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## CATHAOIRLEACH'S STATEMENT

It gives me great pleasure as Cathaoirleach to present Laois County Council's Annual Report for 2012.

The Annual Report provides an opportunity to highlight the achievements of the Council in 2012 and to outline the wide range of services that are provided for the benefit of everyone in the County.

The construction of the Integrated Constructed Wetland project has put Laois on the National stage when it comes to green technology. This green technology reduces the environmental footprint of the wastewater treatment process, supports a wide range of wetland wildlife, provides significant carbon sequestration, effective recycling of nutrients, provides a focus for education and increases awareness of wetlands, which is ultimately a win-win for the environment. The treatment plant can now cater for 1200 population equivalent.

Local Area Plans covering the periods 2012 – 2018 adopted during the course of 2012 included Portlaoise and Mountmellick. Local Area Plans for Portarlinton and Graiguecullen were prepared on an agreed joint basis between Laois and Offaly and Carlow local authorities respectively. These plans set out a strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development for the areas.

Part VIII projects were approved at Council Meetings during 2012. These included the provision of

- A major Schools Campus in Portlaoise
- A residential development at Timahoe Road, Portlaoise
- A water reservoir at Knocks, Ballyfin.

The achievements outlined in this Annual Report could not have been accomplished without the collective input of the Elected Members, Chairpersons and Members of the Strategic Policy Committees, the Corporate Policy Committee, Area Committees, Management Team and Staff together with the many voluntary and community organisations with whom the Council engages on a frequent basis.



Paul Mitchell  
Cathaoirleach

## COUNTY MANAGER'S FOREWORD

Welcome to the 2012 Annual Report of Laois County Council.

2012 was a challenging year for Laois County Council with increased focus on efficiency and value for money.

Following the 2011 opening of the outdoor gym in Stradbally, Laois County Council continued with its promotion of the awareness of Health and Play in the County with the opening of the Amenity area in Mountmellick along with the Gort na nÓg playground in Rathdowney. The playground in Rathdowney is a joint effort involving Rathdowney Playground Group in co-operation with Laois County Council and Laois Partnership Company.

Laois County Council was delighted to see the launch of Music Generation Laois in April 2012. It is managed by Laois Music Education Partnership, led by Laois County Council and supported by Laois VEC and Laois Partnership Company. It is hoped to further expand the programme in 2013.

The Borris Road Improvement Scheme continued the construction of realignment of the Borris Road. The scheme has provided a major safety improvement for road users between the town and major residential areas and the secondary schools.

The Tourism Office continued to promote Laois in 2012 by the holding of events such as The Rose of Tralee Regional Finals, Laois International Golf Challenge, The Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run and The Laois Heartlands Rally which attracted large numbers of people to the County.

The Annual Report also highlights the ongoing commitment of the Council to promote inclusion and encourage participation in the development of cultural and environment programmes. In conjunction with a number of agencies, a week long event called "Laois Connects" took place. The aim of this event was to raise awareness about mental health issues and it provided a showcase for the support that exists in the local community.

Sincere thanks is due to the Elected Members, management and staff who continue to work together to achieve greater efficiencies in order to meet the needs of our citizens.



Peter Carey  
County Manager



## MISSION STATEMENT

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

### Mandate

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

### Council Membership

Laois County Council consists of 25 Elected Members - four members each from Mountmellick, Emo and Luggacurren Electoral Areas, six members from the Borris-in-Ossory Electoral Area and seven members from the Portlaoise Electoral Area.



*Elected Members with the County Manager at Laois County Council AGM in June, 2009*

### Council Meetings

Council Meetings in 2012 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 11 occasions in 2012.

**Borris in Ossory Electoral Area**



John Joe  
Fennelly  
(F.F.)



Michael  
Lalor  
(F.G.)



John  
King  
(F.G.)



Brendan  
Phelan  
(F.F.)



John  
Bonham  
(F.G.)



Martin  
Phelan  
(F.G.)

**Emo Electoral Area**



Raymond  
Cribbin  
(F.F.)



Paul  
Mitchell  
(Non Party)



Tom  
Mulhall  
(F.G.)



James  
Deegan  
(F.G.)

**Luggacurren Electoral Area**



James  
Daly  
(F.G.)



John Robert  
Moran  
(F.G.)



Padraig  
Fleming  
(F.F.)



Ben  
Brennan  
(Non Party)

**Mountmellick Electoral Area**



David  
Goodwin  
(F.G.)



Patrick  
Bracken  
(F.F.)



Patrick  
Bowe  
(Labour)



Seamus  
McDonald  
(F.F.)

**Portlaoise Electoral Area**



William  
Aird  
(F.G.)



Alan  
Hand  
(S.F.)



Mary  
Sweeney  
(F.G.)



Jeremiah  
Lodge  
(F.F.)



Kathleen  
O'Brien  
(F.G.)



Rotimi  
Adebari  
(Non Party)



Catherine  
Fitzgerald  
(F.F.)

**Director of Services:** Anna Marie Delaney

**A/Senior Executive Officer  
Human Resources &  
Corporate Affairs:** Irene Delaney

**Head of Information  
Systems:** John Forde

## CORPORATE AFFAIRS

### Corporate Plan

Laois County Council's Corporate Plan 2009 – 2014 was adopted by the Members of the Council in December, 2009.

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

The strategies and objectives outlined in the Plan enable Laois County Council's Elected Members and Employees to continue to provide leadership in the promotion and development of the social, economic and cultural life of the county. It enhances the role of the Elected Members while continuing to deliver focused more co-ordinated, efficient, and effective services to the public.

An Annual Progress Report is prepared and submitted to the Members for their consideration.

### 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](http://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

- 26th April 2012 - Civic Reception in honour of Liam O'Neill in recognition of his election as 37th President of the Gaelic Athletic Association.



*Guests at the Civic Reception for Liam O'Neill*

- 10th May, 2012 - Civic Reception in honour of Laois Civil Defence
- 16th May, 2012 - Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of Laois Order of Malta.
- 24th May, 2012 - Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of Clonaslee College Girls Basketball Teams.

### Irish Language Scheme 2009 -2012

Laois Local Authorities Irish Language Scheme was confirmed by the Minister for Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and came into effect on 1st December, 2009, for a period of 3 years. The scheme is available to view on our website [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie). A new scheme will be prepared in due course.

Laois Local Authorities recognise that our customers have the right to choose to do business with us in their preferred language and they are facilitated in their dealings with us as far as practicable, whether that is through Irish or through English.

One of the main objectives of this Language Scheme is to ensure that higher standards of public services are available through the Irish Language as the national language and the first official language of the country.

An implementation team has been established, representative of the functional areas of the Council. An implementation plan has been developed together with a schedule of the actions necessary to realise the commitments contained in the Scheme. In 2012, the Council continued to meet the commitments contained in the Scheme.



If you wish to contact the Council in Irish, please send an e-mail to [gaelge@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:gaelge@laoiscoco.ie).

### Higher Education Grants

In 2012, a total number of 510 renewal applications were approved for grant assistance. Funding in respect of the maintenance grant was reduced in the December budget by 3% and became applicable from 1st January, 2012.

The total amount paid out in 2012 in respect of Higher Education Grants was €3,451,245.74

### Health & Safety

**Health & Safety Officer:** Jim Bolger

Risk assessments and safe systems of work were developed on a cross directorate basis. These documents were made available electronically as part of our Safety Management System (SMS). This data base was enhanced as appropriate on an ongoing basis.

Construction contractors were invited to attend a Safety Management Programme sponsored by the County Enterprise Board targeted at construction contractors with 20 or less employees.

The Safety Consultative Committee was rejuvenated and safety representative training was provided for new members. In addition a comprehensive safety training programme was implemented with the focus firmly on statutory training.

### Partnership

The following were the members of the Workplace Partnership Committee as at 31st December, 2012.

Management Nominees	Union Nominees
Kieran Kehoe	Tom Saunders,
Joint Chair	Joint Chair
Michael Rainey	Anne Marie Maher
Bernie Foran	Bernie Kilbride
John O'Donoghue	Tom O'Carroll
Dermot O'Loughlin	Finbar Dunphy

The Partnership Committee held 7 meetings during 2012.

The County Manager held a Staff Briefing Meeting in May, 2012, to inform staff of the challenges facing Laois County Council.

### Freedom of Information (F.O.I.)

The Freedom of Information Act 1997 commenced on 21st April, 1998 for Government Departments and Offices and certain other Government Bodies and on 21st October, 1998 for Local Authorities and Health Boards.

The Freedom of Information (Amendment) Act 2003 came into force on 11th April, 2003. This Act introduced a number of important amendments to the 1997 Act, notably in relation to Section 19 (Government Records), Section 20 (Deliberations of Public Bodies), Section 24 (Security, Defence and International Relations) and Section 47 (Fees).

All Freedom of Information requests must be processed under the F.O.I. Act, as amended.

### Applications received/processed in 2012

Applications on hand at 31/12/2011	4
Applications received during 2012	15
Decisions taken during 2012	17
Applications Withdrawn	1
Applications withdrawn and dealt with outside FOI	1
Applications on hand at 31/12/2012	0

### Nature of Information Sought

Personal (to applicant)	13
Non-personal	2

### Appeals

Appeals to Information Commissioner	Nil
Appeal to High Court	Nil

### Source of Requests

Journalists	3
Business	Nil
Oireachtas Members	Nil
Local Authority Members	Nil
Others/General Public	12

### Register of Electors 2013/2014

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 Constituency on the 1st September preceding the coming into force of the Register.



## HOUSING, CORPORATE AFFAIRS, CORPORATE PLANNING, HUMAN RESOURCES & INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Dáil Constituency	Presidential Electors	Dáil Electors
Laois/Offaly	54,749	55,429
European Parliament Constituency	European Electors	Potential European Electors
Leinster	55,974	226
Local Electoral Areas	Number of Electors	Postal and Special Voters
Borris in Ossory	13,945	Gardaí 1
Emo	9,274	Defence Forces 229
Luggacurren	9,461	Diplomats 6
Mountmellick	8,894	Physically Disabled 25
Portlaoise	<u>15,682</u>	Occupation Etc. 9
Total:	57,256	Special Voters 5
Borough or Town Council	Local Government Electors	
Mountmellick Urban	2,941	
Portlaoise Urban	<u>8,355</u>	
Total	11,296	

### CONFERENCES ATTENDED IN 2012

Conference	Venue	Date	Delegates	Expend.
Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011	Galway	13 – 15 January	1	€430.08
The National Disability Strategy	Westport	27 – 29 January	2	€1,195.31
The Role of the Council in encouraging Enterprise through Tourism	Nenagh	27 – 29 January	1	€185.59
AMAI Spring Seminar 2012	Cavan	10 – 11 February	3	€1,493.52
Mid-West Regional Authority Annual Conference 2012	Ennistymon	16 – 17 February	1	€576.15
21st Kerry Environmental Conference	Tralee	23 – 26 February	4	€2,421.79
Mental Health & Suicide Awareness Conference	Dungarvan	24 – 26 February	1	€379.83
23rd Colmcille Winter School	Letterkenny	24 – 26 February	5	€3,841.90
Guide to Septic Systems	Galway City	9 – 10 March	4	€1,628.84
Media, Social Media & Effective Time Management	Rosscarbery	23 – 25 March	4	€2,366.05
Law & The Environment	University College Cork	29 – March	1	€404.30
Reform of the Water Sector	Salthill, Co. Galway	13 – 15 April	2	€1,019.08
LAMA Spring Seminar	Waterford City	13 - 14 April	9	€3,223.99
Modern Alternatives to the disappearance of Fossil Fuels	Rosscarbery	13 – 15 April	2	€1,082.35
Finance Bill 2012	Tralee	20 – 21 April	1	€541.35
Water Sewerage & Waste	Red Cow, Dublin	26 - April	1	€111.15
Non-Payment of Local Government Charges	Galway City	4 – 5 May	6	€2,710.66
Lissan Gardening & Vintage Festival	Cookstown	5 – 6 May	1	€554.86
Community Tourism	Rosscarbery	11 – 13 May	6	€3,568.08
ACCC Annual Conference	Kilkenny City	10 – 11 May	4	€1,126.12
The Councillor and Local Government Reform	Bundoran	18 – 19 May	4	€1,879.73
Reducing Ireland's dependency on Fossil Fuels	Tralee	25 – 26 May	2	€1,017.57
Draft Performance Standard for Domestic Wastewater	Westport	1 – 2 June	5	€2,584.07

## HOUSING, CORPORATE AFFAIRS, CORPORATE PLANNING, HUMAN RESOURCES & INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Conference	Venue	Date	Delegates	Expend.
Housing Crisis in Ireland	Letterkenny	1 – 3 June	2	€1,342.11
Irish Public Bodies AGM	Dublin City	6 – June	1	€87.88
Planning Seminar	Limerick City	7 – 9 June	2	€691.61
Getting to Grips with the Nations Debt	Galway City	15 – 16 June	5	€2,204.88
Advancing Technology in Majority World Technology	Rosscarbery	22 – 24 June	2	€1,083.92
Byrne Perry Summer School	Gorey	22 – 24 June	1	€427.78
Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2012	Westport	29 – 30 June	2	€1,082.69
Local Authority Housing	Galway City	13 – 14 July	5	€2,077.53
MacGill Summer School 2012	Glenties	22 – 27 July	11	€10,698.59
John Hewitt Summer School	Armagh City	23 – 27 July	2	€1,050.40
Improving Social Housing Stock	Westport	27 – 28 July	2	€1,002.72
Local Government Auditing	Galway City	3 – 4 August	2	€893.85
Creating Employment Opportunities in Local Food Production	Rosscarbery	10 – 12 August	2	€1,087.11
Personal Insolvency Bill	Tralee	10 – 11 August	1	€537.80
Freedom of Information	Galway City	17 – 18 August	2	€844.44
Utilising your Tax Entitlements & Reliefs	Rosscarbery	24 – 26 August	1	€520.09
Regional Economic Conference	Wexford	31 – August	1	€284.69
Cork City Lifelong Learning	Cork City	6 – September	1	€33.61
Local Government Reform	Rosscarbery	7 – 9 September	3	€1,656.70
11th Benedict Kiely Literary Weekend	Omagh	7 – 9 September	1	€670.61
Development Initiatives for your Community	Westport	7 – 8 September	2	€1,032.73
AMAI Centenary Annual Conference	Ballinasloe	13 – 15 September	1	€492.12
Kerry Environment, Culture & Heritage Conference	Tralee	19 – 22 September	4	€2,524.17
Respond Conference	Tallaght	20 – 21 September	1	€291.95
Revenue Collection & Dealing with difficult debt	Tralee	21 – 22 September	4	€1,968.96
LAMA Autumn 2012	Letterkenny	28 – 29 September	7	€4,486.38
Constitutional & Political Reform & the Councillor	Bunclody	5 – 6 October	1	€307.44
Collecting Local Government Revenue	Westport	12 – 13 October	3	€1,585.05
Resource Ireland	Dublin	17 – 18 October	1	€132.46
Publication of the Valuation (Amendment) Bill 2012	Glaslough	19 – 21 October	2	€1,004.28
Septic Tank Case Studies	Westport	19 – 20 October	4	€2,196.57
Douglas Hyde 2012	Ballaghaderreen	26 – October	2	€697.59
Innovation Cities Roadshow	NUI, Galway	2 – November	1	€303.92
Debt Settlement	Tralee	2 – 3 November	5	€2,454.16
Festival of Social Science	Belfast	8 – November	1	€416.15
Education for Work Initiatives	Westport	9 – 10 November	5	€2,491.04
Local Authority Budgets 2013	Letterkenny	16 – 18 November	3	€1,817.37
Environmental Implications of harvesting Wind Energy	Westport	23 – 24 November	2	€909.64
Local Government Budget 2013	Bunclody	30 – Nov to 1 – Dec	1	€234.41
Is a Century of Municipal Local Government to be abolished?	Gormanstown	30 – Nov to 2nd Dec	1	€437.37
Promoting Justice through better consultation	Tralee	30 – Nov to 1st Dec	4	€1,931.44
Rights of Way – Recent changes in the law	Galway City	7 – 8 December	4	€1,750.85
Budget 2013 Seminar	Rosscarbery	14 – 16 December	2	€999.31
Maximising Energy Efficiency in the L. A.	Galway City	14 – 15 December	2	€801.35
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>€93,888.09</b>

## **Housing & Social Strategic Policy Committee**

**Chair:** Tom Mulhall, M.C.C.

**Members** **Sectoral**

Willie Aird, M.C.C.	Pat Flanagan
Alan Hand, M.C.C.	Mick Dowling
James Daly, M.C.C.	Brendan O'Brien
Mary Sweeney, M.C.C.	Michael Kelly
Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C.	
Bobby Delaney,	
Mountmellick T.C.	

**Director of Services:** Gerry Murphy

**Senior Executive Officer:** Michael Rainey

**Senior Executive Engineer:** Brendan Condron

**Senior Social Worker:** Fionnuala Daly

## **HOUSING SERVICES**

The 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 2012**

- Contract signing and commencement of construction of Ballymorris Group Housing Scheme in Portarlinton.
- Completion of long-term leasing arrangements with a number of approved housing bodies resulting in 15 social units under the Social Leasing Initiative.
- Successful delivery of 224 grants for disabled and elderly people living in the County.
- Formal lease of Treo Nua, Portlaoise Resource Centre, to a Board of Management, Treo Nua Ltd., which is made up of representatives from Laois County Council, HSE, Family Resource Centre, Laois Partnership, Scoil Bride National School and the local community.

### **Report on SPC**

The Housing & Social SPC met in May, September and December 2012. The following policy was agreed:

- Control of Horses Byelaws (amended)

## **Rental Accommodation Scheme**

The Rental Accommodation Scheme is intended to provide good quality rented accommodation for eligible persons and it enhances the response of the Council in meeting the long-term housing needs of applicants. In 2012, 57 properties were delivered under the Scheme.

