

OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL



BUDGET 2022

**SUPPLEMENTARY DIRECTORATE
REPORTS**

OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL
DIRECTOR OF SERVICES REPORTS

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CORPORATE SERVICES

Meetings Administration

Corporate Services staff supports the efficient and effective administration of meetings of the County Council, Corporate Policy Group, Management Team and Joint Policing Committee.

Register of Electors

The Register of Electors is updated by Corporate Services in accordance with the legislation.

Ethics Register

The annual Ethics Register was published and made available in accordance with the legislation.

Customer Care Action Plan

The Council supports its Customer Charter.

Ombudsman, Data Protection, Freedom of Information & Access to Information on the Environment

All queries and requests were dealt with by Corporate Service in accordance with the relevant guidelines and within the given timeframes during 2021

Service Indicators

Corporate Services coordinated the Council's 2020 Service Indicators return to the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC)

Service Planning, Service Indicators and Annual Reporting

Section 134A of the 2001 Act (as inserted by Section 50 of the 2014 Act) requires that Local Authorities prepare Annual Service Plans. Progress on the Annual Service Plan 2020 was published in Offaly County Council's Annual Report for 2020. The Annual Service Plan 2021 was prepared in quarter 1 and reflected the 2021 Budget. Monthly progress on the 2021 Annual Service Plan formed the Chief Executive's monthly report to the Council. Performance against prescribed service indicators was published in September 2021 in NOAC's 'Local Authority Performance Indicator Report 2020'.

Information Management and Storage

Corporate Services encourage the use of electronic communication while ensuring sufficient and accurate paper records are kept to meet our obligations.

Internal Audit

The Internal Audit Unit have completed the majority of the agreed Internal Audit Plan for 2021 (with the aim of having all audits completed by year-end). All discretionary audits were completed and submitted within the Department Deadlines. All completed Audit Reports were circulated to the Management Team and the Audit Committee and have been approved. Follow-up checks on the implementation of recommendations of previous Audits were also undertaken as outlined within the Audit Plan. The Internal Audit Unit made significant progress this year with developing the first Internal Audit Strategic Plan for OCC with the aim to have this implemented by year end. All Internal Audit documents were updated including Internal Audit Manual Procedure, Internal Audit Charter, Audit Committee Charter and the Risk Register. The Internal Audit Unit provided administrative support to the Audit Committee in the fulfilling of its duties in 2021, including preparing the agendas and relevant documentation for the hosting of 3 Audit Committee meetings (to date).

Corporate Services Priorities for 2022

Where resources provide Corporate Services will:

- Administer meetings of the County Council, Corporate Policy Group, Management Team and Joint Policing Committee.
- Maintain the Register of Electors.
- Implementation of priority actions from our Access Plan in compliance with the Disability Act 2005.
- Coordination of the Authority's submission of the Service Indicators returns in accordance with the national timeframe.
- Explore cost efficiencies that may be achieved with regard to advertising, stationery, postal and other services.
- Ensure that data is managed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Key Objectives and Priorities

Recruit, retain and support a competent staff complement to deliver organisational priorities and act as a driver for organisational management development and change

Legislative Context

Both national and EU legislation continue to impact on the day to day work of the department both from an operational and financial perspective including: -

- Health, Safety & Welfare at work
- Payment of Wages
- Working Time Directive
- Equality
- Disability
- Data Protection & GDPR

Key Activities & Expenditure

- Recruitment
- Employee welfare and supports
- Industrial Relations
- Staff training and development
- Development and implementation of workplace policies
- Implementing requirements of Public Service Agreements
- Performance Management Development System (PMDS)

Offaly Co. Council employs c. 430 full-time staff. Almost 90% of the budget allocation for the HR department is non-discretionary and assigned to salaries and statutory subscriptions and levies to agencies such as the IPA and LGMA and maintenance and licensing contracts for CORE HR system.

The expenditure is broadly broken down into three main spending areas: -

- Staff Recruitment
- Safety, Health and Welfare of Staff
- Staff Training and Development

Significant recruitment continued during 2020 with 20 competitions held during the year which involved the processing of over 700 applications. This trend continued into 2021 with 17 competitions to date and a number of competitions to be completed by year end.

Funding provided by the members for staff training in the 2021 budget allowed the continuance of the scheme of financial assistance for staff undertaking third level studies. This funding was welcomed and appreciated by staff with 20 employees benefitting from the scheme this year.

The HR Department also closely monitors attendance management and sick leave and the proactive approach taken by the department has resulted in Offaly's sick leave indicator for 2020 of 3.32%, being only slightly above the national average of 3.21%.

Key Priorities 2022

- Workforce Planning taking into account the current age profile of staff and on-going sectoral changes and reform
- Targeted recruitment based on organisational needs, priorities and robust business cases
- Driving organisational change and development in line with national and local policies
- Managing increasing levels of industrial relations issues
- Continue to invest in the training and personal development of our staff to ensure effective implementation of the on-going local government reform agenda

Information Systems

The Information Systems Department manages the Council's entire ICT hardware and software infrastructure. The infrastructure is spread across approximately fifty locations in the County and is utilised by close to 420 users.

In 2021 the Information Systems department completed a number of technology-based initiatives and maintained a modern, reliable and secure ICT infrastructure for the organisation.

The main projects completed in 2021 were:

- Response to Covid-19 - Restart Grant system, Community Call Helpline and response forum, SBASC, Rates Waivers and numerous other smaller initiatives.
- Cyber Security – Upgrade of firewall and this will significantly reduce cyber risk to the organisation.
- ICT Infrastructure 2022-2026 – Work has started on preparing our ICT Infrastructure to support the organisation for the next 5 years.
- Digital Transformation – Digital transformation is the integration of digital technology into all areas of our business, fundamentally changing how we operate and deliver value to customers.
- Upgrade of Core HR Management Software.

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- Upgrade of Audio Visual equipment throughout the organisation including major upgrade to AV system in the council chamber.
 - Promotion of Social Media and our presence now has over 80,000 followers across our social media channels.

In 2022, the work programme for the IS Department will include work on the following projects:

- Complete upgrade of Server Infrastructure and Network / Wireless Connectivity - this will future proof the Council's IT infrastructure and ensure ongoing delivery of services.
- Migration to Cloud Technologies including Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity in line with Government Strategy.
- The Future of Work is Hybrid - Remote working is in place for all office based staff and we are moving towards a one device per-user which has operational, cyber security and environmental benefits.
- Digital Transformation – Develop, implement and promote technology as a means for the Council to collaborate, engage and promote internally and externally.
- Continue work on cyber-security in line with the CIS security control standards and increase staff awareness to help combat against emerging cyber threats.
- Continued support for NWCPO, Libraries, Water & Waste Water sites, Fire stations & Digital Hubs.
- Upgrade of Financial Management System, ePlanning, Library Management System.
- Continue to work with Government in relation to the National Broadband Plan and implementation of Offaly's Digital Strategy.
- Publication of Offaly County Council IT Strategy 2022-2024.
- Promotion of Social Media as another information channel for engagement with staff, elected members and the public to maximise content delivery.
- Offaly.ie – Upgrade of Offaly.ie and VisitOffaly.ie which will be live in 2022.
- Working on initiatives that support climate action such as reducing energy consumption of IT equipment and rollout of MS Teams calling to further facilitate remote working.

Broadband / Digital

Offaly County Council's Broadband Officer acts as a dedicated point of contact within County Offaly for engagement with telecommunications providers and will assist with the preparation of the roll out of the National Broadband Plan. The Broadband Officer plays a vital role in the development of

telecommunications and broadband services throughout Offaly. This is achieved by working closely with industry and participation with Regional and National Action Groups.

Offaly County Council Digital Strategy 2020-2022 ensure that the benefits of infrastructure development under the National Broadband Plan is fully realised from an economic and social perspective. This strategy aims to enable Offaly to leverage broadband and digital technologies for rural regeneration. The Broadband Office will also liaise with council departments, colleagues, councillors, local communities and funding channels to link and coordinate activities and projects in support of the Digital Strategy.

In 2021 the main projects delivered were:

- Implementation of Offaly Digital Strategy 2020-2022 - Infrastructure, Citizen, Enterprise & Digital Council;
- Activating Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) - public locations which have been selected to receive high-speed connectivity in the first year of the National Broadband Plan under the 'Connected Communities' initiative. Rollout to locations throughout the county;
 - ❖ Town and Village Renewal (TVR) Scheme – “Fit out of Broadband Connection Points” - €40,000 funding received.
 - ❖ 8 BCPs fully connected for public use. €212,282 received under Connected Hubs funding to further fit-out.
 - ❖ €10,000 Thematic Training funding successfully applied for Oct 21.
- Rollout of Free Public Wi-Fi in over 100 locations in Offaly.
 - ❖ Recently won Public Sector Magazine Award for “IT Services to the Public Award 2021”.
 - ❖ Completed rollout of the WiFi4EU initiative.
- Engagement with National Broadband Ireland for planning surveys that have started in Offaly - NBI recently started surveys in the Roscrea Deployment Area (DA) - (Birr MD) and Moate DA – (both Birr & Tullamore MD);
- Delivering our STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics programme in primary and post primary schools.
 - ❖ Just Transition: Successful funding application for “Building Resilience & Adaptability in Primary School children through STEM in communities impacted by decarbonisation” - €119,000.

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- ❖ DojoMór - Coding Event for Children 7-17 – OCC involved with eight 3rd Level Colleges – Nov 2021.
 - Commencing the e-denderry Digital Town Works (Smart Town) pilot project with a range of technical partners.
 - ❖ Smart services Internet of Things pilot for Edenderry launched March 2021 with Cellnex and ongoing.
 - ❖ Influential in other counties interest in IoT. DigitalTowns.ie shortlist. Additional funding of €49k secured.

Key Actions planned for 2022

- Continue to be the single point of contact for engagement with telecommunications operators and government departments in the delivery of telecommunications infrastructure, including the National Broadband Plan.
- Manage the successful rollout of the National Broadband Plan, and implementation of actions identified in the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Report, in County Offaly.
- Project manage the implementation of actions defined in the Digital Strategy and leading on certain actions as appropriate.
- Engage with businesses, community groups, schools and other sectors to foster the development of digital opportunities.
- STEM Education - Jobs and employment opportunities are changing and primary & post primary school students are at the perfect age to begin their STEM education. 50 Primary Schools and all 12 Post Primary School involved for 2021/2022 school year.
- Develop Public Wi-Fi locations which are now available in over 100 locations through the county and we plan develop initiatives to promote the use of this service.
- Continue to work in creating sustainable digital hubs in communities. These hubs provide workspaces with high-speed telecommunications capacity for the use of workers, entrepreneurs and local communities.
- Further develop e-denderry as a smart town/community.
- Apply for funding for Digital Initiatives under various schemes.
- Establish collaborative strategic Digital group in the County.
- Data Centres – Looking at opportunities for Offaly.

Motor Taxation

Offaly Motor Tax Office (MTO) process approx. €2.5 million annually and offer a variety of payment options including cash, payment cards, postal orders and cheques.

During 2021, Offaly Motor Tax continue to process 99% of all transactions processed in-house on the same day. 57.2% of transactions occur at the Motor Tax Office counter while 42.8% are postal applications (source Q3 2021 Service Indicators in Local Authorities).

On-line transactions via www.motortax.ie continue to grow on an annual basis with approximately 86% of all motor tax transactions for Offaly registered vehicles occurring on line (Q2 2020 Service Indicators). The rise has been mainly due to COVID 19 as Offaly Motor Tax office experienced a reduction in postal / over the counter transactions during the same period. This has been experienced by all local Motor Tax Offices throughout the country.

Offaly County Council Motor Tax Office staff recently conducted a website review for motor tax related pages on www.offaly.ie and are updating same during Q4 2021. After this update, an innovative project will see QR (Quick Response) Codes being developed for the relevant pages which will be shared with Elected Members, Municipal District offices, Libraries and via community outreach programmes operated by Offaly County Council. The purpose of this project is to provide instant access to motor tax related information using a smart phone / device. Offaly Motor Tax office is not aware of any other local authority that provides this initiative.

Procurement

Corporate Procurement Plan: This Corporate Procurement Plan 2021-2024 was finalised in January 2021 and it sets out Offaly County Council's procurement objectives for the period 2021 – 2024 which reflect EU, National and OCC procurement policies and priorities. OCC is committed to making the most effective use of the resources available to our organisation. A fundamental component of this approach is to ensure efficient service delivery using compliant, equitable and transparent procurement processes that deliver value for money.

Business Process Improvement of Purchase to Pay: The business process monitoring has continued to show progress with regard to compliance levels. For much of 2021, compliance levels in this area have been averaging 95%.

Continuous Training: Online procurement training sessions were provided in 2021 to staff from all departments in 2021. The procurement officer will continue to provide training in 2022. All new and current procurement information with regard to national frameworks and legislation are available on the procurement SharePoint page for staff. The procurement unit will participate in national training events and will continue to assist staff with their procurement queries. Green Public Procurement criteria will be introduced where feasible in requests for tenders at national and EU level.

Insurance: All Property Insurances were examined and policy schedules updated to take account of new properties purchased throughout the year.

Covid 19: The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 impacted greatly upon Offaly County Council and continued to impact procurement in 2021. OCC followed the OGP guidelines in relation to procurement during this time and will continue to do so into 2022.

Housing

Overview

The delivery of many housing services had to be readapted following the introduction of increased national Covid-19 health restrictions in the initial months of 2021. Essential services, including essential repairs, homeless services, emergency housing allocations, HAP and rent reviews continued uninterrupted throughout the year and subsequently service delivery in other areas resumed in accordance with the Government's Roadmap for Recovery. Construction inflation and disruption to the supply of goods have further impacted on delivery across many of the housing programmes.

Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland, the Government's Housing Plan to 2030 was published in September 2021. The programme includes four key strands:

- Support Home Ownership and Increasing Affordability;
- Eradicating Homelessness, Increasing Social Housing Delivery and Supporting Social Inclusion;
- Increase new Housing Supply;
- Addressing Vacancy and Efficient Use of Existing Stock.

Each strand contains multiple actions, 213 in all, which will deliver a range of housing options for individuals, couples and families. The emphasis is on the delivery of new housing units. Each Local Authority was assigned multi-annual targets - Offaly's multi-annual target of new build units between 2022 and 2026 is 463 units. *Housing for All* also provided for a managed phasing out of new long term leasing projects. Housing are currently engaged in developing, for submission to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage a *Housing Delivery Action Plan*, which will detail the social and affordable housing delivery over the appropriate period, 2022-2026, in line with the targets provided under *Housing for All*.

Activities to the end of Quarter 3 - 2021

Social Housing 2021

There were 522 households in Offaly on the social housing list at the end of September 2021. A further 800 households were in receipt of Housing Assistant Payments, 137 on Rental Accommodation Schemes and 174 in various leasing arrangements.

To the end of September 2021, 126 individuals and families were allocated Local Authority, Approved Housing Bodies or RAS / leasing tenancies across the county.

Construction Programme

Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness provided for an overall build (via direct LA, AHB, Turnkey, Part V), leasing and acquisitions of 437 units between 2018 to 2021. Offaly will successfully deliver, if not surpass this programme delivery during this timeframe.

Direct Construction Programme

Capital works, were again paused during the level 5 lockdown which continued until April 2021 when works on the many Council capital projects resumed.

Pat Loftus Construction Ltd. commenced the build of 18 houses in Kylebeg, Banagher on 19th October 2021. In all, a further 99 houses for development by Offaly County Council are at various stages of the Departmental Stage Process and it is expected that these will be delivered in 2022, 2023 and Q1, 2024. These developments will see works commencing in Clara, Tullamore, Edenderry, Belmont, Daingean and, Moneygall.

Following the successful Turnkey Expression of Interest competition, Housing received Departmental approval, in Q4 2020 and Q1 2021, to progress 101 turnkey units throughout the county. The pause to the construction sector has resulted in delays to their delivery. Notwithstanding this 8 houses in Daingean, under the Turnkey programme, were finalised and 8 families received keys to their new homes in October 2021. Earlier in 2021 the final 2 units were delivered in Clonewoman and the balance of the McGregor, 12 units in Birr were allocated. It is anticipated that the balance of these turnkey units will be delivered for families on the Social Housing Support List in 2022.

Part V Programme

Four Part V units in Silverbrook Drive, Tullamore were completed and allocated in 2021. A further seven Part V units in the Hawthorns development in Tullamore are to be delivered in 2021. *Housing for All* increased the requirement in Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 to provide a mandatory 20% (previously 10%) for social and affordable units.

Construction in Partnership with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs)

Offaly County Council, in accordance with Government Policy, continues to work in partnership with AHBs to progress both AHB Housing Construction and AHB Acquisition programmes. Through the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) part-funding can be provided by the Department and the Capital Assistance Programme (CAS) 100% funding can be provided by the Department for the

acquisition or construction of units by an Approved Housing Body, to which the Local Authority will have nomination rights in order to increase social housing supply.

Tuath completed 27 units at Killane Drive, Edenderry and these units were allocated in Quarter 2, 2021.

A further 158 homes are being progressed with the Approved Housing Bodies, as follows:

- Cluid Housing Association are scheduled to deliver 26 units at Jackson Hill, Tullamore and 16 units in the Hawthorns development in Tullamore in 2022.
- Oaklee Housing Association commenced development of 41 units at Kearneys Field, Tullamore and 19 CAS units at Clonminch, Tullamore. Both developments are scheduled for completion in 2022 and 2023 respectfully.
- Sophia Housing Association lodged a planning application for the conversion and build project, delivering 39 units in Portarlinton, Co. Offaly. The redevelopment of Clomamore Hotel as a homeless facility for the Midlands Region continues to be progressed by Sophia Housing Association through the Department stage process.

House Acquisitions & Turnkey Developments

The acquisition of housing units is 100% funded through the Department's Capital Programme subject to unit cost ceilings. Due to progress on the national capital programme the Local Authority acquisition programme was significantly scaled back in 2021. Notwithstanding this the Council have currently, at end of October, acquired 1 house and a further 6 houses have bids agreed.

Returning Vacant Stock to Productive Use (Pre-lets)

Pre-let and void works have been completed on 37 council owned properties, which includes 7 acquisitions to the end of October 2021. The Council's ability to continue to return vacant units to use quickly and to a high standard will be determined by the financial resources available. Part-funding from central government to return vacant units has reduced and it is increasingly likely that there will be an increased reliance on own resources for this activity in the future. Construction inflation and availability of contractors has impacted on pre-let works in 2021.

Local Authority stock (Disabled Persons Grants) & Housing Grants for Private Home Owners (Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability)

The total approved budget in 2021 for private home owners is €1,600,000, i.e., €1,280,000 from the Department and 20%, i.e., €320,000, is funded from the Council's own resources. Covid-19

restrictions, construction cost inflation and disruption to the supply of goods have resulted in successful applicants experiencing delays in the completion of works. The Council continues to work with them to ensure that the funding is maximised in 2021.

The Department also provides part funding (90%) towards accessible works on Council stock, e.g., provision of a ramp, level access shower and ground floor extensions. The 2021 budget for Disabled Person Grants was increased substantially to €932,000 (up from €220,000). It is anticipated that this funding will provide for 9 extensions and 20 adaptations works. The Local Authority contribution is 10% for these grants and provision needs to be made for this programme in the future.

Both the Disabled Persons Grants on Council owned stock and the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, i.e., Private Homeowner grant scheme continue to be oversubscribed.

Maintenance of Local Authority Housing Stock

There were over 2,402 requests for repairs and maintenance by local authority tenants in the first three quarters of 2021. Each request is logged on the i-house software system and forwarded to the relevant Clerk of Works for follow up. The expenditure for housing repairs and maintenance in Q1 to Q3 2021 was €602,050.

2021 saw the continuation of a planned maintenance budget of €250,000. The budget was allocated across the three municipal districts and will benefit up to 177 Offaly County Council owned properties. The nature of works addressed are varied and include the upgrade and replacement of heating systems, smoke and carbon alarms, windows, fascia and soffit and boundary treatments.

