

# COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL



## ANNUAL REPORT 2013



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It gives me great pleasure as Cathaoirleach to present the 2013 Annual Report for Laois County Council.

In 2013, Laois County Council continued to work together for the benefit of the whole community supporting and enabling people to cope positively with the demands of modern life.

In 2013, Mountmellick Library was successfully nominated as one of eight EU Direct Information Centres. The centre acts as a one stop shop for people who require information regarding EU policies or citizens rights and hosts EU events and related activities.

Two playgrounds, one at Gort na Ghreasai in Ballylinan and the other at Clós Cloighthi, Timahoe were opened in 2013. Gort na Ghreasai was developed by Ballylinan Community Council in association with Laois County Council with funding being provided by Laois Partnership. Clós Cloighthi was developed by Timahoe Playground Group. Both these developments are examples of community groups working together to provide facilities for children of the immediate and surrounding areas.

2013 was the Year of the Gathering, an exciting celebration in Laois. In conjunction with Laois Tourism Committee, a number of events took place which attracted many additional visitors to the County during the year.

The town of Portarlinton took a top runner up award in the Annual Irish Public Bodies All-Island Pride of Place Awards and this award represents the contribution that community groups continue to make to society.

Further work continued on the realignment of the Borris Road in 2013 and the latest phase will see the completion of the Borris Road Realignment Scheme by linking the previously completed phases at Onions Lane and the Ashley Gardens roundabout. Major improvement works were also carried out on the junction of the N80 at Kyletalisha.

I would like to commend the staff and members of Laois County Council for their work throughout 2013 and I look forward to continuing to work with them on the delivery of high quality public services for all the citizens of Laois.



I am delighted to welcome the publication of Laois County Council's 2013 Annual Report.

Notwithstanding the fact that 2013 was a difficult year from a financial perspective, Laois County Council continued to have a strong emphasis on maintaining and supporting frontline services.

The action programme "Putting People First" outlines government policy for reform and development across the local government system. It includes renewed structures and the introduction of more effective democratic arrangements which will increase efficiency and provide better value for money. Laois County Council is committed to ensuring its effective implementation.

Laois County Council achieved great success in being selected to deliver the Local Government Superannuation Shared Services Centre which was established in County Hall following a national competitive bidding process. The "My Pay" Centre will be responsible for payroll and superannuation for the entire Local Government Sector. This is a key milestone in the Local Authority Shared Services Programme. It is expected that there will be a maximum staff complement of seventy two and the programme will deliver annual savings of €4.3m when fully operational. This was a very positive development for the organisation and indeed the local economy in Laois.

At the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards 2013, Laois County Council further demonstrated its record for progression and innovation by winning the award for Local Authority Economic Efficiencies in respect of the recycling of material for the restoration of local and regional roads.

Laois County Council continued to improve their energy performance in 2013 through a number of initiatives which included the installation of solar compactor bins in Portlaoise.

The foregoing are but a small number of the achievements of Laois County Council during 2013, all of which are outlined in this report. These initiatives demonstrate the co-operation between the elected members, staff and the community and we look forward to continuing this relationship during 2014.



## MISSION STATEMENT

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

### Mandate

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

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

### Council Membership

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



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

### Council Meetings

Council Meetings in 2013 were usually held on the last Monday of each month in the Council Chamber at Áras an Chontae. There was no meeting held in August.

### Corporate Policy Group (C.P.G.)

The Corporate Policy Group is designed to enhance the democratic mandate and policy making role of the elected members. The C.P.G. is supported by the County Manager and comprises the Cathaoirleach of the Council and the four Chairs of the Strategic Policy Committees (S.P.C.'s). The main function of the C.P.G. is to co-ordinate the work of the different S.P.C.'s and provide a forum where policy decisions affecting the whole Council are agreed for submission to the full Council for decision. The C.P.G. met on 11 occasions in 2013.

MEMBERS OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL



John Joe Fennelly (F.F.)



Michael Lalor (F.G.)



John King (F.G.)



Brendan Phelan (F.F.)



John Bonham (F.G.)



Martin Phelan (F.G.)



Raymond Cribbin (F.F.)



Paul Mitchell (Non Party)



Tom Mulhall (F.G.)



James Deegan (F.G.)



James Daly (F.G.)



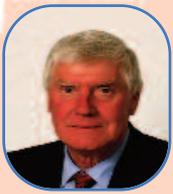
John Robert Moran (F.G.)



Pdraig Fleming (F.F.)



Ben Brennan (Non Party)



David Goodwin (F.G.)



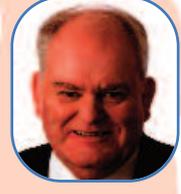
Patrick Bracken (F.F.)



Lisa Delaney (Labour)



Seamus McDonald (F.F.)



Sadly Cllr P Bowe (Labour) passed away on 19th January 2013. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a nanam uasail.



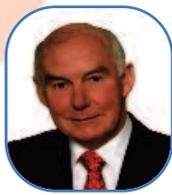
William Aird (F.G.)



Alan Hand (S.F.)



Mary Sweeney (F.G.)



Jeremiah Lodge (F.F.)



Kathleen O'Brien (F.G.)



Rotimi Adebari (Non Party)



Catherine Fitzgerald (F.F.)

**Director of Services:** Anna Marie Delaney

**Senior Executive Officer  
Human Resources &  
Corporate Affairs:** Carmel McNicholl

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

## CORPORATE AFFAIRS

### Corporate Plan

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

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

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

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

### Customer Charter

Laois County Council'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.

### Highlights

- 25th April 2013 - Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of the Laois Medal Winners at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2012.



- 19th June, 2013 - Civic Reception in honour of Alison Miller, Member of the 2013 Ireland Women's Rugby Team, first ever Irish winners of the Six Nations, Triple Crown and the Grand Slam.

### Irish Language Scheme 2009 -2012

Laois Local Authorities Irish Language Scheme was confirmed by the Minister for Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and came into effect on 1st December, 2009, for a period of 3 years. The scheme which is available to view on our website, [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie) ceased on 1st December 2012. 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.

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

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

### Higher Education Grants

In 2013, a total number of 279 renewal applications were approved for grant assistance.

The total amount paid out in 2013 in respect of Higher Education Grants was €2,106,099.10

**Health & Safety**

**Health & Safety Officer:** Jim Bolger

Our Safety Management System (SMS) was further developed through the implementation of a cross Directorate inspection regime. In addition, safety bulletins were attached to all our monthly reports and safety alerts were circulated as appropriate. Our comprehensive safety training programme focused primarily on statutory training, for example, many employees were trained in-house on manual handling. Our training programme also included an emphasis on ‘Supervising Safely’ in construction which is a high risk area for the Council. Where appropriate national policies and procedures were incorporated into our SMS which was maintained up-to date electronically on our intranet system.

**Partnership**

The following were the members of the Workplace Partnership Committee as at 31st December, 2013.

**Management Nominees                      Union Nominees**

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

The Partnership Committee held 6 meetings during 2013.

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

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

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

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

**Applications received/processed in 2013**

Applications on hand at 31/12/2012	0
Applications received during 2013	27

Decisions taken during 2013	26
Applications Withdrawn	0
Applications withdrawn and dealt with outside FOI	0
Applications on hand at 31/12/2013	1

**Nature of Information Sought**

Personal (to applicant)	14
Non-personal	13

**Appeals**

Appeals to Information Commissioner	2
Appeal to High Court	0

**Source of Requests**

Journalists	2
Business	Nil
Oireachtas Members	Nil
Local Authority Members	Nil
Others/General Public	25

**Putting People First – Action Programme for Effective Local Government**

This Action Programme “Putting People First” outlines government policy for reform and development across the local government system. It includes renewed structures and the introduction of more effective democratic arrangements which will increase efficiency and provide better value for money. Laois County Council is committed to ensuring the effective implementation of same.

**Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee Report 2013**

The Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee Report 2013 which was published on Thursday 30th May 2013 outlined proposed changes to Local Electoral Areas effective for Local Elections in 2014.

The report proposed to amend the County of Laois local electoral areas and establish Municipal Districts for the County. It is also proposed to reduce the number of members to be elected from 25 to 19.

The following are the proposed Local Electoral Areas within the County:

Local Electoral Area	No. of Members
Borris In Ossory – Mountmellick	6
Graigucullen – Portarlinton	6
Portlaoise	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>

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

### Register of Electors 2014/2015

Dáil Constituency	Presidential Electors	Dáil Electors
Laois/Offaly	54,734	55,476
European Parliament Constituency	European Electors	Potential European Electors
Midlands-North-West	56,134	373
Local Electoral Areas	Number of Electors	Postal and Special Voters
Borris In Ossory - Mountmellick	19,210	Gardaí 1
Graigucullen - Portarlinton	18,754	Defence Forces 232
Portlaoise	<u>19,703</u>	Diplomats 2
Total:	57,667	Physically Disabled 22
		Occupation 7
		Special Voters 94

## CONFERENCES ATTENDED IN 2013

Conference	Venue	Date	Delegates	Expend.
Civil Liability Legislation	Westport	11-12 January	2	€1,008.55
A national Tourism Conference	Ennistymon	17-19 January	5	€2,970.67
Local Electoral Area Boundaries	Letterkenny	18-20 January	3	€2,310.78
The Criminal Consequences of breaching Local Authority Regulations	Tralee	18-19 January	2	€1,133.62
Debt Solutions	Rosscarbery	25-7 February		€1,133.62
Cumann Merriman Winter School	Westport	1-3 February	2	€1,137.69
Tourism Seminar	Carlingford	8-10 February	4	€2,018.47
Finance (Local Property Tax)	Galway	1-2 February	1	€ 461.04
Equal Status Bill 2012	Tralee	8-9 February	3	€1,548.72
Protection of the Individual	Galway	15-16 February		€ 487.18
Health Issues pertaining to Local Authority Housing	Westport	22-23 February		€1,044.71
Water Quality Conference	Letterkenny	1- 3 March	9	€6,623.33
Action Plan for Jobs	Galway	1-2 March	1	€ 439.24
A.C.C.C. Annual Conference	Waterford City	7- 8 March	4	€1,459.35
Local Authorities as Drivers of Local Development	Carlingford	8-10 March	2	€ 854.09
Local Government supporting volunteerism	Tralee	8-9 March	2	€1,045.82
The Right to Privacy Data Protection	Westport	15-16 March	2	€1,033.84
Local Government & Job Creation	Bunclody	22-23 March	1	€ 273.18
Freedom of Information	Limerick City	22-24 March	1	€ 418.33
Are plans to abolish and amalgamate Local Authorities unconstitutional	Letterkenny	22-24 March	2	€1,498.36
Tax Entitlement Seminar	Carlingford	29-31 March	2	€1,102.71
LAMA Spring 2013	Gorey	5-6 April	5	€1,837.40
Integrated Constructed Wetlands	Waterford	5-7 April	2	€ 968.33

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

<b>Conference</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Delegates</b>	<b>Expend.</b>
The future of L.G. in Ireland	Galway City	12-13 April	1	€ 410.69
Procurement, Expenditure & Revenues	Salthill, Co. Galway	12-14 April	3	€1,478.27
Local Government & The Consumer	Bundoran	19-20 April	1	€ 498.35
Water Services Bill 2013	Westport	19-20 April	2	€1,006.54
The Westport Conference	Westport	19-21 April	1	€ 616.17
Renewable Energy & Energy Management	Galway	26-28 April	5	€2,809.90
Countdown to Local Elections 2014	Letterkenny	3-5 May	3	€1,683.78
Public Service Agreement 2010-2014	Galway	3-4 May	1	€ 413.34
H.S.E. Tobacco Control Policy	Carlingford	10-12 May	2	€1,030.28
Local Tourism & The Councillor	Wexford	10-11 May	1	€ 386.37
Domestic Water & Fluoridation	Cork	10-12 May	3	€1,231.64
Dealing with unfinished Housing Estates	Tralee	17-18 May	1	€ 398.96
L.A. Compliance with European Law	Letterkenny	24-26 May	2	€1,467.89
The Nursing Home Support Scheme	Galway	31-May to 1-June	1	€ 422.21
The Development Plan and the Elected Member	Letterkenny	7-9 June	4	€2,850.79
Standards for Rented Houses	Westport	7-8 June	2	€1,059.65
European Legislation & Local Authorities	Carlingford	7-9 June	1	€ 540.55
Supporting Enterprise, Local Development	Galway	14-15 June	4	€1,740.03
Sustainable Energy – Sustainable Tourism	Kenmare	21-23 June	1	€ 661.64
Local Property Tax	Westport	21-22 June	3	€1,562.78
Euro SME 2013	Dublin	11-12 June	1	€ 122.70
European Movement Ireland	Rosscarbery	28-30 June	3	€1,843.29
Financing current Local Government				
Expenditure	Westport	5-6 July	1	€ 496.64
Mental Health & Wellbeing	Kenmare	5-7 July	2	€1,273.27
Climate Change Policy 2050	Westport	12-13 July	2	€ 989.02
Drug & Alcohol Abuse	Carlingford	12-14 July	1	€ 540.55
Community Development – Art & Sport	Killarney	26-28 July	1	€ 423.51
Patrick McGill Summer School	Glenties, Co. Donegal	28-Jul to 2-August	1	€ 699.76
Rural Crime Prevention & Detection	Letterkenny	2-4 August	2	€1,383.49
Effective Use of Oireachtas Committees	Westport	9-10 August	1	€ 452.93
The Parnell Society	Avondale, Wicklow	11-16 August	1	€ 477.14
European Conference on Human Rights	Killarney	15-18 August	2	€1,179.06
Investment in Cultural Services	Letterkenny	16-18 August	1	€ 641.79
Benefits of Job Creation & Tax Entitlements	Carlingford	16-18 August	2	€ 978.20
Building Safer Communities	Galway	16-17 August	1	€ 383.34
Development Plans – Training the Elected				
Member	Letterkenny	23-25 August	1	€ 747.19
Community Development	Galway	23-24 August	2	€ 780.63
Changing Social Relations of Housing Tenure	Westport	30-31 August	3	€1,432.43
The effect of Building Information (BIM)	Carrick-on-Shannon	30-Aug to 1-Sept	2	€ 919.02
The Westport Conference	Westport	30-Aug to 1-Sept	1	€ 606.10
101st AMAI Annual	Clonakilty	12-14 Sept	1	€ 671.05
How the Elected Member can help				
Combat Crime	Killarney	27-29 Sept	2	€1,184.11
Annual Kerry Environmental	Ballybunion	18-21 Sept	4	€2,497.71
Kerry Literary & Cultural Centre	Listowel	26-27 Sept	1	€ 453.01
People, Policy, Places and the Economy	Galway	19-20 Sept	1	€ 293.79
The Life & Times of Michael Collins	Rosscarbery	27-29 Oct	1	€ 258.24
Internet Elections	Dublin	4-6 October	1	€ 301.05
LAMA Autumn Seminar 2013	Ennistymon	11-12 October	7	€3,357.59
Community Living for Older People	Galway	4-5 October	2	€ 818.35
Preventing & Reducing Alcohol Related Harm	Westport	18-19 October	1	€ 493.03
Supporting Enterprise in the Community	Galway	25-26 October	2	€ 816.59
Design Guidelines for the Planning &				
Development of Rural Housing	Rosscarbery	25-27 October	1	€ 590.75
Future Energy Needs, Wind Turbines	Letterkenny	25-26 October	1	€ 647.21
Intertrade Ireland All-Island Innovation	Belfast	31-Oct to 1-Nov	1	€ 426.86
Planning & Environmental Law Conference	Dublin	9-Nov	1	€ 483.16

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

<b>Conference</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Delegates</b>	<b>Expend.</b>
Local Authority Rates & Diminishing Returns	Galway	8-9 November	1	€ 413.34
Electoral, Local Governments & Planning	Westport	1-2 November	1	€ 449.34
How L.A.'s are affected by EU Law	Ballinasloe	8-10 November	2	€ 825.16
A Practical Guide to Budget 2014	Carlingford	8-10 November	1	€ 437.66
Fostering Stronger Communities	Galway	15-16 November	3	€1,281.97
Community Based CCTV Scheme	Westport	22-23 November	1	€ 510.81
SIPO for Councillors 2014	Dublin	29-Nov to 1-Dec	2	€ 711.16
Local Authority Employment – Law Practice & Procedure	Clonmel	6-8 December	2	€ 707.70
Changing trends & approaches to drug abuse	Cahir	6-8 December	1	€ 442.60
Tourism Technology & Competitive Strategies	Rosscarbery	13-15 December	4	€1,813.12
Housing Grants & Schemes	Galway	13-14 December	2	€ 623.94
<b>Total</b>				<b>€92,294.06</b>

**Housing & Social Strategic Policy Committee**

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

**Members** **Sectoral**

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

**Director of Services:** Gerry Murphy

**Senior Executive Officer:** Michael Rainey

**Senior Executive Engineer:** Brendan Condon

**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 2013**

- Completion of Ballymorris Group Housing Scheme in Portarlington.
- Delivery of 113 grants for disabled and elderly people living in the County.
- Regeneration of waste ground in Knockmay, Portlaoise to create Knockmay Park.

**Report on SPC**

The Housing & Social SPC met in March and September. The following policy was agreed:

- Midlands Region Homelessness Action Plan

**Rental Accommodation Scheme**

The Rental Accommodation Scheme is intended to provide good quality rented accommodation for eligible persons and it enhances the response of the Council in meeting the long-term housing needs of applicants. In 2013, 37 properties were delivered under the Rental Accommodation Scheme and 13 properties were delivered under the Social Leasing

Initiative.

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

**Social Leasing Arrangements**

With Departmental approval, Laois County Council entered into Agreements with a number of Approved Housing Bodies for the long-term leasing of units at various locations in the County. 63 properties were delivered by the end of 2013 under this arrangement.

**Housing Construction & Acquisition**

In 2013, the initial Social Housing Investment Programme allocation was €160,000 for the construction of one house for a family with a disabled child. In July 2013 this allocation was increased by €440,000 for the acquisition and adaption of three properties suitable for families with disabled children. In recognition of the Council's effective program of capital expenditure, the Department increased the allocation further to facilitate the transfer of two units into the social housing stock. The final SHIP allocation for 2013 was €604,893 and this was also fully drawn down by year end.

**Knockmay Regeneration**

Building on the success of Treo Nua, an area of waste ground at the centre of Knockmay was regenerated in 2013. This area was landscaped and the existing entrances to the park were redesigned to include attractive planters and secure kissing gates. Inside the park a 2m wide walking track and small football pitch was provided. Street lighting and CCTV cameras were also incorporated into the park. The project has been a great success with a far greater number of walkers and runners enjoying the facility than was originally imagined.

**Maintenance of Local Authority Stock**

The DoECLG funding for energy upgrades and once-off adaptation grants allowed the Housing Section to make significant structural improvements to a substantial number of its properties. Attic and wall insulation works were carried out on 333 properties. The original allocation of €183,000 was doubled initially and then a further supplementary allocation was provided bringing the final allocation for 2013 to €483,937.

**Part V - Housing Strategy**

In 2013 the Housing Department continued to monitor development and engage with developers in the County to reach agreement for compliance with Part V of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended).

**Voluntary Housing Sector**

At 31/12/13 271 units were provided under the Capital Loan & Subsidy Scheme and 247 units were provided under the Capital Assistance Scheme.

**Private Site Scheme**

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

**Activity under Various Schemes**

Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability:

Applications received	51
Total No. of Grants Paid	36
(Totalling €)	262,160

Mobility Aids Housing Grant Scheme:

Applications received	72
Total No. of Grants Paid	54
(Totalling €)	179,190

Housing Aid for Older People Scheme:

Applications received	68
Total No. of Grants Paid	23
(Totalling €)	85,750

Housing Loans:

No. of Loans Advanced	23
(Totalling €)	1,186,565

**Traveller Accommodation**

The Housing Section continued to implement the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009-2013. Construction of a new 6-unit Group Housing Scheme in Portarlinton was completed on schedule and the units were tenanted in November 2013.



The new Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014 – 2018 was drafted in 2013 and is currently on public display.

**Estate Management**

2013 saw the continued development of the Council's policy on resident participation in issues such as:

- Estate Management
- General Maintenance
- Anti-social behaviour

**National Service Indicators**

**H: Housing**

**H.1. Housing Vacancies:**

Total Number of dwellings in local authority stock	2009
Total Number of dwellings excluding those subject to major refurbishment projects	2008
Overall % of dwellings that are empty (excluding those subject to major refurbishment):	1.25%
% of empty dwellings unavailable for letting	80%
% of empty dwellings available for letting	20%

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

The average time taken (in weeks) from the date of vacation of dwelling to the date when all necessary repairs are carried out which

are deemed necessary to re-let the dwelling.	8 weeks
Time taken in weeks from works @ (a) being completed to the date of the first rent debit.	3 weeks
<b>H.3. Number of repairs completed as a percentage of the number of valid repair requests received.</b>	<b>98.07%</b>
Number of repairs completed	2,649
Number of valid repair requests received	2,701
<b>H.4. Traveller Accommodation</b>	
Total number of traveller families accommodated as a percentage of the targets set in the Local Traveller Accommodation Programme.	133.3%
Number of Traveller families accommodated	12
Target number of Traveller families to be accommodated in the year, as set out in the local Traveller Accommodation Programme	9
<b>H.5. Enforcement of standards in private rented sector.</b>	
Total number of registered tenancies	3,465
Number of dwelling units inspected	135
Number of inspections carried out	195
Number of dwellings inspected as % of registered tenancies (i.e. B as % of A)	3.90%
<b>H.6. Grants to adapt housing for the needs of people with a disability</b>	
Average time taken (in weeks) to notify applicants of decision under Mobility Aids Grant Scheme on receipt of a valid application.	4.6
Average time taken (in weeks) to notify applicants of decision under Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability on receipt of a valid application.	5.2
<b>H.7. Tenant Training</b>	
Percentage of total new local authority tenants who have been offered pre-tenancy training	78.26%
Total number of new local authority tenants	92
Number of new local authority tenants who have been offered pre-tenancy familiarisation courses	72

**HUMAN RESOURCES**

**Recruitment Statistics**

A total of 434 people were employed by Laois County Council at 31st December 2013.

During 2013 Laois County Council held 12 competitions, in relation to which the following statistics have been extracted:

Total Applications received	322		
		Male	Female
Applicants	204		118
Successful Applicants	25		2
Permanent Appointments/Promotions 2013			
		Male	Female
Appointments	5		3
Promotions	6		0

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

**Work Life Balance Initiatives**

Laois County Council continued to implement work life balance initiatives for staff during 2013. At year-end 7 employees were availing of the Career Break Scheme, 29 employees were availing of the job/work sharing scheme, 38 employees availed of the Parental Leave Scheme and 13 employees availed of the Shorter Working Year Scheme.

**National Performance Indicator**

The Council exceeded the 3% minimum National Performance Indicator for expenditure on training and development as a percentage of total payroll costs in 2013. The out-turn was 4.01%.

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

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
	4.12%	4.01%

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

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
Certified	3.94%	4.07%
Uncertified	0.53%	0.35%

**Local Service Indicator**

Number of Training Days provided to staff (excluding Retained Fire Fighters) – 972

**Industrial Relations**

Despite a difficult year nationally, Laois County Council maintained good industrial relations during 2013 with no major disputes arising. The Council in accordance with both the Public Service Agreement 2010 – 2014 and the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 – 2016 (Haddington Road Agreement) and in consultation with the relevant Unions, continued to implement measures designed to improve efficiencies and demonstrate cost savings.

**Employee Training & Development**

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

The annual training programme is primarily based on the individual training needs identified through staff Personal Development Plans as part of the Performance Management Development System process. The Programme also incorporates Health & Safety Needs, National FETAC Programme, Third Level Open Learning Programme and various Seminars/Workshops as they arise.

Total expenditure on training was €354,978 (inclusive of expenditure for Fire Services). A very comprehensive training programme was delivered throughout 2013. A sample of the training programmes provided is as follows:-

- Courtroom skills
- Driver CPC Training
- Agricultural Pollution Training
- Safepass
- Surface Dressing Guidelines
- Chlorine Handling Training
- Local Authority Roads Conference
- PMDS Seminar
- Enforcement of Waste Management

- Signing, Lighting & Guarding at Road works
- Confined Spaces, Low, Medium & High Risk
- Child Protection Training
- Introduction to Human Rights

### **Open Learning Programme**

Laois County Council endeavours, subject to available resources, to facilitate employees wishing to pursue Third Level Open Learning Courses that are relevant to and contribute to the business development of both the Council and the employee's role and responsibilities. A sample of the Open Learning programmes facilitated during 2013 are as follows:-

- IPA - Certificate in Local Government
- CIPFA - Diploma in Finance
- IPASS – Certificate in Payroll Techniques
- ACCA – Accountancy exams
- IIPMM - Certificate in Public Procurement
- UCD – Masters in Computer Science – Cloud Computing Stream
- IPA – Diploma in Public Management

### **Staff Policies**

In line with best practice in Human Resource Management, Laois County Council has developed a range of staff policies - the following were introduced/revised during 2013:

- Shorter Working Year Scheme 2013
- Training Policy & Programme 2013
- Dignity at Work (Revised)
- Maternity Policy (Revised)

### **Equality**

Laois County Council is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to the introduction of a broad range of policies, practices and procedures which aim to support diversity in the workplace, 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.

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

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

be available for rollout in mid 2014.

### **INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY**

As in previous years, budgetary conditions remained challenging throughout 2013, and as a consequence the ICT Departments main priorities were to maintain, and where possible improve upon the level of support and service delivery to the organisation and its' customers, while making the most efficient use of the limited financial and staffing resources available. The Department is committed to a policy of continuous improvement of ICT services and communications within the organisation itself and to the general public who avail of the Council's services.

The section processed in excess of 2,500 support calls during 2013. This includes support calls from staff in County Hall itself, the various Libraries, Area Offices, other remote site Offices, and Elected Members.

### **Health & Safety.**

Staff from the ICT Department attended Health & Safety briefings as required during 2013, and also undertook periodic VDU/Workstation safety assessments as necessary, in co-operation with Health & Safety staff. Health & Safety issues are allocated appropriate priority, and this will continue in 2014 and subsequent years.

### **County Hall Telephone System**

In early 2013 a decision was taken to begin upgrade work on the County Hall Telephone System. The existing digital system has been in use for a long number of years, and despite budgetary constraints, it was considered necessary to begin work on the upgrade of the system. The strategy was to upgrade the entire system over a number of years, in line with available funding. Following a competitive tendering process, work began on the installation of a new Adtran phone system in the second quarter of 2013. To date the system has been rolled out to two floors of Aras 1 and the Central Offices on the Mountrath Road, Portlaoise. The system will be rolled out to further areas within the Council Offices as circumstances permit.

### Shared Payroll Services Centre

The ICT Section commenced supporting the new Shared Payroll Services Centre, on the third floor of Aras 1 towards the end of 2013. Initially, this involved the provision of workstations, computer network connectivity and facilities, and the installation of the new Adtran Phone system at those offices. Work will commence in early 2014 on the upgrade of the County Hall connections to Government Networks, to facilitate the requirements of both the Shared Services Centre, and the Laois County Council itself.

### Staff Training

For a number of years, any user training required has, where possible been provided in-house by the Council's own ICT Staff. Training in a number of areas was provided during 2013 and as technology and systems are constantly developing and improving, further training will continue to be provided on an ongoing basis as required.

### End of Support for Windows XP Operating System

Microsoft are scheduled to end support for the Windows XP operating system in early April 2014. A considerable number of the Workstations and Laptop computers in use by the Council use this operating system. The end of support for Windows XP creates potential security risks and other problems for any organisations using that system. Towards the end of 2013 a strategy was put in place to mitigate the effects of this problem and work will continue into 2014 on replacing or upgrading the affected systems.

### Social Media

#### laois.ie

laois.ie had 504,101 page views last year, 371,101 of these were unique visitors. This is an average of 1,381 visits a day. Most visitors use our online payments page to pay for various local government services and fines. Motor Tax was the next most popular section, due to the government motor tax changes last year. Our Library Section was the third. More and more members are renewing and ordering books online. An average of five queries/reports a day are received on our online contact form.

### Fix Your Street

www.fixyourstreet.ie is a new website that allows users to report issues for any Local Authority. Laois County Council implemented this service in 2013 and it has proved very successful. Users can now report non emergency issues such as graffiti, road defects, issues with street lighting, water leaks/drainage issues and litter or illegal dumping. As promised in the Programme for Government, issues raised on this website are responded to within 2 working days.

### Websites

Laois County Council are reducing costs significantly by developing and maintaining more and more websites in-house. The Council currently host, maintain and update a total of 14 websites.

New websites that were developed in-house in 2013 included:

<http://www.musicgenerationlaois.ie> – for Music Generation Laois

<http://www.laoisgardens.ie> – promoting the best of our gardens in Laois.

<http://www.jamesfintanlalor.ie> – for the James Fintan Lalor inaugural School last September.

<http://www.arthouse.ie> – for the The Arthouse and Library in Stradbally

<http://www.mountmellickgallery.ie> – for the gallery in Mountmellick Library

<http://www.laoiscommunityforum.ie> – for Laois Community Forum

### Social Media

Social networking is becoming more popular each year and is a vital tool for us in communicating with the public.

#### Twitter:

Our main twitter page - @LaoisCouncil has 1,995 followers

Laois Heritage Forum - @LaoisHeritage has 896 followers

Laois Libraries - @LaoisLibraries has 574 followers

Music Generation Laois - @MusicGenLaois has 75 followers

The Arthouse and Library - @ArthouseLibrary has 94 followers

Midlands Energy - @MidlandEnergy has 81 followers

Laois Tourism - @LaoisTourism has 334 followers

James Fintan Lalor School @JFLSchool has 93 followers

**Facebook pages:**

Laois County Council - [www.facebook.com/Laois-CountyCouncil](http://www.facebook.com/Laois-CountyCouncil)

This is our main Facebook page for the organisation. It is updated with news and information from all departments.

Laois Heritage Forum - [www.facebook.com/laois.heritage.forum](http://www.facebook.com/laois.heritage.forum) is maintained by the Heritage Officer who has found the page very successful in raising awareness of all aspects of built, natural and cultural heritage of County Laois.

Laois Libraries - [www.facebook.com/LaoisLibraries](http://www.facebook.com/LaoisLibraries)  
Our Library Department update this with news and events from each of the local libraries.

Laois County Fire & Rescue Service - [www.facebook.com/laoisfire](http://www.facebook.com/laoisfire). The Fire section keeps users informed of local incidents, rescues and training events.

Environment - [www.facebook.com/LaoisEnvironment](http://www.facebook.com/LaoisEnvironment)  
Keep Laois Clean – our Environment Section use their Facebook page to keep followers informed of competitions, community events, clean ups and recycling information.

Laois Tidy Towns - [www.facebook.com/pages/Laois-Tidy-Towns/163631410408752](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Laois-Tidy-Towns/163631410408752), another Environment website to highlight the good work done by tidy town groups throughout Laois.

Laois Tourism - [www.facebook.com/laoistourism](http://www.facebook.com/laoistourism) Our Tourism Officer uses his page as a useful marketing tool to promote County Laois.

Laois Gathering - [www.facebook.com/LaoisGathering](http://www.facebook.com/LaoisGathering), this page was developed last year to promote the many successful events held in Laois through the Gathering.

The Arthouse and Library - [www.facebook.com/thearthouseandlibrary](http://www.facebook.com/thearthouseandlibrary), is maintained by the Arts section to advertise events in The Arthouse Gallery and Library in Stradbally.

James Fintan Lalor School - [www.facebook.com/JamesFintanLalor](http://www.facebook.com/JamesFintanLalor), this Facebook page is used to promote our James Fintan Lalor school, held annually here in Laois.

Laois Community Forum - [www.facebook.com/pages/Laois-Community-Forum/120254797988933](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Laois-Community-Forum/120254797988933), this page provides information for community and voluntary groups throughout Laois.

Laois Arts - [www.facebook.com/LaoisArts](http://www.facebook.com/LaoisArts), this page is used by the Arts section in Laois County Council to endorse events throughout Laois.

Laois School of Music - [www.facebook.com/LaoisSchoolofMusic](http://www.facebook.com/LaoisSchoolofMusic), maintained by our Music Co-Ordinator to highlight and promote the School's good work.

Music Generation Laois - [www.facebook.com/Music-GenerationLaois](http://www.facebook.com/Music-GenerationLaois), used to advertise this fabulous music education service for children and young people in Laois.

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

**Director of Services:** Anna Marie Delaney

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

**Members**

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

**Sectoral**

Brendan O'Brien  
Kathleen Gorman  
Fintan Phelan

**Laois County Development Board**

**Membership of Laois County Development Board**

**Local Government:**

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

**Local Development:**

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

**State Agencies:**

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

**Social Partners:**

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

In 2013, Laois County Development Board continued its work in progressing its objectives for the cohesive development and improvement of the county as orig-

inally set out in its 10-year Strategy, including the endorsement of local development agency plans for submission to Central Government. Sub-committees/Task Groups of the Board continued to meet to progress their objectives under the following headings:

- Enhancing Employment Opportunities for all.
- Promoting Laois as a Child Friendly County.

