

Laois County Council

Annual Report 2007



Laois County Council

In Partnership with the Community

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Cathaoirleach's Statement

It gives me great pleasure as Cathaoirleach to introduce Laois County Council's Annual Report for 2007.

Throughout the year, Laois County Council continued to provide leadership in the promotion and development of the social, economic and cultural life of the county.

Two new Leisure Centres were opened in Portlaoise and Portarlinton, providing state of the art facilities for use by the community. A new library was opened in Mountrath and work on the refurbishment of the library in Abbeyleix was progressed during the year. The provision of these services for the use of all the residents of the county re-enforces the Council's commitment to the provision of the highest quality services and facilities for the people of Laois.

The Council is also committed to the development and promotion of the county as a viable place to do business and during the year continued to participate actively with all local and national development agencies to promote social and economic development.

2007 also saw the Council continue to promote Laois as an excellent place to visit and our profile was greatly enhanced by the variety of national and worldwide events held in the county during the year.

Sadly, 2007 also saw the passing of two of our colleagues on the Council, the late Councillors Larry Kavanagh and Bill Delaney, R.I.P., who died during the year. I would like to offer my sincere sympathy to their families on their sad loss.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a nanam uasal.

John Moran,
Cathaoirleach.





County Manager's Statement

I am delighted to welcome the publication of the Annual Report for 2007.

The rapid population growth of recent years in County Laois continued in 2007 with consequential pressures on all major infrastructure and support services.

However, Laois County Council has played a central role in developing and progressing key infrastructural projects during 2007, such as Portlaoise Main Drainage, Portlaoise Orbital Route and indeed Water Services and other critical infrastructure in our other main towns and villages.

In our efforts to promote the wellbeing of all people in our County, I am very pleased with the significant progress in 2007 on the delivery of major social capital projects. The Leisure Complexes in Portlaoise and Portarlington opened in December 2007 and the Council continues to contribute to the quality of life in County Laois through the proactive Library Development Programme and the provision of playgrounds and sports facilities around the County.

Furthermore we continue to make good progress in the promotion of County Laois and economic development. The Council is giving excellent leadership through the provision of enterprise units and opportunity sites for new business and by working with Enterprise Ireland and the I.D.A. to promote investment in County Laois. The profile of the County was given a significant boost in 2007 with major tourism events such as the World Fleadh, the Seve Golf Trophy and the Electric Picnic among others.

Further progress was also achieved on the Government Decentralisation projects for Portlaoise and Portarlington in 2007. I believe we are succeeding in developing a more vibrant local economy in County Laois.

Notwithstanding the progress made in 2007, it is important to keep a strong focus on the key objectives in our Corporate Plan. I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with the Elected Members, our Staff, the business sector and local communities to improve the wellbeing of all people in the County and to make Laois a better place in which to live, work and visit.

Peter Carey,
County Manager.



Mission Statement

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.

"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."

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 2007 were usually held on the last Monday of each month in the Council Chamber at Áras an Chontae. There was no meeting held in August.

Corporate Policy Group (C.P.G.)

The Corporate Policy Group is designed to enhance the democratic mandate and policy making role of the elected members. The C.P.G. is supported by the County Manager and comprises the Cathaoirleach of the Council and the four Chairs of the Strategic Policy Committees (S.P.C.'s). The main function of the C.P.G. is to co-ordinate the work of the different S.P.C.'s and provide a forum where policy decisions affecting the whole Council are agreed for submission to the full Council for decision. The C.P.G. met on 12 occasions in 2007.



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



Council Members

. : Borris-in-Ossory Electoral Area : .



Laurence Jnr.
Kavanagh
MCC



Brendan
Phelan
MCC



John
Bonham
MCC



Geraldine
Delaney
MCC



Council Chamber
Áras an Chontae



Michael
Lalor
MCC



Martin
Phelan
MCC



John Joe
Fennelly
MCC



Larry
Kavanagh
MCC



Bill
Delaney
MCC

Sadly, Councillor Larry Kavanagh passed away on 7th March, 2007 and Councillor Bill Delaney passed away on 15th July, 2007. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a nanam uasail.

. : Luggacurren Electoral Area : .



Dick
Miller
MCC



James
Daly
MCC



John
Moran
MCC



Michael
Rice
MCC



Corporate Affairs, Human Resources, Information & Communications Technology

Director of Services: Anna Marie Delaney
Senior Executive Officer
Corporate Affairs: Carmel McNicholl
Senior Executive Officer
Human Resources: Michael Rainey
Head of Information Systems: John Forde

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

21st February, 2007 – Civic Reception in honor of the 175th Anniversary of the Leinster Express

22nd November, 2007 – Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of Portlaoise Citizens Information Centre and Ards Citizens Advice Bureau

Higher Education Grants

Laois County Council awards Higher Education Grants under the Local Authorities (Higher Education Grants) Acts, 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 at tkavanagh@laoiscoco.ie, Tel: (057) 8664137, or on our Website at www.laois.ie/heg.

Under the 2007 Grants Scheme, Laois County Council awarded 185 new grants and 273 grants were renewed. The maximum maintenance grant available was €3,420 and Registration fee was increased to €825.

The Special Rate of Maintenance Grant payable increased to €6,690. 16 new awards and 42 renewal awards qualified for payment of this grant. The total amount paid out in 2007 was €2,034,418.89.

Health & Safety

Safety Advisor: Jim Bolger

During 2007, Laois County Council developed a Safety Improvement Plan relative to Safety Management at Roadworks. Laois County Council was among one of twelve Local Authorities to have their Safety Improvement Plans approved by the Health and Safety Authority.

An integral part of this plan is the increased use of road closures and this will become more apparent during the execution of the 2008 Road Maintenance Programme. To ensure that the relevant staff have the skills necessary to implement the Safety Improvement Plan, a comprehensive safety training programme was undertaken with particular focus on Engineering Grades.

The implementation of the plan will serve to enhance the Safety, Health and Welfare of Laois County Council employees and all road users.



Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of Portlaoise Citizens Information Centre and Ards Citizens Advice Bureau



Corporate Affairs, Human Resources, Information & Communications Technology

Partnership

The following were the members of the Workplace Partnership Committee at 31st December, 2007.

Management Nominees

John Daly, Joint Chair
Anna Marie Delaney
Angela McEvoy
Ian McCormack
Gerry Maher

Union Nominees

Bill Devoy, Joint Chair
Geraldine Campion
Tom Saunders
Wes Wilkinson
Valerie O'Reilly

The Partnership Committee held 9 meetings during 2007.

Activities 2007

Welfare Facilities

The programme to provide welfare facilities for our Outdoor Works was continued with the provision of the following units: -

Western Area	Knocks, Ballinakill, Abbeyleix Sewage and Mountrath Roads
Central Area	Derryguile Water Works
Eastern Area	Ballymorris Water Works, Portarlinton

The programme will be continued in 2008 and is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Handling Significant Change Through Partnership

Two meetings of the Handling Significant Change Through Partnership Steering Group were held in 2007. A list of issues to be addressed through Partnership was identified by the Steering Group including:

- Developing effective Human Resource policies
- Improving employee career paths to reward employees and increase motivation
- Involving employees in the development of Corporate Plans and strategies.
- Overtime
- Review of Employee Assignments (Business Process Improvement Exercise)
- Area Offices
- Health and Safety
- PMDS
- Financial Management

Policy Documents

The following Workplace Policies were agreed through Partnership:

Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy
Secondments Policy

Funding

The following LANPAG funding was received for 2007 projects:

Capacity Building	€4,000
Health & Safety – Equipment	
Health Screening	€5,000
Area Partnership Committees	€4,000
Invessel Compost Unit	
Branding of Laois County Council	
Waste Audit	€1,500
Junior Achievement Ireland	€3,500
Junior County Council	€1,500
Irish Language Programme	€2,000
Equality Awareness	€2,500
Staff Integration	€3,000
Newsletter	€2,000
Total:	€29,000



Corporate Affairs, Human Resources, Information & Communications Technology



Presentation of Long Service Awards at Áras an Chontae in June, 2007.

Performance Verification Group

The Partnership Committee participated in the presentation to the Performance Verification Group in June, 2007, giving details of progress made in the work of the Partnership Committee during the previous two years.

Area Partnership Committees

All three Area Partnership Committees were reconstituted in 2007. Issues addressed by the Area Partnership Committees include Health & Safety, PMDS, welfare issues and policy documents. The committees meet every 6 weeks and work closely with the Workplace Partnership Committee.

PANG (Physical Activity Nutrition Group)

Activities organised by PANG during 2007 included a walking programme and Health Checks for all employees. Corporate Membership to the local Leisure Centres was also encouraged and subsidised for 2007.

Greening Committee

The Greening Committee was successful in acquiring funding for the installation of a compost unit in the Canteen in County Hall. This unit will dispose of waste generated by the Canteen and will be converted into garden compost which will be used on the grounds of County Hall.

Freedom Of Information (F.O.I.)

Applications received/processed in 2007

Applications on hand at 31/12/2006	1
Applications received during 2007	17
Decisions taken during 2007	18
Decisions refused	Nil
Applications withdrawn	Nil
Applications on hand at 31/12/2007	Nil

Nature of Information Sought

Personal (to applicant)	5
Non-Personal	12

Appeals

Appeals to Information Commissioner	Nil
Appeals to High Court	Nil

Source of Requests

Journalists	Nil
Business	Nil
Oireachtas Members	Nil
Local Authority Members	Nil
Others/General Public	17



Corporate Affairs, Human Resources, Information & Communications Technology

Register of Electors 2007/2008

The Council is responsible for the compilation of the Register of Electors for County Laois which comes into force on 15th February each year. To be eligible for inclusion in the Register of Electors, 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 Laois/Offaly	Presidential Electors 51,774	Dáil Electors 52,289
European Parliament Constituency Leinster	European Electors 52,442	Potential European Electors 167

Local Electoral Areas	Number of Electors
Borris in Ossory	14,137
Emo	8,794
Luggacurren	8,805
Mountmellick	7,959
Portlaoise	13,282
Total	52,977

Borough or Town Council	Local Government Electors
Mountmellick Urban	2,858
Portlaoise Urban	7,374
Total	10,232

Postal and Special Voters	Dáil Constituency – Laois /Offaly
Gardaí	0
Defence Forces	88
Diplomats	4
Physically Disabled	14
Occupation Etc.	0
Special Voters	9



*Oireachtas Members at Áras an Chontae
with Cathaoirleach John Moran and
Management Team*

Conferences Attended in 2007

The Members of Laois County Council attended the following Conferences in 2007 :

Children's Rights & The Constitution	Dublin	20 Jan.
Merriman	Westport	26 – 28 Jan.
Kadenza	Dungarvan	1 – 3 Feb.
A.M.A.I. Spring Seminar	Tralee	9 – 10 Feb.
Planning Seminar	Tralee	17 Feb.
Master of Science in Financial Services	Limerick	21 Feb.
Colmcille Heritage Trust	Letterkenny	23 – 25 Feb.
Atlantic Events Conference Management	Killybegs	2 & 3 Mar.
Association of County & City Councils	Dungarvan	8 – 10 Mar.
Modes of Insecurity	Letterkenny	23 Mar.
Rattoo Heritage Society	Tralee	28 Mar. – 1 Apr.
L.A.M.A	Killarney	12 & 13 Apr.
Irish Rural Dwellers	Killarney	18 – 20 Apr.
Southern & Regional Assembly	Naas	20 Apr.
Kadenza Consultancies	Letterkenny	27 – 29 Apr.
Tipperary Peace Convention	Tipperary Town	27 – 29 Apr.
Irish Walled Towns Network	Youghal	17 – 18 May
Effective Communications for Councillors	Louth	8 – 10 June
Byrne Perry Summer School	Gorey	29 June – 1 July



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Conferences Attended in 2007 (cont):

Synge Summer School	Rathdrum	1 – 7 July
Local Government Planning Service	Baltimore	5 July
Macgill Summer School	Glenties	15 – 20 July
Parnell Summer School	Rathdrum	12 – 17 Aug.
Merriman Summer School	Lisdoonvarna	19 – 25 Aug.
General Humbert School	Ballina	23 – 26 Aug.
Kilkee Waterworld	Kilkee	6 – 7 Sept.
Listowel Heritage Conference	Listowel	6 – 7 Sept.
A.M.A.I.	New Ross	13 – 15 Sept.
La Touche Seminar	Greystones	28 – 30 Sept.
Getting a Grip	Killarney	4 – 5 Oct.
Local Economic Development Conference	Athlone	17 Oct.
Association of Irish Regions	Killarney	19 Oct.
Douglas Hyde Conference 2007	Roscommon	26 – 28 Oct.
Ceifin Conference	Ennis	6 – 7 Nov.
Role of Family Carer	Dublin	7 Nov.
Aoife Conference	Ballinasloe	8 – 10 Nov.
Local Authority Members Association	Carlow	9 – 10 Nov.
Planning & Environmental Law	Dublin	10 Nov.
Shannon Development & Towns	Tarbert	14 Nov.
Carer's Exhibition	Athlone	14 Nov.
Effective Communications	Letterkenny	16 – 18 Nov.
National Tourism Conference	Ennistymon	22 – 24 Nov.
Regional Development Conference	Galway	23 Nov.
Niall Blaney School	Letterkenny	30 Nov. – 1 Dec.
Local Government Budget	Bunclody	1 Dec.

which the following statistics have been extracted:

Total Applications received:	828	
	Male	Female
Applicants	357	471
Successful Applicants	192	159

Permanent Appointments/Promotions 2007

	Male	Female
Appointments	35	21
Promotions	14	13

Work Life Balance Initiatives

At year-end, 7 employees were availing of the Career Break Scheme, 24 employees were availing of the job/work sharing scheme, 20 employees availed of the Parental Leave Scheme and 11 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 2007.

Employee Training & Development

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

The annual training programme is primarily based on the individual training needs identified through staff Personal Development Plans as part of the PMDS process. The Programme also incorporates Health & Safety

Human Resources

Recruitment Statistics

A total of 529 people were employed by Laois County Council at 31st December, 2007.

During 2007, Laois County Council held 73 competitions, in relation to



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Needs, Return to Learning Programme, Third Level Open Learning Programme and various Seminars/Workshops as they arise.

Expenditure on training was €375,000. A very comprehensive training programme was delivered throughout 2007. A sample of the training programmes provided is as follows: -

- ECDL & Advanced ECDL
- Disability Awareness Training
- Induction Training
- Abrasive Wheel
- Safepass
- Traffic Management Training
- First Aid
- Bio Diversity Training
- Manual Handling Instructor & Assessor Course.

A total number of 8 staff in the organisation successfully completed a Manual Handling Instructor & Assessors' Training Course. These trainers have now initiated a roll-out training programme across the organisation.

Open Learning Programme

Laois County Council endeavours to facilitate employees wishing to pursue Third Level Open Learning Courses that are relevant to and contribute to the business development of both the Council and the employee's role and responsibilities. A sample of the Open Learning programmes facilitated are as follows:

- IPA Certificate, Diploma & Degree in Local Government Studies
- NUI Galway Diploma in Irish
- Open University MSC in Technology Management
- Athlone IT Higher Diploma in Engineering Highway Technology
- IPA Certificate in Managing Change
- NUI Maynooth Diploma in First Line Management

Training Awards Ceremony

The presentation of training certificates was held on 4th December, 2007.