Further information with regard to the scheme is available on [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie).

## **Social Leasing Arrangements**

With Departmental approval, Laois County Council entered into Agreements with a number of Approved Housing Bodies for the long-term leasing of units at various locations in the County. 59 properties have been delivered to date under this arrangement.

## **Housing Construction & Acquisition**

In 2012, the Social Housing Investment Programme allocation was used to fund the transfer of ten repossessed units into the social housing stock and to purchase 6 Part V units. In recognition of the Council's effective program of capital expenditure, the initial SHIP allocation of €170,000 was increased in the fourth quarter of 2012 to €1,567,167 and this was also fully drawn down by year end.

## **Portlaoise Resource Centre**

During 2012 the Treo Nua, Portlaoise Resource Centre has established itself as an important addition to the social, economic and community infrastructure of Portlaoise. This facility is now providing essential services to the community of Portlaoise, morning and evening, seven days a week. The crèche, after-school rooms, meeting rooms, community room and training rooms provide a wide range of community services, educational courses, physical activity classes and family support services and facilitate resident group meetings. The day-to-day management of the facility is overseen by a Board of Management, Treo Nua Ltd., which is made up of representatives from Laois County Council, HSE, Family Resource Centre, Laois Partnership, Scoil Bride National School and the community. The local community have been very supportive of this project from the outset and their pride in this facility is evident from their involvement on the Board of Management and from their efforts to maintain and promote the facility.





### Maintenance of Local Authority Stock

In 2012, the Housing Section continued to improve the business procedures relating to the maintenance and re-letting of Council stock through effective prioritisation and use of the financial and human resources available. This has resulted in significantly improved customer service, response times and a more transparent management of the service. The DoECLG funding for energy upgrades and once-off adaptation grants allowed the Housing Section to also make significant structural improvements to a substantial number of its properties.

### Part V - Housing Strategy

In 2012 the Housing Department continued to monitor development and engage with developers in the County to reach agreement for compliance with Part V of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended).

### Voluntary Housing Sector

At 31/12/12 271 units were provided under the Capital Loan & Subsidy Scheme and 246 units were provided under the Capital Assistance Scheme.

### Affordable Housing

The Council has affordable houses for sale in Maryborough Village, Portlaoise. Further details can be found on [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie).



### Private Site Scheme

A number of private sites are for sale in Castletown, Ballyroan and Clonaslee.

### Activity under Various Schemes

#### Extensions to Local Authority Dwellings:

Approved	1
Completed	1

#### Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability:

Applications received	58
Total No. of Grants Paid (Totalling €)	50 415,823

#### Mobility Aids Housing Grant Scheme:

Applications received	82
Total No. of Grants Paid (Totalling €)	70 250,150

#### Housing Aid for Older People Scheme:

Applications received	93
Total No. of Grants Paid (Totalling €)	104 418,500

#### Tenant Purchase Scheme:

Applications Received	96
Houses Sold	34

#### Housing Loans:

No. of Loans Advanced (Totalling €)	29 2,010,820
-------------------------------------	-----------------

### Traveller Accommodation

The current Traveller Accommodation Programme (2009-2013) was adopted by the Council in January 2009 and was prepared in accordance with the provisions set out in the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998. It provides for an existing need of 37 families and a projected need of 18 families.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government approved the construction of 6 houses for the Travelling Community at Canal Road, Portarlinton in 2012.

Construction has commenced and it is anticipated

that the houses will be completed by November 2013.

### **Estate Management**

2012 saw the continued development of the Council's policy on resident participation in issues such as:

- Estate Management
- General Maintenance
- Anti-social behaviour

### **Best Estate Competition 2012**

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

Kiln Lane, Mountrath

Award certificate and cheque for €150.00

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

Colliers Court, Portlaoise

Award certificate and cheque for €150.00

**Special Award:** For the Estate which has made the greatest improvement to their estate.

Mountain View Square, Portlaoise

Award certificate and cheque for €150.00

## **National Service Indicators**

### **H: Housing**

#### **H.1. Housing Vacancies:**

Total Number of dwellings in local authority stock	2019
Total Number of dwellings excluding those subject to major refurbishment projects	2017
Overall % of dwellings that are empty (excluding those subject to major refurbishment):	1.44%
% of empty dwellings unavailable for letting	89.70%
% of empty dwellings available for letting	10.30%

#### **H.2. Average time taken to re-let dwellings available for letting:**

Time taken from notification of date of vacation of dwelling to the date when all necessary repairs are carried out which are deemed necessary to re-let the dwelling.	9 weeks
Time taken from works @ (a) being completed to the date of the first rent debit.	2 weeks

<b>H.3. Number of repairs completed as a percentage of the number of valid repair requests received.</b>	96.81%
Number of repairs completed	2,908
Number of valid repair requests received	2,731
<b>H.4. Traveller Accommodation</b>	
Total number of traveller families accommodated as a percentage of the targets set in the Local Traveller Accommodation Programme.	0
Number of Traveller families accommodated	0
Target number of Traveller families to be accommodated in the year, as set out in the local Traveller Accommodation Programme	12
<b>H.5. Enforcement of standards in private rented sector.</b>	
Total number of registered tenancies	2,965
Number dwelling units inspected	173
Number of inspections carried out	246
Number of dwellings inspected as % of registered tenancies (i.e. B as % of A)	5.83%
<b>H.6. Grants to adapt housing for the needs of people with a disability</b>	
Average time taken to notify applicants of decision under Mobility Aids Grant Scheme on receipt of a valid application.	2.09 weeks
Average time taken to notify applicants of decision under Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability on receipt of a valid application.	4.5 weeks
<b>H.7. Tenant Training</b>	
Percentage of total new local authority tenants who have completed pre-tenancy training	55.42%
Total number of new local authority tenants	83
Number of new local authority tenants who have been offered pre-tenancy familiarisation courses	46



## **HUMAN RESOURCES**

### **Recruitment Statistics**

A total of 435 people were employed by Laois County Council at 31st December 2012.

During 2012 Laois County Council held 5 competitions, in relation to which the following statistics have been extracted:

Total Applications received	39	
	Male	Female
Applicants	31	8
Successful Applicants	11	6
Permanent Appointments/Promotions 2012		
	Male	Female
Appointments	4	0
Promotions	3	1

The above does not include competitions held by the Public Appointments Service.

These competitions related primarily to vacancies in the Fire Service, which due to the nature of the work are exempt from the terms of the current moratorium on recruitment in place since August 2009.

### **Work Life Balance Initiatives**

Laois County Council continued to implement work life balance initiatives for staff during 2012. At year-end 12 employees were availing of the Career Break Scheme, 29 employees were availing of the job/work sharing scheme, 39 employees availed of the Parental Leave Scheme and 15 employees availed of the Shorter Working Year Scheme.

### **National Performance Indicator**

The Council exceeded the 3% minimum National Performance Indicator for expenditure on training and development as a percentage of total payroll costs in 2012. The out-turn was 4.12%.

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

<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
4.56%	4.12%

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

	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
Certified	4.07%	3.94%
Uncertified	0.62%	0.53%

### **Local Service Indicator**

Number of Training Days provided to staff (excluding Retained Fire Fighters) – 466

### **Industrial Relations**

Despite a difficult year nationally, Laois County Council maintained good industrial relations during 2012 with no major disputes arising. The Council in accordance with the Public Service Agreement 2010 – 2014 and in consultation with the relevant Trade Unions continued to implement measures designed to improve efficiencies and demonstrate cost savings. In May 2012, the 2nd Progress Report for Laois County Council outlined further savings of €1.8 million.

### **Employee Training & Development**

Laois County Council is committed to the training and developing of all our employees in the context of securing the goals and objectives of the Council and for the skills development of employees. Laois County Council is 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 Performance Management Development System process. The Programme also incorporates Health & Safety Needs, National FETAC Programme, Third Level Open Learning Programme and various Seminars/Workshops as they arise.

Total expenditure on training was €319,788 (inclusive of expenditure for Fire Services). A very comprehensive training programme was delivered throughout 2012. A sample of the training programmes provided is as follows:-

- Drinking Water Safety Plan
- Work Place Safety
- Safety Management Course
- Safepass

- VDU Assessor Training
- Environmental Legislation
- Housing Practitioners Conference
- Water Ireland Conference
- Refresher First Aid
- Confined Spaces
- FETAC Waste Water Course
- Safety Representative Training

### **Open Learning Programme**

Laois County Council endeavours, subject to available resources, 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 during 2012 are as follows:-

- IPA - Certificate in Local Government
- IPA - Diploma in Local Government
- IPA - Bachelor of Business Studies
- UCD - Masters in Computer Science – Cloud Computing Stream

### **Excellence Through People**

The Excellence Through People accreditation is Ireland's national standard for human resource development. The award is achieved by organisations who 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 first achieved this award in 2005 and is due for review in 2013. This prestigious award is a great achievement on behalf of employees. It is an external validation conducted by FÁS and highlights the commitment and effort of all employees to their own learning and development as well as their involvement, as individuals and as part of a team in the continuous improvement of the operation of the organisations services and goals.



### **Staff Policies**

In line with best practice in Human Resource Management, Laois County Council has developed a range of staff policies - the following were introduced/revised during 2012:

- Shorter Working Year Scheme 2012
- Training Policy & Programme 2012
- Attendance Management Policy (Revised) 2012
- Annual Leave Policy (Revised) 2012

### **Equality**

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

### **Supporting Diversity**

Laois County Council supports the employment of people with disabilities and meets the target as set out by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. During 2012, Laois County Council in conjunction with Midland Employment Support Agency/other agencies facilitated a number of work experience placements for people with disabilities.

### **HR, Payroll and Superannuation Project**

The HR, Payroll and Superannuation project in Laois County Council is part of a national project being implemented by 27 local authorities and their town councils. The project started in 2008 and will be completed in 2013. All implementation on the project has been completed with the exception of the PMDS and Health & Safety modules. These modules are undergoing significant redesign and will be available for rollout in mid 2013.

## INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

In 2012, despite continued severe budgetary constraints, the ICT department remained at the forefront of technological & communications advancement within the local authority area. As in previous years, the emphasis continued on improved service provision, coupled with cost reduction, where possible, while at the same time improving communications within the organisation itself and with the general public.

In addition to the normal routine work of the Department, the following cost reduction & service level improvement initiatives were completed.

### Health & Safety.

In accordance with Health & Safety requirements, comprehensive V.D.U./Workstation safety assessments are carried out by staff from I.T. Support Section, in addition to Health & Safety staff. A number of these assessments were carried out in 2012 and further assessments will be undertaken as required.

### Staff Training.

Training in the various Microsoft Office products, was provided in-House, by I.T. Support, for any staff who needed to upskill or increase familiarisation with any of the applications. This type of training is provided on an ongoing basis and it is anticipated that further training will be undertaken as the need arises.

### Review of Telephone & Communications Costs

Following on from the review of telephone usage & costs undertaken in 2011 with the intention of achieving cost savings where possible, further numbers of phone lines in use were reduced, throughout the organisation. A competitive tendering procedure was undertaken in 2012 to secure the most cost effective line rental & call charges for the Council. In addition to the savings resulting from that procedure, costs are constantly monitored to achieve further savings where possible.

### Security of ICT Systems & Equipment

Work on managing and improving security on the Council's Information and Communications systems continued throughout 2012. The Council's ICT Department and Data Protection Controller, take the issue of data security extremely seriously. Consider-

able staff resources are devoted to maintaining Data securely, and also in appropriate Data Recovery procedures in the event of hardware or other failures.

As a result of the Audit of Security practices undertaken in 2011, any areas requiring upgrade or strengthening were addressed. Access controls & configurations were tightened while Laptops & portable data devices were encrypted, and security in these areas continues to be improved. In 2012 the existing Anti Virus / Network Security System was upgraded to the latest McAfee product.

### Management of Systems & Equipment

Budgetary constraints require that all I.C.T. equipment is managed and maintained as efficiently as possible both to extend its lifespan and to ensure that it runs at peak efficiency. Considerable staff time & effort was invested in managing the existing stock of desktop PCs and other equipment to best effect, rather than devote scarce financial resources to the purchase of new equipment. Because of the age profile of much of the equipment, significant additional time and effort is now spent on maintenance & upgrade work. Despite difficult budgetary conditions, additional Network Storage was provided, a new Domain Controller was installed, Wireless Access Points for use at Meetings/Seminars etc were installed and a small number of iPads were introduced to replace Laptops.

### Property Management Team

In mid 2012 the management team put a property management team in place. The objective of this team is to map, detail and manage all land and buildings owned by Laois County Council in the county of Laois. The team inputs all available data into a computerised system which is updated with new and updated property information on an ongoing basis. The PIR is now available under the SIA (Spatial Intranet Application) mapping system with a variety of thematic menus. This allows users to get the maximum from the data.

To date the team have successfully inputted over 1550 records into the PIR system and have put in place a process whereby any section dealing with property transactions must inform the team with the relevant details and a map of the land.



## Social Media

### Twitter

Social networking has become a valuable tool in promoting, communicating and educating the public in all our service areas. Our main twitter account @Laois-Council has over 1,300 followers. We use this account to announce service updates like road closures, water shortages, Higher Education Grant updates, finance charges, news and events from all other sections (Arts, Sports, Tourism, and Libraries). @LaoisLibraries is updated by the Library section and all local library activities are posted.

### You Tube

We have presence on YouTube, under the profile LaoisCoCo where videos have been uploaded for Tourism, Arts and Music.

### Facebook

LaoisCountyCouncil - <http://www.facebook.com/LaoisCountyCouncil>  
This is our main Facebook page for the organisation. It is updated with news and information from all departments.

LaoisLibraries - <http://www.facebook.com/LaoisLibraries>  
Our Library Department update this with news and events from each of the local libraries.

LaoisCountyFire & RescueService - <http://www.facebook.com/laoisfire>  
The Fire section keeps users informed of local incidents, rescues and training events.

LaoisEnvironment <http://www.facebook.com/LaoisEnvironment>  
Keep Laois Clean – our Environment section use their Facebook page to keep us informed of competitions, community events, clean ups and recycling information.

LaoisTourism - <http://www.facebook.com/laoistourism>  
Our Tourism Officer uses his page as a useful marketing tool to promote the County of Laois.

LaoisHeritageForum - <http://www.facebook.com/laois.heritage.forum> is maintained by the Heritage Officer who has found her page very successful in raising awareness of all aspects of built, natural and cultural

heritage of County Laois. Heritage has over 1000 followers.

New sites this year include include Laois Arts, which are available on – <http://www.facebook.com/LaoisArts> and Laois Tidy Towns are at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Laois-Tidy-Towns/163631410408752?fref=ts>

### Website

The Councils website continues to be a most successful point of contact with members of the public. Laois.ie had 3508 visits per week last year, 50.6% were returning visitors and 49.4% were new visitors. Our most popular pages were Planning and the online payments page “PayforIT”, where we’ve added the new Household Charge payment. The contact us form is still very popular with users preferring to report problems online.

## **Community and Economic Development, Culture & Heritage Strategic Policy Committee**

**Director of Services:** Ms Anna Marie Delaney

**Chair:** John King, M.C.C.

### **Members**

Michael Lalor, M.C.C.  
John Bonham, M.C.C.  
James Deegan, M.C.C.  
Paul Mitchell, M.C.C.  
Padraig Fleming, M.C.C.  
Rotimi Adebari, M.C.C.  
Alan Hand, T.C.

### **Sectoral**

Brendan O'Brien  
Kathleen Gorman  
Fintan Phelan

## **Laois County Development Board**

### **Membership of Laois County Development Board**

#### **Local Government:**

Mr John King, M.C.C., Chairperson Laois County Development Board.  
Mr Peter Carey, Laois County Manager.  
Mr Tom Mulhall, M.C.C.  
Mr John Joe Fennelly, M.C.C.  
Mr Paul Mitchell, M.C.C.  
Ms Kathleen O'Brien, M.C.C.  
Ms Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C.C.

#### **Local Development:**

Ms Maria Callinan, Laois County Enterprise Board  
Mr Tony Mahon, Laois County Enterprise Board  
Ms Anne Goodwin, Laois Partnership Company  
Mr Paddy Buggy, Laois Partnership Company

#### **State Agencies:**

Ms Mary Delaney, HSE Midlands  
Ms Anne O'Keeffe, Laois VEC  
Mr Kevin Macken, FÁS  
Mr David Hackett, Department of Social Protection  
Mr Larry O'Loughlin, Teagasc  
Dr Michael Brougham, Enterprise Ireland  
Chief Supt. John Scanlon, An Garda Síochána  
Mr Michael Brady, Fáilte Ireland

#### **Social Partners:**

Ms Breda Stackpool, Business Sector  
Mr Brendan O'Brien, Trade Union Sector  
Ms Maria Groarke, Laois Community Forum  
Ms Kathleen Gorman, Laois Community Forum  
Mr Derek Banim, Environmental Pillar  
Mr Michael Bergin, Farming & Agricultural Sector

In 2012, Laois County Development Board continued its work and held 4 meetings to progress the three

objectives of its Strategy Review, including the endorsement of local development agency plans for submission to Central Government. Objectives in the Laois CDB Strategy Review 2009 - 2012 are:

- Enhancing Employment Opportunities for all.
- Promoting Laois as a Child Friendly County.
- Laois will retain and develop the viability of its towns and villages.

Task Groups established by the Board to carry out specific actions in the Strategy Review met regularly in 2012 to progress these actions.

## **Social Inclusion Measures Working Group**

The Social Inclusion Measures Working Group continued to meet throughout the year to discuss and collaborate on issues in respect of social exclusion in the county.

## **Laois Local Drugs Network**

Laois Local Drugs Network Committee continued to meet throughout 2012. The work of the network assists in raising awareness of the importance of supporting those awaiting treatment and recovery of substance misuse within the county. In 2012, the Network showcased an awareness handbook for parents in relation to drug and alcohol misuse and young people, which was published the previous year, by holding information sessions for parents in several locations across the county, in association with Laois Sports Partnership and the GAA ASAP Officer.