**Laois Local Drugs Network**

Laois Local Drugs Network Committee continued to meet throughout 2013. The work of the network assists in raising awareness of the importance of supporting those awaiting treatment and recovery of substance misuse within the county and a charter was developed in 2013 with regard to the Network's aims and objectives in this area. Also during the year, the Network supported projects such as the Portlaoise Street Leagues and the Community Coaching Programme, operated in association with Laois Partnership and Laois Sports Partnership. The Network also rolled out a poster campaign with regard to access to information and services for people seeking assistance in respect of support, recovery and diversionary projects.



**Laois Traveller Inateragency Group**

This Group comprises a number of agencies and organisations whose work includes the betterment of life for the travelling community in the county. In 2013, the work of this Group included:

- Roll out of an education programme, in association with Laois/Offaly Education and Training Board, aimed at literacy skills and confidence building to enter mainstream education. This included education in FETAC Level V Childcare for 4 Traveller Women.
- Traveller Primary Healthcare Programme

4 Traveller Health workers were employed and reached out to over 90 Traveller families in respect of topics e.g., dental health, mental health and fire safety. Smoke Alarms were also distributed by Laois County Council under the 2013 Community Smoke Alarm Scheme.

- Ongoing promotion of Traveller culture including the publication of a supplement in June 2013 as part of National Traveller Pride Week 2013, in association with Laois Nationalist newspaper, highlighting Traveller culture and stories handed down generationally, life experiences in the Travelling Community, local successes, and youth and community work by Laois Traveller Action Group and other agencies.



### Community Smoke Alarms Scheme 2013

In 2013, Laois County Council engaged in the scheme to purchase 400 smoke alarms (2 per residence) and recouped the costs from the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government. With the assistance of Community Representatives, Elected Members, Laois Partnership and Laois Traveller Action Group, 90 Traveller families in Laois along with elderly people in Clonaslee, Ballyroan, Ballinakill, Aghaboe, Portlaoise and Stradbally benefited from this year's scheme.

Community & Enterprise Section continued in 2013 to facilitate and provide supports for:

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

### Laois Comhairle Na nÓg 2013

Laois Comhairle na nÓg (Laois Youth Council) en-

joyed a very successful year in 2013, with the recruitment of several new representatives countywide to the Comhairle.



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

It is the aim of Laois Comhairle to consult with the adult decision making bodies who make policies and plans for our county, such as ensuring protection for young people and the provision of facilities or information for young people. There are so many ways in which young people and adults who make policies can work together, to ensure that young people are protected and informed, through being consulted. The Comhairle is also tasked with the provision of feedback to the young people across the county on these issues and consultations. Laois was also represented nationally on the National Comhairle na nÓg Executive in 2013 by Mr. Ger Quinn.

Laois Comhairle has been very busy in 2013, a new chairperson was elected, Ms Isabelle Lawlor representing Mountmellick Community School and a new Executive, comprising Ms. Hannah Johnston (Secretary), Ms. Joy Turley (Vice Chair), Ms. Ciara Ramsbottom (PRO) and Ms. Clodhna Nic Gearailt (Asst. PRO).



Several projects were progressed by the Comhairle during 2013, including:

- Further work on development of the previous year's extremely successful "IMIND – Stay Connected" concept developed by and for young people, and awareness raised on the issue through a PR campaign, including in

forming secondary schools on the future development of a toolkit for educators.



- Meetings held with 4 secondary school student councils in Co. Laois, through which feedback was given to young people directly on the Comhairle's work and information gleaned from young people on the nature of the issues being raised at local level.
- Continuation of work on the "Be the True You" positive body image campaign with 4 schools signing up to carry out the campaign's challenge the following year.
- The Laois Comhairle AGM was held on 7th November 2013 in Portlaoise College and was attended by over 120 young people. Issues included:
  - The Generation Gap
  - Bullying
  - A survey on Mental Health and related Youth issues was also conducted among delegates at the meeting.

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



- Members of Laois Comhairle presented an update on their work to the members of Laois County Council at the July 2013 Meeting of

the Council. Their work was acknowledged by the members, praised and encouraged to continue their good work.

Other things Laois Comhairle na nÓg has been involved in 2013 were:

- Further Development of Portlaoise Youth Café, a POBAL funded agency collaborative project, which opened to the public the previous year.
- Representing young people on the Laois/Offaly Education & Training Board Youth Committee.
- Attendance at conferences, including a Comhairle National Networking Day and attendance by a number of members at Dáil na nÓg 2013, at which the issues raised to be examined by young people at national level was mental health.

Laois Comhairle was ably assisted and facilitated by the following agencies in 2013:

- Youth Work Ireland (Laois)
- Laois/Offaly Education & Training Board
- An Garda Síochána
- Laois County Council
- Foróige / BLOCK Project Portlaoise

### County Joint Policing Committee

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

The Annual Public Meeting of the County Laois Joint Policing Committee was held on 7th October, 2013. Members of the public attended and posed questions to the Committee and responses were given by An Garda Síochána and Laois County Council.

## Laois Community Forum

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

### Forum Members

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

#### Portlaoise:

Andy Sutton, Maria Groarke

#### Emo:

Margaret Guijit-Lawlor, Michael Cobbe, Tom Donohue

#### Luggacurren:

Roghan Headen, Kathleen Gorman, Pat Whelan

#### Mountmellick:

Sheelagh Coyle, Matt Barrett, Paddy Buggy (Chairperson)

#### Borris-in-Ossory:

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

Laois Community Forum Priorities 2013 were:

- To continue to represent the community/voluntary sector at County Development Board and local development agency level
- To continue to promote social inclusion in all sectors of the community
- To acknowledge the endeavours of those community and voluntary groups in the county and to promote same
- To improve communication between the Forum and community/voluntary groups at local area level
- To deliver the actions committed to by the Forum in the County Development Board Strategy Review 2009 – 2012
- To highlight awareness throughout the county of important issues, e.g., positive mental health and suicide prevention, also governance in community/voluntary sector and principles of fundraising
- To assist the Forum Members through training in presentation and social media networking to enable further publicity of the Forum throughout the county and nationally
- To improve public relations and enhance the image of the Forum through promotion of its work in local and national media

The Forum was well represented at County



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

### Socially inclusive events & projects

Laois Connects Mental Health Awareness Week



One of the highlights for the Forum was the hosting of a week long event on Mental Health Awareness called Laois Connects in September/October 2013. This was the second year of this initiative which has been extremely successful. Launched by RTE presenter, Ms Mary Kennedy, the week long event included talks, workshops and seminars on issues relating to mental health that tied in with the main theme – Laois Connects (Community, Ourselves, Nature, Nurture, Engage, Coping, Talk and Support). The aim of the week was to raise awareness about mental health issues and to provide a showcase for the supports that exist in the local community. This year, Laois Community Forum published a directory of supports and help services in County Laois which was distributed widely. Laois Community Forum hosted the event in collaboration with a number of agencies – HSE, Laois Sports Partnership, Mental Health Ireland, GROW, Shine, Laois County Council, Laois Partnership Company, Laois/Offaly ETB. The event was also partnered with a number of organisations – the GAA, Pfizer, Portlaoise Lions Club and Leinster Express. Key speakers took part in many seminars and workshops around Laois and various activities were organised from walks to yoga to cookery demonstrations and art therapy. This year, 'Laois Connects' teamed up with the GAA, the HSE and Laois Sports Partnership to launch the 'Sport your Mind' programme which is a positive youth mental health awareness programme for Community Sports organisations. This initiative was rolled out initially to a number of GAA clubs around Laois and has received very positive feedback. There were also talks on topics such as cyber bullying, depression, dealing with debt and our mental health, and caring for carers to name a few. Large attendances were recorded for most of the events.

### Community Alert

One of the key objectives for the Community Forum in 2013 was to host networking evenings for Community Alert groups and Resident Groups in collaboration with An Garda Síochána, to give groups an opportunity to share information and ideas with each other as well as receiving advice from the agencies present. A County wide Community Alert networking evening was hosted in April 2013 in collaboration with An Garda Síochána and Muintir na Tíre and was extremely well attended. This was followed up by a Portlaoise Residents meeting which took place in May 2013. Following these meetings, there was a general demand from the Forum to continue to do this on an annual basis. Further collaboration also continues to take place in relation to assisting community alert and neighbourhood watch groups in the county, with advice and support being given by both the Forum and An Garda Síochána.

### Support for people with disabilities

Laois Community Forum funded the Xcessible Youth Sport initiative organised by CARA National Adapted Physical Activity Centre which consisted of Special School Sportshall Programme with St Francis School. This programme ran once a week for 4 weeks in December 2013 including the international Disability Awareness Day.

### Drug and Alcohol Awareness

In 2013, Laois Community Forum sponsored the compilation and wide distribution of posters highlighting the services for those affected by drugs and alcohol related issues.

The Forum continued during 2013 to promote its work and the work of the Community & Voluntary Sector through its Website and Facebook page, and representation of the Forum at all major events in the County, including those organised and held by the Forum itself, such as the Community & Voluntary Awards, Area Meetings with community groups and Residents' Meeting. Excellent coverage of all these events in local press also went to promote the name of the Laois Community Forum and its work during the year.

### 2013 Community & Voluntary Awards recognises community heroes

The heroes of local communities across the county were celebrated by Laois Community Forum last November when over 320 people gathered in the Port-

laoise Heritage Hotel for the 5th Annual Community & Voluntary Awards. Hosted by Laois Community Forum, it aims to recognise the tremendous contribution made by community and voluntary groups to life in County Laois.

The Forum welcomed a record number of 101 nominees in six categories and 33 individuals nominated for their outstanding contribution to their local community, the unsung heroes of our county. All nominees were recognised as having made a significant difference within and beyond their local community, through giving of their time, co-operation, their imagination and their hard work to achieve rewards of successful clubs, events and fundraising within the community. Each group and individual was congratulated on the night and presented with a certificate acknowledging their contribution to the community and voluntary effort in Laois. The Unsung Hero Award was presented at the end of the night.

The Leinster Express, who are a media partner, presented the 'Laois Person of the Year' Award to Ms Anna May McHugh for her tremendous work with the National Ploughing Championships.

The Arts and Culture Category was sponsored by BHP Insurance and the winners and runners up in this category for 2013 were:

#### Arts & Culture

Winner:	Durrow Development Forum Scarecrow Festival
Runner-up:	Abbeyleix Session in d'House

The Children and Young people category was sponsored by Laois Partnership Company and the winners and runners up in this category were:

#### Children & Young People

Winner:	4th Laois Scout Portarlinton
Runner-up:	Coder Dojos Portarlinton

The Environment category was sponsored by the Environment Section of Laois County Council and the winners and runners up in this category were:

#### Environment

Winner:	Abbeyleix Bog Project
Runner up:	Slieve Bloom Association

The Sport & Leisure category was sponsored by Laois Sports Partnership and the winners and runners up in this category were:

### Sport & Leisure

- Winner: Ballyroan Abbeyleix & District Athletic Club
- Runner-up: Laois Cycling & Touring Club

The Community Services and Supports category was sponsored by the Laois Nationalist. This was the largest category and three awards were presented. The winners and runners up in this category were:

### Community Services & Support

- Winner: Mountmellick Development Association Voluntary Board of Directors
- 1st Runner-up: Portarlinton Social Services/Meals on Wheels
- 2nd Runner-up: Friends of St Fiacc's House, Graiguecullen

Of the 33 people nominated, Ger Lynch from Mountmellick was honoured on the night by the Community Forum as Unsung Hero 2013 and was presented with his award by Chairperson of the Forum, Mr Paddy Buggy. Mr Buggy congratulated all the nominees, who are all, as he put it, heroes in their own community, for the hard work and commitment they put into their local areas and people.

### HOW TO JOIN LAOIS COMMUNITY FORUM

Laois Community Forum has over 700 community and voluntary groups on its database and welcomes all groups to register with them. You can do so by contacting 057 86 64227 or 057 86 64107 or by email to [LaoisCommunityForum@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:LaoisCommunityForum@laoiscoco.ie) or download a registration form at [www.laoiscommunityforum.ie](http://www.laoiscommunityforum.ie).



### PRIDE OF PLACE 2013

The town of Portarlinton took a top runner up award in the Annual IPB All-Island Pride of Place Awards announced at the gala ceremony in Derry on 16th November 2013.

Portarlinton received the accolade in Category Five, which is for populations of over 2,000 people.

Minister Phil Hogan TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, joined Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, MLA, Mayor Cllr Martin Reilly, Derry City Council, Co-operation Ireland Chairman, Christopher Moran, Pride of Place Committee Chairman, Tom Dowling and Chairman of IPB George Jones, sponsors of the event, to present the group with their award.

Both Ministers commended Co-operation Ireland for the Pride of Place Awards and their work at building positive relationships at community level through the promotion of mutual respect and co-operation. They highlighted those nominated for awards as a shining example of the community spirit that exists in abundance across Ireland, with people committed to making a positive difference in their local community.

Pride of Place, now in its 11th year, is sponsored by Irish Public Bodies Insurances Ltd and hosted by Co-operation Ireland under its Local Authority Programme, comprising officials from authorities in both parts of Ireland. The aim of the competition is to recognise initiatives taken by local communities to create pride in their area and to celebrate the vital contribution that community groups make to society. The competition focuses on people coming together to shape, enhance and enjoy all that is good about their area.



Portarlinton locals Margaret Guijt-Lawlor, Ann Dunne and Rita Behan were delighted to accept the runner-up prize on behalf of their local community, who worked extremely hard to present their town in all its glory in July 2013, displaying to the judges how despite the recent challenges of a much increased population and the issues that come with recessionary times, the people of Portarlinton love their town and are working together to overcome these challenges, with community based initiatives in education and training, caring for their older citizens, integrated town plans and the work of the community to develop the town and its amenities, while also promoting local entrepreneurship and support for local business. Above all, the people of Portarlinton displayed their incredible spirit of volunteerism which has grown in the town in recent years and that sustains the town and its people in every capacity.

Portarlinton was one of three entries that represented Laois in the 2013 Pride of Place Competition – Knockmay in Portlaoise competed in the Housing Estates Category and South East Laois Arts Network competed in a Single Issue Category entitled “Community Arts”.



Leas Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, Cllr. Martin Phelan, who attended the Awards in Derry, congratulated all the Laois entrants on their hard work

in representing their county and their local communities so well in the competition. He praised the commitment of those who prepared for and took part on the judging days last July.

Director of Services, Anna Marie Delaney said that Laois County Council is delighted to be associated with such positive measures being taken by communities and acknowledged the assistance of all the local and national agencies in the process of the social, cultural and economic development of our county.

### Other Community & Enterprise Activities

#### Community Mediation Service

Laois County Council assisted in 2013 with the launch of the Laois Community Mediation Service, in association with Laois Partnership. This entirely voluntary service was launched in County Hall in September 2013.

Speaking at the launch, founder member Mr. Chris Uys said that mediation can be used by anyone in a conflict situation or in a situation where there is a breakdown in communication. Typical situations that can be resolved through mediation are community issues, neighbourhood disputes, family disagreements, parenting and maintenance conflicts, school and youth group issues and many more. Mediation is an alternative to legal or judicial dispute resolution at any stage of a conflict; however, engagement ideally should be at the earliest stage. The service will also provide equal access to all, without discrimination and as such will help to build capacity in communities to resolve differences.

All the Mediators are members of the community who volunteer their time to mediate disputes. These individuals have received extensive training in mediation, conflict resolution and communication skills and are either accredited or certified by national or international professional bodies. Community Mediation is social entrepreneurship – community based and community led.

The Service can be accessed by calling 085 8636969 or sending an email to [communitymediate@gmail.com](mailto:communitymediate@gmail.com).



### 'Cr0sstheline'

Laois County Council worked closely with Scoil Chríost Rí secondary school, Portlaoise in 2013, to further develop and roll out the "Cr0sstheline" project, in respect of peer-to-peer mental health awareness developed by young people. Five 5th year students from the school delivered sessions to their peers in Scoil Chríost Rí, as well as reaching out with the assistance of Laois County Council's Community & Enterprise Section, to 2nd year students in Mountmellick Community School and 6th class students in St. Paul's National School, Portlaoise. It is hoped to further develop this project with the students in the coming year.



### Schools Business Partnership

In 2013, Laois County Council began a new and exciting partnership with 5th year students in Portlaoise College, to encourage school completion through the roll out of a programme entitled "Skills at Work". 25 Students are being mentored during the 2013/2014 school year by Council staff, which included to date a visit to County Hall with a meet & greet with Council employees, a visit to Portlaoise Fire Station and a session with the Council's Human Resources Department in respect of interview skills and preparation of CV's. The programme will conclude with mock interviews conducted by Council employees and a feedback session by the students who took part.



