



# Comhairle Chontae Laoise Laois County Council



Tuarascáil Bhliantúil  
Annual Report **2016**

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## JOINT ADDRESS BY THE CATHAOIRLEACH AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

It is a great privilege for us to introduce the Annual Report for 2016 which details the wide variety of services provided by Laois County Council to the people of Laois.

The provision of adequate housing and maintaining an environment to support job creation and economic activity represent some of the largest challenges to the Council. It is our role to work with the relevant sectors including approved housing bodies, central government and others to try and identify solutions to these challenges. Work commenced in 2016 on the construction of thirty three housing units at Old Knockmay Road, Portlaoise. The Council progressed the acquisition of units for social housing at a number of locations and approval of design for other proposed developments was also received in 2016.

In the area of Economic Enterprise, the Council continued to support existing and new business. 2016 saw the establishment of the Business Support Unit which incorporates the Local Enterprise Office and the Economic Development team which form a central point of contact for existing and prospective businesses. It will encourage local enterprise and promote County Laois as a prime investment location in Ireland and abroad.

Laois County Council in partnership with Laois Partnership, the Local Enterprise Office and Carlow I.T. launched the “Inspire Rathdowney” programme, an initiative to create new business opportunities, innovation, entrepreneurship and skills development. It recruited over thirty participants from the local area.

The Council is also intent on maximising Laois’ attractiveness as a centre of tourism excellence and is determined to take every opportunity to promote Laois in this context.

The centenary of the 1916 Rising was widely commemorated during 2016 with a total of 72 events held across the county including the publication of two books on the history of the period and a book of poetry and prose inspired by the period. Commemorative gardens were opened at County Hall, Abbeyleix, Emo, Killenard, Mountmellick, Mountrath and Raheen.

The Council also recognised the importance of looking to the future and it is in this context that GVA Bilfinger and Consultants were commissioned to carry out a Vision Statement for Portlaoise Town Centre. A number of public consultations and participation events were held in 2016 to brief interested parties on the proposal and to seek feedback to inform the process.

The ongoing work which is carried out at local level by community groups, tidy towns etc. continued in 2016 and we take this opportunity on behalf of the Council to acknowledge and thank all those involved for their continued support.

We wish to express our appreciation for the dedication and hard work of the Elected Members, the Management Team and staff of the Council and we are confident that this Annual Report will give an overview to the people of Laois of the broad range of activities undertaken and of the Council’s achievements in 2016.



*John Mulholland  
Chief Executive*



*Cllr. Tom Mulhall  
Cathaoirleach*



## MISSION STATEMENT

“The Council will lead the sustainable economic, social, cultural and community 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 which provides an extensive and diverse range of services that impact upon the county's economic, social, environmental, infra-structural, industrial, tourism, and cultural activities. These services include the provision and maintenance of houses, roads, water supplies and sewerage schemes (within the Service Level Agreement under Irish Water), planning and economic development, 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 Chief Executive, professional, technical, legal, administrative, financial and out-door employees.

### Council Membership

Laois County Council consists of 19 Elected Members - six members each from the Borris-in-Ossory-Mountmellick and Graiguecullen-Portarlinton Municipal Districts and seven members from the Portlaoise Municipal District.



*Elected Members with the County Manager at Laois County Council AGM in June, 2014*

### Council Meetings

Council Meetings in 2016 were usually held on the last Monday of each month in the Council Chamber at Áras an Chontae. There were fifteen meetings held in 2016 with 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 Chief Executive and comprises the Cathaoirleach of the Council and the four Chairs of the Strategic Policy Committees (S.P.C.'s). The main function of the C.P.G. is to co-ordinate the work of the different S.P.C.'s and provide a forum where policy decisions affecting the whole Council are agreed for submission to the full Council for decision. The C.P.G. met on 12 occasions in 2016.

### Municipal Districts

The following are the details in relation to the number of Municipal District Meetings held in 2016:

Borris-in-Ossory/Mountmellick Municipal District - 11 meetings

Graiguecullen/Portarlinton Municipal District - 11 meetings

Portlaoise Municipal District - 13 meetings

## MEMBERS OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

The following Members were elected to Laois County Council at the Local Elections held on 23rd May 2014

### MEMBERS OF BORRIS IN OSSORY-MOUNTMELICK MUNICIPAL DISTRICT



Patrick  
Bracken  
(F.F.)



John  
King  
(F.G.)



Brendan  
Phelan  
(Non-Party)



David  
Goodwin  
(F.G.)



Seamus  
McDonald  
(F.F.)



James  
Kelly  
(Non Party)

### MEMBERS OF PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT



Mary  
Sweeney  
(F.G.)



John Joe  
Fennelly  
(F.F.)



William  
Aird  
(F.G.)



Jeremiah  
Lodge  
(F.F.)



Catherine  
Fitzgerald  
(F.F.)



Caroline  
DwaneStanley  
(S.F.)



Noel  
Tuohy  
(Labour)

### MEMBERS OF PORTARLINGTON-GRAIGUECULLEN MUNICIPAL DISTRICT



Tom  
Mulhall  
(F.G.)



John Robert  
Moran  
(F.G.)



Padraig  
Fleming  
(F.F.)



Ben  
Brennan  
(Non Party)



Aidan  
Mullins  
(S.F.)



Paschal  
McEvoy  
(F.F.)

**Director of Services:** Donal Brennan  
**Senior Executive Officer Human Resources:** Carmel McNicholl

## CORPORATE AFFAIRS

### Corporate Plan

Laois County Council's Corporate Plan 2014 – 2019 was adopted by the Members of the Council in December, 2014.

The Corporate Plan provided the framework for the implementation of a coherent strategy for the development of the county for the period 2014-2019 and was prepared following consultation with employees, elected representatives, community, voluntary and environmental interests, external stakeholders and other public bodies operating at local level.

An update on the implementation of the Corporate Plan was considered by the Elected Members at their meeting held in January 2016.

### Customer Charter

Laois County Council's Customer Charter 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). This Charter includes a commitment to equality in service provision and a recognition of the diverse nature of the community we serve. The Charter also includes a Customer Complaints Procedure which may be availed of by any person not satisfied with the quality of service received.

### Highlight

- 26th May 2016 - Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of Intel Mini Scientists - All Ireland Champions



- 23rd June 2016 - Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of Laois ICA



- 27th October 2016 - Municipal District Reception in honour of Zach Tuohy

The total cost of the above was €1,587.20

### Irish Language Scheme

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. The scheme is available to view on our website, [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie). A new scheme is being prepared.

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.

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

### Higher Education Grants

In 2016 a total number of 6 renewal applications were received for grant assistance.

The total amount paid out in 2016 in respect of Higher Education Grants was €24,532.

### Annual Service Delivery Plan

The Members at their meeting held on 25th April 2016 adopted the Service Delivery Plan for 2016. This implementation of the Plan will be reviewed early in 2017 as part of the process of developing the 2017 Plan. The performance of the Council in relation to the performance indicators as specified by NOAC will also be taken into account.



**Health & Safety**

Health & Safety Officer: Jim Bolger

As Laois County Council are in 'wave 1' of the CORE system Health and Safety Module roll-out, our Safety Management System (SMS) was enhanced by ensuring compatibility with the CORE module. In the mid-lands region a cross Local Authority safety auditing initiative commenced with the Fire Services in Laois County Council partaking in same. In addition, the implementation of cross-directorate safety inspection programme served to further develop our 'evidence base'. Our Water Services department through Irish Waters Health, Safety, Quality and Environmental (HSQE) auditing programme continued to measure safety performance.

Statutory safety training was prioritised with the provision of 'safe pass' training. Our MyPay section continued to recruit thus ensuring the need to provide ongoing safety induction training.

Access to our legal database is available to all employees that have intranet access which serves to ensure that Laois County Council are keeping abreast of legislative developments.

Finally, implementation and monitoring of the Council's inoculation programme continued.

**Partnership**

The following were the members of the Workplace Partnership Committee as at 31st December, 2016.

**Management Nominees**

Kieran Kehoe  
(Joint Chair)

Michael Rainey  
Bernie Foran  
Michael O'Hora  
Geraldine Dunne

**Union Nominees**

Anne Marie Maher/  
Tom O'Carroll (Joint  
Chair shared)

Vacant  
Vacant  
Anthony Tynan

The Partnership Committee held 3 meetings during 2016.

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

The Freedom of Information Act 2014 was enacted on 14 October 2014. It introduced significant changes to the Freedom of Information regime repealing and replacing the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003 and expanding the scope of FOI to a number of further bodies. It also consolidated, modernised and

updated the legislation generally.

**Applications received/processed in 2016**

Applications on hand at 31st Dec. 2015	04
Applications received in 2016	65
Decisions taken during 2016	69
Applications not continued with	0
Applications dealt with outside of FOI	0
Applications on hand at 31st Dec. 2016	00

**Nature of Information sought**

Personal (to applicant)	10
Non personal	55

**Appeals**

There were no appeals to the Information Commissioner in 2016.

**Source of Requests**

General Public, Solicitors & Others	33
Journalists	32

**Performance Indicators**

Section 126c of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 sets out the functions of the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) which includes examination of the performance of local government bodies against thirty five indicators.

The report in respect of 2015 was published by NOAC in November 2016.

Laois County Council's performance in each area in 2015 is included in this report in each of the relevant sections.

**Reporting of Protected Disclosures**

No disclosures were received by the Designated Officer for Protected Disclosures during 2016.

**Register of Electors**

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, applicants must be at least 18 years of age on the day that the Register comes into force and must have been ordinarily resident in a Constituency on the 1st September preceding the coming into force of the Register.

## Register of Electors 2017/2018

Dáil Constituency	Presidential Electors	Dáil Electors
Laois	56,344	57,131
European Parliament Constituency	European Electors	Potential European Electors
Midlands-North-West	57,846	605
Local Electoral Areas	Number of Electors	Postal and Special Voters
Borris In Ossory - Mountmellick	19,565	Gardaí 0
Graiguescullen - Portarlinton	19,420	Defence Forces 218
Portlaoise	<u>20,681</u>	Diplomats 3
Total:	59,666	Physically Disabled 15
		Occupation 1
		Special Voters 7



## HUMAN RESOURCES

### Recruitment Statistics

A total of 489 people were employed by Laois County Council at 31st December 2016.

During 2016 Laois County Council held 17 competitions, in relation to which the following statistics have been extracted:

Total Applications received	597
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	Male	Female
Applicants	268	329
Successful Applicants	82	73

Permanent Appointments/Promotions 2016

	Male	Female
Appointments	21	24
Promotions	5	6

### Work Life Balance Initiatives

Laois County Council continued to implement work life balance initiatives for staff during 2016. At year-end 5 employees were availing of the Career Break Scheme, 35 employees were availing of the job/work sharing scheme, 41 employees availed of the Parental Leave Scheme and 18 employees availed of the Shorter Working Year Scheme, 4 employees availed of Unpaid Leave Scheme.

### Industrial Relations

Laois County Council continued to maintain good industrial relations during 2016 with no major disputes arising. The Council continues to operate in accordance with the Public Service Agreements in consultation with the relevant Unions.

### Employee Training & Development

Laois County Council is committed to the training and development 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 requirements, National FETAC Programmes, Third Level Open Learning Programmes and various Seminars/Workshops as they arise.

Total expenditure on training was €355,687 (inclusive of expenditure for Fire Services). A very comprehensive training programme was delivered throughout 2016. A sample of the training programmes provided is as follows:-

- Pesticide Training
- Safe Pass
- Managing Safely in Construction
- Manual Handling
- First Aid Training
- Mobile Access Tower Training
- Confined Spaces – Low risk
- CSCS Mini Digger Training
- Lawn Mower Training
- Operation & Maintenance of small Waste water Plants
- Child Protection Training
- Waste Management Training
- Freedom of Information Training

### Open Learning Programme

Laois County Council endeavours, subject to available resources, to facilitate and support 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 2016 are as follows:-

- IPA – Certificate/Diploma in Local Government
- WIT – MSc Analytical Science & Quality Management
- IPASS – Certificate in Payroll Techniques
- University of Ulster – Civil Engineering
- University of Wales – MA in Library and Information Studies
- ACI – Certificate – Accounting Technician

### Staff Policies

In line with best practice in Human Resource Management, Laois County Council has developed a suite of HR staff policies - the following were introduced/revised during 2016:

- Shorter Working Years Scheme 2016
- Travel and Subsistence Policy
- Grievance Policy and Procedure
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure

### Equality and Supporting Diversity

Laois County Council is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to 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.

Laois County Council supports the employment of people with disabilities and meets the target as set out by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

**Performance Indicators 2015** (Performance Indicators in this document come from The National Oversight and Audit Commission Report No 11 published in November 2016 which refer to 2015 as these are the most recent data available).

#### Total no of wholetime equivalents, % medically certified and self-certified paid sick leave

The wholetime equivalent staffing number	376.12
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Percentage of paid working days lost to medically certified sickness absence	2.76%%
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Percentage of paid working days lost to self certified sickness absence	0.38%
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The national target for absences on certified and un-certified illness leave is set at 3.5%.

## Community, Social, Cultural and Heritage Strategic Policy Committee

**Director of Services:** Donal Brennan

**Chair:** Brendan Phelan, M.C.C.

**Members** **Sectoral**

Padraig Fleming, M.C.C.	P. J Phelan (PPN Community/Voluntary)
Tom Mulhall, M.C.C.	Bobby Delaney (PPN Environment)
James Kelly, M.C.C.	Donald Scully (Farming Pillar)
	Elizabeth White (PPN Social Inclusion)

## LAOIS LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (LCDC)



Laois Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) was established in September 2014 for the purposes of developing, co-ordinating and improving a coherent and strategic approach to Local Community Development.

The LCDC comprises representatives of both public and private sectors and has primary responsibility for co-ordinating, planning and overseeing local and community development in the County.

The LCDC oversees the implementation of:

- Social Inclusion Community Action Programme (SICAP)
- Community objectives in the Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) 2016 - 2021
- Implementation of the Laois Local Development Strategy operated under the LEADER Programme 2014 – 2020 in partnership with the local authority (Financial Partner) and local development company

(Implementing Partner).

Laois LCDC comprises membership from both statutory and non-statutory bodies as follows:

- Paddy Buggy, Laois PPN (Social Inclusion) & Chairperson
- John Mulholland, Chief Executive, Laois County Council
- Cllr John King, Laois County Council
- Cllr Jerry Lodge, Laois County Council
- Cllr Pascal McEvoy, Laois County Council
- Evelyn Reddin, Laois Local Enterprise Office
- David Hackett, Dept. of Social Protection
- Joe Ruane, Health Services Executive
- Linda Tynan, Laois/Offaly Education and Training Board
- Anne Goodwin, Laois Partnership Company
- Joe Thompson, Youth Sector
- Kieran Finane, Business Sector
- Dave Fingleton, Laois PPN (Environmental Pillar)
- Michael Bergin, Farming Sector
- Mary White, Laois PPN (Social Inclusion)
- Robbie Quinn, Laois PPN (Community/Voluntary)
- P J Campbell, Laois PPN (Community/Voluntary)

LCDC Chief Officer - Michael Rainey

## LAOIS LOCAL ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY PLAN 2016 – 2021

The LCDC also monitors delivery of the community elements of the Local Economic and Community Plan 2016 - 2021(LECP). This Plan was compiled in agreement with a number of public sector stakeholders, under both community and economic development headings. It was adopted by Laois County Council in March 2016, will agree the strategic framework for economic and community development resource allocation, and inform other planning processes over the course of 5 years.

The LCDC has completed an assessment of the 2016 implementation plan for the Laois LECP. The LCDC has approved the assessment report and it is noted that significant progress has been made across the majority of the actions in 2016



## LAOIS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORK



The Public Participation Network (PPN) is the framework for public engagement and participation in Laois. The PPN is the main link through which the Local Authority connects with community, voluntary and environmental sectors without prejudice to other consultation processes.