Presentation of Certificates for Managing Safely for Construction Projects Supervisors, December 2007

Supporting Diversity:

Laois County Council supports the employment of people with disabilities and meets its target as set out by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. In addition, during 2007, Laois County Council facilitated a number of work experience placements for people with disabilities.

Excellence Through People

The Excellence Through People accreditation is Ireland's national standard for Human Resource development. 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. 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



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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 organisation's services and goals.

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 2007. The out-turn was 5.5%

Expenditure on Training & Development as a percentage of total payroll costs:

2006	2007
4.6%	5.5%

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

	2006	2007
Certified	3.61%	3.93%
Uncertified	0.44%	0.41%

Information & Communications Technology Department

In 2007, 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 (G.I.S.), Software Development and Network Administration.

Geographic Information Systems (G.I.S.)

G.I.S. 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. 2007 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 and is available under the Planning Section on the main website or at www.laois.ie/gplan. The G.I.S. department implemented a Property Management System in 2007 called the Property Interest Register (P.I.R.). 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 Councils 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

The Software section of ICT develops, manages and maintains all systems throughout the organisation. Our biggest project of 2007 was the implementation of a new, more technologically advanced system in the Landfill. This system is used for the weighing in and out of loads. Hardware, Software and the control system all had to be upgraded. The tender was won in early 2007 and a lot of resources went into testing, which began in early March. The ICT staff had to liaise with the Landfill workers, the Environment Section and the Cash Office to ensure all aspects of the system would work smoothly. The system went live on 3rd June, 2007.

Over 80 employees throughout the Council are trained to use the content management system for the website www.laois.ie. All sections now upload their own content and latest news items. The website is maintained on an ongoing basis with continuous improvements to enhance accessibility and usability. Our website was audited in 2007 and we were awarded the W-Mark Certification in July for our high standards of both accessibility and usability. We also acquired the W3C AA award for accessibility conformance and for the validation of XHTML and CSS. A few online mapping features were added to the site. Local services such as schools, libraries, tourist attractions etc. are now mapped through Google Mapping Services. Our online payments have proven very successful and extra



Corporate Affairs, Human Resources, Information & Communications Technology

services that were added in 2007 include Water Charges, Housing Rents and Housing Loans.

Laois.ie was shortlisted in 2007 for a 'Golden Spider' - Ireland's premier internet awards. In the category of *Best Public Sector Website* the Council were up against stiff competition, so to even be nominated was an achievement in itself. Laois.ie was also shortlisted for the 'BT Inspired IT Awards 2007' in the Business Services category and again the competition was impressive. Although we didn't win the award, we were proud that our efforts were recognised.

Towards the end of 2007 the intranet was upgraded from SharePoint 2003 to Office SharePoint 2007. The intranet is used to share and store documents and to host in-house applications. Office SharePoint Server 2007 is tightly integrated with familiar client desktop applications, e-mail and Web browsers. It comes with several out-of-the-box applications that can be used to improve older systems in use. It has many useful features that will ensure better communication and efficiency throughout the organisation in 2008.

Network Administration

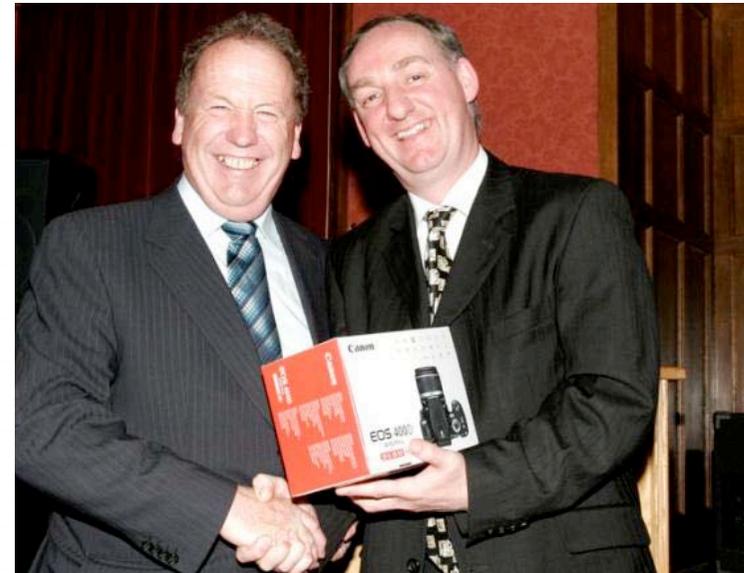
This department processed in excess of 2,800 support calls from Users during 2007, covering a wide variety of Hardware & Software issues. Just over 50 latest spec. PC's were provided to users throughout the organisation, in addition to Laptops, Servers, Printers, etc., as part of the annual Hardware replacement programme.

A number of significant infrastructural Projects were completed during 2007 including the following:

- The main Computer Room in Block 1 of Áras an Chontae was completely rewired and a new high capacity standby power unit (U.P.S.) installed.
- The new Library in Mountrath was brought on-line and the infrastructure department completed the installation of telephone and data links and a comprehensive set of Information Technology facilities for the Library Users & Staff.
- Work on provision of Phone & Data facilities at the Council's new Office adjacent to the community centre in Portarlinton was also completed in 2007.
- Secure remote Network access was provided to the members of

the Senior Management Team and other Staff working from remote Offices.

- Comprehensive user training was provided to the members of the Management Team to enable them to fully exploit the upgraded access facilities.
- User training in the most recent versions of various software products & facilities was also provided for a number of the Elected Members. This type of training is available on an ongoing basis and is provided as the need arises.
- In addition to a system upgrade, the hardware infrastructure at the Kyleshilla Landfill Site, comprising Server & Workstations, was completely replaced with latest specification equipment.
- Further efficiencies were achieved in the area of Mobile Communication with the installation of the O2 Mobile Corporate Private Network (C.P.N.) during 2007. This facilitates preferential call charges for Laois County Council and should result in cost savings.



Christy Crawford, former Head of Information Systems, Laois County Council, being presented with retirement gift by County Manager Peter Carey. Christy retired in April, 2007 after 43 years service.



Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

Chair: Brian Stanley MCC

Members:

William Aird, M.C.C.
Larry Kavanagh, R.I.P., M.C.C.
Paddy Bracken, M.C.C.
Seamus McDonald, M.C.C.
Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C.
Marc Connolly, T.C.

Sectoral:

Mary Wheatley
Pat Culleton
John Grace
Mick Dowling

Director Of Services:

Declan Byrne

Senior Executive Officer:

Martin Daly

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 2007

- Successful implementation of Part V arrangements under the Planning & Development Acts and the Housing Strategy which resulted in the delivery of 69 units.
- Successful delivery of 237 social housing units
- Successful delivery of 124 affordable housing units with prices starting from €140,000.
- Commencement of voluntary housing schemes in Mountmellick, Portarlinton, Portlaoise, Borris in Ossory and Abbeyleix.
- Completion of plans for community facility in Knockmay, Portlaoise

Report on Strategic Policy Committee (S.P.C.)

During 2007, the Housing, Social and Cultural S.P.C. met in 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 Members adopted the Homelessness Strategy, the Laois Local Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Per Cent for Arts Policy and the Hedgerow Policy. They also discussed issues of anti-social behaviour, the integration of social and affordable housing and the provision of Homeless and Domestic Violence Accommodation.

Rental Accommodation Scheme

The Rental Accommodation Scheme, which commenced in Laois in September 2006, is a government initiative to cater for the accommodation needs of persons who are in receipt of rent supplement for a long period of time 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 approx. 109 people in Laois who are currently in receipt of rent supplement for 18 months or more and work is ongoing in assessing their suitability for inclusion in the scheme. In addition, landlords have participated in the scheme. Further information with regard to the scheme is available on www.laois.ie



Clodiagh Way, Clonaslee



Cullenwood, Mountmellick



Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

Housing Construction & Acquisition

During the year, 237 houses were completed under this Programme. The breakdown is as follows:

Rural dwellings	2 units
Meadowbrook, Rosenallis	16 units
Borris Road, Portlaoise	10 units
Ballyroan	22 units
Castletown (Phase 2)	10 units
Clodiagh Way, Clonaslee	18 units
Woodbrook, Mountrath	20 units
Churchview, Rathmoyle, Abbeyleix (Turnkey)	1 unit
Fruithill, Graiguecullen (Turnkey)	15 units
Cullenwood, Mountmellick (Turnkey)	40 units
Shannon Road, Mountrath (Turnkey)	4 units
Portlaoise Road, Mountrath (Turnkey)	4 units
Station Road, Portarlinton (Turnkey)	20 units
Rathmoyle, Abbeyleix (Part V)	3 units
Esker Hills, Portlaoise (Part V)	23 units
Abbey Court, Portlaoise (Part V)	2 units
Sli na Mona, Portarlinton (Part V)	2 units
Fairgreen Phase 2 (Part V)	2 units
Clarney Hall, Rathdowney (Part V)	1 unit
Ossory Court, Borris-in-Ossory (Part V)	1 unit
Ashbrook Gardens, Portlaoise (Part V)	1 unit
Ballacollig, Mountmellick (Part V)	5 units
Slieve Bloom Heights, Rathdowney	1 unit
Purchase of single units	<u>14 units</u>
TOTAL	237 units

The total amount received from the Department for the Capital Programme in 2007 was €24,104,923

Summary of Programme

Houses under construction at 01/01/07	274
Houses commenced in 2007	74
Houses completed in 2007	237
Houses in progress at 31/12/07	111

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

Knockmay Development Project

Laois County Council is undertaking a multi-million euro re-development of the 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 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 in May, 2008.

It is hoped that the proposed Knockmay Development Project will address many of the problems with the original design of the estates and the social issues that have arisen.

The proposed physical works will include improvements to the exterior of the houses, the construction of a neighbourhood centre and creche, 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 has assigned dedicated staff resources on site to deal with all aspects of implementation. The staff will also 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

The Planned Maintenance Phase 4 programme continued during 2007. This programme involves the carrying out of double glazing and fascia work to approximately 244 houses, electrical work to 149 houses and the provision of mains smoke alarms to approximately 285 houses. It is expected that this work will be completed by the end of 2008.



Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

Central Heating Programme

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. Since 2004 approximately 470 houses have been provided with central heating with approximately 80 of these having been completed in 2007. The programme will continue in 2008 and should be completed by December, 2008.

Maintenance of Local Authority Stock

At 31st December, 2007, the Council had 1,819 dwellings in its rented stock, 96% of which were let at the end of the year. During 2007, a total of 2,573 repair requests were received by the Maintenance Section of which 2,391 were completed (92.93%).

Part V- Housing Strategy

In accordance with Part V of the Housing Strategy, 69 housing units (41 social and 28 affordable) were completed around the County in 2007. 207 units (84 social and 123 affordable) are currently in progress in Borris in Ossory, Durrow, Mountrath, Mountmellick, Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Stradbally. 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.

Voluntary Housing Sector

The Voluntary Sector continues to play a vital role in assisting to meet the accommodation needs in Laois. In 2007, Respond! Housing Association completed work on 21 units at Graiguecullen. Also in 2007, Owenass Housing Association for the Intellectually Disabled commenced work on a 6-bed unit in Mountmellick, Cluid Housing Association commenced work on 40 units in Portarlinton and 9 units in Borris in Ossory, and Respond! Housing Association commenced work on 22 units in Portlaoise and 8 units in Abbeyleix.

Affordable Housing

During the year work commenced on 8 affordable housing units in Clonaslee and affordable housing units were completed at the following locations:

Rosenallis	10 units
Ballyroan	12 units
Castletown	4 units
Mountrath	10 units
Graiguecullen	10 units
Portlaoise	50 units
Part Vs	<u>28 units</u>
Total	124 units

Work is in progress on 52 units in Portarlinton, Errill and Camross and on 123 Part V units in Borris in Ossory, Durrow, Portlaoise, Mountrath, Mountmellick, Portarlinton and Stradbally. Prices start at €140,000 and represent a substantial discount on the market price.



Gleann na Glaise, Ballyroan



Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

Private Sites Scheme

Following the adoption by the Members of Laois County Council of a Sale of Sites Scheme in 2006 a number of private sites were made available in Castletown. The purchase price of these sites is €55,500 but some applicants may be able to buy these sites for as little as €23,700 if they qualify for a site subsidy. Interested parties should contact the Housing Department for details. Other sites will be made available in 2008 at Ballyroan and Clonaslee.

Activity under Various Schemes

Extensions to Local Authority Dwellings:

Commenced	-	14
Completed	-	10

Improvement Works in Lieu of Local Authority Housing:

Commenced	-	4
Completed	-	7

Disabled Persons Grants:

Applications Received	-	196
Total No. of Grants Paid (Totalling €)	-	198 €2,688,635

Essential Repairs Grants:

Applications Received	-	122
Total No. of Grants Paid (Totalling €)	-	109 €690,385

Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability:

Applications received	-	4
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Mobility Aids Housing Grant Scheme:

Applications received	-	1
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Housing Aid for Older People Scheme:

Applications received	-	12
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(note: these 3 grants were introduced in November, 2007, to replace the Disabled Person Grant and the Essential Repairs Grant).

Tenant Purchase Scheme:

Applications Received	-	50
Houses Sold	-	27

Shared Ownership Loans:

Applications Received	-	17
Transactions Completed	-	15

Mortgage Allowance Scheme:

Applications Received	-	6
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Housing Rents

The Council reviews its Differential Rent Scheme on an annual basis. The latest Scheme was implemented on 20th October, 2007. The average weekly rent, under the 2006 Scheme, was €39.50. A total rental income of over €2.9m 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 with 10 families being accommodated in 2007.



Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

Estate Management

The year 2007 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 2007

Category A: Laois County Council Housing Estate opened more than 10 years

Winner: St. Fintan's Terrace, Mountrath

Category B: Laois County Council Housing Estate opened between 3-10 years

Winner: Riverview Apartments, Portlaoise

Category C: Laois County Council Housing Estate opened less than 3 years

Winner: Willowgrove, Mountmellick

A special award for the estate which has made the greatest improvement to their estate went to The Crescent, Ballylinan.

A Tenant Liaison Officer and a mobile Caretaker for the Aged and Disabled continue to work in the Housing Department with a separate Tenant Liaison Officer for the Knockmay area in Portlaoise. In 2007 there were 51 Residents' Associations supported by the Housing Department.

Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	2006	2007
Total number of dwellings in local authority stock	1,611	1,819
% that are let	97%	96%
% that are empty	3%	4%
% of empty dwellings subject to major refurbishment schemes	0%	12.3%
% of empty dwellings unavailable for letting	45%	45.70%
% of empty dwellings available for letting	55%	42%
Average time taken to relet	5 wks	1.09 wks
Number of repairs completed as a % of the number of valid requests received	89.06%	92.93%
Average time taken to inform applicants of local authority's decision on applications: -		
Shared Ownership Housing Scheme	9.8 days	6.25 days
Housing Loans Scheme	1 day	19 days
Local Authority Housing	6 days	28.1 days
Total No. of traveller families accommodated as a percentage of the targets set in the local Traveller Accommodation Programme	171.43%	125%
Percentage of Rent Arrears		
Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due (Rental Income)	86%	88%
4-6 weeks old	5.93%	7.07%
6-12 weeks old	10.25%	8.45%
over 12 weeks old	76.59%	75.70%



Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

The Arts

Laois School of Music

In January 2007, Laois School of Music moved to new premises at Portlaoise College, a brand new VEC School. The student body now has an enrolment of 350. Brent Parker was appointed Composer in Residence in January, 2007 and the residency centred round the LSM Orchestra and singers from the Voice Department. The final work, 'The Slieve Bloom Suite' premiered in June in the Dunamais Arts Centre and was subsequently performed at the Electric Picnic, Stradbally, in September 2007. The Composer in Residence was a wonderful experience for all involved. The organisers of the Electric Picnic awarded 2 scholarships to the LSM for the duration of the festival in County Laois.



Laois School of Music performing at the Electric Picnic in Stradbally

Music Makers, a class for children with special needs, began as a pilot programme in April and will continue as a full-time class in the School of Music. 3 Scholarships were renewed for the LSM from Portlaoise Rotary Club, Portlaoise Lions Club and EBS Community Investment Fund. Various concerts, Masterclasses and exams were held throughout the year.

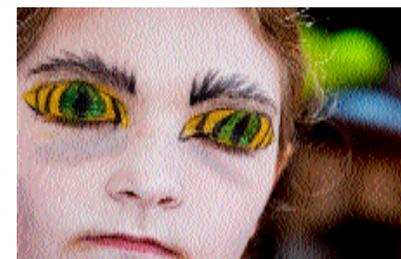
Laois Youth Theatre

Laois Youth Theatre enables young people to avail of the very best drama training. There are currently five groups running in Laois at Portlaoise, Rathdowney, Stradbally, Mountrath and a new group in Portarlington. In

March, Portlaoise and Mountmellick Youth Theatre took part in a workshop with Coisceim Dance Company and attended their show in the Dunamais Arts Centre. The Portlaoise group performed 'Scary Story' in the Dunamais Arts Centre, Portlaoise, in March and the show was entered in the Shell Connections Festival in Cork in May. The Mountmellick group performed 'Sparkleshark' by Philip Ridley in Mountmellick and Rathdowney Youth Theatre also presented their play locally in May. Portlaoise performed 'Playback Theatre' in the Dunamais Arts Centre in June and at the Electric Picnic Festival in September and they are the first youth theatre group in Ireland to tackle this improvisational form of theatre. Stradbally Youth Theatre performed their play 'The Demon Headmaster' and Mountrath Youth Theatre performed their play 'Who's afraid of the Big Bad Burn' in June.



Laois Arts Office workshops at Electric Picnic in Stradbally



Laois Youth Theatre

Laois Youth Theatre took part in the Festival of Youth Theatres 2007 event in the Dunamais Arts Centre. This included workshops for members, tutors and performances by all the groups. In 2007, two new youth theatre co-ordinators and two new assistants joined Laois Youth Theatre and a new youth theatre group was established in Portarlington.

Writer in Residence

Laois writer in Residence, Caroline Barry from Westmeath, began working in Laois in September for a six month term. Special focus for the residency was writing with younger people. An open evening was organised and a series of very successful weekly workshops took place for young writers. Caroline is also edited the new Laois Anthology to include



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works by younger writers that will be published in 2008. Writers groups, schools and community groups have also been facilitated.

Finding Portlaoise – Urban Artistic Interventions

A series of creative artistic events involving artists and the people of Portlaoise town ran from 3rd to 10th October, where artists were invited to submit proposals to work in Portlaoise. Eleven artists from around the country were selected and these included performance pieces in visual art, dance, creative display and temporary installations. A number of invited artists and local artists also took part. Community participation included local retailers/businesses, Prison Community, Traveller Community and schools. Following the event a public seminar was held entitled 'Artistic Intervention – Mere Action or Interaction'.

Artists in Schools Scheme

A total of 9 schools took part in 2007 and these included Scoil Bhride, Rathdowney, St. Josephs GNS, Mountmellick, St Francis School, Portlaoise, Scoil Aonghusa, Stradbally, Arles NS, Kolbe Centre, Portlaoise, Barnashrone NS, Rathdowney Church of Ireland NS and Castlecuffe NS. This scheme gives schools in the county the opportunity to apply for artists' residencies to cover all art media.

Percent for Art Projects



James Fintan Lalor Commemorative Sculpture at Áras an Chontae

The design of the James Fintan Lalor Commemorative Sculpture, by Mayo artist Rory Breslin, was selected by two-stage commissioning process. The bronze and stone sculpture was officially launched by Mr Brian Cowen T.D. on Saturday, 15th December, 2007, at Áras an Chontae. Under the Percent for Art Scheme, artist Michelle O'Donnell from County Offaly was selected to provide a three-part stained glass feature for the Portarlington Swimming Pool, in association with the Sports Section.

Awards & Bursaries

Art Act Grants

€10,000 in grants was presented at a special awards night on 5th April, 2007, in Áras an Chontae, to a total of 42 recipients, comprising of 35 grants to groups and 7 grants to individuals. The groups and individuals who benefited from these awards were wide ranging and included Community groups, Drama groups, Writers groups and artists from all around the county.

The winner of the 2007 Patronage award was Lisa Fingleton, Kilrory, Stradbally, Co Laois. An artist/film maker, Lisa has participated in over 40 group shows in Ireland and abroad. The Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary was awarded to Durrow based artist Maeve Collins and the Scholarship for the Drama League of Ireland Residential Summer School was awarded to Carmel McSweeney.

Summer Arts Programme

Very successful summer arts workshops for children and young people took place during July in a number of areas in Laois. The workshops included pottery, dance, drama, kindermusic, creative writing and art. The range of activities was very popular and over 350 art enthusiasts attended.

Portlaoise Travellers Centre

Photographer, Andy Mason and writer, Jean O'Brien, former Laois Writer in Residence, worked on a collaborative photographic and writing project with clients from the Travelling Community.



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Bealtaine

The Arts Office arranged the following events during this year's festival:

- Concerts in Hospitals for Older People in Laois with Mary Wisely from Laois School of Music at St Vincent's Hospital, Mountmellick, St. Brigid's Hospital, Shaen and Abbeyleix District Hospital.
- Music and Songs with Singer/Songwriter, Christy Cullen in St Vincent's Hospital Mountmellick, Abbeyleix District Hospital and St Brigid's Hospital, Shaen.
- Music & Dance Show from Ireland & Scotland - Award winning duo, fiddle player John Davison and dancer Aisling Walsh, presented a Scottish and Irish Music and dance show in St Vincent's Hospital Mountmellick, Abbeyleix District Hospital and St Brigid's Hospital, Shaen.
- Poetry Readings by Mr Frank Dunne, writer, actor and broadcaster with BBC and RTE.

Leabhar Bheag Laoise

Following on from the visit of the Great Book of Gaelic to Laois in 2006, a book of poetry, art and calligraphy by primary and secondary students in Laois entitled 'Leabhair Bheag Laoise' was published and launched in Áras an Chontae in March, 2007. The event included readings by students featured in the book.

Concerts

A Classical music concert was held in Emo Court in May by American pianist on tour in Ireland, Ivan Illic. The programme consisted of works by Handel, Brahms, Liszt and Debussy.

Other activities

- Artists Mentoring
- Exhibitions
- Book Launches
- Storytelling in Hospitals
- Writers workshops
- Composition workshops
- South East Arts Network Initiative

Performance Indicators

	2004	2005	2006	2007
No. of Arts Grants Allocated	29	26	43	43
Per 1,000 population	119.10	2341	2,809	2,781
No. of Youth Theatres	4	5	5	5
Summer Arts Workshops	8	10	15	20
Drama Workshops	2	2	1	1
Laois School of Music				
No. of Students	332	279	300	350

Sport & Lesiure

The Sport and Leisure Section of Laois County Council delivered a highly successful calendar of events and activities in 2007. Most notable were:

Play Provision

Three new playgrounds were opened in 2007:

Stradbally Playground, named 'Full Steam Ahead', opened in April and is located at The Green, Stradbally.

'Tir na Spraoi' (Land of Fun) Playground was officially opened at the Community Centre, Clonaslee on 7th December and Portlaoise Leisure Centre Playground 'Dun Spraoi' (Fort of Fun) opened on 18th December, 2007.



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Children's Activity Programme

Laois County Council organised and delivered a very successful Easter and Summer activity programme throughout the county in 2007. Parks Tennis Easter & Summer programme was delivered at Abbeyleix, Mountrath, Portlaoise and Portarlington with our six week Camp Co Co Summer programme being delivered at Portarlington, Vicarstown, Castletown, Rathdowney, Ballyroan and Portlaoise.

Playground Markings

School Playground Markings were further developed in 2007, with a further nine schools in Laois availing of funding. The aim of the Playground Markings scheme is to increase the level of school based physical activity and play as well as increasing the number of children who are active. Playground Markings offer children the opportunity to be physically active during their school day and encourage children to take part in active games that can help them to develop physically. Training was provided to teachers and children on games to play on their new markings.

Club Development

The Council's Club Development Programme continued in 2007. The Programme promotes and supports 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 2007 Sports Capital Programme was €1,561,200.

Athletics Track

The provision of a new 8-lane athletics track, playing pitch and field events area on a site adjacent to the new Portlaoise College was completed in 2007. These facilities will be used by students of Portlaoise College, North Laois Athletic Club and other community and sporting groups.

Mini-Pitch

EUFA/FAI Mini Pitch completed at the Swan in December, 2007.

Leisure Centres

Portlaoise Leisure Centre



Following major refurbishment, Portlaoise Leisure Centre opened to the public on 17th December, 2007. The centre contains swimming facilities in three pool areas, all-weather football pitches, a 60 station, state-of-the-art gymnasium and exercise classes. For children, the centre offers fun-filled splash sessions with giant inflatables, swimming lessons for everyone from tots to teens, a soft play area for under 7's and the largest public playground outside of Dublin. It offers an ideal venue for children's birthday parties with on-site catering from 'Caju' - a 45 seater café and juice bar.

Portarlington Leisure Centre



Portarlington Leisure opened its doors as a fully-operational centre in early December. The centre will provide the residents of Portarlington with leisure facilities that can boast of being equal to the best in the region. The centre contains a 25-metre swimming pool to competition standard, learner pool, sauna and steam room, coffee dock, meeting room, a fitness



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suite with Techno Gym equipment and fitness studio offering a varied programme of classes. It will enable children to develop swimming and water safety skills.

With grant aid from the Dept. of Arts, Sport & Tourism and investments by Laois County Council, the new centres will undoubtedly re-enforce Laois County Council's 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.

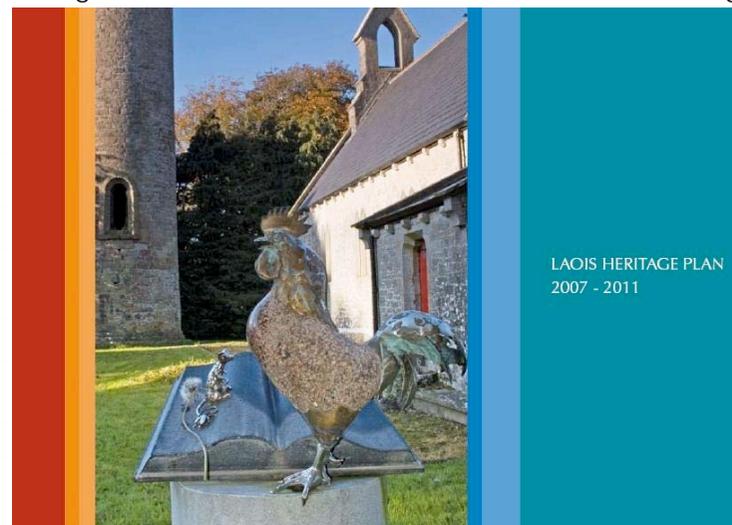
Performance Indicators	Standards Achieved	
	2006	2007
Number of Training Courses Organised	13	4
Number of Trained Leaders & Coaches	160 (including Administrators)	30
Number of communities participating in Summer Camps & other programmes	14	12
Number of children participating in programmes	1,200	1,100
No. of Clubs/Groups assisted with Sports Funding Applications	39	27
No of New Clubs Assisted	-	0
**Total No Of Playgrounds Areas	-	7
**No of Swimmers/annum	-	6,500
** National Indicators		

Heritage

The Heritage Office of Laois County Council works to promote awareness and understanding of the built, natural and cultural heritage of County Laois. This is undertaken with the assistance of the Heritage Council, through the projects detailed in the Laois Heritage Plan.

Laois Heritage Plan 2007-2011

The second Heritage Plan for County Laois was formally launched in early 2007. The plan, which was compiled during 2006 following extensive public consultation, contains 50 actions which will be implemented over the coming years, with four key objective areas: Collect information on the built, natural and cultural heritage of the county; Raise awareness and promote enjoyment of heritage; Promote best practice in heritage management and Promote active conservation of heritage in Laois.



The following information relates to projects from the Laois Heritage Plan undertaken during 2007. Full survey and research reports are available from the Heritage Office of Laois County Council, or to download at www.laois.ie/heritage.



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Collect information on the Heritage of County Laois

The collection of information on the heritage of Laois is a necessary first step in the conservation and highlighting of this heritage. The following heritage surveys were carried out during 2007:

- Survey of thatched structures
- Phase III of the field-by-field survey of habitats in the County
- Survey of tufa-forming springs in the Slieve Blooms, a priority habitat under the EU Habitats Directive
- Survey of the built and natural heritage of bridges in the County, including industrial heritage, birds and bats.



House near Ballybrittas recorded during the 2007 Thatch Survey



Learning about wildlife in Clonaslee during Heritage Week (photo: Michael Scully)

Raise awareness and promote enjoyment of the Heritage of Laois

During 2007, 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 the year 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 2007 to raise awareness of heritage issues included:

- A book on the built and natural heritage of the old Mountmellick Canal was produced, based on the results of the survey carried out

in 2006

- A week-long programme of family events, guided walks, talks, slideshows and fun-days was organised for national Heritage Week
- A competition on the theme of 'Our Built Heritage' was organised and attracted over 150 very high quality entries from adults and children
- Training in biodiversity was provided for all staff of Laois County Council
- The 'Discovering Laois Wildlife' series of workshops and field trips introduced the topic of biodiversity and the wildlife and habitats of Laois to members of the general public
- A book on the Heritage of the Midlands by Dr Paul Gibson was launched by Laois County Council and attracted a lot of interest
- The annual 'Celebrating Laois Heritage' conference was held in Portlaoise Parish Centre in November, to inform the public of issues relating to heritage, research and surveys undertaken during the year
- Dawn walks in Clonaslee and Durrow were organised to celebrate annual Dawn Chorus Day in May
- The Laois Collection of oral history interviews recorded during 2006 was broadcast as a series of programmes on Midlands 103 local radio
- The Laois entries in the national Pride of Place competition, which celebrates community activity, were Portarlinton and Ratheniska. The groups performed extremely well during judging and Ratheniska was short-listed in its population category.

Promote best practice in Heritage management and promote active conservation of Heritage

During 2007, with the support of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Heritage Council, the restoration of Durrow Courthouse continued. The building is of great architectural and historical importance and when completed, it will house the library, a museum and community facilities, as well as showcasing best practice in the conservation of an historic building.



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Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	2006	2007	Notes
Number of actions from the Laois Heritage Plan implemented	8	8	A maximum of 8 actions per year are part-funded by the Heritage Council.
Number of meetings of Laois Heritage Forum held	4	3	The Laois Heritage Forum generally meets quarterly, but met more often in 2006, due to the preparation of the new Laois Heritage Plan.
Number of biodiversity surveys carried out	3	3	
Number of built/cultural heritage surveys carried out	1	2	
Number of publications on Laois Heritage produced / supported	2	1	These publications are in addition to project reports produced following surveys etc.
Number of Heritage Talks/Training Courses/Seminars organised	2	12	Including events held for Heritage Week

Libraries

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 May, Councillor Michael Lalor, Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, launched a five-year Library Development Plan which outlines proposals for infrastructural development, information technology, social inclusion measures and links to outside agencies over the next five years.

Mountrath Library



Construction of the new library in Mountrath was completed in April and the library opened to the public in June. The official opening was performed by Councillor Michael Lalor, Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council. The library is very popular among the local community and since its opening has attracted 830 registered members and over 13,800 visits to the library. There has been over 1,500 internet sessions on nine computers since opening.



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Abbeyleix Library

The refurbishment of Abbeyleix Library (Market House) continued during the year and the expected completion date was March, 2008. A library measuring approximately 320 sq. metres will operate from three floors of the building combined with an art gallery on part of the ground floor. The Market Square area will be fully paved and landscaped on either side of the building.

Mountmellick Library

During 2007 the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government gave approval to go to tender for a new library at the former Courthouse building at O'Moore Street, Mountmellick. The library will be on two floors with a total area of 690 sq. metres. Tender documents are currently being prepared.

Durrow Library

Work commenced in October on the refurbishment of the Courthouse, which will house the public library when completed. The library will be fully automated and have internet access on two PC's. The library area will operate as a community/meeting area during non-library hours.

Automation

The library service continued its Programme of automating the library systems in Branch Libraries with Timahoe and Mountrath Libraries going live in 2007.

WIFI

Wireless Internet Access has been installed in Portlaoise, Mountrath and Portarlinton libraries. WIFI will be available in Abbeyleix, Rathdowney and Mountmellick in 2008.

Bookfund

The Bookfund for 2007 was €188,000, an increase of €4,000 on the previous year. The Department of Science and Education contributed €35,165.60 for the purchase of books for primary schools within the local authority area.

Midlands Prison

In 2007, two staff employed by Laois County Library have worked in the Midlands Prison to provide the library service there. This service aims to replicate, as far as possible, the public library service providing books and other media for learning and leisure. Library staff work with other prison staff to provide and promote a variety of educational, cultural and leisure activities. The prison library service is a unique and vital opportunity to facilitate participation and encourage a lifestyle of lifelong learning among groups who may previously have encountered various obstacles to this.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform provided €15,000 for the purchase of books for the prison library and also recouped the salaries of the two prison library staff to Laois County Council.

Events and Activities

Laois County Library held a large variety of events and activities in all the Branch Libraries throughout the county in 2007:

Rathdowney Library held a very successful Open Day in March, with a Puppet Show for children in the morning. Poet Jean O'Brien read some of her work in the evening to a large attendance.

Mountrath Library held weekly storytelling sessions and weekly arts and crafts sessions for different age groups. Computer classes for Senior Citizens were held on a weekly basis. An adult book club meets once a month in the Library and a children's book club started in the Autumn of 2007.

Portlaoise Library held arts and crafts sessions, author visits, storytelling and weekly class visits. The highlight of the year was the launch of the new Harry Potter book in July, which was attended by 150 children and the library opened at midnight for all the festivities to begin.

Portarlinton Library held storytelling, arts, and crafts sessions and internet training classes for senior citizens.

Online Services

Laois County Libraries provided online services for library users through the website - www.laois.ie/leisureandculture/libraries, online newspapers, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Health Research and Credo Reference.



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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, Mary Arrigan, 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 your 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 was 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 €35,165.60 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.

Statistics

Membership	7,452	
Issues	182,237	
Internet Sessions	8,821	
Performance Indicators	31/12/06	31/12/07
Public Opening hours: Full Time Libraries	35 hrs/wk	37 hrs/wk
Avg per week part time libraries	9.7 hrs/wk	11.2 hrs/wk
M/ship as % of population	10.3%	11.1%
Items issued per head of Population	Books 2.3 Other Items 0.2	Books 2.4 Other Items 0.3
Internet Access: % of libraries	83%	80%
No. of internet sessions per 1000/population	116	131.5



Senior Citizens Internet and Email course



Portlaoise Library



Portlaoise Library



Economic Development & County Promotion Policy

Economic Development & County Promotion Strategic Policy Committee

Aim: To encourage, facilitate and promote balanced and sustainable development within the County.

Chair: James Deegan, M.C.C.

Members:

Mary Sweeney 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
Kathleen Gorman
William Moylan

Director of Service:

Anna Marie Delaney

Senior Executive Officer:

Ian McCormack

The following document was produced by the Committee and agreed by the Members of Laois County Council in 2007:

- Disposal of Industrial Sites.

Economic Development

Laois County Council is actively involved 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 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 acre 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

The Economic Development Department is actively involved in the promotion of local enterprise.



Portarlington Enterprise Centre

The Portarlington Enterprise Centre opened 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 in June 2006 that a sum of €400,000 had been granted to Portarlington Enterprise Centre Ltd. under Enterprise Ireland's Community Enterprise Centre (CEC) Scheme, 2006. Plans have been lodged with Laois County Council for a new extension (10,000 sq. feet.).



Economic Development & County Promotion Policy

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. feet. Laois County Enterprise Board is the anchor tenant in the new Enterprise Centre. Laois County Council is also committed to progressing the development of Enterprise Centres in other locations throughout the County in 2008.

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 that they require.

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 and for industrial units/sites, 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 a number of strategic locations throughout the County in 2008.

Tourism

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.

Tourism Strategy 2006 – 2010

The five year Tourism Strategy was completed in 2006. The ambitious 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 and 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.

Slieve Bloom Signage Project

The Laois Tourism Officer initiated the Slieve Bloom Signage Project in conjunction with Offaly County Council and secured funding from Failte Ireland for the project.

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.



Economic Development & County Promotion Policy

The Gordon Bennett Route has been signposted and a booklet on the amenities and attractions along the route has been published. The Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run Event took place on the June Bank Holiday weekend.



Launch of the new signposting of the Gordon Bennett Route

Budweiser International Golf Challenge 2007

This challenge took place in May, 2007. The Challenge was a great success with participants from Belgium, Wales, England, Scotland, Sweden and Ireland. The challenge was supported by Budweiser, Laois County Council, Failte Ireland and Laois Tourism. The overall winners were two Laois Men, Mick Lambe and Larry Dunne.



Former Irish soccer international Niall Quinn with Honor Deevy and Deirdre Cole at the Budweiser International Golf Challenge

Events & Festivals

One of the key components of the Tourism Strategy is to promote Laois as a major events centre. Due to its strategic location, the County is the perfect venue for hosting high profile events as it is easily reachable from most parts of Ireland.

Events such as the Electric Picnic in Stradbally have enhanced the county's profile and more events are planned for 2008.

The World Fleadh 2007

The World Fleadh, Celtic and Irish Music Festival, was held in Portlaoise in 2007 and proved to be a resounding success. The event helped to boost the local tourism population and added to the existing lively musical and cultural scene in County Laois. The Festival promoted the County's continued growth as an events destination and created positive national exposure.



Set Dancing Workshop at the World Fleadh



Environment & Water Services Policy

Environment & Water Services Strategic Policy Committee.

Chairperson: John Bonham, M.C.C.

Members

James Daly, M.C.C.
Ray Cribbin, M.C.C.
John Moran, M.C.C.
Geraldine 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: John Daly

A/Senior Engineer

Water Services: Tom O'Carroll

Senior Engineer, Environment: John O'Donoghue

Report on Strategic Policy Committee.

The Environment & Water Services Strategic Policy Committee (S.P.C.) held four meetings during 2007. One special meeting was also held in July to discuss the Proposed Draft Cemetery Bye-Laws. Discussions and presentations included issues such as the South East River Basin District Project, Local Agenda 21 Action Plan for Laois County Council, Water Supplies to Cemeteries, Proposed Waste Framework Directive, Progress Report on the Regional Waste Management Plan, proposed amendment to Policy on Bring Banks and Drinking Water Regulations, 2007. Cemetery Bye-Laws and presentation of Waste Bye-Laws were recommended by the S.P.C. and adopted by the full Council during the year.

Community Initiatives

Clean Up Laois Week

Clean up Laois Week took place from 16th - 20th April. In excess of 9 tonnes of litter was collected from various locations around the County. Laois County Council provided €25,000 to fund this very worthwhile initiative.



Laois County Council Clean-Up 2007

Tidy Towns

26 towns and villages make up the Laois Federation of Tidy Towns and results at both national and local level continue to improve. The annual local competition continues to flourish with judging taking place during July and August. A gala awards night was held in October to celebrate the achievements of all during 2007. Under the Summer Wheelie Bin Initiative, all committees were provided with bins from May to October inclusive and grants totalling €31,000 were paid to tidy towns committees during the year.



Laois Tidy Towns Awards 2007



Environment & Water Services Policy

Grants

Community Grants were awarded to 69 groups throughout the County for various projects to benefit the environment and enhance local amenities. The maximum grant awarded under this scheme is €700. 5 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 and aims to contribute to environmental awareness and sustainable development. The Community Project Fund allocated €1,500 to each elected member of Laois County Council to finance worthwhile projects in their own areas.

In association with the Laois Federation of the I.C.A., Laois County Council arranges the 'Art from Waste' competition for primary schools annually. 20 entries were received and judged in 2007 with presentation of prizes in December.



Art from Waste Awards 2007

Veterinary Services/Dog Control

The Veterinary Inspectors ensured the continuance of the highest standards in the operation of the 12 domestic abattoirs throughout the year and that all relevant legislation was adhered to. In 2007, the Dog Warden continued operations in accordance with the Control of Dogs Act.

Environment Awareness & Education

Schools Programme

The Tidy Primary Schools competition was a great success with 9 Primary Schools receiving litter free status. Winning schools were invited to a special prize giving ceremony in Portlaoise Parish Centre and entertainment on the day was provided by Marvin the Magician. A 'Go Green in the Classroom' Teachers' Seminar was also held in Laois Education Centre and covered Laois County Council's successful Green Schools Programme. Maeve Flynn, County Horticulturalist, also discussed wildlife and gardening in schools. 2007 also saw the number of Awarded Green Schools jump to 23! Congratulations to all involved.

Composting

Laois County Council continued with the promotion of composting during 2007. As well as hosting a compost information stand at the Emo Garden Festival, a special Composting and Wildlife Gardening Seminar was held in Heritage House, Abbeyleix, as part of Heritage Week 2007. Also, householders who purchase compost bins also receive a 10ltr kitchen caddy bin absolutely free!

Cinema Campaign

Another first for Laois County Council was a cinema campaign, which tackled the anti social behaviour of littering. Patrons at 6 cinemas across the Midlands Region were shown the importance of having a litter free county and promoted Laois County Council's free phone litter hotline number 1800 323230. This campaign ran for 10 weeks.

Billboard Campaign

In order to highlight the importance of preventing backyard burning, Laois County Council ran a successful 'Think Green Space, not Fire Place' campaign. This campaign ran for 2 weeks in the lead up to Halloween and proved very successful.



Environment & Water Services Policy



Environment Awards

Numerous groups were honoured at Laois County Council's first joint environment awards evening held in October to acknowledge their input in the Laois Federation of Tidy Towns, the Inter Community Litter Challenge and Portlaoise Against Litter – three anti litter campaigns facilitated by Laois County Council during 2007. Speaking during the Inter Community Litter Challenge Awards section, Environment Awareness Officer, Ann-Marie Kelly acknowledged the work undertaken by the community groups, the Litter Enforcement Officers as well as other staff in the Environment Section who are involved in keeping County Laois litter free. All 22 groups that participated in the 2007 competition were awarded prizes with Spink, Errill and Borris in Ossory being the overall winners in each of their categories (Small Village, Large Village and Town respectively).

Farm Plastic Collection - August (Silage wraps & silage pit covers)

The Waste Management Section successfully organised the collection of farm plastics over a 6 day period at 4 locations in the County in August, 2007. In total, 764 tonnes of Farm Plastic was collected and sent for recycling to facilities in Scotland and Holland. 4 locations were chosen and in total, 944 farmers brought their plastics to the collection points, which were supervised by the Waste Enforcement Officers. The table below summarises the quantities collected.

Collection of farm plastics

	No of Farmers	Tonnes collected
Kyletalesha Landfill site	218	153
Leinster Marts Graiguecullen	63	44
Mountrath Mart	424	338
Ballinakill Mart	239	229

Environmental Protection

The Environmental Protection staff work in partnership with the farming community, industry and other government organisations to improve water quality. Work carried out in 2007 by the Environmental Protection section included farm surveys, site inspections, complaint investigations, water quality monitoring, enforcement of licenses, issuing of notices and enforcement of notices issued. The Council is involved in a number of water quality monitoring programmes, including the Water Framework Directive Programme, the Phosphorous Regulations Programme, the Groundwater Quality Monitoring Programme, the Dangerous Substance programme as well as carrying out Small Streams Risk Surveys and specific sub catchment programmes. Some of these programmes are carried out with the Environmental Protection Agency.

A total of 140 complaints were received in 2007 concerning water, air and noise quality issues. The nature of these complaints varied between noise pollution, air pollution, water pollution and odours. There are still a



Environment & Water Services Policy

number of these complaints open where investigations are continuing or where the council has not yet completed its actions. However, the majority of complaints have been resolved and are closed. While investigating complaints it is necessary from time to time to issue a Notice under Section 12 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act, 1977. In 2007, fifteen such notices were issued. These notices require that the respondent carried out specific action within a specific time period to deal with the cause of the water pollution. Failure to comply with a notice may lead to the Council seeking a prosecution through the courts. One notice under Section 26 of the air Pollution Act 1987 was also issued in 2007. This notice required that action be taken to improve air quality at a specific location. A license under Section 4 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act, 1977 is required where trade or sewage effluents are discharged to surface waters or to groundwater. There are currently eight active licenses in the county, two of which were newly issued in 2007. Each license is monitored by the Environmental Protection section and any breaches of the terms of the license are liable for enforcement action. One license was issued in 2007 under Section 30 of the Air Pollution Act, 1987, for a discharge to air from an asphalt plant.

The Council's Water Laboratory analysed a total of 1,045 samples in 2007 due to activities by the Environmental Protection section. These samples were taken as part of the monitoring programmes as well as in the course of investigating complaints. Further surface water and groundwater samples were taken and analysed by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Water Framework Directive and reported directly to the South Eastern River Basin District.



Example of an unlicensed polluting discharge

Parks and green open spaces

Ongoing repair works continued on the two town parks in Portlaoise. The wooden bridges in the Peoples Park were upgraded to allow for easier access for wheelchair users and disabled persons. Signage outlining the Park Bye-laws was erected in both Parks. Footpaths in River Triogue Park off Green Mill Lane were upgraded from gravel to tarmac. Cleaning of the River Triogue from the Peoples Park to the River Triogue at Green Mill Lane was also carried out with the assistance of the Barrow Drainage Team.

The walkway from the Peoples Park along by Rankins Wood was repaired and the path opened up to all users, linking JFL Avenue directly with the Peoples Park along the River Triogue. It is hoped to develop a River walk and fitness trail along the route from the Peoples Park to the River Triogue Park in 2008.

The Sponsorship of Roundabouts scheme was extended to the roundabouts in Graiguecullen and funds received from sponsors was used to help cover the costs of maintenance of these landscaped roundabouts. Our roundabouts continue to receive favourable mention in the National Tidy Towns competition report. Portlaoise Tidy Towns received assistance in preparation of the flower tubs for the summer season. The town was a blaze of colour over the summer.

Forward Planning Section worked with the Environment Section in relation to National Tree Week with schools, villages and local resident groups availing of trees give out as part of National Tree Week.

Litter Management

Litter is a visible and objectionable kind of environmental degradation that scars our towns, villages and countryside. The blight of litter detracts from our image as a clean and natural environment and it is often the lasting impression for those who visit our County. Its presence devalues our living and working environment, makes it less attractive for leisure, tourism and investment, generates a negative impression of our County and places a significant financial burden on the Council's resources.



Environment & Water Services Policy



Anti Litter Promotion Day 2007

The three full-time Environmental Officers (Litter Wardens), Environment Awareness Officer and administration staff exercise their functions and duties under litter/waste management legislation by way of education, increased awareness and enforcement. In 2007, 502 on-the-spot fines issued while 107 prosecutions were initiated, resulting in 38 successful convictions. In addition, 76 no. warning letters (Section 9 Notices) were issued on private landowners for failing to keep outside their premises clean & litter-free.

Litter Bins

Currently, the Environment Section has a four-year programme (2005-2008) in place for the provision of litter bins. To date, 121 litter bins incorporating cigarette receptacles were purchased and installed at strategic locations in the County. The Environment Section will continue to identify and install the maximum number of bins

P.A.L. (Portlaoise Against Litter)

This Committee was formed in 2003 and continues to be very active in an attempt to eradicate litter in the town of Portlaoise. At the same time, the Committee works to improve the town's rating in the IBAL (Irish Business Against Litter) national anti-litter campaign. The Committee meets regularly and consists of members from various sectors which include

Laois Tourism, Gardaí Síochána, Laois Chamber of Commerce, Vitrers Association, Laois County Council and Portlaoise Tidy Towns.

With the assistance of the Environment Section, the Committee organise an annual litter-league. The Committee were also very active in other anti-litter initiatives during 2007, such as participating in a clean-up of identified litter blackspots during Clean-Up Laois Week and the anti-litter promotion day held in Laois Shopping Centre in May.



PAL (Portlaoise Against Litter) in action

Inter-Community Litter Challenge

This anti-litter competition, between participating towns and villages in the County, has proved very successful since its introduction in 2006. The success of the competition can be further measured by a remarkable increase in the marks allocated to participating towns in the National Tidy Towns Awards. The Environment Section recognises their pro-active role with the communities involved and assist by providing support and anti-litter materials i.e. signage, litter-pickers, etc.

National Litter Pollution Monitoring System

The required number of litter pollution/quantification surveys under the litter pollution monitoring system were carried out by the local Litter Wardens during 2007. This system is an important tool used to monitor



Environment & Water Services Policy

the levels of litter pollution and identify the main causes of pollution nationally.

Trailer-cover Initiative

Roadside litter was identified as a growing problem in the County. Therefore, a quantity of trailer nets were purchased in 2007 and available to customers at the landfill at cost price. The aim of the initiative is to encourage transporters of waste to ensure that their waste is secure and sufficiently covered. In addition, spot-checks were carried out during 2007

in conjunction with members of the Gardaí as well as stricter measures implemented by staff at the landfill.

CCTV Monitoring

The employment of contractors to monitor problematic litter blackspots was pursued in 2007. It is anticipated that the 24 hour monitoring service will prove invaluable in our effort to combat litter/illegal dumping by identifying and subsequently prosecuting offenders.

Performance Indicators

Percentage of River Channel (2006 EPA Report entitled 'River Water Quality in County Laois')

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in consultation with the Local Authorities, operates a surface water quality monitoring programme. The EPA produce a report annually based on the results obtained in this monitoring programme. The latest report is dated June, 2007 and covers the period from 1st January, 2006 to 31st December, 2006. This report contains the following data:

- (a) Unpolluted - 80.2%
- (b) Slightly Polluted - 6.25%
- (c) Moderately Polluted - 6.25%
- (d) Seriously Polluted - 7.3%

Waste Collection

% of Households provided with segregated waste Collection. Not required. As attached explanatory notes suggest that no % required for local authorities where the refuse collection service is privatised.

Percentage of household waste recycled

Percentage of household waste going to Landfill

31/12/06

31/12/07

N/A

N/A

24%

29%

76%

71%



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Recycling Facilities – Position at 31/12/07

Category	No. of Bring Sites	No. of Recycling Centres	Total No. of Facilities	Tonnage of waste collected for recycling per 5,000 of population
Glass	41	1	42	1007.47
Cans	41	1	42	17.22
Textiles	8	1	9	195.74
Batteries	-	1	1	41.42
Oils	-	1	1	8.12
Others				
Cardboard	-	1	1	259.08
Magazines	-	1	1	102.22
Plate Glass	-	1	1	28.44
Metal	-	1	1	284.50
Plastic	-	1	1	69.31
WEEE	-	1	1	182.68
Newspaper	-	1	1	305.07
Wood	-	1	1	2.98
Fluorescent Lamps	-	1	1	-
Hedge Trimmings	-	1	1	163.38
Tyres	-	1	1	1.06
Gas Cylinders	-	1	1	1.06
Paint Tins	-	1	1	3.203
Pesticides	-	1	1	0.056

Recycling Facilities – Position at 31/12/06

Category	No. of Bring Sites	No. of Recycling Centres	Total No. 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



Environment & Water Services Policy

Litter

Litter Prevention & Environmental Enforcement

	31/12/06	31/12/07
Total No. of full-time Litter Wardens	3	3
Total No. of part-time Litter Wardens	2	2
No. of On The Spot Fines issued	570	502
No. of prosecutions taken for non payment of On The Spot fines	169	107
No. of prosecutions secured	21	38

% of areas within the Local Authority that are:

	31/12/06	31/12/07
Unpolluted (i.e. Litter Free)	5%	7.9%
Slightly polluted with litter	41%	73%
Moderately polluted with litter	46%	12.4%
Significantly polluted with litter	8%	6.7%
Grossly polluted with litter	0%	0%

Environmental Complaints & Enforcement

	31/12/06	31/12/07
Total Number of cases subject to complaints concerning environmental pollution	560	325
Number of cases investigated	541	315
Number of enforcement procedures taken.	69	52

% of Schools participating in environmental campaigns

	31/12/06	31/12/07
Primary Schools	58%	82%
Secondary Schools	52%	62%

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.



Laois Civil Defence on duty

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

First Aid:

Provision of first aid and ambulance service.

Rescue Skills:

Urban rescue, open country search for missing persons with Laois having the only K9 H.R.D. search and rescue dog within the local authorities. Water based search and recovery.

Fire-fighting:

Pump and ladder drills, pumping floodwaters and supply water to the Community.

Warden Service and Radiation Monitoring:

Radiation detecting and monitoring.



Environment & Water Services Policy

Welfare Skills:

Provision of hot meals, drinks and psychosocial support.

Radio Communications:

Operation of two independent radio systems U.H.F., V.H.F. and Marine Band Radio. These systems are operated from our specialised Operational Support Unit.

Emergency response

Responding to Major Emergencies.

During 2007 we assisted Laois Hospice, St. Patrick's Day Parade, Stradbally Chernobyl Children Project, Electric Picnic, Oxygen Festival, Durrow Carnival, Search and Recovery operations, Local Garda, Midlands Music Festival, World Fleadh, Budwiser Derby and any civic functions run 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 website at www.laoiscivildefence.org.

Service Indicators - Fire Service

Average time, in minutes, to mobilise Fire Brigades in:

Full Time Stations
Part Time Stations

% of attendances at scenes where:

First attendance is within 10 minutes
First attendance is within 20 minutes
First attendance is after 20 minutes

Fire Prevention

Total number of Fire Safety Certificates received
Total number of Fire Safety Certificates processed

Laois County Fire & Rescue Service

There are 8 fire stations in Laois with 5 Senior Fire Officers, 1 Fitter / Mechanic and 71 retained personnel on call 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. Laois County Fire & Rescue Service responded to 1033 callouts during 2007. Of these callouts, 504 related specifically to fires while the remainder involved road traffic collisions, water pumping/flooding, rescues & spillages. The main causes of fires attended by brigades include chimneys/soot/flues/hot ashes, rubbish burning, cooking and heating and electrical equipment. 57 callouts were to incidents caused maliciously.

Staff also processed 135 applications for Fire Safety Certificates in 2007.



31/12/06

31/12/07

N/A
4.9 mins

N/A
5.1 mins

37.10%
47.36%
15.54%

31.87%
52.14%
15.99%

184
180

135
150



Environment & Water Services Policy

Water Services



Portlaoise Main Drainage Scheme

The Water Services functions are divided into four sections;

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

Water Services also provides support to the Planning Department and consults with the public on planning issues relating to water and wastewater services.

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 approx 19,700 properties throughout the county. The cost of the provision of water for 2007 was €3m.

Approximately 14,900 properties in the County are connected to the public waste water system and the cost of maintaining same in 2007 was €2.9m.

The management of operations and maintenance is carried out by the three Area Offices in the County, each staffed with technical, caretaking and administrative staff.

EPA Waste Water Discharge Licence.

The Waste Water Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations, 2007 (S.I. No. 684 of 2007) require the Environmental Protection Agency to authorise all local authority waste water discharges. The purpose is to reduce and prevent the pollution of waters and follows on from the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. In December, 2007, Laois County Council was the first to make an application to the EPA for a Waste Water Discharge Licence. This was for the Portlaoise collection system and treatment plant. The fee of €30,000 was paid as required under these regulations.

Capital Investment Programme

Portarlington Water Supply Scheme

An advance contract was completed to supply a significant amount of water to Portarlington from a new source at the La Bergerie well field. The detailed design of the main scheme was completed in 2007 following tests to assess the water quality and yield from the three proposed well fields.

Portlaoise & Mountmellick Water Supply Improvement Scheme

The detailed design for this scheme was progressed in 2007. An advance contract involving the construction of 7km of new watermain and production well drilling was commenced to supply a significant amount of water to Mountmellick from a new well source at Eyne.

Capital Project Office

Following Department approval and establishment of the Water Services Capital Projects Office, the Project Office team has expanded to three engineers and one administrative staff member. The Capital Projects Office is responsible for delivering the major Water and Wastewater schemes that the DEHLG has approved under the Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009.



Environment & Water Services Policy

Water Services Investment Programme

	W/S	Est.Cost €
Schemes at Construction		
Portarlington Water Supply Scheme	W	5,330,000
Portlaoise Sewerage Scheme (incorporating Laois Sludge Management)	S	40,880,000
Schemes to start 2007		
Mountmellick Sewerage Scheme Phase 1	S	2,600,000
Schemes to start 2008		
Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme (Abbeyleix, Rathdowney, Mountrath, Stradbally, Durrow, Clonaslee)	S	39,000,000
Portlaoise Stage 2 and Mountmellick Water Supply Schemes	W	15,000,000
Schemes to Start 2009		
Portarlington/Emo/ Ballybrittas/ Killenard Sewerage Scheme	S	11,935,000
Rural Towns & Villages Initiative		
Mountmellick Water Supply Scheme*	W	0
*Previously listed with Portlaoise Stage 2 Water Supply Scheme above		
Schemes to Advance through Planning		
Durrow Water Supply Improvement Scheme	W	2,000,000
Laois Villages Sewerage Scheme Feasibility Study	S	210,000
Mountmellick Sewerage Scheme Phase 2	S	12,000,000
Mountrath Water Supply Scheme	W	2,750,000
Water Conservation Allocation		2,200,000
Asset Management Study		60,000
Programme Total		€133,965,000



Environment & Water Services Policy



Portlaoise Main Drainage Scheme

Portlaoise Main Drainage Network

Murphy International Ltd. progressed the construction of the Sewerage Improvement Works (Network) contract with over 17km of new sewers constructed by the end of 2007. Three new pumping stations have also been constructed.



Portlaoise Main Drainage Scheme

Portlaoise Main Drainage DBO

The Design-Build-Operate (DBO) contract for construction of the Portlaoise Waste Water Treatment Plant commenced in January, 2007. The

contractor, EarthTech-Bowen Construction Consortium, completed most of the civil works at the Plant, including the realignment of Ridge Road access junction, by the end of 2007.

Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme

The contract documents for the DBO contract were reviewed by Laois County Council and submitted to the Department for approval to proceed to tender. All Part VIII planning procedures for the new treatment plants were completed in 2007. The contract documents for the Network contract were updated in 2007 to incorporate the Minister's directive on revised land zonings.

Laois Grouped Villages Sewerage Scheme

The final Feasibility Study Report (including Timahoe) for the Laois Grouped Villages Sewerage Scheme was completed in October, 2007, and submitted to the Department in November, 2007. Laois County Council is currently awaiting Department approval to proceed with this scheme.

Mountmellick Sewerage Extension

A review of the scope of the Mountmellick Sewerage Extension project was carried out in 2007. The revised scope focuses on refurbishment and performance improvements to the existing pumping stations and wastewater treatment plant. Following Department approval, Detailed Designs and Contract Documents for the Scheme were completed in 2007. The Mechanical/Electrical aspect of the scheme was tendered in December, 2007.

Portarlington Emo/Ballybrittas/Killenard Sewerage Scheme

Following the submission of a revised Brief to the Department, approval was obtained for the inclusion of Emo, Ballybrittas and Killenard in the Portarlington Sewerage Scheme. The new Brief for the appointment of consultants to the scheme was completed, submitted and approved by the Department in 2007. Prequalification advertisements were then placed and consultants submissions were received. Shortlisting of consultants was completed in October, 2007.



Environment & Water Services Policy

Graiguecullen Water Supply Scheme

A consultancy brief was prepared and a hydrogeology consultancy firm (Eugene Daly Associates) was appointed in July, 2007, to identify possible water source(s) and to prepare exploration drilling tender documents. The draft drilling site selection report was obtained and reviewed by Laois County Council in August, 2007, identifying candidate areas for investigation both in the lowland Barrow Valley and upland Castlecomer plateau areas. Tendering for the exploration drilling is set to commence early 2008.

Assessment of Needs 2007-2014

In 2006, an Assessment of Needs report was submitted for inclusion on the Department's 2007-2009 Water Services Investment Programme (WSIP). The report outlined twelve priority water and wastewater projects to be implemented over the course of the WSIP period. In September, 2007, the Department formally published the new WSIP which included Portarlinton Sewerage Scheme and Mountmellick Sewerage Scheme Phase 2.

Rural Water Programme

The Council's Rural Water Programme includes:

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

Group Water Schemes

A group water scheme provides a private water supply to 2 or more houses by means of a common or shared source of supply and distribution system.

The Council assists groups by working in partnership with them and by:

- Providing advice and guidance on the formation and operation of group schemes
- Providing technical advice on source and supply issues, distribution

- networks, water quality and treatment, scheme design etc.
- Enabling groups to take a water supply from public water mains where this is feasible
- Providing advice and assistance on tender procurement and evaluation
- Grant aiding group schemes up to 85% of the approved cost, subject to a limit of €6,475 per house
- Supervision of construction standards
- Providing an annual subsidy towards the operation and maintenance costs incurred on the scheme by the group.

Small Public Water and Sewerage Schemes

A small public water and/or sewerage scheme consists of capital works on the improvement and/or extension of public water and/or sewerage schemes where the cost of the works does not exceed €1m. The Council funds 25% of the cost of such projects and it recoups the remaining 75% from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, within the confines of an annual allocation of capital funding.

Grants for Individual Well Water Installations

The objective of this grant scheme is to assist households 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 for domestic purposes

Where the supply of water concerned is a supply other than from a public or group scheme and the house concerned is more than 7 years old.



Environment & Water Services Policy

Rural Water Programme 2007

Capital Allocation

DBO Bundle (For South Leinster Bundle Contract)	532,000
DBO Advance Works	735,000
Connecting Schemes to Public Main	30,000
Takeover of Group Schemes	500,000
New & Upgrading Proposals	214,000
Small Public Water & Sewerage Schemes	750,000

Total **€2,761,000**

Expenditure and Recoupment

	Expenditure	Recoupment
DBO Advance Works	178,523	179,284
Connecting Schemes to Public Main	17,880	17,880
Takeover Upgrades	1,329,070	1,835,095
New and Upgrading Schemes	201,307	397,806.94
Small Public Water & Sewerage Schemes	807,788	750,000

Total **€2,534,568** **€3,180,065**

Subsidy

Total subsidy grants paid to groups towards operation and maintenance costs of scheme: **€228,128.52**

Well Grants

Total amount paid in individual well grants: **€109,584.00**

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

Laois County Council in association with Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Wicklow and Kildare County Councils have formed the South Leinster DBO Bundle for the provision and operation of water treatment facilities for group schemes and small public schemes. This bundle now comprises of 38 schemes from these counties, 4 of which are in Laois. The 38 schemes serve 4,174 houses. The schemes in Laois are:

Scheme	No. of Houses
Ballacolla GWS	504
Ballypickas GWS	84
Donaghmore GWS	39
The Swan P.S.	<u>371</u>
Total:	998

The planning of this project, and the public procurement process associated with it, was completed by May, 2006, under the direction of T.J. O'Connor & Associates, Consulting Engineers, and the South Leinster DBO Bundle Steering Committee.



Environment & Water Services Policy

The successful contractor is E.P.S. Ltd., Mallow, Co. Cork, and the design phase has been undertaken by them. Construction phase of the first batch of schemes, which includes Ballacolla and The Swan, is almost completed and construction of the batch which includes Ballypickas and Donaghmore is scheduled to commence early in 2008.

Carlow County Council is the lead authority in the Bundle and capital funding for the construction of the water treatment element of the project as a whole is being provided to that authority. The Water Treatment element for group schemes is 100% grant aided. The civil works element of the DBO is 85% grant aided by the Council and 15% contribution by the group.

Advance Works and Water Conservation Measures in Relation to Schemes in DBO Bundle

The following schemes were grant aided in 2007

Scheme	No. Houses	Grant
Ballacolla Advance Works	504	63,999
Ballacolla Network Upgrade Ph. 2		75,414
Ballypickas Advance Works.	84	36,040
Killeaney Amalgamation/Ballacolla	15	3,070
Total	603	€178,523

Connect Quality Deficient Private Schemes to Public Main

In 2007, grant aid of €17,880 was issued to Raheen Group Water Scheme, which serves 29 houses.

Takeover of Group Water Schemes

Pre-takeover upgrades of the following group schemes were funded in 2007.

Scheme	No. of Houses	Grant
Ratheniska	198	203,259
Ralish	10	482
Slatt/Wolfhill	111	1,100,980
Reary	6	1,082
Attanagh	44	23,267
Total	369	€1,329,070

The Council formally approved of the taking-in-charge of the Killenard group water scheme in 2007.

New Group Schemes and Upgrade of Existing Schemes

The following schemes were grant aided in 2007

New Schemes

Scheme	No. of Houses	Grant
Crannagh/Tullamoy	45	21,316
Kyletalesha	28	6,969
Blackhill/Ballytarsna	15	2,826
Ballycleary	65	373
Total	153	€31,484

Upgrade of Existing Schemes

Scheme	No. of Houses	Grant
Heath	385	52,286
Ballacolla Network Phase 1	504	117,537
Total	889	€169,823

Total for New Schemes and Upgrades of Existing Schemes **€201,307**

Total number of houses benefiting 1042



Environment & Water Services Policy

Small Water & Sewerage Schemes

Capital expenditure incurred on the following projects in 2007:

Scheme	Expenditure €
Clonin Hill Water Source	32,868
Mountrath/Castletown W.S.	11,720
Ballyroan W.S. Augmentation	61,097
Mountmellick WWTP – Security fencing	30,000
Gallow's Hill - New Reservoir	600
Ballinakill WWTP - Desludging Tank	10,465
Graiguecullen WS - Booster Pump	7,377
Vicarstown WS - Lay main across canal	12,150
Abbeyleix WWTP - Electrical Upgrade	2,360
Durrow WWTP - Electrical and pumps upgrade	3,593
Ballinakill WWTP - Electrical upgrade	1,839
Mountrath WWTP - Electrical upgrade	1,839
Rathdowney WWTP - Electrical upgrade	1,839
Mountmellick WWTP - Security fencing	39,000
Luggacurren WS - Upgrade and reserve	99,961
Kyle Water Source – refurbishment	4,882
Meelick Water Main – Upsize 1000 meters	110,631
Modubeigh WS - Upgrade and reserve	141,306
Mountmellick WS - Upsize main at Manor Lane	147,758
Mountmellick WWTP - Upgrade equipment at plant	57,761
Ballylinan WS - New main, flow meter.	20,506
Mountmellick W.S. - Derryguile	8,233
Total	€807,788

Subsidy Towards Operation and Maintenance Costs on Private Group Water Schemes

Subsidy grants towards operation and maintenance costs were paid to the following group schemes in 2007

Scheme	No. of Houses	Subsidy €
Garrinaggert No. 2	3	288
Garryhedder	2	203
Barrowhouse	68	6,907
Graiguehahown	6	610
The Heath	385	39,108
Ralish	10	458
Clonkeen	57	1,607
Knockahonagh	3	305
Knockardgur	2	203
Attanagh	44	4,876
Ironmills	2	203
Ballypickas	84	8,736
Killenard (2005, 2006)	325	20,669
Donaghmore	39	3,462
Cullahill	91	9,447
Killeaney (2004, 2006)	15	4,571
Errill	240	16,788
Moyadd	2	203
Ballacolla (2005, 2006)	504	102,393
Rahanavannagh	2	203
Ballybuggy	6	313
The Island	8	406
Aughmacart (2005, 2006)	5	1,016
Raheen (2002, 2006)	29	5,153
Total	1,932	€228,128



Environment & Water Services Policy

Water Quality in Group Schemes

In 2007, priority in the Rural Water Programme continued to be placed on bringing water quality in existing privately sourced group schemes to the standard required by the European Communities (Drinking Water) Regulations. This objective is being approached through:

Participation of schemes in the South Leinster (DBO) Bundle for the provision of water treatment.

Connection of privately sourced schemes to the public main where feasible.

Takeover of scheme by Council where group agrees.

Capital funding for upgrade of schemes which have occasional quality problems.

Grant aiding the installation of ultra violet water treatment appliances on small group water schemes that have quality problems.

Monitoring Water Quality in Group Schemes

In addition to its statutory functions with regard to the monitoring of drinking water supplies, as provided for in the European Communities (Drinking Water) regulations 2000, the Council's Laboratory also conducted its own Management Monitoring of group water schemes during 2007. The monitoring programme undertaken exceeded the Requirements of the Regulations.

Grants for Individual Well Water Installations

Number of grants paid in 2007:	61
Value of grants paid:	€109,584

Group Water Schemes in County

Position at 31/12/07

Schemes with public sources	68
Schemes with private sources	41
New schemes under construction	0
New schemes at advanced planning stage	3
New schemes at preliminary stage	4
Group Sewerage Proposals	3
Group Schemes Taken in charge	36
Total	155

Rural Water Monitoring Committee

The Rural Water Monitoring Committee consists of nominees of Laois County Council and Rural Organisations. It 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 provisions of supplies to rural and village households.

Meetings of this committee were held on 11th April, 28th June and 11th October, 2007.

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 2006, overall compliance by Laois with the drinking water standards in public water supplies was in line with the national average. In general, compliance with the majority of indicator parameters was satisfactory.

*	Micro	Chemical	Indicator
Overall	96.8%	98.2%	97.0%
PWS	98.5%	99.1%	98.3%
PuGWS	100%	95.9%	97.3%
PrGWS	93.5%	94.7%	94.1%
SPS	89.1%	100%	89.3%

* Source EPA: *The Provision and Quality of Drinking Water in Ireland - A Report for the Years 2006-07*

Water Conservation

In accordance with the Water Pricing Policy Framework document, the programme of installing water meters was substantially complete in 2007. The leak detection team, in partnership with the area staff, identified and repaired leaks with a total estimated volume equivalent to 2,269,000 litres/day. An example of the success of the process is Portlaoise, where



Environment & Water Services Policy

water consumption remains at 2005 levels, despite a significant increase in the number of housing developments.

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.

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 Bye-Laws

Laois County Council Cemetery Bye Laws were adopted by the Members of the Council on 24th September, 2007, and became operative on 1st November, 2007. The Bye-Laws provide for the regulation of Cemeteries in the County of Laois and apply to all Cemeteries under the control or in the ownership of Laois County Council.

Capital Programme

The capital works programme was completed in 2007. Works were carried out in Mountmellick, Sleaty, Killeshin, Annatrim and Borris-in-Ossory cemeteries at a total cost of €272,000.

The extension to Mountmellick cemetery was opened and additional works were carried out as funds became available under Disability Funding. The car park was redesigned and new footpaths and walls were built. The entrance was rebuilt and drainage works were carried out. Some of the works were funded by the disability funding.

The process of providing an extension to Rosenallis cemetery was commenced in 2007, with the completion of the Part 8 process and

agreement to acquire the adjoining site.

The construction of a public toilet in Portlaoise cemetery commenced in 2007 and was funded jointly by the Council and the local committee.

Approval has been granted by the Council for the raising of a loan to facilitate a further programme of capital works for cemeteries throughout the County. The programme will commence during 2008 with planned works at Portlaoise, Emo, Stradbally, Ballyadams and Ballylinan.

Cemetery Grants

Grant assistance is given to voluntary cemetery committees and community groups for the maintenance of cemeteries. A total of 103 grant applications were received in 2007 and €80,000 was paid out. Valuable work is being carried out by these voluntary committees in the upkeep of local cemeteries.

Cemeteries are categorized and grants paid out on the following basis:

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

Public Conveniences

Major refurbishment work costing €35,755, was carried out at Stradbally Public Toilet, and was part funded under the disability funding. Works under disability funding were also carried out at Portlaoise Public Toilet.

Dangerous Structures and Places

The Council is empowered to deal with structures or places which pose a danger to the public or which pose or are likely to pose danger to any person or property. A Notice may be served on the owner of such place/structure requiring works to be carried out. If necessary, the Council can also carry out the works and recoup the costs.



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Chair Michael Rice, M.C.C.

Members Sectoral Interests

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

Director of Services: Gerry Gibson
 Senior Engineer – Roads: Michael O’Hora
 Senior Planner: Peter Dolan
 Senior Executive Officer: Kieran Kehoe (Martin Daly)

Report on Strategic Policy Committee

There were six meetings of this committee in 2007. The following policies were agreed and referred to the Corporate Policy Group for consideration prior to going before the full Council.

- Signage of Housing Estates
- Vulnerable Road Users
- Restoration & Appropriate After Use of Quarries
- Hedgerows

Planning Department

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

The Planning Department can be broken down into 3 separate areas

- (i) Development Control
- (ii) Planning Enforcement
- (iii) Forward Planning.

(i) Development Control

The number of planning applications received in 2007 was 2,409. However, it should be noted that 703 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 2007 and the comparative figures for 2006.

	2006	2007
Number of valid applications received	1,741	1,708
Number of decisions made	1,488	1,822
Number of applications granted	1,225	1,481
Number of applications refused	263	341

2007 Performance

Invalid applications returned to applicant 29.18%.
 Referrals to Area Offices 21 working days.

Validation of Planning Applications

There were 2,411 planning applications validated in 2007 of which 1,708 were valid and 703 were invalid. While 29% of the planning applications were invalid, the main reasons were for public notices being out of date, agents name omitted from maps/drawings and distances not shown on site layouts.

Customer Service Initiatives

2007 saw the continuation of the scanning of planning applications as they are received by the Planning Authority. Throughout 2007 the public were able to access online all planning applications within three weeks of the Planning Authority receiving them.



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Works commenced on the new customer service area during 2007. It was opened to the public in early 2008.

The Planning website continues to be a very popular attraction with over 100,000 hits last year.

(ii) Forward Planning

Introduction

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, is intended to provide a strategic framework and policy context within which the Local Authority makes its planning decisions.

In May, 2007, Mountmellick Local Area Plan was adopted by Laois County Council and in September, 2007, Portarlington and Graiguecullen Local Area Plans were adopted by Laois County Council.

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.

The following Village and Town Plans were endorsed by the Area Councillors throughout 2007 - Killenard, Ballacolla, Borris in Ossory, Errill, Ballylynan, Ballybrittas, Emo, Vicarstown, Ballyroan, Rathdowney, Abbeyleix, Durrow, Clough, Newtown Doonane and Killeshin. The remaining villages and towns in the County Development Plan will be endorsed by mid 2008.

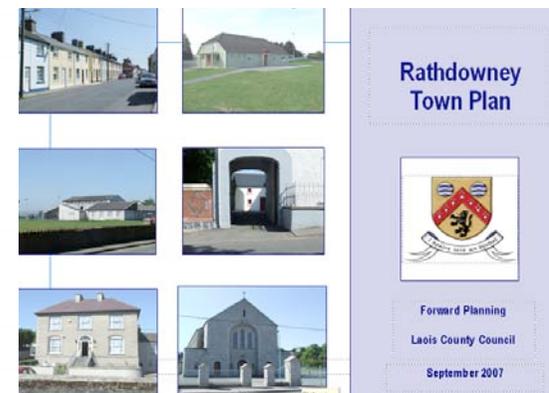
Urban Renewal Scheme

During the year the Forward Planning Section coordinated the annual programme for funding submission to the Department of the Environment.

Following Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government approval, works 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, Portarlington and Rathdowney.



Conservation Grant Scheme 2007

The Conservation Grant Scheme is operated annually. In 2007, €122,000 was allocated to 19 successful applicants. The scheme is very important in promoting the conservation of the protected structures in the County and continues to be implemented by Laois County Council.

Shop Front Scheme 2007

The grant was made available again in 2007. This grant is allocated to assist in the carrying out of works to enhance shop fronts.



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National Tree Week 2007

The Tree Council of Ireland and sponsors Coillte and O2 allocate a number of sapling trees each year. Laois County Council makes the trees available 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 2007

The following Strategic Policy Papers were prepared in 2007:

Restoration and Appropriate After Use of Quarries



Appropriate use of Quarries

Draft Policy Document on the Restoration and Appropriate use of Quarries

This policy document should act as a guide to advise operators of appropriate afteruses for quarries and it should be noted that restoration and other uses listed in the document may not be suitable for every site. Operators should consult with Laois County Council and other consultees such as the EPA to determine the most suitable use of the site after the cessation of quarrying activities.

Signage in Estates



Signage of Housing estates is often overlooked in the planning process but is critical to the identification of new development, particularly large scale residential developments. In this regard, a Policy for the signage of housing estates, both internal and external, was adopted by Laois County Council. This policy document addresses the design, type and location of such signage.

(iii) Planning Enforcement

Introduction

The Planning Authority, in accordance with the statutory requirements under the Planning and Development Acts, 2000 - 2006, will seek to ensure compliance with planning permission conditions and prevent unauthorized 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 granted.



Planning & Transportation Policy

Functions

The Planning Authority will follow up on all written complaints of unauthorized 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 unauthorized 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. 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 unauthorized 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.

Examples:

Electric Picnic held in Stradbally, Co. Laois in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007.
Emo International Garden Festival 2007.

Notice of Registration of Quarries

Under Section 261 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, all Quarries which did not have the benefit of Planning Permission or which received Planning Permission more than five years prior to the operation of Section 261, were registered with the Planning Authority. Laois County Council received 78 applications for registration, of which 60 quarries were registered as operating quarries. The Council is currently monitoring compliance with quarries on which conditions were imposed under Section 261.

Planning and Building Control - Service Indicators

Planning Applications – Decision making

Individual Houses

	31/12/06	31/12/07
Number of applications decided	628	705
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	348 (55%)	408 (58%)
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	279	295
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



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Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	78	75
% of grants	73%	70%
% of refusals	27%	30%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	61%	84%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	39%	16%

New Housing Development

	31/12/06	31/12/07
Number of applications decided	78	91
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	41 (53%)	47 (52%)
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	37	42
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	2
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	83	79
% of grants	54%	45%
% of refusals	46%	55%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	70%	87%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	30%	13%

Other: Not Requiring EIA

	31/12/06	31/12/07
Number of applications decided	776	1020
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	602 (78%)	839 (82%)
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	172	180
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	0
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	78	75
% of grants	93%	92%
% of refusals	7%	7.6%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	33%	48%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	67%	52%



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Other: Requiring EIA

	31/12/06	31/12/07
Number of applications decided	6	6
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	2 (33%)	1 (17%)
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	4	4
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	95
% of grants	83%	83%
% of refusals	17%	17%
% 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

	31/12/06	31/12/07
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were investigated	174	167
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were dismissed	40	-
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were resolved through negotiations (58 - 2007 files & 94 from other years)	16	152
Number of enforcement procedures taken through warning letters	106	82
Number of enforcement procedures taken enforcement notices	30	20
Number of prosecutions	0	0

Opening Hours and Consultations

	31/12/06	31/12/07
Average number of opening hours per week	32.5	32.5
Number of pre-planning consultation meetings held	1236	993
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)	10 (working days)
Buildings inspected as a % of new buildings notified to the Local Authority	12.39%	12.25%



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Roads

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

Length of Roads by Classification

Motorway	23.4km
National Primary	59.6km
National Secondary	79.7km
Regional Roads	317.9 km
County/Other Main Roads	1,718km
TOTAL	2,198.6 km

2007 Road Grant Allocations

In 2007, Laois County Council received a total allocation of €58.2m for National & Non-National roads in the county. Of this, €12.7m was available for expenditure on Regional and Local Roads.

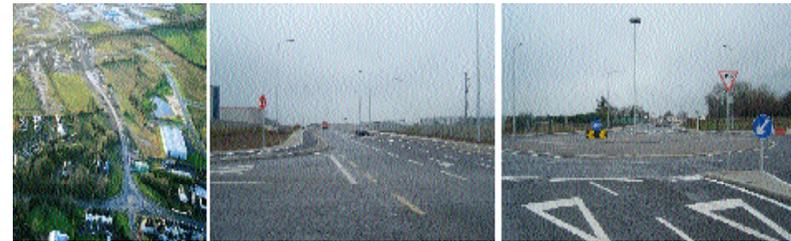
Specific Improvement Schemes

Laois County Council received funding from the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government for the following schemes in 2007:

Kilmullen Bridge - €100,000

In December 2005, An Bord Pleanála held an oral hearing in respect of a draft compulsory purchase order for this scheme. The scheme was approved in 2006 and the allocation went towards a property purchased in 2006. Subject to funding and completion of contract documents / tender award and the finalisation of a bridge agreement with Iarnród Éireann, it is anticipated that this scheme will be completed in June, 2009. The scheme involves the realignment of the R420 Portarlinton to Monasterevin Road and includes a bridge over the main railway line to Dublin.

Portlaoise Western Circular Clonminam Link – €3,500,000



Construction was completed in November 2007 on the Portlaoise Western Circular Clonminam Link Scheme. This scheme included the construction of 0.83 kilometres of a single carriage roadway, together with a 25 metre skew bridge spanning the main Dublin/Cork railway line. Cost of construction was €5.5m and works took 13 months to complete. The entire section of the Portlaoise Western Circular Route from the Abbeyleix Road (R922) to the Mounmellick Road (N80) is now open to traffic. This orbital route will be classified as a Regional Route – route number R941 and advance directional signage is to be approved by the DoT Regional and Local Roads Section.

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 2007, CLÁR funded 100% of the cost of Flashing Amber Safety Lights at all primary schools in CLÁR areas that do not already have such lights. €7,000 is the limit 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. In 2007 Laois County Council erected the remainder of School Flashing Lights under the CLÁR Programme.



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Road Safety Remedial Measures

In 2007, Laois County Council received €129,250 to carry out twelve Road Safety Remedial Measure Schemes at various locations throughout the County on Non-National Road Schemes. These schemes involved the re-alignment of junctions, the provision of lining, road markings and signs to improve road safety.

Road Safety

Laois County Council and An Garda Síochána reconvened a joint committee on Road Safety in 2006. The committee meets every 6 weeks. The aim of the committee is to reduce the number and severity of Road Traffic Accidents in Laois in line with the Road Safety Authority's Strategy for Road Safety 2007 to 2011. The committee sets out to achieve this aim by actively promoting and implementing safety on our roads through Education, Engineering and Enforcement with the participation of all stakeholders. In 2008, the Committee will draw up a Road Safety Strategy for Laois.

Maintenance of National Roads

Two pavement overlay schemes on National Primary Roads were completed in 2007. An allocation of €800,000 was received for pavement overlay of two sections of the N7 totalling approximately 1.6km in length between Derrin Cross and Mountrath. An allocation of €850,000 was received for pavement overlay works of approximately 1.8km of the N8 between Abbeyleix and Durrow.

An allocation of €350,000 was received for pavement overlay of approximately 1km of the N78 National Secondary Road through Ballylynan. This work was completed in 2007.

Maintenance of Non-National Roads

In line with previous years, Laois County Council carried out maintenance works on Regional and Local Roads in the County. These works include, 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 2007, 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 150km were surface dressed in 2007.



Development Charge Funded Schemes

A number of schemes funded through Development Charges were progressed in 2007.

Killenard Road Improvement

The detailed design of the scheme and the tendering process for contractors to undertake this work was completed in 2007. €800,000 has been allocated to this scheme. Work has begun on site and is expected to be completed in 2008.

Crossneen Bends in Graiguecullen

Consultants were appointed and detailed designs for the scheme were completed in 2007. Contractors have been appointed and work is expected to be completed in 2008. €800,000 has been allocated for this work.



Planning & Transportation Policy

Portlaoise Northern Orbital Route

Work commenced in 2007 on ground investigations and topographical surveys along the route. Detailed design of this scheme will be completed in 2008 and a draft CPO will be published. An allocation of €350,000 has been allocated for the design phase of this scheme.

Portlaoise Southern Circular Route

The Part 8 process was completed and approved by Laois County Council. The scheme will be developed by private developers within the context of planning permissions granted along the route of the scheme.

Borris Road Realignment

Part 8 approval was obtained for this scheme in 2007. Consultants will be appointed in early 2008 to undertake the detailed design, contract documents and preparation of CPO. Tenders will be sought and construction is expected to start in 2009 and completion is expected in 2010.

Rathdowney Village Traffic Improvements

Consultants were appointed in 2007 to prepare Part 8 documentation and Part 8 was approved in early 2008. Detailed design is now underway and construction is expected to commence in May/June 2008.

R435 Johnstown Road

Consultants were appointed to prepare Part 8 documentation. A Part 8 process will be brought forward in 2008.

Stradbally By-pass.

A Part 8 process was undertaken in 2007 for Stage 2 of the scheme in early 2008, providing for developer delivery of the road as land along the route is developed. Part 8 approval is now in place for the entire By-pass route.

Other Schemes

A number of other Part 8's have been brought forward in areas where road objectives in towns are affected by proposed developments viz.:

- Mountrath Orbital (Portlaoise Road to Abbeyleix Road);
- Durrow Southern Relief Road;
- Abbeyleix Inner Relief Road – Rathmoyle Section.

Local Improvement Schemes

An allocation of €708,363 was received from the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government in 2007 in respect of the above and 23 projects were completed. A further sum of €53,830 was received from the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs for works to be carried out under this Scheme in the CLÁR areas.

Community Involvement in Roadworks Scheme

This scheme continued in 2007 and a total of 10 projects were successfully undertaken in conjunction with local communities.

Service Indicators – Roads	2006	2007
Local and Regional roads surface dressed per annum (square metres)	633,445	691,425
Percentage of Local and Regional roads surface dressed per annum	6.3%	6.88%

This percentage figure represents an increase of 0.58% over the figure for 2006 or an increase of 9.15% of area of surface dressing. This can be accounted for by a 19.04% increase in expenditure.

This increase in expenditure is almost entirely attributable to increased costs in Health & Safety.



Laois County Development Board

Membership of the Board

Local Government

Mr. James Deegan, MCC Laois County Council - Chairperson Laois County Development Board
Mr. Peter Carey, County Manager
Mr. Michael Rice, MCC, Laois County Council
Mr. John Bonham, MCC, Laois County Council
Mr. Brian Stanley, MCC, Laois County Council
Mr. John Moran, MCC, Laois County Council
Mr. Rotimi Adebari, Portlaoise 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 Development Association
Ms. Diane Burke, Portlaoise Community Action Project
Ms. Fionn Bardon, Laois County Childcare Committee

State Agencies

Ms. Mary Delaney, 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. Jim Buckley, Dept. Social & Family Affairs
Mr. Seamus Murray, Dept. Education & Science
Chief Supt. D. Sheahan, Garda Siochana.
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
Vacant, Community Forum

Director of Community & Enterprise: Declan Byrne

Laois County Development Board was saddened by the sudden death of one of their Board Members – Mr. Eric Lewis – who passed away on 28th September, 2007. Mr. Lewis had been a member of the Board since its formation. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

During 2007, 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:

- BLOCK project - Ms. Diane Burke
- Forward Planning - Mr. Peter Dolan & Ms. Angela McEvoy,
- Opportunities for Co. Laois under NDP - Mr. Gerry Finn, BMW Assembly
- Children and Young Persons - Mr. Bernard McDonald, Office of the Ombudsman for Children.
- Development Contribution Scheme - Mr Kieran Keogh, S.E.O. (Planning)
- Local Agenda 21 Action Plan - Ms. Ann-Marie Kelly, Environment Awareness Officer
- Midland Regional Drugs Task Force - Ms. Antoinette Kinsella, Co-ordinator MRTDF
- Challenges in a changing economic environment. - Mr. Jim Power, Chief Economist, Friends First.
- Teenspace. National Recreation Policy for Young People - Mr. Joe Gavin, Department of Health and Children
- Third level opportunities for Laois - Dr. Rory Nevin, President, Carlow ITC



Laois County Development Board

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.

Laois Community & Enterprise Development Limited (Cohesion)

Work continued on the development of a new unified structure for the Rural Development Programme (LEADER) and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, which will deliver all rural development and social inclusion programmes in the County. In 2007, the company was established and the Board of Directors will be selected early in 2008. The Board will be comprised of representatives from Laois County Council, statutory agencies, social partners and the community and voluntary sector. The new structure will be developed with the assistance of funding received from the Department. A Plan for the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme in the new areas was drafted in 2007 and consultation with local communities will take place in 2008.

Social Capital Projects

Application was made for funding for five social capital projects during the year, all of which were successful.

- Development of Ballycullenbeg Community Centre, Mountmellick and adjacent grounds.
- Development of Green Area at Doonane, Crettyard.
- Development of Youth Facilities at Portarlinton Community Centre
- Provision of a dedicated youth facility at Camross Community Centre.
- Development of Linear Walk, Portlaoise.

These projects are being carried out in association with local and voluntary groups in each area. Work commenced on all of the projects in 2007 and will be completed in early 2008.

Other Funding Received

Funding was received in 2007 for research into the barriers to labour market access by lone parents. This funding was sourced from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform under the Lone Parents Initiative and with the support of NDP funding. The research highlighted the factors which made it more difficult for lone parents to access employment.

Social Inclusion Measures Working Group (SIM)

The SIM group is responsible for developing cohesion in the delivery of services to socially excluded groups. In 2007, Laois County Council, with the support of the SIM Group, began the implementation of the Local Anti Poverty Strategy for County Laois. This group also developed a Traveller Interagency Strategy in the county, which is currently being implemented. Other issues examined by the SIM Group in 2007 include substance abuse, childcare and lone parents.

A Networking Event on the theme of young people and exclusion was held in the Heritage Hotel, Portlaoise. Fr. Peter McVerry was the key note speaker and other presenters included Ms. Aoibheann O'Sullivan, Visiting Teacher for Travellers and Mr. Tony O'Riordan of Midlands SIMON. Presentations were also made by young people from Portarlinton on the theme of youth facilities in Laois.

Lone Parents Network

A lone parents network was established in the county including groups in Rathdowney, Stradbally, Portlaoise and Portarlinton. This is the only such network now operating in Laois. Under the auspices of the network, a democracy training workshop was held which was very well received by those participating.

Supports for Ethnic Minorities

The Community and Enterprise section continued to support Laois Ethnic Minority Support group. Supports in 2007 included the delivery of capacity building and committee skills training to the members and ongoing administrative supports for the group.



Laois County Development Board

Funding was also sourced from Westmeath Employment pact for the delivery of community interpretation training in Polish/English by Dublin City University to two members of the immigrant community who will deliver community interpretation on a voluntary basis on the completion of their training.

Laois County Development Board was also a partner in the FUSION project, which seeks to provide training and integration supports for migrant workers in the county. This project is funded by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the other partners are Portlaoise Community Action Project (PCAP), Mountmellick Development Association Social Inclusion (MDASI) and Laois VEC.

Junior Achievement Ireland

With the assistance of the Community and Enterprise Section, Junior Achievement is a worldwide organisation working with leading business organizations and agencies to create a culture of enterprise within the education system. Programmes begin at primary school level, teaching children how they can impact the world around them as individuals, workers and consumers and continue through secondary school, right up to age 18, preparing students for their future careers. A number of staff members volunteered to deliver these programmes in local primary and secondary schools. Both students and staff members involved received certificates of participation in the programme.

National Pride of Place Competition

Two entries from Laois entered the 2007 National Pride of Place competition, following their nomination by Laois County Council – Ratheniska and Portarlinton. Laois County Council presented both entrants with certificates in recognition of their participation in the competition. The National Awards took place in November, 2007, in Westport, Co. Mayo and Ratheniska Tidy Towns were pleased to receive the runners up prize in their category.



Ratheniska Tidy Towns receive their prize at the National Pride of Place Awards

Laois County Community Forum

The Community Forum held 11 monthly meetings in 2007 and 4 special meetings were held to assist with the development of the new Laois Community & Enterprise Development Company for Co. Laois. Area Fora Meetings were held throughout the year to consult on the Town & Village Plans for Laois. Information evenings were held to discuss Insurance Costs for Community & Voluntary Groups and Community Alert & Neighbourhood Watch in association with An Garda Síochána.

Publications

A Community Forum Information booklet was published with two Newsletters and distributed to Community & Voluntary Groups throughout the County.

Older Peoples Networking

The Forum and Older Persons Task Group of Laois CDB held a networking day in June for active retirement groups and agencies working with older people. The day was facilitated by Age & Opportunity, who made



Laois County Development Board

presentations and discussed older person's issues. The Dept of Social & Family Affairs, Munitir na Tire and Laois Alzheimers Association with the V.E.C also provided information stands and talks.

Comhairle na nÓg 2007

On October 25th, 178 students from the 12 secondary schools in Co. Laois attended Laois County Council's Annual Comhairle na nÓg (Young Peoples Council) which was held in Portlaoise College, Mountrath Road, Portlaoise. Throughout the day there were three issues discussed,



'Promoting Awareness of Road Safety', 'Education through Sport' and 'Our Environment'. Five students from Laois - Marie Callier, Jessica Brennan, Sarah Conroy, Karen Coleman and Fiachra Kavanagh were elected to represent Laois at the National Dáil na nÓg.



Disability Act 2005

The Dept of Environment Heritage and Local Government's Sectoral Plan, which was passed by the Oireachtas in October, 2006, requested each Local Authority to Draw up a three year Implementation Plan (2007 – 2009) setting out a programme of works and objectives to implement the commitments contained in the Disability Act, 2005. A three year plan was completed in July, having consulted with Disability Groups from across the County, and was adopted by Laois County Council at their September Meeting. A Steering Committee was established in February, who will oversee the objectives and targets of the Implementation Plan.

Report on National Service Indicators

Community Participation & Co-operation

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

Secondary Schools Event 100% (12 out of 12) participated.



Financial Management

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 62.14.

The rateable Valuation multiplier for Portlaoise and Mountmellick was

Portlaoise 63.909 Mountmellick 64.562

Water Charges

In 2007, the total number of commercial users was 2,384, of which 2,149 were metered. A fixed charge applied to the remaining customers. By April, 2009, it is intended that all non-domestic users will be metered. The charge for metered water in 2007 was €4.71 per 1000 gallons and €2.27 per 1000 gallons of waste water. In addition there was a standing meter rental charge of €60 per annum.

Prompt Payment of Accounts

Following the introduction of the Prompt Payments 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

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

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: 2007

Total number of late payments in excess of €250	12
Value of late payments in excess of €250	€49,551.09
Average length of late payments	26.5
Proportion in € of all late payments to total payments	0.02% (€53,051.09/€231,698,010.75)
Total amount of Late Payment interest paid	€470.86

Financial Management Systems – Improvements

E-invoicing has been introduced for some of our utility bills. Given the success of this it will be rolled out to other areas in 2008.

Low Value Purchase (LVP) cards are currently in use in a number of sections in the Council and may be extended to other Departments in



Financial Management

2008. This has improved efficiencies in the Accounts Payable section and has also brought benefits to suppliers.

A new costing system for the preparation of the 2008 Annual Budget was introduced this year. The costing system allocates the costs on a more equitable basis to the services being provided. The Annual Financial Statements for 2008 will also be prepared in the new format.

Motor Taxation

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

Vehicle Licences

The total receipts for 2007 were €11,901,090 compared to €11,302,590 in 2006. The number of vehicle licences (discs) issued in 2007 was 56,044 compared to 54,824 in 2006.

Driving Licences

Receipts for 2007 were €148,605 (including duplicates) compared with €140,585 for 2006. The number of driving licences issued in 2007 was 9,422 compared with 9,033 in 2006. A Theory Test is mandatory for all first applicants for Learner Permits. The telephone number to call for a test is 1890 606 106. The Learner Permit replaced the Provisional Licence from 31st October 2007.

Vehicle Testing

Certificates of Roadworthiness for commercial/goods vehicles were issued in respect of 5,337 vehicles during the year compared to 4,763 for 2006. All commercial/goods vehicles require a DOELHG 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 after 4 years and then every 2 years thereafter. Vintage cars are the only vehicle exempt from this test. The use of 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: 9 a.m. – 3.30 p.m. Monday – Friday, including lunchtime.

% of Motor Tax transactions which:

	31/12/06	31/12/07
Are dealt with over the counter	79% (59,900)	79% (61,657)
Are dealt with by post	21% (15,965)	21% (16,027)
Are dealt with in other ways (eg on line, by telephone)	0%	0%
Average number of Public Opening hours per week	32.5 hours	32.5 hours

Number of postal applications and overall postal applications which are dealt with (ie. Discs/driver licences issued) from receipt of the application.

(a) on the same day	77.20% (12,324)	97.05% (15,555)
(b) on the third day or less	18.74% (2,993)	2.18% (349)
(c) on the fifth day or less	1.89% (301)	0.12% (20)
(d) over 5 days	2.17% (347)	0.65% (103)

Revenue Collection

	31.12.06	31.12.07
Housing Loans		
Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	92%	95%
Percentage of arrears:		
(i) 1 month old	12%	14%
(ii) 2 – 3 months old	14%	19%
(iii) more than 3 months old	74%	67%



Financial Management

Commercial Rates

	31.12.06	31.12.07
Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	91%	91%

Non-Domestic Water Charges

Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	68%	63%
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Annual Financial Statements

Revenue Account

Revenue Account	Gross Expenditure 2007	Income 2007	Net Expenditure 2007
Programme Group	€	€	€
Housing & Building	12,053,657	9,561,092	2,492,565
Roads Transportation & Safety	19,787,015	12,962,858	6,824,157
Water & Sewerage	8,953,365	4,014,777	4,938,588
Development Incentives & Controls	4,401,713	1,950,073	2,451,640
Environmental Protection	8,999,020	6,464,892	2,534,128
Recreation & Amenity	4,056,599	790,880	3,265,719
Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare	4,367,364	3,616,327	751,037
Miscellaneous	3,984,442	2,313,413	1,671,029
Total Expenditure/Income	66,603,174	41,674,312	

Net cost of programmes to be funded from Rate & Local Government Fund	24,928,862
Rates	8,508,852
Local Government Fund - General Purpose Grant	18,336,335
Surplus/(Deficit) for Year before Transfers	1,916,324
Transfers from/(to) Reserves	(1,896,370)
Overall Surplus/(Deficit) for Year	19,954
General Reserve @ 1st January 2007	(554,243)
General Reserve @ 31st December 2007	(534,289)

Capital Account

Balance @ 01.01.07	2,660,105
Grants	107,829,768
Other Income	53,169,796
Transfer from/to Revenue	1,892,419
Expenditure	(173,692,667)
Balance @ 31.12.07	(8,140,579)



Portlaoise Town Council

Manager: Mr. Gerry Murphy
Town Clerk: Ms. Lorna Gleeson
Town Engineer: Mr. Trevor Hennessy

Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Portlaoise Town Council held on Tuesday June, 24th, 2007, Councillor Rotimi Adebari was elected as Mayor. Councillor Mary Sweeney was elected as Vice Mayor.

Members on Boards/Committees

County Development Board:
Councillor Brian Stanley

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 2007 - €117,190

In 2007 the Town Council provided support to the following:

- Portlaoise Tidy Towns
- Rossvale Court Residents Association
- Triogue Place Residents Group
- Marian Avenue Community Group

- St. Johns Square Residents Association
- National Association for Parent Support Ltd.
- The Carers Association
- O'Moore Place Childcare
- Lakeglen Residents Association
- Naomh Brid Music Class

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 2007

The Town Council supported and welcomed various developments in Portlaoise, particularly:

- Opening of new Leisure Centre in Portlaoise
- Announcement that CCTV Cameras will be installed in Portlaoise
- Public, Voluntary and Affordable Housing Developments
- Road and Footpath improvements throughout the town

There was one Civic Reception held in 2007 - Presentation to St. Joseph's Accordion Band to celebrate their 50th Anniversary.



Mountmellick Town Council

Manager: Mr. Declan Byrne
Town Clerk: Ms. Pamela Tynan
Town Engineer: Mr. Wesley Wilkinson

Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Mountmellick Town Council, Cllr. Joe Melia was elected as Cathaoirleach. Cllr. Denis O'Meara was elected Leas Cathaoirleach.

Representation on Other Bodies

Place Names Committee

Cllr. Bobby Delaney represented the Town Council on the Place Names Committee for County Laois.

Mountmellick Bye-Laws Committee

Cllr. Michael Gormley, Cathaoirleach Joe Melia and former Cathaoirleach Marc Connolly represented Mountmellick Town Council on the Bye-Laws Committee, addressing all traffic management issues in the town.

Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances

Cllr. Marc Connolly represented Mountmellick Town Council on the above body.

Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland

Cllrs Patrick J. Bracken and Michael Gormley represented Mountmellick Town Council at the Annual Conference and the Annual Seminar of the above body.

County Development Board

Cllr. Helen Hanson fulfilled her term on the County Development Board representing Mountmellick Town Council and Portlaoise Town Council.

Strategic Policy Committees

Cllr. Denis O'Meara is the representative on the Environment & Water Services SPC and Cllr. Marc Connolly is the representative on the Housing Social and Cultural SPC.

Pedestrian Crossing at St. Vincents Hospital

A new pedestrian crossing with traffic lights was installed at St. Vincent's Hospital during 2007.

Mountmellick Parking Areas and Car Park Bye-Laws 2007

The Draft Parking Areas and Car Park Bye-Laws 2007 for Mountmellick were adopted by the members of Laois County Council at the November Meeting. At this meeting, the Mountmellick Appointed Stands Bye-Laws 2007 (Taxi Rank) were also adopted. The adopted Bye-Laws will be introduced into O'Connell Square and will provide for pay and display parking, a loading bay and a Bus Bay and Taxi Rank outside the Post Office.

Town Priorities

A new Town Priorities list was drawn up and adopted by the members in 2007. Some of the priorities included Litter Enforcement, provision of a Town Park/Children's Playground, development of river walks for fishing and picnic areas, provision of a new fire station, the town sewerage extension and the town water scheme. The priorities are divided into short-term priorities, short to medium term priorities, medium term priorities and medium to long-term priorities.

Playground for Mountmellick

A Special Meeting was held in October with Ms. Ann-Marie Maher, Sports & Leisure Officer with Laois County Council, local County Councillors and Mr. John Moloney, T.D. A number of locations for the proposed playground were considered.

Water Safety

During 2007, Water Safety Life Buoys were installed at various locations along the riverside in Mountmellick as recommended by the Irish Water Safety Council.



Mountmellick Town Council

Mountmellick Sewerage Extension

At the October monthly meeting the Members welcomed the Minister's approval for the inclusion of Phase II of the upgrade and extension of the Sewerage Scheme in the Water Services Investment Programme 2007 - 2009.

Meeting with Gardaí

A Special Meeting with An Garda Síochána was held during the year to discuss various issues in the town. It was agreed to hold this meeting every six months.

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:

- Street furniture was painted and replaced where damaged
- 2 new litter bins were purchased and placed on Harbour St. & St. Josephs Terrace
- Eight additional large flower pots were purchased and the twenty flower pots in total were planted with Summer and then Winter Plants. Window Boxes were purchased for the Courthouse
- Weed killer and paint were purchased for environmental projects carried out throughout the local authority estates in the town
- 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 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, roadworks and footpath repairs, signage, public lighting etc.



*Cullenwood, Mountmellick - Laois County Council
Social Housing Scheme officially Opened on 31st August, 2007*



Other Activities

Social

2007 was another very successful year for the Social Club which currently has a membership of 275. Numerous events were held in 2007.

Monthly Draw

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

1st - €50 2nd - €30 3rd - €20

Table Quiz



In 2007 we ran the first in-house section Table Quiz which was a great success and Water Services proved to be the brainiest section on the night. There is sure to be stiff competition in 2008 when they try to retain their title.

Easter Party

The Easter Party was held this year in Grellan Delaneys with plenty of Easter Eggs given out on the night.

BBQ

The Summer BBQ was held in County Hall on 31st August with Eunice and her staff preparing and serving the food which as usual was first class. A great crowd attended and Regina Daly was the proud winner of a BBQ and picnic table.

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 current staff members of Laois County Council. The mass was very well attended and refreshments were provided in the canteen afterwards.

Kiddies Christmas Party



The Kiddies Christmas Party was held on 8th December in the canteen. Like previous years, the party was attended by over 100 children. There was great entertainment with the Fairy Princess, Bob the Builder and Frosty the Snowman and of course Santa and one of his elves. Santa arrived by Fire Engine thanks to John Ging and a Disco was provided by our very own DJ Bell. Thanks to all who helped make it a very enjoyable day for everyone.

Christmas Party

The Annual Christmas Party was held on 14th December in the Heritage Hotel, Portlaoise, with the music and disco on the night provided by 'Eden'. The party was a sell out with 128 tickets sold.

Golf Society

Dolores Murphy captained the Golf Society in 2007. Her Captain's day was held in Portarlington Golf Club in September and a great day was had by all. The Captain's Prize was won by Ken Farrell who also won the Golfer of the Year Award for 2007. The Kennedy Cup was won by Pat Malone at the staff outing held in Roscrea.



Useful Directory

Áras 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

Graiguecullen Area Office

Sleaty Road, Graiguecullen, Carlow
Tel: (059) 9165960

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) 866416
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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