### Representation

Community & Enterprise Section staff represented the County Development Board and Laois County Council on several Boards and Committees during 2013 and also collaborated with the following agencies/organisations on various projects and initiatives throughout 2013:

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

### TOURISM

#### Events & Festivals

The Tourism section of Laois County Council was actively involved in promoting Laois as a Festival & Event destination and building its profile throughout 2013. Laois was also actively involved in the promotion of the National Gathering Initiative. Listed below are some of the major events that were held throughout the year.

#### Launch of Laois – Gathering Events

Laois County Council in partnership with Laois Tourism Committee were actively involved in promoting the Gathering 2013. A Steering Group was established to oversee the events and festivals that would

take place throughout the year. A public meeting to discuss various ideas for Gatherings and outline the structures that would be put in place to support such events/ideas was held in October. In attendance to address the large crowd on the evening was Minister for Art, Sport and Tourism, Mr. Leo Varadkar T.D.

A large crowd including Festival Organisers, Family Gathering Committees, and representatives from many organisations from around the county who were organising Gathering events throughout the year attended the launch of the Laois Gathering Events night which took place in February. Throughout the year over 90 Gathering Events took place throughout Laois including two Flagship Projects which were funded by Failte Ireland, Laois County Council and IPB Insurances: the James Fintan Lalor Inaugural School and the Quaker Tapestry Exhibition held in the Mountmellick Museum hosted by Mountmellick Development Association.



### Laois International Golf Challenge

The Laois International Golf Challenge took place from Monday April 29th - May 2nd. This is the ninth year that the challenge has taken place, and still continues to attract overseas players who come back each year to participate in the event and enjoy a relaxed break in County Laois.

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

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

The Awards ceremony for the event took place on Thursday May 2nd at the Heritage Golf & Spa Resort,

Killenard. Mr. Justin Treacy (RTE Sport) was MC on the night and announced all the results of the various prizes that were presented on the night. Over thirty prizes were awarded to various golfers over the course of the competition, including, nearest to the pin, longest drives, and 3rd, 2nd, and 1st prizes over the four day event.



### Tourism & Business Information Office

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

### The Rose of Tralee Regional Finals

Sixty one young ladies participated in the Rose of Tralee Regional Finals which took place over the June Bank Holiday weekend. A festival was held with a "Beat on the Street" in Portlaoise Town, with the Roses visiting local schools, attending Mass in Abbeyleix, visiting Abbeyleix Hospital and Dove House, Emo House & Gardens and Castle Durrow. The Roses also took part in a grand parade of Portlaoise Town on Saturday June 1st with Rosebuds from the schools across the County, escorted in classic cars from the Gordon Bennett Classic Car Committee Members.



### Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run

The Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run 2013 took place over the June Bank Holiday weekend. A Cathaoirleach's reception was held at Aras an Chon-tae on Friday May 31st to welcome the visitors, particularly the overseas visitors to Laois.

The participants drove the historic Gordon Bennett Route over the weekend and the highlight for many was their participation in the Gala Rose of Tralee Regional Parade through the streets of Portlaoise on Saturday June 1st.

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

### The Laois Heartlands Rally

The Laois Heartlands Rally took place in Co. Laois on the weekend of the 8th /9th of June. This was the 3rd year the event was hosted in Laois and had a mixed variety of entertainment for car rally enthusiasts and families. Two 20km staged races took place on Sunday June 9th and throughout Saturday various activities including servicing, scrutinising of cars and ceremonial start of the event took place on Saturday evening.

### The National Ploughing Championships

The Council were actively involved in promoting the County at the National Ploughing Championships which took place in September and look forward to welcoming the event back to Laois again in 2014.



Other Events that were supported by Laois County Council include,  
St Patrick Day Parades,  
Barrow Awards Scheme 2013  
Laois Walks Festival 2013

French Festival Portarlinton  
Ossory Agricultural Show (Rathdowney)  
Durrrow Howya Festival  
Halloween Howls Comedy Festival



### ARTS SECTION

#### Laois School of Music

Laois School of Music continues to be a centre of excellence for music tuition in the Midlands, with over 300 students availing of tuition over a wide range of instruments, employing 18 part-time tutors and 1 full-time Co-ordinator. In September, a successful application was made for a European Leonardo Project 'Playing for Success in Music', which includes collaborations with musicians and Music Schools in France and Turkey which will continue until 2015.

#### Music Generation Laois

There were many musical highlights in 2013. These included two opportunities made possible by Music Generation - the Stampede Drumming Group's performance for The Edge of U2, Paul McGuinness, Minister Ruairi Quinn and Seminar attendees at the inaugural Seminar for Music Education Partnerships in Dublin on the 22 of January, and the arrival of the John Lennon Bus in Portlaoise in August, to provide a once-off songwriting workshop to participants. By the end of 2013, Laois Music Education Partnership had over 750 children and young people attend weekly music lessons.

#### Laois Youth Theatre

Laois Youth Theatre had a busy year in 2013 with lots of workshops, performances and exchanges taking place throughout the year. The Dunamais Arts Centre saw Stradbally Youth Theatre put in a remarkable performance on Saturday 4th May. The members of the youth theatre presented DNA, a dark comedy by

Dennis Kelly, directed by Siobhán Coffey and Trevor Mulhare.

### **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**

The Arthouse Stradbally had a number of interesting and successful events running throughout the year including workshops, tours and exhibitions. Highlights included a series of masterclasses, events for Bealtaine, National Drawing Day, Culture Night and the Leaves Literary Festival.

### **The Artists in Schools Scheme**

The Artists in Schools Scheme ran in seven schools in 2013. This Scheme allows students to have an in-depth experience with the professional artist and gives them the opportunity to experience different art mediums.

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

The Arts Office presented a programme of events for older people over the month of May including a series of tours and workshops with the resident artists and visiting artists at the Arthouse in Stradbally.

### **Midland Collaborative Projects**

Two Midlands Arts and Culture magazines were published in 2013 and distributed throughout the Midlands region.

### **Summer Arts programme**

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

### **National Culture Night**

Culture Night on Friday 20th September was a huge success with free events all around Laois, which included workshops, exhibitions, drama performances, concerts and lots more for all ages.

### **The Inaugural James Fintan Lalor School**

The Inaugural James Fintan Lalor School took place

in October and included the staging of a specially commissioned play by playwright and screenwriter Mike Finn, performed by Paul Meade and RTE Broadcaster Myles Dungan. A book titled “Glimpses of James Fintan Lalor Through The Eyes of Children” was published, the culmination of several months work in Raheen National School with writer Ann Egan.

### **Leaves Literature Festival**

The annual Leaves Literature Festival which took place in November included a packed programme of childrens’ workshops, adult writing workshops, book launches, readings and music.

### **Other activities included**

- Arts Act Grants Awards
- Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary
- Exhibitions
- Percent for Art Projects included – The conclusion of M7 Motorway Project
- National Poetry Day Event
- National Music Day
- Support of Festivals – Mountmellick Drama Festival, and the Slieve Bloom Storytelling Festival.
- The New Arts Plan 2013 - 2016

### **Performance Indicators 2011 2012 2013**

Performance Indicators	2011	2012	2013
No. of Arts Grants Allocated:	49	47	46
Per 1,000 population:	2430	2150	2108
No. of Youth Theatre:	4	4	3
Summer Arts Workshops:	18	18	18
Laois School of Music -			
No. of Students:	380	330	310
Music Generation Laois			768

### **SPORT & LEISURE SECTION**

The Sport and Leisure Section of Laois County Council has delivered successful events and activities during 2013. Most notable were:

#### **Play Provision**

#### **Playground openings – Ballylinan & Timahoe**

Gort na Ghreasáí Playground, Wynne Park, Ballylinan was officially opened on 1st May 2013 by Ms Miriam O’Callaghan, Broadcaster with RTE. The facility was developed by Ballylinan Community Council in association with Laois County Council with

funding provided by Laois Partnership Company.



Clós Cloighthí Playground, developed by Timahoe Playground Group was opened on 14th June 2013 by An Cathaoirleach, Laois County Council, Paul Mitchell MCC.



Both playground developments are excellent examples of the work of community groups that not only identified a need in their area but also worked tirelessly to be able to address that need in difficult and challenging times. It is an example of what can be done when communities and local agencies work together to provide facilities that will benefit not just the children of the immediate area but also the children of the surrounding communities. Both facilities are now being managed by Laois County Council.

#### Playground Developments– Barrowhouse & Coolrain

Barrowhouse Community Association LTD and Coolrain Tidy Towns Committees successfully secured funding from Laois Partnership Company to develop

community playground facilities. Work commenced on these projects in the autumn of 2013 and both will be opened in spring of 2014.

#### National Bike Week 2013

Bike Week was held from 15th – 25th June 2013. Laois County Council co-ordinated a series of events with the assistance of Community groups countywide. The events catered for all ages and abilities and were attended by over 462 participants. Family Fun Cycles were held in Clough, Killadooley and Abbeyleix.

South Laois Tourism and Ossory Cycling Club held the 'Ballagh Challenge' 100km on Sunday 23rd June, from The Square, Durrow, which was well attended and was followed by a 40km Cycle.



'Cycle your Wobbles Away', St Paul's NS, Portlaoise was a new event added in 2013 to develop children's co-ordination on bikes and to learn to cycle Independently. Other events included Bike Challenge & Games in Kiln Lane Estate, Mountrath, Cycle to get Fit in Rathdowney and Come 'n' Try Tandem Cycle was held at Portlaoise Leisure Centre.



As part of the school Road Safety Programme, a Safe Cycle Workshop was delivered in Portlaoise and also MYDC held Bike Awareness Day in Mountmellick. These workshops delivered information on safety

while cycling, how to check bicycles and fun activities using bikes.

### Children's Activity Programme

Laois County Council organised and delivered a very successful Easter and Summer activity programme in 2013 throughout the county. Parks Tennis, was delivered in Abbeyleix, Rathdowney, Portlaoise and Portarlington. The Easter programme was delivered at Abbeyleix, Stradbally, Portlaoise and Portarlington with our four week Camp Co Co Summer programme delivered at Ballacolla, Portarlington, Ballylinan, Ballyfin, Clonaslee and Portlaoise. Over 650 children participated in these activity programmes.



### National Play Day 2013

Laois County Council in partnership with Rathdowney Playground Group delivered a free family event at St Fergal's College, entitled 'The way we Played', to celebrate National Play Day in July 2013. Funding for the event was provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and The Gathering. The event was very well attended, the rain was never too far away but it didn't deter the enthusiasm of the 500+ participants.



### National Recreation Week 2013 - "Dare to Try"

National Recreation Week 2013 is effectively a joint initiative between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Local Authorities. The theme for 2013 events was 'Dare to Try'. National Recreation Week is aimed at young people aged 12 to 18 years. The overall purpose of the event is to highlight the importance of recreation for young people and to encourage an inter agency approach to achieving some of the main goals of the DCYA's National Recreation Policy.

National Recreation Week 2013 events in Co Laois ran from 24th - 30th June and the DCYA offered a grant of up to a €1,700 this year to fund 'Dare to Try Adventure Activities' for young people in Rathdowney, Mountmellick and Mountrath.



### Games on the Green Initiative

Laois County Council have entered into partnerships with the 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. The programme is aimed at children between the ages of 6 and 12 years of age on a weekly basis for 8 weeks. The Development Officers assisted by local volunteers implemented fun coaching sessions to increase the physical activity of the children in a safe environment. All community programmes are free of charge and open to both boys and girls. The estates covered in the 2013 football programme were St. Brigids, Dr Murphys Place, O'Moore Place, Lakeglen, Collier's Wood/View/Court (Portlaoise), Kiln Lane, Moonbaun (Mountrath), Kilnacourt & Clanmalire (Portarlington).

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

### Community Football Blitz Day

A blitz day was organized in conjunction with Laois Partnership. Groups of children from St. Brigids, Dr Murphys Place, O'Moore Place, Lakeglen, Collier's Wood/View/Court, Kiln Lane and the Mountmellick Youth Development centre visited Portlaoise Leisure centre in early June to take part in a fantastic day of fun and enjoyment. Each group was co-ordinated by volunteers and staff at afterschool programmes in their area. The blitz day was structured in two groups with 6-8 year olds and 9-12 year olds competing in matches and penalty shoot outs. All participants taking part received a token prize for their involvement.

### Soccer Tods Programme

Soccer Tods was introduced to provide soccer activity for boys and girls aged between 3 and 6 years of age. Since the start of the programme it has shown to increase the development of children. The programme is over an 8 week time period and costs €30. 164 participants took part in 2013 with 3 sessions run in both Portlaoise and Portarlinton. The programme works on the development of the basic skills of soccer. The activity is non competitive.

### Women/Girls Soccer

#### Soccer Sisters Programme

This programme is devised by the Women's Unit of the FAI to help give girls aged 7-12 the opportunity to take part in soccer. Many girls within Laois are currently not being catered for by clubs. With the Soccer Sisters and drop in session, more girls are getting the opportunity to play soccer. Linking in with clubs is vital as a number of clubs have taken on teams from the girls that attended the programme. Soccer Sisters camp was ran in Ballylinan in 2013 in association with St Anne's FC.

### Football for All

The FAI Football for All programmes are soccer programmes run for individuals with special needs. There are many opportunities for individuals from primary school right up to adults. Within Laois the FAI Development Officer works with a number of different groups including the National Learning Network, St. Francis Special School, Rehab Care, Oak House and

Rowenberry. The groups are separated into abilities with one group of lower ability taking part in sessions each Thursday and the higher ability participants taking part in sessions every Friday.

### Portlaoise Street League

The Street Leagues were run over 10 weeks from June until August and provided weekly activity for the participants. Teams played on a weekly basis with a one day cup competition. 2013 continued to see large numbers take part with 120-130 participants taking part on a weekly basis. The winning and runner up teams received prizes at the presentation day and will now represent Laois in the All Ireland Street League finals in Tallaght in April 2014. Due to the huge success more individuals that may not normally take part in these programmes are wanting to get involved in the hope of getting trials to represent their country.



### Rose of Tralee- Regional Finals

For the first time ever the Roses taking part in the Regional Finals in Portlaoise donned their tracksuits to take part in an Ireland vs Rest of the World football match as part of the festival. With the help of the Escorts, Organisers, Civil Defence and local Gardai the match was a huge success which had to go to penalties to find the winner which was the Rest of the World Team.

## LIBRARIES

The public Library Service performs an essential role in our communities by providing access to information, knowledge, lifelong learning and leisure reading in an inclusive manner. The Laois library service is delivered through a network of four full-time branches and six part-time branches. Library Services in the county continue to provide an excellent space for sections of the local community. The public libraries in Laois offer more than just books and have wide ranging services in all branches. These include broadband internet services at very reasonable rates, printing, photocopying and scanning facilities, free WIFI for members, audio books, DVD's, music, online resources, daily newspapers and magazines, free events and clubs. Modern libraries offer a rich cultural and educational environment that provides a space and access for those who wish to enrich their day to day lives.

### Events and Activities

Laois County Libraries held a large variety of events and activities in all Branch Libraries throughout the county in 2013. Children and Adults throughout the county enjoyed the numerous events and activities organised by library staff. This year's programme was hectic and exciting with author visits, art competitions, art launches and exhibitions, music recitals, book clubs, computer classes and storytelling.

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

### FÁS eLearning and Computer Learning

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

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

### WIFI

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

### Bookfund

The Bookfund for 2013 was €45,000.

### Story Lab-Summer reading Challenge

Once again the libraries Summer Reading Challenge proved a big success over the summer months. Over five hundred children of all ages from the county completed the challenge, reading six books each in July and August. This initiative further promotes literacy and reading in children and encourages reading for all ages.

### Local History/Studies

The Local Studies and Archives section of the county library continues to be well used both internationally via email queries and by local historians and members of the public. In 2013 Library staff 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/leisureandculture/libraries/localresearch](http://www.laois.ie/leisureandculture/libraries/localresearch). Some well known books on Local History have been digitised and are now available online. They are "Statistical Survey of the Queens County" by Coote, "The History of the Queens County" by O'Byrne and "The Manor of Glenmore".

### Library Events - Highlights

All of the libraries hosted a great selection of events for 2013. For Heritage Week, Mountrath, Ballylinan, Stradbally, Abbeyleix, Mountmellick and Portlaoise Libraries had a visit from Irish History Live and listened to Tales of The Tudors and the Vikings. Jude Stynes, a local historian gave animated history sessions for children in Abbeyleix and Mountrath libraries. Science week was also celebrated in the Libraries this year with a science road show in Portlaoise Library and talks and workshops in Mountmellick Library.

