



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council

BUDGET 2025

SUPPLEMENTARY DIRECTORATE REPORTS



OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORTS

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Division A – Housing & Building

Overview of 2024 - Housing activities to the end of Quarter 3 2024

Offaly County Council continues to progress the actions provided for in *Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland* and the delivery of social housing units as detailed in Offaly's *Housing Delivery Action Plan 2022-2026*.

The Government's Housing Plan *Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland* includes four key strands:

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

Social Housing 2024

There were 736 households in Offaly on the social housing list at the end of September 2024. A further 513 households were in receipt of Housing Assistance Payments and 212 supported in various leasing arrangements.

To the end of September 2024, 131 individuals and families were allocated to Local Authority and Approved Housing Bodies tenancies across the County.

Construction Programme

There are 127 council built social houses in the Housing for All approval pipeline and there will be 83 completed by the end of 2024. There are 94 Turnkey Houses approved with 82 complete and a further 12 on site. There are 276 AHB approved units in the Housing for All approval pipeline with 136 completed and a further 137 on site, with 3 approved and in the pipeline. There are 45 Part V Houses with funding approved across 11 Housing estates in all 3 Municipal Districts with 41 units delivered to date.

In summary there are 542 new build units in the Housing for All delivery pipeline with 300 delivered to date. Approximately 50% of the new build pipeline will be in Offaly County Council's ownership. The department's 2024 target of 68 units was attained in October 2024 and it is projected to be 116 units before the end of the year. This will ensure that overall Offaly County Council will have surpassed targets for the 2022-2024 period.

Housing published an Expression of Interest for Turnkey developments in September 2024. It is hoped that this approach will realise additional housing units.



18 council-built homes in Kylebeg, Banagher allocated in 2023.



8 turnkey development homes in Castlevew

Part V Programme

Housing continues to engage with developers to agree Part V units on development proposals to maximise numbers of units to be delivered.

Affordable Housing

The Council held a survey in 2024 to establish the level of interest in Offaly to acquire an affordable home from the Council in Tullamore. The information is currently being assessed and will help to inform the Council on the level of demand for affordable houses and the house prices that people might be in a position to afford.

Those who qualify for Government supports including 'First Time Buyer' and 'Fresh Start Applicant' were invited to complete the survey. The information gathered will assist the Council to formulate plans for future Affordable Housing.

A number of other affordable supports are active in the county such as local authority home loans, Croi Conaithe, SEAI grants, First Home Scheme and the Help to Buy Scheme. There are currently 35 approvals and 16 drawdowns under the First Home Scheme where qualifying applicants can acquire a new dwelling with the Government providing finance of up to 30% of the cost.

Construction in Partnership with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs)

Offaly County Council, in accordance with Government Policy, continues to work in partnership with AHBs to progress construction and acquisition programmes. The Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) part-funding and the Capital Assistance Programme (CAS) 100% funding can be provided by the Department for the acquisition or construction of units by an Approved Housing Body. The Local Authority has nomination rights on these schemes which will contribute to the reduction of the housing waiting list. The AHB sector are in a position to provide up to 50% of the Housing for All social housing targets.

Tenant in Situ Supports

Where appropriate Housing progresses the acquisition of housing units in accordance with the Tenant in Situ Acquisition Programme. In 2024 Offaly Council were issued a limit of 10 acquisitions under the Tenant-in-situ programme with an option to seek 5 further properties if necessary. At the end of September 9 acquisitions were finalised and householders have become social housing tenants with a further 4 properties at inspection / bid stage. Two units were acquired through the Traveller Accommodation fund with another 2 with bids on. Of concern is the ongoing difficulty in securing funding to upgrade acquired properties. The shortfall in funding will require additional funds from own resources to carry out unfunded refurbishment works and/or additional maintenance.

The Cost Rental Tenant-in-Situ Scheme, introduced by the Government, was made available to tenants of private rented property who have been served a Notice of Termination due to Landlord selling the property and are at risk of homelessness but who are not eligible for social housing supports. Offaly County Council is the first point of contact in the area for this scheme, but it is managed by the Housing Agency. Under the scheme the Housing Agency can purchase a property and rent it to the tenant. The Council will undertake an initial assessment of the tenant's circumstances and refer details to the Housing Agency for consideration, where the tenant is at risk of homelessness and the Cost Rental Tenant-in-Situ Scheme may apply. One application to the end of September was forwarded to the Housing Agency under this scheme.

Returning Vacant Stock to Productive Use (Pre-lets)

Pre-let and void works have been completed on 41 council owned properties to the end of September 2024. The Council's ability to continue to return vacant units to use quickly and to a high standard will be determined by the financial resources available. Part-funding from central government to return vacant units has not increased in line with inflation and when funding has been granted to a property on a previous occasion it will not be granted a second time. There is an increased reliance on the LA's own resources for this activity. Construction inflation and availability of contractors has continued to have a major impact on the cost and turnaround time of pre-let works in 2024.

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

The total approved budget in 2024 for private homeowners is €1,702,197 – (80% from the Department and 20% from the Council's own resources). The programme continues to be over subscribed. The Council will continue to work with the Occupational Therapist to ensure that the funding received is maximised in 2025.

The Department also provides part funding (90%) towards accessible works on Council own stock, e.g. provision of a ramp, level access shower and ground floor extensions. Similar to the private homeowners scheme, the demand for works on Local Authority units continues to exceed the funding available to the

programme. The Local Authority contribution is 10% for these grants and provision needs to be made for this programme in the future.

The availability of contractors and construction inflation continues to impact on the delivery across many of these housing programmes.

The 2025 Budget includes an increase in Council funds of €150,000 towards this programme which will leverage significant additional resources from the Exchequer.

Maintenance of Local Authority Housing Stock

Offaly County Council manages and maintains 2,161 housing units as at 30th September 2024.

There were almost 3,000 requests for repairs and maintenance by local authority tenants in the first three quarters of 2024. Each request is logged on the iHouse software system and forwarded to the relevant Clerk of Works for follow up.

The nature of works addressed are varied and include the upgrade and replacement of heating systems, smoke and carbon alarms, windows, fascia and soffit and boundary treatments. Inflationary costs have impacted on the Council's capacity to meet all planned maintenance works.

Repair and Lease Scheme

The funding available to private landlord to repair a property in accordance with the Repair and Lease Scheme was increased to €60,000 per unit in June 2022. The landlord is required to make the unit available for social housing tenants on a lease arrangement. The cost of repairs is then offset against the landlord's rental income over time. The scheme is targeted towards the owners of vacant properties who cannot afford to bring their properties up to the required standard for rented properties.

Retrofit Programme

Offaly County Council was allocated funding for the retrofitting of local authority owned housing stock. The retrofitting of homes will result in warmer, more comfortable homes. After the works, the Building Energy Ratings (BER) of homes will typically have gone from an E- or D- rating to a B2.



The Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme (EERP)

runs to 2030 and represents significant upscaling from 'shallow' to 'deeper retrofit' on what has been completed by Local Authorities to date. Funding covers the installation of a Heat Pump and insulation, windows and doors only. Insulation, windows and doors are only permitted if calculations show that the Heat Pump

requires fabric upgrades. The maximum grant available per house is €34,000 (increased from €33,000 in 2022) and accordingly the Council need to consider a blend of houses to achieve the approved average spend in order to maximise department funds. A target of 28 units or a funding equivalent of €952,000 (28 x 34,000). The target was achieved in September 2024 and Offaly County Council have sought an increase in budget to retrofit further units.

Local Authority Home Loan (LAHL)

The Local Authority Home Loan, commenced in 2022 saw some modifications introduced in 2023. The LAHL is a government backed mortgage for first time buyers and fresh start applicants and can be used to purchase a new or second-hand property or for self-build. The Loan can provide up to 90% of the market value of the property, to a maximum value of €275,000. The maximum loan amount is determined by where the property is located – in Offaly the maximum LAHL available is €247,500. The loan is a normal Capital and Interest-bearing mortgage which is repaid by standing order on a monthly basis. The maximum loan term is 30 years, up to the age of 70 and must be repaid by an annuity of principal and interest combined.

34 LAHL applications have been received to date – 6 have received approval in principle, 28 were declined or were invalid applications.

Tenant Purchase Applications

Changes to the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016 were introduced and became effective in 2022. Minimum income requirements (revised downward from €15,000p.a. to €12,500 p.a.) and time receiving social housing supports were the main changes to the Scheme. Twenty-eight (28) applications were received to the end of September 2024, of which thirteen (13) have been approved in principle, ten (10) were deemed not eligible/not qualified in accordance with the Scheme and a further eight (8) offers under consideration by tenants and four (4) being processed.

Housing Rents

A Differential Rent Scheme was introduced in 2022. The rent continues to be based on the household income, and is capped at 22% of the household income, and, that a maximum rent applied to all categories within the Scheme. The 2022 Differential Rent Scheme will now be based on the All In Unit Price Costs, which are circulated annually by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

A rent review of all leasing, RAS and HAP tenants was held on all Offaly County Council tenancies in 2024 and it is proposed to hold a rent review of all council tenants in 2025.

Homelessness

The number of homeless presentations continued to be high throughout 2024. The Council's HAP Placefinder works closely with those in emergency accommodation and those at risk of becoming homeless to help them source private rented accommodation. At the end of September there were 38 single adults and 16

couples and families from Offaly's Social Housing Support List being supported in emergency accommodation.

Sophia Housing, with the support of CAS funding, have refurbished Cill Bhríde, the Midlands Regional Temporary Accommodation Service in Tullamore. The centre will be an enhanced centre for the provision of supported accommodation for homeless people in the Midlands region. A team of qualified social care workers will provide residents with support on a 24/7 basis. The facility will provide professional supports for up to 17 individuals from the Midlands Region of Offaly, Westmeath, Laois and Longford. Sophia Housing are in the final stages of finalising operational resources and the facility is expected to open before the end of 2024.

Throughout 2024, Offaly County Council continued to work with the Peter McVerry Trust (PMcVT) in the progression of the Housing First Programme. Those nominated to the Housing First Programme are allocated single bed units and receive wrap-around supports from PMcVT.

Traveller Accommodation

The Local Traveller Accommodation Committee continued to meet during 2024 to progress the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024 initiatives.

Submissions to the Draft Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025-2029 public consultation closed on September 17th, 2024. The submissions received are currently under review and will be considered by the LTAC, following which the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025-2029 will be placed for the consideration of the members in Quarter 4, 2024.

A Traveller Tenancy Support Officer, funded by the Department, commenced in January 2022 and provides enhanced supports to the Traveller community in the context of pre-tenancy preparation and post tenancy sustainment.

The construction of the 4 Group Housing Units at Croghan Road, Birr commenced in 2024 and are scheduled to be completed in early 2025. In addition, a number of traveller specific acquisitions have been concluded in 2024.

Inspection of Private Rented Accommodation

Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland, which was published in September 2021 is the government's housing plan to 2030. The government's overall objective is that every citizen in the State should have access to good quality homes. Key to that objective is the target the plan sets for the inspection of rental properties for compliance with the minimum rental standards, which is the inspection of 25% of all private residential tenancies on an annual basis.

The quality of rental accommodation is critical to the success and sustainability of the residential rental sector and to its attractiveness as a long-term accommodation option for households. Residential rental properties must provide safe, efficient, durable, comfortable and environmentally sustainable homes for those who live in them. They must also be solid, stable and secure investments for those who own

them. Updating and improving standards and regulating their application to the sector are essential to ensuring the quality of accommodation. As standards improve, changes need to be implemented in ways that both ensure higher levels of compliance with regulations, while minimising the cost implications on rental provision.

In this context, Offaly County Council plays a critical public role in ensuring compliance with the standards for rental accommodation through effective inspections and enforcement processes. Offaly County Council procured a consultant in 2024 to carry out some inspections on its behalf. At the end of September there were 576 Inspections carried out with re-inspection planned before the end of December 2024. The exchequer provides some funding per property inspected, however funds from own resources will also be required to ensure target numbers of inspections are met.

Estate Management & Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy

Increased number of housing units increases the number of tenant engagements and the Council's Community Liaison Officers continue to work with existing Residents Associations and seek to re-establish Resident Associations in Local Authority estates. The Housing Section, partnering with the Library, Arts, IT and Heritage services, made significant progress to develop programmes to improve estates and to build their capacity to work together.

Games on the green were provided in a number of Local Authority estates during the summer months with large numbers of participants. Working with our IT Section, Housing developed a suitable version of the VEX robotics programmes and delivered summer workshops in each of the three Municipal Districts. It was very well received and a high number of children participated in the robotics programme.

The Estate Management Fund for 2024, approved by the Elected Members, was allocated to each of the Municipal Districts and a number of enhancement projects were progressed.

During 2024 the Council continued to refer a number of anti-social behaviour cases to the County Solicitor, and these are being progressed in the Courts.

Housing Disability Steering Group

The Housing Director of Services chairs the Offaly Housing Disability Steering Group. The membership of the Steering Group is comprised of representatives from the Housing Section, Offaly County Council, HSE, Disability Sector, AHB and the Housing Agency. The Council adopted its *Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2022 – 2027* in December 2021. The *National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022 – 2027* was published on 14 January 2022. The National Strategy is a joint publication of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; the Department of Health; and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. It sets out how the Government will put in place the frameworks to ensure that the housing and support needs of disabled people are

comprehensively addressed. The Housing Agency is launched the *National Implementation Plan* for the Strategy in summer 2023.

The overarching vision of each of the Strategies is to facilitate disabled people to live independently and be included in their communities. Offaly County Council works with all stakeholders to support this where possible.

Strategic Policy Committee 2024

The Housing Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) met on two occasions in 2024 prior to the Local Elections which were held in June. The Housing SPC meetings will resume when the Housing SPC is fully established. The SPC reviews various housing policies and oversees Social Housing Policy Development.

At the SPC meetings the Committee received briefings on a number of areas including Domestic Violence Supports and updates on the provision of Safe Homes; Strategic Plan for People with a Disability 2022 to 2026; and the Affordable Housing Expression of Interest Survey.

The SPC also received a report on Offaly's Response to Ukraine Refugee Crisis and an update from the newly established Local Authority Integration Team.

Priorities for 2025

- Implementation of Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland under the four strands in line with the supporting Regulations and Department Circulars.
- Progressing the delivery of the multi-annual targets of new build units between 2022 and 2026, i.e., 463 units, and in line with Offaly's Housing Delivery Action Plan.
- Increasing social housing supply through all available means, including:
 - Progression of Council owned construction projects through the department stage approvals, including procurement, planning, construction and completion
 - Appraisal and progression of new direct build proposals, repair and lease scheme, and return of voids
 - Continue to work with Approved Housing Bodies to increase social housing supply
 - Seek to increase the Council's land bank to provide for future schemes in areas of housing need.
- Administer and oversee the Housing Disability Steering Group meetings and working with the various agencies progress the actions provided in the National Housing Strategy for Disability People 2022 – 2027 Implementation Plan.
- Progress the Retrofit Programme and other planned maintenance initiatives
- Continue to review and seek to implement best practice in the delivery and coordination of supports for those presenting as homeless and support Sophia Housing in the opening of the Midlands Regional Temporary Accommodation Service in Tullamore
- Implement the Housing First Programme in accordance with the Service Level Agreement with the Peter McVerry Trust.