## **Laois Traveller Inateragency Group**

This Group comprises a number of agencies and organisations whose work includes the betterment of life for the travelling community in the county. In 2012, the work of this Group included:

- Development of an education programme aimed at literacy skills and confidence building to enter the education system.
- Traveller Primary Healthcare Programme – 3 Traveller Health workers were employed and reached out to over 60 Traveller families in 2012 in respect of topics e.g., dental health, mental health and fire safety.

- Ongoing promotion of Traveller culture including the hosting of photographic workshops and an exhibition during National Traveller Pride Week in June 2012



### Community Smoke Alarms Scheme 2012

In 2012, the County Development Board engaged in the scheme to purchase 200 smoke alarms (2 per residence) and recouped the costs from the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government. Through community representatives and elected members, fifty traveller families along with elderly people in Clonaslee, Ballyroan, Ballinakill, Aghaboe, Portlaoise and Stradbally benefited from this year's scheme

Also in 2012, the Department made available a community scheme for distribution of smoke alarms to the deaf and hard of hearing. Laois County Development Board facilitated the purchase of smoke alarms for ten such households in Co. Laois.

Community & Enterprise Section continued in 2012 to facilitate and provide supports for:

- Laois Ethnic Minority Support Group
- Laois Mental Health Collaborative Group
- Lone Parents Networking
- Older Persons
- Marginalised and Seldom Heard in the community

### Laois Comhairle Na nÓg 2012

Laois Comhairle na nÓg (Laois Youth Council) enjoyed a very successful year in 2012, with the recruitment of several new young people to the Comhairle.



So what has Laois Comhairle done in 2012 to represent young people in Laois and to help their voice be heard?

Laois Comhairle na nÓg strives to represent the young people of Laois and in a real way, want to make their voices heard among the adult decision makers in our county, so that the future generation can help to make our county a better place to live, work and visit.

It is the aim of Laois Comhairle to consult with the adult decision makers, who make policies affecting young people in our county, such as ensuring protection for young people or information for young people on positive mental health or safe spaces to hang out. There are so many ways in which young people and adults who make policies can work together, to ensure that young people are protected and informed, through being consulted. The Comhairle is also tasked with the provision of feedback to the young people across the county on these issues and consultations and they are also represented nationally on the National Comhairle na nÓg Executive in 2012 by Mr. Ger Quinn.



Laois Comhairle has been very busy in 2012, reforming its membership, its Executive and facilitated by adult expertise, completed projects which have been progressed during the year, including:

- The Comhairle formed a new Executive and elected their new Chairperson, Ms. Lysagh Redmond, Scoil Chríost Rí, Portlaoise.



## COMMUNITY, COUNTY PROMOTION, ARTS, SPORTS & LIBRARIES

- Their Youth Mental Health Conference entitled “IMIND”, held as part of the ‘Laois CONNECTS’ Mental Health Awareness Week in September 2012, was a phenomenal success and got much attention at local and national level.



- They published a booklet on “Skills for Leaving Home” for distribution to all 6th year students and opened discussions with a local youth organisation regarding their taking on the updating and distribution in future years.



- They launched a positive body image campaign entitled “Be the True You” among young people in Laois.
- They held their AGM in Mountrath Community School on 25th October 2012 which was attended by over 100 young people. Issues discussed included:
  - What’s out there for young people in Laois
  - Teens in Trouble

Following consultations with all those who attended, various issues were decided by the Comhairle members to work on in the next year/two years.



- They presented their work to Laois County Development Board and met with Laois County Manager, Mr. Peter Carey during 2012.

Other things Laois Comhairle na nÓg has been involved in 2012 were:

- Development of Portlaoise Youth Café, a POBAL funded agency collaborative project, which opened to the public in November 2012.
- Making a presentation to the Dept of Children & Youth Affairs on how Laois Comhairle makes its links with adult decision makers through its relationship with the County Development Board.
- Representing young people on the Laois VEC Youth Committee
- Attendance at conferences, including a Comhairle National Networking Day and The National Comhairle Showcase in November 2012, hosted by the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs.

### County Joint Policing Committee

The Joint Policing Committee offers Local Authorities, Elected Members, An Garda Síochána, members of the Oireachtas, community leaders and members of the public, through a partnership model, the opportunity to make a significant impact on the quality of daily life for all members of the community in each Local Authority area. They provide a forum where the Local Authority and the Senior Garda Officers, responsible for the policing of the County, with the participation of the Oireachtas members and community interests can consult, discuss and make recommendations on matters affecting the policing of County Laois.

The Annual Public Meeting of the County Laois Joint Policing Committee was held on 8th October, 2012. Members of the public attended and posed questions to the Committee and responses were given by An Garda Síochána and Laois County Council. The theme for this year's public meeting was: "Assisting An Garda Síochána and the Local Authority in supporting local communities".

In 2012, the County Joint Policing Committee welcomed Chief Superintendent John Scanlan to the Laois/Offaly Division and thanked Chief Superintendent Frank Moore, who retired during the year, for his commitment and service to County Laois.

### Laois Community Forum

[www.laoiscommunityforum.ie](http://www.laoiscommunityforum.ie)



### Forum Members

Laois Community Forum is made up of an elected Forum Executive Committee representing the community/ voluntary section in each of the five Electoral Areas:

#### Portlaoise:

Sylvia Rouget, Andy Sutton, Maria Groarke

#### Emo:

Margaret Guijit-Lawlor, Michael Cobbe, Tom Donohue

#### Luggacurren:

Roghan Headen, Kathleen Gorman, Pat Whelan

#### Mountmellick:

Sheelagh Coyle, Matt Barrett, Paddy Buggy (Chairperson)

#### Borris-in-Ossory:

Mary White, Jenny McDonnell, Michael Lynch, Michael G. Phelan, Noreen Byrne, and Mick Dowling

Laois Community Forum Priorities 2012 were:

- To continue to represent the community/ voluntary sector at County Development Board and local development agency level
- To continue to promote social inclusion in all sectors of the community
- To acknowledge the endeavours of those community and voluntary groups in the county and to promote same
- To improve communication between the Forum and community/voluntary groups at local area level
- To deliver the actions committed to by the

Forum in the County Development Board Strategy Review 2009 – 2012

- To highlight awareness throughout the county of important issues, e.g., positive mental health and suicide prevention, also governance in community/voluntary sector and principles of fundraising
- To assist the Forum Members through training in presentation and social media networking to enable further publicity of the Forum throughout the county and nationally
- To improve public relations and enhance the image of the Forum through promotion of its work in local and national media

The Forum was well represented at County Development Board level by Kathleen Gorman and Maria Groarke and at local development level by Paddy Buggy. The Forum was also represented on each Council SPC, Town and County Joint Policing Committees and several other forums such as Laois Heritage Forum, Laois Partnership and Laois County Childcare Committee.

### Socially inclusive events & projects



Laois Connects Mental Health Awareness Week

One of the highlights for the Forum was the hosting of a week long

event on Mental Health Awareness called Laois Connects in September 2012. Launched by RTE broadcaster, Ms. Claire Byrne, the week long event included talks, workshops and seminars on issues relating to mental health that tied in with the main theme – Laois Connects (Community, Ourselves, Nature, Nurture, Engage, Coping, Talk and Support). The aim of the week was to raise awareness about mental health issues and to provide a showcase for the supports that exist in the local community. Laois Community Forum hosted the event in collaboration with a number of agencies – HSE, Laois Sports Partnership, Mental Health Ireland, GROW, Shine, Laois County Council, Laois Partnership Company, Laois VEC. The event was also partnered with a number of organisations – the GAA, IFA and the Leinster Express. Key speakers took part in many seminars and workshops around Laois and various activities were organised from walks to yoga to meditation / mindfulness and art therapy. Events were organised in locations throughout County Laois on various mental health topics such as building resilience, coping with stress and anxiety, depression, bereavement and suicide

awareness. The feedback from the Laois Connects week was extremely positive with large attendances at many of the events.

### Community Alert Grant Schemes

One of the key objectives for the Community Forum in 2012 was to financially assist groups who wish to establish community alert rapid texting systems within local community alert areas, in making up the shortfall for same. Eight Community Alert groups applied and each received grants to go towards the cost of setting up rapid texting systems. Support for Community Alert groups and particularly those living in rurally isolated areas is a key priority for Laois Community Forum.

### Support for people with disabilities

Laois Community Forum funded the Transition Year Student's Disability Awareness Programme 2012 in association with Laois Sports Partnership. The aim of the programme is to make students more aware of the issue of disability, through sport and to broaden their knowledge in order to make them feel comfortable when dealing with people with various forms of disability – physical, intellectual, sensory, mental health or emotional/behavioural difficulties.

### Drug and Alcohol Awareness

Laois Community Forum funded the Drugs Awareness Roadshow in conjunction with the ASAP Officer, Laois Partnership and an Garda Síochána and Youth Work Ireland. In 2012, Laois Community Forum sponsored the print run of Parents Manuals on Drugs and Alcohol which raises awareness of drugs and alcohol.

### Support for Older People

'Be Winter Ready' Campaign – publication of brochures and posters which were distributed throughout the County in conjunction with organisations and agencies represented on the Major Emergency Planning Committee for Laois.

### Support for Ethnic Minorities

Laois Community Supported Ethnic Minority groups in Laois by supporting their 'Celebration of Culture and Food Festival' which was a key unifying tool to bring various cultures together and to promote integration and facilitate cross-cultural dialogue.

### Communications & Networking

Members of the Forum attended the various

conferences during the year and the Forum also facilitated some of its registered groups, whose representatives attended one-day training courses provided through The Wheel and other such community development organisations.

The Forum continued during 2012, to promote its work and the work of the Community & Voluntary sector through its website and Facebook page, through its newsletter and representation of the Forum at all major events in the County, including those organised and held by the Forum itself, such as the Community & Voluntary Awards, Area Meetings with community groups and Residents Meeting. Excellent Coverage of all these events in local press also went to promote the name of Laois Community Forum and its work during the year.

### Area Meetings 2012

The Forum's highlight of 2012 with regard to establishing linkages was the hosting of 3 meetings between the Forum and community group representatives at area level. Successful meetings were held in Portarlinton & Castletown, with several issues being discussed and several networking opportunities discovered. A pilot networking of residents' committee meetings took place in Portlaoise Town, as a way of capacity building them to address any estate management issues they may have and to find ways of accessing relevant information which may assist them.

The Forum continued to work with An Garda Síochána in 2012, developing this template for pilot residents' groups networking meeting, which took place in March. Further collaboration also continues to take place in relation to assisting community alert and neighbourhood watch groups in the county, with advice and support being given by both the Forum and An Garda Síochána.

### 2012 Community & Voluntary Awards recognises community heroes

The heroes of local communities across the county were celebrated by Laois Community Forum last November when over 230 people gathered in the Killeslin Hotel, Portlaoise for the 4th Annual Community & Voluntary Awards hosted by Laois Community Forum, aimed to recognise the tremendous contribution made by community and voluntary groups to life in County Laois.

The Forum, comprising 18 members who represent community and voluntary groups countywide, welcomed 74 nominees in six categories and 24 individuals nominated for their outstanding



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

The night was opened with a performance by Award Runners-up and winners on the night were:

### Arts & Culture

Winner: Abbeyfest  
Runner-up: Spink Comhaltas

### Children & Young People

Winner: Graiguecullen/Killeslin  
Youth Ministry  
Runner-up: Abbeyleix Junior Hockey  
Club

### Sport & Leisure

Winner: St Anne's AFC  
Runner-up: Oughaval Athletic Club

### Heritage & Environment

Winner: Abbeyleix Tidy Towns  
Committee  
Runner-up: South Laois Tourism

### Community Services & Support

Winner: Portlaoise Parish Centre  
1st Runner-up: Portarlinton Dirty Old  
Towns Committee  
2nd Runner-up: Woodenbridge & District  
Community Alert Group

Of the 24 people nominated, Maura O' Gorman from Clonaslee was honoured on the night by the Community Forum as Unsung Hero 2012 and was presented with her award by Chairperson of the Forum, Mr Paddy Buggy.

Mr Buggy congratulated all the nominees, who are all, as he put it, heroes in their own community, for the hard work and commitment they put into their local areas and people. He also thanked his fellow Forum members for their commitment and hard work and thanked Laois County Council for its constant support.

Cllr Paul Mitchell, Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, praised and congratulated Laois Community Forum for being the voice of the community in Laois,

stating the importance of that voice being heard strongly and on behalf of all working in the sector, developing ways of working that will empower groups and individuals in the community, especially in the present climate of change and expansion.

Ms Anna Marie Delaney, Director of Services, thanked the Forum for their work in this area and congratulated all the attendees, nominators and nominees. She stated that the hard work attitude and desire of volunteers to enhance and protect their communities should constantly be acknowledged; the community & voluntary sector in Laois is an example of all that can be achieved with such a positive way of thinking.

Laois Community Forum welcomes all groups to register with them and you can do so by contacting Tel. (057) 8674337, by email to [LaoisCommunityForum@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:LaoisCommunityForum@laoiscoco.ie) or download a registration form at [www.laoiscommunityforum.ie](http://www.laoiscommunityforum.ie).



### Pride of Place 2012

Durrow represented County Laois in the 2012 annual Co-operation Ireland All-Island IPB Pride of Place Awards. "Marvellous Community" was just one of the many compliments uttered by the judges who visited the town in July 2012.

Pride of the local people in Durrow was displayed in the best possible way, as the judges were treated to visions of Durrow, past present and future, through the guises of pageants, scarecrows, castles and bicycles, no less!

Having won the competition in their category in 2006, Durrow was entered by Laois County Council in the "Previous Winners" category; a category created to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Pride of Place Competition, and to showcase the wonderful work

being carried out by communities all over Ireland and Northern Ireland, showing the progress that has been made by them over the years, since their success in the competition.

None other than Durrow could stake such a claim of progression since they won the Award in 2006. They boasted festivals and events, fundraising, the support of the local community for young and old alike, tourism initiatives, websites and technology advances, walking and cycling routes, while also displaying the hard work and commitment of the local people to making Durrow the best place to live, work and visit.

The judges, officials and elected members were introduced to over 40 clubs and organisations in the town, as well as local people, business owners and passers by, who wanted to tell them how much Durrow has improved and developed in the 6 years since winning the competition.

Evelyn Clancy, Chairperson of Durrow Development Forum thanked the judges for visiting Durrow and also thanked all the local people who helped out in preparation for the day.

Donal Connolly and William Beatty thanked the community for such a wonderful day, complimenting them on their progress over the past six years, and wishing them the best in their future endeavours.

Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Paul Mitchell stated, on behalf of Laois County Council, how proud we are of our heritage and our local communities, Durrow being such a wonderful example of how communities, by working together, can achieve anything.



In addition to this, the community of Abbeyleix Town, previous winners in the competition, were chosen by the National Pride of Place Committee to enter the International Liveable Communities Awards 2012.

Community representatives from Abbeyleix along with an official and elected members representing Laois County Council travelled to present to the judges in this worldwide competition. The finals of the competition took place in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates and Abbeyleix were successful in securing a silver medal in their category.

Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Paul Mitchell, Chairman of Laois County Development Board, Cllr. John King and Mr. Peter Carey, County Manager all congratulated Abbeyleix on their success in this year's competition and thanked them for representing Laois so well at international level.



### Other Activities

Community & Enterprise Section staff represented the County Development Board and Laois County Council on several Boards and Committees during 2012 and also collaborated with the following agencies/organisations on various projects and initiatives throughout 2012:

- Laois Partnership Company
- Laois Sports Partnership
- Laois Trip
- Laois County Enterprise Board
- Laois County Childcare Committee
- BLOCK and PORT Garda Diversion Projects
- Portlaoise Youth Cafe Consortium
- Laois Local Drugs Network
- Laois Mental Health Collaborative Group
- LABEL (Laois Third Level Centre)
- Laois VEC Youth Committee
- Citizens Information Centre
- Midlands Regional Drugs Task Force
- Midland Traveller Conflict & Mediation Committee



## TOURISM

### Events & Festivals

The Tourism section of Laois County Council was actively involved in promoting Laois and building its profile throughout 2012. Listed below are some of the major events that were held throughout the year.

#### Launch of Laois Garden Trail.

In March with the support of the Heritage Council, a Garden Trail Booklet was published and launched by Broadcaster, Lecturer & Garden Expert, Mr. Dermot O'Neill. The Trail currently features ten gardens from Laois, eight privately owned gardens, and two in the ownership of the Office of Public Works. The garden trail is available for download at [www.laoistourism.ie](http://www.laoistourism.ie) or from The Tourist Office Portlaoise & Public Libraries. A new website [www.laoisgardens.ie](http://www.laoisgardens.ie) was also developed to help promote the gardens.

#### Laois International Golf Challenge

The Laois International Golf Challenge took place from Monday May 14th -17th. This is the eighth year that the challenge has taken place, and still continues to attract overseas players who come back each year to participate in the event and enjoy a relaxed break in County Laois.

This year's event was played at Portarlinton, The Heath, and Portlaoise Golf Clubs, and the final took place at the Heritage Golf & Spa Resort, Killenard.

Sixty eight golfers took part in the golf challenge over three days, with the final twenty teams with the best scores playing in the final in the Heritage Golf & Spa Resort, Killenard.



The Awards ceremony for the event took place on May 17th at the Heritage Golf & Spa Resort, Killenard. Mr. Justin Treacy (RTE Sport) was MC on the night

and announced all the results of the various prizes that were presented on the night. Over thirty prizes were awarded to various golfers over the course of the competition, including, nearest to the pin, longest drives, and 3rd, 2nd, and 1st prizes over the four day event.

#### Tourism & Business Information Office

Laois County Council opened a Tourism & Business Office in Lyster Square, Portlaoise. The Tourism Office is opened five days a week. The Chamber of Commerce & Portlaoise Downtown Traders Group also occupy the offices offering a service to the public.

