
COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE
LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

Áras an Chontae,
Portlaoise,
Co. Laois.
10th December 2012

Don Cathaoirleach agus gach Ball den Chomhairle

**Re: Draft Budget of Income and Expenditure for the year ending 31st
December 2013.**

Introduction

I enclose for your consideration and adoption the draft Budget for the year ending 31st December 2013.

The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government by Circular Fin 12/2012, dated 09/11/2012 has determined the period 24th November 2012 to 13th January 2013 as the prescribed period for the 2013 budget meeting.

At the September meeting of the Council it was agreed to hold the statutory budget meeting on Monday 17th December 2012. The process of considering, adopting the budget and determining the rate on valuation must be completed within a period of 21 days beginning on this date, i.e. by the 6th January 2013. In accordance with the Local Government Act 2001, the Corporate Policy Group was consulted on the 5th December 2012 and advised of the assumptions made in relation to the preparation of the budget.

The preparation of the draft budget has been very challenging as the task of providing the same level of services with reduced resources is very difficult. The reduction in the Local Government Fund of €111,724 (0.91% reduction on the 2012 amount of €13,189,788) has made this task easier. However, there are further reduced income resources available to us across a range of headings, particularly in the Roads Transportation and Safety, Environmental Services and Central Management Divisions. Reduced resources have necessitated many changes in the delivery of services and regrettably this Council had no option but to close facilities in 2012 such as libraries, area offices, the Machinery Yard and a number of depots. It will be necessary to continue to examine the sustainability of services in light of ever decreasing funding.

In preparing the budget I have implemented a 10% to 15% reduction in many service divisions. Reductions in payroll costs have been achieved through the management of vacancies, the non replacement of staff, reductions in premium pay and travel expenses and the retirement of many employees. Every effort has been made to minimise the burden on local business and consumers by ensuring that there are no increases in commercial rates or water charges.

An examination of all expenditure to substantiate the necessity for the current scope/scale of all work programmes across all divisions has been carried out.

County Development Board

The County Development Board (CDB) continued its work of promoting the economic, social and cultural development of the County in 2012. The Economic Development Task Group and the Children and Young Persons Task Group continued their work on the Strategy Review 2009 – 2012.

The Board monitored and was consulted on the following:

- Laois Partnership Annual Local and Community Development Plan 2012
- Knockmay Regeneration Programme
- The work of the Midlands Regional Drugs Task Force and Laois Local Drugs Network
- Strategic Plan for the County Childcare Committee
- Work of the National Environment Pillar
- Laois Music Education Partnership and the rollout of programmes under Music Generation Laois
- The work of Laois County and Town Joint Policing Committees

Other areas of work that the Board was involved included:

- Laois Traveller Interagency Strategy 2010 – 2013, including the celebration of Traveller Pride Week 2012,
- Facilitation of Laois Comhairle na nÓg and the rollout of funding from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs,
- Facilitation of school visits to the Office of Laois County Council through the Educational Partnership Programme,
- Midlands Traveller conflict resolution and mediation,
- The All-Island National Pride of Place Competition,
- Facilitation and administration of the work of the Laois Community Forum to represent the needs of the community and voluntary sector through:
 - The rollout of the Laois CONNECTS Mental Health Awareness Week 2012
 - Information events on networking of community groups and information sharing, fundraising, etc.
 - Subsidised training for community groups
 - Community and Voluntary Awards – 74 nominees in 2012
 - Supporting disability awareness programmes in secondary schools,
 - Networking with ethnic minority groups,
 - Assisting youth group development projects including POBAL funded Portlaoise Youth Café
 - Representation on agencies/organisations such as the Mental Health Collaborative Group, Laois Tourism, County and Town Joint Policing Committees and Strategic Policy Committees.
 - Assisting agencies with the “*Be Winter Ready*” campaign and dissemination of information to rurally isolated / older people in our community.

