

**JANUARY
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 Feabhra

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

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS:

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

FINANCE:

Finance Report– Appendix 1

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

LOCAL ENTERPRISE WEEK 2021

Save the Dates! From 1st - 5th March there will be a range of free online events on throughout the county and nationwide. You won't want to miss out so mark your diaries now! Details available in our report.

SPORTS FUNDING

The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media announced the launch of its Sports Capital Programme scheme in December 2020. The deadline to register on the online sports capital register (OSCAR) is 5pm on Monday, 15th February; while the closing date for receipt of applications under the SCP is 5pm on Monday, 1st March 2021. Offaly Sports Partnership is hosting a “getting grant ready” webinar in February.

REPORT AT A GLANCE

Local Enterprise Office 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.

The scheme closes on 31st March 2021 or when all the funds are allocated, whichever is the earlier.

PLANNING

	To end Dec 2020	To end Dec 2019	Total 2019
Planning Applications	674	628	628
Extensions of Duration Applications & Assessments	5	12	12
Warning Letters and (Enforcement Notices) issued	13(2)	14(6)	14 (6)

	To end Jan 2021	To end Jan 2020	Total 2020
Planning Applications	31	21	674
Extensions of Duration Applications & Assessments		0	5
Warning Letters and (Enforcement Notices) issued	0(0)	1(0)	13(2)

Development Management

Planning applications continued to increase during 2020 despite lockdown due to COVID-19 and related suspension of timescales on Planning Legislation, from March to May 2020. This represented an annual increase of 7% on the 2019 figures

While the annual increase in itself is significant, it does not take into account the size and complexity of the applications received throughout the past year. The Planning Department has assessed a wide range of large-scale developments

including; large residential developments, retail, commercial, industrial and mixed use developments. In addition, the Planning Department has seen a marked increase in the number of 'Green Energy' applications submitted in 2020.

Pre-planning meeting requests and in particular telephone queries have risen sharply during 2020 and has continued during the COVID19 emergency shutdown period. No site visits were permitted during the emergency shutdown period. The Planning Department has conducted in excess of 300 no. pre-planning meetings (mostly using electronic means).

With respect to planning applications received by the Planning Department in 2020, the following has been observed:

Housing Developments

The high volumes of the level of pre-planning meetings undertaken has resulted in a significant increase in the number of large housing developments and schemes lodged to the Planning Department. This trend has been particularly evident with the lifting of COVID planning restrictions and the lodgement of a number of large housing schemes in Tullamore and the key urban areas across the County. In addition, there has been a marked increase in the volume of 'multiple unit housing development' planning applications submitted to the Planning Department in 2020.

Single one-off houses and small minor domestic extensions/additions planning applications etc. have remained relatively constant during 2020.

'Green Energy' Applications

The Planning Department has seen a substantial increase in the volume of green energy related planning applications submitted and processed in 2020. These complex green energy projects include, but are not limited to, large-scale commercial solar farms, wind farm developments,

battery and other new technology energy storage facilities, anaerobic digester, biomass storage facilities, large-scale greenhouse proposals and a biomass gasification plant.

Strategic Housing Development (SHD) Applications (i.e. over 100 houses)

The first Strategic Housing Development (SHD) in County Offaly was lodged to An Bord Pleanála (ABP) in August 2020. The proposed development comprises of 358 no. residential units (172 no. houses & 186 no. apartments), childcare facility and all associated site works.

Following the submission of this SHD application to ABP, a number of internal meetings were held across the various OCC directorates, a presentation of the proposal was undertaken for the elected members at the September Meeting of the Tullamore Municipal District, and Chief Executive's report was subsequently compiled and submitted to the Board as part of the required SHD process. In November 2020, ABP refused the SHD application as it was considered the proposal presented a substandard layout and link road.

Planning administration is working in line with government guidelines with many remote working. This has required changes to service to the public.

Grand Canal Greenway - 2020

Planning

- In February 2020 non-statutory public consultation took place relating to the Grand Canal Greenway – Turraun to Shannon Harbour. This was paused due to COVID Lockdown and resumed in June & July 2020.
- In August the Part 8 for the Grand Canal Greenway Turraun to Shannon Harbour (16.2km) was published

- In October Part 8 was approved for the Grand Canal Greenway Turraun to Shannon Harbour (16.2km)
- In November 2020 – pre-design study of proposed Part 8 from Henesey's Bridge to Pollagh Bridge (circa 5km) on Northern Bank commenced. Part 8 Targeted for Q1 2021.

Funding Applications

- In December 2020- Funding from DTTAS, was announced to complete the GCG from Daingean to Edenderry (County Boundary with Kildare.)- (34km)
- Various Funding Applications are being pursued to complete elements of the GCG/ and the Midlands Cycling Destination – Offaly, as well as extensions to the GCG, under Just Transition Fund, and ORIS and Town and Village Renewal Schemes.

Greenways 2021

- 1- There was a pause in construction at of Grand Canal Greenway - Ballycommon – Daingean and Pollagh to Turraun, due to inclement weather & COVID Restrictions and construction is due to recommence in Q1 2021.
- 2- Preparation of Part 8 from Henesey's Bridge to Pollagh Bridge on the Northern Towpath will commence as soon as COVID restrictions allow, subject to agreement with Waterways Ireland.
- 3- Works on 3.5km between Wood of O Bridge and County Boundary (Kilbeggan Link) are due to commence in Q1 2021. This is funded by ORIS 2019.

Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike (MTB) Trails

During 2020, construction of the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bikes Trail continued in

both counties Laois and Offaly. A funding application coordinated by Coillte, has received funding under the **Rural Regeneration Development Fund programme** to complete the trail system. The development will give a major tourism boost to the area and it is hoped that it will see the village of Kinnitty emerging as a successful hub for services such as bike hire, showers, bike wash, food and accommodation in addition to its existing prominence as a meeting / starting point for the many walks and road cycling routes in the mountains. Offaly County Council submitted an application for a cycle / walkway link between the trails and the village of Kinnitty under the **Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) 2019**. This was unsuccessful, however the link remains a priority, particularly as more trails open in the years ahead.

Forward Planning

The draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 was prepared during 2020 and placed on public display from 27th July 2020 to 7th October 2020 inclusive during which 196 written submissions and observations were received by the Planning Authority for consideration in the making of the final Plan, after which the preparation of a CE Report on the submissions commenced.

The covid timeline freeze introduced by the Covid 19 emergency legislation and associated circulars resulted in a delay to the progression of the draft Co. Development Plan.

REGENERATION

A presentation on the funding streams for regeneration projects is listed on the Agenda for the Monthly Meeting of the Council in February.

Announcements pending

Urban Regeneration Development Fund: (RRDF)

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government announced a call for URDF funding in 2020. A comprehensive application for Tullamore town consisting of a suite of urban regeneration projects were submitted on the May 29th 2020. An announcement of National successful projects is due in Q1 2021.

Rural Regeneration Development Fund: (RRDF)

Rural Regeneration Category 1:

The Department of Rural and Community Development announced a call for RRDF Cat 1 2020 funding in June 2020. 2 applications were submitted by Regeneration Team in conjunction with other relevant sections on 1st December 2020. An announcement of National successful projects is due in Q1 2021.

Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme: (ORIS)

The Department of Rural and Community Development announced a call for ORIS 2020 funding on 29th May 2020. 2 applications were submitted by Regeneration Team in conjunction with other relevant

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 and planning, design and procurement of schemes for 2021 have progressed as normal.

Offaly County Council received the 2021 National Roads Allocation of €2,300,855 from the TII and we are awaiting the grant allocation for the Regional and Local roads in the County. The 2021 Roads Programme will be prepared for March 2021.

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. The Roads section and MDs are currently engaging with the NTA to deliver active travel projects in Offaly in 2021.

ENVIRONMENT AND WATER SERVICES

Reports of EWS works in each of the individual Municipal Districts, Birr, Edenderry and Tullamore were delivered to each of the Municipal districts in February 2021.

Climate Change

Climate Change is continuing to be embedded in the day to day working of each section of Offaly County Council. The Climate Action Steering Group met on Friday 29th. This group has representatives from each section within the Local Authority. Each member reports on the progress of the goals set out under the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. To date over 52 % of the projects/goals set out in the Offaly Climate Change Strategy adopted in late 2019, are at various stages of progression. Climate Action Leadership Training will be delivered to elected members and senior staff on the morning on the 12 February 2021, and training will be delivered to all staff during the year.

Water Services - Water

Works on the upgrade of the Tullamore, Birr and Clonaslee Water Treatment plants are on-going. Find and fix works are

ongoing in Rhode, Tullamore, Newtown, Edenderry and will commence in Clara. Disinfection programme is nearing completion at Toberdaly, Coolderry, Clonbullogue, Edenderry and Walsh Island.

Wastewater

The design for the upgrade and expansion of Edenderry WWTP is ongoing. Design Works are also commenced for Rhode, Walsh Island, Rahan, Kilcormac, and Daingean Wastewater Treatment Plants.

A number of remedial works were completed this month in Tullamore, which should improve the quality of the receiving waters– including, Tara Street, St Brigids Place and Bachelors Walk – Lidl

Environment - Litter & Waste Management

Tullamore came 4th out of 37 towns / cities surveyed in the recent IBAL survey and was deemed “Cleaner than European Norms”—status. Six out of the ten sites surveyed received the top litter grade and there were no seriously littered sites. Top-ranking sites in Tullamore included Market Square, the waterside environment at Bury Quay and Lloyd Town Park – the latter was exceptionally well presented and maintained, a wonderful town park environment.

EWS received and investigated 87 litter and waste complaints to date for 2021, of which 65 complaints have been resolved. Dog fouling is becoming an issue and we have started a social media awareness campaign advising the public to clean up after their dogs. 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.

Water Quality

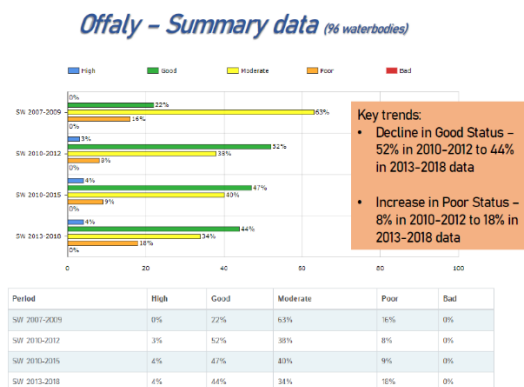
River Basin Management Plan - Cycle 3 Characterisation

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.

The Water Framework Directive sets a target of achieving at least Good Status in all waterbodies by 2027. Offaly County Council have a dual role under the Water Framework Directive –

1. To protect rivers that are Good and High Status and
2. Improve rivers that are at Moderate and Poor Status.

The summary slide below shows the status of rivers across the county, with the most recent data from 2013-2018 at the bottom, and the colour codes for each status under the title. The key trends are worth highlighting with an 8% decline in Good Status rivers, and a 10% increase in Poor Status in Co. Offaly recent years.



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.

Burial Grounds

The tender documents for the extension of Kilreaghan Cemetery in Ferbane are due to be issued in Q1 2021 and Offaly County Council are in consultation with the local cemetery committee to include their views on the project. The proposed extension to Kilcoursey Cemetery in Clara was adopted under Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regs, 2001 and will proceed to tender in 2021.

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:

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 & People with a Disability Scheme

HousingAidGrants@offalycoco.ie

Anti-Social Behaviour

ASB@offalycoco.ie

January Housing Update

- There are 518 on the Social Housing List awaiting housing support at the end of January 2021.
- A further 859 active tenancies are currently being supported under the Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) Scheme, 8 signed up for HAP and 5 exited from HAP in January.
- At the end of January 2021 there were 18 single people and 6 families in emergency accommodation.
- 2 Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans applications have been received in 2021 to date and are currently being assessed.

Housing Stock – Number, Maintenance & Repair

- Total housing stock at end of January, 2021 is 1,924.
- 276 maintenance call were logged to 31st January. In accordance with current Covid-19 restrictions only emergency repairs are currently being responded to.

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 is 11th March 2021.
- 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.
- 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) will be submitted to the Department in Quarter 1, 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 Quarter 1, 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 1, 2021.

- Banagher, Kylebeg (18 Units) - a second stage 3 submission was made in April 2020 and was approved by the DHPLG in May 2020. Tender documentation is almost complete and Tender will issue in Quarter 1, 2021
- Circular Road, Daingean (9 units) - Stage 2 approval was received in December 2019 and the Part 8 planning resolution was approved by the members at the September Council meeting. Stage 3 approval to proceed to Tender was lodged on December 17th and the scheme is expected to proceed to Tender in early February pending Department approval.

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 application is being finalised and will be submitted to the Department in February 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.
- Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs): Housing are progressing the CPO process in respect of 3 houses. 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 Q1, 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 consultant.
- Sofia Housing: Stage 2 approved (39 units) at Presentation Lands, Portarlinton. Stage 2 submission was made in October. Project now needs to progress to planning.
- 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.

Turnkey Developments

- 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
- MacGregor, Birr: (12 Units) – 6 units complete and a further 6 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.

Housing Grants

In all 130 Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People; People with a Disability Scheme and Mobility Grants were approved in 2020 and staff are following up with the applicants.

Disabled Person's Grants

In anticipation of department allocation, the preparation of 2021 works is underway.

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 Tender Documents are currently being prepared and are expected to issue in January 2021. 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. The balance of housing surveys was scheduled to take place in February

Prior to the retrofit works commencing in the dwellings the Council will engage further with the tenants to outline the works involved in each situation.

The consultants will determine the works that will be required, works may include the following:

- Replacement of the heating system to a new technology heating system called a "Heat Pump"

- New radiators
- Attic insulation top up
- External or internal wall insulation
- Window Replacement
- New Doors
- Improved Ventilation

The Council has advised SEAI of the locations of these units for retrofitting and SEAI will now engage with private properties located near these dwellings to offer similar works under their existing home energy grant schemes.

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.

A summary of the calls to the Community Call Helpline by month is given below. January was the busiest month for the Helpline since June 2020.

Month	Number	%
April	312	68
May	93	20
June	19	4
July	8	2
August	8	2
September	7	2
October	9	2
Nov	3	0.6
Dec	8	1.6
Jan-21	19	3.9
Total	486	100

The breakdown of the January calls by type of support is as follows:

SUMMARY OF TYPE OF CALLS AND EMAILS TO COVID HELPLINE 2021	
	Number
Deliveries	6
Isolation	0
Meals	1
Garda	0
Medical	0
Other e.g. volunteers	12
Total	19

Offaly Community Response Forum

The interagency Community Response Forum has met 17 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 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, Túsla, IFA, Offaly Traveller Movement, Kildare Volunteer Centre (covering Offaly), Civil Defence, Offaly Library Service, Family Resource Centres, and Offaly Community Services. There is excellent co-operation and sharing of useful information between all of the agencies on the Forum.

In April 2020 Offaly Community Response Forum allocated €65,553 in Covid-19 Emergency Funding from the Dept. of Rural & Community Development to 37 community groups and agencies responding to the Covid pandemic. A second Emergency Fund award of €48,694 was allocated by Offaly LCDC to 44 successful applicants. These grants will be

of great benefit to the applicants whose services have been greatly affected by the Covid pandemic.

Age Friendly Strategy

The Age Friendly Tri-County Radio programme, "Chatters & Matters" continues to provide entertainment and Information each Sunday morning on Midlands 103 between 8am to 9am, with a range of topics and local contributions to the programme. Healthy Ireland funding is supporting this initiative alongside external sponsorship. Regular meetings take place as the content of the programme come via the Tri County working group and production team.

Thirteen iPads/Tablets have been purchased in partnership with Laois AF via funding from Age Friendly Ireland, to be distributed between the 2 counties.



Public Participation Network

The PPN held workshops on Committee Skills over 4 weeks' x 2 mornings and 2 evenings per week on Zoom. The training was received favourably. A three-hour Grant Application Workshop via Zoom was also undertaken with a good response and requests for a follow up on Project Budgets requested.

Information continues to be delivered from both a local and national level to membership via emails, online Newsletter and Social Media. Information is shared on any funding that may help support them during these challenging times.

SPORTS**Funding**

Age & Opportunity active - €2,000 allocated and drawn down in December 2020

Sport Ireland keep well fund allocation - €10,000 allocated and drawn down in December 2020. 400 keep well packs being developed for dissemination to participants on Offaly Sports Partnership physical activity programmes cancelled as a result of Covid19 restrictions

Healthy Ireland / SláinteCare community resilience funding of €67,225 secured with 90% draw down. Delivery of actions underway; alongside delivery of standard Healthy Offaly actions

Sport Ireland ASPIRE graduate funding – funding secured to host an 11 month ASPIRE graduate placement in Offaly Sports Partnership. Interviews held and Eoghan Pernot appointed to the post commencing 1st February



HEALTHY OFFALY, HEALTHY LAOIS
AND HEALTHY WESTMEATH
PROGRAMMES

Programmes

Following the announcement of the post-Christmas lockdown, all Offaly Sports Partnership have transferred online: -

Community integration fund

- a resource for schools highlighting integrated participation has been completed
- live zoom PE classes ran in January. Pre-recorded sessions planned for February
- older adults –six-week dance programme for 30+ older adults commencing in February
- Operation Transformation – minimum fitness test programme

promoted with over 50 people signing up

- sports inclusion development programme – zoom physical activity supports for disability services underway with a number of services
- women in sport - strength & conditioning supports for women in sport teams: 19 teams registered for same (including boxing, camogie, a golf education programme, ladies football, rowing, rugby and soccer)
- keep well winter campaign being promoted to over 400 people

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.

Upcoming Events and New Initiatives**Local Enterprise Week 2021**

Save the Dates! From 1st - 5th March there will be a range of free online events on throughout the county and nationwide. You won't want to miss out so mark your diaries now!

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, events will be held online. To attend events, please visit www.localenterprise.ie/offaly to reserve a place. This year, the national network of 31 LEOs are providing 10 Spotlight Events which will be open to businesses from all around the country. These include the following: AgriTech Revolution in Farming and Food; Benefits of Green for your Business; Spring Back & Step Forward: Building Leadership & Resilience; Growing Lean; Creative Connections: Enabling your B-2-B Online Opportunities; S.M.A.R.Tech for StartUps;

Masterclass: Health checking your business for its forward journey; Engage for Growth; Building The New; Trading Online Information Seminar.

In addition, LEO Offaly will be running the following three events and a number of mentoring clinics:

- **So You Want to Start your Own Business** - Have you a business idea or are you searching for the freedom of working for yourself but don't know where to start. Take the first step by attending this workshop and see what opportunities 2021 could hold for you. The speaker at the event is Alec Drew.
- **The 3 in 1 Masterclass** – This event takes place on Thursday 4th March and will help business Find, Engage and Retain new clients. It will give business all the information they need to know about growing their business in one workshop. Speakers at the event are Alec Drew and Stephen Murtagh.
- **Digital Marketing for Business** - This course is run over 6 weeks starting on Tuesday 2nd March with Keith Feighery of Digital Insights Ltd. The course is designed for owners/managers of existing businesses in Offaly who wish to understand how to make the most of digital marketing within their business

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.

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. 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.

LIBRARY SERVICES

Level 5 of the Plan for Living with COVID-19

As we remain in Level 5 of the Govt's Plan for Living with Covid-19, all Offaly Library spaces will remain closed to the public.

We continue to programme events safely in online settings for children, teens, families and adults. Keep an eye on our website, social media channels and our newsletter so you don't miss out! The library's [digital collections](#) can be accessed from home and include [eBooks](#), [eAudiobooks](#), [eMagazines](#) and [eNewspapers](#). You can also stream [films](#) and [music](#) and access many online resources for [children](#). In addition you can avail of our online [learning resources](#) anytime, anywhere.

Ireland Reads: 'Squeeze in a Read' with Offaly Libraries

President of Ireland / Uachtarán na hÉireann Michael D. Higgins took time to

send a heartfelt message of support to readers and libraries on 4th February and launched the national **Ireland Reads** initiative as part of our 'Keep Well' campaign. Click on the video link to view the message.



For the month of February, Irish libraries have teamed up with publishers, booksellers, authors and others to celebrate reading and encourage all age groups to read for wellbeing and enjoyment. The campaign is asking everyone to '**squeeze in a read**' on Thursday, February 25.

How? Take the pledge on at www.irelandreads.ie and see how many minutes people all over Ireland will be squeezing in to read on Thursday 25 February. Enjoy the benefits reading brings and take some time to read a book, magazine or whatever you love reading in the run-up to #IrelandReads Day on Thursday 25 February!

Find your perfect book and fulfil your pledge to #SqueezeInARead at www.irelandreads.ie

Share on social media by using #IrelandReads, #SqueezeInARead and #OffalyLibraries and share your photos, pledge to read or tell others about your favorite books, recommended reads or the books that helped you to get through Covid. We are contacting all schools in County Offaly to let them know about the campaign



– perhaps English homework could be replaced by reading for fun instead!



KEEP WELL



Riadas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Library usage in January 2021

- There 1,320 eBooks and eAudiobooks downloads in January. This is an **increase of 84%** compared to January 2020. There are 1,028 new registered users to BorrowBox, bringing the total to 2,576.
- Our eMagazine and eNewspapers are continuing to be very popular with an increase in usage of over 100%.
- The Library Blog continues to have excellent engagement with the public with 842 visits in January alone. This is a 90% increase on the same period last year

Ask the Librarian

Offaly Libraries' e-mail service Ask the Librarian has been busy answering queries for our patrons. Everything from how to access e-books, e-magazines or online newspapers, forgotten library PIN, queries on local studies or wondering



what online activities we are planning.

February 2021 - Digital Art Exhibition in Edenderry Library

Edenderry Library is delighted to host Gloine / Glass, a digital art exhibition by Michelle O'Donnell, Glasshammer Studios, Rhode, Co. Offaly in February 2021. The exhibition will be in a window of Edenderry Library and can be safely viewed from outside.



Michelle is an internationally acclaimed artist and sculptor, originally from Donegal. These exhibition images give the viewer a glimpse of this artist's unique creations. They are highly evocative, and beautiful. Using colour and form, her pieces are stark representations of her imagination and surroundings. Depicting vibrant figures and landscape-inspired scenes, her work lifts any space and lives in conversation with the light around it. Her use of colour brings a great sense of life to her designs and their surroundings, resulting in work that speaks to the head and appeals to the heart.

For more information about Glasshammer Studios, visit www.glasshammer.ie

Healthy Ireland Series: Mindfulness for Pregnancy & Birth Preparation

As part of our Healthy Ireland programme, we presented a series titled 'Mindfulness for

Pregnancy and Birth Preparation' with Leona McDonnell, Mindfulness and Wellness coach.



This series comprises of six episodes exploring the ways in which mindfulness can help ease your worries and stress. Leona demonstrated some practical mindfulness techniques along with guided meditation.

There have been almost 3.5k views of the series. View the series on Facebook by [clicking here](#).

Book A Librarian

Even though our doors are closed, we are still working to provide learning experiences to our community. Recently, Kieran in Tullamore Library hosted a Zoom session with **West Offaly Training's Weekly Senior Citizens group** describing how to access our various online [digital offerings](#), Borrowbox, RB Digital, PressReader, Freegal, Universal Class, Transparent languages, and how to join the library online! Contact us to Book A Librarian : AskTheLibrarian@Offalycoco.ie

Baby Sign Classes

On 12th January we started online Baby Sign Language classes with Claire from 'Clever



Little Handies'. All our participants are loving the new communication channel with their little one. The class was fully subscribed to and there is demand for another term. Watch this space for details on the next term starting in March 2021.

COVID-19 Photos of your experiences

The Library are putting together an Offaly COVID-19 Photographic Archive. We hope



this collection will provide a unique visual record of our current lives and circumstances, offering a 'living history' for future researchers. A digital photographic archive will be created as part of Offaly Library Service Archive collections. Full details on how to submit your photos is available here: www.Offaly.ie/Libraries/Covid-Archive

DAF Project Update - TTRS

Our **Touch-Type Read and Spell (TTRS)**

resource is a multi-sensory course that teaches touch-typing to help children and adults improve their reading and spelling skills. The resource is currently being piloted with key user groups and feedback sought in advance of making 1,000 library TTRS licences available to key user groups around the county.



Sign up for our Library Newsletter

A quick reminder that the best way to keep up to date with all library programmes, developments and new services is via our Library Newsletter and of course through following our social media channels. The link to subscribe to our newsletter is here; [Offaly Libraries Newsletter](#)

Offaly Libraries Keep Well Campaign

As part of "Living with COVID-19" the government has launched a national **Keep Well** campaign focused on five major themes to ensure that people have opportunities within their local community to help themselves keep well. Our core collections and numerous resources will provide our community with plenty of options to keep well during this time. Libraries are in the preparation stages of programmes that will interact with these themes:



- **Keeping active** - keeping active and being outdoors even during the winter, looking after your physical health can help your mental health and wellbeing.
- **Staying connected** - Staying connected with people, addressing isolation, supporting volunteerism and initiatives that support person-to-person connection.
- **Switching off and being creative** - Switching off and being creative or learning something new, getting back to nature and relaxation.
- **Eating well** - by nourishing your body and mind you can help your mental health and wellbeing.
- **Managing your mood** – giving people supports on where to go if they are in

distress and links to relevant information points e.g. HSE's Your Mental Health.

Upcoming Library Keep Well Online Workshops (all available to book on EventBrite)

- Tuesday 23rd February @ 12 Noon: **Sensory Gardening Talk** with Aoife Munn, Horticulturalist
- Thursday 25th February @ 8pm: **"Making Home a Soft Place to Land"** with Val Mullally, Parenting Expert & Author
- Saturday 6th March @ 12 Noon: **Wildflowers Masterclass** with Aoife Munn,
- Saturday 13th March @ 3pm: **The Cool Food School: St. Patricks Day Themed Cookery Workshop: Green Soup & Bread**
- Tuesday 9th March @ 7.30pm: **"Getting organised at home"** with Sarah Reynolds, Declutter Expert from Organised Chaos
- Saturday 27th March @ 3pm: **The Cool Food School: Easter Themed Cookery Workshop**

Valentine's Day Arts & Crafts

We're looking forward to some arts and crafts videos in February for Chinese New Year on February 12th and for Valentine's Day on February 14th. Keep an eye on our website and social media channels.

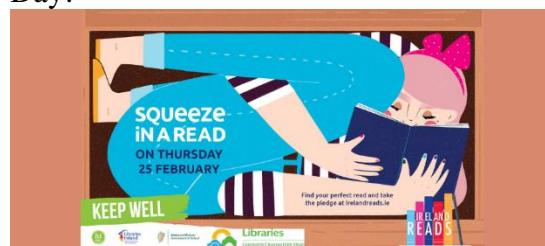


Ireland Reads Day February 25th 2021

Offaly Libraries will host a number of events to celebrate this new national campaign to encourage as many people as possible to get reading. The campaign will run throughout February, leading up to 'Ireland Reads Day' on **February 25th 2021**.

Ireland Reads is about promoting the power of reading for enjoyment and wellbeing, combatting lockdown by encouraging everyone, young and old, to get back into the habit of reading and regularly setting aside time to sit and read a book, a poem, a comic, a newspaper, whatever works for them!

Find out more at www.irelandreads.ie and make your pledge to read on Ireland Reads Day!



Anna Marie Delaney, Chief Executive

Appendix 1