### Mountrath Library

Mountrath Library continued with events and children's activities during 2013. Monthly class visits and book displays continued with arts and crafts for younger readers. FÁS Computer classes continued. For Easter there were Easter Crafts for younger readers. For Children's Book Festival there were cupcake making, author shows and family tree talks. The

weekly Knitting Club was held every Friday morning in the library and proved very popular. Adults and children's bookclubs were held every month in the library.

### Abbeyleix Library

Abbeyleix Library continued to have weekly art classes for children and monthly events. FÁS eLearning continued. The Art Gallery continued to be a premier location in the county for art exhibitions with eight art exhibitions during the year featuring Ann Brennan, Sonia McDonnell and Charlene Delaney. The Children's Book Festival was again a great success with class visits and author visits from Marita Conlon McKenna, Animal Magic Stage show and Niamh Sharkey. Weekly chess clubs for children were also set up.

### Portlaoise Library

Portlaoise Library had a busy year of events and these included monthly adult bookclubs, knitting classes, weekly class visits by local and surrounding schools, FÁS eLearning, weekly Irish Classes "Ciorcal Comhrá" and competitions. Anne Egan held creative writing classes in May and local artist Noel Hume held a display of his work in the library in January. An Irish Evening was held on 13th March with Irish dancing, singing and music with an attendance of over two hundred. For Children's Book Festival there were magic shows, Gruffalo storytime, Craft workshops, authors Don Conroy, Aubrey Flegg and Gillian Perdue read stories to a captive audience. A series of 7 weekly talks were held on Laois and its Architectural heritage.

### Mountmellick Library

Mountmellick Library had a busy schedule of events in 2013. The library has become a great success since opening and is now a central attraction to the community in Mountmellick and surrounding areas. There have been weekly class visits, bookclubs for adults and children, knitting clubs, storytime and weekly games clubs. Highlights of these include; August Launch Of Jane Shackeltons Photographic Display by Mountmellick Heritage Society, Culture Night Events, live music, Slieve Bloom Storytelling festival, Author visits for Childrens Book Festival, Maeve Friel, Michael Smith, Christmas carols and Christmas crafts.

The Art Gallery was fully booked for 2013 with exhibitions by Mary Wallace and Robert Stack and featured local art groups from Geashill and Mountmellick.

### EU Direct Centre in Mountmellick Library

In 2013 Mountmellick library was nominated as one of 8 EU Direct(EDIC) Information Centers 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 2013 the centre held over 30 EU themed events and talks in Mountmellick library promoting the centre and Europe

### National Service Indicators

#### L: Library Services

#### L. 1 Public Opening Hours

Average number of opening hours per week for full-time libraries: 34.50

Average number of opening hours per week for part time libraries (where applicable): 12.81

No of full time libraries that have Lunchtime openings: 1

No of full time libraries that have evening openings: 3

No of full time libraries that have Saturday openings: 3

L. 2 Total No of visits to full time libraries : 171,859

L. 3 (i) Annual expenditure on stock per head of population county wide: 0.55

(ii) Number of items issued per head of population (county/city wide)  
for books 2.52

for other items 0.59

L. 4 Number of Internet sessions provided 22,285

**Planning & Development and Environment Strategic Policy Committee**

**Director of Services:** Kieran Kehoe

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

Members	Sectoral
Ray Cribbin, M.C.C.	Michael McEvoy
John Moran, M.C.C.	Sheelagh Coyle
Patrick Bowe, M.C.C.	Jason Redmond
Patrick Bracken, M.C.C.	Caroline Goucher
David Goodwin, M.C.C.	
Stephen Lynch, T.C.	

**ENVIRONMENT**

**Senior Engineer:** John O'Donoghue

**Report on Strategic Policy Committee**

The Planning & Development and Environment Strategic Policy Committee (S.P.C.) held four meetings during 2013 to discuss and approve strategy and policy documents. The Committee received progress reports and updates on Kyletalesha Landfill Site including the Gas Utilization Project, Evaluation of the Joint Regional Waste Management Plan, Active Travel Town Strategy, Development Contribution Scheme, Unfinished Housing Developments and the Noise Action Plan.

**Community Initiatives**

**Clean Up Laois Week**

In association with An Taisce's National Spring Clean, Clean up Laois Week took place from the 15th to the 19th April, 2013. Now in its 10th year, this initiative proves to be a successful event with the added bonus of AES sponsoring the pick-up lorry and driver this year. Litter pickers, hi-viz jackets, bags and gloves were distributed among the many groups, schools and individuals who became involved in clean-ups in their own areas. The Environmental Enforcement Officers were also available to assist with the collection of the smaller clean-ups. In total 33.8 tonnes of rubbish was collected as a result of this initiative.

**Grant Schemes**

Under the Community Grant Scheme 2013, funding was awarded to seventy five groups for various projects to benefit the environment and enhance local amenities. The Community Project Fund provides fi-

nanacial assistance for each Elected Member to assist with worthwhile projects in their own areas and forty one applications were processed in 2013. Twenty two Tidy Towns Committees received funding under the Tidy Towns Grants initiative. In partnership with the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, six grants were allocated to promote sustainable development at community level under the LA21 Environmental Partnership Fund. These projects will focus on training, education and awareness activities as well as school garden and biodiversity projects.

**Tidy Towns**

Killasmeestia overall winners - Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Competition



Laois County Council is actively working with the Tidy Towns Committees to help invest in their future and ensure continued growth and development. Assistance was provided to the groups in the form of the Tidy Towns Grants, Summer Wheelie Bin Scheme, Clean up Laois Week and the Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Competition and Awards. There are currently thirty two committees in the federation and the annual federation competition has proved to be very prestigious as it allows towns and villages of varying standards to compete with each other where they might not otherwise be afforded this chance at National level. Judging in the competition was carried out by Environment Section staff. In 2013, nineteen Committees entered the competition.

Marks awarded at National level continue to improve each year and results for 2013 proved very positive with winners in the silver and bronze medal categories and an Endeavour Award. Congratulations and well done to all the hard working Committees, the individuals and volunteers involved, who make an invaluable contribution to the enhancement of the County.

### Environment Awareness Initiatives

Social media is now an important additional tool to engage with the general public and was successfully used during 2013 to promote various environmental initiatives including:

- Gum Litter Task Force programme and events
- Stop food waste programme and events,
- Anti litter initiatives – including Clean Up Laois Week and An Taisce’s National Spring Clean,
- Community Grant Schemes and Local Agenda 21 Grant Scheme,
- Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Competition and National Tidy Towns Competition,
- Anti-litter campaigns i.e. illegal dumping and responsible dog ownership & dog fouling awareness,
- Cinema and road side signage promoting anti litter messages.

### Schools Campaign

The green schools programme has over 60 Green-Flags awarded to schools in the County. The comprehensive schools programme also included workshops for schools and the tidy primary schools competition as well as projects for secondary schools.

### Waste Enforcement

In 2013, the Waste Enforcement Section’s priority duty included the successful implementation of a High Court Order requiring a Landowner in Vicarstown to remove all waste from lands located in a Candidate Special Area of Conservation and to fully remediate the lands. The Enforcement Section also had 5 successful District Court cases in the area of illegal dumping. The Section had a very successful awareness desk at the “National Ploughing Championships” where we promoted our “Prevent Food Waste Campaign’ in conjunction with the Clean Technology Centre.

### Litter Management



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

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

This Section continues to promote their freephone confidential litter hotline 1800 323230 via advertisement and anti-litter merchandise to encourage members of the public to play their part and report incidences of illegal dumping in their community. In 2013, 980 environmental complaints were received in Environment Section – 587 were litter-related.

During 2013, one hundred and fifty eight litter fines issued for varying offences. Forty three unpaid fines were sent to our legal team to initiate legal proceedings – eleven resulted in successful convictions in court. A further five Section 9 Notices were served on landowners for failing to keep their private lands clean and free of litter. Numerous warning letters for abandoned cars and unauthorised signs around the county also issued during the course of the year.

## Dog Fouling Campaign

The issue of dog littering in public areas is a problem that is prevalent in some of our towns/villages posing a serious litter nuisance and health risk. This Section will continue creating awareness of this litter offence and a dedicated campaign will again be rolled-out to communities in conjunction with the Tidy Town groups during 2014. The campaign will incorporate an element of monitoring and enforcement whilst this Section will continue to make anti-litter merchandise available i.e. doggie bags, information leaflets, awareness signage/stickers.

## Gum Litter Taskforce



The Gum Litter Taskforce (GLT) is the result of a negotiated agreement with the chewing gum industry and is a central tenet of the Department's anti-litter strategy. Again this year, Laois County Council's Environment Section participated in a local GLT awareness programme incorporating an element of awareness, enforcement and conducting surveys for monitoring purposes.

## IBAL (Irish Business Against Litter)

Portlaoise town continues to be assessed under the IBAL national anti-litter league. In 2013, despite the best efforts and good working relationship between staff and Portlaoise Tidy Towns, our ranking in the league was disappointing. This Section along with the local Litter Warden will continue to work on improving our rating.

However, according to the business group, IBAL, over 83% of Ireland's towns are now as clean or cleaner than their European counterparts with litter levels continuing to fall during the course of the year.

## National Litter Pollution Monitoring System (NLPMS)

This system provides for the ongoing measurement of litter levels across the country with litter

pollution/quantification surveys undertaken by each local authority between the months of May-December each year. In 2013, the Litter Wardens carried out the appropriate number of surveys collecting key information on the composition, scale and nature of littering which is used to clearly identify problem areas at an early stage.

## Energy Efficiency

### Overview of Energy Usage in 2013

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

Laois County Council submitted their 2012 & 2013 Annual Monitoring and Reporting of electricity and gas meters (MPRN'S and GPRN's) using the new on-line tool to the SEAI by 31st January 2014. Further energy data will be returned by 9th May 2014 with scorecards available in July 2014. For 2011, the M&R scorecard showed that Laois County Council had already saved 18.3% energy against their baseline. This is the savings already generated by Laois County Council towards the public sector target of 33% by 2020. For 2011, the provisional scorecard placed Laois County Council as 4th best performer out of 30 local authorities who reported.

In 2011, (latest data available) Laois County Council consumed 30,759 MWh of energy (TPER) consisting of:

- 26,506 MWh of electricity
- 4,098 MWh of fossil fuels
- 154 MWh of renewable fuels

Laois County Council completed their eighteen month energy plan at the end of 2012 with energy savings attributed to measures within the plan amounting to 1,023MWh. A new 2 year energy plan has also been prepared for 2013 & 2014 with 31 action items.

### Actions Undertaken in 2013

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

- Baseline reduction of Public Lights on N7 Motorway (662,298kWh)
- Installation of 29 Big Belly Solar compactor bins
- Machinery Yard activity reduction
- Baseline reduction library office, County Hall

Other activities in 2013 were:

- Provided technical expertise to Midlands Regional Authority for EU STEP project and presented our Good Practice at 2 international meetings
- Laois County Council signed up to SEAI Partnership with a range of supports provided in return for commitment to Energy Management program

Actions Planned for 2014

In 2014, Laois County Council intends to further improve our energy performance by undertaking the following initiatives:

- Landfill Gas Utilisation in Kyletalesha ( landfill operations now ceased )
- Stradbally library MIC reduction and tariff change
- Durrow Library installation of heatpump to replace gasoil heating system
- Investigate energy reduction opportunities in Portlaoise WWTP DBO
- Replacement of 400 Mercury lamps with 25no 150W SON as part of Durrow Square redevelopment

Other activities in 2014

- All water and wastewater plants will become the responsibility of Irish Water from 1st January 2014
- Continued involvement with MRA on the EU STEP project with the transfer of Good Practice relating to Energy Performance Contracting

**Performance Indicators**

**E. Environmental Services**

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

- (i) Dry recyclables
- (ii) Organics

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

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

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

- tonnage
- percentage of household waste collected

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

Statistics for E3, E4 and E5 are available from the National Waste Collection Permit Office - [contactus@nwcpo.ie](mailto:contactus@nwcpo.ie)

**E.6 Recycling Facilities**

Category	Column A	Column B	Column C	Column D
	Number of Bring Sites	Number of Civic Amenity sites	Notal Number of Facilities	Number of locations per 5,000 population
Glass	46	2	2	2.91
Cans	46	2	2	2.91
Textiles	6	2	2	0.50
Batteries	-	2	2	0.12
Oils	-	2	2	0.12
Cardboard	-	2	2	0.12
Magazines	-	2	2	0.12
Plate Glass	-	2	2	0.12
Metal	-	2	2	0.12
Plastic	-	2	2	0.12
WEEE	-	2	2	0.12
Newspaper	-	2	2	0.12
Wood	-	2	2	0.12
Flourescent lamps	-	2	2	0.15
Hedge Trimmers	-	2	2	0.15
Tyres	-	2	2	0.15

E.7 Litter Prevention & Environmental Protection

Number of Litter Wardens

- Total number of full time litter wardens:	3
- Total number of part-time litter wardens:	0
- Number of litter wardens (both full and part time per 5,000 population):	0.19%
- Number of on the spot fines issued:	158
- Number of on the spot fines paid:	75
- Number of notices issued (under Sections 9,15, 16, 17 and 20 of the Litter Pollution Act 1997);	5
- Total number of prosecutions taken (all prosecutions under the Litter Acts 1997-2003):	32
- Number of prosecution cases taken because of non-payment of on-the-spot fines:	32
- Total number of prosecutions secured (all prosecutions under the Litter Acts 1997-2003):	11
- Number of prosecutions secured (relating to non payment of on-the-spot fines):	11
- % of areas within the Local Authority that are:	
Unpolluted (i.e. litter-free)	8%
Slightly polluted with litter	77%
Moderately polluted with litter	15%
Significantly polluted with litter	0.0%
Grossly polluted with litter	0.0%

E.8 Environmental Complaints and Enforcement

- Total number of cases subject to complaints concerning environmental pollution (relation to waste, litter, water pollution, noise pollution, air pollution):	980
- Number of complaints investigated:	971 (9 open, not actioned yet)
- Number of complaints resolved where no further action was necessary:	879 (12 pending)
- Number of enforcement procedures taken:	92

E.9 Percentage of Schools participating in Environmental campaigns

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

**PLANNING**

**Director of Services:** Anna Marie Delaney

**Senior Planner:** Angela McEvoy

**Planning Department**

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

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

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

**(i) Development Management**

The number of planning applications received in 2013 was 441. However, it should be noted that 94 of the total applications received were invalid and required the applicant to submit a new application. The main reasons for invalidation of planning files were public notices being out of date, or not erected on site, previous permissions expired, agents name omitted from maps/drawings, no north point shown on maps and distances not shown on site layouts.

The following table gives a breakdown of valid planning applications received and decisions made during 2013:

Number of valid applications received:	347
Number of decisions made:	327
Number of applications granted:	302
Number of applications refused:	25

**2013 Performance**

Invalid applications returned to applicant:	21%
Referrals to Area Offices (working days):	14

11 applications were appealed to An Bord Pleanála in 2013. 13 Appeal decisions issued in 2013.

**Customer Service Initiatives**

2013 saw the continuation of the scanning of planning applications as they are received by the Planning Authority. Throughout 2013, the public were able to access all planning applications on-line within two weeks of the Planning Authority receiving them.

269 pre-planning meetings were held in 2013, 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.

19 Section 5 Certificates were issued by Laois County Council in 2013.

The Planning website continues to be a very popular attraction with 70,300 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.

A progress report was submitted to the Elected Members at the October Council meeting of Laois County Council which is in compliance with the requirements of section 15(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended. This report set out the progress achieved in securing the objectives of the Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017 since it came into effect in November 2011.

The report is structured in a similar nature to the Laois County Development Plan, outlining the key objectives contained in the Plan in a chapter by chapter format and summarising the status of those objectives to date. It aims to give as clear and complete a picture as possible on the progress made to date. The following guidance was issued by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government to Planning Authorities regarding their responsibilities in terms of planning in 2013. These are as follows:

1. Local Area Plans-Guidelines for Planning Authorities, June 2013
2. Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanala on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment, March 2013

3. Development Contributions Guidelines for Planning Authorities, January 2013

The roll-out of two key objectives of the County Development Plan commenced in the third and fourth quarter of 2013, namely preparation of a

- County Recreational / Walking Strategy
- Tree protection Orders

**Conservation**

A total of 8 no. Section 57 Declarations in relation to works to Protected Structures were processed in 2013, each within the required statutory timeframe.

A Grant for €8,000 under the Structures at Risk Scheme for 2013 was given in respect of Donaghmore Workhouse project. The works are ongoing on this project.

**Part VIII Development**

Part 8 consent for the following projects was granted during 2013:

- A Part 8 procedure for an Urban renewal plan for the Greens in Durrow has been completed by Laois County Council. Funding to be sought from Laois Partnership for the project.

**Dereliction**

**Current Status and Review**

A comprehensive review of all Derelict Sites is ongoing, this review involves closing files where necessary, proceeding with Derelict Site inspection, issuing notices, updating levies and obtaining revised valuations for such levies. 40 No. of files were closed off in 2013, these were files where issues were resolved or ownership changed. 5 no. valuations were carried out in 2013.

Total Number of Files opened for 2013: 30

- 123 no. files in progress at present
- A full review of all sites is in progress and legal action is being initiated in some cases to recover unpaid derelict sites levies.

**(iii) Planning Enforcement**

**Introduction**

The Planning Authority, in accordance with the statu-

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

**Unauthorised Development**

Unauthorised development is where development is carried out without having received the appropriate planning permission or not being considered exempt under the Planning & Development Regulations 2001-2013 as amended. In addition, developments being carried out which are not in accordance with planning permission granted are unauthorised developments. The Planning Authority follows up on all written complaints of unauthorised development where they appear to be well founded. A standard complaint form is available on line.

**General Procedural Steps**

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

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

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

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

**Developments in Enforcement**

The public are now more involved in the Enforcement System as the Planning Authority is obliged to consider and respond to complaints. A number of enquiries from the Office of the Ombudsman are further evidence of increased public involvement.

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

been very pro-active in 2013 in following up complaints of unauthorised developments.

**Licensing of Outdoor Events**

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

The organisers of such events are required to obtain a licence from the Planning Authority where the audience comprises of 5,000 or more people. One such outdoor event is the “Electric Picnic” which has been held in Stradbally yearly since 2004.

**(iv) Building Control**

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

Number of valid commencement notices received:	122
Number of Agricultural Building Notices	9
Number of buildings covered by valid commencement notices:	113
Number of buildings inspected:	20
Number of buildings inspected as a % of buildings covered by valid Commencement notices:	18%

**(v) Unfinished Housing Estates**

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

The following estates were taken into charge in 2013:

1. Wilton Lawns,Portarlington
2. Abbeycourt,Portlaoise
3. Heathfields (8 units only), Portlaoise
4. Fairways, Abbeyleix

5. Kilnacourt Phase 1 & 2, Portarlington
6. Rinnucinni,Portlaoise
7. Brotherton, Graiguecullen
8. Barrowvale, Graiguecullen

A register of unfinished housing estates was compiled by Laois County Council in 2011. However, 2013 has seen a reduction in the number of unfinished estates on this register as Laois County Council has continued to work with developers to ensure the estates are completed in accordance with the planning permission granted. The Planning Authority also has the power to encourage the developer to engage with the local authority by initiating enforcement proceedings. Laois County Council has had considerable success in this regard also in 2013.

The Planning Department in conjunction with the DOEC&LG completed a survey of 55 unfinished estates in the County in 2013.

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

**Planning and Building Control - Service Indicators**

**Planning Applications – Decision making**

Individual Houses	31/12/13
Number of applications decided	39
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	22
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	7
Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant Under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000	0
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	74
% of grants	95%
% of refusals	5%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanála	0%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanála	0%

**New Housing Development** 31/12/13

Number of applications decided	7
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	5
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	2
Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant Under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000	0
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	73
% of grants	100%
% of refusals	0%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations by An Bord Pleanála	0%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanála	0%

**Other: Not Requiring EIA** 31/12/13

Number of applications decided	221
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	165
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	52
Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000	0
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	76
% of grants	94%
% of refusals	6%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations	

by An Bord Pleanála	78%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanála	22%

**Other: Requiring EIA** **31/12/13**

Number of applications decided	23
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	15
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	8
Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000	0
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	82
% of grants	87%
% of refusals	13%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations by An Bord Pleanála	75 %
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanála	25%

**Enforcement** **31/12/13**

Total number of cases subject to complaints that were investigated	106
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were dismissed	23
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were resolved through negotiations	24
Number of enforcement procedures taken through warning letters	78
Number of enforcement procedures taken through enforcement notices	53
Number of prosecutions	20

**Opening Hours and Consultations** **31/12/13**

Average number of opening hours per week	32.5
Number of pre-planning consultation meetings held	269
Average length of time (in days) from request for consultation with local authority planner to actual formal meeting for pre-planning consultation	7 working days
No of new buildings notified that were inspected by the Local Authority	20

## HERITAGE

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

### Laois Heritage Plan 2007 - 2011

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

- Collect information on the built, natural and cultural heritage of the county
- Raise awareness and promote enjoyment of heritage
- Promote best practice in heritage management
- Promote active conservation of heritage in Laois

The draft Laois Heritage Plan 2013 – 2018 finished public consultation in early June and the draft plan was approved by the Planning & Environment SPC. The plan was on the agenda for adoption in December 2013, which was adjourned to January 2014.

### Projects from the Heritage Plan 2007-2011 were delivered in 2013.

The following information relates to projects from the Laois Heritage Plan undertaken with the support of the Heritage Council during 2013. Full survey and research reports are available from the Heritage Office of Laois County Council, or to download at [www.laois.ie/heritage](http://www.laois.ie/heritage).

### Collect information on the Heritage of County Laois

The collection and presentation of information on the heritage of Laois is a necessary first step in the conservation and highlighting of this heritage. The following heritage projects were carried out during 2013:

### Increasing accessibility of Laois Local Studies Archive

This project was undertaken in partnership with the Library Service. It aims to research best practice

methods in digitising, to start to create a digital archive of the Local Studies collection, with the aim of making material available on the internet.

In association with this, discussions have been held with Laois Partnership to tie in with their planned Digital Heritage Training and it has been agreed that a module of the training will be offered to Laois County Council staff and other heritage professionals around the County (eg Museum and Heritage Centre managers etc).

### Audio Guide to Heritage sites in Laois

An application was made to Laois Partnership to produce audio guides to heritage sites in Laois and an approval in principle has been received but final decision is awaited.

### Graveyard and memorial recording

The Heritage Officer has been assisting Laois Partnership with the deployment and roll out of a community training programme on graveyard and memorial recording. Training is being delivered by Eachtra Archaeology and up to 9 community groups will be trained. Graveyards in Raheen, Rosenallis (Church of Ireland & Quaker), Mountmellick (Ivy Church), Ratheniska (Dysart Enos) have already been recorded and plans are underway for Portarlinton (French Church).

### Biodiversity Training

Assistance has been given to Laois Partnership in the development of a project to provide training in wildlife and biodiversity for community groups in several locations around Laois. This project has been very positive in terms of raising awareness of our natural heritage and what communities can do to protect and enhance it.

### Midlands Heritage App Project

This project to develop a Smartphone App to promote heritage sites in the Midlands is ongoing, with the MRA and Waterways Ireland taking a lead, and also involving Heritage Officers in Offaly, Westmeath, Longford and Roscommon.

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

In 2013, the Heritage Officer worked with numerous individuals, community groups and the County Com-

munity Forum to plan heritage projects and provide advice on accessing grant aid and project support. In order to ensure wide dissemination of heritage information, all reports and publications produced during the year have been lodged in the local studies section of Laois County Library and made available to download on the Laois County Council website.

Events held during 2013 to raise awareness of heritage issues included:

- A week-long programme of over 60 family events, guided walks, talks, slideshows and fundays was organized for national Heritage Week in August;
- The Heritage Office assisted with the development and judging of the Laois Heritage Society Schools Heritage Project, a competition for primary and secondary schools, organised in association with the Laois Education Centre;
- The Heritage Officer was involved with the organisation of the Laois Marquee for the National Ploughing Championships and attended the event. Free children's wildlife workshops were offered to the public throughout the three days, provided by Green Bee Education and these were very successful.
- The Heritage Officer has been working with Laois Partnership to develop and implement a programme of training in Biodiversity for Communities throughout Laois. The project has now moved into its second phase, with Local Biodiversity Action Plans being drafted by up to 6 communities across Laois, with the assistance of Ballyroan-based ecologist Fiona MacGowan.
- Support was given to a range of groups for heritage related events, e.g. BirdWatch Ireland Laois Branch, Laois Heritage Society etc.
- The James Fintan Lalor School took place on 20th and 21st September 2013 and was very successful. The venue was full for both days of the event and all aspects of the event were well received by the public, press and all speakers etc involved.

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

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

**Donaghmore Workhouse**

Work commenced on site at Donaghmore Workhouse in early September and is progressing well. Formal site meetings are being held fortnightly and Conservation and Ecological expertise are being accessed as required, The project is on schedule for completion in May 2014.

**Stradbally Market House**

Work at the site has commenced and is going well. The Conservation Architect for this project is Richard McLoughlin.

**Timahoe Library & Round Tower**

A lease has been agreed for the Community at Timahoe to take over management of the former library (former Church of Ireland) there to provide visitor services and tourism information. This is being progressed by the Library Service and heritage support will be provided as required.

Heritage Performance Indicators

Performance Indicators		2011	2012	2013
No. actions from the Laois Heritage Plan implemented	The max no. of actions funded each year by the Heritage Council has fallen from 8 to 4	4	4	3
No. meetings of Laois Heritage Forum held	The Laois Heritage Forum generally meets quarterly, with working groups meeting more often as required	3	3	4
Number of biodiversity surveys carried out		0	0	0
Number of built/cultural heritage surveys carried out		1	1	0
Number of publications on Laois Heritage produced/supported	These publications are in addition to project reports produced following surveys etc.	3	1	1
Number of Heritage Talks/Training Courses/Seminars organised or supported	Including events held for Heritage Week	50	57	65

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

### Economic Task Group

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

Prioritised Actions/Objectives include:

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

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

### Enterprise Centres

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

### Clonminam Business Park Upgrade

Works were undertaken in 2013 contributing to the integrated and coherent development of the area, reinforcing the commercial vitality of the area and making an important contribution to attracting and sustaining employment opportunities.

### Industrial Sites

Laois County Council continues to maintain its direct role in facilitating economic development/job creation through the ongoing disposal of sites throughout the County. The Council will continue to make sites available given the county's potential for further development and capacity for new enterprise.

### Portlaoise Interchange

The development of a 250 acre site at Portlaoise interchange seeks to exploit the Economic Development potential of the key transport corridor which runs through the County. This project is as a direct result of the National Spatial Strategy which puts Laois and Portlaoise at a distinct advantage in designating it as a Transport Node and Inland Port.

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

### Business Networking Event

A seminar entitled "Supporting Economic Recovery" was hosted by Laois County Council on 10th June 2013. Targeted at the local business community, the seminar highlighted the pro-active ways in which Laois County Council is supporting economic recovery throughout the county.

## LAOIS WATER SAFETY

### Water Safety Awareness Week 2013

Laois County Council in conjunction with Laois Water Safety Area Committee delivered a number of key events during Water Safety Awareness Week, which took place from 27th May 2013 to 3rd June 2013. Twenty school visits were conducted, whereby basic water safety awareness talks and ring buoy demonstrations were delivered to primary school children. A schools poster competition was launched where children were asked to design and colour a poster with the caption "Swim Safety this Summer". There was a great response with all of the posters being displayed in Portlaoise Leisure Centre.

Water Safety Awareness Programmes were delivered to Youth and Scouting organisations and were well received by the participants.

### Water Safety Classes and Nipper Club

Laois Water Safety successfully delivered Spring and

Autumn Water Safety Classes during 2013 at Port-laoise Leisure Centre. 130 participating adults and Children received Irish Water Safety Certificates. A successful eight week Nipper Programme was also delivered in 2013.

### Paws Programme

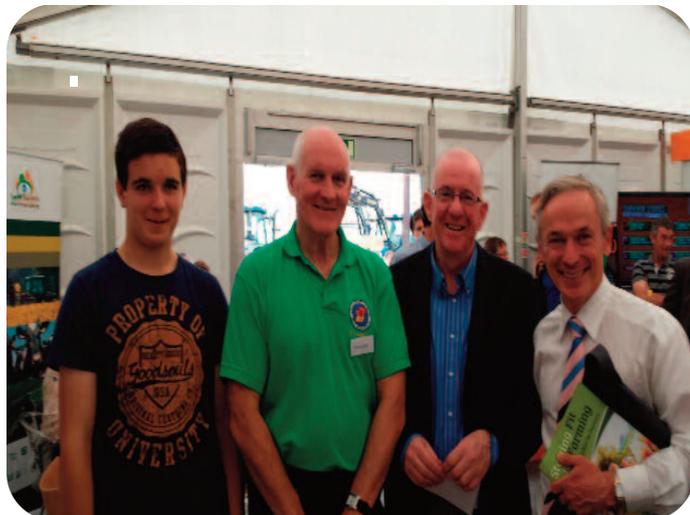
Laois County Council in association with Laois Water Safety and leisure centres continued to successfully support & deliver the Primary Aquatic Water Safety Programme (PAWS) to 50 primary schools in County Laois.

### Ring Buoys

During 2013 Laois County Council continued to maintain and inspect ring buoy at open water locations county wide.

### National Ploughing Championships

Laois Water Safety Area Committee members and instructors operated the Irish Water Safety Stand at the National Ploughing Championships over 3 days where record numbers visited the stand and observed basic life support demonstrations.



## LAOIS COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

**Acting Chief Fire Officer: Declan Power**

### Fire Service Operations

The operational service responded to 734 incidents in 2013. Of these 417 were fires and the remaining were special service calls; 107 road traffic accidents, 7 incidents of flooding, and 203 other miscellaneous incidents.

### Updating of Equipment

The programme of updating fire brigade equipment was continued with the purchase of vehicle mounted variable message signs equipment, communications equipment, gas tight suits, gas detectors, high pressure lifting bags and breathing apparatus equipment. A new 4x4 vehicle was also purchased for use by the Rostered Senior Fire Officer.

### Major Emergency Management

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

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

### Major Emergency Workshops

On the 9th September and 18th October 2013 Laois County Council held Inter Agency Major Emergency Workshops for the On Site Co-ordination Group and the Local Co-ordination Group respectively. All three Principle Response Agencies i.e. Laois Local Authorities, An Garda Síochána and the Health Service Ex-

ective were involved. The workshop ran successfully and the feedback from both the participants and the umpires was positive.



### eTraining

As well as basic training for new entrants to the service, fire brigade staff underwent specialist training in the following areas: emergency medical first responder, fire safety engineering, hazardous materials, specialised instructor courses, hydraulic platform, breathing apparatus, water rescue, rope rescue, , Senior Officer command course & driver training.

### Health & Safety

- The Fire Service's Health, Safety and Welfare Management Programme was reviewed on the 1st February 2013. Laois County Fire and Rescue service rostered senior fire officers convened 25 times throughout the year to assess the programme and monitor its targets.
- Laois County Fire and Rescue Service retained the services of Dr Eddie Murphy to provide our Critical Incident Stress Management C.I.S.M. Service to all fire service personnel.

### Outdoor Events

Extensive planning and liaison was carried out with the organisers of the two large outdoor events in the county during 2013 - Electric Picnic Music Festival in Stradbally (~35,000 attended) and the National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska (~230,000 attended) to ensure the safety of all involved. An extensive programme of inspections was put in place for the National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska – all 1300+ exhibitors received inspections before and during the event.

### Fire Safety Certificate and Planning Applications

In 2013, Fire Safety Certificates for 52 commercial developments were processed and advice was provided to the Planning Section in respect of 79 planning applications.

### Licensing of Premises

Applications in relation to 97 premises licensed under the Intoxicating Liquor Acts, Public Dance Halls Act and the Gaming & Lotteries Act were notified to Laois County Fire and Rescue service during 2013. Inspections were carried out as required with reports forwarded to the Courts Service.

### Inspection of Premises

Fire safety inspections of 120 premises were carried out during 2013. Enforcement action was taken in a number of cases where deficiencies were identified.

### Pre-Incident Planning

The Pre-Incident Planning programme continued in 2013. The recruitment of technicians through the FÁS JobBridge scheme in 2013 has greatly enhanced the process of making information about premises around the county available to responding fire crews.

### Community Fire Safety

The program for National Fire Safety Week included presentations on fire safety to the public in fire stations, attended by people and groups from the local communities, advertising in local newspapers and local radio, use of social media sites facebook and Twitter and leaflets. Check lists for fire safety were also delivered to homes. A fire safety awareness day was also provided to Portlaoise College as part of the College's safety week. Extensive coverage of this event was provided by RTE News.



## Laois Civil Defence

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

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

### First Aid

Provision of first aid and ambulance service.