Laois PPN was established in March 2015 and continues to grow its network with 328 groups registered. The PPN has a Secretariat consisting of 12 members and 29 representative positions. PPN representatives represent the PPN on local authority and other decision making committees in Laois. In January 2016 a dedicated PPN Resource Worker was appointed and in August 2016 a new office was secured for Laois PPN at Lyster Square Carpark, JFL Avenue, Portlaoise.

During 2016, Laois PPN held 2 County Plenaries, one of which incorporated a Funding & Resources Workshop for Community Groups. It was very successful with 25 exhibitors and attended by approximately 250 people. In September 2016, Municipal District Plenaries were held in each of the 3 Municipal Districts. The purpose of the MD Plenaries was to consult with communities on the Draft County Development Plan. Again all Municipal District Plenaries were well attended.

During 2016, Laois PPN also held a training session for PPN Representatives and Secretariat members.

Next steps in development of the PPN include networking and shared learning for groups, asking groups to register with a Special Interest Group and the development of a feedback mechanism for information flow between the decision making bodies and local communities.



## COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY AWARDS 2016

The heroes of local communities across the county were celebrated in May 2016 at the 7th Annual Community & Voluntary Awards 2016, hosted by Laois County Council in association with Laois PPN. The Awards aim to recognise the tremendous contribution made by community and voluntary groups to life in County Laois and welcomed 50 nominees across 6 categories, with 15 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 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 winners and runners up in 2016 were:

### Arts, Culture & Heritage

Winner: Portlaoise St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee  
 Runner-up: Killeshin Pipe Band

### Healthy & Active Community

Winner: St. Abban's Athletic Club  
 Runner-up: O'Dempsey's GAA Club  
 Killeshin Community Centre

### Children & Youth

Winner: 1st Laois Mountmellick Scouts  
 Runner-up: Ratheniska Foroige Club

## Environment

Winner: Killenard Tidy Towns Committee  
 Runner-up: Mountrath Playground/Amenity Park Committee  
 Clonaslee Tidy Towns

## Social Inclusion

Winner: Portlaoise Action to Homelessness (PATH)  
 Runner-up: Mountmellick Community Care

Of the 15 individuals nominated, Ms. Maura Gorman from Mountmellick was honoured on the night as 2016 Unsung Hero. All the nominees and winners were congratulated by Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Catherine Fitzgerald, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Charlie Flanagan, T.D., and Chief Executive of Laois County Council, John Mulholland, who praised the voluntary effort in Laois and thanked all for their for the hard work and commitment they put into their local areas and people.



## COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY PROJECTS FUND 2016

The Community & Voluntary Projects Fund provides

financial assistance to groups/organisations county-wide via applications recommended by an elected member of Laois County Council. 50 applications under this Fund were processed in 2016.

## LAOIS AGE FRIENDLY PROGRAMME



Laois' Age Friendly Programme is part of a national programme to improve the delivery of services to older people and to improve their quality of life under a number of headings.

Laois Age Friendly Alliance, an interagency committee tasked with delivering the Age Friendly Programme in Laois, continued to meet in 2016 and adopted the Laois Age Friendly County Strategy 2016 - 2021 in June 2016 following extensive consultation with older people all over the county. The Strategy sets out a number of objectives which aim to make Laois a better county for older people to live in under headings including outdoor spaces, transportation, health, social and civic participation and respect/social inclusion.

A Laois Older Persons Forum was also established in 2016, comprising countywide representation of older people who monitor the agency delivery of the Age Friendly Strategy and ensure that it will effect appropriate changes. Actions in the strategy commenced in 2016 by Laois County Council in partnership with the Older Persons Forum include piloting Age Friendly parking, an Age Friendly Business Recognition Scheme and a Directory of Services for Older People.





## YOUTH SUPPORTS & PARTICIPATION

### Laois Comhairle na nÓg



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

Coordinated by Youth Work Ireland Laois, in association with Laois County Council, the 25 young members of Laois Comhairle na nÓg met over 40 times in 2016 and launched the fruits of their 2016 project in October 2016, namely the “Laois Activity Atlas” and related survey of young people entitled “Laois through the eyes of a young person”. The booklet contains information on facilities for young people in Laois and was distributed through youth groups and schools to as many young people as possible. Laois Comhairle was also represented in 2016 by 15 delegates who attended the National Comhairle na nÓg Showcase along with Laois’ representative on the National Comhairle na nÓg Executive.

It is the aim of Laois Comhairle na nÓg to consult with the adult decision makers who make policies and plans for our county, and in 2016, Laois Comhairle na nÓg was consulted in respect of the Draft County Development Plan 2017 – 2023 and the proposed Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy. Comhairle members also presented to the elected members, represented young people at several public consultations/meetings and met with Oireachtas members to raise issues around youth service funding in Laois.

The Comhairle is tasked with the provision of feedback to the young people across the county and does this in a number of ways, including through its links with the nine secondary schools and Youthreach, youth groups and at its AGM, which was held on 19th October 2016. The AGM was attended by over 90 young people from across Laois, who gave the Comhairle a mandate to examine the topic of ‘educa-

tion’; this mandate will form the basis of their work in 2017.



### Educational Partnership

The Schools Business Partnership programme “Skills at Work” is aimed at 5th year students in certain secondary schools nationwide and aims to encourage school completion as well as the importance of considering third level education as a viable option for all students, by partnering the school with a business/employer organisation. In the 2016/2017 school year, 25 Portlaoise College students were introduced to several members of Council staff with varying work and education backgrounds and this programme will continue during 2017 to link with Laois County Council on site visits and in their CV preparation and mock interviews. The programme is facilitated by the National Schools Business Partnership and the Dept of Education and Skills.





## YOUTH SUPPORTS

Support for young people in Laois continued in 2016. The Council is represented on the Rathdowney Youth Café Consortium and both Garda Youth Diversion Projects in Portlaoise and Portarlinton. Rathdowney Youth Café is now open and with the assistance of Youth Work Ireland Laois is delivering programmes to local young people.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION

Laois County Council partnered with stakeholders in respect of projects during 2016:

- Portlaoise Street Soccer League
- Community Coaching Programme
- Laois Sports Partnership Social Inclusion Disability Programme
- Rathdowney Youth Café
- Laois Traveller Pride Week/Traveller Men's Shed/Traveller Women's Health Programme
- Integration supports for new communities, e.g. residents of the Direct Provision Centre at Emo



Staff from the Community Development section represented the Council on the following Boards/Committees in 2016:

- BLOCK and PORT Garda Youth Diversion Projects
- Rathdowney Youth Cafe Consortium

- Laois Mental Health Collaborative Group 2016
- Laois Local Drugs Network
- Midland Traveller Conflict Mediation Initiative
- Portlaoise Citizens Information Centre
- Laois Children & Young Persons Task Group
- Laois Comhairle na nÓg adult steering group

## COMMUNITY SMOKE ALARM SCHEME

300 smoke alarms were purchased under the national scheme in 2016 and distributed with the expertise and assistance of Laois Fire & Rescue Services.

## LAOIS CONNECTS



Laois CONNECTS Mental Health Awareness Week 2016 took place between 8th and 15th October and once again was a great success. This series of events, driven by Laois County Council in partnership with a number of agencies, continues to highlight the awareness of mental health and related issues to a wide audience. This year's message was about connecting with each other and seeking help/support. Supports were highlighted through a number of events, including a series of walks and physical activity events, public speaking events and in the 'pop-up' wellness hub hosted by the HSE in Laois Shopping Centre, where creative and mindfulness events took place. The week was hosted in association with a number of agencies working in collaboration – Laois Sports Partnership, Laois Partnership, HSE MH Services, HSE Suicide Prevention Resource Office, Mental Health Ireland and other organisations that hosted events during the week, including GROW, Chillout Ireland, Mountmellick Community School, Glosna House, to name but a few. The week proved to be a resounding success and plans are in place to host the event again in 2017.



### Performance Indicators 2015

#### Youth and Community Participation

Percentage of local schools involved in the local Youth Council/Comhairle na nÓg scheme	100%
No. of Organisations on the County Register at 31/12/2015	297
% of Organisations on the County Register that opted to be part of the Social Inclusion College with the PPN	12.79

### TOURISM

Throughout 2016 the Council continued to promote the County and worked actively with the Board of Laois Tourism, Fáilte Ireland and the community at large to actively promote Laois as a Festival and Event destination and to build its profile as a destination for visitors to return annually.

#### The Community Diaspora Grants Scheme 2016

A total of €32,300 was allocated to 15 various festival and event organising committees under this initiative in 2016. This was a joint initiative between Fáilte Ireland, IBP Insurance and Local Authorities across the country. Events supported included Durrow All Ire-

land Scarecrow Festival, National Steam Rally, The Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run, Laois Walks Festival, Ramble in Eireann High Nelly Heritage Cycle.

The Council also supported a range of smaller festivals including Rosenallis Festival on the Mountain, Laois St Patrick Day Parades, Fishertown Trad Festival, Mountmellick Summerfest and Vicarstown Beat the Barge Festival.

#### The Laois International Golf Challenge:

The 12th Laois International Golf Challenge took place from Monday 16th May to Thursday 19th May. This Golf Challenge continues to grow steadily and this year participants from Wales, England and Northern Ireland joined members of local clubs and the surrounding counties to make the event another success. A total of 35 prizes were awarded to individuals and teams at the awards ceremony held on Thursday 19th May. The overall winners of the event were Martin Conroy (Portumna G.C.) and Paddy Molloy (Kilrush G.C.).

#### The Laois Garden Festival:

The Laois Garden Festival took place on Sunday 12th June in Spink Community Grounds. A range of well known garden experts gave talks on gardening, including Dermot O' Neill. Local gardeners and nurseries were present with various displays alongside local food producers. This was a very well attended event and already plans are being drafted to host the event again in 2017.

#### The Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run

A Cathaoirleach's reception took place on Friday 3rd June in the Council Chamber to welcome the visitors participating in the Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run 2016. The classic cars were involved in a vintage parade on Saturday 4th June as part of the Mountmellick Summerfest Festival. A packed programme of events took place over the June Bank Holiday weekend with the visitors taking in many of the popular tourist attractions in the county.

#### The Old Fort Festival:

An exciting new street festival for Portlaoise took place on Saturday 25th & Sunday 26th June on Main Street. The Old Fort Quarter Festival draws its title and theme from the little known, but fascinating history of the original 'Fort of Maryborough'. A jam packed programme of events ran from noon to mid-



night each day including Street Theatre, Stilt Walkers, Jugglers, Puppet Shows, Giant Games and Family Art Workshops. On Sunday, a range of Medieval Heritage Displays took place offering a taste of life in Maryborough Fort with displays by a Blacksmith, Armoury and more from Irish Arms re-enactment group. Live Music on the Main Street included a range of top acts.

## ARTS SECTION

### Laois School of Music

Laois School of Music enrolment has risen to 320 pupils in September 2016 and our premises have been improved greatly with the installation of a new heating system. The Orchestra had a very busy year and were invited to collaborate with Music Generation Laois in the composition and performance of 'In My Back Garden', composed by Elaine Agnew as part of the MGL New Works Series. This consisted of many workshops and a performance on 22nd May. The Senior Ensemble entered the Wesley Festival and performed in March. The Orchestra were invited to perform at the Abbeyleix Christmas Market in December and in the Kyle Centre, Portlaoise. The 3rd Annual Music Festival took place in March with over 100 participants. In partnership with LSM, MGL & IAYO, the Double Bass was introduced as a less conventional but equally important instrument with our first student beginning lessons in October.



### Music Generation Laois

Now in its 4th year, Music Generation Laois continues to grow and develop. In May 2016, three young musicians were invited to perform in New York, as part of a fundraising dinner for the Ireland Funds. Also in May 2016, the Music Generation Laois New Works Series culminated featuring three new commissioned suites of music. In October, ten young musicians represented Laois in the Creative Connexions Festival in Spain. The inaugural Tionol: Harps and Pipes took place in Portlaoise in November and attracted musicians from all over Ireland. Also in November, over

300 singers took part in the finale concert of the 'Irish Songs We Learned at School' project with John Spillane, part of the Laois 2016 centenary celebrations.

### Laois Youth Theatre

Laois Youth Theatre has 3 theatre groups running in Portlaoise and Portarlington with weekly workshops, for up to 80 children/young people led by qualified drama tutors. Performances in May: 15-18yr olds presented "WORD PLAY", and the 12-14yr olds presented "Don't Shoot the Messenger" by John Morton.



### Dunamais Arts Centre

Laois County Council continues to support the Dunamais Arts Centre as one of the main Arts venues in Laois.

### The Arthouse Stradbally

In 2016 the Arthouse Gallery hosted eight individual exhibitions, as well as artist residencies, workshops, tours and talks. Highlight events included the launch of "En Plein Air" booklet and film in May and facilitating "House Portraits" with Artist Mary Burke utilising the percent for art scheme.

### The Artists in Schools Scheme

The Artists in Schools Scheme ran in nine schools in 2016. 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 full programme of events for older people in community and care settings during the month of May.



### Midland Collaborative Projects

Two Midlands Arts and Culture magazines were published in 2016 and distributed nationally and throughout the Midlands region.

### Summer Arts programme

There were arts and craft, pottery and comic art workshops running over 3 days during July and August throughout the county incorporating socially inclusive projects in Mountmellick and Mountrath.



### National Culture Night

Culture Night on Friday 16th September was a huge success with free events all around Laois. Highlights included a concert by "New Road" and a Craft Fair at the Malthouse, Stradbally, a Showcase Dance Performance by Laois Youth Dance Ensemble at the Plaza, Áras an Chontae, Bodhrán workshops for beginners and "An Plein Air" workshop with Jock Nichol at Emo Court Domain.



### The James Fintan Lalor School

The fourth James Fintan Lalor School took place at the end of September and included a weekend of debates and political discussion inspired by the writings of James Fintan Lalor.

### Leaves Literature Festival

The annual Leaves Literature Festival took place in November with a packed programme including a Literary and Music Evening at Roundwood House, Poetry Workshop/Book Launch and an Open Mic Reading and a Crime Fiction Night was held in the Dunamais Arts Centre.

### Other activities included

- Arts Act Grants Awards
- Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary
- Exhibitions
- Percent for Art Projects - Artist Residencies
- Support of Festivals and community arts events

### SPORT & LEISURE SECTION

The Sport and Leisure Section continued to deliver a successful series of events and activities during 2016. Highlights included;



### Leisure and Play facilities

Both Portlaoise and Portarlinton Leisure Centres achieved Ireland Active White Flag - Gold Medal Awards 2016/17. Laois County Council with assistance from a Sports Capital Grant of €102,000, upgraded gym equipment in both Leisure Centres.

Laois County Council currently manages twenty Community Play Facilities which requires significant annual maintenance and repair programmes to maintain a high quality of service.

Summer 2016 saw the installation of a Skate Park at Portlaoise Leisure Centre, which is enjoying high levels of usage. The Sport & Leisure Section oversaw the provision of additional facilities in Páirc an Phobail, Portlaoise which was awarded a Greenflag at an official Green Flag Raising Event at the park on 26th October 2016.

## Bike Week 2016

Laois County Council successfully secured funding from the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport in 2016 to co-ordinate a series of events with the assistance of Community groups countywide.

Bike Week is a national programme that encourages thousands of people to give cycling a go all over Ireland, whether this is for fun, as a means of getting around to the local shops, school or just to visit friends.



The Sport and Leisure Section co-ordinated 23 Bike Week events held from 11th – 19th June 2016 which were attended by over 784 participants throughout Laois.

Twelve Laois schools successfully participated in Bike Week Events.

11 different community events were organised for Bike Week including Kiln Lane Residence Association Mountrath, Abbeyleix Women's Development Group, The Glen Residence Association, Portarlinton, Woodenbridge Paddlers, Ossory Cycling Club, NLN and Mountmellick MYDC.

Laois County Council staff also embraced Bike Week and organised lunchtime cycles for staff as well as a "Cycle your Wobbles Away" Workshop attended by approx 20 children having difficulties learning how to cycle a bike.

## Children's Activity Programme

### 2016 Summer Brochure

The Sport and Leisure office produced its annual guide to summer activities for families. 10,000 copies were distributed throughout schools and libraries in County Laois.

## Rith 2016

Rith is a national festival and one of the main events of Seachtain na Gaeilge. It was a 700km course run as a series of relay runs from town to town.

The Sport & Leisure Section facilitated the participation of three local schools to run the 5km course through Portlaoise, accompanied by Cathaoirleach Catherine Fitzgerald.



## Parks Tennis 2016

Laois County Council organised and delivered a very varied summer programme in 2016 throughout the county. Parks Tennis was delivered in Rathdowney, Mountmellick, Portlaoise and Portarlinton with 160 children participating in this programme.

## National Play Day 2016

Laois County Council delivered a programme of "free" events in Pairc an Phobail the first week of July 2016, with the "Create your own Fairy Garden", sandcastle building and orienteering. Play dough making, Jewellery Making, Art & Craft plus Tandem Bike Rides also took place in Rathdowney Playground to celebrate National Play Day in July 2016. These events were extremely popular with children and parents alike.

## National Recreation Week 2016

National Recreation Week 2016 is a joint initiative between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and Local Authorities. National Recreation Week is aimed at young people aged 12 to 18 years. The overall purpose of the event in 2016 was to highlight the importance of recreation for young people and to encourage them to try an activity in the outdoors.

Funding was provided by DCYA to deliver a week long programme, that included a 12k Adventure Hike, Raft



Making and Racing, 6k Bogaton, a day trip to an outdoor Activities Ranch where Rifle Shooting, Horse Back Riding, Horse Shoe Throwing and Leg Wrestling were thoroughly enjoyed by all. 30 participants took part in these events which were a huge success.



### Games on the Green

Laois County Council continued its successful partnerships with FAI, Leinster Rugby and Laois GAA to part fund the employment of development officers to deliver a sport in the community programme.

The Games on the Green programme saw development officers deliver coaching sessions to children in estates across the county. This programme is open to both boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 13 years for 12 weeks, on a weekly basis. The locations covered in the 2016 programme were The Village Estate Ballylinan, Kiln Lane & Moanbaun Mountrath, Kirwan Park Mountmellick, Imleach Estate The Swan and Quigley Park Rathdowney. In total 292 children participated in the programme which culminated in a Grand Finale held at Portlaoise Leisure Centre in June 2016 with Laois County Council Cathaoirleach, Tom Mulhall in attendance.



### Soccer Tods Programme

Soccer Tods has continued to offer an opportunity for boys and girls aged between 3 and 6 years of age to take part in an organised sporting activity. The programme is run over 8 weeks, twice during the year in both Portlaoise and Portllington. 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. Clubs have now started to introduce similar academy sessions for children aged 4 upwards so children can link in with clubs at an earlier age



### Football for All

The FAI Football for All programme is a soccer programme that takes place 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, Nua Healthcare and Laois Down syndrome. Football activities are run for the participants to enjoy and learn new skills. Portlaoise AFC was the first club in Laois to set up a Football for All Club which is a team for children with special needs. Portlaoise AFC decided to open it to children on the autism spectrum.

### Portlaoise Street League

The Portlaoise Street league for 2016 was run on a one day blitz format due to a number of elements including Euro 2016. The street league is for students, long term unemployed, individuals who were recovering addicts and ethnic minority groups. The winning and runner up team received prizes at the presentation day and will now represent Laois in the All Ireland



Street league finals in Tallaght in April 2017. Three Portlaoise teams represented Laois at the All Ireland Street League in 2016 with Blue Angels being narrowly defeated in the final. This was a huge result as there was over 200 players taking part on the day.

### Mountmellick Late Night League

The leagues are run on Friday night between the hours of 9-11. The Laois late night league took place in Mountmellick for 6 weeks between 9-10pm and for boys and girls between the ages of 15-18. The league was a huge success with 38 boys taking part over the 6 weeks. Prizes were given to the top two points scorers and extra prizes were given to three participants that had full participation over the six nights.



## LIBRARIES

The Library service continues to play a pivotal role for all communities in Laois and offer an efficient frontline service for all members providing access to books, media, online services and internet/wifi. The libraries work with many groups within their communities and offer varied events and exhibition programmes. In 2016, over 1,000 events were hosted across the county with 17,400 people in attendance. Highlights include author visits, knitting groups, ciorcal comhrá and book clubs, while the art galleries in both Mountmellick and Abbeyleix remain very popular venues for hosting art, cultural and educational exhibitions. The 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 space and access for those who wish to enrich their day to day lives.

### Portarlington New Library

A fully refurbished Portarlington Library reopened to the public in February 2016. The library comprises an area of 450 metres square to cater for the growing populations of Portarlington and its surrounding area. It offers a state of the art facility for the whole community which has over 16,000 volumes of stock and media, upgraded and increased IT Printing scanning facilities and free WIFI. The Library is open on fulltime hours, including Saturdays and has been fitted out with self check systems which enable customers to check in and out their own items. The public "counter" system was installed in May, and in excess of 20,000 members of the public have entered the building, while 3,566 computer sessions recorded on the PC reservation system.



### Portlaoise New Library- Shaws Site Main Street

Shaws building at Lower Main Street, Portlaoise, was acquired by the Council for the provision of a new Public Library and Local Studies section. The building is located strategically in the heart of Portlaoise. Capital funding has been secured for the development of the site, and MCOH Associates were appointed as Architects for the project in October. The project has now moved to detailed planning and design stage. When completed the library will improve the accessibility to services for all parts of the community.

### Events and Activities

Laois County Libraries held a large variety of events and activities in all Branch Libraries throughout the county in 2016. Children and adults enjoyed the numerous events and activities organised by library staff. The 2016 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 Bealtaine, Seachtain na Gaeilge, Heritage Week, Culture Night and Children's Book Festival.

### Summer Reading Challenge

The Library Service organised a summer reading challenge, and in 2016 participated in the national Summer Reading Programme "Summer Stars" supported by the LGMA Libraries Development Unit. This initiative was funded by the Council with a total cost in excess of €4,500. The event is for primary school children to promote literacy development and encourage non readers to engage with books. It has gone from strength to strength and this year more than 1,600 children received medals for completing the challenge. Author Patricia Forde who launched the reading challenge returned to present medals, along with the Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Tom Mulhall, at a series of events in the Heritage Hotel, Portlaoise.

### 1916 Commemoration Programme

2016 was an important year in the library service as the 1916 Easter Rising was commemorated. It was an opportunity for the branch libraries to promote the history and literature of the period by organising/hosting events around the topic. These included:

- A series of lectures by well known historians including Maurice O'Keeffe, Michael Wrafter

and Jim Fleming

- A travelling exhibition detailing the national story and the story of Laois at this time
- Conradh na Gaeilge exhibition
- Procurement of Oral History collection
- Córanearraigh (Maureen Culleton & Laois Active Retirement Group singing songs from 1916)

A grant provided by the LGMA of €6000 also allowed for further development of stock on this subject.

### Mountrath Library

Mountrath Library had a very successful summer programme. This included a farmed themed story-time and book display, a fairytale Treasure Hunt, a BFG colouring session, a picture collage craft and a lollipop stick. All crafts were fully booked out.

Over 80 children completed the Reading challenge. A rediscovery workshop was held for children in June. The highlight of Children's Book Festival was the author visit by Dave Rudden to discuss his new book "Knights of the Borrowed Dark". Ninety pupils and teachers attended from three local schools. At Halloween and Christmas childrens activities included: Spooky Storytime, Autumn Tree Crafts, Octopus Craft and two Christmas crafts for different ages. There was a big demand for seasonal crafts. During the year, the library had class visits from Scoil Bhride N.S., St. Fintan's Boys, Castletown N.S. and LCA Students from Mountrath Community School. The Library had several book displays such as: Star Wars, Roald Dahl, Survival Stories and Halloween and Christmas book themes.

For adults, the following events were held during the year: Bealtaine - Nutrition talk for adults; Heritage Week - Genealogy for Beginners with archivist Sinead Holland; Everyday Life in Laois in 1916 by local author Tom Cox, all which were well attended. Six adult groups meet regularly at the library: Knitting Group meets every Friday morning from 10.30-1pm; Adult Writer's group meet once a month (1st Wed) at 11am; Adult Bookclub meets 1st Thursday of the month at 6.15pm; Local Historical Group meets (2nd Thursday of the month) at 6.15pm; Ciorcail Comhra (Irish Conversation Group) meets (3rd Thursday of the month) at 6.15pm, and Adult Colouring (mindfulness) group meets (2nd & 4th Wed of the month at 11am).

### Abbeyleix Library

Abbeyleix Library continues to hold weekly chess classes for children and monthly Art classes. The Art Gallery, with its impressive road frontage, continues to be a premier location in the county for art exhibitions. The Knitting club for adults also continues to grow from strength to strength. 2016 saw the establishment of a Lego Club for Children, which has proven hugely popular. Summer was a hive of activity as record breaking numbers of children signed up for the 'Summer Reading Challenge'. The library also played host to a 'Mario Makers Club' during the summer months which was a huge hit with children throughout the County. Heritage week in August was again a very busy time with visits from Eddie Lenihan, who regaled young and old with his folktales, and Gordon D'arcy with his impressive wild life drawing classes. The library scored a major coup in October for Children's book festival with a visit from Dave Rudden, author of 'Knight of the Borrowed Dark' a book chosen for the Unesco Dublin Citywide Read.

All of this activity, coupled with regular class visits from local schools and 2nd level students who avail of our facilities to study for exams, ensures that Abbeyleix Library remains a hub of the community.

### Portlaoise Library

Portlaoise Library continues to be an important hub in a growing community. As well as book and media loans, study space and busy IT facilities, it provides a full schedule of free clubs and events. The Classic Film Club and second book club 'The Novel Bunch' were popular additions. The 1916 commemoration comprised a number of events including '1916 in Laois' and two exhibitions. A number of events were run in partnership with the new Social Inclusion Group to highlight Portlaoise's diversity in a positive way. The summer programme of children's reader events contained many elements of the work of Roald Dahl in recognition of his 100th birthday in 2016. Finally, Portlaoise Library welcomed many authors including Linda Allen, Jane Evans, Anna McPartlin, Erika McGann, Dave Rudden and Brian Leyden.

### Mountmellick Library

In 2016, a total of 203 events took place in Mountmellick Library, attended by 3,423 people. Some events were ongoing – Bookclubs, Adult Colouring Group, Crafty Angels Crocheters, Spanish Conversation, Quickcrafts for Kids, Art Gallery launches, Storytime. Others took the form of workshops/talks – Mental Health, Genealogy, Dogs Trust, Art for adults/children,

1916 Commemoration, Concern Charity, Quilting, Irish History Live and author visits etc. We also hosted class visits from schools. Our year was rounded off with a visit from Santa when 36 children (and their extended families) got to meet him, and afterwards made a variety of Xmas cards together.



### Portarlington Library

2016 was a busy time for Portarlington Library. The library re-opened in February and a wide-range of activities took place over the course of the year. Regular events such as the adult knitting club and the children's story time which meet up weekly in the library, the Literary Classics Book Club and Junior Book Clubs which meet up monthly, went from strength to strength as the year progressed.

Pupils from the three primary schools in the town and students from Colaiste Iosagain also paid regular class visits to the library over the year for book exchanges and also to attend special class-oriented events.

As part of the 1916 Centenary Commemorations, the library hosted a presentation by Maurice O'Keeffe on the Oral History of The Rising, a film screening of "A Terrible Beauty", and 1916-themed talks by respected academics Elaine Sisson and Daire Keogh along with a special 1916 Irish History Live event for kids performed by Michael Moylan.

In the Spring, the library hosted two sets of six-week long IT classes for beginners in association with Laois Partnership. Literary events are of course a prominent feature of any library, and in 2016 Portarlington Library hosted the award-winning children's author Dave Rudden as part of Children's Book Festival. UK children's author Bea Jane Evans paid the library a visit, as did local authors David Butler, who launched his graphic novel "Shackleton: Voyage of the James Card" in June and James Egan, who has self-published numerous books and who gave a presentation on the process of self-publishing. Erika McGann also



visited the library as part of Children's Book Festival in October.

The Summer saw a large participation in the annual Summer Reading Challenge and huge interest in the Summer Chess Club for kids. Art workshops with Caroline Keane and origami workshops with Mineko Saito also proved very popular, as did a Dogs' Trust workshop on canine care.

Heritage Week in late-August saw great interest in a Genealogy Workshop provided by archivist Sinead Holland and an Illustrated Talk on the Heritage Trees of Ireland by Kevin Hutchinson, whilst Gordon D'Arcy provided a wildlife drawing class for the younger library members.

September saw Portarlington Library mark the centenary of the birth of famed children's author Roald Dahl with a fun day of Dahl-based activities on 13th September.

Such was the success of the Summer Chess Club for Kids, that chess instructor Lukasz Goralski gave a four-week chess basics course for adults in the library in the autumn.

Science Week in November was marked with a special "Let's Go Fly a Kite" workshop and the end of the year was memorable thanks to Raven Haven Aviaries who paid the library a visit to display their wide range of exotic creatures which went down a treat with both young and old alike.

### EU Direct Centre in Mountmellick Library

Mountmellick library continued as one of 8 EU Direct(EDIC) Information Centres in the Country. The information Centre which is based in the public area of the library acts as a one stop shop for people who want information about the EU, such as policies, information or citizens rights. The centre also hosts EU events and related activities. In 2016 the centre held over 30 EU themed events and talks in promoting the centre and Europe.

### 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. Over the past number of years 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 Library Web Page is: [www.laois.ie/Departments/Libraries/Services/LocalResearch/LocalHistoryOnline](http://www.laois.ie/Departments/Libraries/Services/LocalResearch/LocalHistoryOnline). 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". Archive newspapers are now available in digital form in Branch libraries.

### WIFI

WIFI is available in Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Abbeyleix, Portarlington and Rathdowney Libraries.

### BOOKFUND

The Bookfund for 2016 was €75,000

### Service Development

In keeping with the national strategy for libraries "Opportunities for All", a number of initiatives advanced in 2016 particularly the shared countrywide Library Management System. Data migration commenced in Laois and the crossover will be fully realised by March 2017. This new shared catalogue has improved a range of services for members and has standardised library privileges, fines and charges nationwide while abolishing membership fees.

The library service has also participated in the national procurement project introducing e-books, e-magazines, e-audio books and e-learning programmes to library members nationwide. This new ebooks service was funded from library resources to allow for Laois customers to avail of this facility free of charge.

### Performance Indicators 2015

#### Library Visits

No. of library visits per head of population (based on 2016 census)	2.78
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No. of items issued to borrowers in the year	208,255
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<b>Cost per Capita (based on 2016 Census)</b>	22.23
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## 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 2014 - 2019

The Laois Heritage plan is supported by Laois County Council and the Heritage Council. It contains 50 actions which will be implemented over the coming years, under five key objective areas:

- Increase understanding of the heritage of Laois
- Record the Heritage of Laois
- Protect and promote active conservation of the heritage of Laois
- Promote community participation on heritage plans and projects
- Promote enjoyment and accessibility of heritage

### Projects from the Heritage Plan 2014-2019 which were delivered in 2016

The following information relates to projects from the Laois Heritage Plan undertaken with the support of the Heritage Council, Laois Partnership and others during 2016.

#### 1. Increase understanding of the heritage of Laois

During 2016, the Heritage Officer worked with numerous individuals and community groups 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.

#### Laois 2016

The centenary of the 1916 Rising was commemorated in Laois during 2016, with a total of 72 events held across the county. The programme of commemoration was guided by the Laois Commemorations Committee with support from the national Ireland 2016 project office. Funding was provided by Laois County Council, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Rural Regional and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department

of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurance. Community grants to support local events were paid to a total of €65,100.

Highlights of the programme of commemoration included the publication of two books on the history of the period, and a book of poetry and prose inspired by the period; the opening of commemorative gardens at County Hall, Abbeyleix, Emo, Killenard, Mountmellick, Mountrath and Raheen, with installation of copies of the Proclamation and flag raisings at Portarlinton, Rathdowney and Abbeyleix; the creation and performance of four full length traditional music pieces; youth drama; Irish language song workshops, ceramic art installation, films, talks, debates and exhibitions which spanned to full year and covered every aspect of heritage, the arts and creative expression



### Heritage Awareness Events

In addition to the programme of commemoration, events held during 2016 to raise awareness of heritage issues included:

- A week-long programme of over 50 family events, guided walks, talks, slideshows and fun days was organised for national Heritage Week in August;
- The Heritage Office assisted with the development of the Laois Heritage Society Schools Heritage Project, a competition for primary and secondary schools, organised in association with the Laois Education Centre;
- Science Week in November was very successful with a range of events and public talks. School workshops were held in Abbeyleix, Borris in Ossory and Timahoe, with schools from Portarlinton attending a workshop day at the Portarlinton Library. The events were supported by Discover Science and Engineering and the Heritage Council.



## 2. Record the Heritage of Laois

Gathering and dissemination of data on aspects of the heritage of the county is a necessary first step in the conservation and highlighting of this heritage. In 2016, one data gathering project was carried out:

### Audit of Geological Heritage

A survey of geological sites in the county was carried out with the support of the Heritage Council and the Geological Survey of Ireland. The survey recommended the inclusion of 33 sites of geological importance as “County Geological Sites” in the new County Development Plan. A report on the survey with all the site details has been published and is available via the Laois County Council website.

## 3. Protect and promote active conservation of the heritage of Laois

### Timahoe Round Tower

The Conservation Plan for Timahoe Monastic Site, commissioned by the local community, will be published in early 2017, and implemented in the coming years.

### Lea Castle

With the support of Laois Heritage Office and the Heritage Council, geophysical research around the site of the medieval settlement was continued, and public information evenings were held about this important structure.

### Fort of Maryborough

Stage II of a conservation management plan was commissioned by Laois Heritage Society for this site in 2016, with funding from Laois County Council and the Heritage Council. It is intended that the plan will be completed and implemented in the coming years, subject to availability of funding.

## 4. Promote community participation in heritage plans and projects

### Connecting Communities with Heritage Project

This project involved connecting local people with their very local heritage, across three strands:

- Tidy Towns and Biodiversity. Training and net working sessions were held between Abbeyleix and Castletown Tidy Towns and the Dunamase Beekeepers Society, resulting in planting for pollinators in each community. Support was given to the new Pollinator’s Prize launched in 2016 as part of the National Tidy Towns Competition.
- Mapping Laois – Research has commenced on a new book on the historic maps of Laois, to be published in 2018.
- Commemoration
  - Science heritage: A plaque to the memory of Thomas Prior (one of the founders of the RDS, and a Rathdowney native) was unveiled at the Church of Ireland in Rathdowney in April 2016.
  - Biddy Aghaboe: A bilingual plaque to mark Biddy Aghaboe’s well will be erected at the site on the Mountrath Road in Portlaoise.

## 5. Promote enjoyment and accessibility of heritage

### New Laois Heritage App and Multilingual Audioguides

With funding from Fáilte Ireland, a smartphone app guide to the heritage of Laois was created in 2016, with audioguides to the Laois Heritage Trail and Laois Monastic trail in English, Irish, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Mandarin. Three short multi-lingual films on the stories of the county were also created and are available for visitors at the key heritage sites in Timahoe, Donaghmore and Abbeyleix, as well as on the internet via the Laois County Council website and Youtube.





## Transportation, Environment & Emergency Services Strategic Policy Committee

**Director of Services:** Kieran Kehoe  
Donal Brennan

**Chairperson:** Jerry Lodge, M.C.C.

### Members

Ben Brennan, M.C.C.

John King, M.C.C.

Noel Tuohy, M.C.C.

Seamus McDonald, M.C.C.

### Sectoral

Michael KIELTY, I.C.T.U.  
(Trade Union)

John Fitzpatrick,  
(Farming)

Chris Callaghan  
(Development/  
Construction)

Kitty Creighton  
(Environment/  
Conservation)  
Ger Mulhall (Business/  
Commercial)

## ROADS

**Senior Engineer:** Henry Ritchie, Roads  
& Environment

### 2016 Road Grant Allocations

In 2016 the Roads Department secured €14.8 million funding as follows:-

- €8.2 million from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS),
- €2.1 million from Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly the NRA),
- €964,744.24 million in Revenue & €1,753,351.76 million in Capital funding from Laois County Council's own resources.

### Capital Schemes

#### Carlow Northern Relief Road

Land acquisition from NAMA and the Receivers of Fruithill Manor was successfully concluded for the construction of the Carlow Northern Relief Road extension between the Castlecomer and Numbers Roads in Graiguecullen in 2015. The 750m extension contract was procured in August 2015. Construction commenced during September. In December an extension to the contract was agreed which allowed for the widening and upgrade of a further 200m of the Numbers Road into Carlow. The scheme was suc-

cessfully completed and officially opened to traffic on the 29th of April 2016.



### Portlaoise Southern Circular Route

Portlaoise Southern Circular Route Extension – Following the granting of Part VIII Planning Approval in July 2016, detailed design works and surveys are progressing. Liaison with affected and adjacent property and landowners is continuing. Subject to DTTAS funding, the scheme could commence during the first half of 2017.

### N80 Coolanowle to Maidenhead Realignment, Arles

N80 Maidenhead Realignment Scheme – Landowner objections received by An Bord Pleanála for the planning application were withdrawn negating the need for an Oral Hearing which was subsequently cancelled by An Bord Pleanála. The Compulsory Purchase Order was referred back to Laois County Council and became operative on the 23rd August 2016. An Bord Pleanála approved, subject to conditions, the Scheme under Section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act 2000-2015. Notice to Treat was served on affected landowners on 25th October 2016.

### Lyster Square, Portlaoise

Lyster Square, Portlaoise – Following liaison with traders, Laois County Council is now progressing a design on a reduced scheme in the short term with an additional pedestrian crossing and a right turning lane for traffic wishing to turn right towards the library when coming off the JFL Roundabout. The further enhancement of Lyster Square is now being examined through the wider Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy. The aim of the scheme is to enhance the character of the Square and make it a more welcoming environment for shoppers pedestrians and other vulnerable road users.

## MAINTENANCE SCHEMES

### Road Restoration Improvement and Pavement Maintenance

#### National Roads

Funding of €550,000 for two resurfacing schemes was approved by Transport Infrastructure Ireland. Laois County Council and Kildare National Roads Office progressed design works and construction of pavement improvement at N77 Tonduff and N80 Stradbally pavement Improvement of 3km.

National Secondary resurfacing schemes to specifically enhance the skidding resistance of the road pavement were received for 2016. Nine sites on the N80 and N77 were identified for surface improvement through mechanical abrasion. A further 15 sites were examined for resurfacing. Scheme drawings and contract documents were prepared. Two resurfacing schemes were approved by the Department on National Roads and were completed last year. One at Stradbally on the N80 and one at Corbally on the N77. Funding was provided by Transport Infrastructure Ireland and the total length of road to be resurfaced will be approximately 3km.

#### Regional and Local Roads

Roads Area staff supported by Road Design carried out pavement strengthening and surface dressing of regional and local roads under the roads programme. 24.79 km of our network was strengthened while 24.84 km of road was surface dressed. This in total represented approximately 2.3% of the total road network in the county.



#### Severe Weather Works

At the end of January 2016, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport announced a Severe Weather

Fund with an allocation of €106 million nationally for repair works in response to the storm and flood damage caused in December 2015 and January 2016. Laois County Council made a submission to the Department in early February seeking funding for repairs to damage and also preventative works to prevent re-occurrences. A more detailed submission was made at the end of April 2016. A total of €1.8 million was allocated by the Department towards the costs of these repairs and preventative works across the county which were substantially completed by the end of 2016.



As in previous years, Laois County Council carried out weekly maintenance works on all public roads in the county. These works included drainage works, verge trimming, footpath repairs, erection and replacement of damaged safety barriers, street cleaning and litter collection.

#### Barrow Drainage Works

Significant maintenance works were carried out by the Council's Barrow Drainage staff on the tributaries of the Rivers Barrow and Nore in both the Borris-in-Osory/Mountmellick and in the Graiguecullen/Portarlinton Municipal Districts. These works involved the removal of dense vegetation, fallen/overhanging trees and silt islands along sections of these rivers. Each



location required a consent/licence from National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) as well as permission from Inland Fisheries Ireland. These maintenance works will alleviate the potential flooding problems that were experienced in recent years.



### Structures

Upgrade works were carried out on Spa Bridge, a five-arch masonry bridge which carries R419 over the River Barrow on the northern outskirts of Portarlinton. The abutments on this structure were undermining due to scour. The piles supporting the concrete arch extension were exposed beneath the southern abutment. Concrete apron walls were installed on the piers and abutments of both outer arches in July 2016 to prevent scour occurring in the future.



### Low Cost Safety Schemes

Low Cost Safety Schemes were progressed at eight sites across the county with funding of €250k provided by the DTTaS. Works varied across the sites but included enhancements to signage and line markings as well as pavement works together with installation of bollards, splitter islands and public lighting. The roundabout at Eskerhills Estate on the Ridge Road was redesigned and reduced to improve safety to all road users as part of these monies.



### Speed Detection Signs

Speed detection signs with variable message displays were installed at eight locations indicating motorists' speeds within 60km/hr and 50km/hr zones. These prove very effective in alerting motorists to their speed and encouraging them to slow down.



### Public Lighting

Funding of €55,000 for upgrade of 57 Lights to energy efficient LED at Newtown cross and Simmons Cross N77 was provided by Transport Infrastructure Ireland. These lights were installed in 2016 and will reduce TII Public Lighting Energy's cost up to €6,000 per year.

CLÁR funding was used to support lighting upgrades at schools & community facilities at nine locations around the County and allowed for the upgrading of 70 lights to energy efficient LED's again allowing savings of up to 50%.

### Speed Limit Review

Work continued on the National Speed Limit Review as it pertains to county Laois in 2016. The public display period for the draft 30km/hr housing estate speed limit bye-laws was concluded and they were brought before the Council June meeting for adoption.



Installation of remaining 30km/hr slow zone signs for housing estates was completed in summer 2016 and a policy on variable speed limits was presented to the Transportation SPC. Bye-Laws for the implementation of speed limits across all public housing estates in charge of the Council are now in place. Their commencement date was the 1st August 2016.

Following the adoption of the policy on periodic speed limits outside Laois' 75 schools (67 primary and 8 secondary) in June, applications for funding were prepared for periodic sites where variable message signage would be in place to reduce speed limits on particular hours of certain days. Periodic speed limit signs were installed at eight locations around schools. For national routes, meetings were held with TII and the Gardai in August to discuss the speed limit review on Laois' 101km of National Secondary Routes. The proposal was that rural sections of national routes largely remained at 100km/hr but there would likely be changes to the extents of the 60km/hr and 50km/hr limits on approaches to towns. Following a subsequent round of briefing meetings with Elected Members across the three Municipal Districts, the drafting of speed limit bye-laws progressed for national, regional and local roads.

## Pedestrian Crossings

Four new pedestrian crossings on the N80 and N77 in Portlaoise were completed in 2016 funded by TII at the following locations.

- N77 Abbeyleix Road - Signalised Pedestrian Crossing at Cherrygarth
- N80 Mountmellick Road - Pedestrian Crossing at Fairgreen
- N80 Mountmellick Road - Pedestrian Crossing at Beechfield (near Medical Centre) and
- N80 JFL Avenue/426 Timahoe Road Junction - Pedestrian crossing across the Timahoe Road side of the junction.

## Winter Maintenance

Winter Maintenance operations were carried out on 41 occasions during the 2015/2016 winter season treating 446km of the salted network in Laois. Approximately 1,680 tonnes of salt were spread during the period. At the start of the 2016/2017 season in October 2016, an additional 7% or 30km was added to the treated network taking the distances salted to approximately 476km. This was achieved by route optimisation of treated lengths.

## Cycle Safety Training

625 primary school students, from 12 national schools and 12 students from Laois Down Syndrome took part in the Safe Cycle Training programme throughout the county, with 20 children taking part in the Annual Road Safety Event held during national Bike Week.

## Drive For Life Programme

The road safety and awareness programme for secondary school students saw an additional sixty students taking part.

## Road Safety Talks/Visits

The Road Safety Officer's visits to primary schools took place during the year to promote road safety education.

## Hi-Visibility Vests

Hi-visibility vests, arm bands, stickers and school bag dangles were supplied to children during school visits and to various organisations on request.

## Performance Indicators 2015

Percentage (based on length) of both regional and local roads whose PSCI condition has been recorded as at 31/12/2015

	Regional	Local
Overall%	100%	100%

## Ratings in Pavement Surface Condition Index

Percentage of regional, local primary, local secondary and local tertiary road surfaces in each of the 10 PSCI rating categories

Road Class	1-4	5-6	7-8	9-10
Regional	10%	29%	30%	20%
Local Primary	14%	35%	27%	4%
Local Secondary	14%	32%	28%	5%
Local Tertiary	14%	20%	17%	11%

## ENVIRONMENT

**Director:** Donal Brennan

**Senior Engineer:** Henry Ritchie, Roads & Environment

### Litter Management



Our largest and longest running annual anti litter initiative, Clean Up Laois was held in April 2016 in association with our sponsor, AES. 54 groups participated. Following on from this success, Portlaoise Tidy Towns arranged to host quarterly cleanups engaging with resident associations during the process. Both projects were very successful and linked in with the objectives of the Litter Management Plan 2015-2017. Two full colour two page supplements on dumping, litter pollution and pay by weight were circulated in local press during 2016.

### Environmental Awareness & Community Initiatives

Continuing on the excellent partnership with elected representatives, local communities, schools and agencies, we hosted the following campaigns and support programmes:

- Providing mentoring, training and hosting a local competition for the Laois Federation of Tidy Towns;
- 



- Delivering national awareness initiatives tailored for local level engagement;
- Ran a national pilot project for household battery recycling in association with WEEE Ireland and Abbeyleix Tidy Towns.
- Providing specific training for specific groups e.g. schools
- Arranging a food waste prevention cookery demo, attended by 240 guests, with Rory O'Connell in association with Cullohill Community Council, funded under the EPA's Local Authority Prevention Network programme, which complemented a 4 week capacity building Stop Food Waste initiative with 12 local Cullohill families.
- Financial assistance was provided to groups around the county in accordance with the Tidy Towns Grants Scheme, Community Grants Scheme and the Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund.

### Páirc an Phobail, Portlaoise

As part of the ongoing development programme in Páirc an Phobail, biodiversity workshops were held in the Páirc for local schools. During 2016, the Páirc was one of 21 national outdoor parks/spaces to receive the prestigious green flag award. A local green flag raising ceremony was held in October 2016 and had a strong community engagement focus.



### Waste Enforcement

The Waste Enforcement Section is committed to maintaining and improving the high quality environment for the people of County Laois through the enforcement of Waste Legislation and Regulation. This Section has had a successful year in resolving waste complaints and working closely with colleagues in the Planning Enforcement Section. In 2016, 89 waste related complaints were successfully dealt with.

The Waste Enforcement Section is responsible for re-

viewing and issuing new Waste Facility Permits and Certificates of Registration. In 2016, 18 Waste Facility Permits and Certificates of Registration were registered in County Laois.

## Midlands Energy Agency

### Overview of Energy Usage in 2016

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

The SEAI Annual Report 2016 on Public Sector Energy Efficiency Performance reports that Laois County Council made an 18% saving by the end of 2015 against their 33% target by 2020.

### Actions Undertaken in 2016

Midland Energy Agency undertook a range of actions to promote energy efficiency throughout the region:

- Facilitated Public Lighting Inventory Studies of over 33,000 lights through the Community of Practise, organising Deadsure database software training for public lighting staff and lighting contractors completing the study.
- Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategy (LARES) Training was hosted by the MEA on Part L of the Building Regulations for Spatial Planning and Energy Demand Mapping training in conjunction with SEAI for local authority planning and professional staff.
- Day 3 of Energy MAP Training completed for Energy Teams in local authorities supported by the SEAI.
- MEA held a tender for provision of energy advisory services to support energy audits advice and mentoring across the region. The appointment of Carlow Kilkenny Energy Agency as advisors will provide the expertise and support to drive energy management in each of the 4 local authorities in 2017.
- MEA coordinated the appointment of SEAI support to design team for energy efficient design of Portlaoise library to NZEB standards.

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

- Completing an Inventory Study on all Public Lighting Assets to a national standardised inventory as advised by SEAI/TII Technical Working group. This will allow future LED

retrofits to be evaluated as to cost benefit and provides for the ESB unmetered database to be updated with latest lighting assets.

- TII supported an energy efficient upgrade in the public lighting at Newtown & Crettyard on the N78. 60 lights were replaced with energy efficient LEDS's at a cost of €55,000 resulting in energy savings of 50%.
- CLÁR funding was used to support lighting up grades at schools & community facilities at 9 locations around the County and allowed for the upgrading of 70 lights to energy efficient LED's again allowing savings of up to 50%.
- Completed Display Energy Certificates on 9 of our public buildings including offices, leisure centres and libraries in accordance with Energy Performance of Buildings Directive.
- Participated in the OPW Optimising Power @Work Program at Portlaoise County Hall. Gas & electricity meters have been installed to monitor energy usage and an ongoing energy awareness program is running.
- Arranged SEAI to carry out an (AMA) Advice Mentoring & Assessment energy audit of Portlaoise County Hall and implemented some of the low cost items arising from their report to assist in energy reduction.
- Demonstrated the energy free hydraulic RAM pump at the Energy in Agriculture event in Gurteen Agricultural College which generated much interest among 1200 attendees.
- Dunamase Theatre in Portlaoise have partnered with Econcertive to access 50% funding under BEC2016 to upgrade from oil to gas heating saving 55,000kwh/yr with match funding by Laois County Council & Dept of Arts.
- Portlaoise Leisure Centre recently partnered with Urban Volt to do a lighting upgrade. 218 fittings were replaced with projected annual savings of 16,000kwh. This allowed them to complete a €30k project through a 5 year energy saving repayment scheme.

## Performance Indicators 2015

### No./% of households availing of a 3 bin service at 31/12/2015

The no. of households, based on the 2011 Census, who are availing of a 3 bin service at 31/12/2015 4,919

% of households availing of a 3 bin service 17.62



## Environmental Pollution Complaints Closed

Total No. of Pollution cases that were the subject of a complaint during 2015 796

Total No. of Pollution cases closed during 2015 773

Total No. of Pollution cases on hand at 31/12/2015 16

## % Local Authority Area within the 5 Levels of Litter Pollution

% area unpolluted or litter free 23

% area slightly polluted 74

% area moderately polluted 3

% area significantly polluted 0

% area grossly polluted 0

## WATER SERVICES

Senior Engineer: Michael O'Hora, Water Services

Laois County Council continued to provide public water and wastewater services to the people of County Laois, in collaboration with Irish Water under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and in accordance with an agreed Annual Service Plan (ASP) in 2016. The expenditure incurred by Laois County Council in provision of these services comes from a budget provided by Irish Water. Irish Water continues to be the statutory authority with responsibility for all public water and wastewater schemes.

The delivery of Water Services under the SLA, although challenging, is an opportunity to retain a level of water services activity within Local Government and thus to influence water services investment and policy in the future.

Irish Water is in the process of developing the Water Industry Operating Framework (WIOF) which aims to provide for a Public Utility Model (PUM) based on Local Authorities and Irish Water working together as a single unit in the provision of public water and wastewater.

Laois County Council continues as the Water Services Authority under the Water Services Act 2007 for all private water and wastewater supplies including Group Water Schemes (GWS) and Group Sewerage Schemes (GSS) small private supplies with a public use (SPSs) and is the supervisory authority for all private water supplies under the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014.

Laois County Council's Water Services Laboratory was awarded accreditation to ISO17025 for drinking water check parameters plus nitrates by INAB on 26th October 2016. Laois County Council lab continues to provide a quality service to Irish Water under the SLA and will carry out test analysis for GWS, Small Private Supplies (for public use) and WFD and landfill monitoring.



## Public Water and Wastewater service delivery

### Ongoing Operation and Maintenance

Laois County Council currently supplies approximately 23,000 cubic meters of water per day to the people of County Laois on behalf of Irish Water, through the provision and maintenance of adequate water supplies across 28 Water Supply Zones and wastewater treatment and disposal facilities at 27 wastewater agglomerations (including some Design, Build and Operate facilities).

Unaccounted for WATER (UFW) in County Laois is 49%.



## Drinking Water Quality

Irish Water has statutory functions with regard to the monitoring of public drinking water supplies in the county as laid out in the EU (Drinking Water) Regulations, 2014. Results of analysis of drinking water in 2016 shows that Public Water Schemes in Laois had a 99.6% microbiological compliance rate and 99.9% chemical compliance rate.



Under the Regulations, Laois County Council is also the Supervisory Authority for Private Group Water Schemes and Small Private Water Supply Schemes. Results of analysis of drinking water for 2016 show that Private Group Water Schemes were 100% compliant with microbiological parameters and 99.0% compliant with chemical parameters. Small Private Water Supplies Schemes had a 100% chemical compliance rate and 96.5% microbiological compliance rate.

## Discharges to Sewers

There are 111 Section 16 Discharge Licences issued under the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977 and 1990, to businesses to discharge trade effluent to sewers in the county and the Council monitor these on a regular basis throughout the year. Fees for these licences migrated to Irish Water in October 2016.

## EPA Waste Water Discharge Licence

Laois County Council operates Wastewater Treatment Plants on behalf of Irish Water in accordance with Certificates of Authorisation or Discharge Licences from the EPA under the Wastewater Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations 2007. These licences and certificates stipulate conditions to ensure compliance with water quality standards and EU Environmental Directives. To date discharge licences have been granted for 14 agglomerations. Certificates have been obtained for 14 small treatment plants in the county.

## Environmental Protection

Environmental Protection staff are involved in the implementation of legislation and policy regarding river water and groundwater quality, air quality and noise pollution as they apply in County Laois.

## Water Quality

Laois County Council continued in 2016 to implement the South Eastern River Basin District and Shannon International River Basin District Management Plans 2009 - 2015. The current plan will now extend to 2017, after which a revised plan will come into operation. The Council collected 415 river water samples for the EPA Surveillance and Operational monitoring programmes and took 63 investigative river water samples.

Thirty-eight Nutrient Management Plans concerning the spreading of Sewage Sludge in the county were submitted to the Council for approval in 2016.

The Council continued to monitor discharge licences to rivers and groundwaters in 2016 under Section 4 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts 1977 to 1990. A total of 48 samples were taken and analysed to ensure compliances with licences. Nine licences were operational in 2016 and two may commence in 2017. One operational licence was in respect of a housing estate that was taken in charge in late 2016.

The Council also inspected septic tanks in accordance with the EPA's National Inspection Plan 2015 - 2017 for Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems. A total of 23 inspections were carried out in 2016, as required by the Plan.

Laois County Council investigated all complaints received concerning water pollution in the County. Twenty-three water complaints were received in 2016. No notices were issued under Section 12 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts 1977 to 1990.

## Air Quality

There were no active Air Emissions Licences in the county in 2016. Thirty four complaints were received and investigated in 2016 concerning air quality. The nature of these complaints included agricultural odour problems and smoke nuisance. A register of fuel suppliers was established and 83 smoky coal inspections were carried out in 2016.

### Noise Pollution

Eighteen noise complaints were received in 2016. Some of these complaints were domestic in nature and in these cases the Council encourages neighbours to discuss the problem between themselves and to come to an agreed solution. Other complaints concerned commercial activities in the County.

### Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

A team was convened to begin work on the preparation of the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, which seeks to improve the resilience of the Council in providing services in the face of future climate risk.

### Irish Water - Capital Investment Programme

Irish Water continue to fund all Water Services Capital Projects.

### Portarlington Water Supply Improvement Scheme – La Bergerie

The contract for the Portarlington Water Supply Improvement Scheme Advanced Contract at La Bergerie wellfield was signed recently. The works include bringing a third borehole in the wellfield into production, provision of a building housing chlorine, fluoride and manganese treatment facilities. A twelve month DBO contract with a further twelve months O&M service has been awarded to Veolia, who took operational responsibility from 20th July 2016.

### Portarlington Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade (Advance Contract)

The Portarlington Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade contract was issued to tender in 2015. The works include improvements and upgrades at the plant to achieve effluent standards compliance and energy efficiencies. A seven month DBO contract with a further twelve months O&M service has been awarded to AECOM who took operational responsibility from 1st September 2016.

### Watermains Rehabilitation Contract 2 (Design)

RPS have been engaged to provide consultancy services to prepare designs and contract documents to go to tender – for a further 8.5 km of watermains replacement under Contract No. 2. A site investigation contract has been awarded to Priorty and commenced in November. This design phase will be completed during 2017.

### Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme

All new plants have now been process proved and came into operation in 2015 and a twenty year operations service commenced in 2016.

### Portlaoise, Portarlington and Mountmellick Sewerage Schemes

Wastewater Drainage Modelling of flow and load for Portlaoise, Portarlington and Mountmellick was progressed with the engagement of Consultants during 2016. RPS has been engaged for Portlaoise DAP and modelling of flow and load should be complete during 2017.

### Minor Projects/Programs

In 2016, several minor capital projects were progressed including Portlaoise Drainage Area Plan (Design), upgrades to Mountmellick WWTP (Tender stage), Castletown WWTP (Tender Stage) and Borris in Ossory WWTP (Construction), Portlaoise WWTP overflow, Reservoirs Refurbishment program, Flow Monitoring and Sampling installation at Borris-in Ossory, Ballyroan and Portarlington WWTP's, construction of exploratory well at Fermoy, installation of Cryptosporidium Sampling at a number of WTP's, Ballyroan inlet screen, pressure reducing valve survey's, and upgrading borehole PLCs/SCADA in Kilminchy WTP.

### Asset Needs Briefs

Further submissions in the form of Assets Needs Briefs were made to Irish Water in 2016 for a range of water and wastewater capital projects. Pending approvals by Irish Water these projects are expected to be progressed in 2017.

### Water Conservation

Active Leak Detection works started in late 2016, in Portlaoise and Mountmellick. This work will assist in reducing the volume of water lost through leakage on the public water network. It is expected that these works will expand in 2017, enhancing security of supply, and allowing development.

### RURAL WATER PROGRAMME

#### Multi Annual Programme 2016 – 2018

The Multi Annual Programme 2016-2018 was introduced in 2016, transitioning from the previous annual programme to a new multi-annual funding framework. The objectives of which are:



- To provide enhanced funding certainty for priority investment needs.
- To support the implementation of proper planning and sustainable development of rural areas, to meet the requirements of the Drinking Water Directive in relation to rural water supplies.
- To support the delivery of measures identified in the River Basin Management Plan to meet the objectives of the Water Framework Directive.

Laois received a total allocation of €387,250 for works under the following categories.

## Measure 1. Environmental and Public Health Compliance in the Group Water Sector

Works carried out in this category included the installation of a nitrates treatment system by Cullohill GWS, to ensure compliance with the EU Drinking Water Regulations. In addition, Attanagh GWS installed a new chlorine dosing pump.

## Measure 2. Enhancement of existing Group Schemes

Pumphouse and network upgrade works were carried out by a number of Group Schemes including Ballymaddock GWS, Ballypickas GWS, Barrowhouse GWS, Derrylemogue GWS and Graiguenahoun GWS.

Network Upgrade contracts were commenced by Ballacolla GWS, Errill GWS and Heath GWS. These works will continue into 2017.

## Measure 3. Rural Development in the group water sector

A Hydrogeologist was appointed to carry out a study on the capacity of Ballypickas GWS source to supply water to a proposed new group water scheme at Knock, Spink.

## Measure 4. Transition of schemes to public water and waste water sector

Phase III of the upgrade of the Clonkeen Fermoy GWS commenced in 2016 with the contract being awarded to Dunne Brothers, Mountmellick, following the eTender process.

Work commenced on Ballycleary GWS, and Ballyadams GWS (incorporating Ballyadams 1 & 2 and Monascreebeen) towards the end of 2016, in preparation for takeover by Irish Water.

## Measure 5 Innovation and Research

Funding was provided to Cullohill GWS to carry out a nitrates survey to identify the source of nitrates in the catchment zone through monitoring and analysis. The research was carried out by a Masters student under the supervision of Trinity College and with the support of the GSI and the NFGWS.

Ballacolla GWS received funding for the installation of one weather station in a national school supplied by the scheme, with the purpose of raising awareness about water, it's importance, the importance of the local Group Water Scheme and the importance of protecting the water. As there are three national schools supplied by the GWS, it purchased and installed a further two weather stations from its own resources.

The total expenditure on the Rural Water Programme 2016 was €309,561, with a further expenditure of €119,363 on the completion of 2015 programme.

All these works have progressed the Council's aims to assist the group schemes in the County maintain a high quality water supply in line with the EU drinking water quality standards and also to reduce energy and operating costs.

The Council's Rural Water Programme also processed €307,806 in subsidies to Group Water Schemes in 2016. The sum of €54,121 was paid to applicants for provision of new or upgrade to their domestic wells in 2016. No applications for grant aid were received in 2016 for Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems. This Scheme is available to assist owners of premises connected to domestic waste water treatment systems with the costs of repairs to and upgrading or replacement of such treatment systems. All payments in respect of these grants and subsidy payments are recouped from the Department of the Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

## National Lead Strategy

The National Lead Strategy was launched in June 2016 and introduced a grant scheme for low-income households to assist with the replacement of lead pipes in their homes. The grant scheme is administered by the Local Authority and funded by the Department for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. This grant scheme was advertised in the local press, the Council website and Facebook. No applications have been received for grant aid to date.

## Review of the Local Authorities Service Delivery for Rural Water

Under the aegis of the CCMA and the DHPCLG, a new working Group – the National Rural Water Review Group (NRWRG) was set up with Laois County Council as the Lead Authority with members drawn from the Department, NFGWS and a number of Local Authorities across the country. The purpose of this project was to identify a number of models that will achieve efficiencies and improved service delivery to the Rural Water Sector.

The Group had its inaugural meeting in March and completed the PID in September. The document was approved by the Project Board in December. The next step is the preparation of a Business Case which will commence in 2017 and a recommendation made on the preferred model for delivery of rural water services.

## Dangerous Structures and Places

Under the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1964, Local Authorities are empowered to serve Notice on property owners, where in the opinion of the Council a property or place is dangerous, requesting them to carry out remedial action to make the property safe. Failure to comply with the Notice can result in the matter being referred to the Courts. In cases of emergency the Council is empowered to render such properties safe and to recoup the costs. A Register of Dangerous Places/Structures is maintained by the local authority and there are 27 open files on the register in Laois at 31st December 2016.

## National Service Indicators 2015

Drinking water in private schemes in compliance with statutory requirements	98.84%
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## LAOIS WATER SAFETY

### Water Safety Awareness Week 2016

Laois County Council in conjunction with the Laois Water Safety Area Committee delivered a number of key events to promote Water Safety Awareness in 2016.

During 2016, schools & community group visits were conducted, whereby basic water safety awareness talks and ring buoy demonstrations were delivered.

Laois Water Safety successfully worked in conjunction with Vicarstown 'Beat the Barge' Canalfest in

September 2016 where kayaking/canoeing, paddle boarding and raft making activities were available. The events emphasised the importance of wearing the appropriate lifejacket/buoyancy aid when participating in open water.



## WATER SAFETY CLASSES 2016

Laois Water Safety successfully delivered Spring and Autumn Water Safety Classes during 2016 at Portlaoise Leisure Centre. 135 adults and children participated in the classes throughout the year. Laois Water Safety held a very successful Water Safety Awards Night in Áras an Chontae on 28th June 2016 with approx 100 participants in attendance to receive their Water Safety Certificates which were presented by An Cathaoirleach, Tom Mulhall. Participants and Instructors from Laois Water Safety Classes visited the RNLI Lifeboat Station on Saturday 28th May in Dún Laoghaire where they received a tour of all facilities, demonstrations, and a presentation by the RNLI Lifeboat Service and participated in water activities in Dún Laoghaire Harbour.



## Paws Programme

Laois County Council in association with Laois Water Safety and Portlaoise Leisure Centre continued to successfully support and deliver the Primary Aquatic Water Safety Programme (PAWS). Primary schools were visited in County Laois in December where over 1,000 children were presented with PAWS Certificates

after participating in the Programme.

### Ring Buoys

During 2016 Laois County Council continued to inspect, maintain, erect and replace ring buoys at open water locations countywide.

### National Ploughing Championships

Laois Water Safety Area Committee members and instructors aided Irish Water Safety at The National Ploughing Championships. The National Ploughing Championships were held over 3 days in Offaly where record numbers visited the stand and observed basic life support demonstrations.

### INTO Annual Conference 2016

Laois Water Safety Area Committee members and instructors aided Irish Water Safety at the INTO Annual Conference. The Conference was held over 2 days in The Heritage Hotel, Killenard where Primary Teachers visited the stand and observed basic life support demonstrations and received information relating to the PAWS Programme.

## LAOIS COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

**Acting Chief Fire Officer:** Declan Power

The Fire Service continued to provide a quality service in the areas of Fire Prevention, Fire Brigade Operations, Community Fire Safety Awareness and Major Emergency Planning.

Laois County Fire & Rescue Service attended 715 emergency incidents consisting of 409 fires, 208 special service incidents & 98 false alarms.

To enhance equipment standards the programme for replacement and updating of equipment was continued in 2016. New breathing apparatus sets and cylinders, gas-tight chemical protective clothing, road traffic collision & specialist rescue equipment, thermal imaging camera, gas detectors and fire ground communications equipment were provided.

An extensive programme of training for operational fire fighters was completed involving over 630 person days.

To enhance Safety, Health and Welfare for fire crews the Standard Operational Guidelines programme to implement a set of fire brigade operations continued in 2016. In addition a Health, Safety & Welfare Management Programme was approved by Senior Man-

agement and was reviewed 39 times throughout the year.

38 fire safety certificate applications and 80 licensing applications were received, with 79 planning applications also referred to the fire service during the year. 106 premises were inspected. 7 Closure Notices were served on premises with serious fire safety issues.

Extensive planning and liaison was carried out with the organisers of the Electric Picnic Music Festival in Stradbally (approx 58,000 attended) to ensure the safety of all involved. An extensive programme of inspections was put in place for this music festival.

The Fire Safety Primary Schools Programme was carried throughout the county between October and December 2016. All eight fire stations were involved. 63 primary schools were visited and fire safety advice/information was received by 2029 students.

The program for National Fire Safety Week was held in October. All fire stations held open nights which included presentations on fire safety attended by the public and groups from the local communities, advertising in local newspapers and local radio, use of social media sites, facebook and Twitter and leaflets.



Laois County Fire & Rescue Service took part in the 2016 National Extrication and Trauma Challenge held in County Meath in May, achieving the following results:

- Trauma Competition: Overall 1st and 2nd Place, Best Complex Scenario, Best Standard Scenario.
- Extrication Competition: Overall 2nd Place, Best Standard Scenario.

All Major Emergency Management facilities were maintained and all relevant plans, sub-plans and procedures were updated throughout the year. MEM Training was provided to Council staff in Information Management and Media liaison.



## Performance Indicators 2015

## Cost per capita of the Fire Service

Cost per Capita €43.69

Service Mobilisation

Average time taken, in minutes to mobilise fire brigades in full-time stations in respect of fire N/A

Average time taken, in minutes to mobilise fire brigades in part-time stations (retained fire service) in respect of fire 5.32

Average time taken, in minutes to mobilise fire brigades in full-time stations in respect of all other (non-fire) emergency incidents N/A

Average time taken, in minutes to mobilise fire brigades in part-time stations (retained fire service) in respect of all other (non-fire) emergency incidents 4.42

## Percentage of attendances at scenes

% of cases in respect of fire in which first attendance at the scene is within 10 minutes 35.24%

% of cases in respect of fire in which first attendance at the scene is after 10 minutes but within 20 minutes 55.83%

% of cases in respect of fire in which first attendance at the scene is after 20 minutes 8.93%

% of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the scene is within 10 minutes 37.34%

% of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the scene is after 10 minutes but within 20 minutes 49.79%

% of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the

scene is after 20 minutes

12.88%

## 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 one K9 H.R.D. search and rescue dog. One of 8 Counties providing drones for Ariel search.

- **Fire-fighting**

Pumping floodwaters and supplying water to the community.

- **Warden Service and Radiation Monitoring**

Radiation detecting and monitoring.

- **Radio Communications**

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

- **Emergency Response**

Training centres are located at Stradbally, Durrow, Mountmellick and Portlaoise. If you are interested in the above and are aged between 18-65, contact us to find out more information on (057) 8664106, e-mail [lpreston@laoiscivildefence.ie](mailto:lpreston@laoiscivildefence.ie) or visit our website at [www.laoiscivildefence.ie](http://www.laoiscivildefence.ie)

## Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning

<b>Director of Services:</b>	Kieran Kehoe
<b>Chairperson:</b>	John Moran, M.C.C.
<b>Members</b>	Sectoral
John Joe Fennelly, M.C.C.	Harry Vanston (Farming Sector)
Mary Sweeney, M.C.C.	Pat Culleton, (Development/ Construction)
David Goodwin, M.C.C.	Michael Kieilty, I.C.T.U. (Trade Union)
Aidan Mullins, M.C.C.	William Telford (Business/Commercial)
	Noel Gavigan (Environment/ Conservation)

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Laois County Council continues on an ongoing basis to promote the economic development of County Laois. The Laois Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is a statutory Plan which was prepared to promote the economic and community development of County Laois from 2016-2021.

The LECP was prepared by Laois County Council and the Laois Local Community Development Committee (Laois LCDC) in consultation with other agencies, organisations and groups.

The plan was adopted by the Planning and Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee and Laois County Council in March 2016 and was formally launched at the National Ploughing Championships in Tullamore in September 2016.

An assessment of the 2016 implementation plan for the Laois LECP has been undertaken and it is noted that significant progress has been made across the majority of the actions in 2016. Updates are provided to the SPC, Management Team and Full Council on an ongoing basis.

2016 also saw the formal establishment of the Business Support Unit in the Council which incorporates the Local Enterprise Office and the Economic Development team from the Council to form a central point of contact for existing and prospective businesses. It will encourage local enterprise and inward investment by providing a supportive business environment in the County. The promotion of County Laois as a prime in-

vestment location in Ireland and Europe will be a key objective of the support unit.

Whether a business is relocating or expanding, or if an entrepreneur is starting a new enterprise, the Support Unit will be available to effectively guide and facilitate when business is being done in County Laois.

Other key actions of the Business Support unit in 2016 were:

- The commencement of a marketing strategy for the County
- The promotion and development of Business Incentive Schemes
- The establishment of the REDZ project "IN SPIRE Rathdowney"
- The upgrade of Clonminam Business Park in Portlaoise
- The launch of a Business Survey
- Support to 5 no. Towns to participate in National Enterprise Town Awards



## LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE LAOIS

2016 was a very productive year for LEO Laois. €257,083 approved in grant aid with the potential to create 41 full-time jobs and sustain a further 20. 14 applications were approved for grant aid, an increase of over 50% on 2015, with potential jobs increasing from 33 to 41, a trend we would hope will continue for 2017. Over 600 enquiries were dealt with and 2016 saw 480 participants attend training courses, with mentoring assignments and mentoring clinics seeing a higher demand than previous years. All of these supports were promoted to, made available for, and tailored specifically towards the needs of small, micro and start-up businesses in Laois. Dedicated programmes were designed and run to support target groups such as the food and retail sectors, women in business, etc.

During the year LEO were involved in the INSPIRE Rathdowney Project which was funded under the

REDZ Programme in collaboration with Laois County Council, Laois Partnership and Carlow IT. LEO Laois together with Offaly, Longford and Westmeath were successful in securing funding under Enterprise Ireland's Competitive fund for 2 projects Midlands 1 to 2 Growth Initiative and Midland's Engineering Cluster Programme, and with Wexford, Waterford, Wicklow, Tipperary, Carlow, Kilkenny and Kildare were successful in securing funding for the Growth Accelerator Programme.

64 applications were received in respect of Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur, placing Laois 11th out of 31 LEOs in terms of applications received.

## REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS AND KEY INITIATIVES DURING 2016

### Measure 1- Selective Financial Intervention – Grant Aid

LEO provides direct financial support to micro businesses (10 employees or less) in the form of Feasibility/Innovation Grants, Priming Grants and Business Expansion Grants.

- A Feasibility/Innovation Grant is designed to assist the promoter with researching market demand for a product or service and examining its sustainability.
- A Priming Grant is a business start-up grant available to micro enterprises within the first 18 months of start-up.
- A Business Expansion Grant is designed to assist the business in its growth phase after the initial 18 month start-up period.

The financial support approved for businesses in county Laois in 2016 is summarised as follows:

#### GRANTS BY TYPE, NUMBER & AMOUNT APPROVED 2016

Grant Type	No. of Businesses	Amount €
Priming Grants	7	121,577
Business Expansion Grants	6	131,233
Feasibility Grants	1	4,273
Total Approved	14	257,083

### Measure 2 - Entrepreneurial and Capability Development

This measure is designed to provide small businesses

with the necessary skills and information to assist them in their development and growth. It also provides for actions that assist in the development of an entrepreneurial culture in the county. The actions include training programmes on a variety of business issues, mentoring and management development programmes, exhibitions, schools programmes, etc. A total of 55 training courses were on offer through LEO in 2016 with a total of 480 persons participating. Of the persons trained during the year, a total of 170 (35%) were male and 310 (65%) female.

LEO ran 7 Start Your Own Business courses with 70 participants in 2016 which provided vital information and training to those considering entering the field of entrepreneurship.

LEO continued to provide training to meet the needs of existing businesses. Training was delivered via half day or full day workshops and included the following:

- Start Your Own Business
- Sage Computerised Accounts
- Digital Marketing and Website Design
- Marketing Tips of the Small Business
- HACCP/ Food Safety
- The Potential for LinkedIn for Business
- The Potential for Facebook for Business
- The Potential for Twitter for Business
- Basic Bookkeeping and Taxation
- Business Growth Programme
- Online Marketing and Social Media
- How to successfully Pitch for new Business
- How to get Paid on Time
- Choice 4 Women
- Kick Start Your Own Food Business
- Health & Safety for the Small Business
- How to convert Website Visitors to Sales
- Pulling Power for the Local Retailer
- How to Shoot & Edit Videos on a Budget
- Food Academy
- Maximise your Trade Show Investment
- The Foodpreneur
- How to use Snapchat for Business
- An Introduction to Lean Manufacturing
- Strategic Marketing and Branding
- Keeping the Taxman Happy

### Female Entrepreneurship

LEO recognises that new business start-ups for all people are difficult and its programmes are tailored to be as flexible as possible. It acknowledges, however, that specific issues affect women in business and it addresses these by providing specific programmes for women in business.



### • Choice 4 Women

This programme was offered to women to address the challenges of starting and continuing in business. A total of 6 participated on this programme

### • Laois Enterprising Women's Network

LEO continued to facilitate the Laois Enterprising Women's Network with 6 network meetings held during the year.

### Student Enterprise Awards

The Student Enterprise Awards is the biggest enterprise competition for students in Ireland. It helps students to grasp real life skills associated with running a business including working as part of a team, managing production and finances, organising a sales and marketing campaign and liaising directly with customers, judges and the media. LEO played an active part in promoting this initiative with 7 schools participating in the 2016 Programme, comprising over 300 students.

### Promotion

During the period LEO continued to carry out a range of promotional activities designed to promote enterprise within the county. LEO provided a range of information on the services and supports available to small businesses through the website, social media, local advertising and mailshots.

### Mentoring

The Mentor Programme is designed to match up the knowledge, skills, insights and entrepreneurial capability of experienced business people with small business owner/managers who need practical and strategic one-to-one advice and guidance. 98 clients received one-to-one mentoring in 2016, a significant increase on 2015.

### Business Clinics

20 business clinics in the areas of Social Media, Business Planning and Marketing were held throughout the year with a total of 120 clients availing of free one-to-one business advice.

### Micro Finance Ireland

Under a partnership between Microfinance Ireland

and the Local Enterprise Offices, business loans are available through the Local Enterprise Office. 9 businesses applied for funding under this programme in 2016, with 2 being approved.

### Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur

64 applications were received in Laois under this initiative, the 11th highest in the country. 3 County Winners – Best Idea, Francis Cosgrave (Sonrimar Ltd); Best Start Up, Alan Meredith (Alan Meredith Studio) and Best Established, Kelly Ging (Kelly Lou Cake), progressed to the Regional Finals.



### Trading Online Vouchers

To support small businesses to enhance their online trading presence, Online Trading Vouchers to the value of €2,500 (up to a maximum of 50% of the total cost) are available to Laois Businesses through a programme under the Government's National Digital Strategy and delivered through the Local Enterprise Offices. Under this initiative 23 applications were received as follows:

- 4 refusals
- 18 approvals to the value of €38,110 with the potential to create an additional 25 full time/22 part time jobs
- 25 business attended information sessions

### Local Enterprise Week

Local Enterprise Week ran from the 6th to 11th March,

2016 as part of a National LEO initiative. Over 100 entrepreneurs attended free mentoring/seminars throughout the week.



### National Women's Enterprise Day

25 female entrepreneurs from Laois attended Road to Success on the 19th October as part of National Women's Enterprise Day 2016. Run jointly with Offaly, Westmeath and Longford, participants on the day learned key tips from the experiences and journeys of all the speakers to apply to the running of their own business. The event also afforded attendees the opportunity to step back from the day to day of running their own businesses and network, learn and share in the experience of other business women from the region.

Table 1a: Summary of Measure 2 Activities 2016

#### Measure 2 (Business Advice, Training, Mentoring and Networking Programmes) 2016

Number of Training Programmes Delivered	55
Total of Participants on Training Programmes	480
Number of Mentoring Sessions Delivered to Clients	148

### Performance Indicator 2015

#### Economic Development

The no. of jobs created with assistance from the Local Enterprise Office with each part-time job = 0.5	112
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### Planning Department

The overall objective of the Planning Department is to implement the provisions of the Planning Acts and to 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 sus-

tainability.

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 2016 was 673. However, it should be noted that 162 of the total applications received were invalid and required the applicant to submit a new application. The main reasons for the 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 2016:

- Number of valid applications received: 511
- Number of decisions made: 459
- Number of applications granted: 450
- Number of applications refused: 9

#### 2016 Performance

- Invalid applications returned to applicant: 24%
- Referrals to Area Offices (working days): 14
- 14 applications were appealed to An Bord Pleanála in 2016.

#### Customer Service Initiatives

2016 saw the continuation of the scanning of planning applications as they are received by the Planning Authority. Throughout 2016, the public were able to access all planning applications on-line within two weeks of the Planning Authority receiving them. 406 pre-planning meetings were held in 2016, 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.

39 Section 5 applications were processed by Laois County Council in 2016.

The Planning website continues to be a very popular attraction with 66,084 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. The review of the County Development Plan continued through 2016 with the Draft Plan and accompanying documents adopted for public display at the July Council meeting.

The second public consultation period on the Draft Plan ran from the 5th August to 17th November 2016 and meetings were held in Ballylinan, Abbeyleix and Castletown. Eighty submissions were received during this consultation phase. The review process is a two year process which will conclude in 2017.

## Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy / Vision Statement

GVA Bilfinger consultants were commissioned in July 2016 to carry out a Public Realm Plan and Vision Statement for Portlaoise Town. Public Meetings were held in the Heritage Hotel on Tuesday 30th September 2016 and 19th October 2016 which were attended by large numbers of people from both the business community and residents within the town. The Plan is anticipated to be delivered in Q1 2017.

## Conservation

A total of 11 no. Section 57 Declarations in relation to works to Protected Structures at various locations throughout County Laois were processed in 2016.

## Grant aid for Protected Structures

Two grant schemes for owners of historic properties were run in 2016, with funding from the Department of Arts, Heritage, Rural, Regional and Gaeltacht Affairs.

The Built Heritage Investment scheme provides funding for maintenance of protected structures. In 2016, funding was allocated for the conservation of five historic properties, to a total of €46,250

The Structures at Risk fund is for buildings in imminent danger of collapse. In 2016, a maximum of two structures per county were grant aided. Two protected structures in Laois received funding for urgent conservation work to a total of €43,527. These schemes are managed by the Heritage

Office.

## Local Authority Development (Part 8 projects)

Part 8 consent for the following two projects was granted during 2016:

- extension of Portlaoise Southern Circular Route from R426 Timahoe Road To N77/Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise, County Laois and
- upgrade of Clonminam Business Park, Portlaoise, County Laois

## Dereliction

The Council is implementing its powers under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 targeting those properties that are on the Derelict Sites Register. Working with the owners of those properties, the outstanding issues are being dealt with and those properties that are no longer deemed 'derelict' are then removed from the Derelict Sites Register.

## Definition of a Derelict Site

The Derelict Sites Act, 1990 defines a Derelict Site as;

"Any land which detracts, or is likely to detract, to a material degree from the amenity, character or appearance of land in the neighbourhood of the land in question because of-

- a) the existence on the land in question of structures which are in a ruinous, derelict or dangerous condition, or
- b) the neglected, unsightly or objectionable condition of the land or any structures on the land in question, or
- c) the presence, deposit or collection on the land in question of any litter, rubbish, debris or waste, except where the presence, deposit or collection of such litter, rubbish, debris or waste results from the exercise of a right conferred by statute or by common law

Total Number of Files opened for 2016: 9

Total Number of Files closed as a result of dereliction being addressed in 2016: 35

Total Number of Files: 66



**(iii) Planning Enforcement**

The Planning Authority, in accordance with the statutory requirements under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2013 as amended, seeks to ensure compliance with planning permissions and also to prevent unauthorised development.

Work continued in 2016 by the Enforcement team to ensure that any breaches of planning law were investigated and followed up. In 2016, Council staff attended Court on 29 occasions in respect of enforcement prosecutions and while some cases are still ongoing, 9 cases were successfully resolved during 2016.

The Planning Authority served 54 enforcement notices, 214 warning letters and investigated 101 complaints all of which highlight the active pursuit of planning non-compliance and unauthorised development by our Enforcement Section.

**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: 182
- Number of commencement notices for Change of Use /Alterations/Renovations/ Extensions = 31
- Number of Commercial Building Notices = 25 (No of commercial buildings covered = 25)
- Number of Dwellings covered by valid commencement notices: = 184 ( of which 96 are "one off" dwellings)
- Number of buildings inspected: 30
- Number of buildings inspected as a % of buildings covered by valid Commencement notices: 12%

**(v) Unfinished Housing Estates**

Laois County Council is responsible for the taking in charge of estates. In 2016, 9 estates were taken in charge which are listed below. 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, where possible, is funded from the bond. This policy of actively pursuing the developer and bond holder will continue in 2017.

The following estates were taken in charge in 2016:

1. Ballymorris Court, Portarlinton
2. Rahin Towers, Ballylinan
3. Bruach Na hAbhann
4. Carriglea, Killenard
5. Aghnaharna Court
6. Knocknamoe Lane, Abbeyleix
7. Limetree Avenue, Kilminchy, Portlaoise
8. New Line Close, Mountrath
9. Radharc Na Sleibhte

The following estates received funding under the "National Taking in charge Initiative For Residential Estates" (NTICI) in 2016. It is intended that these estates will be taken in charge in 2017.

Estate Name	Households	Funds allocated
Ard Erin Mountrath	48 units	€73,082.65
Mill Court, Borris-in-Ossory	7 units	€18,063.53
Hynd's Square, Portlaoise	15 units	€42,159.58
Wallis Street, Mountrath	10 units	€11,350.00
Rushall, Mountrath	85 units	€27,330.80
Total	165 units	€171,986.56

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

**Performance Indicators 2015****New buildings inspected**

New Buildings inspected as a percentage of new buildings notified to the local authority	15.75%
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**No./% of planning decisions confirmed by An Bord Pleanála**

No. of local authority planning decisions which were
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the subject of an appeal to An Bord Pleanála that were determined by the Board in 2015	11
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% of the determinations that confirmed (with or without variation) the decision made by the local authority	81.82%
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### Performance of Enforcement

Total no. of planning cases referred to or initiated by the local authority during 2015 that were investigated	109
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Total no. of planning cases being investigated at 31/12/2015	181
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Total no of cases that were closed	144
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% of the cases closed that were dismissed under Section 152(2), or statute barred or exempted development	21.53%
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% of the cases closed that were resolved to the local authority's satisfaction through negotiations	2.78%
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% of the cases closed that were closed due to enforcement proceedings	75.69%
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### Cost per capita of the planning service

Cost per capita of the planning service (based on 2016 census)	€21.36
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## Housing Strategic Policy Committee

**Chair:** Paschal McEvoy, M.C.C.

### Members

Willie Aird, M.C.C.  
Caroline Dwane  
Stanley, M.C.C.  
Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C.  
Paddy Bracken, M.C.C.

### Sectoral

Michael Kelly Jr.  
(Development/  
Construction)  
Andrew Cremin  
(Business/  
Commercial)  
Sheelagh Coyle  
(Social inclusion)  
Michael Cobbe  
Community/Voluntary)

**Director of Services:** Gerry Murphy

**Senior Executive Officer:** Ian McCormack

**Senior Executive Engineer:** P J Dempsey

**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 2016

- Commencement of construction of 33 units at Conniberry Way, Old Knockmay Road, Portlaoise.



- Acquisition of 16 units for social housing in various locations across the County.
- Successful delivery of 236 grants for disabled and elderly people living in the County and local authority tenants.
- Approval of Stage 1 design for proposed development of 20 units in Portarlinton,

10 units in Ballyroan, 8 units in Mountmellick, 8 units in Mountrath and the reconstruction of 1 unit at Harpur's Lane, Portlaoise.

- 60 properties retrofitted under the Energy Efficiency Scheme.

### Report on SPC

The Housing Strategic Policy Committee met in March, June and December 2016.

The main issues considered were as follows:

- Tenant Purchase (Incremental) Scheme 2016.
- Housing Assistance Payment
- Housing Reports
- Local Traveller Accommodation Programme
- Social Housing Strategy 2020
- Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness

### Social Housing Investment Programme

The provisional Social Housing Investment Programme allocation for the period 2015 to 2017 is €31,100,000 (Capital and Current). This includes construction of social units, acquisitions, Part V units, Return of Voids, Capital Assistance Scheme, Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SCHEP) and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). The target is for the provision of an additional 366 units.

Under Construction; 33 No. units were commenced in Portlaoise resulting in a drawdown in 2016 of €476,675. Under Acquisitions; 16 No. units were purchased at a cost of €1,671,969 and 14 further units are currently under conveyancing process. Approval to the design for the proposed development of 20 units in Portarlinton, 10 units in Ballyroan, 8 units in Mountmellick, 8 units in Mountrath and the reconstruction of one unit in Harpur's Lane, Portlaoise was received in 2016. An application for design approval for 5 units in Rathdowney was made to the Department in December 2016.

### CLSS & Capital Assistance Scheme

At 31/12/16, 271 units were provided under the Capital Loan & Subsidy Scheme and 264 units were provided under the Capital Assistance Scheme. Respond Housing Association has applied for planning approval for 39 units in Portlaoise, of which 15 will be funded under the Capital Assistance Scheme. Oaklee Housing is awaiting approval to go to planning for 8 units on a site in the grounds of St. Fintan's Hospital, Portlaoise. Cluid Housing Association delivered 2 social houses under the Capital Assistance Scheme in 2016.



## RAS & Leasing

To date the Housing Section has secured a total of 230 properties under the Rental Accommodation Scheme and 129 properties under the Social Leasing initiative. In 2016, forty three new units were taken on under the Social Housing Leasing Initiative. A further 49 units have received Departmental approval and are expected to come on stream in 2017.



## Traveller Accommodation

The Housing Section continues to implement the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018. Targets under the Programme for the accommodation of Travellers have been met from 2014 to 2016.

## Housing Maintenance and Relet

In 2016, 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. In addition to the Council's own funding, the DHPCLG provided an additional €97,053 for the refurbishment of 12 No. vacant units in 2016.

## Fabric Upgrade and Improvement Works

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government 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. Attic and wall insulation works were carried out on 60 properties, resulting in a drawdown of funds of €77,999 from the Exchequer. Under the adaptation works to social houses programme 25 tenants benefited from disabled works carried out such as the provision of wet rooms, shower facilities, ramps and 2 extensions were completed.

## Estate Management

Estate management remains a key function for the Housing Section, with 2016 seeing increased levels of interaction with tenants and resident groups. The Housing Section provided a range of supports to various resident groups including grants where appropriate.

## Private Grants

In 2016, the DHPLG provided an allocation of €878,326 for Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability. Through effective management of the funding available the Housing Section has been able to keep the scheme open all of 2016.

## Treo Nua Portlaoise Resource Centre

Treo Nua Portlaoise Resource Centre continues to play an important role in the social, economic and community infrastructure of Portlaoise and is providing essential social and training services to the community. The crèche, after-school rooms, meeting, community and training rooms are all busy providing a range of services, educational courses, physical activity classes and family support services.

## Part V- Housing Strategy

In 2016 the Housing Department continued to monitor development and engage with developers to reach agreement for compliance with Part V of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended). Four Part V meetings were held with developers in 2016.

## Private Sites

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

## Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)

HAP was introduced in Laois in December 2016 as a replacement for rent supplement. Under the scheme, existing rent supplement cases will transfer to HAP on a phased basis while new applications will also be processed. It is anticipated that a significant number of applicants will transfer to HAP in Laois in 2017.

## Tenant Purchase (Incremental) Scheme 2016

10 eligible applications were received under the Tenant Purchase (Incremental) Scheme 2016.

**Housing Needs Assessment**

A Housing Needs Assessment was carried out during the months of July, August and September and was completed and signed off on the 7th October, 2016. A total of 1,762 households were assessed and 460 households were deemed not to qualify for social housing support. 1,302 households qualified for social housing support on the Housing Needs Assessment date on the 21st September 2016.

**O'Moore Place Regeneration Project**

The Council commenced work on the preparation of a draft physical, economic and social plan for O'Moore Place, Portlaoise in 2016 in consultation with all relevant stakeholders including the local community, An Garda Síochána and Laois Partnership Company.

**Performance Indicators 2015****Total Social Housing Dwellings Provided 01/01/2015 - 31/12/2015**

Total Social Housing Dwellings provided 1/1/2015 to 31/12/2015	43
--	----

No. of Dwellings directly provided by the Local Authority	34
---	----

No of Local Authority Dwellings constructed	6
---	---

No of Local Authority Dwellings purchased	28
---	----

No. of units provided under the Rental Accommodation Scheme	1
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No. of units provided under HAP	N/A
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No. of units provided under SHCEP	8
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**Social Housing Dwellings Stock as at 31/12/2015**

Total No. of Social Housing Dwellings as at 31/12/2015	2,208
--	-------

Dwellings directly provided (constructed or purchased) by the Local Authority	2,042
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Dwellings provided under RAS	143
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Dwellings provided under HAP	N/A
------------------------------	-----

Dwellings provided under the SHCEP	23
------------------------------------	----

% of the Directly Provided Dwellings that were vacant on 31/12/2015	1.32%
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**Average Re-letting time and cost; Maintenance Cost by Unit**

Average Time from Date of Vacation of dwelling to the date in 2015 when a new tenancy had commenced. (weeks)	12.34 wks
--	-----------

Average cost expended on getting the Re-tenanted units ready for re-letting (€)	4,683.64
---	----------

Average per Unit Expenditure in 2015 on Repair and Maintenance of LA Housing (€)	1,348.68
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**Private Rented Sector Inspections; Long-term Homeless Adults**

Total no. of registered tenancies in the local authority area at the end 2015	3,690
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No. of inspections carried out in 2015	92
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No. of Adults classified as Homeless and in Emergency Accommodation on Night of 31/12/2015	5
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% of Adults who on that Date had been in Emergency Accommodation for 6 months	20
---	----

**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 (Rates, Fire charges, Rents, Loans, Development Contributions), NPPR, 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.

## Water and Waste Water Charges

On 21st October, 2016, Irish Water assumed responsibility for the management of non-domestic water customer invoices for standard Water Services including Miscellaneous/Ancillary Water Services. Irish Water also assumed responsibility for the payments, collections and the management of customer queries in relation to non-domestic invoices. Laois County Council will continue to carry out meter reading and meter operations and will provide support to Irish Water in the resolution of customer queries.

## 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

## Performance Indicators 2015

### 5 year summary of revenue account balance

2011	€-499,962
2012	€-494,535
2013	€-493,027
2014	€-393,286
2015	€-297,861

### 5 year summary of % collection levels for major revenue sources

The individual % figures for each of (a) Rates, (b) Rent & Annuities and (c) Housing Loans 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rates	77%	74%	70%	69%	75%
Rent & Annuities	94%	94%	94%	95%	96%
Housing Loans	81%	76%	67%	62%	64%

## MyPay Update

The project is currently running on schedule and within budget. There are currently 69 employees based in the shared services centre. Waves 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 have been completed on schedule with Laois, Offaly, Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath, Leitrim, Galway, Carlow, Monaghan, Cavan, Kildare, Meath, Kilkenny, Louth, South Dublin, Tipperary, Kerry, Wicklow, Sligo, Mayo and Donegal County Councils along with Limerick and Waterford County and City Councils, Cork and Galway City Councils and the LGMA are now live.

The following are the statistics on the project up to the end of December:

Value of Payments	€975m
Number of Payments	1,175,410
Number of Pay Groups Paid	3,749
Number of Payroll Runs	1,768

The Wave 6 implementation commenced with Clare in September. Work is well underway to bring Fingal and Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Councils live on board by the end of September 2017 as part of Wave 6. Work is ongoing with Cork County Council with a view to bringing them on board in 2017 also.

The Superannuation element of the project has commenced. The “as is” process mapping has been completed. Workshops have been held in a number of Local Authorities on the “to be” process mapping and data requirements.

- A pilot of the service was successfully completed in Laois and Carlow County Councils together with the LGMA in September.
- The Wave 1 Rollout commenced in September with Sligo and Longford County Councils together with Waterford City &



County Councils now live. The Wave 1 rollout will be completed with Clare and Roscommon County Councils in quarter 1 2017.

contacted at 1890 927 787 or on line at [www.nct.ie/vrt](http://www.nct.ie/vrt).

## Motor Taxation

This Section continues to cater for all motor taxation transactions for the County which is availed of by customers visiting the public counter, by post and, now more widely used, via the online service. The online transactions usage is steadily increasing which now represents 46.91% of the overall business conducted in Motor Tax. The total transactions carried out by Laois Motor Taxation Office in 2016 is 49,387.

### Rates

Motor Tax for vehicles registered after 1 July 2008 is determined on the basis of CO2 bands or cubic capacity of engine, whichever is less. 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.

### Vehicle Licences

Gross income for the year fell by €1,597,463 to €7,821,091 compared with €9,418,554 in 2015, a drop of 17%. The number of transactions also fell from 53,687 to 45,821 – a drop of 14.6%. This fall was expected due to the higher online tax renewals.

### Off the Road Declarations

If a vehicle is not going to be used in a public place, a self-declaration must be made in advance of the vehicle being taken off the road and while the vehicle is still in tax. A vehicle can be declared off the road for a period not less than 3 months and not greater than 12 months. In 2016, 1,167 SORD applications were processed.

### Revised Vehicle Testing Procedures

Certificates of Roadworthiness for commercial/goods vehicles are carried out by the commercial vehicle test centres. Customers will receive a pass statement at the garage and a new style CRW by post. The NDVF system is automatically updated with CRW details.

### 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

## NCT (National Car Test)

Testing of private vehicles is carried out at the various test centres locations around the country. In Laois, the test centre is located at Lismard Business Centre, Timahoe Road, Portlaoise. The initial test is after 4 years and then every 2 years thereafter. Vintage cars are the only vehicle exempt from this test.

## Performance indicators at 31st December 2015

### % of Motor Tax Transactions conducted online

<p>The percentage of motor tax transactions which are dealt with online (i.e transaction is processed and the tax disc is issued)</p>	<p>46.91%</p>
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## Revenue Collection

Housing Loans		31.12.2016	31.12.2015
a)	Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	65%	64%
b)	Percentage of arrears:		
	(i) Less than 1 mth	1%	1%
	(ii) 1-2 Mths	1%	1%
	(iii) 2 – 3 months old	2%	1%
	(iv) more than 3 months old	96%	97%
Rents			
a)	Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amounts due	95%	96%
b)	Percentage of arrears		
	(i) Less than four weeks	9%	10%
	(ii) 4-6 weeks	11%	11%
	(iii) 6-12 weeks	16%	16%
	(iv) greater than 12 weeks	64%	63%
Commercial Rates			
Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due		76%	75%

# FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

## Annual Financial Statement 2016

Revenue Account	Gross Expenditure 2016 €	Income 2016 €	Net Expenditure 2016 €
<b>Programme Group</b>			
Housing & Building	10,094,880	11,852,885	(1,758,005)
Road Transportation & Safety	15,465,111	11,106,849	4,358,262
Water & Sewerage	3,599,138	4,570,835	(971,697)
Development Incentives & Controls	5,263,218	2,223,832	3,039,385
Environmental Protection	6,366,422	1,693,084	4,673,338
Recreation & Amenity	4,001,375	962,806	3,038,569
Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare	708,593	324,051	384,542
Miscellaneous	9,850,286	6,339,494	3,510,792
<b>Total Expenditure/Income</b>	<b>55,349,022</b>	<b>39,073,836</b>	

Net cost of programmes to be funded from Rates & Local Government Fund	16,275,185
Rates	12,453,983
Pension Levy	721,551
Local Government Fund - General Purpose Grant	7,631,324
Surplus for Year before Transfers	4,531,672
Transfers from/(to) Reserves	(4,432,180)
Overall Surplus for Year	99,492
General Reserve @ 1st January 2016	(297,861)
General Reserve @ 31st December 2016	(198,369)

### Capital Account

Balance @ 01.01.2016	(4,705,916)
Grants	8,033,380
Other Income	6,092,323
Transfer from/to Revenue	4,321,271
Expenditure	(13,007,664)
Balance @ 31.12.2016	733,395



## INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

**Director of Services:** Gerry Murphy

**A/Head of Information Systems:** John Smith

The Information & Communications Technology (I.C.T.) Department, is based at the Council Headquarters at Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise. The Department comprises 8 staff members and manages the Council's entire I.C.T. infrastructure including datacentre, computer and communication installations at County Hall, Area Offices, Libraries, and various other Council properties throughout the county. The IT Department provides technical support to all the other Council Departments and is responsible for the implementation, maintenance, management and security of the Council's I.C.T. systems. The Department is committed to a policy of continuous improvement of I.C.T. services, both within the Council itself and to the public who avail of the Council's services.

In excess of 2,500 support calls from departments within the Council were processed by technical support staff during 2016.

### Desktop Computer Refresh

In recent years it became necessary to upgrade the Council's stock of desktop computers to the current approved Windows 7 operating system. This was a large scale project which involved a significant amount of staff time and was further advanced in 2016. The remaining stock of desktops was upgraded to Windows 7 and this effectively completed the move to more powerful and higher specification equipment.

### Data Protection

The Data Protection Acts require the Council to ensure that the data it holds is retained in a secure and safe environment. This is a requirement the Council takes very seriously and significant resources are devoted to ensuring the safety & integrity of data and systems. A number of security initiatives were examined and implemented in 2016 with a view to increasing security measures to cope with an increasingly difficult threat environment.

### Upgrade of Agresso Financial Management System

Laois County Council was amongst the first local authorities to implement the Agresso Financial Management system in 2001. Over the years there have been

various upgrades and enhancements to that system. The new MS4 Version of the System was scheduled for implementation in 2016. A Project Team was established to manage the implementation. The ICT Section had a significant involvement in the technical aspects of the project during the implementation phase and continues to support the system on an on-going basis.

### System for Council Meetings

In common with a number of other local authorities, Laois County Council has implemented a computerised system for the conduct of meetings of the elected Council, and meetings of other committees and groups. The new meetings system has facilitated a reduction in the amount of paper handling and processing required and has also reduced postage and other associated costs. Documentation, reports and other meeting related correspondence are made available to meeting participants without the need for large volumes of paper based material.

### Upgrade of Corporate Website

The Council's corporate website, [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie) has been in existence in its current format for a number of years. A decision was taken to refresh the website appearance and functionality, and to make it easier for visitors to the site to find the services or information they required. The 2017 version of the Corporate website was designed and created in-house by the Council's own web management staff and was formally launched at the Council meeting on November 28th 2016.

### Social Media

#### Laois.ie

Laois.ie had 536,014 page views in 2016, and 201,612 sessions, almost half of this traffic came from tablet & mobile users. These figures represent slight increases on the corresponding 2015 figures, and represent an average of over 1468 site visits per day. The Online Planning Enquiry facilities and Job Vacancy enquiries attract a large number of visitors, while online payment facilities are also very popular with our Website users and are a convenient way to pay for various Local Government Services. Similarly, increasing numbers of Website visitors make use of the Motortax Online system, and the online contact / enquiry form also attracts a steady number of enquiries on a weekly basis.

## Twitter:

The Council's main twitter page - @LaoisCouncil has over 3,500 followers.

Laois Heritage Forum - @LaoisHeritage has over 2,200 followers.

Laois Libraries - @LaoisLibraries has almost 1400 followers.

Music Generation Laois - @MusicGenLaois has over 300 followers.

The Arthouse and Library - @ArthouseLibrary has over 250 followers.

Midlands Energy - @MidlandEnergy has almost 100 followers.

Laois Tourism - @TourismLaois has over 420 followers.

James Fintan Lalor School - @JFLSchool has in excess of 200 followers.

## Websites

The I.C.T. Department is committed to reducing costs by developing and maintaining more websites in house where this is feasible. Considerable progress was made in this area in recent years and development work in some areas was completed in 2016. Further development is planned for this area and will be progressed as resources permit. The Council currently hosts and maintains a number of websites in addition to the laois.ie website.

## GIS (Geographic Information Systems)

The GIS section commenced the roll out of a new ArcGis online mapping system which will include a portal for quick map access for both staff and the public through the internet and intranet. The online planning solution provided from the Local Government Computer Services Board will be replaced with services run from the installation of the new GIS software. This technology will also facilitate the inclusion of services from other government bodies such as the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. Live access to the most up-to-date data provided by these departments will be a feature of the service.

## Performance Indicators 2015

### No. of page visits to local authority website

The cumulative total page views 532,037

## Overall cost of ICT provision per whole time equivalent

Overall Cost	€3,191.31
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### Social Club

2016 was another very successful year for the Social Club which currently has a membership of 284. Numerous events were held in 2016.

### Monthly Draw

On the first Friday of every month a draw takes place for Social Club members. Three prizes of €50.00 each increased to 10 winners in the December draw.

### Summer Barbecue

A Barbecue was held on 23rd June in County Hall with 70 people attending.

### October Social Evening

A social gathering was held in Lethean on 21st October, approximately 40 people attended. Finger food was provided.

### Annual Mass

The Annual Mass for deceased members and staff of Laois County Council took place in the Council Chamber on 15th November. Invitations were issued to all retired and current staff members of the Council. The Mass was very well attended and refreshments were provided in the canteen afterwards. Mass was held at 6pm instead of the usual time of 7.30pm.

### Members Kiddies Christmas Party

The Social Club Members Kiddies Party was held this year in the Heritage Hotel on Sunday 11th December. It was a great success. The kiddies were entertained by Santa (aka Cllr. John King), his Elf and Jecca the Clown.

### Annual Christmas Party

The party was held on Friday the 2nd December in the Heritage Hotel. 100 staff attended and a great night was had.

Last day Christmas draw was a great success and the prize fund was increased this year. It was also a Christmas Jumper Day and all monies raised went to Portlaoise Action to Homelessness.

### Retired Members

Presentations were made to retired staff members.

### Other Events

Discounted tickets were provided for members for the following events:

Bloom - 69 people availed  
The Knitting and Stitching Show - 6 people availed  
The Nutcracker - 40 people availed

Some of the other events held were:

Subsidised packages to Dublin Zoo,  
National Stud/Japanese Gardens,  
Fota Island,  
Tayto Park and  
"Thank Crunchie its Friday"



**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 2016**

**COMMITTEES**

<b>Name of Committee</b>	<b>Members Elected</b>	<b>Number of Meetings</b>
Local Community Development Committee	Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Jerry Lodge Councillor John King	8
Joint Policing Committee	Councillor Pdraig Fleming Councillor Paddy Bracken Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor John Moran Councillor John King Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor David Goodwin Councillor William Aird Councillor James Kelly Councillor Noel Tuohy Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley	3
Heritage Forum	Councillor Pdraig Fleming Councillor William Aird	4
Placenames Committee	Councillor Jerry Lodge Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor William Aird Councillor Mary Sweeney	None
Audit Committee	Councillor John Moran Councillor Jerry Lodge	5
Laois School of Music	Councillor Mary Sweeney	1
Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor John King Councillor Jerry Lodge Councillor Paddy Bracken	2
Kyletalesha Monitoring Committee	Councillor Paddy Bracken Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor William Aird	3
Rural Water Monitoring Committee	Councillor Paschal McEvoy Councillor Pdraig Fleming Councillor Tom Mulhall	3

Decade of Commemorations Committee

Councillor Noel Tuohy  
 Councillor Aidan Mullins  
 Councillor John Joe Fennelly  
 Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald  
 Councillor Pdraig Fleming  
 Councillor John King  
 Councillor James Kelly

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**OUTSIDE BODIES****Name of Committee****Members Elected**

Association of Irish Local Government

Councillor John Joe Fennelly  
 Councillor Paschal McEvoy  
 Councillor David Goodwin

Laois &amp; Offaly Education &amp; Training Board

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald  
 Councillor Jerry Lodge  
 Councillor Paschal McEvoy  
 Councillor Mary Sweeney  
 Councillor John King  
 Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley

Laois Tourism Company Ltd

Councillor John Moran

AGM of Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances Ltd

Councillor Jerry Lodge

Laois Arts Theatre Company Ltd

Councillor Paschal McEvoy  
 Councillor Jerry Lodge  
 Councillor Mary Sweeney

Board of Abbeyleix Heritage Trust

Councillor John Joe Fennelly

Local Authority Members Association

Councillor Seamus McDonald

Eastern &amp; Midland Regional Assembly

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald  
 Councillor Paddy Bracken

Laois Partnership Company Ltd

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald  
 Councillor William Aird

Portarlinton Leisure Centre

Councillor Paschal McEvoy  
 Councillor Pdraig Fleming  
 Councillor Tom Mulhall

Portlaoise Leisure Centre

Councillor Jerry Lodge  
 Councillor William Aird  
 Councillor Noel Tuohy

Portlaoise Enterprise Centre

Councillor Jerry Lodge  
 Councillor William Aird  
 Councillor Mary Sweeney

Portarlinton Enterprise Centre

Councillor Paschal McEvoy  
 Councillor Tom Mulhall

Midlands Energy Agency

Councillor John Joe Fennelly

Board of Treo Nua Ltd

Councillor Noel Tuohy

## APPENDIX I

Dublin Mid-Leinster Regional Forum	Councillor Padraig Fleming Councillor William Aird Councillor John King
Laois Advocacy Against Domestic Abuse Limited	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald
Midland Regional Drugs Task Force	Councillor Paschal McEvoy
LABEL- Laois Third Level Initiative	Councillor Jerry Lodge



**PAYMENTS TO MEMBERS 2016**

Conferences	€ 9,286.31
Training	€ 55,442.25
Phones	€ 776.83
Monthly Expenses	€ 85,760.27
Strategic Policy Committee Chair Allowance	€ 24,000.00
Representational Allowance	€313,650.48
Cathaoirleach's Allowance	€ 19,929.30
Leas Cathaoirleach's Allowance	€ 3,986.06
Municipal District Chair Allowance	€ 17,937.66
Total	€530,769.16

**The following are details of the conferences and training events attended by Members of Laois County Council in 2016**

Conference	Venue	Date	Delegates	Expend.
27th Colmcille Heritage Trust	Gartan	26th & 27th February	6	€3,780.39
Housing (Misc. Provisions) Act	Galway	5th & 6th February	1	€ 417.65
Integrated Roads & Planning Policy	Galway	12th & 13th February	1	€ 282.35
Housing Grants & Schemes	Carlingford	18th to 20th March	1	€ 534.07
Water, Sewerage and Waste	Dublin	19th April	1	€ 129.47
Local Economic & Community Plans	Clonakilty	26th-28th August	5	€2,854.33
Domestic Water Saving Conservation	Clonakilty	16th - 18th September	1	€ 257.45
A Practical Guide to Budget 2017	Clonakilty	28th-30th October	1	€ 613.03
Community Development Achieving Social inclusion	Galway	16th & 17th December	1	€ 417.57
Overall Total:				€ 9,286.31

Training	Venue	Date	Delegates	Expend
<b>AILG</b>				
AILG Module 1	Mullingar	18th February	5	€ 775.09
AILG 3rd Annual Conference	Buncrana	5th & 6th May	7	€4,909.64
AILG – Module 2	Arklow	10th May	3	€ 591.35
AILG – Module 3	Dundalk	18th June	3	
	Virginia	23rd June	1	
	Ennistymon	14th June	2	€1,686.41
AILG – Module 4	Longford	15th September	4	€ 746.32
AILG – Autumn 2016	Gorey	13th & 14th October	7	€2,526.75
AILG -Module 5	Birr	18th October	3	
	Sligo	22nd October	1	€ 754.92
AILG – Module 6	Dublin	19th November	3	
	Ballinasloe	24th November	1	€ 757.34

**LAMA**

LAMA Spring Training	Sligo	1st & 2nd April	13	€7,117.88
LAMA Autumn Training	Bantry	30th September & 1st October	7	€3,754.62

**Irish Private & Public Bodies Consulting Ltd.**

Governments Construction 2020	Wexford	22nd-24th January	2	€ 835.55
Boundaries/Changes	Letterkenny	12th-14th February	8	€5,855.42
The Value of Local Government	Wexford	11th-13th March	7	€2,861.41
2014 FOI Act and WRC	Letterkenny	15th-17th April	10	€7,543.87
Changing trends & approaches to Drug & Alcohol abuse	Cork	6th to 8th May	1	€ 559.38
A Programme for Government	Wexford	27th-29th May	3	€1,262.80
The Council & Local Development	Letterkenny	10th-12th June	12	€8,700.41
Industrial Relations & The Councillors Constituents	Wexford	8th-10th July	9	€4,092.04
IPBMI AGM	Dublin	29th April	1	€ 111.05

Overall Total: €55,442.25

## 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) 8664033
Cash Office, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674308
Civil Defence HQ, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664106
Environment, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674318
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) 8594982
Motor Tax Office, Block 2, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674385
Planning, Block 1, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664032
Register of Electors, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664105
Roads, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674352
Sports & Leisure, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664041
Water Services, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674355