#### The Rose of Tralee Regional Finals

Fifty four young ladies participated in the Rose of Tralee Regional Finals which took place over the June Bank Holiday weekend. A weekend long festival was held with the Roses visiting local schools, St Vincents Hospital Mountmellick, attending Mass in Portlaoise, visiting Emo House & Gardens, Killenard Golf & Spa Resort and Castle Durrow. The Roses also took part in a grand parade of Portlaoise Town on Saturday June 2nd with Rosebuds from the schools across the County, escorted in classic cars from the Gordon Bennett Classic Car Committee Members.

Laois County Council & Laois Tourism have secured the hosting of the festival for another three years, with support from the following sponsors: The Portlaoise Heritage Hotel, The Maldron Hotel, Castle Durrow and Morrissey & Co.





### Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run

The Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run 2012 took place over the June Bank Holiday weekend. A Cathaoirleach's reception was held at Aras an Chontae on Friday June 1st to welcome the visitors, particularly the overseas visitors to Laois.

The participants drove the historic Gordon Bennett Route over the weekend and the highlight for many was their participation in the Gala Rose of Tralee Regional Parade through the streets of Portlaoise on Saturday June 2nd.

The Gordon Bennett Festival is now an important component of the Rose of Tralee Regional Festival in Portlaoise.



### The Laois Heartlands Rally

The Laois Heartlands Rally took place in Co. Laois on the weekend of the 9th /10th of June. This was the 2nd year the event was hosted in Laois and had a mixed variety of entertainment for car rally enthusiasts and families. Two 20km staged races took place on Sunday June 10th and throughout Saturday various activities including servicing, scrutinising of cars and ceremonial Start of the event took place on Saturday evening.

### The Gathering

Laois County Council in partnership with Laois Tourism Committee were actively involved in promoting the Gathering 2013. A Steering Group was established to oversee the events & festivals that will take place throughout the year. A public meeting to discuss various ideas for Gatherings and outline the structures that will be in place to support such events/ideas was held in October. In attendance to address the large crowd on the evening was Minister for Art, Sport and Tourism, Mr. Leo Varadkar T.D.

Other Events that were supported by Laois County Council include,  
St Patrick Day Parades, Mountmellick, Portlaoise, Abbeyleix, Portlarlinton  
GAA Annual Conference 2012  
Laois International Golf Challenge 2012  
Laois Regional Rose of Tralee Finals 2012  
Abbeyfest Festival - Abbeyleix  
Barrow Awards Scheme 2012  
Laois Car Rally 2012  
Laois Feile Peil na nÓg  
50th Festival of Mountain Rosenallis  
Laois Walks Festival  
French Festival Portarlinton  
Rathdowney Flare in the Square  
Ossory Agricultural Show (Rathdowney)  
Durrow Howya Festival  
Stradbally National Steam Rally  
Blueberry Festival, Portarlinton  
Halloween Howls Comedy Festival

## ARTS SECTION

### Laois School of Music

Laois School of Music continues to be a centre of excellence for music tuition in the Midlands, with over 300 students availing of tuition over a wide range of instruments, employing 18 part-time tutors and 1 full-time Co-ordinator. A Gala Celebration Concert was held in April to mark 10 years of the project and members of the LSM's Youth Orchestras performed for President Michael D.Higgins during his visit to Laois in June.

### Laois Music Generation

Laois Music Education Partnership was successfully granted Music Generation funding in December 2011, and Music Generation Laois commenced in April 2012, after the appointment of Rosa Flannery as Co-ordinator to the project. The project is led by Laois County Council, and supported by Laois VEC and Laois Partnership. Music Generation Laois has eight programme strands; Harp, Brass, Uilleann Pipes, Choral, an Orchestral programme, a School of Rock, The Music Box – a programme for children and young people with special needs and Stampede Drumming – a world percussion programme. Music Generation Laois delivered a range of successful Summer Camps in Portlaoise in July. An Open Evening in Portlaoise College in September, aimed at schools and the public, further developed interest and enthusiasm in the Music Generation Laois programme

strands, and the event received substantial coverage on RTE's Nationwide.



Between September and December 2012, over twenty one schools and Centres participated in Music Generation Laois programmes. The Music Box, Stamped Drumming, the brass, harp, uilleann pipe and choral programmes are now firmly established, and further expansion is planned for 2013 including the commencement of The School of Rock and the Orchestral programme.



### Laois Youth Theatre

Laois Youth Theatre had a busy year in 2012 with lots of workshops, performances and exchanges taking place throughout the year. Members and facilitators participated in fun and inspiring workshops with Coisceim Dance Company at the Dunamais Arts Centre and provided a colourful display at the Portlaoise St Patrick's Day Parade. The Portlaoise group went on an exchange trip to Ennis to develop a partnership with Clare Youth Theatre. In May Stradbally Youth Theatre took part in an intergenerational event for the Bealtaine Festival for older people. Shoppers at Laois Shopping Centre were stopped in their tracks when Laois Youth Theatre presented a FLASHMOB with their friends from Clare Youth Theatre. A Halloween event included a performance by Laois Youth Theatre as frozen statues at the Laois Shopping Centre much to the amusement of passing shoppers. In November

the NAYD spent a day filming with Stradbally Youth Theatre for their Capture Youth Theatre video, due out this year. The culmination of the years' work was the presentation of "It Only Ever Happens in the Movies" in November at the Dunamais Arts Centre; the shows also featured "HEADLINES", a short play by Stradbally Youth Theatre. In December the members also enjoyed a trip to the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin for a tour of this newly opened theatre and to see the show "Pinocchio-A Nightmare".

### Dunamais Arts Centre

Laois County Council continues to support the Dunamais Arts Centre. Louise Donlan, founding Manager, resigned from the Dunamais Arts Centre and Michelle de Forge was appointed as Centre Manager in November. A root and branch review of the Dunamais Arts Centre was undertaken in 2012.

### Stradbally Arthouse

The Arthouse Stradbally had a number of interesting and successful events running throughout the year including workshops, tours and exhibitions. One of the main highlights included welcoming President Michael D. Higgins on 13th June to the Arthouse on his first official visit as President to County Laois. The exhibition programme included paintings by George Burland, work by the children of Corrig Kids Playschool in aid of Chernobyl Children International, a photographic exhibition by Fiona Saunders and The Art of Sound - presented by the Contemporary Music Centre. In August the artists' in the Arthouse were involved in creating the "The Honeycomb" art installation project for the Electric Picnic. Resident artists Gemma Guihan, Karen Hendy, Lorraine Walsh and Cara Byrne held a series of weeklong summer camps in July and workshops were held for National Drawing Day as well as a series of Mother and Toddler workshops. National Culture Night on 21st September involved a full programme of free events including artists' workshops, tours, exhibitions and music performances. In October - Shadow Play-a series of five workshops ran in The Arthouse, Stradbally with resident artist Lorraine Walsh. Artist C  il  n Rush, the NCAD graduate artist in residence worked throughout the year with three community groups, giving regular workshops and talks.

### The Artists in Schools Scheme

The Artists in Schools Scheme ran in seven schools in 2012. This Scheme allows students to have an in-depth experience with the professional artist and

gives them the opportunity to experience different art mediums.

### **Bealtaine Festival – for Older People**

The Arts Office presented a programme of events for older people over the month of May including a series of tours and workshops with the resident artists and visiting artists at the Arthouse in Stradbally. An Exhibition of Photography was held in Áras an Chontae. An Intergenerational Storytelling workshop with Stradbally Youth Theatre and members of the Stradbally guild of the ICA in Stradbally. The Carnation Theatre Group and the Laois ICA Federation Choir performed in Mountmellick and Abbeyleix Hospitals. Intergenerational dance workshops and a showcase performance at the Parish Centre by members of The 50+ Active Age Group and students from Emo NS. A brochure listing the programme of events happening in the county was published by the Arts Office.

### **Midland Collaborative Projects**

Two Midlands arts and culture magazines were published in 2012 and distributed throughout the Midlands Region. A Series of Midland Master classes included the delivery of professional master classes/development courses for writers and photographers.

### **Summer Arts programme**

A series of 18 weeklong art workshops were held throughout the county incorporating socially inclusive projects in Mountmellick, Mountrath and Portlaoise.

### **Leaves Literature Festival**

The annual Leaves Literature Festival in November included a packed programme of children's' workshops, adult writing workshops, book launches, readings and music.

### **National Culture Night**

Culture Night on Friday 21st September was a huge success with free events happening all around Laois, including workshops, exhibitions, drama performances, concerts and lots more for all ages.

### **Other activities included**

Arts Act Grants Awards  
Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary  
Exhibitions

Percent for Art Projects included – M7 Motorway Projects  
National Poetry Day Event  
National Music Day  
Support of Festivals – Mountmellick Drama Festival, and the Slieve Bloom Storytelling Festival.

### **Arts Plan 2013 - 2016**

The new Arts plan 2013-2016 was compiled and will be published in 2013.

<b>Performance Indicators</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
No. of Arts Grants Allocated:	45	49	47
Per 1,000 population:	2714	2430	2150
No. of Youth Theatre:	4	4	4
Summer Arts Workshops:	18	18	18
Laois School of Music -			
No. of Students:	380	380	330

### **SPORT & LEISURE SECTION**

The Sport and Leisure Section of Laois County Council has delivered successful events and activities during 2012. Most notable were

#### **Play Provision**

Amenity Area – Mountmellick

An Outdoor Gym, Table Tennis & Chess Tables, Boules and Meggars Courts are amongst the facilities in the newly developed amenity area with exercise stations, which was officially opened on Tuesday 5th June 2012 in Irishtown, Mountmellick Co. Laois by Councillor John Bonham, Cathaoirleach, Laois County Council and Councillor Stephen Lynch, Cathaoirleach, Mountmellick Town Council. The facility was developed by Laois County Council in association with Mountmellick Town Council with the assistance of National Lottery Funding from the Local Authority Sports Capital Programme, administered by Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport.

The outdoor gym consists of seven exercise stations with different pieces of equipment, including a cross-trainer, a double air-walker, a leg press, a double-rider, and a shoulder-builder. The gym is specially designed to safely exercise all parts of the body, and each piece of equipment is accompanied by detailed instructions. The facility uniquely also contains a toddler play area which will facilitate parents and grandparents to exercise while the toddlers in their charge play safely within view.



### Playground opening – Rathdowney

Gort Na nÓg (Field of the Young) Playground and Multi Use Games Area was opened on 29th June 2012 beside St Fergal's College and was named by Isabelle Kelly, Kiladooley NS. This Playground and MUGA is an excellent example of the work of a community that not only identified a need in their area but also worked tirelessly to be able to address that need in difficult and challenging times. It is an example of what can be done when communities and state agencies work together to provide facilities that will benefit not just the children of Rathdowney but also the children of the surrounding communities.

The Rathdowney Playground Group raised this money, through various fundraising activities (fun days, 5km walk, scrap metal collection, guess the value of the trolley) and donations. This funding has provided the necessary financial support to allow the Rathdowney Playground Group made up of dedicated parents and community members to develop the first state of the art play and games area for the children of Rathdowney and surrounding areas.



The project is a joint effort involving the Rathdowney Playground Group in co-operation with Laois County Council and Laois Partnership Company.

### National Bike Week 2012

Annual National Bike Week was held from 16th – 24th June 2012. Laois County Council co-ordinated a series of events with the assistance of Community groups countywide. The events catered for all ages and abilities and were attended by over eight hundred participants. Family Fun Cycles were held in Emo, Durrow, & Clonaslee.

The South Laois Tourism Bike Trail was officially launched on Sunday 17th June in The Square, Durrow

by Liam Ó Neill, Uachtarán CLG. The trail was well attended and was followed by a Family Fun Cycle. This year we had the participation of the Clough High Nelly Club in a Fun Cycle. Other events included Bike Challenge & Games in Kiln Lane Estate, Mountrath, Cycle to get Fit in Rathdowney and Come 'n' Try Tandem Cycle was held at Portlaoise Leisure Centre.

As part of the school Road Safety Programme, a Safe Cycle Workshop was held at Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise and also MYDC held Bike Awareness Day in Mountmellick. The workshop gave information on safety while cycling, how to check bicycles and there were fun activities using bikes.



All the events were very well attended, the rain was never to far away but it didn't deter the enthusiasm of the participants.

### Children's Activity Programme

Laois County Council organised and delivered a very successful Easter and Summer activity programme in 2012 throughout the county. Parks Tennis, Easter & Summer programme was delivered at Abbeyleix, Mountmellick, Portlaoise & Portarlinton with our four week Camp Co Co Summer programme being delivered at Vicarstown, Portarlinton, Ballyroan, Mountrath, Rathdowney and Portlaoise. Over eight hundred children participated in these activity programmes. This year for the first time we held a Halloween Soccer Camp in Portlaoise and Portarlinton for 6 – 12 year olds.

### National Play Day 2012

Laois County Council delivered a free family event to celebrate National Play Day during the summer of 2012 which was held in Giguecullen, Carlow. It was organised in co-operation with the Laois and Carlow Local Authorities with funding from the Department of

Transport, Tourism & Sport. The event was very well attended, the rain was never too far away but it didn't deter the enthusiasm of the 500+ participants.



### National Trails Day

National Trails Day took place on 7th October 2012, in Emo Park and this year we included a Family Fun Walk with a Nature Detective element catering for all abilities and ages. The event was a great success.

### Sports Capital Grants

Laois County Council received Sports Capital Funding of €185,243 towards the development of the following facilities; Outdoor Gym & Table Tennis in Mountrath & Mountmellick, Floodlighting of Outdoor Pitches Portarlinton and an Extension to the Gym at Portlaoise Leisure Centre.

### Pools Programme Grants

Grant-aid of €396,360 was made available to Laois County Council towards the cost of improving disability access and energy efficiency at Portlaoise & Portarlinton Leisure Centres.

### Laois County Council / FAI Football in the Community Programme

#### Community Football Programmes

The football in the community programme has been running across the county in both rural and urban areas for the last number of years, nominated by both local residents and councillors. The programme is aimed at children who may not play soccer with a club or want to enjoy soccer on their own doorstep. The Development Officer assisted by local volunteers will implement weekly coaching sessions for one hour

over an 8 week period to give children the opportunity to take part in organised sport within their local community. All community programmes are free of charge and open to both boys and girls.

### Road to Poland

To celebrate Euro 2012 being held in Poland/Ukraine there was a Road to Poland competition run in a number of communities linking in with clubs across the county. Local competitions were held in 6 venues with the winners coming through to a finals day in Portlaoise Leisure Centre on June Bank Holiday weekend. The competition was very successful day with Cathaoirleach John Bonham presenting prizes to the winning teams from Portlaoise and Portarlinton.

### Soccer Tods Programme

Soccer Tods was introduced to provide soccer activity for boys and girls aged between 3 and 6 years of age. Since the start of the programme it has shown to increase the development of children and they are more likely to get involved with a club once they finish the programme with us. The programme is over an 8 week time period and costs €30. 116 participants took part in 2012 with a number of participants taking part in 2/3 sessions in the year. The programme works on the basic skills of soccer including passing, dribbling, shooting and goalkeeping. The activity is non competitive with each child having a football during practice to ensure they get a large amount of contact time with the football which has been proven to help players develop.

### Late Night Soccer

This programme was set up mainly to give young adults ages 15-18 an activity to take part in late on a Friday night. The programme is run in association with the Gardaí and the Garda diversion programmes in





the town where the league is set up. Mountmellick had 36 boys aged between 16 and 18 that took part in the league over 8 weeks with prizes awarded to the top three points scorers.

### Women/Girls Soccer

#### Soccer Sisters Programme

This programme is devised by the Women's Unit of the FAI to help give girls aged 7-12 the opportunity to take part in soccer. Many girls within Laois are currently not being catered for by clubs. With the Soccer Sisters and drop in session more girls are getting the opportunity to play soccer. Linking in with clubs is vital as a number of clubs have taken on teams from the girls that attended the programme. Soccer Sisters camp was ran in Durrow in 2012 with fifteen participants.



### Football for All

The FAI Football for All programme are soccer programmes that are run for individuals with special needs. There are many opportunities for individuals from primary school right up to adults. Within Laois the FAI Development Officer works with a number of different groups including the National Learning Network, St. Francis Special School and Rehab Care, Oak House and Rowenberry. The groups are separated into abilities with one group of lower ability taking part in sessions each Thursday and the higher ability participants taking part in sessions every Friday.

### Portlaoise Street league

The Street Leagues were run over 10 weeks from June until August to provide weekly activity for individuals who were students, long term unemployed, individuals who were recovering addicts to alcohol or drugs, ethnic minority groups including Irish travellers.

Teams played on a weekly basis in the league with a one day cup competition. 2012 saw the biggest numbers so far with just over 110 players taking part on a weekly basis. The winning and runner up teams received prizes at the presentation day and now represent Laois in the All Ireland Street League finals in Tallaght in April 2013. The All Ireland finals are also used as a trial for the international team. In 2012 Oliver Carroll was chosen to represent Ireland in Mexico after completing trials in Dublin for six weeks and was honoured with a reception from Dublin City Mayor. On the same night Brian Farrell received his cap for his international trip to Mexico.

## LIBRARIES

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 four full-time branches and six part-time branches. Library Services in the county continue to provide an excellent space for sections of the local community. The public libraries in Laois offer more than just books and have wide ranging services in all branches. These include broadband internet services at very reasonable rates, printing, photocopying and scanning facilities, free WIFI for members, audio books, DVDs, music, online resources, daily newspapers and magazines, free events and clubs. Modern libraries offer a rich cultural and educational environment that provides a space and access for those who wish to enrich their day to day lives.

### FÁS eLearning and Computer Learning

Laois County Libraries in partnership with FÁS, continued with the "FÁS eLearning at the Library" project in selected libraries in Laois. This new learning programme has been developed by FÁS for people with little or no IT skills as well as for those with some basic IT skills.