Buy and Renew Schemes & Repair and Lease Scheme

The Buy and Renew Scheme allows the Local Authority or an Approved Housing Body to buy houses that are derelict and bring them back to the required standard for social housing rental. Cost ceilings for such acquisition and repair projects are as per the Department's acquisition ceilings for standard house acquisitions. The Council is progressing two houses under this scheme. A further two units compulsorily acquired under the Derelict Sites Act are currently being refurbished and will be available for allocation before year end.

The funding available to private landlord to repair a property in accordance with the Repair and Lease Scheme was increased to €60,000 in Q3, 2021. The landlord is required to make the unit available for social housing tenants on a lease arrangement. The cost of repairs is then offset against the landlord's rental income over time. The scheme is targeted towards the owners of vacant properties who cannot afford to bring their properties up to the required standard for rented properties.

Retrofit Programme

Offaly County Council have been allocated €3.3 million for the retrofitting of local authority-owned houses in the county. The retrofitting of homes will result in warmer, more comfortable homes and benefit householders' health through improved air quality. After the works, the Building Energy Ratings (BER) of homes will typically have gone from an E- or D- rating to a B2. They will be expected to be substantially cheaper to heat than similar homes heated by oil or gas.

The works are part of the Midlands Retrofit Programme and funded by the Carbon Tax. Surveying of the initial homes to be retrofitted commenced in 2020 and continued in 2021 when Covid 19 restrictions facilitated same. Works typically involve insulation, upgrades of windows and doors and installation of heat pumps (renewable energy heating systems), as committed to under the Programme for Government. This will help Ireland's efforts to combat climate change. About 40% of Ireland's energy-related carbon emissions are from buildings.

During 2021 the Retrofitting programme, initially paused in accordance with Covid-19 restrictions, commenced with the Contractor commencing on the retrofit of 35 houses in the Municipal District of Birr. A further 85 houses across the county have been surveyed and the Consultants are preparing the works tender which will be advertised on www.etenders.gov.ie in Q4, 2021. A further 19 units, under-going pre-let works, were retrofitted in line with the programme throughout 2021.

Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RBIHL)

RBIHL applicants must be first time buyers; meet income limit criteria; and demonstrate a capacity to repay the loan. 42 RBIHL were provisionally approved by the Council's Credit Committee, to the value of €5.7m, to the end of September 2021 and 15 RBIHL have paid and drawn down to date to the total value of €1,916,815.

Tenant Purchase Applications

3 Tenant Purchase Applications have been approved in accordance with the Scheme to date in 2021.

Housing Rents

Offaly County Council carried out a rent review of 1,813 Local Authority tenants accounts and the revised rent became effective on 9th October. It is proposed to hold a rent review of all leasing, RAS and HAP tenancies in early 2022. Tenants whose income was impacted by Covid 19 restrictions had their rent accounts reviewed and adjusted in line with the Differential Rent Scheme. The debt collection function associated with housing rents and loans transferred from the Housing Department to the Central Revenue Collection function from the end of 2016.

Homelessness

The number of homeless presentations continued to be high throughout 2021. Notice to Quit by private rented landlords, unaffordable private rents and the lack of private rented supply were the main reasons for presentation. The Government embargo on evictions, associated with the Covid 19 emergency, continued until April 2021.

The Council's HAP Placefinder works closely with those in emergency accommodation and those at risk of becoming homeless to help them source private rented accommodation. At the end of September there were 17 single adults and 4 families from Offaly's Social Housing List being supported in emergency accommodation.

Offaly County Council commenced nominations to the Housing First Programme, operated in the Midland's Homeless Region by the Peter McVerry Trust (PMcVT), in 2021. Those nominated to the Housing First Programme are allocated single bed units and receive wrap-around supports from PMcVT.

Traveller Accommodation

The Local Traveller Accommodation Committee continued to meet, by zoom, during 2021 to progress the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024 initiatives. The mid-term review of the Traveller Accommodation Plan 2019-2024 has commenced and will be considered by the LTACC at their Q4 meeting.

Offaly County Council continued to implement, in accordance with the Department Circular and in consultation with the Traveller representatives (including Offaly Traveller Movement, Birr Traveller & Settled Persons Group and the HSE) a range of measures and works to provide appropriate responses to the challenges faced by the traveller community consequent to the Covid 19 emergency. Significant resources were deployed to identify solutions for a number of families.

In partnership with the HSE the Council secured funding for the appointment of a Traveller Tenancy Support Officer. This Support Worker will work to provide enhanced supports to the Traveller community in the context of pre-tenancy preparation and post tenancy sustainment.

Estate Management & Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy

Following consideration at the Housing SPC and Joint Policing Committee the members adopted an updated Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy in September 2020. The Policy endeavors to adhere to the Corporate Plan 2019-2024 objective to promote and build sustainable communities by improving estate management, engaging and fostering tenant participation and, working with other agencies and stakeholders, to develop a sense of ownership, pride of place and allow all to live without conduct

that violates the basic rights of another person or behaviour that is considered to be disruptive to others. The pilot interagency committee, which was established in 2020, was incorporated, on a formal basis, under the aegis of the Joint Policing Committee in summer 2021. It meets on a quarterly basis and has Elected Members representation from each of the three Municipal Districts, and is supported by representatives of An Garda Síochána and various sections of the Council (Housing, Environment, Municipal District).

The Council continued to refer a number of anti-social behaviour cases to the County Solicitor in 2021 and these were successfully addressed by the Courts.

Staff continue to work with existing Residents Associations and to re-establish Resident Associations in Local Authority estates. The Housing Section, partnering with the Library, Arts and Heritage services made significant progress to develop programmes to improve their estates and to build their capacity to work together.

The Estate Management Fund for 2021, approved by the Elected Members, was allocated to each of the Municipal Districts and a number of enhancement projects were progressed.

Strategic Policy Committee 2021

The Strategic Policy Committee met on three occasions to date in 2021 to review various housing policies and oversee Policy Development. The Committee received briefings on a number of areas including the Retrofit Programme; Strategic Plan for People with a Disability 2021 to 2026; Housing Grants; and, proposed modifications to the Differential Rent Scheme.

Priorities for 2022

- Implementation of *Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland* under the four strands in line with the supporting Regulations and Department Circulars.
- Progressing with the delivery of the multi-annual targets of new build units between 2022 and 2026, i.e., 463 units, and in line with *Offaly's Housing Delivery Action Plan*.
- Increasing social housing supply through all available means, including
 - Progression of Council owned construction projects through the department stage approvals, including procurement, planning, construction and completion.
 - Appraisal and progression of new direct build proposals, repair and lease scheme, and return of voids.
 - Continue to work with Approved Housing Bodies to increase social housing supply.
 - Seek to increase the Council's capital housing lands in areas of housing need.

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- Progress the Retrofit Programme in line with funding received under the ‘Just Transition for the Midlands Region’ programme.
 - Implement the Housing First Programme in accordance with the Service Level Agreement with the Peter McVerry Trust.
 - Review and record status of Local Authority Housing stock for planning and maintenance purposes.
 - Seek to maximise the resources available to improve housing stock to meet tenant’s needs via programmes such as energy efficiency, voids, DPGs and Traveller Accommodation funding.
 - Progress the *Traveller Accommodation Plan 2019-2024* including advancing Group Housing projects.
 - Increase the number of private rented inspections.
 - Continued on-going administration of the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme.
 - Administration and management of the Tenant Purchase Scheme.
 - Progress Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan applications in a timely manner.
 - Initiate and administer a Rent Review on Rental Accommodation Scheme, Social Leasing tenants and those in receipt of Housing Assistance Payments.
 - Capacity building and support for Local Authority Residents’ Associations through an Estate Management Programme in consultation with the Municipal Districts.
 - Implement a programme of review and revision of Local Authority tenancy issues.
 - On-going review of the structure, efficiency and effectiveness of Offaly County Council’s Housing Service in the interests of customers and staff.
 - Develop best use of technologies to maximise online services for customers and begin the process of reducing paper files retained and moving to a paperless record management system.

Library Service

Offaly County Library Service continues to deliver on the objectives of the national five-year strategy for public libraries: *Our Public Libraries 2022- Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities*. During these pandemic times, we are delivering on strategic objectives via innovative technological solutions to increase user engagement and particular efforts have been directed towards a blended delivery of our diverse community and cultural events programmes. Strategic national programmes underway include;

- Reading and Literacy Development (Right to Read Festivals)

- Learning and Information Services (eResources and Work Matters at Your Library)
- Community and Culture Provision (Healthy Ireland, Creative Ireland & Age Friendly)

Offaly Library Service – Covid-19 Response:

A reimagining of library services continued during 2021. Staff provided core services, collections and space to provide responsive, inclusive and safe methods of access to library resources and programmes during another national lockdown from January to May. Offaly Libraries offered *Contact & Collect and Browse By Appointment Services*; quality digital resources and online learning supports and events for all ages. Throughout the remainder of the year a hybrid offering of services was delivered in libraries, with leisure reading, PC access and study provision reintroduced in September.



New Services, Community Engagement, Social Inclusion Actions:

ICT & Digital Resources Developments

- **iVox** – Offaly Libraries interactive animated storybooks for children available online
- **TTRS** – teaches touch typing and improves literacy skills
- **Zoom Bookclubs** for Adults & Teens
- **Occupancy Software** – managing safe buildings occupancy in 3 libraries
- **My Open Library Technology Upgrades** – in progress in Tullamore and Banagher
- **Eduroam** – available in all libraries helping third level students stay connected
- Preparations for a **new Library Website & new library catalogue** are underway

Library Buildings Developments

- **Kilcormac Library** - refurbishments completed
- **Sensory Room, Tullamore** - fit-out due for completion in 2021
- **Local Studies & Reading Room** - due for completion in early 2022
- **Daingean Library** - refurbishments due for completion in early 2022

New Online Library Programmes 2021

2021 Departmental Grant Awards to Offaly Libraries:

- €6,000 grant funding award to support the public libraries delivery of Healthy Ireland and other library services in line with public health recommendations from DRDC – a Healthy Ireland Reading Zone and outdoor seating will be funded by this grant.
- A grant of €20,000 from the Dormant Accounts Fund for Library Supports for Socially excluded and disadvantaged communities which is funding the installation of Hearing Loops in all libraries; improvement of accessibility in Daingean Library; a curated school STEAM programme and an Autumn Parenting Programme, delivered in partnership with Laois Libraries. This project is 10% matched funded by Offaly County Council.
- Offaly Libraries secured a **grant of €60,558 from DRCD for Capital My Open Library upgrades in Tullamore and Banagher Libraries.** This funding will allow huge improvements in our technology systems and improve the user experience of MOL services for years to come. This project is 10% matched funded by Offaly County Council.



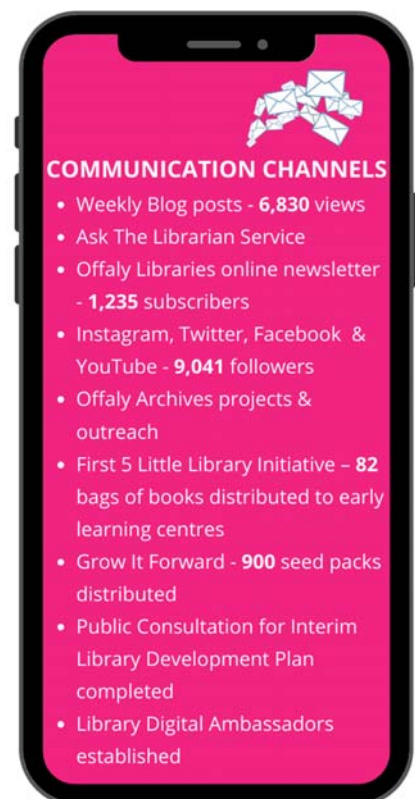
CURATED ONLINE PROGRAMMES

- **NEW Sensory Offaly Programme** – 9 events and a new sensory collection available to borrow
- **NEW STEAM programme** – delivered 26 online events to primary school all over Offaly
- **NEW Parenting Programme** – 30 events
- **Seachtain na Gaelige** – Comhrá ám Lóin & 4 other online events with over 150 participants and a social media reach of over 60,000
- **Spectrum Series** – new 6 part webinar series
- **Summer Stars** – readings online & outdoor, 1,187 children signed up to participate
- **Children's Book Festival** – 36 events and activity packs
- **Visual Arts Exhibitions** – animating our streetscapes
- **Healthy Ireland** online; masterclasses on Wildflowers, Cooking, Baking, Writing for Wellbeing & Grow It Forward seed packs

Innovative Events & Virtual Programmes:

Restrictions due to COVID-19 meant than traditional methods of event and programme delivery had to move online. Virtual engagement, innovation and creativity was not found wanting in our library users!

- **Cruinniú na nÓg 2021 & Offaly Libraries Comic Con;** a day of creativity with 35 events & 10 workshops hosted as part of our award winning Comic Con.
- **Age Friendly Libraries, Bealtaine & Positive Ageing Week;** Online events and presentations of gifts to older members of our communities.
- **Offaly Parenting Programme** – as part of the Keep Well campaign and with Dormant Account Funding, Offaly Libraries offered a Spring and Autumn programme of 30 events to support parents.



COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

- Weekly Blog posts - **6,830** views
- Ask The Librarian Service
- Offaly Libraries online newsletter - **1,235** subscribers
- Instagram, Twitter, Facebook & YouTube - **9,041** followers
- Offaly Archives projects & outreach
- First 5 Little Library Initiative - **82** bags of books distributed to early learning centres
- Grow It Forward - **900** seed packs distributed
- Public Consultation for Interim Library Development Plan completed
- Library Digital Ambassadors established

- **Right to Read programmes** online via Facebook & Zoom. Very successful *Spring Into Storytime*, *Summer Stars* and *Children’s Book Festival* events in partnership with schools and families.
- **Work Matters at Your Library:** Business and Jobseeker support working with LEO, OLDC, LOETB & CIS. Hosted a series of well attended online talks in April with another series planned for November/December.
- **Healthy Ireland at your Library** working with LGMA & Dept. of Health and local Healthy Ireland partners.
- **Creative Ireland:** working with Heritage, Arts, and Community to deliver events.
- **Offaly Libraries’ Local Studies** in partnership with Offaly History as part of the Decade of Centenaries Programme presented a History Lecture Series.
- **Delivery of in-person and online events** for Poetry Town, Culture Night and Hullabaloo! in partnership with Offaly Arts Office.



Priorities for 2022 include:

- Publish a new Interim Library Development plan for Offaly Library Service
- Progress plans and grant applications for the capital development of a new library and arts base in Edenderry
- Update library building facilities across the county
- Implement the new national Library Management System (LMS)
- Increase promotion of library services especially through online channels
- Libraries at the centre of communities; continue to promote social inclusion and develop innovative partnerships & events
- Increase library engagement by developing traditional and digital collections, services and library technology
- Further promote Offaly Archives Service
- Review and evaluate library service activities to the benefit of the community
- Increase active membership – encourage users back into library spaces & increase engagement
- Increase promotion via monthly newsletters, interactive online programmes & social media

Community & Culture 2021

Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)

The Offaly Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) was established under the Local Government Act in 2014 and is managed by Offaly County Council for the purpose of developing and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development. The LCDC held 6 meetings up to October 2021 with a further 2 scheduled for November and December.

The 19 member LCDC has broad representation from public and private interests including business, local development, education, enterprise, agriculture, voluntary and local authority members. Membership of Offaly LCDC during 2021 is as follows:

STATUTORY INTERESTS (9)			
Local Authority Elected Members	Declan	Harvey(Chair)	Offaly County Council
	John	Leahy	Offaly County Council
	Noel	Cribbin	Offaly County Council
Local Authority Officials	Anna-Marie	Delaney	Chief Executive Offaly County Council
	Orla	Martin	Head of Enterprise, LEO
State Agencies	Anne-Marie	Keane	Laois/Offaly ETB
	Con	Feighery	Regional Manager, Teagasc
	Ryan	McKay	DEASP
	Ann	Sheerin	Community Services Manager, HSE
NON STATUTORY INTERESTS (10)			
Community & Voluntary	Sinead	McDonagh (Vice-Chair)	PPN Community & Voluntary
	Sylvia	Sweeney	PPN Community & Voluntary
Social Inclusion	Deirdre	Arnold	PPN Social Inclusion
	Olive	O'Sullivan	PPN Social Inclusion
Environment	Rebekah	Keaveny	PPN Environment
Local Development & Community	Brendan	O'Loughlin	CEO - OLDC
Other civic society or 'local and community' interests	Padraig	Hannon	Construction Industry Federation
	Richard	Scally	President, Offaly IFA
	Fechin	Daly	Construction Industry
	Philip	O'Brien	Offaly Tourism Marketing (CLG)

The Offaly Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) is responsible for coordinating, planning, overseeing and implementing local development initiatives including the implementation of the Offaly

Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021. It is the contracting authority for the Offaly Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) totalling €783,277 annually and arranges for the implementation of the oversight and delivery of Offaly Rural LEADER Programme (2014-2020) which is to the value of approximately €8m and the Transitional LEADER Programme total budget to the value of approximately €2.3m.

Rural Development LEADER Programme 2014-2020 and Transitional LEADER Programme 2021-2022

The Rural Development LEADER Programme provides support and funding for individuals and rural communities to become involved and take ownership for the development of their own area. Offaly LCDC is the contract holder for the LEADER Programme and Offaly Local Development Company is implementing the programme on their behalf. The programme has 3 themes: Economic Development & Enterprise Support, Social Inclusion and Rural Environment and a total budget of €8m (€6m for projects).

During 2021, 112 projects were approved by the LCDC to the value of €2,926,187.78 and claim expenditure was paid in the amount of €1,155,287.16. In total over the period of 2016-2020 of the LEADER Programme there were 260 projects approved and approximately €6.5m of grant aid awarded to promoters across Offaly. For the period up to September 2021, €4,369,806.68 (67.9%) of expenditure has been paid to promoters.

The Transitional LEADER Programme 2021-2022 has been introduced to bridge the gap between the current LEADER programme and the next EU LEADER programme (2023-2027) with specified aims and priorities to be met for approval of funding.

The Transitional Project Budget allocation for Offaly LAG is €1,780,874. The Transitional Programme commenced on 1st April, 2021 for project approvals. As at September, 2021, 11 projects were approved and €135,553.06 awarded to promoters and claim expenditure of €2,850 has been paid.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-22

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is the primary social inclusion programme of Government. The aim of SICAP is to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality in Ireland through supporting communities and individuals using community development approaches, engagement and collaboration. DRCD have decided to extend the SICAP 2018-2022 Funding Agreements for a period of 12 months, up to 31st December, 2023.

SICAP is managed by the LCDC with Offaly Local Development Company as the Programme Implementer. The value of the Offaly SICAP contract for 2022 is €783,277. There are two overall goals in SICAP - Supporting Communities and Supporting Individuals with key performance indicators to be achieved. Continued funding is subject to satisfactory performance reviews. There are thirteen SICAP target groups. These are - Disadvantaged Children and Families; People living in Disadvantaged Communities; Disadvantaged Young People (aged 15-24); People with Disabilities; Disadvantaged Women; Roma; Emerging Needs Groups; Travellers; Lone Parents; the Disengaged from the Labour Market (Economically Inactive); Low Income Workers/Households; The Unemployed; New Communities.

Inaugural Community Recognition Awards 2021

Offaly County Council was delighted to hold its inaugural Offaly Community Recognition Awards 2021 on Friday 18th June 2021. The awards acknowledged and celebrated the outstanding community efforts by individuals, groups and volunteers in County Offaly during the past difficult year.

The high number of entries and nominations received under seven categories were an acknowledgement of the outstanding community efforts that individuals and groups delivered in County Offaly during the Covid pandemic.

Both the Cathaoirleach of Offaly County Council, Cllr. John Carroll, and the Chief Executive acknowledged the great variety of community supports in the county and these were reflected in the nominations.