### Rescue Skills

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

### Fire-fighting

Pumping floodwaters and supplying water to the community.

### Warden Service and Radiation Monitoring

Radiation detecting and monitoring.

### Welfare Skills

Provision of hot meals and drinks.

### Radio Communications

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

**Transportation & Water Services Strategic Policy Committee**

**Director of Services:** Kieran Kehoe

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

Members	Sectoral
Brendan Phelan, M.C.C.	Francis Gorman
Ben Brennan, M.C.C.	Pat Culleton
Jeremiah Lodge, M.C.C.	Noreen Byrne
Kathleen O'Brien, M.C.C.	Brendan O'Brien
Seamus McDonald, M.C.C.	
Matthew Keegan, T.C.	

**ROADS**

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

**2013 Road Grant Allocations**

In 2013, Laois County Council received a total allocation of €8,172,794 for National & Non- National roads in the County. €6.7m of this funding was provided by the Department of Transport under the Regional and Local Roads Investment Programme through the National Roads Authority.

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

**Specific Improvement Schemes**

Laois County Council received Specific Improvement Grant funding of €890,000 from the Department of Transport for the following schemes in 2013:

**Borris Road - €790,000**

This project continues the construction of realignment of the Borris Road for the fourth year and the latest phase will see the completion of the Borris Road Re-alignment scheme by linking the previously completed phases at Onions Lane and the Ashley Gardens roundabout. The scheme involves the acquisition of lands through Compulsory Purchase Order and construction of carriageways, footpaths, cyclepaths, road drainage, telecommunications infrastructure, public lighting works and ancillary services. A new cul-de-sac road will facilitate access from the nursing home and many houses along the existing Borris Road to the realigned road. The Department of Transport al-

lowed the completion of the scheme to be delivered under a single phase, despite the relatively higher cost of this phase compared with other phases, on the basis that the works be delivered through a publically procured contract. The detailed design, tender and contractor appointment proceeded through 2013 and the contractor started the works in November 2013.

This scheme provides a major safety improvement for road users between the town and major residential areas and the secondary schools opposite Ashley Gardens and with broader public road network. The works are due for completion in the Summer of 2014.

**Other Specific Improvement Schemes**

Scheme	Allocation
LP1656 Poormans Bridge: Replacement of existing bridge	€10,000
Kyledellig Bridge: Replacement of existing bridge:	€27,000
Castletown Bridge: Replacement of existing bridge	€63,000

**Road Safety Remedial Measures**

In 2013 Laois County Council received allocations to carry out Road Safety Remedial Measure Schemes at various locations throughout the County.

The National Road schemes were as follows:

Scheme	Allocation
N77 Clonadadoran(Design)	€10,000
N77 Tonduff (Design)	€50,000
N80 Corbally	€15,000
N80 Stradbally	€50,000
N80 Maidenhead	€50,000
(Re-alignment, Design)	
	€175,000

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

The Non-National Road schemes were as follows:

Scheme	Allocation
R422 Carn Bridge	€15,000
R423 Ballyfin	€65,000
R423 Derrylusk	€20,000
R427 Balyknockan	€40,000
L7815 Garryduff	€10,000
L1036 Tinakill Cross	€10,000

## TRANSPORTATION & WATER SERVICES

L7916 Yellow Pond Cross	€20,000
L2097 Owenass Bridge	€10,000
	<hr/>
	€190,000

The above schemes involved realignments, improvements, super-elevation, visibility improvements and the provision of signage at junctions.

### Road Safety:

#### Cycle Safety Training

Cycle Training was carried out by two companies

- A. Cycletrax/SouthEast
- B. Cycling Safety and Skills School

877 primary school students, from 16 national schools took part in the safe Cycle Training program.

21 children took part in a one day cycle workshop, which took place during National Bike Week. This workshop was run in partnership with Knockmay After School Project, An Gardaí Síochána and Laois Sports Partnership.

5 children from Laois Down Syndrome took part in safe cycle training. The training was very successful, with plans to make this training an annual event.

#### Drive For Life Program

Secondary School students from St Fergal's College, Rathdowney, St Mary's CBS, Portlaoise, Colaiste Iosagain, Portarlinton participated in this programme in 2013.

#### Publicity

The Road Safety Officer was interviewed in February for national radio ( Brian Lally - Drive Time) regarding Laois County Council Collision Data for 2012, with no fatalities recorded on the county road network in that year.

#### Teen Aware

A Collision Extrication exercise took place in Killbegan at the annual Teen Aware event in partnership with Kildare, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois County Council.

#### Road Safety Talks / Visits

The Road Safety Officer visited Heywood Community School, and 4 primary schools to speak with the

pupils on issue of road safety. (770 pupils)

Road Safety talks also given to Parents Councils, Gael Scoil, Marybrough and Educate Together National schools.

Road Safety In partnership with Green School's Travel Flag – An Tasice – WOW- Walk to School on Wednesday.

#### Road Safety Inspection

Five site inspections were carried out at schools following concerns raised by principals, teachers, parents and members of the public.

#### Hi-Visibility Vest

1000 vests were supplied to children during school visits to various organisations during the year, including Cycle Clubs, Playschools and Laois Down Syndrome.

#### N80 Kyletalisha Junction Improvement

An allocation of €935,000 was received for the improvement of the N80/L2117 junction at Kyletalesha. Land acquisition was completed in 2012 and the construction of the scheme was completed by Laois County Council in 2013. The scheme involved the provision of a ghost island arrangement with a right turn lane for northbound N80 traffic. The L2117 was realigned to remove the skew angle that was in place at the junction. New public lighting and ancillary services were also provided.



#### Maintenance of Non National Roads

In line with previous years, Laois County Council carried out maintenance works on Regional, and Local Roads in the County. These works include, drainage works, verge trimming, footpath repairs, erection and replacement of signs, relining, the provision of studs, street cleaning and litter collection and the replace-

ment of safety barrier/fencing.

In 2013, under the Multi-Annual Roadworks Programme 2011-2013, Strengthening and Surface Dressing works were carried out to Regional and County Roads throughout the County. A total of 49.62km of Regional and County Roads were strengthened and a further 45km were surface dressed in 2013.

### Community Involvement in Roadworks Scheme

This scheme continued in 2013 with an allocation of €109,500 provided by the Department of Transport and a total of nine projects were successfully undertaken in conjunction with local communities.

### National Service Indicators

#### R: Roads

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

94.7km

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

0km

### Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards 2013

At the Excellence in Local Government Awards Laois County Council won the award for Local Authority Economic Efficiencies sponsored by CBRE. This was for work on Road Recycling for the Restoration of Local and Regional Roads

The award was presented to Michael Malone Senior Executive Engineer by Minister Phil Hogan and RTE Presenter Mary Kennedy. This project aimed to evaluate and prove the effectiveness of In-Situ Cold Recycling for the restoration of Local and Regional Roads. From 2010 – 2012 Laois County Council – Western Area, examined and tested this road restoration process against the existing methods of Wet Mix Macadam and hot macadam overlays. Following this evaluation period which included trials and testing, Laois County Council developed a user/client tender specification based on functional requirements and desired outcomes which leaves room for supplier in-

novation.

In 2012, using the developed tender specification to procure the annual road strengthening program by way of Cold In-Situ Road Recycling Laois County Council benefited as follows:

- Cost saving of over 40% compared to other solutions
- Reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 56%

The above were achieved in addition to high quality finished roads with average Stiffness values of 2263 Mpa, average Wet Strength of 19.4 kN and average Dry Strength of 44.3 kN. The problems traditionally associated with significantly increased road elevation were also avoided as the Cold In-Situ Road Recycling process generally results in only marginal increase in road elevation by using the existing granular material in the road.

Laois County Council would like to acknowledge the assistance of TDEL Road Recycling, Irish Tar, Department of Transport Tourism & Sport & Department of Environment Community & Local Government in progressing this project.



### WATER SERVICES

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

The Water Services functions are divided into four sections:

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

Water Services also provides support to the Planning

Department and consults with the public on planning issues relating to water and wastewater services.

### Ongoing Operation and Maintenance

The Water Services Section is responsible for the provision and maintenance of adequate water supplies and wastewater treatment and disposal facilities which comply with both the EU Drinking Water Directive and EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. Laois County Council currently supplies approximately 24,000 cubic meters of water per day.

### Water Quality

Laois County Council has statutory functions with regard to the monitoring of drinking water supplies and public group water schemes in the County as laid out in the EU (Drinking Water) No. 2 Regulations, 2007. Under the regulations, Laois County Council is also the Supervisory Authority for Private Group Water Schemes and Small Private Water Supply Schemes.

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

### Discharges to Sewers

Under the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977 and 1990 and its regulations, a licence is required by any company that discharges trade effluent (including cooling waters) to a sewer.

There are 152 Section 16 licences issued by Laois County Council to businesses in the county and the discharges from the larger businesses are monitored on a regular basis throughout the year.

### EPA Waste Water Discharge Licence

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

The EPA stipulates conditions to ensure compliance

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

### Environmental Protection

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

- Implementing environmental policy programs
- Implementing and enforcing regulations
- Issuing, monitoring and enforcing discharge and emissions licenses
- Investigating pollution incidents and finding sources of pollution
- Responding to environmental complaints from the public
- Preparing environmental policy

### Water Quality

Laois County Council continued in 2013 to implement the South Eastern River Basin District and Shannon International River Basin District Management Plans 2009 - 2015. These plans set out the water quality objectives for each water body in the County. The surface water and ground water monitoring programs continued in 2013. The EPA will use these results to assign River Quality Status to each River Body at the end of the Plan period.

Environmental Protection staff continued to implement the Council's Farm Inspection Program in 2013. 168 farmers were inspected in 2013 resulting in 747 inspections on separate land parcels. These farmers were chosen as records indicated that part of the lands farmed by them were located within Public and Private Drinking Water Protection Areas. These inspections were whole farm inspections and included farm yard inspections, land spreading inspections and Nutrient Management Monitoring. 30 farmers were found not to have been compliant with the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2010 and these were cross reported to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Marine. An additional 56 farmers were inspected by the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and the Marine. 11 of these farmers were found not to be compliant with the regulations. A total of 82 Nutrient Management Plans concerning the spreading of Sewage Sludge in the county were submitted to the Council for approval in 2013.

A license is required under Section 4 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts 1977 to 1990 where trade or sewage effluents are discharged to surface waters or groundwaters. The Council continued to monitor discharge licenses to waters in 2013. A total of 14 samples were taken and analysed to ensure compliance with licenses. The numbers of active licenses reduced in 2013 as a number of quarries were not operational over the year.

The EPA published The National Inspection Plan 2013-2014 for Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems in June 2013. This plan separated the country into 8 risk zones based on defined criteria. The plan requires that 1000 inspections be carried out nationally before 1st July 2014 and allocates the numbers to be carried out by each Council. Laois County Council is required to carry out 26 inspections before 1st July 2014. Specific numbers were allocated to each of the 8 risk zones in the county. Laois County Council took the National Inspection Plan and prepared its own inspection plan. It chose the specific septic tanks that it wishes to inspect and these will be inspected in spring 2014.

Laois County Council investigated all complaints received by it concerning water pollution in the County. As a result of these complaints 3 Notices were issued under Section 12 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts 1977 to 1990.

### Air Quality

Portlaoise was included as a Smoky Coal restricted area in 2013. There are currently two such areas in the County, the other is in Graiguecullen. There were no active Air Emissions Licenses in the county in 2013. 35 complaints were received and investigated in 2013 concerning air quality. The nature of these complaints varied between breaches of the smoky coal regulations and burning of refuse.

### Noise Pollution

13 noise complaints were received in 2013. 7 of these complaints were domestic in nature mostly concerning barking dogs. In these cases the Council encourages neighbours to discuss the problem between them and to come to an agreed solution. The other 6 complaints concerned commercial activities in the County.

## Capital Investment Programme

### Capital Projects Office

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

### The Capital Programme

The overriding purpose of the Laois County Water Conservation Project is to conserve water by the identification and rehabilitation of those areas of the water main infrastructure yielding the greatest sustainable water savings. In June 2013, as part of Laois County Council's ongoing commitment to water conservation and a targeted reduction in leakage, a county-wide telemetry contract was completed. This contract was carried out by EMR Integrated Solutions. A total of 107 data loggers were installed on watermain meters across the county. A SCADA system was developed that allows the collection, monitoring and reporting of water usage data so that leakage can be identified immediately resulting in significant savings.

Stage 3 of the Water Conservation Project provides for the replacement of watermains that are beyond the point of economical repair, have high leakage and prone to frequent bursting. In December 2013, the first Stage 3 watermains replacement/ rehabilitation contract was awarded to David Walsh Civil Engineering Ltd. This Contract No. 1 is concerned with the replacement of 13km of watermains in Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Timahoe, Luggacurren and Ballyroan. The contract value is €1,960,444. The contract period is for 1 year and works are due to commence in early 2014.

The 'Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme (DBO Contract)' was awarded in June 2013 to Response Engineering Ltd / Ward & Burke Ltd joint venture. This scheme involves the construction of new wastewater treatment plants in 5 Towns (Abbeyleix, Durrow, Stradbally, Rathdowney, Mountrath). The contract value is €11,439,869. The contract period is 2 years and works are ongoing at all 5 towns.

The 'Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme (Network Contract)' awarded in October 2013 to Ward & Burke Ltd. This scheme involves the construction of new sewer networks in 6 towns (Abbeyleix, Durrow,

Stradbally, Rathdowney, Mountrath, Clonaslee). The contract value is €7,359,233. The contract period is for 2 years.

The 'Portlaoise/Mountmellick Water Supply Improvement Scheme Contract No. 6 RAL' awarded in October 2013 to Ward & Burke Ltd. This contract involves the construction of 3.5km of watermains, development of a well at Coolbanagher, a new booster station at Derryguile and associated telemetry works. The objective of the contract is to improve the security and quality of the water supply for the Portlaoise and Mountmellick area.

In December 2013, a contract was awarded to EPS Ltd for the repair and reinstatement of the fire damaged sludge treatment building at the Portarlington Wastewater Treatment Plant. The contract involves the repair of the existing building, installation of a new Filter belt Press together with ancillary equipment and associated site-works.

The Department gave approval to prepare designs and tender documents for the Portarlington Water Supply Improvement Scheme Advanced Contract at La Bergerie wellfield. The works include bringing the third borehole in the wellfield into production, provision of a building housing chlorine, fluoride and manganese treatment facilities. The preparation of designs and tender documents are also at an advanced stage for the Portarlington Wastewater Treatment Plant Inlet works upgrade contract,

In October 2013, submissions were made to Irish Water for a range of water and wastewater capital projects for inclusion under Irish Water's Capital Investment Programme 2014-2015.

### Rural Water Programme

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Summary of Grants paid in 2013

Taking In Charge of Group Water Schemes	€409,531
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Ballyfin G.W.S., Raheen G.W.S., Ratheniska G.W.S., Reary G.W.S., Sleaty Road G.W.S. and The Island G.W.S.

Upgrade of Existing Group Water Schemes	€376,352
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Aughmacart G.W.S., Cullohill G.W.S., Errill G.W.S., The Heath G.W.S., Ballacolla G.W.S., Ballypickas G.W.S., and Barrowhouse G.W.S.

New Group Water and Group Waste Water Schemes – €58,200	
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Funding was provided for the provision of a new Group Water and a new Group Waste Water scheme at Derrymoyle, Graiguecullen.

Subsidy Grants	€356,978
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To the various Group Water Schemes in the county.

### Small Water & Sewerage Schemes

Total	DECLG	Laois Co Co
€1,095,039	€821,279	€273,760

Funding is provided for capital projects for the provision and upgrading of small publicwater and sewerage schemes that complement existing rural

water measures. In 2013, work was carried out on the following schemes:

- Ballyroan Water Supply
- Portlaoise Water Supply
- Arles Water Supply,
- Kyle Water Supply,
- The Strand Water Supply,
- Durrow/Ballinakill Water Supply,
- Coolenaugh Water Supply,
- Abbeyleix Water Supply
- Mountmellick Water Supply at Derryguile and Eyne
- Mountrath Water Supply at Drim, Round wood and The Knocks,
- Rathdowney Water Supply
- Camross Water Supply
- Ballinakill Waste Water Treatment Plant.

A major upgrade of the SCADA System was also carried out under this category.

### Additional Works - €168,000

Bottle necks existed in the water main network in Mountrath town which resulted in a restriction of the supply from the Clonin Hill reservoir. Laois County Council funded mains replacement on the New Line Road and the Shannon Road and also a river crossing on the White Horse River thus removing the restriction and ensuring an adequate supply for the town. This will also allow the supply of water from The Knocks to Portlaoise if required.

### Individual Water Supply Grant Scheme €53,969

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

### Rural Water Monitoring Committee

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

### Provision and Maintenance of Cemeteries

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

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

An important part of the Water Services section is the maintaining of records. The transfer of manual data from registers to electronic format continued in 2013.

### Public Conveniences

A total of €71,000 was spent on the maintenance and upkeep of the public toilets in Portlaoise, Mountrath and Stradbally.

### Dangerous Structures and Places

Under the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1964, Local Authorities are empowered to deal with structures or places which pose a danger to the public or which pose or are likely to pose danger to any person or property.

A Notice may be served on the owner of such place/structure requiring works to be carried out. If necessary, the Council can also carry out the works and recoup the costs.

### National Service Indicators

#### E. Water - January to December 2013

E.1	Unaccounted for Water (UFW) as a % of total water supplied under the water supply schemes that the Local Authority is responsible for.)	48%
E.2	Percentage of drinking water analysis results in compliance with statutory requirements with regard to:	
	Public Schemes:	100%
	Private Schemes: (where appropriate)	98%

**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, Water, Fire charges, Development Contributions), Payroll and Superannuation, 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. The rateable Valuation multiplier for Portlaoise and Mountmellick was;

Portlaoise:	€66.63
Mountmellick:	€67.43

### Water and Waste Water Charges

In 2013, the total number of commercial users was 2,729, of which 2,597 were metered. The charge for metered water in 2013 was €0.96 per 1,000 litres and €1.45 per 1,000 litres for waste water. A fixed charge applied to the remaining customers. In addition, there was a standing meter rental charge of €60 per annum.

### Prompt Payment of Accounts

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

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

### Local Government Payroll and Superannuation Shared Services Centre

The Local Authority Shared Services Payroll & Superannuation Evaluation Committee, after a competitive bidding process, recommended that Laois County Council provide Shared Payroll and Superannuation services on behalf of all local authorities.

The new local authority shared service centre based on the top floor in block 1 of County Hall began operation in October 2013 with a view to going live with a

pilot in Offaly County Council in January 2014. Pending a successful pilot the rollout to all local authorities will commence on a wave basis from April 2014 as part of a 3 year implementation plan.

There are currently 12 staff all recruited from within Laois County Council based on the third floor. They are tasked with the delivery of detailed as-is and to-be process mapping and preparing the payrolls in both counties for a successful pilot in January. This staff compliment will increase over the course of the project as each wave goes live.

It is anticipated that the shared service centre will operate with a maximum staff complement of 72, once fully operational, and that the shared service will deliver annual savings of €4.3m and free up almost 70 staff in the sector.

This is a key milestone in the local authority shared services programme. Shared services are an important element of the Government's public service reform agenda and can provide much needed cost savings and efficiencies while also fully standardising and improving services. The sharing of back-office functions such as payroll and superannuation will in turn allow local authorities to concentrate on providing services to citizens.

### Motor Taxation

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

The total transactions carried out by Laois Motor Taxation Office in 2013 was 73,906.

### CO2 Rates

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

### Revised Vehicle Registration Procedures

The Revenue Commissioners have appointed the National Car Testing Services (NCTS) to carry out vehi-

cle registration functions on their behalf. They can be contacted at 1890 927 787 or on line at www.nct.ie/vrt.

### Vehicle Licences

The total receipts for 2013 was €11,369,224 compared to €10,768,187 in 2012. The number of vehicle licences (discs) issued in 2013 was 50,582 compared to 51,306 in 2012. The Non-Use of Motor Vehicles Bill 2013 came into effect in July 2013. The primary purpose of the Bill was to provide for a prospective system of declaring vehicles off the road for motor tax purposes thus closing a loophole whereby owners can declare retrospectively that a vehicle has not been is use on the public road which was unverifiable.

On 1st October 2013 the existing arrangements where a person made an off the road declaration in the Garda Station ceased. In the future if a vehicle is not going to be used in a public place a 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. This led to a huge surge in the number of SORD (Statutory Off Road Declaration) applications received by Laois Motor Tax. In total 4,088 SORD applications were processed in the last six months of 2013.

### Revised Driving Licence Procedures

2013 saw the end of the paper licence and introduction of the plastic card licence. Up to the 25th October 2013, Laois County Council processed 7,906 no Driver Licences. From the 29th October 2013, all Driver Licence applications are processed by a private service provider – The National Driver Licence Service (NDLS). Their Laois office is located at Unit 26A, Laois Shopping Centre, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.

### Revised Vehicle Testing Procedures

Certificates of Roadworthiness for commercial/goods vehicles were issued in respect of 5,111 vehicles during the year compared to 5,942 for 2012. In September 2013, the function of issuing Certificates of Roadworthiness was taken over 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.

### NCT (National Car Test)

Testing of private vehicles is ongoing since January, 2000. The Laois Centre is at Lismard Business Centre, Timahoe Road, Portlaoise. Initial test is after 4 years and then every 2 years thereafter. Vintage cars are the only vehicle exempt from this test.

### Service Indicators at 31st December 2013

% of Motor Tax transactions which:

#### Are dealt with over the counter:

90.98% (55,599) of Laois MTO Transactions

#### Are dealt with by post:

9.02% (5,512) of Laois MTO Transactions

#### Are dealt with on-line:

39.61%(33,292) of vehicle owners eligible to pay Tax online. This is 35% of total tax applications.

Average number of Public Opening hours per week  
28.77 hours

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

- |    |                       |                |
|----|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) | on the same day       | 95.88% (5,285) |
| b) | on the 2nd or 3rd day | 1.67% (92)     |
| c) | on the 4th or 5th day | 1.07% (59)     |
| d) | over 5 days           | 1.38% (76)     |

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

- |    |                       |                |
|----|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) | on the same day       | 71.14% (5,624) |
| b) | on the 2nd or 3rd day | 24.21% (1,914) |
| c) | on the 4th or 5th day | 2.49% (197)    |
| d) | over 5 days           | 2.16% (171)    |

**Revenue Collection**

	31.12.2012	31.12.2013
Housing Loans		
a) Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	76%	67%
b) Percentage of arrears:		
(i) Less than 1 mth	1.7%	4.3%
(ii) 1-2 Mths	2%	1.8%
(iii) 2 – 3 months old	3.1%	2.1%
(iv) more than 3 months old	93.2%	91.8%
Rents		
a) Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amounts due	94%	94%
b) Percentage of arrears		
(i) Less than four weeks	10.7%	11.6%
(ii) 4-6 weeks	9.9%	10.6%
(iii) 6-12 weeks	12.4%	16.3%
(iv) greater than 12 weeks	67%	61.5%
Commercial Rates		
Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	74%	70%
Non-Domestic Water Charges		
Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	57%	60%

**Annual Financial Statement**

Revenue Account	Gross Expenditure 2013 €	Income 2013 €	Net Expenditure 2013 €
<b>Programme Group</b>			
Housing & Building	9,905,651	10,966,234	(1,060,583)
Road Transportation & Safety	13,498,097	9,294,837	4,203,261
Water & Sewerage	10,000,606	3,030,959	6,969,647
Development Incentives & Controls	3,513,129	595,868	2,917,261
Environmental Protection	6,609,118	1,924,526	4,684,593
Recreation & Amenity	3,488,452	675,580	2,812,872
Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare	3,041,185	2,527,946	513,239
Miscellaneous	6,020,798	2,484,120	3,536,678
<b>Total Expenditure/Income</b>	<b>56,077,037</b>	<b>31,500,069</b>	
Net cost of programmes to be funded from Rates & Local Government Fund			24,576,968
Rates			12,273,101
Pension Levy			987,188
Local Government Fund - General Purpose Grant			13,070,064
Surplus for Year before Transfers			1,753,385
Transfers from/(to) Reserves			(1,751,878)
Overall Surplus for Year			1,507
General Reserve @ 1st January 2013			(494,534)
General Reserve @ 31st December 2013			(493,027)

**Capital Account**

Balance @ 01.01.2013	(5,993,380)
Grants	15,814,137
Other Income	4,676,647
Transfer from/to Revenue	1,751,878
Expenditure	(20,638,059)
Balance @ 31.12.2013	(4,388,777)

## PORTLAOISE TOWN COUNCIL

**Manager:** Michael Rainey

**Town Clerk:** Pamela Tynan

**Town Engineer:** Farhan Nasiem

### Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Portlaoise Town Council, Councillor William Aird was elected as Mayor. Councillor Jerry Lodge was elected as Vice-Mayor.

### Members on Boards/Committees

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

Councillors Rotimi Adebari and Alan Hand

#### Transport & Water Services Committee

Councillors Jerry Lodge, Kathleen O'Brien and Matthew Keegan

#### Housing & Social Policy Committee

Councillors Willie Aird and Catherine Fitzgerald

### Monthly Meetings

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

### Main Services Provided

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

### Budget 2013 - €90,486

In 2013, Portlaoise Town Council provided support to the following:

- St Patrick's Day Parade Committee
- Portlaoise Christmas Lighting Association
- Portlaoise Tidy Towns
- Various Residents Associations and Community Groups

### Conferences

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

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

## MOUNTMELICK TOWN COUNCIL

**Manager:** Ian McCormack

**Town Clerk:** Pamela Tynan

**Town Engineer:** Dermot Leonard

### Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Mountmellick Town Council, Councillor Patrick J Bracken was elected as Cathaoirleach. Councillor Lisa Delaney was elected Leas Cathaoirleach.

**Budget 2013:** €54,181

### Representation on Other Bodies

#### Place Names Committee

Councillor Bobby Delaney

#### Mountmellick Bye-Laws Committee

Councillors David Goodwin, Seamus McDonald, Marc Connolly, Lisa Delaney and Paddy Bracken.

#### Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances

Councillor Marc Connolly

#### Strategic Policy Committees

Councillors Stephen Lynch and Bobby Delaney

#### Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland

Councillors Paddy Bracken and Stephen Lynch.

### Monthly Meetings

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

### Conferences

The Town Council supported and was represented at the following conference

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

### Social Club

2013 was another very successful year for the Social Club which currently has a membership of 220. Numerous events were held in 2013.

### Monthly Draw

On the first Friday of every month a Draw takes place for Social Club members. The prizes are as follows: 1st - €50, 2nd - €30, 3rd - €20.

### Evening Dinner October 2013

An Evening Dinner was organised for Wednesday 23rd October at 4.30pm for all members. Nearly 70 members came down to the canteen for some great food and chat with their friends and colleagues

### Annual Mass

The Annual Mass for deceased members and staff of Laois County Council was organised by the Social Club in the Council Chamber on Tuesday 19th November. Invitations were issued to all retired and current staff members of Laois County Council. The Mass was very well attended and refreshments were provided in the canteen afterwards.

### Members Kiddies Christmas Party

The Social Club Members Kiddies Party was held this year in the Heritage Hotel Sunday morning 1st December. It was a great success. The kiddies were entertained by Jecca the Clown while the parents had Tea and Sandwiches. Thanks to all who helped make it a great morning.

### Annual Christmas Party

The party was Friday the 13th December this year in the Heritage Hotel. 80 staff attended on the night and a great night was had.

### Other Events

Some of the other events held were

- Samaritans Easter Egg draw
- Grand National Draw
- Night at the dogs in Newbridge
- Packages to Dublin Zoo
- Crunchie Friday

### Golf Society

Tom O'Carroll captained the Golf Society in 2013. His Captain's Prize was held in Rathdowney. There was a good turn out on the day and his prize was won by Mary Malone.

The Kennedy Cup was played this year in conjunction with the Pang Trophy in Gowran Park Golf Club. The Kennedy Cup was won by Martin Parkinson and the Pang Trophy was won by Roy Glynn, Fint Scully and Philip McVeigh.

The golfer of the year competition was won by Larry Dunne.

Eddie Kelly is the incoming Captain for 2014.

We are always looking for new members, enquires to Cathal Farrelll, Eddie Kelly or Larry Gittens.

## APPENDIX I

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

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

#### **COMMITTEES**

<b>Name of Committee</b>	<b>Members Elected</b>	<b>Number of Meetings</b>
Rural Water Monitoring Committee	Councillor Ben Brennan Councillor John Bonham Councillor Tom Mulhall	4
Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Alan Hand (Replaced by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley) Councillor Lisa Delaney Councillor William Aird Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor John King	4
Kyletelisha Landfill Monitoring Committee	Councillor Patrick Bracken Councillor James Daly Councillor Martin Phelan	1
Laois School of Music Steering Committee	Councillor Mary Sweeney	2
Audit Committee	Councillor John Moran Councillor Jerry Lodge	4
Joint Policing Committee	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor Brendan Phelan Councillor Patrick Bracken Councillor Ray Cribbin Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor Michael Lalor Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor David Goodwin Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor John King Councillor James Daly Councillor Ben Brennan	3
Placenames Committee	Councillor Ben Brennan Councillor Ray Cribbin Councillor John Bonham Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor David Goodwin	0

**OUTSIDE BODIES**

<b>Name of Committee</b>	<b>Members Elected</b>
Barrow Drainage Board	Councillor Lisa Delaney, Councillor David Goodwin
River Goul Drainage Committee	Councillor Brendan Phelan, Councillor Martin Phelan Councillor John King
Dungar Joint Burial Board	Councillor Brendan Phelan, Councillor Seamus McDonald, Councillor Michael Lalor,
Portarlington Joint Burial Board	Councillor Ray Cribbin, Councillor Patrick Bracken Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor James Deegan
Association of County & City Councils	Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor David Goodwin Councillor Ben Brennan
Midland Regional Authority	Councillor Patrick Bracken, Councillor Brendan Phelan Councillor James Deegan, Councillor Martin Phelan Councillor James Daly, Councillor John Bonham
E.U. Operational Committee	Councillor John Bonham
B.M.W. Regional Assembly	Councillor James Deegan, Councillor James Daly
Laois Arts Theatre Company Ltd	Councillor Rotimi Adebari Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor Mary Sweeney
Abbeyleix Heritage Trust	Councillor John Bonham
Local Authority Members Association	Councillor Michael Lalor
Laois County Enterprise Board	Councillor Lisa Delaney, Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor James Daly, Councillor William Aird
Laois Partnership Company Ltd	Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor Michael Lalor, Councillor Lisa Delaney, Councillor John King
Laois Transport for Rural Integration Programme	Councillor Michael Lalor
Laois Tourism Company Ltd.	Councillor John Bonham, Councillor Martin Phelan
South East River Basin District Advisory Council	Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor John King
Shannon River Basin District Advisory Council	Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor Martin Phelan
Portarlington Leisure Centre	Councillor Ray Cribbin, Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor Tom Mulhall
Homeless Forum	Councillor Mary Sweeney, Councillor Kathleen O'Brien
Portlaoise Leisure Centre	Councillor Alan Hand(replace by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley Dec '13), Councillor William Aird,Councillor Kathleen O'Brien

## APPENDIX I

Portlaoise Enterprise Centre	Councillor Jerry Lodge, Councillor William Aird, Councillor Mary Sweeney
Portarlington Enterprise Centre	Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor James Deegan
Midlands Energy Agency	Councillor John Bonham
Laois County Development Board	Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor John King, Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor Kathleen O'Brien, Councillor John Joe Fennelly
Dublin Mid-Leinster Regional Health Forum	Councillor Ben Brennan, Councillor Kathleen O'Brien Councillor William Aird
Laois Advocacy Against Domestic Abuse Limited	Councillor Mary Sweeney, Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald
Midland Regional Drugs Task Force	Councillor William Aird
Laois Third Level Initiative	Councillor Paul Mitchell & Councillor Jerry Lodge
Laois VEC	Councillor Alan Hand (replaced by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley Dec '13), Councillor Rotimi Adebari, Councillor Lisa Delaney, Councillor Mary Sweeney, Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor Ben Brennan, Councillor William Aird, Councillor John King, Councillor Kathleen O'Brien
Heritage Forum	Councillor Martin Phelan
Management Company for Treo Nua at Knockmay	Councillor Kathleen O'Brien

## APPENDIX II

### PAYMENTS TO MEMBERS 2012

Monthly Allowance	€110,139.74	
Conference Allowance	€92,294.06	
Telephone allowance	€522.90	
Representational Allowance	€463,083.81	(inc. Chairperson's & Vice Chairperson's Allowance & CDB Chair Allowance)
SPC Allowance	€24,000.00	

## HOW TO CONTACT US

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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) 8674322
Higher Education Grants, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664137
Housing, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664110
Human Resources, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664219
Landfill Site, Kyletalesha, Portlaoise	Tel: (057) 8620653
Library Headquarters, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664041
Motor Tax Office, Block 2, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674301
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) 8674363
Water Charges, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664119
Water Services, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664120