Treo Nua Portlaoise Resource Centre

Treo Nua Portlaoise Resource Centre, opened in October 2011, has established itself as an important addition to the social, economic and community infrastructure of Portlaoise. This facility is now providing essential services to the community of Portlaoise. The large crèche, after-school rooms, meeting rooms, community room and training rooms are all very busy providing a range of community services, resident group meetings, educational courses, physical activity classes and family support services. The local community have a huge pride in this facility and this is evident from their involvement on the Board of Management and in their efforts to maintain and promote the facility.

Economic Development

The Council continues to adopt a positive approach to maintaining and creating employment throughout the County. Advice and assistance is given to those interested in establishing or improving their own businesses.

The Council will continue to promote industrial development through the provision of industrial sites, rental of office accommodation and incubation units at its Enterprise Centres and through co-operation with other organisations / agencies to bring about the conditions favouring economic development.

Work on the upgrade of Clonminam Business Park was completed this year and work will commence in 2013 on the conservation of Donaghmore Workhouse which has the potential to generate jobs.

The Action Plan for Effective Local Government "Putting People First" recognised the strong rationale for increased local government involvement in economic development and the need to capitalise on its full potential to promote economic development, enterprise and job creation locally. This will be achieved during 2013 through the integration of local micro-enterprise support services currently undertaken by County Enterprise Boards with local authorities and the establishment of Local Enterprise Offices.

Forward Planning

The Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017 came into effect in November 2011. New local area plans for Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Portarlinton and Graiguecullen were adopted in October 2012 and came into effect in November 2012. The latter two plans were in the form of joint local area plans with Offaly and Carlow local authorities, following close consultation between officials and Elected Members of the respective authorities.

The Mountmellick Local Area Plan is currently the subject of a draft direction from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

For 2013, two key strategies will be prepared. One is a Walking Strategy for the County while the other will focus on Tree Preservation Orders. Provision for the preparation of these two strategies has been made in the 2013 Budget.

Further key tasks for 2013 include the preparation of the two year review of the County Development Plan 2011-2017, the preparation of a new Development Contribution Scheme, Conservation and the application of the Derelict Sites Act.

Planning Enforcement

The staffing of the Planning Enforcement Section has been strengthened over the last few years and further success has been achieved in dealing with unauthorised developments. Enforcement proceedings are increasingly being used to ensure estates are completed to the required standard. Eighteen prosecutions were heard in court during 2012. There are cost implications for the Council arising from this activity and provision has been included in the 2013 budget for this purpose.

Quarries and Substitute Consent

The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 introduced a new requirement on Planning Authorities to carry out a survey of all the quarries in the county. This survey was completed in 2012 and has resulted in enforcement action in a number of cases consequent to Section 261A of the Planning and Development Act 2000-2011.

During 2013 the Planning Authority will examine quarries which do not have the benefit of planning permission or pre October 1964 land use rights with a view to taking enforcement action where necessary. The Planning Authority will also be required to furnish reports in 2013 to An Bord Pleanála in relation to quarries requested to prepare remedial environmental impact statements and remedial natura impact statements.

Taking in Charge of Housing Estates

Good progress has been made in this area with forty one estates taken in charge over the last five years. Work will continue in this area in 2013.

Unfinished Estates

A dedicated team is in place to deal with unfinished estates in line with national policy. We have been actively pursuing developers who have not satisfactorily completed developments and had many successful court convictions in 2012. We have also secured bonds on estates and had works carried out to complete them. Some of these are listed below:

Ballacollig and Silverwood in Mountmellick, Barrowvale in Graiguecullen, Corrig Glen, Portarlinton, Rinnuccini and Abbeycourt in Portlaoise and Glenall in Borris in Ossory.

The policy of pursuing the developer and Bond holder will continue in 2013.

Carlow Northern Relief Road

Works will commence on the extension of the Carlow Northern Relief Road from the Killeshin Road roundabout to the Numbers Road, with the overall length being circa 800 metres.