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- Implementation of +AddJust the new National Housing Asset management software that will assist local authorities in the survey and recording of its own housing assets as well as the private rented inspection function.
 - The implementation of project Dion, a national system that will provide a more efficient way of delivering housing programmes for stakeholders and will change how the Department and Local Authorities interact with each other. The new system will manage the processes, data and reporting involved with bringing housing on stream.
 - Seek to maximise the resources available to improve housing stock to meet tenant's needs via programmes such as energy efficiency, voids, DPGs and Traveller Accommodation funding.
 - Progress the Traveller Accommodation Plan 2025-2029 including advancing Group Housing projects.
 - Carry out inspections on 25% of private rented stock
 - Administration of the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme.
 - Administration and management of the Tenant Purchase Scheme.
 - Progress Local Authority Home Loan applications
 - Initiate and administer a Rent Review on Council tenants in accordance with Differential Rent Scheme 2022.
 - Capacity building and support for Local Authority Residents' Associations through an Estate Management Programme in consultation with the Municipal Districts.
 - Implement a programme of review and revision of Local Authority tenancy issues.
 - On-going review of the structure, efficiency and effectiveness of Offaly County Council's Housing Service in the interests of customers and staff.
 - Develop best use of technologies to maximise online services for customers and begin the process of reducing paper files retained and moving to a paperless record management system.
 - Support the organisation in the implementation of Building Information Modelling

Division B - Roads & Transportation

In 2024 the Roads and Transport Department built on progress from previous years and targeted significant investment towards maintaining, upgrading and expanding our existing road networks to facilitate growth across our entire County. Significant milestones have been reached as part of the 2024 Road Program delivery - specifically the delivery of the Edenderry Inner Relief Road, the completion of the mainline section of the Grand Canal Greenway and the tendering of the Birr North Distributor Road Scheme.

The 2024 Roads program included for the following works which are currently at design, procurement, construction or completion stage.

- Annual 2024 Roads Program
- Active Travel Schemes
- Regional Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy
- Appointment of Technical Consultants to the Birr Transport Options project formerly Birr Southeastern Distributor Road
- Grand Canal Greenway Construction and associate Trailhead at Ballycommon
- Reconstruction of 1.75 km of the R400 as part of our Peat Roads Pilot Scheme 2024
- Completion of Land Acquisitions for the construction of the Monasteroris Road Widening Project
- Submission of Clara Western Relief Road to the Department of Transport for funding under the Strategic Regional and Local Roads Program for 2025
- New Default Speed Limits for all Local and County Roads
- The 2024 grant allocations from Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), the Department of Transport (DOT), National Transport Authority (NTA) and The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) are set out below, the figures for 2023 are shown alongside for comparison purposes. During the year TII paused the funding of €1,200,000 assigned for pavement renewal and in this regard these monies have been recommitted to Offaly County Council from TII in 2025. An additional €658,500 was provided under the Restoration Improvement program from the Department of Transport.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland & Department of Transport, Road Grants

Initial Grant Allocations	2023 (€)	2024 (€)
Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)		
National Primary		
Motorway MMaRC Lighting	9,117	9,117
National Secondary Improvement		
Minor Works N62 Crancreagh (Cloghan to Derrinlough)	200,000	10,000
Pavement Scheme on the N62/N52	4,000,000	1,200,000 (Funding brought forward to 2025)
Pavement Scheme HD28 Pavement Renewals	TBC (Q2/Q3)	TBC (Q2/Q3)
N52 Durrow Junction Road Safety Scheme	0	100,000
N62 Road Safety Scheme		10,000
HD15 & HD17 Minor Works Fencing Retrofit (N52/N62/N80)	0	10,000
Local Authority Support (Improvement)	275,000	275,000
National Secondary Maintenance		
Ordinary Maintenance	129,194	129,194
Route Lighting	75,901	75,901
Winter Maintenance	170,000	137,925
Local Authority Support (Maintenance)	11,800	11,800
Local Authority Support (Winter Maintenance)	10,000	10,000
Greenways	3,880,000	3,940,000
TII Total	€8,761,012	€5,918,937

Department of Transport		
Regional & Local Roads Grants		
Restoration Improvement	6,542,000	7,310,000(initial allocation was €6,651,500 + €658,500)
Restoration Maintenance	955,000	909,500
Supplementary Restoration Maintenance	750,500	796,000
Discretionary Grant	1,783,500	1,750,500
Bridge Rehabilitation	376,500	373,250
Safety Improvement Works	300,000	325,000
Specific Improvement Grants	2,100,000	2,145,000
Speed Limits	54,000	27,400
Cycle Signs	7,150	0
Former National Roads	420,000	540,000
Strategic Regional and Local Roads	50,000	100,000
Climate Adaptation	388,650	368,500
Training Grant	47,500	47,500
Community Involvement Scheme	301,500	301,500
Pilot Scheme testing on roads over peat	1,000,000	1,000,000
PSCI Survey Support	16,000	16,000
Drainage Works	447,000	402,500
DOT Total	€15,539,300	€16,412,650

National Transport Authority		
Active Travel		
Transport / Mobility Plans: Tullamore	134,448	71,500
Tullamore Cycle Network Phase 1	358,231	253,600
Footpath Improvements Package A: Birr & Crinkill	100,563	32,850
Footpath Improvements Package B: Clara	298,882	
Footpath Improvements Design Package: Banagher & Cloghan	38,000	250,000
Tullamore - Spollenstown Road	191,104	200,000
Countywide Pedestrian Crossings	26,212	
Safe to Schools Programme - Support Infrastructure: Frederick Street, Clara	9,382	
Low Cost Urban Junction (tightening) Schemes: Edenderry & Birr	110,449	96,000
Tullamore Urban Greenway Project	50,000	200,000
EDENDERRY - R402-1 Junction Upgrade	183,055	68,500
TULLAMORE - Collins Lane Junction - Advance Scheme	99,473	
BIRR - Riverside Walk Upgrade/Link	147,500	61,500
RHODE - Pedestrian Crossings & Footpath	185,000	140,000
MUCKLAGH - Brocca Rd - Junction/Path	191,083	6,500
SHINRONE - Cloughjordan Road	140,000	207,500
BALLYCUMBER - Upgrade Footpath Links	125,000	10,500
Offaly County Council Active Travel Office - Staff Costs	271,000	271,000
Edenderry - SRTS (R1) Design & Cycle Links	75,000	50,000
Edenderry Active Travel elements	50,000	350,000
Arden View Tullamore Active Travel elements	75,000	
Banagher SRTS (R1) Design Links	75,000	5,000
Kilcormac Village, Kinnitty Road Active Travel elements	75,000	175,000
Cox's Bridge, R443-2 Clara Rd, Tullamore		275,000
Edenderry Harbour and Grand Canal Link		275,000
<i>Bus Stops</i>		<i>500,000</i>
NTA Total	€3,009,382	€3,500,000

Funding Partner	2023 Initial Allocation	2024 Initial Allocation
Transport Infrastructure Ireland - National Roads allocation together with Greenways allocation	€8,761,012	€4,718,937
Department of Transport	€15,539,300	€16,412,650
National Transport Authority (incl. Bus Stops)	€3,009,382	€3,500,000
Offaly County Council (Own Resources Local Roads)	€2,246,269	€2,396,269
Total	€29,555,963	€27,027,856

Birr North Distributor Road

A tender was issued in 2024 for the construction of the new Birr North Distributor Road. The MEAT or Most Economically Advantageous Tender was issued to the Department of Transport with a request to award in Quarter 4 2024. It is planned to commence works before the end of 2024 with a tentative delivery timeline of 6 months.

Edenderry Inner Relief Road Opening

The Roads Department completed the works involved with the delivery of Edenderry Inner Relief Road in 2024. The official opening was presided over by Minister for Transport Mr. Eamon Ryan TD. The new Phase 2 project includes 800m of new carriageway linking Downshire/Fr. Mc Wey Street to Eden Business Campus

New junction at Downshire

250m of upgraded carriageways to Ard na Carraige

2,100m of new cycle-ways

2,100m of new footpaths

The scheme as now constructed opens up lands for business and employment, in addition to improving access to existing business parks such as Eden Business Campus and Monasteroris Business Campus.

TII Grand Canal Greenway

Offaly County Council's Roads Department completed the delivery of the final mainline stages of the Grand Canal Greenway in collaboration with Transport Infrastructure Ireland and Waterways Ireland. The official opening of the completed 70km of mainline section occurred on the 10th of October 2024 and was presided over by Minister of State Mr. James Lawless TD.

There is now a shift in emphasis towards creating green, sustainable and safe links between our Urban centres and the Greenway. In 2024 we have completed the first of our NTA funded pathfinder links to the Greenway via our scheme between Edenderry Harbour and the Greenway. Design works are now also ongoing on our new scheme which is the link between Ferbane and the Greenway.



R400 Peat Pilot 2024

Works commenced on the reconstruction of between 1.75-2km of the R400 Regional Road in September 2024. The works included for the excavation of the existing road to a depth of 1.25m. The road is then being rebuilt utilising the deployment of a number of geotextile and geogrid layers to provide greater substructure stability to the road's foundation.



Specific Improvement and Strategic Regional and Local Road grants

Stage 2 of the Edenderry Inner Relief Road was completed and opened to traffic in 2024. This scheme is an exemplar as to how Offaly County Council have been utilising the Specific Improvement and Strategic Regional and Local Road grants for the delivery of smaller scale new road links within the €0-5 million and €5-10 million ranges. We have agreed, in principle, the delivery of the following schemes over the coming years with the Department of Transport.

- Birr North Distributor Road
- Monasteroris Road Widening
- Clara Western Relief Road
- Birr Transport Options formerly Birr Southeastern Distributor Road

Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Regional Strategy

Offaly County Council's Road and Transportation Department, acting as the lead authority on behalf of our colleagues in Westmeath, Longford, Laois and Roscommon, appointed Specialist Technical Consultants Systra, to deliver our Regional Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy. Stakeholder engagement is now ongoing, and a draft of the strategy is scheduled for delivery in Quarter 2 in 2025.

Expansion of our Road Maintenance Fleet via the purchase of a 3rd Velocity Patcher

In 2024 Offaly County Council's Road and Transportation Department placed the order for our 3rd velocity patcher which will allow for a permanent assignment of one

machine to each Municipal District. The new vehicle, like the 2 new vehicles deployed in 2023, will operate on Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil(HVO) which further strengthens our commitment to the reduction in our carbon footprint.



Climate Change and Climate Adaptation works

As in previous years Offaly County Council's Road and Transportation Department works programs for 2024 were underpinned by assisting our organisation's approach towards meeting our Climate Action commitments and showing leadership in this space. Examples undertaken in 2024 include:

- Active Travel Schemes
- National Trial of a roads Carbon Calculator
- Regional Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy
- Deployment of a 3rd new Velocity Patcher
- Completion of the Grand Canal Greenway

Road Safety 2024

The Road Safety Working Together Grouping have met twice in 2024 with a shared emphasis on road safety. All works delivered by the Roads Department are targeted at improving the safety across our Road network on all categories of Roads.

Key Actions for 2025

Schemes that the Road Section intend progressing in 2025 include:

- Completion of the Birr North Distributor Road.
- Delivery of Stage 2 of the R400 Peat Pilot Project.
- N62 Pavement Renewal Works at Crancreagah and Doon.
- Appoint Technical Consultancy Services for the design of the Clara Western Relief Road Project.
- Deliver the Ferbane to the Grand Canal Greenway Link.
- Continue to work with the NTA to deliver Active Travel and Safer Route to Schools schemes in Offaly.
- Safety schemes on National and Non National Road Network such as the N52 Durrow and the Faithful Fields.
- Public Lighting upgrades to LEDs through the Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project which are to be delivered in 2024.
- Formulate and deliver the 2025 Roads Programme.
- Winter service and severe weather response in accordance with the 2022 - 2023 plans.
- Deliver our Regional Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy and commence the delivery of the associated Implementation Plan for same.
- Implement the use of the Carbon Calculator for the Roads Program 2025.
- Set up an Asset Manager Department within Roads to manage Road licencing and data upload to the RMO Map Road website.

Division C Water Services

RURAL WATER PROGRAMME

Subsidies: Annual Group Water Scheme Subsidy (GWS) payments totaling over a million euro have been made in 2024 to 15 no. Group Water Schemes which supply a combined total of 4,704 domestic customers. Similar levels of subsidies are anticipated for 2025. The GWS Subsidies help to support group water scheme to operate to their full potential and deliver potable water to their customers.

Multi Annual Rural Water Programme (MARWP) - Capital Works: Applications for capital funding from the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2024 to 2026 were submitted to the Rural Water Unit (RWU) in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in April, and all projects have been reviewed and passed stage 1 of the application process. Stage 2 of the application process involves consideration by the RWU's Expert Panel for consideration. A total of 37 projects were submitted, seeking combined funding of over €3million. Announcements on the funding are anticipated towards the end of 2024. This announcement will prompt the commencement of a significant multi-annual programme of works.

Well Grants: Grants are available to householders to improve their existing domestic water supply, where they are dependent on a well.
For new wells the grants are for the lesser of 85% of costs and €5,000.
Well Rehabilitation grant are for the lesser of 85% of costs and €3,000.
Water Treatment Systems grants are for 100% of cost to a maximum of €1,000.

Domestic Wastewater Treatment grants: This grant may be available to householders where they have been identified by the Local Authority under various river basin and catchment area plans. They must also meet specific criteria (an applicant cannot self-declare for these grants). The percentage of the approved cost of works that can be claimed by the applicant has increased from 75% to 85% of costs up to a maximum of €12,000, whichever is the lesser.
Up to October 2024, 14 grants under the Domestic Water Grant scheme and 11 grants under the DWWTS Grant Scheme were paid.

Division D Development Management

Development Management

Offaly County Council administers the planning function for the entire county. The number of planning applications within the county is in line with 2023 levels.

	Estimate to end 2024	Total 2023
Planning Applications	650 (522 actual to end September)	681

	Total received to end of September 2024	Total 2023
Extension of Duration Application & Assessments	7	20

Overview

The new online planning system, which was introduced in June 2023, is operating well. This new planning system is a one-stop online service for submitting planning applications and submissions / representations. It allows the tracking of development applications by providing an alternative to the requirement to submit applications in hard copy. This facilitates an efficient, easy to use and environmentally friendly system.

Since its introduction, the percentage of online applications has increased from 60% to 75%. It is expected that there will be a continuous increase in the on-line planning applications, with an anticipated increase to 80% of planning applications being made online by Quarter 3 2025.

The Planning Department continues to facilitate pre-planning meetings to give prospective applicants the opportunity to discuss their proposed planning application. Pre-application consultations are often conducted via phone or email, and face-to-face meetings are also available for larger or more complex proposals. Proposed developments, meeting the definition of Large-scale Residential Development, are required to engage in Pre-Planning consultation under Section 247 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.

The Planning Department's scanning project continues to allow for current and historical files to be viewed via the internet. This is important in terms of compliance with Access to Information on the Environment Regulations.

Other key areas of focus for Development Management in 2024 included:

Housing

Over 700 proposed houses currently have planning permission in Tullamore on a variety of sites. The Planning Department have requested further information on two planning applications in Birr which together proposed a combined 124 houses for the town.

‘Green Energy’ Applications

Similar to 2023, the Planning Department has continued to receive a high volume of large-scale green energy-related pre-planning meeting requests. These include a number of large solar farm proposals, battery energy storage facilities and windfarm proposals.

Large-Scale Residential Developments (LRD)

Offaly County Council received a Large-Scale Residential Development planning application in 2024 in Tullamore. This was a very complex case which required substantial staff resources to process. The Council’s decision was appealed to An Bord Pleanála. The Board supported Offaly County Council’s decision on this application.

Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) Applications

In line with the legislation, Section 37A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, Offaly County Council was directed by An Bord Pleanála to provide a comprehensive report on a proposal for 8 wind turbines for the proposed Cush Wind farm north of Birr. A decision is currently pending from the Board on this application.

A SID application was also made by Bord na Mona for a large, combined cycle gas turbine power station at Derrygreenagh North of Rhode Village. A decision is currently pending from the Board on this application. A SID application in respect of the Water Supply Project – Eastern & Midlands Region is expected in 2025. The proposed pipeline corridor passes through Co. Offaly from the southwest to the northeast of the county. This will be a very resource-intensive process across most Council sections.

Enforcement & Compliance

Enforcement activity is outlined as follows:

	To end September 2024	To end September 2023	Total 2023
Warning Letters and (Enforcement Notices) issued	23 (10)	42 (10)	49 (10)

The investigation, regularisation and prosecution of complaints of unauthorised development is on-going.

Development Contribution Collection & Bonds

	To end September 2024	To end September 2023	Total 2023
Warning Letters and (Enforcement Notices) issued	31 (15)	141 (75)	154 (85)
Referred for Legal proceedings	7	18	27

Forward Planning

County Development Plan 2027-2037

The preliminary preparatory work for the next County Development Plan is ongoing with the preliminary stage currently involving data gathering and analysis, preparation of baseline reports in relation to important issues in the county such as housing, employment and enterprise, renewable energy along with social and physical infrastructure. This stage requires the procurement of consultants to carry out Strategic Environmental Assessment, Appropriate Assessment, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and analysis of county Census 2022 data.

Publication of a draft County Development Plan is dependent on the revision of the revised NPF, the revised Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern & Midlands Region and Regional Renewable Energy Strategy in addition to the timelines involved in commencing relevant parts of the new Planning and Development Act.

Local Area Plans (LAPs)

Portarlington Joint LAP 2025-2031 is currently being prepared, with Laois County Council as lead authority, with the Draft Plan expected to be published in November 2024.

Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT)

The RZLT was announced in Central Government's Budget 2022 and was introduced into Part 22A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 by the Finance Act 2021. The principal purpose of the RZLT is to encourage the timely activation of zoned and serviced residential development land for housing. The Ministerial Guidelines titled '*Residential Zoned Land Tax – Guidelines for Planning Authorities June 2022*' clarifies the requirements for planning authorities in relation to RZLT. In order to implement this tax measure, local authorities are required to undertake mapping to identify lands in scope for the tax, with provisions allowing those landowners identified as being within the scope to make submissions and appeal.

The draft map of these lands was placed on public display from February 1st until April 1st, 2024.

5 submissions requested removal of land from the annual draft map, 4 of which the Council were satisfied to exclude from the Draft RZLT map and 1 which the Council decided to retain following determinations made under Section 653E (1) of Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997, as amended.

One submission requested a variation of the Offaly County Development Plan which was subject to a Chief Executive's report in July 2024, in which the CE recommended not varying the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027, and which the members agreed with.

None of the Councils RZLT decisions regarding requests to remove lands from RZLT mapping or requests for zoning variations were appealed to An Bord Pleanála.

The administration of the tax will be undertaken by the Revenue Commissioners.

The next annual RZLT map is required to be published by the local authority on 1 February 2025.

Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones

A bill to introduce proposals to ensure that communities get a greater share of increases in land value which arise from decisions made by the State to zone or designate land for development was published on 22 December 2021. It is currently being progressed as a separate piece of legislation to the new Planning and Development Act 2024. The General Scheme for the Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones Bill envisages that local authorities will be enabled to secure a proportion of the increase in the value of land that is either newly zoned for housing or for housing and a mix of other uses, or where any land zoned for housing or a mix that includes housing, is subject to an 'Urban Development Zone' or 'UDZ', designation. The contribution is to be used to deliver the necessary infrastructure to support the development of sustainable communities.

It is proposed that all or part of the contribution to be secured by condition of the planning permission may be facilitated by financial contributions, land transfer, and/or the undertaking of infrastructural works by the developer. Where applicable, this will replace current development levies.

Land Value Sharing will also apply to designated Urban Development Zones (UDZs), where significant potential for development including housing is identified. The proposed legislation will build on the existing Strategic Development Zone ('SDZ') concept. UDZs will involve a key decision-making role for the local authority and early engagement with the local community and landowners, through a plan-led approach that must include determination of a planning and delivery scheme. Enhanced land assembly and acquisition powers are likely to be proposed, which may include obligations to transfer 'critical land' required for infrastructure within the UDZ, to the designated development agency on behalf of the State. It is intended that the proposed land value sharing, and urban development zone measures will operate in conjunction with the new Residential Zoned Land Tax.

Wilderness / Landscape Corridors

Consultants were appointed to prepare a report with clear mapping and policy and practice recommendations on the implementation of Objective BLOP-28 from the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 relating to the feasibility of developing Wilderness Corridors on rehabilitated peatlands linked to Midland Cycling Destination Routes in locations in East and West Offaly. It should be noted that this report requires stakeholder and public consultation.

Miscellaneous

Forward Planning and Development Management prepare submissions on draft consultation Guidelines and statutory returns relevant to Planning. The most recent submissions made were on the draft First Revision of the National Planning Framework. A submission was also made with detailed information and mapping to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications linked to the requirements of the EU Renewable Energy Directive (2023/2413), the Climate Action Plan and the work of the Government's Accelerating Renewable Electricity Taskforce.

All Council Sections must implement County Development Plan objectives and Strategic Environmental Assessment objectives.

Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike (MTB) Trails

The trails network (approx. 60kms singletrack and 80kms overall) is complete. Plans for a hub building at Baunreagh, Co. Laois are progressing. Council staff continue to sit on a steering group with Coillte and Fáilte Ireland in respect of this project's continued development.

Architecture & Conservation

The Architect's Department provides a cross-departmental service throughout the County Council, particularly in areas of **Planning, Conservation and Public Realm**. The Architect's Department continues to make a significant contribution to delivering the aims of the County Development Plan through *inter alia* managing the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) which includes the upkeep of the multifaceted database, Section 57 Declarations and all planning permission files related to protected structures.

Advice and assistance are also given on a regular basis to owners and community groups regarding proposals for the upkeep or reuse of existing protected structures. Additional projects for planning consist of providing technical advice on large-scale planning applications; the production of site-specific documents relating to possible future developments.

Built Heritage Investment Scheme: 19 projects received an offer of grant funding and 13 projects progressed.

Thatch Funding: 4 applicants received approval for specific thatch funding. Two of these projects proceeded to complete the thatch.

Historic Structures Fund: Six projects received funding and grant allocations included:

- Birr Castle (repair of 21 windows) €48,000,
- St. Kieran's Church of Ireland, Clareen (structural repairs and rainwater goods); €45,400,
- St. Mary's Church, Edenderry (roof repairs) €20,000,
- Stream 2 project, Tullamore Presbyterian Church, (roof repairs, rainwater goods and internal plaster repairs),
- Historic Shopfronts, Luker's Public House (Shopfront repairs) €30,000.00 – This project did not go ahead as structural repairs to the roof was needed as a first phase.
- A vernacular project in Belmont, Skehanagh Carthouse (Stabilization and rebuilding works) €10,000.

Heritage Stewardship Fund: Under the Heritage Stewardship Fund in 2024 Offaly County Council partnered with the Irish Georgian Society and their Birr and Midlands Branch to host a *Traditional Skills* weekend in Birr in June.

Masterplan Steering Groups: as required, subject to availability: Tullamore general, Tullamore Harbour, Banagher, Birr Rectory Lands, Edenderry Library etc.

Traditional Architecture in Offaly – ‘Traditional Architecture in Offaly’ by Rachel McKenna published by Offaly County Council in 2022 was sold out and reprinted in 2024. In addition, a research element of this book was developed into a video on ‘*God in a Bottle*’ filmed by Mixed Bag Media which was part funded under the Heritage Council – Heritage Plan funding - and is now hosted on the Offaly Heritage YouTube channel.

Heritage Team

The Heritage Office works with the Offaly Heritage Forum to deliver the *Offaly Heritage Plan 2023-2027*. The forum meets four times a year and its members are from state agencies, council staff and NGOs. The national Heritage Council provides funding towards the post of heritage officer and biodiversity officer under an SLA. Additional funding is allocated towards the delivery of the *Offaly Heritage Plan* and in 2024 towards the development of the *Biodiversity Action Plan*.

The Heritage office has a full-time heritage officer: a full-time biodiversity officer and shared administration support. The Creative Communities Engagement Officer for the Creative Ireland programme is based with the Heritage Team.

Community Monuments Fund - Offaly received support for conservation works at five sites in Offaly in 2024 - Seir Kieran Monastic Site, Killeigh chapter house, Ballintemple medieval church near Walsh Island, Lemanaghan Castle and Monasteroris.

Just Transition Medieval Churches Conservation and Pollination Project:

This is a joint project with Laois County Council which is concluding in 2024. The focus has been conserving a medieval church in each MD and managing the area for pollinators. The three Offaly churches are Kilmurryely in Birr MD, Kilbride in Tullamore MD and Monasteroris in Edenderry MD.

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

Publications – In 2024 Offaly County Council published, launched and distributed 3 books, *The River Brosna, an Environmental History* by John Feehan, *Step into Nature* by Rachel McKenna and *Bully's Acre* by Stephen Callaghan.

Creative Ireland - *Creative Ireland 2023-2027* places creativity at the centre of public policy focusing on projects that are collaborative involving the arts, heritage and libraries with strong community reach. The Heritage Officer is the county coordinator working with the team from the Arts Office, Architect, Library Service, Community and Local Development and the Local Enterprise Offaly. In 2024 over €207,000 has been allocated to the diverse range of programmes being delivered under the *Offaly Creative Ireland Strategy 2023- 2027*

Offaly Archives Service – along with the county librarian, the heritage officer is on the SLA working group with Offaly History to support the delivery of the Offaly Archive Service.

Decade of Centenaries funding was received in 2024 and a programme of publications, videos, blogs, and material hosted on the website has been developed in partnership with Offaly History and the Offaly Library Service.

Access to heritage -The very popular YouTube series of *Wildflowers of Offaly* featuring John Feehan added 25 new species videos in 2024. The *In Your Nature* podcast featuring biodiversity officer Ricky Whelan in partnership with Niall Hatch of BirdWatch Ireland delivered 3 seasons in 2024.

Biodiversity –In 2024 the key focus for the biodiversity officer was the development of *Offaly's Biodiversity Action Plan*. This is currently at draft stage and will be proposed to the members for adoption by year end.



Long Eared Owl Chick – Áras gardens, July 2024
Photo courtesy of Dan Singer

Local Biodiversity Action Funding - in 2024 biodiversity projects delivered through this scheme included surveys and monitoring of county flora and fauna, outreach and education, invasive species control and staff training.

The **Offaly Field Naturalist Club** programme was delivered with field events throughout the county including a 5-day summer school in July and with more in-depth events for Biodiversity Week in May and Hedgerow Week in September.

Invasive Species - Offaly has two main invasive alien species which are being addressed by the County Council. The species Himalayan Balsam was noted spreading on the Camcor and Little Brosna Catchment and work continued to removal the plant. The second species is Japanese knotweed which has been tackled by Offaly County Council for the past decade.

Heritage Week - Nine days of events were held in August 2024 with 73 events hosted countywide – which was an increase of 33 on 2023. This increasingly popular week is co-ordinated and promoted by the heritage team.

Community Engagement

A core focus for all the heritage team is to support community groups to develop projects across the range of built, natural and cultural heritage and to assist them in planning and delivering projects.

New legislation, national guidelines and strategies expected in 2025:

- Revised National Planning Framework
- Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy review
- Regional Renewable Energy Strategies
- Revised windfarm guidelines
- Sustainable rural housing guidelines update
- Guidelines on water framework directive
- Revised / amended childcare facilities guidelines
- The General Scheme for the Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones Act
- Revised building height guidelines - in 2025 (according to page 86 of Housing for All)
- Revised Development Management Guidelines

Areas of Activity for 2025

In addition to the normal activities of Development Management, Forward Planning, Architecture, Conservation, Heritage, Biodiversity, and Enforcement, the following are the main major items of activity envisaged for 2025:

- Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT) annual review of maps (January 2025)
- Portlington Local Area Plan 2025-2031
- Potential commencement of the review of the County Development Plan depending on timelines for the review of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region.
- Renewable Energy Acceleration Zones, regional level proposal
- The ongoing investigation, regularisation and prosecution of complaints of unauthorised development/s through enforcement.
- County Development Plan implementation and monitoring, SEA monitoring, and monitoring by Development Management of permitted residential development by maintaining a backdated and continuous record in accordance with objective CSO-01 of the CDP
- Input into various and emerging tourism and amenity projects/initiatives, in particular the proposed Wilderness / Landscape Corridors as per objective BLO-28 of the County Development Plan 2021-2027
- Large Scale Residential Developments – statutory and time-bound procedures for pre-planning meetings and the subsequent administration and assessment of all housing applications of all sizes.
- The processing of Substitute Consent referrals from the Board with respect to historical peat extraction.

Just Transition

The EU Just Transition Fund was formally launched by Eamon Ryan, Minister for the Environment, Climate, Communication and Transport in 2023 and provides a fund of €169m - made up of €84.5 from European funding with the balance from the Irish exchequer. The purpose of the fund was to assist with the transition to a climate-neutral economy, while securing the future of and livelihoods of workers and their communities, most affected by this transition.

Several funding calls have been announced to date. Offaly County Council has submitted applications to the Community Facilities EV Chargers Scheme (€15m fund) and to the Local Economic & Community Plan / Regional Enterprise Plan Schemes (€24m fund).

In April 2024, it was announced that Offaly County Council had been successful under the latter scheme in its application to secure funding in the sum of €252,985 to resource FilmOffaly and to promote Offaly as a film location. Offaly will also benefit from the success of Laois County Council's application which secured €3,992,882 for the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Pathway for Just Transition. In August 2024, it was announced that €3.7m remained in this strand of the fund and a subsequent call has seen Offaly County Council submit one application in relation to the upgrade of the Dalton Centre in Shannonbridge, a large vacant unit with a potential use as an enterprise and / or a training space.

A Strategic Partnership Agreement between Offaly County Council and Failte Ireland was signed in 2023 which has allowed the local authority to apply directly for funding for regenerative tourism projects. Three applications were submitted in February 2024 in relation to street works in Birr, the planning and design of a plaza / floating walkway project in Shannonbridge and for works to the Derrycastle Lakes and Trails in Portlannington. In June 2024, funding was awarded for paving at Birr Castle in the sum of €188,183 while funding was awarded to the Shannonbridge Plaza / Walkway project in the sum of €218,275.

Offaly County Council was successful in securing 72 days of assistance from the Secretariat for Technical Assistance for Regions in Transition. The partners involved in this process were Offaly County Council, the Technological University of the Shannon, the Laois / Offaly Education and Training Board and the Offaly Local Development Company. All partners worked together to map opportunities and clear educational pathways which would assist in achieving higher educational attainment in the county, but also to provide more defined routes into third level education and to provide courses that are relevant to both the emerging and changing economies on the Midlands.

Site visits, meetings and workshops took place in 2023 and 2024, culminating in the START Support for a Just Transition in County Offaly Report, published in February 2024. The report has greatly informed the grouping of the above-mentioned partners, who had an inaugural meeting on 23rd February 2024 and have since signed a Memorandum of Understanding. Meetings take place on a regular basis to continue the learning than can be achieved as a result of shared experiences.

Regeneration

The Regeneration Department in Offaly consists of two key teams: the Regeneration Team and the Property Activation Team. The Regeneration Team plays a vital role in coordinating community support to access funding opportunities for the development of towns and villages across Offaly. The team works closely with local communities, elected members, and stakeholders to identify, assist in developing and delivering potential projects by accessing funding opportunities.

The Property Activation Team are responsible for tackling derelict and vacant properties to reactivate them through various processes and grants.

Derelict & Vacant Sites

A new team has been put in place to tackle property dereliction and vacancy in Offaly's towns and villages. The team will update the derelict site register, prioritise town centre and villages with a high level of vacancy, manage and coordinate the various funding schemes to assist property owners of such properties.

Derelict Site Policy and Procedure

The new policy is being implemented and tackling vacancy and dereliction within towns and villages across the county. This policy, which supports the government's town centre first policy, uses a combination of engagement, collaboration, and enforcement to achieve its objective of reducing dereliction and vacancy by implementing the functions set out in the Derelict Site Act 1990.

URDF Call 3

Offaly County Council secured funding of €2 million under 'Call 3' of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) for Tullamore Town only. The aim of this fund is to end long-term vacancy and dereliction. Work has commenced on selected vacant and derelict properties and staff are engaging with the property owners, auctioneers and where appropriate the legal team to progress activation of properties.

Croi Cónaithe – Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant

The Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant is progressing as supports continue to be available to turn vacant properties into private residences/rental properties.

Main criteria:

- Properties built up to and including 2007
- Maximum grant rate is €50,000 increasing to €70,000 if the property is deemed derelict or structurally unsound.
- Property must be proved vacant for 2 years.
- Works must be complete within a period of 13 months.
- Works carried out must be compliant with all relevant planning and building regulations.

175 applications have been received to date

- 68 applications have had requests for additional supporting documentation.
- 97 applications were approved.
- 12 applications were completed with grants paid.

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- 10 applicants have withdrawn

Vacant Homes Officer

The Vacant Homes Officer (VHO) collects, monitors and assesses vacancy data within County Offaly and actively engages with the property owners to encourage them to bring their properties back into residential use. The VHO is the main point of contact and promotes the various schemes, initiatives and funding programmes available to property owners to assist them in bringing their properties back into use.

CPO Activation Programme

The CPO Activation Programme was launched in April 2023 and is incorporated into the newly adopted Derelict Site Policy and Procedure for Offaly. Under the Programme, local authorities are required to adopt a proactive, planned and systematic approach to the identification and activation of vacant and derelict properties. The main steps of the programme are -

- Identification of vacant and derelict properties
- Identification of and engagement with owners
- Communication regarding the various schemes and measures in place to support bringing the property back into use
- Where owners of vacant and derelict properties cannot be identified or where they are unwilling to engage, use of available legislative powers to compulsory purchase or acquire such properties using either the Housing Act, 1966 or the Derelict Sites Act, 1990
- Acquired properties may subsequently be made available for sale on the open market, used for social housing, or used for other purposes e.g. community use
- The vacant or derelict property must be brought into use as quickly as possible

Offaly County Council has been set a target on 65 vacant and derelict properties to enter the programme in 2024 and 1 CPOs/Compulsory Acquisitions to commence in 2024.

Town Centre First

The Town Regeneration Officer (TRO) is a crucial link between local communities and national programs, helping address the challenges faced by Offaly's towns and villages. This role involves supporting the establishment of Town Teams, working alongside local champions to develop and implement Town Centre First Plans. This initiative, launched in 2022, aims to tackle vacancy and dereliction in town centres, providing a comprehensive policy framework to rejuvenate these areas. Following the success of Clara's Town Centre First Plan, the 2024/2025 focus will be on the town of Ferbane. The Town Team will aim to transform the town centre by integrating existing projects and introducing new ideas. Additionally, Offaly County Council has secured further funding for other towns, including €50,000 for project development in Clara and €10,000 to support town team research in Kilmalogue and Daingean, further ensuring that towns across the county have the resources to thrive and revitalize.

Rural Regeneration Development Fund

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

Banagher - The Royal Shannon Hotel is in the ownership of Offaly County Council and consultants have been appointed to carry out a Conservation Master Plan for the property and site, with completion due Quarter 1, 2025. The Master Plan for Banagher Marina and Environs is now complete. The design area of the public realm works of the Marina have been delayed due to lease and an unauthorised development in the Marina area which are currently being pursued through the legal system.

Banagher Regeneration – awarded RRDF 2020					
Total cost	€ 606,047	Grant awarded	€ 454,535.25	Match funding	€ 151,511.75

Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF) 2021

Edenderry – Edenderry Regeneration Project Phase III was awarded the Rural Regeneration Development Fund during 2024, which will allow for the redevelopment of 33/34 JKL Street, the former Tesco Supermarket site into a new Town Centre development consisting of a newly constructed Community Library and Arts Space with outdoor programming areas. The development also includes a new pedestrian and cycle connection from JKL Street to Blundell Avenue and to the greater Blundell Area, site boundary treatment and enabling works and public realm improvements including biodiversity landscaping, accessible parking, resting area and an urban plaza.

Edenderry Regeneration Phase III					
Total cost	€15,256,727	Grant secured	€12,256,727	Match funding	€3,000,000

Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF), Category 2 2021

Ferbane – The Design team appointed continue to complete the design for the refurbishment of St Joseph's Convent and lands into a multipurpose community/social/enterprise building continue to work with An Siolan. A business case is currently being prepared to allow for preparing for a Category 1 application in 2025. Planning permission will also need to be secured prior to the next RRDF application.

Ferbane Regeneration – pending RRDF 2021					
Total cost	€ 683,000	Grant awarded	€537,352	Match funding	€ 136,600

Town & Village Renewal Scheme

2021

In 2021 6 applications were prepared and submitted to Department and the following were successful:

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Tullamore	Killeigh Community Centre Development	€250,000	€35,000	€285,000
Birr	Ballyboy amenity and public realm	€100,000	€15,000	€115,000
Edenderry	Clonbullogue pedestrian bridge and amenity enhancement	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000

All projects are now complete.

2022

In 2022 9 applications were prepared and submitted to Department and the following were successful:

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Birr	Kilcormac – redevelopment of Old Fiesta Hall	€500,000	€60,000	€560,000
Birr	Shinrone – redevelopment of Old Shinrone Library	€250,000	€30,000	€280,000
Birr	Birr Market Square Plaza	€250,000	€30,000	€280,000
Birr	Moneygall project development measure	€50,000	€6,000	€56,000
Edenderry	Daingean Town Hall project development measure	€50,000	€6,000	€56,000
Birr	Building Acquisition Measure - Moneygall	€175,000		
Birr	Building Acquisition Measure - Ballyboy	€50,000		

Offaly County Council is currently progressing these projects.

2023

In 2023 5 applications were prepared and submitted to Department and the following were successful:

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Tullamore	Killeigh Community Centre Development, outdoor area	€250,000	€35,000	€285,000
Birr	Ferbane public realm enhancement of Fairgreen	€250,000	€35,000	€285,000
Birr	Building Acquisition Measure – Clara	€290,000		€290,000

Offaly County Council is currently progressing these projects.

Town Centre First

2024

The Town Centre First (TCF) Suite of Supports replaced the supports previously available for the development of TCF plans, town health-checks and the Project Development Measure (PDM) through the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. In 2024 four applications were prepared and submitted to Department and the following were successful

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Edenderry	Measure 1 Daingean - Town Centre First Town Team Support Fund	€10,000		€10,000
Edenderry	Measure 1 Kilmalogue - Town Centre First Town Team Support Fund	€10,000		€10,000
Birr	Measure 2 Ferbane - Town Centre First Plan Nomination Form	€30,000		€30,000
Tullamore	Measure 3 Clara - Project Development Measure	€50,000		€50,000

Offaly County Council is currently progressing these projects.

Community Centre Investment Fund

Offaly County Council worked closely with Moneygall Development Association to secure funding under the Community Centre Investment Fund for a new build community centre. Applications under this scheme were limited as the criteria for this scheme requires that projects be shovel-ready on a greenfield site with all the necessary permissions, consents and leases in place.

Municipal District	Project	Grant pending	Match funding	Total Cost
Birr	Community Centre Investment Fund	€ 1,407,659.59	€117,304.97	€1,564,066.21

Offaly County Council is currently progressing this project.

Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme

Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme 2020

The following project was submitted and was successful in 2020.

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

The project is now complete.

Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme 2021

The following ORIS applications were submitted in 2021.

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

The project is now complete.

Derryounce – 10 Year Plan and Concept Designs

On 24th May 2024 Offaly County Council officially launched the Derryounce 10 Year Plan as prepared by SLR Consulting Ltd assisted by the Portarlinton Community Development Association. The 10-year plan emphasises the importance of outdoor recreation, nature conservation, and the social and economic benefits for Derryounce and its surrounding area. There is a particular focus on identifying new recreation uses, enhancing existing uses and the provision of necessary infrastructure. The Plan aims to bring economic and social benefits to the area by promoting Derryounce as a Regenerative Tourism Destination and a key trailhead within the Midlands Cycling Destination for Offaly and the wider Blueway and Greenway Networks while also promoting ideas of Play and Activity for all.

Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme 2023

The following ORIS applications were submitted in 2023.

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
County wide	Technical support for 3 communities in East and West Offaly to identify cluster opportunities for linking tracks, trails and recreational amenities in the peatlands.	€49,500	€5,500	€55,000
Birr	Small scale upkeep and repair work on the Slieve Bloom Way & ancillary loops at Cadamstown & Kinnitty	€30,000	€3,500	€33,500
Birr	Small scale upkeep and repair work on the Offaly Way & ancillary loops at Kilcormac and Lough Boora	€30,000	€3,500	€33,500

Offaly County Council is currently progressing these projects.

Community & Culture 2024

Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)

The Offaly Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) was established under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 for the purpose of developing and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development.

The 19 member LCDC has broad representation from public and private interests including business, local development, education, enterprise, agriculture, voluntary and local authority members. Offaly LCDC hold monthly meetings, and current membership is as follows:

STATUTORY INTERESTS (9)			
Local Authority Elected Members	Declan	Harvey	Offaly County Council
	John	Leahy (Chair)	Offaly County Council
	Noel	Cribbin	Offaly County Council
Local Authority Officials	Anna-Marie	Delaney	Chief Executive Offaly County Council
	Orla	Martin	Head of Enterprise, LEO
State Agencies	Eileen	Dunne	Laois/Offaly ETB
	Tom	Kellegher	Teagasc
	Celine	Kirwan	Dept. of Social Protection
	Ann	Sheerin	Community Services Manager, HSE
NON-STATUTORY INTERESTS (10)			
Community & Voluntary	Fiona	Fitzpatrick	PPN Community & Voluntary
	Sylvia	Sweeney (Vice-Chair)	PPN Community & Voluntary
Social Inclusion	Deirdre	Arnold	PPN Social Inclusion
	Olive	Davis	PPN Social Inclusion
Environment	Brian	Flynn	PPN Environment
Local Development & Community	Roisin	Lennon	CEO - OLDC
Other civic society or 'local and community' interests	Mark	Cronin	Construction Industry Federation
	Richard	Scally	Offaly IFA
	Fechin	Daly	Business Sector
	Philip	O'Brien	Offaly Tourism Marketing (CLG)

The Offaly Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) is responsible for coordinating, planning, overseeing and implementing local development initiatives including inter alia the following:

- Prepare, and adopt the community elements of the Local Economic and Community Plan.
- Implement or arrange for the implementation of the community elements of the of the Local Economic and Community Plan.

-
- Management and implementation of the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2024 – 2028.
 - Co-ordinate the management and implementation of the programmes that have been approved either by the local authority or by agreement between the LCDC and other public bodies.
 - Ensure effectiveness, co-ordination, consistency and the avoidance of duplication between publicly funded local and community development programmes.
 - Optimise resources for the benefit of local communities and improve the efficiency with which publicly funded local and community development resources are used.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2024 - 2028

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2024 - 2028 is the primary social inclusion programme of Government and provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion at a local level through engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. SICAP is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development with co-funding from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion, Skills and Training (EIST) Programme 2021 - 2027

Offaly Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) is the Contracting Authority for SICAP and oversees, co-ordinates and manages the delivery of SICAP and directs funding to the Programme Implementer. The Programme Implementer is Offaly Local Development who delivers SICAP at a local level. The Programme aims to address high and persistent levels of deprivation and to target and support those who are most disadvantaged, hardest to reach and less likely to use mainstream services through targeted and innovative locally led approaches.

The programme is structured over two Goals:

- **Goal 1 – Contribute to Building more Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities:** Empower groups of individuals, local community groups, networks and social enterprises to address collective community needs.
- **Goal 2 – Empower Disadvantaged people to Improve the Quality of Their Lives:** Support disadvantaged individuals, children and families to progress their formal education and participate in lifelong learning, to progress into employment/self-employment, and to improve their soft skills and wellbeing.

Target Group List

For SICAP to be effective, it is critical that resources, supports and interventions are targeted.

12 pre-defined target groups have been set for SICAP. These have been selected based on socioeconomic context, the level of need in society, and government priorities.

- People living in disadvantaged communities
- People impacted by educational disadvantages

- People living in jobless households or households where the primary income source is low-paid and/or precarious
- People who are long-term unemployed
- People with a criminal history
- Refugees
- International Protection Applicants
- Disabled People/People with Disabilities
- Heads of One-parent Families
- Travellers
- Roma
- Island residents

The SICAP budget is allocated on an annual basis and continued funding is subject to satisfactory performance reviews and key performance indicators being met. The Offaly SICAP budget allocation for 2024 was €990, 371 and New Arrivals allocation was €127,196.

Community Recognition Fund (CRF) 2024

The Community Recognition Fund was first introduced in 2023 to recognise the significant efforts made by communities, villages and towns where the highest level of new arrivals are located and where there is a clear need for investment identified.

An additional allocation €1,002,543 was made under the fund to Offaly in 2024 for projects over €50k in value. This was done under a scheme that specifically targeted capital projects that are located in communities, towns and villages that are hosting the Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection and/or International Protection Applicants ('new arrivals') including towns identified for the rapid build homes programme. The scheme aims to promote the development of facilities that will be used in the future by all members of the community.

The LCDC Evaluation Committee recommended 11 projects valued at €702,000 to the Department for approval. The Department of Rural and Community Development approved all 11 projects on 2nd August 2024.

Community Recognition Fund 2024 (Grant Announcement Window 1)	
Birr Leisure Centre	€87,000
Birr MD Wilmer Road Playground Upgrade	€80,000
Birr MD Banagher Playground Upgrade	€50,000
Crank House Building Repair	€50,000
Homefix Service Transport	€50,000
Edenderry Golf Club	€65,000
Geashill Community	€60,000
Esker Arts Centre	€70,000
Tullamore Harriers AC	€50,000
Tullamore MD – Connolly Park Community Playground	€80,000
Tullamore Town Park Playground Upgrade	€60,000
	€702,000

The final window for submission of projects for the remaining €300,000 available under the CRF 2024 will be in January 2025. Details will be provided through Offaly PPN, the Council website and social media. All projects are due to be completed by November 2026.

Local Enhancement Programme 2024

The Local Enhancement Programme 2024 provided vital support to community groups to help them improve their facilities. It supports small-scale funding for projects which range from purchasing equipment to minor renovations to buildings. This Programme was announced on 6th December 2023, with two elements:

€127,369.50 General Fund for Community Groups.

€ 27,099.89 for Women's Groups.

Offaly LCDC recommended 127 projects, which were subsequently approved by the Minister for Rural and Community Development in May 2024, with all projects to be completed by the end of October 2024.

Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2024-2029

The LECP 2024-29 was adopted by Offaly County Council in November 2024. The preparation of an LECP Plan is a statutory requirement under the Local Government Reform Act 2014. This is the second Offaly LECP, replacing the initial Plan which covered the years 2016-2021.

Consultation and preparation for this plan began in 2022 and involved intense engagement with a wide range of business, community and voluntary organisations, public agencies, social partners and other key stakeholders in Offaly. The LECP process consists of two documents including:

a) **the LECP Framework** which details the High-Level Goals and Sustainable Community and Economic Objectives as well as outcomes and high-level indicators for the 6-year LECP period.

b) **The Implementation Plans** detail the inputs, actions and resources required for the Implementation Plan period as well as relevant key performance indicators to facilitate evaluation.

This plan should act as a key reference document for all publicly funded bodies and other agencies operating in Offaly in the coming years. Four High Level Goals are identified in the Plan:

- **Community:** Offaly will be a county which supports Sustainable, Inclusive, and Empowered Communities
- **Healthy Place Making:** Offaly will improve the physical and social infrastructure to create places that are healthy and attractive to live, work and invest in
- **Economic Opportunity:** Offaly will strive to spread economic opportunity and prosperity to all sections of society
- **Climate Action:** Offaly will be proactive in addressing Climate Change in line with national targets.

The first Implementation Plan will last two years and will be monitored, evaluated, and revised at the end of 2025. Additional Implementation Plans will be prepared for

the periods 2026-27 and 2028-29. Each LECP objective also aligns with several of the seventeen UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The actions contained in the Implementation Plan will be the focus of the work for the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), the Economic Development Planning & Regeneration SPC and the Climate Action Transport and Environment Policy SPC in the coming years.

Community, Culture & Emergency Services Policy SPC

The 9 member SPC meets on a quarterly basis and has representation from local authority members, sectoral interests and PPN representatives. Membership of the SPC prior to the local elections in June 2024 was as follows:

Sector	Members Name	Organisation
Local Authority Elected Members (5)	Cllr John Clendennen, Chair Councillor Clare Claffey Councillor Mark Hackett Councillor Liam Quinn Councillor Sandra Feehan Smollen	Offaly County Council
Sectoral Representatives (1)	Thomas Woulfe	Agriculture/Farming
PPN Representation (3)	Ana-Maria Cumpanici & Rachel Kenny Madeline Corboy Vacant	Youth & Environment Voluntary / Community Social Inclusion

The membership of the SPC after the June 2024 local elections comprised:

Sector	Members Name	Organisation
Local Authority Elected Members (5)	Cllr Sean O'Brien, Chair Councillor John Clendennen Councillor Declan Harvey Councillor Audrey Hennessy Kennedy Councillor Sean Maher	Offaly County Council
Sectoral Representatives (1)	Marita Phelan	Agriculture/Farming
PPN Representation (3)	Linda Kelly Breda Colgan Karen Boylan	Voluntary / Community Voluntary / Community Social Inclusion

The SPC are scheduled to meet four times in 2024.

Issues and policies discussed and progressed by the SPC during 2024 included: Offaly LECP 2024-29; Offaly Age Friendly Strategy 2024-29; Offaly Library Development Plan; Film Offaly; Offaly Arts Strategy 2024-2029.

Offaly Comhairle na nÓg

Comhairle na nÓg are local councils for children and young people, aged 12-17 that give them a voice on the development of local policies and services in the 31 local authorities of the country. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020, highlight the importance of ensuring that children and young people are given a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Comhairle na nÓg is a key structure in giving young people a voice in decision-making at local and national level.

Offaly Comhairle na nÓg has representatives from across Offaly, Regular meetings are held in various locations across the county and work on topics, chosen by the members who identify, prioritize and progress issues that are important to them. The members aim to influence local decision makers to achieve their desired outcome, impact or change. The group have been involved in several consultations and events throughout the year.

Some highlights this year:

- This year the group's chosen work topic was Supporting Mental Health among Young People. Proposals were developed to support Young Peoples Mental Health such as Gardens for Youths, Casual Youth Groups & Book Clubs. In keeping with this topic, Comhairle worked in partnership with Jigsaw – the National Centre for Youth Mental Health. Members from all over the county took part in Jigsaw Colour Climb hiking in the Slieve Blooms while raising money for this much needed service.
- Offaly Comhairle members were among over 160 delegates from Comhairlí across Ireland who met in Dáil Éireann to debate the critical issue of mental health, one of the biggest topics of concern to young people in Ireland, particularly since the pandemic. Ireland's National Youth Parliament plays a vital role in ensuring the interests of young people are considered in policy development.
- Delegates from Offaly Comhairle have attended the National Youth Assembly on Climate Change and The Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office Youth Advisory Group.
- In October, over 100 young people attended Offaly Comhairle na nÓg's Youth Conference.

This was an opportunity for members to present their work and to gather the opinions of young people from Offaly voting on topics Offaly Comhairle na nÓg should focus on.

Supporting Mental Health among Young People will continue as the focus topic for 2024. Cathaoirleach addressed the young people on the importance of their voice in local policy and decision making. Guest speaker Jordan Conroy spoke to the attendees about Mental Health and how to ask for help and how to support each other, This annual event was a success with representation from all Second level Schools in the County and a high number of young people who attended expressed an interest in joining Offaly Comhairle na nÓg for 2025.



Offaly Age Friendly Programme

Age Friendly Ireland (AFI) is a shared service of local government hosted by Meath County Council. The Programme aims to prepare for the rapid ageing of our population by paying increased attention to the environmental, economic, and social factors that influence the health and well-being of older adults. Initiatives focus on areas such as housing, transport, caregiving, community engagement, volunteering, social inclusion and combating isolation among older citizens.

Offaly now has a significant Age Friendly Programme team in place which is a solid foundation on which to build for the future. The Age Friendly team includes:

- Older Persons Council
- Age Friendly Alliance
- Age Friendly Interdepartmental Team
- Age Friendly Programme Manager
- Regional AF Programme Manager
- Age Friendly Housing Specialist
- Healthy Age Friendly Homes County Coordinator
- Healthy Age Friendly Homes Regional Manager





Members of Offaly Age Friendly Alliance at the launch of the Offaly Age Friendly Strategy 2024-29 on 27th September 2024.

The Offaly Age Friendly Strategy 2024 -2029 was launched at a meeting of the Offaly Age Friendly Alliance on Friday 27th September 2024 by Anna Marie Delaney, Chief Executive of Offaly County Council and Chair of Offaly Age Friendly Alliance. The strategy was produced under the guidance of the members of the Age Friendly Alliance (AFA), which includes key community/voluntary, public and private sector service providers in the county.

Among the key Age Friendly actions progressed in 2024 was the plan to make Tullamore train station an Age Friendly Train Station in accordance with the recognised WHO process. A walkability audit was completed on 11th October 2024 attended by members of Offaly Older Persons Council, Offaly Age Friendly Alliance, Offaly Disability and Equality Network, and by staff from Iarnród Éireann, AFI and Offaly County Council.



Age Friendly Audit of Tullamore Train station on 11th October 2024.

Public Participation Network (PPN)



PPN 10th Anniversary Celebrations commence

Offaly Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in 2015 following Local Government Reform Act 2014. It is the main link through which the Local Authority connects and consults with the community, voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors. The PPN Secretariat meets monthly in person to guide and direct the work of the PPN on behalf of the Membership. Members of the Secretariat meet with OCC Community section management team quarterly. From a base of 149 groups in 2017, Offaly PPN now has over 700 member groups across the county.

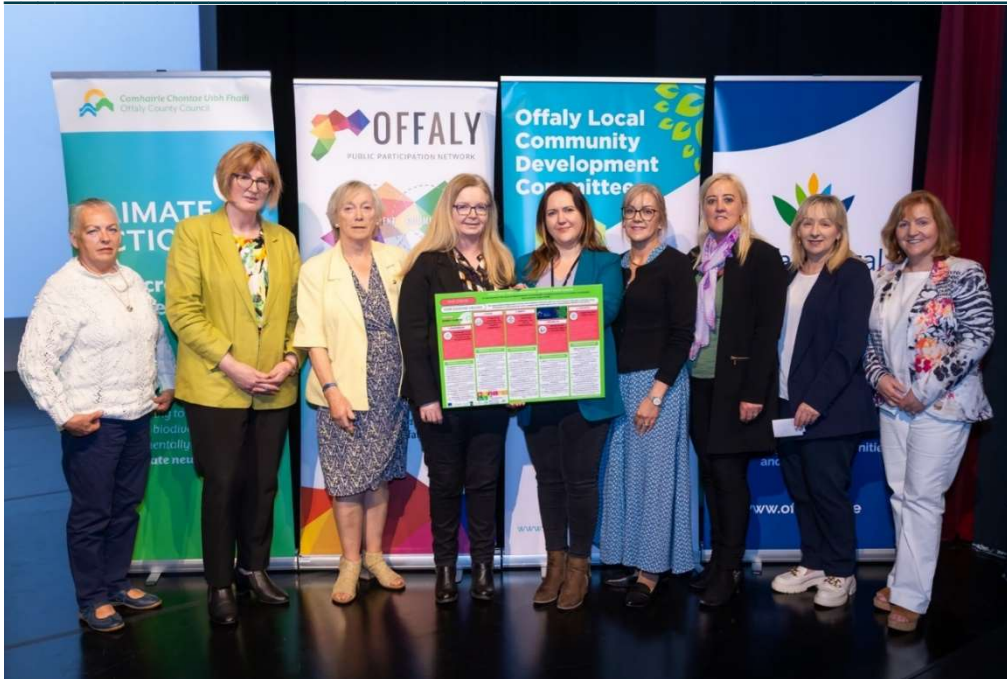
The PPN distributes information from a local and national perspective and shares information broadly across the Community sector reflecting the needs of its members. Groups are supported in joining the PPN, accessing MD grants, Town & Village renewal projects, the Community Enhancement Programme and Clár funding and other opportunities. Plenaries are held in Spring and Autumn, An Offaly/Laois PPN Biodiversity event took place at Derrycastle Lake with Ricky Whelan, Offaly County Council Bio-Diversity Officer.



The Offaly Community Energy Charter was launched in May 2024 to provide a blueprint for communities in terms of their ask when consulting with developers and new energy projects in their communities to ensure what is most beneficial to communities is achieved.

Offaly PPN collaborated with OCC Climate team and the LCDC alongside OLDC and other interested parties in bringing this Charter to fruition with the assistance of Green Offaly, the PPN Environment thematic group.

Next step is the establishment of a Community Energy Team to implement the Charter principals.



The Disability & Social Inclusion weeks take place Annually coordinated by Offaly PPN



Groups are also assisted with queries including Revenue/Tax registration and Tax Clearance to draw down grants.

In Spring and Autumn the PPN hosts Municipal District meetings and these inform the Plenary content. The PPN has a growing Social media presence via the PPN website, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram platforms.

In-person and online training events are undertaken during the year on a range of topics including Funding, Committee skills, Online Communications and Budget Projections. Informing and representing the PPN membership and developing the capacity of members are key elements of the PPN remit. Offaly PPN are members of

the Midland Regional PPN and meets quarterly to network and deliver on cross county projects.

Tidy Towns Network

The Offaly Tidy Towns Network is in place since 2011 and is a collaborative project of the Community and Heritage sections of Offaly County Council. Tidy Towns Network meetings are held two to three times a year when advice, information and invaluable networking between members takes place. Dr Christy Boylan, Tidy Towns Adjudicator, provided invaluable advice to the members of Tidy Towns groups present at a network meeting in April 2024.

The SuperValu TidyTowns competition is now in its 66th consecutive year. The Competition contains a number of Special Awards such as the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan Award, the Young Persons in TidyTowns Award, the Heritage Award and the Leave No Trace Award among others, which bring an added dimension to the competition. The results of all categories will be announced at the latter end of 2024.

Pride of Place 2024

This is an annual competition organised by Co-operation Ireland and sponsored by IPB Insurance which promotes and celebrates the best in community development. The competition is about communities demonstrating pride in their heritage, culture, achievements, people, and place.

It is an All-Island competition whereby local authorities from across the Island of Ireland nominate groups in their communities who they feel have made a significant contribution to improving their neighbourhood by working collectively.

In 2024 Offaly County Council nominated the following groups:

MD	Community Group	Category
Edenderry	Acorn Project	Community Youth Initiative
Tullamore	International Welcome Centre	Inclusive Communities
Birr	Banagher Development Group	Population - 1000-2000



Pride of Place judges with members of Banagher Development Group and Council staff at Crank House Banagher on 24th July 2024.

Judging in the three Municipal Districts took place on 24th & 25th July 2024 with the two judges extremely impressed with the efforts of all groups to promote positive community action. The awards ceremony is scheduled to be held on Saturday 2nd November 2024 in Monaghan,



Pride of Place judges with members of the Acorn Project, Councillor Noel Cribbin and Council staff at the judging event on 25th July 2024.



Pride of Place judges with members of the International Welcome Centre, Councillor Declan Harvey and Council staff at the Pride of Place judging event on 24th July 2024.

Integration

Local Authority Integration Team

The Offaly County Council Local Authority Integration Team (LAIT) was established in 2024 and consists of 4 members: Integration Support Coordinator; 2 Integration Support Workers; Assistant Staff Officer Admin Support. A LAIT has been established in each Local Authority.

The Roles are funded by the Department of Disability, Community Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and LAITs are coordinated on a national level by the LGMA.

The purpose of the LAIT is to help coordinate all support within Offaly available to people who are applying for international protection, have refugee status and others in similar situations.

The goal of the work carried out by the LAIT is to help International Protection Applicants and Refugees to become independent, settle into their new communities and participate in Irish life by connecting refugees to important services that can help them integrate into the community.

LAITs provide support for the following cohorts:

- Applicants for International Protection (IP)
- People who have been granted refugee status or other forms of protection, such as subsidiary protection or permission to remain
- Refugees who have been resettled in Ireland through a government programme
- Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTPs) – Those fleeing the war in Ukraine

The guiding principle which LAITs operate under is 'Integration from Day One' meaning that the team in Offaly will provide integration supports as soon as the abovementioned cohorts arrive in the County. The team organises regular clinics in each of the accommodation centres in the county allowing for both group information sessions or one on one meetings with residents. Issues encountered by the Team when engaging with the relevant cohort can be summarised as follows:

- Providing assistance with problems experienced when dealing with public services
- Connecting new arrivals with services like legal aid, childcare, access to school places and healthcare
- Connecting new arrivals with services that improve their ability to live independently, like job training, English classes, education, and apprenticeships
- Guiding new arrivals through the process of applying for financial support, medical help
- Supporting people if they face racism or other unfair treatment, helping them report it to the right authorities

- Helping vulnerable new arrivals get in touch with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other services if they need extra help

The LAIT also promotes integration through the organisation of events, along with other stakeholders in Offaly, to which invites are extended to the target cohorts. These events may be specific to a particular part of the county or county wide and can include collaboration with local sports clubs through the holding of meet and greets or with other agencies/stakeholders such as OLDC and Offaly Sports Partnership. The Team recently collaborated with Edenderry Volleyball Club and Offaly Sports Partnership in organising a meet and greet night for the residents of two centres in Edenderry called 'Volleyball for All' which proved to be very successful and resulted in a number of new memberships with the club.



Volleyball for All event in Edenderry GAA Centre

It is envisaged that in 2025 LAIT will continue to expand its clinic schedule in the accommodation centres

throughout the County with an emphasis on new arrivals. As the Team becomes more settled into its role further Integration events will be planned also.

Offaly Community Integration Forum

Following the military invasion of Ukraine the Offaly Community Response Forum (CRF), was established and has meets regularly. The meetings provide useful sharing of information and invaluable co-ordination of communication of support services between agencies. In 2024 DCEDIY directed that the CRFs in each Local Authority be realigned with a view to expanding their remit to include the needs of International Protection Applicants, Those with Status (TwS) and Irish Refugees Protection Programme (IRPP).

The forum was renamed to the Community Integration Forum and its first meeting was in held in April 2024. The CIF meets monthly.

The membership includes:

Offaly County Council	Health Service Executive
Offaly Local Development Company	Offaly Volunteer Centre
Citizens Information Service	County Childcare Committee
Department of Social Protection	SVP
An Garda Síochána	Local Link Laois Offaly
Offaly Library Service	Túsla
Laois Offaly ETB	Family Resource Centres
Offaly Domestic Violence Support Services	Tuath Housing

The main purpose of the Community Integration Forum is to provide a co-ordinated response to support the refugees arriving into the county. Issues being dealt with by the Forum include:

- Sharing of Information
- Access to Dept Social Protection Supports
- Medical Cards and access to GP's
- School Placements
- Needs Identification
- Ukrainian specific accommodation
- Integration Activities
- Language Classes
- Education Options
- Employment Assistance

Ukrainian Response

The LAIT role is also to engage with Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BoTP) of which there are 1,100 in state contracted accommodation in Offaly.

The Ukrainian Response Section in Offaly County Council worked with the LGMA on the Refurbishment Programme which involved progressing a number of accommodation centres in the county, which are specifically for BoTPs, from proposal stage up to entering a contract with DCEDIY. The refurbishment programme will not be in place for 2025.

The Offer-A-Home Scheme has proved to be successful in Offaly with 60 properties pledged and occupied through the scheme. Offaly County Council ensures the property meets the required standard at which point it is referred to The Irish Red Cross who match suitable families and individuals to the property on behalf of Offaly County Council. The Offer a Home Scheme has been extended to the end of 2025 and suitable properties continue to be sought.

The Rapid Build scheme at Clonminch was completed and has been occupied by Ukrainian Refugees since December 2023. All 64 units fully occupied, and the site is managed by the Tuath AHB.

Local Enterprise Office



LEO Offaly manages the Enterprise, Economic Development and Tourism Functions within Offaly County Council.

Through a wide range of activities and targeted work programmes, Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Offaly works to deliver Offaly County Council's Mission Statement "To lead sustainable economic, social and community development in Offaly."



Core Activities:

- First Stop Shop for anyone thinking of setting up or growing a business
- Business Advice, Mentoring and Coaching
- Enterprise Training
- Networking Events and Seminars
- Finance, Grants and Loan Finance
- Promoting Entrepreneurship

Key Enterprise Highlights 2024

LEO Offaly is the First Stop Shop for anyone looking to set up or grow a business. Throughout the county, aspiring and existing businesses owners receive support through targeted mentoring, enterprise and management training, funding, and networking. LEO Offaly also provides consultancy days to assist with business strategy and development. LEO Offaly actively encourages business owners to engage with their LEO office both when times are going well, and when there are difficulties. LEO Offaly's monthly electronic newsletter issues to over 5,000 subscribers.

Training, Seminars and Events

Throughout the year, LEO Offaly delivers a wide range of enterprise training and business events. In 2024, LEO Offaly continued to deliver many training programmes online while also arranging a number of in-person training and networking events. In the first three quarters of 2024, over 575 business people participated in enterprise training programmes and a further 230 people availed of one-to-one mentoring.

Improved business efficiencies, innovation, export and sustainability



In 2024, LEO Offaly worked closely with Enterprise Ireland to promote a range of targeted initiatives to help businesses become more efficient and productive. They include Green for Business, the Energy Efficiency Grant, Lean for Business and Digital for Business. These supports have been extended and are now open to businesses that employ between 1 and 50 people, ensuring more businesses can access targeted supports. These Productivity Initiatives are promoted nationally through the *All in a Day's Work* campaign (www.allinadayswork.ie) and locally via LEO Offaly.

In 2024, LEO Offaly together with the Midland LEOs of Westmeath, Longford and Laois developed a suite of videos featuring local businesses that have availed of the initiatives. These will be promoted throughout 2025 to increase awareness of the supports, and to highlight dynamic local enterprises.

To complement this campaign, LEO Offaly has introduced a free mentoring session to Offaly businesses owners so that they can learn more about the initiatives and which supports would best suit them. The initiatives are either free or heavily subsidised and can be completed over a 2 to 5 day period.

Pilot to Support Businesses with International Ambition

In 2024, LEO Offaly worked with Enterprise Ireland on a new Pilot Initiative for Manufacturing and Internationally Traded Service Businesses employing up to 50 people. Qualifying businesses, with an ambition to export, can apply and subject to criteria, be supported by either LEO Offaly or Enterprise Ireland. The initial support is towards the creation of an Internationalisation Plan. Following on from that, the business may be assigned to either LEO Offaly or Enterprise Ireland where they can apply for financial supports.

Entrepreneurship Promotion – Student Enterprise, Female Entrepreneurship

Student Enterprise - LEO Offaly is one of a few Local Enterprise Offices nationally that runs Student Enterprise Programmes at both Primary and Secondary levels.

In 2024, for the **Primary Level**, there were 9 participating schools and **28 participating pupils**. At **Secondary Level**, there were 14 participating schools and **757 participants**.

Female Entrepreneurship – National Women's Enterprise Day Midlands Region took place on Thursday, October 17th, 2024, in the Crypt under St. Mel's Cathedral in Longford and gave women from Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath a chance to network, learn and be inspired by other women in business. Over 120 women attended the event.

Local Enterprise Priorities for 2025

LEO Offaly's annual work plan for 2025 includes the following:

- Preparation and Publication of the Local Enterprise Development Plan 2025-2028
- Implementation of the Local Enterprise Plan, under the headings of Business Information & Advisory Services; Enterprise Support Services; Entrepreneurship Support Services; and Local Enterprise Development Services.
- Implementation of relevant Enterprise Actions in the Local Economic & Development Plan (LECP)
- Collaboration with stakeholders on the implementation of actions under the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan. These include actions for the Midlands Food & Drink Cluster and the Midlands ICT Cluster.



Economic Development

In 2024, Offaly County Council's Economic Development Team progressed:

- Grand Canal Harbour Masterplan – Public Consultation, AA/SEA Screening and Masterplan all completed
- Co-Working Hubs – Expansion to 25J The Junction Office Suites completed with 9 new turnkey offices and one warehouse developed.
- Rhode Green Energy Park – Infrastructural works completed. Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for Industrial Sites sought. Competition closed and submissions under review
- Ferbane Business Park – Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for Industrial Sites sought. Competition closed and submissions under review.

Economic Objectives for 2025

- Implementation of Actions within the Offaly Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan 2022-2027
- Implementation of aligned actions in the Local Economic & Development Plan and the Corporate Plan
- Collaboration with stakeholders on Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan initiatives, including Midlands Pathway to Transition, Midlands Placemaking Programme and Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan
- Progression of Acquisition and Development of New Industrial Sites

- Rhode Green Energy Park – actively engage with businesses to develop as an eco-industrial park.
- Develop Marketing and Promotion of Offaly as The Green Energy County
- Co-Working Hubs – Identify and implement cost-effective ways of reducing the administrative and operational cost of managing the hubs
- Co-Working Hubs – Implement cost-effective ways of reducing the carbon footprint of the co-working hubs, building on the Green for Business Energy Audit undertaken in 2024.



Tourism

Offaly Tourism team works collaboratively with Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and other bodies and agencies to advance tourism in Offaly and the wider region. The team supports Offaly Tourism Marketing (CLG) which is a marketing group established to promote Offaly as a tourist destination to relevant key markets.

Tourism has a valuable role to play as a driver of economic growth and as a contributor to the sustainability of rural communities in Offaly. The tourism team develop and implement an annual Strategic Marketing Plan and actions which focuses on marketing and promotion in order to increase visitor numbers, dwell time and help the industry sustain and flourish.

Key Tourism Highlights 2024

Marketing

The implementation of the Annual Marketing Plan includes public relations, advertising and social media but also a myriad of smaller marketing activities to reach various target audiences including blogs, ezines, competitions, marketing collateral.

- Social Media followers continue to grow at +21K (Increase of 40% over last 3 years)
- Summer advertising campaign over the national radio stations, Newstalk & Today FM, Spin1038 & 98FM

- Tracks and Trails episode focusing on three Offaly trails broadcast on a primetime RTE 1 slot (sponsored by OCC, Tourism dept)
- Successful partnerships with high reach influencers over social media; Rachel Gorry & Jane Casey (Jane Casey Instagram; 322k plays & 14k likes, TikTok)

Events/Shows

Festivals and Events area are great vehicle to attract visitors, and they continued throughout 2024, with the recurring annual Birr Vintage Week and Arts festival and Tullamore Tradfest along with welcoming novel events like Rás Tailteann to Tullamore & Cannonball to Edenderry (which were sponsored by the Tourism department).

Holiday World Show

Offaly Tourism exhibited once again in the Holiday World Show in January 2024. This three-day show is Ireland's largest tourism exhibition, with an attendance of approx. 70,000. It was a great success with a captive audience and especially a great interest in the outdoors!



Tullamore Show

Offaly Tourism along with Local Enterprise Office Offaly showcased the best of Offaly tourism, artisan food and craft at the Tullamore Show in 2024. With glorious weather we welcomed a large footfall to the Experience Offaly Pavilion.



The Irish Hot Air Ballooning Championships

Offaly once again proudly hosted The Irish Hot Air Ballooning Championships in September 2024. Now in its 52nd year, Offaly County Council tourism team co-sponsored the event, bringing worldwide visitors to Tullamore for the weeklong festivities to the delight of onlookers.



Photo credit: Paul Moore

Fáilte Ireland EU Just Transition Fund

Our Tourism Activator worked throughout 2024 to guide, assist and support applicants for the Investment Grant Aid Scheme for Private & Community SMES. Her role is in building awareness and confidence in the potential of tourism in Offaly, elicit quality ideas and grant applications, guide and assist in applications and to build strong networks among our tourism businesses.

New Offaly Tourism Strategy 2023 - 2027

The new Tourism Strategy 2023-2027 is advancing towards completion. The new Strategy will guide the recovery, growth and development of the tourism sector in Offaly. It is a clearly articulated, measurable and actionable strategy to enable recovery and sustained growth within the tourism sector in Offaly.



Tourist Office

The tourist office in Tullamore continued to welcome visitors throughout 2024. Manned by a dedicated team of volunteers, the numbers visiting remaining steady.



Priorities for 2025

- Implementation of the new Offaly Tourism Strategy in partnership with our stakeholders and working closely with Fáilte Ireland to deliver the Mid Shannon Interim Action Plan.

- Launch of a new brand identity for **Visit Offaly**, to create a positive impact on target markets, customers and stakeholders, to increase brand awareness and loyalty, and, ultimately, to drive business growth within the industry.
- Redesign of our website www.visitoffaly.ie with the assistance of the Digital Transformation grant funding under the with EU Just Transition Fund Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Scheme. Incorporating the new branding and new design elements, the website will be a modern, user-friendly experience, appealing to our target markets.
- Focus on marketing of the Slieve Bloom area, which now includes the completed Mountain Bike Trails, in partnership with relevant stakeholders and partners.



- Continue to work with and support the industry with EU Just Transition Fund Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Scheme; helping to maximise the potential of each enterprise that has received funding under the Scheme through ongoing support; developing and nurturing high-functioning clusters of tourism SMEs and experienced providers who can elevate the visibility and promotion of the destination now and into the future.
- Work closely with Bord na Mona and Fáilte Ireland on the design and development of the Trail Network Development Scheme funded by the EU Just Transition Fund Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Scheme for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026.
- Assist and advise the Irelands Hidden Heartlands team with the development of a new Visitor Experience Development Plan for the Mid Shannon Region.
- Assist the OPW and partners in the implementation of the Clonmacnoise Masterplan.


OFFALY
 IRELAND'S HIDDEN GEM

Division E – Environmental Services

Waste Management

Derryclure Landfill

A significant body of work commenced in 2024 on essential maintenance and clear up of the Derryclure site to meet requirements of EPA landfill licence. These major works will ensure routine maintenance in the years that follow will satisfy the compliance requirements.

A full review of all activities at the landfill has been ongoing in 2024 to determine where improvements can be made with operational plant and equipment. This is again with a view to looking to the future to find efficiencies and potential cost reductions. A Closure, Restoration and Aftercare Management Plan has been prepared. The Report provides up-to-date costings that deal with site decommissioning and known liabilities for the facility at closure.

Recycling Facilities

There are currently 39 bring banks in the County for glass, aluminium & steel cans recycling on both private and public sites. Offaly County Council pays for the recycling of the glass by the service provider, Glassco Ltd. as per the tender agreement. Prior to June 2024 Offaly County Council received an income from Glassco for the aluminium and steel cans.

However, following the introduction of the Deposit rebate Scheme, Glassco have advised all local authorities that they are no longer in a position to pay a rebate to the Councils for cans due to the loss of income as a result of the bring bank collection system.

Prior to June 2024 Offaly County Council invoiced Coppertale for the collection and processing of textiles at bring banks located in the county. Due to a reduction in national and international textile markets, Coppertale contacted Councils to advise they were not in a position to pay a rebate to Councils.

Offaly County Council decided to leave the current banks in situ for 12 months but this will be reviewed in summer 2025.

Civic Amenity Sites

The contract to operate and manage 3 civic amenity sites at Birr, Derryclure and Edenderry was awarded to Oxygen in May 2022 for an initial period of 2 years. These sites accept a wide range of materials for recycling and complement our existing Bring Bank facilities. Charges apply for certain waste brought to these facilities, items such as waste electrical electronic equipment, glass, packaging and batteries are free. The gate fees of these facilities are retained by the contractor under the terms of the current service agreement.

The success of the Deposit Return Scheme may also have an impact on civic amenity costs. Reports indicate that the much reduced recovery of aluminum by Civic Amenity operators is leading to higher costs to local authorities. This remains a risk, in addition to the general risk of recycling material commodity prices on the open market.

Offaly County Council will review the potential and feasibility of on-site storage of used mattresses for recycling at Civic Amenities to enhance Circularity in line with government policy.

Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy – Ireland’s National Waste Policy 2020-2025

Offaly County Council staff work with our regional colleagues to implement the policies of the National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy. This plan provides a framework to support the transition to a circular economy in Ireland. The plan includes specific targets, policies, and actions to enable the waste and resource sector to meet the circularity challenge and accelerate the transition to a circular economy.

Waste Enforcement

We continue to investigate all illegal waste activities and instigate legal proceedings where appropriate. Inspections and audits of the operations of the 57 Waste Collection Permit holders and the 18 Waste Facility Permit Holders in the functional area are ongoing.

From 1st January to the start of October, the Environment Section received 805 complaints, an increase of 6% on the same period for 2023.

Complaint Category	Number
Air Pollution (Dust/odour/emissions)	18
Litter pollution (fly tipping/casual litter/litter on property)	521
Waste (dumping/burning/unauthorised sites)	62
Noise (community/commercial/industrial)	26
Control of Horses	15
Control of Dogs	73
Water Quality	18

Waste Conviction Register

Offaly has taken legal action against 1 individual for storage of domestic waste in 2024. This case is pending a court date. However, this is a repeat offence under Section 32(1) of the Waste Management Act, 1996.

The Environment Department maintains a Convictions Register which is updated regularly.

In 2024, the section issued 4 litter fines were issued and all were paid.

Anti-Dumping Initiative

An application was made to DECC under the Anti-Dumping Initiative 2024 for a grant to address waste issues within County Offaly. Two Projects were approved, the clean-up of an illegal dumping site and preparations for the installation of CCTV at

this blackspot were carried out in September 2024. It is anticipated that similar funding may be secured in 2025, with projects to be based on national priorities & local need.

Anti-Litter Anti-Graffiti Grant

In April 2024, Offaly County Council were advised of an allocation of €16,000 from DECC for anti-litter and anti-graffiti initiatives. Initiatives implemented included:

- the provision of litter supplies for communities,
- Composting for Schools Project,
- Awareness campaigns
- Fast Fashion Initiatives for Secondary Schools.

All individual projects were co-funded by Offaly County Council.

Environmental Educational and Awareness Projects

Green School Awareness Programme

Offaly County Council continues its support to all primary and secondary schools as part of this awareness programme. A teacher training seminar was held on in October with An Taisce, to advise schools on their journey towards applying for their Green Flag. The Environment Section also supports schools financially by funding specific environmental projects. In the last school term, Offaly County Council participated in a ReLove Fashion programme with the Rediscovery Centre, aimed at second level schools to address sustainable fashion initiatives. This proved very successful with two schools participating in the national finals. Following its success, this has been re-introduced in 2024 and is currently ongoing, with 13 entries (projects).

In 2023, Offaly County Council piloted a Composting for Schools Programme with Munster Technological University and Clean Technology Cork. To date, the programme is very successful with positive feedback from the schools. Three more schools are participating in 2024.

For 2024, Offaly County Council supported a new litter initiative in primary schools called Picker Pals. This is a fun programme where schools sign up to tackle litter in their local school and community. Schools are given packs and have workshops based around litter. It is both educational and hands-on. There are 17 schools participating this year in our County with Offaly County Council financially supporting the programme.

Litter Picks

In 2024 to date, Offaly County Council has supported the collection and disposal of 263 litter picks by members of the public. These collections in total weighed 30.1 tonnes. Offaly County Council continues their support all year round to Community groups.

Air Quality

The EPA air quality monitoring network has observed over the past number of years that the air pollution levels in Edenderry are a matter for concern, particularly in relation to sulphur and particulate matter.

In response, Offaly County Council, in collaboration with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) and the Health Service Executive (HSE) Public Health Unit, has proposed a multifaceted clean air initiative. This project aims:

- to gain localised insights to the issue around fuel burning in residential settings in Edenderry,
- identify a programme of measures that could be implemented in targeted areas
- conduct a community engagement programme to bring about change.

Offaly County Council secured €80,000 from DECC to carry out an Awareness & Education Campaign, including Household Survey Air Quality Monitoring & Analysis Programme Communications with Communities.

This project commenced in Quarter 4 2024 and will continue into 2025. It is envisaged that this study will inform an options analysis to reduce PM Air Pollution by reducing domestic solid fuel burning/emissions., further informing our retrofit strategy in Edenderry.

Climate Action

In February 2024 the elected members of Offaly County Council adopted the local authority's first Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 (LACAP). This plan aims to translate national climate policy into local actions helping the country meet legally binding climate and energy obligations. The LACAP contains almost 120 actions across 6 thematic areas of focus encompasses all forms of climate action including mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity enhancement. Our LACAP sets the framework for a dedicated 'Decarbonising Zone' (DZ) which sees Tullamore as the nominated geographical area. It is envisaged that the DZ will be a testbed of ambitious and innovative climate actions that could be successfully scaled up and rolled out across the county and region. The LACAP is an exciting plan, and the actions contained within will require significant effort and investment.

The plan sets out actions which will encourage and support our local communities to strengthen their capacity and resilience to climate change, supported by funding through the Community Climate Action Fund (€444,000) launched in Quarter 1 2024. Phase 1 of this scheme sees 19 individual local community groups receive 100% funding towards locally implemented climate action projects.

In our efforts to achieve legally binding energy targets of 50% increases in efficiency (currently at 38.5%) and 51% reductions of greenhouse gas emissions, Offaly County Council have taken positive steps towards implementing international best practice in energy management by signing up for the SEAI ISO 50,001 Accelerator Programme. This programme runs until December 2024 and it is envisaged that accreditation will be sought early in 2025. The organization has assigned a dedicated Energy Engineer to drive embedment of this new Energy Management System while also engaging with SEAI on their deep retrofit 'Pathfinder Programme'.

This funding programme sees 50% funding coming from SEAI, through the national Climate Action Fund, to assist public bodies deep retrofit their corporate buildings in order to reduce their greenhouse gases.

Offaly County Council continue to show real leadership in Climate Action through our participation in European initiatives such as NBS EduWORLD, which aims to enhance nature based solution education across the continent, and through active engagement as a signatory to the EU Mission on Climate Adaptation.

An increasing number of projects will be progressed following on from the actions agreed within the Offaly County Council Climate Action Plan, from drainage, flood relief, EV infrastructure, solar PV, building retrofits to biodiversity and paperless offices. These projects are being carried out by a number of different sections throughout the organisation. Climate Action will continue our focus on building capability in Energy Action in 2025, to lead the delivery of energy related initiatives, and engage with funding streams to deliver on energy efficiency and reduction measures. A key priority for 2025 will be the ramping up of engagement, supporting structures, initiatives and actions within the Tullamore Decarbonising Zone in 2025.

Burial Grounds

Capital Works

St. Mary's Cemetery, Edenderry: Main works are currently being finalised and the extension will provide an extra 300 burial spaces in the cemetery. Finalisation and landscaping will follow in early 2025.

The extensions of Clonmacnoise, Cappincur and Cloncrane burial grounds will be further investigated in 2025. Resources will need to be allocated annually in the coming years to fund the necessary works. We will also be carrying out some minor works in various cemeteries, such as extra plinths in St. Michael's Cemetery, Portarlinton, a new driveway in Killeigh Cemetery, and plinths for new lawn section in Boher Cemetery.

Maintenance and Upkeep

Cemetery Committees: We are working with 17 cemetery committees, and we look forward to working with two new committees that have been formed in 2024. There are grants and assistance available from the CAERW section and we welcome engagement from groups that are currently maintaining their local cemetery or planning on forming a committee to do that.

National Waste Collection Permit Office (NWCPO)

There are 2,022 waste collection permits on the NWCPO register and 258 applications pending. 417 permits were due for renewal in 2024 and of these 224 review applications and 102 new applications were received up to the end of October. This number of applications was in line with projections and the 5-year waste collection permit cycle.

Incentivised Charging Study

The NWCPO has engaged Eunomia Consulting to undertake a study into incentivised charging for household and commercial kerbside waste collections. The study is being coordinated by the NWCPO and funded by DECC. The study is expected to be completed in January 2025 and the findings will inform national waste policy and the re-casting of the waste collection regulations.

Legal Matters

Two cases have been sent, by agreement, from the district court to the High Court as consultative cases stated for legal interpretation of the relevant law.

The first matter related to the NWCPO interpretation of Fit and Proper Person criteria as provided for in the Waste Management Act. The court found that the NWCPO's interpretation was correct whereby we are prohibited from granting a waste collection permit to operators that have prescribed convictions.

An application for Judicial Review (JR) has been lodged with the High Court, challenging the constitutionality of the legislation. The NWCPO is the first Respondent, with Ireland and the Attorney General, and the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications as the second, third and fourth Respondents.

The second matter related to the interpretation of the requirement on waste collectors to provide a food waste collection service and was heard in the High Court on May 14, 2024. A judgement was made on June 13 confirming that the NWCPO's interpretation of the legislation was the correct one.

NWCPO Office Enhancement and Tender for funding model

The NWCPO has engaged Indecon, International Strategic, Economic and Management Consultants to examine the existing funding model and design a new funding model for application fees, administration fees, local authority contributions and other stakeholder contributions. The funding model needs to cover the operational costs of the NWCPO and provide for a legal reserve. The funding model will also inform the waste collection permit application fee for the re-casting of the waste collection permit regulations.

Re-Casting of Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations

The NWCPO continues to prepare a submission to DECC for the recasting of the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations. The matters arising in recent court cases are taken into consideration. We will engage with other stakeholders as work progresses.

Fire Services

Activities in 2024

Offaly County Council Fire & Rescue Service provided an effective and professional response to emergencies on a 24/7, 365-day basis throughout 2024. Offaly County Council Fire & Rescue Service respond to an average of 600 incidents and 700 station callouts throughout the county per annum.

During 2024 Offaly Fire Service commenced the implementation of the Workplace Relations Commission recommendations for retained fire fighters. These recommendations, along with the pay elements, have seen the recruitment of additional firefighters and has provided structured time off for firefighters. Significant additional costs have been incurred, with elements of the cost recoupable from the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management.

The Council's commitment to training for fire fighters, and research into the latest equipment and technology, ensures that our fire crews are best equipped to respond quickly, safely and effectively to the full range of emergency incidents that we attend.

Offaly County Council Fire Service is also responsible for the assessment of all Fire Safety Certificates, Dangerous Substances, and Disabled Access Certificate applications, and providing advice on planning referrals. The Service also processes licence applications, undertakes fire safety inspections of public premises and manages fire safety promotion campaigns. Offaly Fire service is actively involved in the Community Smoke Alarm Project and also delivered the Fire Safety Schools program to all primary schools in the county.

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

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

Equipment & Capital Expenditure

The Training Centre in Tullamore is utilised for the training of Offaly Firefighters and is leased by other Fire Authorities and non-Local Authority organisations. Construction has commenced on our new Training and Development Centre in Tullamore with completion due in March 2025. The total cost which is €4 million will be funded by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management.

A site for a new Fire Station in Clara, has been identified in Raheen. In 2024, the Fire Service continued to engage with the National Directorate of Fire and Emergency Management for funding which has now been secured. The appointment of design consultants will take place shortly.

March 2024 also saw the delivery of a new fire tender which has been assigned to Edenderry. This has been acquired through funding of €450,000 from the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management.

2025 will see the delivery of an additional new fire tender, which will be located in Birr

Funding was also obtained in 2024 from the National Directorate for the provision of a new incident command vehicle

Civil Defence

Civil Defence provides an emergency response capability and supports the community and events throughout the year.

2024 brought a new change and direction to Offaly Civil Defence and with the continued support of all involved and the implementation of the 'Towards 2030 Civil Defence Policy' Offaly County Council will play its part in the future development of the organisation and continue to support the Principal Response Agencies in the years ahead.

Division F – Recreation & Amenity

Library Services

Offaly County Library Service continues to deliver on the objectives outlined in: **The Library is the Place: Information, Recreation, Inspiration** National Public Library Strategy 2023 – 2027.

‘Creating Space’ Offaly Libraries’ Development Plan 2024 – 2028

Offaly Libraries’ ambitious new plan (adopted in May 2024) responds to the evolving needs of our communities and aligns with significant local and national policy. It outlines eighty-three objectives across nine strategic areas, all anchored in three central themes of **People, Spaces** and **Connections and Culture**.

We continue to harness innovative technologies, including *My Open Library* services, and utilise our unique civic spaces to strengthen the role of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works, skills and experiences. Particular efforts are directed towards embedding Social Inclusion, Climate Adaptation and Accessibility in support of increasing user engagement. We promote the services on offer through newsletters, interactive cultural programmes and via various social media platforms.

2024 Departmental Grant Awards to Offaly Libraries

€12.2 million DRCD RRDF Funding: to develop a new community library & arts base in Edenderry and regenerate the centre of the town.

€13,360 Dormant Account Funding: for Library Supports for Marginalised, Socially Excluded and Disadvantaged Communities. Assistive technology such as Looky Books and wheelchair accessible furniture were secured as part of this grant.

€9,965 Healthy Offaly Funding and €2,400 Healthy Ireland Funding: Towards a curated series of health education seminars and events.

€6,000 CYPSC Funding: Supporting Offaly Libraries’ Parenting Support Programme, curated in partnership with Laois Libraries

€2,000 CYPSC Funding: Supporting Offaly Libraries Sensory Offaly programme.



Reading & Literacy Development

Right to Read Festivals



Learning and Information Services

eResources and Age Friendly



Community and Culture Provision

Healthy Ireland and Sensory Offaly



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development



Healthy Offaly

Capital Development: Edenderry Library and Arts Space



Part 8 Planning was received for the development of a new library and arts space for Edenderry in early 2024.

The project was awarded **€12.2 million in RRDF funding** from the Department of Rural and Community Development for the provision of the new library and arts space and to regenerate the centre of the town in May. The project is now in 'detailed design phase'.

Library Buildings Developments

My Open Library services successfully installed in Kilcormac Library

Sensory Space, Birr Library – Dedicated Sensory Space now on offer in Birr

Additional **Accessible signage, hearing loops and leisure reading areas** installed around the county

Library refurbishment works and upgrades – completed in Banagher and Ferbane libraries and ongoing in Tullamore and Kilcormac



Reading and Literacy Development

Bibliographic Services and Reader Services

Offaly Libraries continue to implement objectives and procedures for the purchase, management and promotion of items across library collections.

These collections comprise books, periodicals, equipment, audio-visual materials and electronic resources and serve to support the people of Offaly in a lifelong habit of reading, learning and library use. Through Reader Services we aim to respond to patrons' needs and interests and monitor collections for currency, quality and use.

We support the wider library team in creating and implementing events and programmes during the course of the year. We supply quality bookclub titles to a wide network of Book Clubs; Class Sets to support school reading programmes; and books are chosen to complement reading initiatives and festivals. Specialist areas of collection development this year included **Sustainable Development Goals related materials, Irish Language publications and Age-Friendly audiobooks on CD.**

Preparations are currently underway to implement a **new short loan collection for all age groups**, improving the availability of high interest titles and the 'browsing experience'.



Adult Literacy for Life (ALL)

ALL is a whole-of-society strategy. It aims to ensure that everyone has the literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills to participate in society and succeed in life.

Offaly Libraries actively participate and collaborate with stakeholders in the ALL Regional Coalition Action Plan, and contribute to shaping the local support landscape. We help champion adult literacy and expand pathways for learners with the goal of building a stronger, more inclusive community, removing barriers to empower adults to build their literacy skills.



ICT & Digital Resources Developments:

- 10,500+ Newsletter Subscribers
- Digitisation Equipment acquired to support access to and engagement with Local Studies resources
- New iMacs, iPads and public PCs, supporting further digital inclusion, were rolled out. Funded by DRCD under a grant award of €58,854, this important advancement was 10% match funded by OCC.
- Assistive Technologies including digital readers acquired



- Launch of Age Friendly Digital Skills programme in Banagher Library using Acorn Tablets, in collaboration with Offaly County Council, IS, and other key partners



Reading Eggs subscription was renewed for 2024-2025, with the addition of 100 licenses. This means Offaly Libraries now offer **350 free licenses** for Primary School students

Increased Borrowbox Offerings – expanded eServices now include eNewspapers and eMagazines in one app. **Over 35,600 items issued in 2024!**

Community Integration:

Offaly Libraries work as part of the wider Offaly County Council Community Integration Forum in support of the people of Ukraine and those in International Protection Accommodation Services, in the following ways:

Free events were delivered specifically to those in **International Protection Accommodation Service centres** this year as part of our **Cruinniú na nÓg** and **Parenting Support programmes**.

In June, Offaly Libraries partnered with OCC's Integration Team to celebrate **Refugee Week**, delivering storytimes to over 75 children.

Fáilte Isteach are conversational **English Classes** which take place weekly in Tullamore Library, delivered in partnership with **Offaly Local Development Company**.

Library digital services and publications also have **multi-lingual offerings**, including Ukrainian.

Innovative Events and Curated Programmes
at Offaly Libraries
Delivered Online and In Branch



Creative Ireland: Offaly Library Service works as part of the Offaly Culture and Creativity team, partnering with Heritage, Arts, Community, LEO and culture administrative officer to deliver a diverse and innovative events programme across the county in line with the Offaly Culture & Creativity Strategy 2023-2027.

Offaly Libraries Comic Con welcomed **1,400 visitors** to Tullamore Library on Saturday 14th September 2024



Cruinniú na nÓg 2024 offered 28 free events delivered to 482 children all over the county



Offaly Libraries STEAM programme, kindly co-funded by Creative Ireland, successfully delivered **172 free events with 3,808 attendees** so far in 2024.



The STEAM programme was also included in Offaly County Council's win for Best Communications / Innovation at the LAMA Awards in February 2024.



Right to Read: Offaly Libraries continues to offer exciting events within the four national pillars. Almost **500 Free Events** offered so far under Spring Into Storytime and Summer Stars, with a combined **attendance of 8,207**.



Sensory spaces on offer in three branches, supported with curated events and an expansive range of **Sensory Toys, Books and Assistive Technology** available to borrow.

Sensory Offaly
Space to Grow at Offaly Libraries

Parenting Programme: with **CYPSC** funding, currently underway with **17 Free events** delivered in **partnership with Laois Libraries** this Autumn 2024.

Offaly & Laois Libraries:
Parent Support Programme

Age Friendly Libraries & Positive Ageing Week with **22 free Events** including an **Intergenerational Robotics Workshops**, which saw **12 families, 35 people** total, attend the first session. Accessible Seating, Shelving & Inclusive Technologies in all our branches.



Healthy Ireland at your Library: working with LGMA, Dept. of Health and local Healthy Ireland partners, Offaly Libraries delivers a varied programme of free events both online and in branch.



Healthy Ireland
at your Library

Priorities for 2025 include:

- Progress capital development of a new community library and arts space in Edenderry
- Increase promotion of library services especially through online channels including newsletters, interactive cultural programmes & social media
- Showcase Offaly Libraries as the heart of reading and literacy development within our communities
- Contribute to local and national climate and environmental objectives by providing information and programmes for the community via libraries
- Embed strategic alignments and maximise funding opportunities at a local, national and European level
- Libraries at the heart of communities; continue to promote social inclusion and develop innovative partnerships and community and cultural events
- Increase library engagement by developing traditional and digital collections, services and library technology
- Increase active membership by encouraging users back to libraries
- Further strengthen the partnership between Offaly Archives Service and Offaly Libraries, and promote complementary collections
- Review, monitor and evaluate library service activities



Arts Service

Offaly County Council's Arts Office is responsible with investing and developing high quality, imaginative arts activity, with and for the people of Offaly and visitors to the county. In doing so, the arts office advocates for and clearly communicates the significant role that the arts play in enriching the wellbeing of society, of our citizens, and in enhancing the public realm. This is achieved through our strategic planning processes, with an annual programme that is delivered in cooperation with artists, cultural producers, community groups and local stakeholders and, involving regional and national partners. Offaly arts office assists with the development of a range of key county-wide arts programmes such as: **FilmOffaly, Hullabaloo Children's Arts Festival, Anam Beo - Arts and Health, Culture Night**, along with providing ongoing support and advice to the many artists, creative practitioners, festivals, and community groups undertaking arts and culture projects across the county.

2024 - Key achievements

Arts programming

Youth Arts

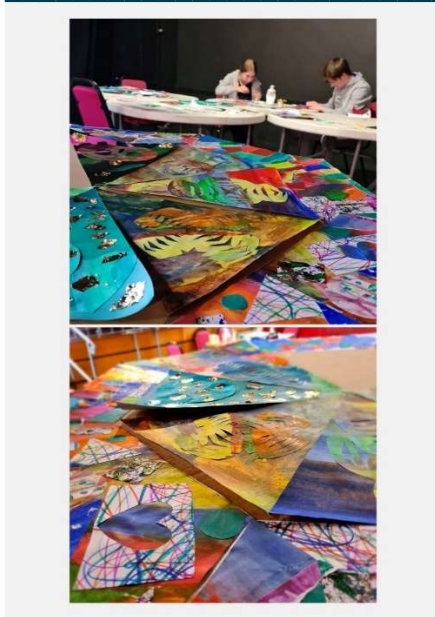
In 2024, the Arts Office continued to implement the findings of the report '*The Makings: Fostering Youth Creativity*', which examines both current and potential arts provision for young people in Offaly, with the purpose to recommend a framework for developing and implementing a new strategic approach for young people's arts provision in the county over the coming five years.

Youth Arts Commissions

The Arts Office continued to develop the Youth Arts Commission programme for 2024. A call was sent out to artists to work with youth groups and communities to develop projects that will enable engagement between professional artists and young people (13+), facilitated by youth organisations, youth leaders and schools. The goal being to build secure relationships with relevant partners for the development of Youth Arts in the county. The voice of the young people is a priority for this programme.

The Arts Office commissioned 2 artists to deliver Youth Art Commissions over the year - Projects included:

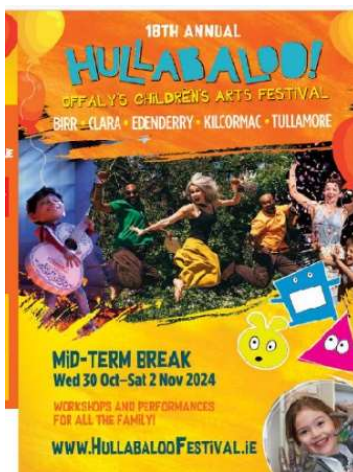
- **Creative Spaces Art Programme:** A project facilitated by Emma Barone, collaborating with the SUBProject (Foroige) youth club in Birr, aiming to provide a platform for artistic expression and personal development for young individuals (13-26) at risk of leaving school early. Comprised workshops across broad spectrum of the arts.



- **Music Residency** with artist Tolü Makay working with Transition year students from Tullamore College, project facilitated by Music Generation Offaly

HULLABALOO! Offaly's Children's Art Festival

Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival returned for 2024: 4 days of Creativity and Imagination for children under 12 and their whole family!



Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival presented a programme of extravaganza, creativity, art making and fun experiences for all the family. Now, in its 18th year, **Hullabaloo!** Offaly's dedicated arts festival for children under 12, ran from Wednesday 30th October to Saturday 2nd November in Birr, Clara, Edenderry and Tullamore with the addition of a programme for Kilcormac this year.

Hullabaloo! is all about creativity, stimulating curiosity, originality and confidence with workshops and family performances with the best artist facilitators from all over Ireland and beyond. Children have fun and experience a medley of high-quality creative experiences, curated to

meet the developmental needs and interests of children of all ages.

The Arts Office worked in partnership with Birr Theatre and Arts Centre, Esker Arts and Creative Places Edenderry to deliver a programme of exciting live events countywide.

Mini Movies

The Arts Office Mini Movies programme for 2024 included a commission to **Young Irish Film Makers** to work in three schools in Birr, Mercy Primary School, St Brendan's Community School and St Brendan's Primary School engaging with a

total of 65 children and young people. YIFM worked with pupils to create short films which were premiered during OFFline Film Festival in October.

FilmOffaly

The FilmOffaly Award 2023 entitled *A Simple Killing* was shot on location in Offaly during 2024. *A Simple Killing* was produced by Western Front Studios Ltd, by Emer Durcan and Mark Carey, and written by Mark Carey and directed by Jason Branagan. The film held a local premiere in Birr during the OFFline Film Festival in October 2024 and the film then entered the national / international film festival circuit.



FilmOffaly Award 2024 – The Arts Office were delighted to announce the winner of the 2024 award entitled *The Cure*, written by Conor Mc Cormick, the film will be produced by Lorcan O’Hanlon for Carousel Pictures Ltd and directed by Conor Mc Cormick. Production commenced production in Offaly in 2024 and will be completed in 2025.

FilmOffaly Resource Development

Offaly County Council Arts Office was successful in an application made to deliver a project co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through the EU Just Transition Fund Programme 2021-2027. The funding provided by the EU Just Transition Fund Programme 2021-2027, enabled the appointment of a film officer for the term of the project, and is hugely welcomed for the Arts and Film in County Offaly and will provide an important phase in the reinvigoration and development of Film Offaly, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. The appointment aligns with the new arts strategy and will have a substantial impact on the delivery of a number of objectives pertaining to FilmOffaly within this plan.

Culture Night Offaly 2024

The Arts Officer once again delivered the highly popular national Culture Night Programme for 2024. Venues and public spaces across Offaly opened their doors to host a programme of free entertainment for Culture Night 2024. This year there was an emphasis on diversity and inclusion with all communities encouraged to come and be part of a range of multi-disciplinary events.



Birr Theatre & Arts Centre hosted *Journeying Together: Celebrating Irish Traveller Traditions and Culture* with celebrated artist Thomas Mc Carthy. Eileen Casey gave an early reading of a play in progress based on the life of Lettice FitzGerald Digby in Birr Library. In **Banagher** at JJ Hough's Singing Pub, commissioned artists Patrick Hough screened his film *Whale Fall*, visitors were also able to enjoy a display of new paintings by Sheila Hough.

In **Clonmacnoise** the evening was celebrated at Granny's Cottage with the event Cupán Tae

sa Chistin. **Clara Musical Society** once again delivered an exciting programme Musical All Sorts to a delighted audience at the Friends Meeting House in Clare. Creative Edenderry hosted '**Cultures of Edenderry**', a special evening celebrating the diverse cultures and nationalities of Edenderry and surrounding areas through showcasing a variety of food, fashion music. In **Edenderry Library** audiences attended Eden Chorale's Autumn Airs.



Dan & Molly's Parlour in **Kilcormac** hosted an evening of art, music and culture in collaboration with Esther Lambe. In **Shinrone**, Cloughmoyle Hall was decorated in the style of an old rambling house with music performed by Ruairí O'Shea and Laura Beth.

Esker Arts in **Tullamore** celebrated their second Culture Night. Events included a children's dance workshop, an Open Youth Busk event hosted by Music Generation Offaly, an exhibition titled *In Dreams* by Arno Kramer and Cecilia Bullo, Sonic Kaleidoscope - a music and visual arts improvisation event, a performance by Alma

Duo, silent film screenings and book launches. Also in Tullamore, events at **John Lee's** brought two DJs together for fans of 80s classics followed by a set fusing jungle and garage. **The library** hosted an evening with bestselling author Patricia Gibney.



Art in the Landscape: Festival of Change – