It is proposed to organise a similar seminar in early 2008.

Shop Front Scheme 2006

The grant was made available again in 2006. This grant is allocated to assist in the carrying out of works to enhance shop fronts.

National Tree Week 2006

The Tree Council of Ireland and sponsors Coillte and O2 allocate a number of sapling trees each year. Laois County Council makes available the trees to community groups throughout the County. Laois County Council funded a number of larger trees which were also available to the community groups. The scheme is open to Residents Associations, Tidy Towns groups and other local development groups and schools.

Strategic Policy Committee Policies 2006

o Taking in Charge of Estates

A policy aimed at providing guidance to all in relation to the taking in charge of estates, outlining the quality of standards expected prior to taking in charge of estates and assisting in the smooth transfer of public areas from private to public ownership was endorsed by the full County Council in September, 2006.



"Ballylynan Village Plan Public Information Session"

o Open Space Considerations for Residential Developments

A policy aimed at enhancing the quality of life in the built environment was endorsed by Laois County Council in September, 2006. This provides clarity as to appropriate levels, standards and types of open spaces which are to be encouraged within residential areas.

PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL

Service Indicators

Planning Applications - Decision-Making

INDIVIDUAL HOUSES	31.12.06	31.12.05
Number of applications decided	628	499
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	348 (55%)	316
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	279	182
Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant, under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000	0	1
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	78	77
% of grants	73%	77.96%
% of refusals	27%	22.04%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	61%	77.78%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	39%	22.22%
NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT		
Number of applications decided	78	85
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	41 (53%)	39
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	37	46
Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant, under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000	1	1
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	83	80
% of grants	54%	63.53%
% of refusals	46%	36.47%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	70%	90.91%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	30%	9.09%



SERVICE INDICATORS

Other: NOT REQUIRING EIA	31.12.06	31.12.05
Number of applications decided	776	717
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	602 (78%)	499
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	172	215
Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant, under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000	3	2
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	78	78
% of grants	93%	90.66%
% of refusals	7%	9.34%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	33%	72%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	67%	28%
Other: REQUIRING EIA		
Number of applications decided	6	2
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	2 (33%)	2
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	4	0
Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant, under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000	0	0
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	93	0
% of grants	83%	100%
% of refusals	17%	0%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	0%	0%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	0%	0%

ENFORCEMENT

Total number of cases subject to complaints that were investigated	174 (a 48% year-on-year increase in complaints investigated)	117
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were dismissed	40	0
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were resolved through negotiations	16	25
Number of enforcement procedures taken through warning letters	106	112
Number of enforcement procedures taken enforcement notices	30	32
Number of prosecutions	0 (8 cases currently with the solicitor and additional resources assigned to ensure conclusion)	1

CONSULTATIONS

	31.12.06	31.12.05
Average number of opening hours per week	32.5	32.5
Consultations		
Number of pre-planning consultation meetings held	1236	900
Average length of time (in days) from request for consultation with local authority planner to actual formal meeting for pre-planning consultation	10 (working days)	12
Buildings inspected as a % of new buildings notified to the Local Authority	12.39%	12.1%



Roads

Laois County Council is responsible for and maintains the 2,278. km of roadway and 28km of motorway in the County.

Length of Roads by Classification

Motorway	28km
National Primary	70km
National Secondary	75km
Regional Roads	268 km
County/Other Main Roads	865km
TOTAL	2306 km

2006 Road Grant Allocations

In 2006, Laois County Council received a total allocation of €50,416,362 in respect of expenditure on National & Non- National roads in the County. Of this €2,782,216 was financed from Laois County Council's own funds, with the remainder coming from the Department of the Environment & Local Government, and the National Roads Authority.

CLÁR Funding

In April 2006, the Minister for Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs announced that 39 Electoral Divisions in rural Laois are now eligible for funding under the CLÁR Programme. CLÁR is an investment programme for disadvantaged rural areas.

Flashing Amber Safety Lights at Primary Schools in CLÁR Areas:

In 2006 CLÁR funded 100% cost of Flashing amber safety lights at all primary schools in CLÁR Areas that do not already have such lights. There was a limit of €7,000 per set of safety lights with priority given to schools on regional roads outside the 50 kilometres per hour speed limit zone with no traffic lights.

The following funding was received by Laois in 2006 at the following locations:

SCHOOL	ADDRESS	FUNDING
SN BAILE FINN	BALLYFIN PORTLAOISE	€7,000
TOBAR AN LEINN	RAHEEN MOUNTRATH	€7,000
TRUMERA	TRUMERA, MOUNTRATH	€7,000
CAMROSS	CAMROSS, MOUNTRATH	€7,000
KILADOOLEY	KILADOOLEY, BALLYBROPHY	€7,000
SN NAOMH COLMCILLE	ERRILL RATHDOWNEY	€7,000
BALLYADAMS	BALLYADAMS, ATHY	€7,000

SCOIL MHUIRE	WOLFHILL ATHY	€7,000
SN MOLAISE	MOLAISE AN CNOCH (SPINK)	€7,000
GAELSCOIL AN TSLÍ DÁLA	BALLAGHMORE, CO. LAOIS	€7,000

Specific Improvement Schemes

Laois County Council received funding from the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government for the following schemes in 2006:

Kilmullen Bridge

In December 2005, An Bord Pleanála held an oral hearing in respect of draft Compulsory Purchase Order for this Scheme. The Scheme was approved in 2006 and subject to funding being in place, it is anticipated that this Scheme will be completed in 2008. The Scheme involves the realignment of the Portarlinton to Monasterevin Road and includes a bridge over the main railway line to Dublin.



Realignment Works at Dereen

Portlaoise Western Circular - Clonminam Link

Jons Civil Engineering was awarded the Contract to carry out the works on the Clonminam Link. A Bridge Agreement with CIE/Iarnród Eireann was also finalised. Construction on this Scheme which included a new bridge over the main Dublin railway line at a cost of €5.5m commenced in September 2006 and is expected to be completed by August 2007. When complete, the entire section of the Portlaoise Western Circular Route from the Abbeylax Road to the Mounmellick Road will be open to traffic.

Road Safety

Laois County Council and An Garda Síochána reformed a Joint Committee on Road Safety in 2006. The Committee meets every 6 weeks and aims to reduce the number of Road Traffic Accidents in Laois in line with the Government's Strategy on Road Safety. It sets about to achieve this aim by actively promoting and implementing safety on our roads through Education, Engineering and Enforcement with the participation of all stakeholders.

Road Safety Remedial Measures

Fourteen Road Safety Remedial Measure Schemes were carried out at various locations throughout the County on National and Non- National Road Schemes. These schemes involve the provision of lining, road markings and signs to improve road safety.



Money Cross

Money Cross junction was a major Road Safety scheme carried out in 2006. This Scheme involved staggering the junction, re-aligning the road, providing road markings and warning signs. Laois County Council spent approximately €490,000 on this Scheme alone in 2006.

N8 Tonduff Cross:

In 2006, Laois County Council constructed a High Cost Road Safety Remedial Measure scheme at Tonduff Cross on the N8 National Primary Road. The Scheme involved the provision of right-turn lanes for Tonduff and Raheenabrogue junctions along with pavement and signage improvements. Laois County Council's expenditure on this was €287,000.

Other Road Schemes.

N8 Derreen

Laois County Council Western Area staff completed the realignment of the National Primary Route N8 at Derreen and Tubberboe Townlands.

N78 Ballylinan Traffic Calming

In 2006, Laois County Council designed and started work on this Scheme. This Scheme and the pavement renewal will be completed in 2007

N7 Mountrath Traffic Calming

Similar to Ballylinan, a traffic calming scheme was installed in Patrick Street Mountrath.

All the above schemes were constructed by direct labour staff from the 3 Area Offices and designed in-house by the Road Design Section.

In line with previous years, Laois County Council carried out maintenance works on national, regional, and local roads in the County. These works include salting of all National Routes during winter, drainage works, verge trimming, footpath repairs, erection and replacement of signs, relining, the provision of studs, street cleaning and litter collection and the replacement of safety barrier/fencing.

In 2006, under the Multi-Annual Roadworks Programme 2006-2008, strengthening and surface dressing works were carried out to Regional and County Roads throughout the County. A total of 81km of Regional and County Roads were strengthened and a further 129km were surface dressed.

Portlaoise Western Circular - Clonrooske Link:

This important transport link which completes the section of the Portlaoise Western Circular road from the Ballyfin Road to the N80 Mountmellick Road was opened to traffic in November 2006. The road was constructed by private developers.

Community Involvement in Roadworks Scheme

This scheme continued in 2006 and a total of 13 projects were successfully undertaken in conjunction with local communities.

Local Improvement Scheme

An allocation of €612,428 was received from the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government in 2006 in respect of the above which financed 28 projects in the county. A further sum of €160,229.25 was received from the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs for works to be carried out under this Scheme in the CLÁR areas. This enables the completion of a further 6 schemes. A total of 3.5km of roads were completed.

Public Lighting

A total of 5477 lights are maintained by the Council and in 2006, the cost was €644,976

Taxis and Hackneys

On 15th May, 2006 Laois County Council submitted all files on hand to the Taxi Regulator. Under this new system, all Taxi and Hackney licences are now issued in the local NCT Centres on behalf of the Taxi Regulator.

School Wardens:

Laois County Council employs 8 full time School Wardens and 1 stand-by School Warden servicing National Schools in Portlaoise town, Mountmellick and Griaguecullen. A school warden was introduced at St. Paul's National School, Borris Road, Portlaoise.

Safe Cycling Programme:

A total of 300 children from National Schools participated in this programme in 2006. A One Day Programme was introduced to facilitate children attending urban schools. 60 children took part in the programme.

"Drive for Life":

A total of 200 secondary school students took part in the "Drive for Life" Programme during the year. Other community groups were involved also.



“Road Safety & Me” - Art Competition

A total of 350 entries were received from approximately 12 National Schools in Laois. The winning posters were on display in County Hall for a period of 1 week following which a presentation took place in County Hall in June 2006 for all the winning students and their families.

School Visits

The Road Safety Officer visited 5 National Schools in County Laois and spoke with the children regarding Road Safety and all relevant issues relating to the particular schools i.e. safe crossing, safety awareness, importance of wearing arm-bands or cycle helmets etc.

Vulnerable Road Users Report - Portlaoise Town

This report targeted areas in Portlaoise Town with regard to 3 main areas:-

- o engineering,
- o enforcement and
- o education

An extensive programme was agreed to tackle the educational requirements identified in this report i.e. the one-day Safe Cycling Programme was introduced to meet the requirements for the children attending the Sacred Heart School in Portlaoise.

M7 Portlaoise to Castletown/M8 Portlaoise to Cullahill Motorway Scheme 2003

The Scheme covers the proposed routes of the M7 and M8 from the termination of the M7 Portlaoise By-pass to beyond Borris-in-Ossory on the existing N7, and beyond Cullahill on the existing N8. The Scheme includes new roads for the M7 and the M8, and improvement or ancillary works to existing National, regional or local roads associated with the proposed Scheme.

The M7/ M8 Scheme has been selected by the National Roads Authority as a Private Public Partnership (PPP) Scheme

The following are the main elements of the proposed M7/M8 Scheme from Borris-in-Ossory to Portlaoise:

- Approximately 2 km of standard single carriageway roadway, which will provide a link from the existing N7 to the proposed motorway.
- Approximately 27 km of standard 2 x 2 lane motorway which will extend the M7 motorway from Borris In Ossory to the existing M7 Portlaoise Bypass.
- A Toll Plaza
- A Motorway - Motorway Interchange
- Two grade separated junctions on the R435 close to Borris-in-Ossory, and on and on the R445 between Mountrath and Portlaoise.
- Approximately 1 km of reduced single carriageway roadway which will provide a link to the existing

R435

- Bridge crossings of the Rivers Gully, Nore and Cappamacloughy.
- 12 number minor road crossings and associated side road realignments with an over all length of approximately 8 km.

The following are the main elements of the proposed M7/M8 Scheme from Cullahill to the M7/M8 Motorway-Motorway Interchange:

- Approximately 170 m of standard single carriageway roadway, which will realign the existing N8 approaching the proposed N8/M8 roundabout.
- Approximately 13 km of standard 2 x 2 lane motorway which will extend the M8 Motorway from Cullahill to M7/M8 Motorway-Motorway Interchange.
- A Motorway-Motorway Interchange.
- A grade separated junction on the R433 close to Reid Cross Roads.
- An at grade roundabout junction on the N8 near Cullahill.
- Bridge crossings of River Goul, Mill and Erkina.
- 7 number minor road crossings and associated side road realignments with an over all length of approximately 7 km.

The Motorway Order and Environmental Impact Statement for the M7/M8 Motorway Scheme was confirmed by An Bord Pleanála on 29th October, 2004. The Motorway Scheme became operative on 1st December, 2004. Notices to Treat were served in February and April of 2005.



Advance Works consisting of:

Site Investigation works, Topographical Contract, Ecology Investigation, Archaeological Works, Site Clearance Works and diversion of 400 kv. ESB Line are to be completed in 2007.

The Toll Scheme was approved in January, 2007 and the Contract for construction of the motorway is to be awarded in mid 2007 with completion in 2010.

N7 - Castletown to Nenagh Scheme(-Derrinsallagh to Ballintotty -)

This project is being undertaken by Laois County Council on its own behalf and on behalf of Offaly and North Tipperary County Council in accordance with agreements made under Section 59 of the Local Government Act, 1955 and approved by the National Roads Authority under Section 14 (8) of the Roads Act, 1993.

Scope of the Works

The N7 Castletown to Nenagh Scheme (-Derrinsallagh to Ballintotty-) will consist of:

- o 36.2 kilometres of high quality dual carriageway connecting a link road in the townland of Derrinsallagh in the District Electoral Division of Borris-in-Ossory in the County of Laois to the existing N7 Nenagh By-Pass in the Townland of Ballintotty in the District Electoral Division of Kilkeary in the County of North Tipperary.
- o Four grade separated junctions
- o Realignment of minor roads
- o A number of structures and culverts including:
- o Twenty-four Road Bridges
- o One Railway Bridge
- o Seven Accommodation Bridges
- o Three River Bridges
- o Associated ancillary works

Recent Scheme Developments

The Compulsory Purchase Order and Environmental Impact Statement for the N7 Castletown to Nenagh Scheme went to Oral Hearing in July 2005 and was confirmed by An Bord Pleanála on 21st November 2005. The Scheme became operative on 11th February, 2006.

Current Scheme Status

Notices to Treat were served on land owners on the 4th July, 2006.

Land Acquisition is progressing

Site Investigation works and Archaeological testing and resolution along the length of land take will commence in 2007.

In October 2006, Expressions of Interest in the N7 Castletown to Nenagh Design and Build Contract were sought and submissions were received from 5 No. Contractors. The Contract will be awarded in 2007.

Service Indicators - Roads		
	Position at 31.12.06	Position at 31.12.05
Local and Regional Road Surface dressed per annum (square metres)	633,445	572,700
Percentage of Local and Regional Roads surface dressed per annum	6.3	5.7



Laois County Development Board

Local Government

Mr. Peter Carey, County Manager, Laois County Council
Ms. Mary Sweeney MCC, Laois County Council (Chairperson)
Mr. James Deegan MCC, Laois County Council
Mr. John Joe Fennelly MCC, Laois County Council
Mr. Brian Stanley MCC, Laois County Council
Mr. Larry Kavanagh, R.I.P., MCC, Laois County Council
Ms. Helen Hanson TC, Portlaoise & Mountmellick Town Council

Local Development

Ms. Maria Callinan, County Enterprise Board
Ms. Lena Ging, County Enterprise Board
Ms. Ann Goodwin, Laois LEADER
Ms. Julia Booth, Laois LEADER
Mr. Pat Fitzpatrick, Mountmellick Dev. Assoc.
Ms. Diane Burke, Portlaoise Community Action Project
Ms. Fionn Bardon, Laois County Childcare Committee
Director of Community & Enterprise - Mr. Declan Byrne

State Agencies

Mr. Aidan Waterstone, HSE Midlands
Mr. Pat Campbell, FAS
Mr. Con Feighery, Teagasc
Ms. Anne O'Keeffe, Laois VEC
Mr. Pat Byrne, Enterprise Ireland
Ms. Brid Moody, IDA Ireland
Mr. Denis Galvin, Dept. of Social & Family Affairs
Mr. Seamus Murray, Dept. of Education & Science
Mr. Kevin Donohue, Garda Síochána
Mr. Kevin Kidney, MERTA

Social Partners

Ms. Margaret Ryan, Business Sector
Mr. William Moylan, Trade Union Sector
Mr. Michael Bergin, Farming Sector
Mr. Brian Bonham, Community Forum
Mr. Eric Lewis, Community Forum

During 2006, Laois County Development Board held 4 meetings. Considerable progress was made in the implementation of the Board's prioritised actions.

Presentations were made to the Board during the year by the following:

Ms. Ann Goodwin, Laois LEADER
Professor Jim Phelan, School of Biology & Environmental Science, Agriculture & Food Science Centre, UCD,
Ms. Teresa Lavin, Institute of Public Health in Ireland.
Dr. Aine ni Dhubhainn, School of Biology & Environmental Science, UCD
Mr. Thos McDermott, Laois Sports Partnership

Task Groups of the Board

The partnership approach of the County Development Board process has been further enhanced by the establishment of a number of Task Groups, which reflect the new priorities set out in the Board's Strategic Review 2005 to 2008.

Development of a new unified structure for the Rural Development Programme (LEADER) and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme

At the request of the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government, the Director of Community and Enterprise and his staff have overseen the establishment of a Cohesion Committee to work on the development of a new unified structure for the county to deliver all rural development and social inclusion programmes in the county. In addition, the new structure will extend the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, which is currently only available in Portlaoise and Mountmellick, to the remainder of the county. The Cohesion Committee is comprised of representatives of each of the three existing development bodies, namely Laois LEADER, Portlaoise Community Action Project and Mountmellick Development Association Social Inclusion along with representatives from Laois County Council, statutory agencies and Laois County Community Forum. The new structure will be developed with the assistance of funding received from the Department.

Social Capital Projects

Application was made for funding for four social capital projects during the year. Of these one was successful, namely the development of Durrow Courthouse as a community and library facility. The Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government allocated the sum of €240,000 for this project which will be carried out in 2007. This project is being carried out in association with the local community in Durrow.

Other Funding Received

Funding was received during the year from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform for the development of an assessment of the needs of lone parents in the county.

Funding was also received from the Regional Drugs Task Force for the preparation of a survey of the services available to substance abusers in Co. Laois.

Social Inclusion Measures Working Group (SIM)

The SIM group is responsible for developing cohesion in the delivery of services to socially excluded groups. In 2006, Laois County Council with the support of the SIM Group developed a Local Anti- Poverty Strategy for County Laois. This group is also in the process of developing an Integrated Strategy for Travellers in the County.

National Pride of Place Competition

Five entries from Laois entered the 2006 National Pride of Place competition, following their nomination by Laois County Council.

Community groups in Durrow and Stradbally were honoured at a major National Awards Ceremony in October, for their work towards promoting social inclusion and "Pride of Place" in their areas. Durrow Development Forum won the competition in their category.

The development of a Fishing Lake by Stradbally Development Association was honoured with a Special Amenity Projects Award.

Both Clonaslee Tidy Towns and Ballacolla Tidy Towns were short listed for an award in their respective population categories.

Abbeyleix Community Development Group represented Abbeyleix and Laois in the very competitive, Category 4.

Performance Management

Meetings held in 2006 -a total of 4 meetings were held in March, June, September and December.

Supports Provided and Consultations

- o Library Plan
- o Town Development Plans

Anti-Poverty Strategy

In partnership with other agencies in the county, a local Anti- Poverty Strategy was developed.

Laois County Community Forum

Meetings:

The Community Forum continued to meet monthly throughout 2006.

Area Fora Meetings were held around the county to discuss the Library Development Plan 2007 - 2011, the new Heritage Plan 2007 -2011, Laois Anti Poverty Strategy and the Area Plans for Mountmellick, Portlaoise, Portarlington and Graiguecullen.

Two special meetings were held April and July. In April, the members met to elect representatives from each electoral area to sit on the Cohesion Committee and in July Laois Community Forum met with Offaly Community Forum.

Publications

The Community Forum also published two newsletters in June and December 2006. The 2007 wallchart was completed and distributed to all households in the County.

Laois Disability Action Group

The Community Forum and Laois Disability Action Group held a conference on Thursday December 7th to discuss issues in relation to disabilities and Laois County Council's role in implementing the Disability Act 2005.

Older Peoples Networking

The Community Forum with the Older Persons Task Group held a networking day for active retirement groups and groups working with older people in July, to discuss a number of issues including living alone, entitlements for older people, and developing Active Retirement Groups.

A visit was also made to the Third Age Centre in Summerhill, Co. Meath. The members discussed funding, promotional activities and future proposals for assisting older people.



Stradbally and Durrow Community Groups receiving their prizes from Minister Dick Roche, T.D.



Smoke Alarm Scheme

Five hundred smoke alarms were distributed throughout the county under a new scheme that the Department of Environment introduced through Local Authorities - a "Safer Society through Domestic Smoke Alarms"

Fighting Insurance cost for the Community & Voluntary Sector/Information Evening

Laois Community Forum worked with the National Community & Voluntary Forum and signed up to an exclusive insurance package with BHP Insurances. It offers community and voluntary groups more affordable and easy to arrange insurance.

Community Supports & Grants Information Evening

An information evening on community supports and grants available from Laois County Council, Laois LEADER and Laois Childcare Committee was held in November. Arising from this, the Community Forum will look at the possibility of publishing an information booklet on Community Supports & Grants in 2007.

Performance Management

- o 11 monthly meetings
- o 2 special meetings

Area FORA Meetings

- o 6 Area Fora meetings

Comhairle na nÓg 2006



Five students attending national Dail na nÓg
On 25th march 2006 at Croke Park, Dublin

In 2006, two events were run for the under 12's (Comhairle na bPáistí) and the under 18's (Comhairle na nÓg) which included discussion groups on a number of topics, activities and voting. Laois County Council's Heritage Officer, Environmental Awareness Officer and staff from the Council's Sports Section were on hand to discuss and answer questions in relation to the topics discussed.

Some children were then chosen to represent Laois at the national Dail na nÓg event.



Students participating at Comhairle na nÓg- March 2006

Service Indicators

Percentage of Local Schools involved in the Local Youth Council//Comhairle na nÓg Scheme

Secondary Schools Event	83% (10 out of 12)
Primary Schools Event	28% (19 out of 69)

Community Participation & Co-operation

Percentage of local schools involved in the local Youth Council/Comhairle na nÓg Scheme

	Position at 31.12.06	Position at 31.12.05
- Secondary Schools event	83%(10 out of 12)	82%
- Primary Schools event	28%(19 out of 69)	

Head of Finance:

Gerry Murphy

Financial/Management Accountant:

Julie Bergin

The Finance Department is responsible for the following services:

Motor Tax, Accounts Payable, Revenue Collection, Payroll and Superannuation, Internal Audit, Preparation of Annual Budgets and Financial Statements, Financial Management and all ancillary matters.

Commercial Rates

The General Annual Rate on Valuation was 60.3222.

The Rateable Valuation Multiplier for Portlaoise and Mountmellick was:

Portlaoise:	1.769	Mountmellick:	2.422
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Water Charges

In 2006, the total number of commercial users was 2070, of which 1849 were metered. A fixed charge applied to the remaining consumers. By July 2007, it is intended that all non-domestic users will be metered.

The charge for metered water in 2006 was €4.95 per 1000 gallons. In addition, there was a standing charge of €50.00 per annum.

Late Payment of Accounts

Following the introduction of the Prompt Payment of Accounts Act as amended by the European Communities (Late Payment in Commercial Transactions) Regulations 2002, commercial suppliers are entitled to payment of interest on amounts owed to them after

- the date specified under the terms of a written Contract, or
- 30 days of receipt of the invoice or delivery of goods, whichever is the later, where there is no written contract or if the contract does not specify a payment date.

Laois County Council complies with the terms of the Prompt Payments Act as amended by the European Communities (Late Payment in Commercial Transactions) Regulations. To ensure compliance with the Act and Regulations, invoices are date stamped on receipt in the Accounts Payable section and outstanding invoices approaching their due date are examined weekly. In cases where late payment interest is payable, a statement detailing the interest calculation is sent to the supplier with payment. The procedures detailed above can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance against material compliance with the Act.

The standard payment periods specified in written contracts are generally:

Housing Contracts	10 working days
Roads Contracts	28 days
Water Contracts	14 days/1 month

Late Payment Statistics: 2006

1. Total Number of late payments in excess of €250:	3
2. Value of late payments in excess of €250	€10,254.23
3. Average length of late payments	175 days
4. Proportion in Euro of all late payments to total payments. (€138,411,704/€10,424) x 100%	.007%
5. Total Amount of Late payment interest paid	€470.86

Financial Management Systems - Improvements

Low value purchase (LVP) cards were introduced in 2006 which enable purchases from suppliers to Laois County Council, below a specified amount, to be made by credit card transaction. The supplier receives payment automatically on a monthly basis and does not need to invoice the Council for the goods/services supplied. The Council intends to expand the use of the LVP cards in 2007.

An upgrade to the water charges invoicing module was installed this year. Changes incorporated in the upgrade have reduced the time taken to issue invoices and improved the effectiveness of the module in monitoring water charges accounts.

Motor Taxation

The Motor Tax Department continues to provide services widely availed by the public. The introduction of the N.V.D.F. (National Vehicle Driver File) System caters for all motor tax and driver licences.

Vehicle licences

The total receipts for 2006 were €11,302,590 compared to €10,959,275.50 in 2005. The number of vehicle licences (discs) issued in 2006 was 54824 compared to 53,145 in 2005.

Driving licences

Receipts for 2006 were €140,585 (including duplicates) compared with €123,265 for 2005. The number of driving licences issued in 2006 was 9033 compared with 7,981 in 2005. A Theory Test is mandatory for all first applicants for provisional licences. The telephone number to call for a test is 1890 606 106.

Vehicle Testing

Certificates of Roadworthiness for commercial/goods vehicles were issued in respect of 4763 vehicles during the year, compared to 3,923 for 2005. All commercial/goods vehicles require a D.O.E.H.L.G. test every year.



NCT (National Car Test)

Testing of private vehicles is ongoing since January 2000. The Laois Centre is at Lismard Business Centre, Timahoe Road, Portlaoise. Initial test is every 4 years then every 2 years thereafter. Vintage cars are the only vehicles exempt from this test. The use of the on-line facility was extended to the first taxation of all new cars from 1st January, 2006. Information on how to use this facility is available from all registered dealerships. Opening Hours: 9am - 3.30pm Monday - Friday including lunchtime.

Percentage of Motor Tax Transactions which:

- are dealt with over the counter	79%	59,900
- are dealt with by post	21%	15,965
- are dealt with in other ways (e.g. on line, by telephone)		
Average number of Public Opening hours per week -	32.5 hours.	

Number of postal applications and & overall postal applications which are dealt with (i.e. discs/driver licences issued) from receipt of the application:

- i) on the same day
- ii) on the third day or less
- iii) on the fifth day or less
- iv) over 5 days

	2006		2005	
	12,324	77.20%	12,612	62.28%
	2,993	18.74%	3,778	18.66%
	301	1.89%	1,768	8.73%
	347	2.17%	2,091	10.33%

REVENUE COLLECTION

Housing Rents

(a)	Amount collected at year end as a % of amount due	31.12.06	31.12.05
(b)	Percentage of arrears:		
	- 4-6 weeks old	5.93%	3.93%
	- 6-12 weeks old	10.25%	6.47%
	- over 12 weeks old	76.59%	83.71%

Housing Loans

(a)	Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	92%	94%
(b)	Percentage of arrears:		
	- 1 month old	12%	10%
	- 2-3 months old	14 %	13%
	- More than 3 months old	74%	77%

Commercial Rates

Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	91%	92%
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Refuse Charges

Percentage of households paying refuse charges at year end	N/A	N/A
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Non-Domestic Water Charges

Amount at year end as a percentage of amount due	68%	68%
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Annual Financial Statement

Revenue Account

Programme Group	Expenditure	Income	Net Exp
Housing and Building	9,469,862	8,253,690	1,216,172
Road Transportation and Safety	19,208,002	12,947,525	6,260,477
Water Supply and Sewerage	7,729,898	2,195,055	5,534,843
Development Incentives and Controls	3,722,799	1,995,765	1,727,034
Environmental Protection	9,068,067	7,629,939	1,438,128
Recreation and Amenity	3,318,667	713,761	2,604,906
Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare	3,642,377	2,946,057	696,320
Miscellaneous	4,415,281	2,602,682	1,812,599
Total Expenditure / Income	60,574,953	39,284,474	

Net cost of programmes to be funded from Rates and Local Government Fund	21,290,479
Rates	8,057,640
Local Government Fund	17,019,082
Surplus for Year before transfers	3,786,243
Transfers to Reserves	(3,765,690)
Overall Surplus for year	20,553
General reserve @ 1st January 2006	(574,797)
General reserve @ 31st December 2006	(554,244)

Capital Account

Balance at 1/1/06	163,829
Grants	85,139,904
Other Income	39,880,946
Transfers from/to Revenue	3,703,412
Expenditure	126,227,986
Balance at 31/12/06	2,660,105



COMHAIRLE BHAILE PORTLAOISE

Manager Mr. Gerry Murphy
Town Clerk Ms. Georgina Ireland
Town Engineer Mr. Trevor Hennessy



Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Portlaoise Town Council held on Tuesday 27th June 2006, Councillor Brian Stanley was elected as Mayor. Councillor Kathleen O'Brien was elected as Vice Mayor.

Members on Boards/Committees

County Development Board:	Councillor Brian Stanley
Planning and Transportation Strategic Policy Committee:	Councillor Jack Nolan
Economic Development & County Promotion: Strategic Policy Committee	Councillor Rotimi Adebari

Monthly Meetings

The first Tuesday of each month.

Main Services Provided

Housing maintenance and repair, School Warden Services, Community & Environmental Initiatives, Public Convenience, Civic Receptions & Town Twinning.

Budget 2006 - €108,845

In 2006, the Town Council provided support to the following:

- Portlaoise Tidy Towns
- Lake Glen Residents Association
- Marian Avenue Residents Association
- Triogue Place Residents Association
- St. John's Square Resident's Association
- Glendowns Residents Association
- Birchgrove Residents Association
- Rossvale Court Residents Association
- Naomh Brid Music Class

- A.P.A. Youth Group
- Grow in Midlands
- National Association for Parent Support
- The Carers Association
- O'Moore Place Childcare

Conferences

The Town Council supported and was represented at the following conferences:

- The Annual Conference of the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland.
- The Annual Seminar of the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland.

Highlights during 2006

- o The IDA and Enterprise Ireland were lobbied for increased employment opportunities in Portlaoise;
- o The Town Council supported and welcomed various developments in Portlaoise, particularly
 - Public, Voluntary & Affordable Housing Developments;
 - Commencement of work on the construction of the new swimming pool and leisure facility;
 - Road and footpath improvements throughout the town;
 - Granting of outline planning permission for two new post primary schools and associated works at Borris Road, Portlaoise;
 - Opening of new Vocational School and Post Leaving Certificate College.
- o Two Civic Receptions were held in 2006
 - Presentation to the Portlaoise Soccer Club to celebrate to celebrate their 40th anniversary.
 - A reception for Bob Osbourne, Former Mayor of Maryborough, Australia.



Civic Reception in honour of the 40th Anniversary of
Portlaoise Soccer Club 1966 - 2006

COMHAIRLE BHAILE MHOINTEACH MILIIC

Manager: Mr. Declan Byrne
Town Clerk: Ms. Aisling Ryan
Town Engineer: Mr. Wesley Wilkinson



Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Mountmellick Town Council, Cllr. Marc Connolly was elected Cathaoirleach and Cllr. Joe Melia was elected Leas Cathaoirleach.

Representation on Other Bodies

Place Names Committee
Cllr. Bobby Delaney is elected to represent the Town Council on the Place Names Committee

Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances

Cllr. Marc Connolly represents the Town Council at meetings of the above body.

Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland

The Town Council is represented by Cllrs. Patrick J. Bracken and Michael Gormley.

County Development Board

The Town Council is represented by Cllr. Helen Hanson on the above Board.

Strategic Policy Committee

The Town Council is represented on the Environment & Water Services SPC by Cllr. Denis O'Mara and Cllr. Marc Connolly is the representative on the Housing, Social and Cultural SPC.

Mountmellick By-Laws Committee

The Town Council is represented by Cllrs. Marc Connolly and Michael Gormley.

New On-Line Facility

In June, a new on-line facility was officially launched from the Town Clerk's office, whereby the general public can now avail of many of Laois County Council's services such as topping up their keyfob or taxing their car etc.

Ministerial Visits

On 7th September, The Members officially welcomed Minister for State, Dermot Ahern T.D. to Mountmellick for the official opening of the Voluntary Housing Scheme for the elderly at Wolfe Tone Court.

Environmental Works/Grants

Throughout the year various Environmental Works were carried out throughout the town under the Town Council's Environmental Works Programme as agreed by the Members. These works included the following:

- o Street furniture was painted and replaced where damaged
- o 2 new litter bins were purchased and placed on Harbour St. & St. Josephs Tce.
- o Eight additional large flower pots were purchased and the twenty flower pots in total were planted with Summer & then Winter Plants. Window Boxes were purchased for the Courthouse.
- o Weed killer and paint were purchased for environmental projects carried out throughout the local authority estates in the town.
- o A contribution was made to Mountmellick's Community Employment Scheme and Mountmellick Tidy Towns, who carried out various environmental projects in the town as agreed by the Members.

Business at Meetings

As in previous years, there was exceptional attendance by the Members at meetings during which they made representations regarding key issues of concern. These included environmental works, traffic management, road-works and footpath repairs, signage, public lighting etc. During the year. the Members were briefed by Laois County Council Heritage Officer, Environmental Awareness Officer and Sports & Leisure Officer. The Members were also consulted regarding Mountmellick Local Area Plan and Mountmellick Inner Relief Road.

Civic Reception

To celebrate Mountmellick Christmas Tree Committee's 50th Anniversary, the Town Council hosted a Civic Reception on 6th December, 2006 and presented an engraved seat for O'Connell Square in commemoration.



Mountmellick Town Council hosted a Civic Reception in honour of 50th Anniversary of Mountmellick Christmas Tree Committee - 6th December 2006.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Coiste Gaeilge

The Primary role of the Coiste Gaeilge is to assist the Authority in making adequate provision for the use of Irish. For the past two years, Laois County Council has given special leave to candidates who were successful in obtaining scholarships to the Gaeltacht. They also hope to commence training classes for staff who wish to improve their competence in Irish. Laois County Council also assist the Committee of Seachtain na Gaeilge in promoting the Irish Language through various social activities.

Golf Society

Pat Delaney captained the Golf Society in 2006. His Captain's day was held in the Heath Golf Club in July and a great day was had by all. The Captain's Prize was won by John Beere. The Golfer of the Year Award for 2006 went to Michael Rogers. The Kennedy Cup was won by Roy Glynn at the staff outing held in Rathdowney. The event was saddened due to the absence of our valued former member, Mr. John Kennedy, R.I.P. after his untimely death shortly beforehand.

Social Club 2006

2006 was a very successful year for the Laois County Council Social Club. The Social Club currently has a membership of 245 who contribute €1 per week. Numerous events were organised in 2006:

Monthly Draw

On the first Friday on every month a Social Club Draw takes place for Social Club members. The prizes are:

1st:	€50	2ND:	€30	3RD:	€20
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Easter Party

This was held in the Outback, Delaneys, Portlaoise. D.J, Finger food and plenty of Easter Eggs were provided on the night.

Golf

The Annual Golf outing was held in Mountrath in June and proved to be a great day.

A night at the Dogs:

This was held in November in Newbridge.

Summer BBQ

This was the first BBQ held in County Hall and took place on 6th July. Eunice Burns took care of catering and the Social Club would like to thank her for putting on such a spread and for all her help during the year. A great crowd attended the event and Joe Lambe was the proud winner of a BBQ.

Bowling

This was held in Roll and Bowl on 28th September.

Winning Team:	Gavin Cobbe, Geraldine Jones, Eimear Ryan, Orla Walsh
King of the Bowls:	Brian O'Sullivan
Queen of the Bowls:	Orla Walsh

Halloween Party

This was held in the Outback, Delaneys on the 20th October. D.J, Finger food and prize for best fancy dress on the night. The winner was Maura Fingleton.

Annual Mass

The Annual Mass for deceased members and staff of Laois County Council was organised by the Social Club in the Council Chamber. Invitations were issued to all retired and present staff members of Laois County Council. The Mass was very well attended. Refreshments were provided in the canteen afterwards.

Kiddies Christmas Party

The kiddies Party was held on the 9th December 2006 in the canteen, like previous years there was over 100 children who attended. There was great entertainment with Bob the Builder, Sponge bob Square Pants, a fairy Princess and of course Santa and one of his elves. Santa arrived by fire engine. Disco was provided by our very own Ray Bell. There was plenty of help on the day from Social Club members.



Children enjoying Santa at the Kiddies Christmas Party

Christmas Party

The annual Christmas Party was held on 15th December 2006 in the Heritage Hotel. This was a sell out with 128 tickets sold to both staff and councillors. Music on the night was provided by Eden, followed by a disco by Anthony Jeffries.



Aras an Chontae

Portlaoise

Tel: (057) 8664000

Fax: (057) 8622313

E-Mail: corpaffairs@laoiscoco.ie

Opening Hrs: 9.00 am to 5.00 pm (incl. Lunch Hour)

Web: www.laois.ie

Cash Office

Block 2

Áras an Chontae

Tel: (057) 8674308

Opening Hrs: 9.00 am to 3.30 pm (incl. Lunch Hour)

Planning Office

Áras an Chontae

Tel: (057) 8664039

Fax: (057) 8622491

Opening Hrs: 9.30 am to 4.00 pm (incl. Lunch Hour)

Motor Tax Office

Block 2

Áras an Chontae

Tel: (057) 8664009

Fax: (057) 8621184

Opening Hrs: 9.00 am to 3.30 pm (incl. Lunch Hour)

Sports & Leisure Office

Áras an Chontae

Tel: (057) 8664007

Fax: (057) 8622313

Arts Office

Block 2

Áras an Chontae

Tel: (057) 8674342

Fax: (057) 8674382

Library Headquarters

Block 2

Áras an Chontae

Tel: (057) 8674315

Fax: (057) 8674381

Western Area

Courthouse, Borris-in-Ossory

Tel: (0505) 41123

Fax: (0505) 41188

Eastern Area

Courthouse, Stradbally

Tel: (057) 8625227

Fax: (057) 8625227

Central Area

Mountrath Road, Portlaoise

Tel: (057) 8664168

Fax: (057) 8660135

Housing Repairs

Mountrath Road, Portlaoise

Tel: (057) 8622177

Fax: (057) 8622177

Road Design Office

Áras an Chontae

Tel: (057) 8664000

Fax: (057) 8622633

Laboratory

Mountrath Road, Portlaoise

Tel: (057) 8664168 Fax: (057) 8663502

Machinery Yard

Clonboyne, Portlaoise

Tel: (057) 8621148

Fax: (057) 8621148

National Roads Project Office

Clonboyne, Portlaoise

Tel: (057) 8664850

Fax: (057) 8664858

Landfill Site, Kyletalesha

Portlaoise

Tel: (057) 8620653

Fax: (057) 8660858

Civil Defence HQ

Áras an Chontae

Tel: (057) 8664000

Fax: (057) 8625058



Laois County Council

In Partnership with the Community



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