The project is running very successfully in Abbeylax, Mountrath, Portlaoise and Mountmellick Libraries with waiting lists for all courses.

### WIFI

WIFI is available in Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Abbeylax, Portarlinton and Rathdowney Libraries.



## Bookfund

The Bookfund for 2012 was €35,000 with an additional book grant of €12,000 from the Department of Justice for the provision of Prison Library stock.

## Events and Activities

Laois County Libraries held a large variety of events and activities in all Branch Libraries throughout the county in 2012. Children and Adults throughout the county enjoyed the numerous events and activities organised by library staff. This year's programme was hectic and exciting with author visits, art competitions, art launches and exhibitions, music recitals, book clubs, computer classes and storytelling.

The highlights of the year included Library Ireland Week, Heritage Week, Culture Night and Children's Book Festival.

## Story Lab-Summer reading Challenge

The drip drip of the rain and the recession didn't do much for a lot of children this summer, however the libraries Summer Reading Challenge proved a big success over the summer months. Over five hundred children of all ages from the county completed the challenge, reading six books each in July and August. This initiative further promotes literacy and reading in children and encourages reading for all ages.

## Local History/Studies

The Local studies and Archives section of the county library continues to be well used internationally via email queries and by local historians and members of the Public. In 2012 Library staff have improved and added extra content to the local history website [www.askaboutireland.ie](http://www.askaboutireland.ie). It includes a large selection of postcards of County Laois, e.g. old streetscapes and famous landmarks. There is also added narrative about local customs and folklore. The link from the LibraryWeb Page is: [www.laois.ie/leisureandculture/libraries/localresearch](http://www.laois.ie/leisureandculture/libraries/localresearch). Some well known books on Local History have been digitised and are now available online. They are "Statistical Survey of the Queens County" by Coote, "The History of the Queens County" by O'Byrne and "The Manor of Glenmore".

## Heritage Week - Library Events

All of the libraries hosted a great selection of events for Heritage Week 2012. Mountrath, Ballylinan, Strad-

bally, Abbeyleix, Mountmellick and Portlaoise Libraries had a visit from Irish History Live and listened to Tales of The Titanic. Jude Stynes, a local historian gave animated history sessions for children in Abbeyleix and Mountrath libraries. Well known illustrator Gordon Darcy held wildlife drawing sessions in Mountmellick, Stradbally, Durrow and Portlaoise Libraries.

## Mountrath Library

Mountrath Library continued with events and children's activities during 2012. Monthly class visits and book displays continued with arts and crafts for younger readers. FÁS Computer classes continued. For Easter there were Easter Crafts for younger readers. For Children's Book Festival there were cupcake making, magic shows and family tree talks. The weekly Knitting Club was held every Friday morning in the library and proved very popular. Adults and children's bookclubs were held every month in the library.

## Abbeyleix Library

Abbeyleix Library continued to have weekly art classes for children and monthly events. FÁS eLearning continued. The Art Gallery continued to be a premier location in the county for art exhibitions with eleven art exhibitions during the year featuring Sheelagh Cross, Orlagh McDonagh, John Byrne and Kay Butler. The Children's Book Festival was again a great success with class visits and author visits from Judi Curtin and Niamh Sharkey.

## Portlaoise Library

Portlaoise Library had a busy year of events and these included monthly adult bookclubs, knitting classes, weekly class visits by local and surrounding schools, FÁS eLearning, weekly Irish Classes "Ciorcal Comhrá" and competitions. Anne Egan held creative writing classes in May, local artist Noel Hume held a display of his work in the library in January. An Irish Evening was held on 9th March with Irish dancing, singing and music with an attendance of over two hundred. For Children's Book Festival there were magic shows, storytime, genealogy talks, authors Judi Curtin, Joe O'Brien and Michael Smith read stories. The "Main Street Exhibition" of old shopfronts and premises in the town was very popular and local residents and businesses were invited to the library to view it and bring in their own photos.

### Mountmellick Library

Mountmellick Library has had a busy schedule of events in 2012. The library has become a great success since opening and is now a central attraction to the community in Mountmellick and surrounding areas. There have been weekly class visits, bookclubs for adults and children, knitting clubs, storytime and weekly games clubs. Highlights of these include; launch of Tom Phe-lans book "Nailer", Culture Night Events with readings by Arthur Broomfield and art demonstration classes and a visit by Author Monica McInerney, Library first birthday party, Slieve Bloom Storytelling festival, Author visits for Childrens Book Festival, Maeve Friel, Michael Smith, Christmas carols and Christmas crafts.

The Art Gallery was fully booked for 2012 with exhibitions by Lucy McKenna, Mountmellick Photography Society, Tom Joyce and Alison Weir and featured local art groups from Geashill and Mountmellick.

### Prison Service

The library service works with the staff of the Midland and Portlaoise Prisons to provide a service modelled as closely as possible on the public library. The prison libraries provide access to books, newspapers, magazines and other multi-media stock as well as a space in which to pursue educational, cultural and leisure interests. The purchase of stock and library activities seek to include vulnerable groups and to foster literacy and reading in the prisons. The library helps inmates deal with their sentences in a positive way and also to plan and work towards a new life after release.

In 2012 the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform provided €12,000 for the purchase of library stock.

### National Service Indicators

#### L: Library Services

#### L. 1 Public Opening Hours

Average number of opening hours per week for full-time libraries:	34.71
Average number of opening hours per week for part time libraries (where applicable):	13.65
No of full time libraries that have Lunchtime openings:	1
No of full time libraries that have evening openings:	3
No of full time libraries that have Saturday openings:	3

L. 2 Total No of visits to full time libraries : 213,400

L. 3 (i) Annual expenditure on stock per head of population county wide:	0.58
(ii) Number of items issued per head of population (county/city wide)	
for books	2.96
for other items	0.64

L. 4 Number of Internet sessions provided 19,318

## Planning & Development and Environment Strategic Policy Committee

**Director of Services:** Kieran Kehoe

**Chairperson:** John Joe Fennelly, M.C.C.

### Members

Ray Cribbin, M.C.C.  
John Moran, M.C.C.  
Patrick Bowe, M.C.C.  
Patrick Bracken, M.C.C.  
David Goodwin, M.C.C.  
Stephen Lynch, T.C.

### Sectoral

Michael McEvoy  
Sheelagh Coyle  
Jason Redmond  
Caroline Goucher

## ENVIRONMENT

**Senior Engineer:** John O'Donoghue

### Report on Strategic Policy Committee

The Planning & Development and Environment Strategic Policy Committee (S.P.C.) held four meetings during 2012 to discuss and approve strategy and policy documents such as the update of Local Area Plans. The Committee also received progress reports and updates on the Framework for Sustainable Development, Consultation on National Waste Policy Change, updates on Kyletalesha Landfill Site, Evaluation of the Joint Regional Waste Management Plan, Septic Tank Regulations, Active Travel Town Strategy, County Walking Strategy and County Tree Preservation Strategy.

## Community Initiatives

### Clean Up Laois Week

In association with An Taisce's National Spring Clean, Clean up Laois Week took place from the 16th to the 20th April, 2012. Litter pickers, hi-viz jackets, bags and gloves were distributed among the many groups, schools and individuals who became involved in clean-ups in their own areas. The Environmental Enforcement Officers worked closely with the community and collected the resulting bags of rubbish for appropriate disposal. In total 46.6 tonnes of rubbish was collected as a result of this initiative.

## Grant Schemes

Under the Community Grant Scheme 2012, funding was awarded to eighty seven groups for various projects to benefit the environment and enhance local amenities. The Community Project Fund provides financial assistance for each elected member to assist with worthwhile projects in their own areas and thirty applications were processed in 2012. Twenty two Tidy Towns Committees received funding under the Tidy Towns Grants initiative. In partnership with the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, seven grants were allocated to promote sustainable development at community level under the LA21 Environmental Partnership Fund. These projects will focus on training, education and awareness activities as well as school garden and biodiversity projects.

### Tidy Towns

Ballacolla overall winners - Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Competition



Laois County Council is actively working with the Tidy Towns Committees to help invest in their future and ensure continued growth and development. Assistance was provided to the groups in the form of the Tidy Towns Grants, Summer Wheelie Bin Scheme, Clean up Laois Week and the Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Competition and Awards. There are currently thirty one committees in the federation and the annual federation competition has proved to be very prestigious as it allows towns and villages of varying standards to compete with each other where they might not otherwise be afforded this chance at National level. Judging in the competition was carried out by Environment Section staff under the headings; Best Natural Environment, Best Built Environment, Best Litter Control and Overall Winners in each population category. In 2012, twenty four Committees entered the competition.

Marks awarded at National level continue to improve



each year and results for 2012 proved very positive with winners in the silver and bronze medal categories. Further awards included an Endeavour Award, County Awards and a Sustainable Development Award. Congratulations and well done to all the hard working Committees, the individuals and volunteers involved, who make an invaluable contribution to the enhancement of the County.

### Environment Awareness Initiatives

The role of social media was explored and successfully used during 2012 to promote environmental awareness initiatives and now is an important additional tool to engage with the general public. Various projects were promoted using facebook and twitter including:

- Gum Litter Task Force programme and events (launch and campaign boost initiatives),
- Stop food waste programme and events,
- Anti litter initiatives – including Clean Up Laois Week and An Taisce's National Spring Clean,
- Domestic waste water treatment systems and registration (septic tank registration),
- Community Grant Schemes and Local Agenda 21 Grant Scheme,
- Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Competition and National Tidy Towns Competition,
- Sustainable Transport initiatives (EU 'Do The Right Mix' programme),
- Launch of Bingy – our anti litter mascot, named by the Our Lady's Meadow NS, Durrow,
- Responsible Dog Ownership & dog fouling awareness week,
- Cinema and road side signage promoting anti litter messages.

### Schools Campaign

The green schools programme goes from strength to strength with over 60 Green Flags awarded. The importance of keeping a litter free environment (county-wide and at bring banks) as well as energy conservation, water conservation and sustainable travel also featured in green schools teacher seminars held in Laois Education Centre, Portlaoise during 2012. The comprehensive schools programme also included workshops for schools and the tidy primary schools competition as well as an eco media project for secondary schools.

### Waste Management

A maintenance programme for bring banks was on-going in 2012 as well as the promotion of Civic Amenity Sites (Recycling Centres) at Portlaoise (Kyletalesha) and Portarlinton. The Midlands Waste Management Region conducted an evaluation of the Regional Waste Management Plan as part of their statutory obligations – resulting in the Plan being revised or replaced. This was done in accordance with the Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC) transposed to Waste Directive Regulations 2011. After the evaluation, it was recommended that the Midlands Waste Management Plan be replaced with a new plan which should take into consideration the objectives contained in the latest government waste policy – 'A Resource Opportunity'.

### Litter Management

Litter is one of the main threats to an unspoiled environment – its scale ranges from large-scale indiscriminate dumping to incorrect disposal of chewing gum. Litter, in all its forms, devalues from our living and working environment, makes it less attractive for leisure, tourism and investment and generates a negative impression of our County.

Despite investment of considerable resources in street cleansing & litter control, education & awareness and enforcement at a local level, Laois has a continuing & visible litter problem. It is our view that this challenge is best addressed by working in partnership with key stakeholders (tidy towns, committees, voluntary groups, schools, business community and other public bodies) in our community to combat this problem. Its success is also dependent on maximising on resources available and seeking a fundamental change in the behaviour of each and every citizen of our County.

This Section continues to promote their freephone confidential litter hotline 1850 323230 via advertisement and anti-litter merchandise to encourage members of the public to play their part and report incidences of illegal dumping in their community. In 2012, 899 environmental complaints were received in Environment Section – 554 were litter-related.

During 2012, one hundred and eighty seven litter fines issued for varying offences. Thirty five unpaid fines were sent to our legal team to initiate legal proceedings – sixteen resulted in successful convictions in court. A further ten Section 9 Notices were served on landowners for failing to keep their private lands clean

and free of litter which does not include numerous warning letters for abandoned cars and unauthorised signs around the county.

### Environments' New Mascot



Staff from the Environment Section introduced an anti-litter mascot for the Section which was aptly in the form of a bin. It was fitting to give the life-like character an appropriate name therefore a competition was held inviting primary school children to enter online to choose a suitable name. Of all the entries received, one name stood out above the rest "Binjy"! "Binjy" visited Our Ladys Meadow National School to present their prize as the winning entrant and is now an integral part of anti-litter initiatives in the Section.

### Dog Fouling Campaign



The issue of dog littering in public areas is an issue that has come to the fore in recent times posing a serious health and litter nuisance for communities. Whilst considerable investment in promoting awareness of this litter offence is ongoing (signage, provision of specialised bins in public parks/green areas, distribution of responsible dog ownership leaflets, billboard & media campaigns, stickers, doggie bag holders), this Section further strengthened their intolerance of this offence with a week-long campaign in problematic towns in Laois in March 2012. The anti-dog fouling team launched their campaign in Mountmellick and afterwards rolled out the initiative to Portlaoise, Portarlington, Mountrath, Rathdowney, Abbeyleix and Durrow with the assistance of the Tidy Towns groups.

### Gum Litter Taskforce



The Gum Litter Taskforce (GLT) is the result of a negotiated agreement with the chewing gum industry and is a central tenet of the Department's anti-litter strategy. The 2012 GLT campaign proved successful with monitoring results indicating an improvement in gum litter levels.

### IBAL (Irish Business Against Litter)

Portlaoise town continues to be assessed under the above national anti-litter league. For the second half of 2012, Portlaoise town improved their cleanliness rating and is now ranked in thirty ninth position out of forty two cities/towns surveyed with seven out of the ten sites inspected receiving the top grade.

According to the business group, IBAL, over 80% of Ireland's towns are as clean or cleaner than the European average despite a tightening of the public purse at local authority level. Stimulating local pride among the local community and business people is regarded as key to achieving success.

## National Litter Pollution Monitoring System (NLPMS)

This system provides for the ongoing measurement of litter levels across the country with litter pollution/quantification surveys undertaken by each local authority between the months of May-December each year. Year on year, a marked improvement in our litter levels nationally has been observed. With the help of these surveys, a high level of cleanliness has been achieved (74%) in comparison to 48% when the initiative was first introduced in 2002. These surveys also assist in monitoring the success of anti-litter activities as well as collecting key information on the composition, scale and nature of littering and to clearly identify problem areas at an early stage.

## Energy Efficiency

### Overview of Energy Usage in 2012

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

Laois County Council submitted their 2011 Annual Monitoring & Reporting report to the SEAI on the 9th November 2012. The 2012 Annual Monitoring & Reporting report will be completed using a new online tool mid 2013. SEAI will produce a scorecard from the 2011 data in May/June 2013 so total consumption figures for 2011 will not be available until that date.

Laois County Council have completed their eighteen month energy plan, prepared in June 2011. This energy plan aimed to deliver annual savings of 3% across all major energy consuming departments. Savings delivered in 2012 are shown below. A new 12 month energy plan has also been prepared for 2013 with highlights also shown below.

Actions Undertaken in 2012 (Total Savings: 246.542MWh)

Laois County Council undertook a range of initiatives to improve our energy performance, including:

- Clonaslee Integrated Constructed Wetlands project (16,960kWh)
- Install Storage heater controls at Portarlinton Library (3,000 KWh)
- Install Storage heater controls at Rathdowney Library (3,000 KWh)
- Landfill gas feasibility study (Offaly, Westmeath, Laois)
- Raised temperature of server room - while en-

suring the server intake does not rise above 23 deg C (8,760 KWh)

- Reduced solar gain by installing thermal film to windows or by blocking windows with a partitioning system (4,380 KWh)
- Removed Cable management arms at rear of servers to allow heat to escape from the rear of the servers more efficiently
- Removed 7no. 150W SON with 0NONE at Main Street (4,358 KWh)
- Mountmellick Library Tariff change (43,200 KWh)
- EV utility vehicle in Portlaoise (23,964 KWh)
- Closed Rathdowney area office (18,000 KWh)
- Closed Portarlinton area office (9,120 KWh)
- Closed Ballymorris WTP (103,800 KWh)
- Closed Stradbally WC (8,000 KWh)

### Actions Planned for 2013

In 2013, Laois County Council intends to further improve our energy performance by undertaking the following initiatives:

- Implement heating management systems at Abbeyleix Fire Station
- Implement heating management systems at Durrow Fire Station
- Implement heating management systems at Portlaoise Fire Station
- Replacement of 400Mercury lamps with 25no 150W SON
- Implement GPS/ECO Drive education and monitoring process
- 29 Big Belly Solar compactor bins
- Stradbally Library Tariff review
- Programme timer for heating and cooling in previously Roads office space, County Hall
- Machinery yard heating optimisation
- Landfill activity reduction
- Baseline reduction library office, County Hall
- Baseline PL reduction motorways
- Install landfill gas engine



## Performance Indicators

## E. Environmental Services

E.3 Percentage of households provided with segregated waste collection for:

- (i) Dry recyclables
- (ii) Organics

E.4 Household waste collected from kerbside and household waste collected from recycling facilities, which is sent for recycling:

- (i) Percentage of Household Waste (collected at kerbside) which is sent for recycling:
- (ii) Tonnage of Household Waste (collected at kerbside) which is sent for recycling
- (iii) Tonnage of Household Waste recycled, which arises from waste collected from recycling facilities (i.e. bring banks, Civic amenity sites, transfer stations and other recycling facilities)

2,427

E.5 Household waste collected which is sent to landfill:

- tonnage
- percentage of household waste collected

\*Based on householders who avail of kebside collection in the county

## E.6 Recycling Facilities

Category	Column A	Column B	Column C	Column D
	Number of Bring Sites	Number of Civic Amenity sites	Notal Number of Facilities	Number of locations per 5,000 population
Glass	47	2	2	2.91
Cans	47	2	2	2.91
Textiles	6	2	2	0.50
Batteries	-	2	2	0.12
Oils	-	2	2	0.12
Cardboard	-	2	2	0.12
Magazines	-	2	2	0.12
Plate Glass	-	2	2	0.12
Metal	-	2	2	0.12
Plastic	-	2	2	0.12
WEEE	-	2	2	0.12
Newspaper	-	2	2	0.12
Wood	-	2	2	0.12
Flourescent lamps	-	2	2	0.15
Hedge Trimmers	-	2	2	0.15
Tyres	-	2	2	0.15

E.7 Litter Prevention & Environmental Protection

Number of Litter Wardens

- Total number of full time litter wardens:	3
- Total number of part-time litter wardens:	0
- Number of litter wardens (both full and part time per 5,000 population):	0.19%
- Number of on the spot fines issued:	187
- Number of on the spot fines paid:	65
- Number of notices issued (under Sections 9,15, 16, 17 and 20 of the Litter Pollution Act 1997);	10
- Total number of prosecutions taken (all prosecutions under the Litter Acts 1997-2003):	35
- Number of prosecution cases taken because of non-payment of on-the-spot fines:	35
- Total number of prosecutions secured (all prosecutions under the Litter Acts 1997-2003):	16
- Number of prosecutions secured (relating to non payment of on-the-spot fines):	16
- % of areas within the Local Authority that are:	
Unpolluted (i.e. litter-free)	12%
Slightly polluted with litter	81%
Moderately polluted with litter	7%
Significantly polluted with litter	0.0%
Grossly polluted with litter	0.0%

E.8 Environmental Complaints and Enforcement

- Total number of cases subject to complaints concerning environmental pollution (relation to waste, litter, water pollution, noise pollution, air pollution):	901
- Number of complaints investigated:	888 (13 open, not actioned yet)
- Number of complaints resolved where no further action was necessary:	740 (7 pending)
- Number of enforcement procedures taken:	141

E.9 Percentage of Schools participating in Environmental campaigns

- Primary Schools	89%
- Secondary Schools	100%
Total number of Primary Schools	72
Total number of secondary schools	12
Number of Secondary Schools participating Environmental Campaigns	100%

## PLANNING

**Director of Services:** Anna Marie Delaney

**Senior Planner:** Angela McEvoy

**Senior Executive Office:** Carmel McNicholl

### Planning Department

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

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

- (i) Development Management
- (ii) Forward Planning
- (iii) Planning Enforcement
- (iv) Building Control
- (v) Unfinished Housing Estates

#### (i) Development Management

The number of planning applications received in 2012 was 489. However, it should be noted that 109 of the total applications received were invalid and required the applicant to submit a new application. The main reasons for invalidation of planning files were public notices being out of date, or not erected on site, previous permissions expired, agents name omitted from maps/drawings, no north point shown on maps and distances not shown on site layouts.