Offaly Comhairle na nÓg

Comhairle na nÓg was set up under the National Children's Strategy in the 31 Local Authorities throughout the country, to give children and young people a voice in the development of local services and policies. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020, highlight the importance of ensuring that children and young people are given a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

Comhairle na nÓg is a key structure in giving young people a voice in decision-making at local and national level. The Offaly Comhairle na nÓg AGM 2021 is planned to place virtually in November 2021 and the theme is Inspiration/motivation. The Offaly Comhairle na nÓg members engaged in the consultation process for the policy on Women & Diversity in Local Government. This policy was adopted at a council meeting in July 2021. This year also the Comhairle na nÓg Committee is finalising the topic on Climate Change and have developed an app that provides schools with a toolkit that helps

them become plastic free. The committee have collaborated with the Environment section in Offaly County Council and 4 secondary schools in Offaly are currently taking part in the project and completing funded workshops on how to make their school single use plastic free. It is hoped the app they have developed, will continue to aid schools in being more plastic conscious.

Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)

One of the main responsibilities of the Offaly LCDC is implementation of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021, which was adopted by Offaly County Council in December 2015. A Review of both the Community and Economic elements of the LECP was carried out in 2021 and presentations were made to the LCDC on the level of progress made on key objectives in both areas since the Plan was adopted. Guidelines on the next LECP 2022-2027 are expected in Q4 2021 with preparations for the new Plan commencing in late 2021.

Community, Cultural & Emergency Services SPC

The 9 member SPC meets on a quarterly basis and has representation from local authority members, sectoral interests and PPN representatives. Membership of the SPC during 2020/21 was as follows:

Sector	Members Name	Organisation
Local Authority Elected Members (5)	Councillor Liam Quinn, Chair Councillor Clare Claffey Councillor Ken Smollen Councillor John Clendennen Councillor Mark Hackett	Offaly County Council
Sectoral Representatives (1)	Thomas Woulfe	Agriculture/Farming
PPN Representation (3)	Vacant Madeline Corboy Johnny O'Connor	Environment/ Conservation Social Inclusion Voluntary / Community

During 2021 policies were developed for adoption by the SPC including Council Funding of Sporting Activities delivered through Sporting Bodies; Policy to support Women and Diversity in Local Government and Decision Making Structures and drafted an Offaly Playground Strategy.

Offaly Covid-19 Community Response Helpline

The Community Helpline operated from 9-5pm, 7 days a week during 2021 until the weekend of 25th September 2021 when the operating hours changed to 9.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday due to the lack of weekend calls. The Helpline service helped those who are vulnerable and in need of help accessing essential services or a listening ear. A dedicated team of Community & Culture staff answer queries.

SUMMARY OF MONTHLY CALLS TO COVID HELPLINE 2020-21										
2020	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Number	312	93	19	8	8	7	9	3	8	
%	57.7	17.2	3.5	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.7	0.6	1.5	
2021	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Total
Number	19	11	9	13	9	3	3	3	4	541
%	3.5	2.0	1.7	2.4	1.7	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7	100.00

Offaly Community Response Forum:

The Offaly Community Response Forum was set up on 30th March 2020 and met regularly throughout 2020 and 2021. The members of the Forum are Offaly County Council, HSE, GAA, OLDC, An Garda Síochána, ALONE, SVP, An POST, Offaly PPN, Local Link, Citizens Information Service, TúsIa, IFA, Offaly Traveller Movement, Kildare Volunteer Centre (covering Offaly), Civil Defence, Offaly Library Service, Family Resource Centres, and Offaly Community Services. Regular meetings continue to be held to ensure an efficient and coordinated response to the Covid 19 pandemic by the relevant agencies and support services.

Offaly Age Friendly Alliance

The Offaly Age Friendly team consists of:

- Midlands Regional Age Friendly Manager, Eileen Hughes who oversees and supports the work of the AF's initiatives in Offaly, Laois, Longford, Westmeath & Roscommon
- Age Friendly Housing Technical Specialist: Noelle McGinley
- Age Friendly Programme Offaly Manager: Bridie Costello Hynes

In 2021 a review of the Age Friendly Strategy 2018 – 2021 was carried out which illustrated the actions progressed from 2018 – 2021. The majority of actions have been completed at this stage and a new strategy will be developed in 2022.

Offaly Age Friendly Alliance met on 5 occasions in 2021. The Age Friendly Alliance continued to operate remotely during 2021. Operations set in train in 2020 to address Covid 19 including holding meetings online and putting communication channels in place for older people continue to operate. The Alliance contributes to a newsletter for older people 'Connecting the Faithful' with four editions published in 2021, one to mark each season. The delivery of the Newsletter was more focused in 2021 with key Alliance members supporting the distribution of the newsletter.

The Offaly Age Friendly team launched a radio programme on Midlands 103 in Nov 2020. This is a collaborative piece with Westmeath and Laois Age Friendly Alliances and the Older Peoples Councils

in the three counties. The programme has a one-hour slot from 8-9am every Sunday morning presented by Aisling O'Rourke. The Production Team is made up of members of the Alliances and OPC's in Offaly, Westmeath & Laois supported by the AF team. A Tri County working group was established to work on the programme content.

Age Friendly events that went ahead in 2021 included the 'Teddy Bears Picnic', an Age Friendly Intergenerational event in conjunction with the Gardaí, the Offaly Older Persons Network & OLDC. A number of initiatives were undertaken for Positive Ageing Week. These were well attended on an invite only basis while remaining within the HSE Guidelines. A number of other events were held online. A writing project also took place with workshops online which will culminate in the printing of a book of stories entitled 'The Way We Were' due to go to print before year end. The Council's internal Age Friendly Interdepartmental Team is now established with the aim of collaborating on Age Friendly initiatives in the County.

The Offaly County Council Age Friendly Pilot project in Clara in conjunction with the Interdepartmental team will be progressed during 2022. Clara Branch Library already has Age Friendly status.

Public Participation Network (PPN)

The Offaly Public Participation Network (PPN) is the main link through which the Local Authority connects with the community, voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors. In 2021 the Community Wellbeing Statement was completed and is going to print before year end.

The Secretariat primarily met monthly on Zoom, with a few meetings held in person as guidelines allowed. The PPN continued to support the Community Response Helpline on weekdays and weekends. The PPN plays an active part in the Community Response Forum. The PPN continues to distribute information from a local and National perspective and share information broadly across the Community sector reflecting the needs of its members.

Throughout 2021 groups were supported in joining the PPN, accessing MD grants, Town & Village renewal projects, the Community Enhancement Programme grant and Clár funding. Groups were also assisted with Revenue/Tax registration and Tax Clearance in order to draw down grants. In Autumn Municipal District fundraising awareness meetings are taking place in-person while being cognisant of social distancing guidelines. All the events are ticket only with the option to participate by Zoom also available. The PPN continues to reach out to groups providing national and local information in a timely manner including Government Departments and HSE guidance in these challenging times. This includes an ongoing Social media presence. The PPN is also actively engaged with the Regional Just Transition team.

Online training events were undertaken during the year on a range of topics including Funding, Committee skills, Communication online options and Budget projections. Informing and representing the PPN membership, and developing the capacity of members are key elements of the PPN remit. These priorities will continue to be provided for the membership which now exceeds 600.

Community Enhancement Programme

In 2021 Offaly received a total allocation €138,550 under the Community Enhancement Programme. Offaly LCDC administered the scheme and funding was distributed to 125 applicants following recommendations by an LCDC Sub-group.

Tidy Towns Network

This network is in place since 2011 and is a collaborative project of the Community and Heritage sections of OCC. While there was no competition held in 2020 due to Covid, the Tidy Towns competition was held virtually in 2021 with entrants being judged on submissions in relation to all works undertaken since June 2019. It is hoped that Tidy Towns Network meetings will resume again in 2022 to build on the great success achieved by Offaly groups in 2019.

Pride of Place 2021

This is an All-Island competition where local authorities nominate groups in their communities who have made a significant contribution to improving their neighbourhood. Due to Covid restrictions one group was nominated in Pride of Place 2021 - Kilcormac Development Association (KDA) Meals on Wheels Service.



The Pride of Place judges were impressed to hear how this service made an enormous response to the needs of the community in West Offaly during Covid. It increased capacity from 40/ 50 dinners per day to 200 dinners per day in the height of the pandemic. It expanded its geographical area to include much of South/ West Offaly. Judging took place on 25th August 2021 but the awards ceremony will not take place until February 2022 when Covid restrictions will hopefully be over.

Offaly Community Watch Network/Community CCTV

Offaly Community Watch is a network of Community Alert and Neighbourhood Watch groups that is in operation since 2011. It is facilitated by the PPN, Local Garda Sergeant and Muintir na Tire Regional Worker. The Network normally meets 3 times per year with a regular attendance, which includes the PPN reps from the JPC. A number of online safety and security events took place to support communities, including one such event which was held online in conjunction with Laois PPN. Plans are underway to host an in-person Community Watch meeting in the Council Chamber while adhering to Social Distancing Guidelines.

The Community CCTV Grant Aid Scheme run by the Department of Justice and Equality is designed to provide support to local communities wishing to install and maintain Community CCTV security systems in their area. Funding of 60% of the total capital cost up to a maximum of €40,000 is available for new community CCTV schemes.

In Offaly, Project Team meetings with applicant groups have resumed in 2021. The meetings are attended by the applicant schemes, key officers from An Garda Síochána, and staff from Offaly County Council's Community, IT & Planning Sections. Meetings have been held with 4 proposed Community CCTV schemes in Offaly to progress their applications:

- Belmont Community CCTV Scheme
- The Arthur Elliott CCTV Scheme formerly known as Coolderry/ Kilcolman/ Aghancon CCTV Scheme
- Rahan Community CCTV Scheme
- Portarlington Business Association CCTV Scheme

Traveller Interagency Group

In June 2021, Offaly LCDC members formally approved the establishment of the Offaly Traveller Interagency Group. The inaugural meeting of the group was held on the 30th September 2021.

The membership of the Group includes: Offaly County Council Community, Housing & Environmental Section staff; Offaly Traveller Movement; Birr Travellers & Settled Peoples Group; OLDC/SICAP; Department of Social Protection; Túsla; Health Service Executive; Offaly Community Childcare Committee; Laois Offaly ETB; An Garda Síochána and Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS).

Refugee Resettlement Programme

The Offaly Refugee Resettlement Programme operated from August 2018 until completion in June 2021. The Department of Justice assigned a total of 21 Syrian refugee families who were resettled in Tullamore, Clara and Birr. A Resettlement Worker was employed by the implementing partner, Offaly Local Development Company, to assist the integration of the families into their communities.

Offaly Sports Partnership

Established in 2003, Offaly Sports Partnership is a multi-sectoral subcommittee of Offaly LCDC, hosted by Offaly County Council and core funded by Sport Ireland. The long term shared vision of Offaly Sports Partnership is of a county with a vibrant sport culture which is inclusive of all people. Its mission is to actively support measures to increase and sustain participation in sport in Offaly.

Offaly Sports Partnership believes that all people, irrespective of ability; age; cultural background; educational attainment; ethnicity; family status; gender; marital status; physical, mental and intellectual capabilities; religious beliefs; or sexual orientation are entitled to enjoy the benefits of improved physical and mental health derived from their participation in sport and physical activity.

In 2021, Offaly Sports Partnership employed a staff of five – Eamonn Henry, Coordinator; Olivia Murphy, Administrator; Jean Brady, Sports Inclusion Development Officer supporting the participation of people with disabilities in sport and physical activity; Denise Coghill, Community Sports Development Officer coordinating the delivery of community based sport and physical activity programmes in the county; and Eoin Pernot, ASPIRE graduate supporting the delivery of schools based programmes and summer camp programmes throughout the county. The Healthy Offaly / Westmeath Coordinator, Dermot Egan, is also attached to the sports partnership; and this post is funded through the Healthy Ireland framework.

Covid19 had a significant impact on the delivery of the Sports Partnership's sport and physical activity programmes in 2021 but the following activities were delivered: -

- online Operation Transformation minimum fitness programme for 55 adults
- online strength & conditioning programmes for women and girls in sport – 22 female teams participated on the programme
- online physical activity supports for disability organisations catering for 100 people with disabilities
- online SEN physical activity supports for 25 classes and 280 pupils
- Covid19 return to sport grants

-
- virtual fitness programmes in primary schools
 - 1:1 supports for 35 people with disabilities including learn to cycle programmes for children with Downs Syndrome
 - return to sport challenges across eight sporting disciplines
 - 2nd annual longest day challenge – over 1,500 registered to participate in the challenge
 - physical activity, recreational sport and active living programmes for adults, older adults, women and girls, and other underrepresented groups
 - all ability summer camps for 150 children with disabilities and their siblings
 - return to sport physical activity programmes in 30 schools
 - return to sport physical activity, recreational sport and active living programmes delivered by the south Offaly and Daingean sports hubs

Offaly Sports Partnership secured €419,500 in funding and earned income from a variety of sources (e.g. Sport Ireland; Health Services Executive; the Dormant Accounts Disbursement Fund, etc.) in 2021, with much of this funding supporting delivery of the aforementioned programmes of physical activity and sport.

Offaly Sports Partnership also launched its newest five-year strategic plan for the period 2021 to 2025 inclusive; restructured its management committee; and completed its Sport Ireland governance audit.

Healthy Ireland

The Healthy Offaly Team was created by Offaly LCDC in 2018 to implement actions contained in the LCEP 2016-2021. The team is made up of representatives from key statutory organisations responsible for the promotion of health enhancing activity in Offaly.

The Healthy Offaly Plan includes objectives under five key themes including physical activity, mental health, sexual health, healthy weight and alcohol / substance misuse and tobacco.

Actions are delivered in the areas of physical activity for children; building healthier communities with a focus on rural Offaly; grow your own and healthy eating (meals on wheels); and community eco spaces as places of health and wellbeing.

Arts Service

Offaly County Council arts service is charged with investing and developing high quality, imaginative arts activity, with and for the people of Offaly and visitors to the county. In doing so, the arts office advocates for and clearly communicates the significant role that the arts play in enriching the

wellbeing of society, of our citizens, and in enhancing the public realm. This is achieved through our strategic planning processes, with an annual programme that is delivered in cooperation with artists, cultural producers, community groups and local stakeholders and, involving regional and national partners. Offaly arts service assists with the development of a range of key county-wide arts programmes such as: *FilmOffaly*, *Music Generation*, *Hullabaloo Children's Arts Festival*, *Anam Beo - Arts and Health*, *Culture Night*, along with providing ongoing support and advice to the many artists, creative practitioners, festivals, and community groups undertaking arts and culture projects across the county.

Lough Boora Sculpture Park

In 2021, the continuing partnership between Offaly County Council (OCC) and Bord na Móna (BNM), endorsed through a Memorandum of Agreement, which set out the basis of a collaborative partnership approach; saw the continued working of the Lough Boora Sculpture Park Management Committee. The purpose of the Management Committee is to establish a framework that will enable evolving an exceptional artistic vision for sustaining and developing the *Sculpture Park* at Lough Boora Discovery Park. This will be to establish the future curatorial direction of the Sculpture Park, at the same time as developing a model of governance and management structures that will be required to support this objective. In 2021 the Arts Office finalized a project funded by the Arts Council under the 'Invitation to Collaboration' scheme, to publish a research document titled *Art in Landscape* by Terre Duffy that recommended an operational framework for the Sculpture Park into the future. The Arts Office received further funding from the Arts Council based upon this research to develop a conference / seminar exploring the potential synergies and opportunities between culture, tourism and heritage. A series of workshops will lead up to a conference in 2022. The key audience for the seminar will include people interested in and working in the arts, culture, tourism and environment sectors, people living locally who engage with art in the landscape, and experts in their field nationally and internationally.

Youth Arts Research

The research report '*The Makings: Fostering Youth Creativity*', carried out by consultant Angela Ryan Whyte to examine both current and potential arts provision for young people in Offaly, with the purpose to recommend a framework for developing and implementing a new strategic approach for young people's arts provision in the county over the coming five years, was published and launched as part of Culture Night 2021.

Youth Arts Forum

In direct response to the findings of *The Makings – Fostering Youth Creativity.*, the Arts Office commissioned Youth Arts Facilitator, Oisín Robbins to develop a youth-led Arts Forum/Network. Oisín worked with the Arts Office to develop a number of initiatives with a focus on the age cohort 13-24 years, involving young people in the planning, delivery and evaluation of all programmes for and with young people. Oisín was also commissioned to liaise with youth workers, youth arts facilitators and youth organisations, to develop potential collaborations, funding opportunities, partnerships, with the aim of developing lasting partnerships in the area of youth led youth arts practice. This initiative did face challenges due to Covid 19, but despite this the youth forum established and began meeting regularly and plans are in place to grow the forum in 2022.

Youth Arts Commission

A new Youth Art Commission was initiated - *Making it with Nature* is a youth led exploration of our understanding and relationship with nature and biodiversity, led by artist Caroline Conway. The project is planned to be completed 2022.

Mini Movies

Approximately 100 young people took part in our Mini Movies programme from three schools in Edenderry. The programme was facilitated by Julie Forrester and consisted of learning skills in stop motion animation. The films were launched in Edenderry in October and also featured in OFFline Film Festival.

FilmOffaly

FilmOffaly continued to attract investment from national and international film-makers.

The FilmOffaly bursary winners for the film *Whale*, and *The Passion* were both completed in 2021. FilmOffaly 2021 bursary winner was awarded to Mixed Bag Media, and included a strong mentorship programme for Offaly Film Professionals.

FilmOffaly Mentoring Programme continued to offer opportunities for the development of script writing skills. Ireland's leading Script Writer, editor and mentor Mary Kate O'Flanagan was selected as FilmOffaly's Script Mentor for 2021, she worked with 4 writers selected for the programme. FilmOffaly continued to work with LOETB and Screen Skills Ireland to explore the potential to develop an accredited educational course for film professionals which will assist in the development of the industry in Offaly.

FilmOffaly worked in partnership with OFFline Film Festival to deliver a FilmOffaly Industry Day, as part of OFFline Film Festival. This opportunity was funded through Offaly Local Enterprise Office.

Creative Places Edenderry

The Arts Office in conjunction with the national charitable agency, Creative Lives were successful in an application to the Arts Council for funding under their Creative Places scheme. This is an ambitious three year funding stream that will be led by Creative Lives in partnership with Offaly County Council Arts Office and Edenderry Municipal Council. This is a ground up developmental project which has the potential to galvanise and transform the creative and cultural scene in Edenderry. The project will include a steering committee inclusive of Creative Lives, Offaly County Council Arts Office and Edenderry Municipal District, together with Offaly County Library Service, Creative Edenderry, North Offaly Community Development Network and Edenderry Community Cabin. The ambition of the partners is to facilitate the emergence of a strong cultural identity for the area and support sustainable networks and opportunities for cultural engagement and participation. It will aim to achieve this through open, collaborative methods engaging with the community at grassroots level. The project will work in alignment with plans for the new library and art space.

Culture Night Offaly

2021 Culture Night consisted of 19 online and offline events across Offaly at 11 venues with over 80 artists involved. The night attracted over 500 on the ground and a virtual audience of over 4000. There were four specially commissioned art works for Culture Night, one of which, Dance like a Girl by the Donlon Dance Company featured on RTE Nationwide as a highlighted Culture Night Event. Culture Night is co-funded by the Arts Council.

Poetry Town

Tullamore became a 'Poetry Town', for a week, a programme collaboration between Offaly Arts office and Poetry Ireland. Throughout the week 6 events took place around Tullamore, with Poetry Slams, Poetry Workshops and Reveal of Poet Laureate Cormac Lally reaching seasoned and amateur poets of all ages. Over 23 local poets were involved attracting a ground audience of over 130.

Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival

Hullabaloo! celebrated its 15th annual festival as a combined online and offline series of events taking place over 4-day with high intensity and wide-ranging programme of creative zoom/pre-recorded

workshops and shows, for children aged between 3 to 12 years. With music, art, dance, film, literature, painting, craft and much more. The festival is undertaken in partnership with Birr Theatre and Arts Centre working with Offaly libraries and Clara Family Resource Centre.

