

**MARCH
2021**



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council

MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT

Do: Baill Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí

To: Each Member of Offaly County Council

Tuairisc mhíosúil bainistíochta a bhreithniú i gcomhair tionóil mí Aibreán

Monthly Management Report for consideration at the April 2021 Monthly Meeting.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS - A schedule of Chief Executive Orders is included with the Council Agenda.

FINANCE - Appendix 2

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Offaly Libraries events



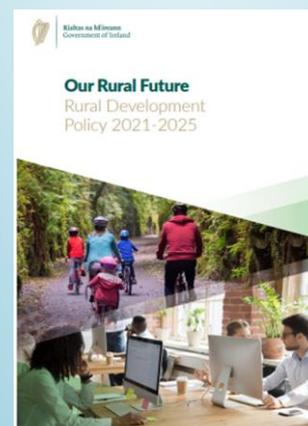
- **Storytimes** on Facebook Monday – Thursday at 6pm throughout April
- Storytimes on Facebook Friday – Sunday at 3pm throughout April
- Live '**Wednesday Wobblers**' storytimes at 11am on Wednesdays throughout April **Register at** <https://www.eventbrite.ie/o/offaly-libraries-26265678679>

Check out our [Facebook page](#) regularly throughout April for more storytime

REPORT AT A GLANCE

REGENERATION

On the 30th March the Department of Rural and Community Development published “Our Rural Future” 2021-2025, the most ambitious and transformational policy for rural development for decades. The policy reflects the unprecedented change in living and working patterns during covid-19 and the significant opportunities this presents for rural communities – from remote working and revitalising out town centres to job creation, developing a green economy and outdoor amenities. Our rural future sets out the blueprint for the development of rural Ireland over the next 5 years.



<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4c236-our-rural-future-vision-and-policy-context/>

PLANNING

	To end March 2021	To end March 2020	Total 2020
Planning Applications	178	113	674
Extensions of Duration Applications & Assessments	6	1	5
Warning Letters and (Enforcement Notices) issued	3 (1)	2 (1)	13(2)

Development Management

An application under section 182A(1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, was submitted to An Bord Pleanála for a 110kV substation and associated 110kV underground grid connection and associated works at Srah, Coolcor and Clonin, Rhode, Co Offaly. This substation development is intended to serve a proposed solar PV farm and battery storage development on a c.132ha site, located in the townlands of Srah, Greenhills and Wood Co. Offaly. This large solar farm proposal was submitted to Offaly County Council for planning consent and is currently at further information stage (Planning Ref. 20/494). As part of the 182A application process, the Planning Department of OCC have been requested to provide a submission report to the Board. This report is currently being finalised and is due for submission to the Board by 15 April 2021. Planning Applications to date in 2021 reflect a 58% increase on 2020. The first three months applications is on a par with the first five months of 2020.

REGENERATION

Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF)

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage announced a call for URDF funding in 2020. On March 8th, 2021, Minister Darragh O’Brien TD announced €2.25m funding for regeneration projects in Tullamore. The successful application for Tullamore town consists of a suite of integrated urban regeneration projects to rejuvenate Tullamore Town and compliment previous URDF and ERDF successful projects. The following is a list of projects which were included in the successful application:

Tullamore URDF – 2020 successful application



Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS)

The Department of Rural and Community Development announced a call for ORIS 2020 funding on 29th May 2020. On 22nd March, 2021 Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys T.D., has announced a €500,000 grant for Kinnitty and the surrounding hinterland of West Offaly with significant match funding of €275,300 from Offaly County Council.

- This project consists of the ‘Route to the Trails’ is to be a seamless, safe and attractive connecting cycle and pedestrian link from the centre of Kinnitty Village to the existing Mountain Bike trails and walking /

hiking routes starting in the Kinnitty Forest behind Kinnitty Castle.

- The ‘**Kinnitty Woods Loop**’ a novice trail (2km). It will be a new component to the Slieve Bloom MTB trails (National Scale Centre) allowing younger and novice cyclists to develop cycling skills and confidence to promote use of the mountain bike trails. It will therefore increase the scope of the MTB offer to a wider audience.

- The “**Rediscovering Castle Bernard’s Historic Bridges**”



aspect of the project is to further enhance the very extensive walking and hiking offer of the area (many waymarked walks start in the forest behind the Castle) and in particular to showcase aspects of the Kinnitty Castle Demesne’s fine outdoor heritage e.g. its historic bridges and associated demesne walks.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

No update

Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF)

No update

Enforcement

Current resource limitations are causing long delays in dealing with cases and the members’ forbearance is requested. A new Enforcement Officer will join the Planning

team shortly and members will be updated on progress in coming months.

Forward Planning

The Chief Executive Report on submissions received on the draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 was issued to elected members for consideration in advance of MD and Special Council Meetings. Special Meetings at each Municipal District have been convened to discuss the implications for each area.

Rural Development Strategy

Our Rural Future: Government’s blueprint to transform rural Ireland.

On 29th March 2021 the Government issued a press release by An Taoiseach Micheál Martin, An Tánaiste Leo Varadkar, Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, and Minister for Transport and the Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan regarding the new initiative for the period 2021 – 2025

It is a five-year plan underpinned by the National Development Plan and will address a suite of issues around rural communities with a view to enhancing the quality of life in rural communities across Ireland in a sustainable economic, social, and environmental developmental way.

The Key Deliverables will be:

- More people living in rural Ireland-in our towns, villages and on the islands, reversing population decline.
- More people working in rural Ireland, with good career prospects, regardless of where their employer is based.
- Rural Ireland benefits from the transition to a more sustainable future.
- Rural towns as vibrant hubs for commercial and social activity, with access to public services.

•Rural communities, and especially young people, having an active role in shaping their future.

It is supported by 150 commitments across Government, which will address the challenges facing communities and deliver new opportunities for people living in rural areas. Commitments in the following areas are outlined

- Remote Working and Jobs
- Revitalising Town Centres
- Rural Living
- Tourism Culture and Heritage
- Supporting Communities
- Islands and Coastal Communities
- Agriculture
- Climate Transition

For more details of the initiative, commitments and potential funding streams, please refer to the Government website for Press Release at <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/01e45-our-rural-future-governments-blueprint-to-transform-rural-ireland/>

HERITAGE

January to March 2021 Heritage Office Report

Despite the C19 restrictions, project planning continues under the Offaly Heritage Plan 2017-21. The Offaly Heritage Forum met in February to discuss projects for the year.

Heritage Council funding

€30,000 has been secured in 2020 for three projects. The first is the **Conservation Master Plan for Birr Courthouse** which is in the process of being prepared by Howley Hayes Conservation Architects.

The second is towards the delivery of the **Offaly County Archive Service** following

the completion of the archive building at Axis Business Park. The recent work on the Mother and Baby homes highlights the importance of having a professional service.

The third element includes a number of community outreach awareness projects.

Offaly Biodiversity

- **National Biodiversity Action Plan Funding** of €27,400 has been applied for in March to develop actions in the All Ireland Pollinator Plan; to assist in the recording of biodiversity data with a specific focus this year on a county wide barn owl survey; and to support the ongoing work at Ballywilliam / Killaun Bog.
- We are working with four main stakeholders to develop a plan for the **Ballywilliam/ Killaun bog** east of Birr as well as carrying out some baseline ecology studies. Since last August we have been actively working with Saint Brendan's Community School who own the southern 40 hectares and are currently upgrading the 420m boardwalk with recycle plastic from Irish Recycled Products in Syngefield.
- **Invasive Species Funding** of €16,000 has also been applied for to continue to treat Japanese knotweed county wide and to remove himalayan balsam from the Camcor and Little Brosna Catchments.
- We are continuing with the second year of **Wildflowers of Offaly YouTube** videos by John Feehan, hosted on the Offaly Heritage YouTube channel.
<https://www.youtube.com/user/offalyheritage>

- Working with Laois County Council we are supporting 6 **In Your Nature Podcasts by BirdWatch Ireland** in a spring series providing seasonal information at a time when many are engaged with nature in their 5k. This is funded through the Keep Well campaign.

Historic Towns Initiative

Birr was one of ten towns nationally to receive Historic Towns funding, which is for the Birr Courthouse project. €200,000 was received towards the works needed to secure the building envelope of the Courthouse, which Birr 2020 proposes to use at a Creative hub.

Birr Destination Town Funding

Working with the OCC team to deliver this project following the review of the Public Realm Plan 2009. Three main elements are being developed; upgrading the Green; improved connection with Birr Demesne and an interpretation strategy for the town which will lead to specific interventions for interpretation.

Creative Ireland

In 2021 a budget of €147,000 is allocated to the Offaly Creative Ireland core programme with additional funding for Older Persons project and Cruinniu Children's Day in June. In Offaly the team involves the libraries, arts, architecture, heritage, enterprise and community all working together. The Open Community Call for projects has just closed and applications are being assessed.

Decade of Commemorations

An application for €50,000 from the Dept of CHG in 2021 is currently being assessed. The proposal is in partnership with Offaly History and historical societies across Offaly.

Community Monuments Fund

This fund closes in April so applications are currently being prepared.

Medieval Churches

- We are awaiting confirmation of Just Transition funding with Laois Heritage Office of €748,000 which will go towards 'conservation and pollination' plans and works at a medieval church in each MD. The churches in Offaly are Monasteroris in Edenderry, Kilbride (nr canal) in Tullamore and Kilmurry Glebe near Shinrone in Birr.
- The maintenance programme will continue at the sites that have been conserved in recent years.
- We are working with the community at Kilcomin, near Shinrone, to plan for the conservation of the early Christian Monastic Site.