The following table gives a breakdown of valid planning applications received and decisions made during 2012:

Number of valid applications received:	380
Number of decisions made:	356
Number of applications granted:	310
Number of applications refused:	46

#### 2012 Performance

Invalid applications returned to applicant:	22%
Referrals to Area Offices (working days):	14

13 applications were appealed to An Bord Pleanála in 2012. 15 Appeal decisions issued in 2012.

### Customer Service Initiatives

2012 saw the continuation of the scanning of planning applications as they are received by the Planning Authority. Throughout 2012, the public were able to access all planning applications on-line within two weeks of the Planning Authority receiving them.

213 pre-planning meetings were held in 2012, at which members of the public had an opportunity to discuss planning matters with a planner prior to submitting a planning application. The Planners also facilitated the public by holding a number of pre-planning meetings on site.

18 Section 5 Certificates were issued by Laois County Council in 2012.

The Planning website continues to be a very popular attraction with 84,164 hits last year.

#### (ii) Forward Planning

Forward Planning plays a pivotal role in the physical, economic and social development of County Laois. The Laois County Development Plan 2011- 2017, provides the strategic framework and policy context within which the Local Authority makes its planning decisions.

### Land-Use Plans

In relation to Land Use Plans the following Statutory Local Area Plans, each covering the period 2012-2018, were adopted in the course of 2012:

- Portlaoise Local Area Plan
- Mountmellick Local Area Plan
- Portarlington Joint Local Area Plan 2012-2018
- Carlow/Graigucullen Joint Spatial Plan 2012-2018.

The Portarlington and Graigucullen plans were prepared on an agreed joint basis between Laois and Offaly and Carlow local authorities respectively. The preparation of the joint plans represented a prime example of the principle of Shared Services in operation among local authorities. Each local area plan included an environmental report covering such topics as Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.



## Conservation

A total of 8 no. Section 57 Declarations in relation to works to Protected Structures were processed in 2012, each within the required statutory timeframe. Laois County Council ran a joint planning/heritage seminar in November 2012. Well attended and received, the seminar covered a wide range of relevant topics including energy sustainability in protected structures, funding and the preparation of conservation plans. The Abbeyleix Sustainable Communities Plan was launched at the seminar.

## Active Travel Strategy

To avail of funding made available by the Dept. of Transport, an Active Travel Strategy was prepared by the Planning and Road Design Sections in 2012. The key objective of the strategy, which focuses on the main urban centres of the county, is on encouraging a modal shift in transport means so as to increase walking and cycling participation rates as well as greater use of public transport and reduced dependency on the private car.

## Part VIII Development

Part 8 consent for the following projects was granted during 2012:

- A major Schools Campus in Portlaoise, comprising three separate schools, was approved by the members of Laois County Council at the October 2012 Council Meeting.
- A residential development at Timahoe Road, Portlaoise was approved by the members of Laois County Council at the April 2012 Council Meeting.
- A water reservoir at Knocks, Ballyfin was approved by the members of Laois County Council at the January 2012 Council Meeting.

## Dereliction

Availing of the powers available to it under the provisions of the Derelict Sites Act 1990 as amended, Laois County Council continues to be pro-active in dealing with the problem of dereliction throughout the county.

Eight new cases of dereliction were identified in the course of 2012, of which seven are located in Portlaoise and one in Abbeyleix. For each case, the Council served a Section 8[2] Notice of Intention on the

relevant owners of the properties. This notice is similar to a Warning Letter used in conventional enforcement cases. It is basically a warning to the property owner that the Council is considering formally placing the property in question in the Derelict Sites Register.

Separately, levies in the sum of €108,300 were charged on the owners of derelict properties while levies in the sum of €5,700 were paid.

Where levies have not been paid, cases will be referred to the Council's solicitors to initiate Court action in order to secure payment of the debts. This process is ongoing.

## Quarrying

Laois County Council conducted a review of all quarries in its administrative area in 2012. This review was carried out under Section 261(A) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended. The main purpose was to ascertain compliance with European Environmental Law. Following this review some quarries were directed to apply to An Bord Pleanála for substitute consent while others are being issued with Enforcement Notices.

## (iii) Planning Enforcement

### Introduction

The Planning Authority, in accordance with the statutory requirements under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2011, seeks to ensure compliance to planning permissions and also to prevent unauthorised development.

### Unauthorised Development

Unauthorised development is where development is carried out without having received the appropriate planning permission or not being considered exempt under the Planning & Development Regulations 2001-2012. In addition, developments being carried out which are not in accordance with planning permission granted are unauthorised developments. The Planning Authority follows up on all written complaints of unauthorised development where they appear to be well founded. A standard complaint form is available on line.

### General Procedural Steps

On receipt of a bone fide written complaint, an investigation is carried out and a decision taken on validity of the complaint. The following Enforcement steps

may be initiated.

A Warning Letter may be issued within 6 weeks from receipt of written representation. If a satisfactory resolution is not achieved following issue of a Warning Letter, then further enforcement action may be followed by service of an Enforcement Notice.

The Enforcement Notice gives a timescale for compliance and if it is not adhered to, this will result in further action such as referral to our legal advisor. It also seeks to recoup both legal and administrative costs incurred by Laois County Council in respect of the case.

The issuing of an Enforcement Notice can proceed even if a Warning Letter has not been sent.

### 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. A number of enquiries from the Office of the Ombudsman are further evidence of increased public involvement.

There are strong legal powers available to enable the Planning Authority to deal with offenders and there has been a significant increase in the fines payable, together with the imposition of a minimum fine where a person is convicted of an offence in relation to unauthorised development. Laois County Council has been very pro-active in 2012 in following up complaints of unauthorised developments.

### 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. One such outdoor event is the "Electric Picnic" which has been held in Stradbally yearly since 2004.

### (iv) Building Control

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

Number of valid commencement notices received:	145
Number of Agricultural Building Notices	10
Number of buildings covered by valid commencement notices:	135
Number of buildings inspected:	35
Number of buildings inspected as a % of buildings covered by valid Commencement notices:	26%

### (v) Taking-in-Charge of Estates

Laois County Council is responsible for the taking in charge of estates. Traditionally this occurred when a request was received from the developer of the estate and/or the owners of the houses within the estate. However, in recent years, where the developer has failed to complete the estate, Laois County Council has intervened to complete the estate and this work is usually funded from the bond.

There were 8 estates taken in charge in 2012:

Rathevan,Portlaoise  
Seskin Court, Portarlinton  
Barrowview, Portarlinton  
Sli-na-Mona, Portarlinton  
Grallow Woods, Abbeyleix  
Royal Court, Borris in Ossory  
Brockview, Mountmellick  
Churchfield Court, Castletown

A register of unfinished housing estates was compiled by Laois County Council in 2011. However, 2012 has seen a reduction in the number of unfinished estates on this register as Laois County Council has continued to work with developers to ensure the estates are completed in accordance with the planning permission granted. The Planning Authority also has the power to encourage the developer to engage with the local authority by initiating enforcement proceedings. Laois County Council has had considerable success in this regard also in 2012. Under the Government funded "Public Safety Initiative for Unfinished estates", Laois County Council secured €55,360 in 2012 in respect of the Corrig Glen estate in Portarlinton.

The Planning Department in conjunction with the DOEC&LG completed a survey of 70 unfinished estates in the County, also in 2012.

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

## Planning and Building Control - Service Indicators

### Planning Applications – Decision making

Individual Houses	31/12/12
Number of applications decided	1
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	0
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	1
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	67
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	100%
% of grants	0%
% of refusals	0%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanála	0%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanála	0%
New Housing Development	31/12/12
Number of applications decided	9
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	6
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	3
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
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	73
% of grants	89%
% of refusals	11%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations by An Bord Pleanála	0%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanála	0%
Other: Not Requiring EIA	31/12/12
Number of applications decided	291
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	195
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	96



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
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	75
% of grants	91%
% of refusals	9%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations by An Bord Pleanála	80%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanála	20%

**Other: Requiring EIA** **31/12/12**

Number of applications decided	6
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	2
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	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
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	77
% of grants	100%
% of refusals	0%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations by An Bord Pleanála	0%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanála	0%

**Enforcement** **31/12/12**

Total number of cases subject to complaints that were investigated	99
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were dismissed	33
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were resolved through negotiations	20
Number of enforcement procedures taken through warning letters	61
Number of enforcement procedures taken through enforcement notices	29
Number of prosecutions	10

**Opening Hours and Consultations** **31/12/12**

Average number of opening hours per week	32.5
Number of pre-planning consultation meetings held	213
Average length of time (in days) from request for consultation with local authority planner to actual formal meeting for pre-planning consultation	7 (working days)
No of new buildings notified that were inspected by the Local Authority	35

## 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 delivery of the projects detailed in the Laois Heritage Plan.

### Laois Heritage Plan 2007 - 2011

The Heritage Plan is a partnership plan written and implemented by the Heritage Forum, a group representing all groups with an interest in heritage in Laois. The current plan contains 50 actions which have been implemented over the past number of years, under 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
- Promote active conservation of heritage in Laois

Projects from the Heritage Plan 2007 -2011 were delivered in 2012. A new Heritage Plan for Laois is at draft stage and will be completed in 2013.

The following information relates to projects from the Laois Heritage Plan undertaken with the support of the Heritage Council during 2012. Full survey and research reports are available from the Heritage Office of Laois County Council, or to download at [www.laois.ie/heritage](http://www.laois.ie/heritage).

### Collect information on the Heritage of County Laois

The collection and presentation 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 2012:

- Laois County Council provided data for the development of the National Heritage Council data viewer on the internet.
- Data collected on all the graveyards of Laois was uploaded to the website [www.historic.graves.ie](http://www.historic.graves.ie).

### Raise Awareness and Promote Enjoyment of the Heritage of Laois

In 2012, 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.

Events held during 2012 to raise awareness of heritage issues included:

- A week-long programme of over 50 family events, guided walks, talks, slideshows and fundays was organized for national Heritage Week in August;



- The Heritage Office assisted with the development and judging of the Laois Heritage Society Schools Heritage Project, a competition for primary and secondary schools, organised in association with the Laois Education Centre;
- A plan for the future sustainable development of the public realm in Abbeyleix was launched in November;
- The annual "Celebrating Laois Heritage" seminar was held in Abbeyleix in November;



- Support was given to a range of groups for heritage related events, e.g. BirdWatch Ireland

Laois Branch, Laois Heritage Society etc.

In addition to events, a book on the Geology of Laois and Offaly by Dr John Feehan was supported in 2012. In addition, the Laois Gardens Trail booklet was launched, and the partner website to the booklet was developed, now live at [www.laoisgardens.ie](http://www.laoisgardens.ie), in partnership with Laois Tourism.

**Promote Best Practice in Heritage Management & Promote Active Conservation of heritage.**

A range of groups were assisted with practical conservation projects in areas ranging from wildlife surveys

to graveyard management.

The conservation of the dining hall at Donaghmore Workhouse was progressed in 2012, with the assistance of Laois Partnership funding. A design team was appointed and a detailed plan for the site prepared, in preparation for going to tender for contractors.

**Heritage Performance Indicators**

Performance Indicators		2010	2011	2012
No. actions from the Laois Heritage Plan implemented	The max no. of actions funded each year by the Heritage Council has fallen from 8 to 4	4	4	4
No. meetings of Laois Heritage Forum held	The Laois Heritage Forum generally meets quarterly, with working groups meeting more often as required	3	3	3
Number of biodiversity surveys carried out		1	0	0
Number of built/cultural heritage surveys carried out		2	1	1
Number of publications on Laois Heritage produced/supported	These publications are in addition to project reports produced following surveys etc.	4	3	1
Number of Heritage Talks/Training Courses/Seminars organised or supported	Including events held for Heritage Week	46	50	57



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Laois County Council is actively involved in and has a pivotal role to play in the economic development of the County. The Council is committed to attracting inward investment, fostering a climate of self sustaining development and is eager to ensure that balanced development takes place throughout the County.

### Economic Task Group

The County Manager chairs the economic task group, which comprises representatives from state agencies and local business interests, and provides a focal point for the economic promotion of the County.

Prioritised Actions/Objectives include:

- Development of the National Enterprise Park
- To encourage/facilitate the development of indigenous industry
- Decentralisation
- Promoting County Laois as an events centre
- Promoting the development of high and specialised education fields in the county to attract new industry
- Developing a high level support group to act as advocates for County Laois
- Implement the objectives contained in the County Development Strategy review 2009 - 2012 which focus on enhancing employment opportunities for all.

The Task Group has set up two sub-committees of local business people who will make recommendations to the group in relation to Business Development Initiatives and Marketing and Promoting the County.

### Enterprise Centres

Laois County Council has provided two Enterprise Centres within the County, located at Portlaoise and Portarlinton. Both are open for business and committed to developing and sustaining a local enterprise culture in their respective areas. A total of 20 people are presently employed at Portlaoise Enterprise Centre and a further 25 are employed at Portarlinton Enterprise Centre.

### Clonminam Business Park Upgrade

Works were undertaken in 2012 contributing to the integrated and coherent development of the area, reinforcing the commercial vitality of the area and making an important contribution to attracting and sustaining employment opportunities.

## 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 will continue to make sites available given the county's potential for further development and capacity for new enterprise.

### 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.

Future developments on this site will harness the potential of Portlaoise's geographical position in the centre of the Country.

### Business Networking Event

A Business Networking Event was hosted by Laois County Council at Áras an Chontae on 20th June 2012 with representatives from eighty six different businesses in attendance. The event was very successful with presentations by Mr Niall Hughes, Connect Ireland & Mr Stephen Hughes, Dalata Hotel Group.

## LAOIS WATER SAFETY

### Water Safety Awareness Week 2012

As Part of Laois' commitment to Water Safety Awareness, Laois Water Safety ran a schools poster competition during Water Safety Awareness Week 28th May 2012 to 1st June 2012. The children were asked to design and colour a poster with the caption "A Life Jacket saves lives you can bet your life on it " There was a great response with all posters displayed in Portlaoise Leisure Centre. The winners and runners up were presented with vouchers for Elvery's Sport Shop. During this week awareness talks were held in two venues, Durrow and Fisherstown. Water Safety Instructors met with local fishermen, canoeists, walkers and scouts to hear how to stay safe on and near the river banks.

## Water Safety Classes

Laois Water Safety successfully delivered Spring and Autumn Water Safety Classes at Portlaoise Leisure Centre. Certificates were presented to all participants in May 2012 by Mr Noel McCarthy, Chairperson Laois Water Safety.

## Nipper Club

After Easter for the last few years Laois Water Safety have been running a Nipper Club. This group are shown how to use rescue equipment and challenges are held to improve speed and techniques. This year we were invited to visit Waterford Water Safety. Thirty children with four instructors travelled to Tramore and great fun was had by all. This was an excellent opportunity for our club to experience open water.



## Paws Programme

Laois County Council in association with Laois Water Safety and leisure centres continued to successfully support & deliver Swimming Lessons combined with Water Safety to fifty primary schools in Co Laois

## Just In Time Award

Captain Colin Lawlor, Clonking, Abbeyleix was the recipient of a "Seiko Just in Time Award" at the Irish Water Safety National Awards ceremony at Dublin City Hall on 27th November 2012. Colin carried out a daring and successful rescue at the river Nore in Kilkenny on the 17th August 2011.