Portlaoise Orbital Routes

A submission has been made to the Department of Transport for the completion of the Southern Circular Route from the Timahoe Road to the Abbeyleix Road under a Specific Road Improvement Grant. As the development of the schools on the site at Summerhill has commenced we have raised the issue of the upgrade of junctions on the N80 with the NRA and it is of highest priority to advance these upgrades in 2013.

N80 – Kyletalesha Junction Upgrade

We will be commencing the works to improve the Junction between the N80 and Kyletalesha Road in 2013. The necessary land acquisitions have been agreed and funds have been made available from the NRA.

Borris Road, Portlaoise

It is intended to continue the upgrade of the Borris Rd, extending on from where the works were completed this year adjacent to Forest Park.

Public Lighting

There are 7,800 public lights in the County which represents a 30% increase over the past three years. The running and maintenance costs represent a significant cost burden for the Council. Initiatives to reduce costs include a new type of maintenance contract that incorporates energy savings as well as the provision of other energy saving methods.

Clonaslee Integrated Constructed Wetlands (ICW) Treatment Facility

Work on the Integrated Constructed Wetland (ICW) Treatment facility for Clonaslee was substantially completed in April 2012. The project has been very successful and the "ECOYE" TV programme has filmed a report on the plant for airing early in 2013.

Laois Towns and Villages Sewerage Schemes

The Wastewater Treatment Plant (D.B.O.) contract includes new treatment plants for the towns of Abbeyleix, Durrow, Mountrath, Rathdowney and Stradbally. Tenders were received during the year and a tender report will be issuing to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government before the end of the year recommending a successful tenderer with an appointment being made in the first half of 2013 subject to DECLG approval.

Tender documents will issue on the Networks Contract for six towns within the next 2 weeks with the aim to appoint a contractor before the 3rd quarter in 2013 and with on site start shortly after then.

Portarlington Water Supply Scheme

This scheme was listed under 'Schemes at Planning Stage' in the 2010-2012 Water Services Investment Programme, published in April 2010. A submission is currently being prepared to the Department to advance additional supply works at the La Bergerie Well field.

Portlaoise/Mountmellick Water Supply Scheme

Contract documents are currently being finalised for this scheme. Part VIII's have been passed and land has been acquired for a new reservoir at Kilminchy, Portlaoise. Departmental approval has been received for the following contracts:

- 1) New well (in Coolbanagher) to supply Portlaoise.
- 2) Additional treatment capacity at Kilminchy Water Treatment Plant.
- 3) Derryguile Booster Station.

Water Conservation - Mains Rehabilitation Contract

Contract Documents are being finalised at present for issue for tender following a detailed Site Investigation contract completed in October 2012. This will allow the appointment of a contractor to this project in the 3rd quarter of 2013.

Portarlington/Emo/Killenard/Ballybrittas Sewerage Scheme

The Preliminary Report was submitted to the Department in May 2010. An Bord Pleanala granted conditional approval to advance this scheme in 2012 (Environmental Impact).

A new package treatment plant is in operation at the Portarlington Wastewater Treatment Plant site which will further increase the wastewater treatment capacity.

Mountmellick Sewerage Extension

The Preliminary Report was submitted to the Department in May 2010 and an application was, also, made to An Bord Pleanala in relation to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The decision of the Board is awaited.

A new package treatment plant is in operation at the Mountmellick Wastewater Treatment Plant site which will further increase the wastewater treatment capacity.

Establishment of Irish Water

A government decision has been taken to set up a Water Utility, Irish Water. Over the course of 2013 we will advise you of the impact of this decision on the Council and the implications for water and sewerage provision in the County.

Waste Management

The Council is continuing to work with the midland local authorities to ensure that the objectives of the Waste Management Plan for the region are fully implemented.

Fire Service

A detailed design and cost plan for the proposed new fire station in Rathdowney was submitted to the Department of the Environment in June 2009 with a request for approval to go to tender. There has been no change in this position.