In the Open | Faoin Spéir

The Arts Office were awarded funding from the Arts Council to generate a sustained and curated programme of multidisciplinary, inclusive arts activity in public or open spaces in towns and communities around Ireland between July 2021 and April 2022. This is a collaborative partnership, led by Offaly County Council's Arts Office, including Birr Theatre and Arts Centre and Birr Festivals Collective. With the aim to develop an exciting and innovative curated programme of outdoor events, planned for Birr, Lough Boora, (in conjunction with the Sculpture Park) and Tullamore, in anticipation of the opening of the new Arts Centre for the town next year. The planning and programming is underway and will be launched in November, with the programme to be completed 2022.

Arts Act Grants

15 groups from the arts, community and voluntary sectors received grants towards arts activities in their community. The projects were selected on the basis of their ability to provide an innovative and high quality engagement with arts activity within particular community settings and sectors.

Festival Arts Grant

The county arts service disburses grants on an annual basis to a wide selection of arts and cultural festival taking place in Offaly. In 2021, Offaly county council provided financial assistance, advice and promotional assistance to, Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival, OFFline Film Festival, Tullamore International Summer Organ Series, Shakefest, Scripts and Birr Festival of Music, as well as leading out with other festivals such as Hullabaloo Children's Arts Festival in partnership with Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. Many of the festivals were able to adapt to an online offering for their audiences.

Arts in Health – Anam Beo

Anam Beo, Offaly's Arts and Health organisation promotes arts inclusion through the delivery of comprehensive arts projects in care settings. In 2021, Anam Beo was one of the organisations badly affected by the Covid-19 restrictions, with minimal access to their primary target audience. However, through careful planning they were able to work with active age groups, older people and staff in care settings in a response to the pandemic in a distanced way. Anam Beo work in conjunction with HSE care settings in Edenderry, Riada House, Tullamore, Birr Community and Nursing Unit, The Irish

Wheelchair Association, Ballinagar and Ballycumber Active Age Group. Anam Beo were funded through Creative Ireland under the Creativity in Older Age scheme to develop a project for older age groups in response to Covid 19, The project Conversations On Your Doorstop, involved three Offaly artists connecting with people 'on their doorstep'. The focus was on individuals needs and a gentle process with people in the community who were feeling isolated, where their usual community engagements had been out of reach. There were a total number of 13 participants from Birr Community & Nursing Unit, Birr, Crinkle, Clareen, Tullamore, Killeigh and Lockclose. Artistic outcomes included, Posters with Quotes, an 8 min short film, illustrated voice over clip and visual images. Anam Beo are also working with Age and Opportunity and other national organisations in the research/development/ implementation of A National Arts and Creative Charter for Older People

Creative Ireland Projects

The Arts Office continued to lead on a number of Creative Ireland projects including: Creative Edenderry, Community Open-Call projects, Animation Residency and the Tullamore Arts Development Project.

Animation Residency

Offaly County Council arts service, through the Creative Ireland programme, continued to support the Animation Film Residency that enables two film animators to undertake a residency, in Birr. This six-month residency offers ongoing mentorship and post-production services and an opportunity to create and show-case new work to audiences of filmmakers and the general public at the OFFline Film Festival.

Public Art

Banagher Public Art

Writer Jessica Traynor completed a writing project working with the community to create a poetic history of Banagher. The project was developed through a series of workshops with Banagher's writing community plus workshops with local schools. Jessica also worked with Banagher College with musician Elaine Agnew, and St Rynagh's with Music Generation to deliver online workshops and recording with students. A recording of the song and poetry was launched online.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre continued to provide an extensive arts programme through its annual performance season, its learning and outreach community projects and as an incubation and

administrative hub for a considerable number of prestigious arts festivals in Offaly: Birr Vintage and Arts Week, OFFline film festival, Scripts- Offaly film and playwriting festival; Birr Festival of Music and Voice and, as co-producer with Offaly County Council of the Hullabaloo! Children’s Arts Festival. Birr Theatre & Art Centre continued to face many challenges throughout the year as a consequence of Covid-19, but rose to the challenge producing much of their festival work as online events and taking care to maintain their presence to their audience, while supporting local artists on the ground. Offaly County Council provided funding of €38,000.00 to Birr Theatre and Arts Centre in 2021.

Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath

MGOW continued to deliver a hybrid service throughout 2021 combining online workshops and classes with face-to-face activity where possible. Through our online programme we worked hard to develop new ways to keep our amazing community of young musicians and their tutors connected and when it was possible to do so, we adapted face to face approaches to make them safe for everyone involved. Many of our courses and ensembles, such as Singfest and Sinfonia moved online, and also included music technology and song writing sessions, instrumental tuition for schools and community groups, an online singing camp in partnership with Music Generation Louth, Sing Ireland and IMRO. All resulting in a jam-packed weekly programme of musical activity. One of the highlights of the online offering was the introduction of the Rock @ 2 – a class developed exclusively for the children and young people attending SEN and ASD units. Each week they zoom in for 30 minutes of music fun. We were also delighted to be able to bring our young songwriters together for the Music Box Residency during July 2021. Building on yearlong online opportunities to collaborate and learn all about song writing, the residency brought young musicians from across Offaly & Westmeath together with music industry professionals. Along with creating further opportunities to develop their song writing skills and learning about recording, the young composers collaborated with a videographer as they storyboarded and filmed videos to accompany their music. The videos were released during a live-streamed launch as part of Culture Night 2021 activities and the album will soon be available from all major music streaming services including Spotify. We were also delighted to be awarded the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards 2020 for our work in *Sustaining the Arts*

Support and Information to Professional & Voluntary Groups/Individuals

The Arts Office is a resource for artists and organisations that require advice, direction and information on developing and promoting a project or their practice. This element of the Arts Service continued to be busy in 2021, with many enquiries from artists and community alike addressing the challenges

faced by the Covid 19 restrictions. This element of the service is based on best practice principles in all forms of arts development and is intended to give rise to increased confidence in quality methods and professional approaches.

Professional Artists Support Grant

In 2021 the county arts service continued to provide assistance to professional artists from and living in Offaly. The awards are designed to support the development of artist's professional practice. Thirteen grants were awarded to artists.

Professional Development Training for Artists

The Arts Office organized a number of online supports through training opportunities for artists including an online show and tell for offaly artists giving the opportunity for artists to promote their work and discuss common concerns.

Online Communication Strategy

The Arts Office continue to engage the public and artists through our online and social platforms, Facebook, twitter and our extensive email distribution databases.

Birr Writers Residency

The continuation of the successful annual partnership with the St Brendan's House (Tin Jug Studio) in Birr saw four writers awarded with the writers residency. Due to Covid restrictions some of the residencies had to be postponed.

Capital Projects

Arts Infrastructure Strategy

The Arts infrastructure Strategy for the County continues to be progressed by People Places Consulting: Caoimhín Corrigan and Siobhán O'Malley. The strategy will explore how all the Arts Infrastructure (existing and planned) can be developed in a collaborative and harmonic manner, resulting in a cohesive, complimentary and self-sustaining network of arts infrastructure that is beneficial to the whole county. This project will be due for publication 2021- 2022.

Tullamore Community Arts Centre

The Tullamore Community Arts Centre project continued to be developed through 2021, this was based upon the agreement from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht confirming

the support through Access Funds of €2 million. In addition to this funding €2.5 million was pledged by Offaly County Council. The Board of the Centre pledged to raise a further €500,000 by way of fundraising.

The Arts Office continued to assess best practice operational and planning options. An Arts Office programme, as a stand-alone curated project, ran throughout 2021, engaging targeted audiences / local community participation in advance of the Art Centre opening.

Edenderry Library and Arts Space

The Arts Office continued to work in collaboration with the county librarian in the development of plans for a multi-purpose arts space to be incorporated into the planning of the new library for Edenderry, this will include developments that take place as part of the Creative Places Edenderry project.

Aras Exhibition Programme

The exhibition programme for the Atrium continued to be suspended as a result of Covid 19 restrictions during 2021.

Fire Service

Activities in 2021

Offaly County Council Fire & Rescue Service provided an effective and professional response to emergencies on a 24/7, 365day basis throughout 2021. Offaly County Council Fire & Rescue Service respond to an average of 600 incidents and 700 station callouts throughout the county.

The Section 26 Fire and Emergency plan formed the basis for the Fire Service work program 2021. The 2021 budget of €3.2 million maintained the Fire Service.

Significant resources have been made available for training within the Fire Service with an expected spend of €150,000 for training alone in 2021. In addition, the Councils commitment to training for fire fighters, and research into the latest equipment and technology, ensures that our fire crews are best equipped to respond quickly, safely and effectively to the full range of emergency incidents that we attend.

Offaly County Council Fire Service is also responsible for the assessment of all Fire Safety Certificates, Dangerous Substances, and Disabled Access Certificate applications, and providing advice on planning

referrals, The Service also processes licence applications, undertakes fire safety inspections of public premises and manages fire safety promotion campaigns. Offaly Fire service is actively involved in the Community Smoke Alarm Project and also delivered the Fire Safety Schools program to all primary schools in the county.

The Building Control function of Offaly County Council is integrated into the fire service. This includes the inspection and monitoring of new works to monitor for compliance with all the requirements of the Building Regulations.

Both the Local and the Regional Major Emergency Plans were maintained, reviewed and revised by the Major Emergency Development Committee, the Regional Working Group and the Regional Steering Group.

Civil Defence provides an emergency response capability and supported the community and events throughout early 2021. Civil Defence is assisting the Covid 19 response in the community and also assisted in the testing regime.

The Breathing Apparatus Training Centre in Tullamore is utilised for the training of Offaly Firefighters and is leased by other Fire Authorities and non-Local Authority organisations. A detailed preliminary appraisal for the proposed expansion of facilities at Tullamore Breathing Apparatus Training Centre was submitted to the National Directorate for Fire & Emergency Management. Funding of €1.1 million has been approved in 2021, this will fund the extension of the existing drill training yard into the adjoining lands, and provide for the construction of a training support block.

2022

The 2022 Estimate demonstrates Offaly County Council's commitment to maintaining the level of funding required to implement the Fire Service Section 26 Plan so that an effective and professional response to fires and other emergencies is provided. Offaly Fire Service will continue to explore and implement cost efficiencies across all aspects of the service.

Enterprise

The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Offaly is working to deliver Offaly County Council's Mission Statement which is "To lead sustainable economic, social and community development in Offaly".

LEO Offaly manages the Enterprise and Economic Development Functions within Offaly County Council. In April 2021, Tourism as an economic driver was added to the brief. In 2021, 7 members of staff (inclusive of temporary staff) in the Local Enterprise Office, 3 members of staff in Offaly Tourism and 2 Business Development Managers in Offaly Innovation & Design Centre CLG report to the Head of Enterprise. The Head of Enterprise reports to the Director of Services for Economic Development and Planning.

Offaly in context:

Offaly has a population of almost 78,000 and is a predominantly rural county and as such, a large proportion of the workforce is engaged directly in agriculture or agri-related businesses throughout the county. In terms of employment and skills, Offaly has a strong heritage of energy production and manufacturing. Employment in ESB and Bord na Móna resulted in generations of skilled fabricators. Many of those employees have gone on to create their own manufacturing businesses. The Brown to Green strategy and Accelerated Decarbonisation presents a significant challenge to Offaly, with 100s of direct and indirect job losses.

The number of active enterprises in Offaly is 4,367 which employ 17,546 people. 26% of these businesses are in less conventional sectors, where emerging business clusters can often be found. These include Med-Tech, FinTech, ICT and Engineering employers (such as Integra, Zoetis, Kelpak Medical and McDonald International). Offaly is also a growing hub for the Food & Drinks sector, with large employers like Tullamore Dew Distillery, Carroll Meats and Glenisk and the artisan food producers based in Ferbane Food Campus. Professional services, scientific and technical activities, as well as various public service providers comprise the county's other key economic pillars, with traditional employment in peat production giving way to opportunities in the green economy.

There are significant opportunities emerging through the co-working facilities, eco innovation and investment in tourism, greenways and heritage related centres. The basis exists, therefore, for building on the strengths of the Region in green enterprises and services and developing a co-ordinated and integrated way to create a "whole of Midlands approach" to maximise future "Accelerated Decarbonisation" initiatives for the Region. These can be funded from current and future carbon tax funding and the sources of funding from the European Union under its Smarter Europe/A Greener Low Carbon Europe objectives.

Enterprise Development

The Local Enterprise Office produces a four-year Enterprise Development Plan. Earlier this year, the 2017-2020 Plan was reviewed and the new 2021 LEO Offaly Enterprise Development Plan was produced.

LEO Offaly Enterprise Development Plan 2017-2020 Review

The period 2017-2020 was a period of transition and change, with external influences affecting the economic landscape beyond what was anticipated during the preparation of the Local Enterprise Plan. While the impact of Brexit and Accelerated Decarbonisation were anticipated, the effect of these have been amplified by Covid-19.

Despite the above challenges, LEO Offaly met or exceeded the majority of original targets set out in the 2017-2020 Local Enterprise Plan. There continues to be a strong pipeline of grant applications as evidenced by 37 approvals in 2020 vs a target of 30. 75 courses took place in 2020 compared to a target of 40. This figure was inflated in 2020 due to Covid-19 with a range of additional programmes being run to assist all businesses manage the impact of the pandemic.

The temporary Covid-19 Trading Online Voucher scheme resulted in a large volume of applications for the scheme, largely due to increase in percentage of grant aid from 50% to 90%. There were 162 approvals under the Trading Online Voucher scheme in 2020, compared to a target of just 25.

A summary of the actual performance vs **original** targets set out in 2017-2020 plan below:

Jobs:	Target 2020	Output 2020
Total Employment in LEO Clients	874	1,049
Gross Jobs Created	170	179
Full Time Created	99	114
Other Time Created	71	65
Net Increase (after Job Losses)	92	-34
Number of LEO Clients	221	228

Measure 1	Target 2020	Output 2020
Grant Applications Approved:	30	37
Feasibility	6	3
Priming	8	11

Business Expansion	16	23
No. of potential new jobs associated with Priming & Business Expansion	40	51

Measure 2	Target 2020	Output 2020
Training:		
Total No. of Courses	40	75
Total No. of Participants	570	845
No. of SYOB Programmes	11	13
Mentoring:		
Number of Participants	148	168

Schools Entrepreneurship	Target 2020	Output 2020
Number of Secondary Schools Participating	10	10
Number of Students Participating	575	476

Trading On Line Vouchers:	Target 2020	Output 2020
No. of Trading Online Vouchers approved	25	162

A number of new initiatives were also rolled out during the period including national programmes such as GradStart and Covid-19 Business Continuity Vouchers. LEO Offaly also participated in regional initiatives funded under LEO Competitive Fund Scheme including Engenuity - Midlands Engineering Network and Going Green.

A summary of the outputs from these new initiatives can be found below:

Scheme:	Output 2020
GradStart programme: Companies approved	1
Agile R&D Fund: Companies approved	2
Business Continuity Vouchers approved	377
Micro Enterprise Assistance Scheme approvals	4
Engenuity Midlands Engineering Network: Offaly participants	16
Going Green programme: Offaly participants	8
Midlands Exporters Programme: Offaly participants	5

LEO Offaly Highlights in 2021

Increased Client Engagement

During 2021 and in response to Covid-19, LEO Offaly continued to provide a wide range of new and existing supports to Offaly's business community. Client interactions continued to grow as LEO Offaly adapted services to provide online training programmes, online events and networking, mentoring via phone and Zoom/MS Teams and enhanced grant supports to a wider business audience. In addition to assisting with the Covid-19 challenge, LEO Offaly continued to work with Offaly businesses to ensure they could be as well prepared as possible for Brexit and the transition to a low carbon, digital future. In 2021, LEO Staff re-introduced physical client meetings and site visits in compliance with Covid-19 restrictions.

Client Feedback/Testimonials

"Offaly LEO are always extremely helpful and knowledgeable when dealing with any queries. Their online courses, especially during COVID, have been a timely and great resource for myself and my clients alike"

"There is so much to marketing a business now and thanks to the Local Enterprise Office. You are allowing the small businesses to have a chance at surviving in the new online world. The tutor explained how we can set up a marketing plan and be as good as the top companies. I am looking forward to putting it into operation"

"Again another invaluable workshop for business owners in the Offaly area - I have found all workshops I have attended through Offaly Local Enterprise a great help and support, thank you"

National Enterprise Awards

The National Enterprise Awards final were broadcast online from the Mansion House in Dublin on the 11th February. The National Enterprise Awards are one of a number of initiatives that the Local Enterprise Offices run, to foster entrepreneurship across the country. Competing for Offaly at the national final was Dr. Emma-Rose Conroy of Euro Stallions (Ireland) Ltd. Euro Stallions (Ireland) Ltd is the first EU approved embryo collection center in Ireland. Westmeath company Bevcraft, a mobile canning company took the top prize at this year's National Enterprise Awards.

Local Enterprise Week

It was Local Enterprise Week from Monday March 1st to Friday March 5th. Over 200 budding entrepreneurs and business owners in Offaly took part in online events. An annual initiative from the

31 Local Enterprise Offices around the country, including Local Enterprise Office Offaly, more than 270 events took place online under the theme of ‘Making It Happen’ attracting over 10,700 bookings nationally.

Student Enterprise Awards Offaly

The Student Enterprise Awards County Offaly Final took place on 9th March, which was held live online for the first time ever in the history of the competition. Almost 500 students from 10 schools took part in the annual programme locally. Damien Delaney and Alex Byrne of Hology Photography were the winning teenager entrepreneurs from Birr Community School. They run a photography business selling pictures framed, unframed and on canvas of the local area and more.

National Student Enterprise Awards

Damien Delaney and Alex Byrne from St. Brendan’s Community School in Birr won the Natasha Lynch Commemorative Award for Excellence in Social Media award at the National Final of this year’s Student Enterprise Programme.

The Finals of the Local Enterprise Office initiative were broadcast virtually from Croke Park with An Tánaiste Leo Varadkar and Ambassador Derval O’Rourke speaking with host RTE’s Rick O’Shea, as students and teachers watched on from across the country.

There were 72 student enterprises competing in this year’s National Final in what is Ireland’s largest entrepreneurship programme for second level students. The initiative, funded by the Government of Ireland through Enterprise Ireland and delivered by the 31 Local Enterprise Offices in local authorities throughout the country, saw 29,000 students from almost 500 secondary schools across the country take part.

Regional Initiatives

LEO Offaly in association with the Midland LEOs of Laois, Westmeath and Longford continued to collaborate on a number of joint initiatives, including Export Programmes, the development and promotion of the Engenuity Engineering Cluster, the Going Green Programme, and the development of the Midlands Food and Drink Strategy.

Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan

LEO Offaly participated in review of the closing plan and in the development of the new Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024. The 3 key objectives are: 1. Climate Action: Transition to a zero-carbon economy; 2. Build on achievements to date in sectors in which the region has a competitive advantage through Smart Specialisation and wider adoption of digitalization within business,

leveraging the new Technological University of the Shannon; 3. Placemaking – position the Midlands as a community of choice in which to live, create, study, work, visit, and invest.

Midlands Regional Transition Team

LEO Offaly continues to be an active member of this team, participating in meeting and contributing to the delivery of actions.

LEO Offaly Enterprise Development Plan 2021-2024

This new plan has been prepared in line with the national, regional and local policies and initiatives identified in a number of other relevant plans, including the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031, Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan, Project Ireland 2040, National Planning Framework, the National Development Plan 2018-2027, Enterprise 2025 Renewed, Offaly County Council Corporate Plan 2019-2024, County Development Plan 2021-2027, Offaly Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021, Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2024, Midlands Regional Food & Drink Strategy 2020 -2024 and Climate Action Plan 2019.

Key deliverables include supporting and promoting the green and circular economies, engineering and manufacturing sectors, the food and beverage sector, and increasing employment levels in grant aided businesses.