County Council Working Groups

- OCC Climate Action Group
- Lough Boora Parklands Sculpture Park working group – there are 3 reps from OCC and 3 from Bord na Mona to manage the future of the sculpture park – led by Sally O'Leary Arts officer.
- Birr Town Camcor River Study – on working group with Birr 2020 who secured LEADER funding for this project

Irish Heritage School and Know your Locality Course

Under the Keep Well Campaign a course on exploring online resources about county Offaly was led by the Irish Heritage School based in Birr town. This was five nights of positive engagement and was booked out within 24 hours.

Tidy Towns' Network

Working with the Community Section, we continue to provide information to groups as we await news of the competition in 2021.

ROADS

Roads Programme 2021

In line with Public Health Measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 road works are currently restricted to essential services: repair/construction of critical road and utility infrastructure. The service has continued with minimum disruption with planning, design and procurement of schemes for 2021 have progressed as normal.

Offaly County Council received the 2021 National Roads Allocation of €2,319,755 from the TII and the Regional & Local Allocation of €12,447,240 from the Department of Transport and €3,579,655 from the National Transport Authority. Offaly County Council has allocated €1,867,130 from own resources. The 2021 Roads Programme will be presented at the April Council meeting.

2021 Initial Roads Budget	
Transport Infrastructure Ireland	€2,319,755
Department of Transport	€12,447,240
National Transport Authority	€3,579,655
Offaly County Council (Own Resources)	€1,867,130
Total	€20,213,780

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has developed a five year walking and cycling infrastructure delivery plan to progress the Government's commitment of €1.8bn toward the development of active travel over the next 5 years. Offaly has

received €3,439,000 in 2021 to progress active travel schemes in the County.

The schemes, funded to improve the urban environment and walking and cycling accessibility in towns in Offaly, include Local Transport Plans in the 5 large towns: Tullamore, Birr, Edenderry, Clara and Banagher; footpath improvements, cycleways and pedestrian access in Birr, Clara, Edenderry and Portarlinton; advancing a significant cycle network project in Tullamore; continuing our programme of pedestrian crossing upgrades and funding for the Urban Greenway in Tullamore. The schemes will commence in 2021 and continue with further funding over a 5 year programme.

ENVIRONMENT AND WATER SERVICES

Climate Action

Climate Change is continuing to be embedded in the day to day working of each section of Offaly County Council and the training programme is on going throughout the organisation.

Offaly County Council will have to identify one location or area which will be subject to a plan for a Decarbonization Zone prior to the end April, in order to comply with Action 165 of the Climate Action Plan.

Consultation is open

The **Climate Action Plan** is Ireland's roadmap to becoming a climate neutral economy and resilient society by 2050. This means that the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere is dramatically reduced and is balanced by the amount removed by our land, forestry, or technology. Becoming a climate resilient society will help us to cope with the impacts of a changing climate. Ireland is committed to achieving this future through a just transition, meaning all voices will be heard in a fair and equal manner, and that new

opportunities will mean no one is left behind.

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications are now developing the 2021 Climate Action Plan and want your views on how we can transform Ireland and support people to take their own climate actions. You are invited to be part of this [Climate Conversation](#) and to share your views on the government's climate action and how it can support you to take climate action in your own life. Your views will also be part of the wider [National Dialogue on Climate Action \(NDCA\)](#) and will help to engage and communicate with more people on Ireland's climate action in the future.

You don't need to be a climate expert for your opinion to be valued, the DECC want to hear from as many people as possible.

This consultation is open until **17.30 18 May 2021** and submissions can be made online through the [consultation platform](#). If you have difficulties submitting a response online, or would like to make a submission by post, email or through Irish please email ClimateConversation@decc.gov.ie

Environment Litter & Waste Management

Having issued 540 letters to residents of various housing estates in Tullamore, Kilcormac and Birr during March, feedback and engagement has been largely positive, Environment Section continue to track responses from residents with a view to issuing some reminder letters before proceeding to issuing fines. These letters are in relation to segregation, storage and presentation of household waste by-laws i.e. how households manage their waste, if they have kerbside collection or use other authorised facilities. This project will be rolled out across the entire county in due course.

EWS received and investigated 444 environmental complaints to the end of March 2021. Dog fouling is highlighted as being an issue and we have started a social media awareness campaign advising the public to clean up after their dogs. Tidy Towns or community groups can receive supplies of "doggie waste bags" from the Environment Section.

EWS are happy to support An Taisce in their annual National Spring Clean which takes place during April 2021. Local communities can register on line, bags and pickers will be available from the Environment Section with collected/bagged litter disposed of by OCC litter wardens. In 2020, An Taisce estimated that 2,900 tonnes of litter was collected nationwide.

EWS continues to support schools in their green schools and work with An Taisce in trying to deliver the Green Schools Programme in an effective manner remotely.

In relation to the Community Action Fund, the deadline for the 2019/2020 projects has been extended by the DCCAE until June 2021. E&WS has completed the vast majority of projects and will have completed-all projects by the deadline.

PRE-DRAFT NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF THE "NATIONAL WASTE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY"

Legislation:- Waste Management Act, 1996 and Waste Management (Planning) Regulations, 1997

The 3 Regional Waste Management Planning Offices are giving notice of intention to commence preparation of the "National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy" to replace the existing Regional Waste Management Plans. This plan will be subject to Strategic

Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment.

A Briefing Note about the current Regional Waste Management plans is attached. The current plans are available on www.mywaste.ie

Written submissions in relation to the preparation of the plans can be made to info@srwmo.ie or by post to Southern Region Waste Management Office, Lissanalta House, Dooradoyle Road Limerick, V94 K6PO and/or by completing a short questionnaire on www.mywaste.ie by close of business on the 6th May 2021.

Water Quality River Basin Management Plan - Cycle 3 Characterisation

A review of all waterbodies (rivers) has been completed by the EPA, and the Environment & Water Services Section have made submissions for Offaly's waterbodies. This will be incorporated in the next *Draft River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027* which will also be open for public consultation in 2021, and all Councillors will be notified.

Wastewater

- Consultants are to be appointed shortly for the upgrade of the Edenderry Plant, this project will be led by Irish Water.
- Daingean: Design of new inlet sump is near completion.
- Walsh Island: The design of reed bed is near completion
- Shannonbridge: Repair works were carried out on the tanks, and All weep holes have been made good.
- Bracknagh: Health & Safety works to be carried out shortly.
- Rahan: New sump & Control House completed.

- Sewer repairs were carried out in Edenderry, Clara & Daingean

Water

- Works on the upgrade of the Tullamore, Birr and Clonaslee Water Treatment plants are ongoing.
- Find and fix works are ongoing in Edenderry, Portarlington, Tullamore, Rahan, Brosna and Rhode .
- Watermain rehabilitation works are ongoing in Clara, Fahy and Rhode village.
- Disinfection programme is nearing completion at Tubberdaly, Coolderry, Clonbullogue, Edenderry and Walsh Island.

Rural Water Programme

The Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2019 – 2021 is ongoing. Of the 19 projects across the county that were approved for grant funding for capital projects under MARWP 19-20, 7 have been completed to date and the other 12 projects are at various stages of planning and construction. More than €1.85m was allocated to Group Water Schemes in Co. Offaly under the MARWP 2019-2021 and so far €568,166.35 has been paid to GWSs for the works already carried out.

Annual subsidies for Group Water Schemes have been completed, a total of €978,426.00 was paid to schemes across the county. Our subsidy payments process was audited internally in 2020 and was found to provide 'Satisfactory Assurance' that it is in compliance with the Public Spending Code. Water quality sampling of Group Water Schemes has continued during the year with the Groups Schemes helpfully providing sampling kiosks and access to outside taps to assist with sampling during Covid-19 related restrictions.

HOUSING

Covid 19 – Housing

The Housing Section continued to provide critical essential services as outlined in the Government Roadmap during the Covid-19 level 5 restrictions. To assist us in streamlining service delivery we encourage the use of the following email addresses:

Service	Email Address
HAP Enquiries	hap@offalycoco.ie
Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans	homeloans@offalycoco.ie
Housing Inspections – HAP, Leased, Private, etc.	standards@offalycoco.ie
General Enquiries, Maintenance Issues, etc.	housing@offalycoco.ie
RAS & Leasing Enquiries	RAS@offalycoco.ie
Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability Scheme	HousingAidGrants@offalycoco.ie
Anti-Social Behaviour	ASB@offalycoco.ie

February Housing Update

- There are 527 on the Social Housing List awaiting housing support at the end of March 2021.
- A further 858 active tenancies are currently being supported under the Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) Scheme, 16 signed up for HAP and 12 exited from HAP in March.
- At the end of March 18 single people and 4 families were being

supported in emergency accommodation.

- 7 Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans applications have been received in 2021 to date and are currently being assessed.
- Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2021 come into force on 19th April 2021. Accordingly, a revised Housing Application Form will become effective and made available to applicants from that date.

2021 Rent Review

- The Housing Section have commenced a Rent Review of Local Authority housing units. Letters have issued to all Local Authority housing tenants requesting them to complete and submit the required documentation by Friday, 30th April 2021. All queries in relation to the review should be emailed to rentreview@offalycoco.ie

Housing Stock – Number, Maintenance & Repair

- Total housing stock at end of March, 2021 is 1,927.
- 248 maintenance calls were logged in March. In accordance with current Covid-19 restrictions only emergency repairs are currently being responded to.
- €476,000 announced for further retrofit works under the national retrofitting scheme whereby a number of voids will be targeted.