The Department has advised that the "Initial Appraisal" report for the Stradbally project will be considered under future Capital Programmes.

Substantial resources continue to be made available in the Budget for ongoing training of Fire Service personnel.

Consultation will commence in 2013 on the Fire Services Change Programme "Keeping Communities Safe".

Leisure Centres

All works which received Local Authority Sports Capital Grants were completed in early 2012. These included:

- Outdoor gyms in Mountrath and Mountmellick,
- Two all-weather playing pitches at Portarlinton Leisure Centre and
- Spinning room in Portlaoise Leisure Centre.

The leisure centres at Portlaoise and Portarlinton benefitted from grants for disability works and greater energy efficiency measures.

Library Services

The public libraries continue to provide an efficient and vital frontline service to all sections of the community in the county. With newly constructed and refurbished library buildings, the libraries have performed excellently during the year. The Art Galleries in Abbeyleix and Mountmellick Libraries continue to be very popular venues for Art Exhibitions with a total of 16 exhibitions in 2012.

Highlights include:

- Holding of a variety of free events such as quizzes, competitions, adult and children book clubs, culture night events and a host of other daily activities,
- Free heritage week events,
- Summer reading challenges with over 500 children participating,
- The Computer Elearning initiative, in partnership with FAS, in the 4 fulltime branch libraries with over 500 classes given during 2012, with candidates receiving a FETAC qualification.

Playgrounds

There are 16 play facilities in the County managed by this Council. They include three multi use games areas in The Swan, Mountmellick and Rathdowney. A playground was provided in Rathdowney in 2012, jointly funded by the Council, Laois Partnership Ltd and Rathdowney Playground Group. An outdoor gym and toddler play area was opened in Mountmellick on the old library site in June 2012.

Play Facilities Planned

Ballylinan Development Association, Timahoe Playground Group and Coolrain Tidy Towns Committee were assisted by the Council to secure funding for playgrounds from Laois Partnership Company in 2012.

Sport and Recreation Development

A number of projects will continue in 2013 subject to funding:

- Year round activity programmes and camps for children,
- Club Development Training
- Preparation of Community groups and clubs for Sports Capital Grant Applications – 42 clubs made applications to Dept of Transport, Tourism and Sport in May 2012 with Laois receiving in excess of €500,000,
- National Play Day and National Recreation Week

The Council and the FAI in partnership have funded the employment of a Football in the Community Officer since April 2008. Funding has, also, been provided to recruit two part time GAA Officers in conjunction with the GAA in 2012 and this will be continued next year.

Tourism

In 2012 the Council continued to work with the Board of Laois Tourism and the tourism providers to promote Laois as a National Events and Festivals Destination. The Rose of Tralee Regional Final was hosted and the Council secured the festival for another three years. The Council supported the Laois International Golf Challenge, now in its eight year, and a range of other festivals and events throughout the year.

The Laois Garden Trail was launched and a new website to further develop and promote the gardens in Co. Laois was developed.

The Council has leased the Tourism Office at Lyster Square, Portlaoise from Failte Ireland and the office is open 5 days a week, and shares its services with Laois Chamber of Commerce and Portlaoise Downtown Group. The Council's Tourism Officer works closely with Laois Tourism providers, businesses, and vintners, local and National agencies in the promotion of tourism on a domestic and international level.

The Council will continue to promote Laois, and play its part in "The Gathering" National Initiative. The Council welcomes the National Ploughing Championships to Ratheniska County Laois in September 2013.

Heritage

Four projects were funded in 2012 by the Heritage Council under the Laois Heritage Plan - Heritage Awareness/ Graveyard Survey and Memorial Recording/ Laois Gardens Website – www.laoisgardens.ie/Book on Geology of Laois and Offaly by Dr John Feehan – this will be launched in early 2013.

A further national project involving the development of a heritage map viewer to view heritage data, via a website, was also contributed to by the Council.

An application for funding for 2013 projects has been prepared for submission to the Heritage Council. Discussions are, also, underway with Laois Partnership for a number of joint projects on Graveyards and Heritage Awareness.

In addition a variety of Heritage awareness events took place through the year. These included over 50 events during National Heritage Week in August 2012, the annual Planning and Heritage Seminar in November 2012 and the launch of the Abbeylisk Sustainable Communities Plan.

Work on Donaghmore Workhouse conservation (with funding from Laois Partnership and in partnership with the Donaghmore Museum Committee) commenced with the appointment of a Design Team. Tender documents are being prepared. It is intended that contractors will be appointed in early 2013.

Work on the review of the present Heritage Plan will continue in 2013. This new plan will be the framework for Heritage Protection, awareness and understanding for the period to 2018.

Arts

The following were highlights during 2012:

- Visit of President Michael D. Higgins to the Dunamaise Arts Centre, Portlaoise and the Arthouse Studios and Gallery Stradbally in June,
- The School of Music sustaining a student body of 330 pupils and eighteen part time tutors,
- The delivery of a varied programme of events and programmes,
- The Laois Youth Theatre programme of workshops, exchanges with other groups and performances at community events,
- Increased programme of events for National Culture Night,
- Participation and running of events as part of National Poetry Day, National Drawing Day and Love Live Music and
- The Leaves Literature Festival.

The new Arts Plan 2013-2015 was compiled and will be published in the New Year.

Music Generation Laois 2012 Round-up

Laois Music Education Partnership was awarded funding from Music Generation, Ireland's National Music Education Programme in December 2011. The project commenced in April 2012, following the appointment of a Co-ordinator. Music Generation Laois is supported by the Council, Laois VEC and Laois Partnership.

Activity commenced in July of this year with a series of Summer Camps in Portlaoise. In September, RTE's Nationwide attended the Music Generation Laois and Laois School of Music Open Evening in Portlaoise College. 21 schools and centres are now participating in Music Generation Laois programmes. The range of musical activity includes Choirs, Glee Clubs, Harps-in-Schools, Brass, Strings,

Uilleann Pipes, Stãmpede Drumming, and The Music Box – a music programme for children with special needs. Music Generation Laois took part in Love: Live Music 2012 in June of this year and also Culture Night on 21.

Further expansion is planned in 2013, including a School of Rock in association with Youth Work Ireland Laois in their new Youth Caf  on JFL Avenue, Portlaoise.

Midlands Energy Agency

The Midlands Energy Agency (MEA) operates on behalf of the four midlands local authorities and the Midlands Regional Authority. Good progress continued to be made in 2012 to reduce local authority operating costs. Laois participated in the National Procurement Service (NPS) public sector electricity tender which will result in very competitive electricity rates for 2013.

External Audit Committee

The role of the external audit committee, comprising of two elected members and three external members, is advisory in relation to financial matters and fosters the development of best practice in the internal audit function. The Committee met four times during the year and agreed a Work Programme and examined reports completed by the Internal Auditor and the Local Government Auditor.

Public Service (Croke Park) Agreement 2010 – 2014

The Implementation Body for the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 published its 2nd Annual Progress Report in June 2012. The review period was from April 2011 to March 2012. Almost  900 million of pay and non-pay savings have been achieved in the second year of the agreement. The pay and non-pay savings achieved for the first two years of the Agreement equate to  1.5 billion across the public sector. The Local Government Sector has 8,500 less staff since 2008 and 1,840 less staff in this review period.

With regard to Laois County Council, the 1st Annual Progress Report showed savings of  3 million for the period April 2010 to March 2011 and a further  1.8 million in savings for the period April 2011 – March 2012. The  1.8 million included non-pay savings of  709,000, costs avoided of  936,600 and overtime and pay savings of  151,000.

A major contributory factor in achieving these savings has been the significant reduction in staff numbers and the re-structuring and cost saving measures which have been implemented across the organisation. The following are examples of where savings have been achieved to date:

1. Restructuring of the Machinery Yard and the re-deployment of staff,
2. Area Roads Crews re-structured,
3. Reduction of Directorates to three, inclusive of the Finance Directorate,
4. Shared Services provisions, e.g. assignments of Executive Planners to Longford and Carlow County Councils and the Internal Auditor to Westmeath County Council on a short term basis,
5. Midlands Energy Agency – Laois County Council is lead authority for the region,
6. Closure of Area Offices and the re-deployment of staff,

7. Shared Services at Portlaoise Resource Centre, Knockmay with multi agency service delivery,
8. Procurement initiatives by way of tendering for energy and public lighting

The use of Shared services will play an increasing role in the delivery of services by local authorities. This Council successfully completed the business case for Shared Payroll on behalf of the Sector.

The Council is committed to meeting the terms of the Public Service Agreement and acknowledges that considerable progress has been made to date with the co-operation of Staff, Unions and Elected Members.

Procurement

The Council will continue to examine and identify appropriate areas through the in house Procurement Group to achieve increased efficiencies and value for money. The Council will also have regard to the report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group in this area and will continue to adhere to the current National Procurement Framework Agreements.

ICT

Laois County Council is examining all appropriate initiatives in this area for implementation as appropriate.

Health and Safety

We continually strive to improve our Safety Management System (SMS) and we are required in 2013 to enhance this system further. This enhancement will serve to commence achieving the aims and objectives of the National 5 year plan (CCMA under the aegis of Local Government Management Agency). Up-skilling our employees and meeting our statutory obligations will require additional financial resources. Achieving the above will have a positive effect on the safety, health and wellbeing of our employees and others affected by our activities, helping to ensure that we comply with the provisions of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 and associated regulations.

Risk Management

A Risk Management Register for all of the activities of the Council has been compiled and the risks identified are being evaluated on an ongoing basis.

Water Pricing

The same charges will apply in 2013 as 2012:-

Water Supply:	€0.96 per 1000 litres
Waste Water:	€1.45 per 1000 litres

Commercial Rates

The proposed general annual rate on valuation for 2013 is €64.63, the same rate as applied in the last five years. It is the minimum required to balance the budget.

Conclusion

In preparing the budget for 2013 every effort has been made to ensure that essential services provided by the Council are continued at a high standard and that the statutory duties of the Council are, also, complied with. I have, also, ensured that there are no increases for ratepayers or consumers of water. I am satisfied that the budget now before you achieves a fair balance in this regard and that the Council will be in a position to demonstrate progress in service delivery over the course of the coming year.

In addition to the revenue expenditure contained in this draft budget the Council has a capital programme that will impact positively on the economic, social and physical fabric of the County. A report (to issue under separate cover) will provide an overview of this indicative programme. It is essential that the Council continues to take a proactive and innovative approach to capital projects in order to boost the local economy and continue the positive development of the County.

The draft budget provides for revenue spending of €59,908,000. This is the amount required to meet the expenses and to provide for the liabilities and requirements of Laois County Council during the year ending on the 31st December 2013.

The detail of the budget provisions across each of the divisions is set out in the following pages.


The adoption of the budget is a reserved function of the Council. It is a key decision as it effectively sets the level of spending for the year ahead.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Cathaoirleach, Corporate Policy Group and Members over the past 12 months and I look forward to working in partnership with you in 2013.

The preparation of the annual budget is a detailed and demanding task. I wish to thank Mr. Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance, Ms Julie Bergin and their staff who managed and co-ordinated the process. I would, also, like to record my appreciation to the Directors of Services and their staff, both indoor and outdoor, for their help and co-operation over the past 12 months.

I recommend the adoption of the draft budget as presented and the determination of the general annual rate on valuation of €64.63.

Beannacht Libh


Bainisteoir
10/12/2012