Over the next 4 years we will see a continuation and development of work undertaken in the following areas in the previous period:

- Drive the development of sustainable local enterprise, putting local micro and small business at the heart of job creation in Offaly
- Drive and support business start-ups and promote a ‘can-do’ business culture
- Increase the job potential of new and existing micro and small businesses
- Increase the number of innovative businesses with potential to export
- Develop a progression pathway for clients to Enterprise Ireland High Potential Start-Ups (HPSUs) and maintain strong links with Technological University of the Shannon Midlands/MidWest and Midland Innovation and Research Centre (MIRC)
- Deliver appropriate enterprise training to enhance Capability and Management Development
- Work with Members and different departments of Offaly County Council to promote a pro-business enterprise message
- Drive an entrepreneurial culture across the county, at all levels
- Utilise all opportunities to leverage additional funding for Enterprise Supports

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- Give particular focus to the following sectors: Sustainability, Green Energy/Technologies, Food & Beverages, Engineering, Science and Big Data, Tourism & Creative Industries
 - Enhance Economic Infrastructure: Co-Working Hubs, Industrial & Business Parks, Data Sets, Connectivity Reports, Promotional Material
 - Collaborate with Local Stakeholders on the Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) Review
 - Collaborate with Regional Stakeholders on the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Objectives

Economic Development

LEO Offaly staff together with colleagues in Offaly County Council and stakeholders in the Midlands Region have been supporting businesses and communities in the transition towards a sustainable, low carbon, digital future. Through collaborations and competitive funding schemes, there have been significant advancements in the development of tourism projects such as Greenways and Mountain Bike Trails, Green Energy projects in North Offaly, Science and Big Data projects in South Offaly, an enhanced Wi-Fi and broadband projects throughout the County.

Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021 Review

In 2021, LEO Offaly conducted the review of the Economic element of the LECP 2016-2021 Review. The findings were presented to the SPC for Land Use, Planning and Economic Development, and the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC). Under the Local Government Reform (Amendment) Act 2014, each Local Authority is required to develop a six year LECP, which is to be reviewed once in its lifetime.

Within the plan, there were 49 Special Objectives and 261 Actions. For the Economic Plan element, there were 30 Objectives and 104 Actions.

Observations from the Review

- At the time the LECP was written, there were no funding streams available to implement the Plan
- A range of competitive funding streams were introduced during the life of the Plan, and this enabled impressive progress over 6 years
- Most of the actions continue to be relevant, and variations may feature in the next LECP
- Over reliance on OCC and LEO Offaly to drive majority of actions
- Many actions have a status of “In Progress”. Often, this means that work is ongoing as opposed to a one off action e.g. Promote Tullamore for Inward Investment” Need to ensure that there are adequate resources to take on new actions

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- The inclusion of Goals/Actions was useful to reference in Funding Applications

Lessons from the Review

- LECP needs to be key part of linked national, regional and local plans
- Other Plans such as Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan, Local Enterprise Development Plan etc. need to be complementary to LECP
- LECP needs to identify and include key local priorities
- Establish mechanism for interagency implementation of actions
- Keep implementation simple – no meeting burnout!
- Develop goals which are directional rather than aspirational
- Ensure relevance of actions for implementing agency – agency must have capacity to implement it
- Reduce high number of actions – 261 in Offaly LECP
- Ensure goals are relevant for term of the LECP
- Need clear guidance on mid-term review process
- Greater integration of community and economic goals

The findings of the LECP Review will be used in the development of the new LECP Plan which is scheduled to be completed and published in 2022.

Economic Development Highlights 2021

Co-Working Hubs

LEO Offaly staff continue to work closely with Offaly Innovation & Design Centre CLG, both with the running of the four hubs and the due diligence/secretariat requirements. In 2021, Offaly Innovation & Design Centre CLG successfully applied for the following funding: €75,000 under the Connected Hubs Scheme; €69,750 under the EI Enterprise Centre Grant, and €476,000 under the Just Transition Fund. A new Business Development Manager for The Junction and e-Hive has been recruited and design plans are completed and tendering underway for refurbishment of 19H The Junction Business Innovation Centre and expansion at 25J The Junction Office Suites. A series of training events and initiatives in streamBIRR to promote data analytics has also taken place.

Green Energy/Rhode Green Energy Park

Offaly County Council in association with North Offaly Development Fund (NODF) CLG continued to build on the work undertaken in 2020 with the launch of the Opportunity Assessment Report for Rhode in North Offaly.

In 2021, Offaly County Council in association with North Offaly Development Fund received a funding offer to complete Rhode Green Energy Park's infrastructure. The funding also allows for a Feasibility Study on integrating a Data Centre/large energy user with renewable energy and green hydrogen.

In 2021, North Offaly Development Fund CLG successfully applied for funding for a Feasibility Study. The €110,000 project will investigate the feasibility of creating a green hydrogen demonstration hub at Rhode Green Energy Park, integrating energy from renewable electricity with the gas network. Project partners are NODF, SSE and Bord na Mona. The study will be carried out by RPS, NUIG and UCD.

In addition, Offaly County Council in association with NODF arranged regular briefings with promoters and stakeholders in and around the Park to develop the business community and opportunities for collaboration. Offaly County Council in association with RPS presented at the National Hydrogen Conference in June 2021. Furthermore, Offaly County Council made a detailed cross-departmental submission to Eirgrid's Shaping Our Electricity Future Consultation.

Space to Grow

A potential c.1GW of renewable energy generation and storage, only 30 - 80 km from the Greater Dublin Area presents an unprecedented opportunity for large energy users and employers to establish in the Midlands. In addition, by locating in Offaly, large energy users will join a dynamic eco-system of green energy companies, and also can fulfil CSR obligations in investing in an area most affected by the accelerated cessation of peat harvesting and peat fired power generation.



Shopfront Scheme

LEO Offaly is managing the Pilot and supplementary scheme as funded under the Town & Village Renewal scheme. This is in conjunction with Planning and Architecture within OCC. There were 52 applications under this scheme.

Streetscape Enhancement Scheme

Due to staff shortages elsewhere in the organisation, LEO Offaly is managing this scheme which has 31 applications from businesses in Tullamore, Portarlington, Birr and Edenderry.

Site Sales

LEO Offaly is continuing to manage enquiries and deal with site sales in Ferbane Industrial Park, Lemonaghan and Portarlington Industrial Park. There is increasing interest in the purchase of industrial serviced sites across the County. There are four units under construction in Ferbane Industrial Park.

Expansion Announcement

Zoetis, a biopharma company [focused on animal healthcare](#), announced that it will expand its presence in Ireland with the creation of up to 100 new jobs at its facility in Tullamore. It currently employs about 90 highly skilled scientists and technicians at its Tullamore site. The Co Offaly facility became part of Zoetis when it acquired Nexvet Biopharma for about \$85m in 2017. The US-headquartered company plans to break ground on the Tullamore expansion early next year and to be fully operational by 2025. The development will create 80 to 100 jobs over the next three years, with some roles being phased in later this year.

Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning Strategy Policy Committee (SPC)

LEO Offaly provides the Secretariat for this Committee. In 2021, 4 meetings were held and the SPC worked through its adopted work programme, covering topics such as:

Briefing and consideration of the draft County Development Plan and draft Development Contribution Scheme

- Economic Development Updates and Initiatives
- Offaly Tourism updates
- Regeneration Schemes and Greenways updates.
- North Offaly Development Fund CLG

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- LEO Offaly provides the Secretariat, admin support and on-going assistance to develop opportunities at Rhode Green Energy Park

2022 Enterprise & Economic Development Priorities include:

- Continue to support Offaly Enterprises as they deal with the challenges of Covid-19
- Assist Offaly Enterprises respond to the challenges of BREXIT through preparation, adaptation and exploring alternative markets
- Continue to engage with local, regional and national stakeholders to support the transition to a decarbonized economy
- Promote, Support and Develop Offaly Enterprise at all levels including student enterprise, female entrepreneurship, senior entrepreneurship
- Continue to develop and deliver timely and relevant training programmes and initiatives designed to: Increase exports, Build resilience, Increase productivity, prepare for the low carbon economy, Embrace the digital economy, Innovate, be managed by ambitious & capable individuals, Fuel regional growth
- Promote Offaly as a great location for business expansion, and continue to manage to all enquiries and opportunities for inward investment
- Promote Offaly's key sectoral strengths including: Green Energy & Technology, Food & Drink, Engineering and Manufacturing, Science and Big Data, Tourism and Creative Industries
- Continue to engage with local, regional and national stakeholders to deliver the key objectives of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan
- Continue to work with other departments in Offaly County Council to progress projects benefiting economic development of the County
- Continue to work with and support Offaly Innovation & Design Centre CLG and the development of co-working hubs in Offaly

Subject to resources, LEO Offaly will

- Co-Ordinate and develop the Economic Element of the Local Economic & Community Plan 2022-2028
- Tender for an Economic Vision and Strategy for Co. Offaly
- Explore opportunities for developing a new Industrial Park in Tullamore and/or acquiring new industrial lands elsewhere in the County

- Assist in the development of Offaly Tourism to address new Product Development and capability development of Tourism Providers

Tourism

Once again, 2021 was a difficult year for the tourism sector with restrictions continuing into August. The businesses however showed great resilience and creativity. The tourism team worked closely with Fáilte Ireland to assist and support our stakeholders through the recovery. Offaly Tourism continued to promote Offaly to the domestic market, increasing visitor numbers and dwell time.

TV Presence

The magazine style American cable TV show, *'Ireland County by County'* filmed for two days in June. The crew visited a number of sites including Clonmacnoise, Lough Boora, Birr Castle Clara Bog. The show will be carried by 239 public TV stations across the USA, with an audience of 40+ million annual TV viewers and broadcast from Autumn 2021.

Tourism sites in Offaly also featured in the TG4 *'Heartlands'* show and the music documentary *'Fleadh 21'*, broadcast in July & August.



Summer Marketing Campaign

Offaly Tourism's national Summer marketing campaign launched in Mid May 2021.

For the second year, Offaly tourism was delighted to collaborate with its neighbours in the midland counties to jointly promote the area on local radio. The *'Magical Midlands'* adverts began broadcasting in June for a period of eight weeks. The campaign consisted of three county specific adverts for Offaly, Laois and Westmeath.

The common message at the beginning and ending of the adverts is to enjoy the ‘Magical Midlands’. The adverts encourage the midlanders to get out and explore the wonders and beauty within the region.

A national radio campaign ran for a period of two weeks in July on Today FM & Newstalk, boosting Offaly’s profile nationwide. A further ad campaign was broadcast on iRadio for a two-week period in June targeting a younger demographic.

Promotional Videos

2021 saw the filming and launch of the first ever Offaly Tourism Videos. The series of videos were launched throughout the Summer on our website and social media. Receiving a great response, they showcase all the great things to experience in Offaly and are a valuable promotional resource which will be utilised into the future.

Digital Marketing

Offaly Tourism continued to grow its social media presence in 2021, with Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts using the #visitoffaly. Working with a social media consultancy firm, our following and reach has grown significantly YOY. The total number of followers over the social media platforms is in excess of 15,000; an increase of 42% in the last two years.

Social media influencers continue to carry great power over their audience. Offaly welcomed a number of high profile bloggers in 2021 including Roz Purcell, Greg O’Shea and Jedward, with posts receiving 70k likes!



Fáilte Ireland's 'Keep Discovering' Campaign

The very successful Fáilte Ireland 'Keep Discovering' Campaign continued throughout the Summer with TV, print and radio advertising. Birr Castle Demesne featured in the IAE TV advert and cruising on the River Shannon on the IHH advert. Offaly adverts featured in the national newspapers; Irish Times, Irish Independent and Examiner, in July and October.



Print Advertising

Offaly specific adverts and editorial were organised for a number of publications in 2021; 'Your Ireland' Supplement, Celtic Media Group; 'Family Days Out', Iconic Media; 'Discover Ireland 2021', Western People Group



New Promotional Material



A number of new marketing material was completed in 2021 including; Offaly Outdoors brochure, A3 Map, Golf brochure and 'Top things to do in Offaly'.

Tourism Seminar

A tourism seminar will be held on 24th November in Tullamore. All members of the trade and associated stakeholders will be invited to attend. It is expected to be a great morning with a number of guest speakers including the Irish Independent's travel editor Pól Ó Conghaile. It will be an opportunity for the sector to meet face to face, network and build relationships.

Offaly Tourism Marketing Meetings

Despite the situation with COVID-19, Offaly Tourism Marketing meetings continued virtually throughout 2021. Chaired by Grainne O'Malley there was five meetings held; 26th January, 29th April, 6th July, 7th Sept., 16th November. The AGM also took place on 16 November.

The meetings are a great opportunity for the trade to engage directly with the tourism team, giving valuable feedback for marketing activities, campaign development etc.

Beyond 2021

- New www.visitoffaly.ie website will be launched for the 2022 tourist season
- Completion of the Fáilte Ireland's 'Destination Towns' project in Birr, Q3 2022
- New Offaly Tourism Strategy to be commissioned in 2022
- Opening up of new sections of the Grand Canal Greenway e.g. Ballycommon to Edenderry
- Works continuing on the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trails and sections will open throughout 2021 once completed.



Planning & Development

Development Management:

Offaly County Council administers the planning function for the entire county. The number of planning applications within the county have continued to increase during 2021. There has been an increase of 162% since 2014.

	Estimate to end 2021	Total 2020	Total 2014	Increase from 2014
Planning Applications	811 (611 to end September)	674	310	162 %

	Total received to end of September 2020	Total 2019	Total 2014	Decrease from 2014 to 2020
Extension of Duration Application & Assessments	11	5	42	74%

Overview:

2021 has been an extremely busy year for the Planning Department. The impact of Covid 19 (ongoing) remains a key issue in terms of the delivery of the various planning functions/services. The numbers of planning applications across the various development types continues to increase year on year.

The Planning Section has received and processed a significant volume of pre-planning meetings requests and development queries. In excess of 300 no. pre- planning meetings and development queries have been completed to date in 2021. Given the current Covid 19 restrictions these have been conducted largely using electronic means such as Zoom or Windows Teams, or by telephone and email. The planning counter has been open to general queries and viewing files since the lifting of Covid 19 restrictions but only on a limited basis, by appointment, which has resulted in many more queries by phone and email.

The Planning Department received its first Section 254 Application in August from National Broadband Ireland (NBI) with respect to the roll-out of the national broadband scheme. A number of additional

Section 254 applications will be received by the Planning Department from NBI over the coming months and into 2022.

The Planning Department is also continuing with its scanning project, which allows for current and historical files to be viewed over the internet. This has proved important in terms of compliance with Access to Information on the Environment Regulations. 2022 will bring the start of 'e-planning', a national initiative to allow the submission of planning applications electronically.

In addition to the above mentioned, the other main areas of focus for Development Management in 2021 were as follows:

Housing:

The Planning Department has received and processed a number of large scale housing developments throughout the County. Tullamore has experienced a significant increase in the number of housing developments with 5 no. planning applications in excess of 75 dwelling units each, submitted to date. The key county towns of Birr, Edenderry and Portarlinton have also seen an increase in the volume of housing proposals submitted, albeit of a smaller scale than that of Tullamore.

As mentioned above high volumes of the level of pre-planning meetings requested has continued throughout 2021. Given the current housing climate it is anticipated that the volume of pre-planning meetings and planning applications for housing developments will continue to increase into 2022.

The number of rural one-off houses and small minor domestic extensions/additions planning applications began on an upward trend from the start of 2021 and this has continued throughout the year with no signs of abating into 2022.

'Green Energy' Applications:

There has been a marked increase in the volume of large scale green energy-related developments and pre-plan meeting requests submitted during 2021 and this trend is likely to continue onto 2022. These include a number of large solar farm proposals, battery energy storage facilities, biomass storage facilities, large-scale greenhouse proposals and gasification plants.

Strategic Housing Developments (i.e. over 100 houses):

3 no. pre-planning meetings took place with respect to SHD applications in Tullamore during 2021.

A SHD application has recently been lodged with An Bord Pleanála on lands at Clonminch, Tullamore.

Large Scale Residential Developments (LSRD):

From 2022, Housing Developments over 100 units in size will revert to being adjudicated by Local Authorities. The Strategic Housing Development Legislation which has been in place since 2017 is due to be replaced. This process will introduce statutory provisions, in particular in relation to pre-planning and will have impacts on resources in both the planning and other sections which input into planning applications.

Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) Applications:

The Derrinlough Wind Farm SID application was granted by ABP in August 2021. The proposal includes the development of 21 no. wind turbines with a tip height of 185 metres and all associated works.

In April, a SID application for a grid connection and 110KV substations at Rhode (pursuant to Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act) was lodged to An Bord Pleanála and consequently a report was issued by the Planning Department to An Bord Pleanála as part of the Section 182A process. In May, a second 182A SID application for a 110KV Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) Loop Substation with 400m long overhead line grid connection at Cloncreen was submitted to An Bord Pleanála. Subsequently, the Planning Department issued a referral report to An Bord Pleanála with respect to the proposed development.

On foot of recent pre-planning meetings, it is anticipated that a number of Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) applications may be lodged to ABP in 2022 within County Offaly.

Unfinished Housing Developments & Taking in Charge Applications

The Planning Department in conjunction with the Housing, Roads, Water Services and Environment Departments continues to implement the DECLG's Managing and Resolving Unfinished Estates Guidelines. 33 no. estates have been removed from the Department of Housing Planning & Local Government's Survey of Unfinished Housing Developments since 2012 as a result of the necessary works having been undertaken by developers, site development inspections and meetings, facilitation (i.e. targeted release of bonds) and pursuing site resolution plans during this period.

A number of proposals have been received to date in 2021. Currently there are 8 no. new proposals for housing estates to be taken in charge by OCC to be presented to the elected members for consideration.

In addition, there are a number of housing estates which are in the process of being finalised with a view to the Council taking them in charge. This process is likely to be completed in 2021 but it should be noted, this is resource and funding dependent, as no additional funds have been issued at a national level for the completion of unfinished housing estates in recent years.

Derelict Sites

Due to limited resources, the work on Derelict Sites Register following Covid 19 has been limited. During 2020 the Derelict Sites Levy increased from 3% to 7% on properties on the register. There has been a recent drive for more output on Derelict sites and additional resources will be applied over the coming months. The new rate of Derelict sites levy was risen to 7%, under the provisions of the Planning & Development (Amendment) Act 2018. Some of the properties on the register have been examined by Housing Department with a view to determining if they can be acquired and brought back into use.

Vacant Sites Register – the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act, 2015

The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced the vacant site levy, which is intended to incentivise the development of vacant or idle sites in urban areas. In accordance with the Act:

- Work planned for early 2020 on Vacant Sites had to be deferred due to the Covid 19 pandemic.
- The next steps are to identify vacant sites, engage with landowners, register vacant sites, and apply a vacant sites levy which now stands at 7%.
- It is noted that that the Government’s 2021 Housing For All plan proposes to discontinue the Vacant Sites Levy in favour of other mechanisms to bring underused land into development.

Enforcement & Compliance

Enforcement activity in the year 2021, in comparison to previous years, is outlined in the table below.

	To end September 2021	To end September 2020	Total 2020
Warning Letters and (Enforcement Notices) issued	23 (1)	6 (2)	13 (2)

In addition, 2021, saw an increase of 21% in the number of complaints lodged, compared to the same period (January – September) in 2020. This increase may be partly contributable due to changes made

by households and businesses, during the course of the restrictions brought about by the pandemic. The investigation, regularisation and prosecution of complaints of unauthorised development/s are on-going and continues to be a challenge within the limited resources currently available.

Forward Planning

County Development Plan

The Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 was adopted 10th September 2021 and came into effect 6 weeks later on 22nd October 2021. It details the overall strategy of the council for the proper planning and sustainable development of the county over a 6-year period.

Local Area Plans

The preparation of Local Area Plans for Tullamore and Birr will be underway throughout 2022 in tandem with Area Based Transport Assessments, which Forward Planning will also input into. Later in the year it is hoped to commence the review of the Edenderry LAP.

Miscellaneous

- Forward Planning will prepare submissions on draft consultation Guidelines and statutory returns relevant to Forward Planning.
- Forward Planning will input into the Tullamore Regeneration Framework and the Tullamore Grand Canal Harbour masterplan.
- Implementation of County Development Plan objectives.
- Annual Development Plan Monitoring Report (as per draft Development Plan Guidelines) (goes to elected members and on website) – input from Development Management and Forward Planning.
- Input into the Tullamore Regeneration Framework.
- Input into the Tullamore Grand Canal Harbour masterplan.

Regeneration

The Regeneration Team continues to engage with the communities, stakeholders and local representatives to establish and develop possible projects for funding under the various regeneration schemes. The team coordinates with all sections within Offaly County Council to deliver successful, existing projects. Project development is ongoing to prepare for future calls of the various funding streams.

Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF)

URDF 2018

€3m Urban Regeneration Development Funding was secured in 2018 to carry out street enhancement works on High St. to Columcille St., Pedestrian bridge, Harbour Street and Store Street and construction of the Greenway (urban section) from Convent View to Ballydrohid. The first phase of the works is complete being High St, Bridge St, Columcille St, O'Connor Sq. and the pedestrian bridge at Millennium Sq. Full design and contract documents have been drawn up for the next phases: - Urban greenway, Harbour St. and Store St. Department approval for this phase to commence is pending. Meanwhile it has been suggested to the department that the High St Tanyard link (R2) proceed ahead of the Harbour St / Store St phase.

URDF 2020

The Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage announced the successful URDF application for Tullamore in 2020. This application consisted of the following project elements:

O'Connor Square to Church Street link over the Tullamore River and the proposed new urban garden on Church Street will provide a clear open space which will act as a pivotal connection between the two key squares in Tullamore. The provision of a Remote Working Hub can capitalise on this new 'placemaking' and would be a catalyst to revitalise Church Street.

High Street to Tanyard link; proposed new link to the rear of O'Connor Square. This new link can improve permeability from High Street to the Tanyard and open up the rear of the square to development opportunities.

Meath Lane Civic Space will compliment and improve the civic space around the development of the Tullamore Community Arts Centre and improves pedestrian linkage between High Street and Tara Street.

Tullamore Regeneration Framework Plan; providing a Vision for Tullamore to 2040, incorporating:

- A Public Realm Framework for Tullamore
- A Regeneration & Renewal Framework
- A Strategy for Sustainable Access & Permeability

Joint commissioning of "**Tullamore Harbour Development Options and Viability Appraisal**" between

OCC & Waterways Ireland, providing:

- Detailed economic analysis of each development option identified
- Recommend preferred options and most appropriate model of delivery
- Masterplan for the preferred and agreed option.

Acres Folly Enhancements involves the provision of a new (replacement) internal stair to allow managed access to the former viewing area at the top of the folly, a significant compliment to the wonderfully restored Acres Hall and the award-winning Lloyd Town Park

Tullamore URDF awarded 2020.					
Total cost	€2,993,876	Grant awarded	€2,245,407	Match funding	€748,469

Projects are ongoing currently. There are no calls currently for URDF, next call expected 2022.

Rural Regeneration Development Fund

Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF) 2018 and 2021

Edenderry – The Blundell Master Plan under the Rural Regeneration Development Fund in 2018 is now complete. A comprehensive Blundell Master Plan document has been launched and was very informative for the application submitted in July, 2021 for the RRDF Category 1, application “Edenderry Regeneration Phase II”- to include the demolition of the Old Tesco site, 33/34 JKL Street, design consultancy services for a new community library and arts base and land purchase. Announcements are pending - November 2021.

Edenderry Regeneration Phase II – pending RRDF 2021					
Total cost	€2,366,760	Grant pending	€1,893,408	Match funding	€473,352

Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF), Category 1 (‘Shovel ready’), 2019

The Edenderry Regeneration Phase I, Link Street application was successful as a Category 1 RRDF project in 2019 and is now nearing completion. This project consisted of the construction of a new Link Street, between Granary Court and Fair green to open up access to backlands of opportunity sites, Old Tesco Site, William Wallers Store and OPW lands as well as improving connectivity and permeability for Edenderry Town

Edenderry Regeneration Phase I – awarded RRDF 2019					
Total cost	€ 696,276	Grant awarded	€ 522,207	Match funding	€ 174,069

Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF), Category 2 2020

Banagher Regeneration was successful and is progressing. Consultants have been appointed to provide for an Architectural and Tourism Master Plan for Banagher Marina and Environs. Options to progress the project further are being considered by Regeneration team and Birr Municipal District.

Banagher Regeneration – awarded RRDF 2020					
Total cost	€ 527,000	Grant awarded	€ 395,250	Match funding	€ 131,750

Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF), Category 2 2020

Ferbane Regeneration – submitted in July 2021, consisting of 4 project elements as follows –

- Project (A) Architectural and Planning Framework for key sites and buildings
- Project (B) Ferbane Town Centre Public Realm Master Plan
- Project (C) Tourism and Green Infrastructure Development
- Project (D) Community-led Green Energy Enterprise

Announcement is pending - November, 2021

Ferbane Regeneration – pending RRDF 2021					
Total cost	€ 837,000	Grant pending	€ 669,600	Match funding	€167,400

There are no calls currently for RRDF applications. Next calls are expected in 2022.

Town & Village Renewal

Town and Village Renewal 2018

1 no. TVR projects from 2018 is due for completion in Q3 2021. All 11 other projects are successfully completed.

Town and Village Renewal 2019

11 no. TVR applications were submitted in 2019, the following 5 were successful

Municipal District	Project	Total Cost	Grant awarded	Match funding
Edenderry	Blundell Park, Edenderry – amenity enhancement	€250,000	€200,000	€50,000
Birr	The Green, Birr – public realm enhancements	€250,000	€200,000	€50,000
Birr	Crinkle – public realm enhancements	€125,000	€100,000	€25,000
Birr	Shinrone – Phase II of public realm enhancements	€125,000	€100,000	€25,000
Tullamore	Mount Bolus – Public realm enhancements	€125,000	€100,000	€25,000

Offaly County Council is currently progressing all of the above projects with completion date estimated at Q3 2022.

Town and Village Renewal 2020

During 2020, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, was tailored to address the emerging challenges associated with COVID-19. This introduced a new strand of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme for 2020 that focused on immediate interventions that could be delivered in the short-term to assist towns and villages to adapt to COVID-19. This new Strand is titled the “Accelerated Measures in Response to COVID-19” and consisted of 3 rounds of funding to which the following projects were successful:

Round 1 (submitted 3rd July, 2020) “Accelerated Measure in Response to COVID-19” - Grants awarded

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
County	Shop Front Scheme Covid 19 TVR 2020 R1	€40,000	€5,000	€45,000
County	Covid Capacity Scheme Covid 19 TVR 2020 R1	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Birr	Shannonbridge Tourist office public realm works Covid 19 TVR 2020 R1	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000

Round 2 (submitted 14th Aug, 2020) “Accelerated Measure in Response to COVID-19” - Grants awarded

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
County	Broadband connection points x6 Covid 19 TVR 2020 R2	€40,000	€5,000	€45,000
Edenderry	Edenderry, O'Connell Sq. Covid 19 TVR 2020 R2	€40,000	€5,000	€45,000
Birr	Birr geodome tents x4 festival equipment	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Tullamore	Killeigh Green public realm Covid 19 TVR R2	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Birr	Clareen public realm Covid 19 TVR 2020 R2	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Birr	Lusmagh public realm Covid 19 TVR 2020 R2	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000

Round 3 (submitted 28th Aug, 2020) “Accelerated Measure in Response to COVID-19” - results awarded

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Tullamore	Tullamore Millennium sq. enhancement	€40,000	€5,000	€45,000
Edenderry	Daingean Town Square enhancement	€40,000	€5,000	€45,000
Tullamore	Clara River picnic amenity area	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Birr	Ferbane pop up Urban garden	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Birr	Ballycumber River walk	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Edenderry	Geashill Picnic area	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000

These projects are all progressing through various sections of Offaly County Council with a completion date for all December, 2021.

The general Town and Village Scheme 2020 increased the maximum number of applications permitted per Local Authority from 6 to 10 based on the July stimulus package.

10 no. applications were prepared and submitted to the Department on 30th Sept, 2020 and the following were successful:

Municipal District	Project	Grant pending	Match funding	Total Cost
Tullamore	Mountbolus phase II public realm enhancements	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000
Tullamore	Mucklagh public realm enhancements	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000
Edenderry	Cloneygowan public realm enhancement of the green	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000
Edenderry	Kilmalogue public realm enhancements	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000
Edenderry	Daingean phase II public realm enhancements	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000
Birr	Ferbane public realm enhancement of Fairgreen	€200,000	€23,000	€223,000
Birr	Pollagh public realm enhancements	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000

Ballycumber, Killeigh and Birr Court House were unsuccessful.

There are no calls currently for TVRS applications. Next call is expected in 2022.

Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme

Scheme 2019

4 ORIS applications were submitted in 2019, the following 3 were successful: -

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Tullamore	Clara Bog Trail Connection footpath	€72,000	€18,000	€90,000
Edenderry	Derryounce Lakes and Trails development	€152,360	€38,090	€190,450
Tullamore/ Edenderry	Ballycommon to Kilbeggan Extension to Greenway	€313,280	€78,320	€391,600

Offaly County Council has completed the Ballycommon to Kilbeggan extension to the greenway and is currently progressing Derryounce and Clara projects.

Scheme 2020

The following project was submitted and was successful in 2020.

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Birr	Measure 3 Kinnitty – 'Route to the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trails' 'Kinnitty Woods Novice-Grade MTB Loop', and "Rediscovering Castle Bernard's Historic Bridges".	€500,000	€235,330	€735,330

Part 8 for the Kinnitty ORIS project has been advertised (Sept. 2021).

Scheme 2021

The following ORIS applications were submitted in 2021.

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Tullamore	Clara River Walk	€200,000	23,000	€223,000
Edenderry	Derrycastle – Project Development Measure: Funding for the preparation of 10-year plan for the site as a basis for future amenity and rural development applications.	€50,000	€20,000	€70,000

Announcements are pending - November 2021.

Greenways

Over €8,000,000 in greenway related funding has been secured since 2018, including approx. €500,000 match funding from Offaly County Council.

Connecting People – Connecting Places, Offaly's Walking & Cycling Strategy

Building on the foundation of *Connecting People Connecting Places*, September 2015, which outlines the overall vision for walking and cycling in the county, the Senior Planner and a member of the Forward Planning team, in conjunction with the Roads Section have since 2017 endeavoured to deliver the key objectives of this strategy.

Grand Canal Greenway – the objective is to extend quality, family friendly cycling and walkways along the Grand Canal towpath from Edenderry to Shannon Harbour, including the Kilbeggan Branch. The Council has since 2018 worked in partnership with Waterways Ireland, South Dublin County Council and Kildare County Council to develop a greenway along the entire length of the Grand Canal, from Dublin to Shannon Harbour. Delivery of funding under the **National & Regional Greenway Fund** moved from the Department of Transport to Transport Infrastructure Ireland in late 2021. The Council had been very successful under the National Greenways fund, securing €2.65m in 2020 to complete the Greenway from Daingean to Lough Boora Discovery Park and a further €3.1m in 2021 to complete the greenway from Daingean to Edenderry.

In summary, circa 47km of the Grand Canal (main line) Greenway is now in place with 20kms of this ‘shared’ with road vehicles. In the future, it is planned that this shared element will be reduced to 12kms on very quiet rural roads. A further circa. 14kms of Greenway is in place between Ballycommon and Kilbeggan with 7km of this in Co Westmeath. 3kms of this is ‘shared’ space.

Carbon Tax Fund 2021 – Feasibility Studies

2 no. feasibility studies under this 2020 fund are underway (Oct. 2021). One will examine the potential for a greenway from Shannon Harbour to Athlone *via* Shannonbridge and Clonmacnoise. This would link the Grad Canal Greenway with the Dublin – Galway Greenway at Athlone and potentially at Shannonbridge also. The second will examine the potential of a greenway link from Kilbeggan to Mullingar, thus completing a greenway link from Tullamore to Mullingar.

The combination of these routes and the completion of the Grand Canal Greenway to Shannon Harbour would result in a cycling and walking route of approx. 150kms, linking Tullamore, Mullingar, Athlone, Shannonbridge, Shannon Harbour and Ferbane.

Midlands Cycling Destination - Offaly

Work is continuing to examine the potential for delivering on the *Feasibility Study for the Development of a Major Cycling Destination in the Midlands of Ireland*, otherwise known as the *Midlands Cycling Destination – Offaly*. This is listed as a key objective in the *Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters in Ireland 2017-2021*, prepared by various state agencies with public lands in their ownership. A tender for this work is being prepared and Just Transition Funding has been secured for the development of the Implementation Strategy.

Funding to construct the ‘urban’ section of the Grand Canal Greenway through Tullamore (1.2km) to

include a Canal Waterfront Boardwalk, has been allocated under the **Urban Regeneration and Development Fund 2018**, subsequent to a detailed application by the Council. It is anticipated that this will be a showpiece of the Grand Canal Greenway.

Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike (MTB) Trails

During 2021, construction of the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bikes Trail continued in both counties Laois and Offaly with 31kms built in Offaly and 18km in Laois (as of Sept. 2021). Council staff continue to sit on a steering group with Coillte in respect of this project's continued development.

Offaly County Council was successful in securing €500,000 funding (with match funding of €250,000 from the Council and other sources) under Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) 2020. The project encompasses (i) the 'Route to the trails' link from Kinnitty village, (ii) a 2km Novice Loop in Kinnitty Forest and (iii) 'Rediscovering Castle Bernard's historic bridges and waling routes'. The Part 8 for elements (i) and (ii) is currently ongoing.

Architecture & Conservation

The Architects Department provides a cross departmental service throughout the County Council, particularly in areas of Planning, Conservation and Public Realm. The Architects Department continues to make a significant contribution to the County Development Plan in the running of the Record of Protected Structures (RPS), 2020-2021 involved additions and deletions to RPS and compilation of final database and document. This includes the upkeep of the multifaceted database, Section 57 Declarations and all planning permission files related to protected structures. Advice and assistance is also given on a regular basis to owners and community groups regarding proposals for the upkeep or reuse of existing protected structures.

Additional projects for planning consist of providing technical advice on large scale planning applications; the production of site specific documents relating to possible future developments.

Built Heritage Investment Scheme €94,800: More applications were received in 2021 for this scheme than any other year. Out of 39 applications, 24 were approved a Provisional Grant from the allocation of €94,800 by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Nine applicants withdrew from the scheme while 15 have been successfully completed. Projects vary from slate roof to thatch repair, historic sash window to stained glass repairs, structural repair to stone walls or bridges to streetscape enhancement projects in the form of lime render to front facades. Works involves dealing

with applicants and queries, site visits, interim reports for the Department, collation of payment material and preparation of final reports and accompanying Department forms for each of the 15 completed projects. (*Thatch repairs Galross*)

Historic Structures Fund €335,000: 18 applications were received and assessed for the 7 projects allowable to put forward to the Department. Five were selected by the Department including 2 state projects (Coillte and Waterways Ireland), giving a total of €335,000 allocation for Offaly, managed by the Architects Department. Works involves dealing with applicants and queries, site visits, interim reports for the Department, collation of payment material and preparation of detailed final reports and accompanying Department forms for each of the 5 completed projects. 1 such project includes the council owned Birr Courthouse a significant 2021 project.

Creative Ireland €15,000: As well as being part of the 5-person team managing the Creative Ireland annual programme, the Architects Department oversees conservation works to a Folly project with a Creative Ireland allocation of **€10,000** since the publication of the book *Flights of Fancy, Follies Families and Demesnes in County Offaly* in 2017. The project this year consist of the Suspension Bridge in Kinnitty which has come in under several funding schemes. Three projects have formed a small and very successful Vernacular Architecture projects **€5,000**, the repair of a 18th century wrought iron gate at Woodfield, Clara, restoration of a blacksmith forge Killyon and repairs to a thatched cottage and gate at Derrybeg Tullamore.

Follies Trust €4,500: The Follies Trust have again agreed to assist with the folly project for 2021, Kinnitty Suspension Bridge and have pledged **€4,500** towards conservation repairs.

Tullamore URDF: Provision of accompanying documentation, sketch designs, photomontages, and suitable examples of materials and finishes to feed into the URDF funding applications.

RRDF, Urban & Village Renewal, Outdoor Dining Schemes etc.: Preparation of documents to assist Regeneration Team with funding applications.

Birr Destination Town €650,000: Working with Birr MD and Heritage Office and Failte Ireland funding, Birr MD €400,000 for The Green Enhancement Works, working with Heritage Office appoint of consultants, design and Planning Application for proposed new entrance to Birr Demesne **€100,000**, remaining **€150,000** for Interpretation and Design.

Birr Courthouse €347,600: Working with Heritage Office and various funding sources HTI (Heritage

Office), HSF (Architects), Creative Ireland, OCC and Birr MD contributions; repairs to roof, lead valleys, windows door to front façade.

Shopfront Enhancement Scheme (Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2021): Assist Local Enterprise Office and the Senior Planner with assessment of applications.

Heritage

The Heritage Office works with the Offaly Heritage Forum to deliver the **Offaly Heritage Plan 2017-21**. The forum usually meets four times a year and is made up of people from state agencies, council staff and NGOs. All meetings in 2021 have been by zoom.

The National Heritage Council provides funding towards the running of the Heritage office (25%) and also gives an allocation towards the delivery of the Offaly Heritage Plan of €30,000. This year the funding went towards the county archives service; the Birr Courthouse Conservation Master Plan and Communications. The heritage office has one full time officer and part time administration support from mid-2021. In 2021 the heritage office received additional funding from the Historic Towns Initiative, the Creative Ireland programme; the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the new Community Monuments Fund. This report is set out as an update on all 8 actions in the Offaly Heritage Plan 2017-21.

The office is involved in projects such as 1916/2016 Centenary Commemorations and the follow on programme Creative Ireland; management of key county sites such as Durrow and Clonmacnoise, public realm plans and ongoing projects as they arise.

Birr Courthouse Conservation Master Plan – the Courthouse in Birr came into Offaly County Council’s ownership in the summer of 2021. In order to plan for its future conservation and use, Howley Hayes Cooney conservation architects were commissioned to develop a detailed conservation master plan. This was funded by the Heritage Council, Creative Ireland and a contribution from Birr Municipal District.

In 2021 under the Historic Towns Initiative €220,000 was allocated to the conservation of Birr Courthouse roof and façade windows and doors. This is the first time this funding has been secured in Offaly from this scheme. It was combined with Historic Structures Funding and a contribution from Offaly County Council and this physical element of works will be completed by year end.

Decade of Centenaries funding of €57,000 was received in 2021 and a comprehensive programme of publications, videos, blogs, and material hosted on the website has been developed in partnership

with Offaly History.

Creative Ireland - Creative Ireland 2017-22 places creativity at the centre of public policy focusing on projects that are collaborative involving the arts, heritage and libraries with strong community reach. The Heritage Officer is the county coordinator working with the team from the Arts Office, Architect, Library Service, Community and Local Development and the Local Enterprise Offaly. In 2021 €160,161 has been allocated to the diverse range of programmes.

Lough Boora Sculpture Park -The heritage officer is on the working group of 3 Council and 3 Bord na Mona representatives to manage the sculpture park and is involved in the reports currently being undertaken.

Partnering with local communities and societies working on heritage projects, ranging from the Tidy Towns network to Historical Societies.

A number of communities were successful in receiving **Heritage Council Community Grants** and support was provided in completing these for the Kilcomin graveyard group management plan; St Brendan's Hall, Birr conservation report for the Church of Ireland Vestry in Birr; conservation of archival material for Offaly Archives and the replacement of Killaun walkway by St Brendan's Secondary School.

Camcor River Study – the Heritage Officer is part of the team working with Birr 20:20 community group on this study on managing the Camcor and its banks between Springfield Bridge and Croghan Bridge.

Heritage and Tourism– making sites accessible and improving signage and information including inputs to www.visitoffaly.ie

Birr Destination Town Working Group – the Heritage Officer is part of the team working to deliver the Birr Destination Town project comprising of public realm works at the Green; a second entrance to Birr Demesne at the Green; and delivering interpretation for Birr. On this third element, a community engagement project was carried out by consultant Alan Hill in 2021 - *Birr Interpretive Strategy*

Developing a County Archive Service in partnership with Offaly History, the Library Service and private owners.

The County Archive Service has been developed by Offaly History and supported by Offaly County Council as a priority project of the Offaly Heritage Plan 2017-2021. The specially designed archives

building in the Axis Business Park opened in the spring of 2020 is fully operational now albeit with Covid 19 restrictions. Work continues to develop the county archive service website www.offalyarchives.com which hosts catalogues and certain digitised material. Under a SLA the archives of Offaly County Council are managed by the Offaly County Archive Service.

Medieval churches/Monastic Site conservation of the structures, management plans and access (these sites are predominantly in Offaly County Council ownership)

Just Transition Medieval Churches Conservation and Pollination Project €880,000

This is a joint project with Laois County Council from 2021 to 2023, conserving a medieval church in each MD and managing the area for pollinators. The three Offaly churches are Kilmurry-Ely in Birr MD, Kilbride in Tullamore MD and Monasteroris in Edenderry MD.

Community Monuments Fund - €135,000

The Offaly Heritage Plan focused on medieval churches as they are owned by the Council however in 2020 a new funding stream opened for buildings in public and private ownership. This in 2021 work was able to be carried out at the Council owned Blundell Castle in Edenderry and at Castle Armstrong, Ballycumber (private).

The Council was also able to support the development of a conservation report for Seir Kieran graveyard wall which was commissioned by the Church of Ireland) and support was also provided for signage at Lynally monastic site.

Maintenance of Medieval Churches and Burial Grounds -A maintenance programme has been put in place for medieval churches that have been conserved including Lynally, Lemanaghan, Drumcullen, Kilbride Clara, Croghan and Roscomroe.

Publications – commissioning of and assisting with publications, specifically Offaly Castles and demesne landscapes which are currently in preparation.

Killaun Bog, near Birr. A publication on the past, present and future development options for this bog researched and written by John Feehan will be published in November– funded by National Biodiversity Action Plan.

100 Year's of Clara's History by Michael Goodbody was supported through the Decade of Commemorations programme and will be launched in 2021.

Biodiversity -promotion of the All Ireland Pollinator Plan, submitting records to the National

Biodiversity Data Centre and control of invasive species with particular focus on Japanese and Himalayan knotweed and Himalayan Balsam.

Under the **National Biodiversity Action Plan** an allocation of €25,000 was allocated towards the following projects:

Killaun Bog near Birr. The boardwalk on this bog was installed by St Brendan's Community School 30 years ago and support from a number of schemes has meant that it is fully replaced and reopened in 2021. Ongoing research at this site has included bird surveys by BirdWatch Ireland, mollusc survey by Roy Anderson, spider survey by Myles Nolan and bryophyte surveys by Blackthorn Ecology.

A **County Barn Owl survey** was undertaken by BirdWatch Ireland and nest boxes were erected where good locations were found with thanks to landowners' goodwill.

Invasive Species - Offaly has two main invasive alien species which are being tackled by the County Council. The species Himalayan Balsam was noted spreading on the Camcor and Little Brosna Catchment and work continued to removal the plant. The second species is Japanese knotweed which has been tackled by Offaly County Council for the past decade. Work continues to combat this destructive plant and to try and contain it, involving annual treatment and a mapping programme along with contacting private landowners where the species is noted. An additional €16,000 was allocated for removal of invasive Himalayan balsam on Camcor and Little Brosna Catchment and Japanese knotweed county wide.

Access to heritage -coordinating and management of events such as Heritage Week, Offaly Naturalists' Field Club, Annual Offaly Heritage Seminar and awareness of Offaly's heritage through all appropriate means.

Instead of physical events, in 2021 the heritage office has worked with John Feehan and continued the very successful series of **Wildflowers of Offaly** and **Story of the Bogs** YouTube videos bringing the total views to 39,405 views to date in 2021.

Heritage Week went ahead online had a mixed format of online and in person events in 2021. The **Annual Offaly Heritage Seminar** will not go ahead in its usual format but information on projects will be disseminated.

Legislation / Guidelines received in 2021 and / or expected in 2022

Legislation 2021

- Planning and Development (Amendment) Regulations 2021
- Planning and Development (Exempted Development) Regulations 2021 (SI no. 114 of 2021) re schools
- Planning and Development (Exempted Development) (No.2) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 115 of 2021) Electric Vehicle Charging Points and Hubs
- Climate (Amendment) Bill 2021
- Planning and Development (Amendment) (no. 18) Act 2021 Extension of Development Plan Review Process
- Planning and Development Act 2000 (Section 254 – overhead telecommunication cables) Regulations 2021
- EU (Planning) (Habitats, birds and environmental impact) Regulations 2021
- EU (Planning) (Habitats, birds and environmental impact) (no. 2) Regulations 2021

Guidelines 2021

- Guidance on the Preparation of a Housing Need and Demand Assessment
- Regulation of Commercial Institutional Investment in Housing, Guidelines for Planning Authorities.
- Draft Development Plan Guidelines
- Draft SEA Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities

Circulars 2021

- Circular Letter PL 01/2021 re: Planning and Development (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 9 of 2021)
- Circular Letter PL 02/2021 re: Event licensing in 2021 in the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic
- Circular Letter PL 04/2021 Re: Planning and Development (Exempted Development) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 114 of 2021) School Buildings and Planning and Development (Exempted Development) (No.2) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 115 of 2021)
- Circular Letter PL 05/2021 Re: Working hours conditions attached to planning permissions in the context of Covid-19
- Circular Letter Housing 14/2021 Re: Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA)

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- Circular Letter: NRUP 02/2021 re Residential Densities in Towns and Villages, as set out in Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009)
 - Circular Letter: NRUP 03/2021 re: Ministerial Planning Guidelines under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), Regulation of Commercial Institutional Investment in Housing.
 - Circular 23/2021 re: Affordable Housing Fund (AHF) Scheme
 - Circular PL 07/2021 re Planning and Development Act 2000 (Section 254 – Overground Telecommunication Cables) Regulations 2021 – S.I. 422 of 2021
 - Housing Circular 28/2021 re Affordable Housing Act 2021 – Amendments to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000
 - Circular Letter: EUIPR 01/2021 re Amendments to section 42 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended and associated Planning and Development Regulations 2001
 - Circular Letter: EUIPR 02/2021 re Publication of Consultation Draft Strategic Environmental Assessment, Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities

Strategies / Plans etc. 2021:

- Age Friendly Ireland; Age friendly principles and guidelines for the planning authority
- Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management by OPR Practice Note PN01
- National Remote Work Strategy
- Our Rural Future; Rural Development Policy 2021-2025
- Delivering Effective Climate Action 2030: Local authority sector strategy for delivering on the Climate Action Charter and Climate Action Plan.
- Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) – Good Practice Principles Handbook for Community Benefit Funds by Gov.
- Public Rights of Way and the Local Authority Development Plan’ (OPR, 2021)

Expected 2022:

- Final Updated Development Plan guidelines
- Revised wind energy guidelines
- Sustainable rural housing guidelines updated

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- SEA directive guidelines updated
 - Guidelines on water framework directive implications for planning
 - Density guidelines
 - Guidance on the reuse of existing buildings for residential purposes
 - Revised / amended childcare facilities guidelines

Areas of Activity for 2022

In addition to the normal activities of Development Management, Forward Planning, Regeneration, Architecture, Conservation & Heritage, Enforcement, Derelict Sites, Vacant Sites, Unfinished Housing Developments and Taking in Charge of developments, the following are the main major items of activity envisaged for 2022:

- Interaction with local and community groups throughout the county (subject to resources / workloads) with particular reference to regeneration, tourist potential and amenity developments.
- Attempting to progress the delivery of the *Major Cycling Destination in the Midlands of Ireland*, otherwise known as the *Midlands Cycling Destination – Offaly*, in conjunction with Bord Na Móna, Coillte, Waterways Ireland, adjoining Local Authorities and funding agencies.
- Continue to make progress on resolving Unfinished Housing Developments and Derelict Sites
- Annual Vacant Sites review in accordance with objectives RO-07 of the CDP.
- Monitoring of residential development by maintaining a continuous record in accordance with objective CSO-01 of the CDP.
- Input into various and emerging tourism and amenity projects/initiatives.
- Large Scale Residential Developments – statutory and time bound procedures for pre-planning meetings and the subsequent administration and assessment of all housing applications of all sizes.
- Conduct a review of the list of registered / Section 261 quarries in the County (subject to resources).
- Managing the electronic submission of planning applications through the roll out of the National e-planning Portal
- Part 8 for Ferbane Fair green TVR Development

ROADS

The 2021 grant allocations from Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), the Department of Transport (DOT), National Transport Authority (NTA) and The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) are set out below, the figures for 2020 are shown alongside for comparison purposes.

Road and Infrastructure Grants Received in 2021

Grants	2021	2020
Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)		
National Primary		
Motorway MMarC Lighting	9,117	9,117
National Secondary Improvement		
Major Scheme N52 Tullamore to Kilbeggan Link	1,000,000	331,541
Minor Works N62 Crancreagh (Cloghan to Derrinlough)	250,000	24,123
Pavement Scheme N52 Ballynacard East & West	450,000	1,100,000
Pavement Scheme HD28 Pavement Renewals	257,400	589,872
Capital Maintenance NS Pavement Works	195,160	423,292
HD15 & HD17 Minor Works	255,510	182,389
HD15 & HD17 Minor Works Fencing Retrofit	69,100	64,712
Local Authority Support (Improvement)	164,000	164,000
National Secondary Maintenance		
Ordinary Maintenance	350,342	223,667
Route Lighting	86,744	113,474
Winter Maintenance	190,000	222,455
Local Authority Support (Maintenance)	30,700	30,700
Local Authority Support (Winter Maintenance)	10,000	10,000
TII Total	€3,318,073	€3,489,342
Department of Transport Regional & Local Roads		
Restoration Improvement	5,707,500	5,385,911
Restoration Maintenance	955,000	955,000
Supplementary Restoration Maintenance	682,000	587,721
Discretionary Grant	1,813,500	1,802,000

Bridge Rehabilitation	344,950	331,851
Safety Improvement Works	300,000	319,639
Specific Improvement Grants	900,000	416,061
Speed Limits	12,000	16,059
Former National Roads	300,000	0
Active Travel	50,893	782,371
Climate Adaptation	95,404	176,596
Training Grant	47,500	47,500
Community Involvement Scheme	735,500	705,023
Pilot Scheme testing on roads over peat	40,000	26,967
PSCI Survey Support	16,000	14,577
Drainage Works	446,993	443,271
Climate Adaptation and Resilience Works	633,035	0
DOT Total	€13,080,275	€12,010,547
National Transport Authority Active Travel 2021		
Transport Plans: Tullamore, Edenderry, Birr, Clara, Ban	250,000	New in 2021
Tullamore Cycle Network Phase 1	500,000	
Footpath Improvements Package A: Birr & Crinkill	289,000	
Footpath Improvements Package B: Clara	470,000	
Edenderry - Hare's Lane	175,000	
Footpath Improvements Design: Banagher & Cloghan	40,000	
Tullamore - Spollenstown Road	420,000	
Countywide Pedestrian Crossings	250,000	
Portarlinton Active Travel Scheme	180,000	
Safe to Schools Programme: Frederick Street, Clara	70,000	
Low Cost Urban Junction Schemes: Edenderry & Birr	145,000	
Light Segregation Cycling Scheme: Edenderry	75,000	
Tullamore Urban Greenway Project	575,000	
NTA Active Travel Total	€3,439,000	
Outdoor Infrastructure Fund Tullamore & Kinnitty	€266,455	
Bus Stops in Tullamore & Edenderry	€140,655	€42,450
Department of Rural and Community Development		

Local Improvement Scheme	€545,240	€278,871
CLÁR	€47,025	€99,000
Grand Canal Greenway		
DOT/TII Funding	€5,048,600	
Just Transition Funding	€780,000	
Offaly County Council Own Resources		
County Roads Maintenance	€1,642,130	€1,642,130
Winter Maintenance	€75,000	€75,000
Severe Weather Response	€150,000	€150,000
<i>Ref TII PRS 24/9/2021</i>		

The Offaly County Council also allocates **€949,500** for Public Lighting and a central management charge (support services) of **€3,110,127**.

Grand Canal Cycleway

The roads section working with the planning section has delivered the following sections of the Offaly Grand Canal Greenway and other cycling infrastructure in 2020 and continuing in 2021.

- Ballycommon Bridge to Daingean (5.5km) complete 2021;
- Wood of O to County Boundary (3km) complete 2021;
- Daingean to Edenderry (17km) commenced 2021 in 5 phases, 4 phases complete in 2021;
- Clara Bridge to Kilbeggan Bridge, Tullamore (1km) commence 2022;
- New traffic lights at the Clara Bridge & Kilbeggan Bridges in Tullamore Town to facilitate introduction of new safe walking & cycling track crossing points in 2022;
- Clara Bridge to Srah Bridge (1.8km) commence in 2021;
- Turraun to Shannon Harbour (17km) Part 8 process 2021; Funding 2022;
- Henseys Bridge to Pollagh (5km) commence Part 8 process 2021, Complete 2022.
- Old rail Trail – Kilbeggan to Dublin/Galway NCN – Consultants appointed 2021 to assess routes/feasibility;
- Shannon Monastic Greenway – Athlone to Shannon Harbour via Shannonbridge – Consultants appointed 2021 to assess routes/feasibility;
- Just Transition Upgrade Cycle Links from Turraun to Lough Boora Parklands (10km).

Climate Change Adaption and Energy Efficiency

Climate Change & Energy awareness continue to be key areas where we show leadership in both promoting public awareness and in changing mind sets towards energy management. Offaly County Council continues to work in conjunction with the Midland Energy Agency in an effort to achieve the objectives as set out in the 2030 and 2050 targets. The Roads section continues to implement the goals and actions identified in the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy in 2021.

Areas of Activity in 2021

Areas of Activity	Objectives Delivered in 2021
Road Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2021 Roads Programme ensuring all TII and DOT grant allocations were used efficiently and economically; • Applied for additional funding where available such as Climate Adaptation and Resilience Works, Active Travel, Outdoor Infrastructure; • Maintained and improved the Road Network making the optimal use of available resources; • Ensured best practice techniques and methodologies are used in road maintenance operations and upgrades; • Continued our programme of upgrading Public Lighting to LED in the interest of energy efficiency; • Continued our bridge rehabilitation programme, develop plans and seek funding for further schemes; • Progressed the Community Involvement Scheme, Local Improvement Scheme and CLAR funded by DOT and DRCD.
Road Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road Safety awareness in association with the RSA and Gardai; • Road Safety Initiatives in Offaly; • Road Safety Improvement programme, developed plans and sought funding for further schemes; • Winter Service duties in accordance with the Plan; • Responded to extreme weather events as required;
Roads Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offaly as an important transport link in the midlands progressing the following projects by engagement with TII, DOT and relevant stakeholders: • N52 Tullamore to Kilbeggan Link route selection, Public consultation; • N62 Cloghan to Kennedys Cross peat replacement Minor Works Scheme feasibility report engaging assistance from WNRO; • Edenderry Town Inner Relief Road stage 1 commencing construction;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birr Distributor Road R439 Banagher Road to N52 Tullamore Road specific road improvement scheme; • Collins Lane Tullamore Junction Upgrade Works; • Edenderry Granary Court to Fairgreen Link Road
Roads Sustainable Transport Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NTA Active Travel Measures to improve walking and cycling infrastructure in the County; • NTA Safer Route to school Programme; • Pedestrian & cyclist accommodation on our road network; • Development of the Offaly Greenway off road pedestrian & cyclist routes; • Climate Change Adaptation measures to address the impact of climate change on the road network; • New Wheelchair Accessible Bus Stops Tullamore & Edenderry on behalf of the NTA.
Machinery Yard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operated and maintained the fleet in a safe and efficient manner; • Implemented the fleet replacement plan and review fleet energy efficiency; • Implemented electronic vehicle inspection sheets and new fuel system.

Road Safety 2021

- Supplied Hi-Vis vests for Positive Aging Week to the Libraries together with road safety leaflets to include in over 100 gift bag for this week;
- Update the website in relation to weather alerts and road safety initiatives;
- Circulated weather alerts and road safety authority notifications to Councillors and staff and uploaded on Council's web site, Facebook and Twitter;
- The Drive for Life day long Programme was carried out in a number of Secondary Schools in the County up to COVID 19 when the schools closed. This programme is tailored for students and young adults in a school setting and issues such as consequences of speed, alcohol, drugs and driving, mobile phones, seat belts forms part of the content of the programme. Further consideration will be given to re-commencing this programme in 2022 in line with HSE Guidelines;
- Liaised with Municipal Districts concerning road safety matters in the County;
- Road Safety presentations delivered to a number of national schools in collaboration with the RSA up to COVID 19. It is hoped that these presentations will recommence in 2022 in accordance with HSE Guidelines;

- Road Safety Video/Message in various Credit Unions throughout the County;
- In conjunction with local newspapers supported newspaper articles for “Back to School”;
- Collaborated with the Road Safety Authority in relation to their “Check it Fits Service” prior to COVID 19. An on-line check it fits service is now available. Experts advise on how to fix any problem with child car seats, demonstrate how to fit the restraint correctly and answer any queries participants might have.

HEALTH AND SAFETY 2021

Health and Safety objectives were set out at the beginning of the year with the management team after reviewing 2020 both from a local and national level.

The key objectives were:

1. To continue to enhance the safe working environment for all employees of Offaly County Council and members of the public;
2. To ensure that communication between all levels of staff within the organisation relating to health and safety are improved;
3. To continue to work closely with external groups such as the Health and Safety Authority and consider any improvements which are suggested;

Every day staff in Offaly County Council are reminded of the risks they face and how to eliminate or reduce this risk. Nationally, during 2021, 25 fatalities have occurred as of the 1st of October 2021.

Industry	Number of Fatalities in 2020	Number of Fatalities in 2021
Agriculture	20	5
Fishing and aquaculture	3	0
Forestry & logging	0	0
Mining and quarrying	0	0
Manufacturing	4	4
Water supply	1	2
Construction	16	8
Repair of motor vehicles	4	1
Transportation and storage	2	4

Public Administration (Others Arts, Entertainment & Recreation, Education)	4	1
Total	54	25

H.S.A website updated 28th of Sept 2021

2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
54	47	39	48	48	55	55	47	48	54	48	43	57	67

One of the main targets for 2021 was to enhance communication with staff on accidents/incidents and good practices from other Local Authorities and private companies. This was achieved through monthly safety discussions and through re-fresher health and safety training. Training during 2021 was generally completed on line or in certain circumstances outdoors due to Covid-19. This will continue in 2022.

All work needs to be treated safely and a suitable Safe system of Work agreed and communicated to all staff prior to commencing the works. Another key focus for 2021 has been a focus on transport safety and vehicle management in light of the number of serious incident across the country in 2021.

There was an overall reduction in Offaly County Councils accident ratio in 2021 (as of the 1st of October 2021) when compared to the same period in 2020.

Senior management continued to provide leadership in order to raise the profile of safety within Offaly County Council. A key focus in 2021 involved safety discussion with all staff and additional line manager meetings with staff. An internal seminar was carried out in early 2021 with all line managers setting out the targets and the key health and safety points for 2021.

The management team and senior management group carried out a number of inspections during the year, this will remain a key focus for 2022 along with tracking the number of inspections carried out by each department and directors attending key quarterly health and safety meetings in their departments.

An internal health and safety audit is scheduled for the last quarter of 2021 and the key findings will be closed out by the relevant departments. Offaly County Council are involved in Construction Safety week also during 2021.

A health and safety review will be completed in full in early 2022 and this will be used to set out the targets and areas for improvements in 2022.

Key Actions for 2022

It is anticipated that the roads budget for 2022 will be similar to 2021 for both National and Non National Roads. Offaly County Council will continue to engage with the TT, DOT and NTA to secure significant investment for our National, Regional and Local Roads including urban walking and cycling improvements and rural linkages. OCC has received approval for a number of capital schemes as outlined below and will continue to submit applications for specific road improvement funding.

A number of schemes the Road Section wish to progress in 2022 at various stages of approval and funding include:

- N52 Tullamore to Kilbeggan Link Phase 2 planning & design in collaboration with the TII, Westmeath National Design office & RPS Consulting Engineers;
- N62 Cloghan to Kennedys Cross peat replacement and road improvement TII Minor Works Scheme engaging WNRO to prepare the state 0-1 reports;
- Edenderry Town Inner Relief Road specific road improvement scheme stage 1 construction and stage 2 design and land owner engagement;
- Birr Distributor Road – R439 Banagher Road to N52 Tullamore Road specific road improvement Scheme, secure funding in 2022 to appoint Consulting Engineers for detailed design;
- R444 Ballinahown to Clonmacnoise to Shannonbridge specific road improvement scheme secure future funding;
- Grand Canal Greenway continue to progress the Greenway to completion;
- Continue to work with the BTA to deliver Active Travel and Safer Route to Schools schemes in Offaly;
- Safety schemes on National and Non National Road Network;
- Public Lighting upgrades to LEDs through the Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project;
- Pedestrian Crossings upgrade works including lights to LEDs;
- Engage with DOT following the pilot scheme for peat on bog roads to inform applications for strategic grants and identify additional funding sources for county road maintenance;

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- Winter service and severe weather response in accordance with the 2021 - 2022 plans;
 - Develop the machinery yard to enhance the services and functions;
 - Deliver new Wheelchair Accessible Bus Stops Edenderry & Birr on behalf of the NTA.
 - Progress the community involvement scheme, local improvement scheme and Clár funded by DOT and DRCD;

NATIONAL WASTE COLLECTION PERMIT OFFICE (NWCPO)

There are 2,027 waste collection permits on the NWCPO register and 209 applications pending. 333 permits were due for renewal in 2021 and of these 198 review applications have been received to date. There were 135 new applications received to date in 2021.

The NWCPO has maintained service delivery consistent with that provided prior to COVID-19. Systems and processes were modified as necessary to prioritise and delegate the workload.

Household Kerbside Waste Collections

There are currently 53 (46 active) waste collectors. The NWCPO continues the assessment of applications for household kerbside waste collections, including on-line audits of the systems and processes used by the waste collectors.

ISO 9001 Certification

The office received certification for the ISO 9001 standard in November 2014. The office has been successfully recertified following a 3-year re-assessment audit in April this year.

IS Systems Development

The functioning of the IT Team within the NWCPO is critical to its operation and that of the waste regulatory sector as a whole. NWCPO systems are now an integral part of waste data gathering, enforcement and reporting at local, regional and national level.

The following is an outline of the IS systems operated by the NWCPO:

These systems include:

- **Environmental Information Management System (EIMS)** – used to manage the waste collection permit application process and maintain waste collection and facility registers
- **NWCPO Admin Portal** – used by the NWCPO team to manage data not available on the EIMS

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- **Permit Holder Portal** – Website for Waste Operators to manage their permit and complete their annual returns
 - **EDEN Portal (Local Authority Portal)** – used by LA’s to view NWCPO files and pending applications, view waste data and validate annual returns. Also will host the closed landfills register.
 - **NWCPO website** – used by operators to download forms and the public to search for permits

A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy

“A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy” was launched on the 4th of September 2020 last. The policy specifically identified new roles for the NWCPO as well as introduced new policies that will impact on current operations and require measures to be taken.

Environment and Water Services

Water Services

Irish Water Service Level Agreement (SLA)

The Council is continuing to deliver Water Services in accordance with the SLA with Irish Water and the Annual Service Plan for 2022. Water Services are 100% funded by Irish Water who are now the Statutory Authority for water services and all major decisions around funding of services are approved by Irish Water.

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

Local Authority remains the Water Services Authority in connection with Group Schemes, Small Private Supplies (SPS) and domestic wastewater treatment systems (septic tanks).

Drinking Water Supply

The most recent EPA Drinking Water Report has been published and shows that the compliance rate in Offaly calculated for 2020 (based on compliance data sent to IW and the EPA) is:

- Microbiological = 100%

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- Chemical = 100%
 - Indicator = 98.77%
 - Overall Compliance = 99.14%

Watermain Rehabilitation Works are ongoing in Newtown and on the Clara Road, Tullamore. Works at Croghan have recently been completed.

Leak detection and pressure management have reduced the consumption of water in Public Water Schemes (PWS) in Offaly since the beginning of 2020. Leak repair, Find and fix works are ongoing in Edenderry, Tullamore, Ferbane, Banagher, Ballybeg (Dromakeenan) and Clonbullogue.

There has been a saving of 4,243 m³/day since January 2018 in Offaly where average consumption in January 2018 was 24,839 m³/day compared to 20,596m³/day last month i.e. September 2021.

IW are currently preparing the design for a replacement reservoir at Clonbullogue and considering a replacement reservoir at Walsh Island.

Wastewater

There are 14 Wastewater Treatment Plants in Offaly with Discharge Licenses serving agglomerations with populations greater than 500. Meeting the stringent limit values on these licences is challenging. Full secondary treatment is now provided in all public sewerage schemes in Offaly with a significant improvement in quality standards compliance being achieved as a result.

Consulting Engineers have been engaged for Birr, Shinrone, Cloghan & Daingean. They will examine the existing plants and come up with proposals to treat storm water via holding tanks or reed beds. Also, a Design Team has been engaged to upgrade the design of the Banagher WWTP.

Significant improvement works have been carried out at the various Plants throughout the County, especially with regard to Health and Safety. Also, Aeration Tanks & Clarifiers were cleaned leading to a better final effluent quality and also a reduction in the running costs of the Plants.

Phase 3 of the Tullamore Drainage Area Plan is complete, however, Phase 4 has not yet commenced. The data collated from Phase 3 can be used to inform any future proposals in Tullamore.

IW have engaged a consulting engineer to design an interceptor sewer to the south of Tullamore.

Edenderry WWTP: IW have appointed Aecom consultant engineers to design an upgrade of the plant to ensure capacity into the future.

Rhode WWTP is included for funding under the Small Town & Villages Programme, this work should commence 2022.

Water Services Capital Schemes

A major upgrade of the Tullamore and Birr Water Supplies is under way. Aecom/Jennings O'Donovan appointed Murphy Processing Engineering to Design and Build the project. The contract which involves the major upgrade of the Ardan, Clonaslee and Birr Water Treatment Processes, commenced in November 2018 and is currently 85% complete.

Under Irish Water's Disinfection programme, works are currently ongoing at Toberdaly WTP, Edenderry WTP, Clonbullogue WTP, Walsh Island WTP and Coolderry WTP.

Design works are being carried out on Geashill and Holmshill WTPs.

It is envisaged that greater emphasis will be placed on completing low cost small scale projects through the Capital Programmes and Capital Maintenance Programme which will facilitate the upkeep and improvement of existing schemes and the replacement of end-of-life assets. This approach will be beneficial to our County given the large number of small schemes.

In 2022, we will continue to engage with IW on prioritising infra-structural improvements in Offaly. There is a rigorous health & safety inspection and management regime in place across all water services infrastructure and this is driving an ongoing programme of Significant Health and Safety Improvement Works. There is also a significant investment in plant replacement and process optimisation through the Capital Works Programme and a countywide Disinfection Programme.

RURAL WATER PROGRAMME

Subsidies

- A total of €973,760.00 was paid in 2021 to the Group Water Schemes for GWS Subsidies to support group water scheme to operate to their full potential and deliver potable water to their customers. Annual subsidies amounted to €386,831.00 and advance subsidies €586,929.00

Rural Water Programme (RWP) 2019 - 2022 Capital Works:

Circular L1/19 was received from the Department on 8th February, 2019 inviting Local Authorities to bid on a priority scheme & project basis, for grant assistance under the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2019- 2022.

The objective for this funding is to provide enhanced funding certainty for priority investment needs to support the implementation of proper planning and sustainable development in rural areas. It is to assist in meeting the requirements of the Drinking Water Directive in relation to rural water supplies and to support the delivery of measures identified in the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018 – 2022 to meet the needs of the Water Framework Directive.

The total allocation to the successful projects under the programme is €1,839,625.00 for 19 projects. Seven of these projects are completed and the other 12 are at various stages of progress with all projects expected to be completed in 2022.

The total funding allocation breakdown is:

- Measure 1; Source Protection € 31,440
- Measure 2: Public Health Compliance €495,800
- Measure 3: Enhancement of schemes including Water Conservation 1,261,625
- Measure 6(a): Community Connection Networks (Water) € 51,000

The panel who considered the requests for funding submitted have recommended the rationalisation and/ amalgamation of some schemes. We have also been advised that the most sustainable long-term solution for a GWS is interconnection to, and taking-in-charge by Irish Water. The Local Authority has been requested to pro-actively assist and focus the schemes in doing so and funding under the programme should be used for this long-term solution only.

Domestic Water and Domestic Waste Water Grant Schemes:

Under Measure 8 of the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2022 a revised Private Water Supply (Well Grants) and Domestic Waste Water Treatment grant scheme was announced by the Dept of Housing, Planning and Local Government in June 2020. Applicants that have been approved under the terms of the previous scheme are entitled to re-apply under the terms of the new scheme, if they wish, and their existing approval will still apply.

Well Grants: The application process and the level of grant payable have been revised. The main revision of the scheme is that the applicant must provide three quotes for the proposed works and that the percentage of the approved cost of works that can be claimed by the applicant has been increased from 75% or a max of €2,031.58 to 85% or €5,000.00, whichever is the lesser. There are also new grants available for Well Rehabilitation of 85% of costs up to €3,000.00 and Water Treatment Systems grant of 100% up to €1,000.00.

Domestic Waste Water Treatment grants: This grant may be available to householders where they have been identified by the Local Authority under various river basin and catchment area plans and they must meet specific criteria (an applicant cannot self declare for these grants). The percentage of the approved cost of works that can be claimed by the applicant has been increased from 75% to 85% or €5,000.00, whichever is the lesser.

- So far, in 2021, under the Domestic Water Grant scheme we have paid 18 grants to a total of €37,665.20 and under the DWWTS Grant Scheme we have paid 3 applicants a total of €15,000.00

ENVIRONMENT

Waste Management

Derryclure Landfill

The aftercare costs of the landfill continue to be a financial burden on the Council. To reduce costs, Environment carried out feasibility studies of alternative on site technologies for the treatment of leachate and gas, this study determined the current system of treating the leachate off site and flaring of the landfill gas were the most cost effective treatment methods. However, looking to the future a full review of the activities at the landfill needs to take place in order to consider costs and opportunities associated with changes overtime, treatment methodologies available, degrading gas quality and quantity, wear and tear on installed systems etc.

Recycling Facilities

There are currently 40 bring banks in the County for glass, aluminium & steel cans recycling on both private and public sites and we continue to pay for the recycling of the glass by the service provider, Glassco Ltd., as per the tender agreement of €17.90 per tonne. Offaly receives an income from Glassco of €130 per tonne for the aluminium cans. For 2020, we received an income of €14,256. The income

for 2021 will be considerably lower than this due to the changed tender rates applied mid-year. We continue to operate three Civic Amenity Facilities (CAF) in Birr, Derryclure and Edenderry.

These accept a wide range of materials for recycling and complement our existing Bring Bank facilities. Charges apply for all waste brought to these facilities, with the exception of electrical items, glass, packaging and batteries. The gate fees of these facilities are retained by the contractor under the terms of the current service agreement.

It is the intention of Environment to tender for the operation of the three Civic Amenity Sites and the waste transfer station at Derryclure before the end of 2021.

Eastern Midlands Regional Waste Management Plan 2015-2022

The Waste Management Planning regional structure was changed to three regions in line with the 2012 Government Policy document “A Resource Opportunity-Waste Management Policy in Ireland”. Offaly is in the Eastern/Midlands Region. The current Eastern Midlands Regional Waste Management Plan 2015-2022 was launched on the 14th May 2015. Offaly County Council staff work with our Regional colleagues to implement the policies of the plan.

Waste Enforcement

We continue to investigate all illegal waste activities and instigate legal proceedings as appropriate. Inspections and audits of the operations of the 57 Waste Collection Permit holders and the 18 Waste Facility Permit Holders in the functional area are ongoing. To the start of October, Environment Section received 1030 complaints since the 1st January 2021.

Complaint Category	Number
Air Pollution (Dust/odour/emissions)	14
Litter pollution (fly tipping/casual litter/litter on property)	721
Waste (dumping/burning/unauthorised sites)	110
Noise (community/commercial/industrial)	13
Control of Horses	14
Control of Dogs	111
Water Quality	47

Environment Section assisted in 233 community clean-ups across the county, providing bags, pickers, gloves and removing materials collected. It should be noted that the 233 community clean-ups are not included in the complaint figures.

Anti-Dumping Initiative

An application was made to the DCCAIE for funding under the Anti-Dumping Initiative to clean up some very littered areas and to provide funding for CCTV at bottle banks, Offaly County Council was approved for €80,065. In the event that the Department make similar funding available for 2022, Offaly County Council will seek comparable funding.

Local Agenda 21

Local Agenda 21 (Environmental Partnership Fund 2019) is a grant scheme for environmental projects. A total of 37 applications were received. The grant received from the DHPCLG is €10,925 which is match funded by the Council. Project proposals will be assessed in accordance with guidelines and criteria provided by the DHPCLG, and will be announced after the Department has finalised the list of successful projects.

Due to the restrictions in place during the COVID19 pandemic DCCAIE has extended the completion date for Projects of the 2019 Community Environment Action Fund from August 2020 to the end of December 2020. We are currently examining the feasibility of the 2021 Scheme taking into consideration the current public health guidelines and restrictions. It is expected that applications for the next Community Environment Action Fund will be delayed until Q1 of 2022

Green Schools Awareness Programme

Offaly County Council continues to support the Green Schools Programme by frequent visits to the schools, facilitating free workshops to the schools, arranging the annual teacher training seminar as well as making a financial contribution to the schools for their environmental projects.

Protection of Natural Waters Water Framework Directive

Water Quality

We implement the objectives of Water Framework Directive as set out in the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2022. Roles undertaken in this work area include the co-ordination of sampling for the EPA's national monitoring program in Co. Offaly, the enforcement of Section 4 licences for discharges to surface waters and the investigation of complaints relating to a range of water linked

issues. Inspections are also undertaken across various sectors including domestic septic tank inspections, agricultural inspection and catchment assessments where waterbodies are not achieving Good Status.

The Council are committed to advancing water quality in the county, recognising the links between water quality and the Councils goals throughout Co. Offaly, from Enterprise to Tourism. We are committed to working closely with the Local Authority Waters Program Office (LAWPro), towards shared national goals.

A detailed submission has been returned to the EPA regarding the 3rd Cycle Characterisation to be considered in the Departments Draft River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027, covering both the Midlands & East WFD Region and the South East WFD Region. A draft version of the new RBMP has been published in Q3 of 2021, this will be open to public consultation from late 2021 and into early 2022.

Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Studies (CFRAM)

On 3 May 2018, Minister of State with special responsibility for the Office of Public Works (OPW) and Flood Relief, Kevin Moran T.D. published 29 Flood Risk Management Plans to address flood risk in Ireland. The CFRAM Programme studied the flood risk for 300 areas or communities in Ireland and concluded that it is possible to provide protection through flood relief schemes to approximately 95% of properties at risk within the assessed areas.

Under the Flood Risk Management Plans there are 2 schemes proposed for Offaly one in Birr and one in Rahan.

Offaly County Council are also discussing a number of schemes under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works, these include the Bog Lane in Portarlinton and Newtown, Ballybritt.

Burial Grounds

Part VIII approval has been granted for the extension of Kilcoursey and Kilreaghan cemeteries. Kilreaghan extension works have been successfully completed. Tender documents are currently being drawn up for Kilcoursey with commencement on site expected to follow in early 2022. The extensions of Cappincur, Cloncrane and Clonmacnoise burial grounds will be further investigated in 2022. Resources will need to be allocated annually in the coming years to fund the necessary works.

Climate Change

Offaly County Council has prepared the Offaly Climate Change Adaptation Strategy in accordance with the provisions of The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 and the National Adaptation Framework (NAF) 2018. The Offaly Climate Change Strategy was adopted by the Elected Members at the Council meeting of 16th September 2019.

The purpose of the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy is to, ensure a proper comprehension of the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, bring forward the implementation of climate resilient actions in a planned and proactive manner and, ensure that climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all plans and policies and integrated into all operations and functions of Offaly County Council.

In accordance with the strategy, a Climate Change Adaptation Steering Group with representatives from across key functions of Offaly County Council was set up in 2020 to ensure the successful implementation of the actions of the Offaly Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and to report on progress. The Group meets monthly to manage and oversee the effective mainstreaming of adaptation measures into all plans, programmes, strategies and policies of Offaly County Council.

Specific training was made available for members of the Climate Action Team in 2021 and Climate Action Training was provided on-line to all indoor staff. Climate Action Leadership Training was provided to the Management Team, Senior Management Group and elected representatives at an interactive scheduled session. Scheduled interactive training sessions will also be provided for outdoor staff.

A number of projects are being progressed under the banner of Climate Change, from drainage, flood relief, to biodiversity and paperless offices. These projects are being carried out by a number of different sections throughout the organisation.

ENCORE CONFERENCE 2021; Regional Collaboration for a Green and Sustainable Transition

This conference was hosted by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, the 14th Environmental Conference of the Regions of Europe, ENCORE 2021 took place online on the September 24th 2021. The bi-annual conference of the ENCORE Network, ENCORE 2021, hosted 'virtually' from Tullamore in

the Irish Midlands, was attended by political representatives from across Europe and wide-ranging stakeholders.

The conference culminated in the signing of the ‘Tullamore Declaration’ by member regions - a statement of common intent which will guide regions to effectively exert their collective influence on the formulation of environmental policy within the European Union.

Economic Conference

On Tuesday 12 October and Wednesday 13 October 2021, a virtual conference entitled ‘Climate Action Economic Opportunities – Local Authorities Supporting Enterprise’, took place, supported by Ms Anne Marie Delaney.

This conference is part of the work of the Climate Action and Economic Opportunities project steering and working groups convened under the Business, Enterprise, Innovation and Urban/Town Economic Renewal (BEIUR) Committee of the County and City Management Association (CCMA).

The conference was building on the success of the inaugural conference in October 2019, and facilitated sharing of the latest research undertaken by the local government sector to explore how local authorities can, through their economic remit, support, encourage and nurture new and existing business and enterprise as they transition to a net-zero economy through innovation, digitalisation and the adoption of more sustainable practices.

The conference showcased examples of how businesses are pivoting to capitalise on new opportunities and in doing so are becoming green economy pioneers, with the support of local authorities in areas such as: Renewable energy, Circular economy, Research and innovation, Rural working hubs, New technologies, Bio-economy and SMART cities.

COUNTY VETERINARY SERVICE

Food Safety

We have entered into a shared service agreement with Westmeath County Council to provide the County Veterinary Service in Westmeath, including Temporary Veterinary Inspectors in abattoirs, Control of Dogs and Control of Horses.

Control of Dogs.

Number of Dog Licences sold in 2020:	2,671
Number of Dog Licences sold to date in 2021:	2,286
Number of stray dogs in dog pound 2021 (to 22/10/21):	190
Number of Dog breeding establishments registered in 2021:	3

Control of Horses

Under the Control of Horses Act 1996, all local authorities are responsible for the control of horses in their area including the collection of stray horses on public land. The numbers have been reducing in recent years from a high of 164 horses in 2014 to only 1 this year to date.

Year No. of Horses Seized

Year	No of horses seized
2014	164
2015	101
2016	67
2017	60
2018	16
2019	5
2020	2
2021	1 (YTD)