Housing Capital Programme Update

- Raheen, Clara development (38 units) – received Stage 2 approval on 21st August 2020. It is currently at public consultation phase of the Part 8 planning process, closing date for submissions was 11th

March 2021. The Chief executives report will be presented at the May Council meeting.

- Dargan Drive, Chancery Lane (20 Units) – received Stage 1 approval in March 2020. The Design Team have been appointed and initial meeting held. Site investigations contractor has been procured but works cannot commence during the current Covid-19 level 5 restrictions. These site investigations are required to progress the design to Stage 2.
- Moneygall (4 units) – received Stage 2 approval in July 2020 and the members approved the Part 8 planning at the October Council meeting. Stage 3 application (permission to proceed to Tender) to be submitted to the Department in April, 2021.
- Beechgrove Belmont (7 units) – received Stage 2 approval in July 2020 and the members approved the Part 8 planning at the November Council meeting. Stage 3 application will be submitted to the Department in April, 2021
- Sr. Senan, Edenderry (4 Units) – received Stage 2 approval in August 2020, and Part 8 planning was approved by the Elected Members at the December Council meeting. Stage 3 is currently being prepared for submission and is expected to be lodged with Department in Quarter 2, 2021.
- Banagher, Kylebeg (18 Units) - a second stage 3 submission was made in April 2020 and approved by the DHLGH in May 2020. Currently issued on www.etenders.gov.ie with a closing date of 22nd April 2021. Stage 4, permission to proceed to construction/appoint most

advantageous tenderer to commence the works will issue following the Tender process.

- Circular Road, Daingean (9 units) - Stage 3 approval was received in March 2021. Works Tender will issue on www.etenders.gov.ie in April/May 2021.

Vacant Houses Initiatives

- 1 Newbridge Street, Birr: Refurbishment of derelict dwelling to provide retrofitted 3-bedroom dwelling. An external design team is appointed and Stage 2 departmental approval was received in October 2020. Stage 3 will be lodged in Q2 2021.
- 4 Hillview, Holly Park, Birr: Stage 1 application was submitted to the Department on 22nd December 2020 to refurbish the existing derelict dwelling. Departmental decision is pending.
- 121 Lakeview, Clara: Stage 1 submission in April 2021.
- 3 x Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) complete in 2021, An application for funding for their refurbishment has been submitted to the department.

Approved Housing Bodies Schemes

- Cluid Housing Association: Construction on the 26 units has stopped due to the current Covid-19 Level 5 restrictions.
- Tuath: Killane Drive, Edenderry (27 units) – Deemed an essential site and completion is expected in 30th April 2021.
- Oaklee: Clonminch, Tullamore (19 units) – Appointment of contractor is pending the resumption of construction activity.

- Oaklee: Kearney's Field (41 Units) – In process of appointing a contactor
- Sofia Housing: Stage 2 approved (39 units) at Presentation Lands, Portarlinton. Stage 2 submission was made in October. Project will progress to planning soon
- Sofia Housing, in a joint initiative with Midlands Simon Community, acquired Clonamore Hotel in Q3, 2020. The facility will be developed as an enhanced centre for the provision of supported accommodation for homeless people. Under the terms of a landmark agreement Midlands Simon Community will operate the facility, with a team of qualified social care workers providing support on a 24/7 basis. Following refurbishment, the facility will provide professional supports for up to 17 people.
- The Department have approved the acquisition 4 No. Part V units in Silverbrook Drive, Tullamore.

Housing Grants

The Department has advised that €1,368,805, of which €273,761 is to be provided from Offaly County Council own revenues, will be made available for private housing grants, i.e., Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People; People with a Disability Scheme and Mobility Grants. Funds are being allocated to qualified households and under the current Covid-19 restrictions works should only proceed should the householder agree to these works progressing with the approved contractor.

Disabled Person's Grants

A submission for funding has been made to the Department and we are currently awaiting notification of our final 2021 allocation.

Turnkey Developments/Part V

- Main Street Daingean (8 Units): Approved 13th August and works commenced in November 2020 currently on hold due to the current Covid-19 Level 5 restrictions
- MacGregol, Birr: (12 Units) – 8 units complete and a further 4 are progressing and will be delivered in 2021
- 6 Turnkey Schemes (82 units) [Mucklagh 8 units; Bog Road, Portarlinton - 28 units; Woodfield, Birr - 34 units; Walsh Island - 4 units; Tullamore – 5 units; Cloneygowan – 3 units] received departmental approval in December 2020. Construction of all schemes are paused until level 5 restrictions are lifted.

Retrofit Programme

The Council received notification on 8th September that €3.3m was being awarded to Offaly for the 'Just Transition for the Midlands Region' programme.

The Design Team have completed surveys of 36 no. houses and Tenders for the completion of the retrofit works for this first Lot of houses in Birr will issue shortly. A further lot of 42 houses surveys were due to take place in January 2021 but have now been postponed owing to the current Covid situation. Lot 5 & 6 of the retrofit surveys has been tendered to consultants and award of this lot of 47 no. houses is also on hold until restrictions are lifted.

LOCAL & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Offaly Covid-19 Community Response Helpline

The Offaly Community Call Helpline has operated since 30th March 2020. It operates from 9.00am to 5.00pm, 7 days per week helping those who are vulnerable and who need help accessing essential services or a listening ear. The Helpline number for Offaly is **FREEPHONE: 1800 81 81 81**. A dedicated team of Community & Culture staff answer queries, with two staff working each weekend.

The number of calls increased slightly in January 2021 due to the lockdown, but they have reduced again during February and March. There have been 9 calls to the Helpline up to 29th March 2021.

The breakdown of monthly Helpline calls to date is as follows:

SUMMARY OF TYPE OF CALLS AND EMAILS TO COVID HELPLINE 20-21		
	Number	
Deliveries	92	18.4
Isolation	30	6.0
Meals	8	1.6
Medical	105	21.0
Other e.g. volunteers	265	53.0
Total	500	100

Month	Number	%
April	312	61.7
May	93	18.4
June	19	3.8
July	8	1.6
August	8	1.6
September	7	1.4
October	9	1.8
Nov	3	0.6
Dec	8	1.6
Jan-21	19	3.8
Feb-21	11	2.2
Mar-21	9	1.8
Total	506	100

Offaly Community Response Forum

The interagency Community Response Forum has met 19 times since the first meeting on 30th March 2020. The role of the Forum is to lead the co-ordination of community supports and resilience, helping vulnerable members of the community or those living alone to get deliveries of groceries, medicine and fuels and to have social contact during the pandemic.

The most recent meeting was held on the 25th March 2021. Concern was expressed at the meeting by a number of agencies regarding the high level of Covid cases in Offaly. The meeting was attended by Arlene Crean, HSE Dublin Midlands Communications Group, to consider what further actions can be taken locally from a communications perspective.

It was agreed that staff in Offaly County Council would engage in a publicity campaign with young people in the county using additional forms of social media such as Instagram and Tik Tok. These apps are used more widely by young people compared to Facebook, radio and newspaper advertising. The Council's Community Section and Comhairle na nÓg team contacted a number of local social

media influencers, bands such as Chasing Abbey and Ruaile Buaile, Offaly GAA, Youth Work Ireland, Foroige, LOETB, etc to get their assistance in spreading the message in their own words, to remind young people to stay within their 5k, and to comply with other measures to limit the spread of Covid over the Easter break period and beyond.

Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)

Offaly LCDC held their monthly meeting on Thursday 11th March with members attending by video link. Main agenda items included the Rural Development LEADER Programme 2014–2020; The Transitional LEADER Programme; LEADER Annual Progress Report 2020 and Implementation Plan 2021; Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 Annual Plan 2021 Revision; West & South Offaly Meals on Wheels Project (Update).

Following a detailed presentation and overview of the LEADER Programme 2014-2020 with key achievements, challenges, lessons and case studies for 2020 highlighted, together with proposals for the close out of the Programme in 2021 and allocation of funding approved, the Members approved the LEADER Annual Progress Report 2020 and Implementation Plan 2021.

Members were briefed on the new Transitional LEADER Programme and proposals for priorities, implementation and funding allocations under the various themes were presented, discussed and approved.

An update was provided to the members on West and South Offaly Meals on Wheels Project and the Offaly Healthy Homes Project outlining the significant expansion

to the programme in the past year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the various lockdowns across the county.

Mr. S. McKenna, HEAnet, Ireland's National Education & Research Network, gave a presentation on the EDURoam (Education Roaming) Project – a specific network access system for students to provide quality, secure, reliable internet access worldwide, with no requirement for usernames or passwords.

Age Friendly Strategy

The Easter edition of the Age Friendly Newsletter 'Connecting the Faithful' is making its way across the County. To ensure that we reach those most in need of a positive uplifting Newsletter, the delivery is now taking place via Meals on Wheels, Active Retirement & Community Groups across the county.

Offaly County Council are supporting a HSE 'Older Persons Supports' Directory through the Alliance. This will include information on supports and services available through Offaly Co. Co. It is at print stage now.

A warm welcome to Eileen Hughes the Midlands Regional Age Friendly Manager who joined the Community & Culture section recently.

Initiatives with LEO are commencing with Training programmes for Mature Entrepreneurs due to commence shortly.

Public Participation Network

The Green Dog Walker initiative is progressing with the Environment Section and Area Engineers working collaboratively with the PPN and ODEN (Offaly Disability Equality Network) to address Dog Fouling.

PPN Rep meetings took place to look at the most effective ways of being representative of the membership. Meetings with each of the pillars (Community, Social Inclusion &

Environment) took place with a decision taken to focus on specific themes going forward.

A Power Point Presentation on the PPN and how it can work with sections most effectively was made to the Senior Management Group and also to the Climate Steering Group this month.

Offaly PPN hosted a Pilot Climate Conversation on March 25th. This was well attended including members from Comhairle Na nÓg in attendance. A welcome opportunity to include the voice of young people.

PPN Elections are underway. The candidates will be ratified at the Plenary on March 30th @7.30pm

We continue to provide information on Social Media platforms in relation to Covid Updates and the Community Helpline supports.

Comhairle na nÓg:

A welcome and information meeting was held in early March for all the new Executive to get to know each other a little better. On the 24th of March the Executive held a meeting and invited an app developer and also a member of the Waterford CNN to come and share knowledge of a project they completed. On the 10th of March we held our first steering group meeting of the year which gave great guidance on our topic for this year. Our member Saul Whelan was nominated as part of a national group to take part in the 'In depth Climate Change Conversations'. Executive member Riain Underwood took part in the PPN Climate Conversation to increase his knowledge. Kenneth Bracken was elected as the PPN representative for young people in Offaly at SPC meetings. Offaly Comhairle na nÓg came 4th in the fittest Comhairle na nÓg in Ireland. Ruth Egan was nominated as part of a Youth Advisory Committee, a national committee for Comhairle na nÓg to help with the networking events for CNN. Four

of our members are taking part in the Comhairle national networking event this year. Offaly Comhairle started a campaign on Tik Tok to encourage young people to stick with the restrictions recommended by the HSE.

ARTS

Music Generation

Lockdown Tea-time Choir

Our Lockdown Lunchtime Choir for young people from 2nd class which started in February was such a success



that we wanted to keep it going even though the children have started returning to school. So we have changed the lunchtime choir to the tea-time choir. We are now holding our choir rehearsals at 6pm to allow children the opportunity to continue to participate.

Online workshops with Sir James and Lady Jeanne Galway

In March, some of our young flautists participated in two online workshops as well as a special collaborative online performance with Sir James and Lady Jeanne Galway. We cannot thank Sir James and Lady Jeanne Galway enough for being so generous with their time to impart their knowledge, experience and expertise with our young musicians – the next generation of flautists.



Spring Voices 2021

We are preparing our Spring voices programme which will take place over the Easter break in early April.



CPD Training for our Music Educators

Music Generation Offaly Westmeath are supporting a number of our Music Educators to access CPD provided by National Youth Choir of Scotland who supported us back in 2013 when we were preparing to roll out our Kodaly schools programme.

Online Programme

All of MGOW's community & school work are continuing on line as we remain in level 5. On a weekly basis we are providing c.20 hours' online tuition involving 10 members of our Musician Educators.

Our regular schedule now includes:

- Monday morning music for pre-schoolers,
- Choral activities for all ages - Singfest Choirs
- Ukulele and guitar with MGOW musicians Ronan and John for primary & post primary students
- Our Sinfonia Ensemble developed in partnership with Maynooth University Music Department;
- MGOW Schools Kodaly online – Junior & Senior Infants
- MGOW Schools Kodaly online – 1st & 2nd class
- Intergenerational Ukulele
- Rock at 2pm for children and young people based in SEN/ ASD units
- Music Production and song writing
- Music Jam

Creative Ireland Grant

We were delighted to be awarded €31,435 in funding as under the Creative Ireland Programme in response to the Creativity in Older Age Scheme.

We will be partnering with Music Generation Laois to expand two intergenerational projects across our regions.

Involving Musical Memories and Ukulele Ceilí, projects currently developed and run by Music Generation Laois and Music Generation Offaly-Westmeath respectively, this was a collaborative application from Music Generation Laois and Music Generation Offaly Westmeath with support from Laois, Offaly and Westmeath County Councils and Laois Offaly ETB and Longford Westmeath ETB.

Weekly Newsletter

We issue weekly newsletters to our partner schools and all primary & post primary schools in Offaly & Westmeath and everyone on our mailing list.

Social Media/Website

We are very active on all our social media outlets and working to keep our website (www.musicgenerationoffalywestmeath.ie) updated. We also produce regular newsletters which are circulated with our subscribers and partner schools.

ARTS OFFICE

The Arts Office continues to plan for a very busy annual programme for 2021. The annual programme will be delivered in response to the current and anticipated restrictions, therefore will be a combination of online and where possible on the ground projects.

Grants & Awards

Arts Acts Grants, Professional Artists Support Scheme, Festival Arts Grants –

have been awarded and are in progress. Drawdown date for all the above is end of November 2021.

Artist Supports

An online funding information webinar was undertaken in partnership with the Arts Council. The webinar was specifically for Offaly's professional artists. 25 were in attendance.

Public Art

Plans for the launch of Jessica Traynor's public art project are being made to take place April/May. The project has consisted of

- Primary and secondary school workshops
- Mentorship programme - A summer mentorship programme for 6th year students and adults
- Creative Writing workshops at Crank House
- Oral history conversations
- A four week online creative writing workshop
- Workshops with composer Elaine Agnew with primary and secondary schools – the poetry that they made together will be set to music
- Jessica has written the poetic history of Banagher – a pamphlet of fifteen poems inspired by the folklore and history of Banagher. The pamphlet is called **A Place of Pointed Stones**, a translation of the word *Banagher*.

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.

Edenderry Library and Arts Space

The Arts Office will be continuing 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. The Arts Office are exploring new funding opportunities for the development of arts in the town and its environs

Creative Ireland

Around the Faithful Homes Online Exhibition – An initiative funded through Creative Ireland/Galway 2020 organised by the Arts Office and facilitated by Michael Fortune. This remote project is a photographic collection of over 150 objects and their amazing stories found within Offaly homes. People throughout Offaly submitted their photos and stories to Michael, he then curated same into an online exhibition. The exhibition was launched on Sunday 21st March via zoom with over 50 in attendance.



The Arts Office will continue to lead on a number of Creative Ireland projects including: Creative Edenderry, Community Open Call projects, Animation Residency

and the Tullamore Arts Development Project.

Online Communications



We engage public and artists through our online and social platforms, Facebook, twitter and our extensive email distribution database.

We continue to advise artists and the public on opportunities, achievements and online events.

FilmOffaly

Offaly Film Commission has decided to change the specifications for the FilmOffaly Short Film Award 2021 – this year the award of €10,000 will go to a commissioned short film that responds to the unique circumstances that we are facing and allows for a mentorship element for Offaly Film Professionals within its creation.

A new brief has been approved and the initial call for the commission has been sent to Offaly Film Production Companies. Closing date is in April

Creative Edenderry

Creative Edenderry successfully launched their events over the weekend of 19th – 21st March. The online Facebook launch of the Shoes of Edenderry book on Friday 19th



March was viewed by over 3500. On Saturday the group unveiled ‘Walking in My Shoes’ a glass sculpture installation by Michelle O’Donnell and an exhibition of photographic portraits of and by the people of Edenderry displayed on large billboards on the facade of the old Tesco site on JKL Street Edenderry. These events are affiliated to the Galway 2020 programme and can be found on the Galway2020 website as well as on the groups social media page.



SPORTS Funding

75% Sport Ireland draw down received (€225,779) Applications to the Sports Capital & Equipment Programme closed on March 1st. A total of 59 applications were submitted by clubs and organisations in Co. Offaly

Education & Training

Jean Brady, Sports Inclusion Development Officer is working with swim clubs in Offaly to support the delivery of swim coach programmes in the area of disability swimming

Programmes

The majority of Offaly Sports Partnership’s physical activity programmes are continuing online: -
Operation Transformation minimum fitness test programme – the eight week online programme designed to support people to

achieve a minimum level of fitness concluded at the end of March. 55 people signed up with participants divided into 11 groups of five. Each group participated in a twice weekly online exercise class and received support and information on leading a healthier lifestyle.

Women in Sport - online strength & conditioning programme for women in sport – 22 female teams continue to participate in online strength and conditioning classes.

Community Sports Development Programme

Offaly’s Longest Day 2021

A 20-day physical activity challenge encouraging the county to get up and get active for the 20 days in the run to the longest day on the 21st June. Diaries can be requested via Eventbrite - <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/offaly-sports-partnership-longest-day-challenge-tickets-145729664349> - or by emailing longestday@offalycoco.ie. Closing date for diary requests is 23rd April

Couch to 5k

Offaly Sports Partnership’s ASPIRE graduate, Eoghan Pernot (funded by Sport Ireland) developed a Couch to 5k



programme. 30 people have requested a copy of the programme to date

Walking Football

Working with the FAI, Eoghan is also looking into re-establishing walking football in the county when the easing of restrictions allows for same

Dance Classes

Older adults/women – 10-week online dance classes for 20 older adults and women aged 35 – 55 years continues.

Sports Inclusion Development Programme

- Special education needs units / schools programme – having commenced on the 8th March, this programme supplies three resource videos (athletics, dance, strength & conditioning, yoga, etc.) to schools with special education needs units on a weekly basis. Currently, 25 classes and over 280 pupils are involved in the programme.
- National Learning Network Tullamore Fitness Friday – Offaly Sports Partnership continues to support the National Learning Network in the delivery of their “Fitness Friday” programme for up to 75 service users.



- Online exercise programmes for disability services – three services (St Cronan’s Birr, Riverview Resources Birr and the Bannon Centre Tullamore) continue to be supported in the delivery of a 10-week physical activity and exercise programmes for their service users.



HEALTHY OFFALY

March was a busy month with Healthy Offaly activities. Apart from the ongoing publicity in newspapers and radio for the Community Call service and Covid-19 targeted actions delivered by Offaly Sports Partnership; there were three proposed amendments to Healthy Offaly

- Action 1 Physical Fitness Programme for Children and Young People (Fit Class),
- Action 4 Eco spaces as places of Health and Well-being and a
- Community Engagement Action run proposed by the Children & Young Person Services Committee (CYPSC).

Changes to Action 1: The Physical Fitness Programme for Children & Young People are to suspend the current ‘in school’ intervention delivered by tutors to a Physical Fitness Diary resource to be developed by Offaly Sports Partnership which will be sent to every primary school going child in the County.

Changes to Action 4: Relates to the reconstitution of the Eco Spaces action by Offaly Local Development Company whereby there is an emphasis away from close contact water based activities to more easily delivered walking and cycling activities along the County’s greenways and blueways. The action will now cater for smaller groups with smaller number per group. These changes are necessary to comply with ongoing Covid-19 Government restrictions.

Finally, a change has been requested by CYPSC regarding a Community Engagement action that centred around an LGBTI+ Youth Pride event that could not proceed in May 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions. Instead it is proposed to redirect the Offaly LCDC Community engagement allocation of €5,000 to Laois Offaly CYPSC to conduct individualised physical activity programmes in Offaly for primary school aged children up to the 24-year-old age bracket. This programme will be run on behalf of CYPSC by Offaly Sports Partnership. All three change requests have been forwarded to Pobal for their approval in March and a response will be forthcoming from them shortly.

The Longest Day Challenge

Friday 26th March 2021 saw the launch of the Longest Day Challenge for 2021. Cllr. John Carroll (a participant from the inaugural challenge in 2020) performed the launch with a call for everyone in County Offaly to get involved. The Longest Day Project was created by Offaly Sports Partnership and is supported by the Offaly Local Community Development Committee and the Healthy Offaly Team. Last year the challenge took place in June 2020 as the Country was emerging from the 1st Covid-19 lockdown. There was huge interest among the citizens of County Offaly with young and old taking part. The challenge has returned this year following on from a successful event last June. The idea of the challenge came about to give people a reason to get up and active in these difficult times and to have a physical activity goal or target to reach over the three weeks in the run up to the longest day. The 2021 challenge has been very well received so far with over 600 applicants in



the first week of being launched. All registration details can be viewed on Offaly County Council's social media pages and all local papers this week (31st March 2021).

LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE

The Local Enterprise Office Offaly team continues to work remotely and provides a full service to new and existing enterprises in Offaly. The LEO team are providing much needed assistance to deal with the unprecedented numbers of business owners contacting the Local Enterprise Office.

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. Supported by Offaly County Council and Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Office Offaly hosted 3 events for local businesses this week, in addition to ten Spotlight events which were open to businesses across the country. Highlights from the week included 3 in 1 Masterclass delivered by Mr. Alec Drew – The Business Expert and Digital Marketing course delivered by Keith Feighery of Digital Insights.

Student Enterprise Awards

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. The winning teenager entrepreneurs from Birr Community School will represent Offaly at

this year's Student Enterprise Programme National Finals on the 14th May. Hology Photography from Birr Community School which is owned by Damien Delaney and Alex Byrne. They run a photography business selling pictures framed, unframed and on canvas of the local area and more. The programme supports students to create, design and market their own business, all with the hope of reaching the National Finals. The local students will be competing against hundreds of other student entrepreneurs from all over Ireland in the Annual Student Enterprise Programme National Finals in May.



Shopfront Enhancement Grant Scheme

Offaly County Council has extended the Shopfront Enhancement Grant Scheme for 2021 as a result of funding secured under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme – Accelerated Measure in Response to Covid-19. The maximum Grant permitted is 50% of costs (vat exclusive) with a maximum grant payment of €2,000.

The Scheme is open for applications from businesses/retail premises in all towns and villages in Offaly, excluding Tullamore Town. Tullamore has a population >10,000 which excludes it from Town and Village Renewal funding. It is a condition of the scheme that all approved works should be completed by 31st July 2021. Application forms and terms and conditions of the scheme can be obtained by contacting the Local Enterprise Office Offaly at info@leo.offalycoco.ie. The closing date for receipt of completed applications is 12.00 noon on Thursday 22nd April 2021.

Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID (SBASC)

The Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID (SBASC) which is intended to target those businesses with operating costs that do not qualify for the COVID Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS) operated by the Revenue Commissioners. The eligibility criteria for both schemes are similar. The main difference between SBASC and CRSS is the requirement, in the case of CRSS, for the public to have access to a business premises. SBASC also aligns with recently announced grant schemes for the tourism, arts and entertainment sectors. The grant is available from Offaly Co Co., and is a contribution towards fixed costs to assist a business to keep operational for an eventual re-opening, is only available to an applicant operating from a rateable property. The closing date for applications for the initial grant under SBASC is 21 April 2021.

Food Academy Programme

Food Academy is a training programme aimed at supporting and nurturing early stage food businesses. The Local Enterprise Offices have joined forces with Bord Bia and SuperValu on this initiative to provide a consistent level of food marketing knowledge to early-stage food business owners.

The programme helps develop an in-depth knowledge of the tools which can be used to assess market gaps for your product. It gets food companies to understand core technical issues facing your food or drink business and learn how to grow sales for your product range through better branding and packaging design. The Food Academy is aimed at those in the early to mid-stages of developing a food or drink business. Selection criteria will apply. Contact LEO Offaly for further details. The closing date for applications is Friday 23rd April 2021.

Engenuity Midlands Engineering Network

Engenuity is for any Midlands engineering firm with an ambition to grow their business. Engenuity enables access to a range of unique supports, and is enabling networking of business owners throughout the Midlands Region. Engenuity Midlands Engineering Network is an initiative of the Midland LEOs. New members are welcome, for more information, visit www.midlandengineering.ie.

Amazon Bootcamp Ireland

Amazon Bootcamp Ireland is taking place over two mornings on April 13th & 14th and LEOs are asked to please encourage suitable clients to attend. The event is hosted by Amazon and is supported by Enterprise Ireland and LEOs and delivered by Enterprise Nation.

The aim of the bootcamp is to provide free training and guidance to help businesses in Ireland increase their online sales and reach new customers. The event will include practical sessions on how to sell products on the Amazon stores, scale operations, master social media and advice around securing funding. Tickets are free, but LEO clients must register in advance via this link - <https://bit.ly/3IJBKBI>.

Upcoming Events and New Initiatives

The Green for Micro programme

Offaly's small businesses are being encouraged to become more sustainable this year following the launch of a new programme to green your business. The Green for Micro programme is an initiative from the Local Enterprise Offices, with support from Enterprise Ireland, being rolled-out nationwide to help prepare small businesses for the low carbon, more resource efficient economy of the future. It is now available to businesses across Offaly via the Local Enterprise Office.

With the help of a Green Consultant, small businesses with up to ten employees can get free advice and technical support on resource efficiency, how to better understand their carbon footprint and how to implement an environmental management system to reduce costs and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

To find out more about the new Green for Micro programme, contact your LEO Offaly or go to www.LocalEnterprise.ie/Green for more information.

BREXIT – Information for Businesses

With Brexit now upon us, LEO Offaly continues to provide a range of training supports, mentoring and initiatives to help business deal with the reality of BREXIT.

Ready for Customs Grant

This new grant provides companies with financial assistance to cover the costs of taking on much needed additional customs clearance staff. This is a cash limited scheme of up to €20m, with the following financial support available:

- A grant of €9,000 to support the recruitment or redeployment of a full-time¹ employee into a dedicated customs role.
- A grant of €4,500 to support the recruitment or redeployment of a part-time² employee into a dedicated customs role.

GradStart scheme now available for LEO clients

The GradStart scheme is a 24-month graduate placement programme with funding of up to €30k (€15k per year). Local Enterprise Office client companies with at least 5 full time staff can apply for the GradStart programme.

The objective of GradStart is to assist indigenous companies to scale and grow their businesses through the introduction of

good graduate talent (with a minimum Level 6 degree qualification) to deliver clearly defined projects.

Innovation Vouchers - open call

Open call for applications continues for 2021. Standard €5k vouchers are available to assist a company explore a business opportunity or problem with a registered knowledge provider.

EENGINEX Meet the Buyer event, 15th April

EENGINEX, the engineering “Meet the Buyer” event, makes a welcome return in 2021, where firms from all over Ireland and further afield will meet at City North Hotel to engage in face-to-face meetings with senior buyers and fellow manufacturers from throughout Ireland and the EU.

COVID 19 Supports

Remote Training Sessions

Booking is now available for a number of Online courses such as Start your Own Business Course, Digital marketing for Business, COVID-19 Government Supports for business, A Layman's Guide to Tax, How to create marketing videos on a budget and Start your Own Business course, Mentoring Sessions with Bobby Connolly. These courses are aimed at those interested in starting their own business or growing their business. Most of the courses have been fully booked and have received excellent feedback.

Remote Mentoring Sessions

The Local Enterprise Office Offaly has a number of free mentoring sessions to assist businesses through the Covid-19 crisis. Please contact us to arrange a mentoring session. The types of mentoring available are Business, Finance, Banking Supports & Advice, Human Resources, Social Media Strategy and Microfinance Loans.

Financial Supports Overview

Some financial supports that may be available to Offaly businesses are listed below. Further information on all of these supports is available on <https://www.localenterprise.ie/Offaly/Financial-Supports/>

Feasibility, Research and Development:

- a. LEO Feasibility Grant
- b. Agile Innovation Fund (Enterprise Ireland Scheme open to LEO Clients)

Business Start-Ups:

- a. Priming Grant
- b. Microfinance Loan Scheme

Business Expansion:

- a. Business Expansion Grant
- b. Microfinance Loan Scheme
- c. GradStart Scheme (Enterprise Ireland Scheme open to LEO Clients)
- d. Ready for Customs Grant ((Enterprise Ireland Scheme open to LEO Clients)
- e. Trading Online Voucher

Additional financial supports from other agencies include

1. InterTrade Ireland Start To Plan Voucher Scheme

InterTrade Ireland offers 100% financial support up to €2250 (inclusive of VAT) towards professional advice in relation to Brexit matters. This support can help your business get advice on specific issues such as movement of labour, goods, services and currency management. For more information, visit

www.intertradeireland.com.

2. SBCI Brexit Loan Scheme

The Brexit Loan Scheme can provide affordable financing to businesses that are impacted by Brexit. The Scheme is delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through commercial lenders and will make €300

million available to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees at an interest rate of 4% or less. The loans are available through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank. Loans will range from €25,000 to €1.5 million per eligible business, with unsecured loans up to €500,000 and terms ranging from 1-3 years. For more information, please visit www.sbc.gov.ie

3. InterTrade Ireland: Support towards employing a full-time sales person

Many businesses face the challenge of funding and recruiting a dedicated professional to win sales in the cross-border market – and, here again, Acumen can help. Acumen will fund up to 50% of the cost of a Sales Person's salary in the first year. The maximum cost covered can be up to €37,500/£30,000 with Acumen paying up to €18,750/£15,000. For more information, visit www.intertradeireland.com

BROADBAND / DIGITAL

Offaly Digital Strategy

A photo opportunity with the Cathaoirleach, Chief Executive and a couple of the staff involved in the development of the strategy was undertaken after the January 2021 council meeting, to reflect the conclusion of the strategy development late in 2020 following adoption of it by members some months previously and with some amendment work to be undertaken to finalise it.

A programme of work is in hand for 2021 linking a range of colleagues across the organization and externally for a range of projects

Broadband and Digital project activity now has a presence on the offaly.ie website, under the 'Services' section.

This is populated with initial information and will be updated regularly.

National Broadband Plan (NBP)

Offaly has recently been advised it is in the second onwards phase of national broadband rollout. Some surveys have been undertaken to date by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) at various sites on the perimeter of the county, where the locations are in the range of the Points of Handover (PoHs from national level back-haul) situated in counties adjacent to Offaly.

With regard to Broadband Connection Points please see [Connected Communities \(myconnectedcommunity.ie\)](http://myconnectedcommunity.ie) for live sites and updates re same.

- 9 sites are fully connected technically (some to live standard) with 5 formally handed over to OCC by Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).
- A 10th site is being considered by DRCD and has had an initial survey,
- Offaly has submitted an innovative funding proposal to DRCD for consideration for Arts & Culture funding, one of their pillars of activity for BCPs.
- DRCD have completed their order for Offaly, of now 9 phone signal repeater boosters for each of the BCPs, and installation will commence shortly.

We have submitted the 8 public BCPs to date to the national database of remote working hubs and included TCube and Creative 65 both in Edenderry town.

We have participated in a national survey for BCP activation and utilization recently undertaken by the Western Development Commission on behalf on an inter-governmental departments and other experts working group focusing on this area.

Town street scape fibre upgrades

We are focusing Virgin Media's attention on finalizing the upgrade of the fibre installation in Patrick St, Portarlinton to get them to complete the works.

SIRO have undertaken some surveying in Tullamore and we are following this up with them.

WiFi4EU

Offaly has recently concluded on the rollout of these services. Offaly is the first county in Ireland to achieve completion on its four vouchers of €15,000 each from the EU; supported by the same amount of matching funding from DRCD. We very much thank all community and business venues that have supported this project.

Along with prior tourism and amenity WiFi4U access points previously installed, this brings us to over 100 WiFi Access Points that are deployed throughout the county. (See full list of locations below where Offaly County Council provide Free Public WiFi – Note this list includes Libraries, WiFi4EU, Tourism WiFi Initiative, Digital Hubs, BCP's and Council Buildings)

We will shortly commence work with Donegal Co Co to map these to a national WiFi4EU information service DCC have developed under their GIS perspective.

Offaly may be able to consider AP installation at other sites not to date included on the voucher rollout later into 2021, budget dependent. Please contact Broadband Officer if you have additional locations to consider.

Offaly was selected and interviewed by WiFi4EU on how we rolled out the Free Public WiFi throughout the county. Article - “In County Offaly, the European Commission, the Irish government and the County Council are coming together to install WiFi4EU hotspots and ensure access to connectivity for all citizens.”

<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/wifi4eu-stories-interview-offaly-county-council-ireland>

Eduroam

Please see eduroam.ie - eduroam stands for education roaming. It is offered by the Higher Education Authority network (HEAnet) to third level institutions in Ireland. It provides students with seamless access service directly in to their network profile as a student within their college so they can easily connect to their college course material, library and research facilities, and peer student networks for collaborative learning etc. It can be accessed in thousands of locations in more than a 100 countries around the globe.

Offaly have developed an opportunity with HEAnet to deploy this service in Banagher library (in partnership with the county library service) as a pilot for our libraries. Banagher in particular was chosen for various reasons including those in relation to the educational access challenges in West Offaly for third level; notable levels of

dropout rates between 1st and 2nd years in college by Offaly students; and opportunities to grow this service with other partners in the Banagher region as part of an IT focus on re-generation opportunities there and in West Offaly. An introduction to the project was advised to the March 2021 meeting of the Offaly Local Community Development Committee.

Offaly has also commenced enquiries via the HEAnet and DRCD, with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIA) as to utilizing our BCPs as pilots for Eduroam.

e-denderry

This is a flagship national level project undertaken by Offaly County Council and Cellnex (an international telecoms provider focusing on various service delivery pillars in telecoms in 12 countries in Europe).

E-denderry is an innovative IoT – Internet of Things | LoRaWan | Smart Town Technology pilot. It is the first of its kind in Ireland. Offaly been highly fortunate to partner with Cellnex in this regard. To date sub-projects have been developed in the areas of -

- parking bay management
 - loading bays,
 - Electric Vehicle parking and charging bays in partnership with EV ESB, and
 - wheelchair parking bay management currently being discussed with the service user group.
- Air quality monitoring in partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency.

- Street bin management in collaboration with HarteCast the Irish street furniture company.
- In building sensors in the Edenderry MD HQ building covering humidity, space use, emergency light monitoring and a smoke alarm system, and
- An in-building sensor system in the Blundell community cabin to monitor entry/egress and internal space use; and long energy monitoring both of which are designed to support post current covid use of the space.

A launch took place on 10th March where the project was welcomed by the OCC Cathaoirleach and the Chief Executive, Cathaoirleach of Edenderry Municipal District and Director of Services Sharon Kennedy and EMD Councillors, management of Offaly County Council and EMD, the specific service partners involved to date, the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Minister for the Environment Eamon Ryan T.D. Some PR also issued on the day.

Phase 1 of the project is being finalized, and planning for Phase 2 has commenced. OCC & Cellnex are doing presentations to other national peer groups and influencers with a view to sharing the project knowledge development to date and planning further rollout of services in the town initially to support town management and develop e-denderry as an exemplar in this area. Sincere thanks are due to colleagues, the community and Cllrs for their support to date.

Mobile Voice & Data coverage

Coolderry was the site of a pilot installation of a mobile voice and data ‘smartpole’ system. This is in collaboration with our tech partner Cellnex. This project is a flagship installation for Offaly and is a system designed to increase voice and data signal coverage in outlying areas.

We would hope these systems can be further rolled out across the county and Coolderry (& Shinrone) are the initial installation points. As such they can be vanguard users of these innovative new facilities for evaluation and we hope the experience will help lead out on general installation in Offaly.

Overall this is really good news for our county and is one of the core components of our Digital Strategy.

Further to county wide press coverage on the issue in early February, following subsequent helpful enquiries from Councillors to the BBO on behalf of the community the Council (after relevant checks on queries raised) was able to advise as follows-

- we recognize it may not have been the case that the community were aware of the installation in advance of the pole due to the nature of the planning process for Section 254s,
- we have commenced initiating a process of these installations coming under the auspices of the Broadband & Digital services projects agenda, with input from various colleagues,

- communities and Councillors as required,
- we will be having regular update meetings in due course with our telco partner with a view to the planning for streetworks smart poles rollout as part of the Rural Connectivity Project.

Imagine are planning service upgrades for Killurin and Derrygreenagh.

Section 254 applications

Offaly can expect a further significant number of these applications from the near to mid future onwards. In the planning legislation, this process is designed for minor streetworks service upgrades and the like of street tables etc for outdoor dining etc. This element of the legislation is currently being considered for utilization by the Department of Energy, Climate and Communications (DECC) – (who manage the contract with NBI for the NBP), the Roads Management Office shared service in Cork, the NBP NBI team, and the LGMA.

The S254s we can expect will relate to various road openings, pole and tech services required in particular for planning for rollout of the national broadband plan. These requests are likely to have considerable impact on operational responses needed by OCC, and the resources currently available across Planning, Roads and Area Management colleagues.

The BBO has requested the convening of peer members of the OCC internal Infrastructure Liaison Group to see how the imminent need to urgently service these project needs when they arise, can

be addressed. The initial meeting is due to take place on 23rd April.

STEM/STEAM/STREAM

(Science, Technology, Research, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEM) Education Programme with primary and post primary schools in Offaly using VEX Robotics

- 30 Primary schools and all 12 post primary schools currently involved in programme
- Funding received via Just Transition to include an additional 15 primary schools and also support for schools via STEM Education Officer (3 Year Contract) – Programme called - Building Resilience & Adaptability in Primary School Children through STEM in Impacted Communities”
- This year we were unable to hold the Offaly VEX Championships but we plan to have a big events and competition next year starting in September 2021 for the 2021/2022 school year.

Meeting / seminar attendance

- Offaly is a prominent member of the national Telecommunications Action Group (TAG) convened monthly by DRCD
- Offaly has attended monthly EU Broadband Competence Offices Network meetings
- Offaly has been in some regular meetings with Eastern Midland Regional Assembly with regard to possible funding and collaboration opportunities across the region
- Offaly has attended short social and economic focused workshops in relation to digital

service development at operational level now that we have most of our current infrastructure installed via BCPs and WiFi4EU. These include for instance a ‘Tomorrow City’ workshop, a Digital Evolution seminar hosted by Business & Finance; and a Reviving Town and City Centres conference hosted by UK experts focusing on tech services for same

- Offaly also occasionally attends specialist tech events by invitation for instance with Cisco Meraki, a Cellnex ‘Connectivity’ day, and an Energy summit re how IoT can be utilized in this area
- Offaly has started holding regular reviews with potential industry interested partners in specialist support areas; as to their own developing interest in how Offaly is approaching its digital activities and how they can consider contributing to our work programme

Other

Offaly Broadband / Digital made a submission to the Bord na Mona Bog Rehabilitation project as part of the Climate Change agenda, and had an initial meeting with BnM on our submission. This was in addition to the submission by Offaly County Council in general. Digital / Broadband are now hoping to explore with BnM an application for further BCP services in very outlying areas e.g. bog land under rehabilitation, with a view to for instance broadband service provision for future enterprise, sustainable tourism planning, amenity use management and environmental

monitoring needs. DRCD is in favour of this application being made.

For the second year in a row, Offaly has been turned down on its application to DPER for Public Service Innovation Funding see [Our Public Service 2020 - Funding \(ops2020.gov.ie\)](https://ops2020.gov.ie). Last year’s Offaly application was for the wheelchair parking bay monitoring element of the e-denderry project, which has now gained some prominence in our appropriate tech business, peer government and service user group level. This year we applied for three innovative tourism e-information boards and upgrade of three of our BCPs in the relevant locations, to self-service tourism support venues, along the stretch of the Grand Canal in Offaly with a view to overall support for the Grand Canal Greenway. This was with support from the Irish national inland waterways volunteer organization, with a view to collaboration on the development of the waterways towpaths into greenways, for the benefit of all. While we were helpfully advised this year’s application got to the final stages of funding judging; we will now be requesting detailed feedback on the marking scheme etc once it has become public what other projects were successful in their funding application for 2021.

Full list of locations that Offaly County Council provide Free Public WiFi available at Appendix 1

LIBRARY SERVICES

Keep Well with Offaly Libraries

Offaly Libraries curated a wide range of activities and resources to help our patrons **Keep Well** over the Easter period. These

free library activities were tailored to enjoy at home or within the 5km, or with friends online to help everyone relax, unwind, be creative and get outdoors. Children members have been enjoying the brilliant storytimes on Facebook, all still available to view here: [Easter at Offaly Libraries](#) which happily coincided with the start of Spring Into Storytime 2021.

Our staff have chosen some fantastic stories to keep us all entertained in April and May, stay tuned to [Facebook](#) so you don't miss out!



Recent Keep Well Events



Over 70 people participated in these great online Keep Well events.

- Sarah Reynolds from Organised Chaos gave tips and tricks on how to declutter our homes and make better use of the space available to us.
- Aoife Munn, Horticulturalist hosted two hugely successful Wildflower Masterclasses.
- Deirdre from The Cool Food School had children cooking green soup to celebrate St. Patrick's Day and

baking lovely carrot muffins to get us in the mood for Easter!

Writing for Wellbeing Course

Starting this month Offaly Libraries will host a 'writing for wellbeing' course with E.R. Murray, which will run for 6 weeks on Wednesday evenings at 6pm. Elizabeth, a well-known author, will help participants tap into their creativity. Through a series of writing exercises and prompts, attendees will explore emotions and how to get their ideas onto paper. This supportive and friendly writing workshop is designed to help encourage wellbeing, giving people writing tools to help boost focus, inspiration, enthusiasm and confidence.



Grow It Forward Campaign

Following the success of our Wildflowers Masterclasses recently and now we are running **Grow It Forward**. This campaign is designed to help the nation eat well by inspiring and supporting people to



grow some of their own food at home while connecting with friends and family to join them. Register your name and address at AskTheLibrarian@OffalyCoCo.ie to get your free seed pack. Each food growing pack includes seeds for beetroot, carrots,

salad leaves, peas, and tomatoes, as well as a growing guide, a postcard, and gift tags to help you share with others.

So far Offaly Libraries have posted out more than 246 kits to people who have registered and will send out more as soon as we receive the next delivery of seeds from Healthy Ireland.

If you want to further your green fingers, check out gardening magazines on [RB Digital](#).

Get Outside!



Take the opportunity to get outside and get some fresh air now that the evenings are brighter. Let us keep you company with an [audiobook](#) from BorrowBox or a motivating playlist from [Freegal Music](#) - all for free in our [#DigitalLibrary](#)

Interim Library Development Plan – Public Consultation

Offaly Library Service is preparing an Interim Library Development Plan 2021 - 2023. As part of the consultation process, we are looking for your feedback to help us develop our services for the next few years.

The survey only takes about six minutes to do and will be open until Friday, 16th April. It can be accessed via this link:

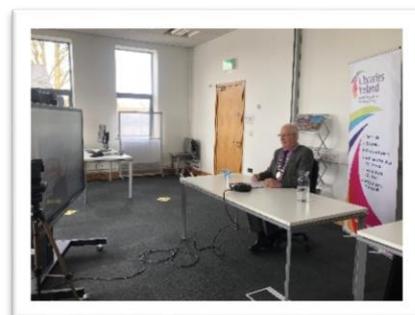
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NRTW6F9>

Library usage in March 2021

- Over 150 people participated in our Seachtain na Gaeilge lunchtime talks kindly hosted by Cathaoirleach, Cllr. John Carroll.



- Library staff hosted four other online events during Seachtain Na Gaeilge and our overall social media reach was over **60,000!**
- There were over **30,000 digital downloads** in March.
- The Library Blog continues to have excellent engagement with the public with 504 visits in March alone.



Age Friendly Digital Ambassadors



Library Digital Ambassadors

Would you, or someone you know, like us to show you how to get online? You don't even have to be a member of your local library already, we'll help you join.

To find out more contact any of our staff at Offaly Libraries:
tullamorelibrary@offalycoco.ie
 or
claralibrary@offalycoco.ie



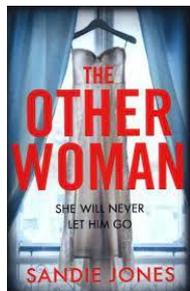

LGMA
 Libraries Ireland
 Age Friendly Ireland
 Libraries
 Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
 Offaly County Council

To help our community make full use of our brilliant **free** digital library, Offaly Library Service is delighted to launch our newest Age Friendly service – Library Digital Ambassadors.

Baffled by BorrowBox? Put off by PressReader? Rattled by RBdigital UK? If you, or someone you know, have no clue how to access our great range of online services to read or listen to books, read magazines, listen to music or watch films, get in touch!

Our Age Friendly Digital Ambassadors can help - and if you're not yet a member of Offaly Libraries we can help with that too. Contact Tullamore Library at tullamorelibrary@offalycoco.ie or Clara Library at claralibrary@offalycoco.ie.

Online Bookclub



Our first online bookclub meeting was held on Thursday 1st April via Zoom. The first book was 'The High Mountains of Portugal by Yann Martel' which stimulated a lively discussion and was rated 2.5/5 by the members.

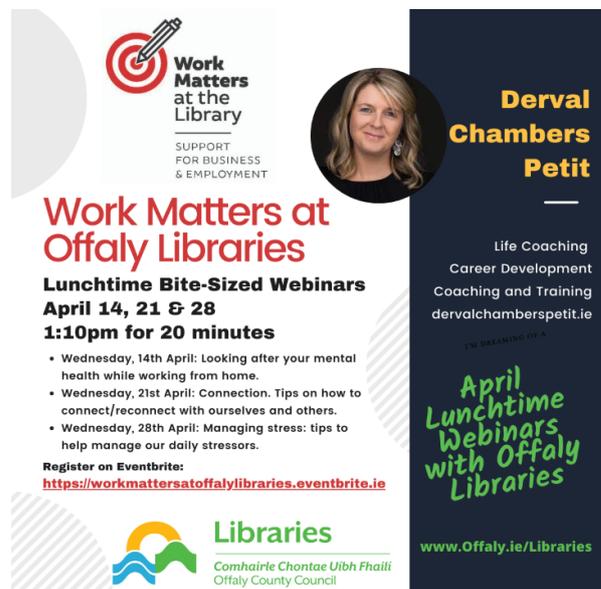
New members are welcome to consider our next book, a psychological thriller called

'The Other Woman by Sandie Jones' and we are meeting to discuss on Thursday 6th May. Download ['The Other Woman'](#) from [Borrowbox](#) and get in touch with tullamorelibrary@offalycoco.ie if you would like to join us for the next meeting in May.

Work Matters at Offaly Libraries

Join us on Wednesday, 14th April for the first in a series of "bitesized" lunchtime webinars focused on providing us with tips and techniques during these challenging times.

Derval is a highly qualified Life Coach and will deliver three 20 minutes sessions in April. Information on these free webinars have been shared with our Work Matters partners in LEO, OLDC, LOETB, Intreo and Citizens Information. Registration is available on Eventbrite.



Work Matters at the Library
 SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS & EMPLOYMENT

Derval Chambers Petit

Life Coaching
 Career Development
 Coaching and Training
dervalchamberspetit.ie

Work Matters at Offaly Libraries
Lunchtime Bite-Sized Webinars
April 14, 21 & 28
1:10pm for 20 minutes

- Wednesday, 14th April: Looking after your mental health while working from home.
- Wednesday, 21st April: Connection. Tips on how to connect/reconnect with ourselves and others.
- Wednesday, 28th April: Managing stress: tips to help manage our daily stressors.

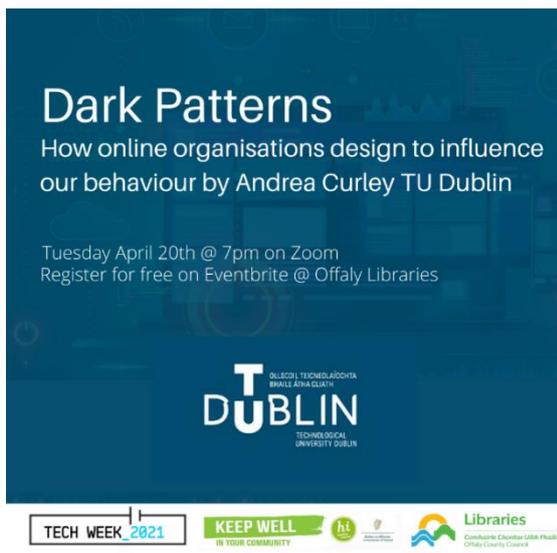
Register on Eventbrite:
<https://workmattersatoffalylibraries.eventbrite.ie>

Libraries
 Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
 Offaly County Council

April Lunchtime Webinars with Offaly Libraries
www.Offaly.ie/Libraries

Tech Week 2021 - 17th to 23rd April

Offaly Libraries have organised 3 webinars on Cyber Security to be delivered to three schools in Offaly, one school in each MD. On April 20th @7pm there will be an online talk: **Dark Patterns: How online organisations design to influence our behaviour** to be delivered by Andrea Curley, Lecturer at Technological University Dublin, which will show us how 'Dark Patterns' are an increasingly common occurrence on digital platforms including social media sites, shopping websites, mobile apps, and video games. At best, dark patterns annoy and frustrate users. At worst, they can mislead and deceive users, e.g., by causing financial loss, tricking users into giving up vast amounts of personal data, or



inducing compulsive and addictive behaviour in adults and children.

Sign up for our Library Newsletter

A quick reminder that the best way to keep up to date with library programmes, developments and new services is via our Library Newsletter subscribe here; [Offaly Libraries Newsletter](#)



Spring Into Storytime 2021

is a national Right to Read story-time initiative. It celebrates the importance of families reading together and sharing stories. Our annual Spring into Storytime programme started 1st April and promises to bring the magic of storytime to homes across the county. This year, Spring into Storytime is moving online again and we have organised a host of virtual events and activities, all based around reading and listening to stories, which families can enjoy at home.

Bealtaine at Home

Library staff are busy creating an exciting programme of online events for the second year celebrating at home. Keep an eye on our website and social media for details as they are announced.



Anna Marie Delaney, Chief Executive

Appendix 1

Full list of locations that Offaly County Council provide Free Public WiFi

Note: This list includes Libraries, WiFi4EU, Tourism WiFi Initiative, Digital Hubs, BCP's and Council Buildings

AP Name	Indoor	Outdoor
Ballinamere - Ballykilmurray Community Centre	*	*
Ballycommon - Ballycommon Telework and Training Centre	*	*
Ballycumber - The Barracks	*	*
Banagher - Crank House	*	*
Banagher - Library	*	*
Banagher - Marina Outdoor		*
Birr - Birr Castle	*	*
Birr - Guinan Footwear		*
Birr - Hooper Dolan Insurance		*
Birr - Johns Place	*	*
Birr - Library	*	
Birr - Pharmacy (Emmet Sq)		*
Birr - Pharmacy (O'Connell St)		*
Birr - STREAM Creative Suite	*	
Birr MD	*	
Boora - Lough Boora Discovery Park		*
Bracknagh - St. Broughan's Community Centre	*	*
Clara - Baggots Centra		*
Clara - Community and Family Resource Centre	*	
Clara - Library	*	
Clara - McManus Pharmacy		*
Clareen - Clareen Community Hall	*	*
Cloghan - Community Centre (Hall)	*	
Cloneyhurk - St. Brigid's Community Centre	*	*
Clonmacnoise - Clonmacnoise Monastic site		*
Coolderry - Coolderry Community Hall	*	*
Croghan - Croghan Community Hall	*	*
Daingean - Library	*	*
Daingean - Square		*
Dunkerrin - Dunkerrin Community Centre	*	
Durrow - St.Colmcille's Community Centre	*	
Edenderry - Blundell Park		*
Edenderry - Creative 65		*
Edenderry - eHive	*	
Edenderry - EMD Town Hall (Library Side)		*
Edenderry - EMD Town Hall (Tesco Side)		*
Edenderry - Harbour		*

Edenderry - Library	*	*
Edenderry - Patrick Larkin		*
Edenderry - WW Pumping Station		*
Edenderry MD	*	
Ferbane - Ferbane Food Campus	*	
Ferbane - Ferbane Library	*	*
Ferbane - Rosfaraghan Business Park	*	*
High Street (Belmont) - High Street Hall	*	*
Kilclonfert - Kilclonfert Community Hall	*	*
Kilcormac - St Josephs Community Centre	*	*
Killavilla - Killavilla Community Hall	*	*
Kinnitty - Community Centre	*	
Kinnitty - Giltraps Pub	*	*
Kinnitty - Slieve Bloom Bar	*	*
Moneygall - Community Centre		*
Mountbolus - Killoughey Community Centre	*	*
Mucklagh - Community Centre	*	
Pullough - Community Centre	*	*
Pullough - The Pull Inn	*	*
Rahan - Community Centre	*	
Rath - Community Centre	*	
Rhode - Community Centre	*	
Shannon Harbour - McIntyre	*	*
Shannonbridge - Killeens	*	*
Shannonbridge - Lukers	*	*
Tullamore - Áras an Chontae	*	
Tullamore - Arts Centre	*	*
Tullamore - Cloonans		*
Tullamore - Doyles Gala		*
Tullamore - Jigsaw	*	
Tullamore - Library	*	*
Tullamore - Lloyd Town Park		*
Tullamore - Mens Shed	*	
Tullamore - Supermacs (Church St)		*
Tullamore - Supermacs (William St)		*
Tullamore - Teach Cheoil	*	*
Tullamore - The Junction	*	
Tullamore - Tourist Office (High St)		*
Tullamore - Tourist Office (O'Connor Sq)		*
Tullamore - Tullamore Bury Quay	*	*
Tullamore - Tullamore MD	*	*

Please contact Broadband Officer if you have additional locations to consider.

Appendix 2

Draft Consolidated Revenue Account Income & Expenditure Summary by Service Division to 31st December 2020

	Expenditure €	Income €
Housing & Building	15,239,032	14,721,371
Road Transport & Safety	24,081,815	17,623,188
Water Services	5,547,247	5,307,656
Development Management	21,037,341	15,533,899
Environmental Services	8,831,828	2,315,418
Recreation & Amenity	4,334,573	635,776
Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare	675,760	344,647
Miscellaneous Services	12,137,452	9,313,269
Local Government Fund / GPG		8,398,668
Gross Rates Income		17,903,391
	91,885,049	92,097,283
Deficit reduction to 31st December 2020		212,234

OCC to 31st March 2021

	<u>Rates</u> €m	<u>Rents</u> €m	<u>Loans</u> €m
Opening Balance Jan 1, 2021	3.35	0.57	0.19
Invoices/Adjustments	11.77	1.56	0.09
2021 Cash Collected to end of March	1.31	1.59	0.15
Closing Balance March 31st , 2021	13.81	0.55	0.13
<u>2020 Cash collected to March</u>	0.40	1.59	0.14
% Collection at this point in 2020	325%	100%	103%

Bank Overdraft to 31st March 2021

Number of days Overdrawn in Bank year to date	14	16%
Overdraft Interest and non-conforming charges to March 31st 2021 YTD		€5,078
Bank Administration and transactional charges to March 31st 2021 YTD		€4,104