Colin's citation read "On the afternoon of the 17th August 2011, at John's Bridge on the River Nore, Kilkenny, Colin Lawlor was out running along the riverbank when he noticed a person in distress in the

water. He instructed two passers-by to call the emergency services. Without any hesitation he grabbed a lifebuoy and entered the water. The person was tiring and had gone under the water a few times. As he went under again Colin grabbed his wrist and carried him to the bank. Emergency Services arrived and commenced first aid. He made a full recovery."



Just prior to this daring rescue Colin had completed a Water Safety Course with Laois Water Safety at Portlaoise and attributed his successful rescue to methods learned there.

Colin left for a tour with the UN in Lebanon soon after his rescue. He is now attached to the Defence Forces at the Curragh. He hopes to recommence his water safety training.

At the same ceremony six members of Laois Water Safety received Long Service medals for their contribution to water safety –

- 15 year award - Ann Marie Maher and Pat Scully
- 20 year award - Jackie Delaney and Valerie Case
- 30 year award - Stephen O' Toole
- 40 year award - Noel McCarthy



## LAOIS COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

**Acting Chief Fire Officer: Declan Power**

### Fire Service Operations

The operational service responded to 532 incidents in 2012. Of these 313 were fires and the remaining were special service calls; 82 road traffic accidents, 25 incidents of flooding, and 112 other miscellaneous incidents.

### Updating of Equipment

The programme of updating fire brigade equipment was continued with the purchase of vehicle mounted variable message signs equipment, communications equipment and breathing apparatus equipment.

In addition all fire stations are now equipped with an automated external defibrillator (AED)

### Major Emergency Management

Laois County Council's Major Emergency Management Committee continued to assemble every eight weeks to discuss our major emergency management within County Laois.

The Major Emergency Plan was amended twice throughout the year and distributed to all relevant personnel. Work continued in the Council's Chamber area which has been adapted to function as an Inter Agency Local Co-ordination Centre in the event of a Major Emergency being declared. The centre has been provided with all necessary equipment and communications as specified within the Guidance Document for Local Coordination Centres. Additional equipment and communications were provided for the 'On Site' Controller of Operations Team. Laois County Council complied with all Department request regarding both internal training for Council Staff and Inter Agency Training provided by the Department.

### Major Emergency Workshop

On the 7th December 2012 Laois County Council held an Inter Agency Major Emergency On Site Co-ordination Workshop involving the three Principle Response Agencies i.e. Laois Local Authorities, An Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive. The workshop ran successfully and the feedback from both the participants and the umpires was positive.

### Training

As well as basic training for new entrants to the service, fire brigade staff underwent specialist training in the following areas: emergency medical first responder, fire safety engineering, hazardous materials, specialised instructor courses, pump instructor course, hydraulic platform, breathing apparatus, water awareness, driver training and compartment fire behaviour.

### Health & Safety

- The Fire Service's Health, Safety and Welfare Management Programme was reviewed on the 19th January 2012. Laois County Fire and Rescue service rostered senior fire officers convened 30 times throughout the year to assess the programme and monitor its targets.
- Laois County Fire and Rescue Service retained the services of Dr Eddie Murphy to provide our Critical Incident Stress Management C.I.S.M. Service to all fire service personnel.

### Laois Wildland Fire Liaison Group

Laois County Fire & Rescue Service hosted a training seminar on the 12th of April on the topic of firefighting with helicopters.

Agencies including An Garda Síochána, Coillte, the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Bórd na Móna, Laois Civil Defence, Laois Farm Forestry Growers and fire services from around the country attended, with speakers from the Department of Defence, Irish Air Corps, Irish Helicopters and Coillte.

### Fire Safety Certificate and Planning Applications

In 2012, Fire Safety Certificates for 48 commercial developments were processed and advice was provided to the Planning Section in respect of 80 planning applications.

### Licensing of Premises

Applications in relation to 100 premises licensed under the Intoxicating Liquor Acts, Public Dance Halls Act and the Gaming & Lotteries Act were notified to Laois County Fire and Rescue service during 2012. Inspections were carried out as required with reports forwarded to the Courts Service.



## Inspection of Premises

Fire safety inspections of seventy four premises were carried out during 2012. Enforcement action was taken in a number of cases where deficiencies were identified.

## Pre-Incident Planning

The Pre-Incident Planning programme continued in 2012. The recruitment of technicians through the FáS JobBridge scheme in 2012 has greatly enhanced the process of making information about premises around the county available to responding fire crews.

## Community Fire Safety

Fire safety presentations were delivered to a number of community groups during the year. Activities organized during Fire Safety week which took place between October 1st to 8th included station open nights and fire safety leaflet drops.



## Laois Civil Defence

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

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

### 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 and Water

based search and recovery.

## Fire-fighting

Pump and ladder drills, pumping floodwaters and supplying water to the community.

## Warden Service and Radiation Monitoring

Radiation detecting and monitoring.

## 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

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) 8664106, e-mail [lpreson@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:lpreson@laoiscoco.ie) or visit our website at [www.laoiscivildefence.ie](http://www.laoiscivildefence.ie)



## Transportation & Water Services Strategic Policy Committee

**Director of Services:** Kieran Kehoe

**Chairperson:** Kathleen O'Brien, M.C.C.

### Members

Brendan Phelan, M.C.C.  
Ben Brennan, M.C.C.  
Jeremiah Lodge, M.C.C.  
Kathleen O'Brien, M.C.C.  
Seamus McDonald, M.C.C.  
Matthew Keegan, T.C.

### Sectoral

Mr Francis Gorman  
Mr Pat Culleton  
Ms Noreen Byrne  
Mr Brendan O'Brien

## ROADS

**Senior Engineer, Roads:** John O'Donoghue

### 2012 Road Grant Allocations

In 2012, Laois County Council received a total allocation of €12,325,240 for National & Non- National roads in the County. €7.7m of this funding was provided by the Department of Transport under the Regional and Local Roads Investment Programme through the National Roads Authority.

**Funding was provided by the Department of Transport for the following schemes under the Regional and Local Road Investment Programme through the National Roads Authority:**

### Specific Improvement Schemes

Laois County Council received Specific Improvement Grant funding from the Department of Transport for the following schemes in 2012:

**Borris Road** - €1,293,311



This project continued the construction of realignment of the Borris Road for the third year and focussed on the vicinity of Onion's Lane. The scheme involved the acquisition of lands through Compulsory Purchase Order and construction of carriageways, footpaths, cyclepaths, including a new stream culvert, road drainage, telecommunications infrastructure, public lighting works and ancillary services. This scheme provided a major safety improvement for road users between the town and major residential areas and the secondary schools opposite Ashley Gardens and with broader public road network.

### Other Specific Improvement Schemes

Scheme	Allocation
LS5032 Birchgrove Bridge: Replacement of existing bridge	€80,000
LT97122 Cappalug Bridge: Replacement of existing bridge	€60,000

### Road Safety Remedial Measures

In 2012 Laois County Council received allocations to carry out Road Safety Remedial Measure Schemes at various locations throughout the County. €1,014,476 was spent on National Road Schemes and €172,770 was spent on Non- National Road Schemes.

The National Road schemes were as follows:

Scheme	Allocation
N77 Abbeyleix	€47,000
N78 Ballylinan	€37,500
N80 Dysart	€40,000
N80 Windy Gap	€71,000

The above schemes involved junction improvements, traffic calming measures, public lighting improvements, footpaths, pedestrian crossing facilities and the provision of signage.

The Non-National Road schemes were as follows:

Scheme	Allocation
R425 Rock of Cashel	€40,000
R430 Boleybeg	€30,000
R433 Rathdowney	€30,000
R435 Glasha	€30,000
L3838 Coolnaback	€41,000
L3932 Rosnamullane	€20,000
L7176 Ullard	€10,000

The above schemes involved realignments, improve-

ments, super-elevation, visibility improvements and the provision of signage at junctions.

### Road Safety:

395 children received Safe Cycling Training through the six week school programme. An additional 50 pupils took part in a one day Safe Cycle Training, held in the underground car park during National Bike Week. This is an overall increase of thirty two children and three new primary schools taking part in the Safe Cycle Programme. Four secondary schools continue to take part in the Drive for Life Programme.

Demand for high visibility materials such as waist-coats and reflective arm bands increased again this year. Distribution to primary schools and to various community services continues, with requests received from playgroups and Athletic Clubs this year.

Continued co-operation between Environmental Awareness, Laois Sport Partnership and An Taisce has ensured all requests for safety equipment, high-visibility vests and training were met continuing support for the Travel Flag, under the Green Schools Programme.

The Road Safety Officer visited five National Schools and a community alert meeting promoting road safety education was held.

### National Secondary Pavement and Minor Improvement Works

Pavement and minor improvement works were carried out in 2012 on the following roads:

N80 Coolanowle - Stradbally - €780,000: Pavement overlays on the N80 at Corbally, Mountmellick and Stradbally. Eastern Area constructed substantial drainage improvement works in Stradbally in advance of the overlay as part of this allocation.

An allocation of €620,000 was received for the improvement of the N80/L2117 junction at Kyletalesha. Land acquisition was completed in 2012 and the allocation will be used to complete the construction of the scheme in 2013.

### 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 2012, under the Multi-Annual Roadworks Programme 2011-2013, Strengthening and Surface Dressing works were carried out to Regional and County Roads throughout the County. A total of 57.5km of Regional and County Roads were strengthened and a further 39.6km were surface dressed in 2012.

### Regional Road Signage Programme:

During 2012, the Council completed the delivery of the Regional Road Signage programme with upgrades to directional signage on all Regional roads.

### Development Charge Funded Schemes

A number of schemes funded through Development Charges were progressed in 2012.

- Portlaoise Northern Orbital Route

It is expected that sections of this road will be delivered through development of zoned lands.

- Portlaoise Southern Circular Route

Laois County Council has continued to seek dedicated funding to progress the completion of the route independent of private development of the lands.

- Other Schemes

The following schemes were identified to be developed to planning approval stage:

- The Part VIII for the Extension of the Carlow Relief Road went on public display in November 2012. Detailed design and land acquisition will commence early in 2013 following completion of the Part VIII process.
- Portarlinton Western Relief Road, due to be prepared for planning application under Strategic Infrastructure Act in 2012.

### Community Involvement in Roadworks Scheme

This scheme continued in 2012 with an allocation of



€170,000 provided and a total of four projects were successfully undertaken in conjunction with local communities.

### National Service Indicators

#### R: Roads

R.1 Number of kilometres of local and regional roads improved and maintained under the Restoration Programme per annum:

97.1km

Number of kilometres of local and regional roads constructed under the specific improvement grants scheme per annum:

0.5km improved on Borris Road

### WATER SERVICES

**Senior Engineer, Water Services:** Michael O'Hora

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 approximately 24,000 cubic meters of water per day. The volume of unaccounted for water currently stands at 34%, which is better than the national average.

#### 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) No. 2 Regulations, 2007.

The overall compliance by Laois with the drinking water standards in public water supplies is excellent. Water quality has continued to improve year on year.

#### 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.

There are over 100 licences issued by Laois County Council to businesses in the county and the discharges from these businesses are monitored on a regular basis throughout the year.

#### EPA Waste Water Discharge Licence

Under the Wastewater Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations 2007, Laois County Council must apply to the Environmental Protection Agency (E.P.A.) for licences to operate our Wastewater Treatment Plants. Applications in respect of all 29 Waste Water Treatment Plants in the county were submitted to the EPA from 2007 to 2009 and to date licences have been granted for Portlaoise and Clonaslee Plants and certificates have been obtained for fifteen small treatment plants in the county.

The EPA stipulates conditions to ensure compliance with the standards for various discharge parameters and conformity with obligations under various EU Environmental Directives. The EPA will periodically review Licences granted by it.

#### Capital Investment Programme

##### Capital Projects Office

The Capital Projects Office is responsible for delivering the major Water and Wastewater schemes that the Department for the Environment, Community & Local Government has approved under the Water Services Investment Programme 2010 - 2013. This latest annual review of the programme was published in July, 2011.

##### Portarlinton Water Supply Improvement Scheme

The main scheme remains in the category of 'Schemes at Planning Stage 2010 – 2013' under the Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2013.

In March 2012 the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government (DOECLG) approved a budget for consultancy's fees for advanced works at the La Bergerie wellfield. Hydrogeological testing of the La Bergerie wellfield was completed in 2012 and has found it to be a very sustainable source of water for Portarlinton.

### Portlaoise & Mountmellick Water Supply Scheme

The detailed design and preparation of contract documents for the main scheme were progressed in 2012. The current programme puts the main scheme in the category of 'Schemes at Planning Stage 2010 – 2013'.

Following the WSIP Annual Review in July, 2011, Department approval was received for a new advance works contracts which will improve the security and quality of the water supply. A detailed budget submission was subsequently made to the Department to progress these contracts. Contract Documents have now been completed and it is expected to go to tender in the first quarter of 2013.

### Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme

The tenders for the DBO contract were issued to shortlisted Contractors and these tenders are currently being assessed. When this has been completed and approved by Laois County Council it will be submitted to the DOECLG for final approval to award the contract.

The Network contract is currently out to tender. When the tender report is completed and approved by Laois County Council it will be forwarded to the DOECLG for final approval to award the contract.

### Clonaslee ICW

Following the issuing of the EPA Wastewater Discharge Licence for Clonaslee and discussions with the Department, an Integrated Constructed Wetland (ICW) was constructed for Clonaslee. The contract for the Clonaslee ICW was advertised in February 2011. The contract was subsequently awarded to Killeen Civil Engineering and construction started on site in August 2011 and was completed in May of 2012.

In June 2012, Laois County Council hosted a visit from the Deputy Minister of the Water Resources in China and her officials, together with personnel from the Department of Environment. They were very in-



terested to see the newly constructed Integrated Constructed Wetland (ICW) in operation.

A presentation outlining the history of the Clonaslee project and its successful development was given to the visitors. The Chinese delegation was also presented with pottery by local artist – Franz Caffrey and a book on heritage sites in County Laois, before the group continued with a tour of the ICW site.

Mr. Duncan Steward, Environmentalist and Broadcaster, also visited the site while preparing an ECO Eye programme for the RTE series, which is due to be shown on television on Tuesday, 26th Feb 2013.

### Laois Grouped Villages Sewerage Scheme

In the 2010-2012 programme, the Department sanctioned this project as a 'Scheme at Planning'. This scheme covers the five villages of Newtown, The Swan, Ballinakill, Errill and Ballyroan. A brief for the appointment of Consulting Engineers was prepared in December 2012 for submission to the Department in the first quarter of 2013.

### Mountmellick Sewerage Scheme

In May 2012, An Bord Pleanála granted conditional approval for the Mountmellick Sewerage Scheme Phase II to increase the capacity and upgrade the existing plant to a population equivalent of 8,000. The main scheme remains in the category of 'Schemes at Planning Stage 2010 - 2013' under the Water Services Investment Programme 2010 -2013.

### Portarlinton (incl. Emo/Ballybrittas/Killenard) Sewerage Scheme

In May 2012, An Bord Pleanála granted conditional approval for the Portarlinton Sewerage Scheme Stage 1 to increase the capacity and upgrade the existing plant to a population equivalent of 14,000. The main scheme remains in the category of 'Schemes at Planning Stage 2010 – 2013' under the Water Serv-

ices Investment Programme 2010-2013.

## Water Conservation

In February 2012, the DOECLG accepted the Council's Watermain Rehabilitation Strategy Report and proposed works packages that identifies a combined total length of 39km of priority watermains for replacement/rehabilitation. The DOECLG also approved a budget of €2.35m for the first watermains rehabilitation contract. In June 2012, a county-wide telemetry contract was awarded for a telemetry system which will allow Laois County Council to continuously monitor pressure and water usage at 108 meter sites located throughout the County. A Site Investigation Contract for the first watermains rehabilitation contract was completed in December 2012. Expressions of Interest were sought in May 2012 from Contractors for the first Watermains Rehabilitation Contract, Contract No. 1. Following submissions assessment, eight no. Contractors were shortlisted in December 2012 and they will be invited to tender for the Contract in 2013.

## Rural Water Programme

The Council's Rural Water Programme comprises of the following measures:

- Group Water Schemes
- Small Public Water and Sewerage Schemes
- Individual Water Supply Grant Scheme (private wells)

## Group Water Schemes (G.W.S.)

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

There are currently sixty two operational Group Water Schemes in Laois.

## Summary of Grants paid in 2012

### Taking In Charge of Group Water Schemes

€205,575

Ballyfin G.W.S. and Reary G.W.S.

### Upgrade of Existing Group Water Schemes

€267,678

Cullohill G.W.S., Errill G.W.S., The Heath G.W.S., Ballacolla G.W.S., Ballypickas G.W.S., and Barrowhouse G.W.S.

### Subsidy Grants

€383,873

To the various Group Water Schemes in the county.

### Small Water & Sewerage Schemes €557,116

Funding is provided for capital projects for the provision and upgrading of small publicwater and sewerage schemes that complement existing rural water measures. In 2012, work was carried out on the following schemes:

- Ballyroan Water Supply
- Portlaoise Water Supply
- Arles Water Supply,
- Kyle Water Supply,
- The Strand Water Supply,
- Durrow/Ballinakill Water Supply,
- Coolanagh Water Supply,
- Pumphouse Disinfection Upgrades,
- Durrow Waste Water Treatment Plant,
- Ballyroan Waste Water Treatment Plant,
- Ballinakill Waste Water Treatment Plant and Arles Waste Water Treatment Plant.

## Special Environmental Compliance Objective

Funding was provided for small towns and villages to ensure compliance with environmental statutory requirements. Ballyroan Wastewater Scheme was the only town in Laois to receive funding under this measure.



## Individual Water Supply Grant Scheme €57,239

A grant of 75% of cost subject to a maximum grant of €2,031.58 is payable for upgrading a private individual water supply when no alternative group or public supply is available.

## Rural Water Monitoring Committee

The Rural Water Monitoring Committee was set up in 1998. The Committee meets quarterly to agree and monitor the Rural Water Programme. The Committee is comprised of representatives from the Irish Farmer's Association, the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association, The County Federation of Group Water Schemes, The National Federation of Group Water Schemes and Members and Officials of Laois County Council.

## Provision and Maintenance of Cemeteries

Laois County Council continued to operate twenty seven cemeteries throughout the county at Abbeyleix, Annatrim, Ballacolla, Ballinakill, Ballyadams, Ballyfin, Ballylinan, Barrowhouse, Borris-in-Ossory, Camross, Castletown, Clonaslee, Emo, Durrow, Killenard, Killeslin, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Moyanna, Portlaoise, Raheen, Rathdowney, Rosenallis, Shanahoe, Sleaty, Stradbally and Timahoe.

Cemetery Registrars are employed for each Council Cemetery with responsibility for the sale of plots and the maintenance of the burial ground register.

An important part of the Water Services section is the maintaining of records. The transfer of manual data from registers to electronic format continued in 2012.

## Public Conveniences

A total of €74,000 was spent on the maintenance and upkeep of the public toilets in Portlaoise, Mountrath and Stradbally.

## 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.

## National Service Indicators

### E. Water - January to December 2012

E.1 Unaccounted for Water (UFW) as a % of total water supplied under the water supply schemes that the Local Authority is responsible for.) 34%

E.2 Percentage of drinking water analysis results in compliance with statutory requirements with regard to:

Public Schemes: 99.7%

Private Schemes: 97%  
(where appropriate)

**Head of Finance:** Gerry Murphy

**Financial/Management Accountant:** Julie Bergin

The Finance Department is responsible for the following services:

Motor Taxation, Accounts Payable, Revenue Collection, Payroll and Superannuation, NPPR, Household Charge, Internal Audit, Preparation of Annual Budgets and Financial Statements, Financial Management and all ancillary matters

### Commercial Rates

The General Annual Rate on Valuation was €64.63. The rateable Valuation multiplier for Portlaoise and Mountmellick was;

Portlaoise:	€66.63
Mountmellick:	€67.43

### Water and Waste Water Charges

In 2012, the total number of commercial users was 2,853, of which 2,736 were metered. The charge for metered water in 2012 was €0.96 per 1,000 litres and €1.45 per 1,000 litres for waste water. A fixed charge applied to the remaining customers. In addition, there was a standing meter rental charge of €60 per annum.

### Prompt Payment of Accounts

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

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

### NPPR – Non Principal Private Residence

The Local Government Charges Act 2009 introduced a €200 annual charge on non principal private residences. This is payable by the owners to NPPR on behalf of the local authority in whose area the property concerned is located. Payment can be made through the NPPR website [www.nppr.ie](http://www.nppr.ie) or it can be paid by submitting the NPPR registration form and payment to the cash office of your local County Council.

The liability date for the NPPR charge is 31st March

each year. The due date for payment is 31st May. Penalties of €20 per month will be incurred after 30th June.

In 2012, 3,216 non principal private residences were registered (receipts of €855,436)

### Household Charge

The Household Charge was introduced by the Local Government (Household Charge) Act 2011 and is payable by the owners of residential property.

The Household Charge is used to fund local services including fire and emergency services; maintenance and cleaning of streets; planning and development; public parks; street lighting; libraries; open spaces and leisure amenities.

The Household Charge is an interim measure and will cease on January 1st 2013 to be replaced by a Local Property Tax. 26,185 properties are liable to pay the charge in the County. To date 66% of householders have paid the charge.

### 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.

The total transactions carried out by Laois Motor Taxation Office in 2012 was 72,120.

### CO2 Rates

Motor Tax for vehicles registered after the 1 July 2008 will be determined on the basis on twelve CO2 bands. Taxes range from €120 a year for the greenest cars to €2,350 for cars with the highest emissions ratings. Motor tax rates are graduated as one moves up the CO2 emissions.

### Revised Vehicle Registration Procedures

The Revenue Commissioners have appointed the National Car Testing Services (NCTS) to carry out vehicle registration functions on their behalf. They can be contacted at 1890 927 787 or on line at [www.nct.ie/vrt](http://www.nct.ie/vrt).

## Vehicle Licences

The total receipts for 2012 were €10,768,187 compared to €10,655,874 in 2011. The number of vehicle licences (discs) issued in 2012 was 51,306 compared to 53,658 in 2011.

## Driving Licences

Receipts for 2012 were €174,140 (including duplicates) compared with €176,315 in 2011. The number of driving licences issued in 2012 was 10,936 compared with 10,392 in 2011. A Theory Test is mandatory for all first applicants for Learner Permits. The telephone number to call for a Theory test is 1890 606 106. If your first category B Learner Permit is dated after 4th April, 2011 you must take a course of 12 hour Essential Driver Training (EDT) or a 16 hour Basic Training Course before you can ride a motorcycle on a public road.

2012 sees the end of the paper licence. From the 19th January to September 2013, your licence application form will be processed by Laois County Council but you will receive a new style plastic card licence. From September 2013, all applications will be handled by a new service provider – The National Driver Licence Service (NDLS).

## Vehicle Testing

Certificates of Roadworthiness for commercial/goods vehicles were issued in respect of 5,942 vehicles during the year compared to 6,036 for 2011. All commercial goods vehicles require a DOEHLG 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.

Opening Hours: 9.30 a.m. – 3.30p.m. Monday – Friday, including lunchtime.

## Service Indicators at 31st December 2012

% of Motor Tax transactions which:

Are dealt with over the counter:

90.49% (55,175) of Laois MTO Transactions

Are dealt with by post:

9.51% (5,797) of Laois MTO Transactions

Are dealt with on-line:

39.87 (32,263) of vehicle owners eligible to pay Tax online

36% figure for online overall business

Average number of Public Opening hours per week  
28.85 hours

Number of Vehicle Licence Postal Applications and % of overall postal applications which were dealt with:

- |    |                       |                |
|----|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) | on the same day       | 99.26% (5,754) |
| b) | on the 2nd or 3rd day | 0.41% (24)     |
| c) | on the 4th or 5th day | 0% (0)         |
| d) | over 5 days           | 0.33% (19)     |

Number of driver licence applications (with monetary value) and % of such applications which were dealt with:

- |    |                       |                |
|----|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) | on the same day       | 88.06% (8,821) |
| b) | on the 2nd or 3rd day | 11.50% (1,152) |
| c) | on the 4th or 5th day | 0.10% (10)     |
| d) | over 5 days           | 0.30% (34)     |



## Revenue Collection

	31.12.2012	31.12.2011
<b>Housing Loans</b>		
a) Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	76%	81%
b) Percentage of arrears:		
(i) Less than 1 mth	1.7%	2%
(ii) 1-2 Mths	2%	4%
(iii) 2 – 3 months old	3.1%	3%
(iv) more than 3 months old	93.2%	91%
<b>Rents</b>		
a) Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amounts due	94%	94%
b) Percentage of arrears		
(i) Less than four weeks	10.7%	12%
(ii) 4-6 weeks	9.9%	8%
(iii) 6-12 weeks	12.4%	12%
(iv) greater than 12 weeks	67%	68%
<b>Commercial Rates</b>		
Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	74%	77%
<b>Non-Domestic Water Charges</b>		
Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	57%	55%

## Annual Financial Statement

Revenue Account	Gross Expenditure 2012 €	Income 2012 €	Net Expenditure 2012 €
<b>Programme Group</b>			
Housing & Building	10,260,877	11,037,057	(776,180)
Road Transportation & Safety	13,668,351	9,775,313	3,893,038
Water & Sewerage	9,572,104	2,910,626	6,661,478
Development Incentives & Controls	3,673,391	548,611	3,124,780
Environmental Protection	8,969,783	4,642,699	4,327,084
Recreation & Amenity	3,495,912	704,471	2,791,441
Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare	4,465,284	3,918,768	546,516
Miscellaneous	5,450,573	1,960,610	3,489,963
<b>Total Expenditure/Income</b>	<b>59,556,275</b>	<b>35,498,155</b>	
Net cost of programmes to be funded from Rates & Local Government Fund			24,058,120
Rates			12,048,656
Pension Levy			977,108
Local Government Fund - General Purpose Grant			12,780,188
Surplus for Year before Transfers			1,747,832
Transfers from/(to) Reserves			(1,742,404)
Overall Surplus for Year			5,428
General Reserve @ 1st January 2012			(499,962)
General Reserve @ 31st December 2012			(494,534)

## Capital Account

Balance @ 01.01.2012	(5,017,537)
Grants	14,742,783
Other Income	4,444,195
Transfer from/to Revenue	1,742,404
Expenditure	(21,905,225)
Balance @ 31.12.2012	(5,993,380)

## PORTLAOISE TOWN COUNCIL

**Manager:** Michael Rainey

**Town Clerk:** Susan Rooney

**Town Engineer:** Farhan Nasiem

### Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Portlaoise Town Council, Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald was elected as Mayor. Councillor Kathleen O'Brien was elected as Vice-Mayor.

### Members on Boards/Committees

#### Community, Economic Development, Culture & Heritage Committee

Councillor Rotimi Adebari  
Councillor Alan Hand

#### Transport & Water Services Committee

Councillor Jerry Lodge  
Councillor Kathleen O'Brien  
Councillor Matthew Keegan

#### Housing & Social Policy Committee

Councillor Willie Aird  
Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald

### Monthly Meetings

Portlaoise Town Council meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month.

### Main Services Provided

School Warden Services, Community & Environmental Initiatives, Public Convenience, Civic Receptions & Town Twinning.

**Budget 2012** - €89,275

### Conferences

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

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

## MOUNTMELICK TOWN COUNCIL

**Manager:** Ian McCormack

**Town Clerk:** Pamela Tynan

**Town Engineer:** Dermot Leonard

### Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Mountmellick Town Council, Councillor Pat Bowe was elected as Cathaoirleach. Councillor Rosemary Lynch was elected Leas Cathaoirleach.

**Budget 2012:** €55,940

### Representation on Other Bodies

#### Place Names Committee

Councillor Bobby Delaney

#### Mountmellick Bye-Laws Committee

Councillors David Goodwin, Seamus McDonald, Marc Connolly, Pat Bowe and Paddy Bracken.

#### Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances

Councillor Marc Connolly

#### Strategic Policy Committees

Councillors Stephen Lynch and Bobby Delaney

#### Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland

Councillors Paddy Bracken and Stephen Lynch.

### Monthly Meetings

Mountmellick Town Council meetings are held on the first Thursday of each month.

### Conferences

The Town Council supported and was represented at the following conference

- The annual Conference of the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland.

### Social Club

2012 was another very successful year for the Social Club which currently has a membership of 246. Numerous events were held in 2012.

### 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.

### Farewell Party

Due to the large number of staff retiring, both Social Clubs and Management joined forces and organised a Farewell party on 31st May this year to mark the retirement of forty employees. The party was held in the Abbeyleix Manor Hotel and presentations were made to each retiree. A great night was had by all.

### Evening Dinner October 2012

An Evening dinner was organised for Wednesday 17th October at 4.30pm for all members. Nearly 70 members came down to the canteen for some great food and chat with their friends and colleagues

### Annual Mass

The Annual Mass for deceased members and staff of Laois County Council was organised by the Social Club in the Council Chamber on Wednesday 21st November. 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.

### Members Kiddies Christmas Party

The Social Club Members Kiddies Party was held this year in the Heritage hotel Sunday morning 25th November. It was a great success. The kiddies were entertained by Jecca the Clown while the parents had Tea and Sandwiches. Thanks to all who helped make it a great morning.

### Annual Christmas Party

The party was Friday the 7th December this year in the Heritage Hotel. 100 staff attended on the night and a great night was had.

### Golf Society

Larry Gittens captained the Golf Society in 2012. His Captain's Prize was held in Kilkenny Golf Club. There was a good turn out on the day and his prize was won by Fint Scully.

The Kennedy Cup was played this year in conjunction with the Pang Trophy in Gowran Park Golf Club. The Kennedy Cup was won by John Culleton and the Pang Trophy was won by Larry Gittens, John Culleton and Cathal Farrell.

The golfer of the year competition was won by Jim Scully.

Tom O' Carroll is the incoming Captain for 2013.

We are always looking for new members, enquires to Tom O' Carroll, Eddie Kelly or Larry Gittens.



## APPENDIX I

### **Title, purpose and number of members of each Committee and Joint Committee and the number of meetings of each Committee, Joint Committee and Joint Policing Committee held during 2012.**

The following members were elected to the Committees/Outside Bodies outlined hereunder at the Annual General Meeting of Laois County Council held on 19th June, 2009.

#### **COMMITTEES**

<b>Name of Committee</b>	<b>Members Elected</b>	<b>Number of Meetings</b>
Rural Water Monitoring Committee	Councillor Ben Brennan Councillor John Bonham Councillor Tom Mulhall	3
Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Alan Hand Vacancy due to the death of Councillor Pat Bowe (R.I.P) Councillor William Aird Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor John King	1
Kyleelisha Landfill Monitoring Committee	Councillor Patrick Bracken Councillor James Daly Councillor Martin Phelan	2
Laois School of Music Steering Committee	Councillor Mary Sweeney	4
Audit Committee	Councillor John Moran Councillor Jerry Lodge	4
Joint Policing Committee	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor Brendan Phelan Councillor Patrick Bracken Councillor Ray Cribbin Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor Michael Lalor Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor David Goodwin Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor John King Councillor James Daly Councillor Ben Brennan	3
Placenames Committee	Councillor Ben Brennan Councillor Ray Cribbin Councillor John Bonham Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor David Goodwin	0

**OUTSIDE BODIES**

<b>Name of Committee</b>	<b>Members Elected</b>
Barrow Drainage Board	Councillor Pat Bowe (R.I.P.), Councillor David Goodwin
River Goul Drainage Committee	Councillor Brendan Phelan, Councillor Martin Phelan Councillor John King
Dungar Joint Burial Board	Councillor Brendan Phelan, Councillor Seamus McDonald, Councillor Michael Lalor, Councillor John King
Portarlinton Joint Burial Board	Councillor Ray Cribbin, Councillor Patrick Bracken Councillor Alan Hand, Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor James Deegan
Association of County & City Councils	Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor David Goodwin Councillor Ben Brennan
Midland Regional Authority	Councillor Patrick Bracken, Councillor Brendan Phelan Councillor James Deegan, Councillor Martin Phelan Councillor James Daly, Councillor John Bonham
E.U. Operational Committee	Councillor John Bonham
B.M.W. Regional Assembly	Councillor James Deegan, Councillor James Daly
Laois Arts Theatre Company Ltd	Councillor Rotimi Adebare Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor Mary Sweeney
Abbeyleix Heritage Trust	Councillor John Bonham
Local Authority Members Association	Councillor Michael Lalor
Laois County Enterprise Board	Councillor Pat Bowe (R.I.P.), Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor James Daly, Councillor William Aird
Laois Partnership Company Ltd	Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor Michael Lalor, Councillor Pat Bowe (R.I.P)
Laois Transport for Rural Integration Programme	Councillor Michael Lalor
Laois Tourism Company Ltd.	Councillor John Bonham, Councillor Martin Phelan
South East River Basin District Advisory Council	Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor John King
Shannon River Basin District Advisory Council	Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor Martin Phelan
Portarlinton Leisure Centre	Councillor Ray Cribbin, Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor Tom Mulhall
Homeless Forum	Councillor Mary Sweeney, Councillor Kathleen O'Brien
Portlaoise Leisure Centre	Councillor Alan Hand, Councillor William Aird Councillor Kathleen O'Brien
Portlaoise Enterprise Centre	Councillor Jerry Lodge, Councillor William Aird, Councillor Mary Sweeney

## APPENDIX I

Portarlington Enterprise Centre	Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor James Deegan
Midlands Energy Agency	Councillor John Bonham
Laois County Development Board	Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor John Moran, Councillor Michael Lalor, Councillor Martin Phelan, Councillor John Joe Fennelly
Dublin Mid-Leinster Regional Health Forum	Councillor Ben Brennan, Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor William Aird
Laois Advocacy Against Domestic Abuse Limited	Councillor Mary Sweeney, Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald
Midland Regional Drugs Task Force	Councillor William Aird
Laois Third Level Initiative	Councillor Paul Mitchell & Councillor Jerry Lodge
Laois VEC	Councillor Alan Hand, Councillor Rotimi Adebari, Councillor Pat Bowe (R.I.P.), Councillor Mary Sweeney, Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor Ben Brennan, Councillor William Aird, Councillor John King, Councillor Kathleen O' Brien
Heritage Forum	Councillor Martin Phelan
Management Company for Treo Nua at Knockmay	Councillor Kathleen O' Brien

## APPENDIX II

### PAYMENTS TO MEMBERS 2012

Monthly Allowance	€116,518.92	
Conference Allowance	€93,888.09	
Telephone allowance	€1,008.34	
Representational Allowance	€476,601.00	(inc. Chairperson's & Vice Chairperson's Allowance & CDB Chair Allowance)
SPC Allowance	€24,000.00	



## HOW TO CONTACT US

[www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie)

E-Mail: [corpaffairs@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:corpaffairs@laoiscoco.ie)

Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise	Tel: (057) 8664000
Accounts Payable, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664117
Arts Office, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674342
Cash Office, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674308
Civil Defence HQ, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664106
County Development Board, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664074
Driving Licences, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674306
Environment, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674322
Higher Education Grants, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664137
Housing, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664110
Human Resources, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664219
Landfill Site, Kyletalesha, Portlaoise	Tel: (057) 8620653
Library Headquarters, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674315
Motor Tax Office, Block 2, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664009
National Roads Project Office, Clonboyne, Portlaoise	Tel: (057) 8664850
Planning, Block 1, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664026
Register of Electors, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664105
Roads, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664142
Sports & Leisure, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674363
Water Charges, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664119
Water Services, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664120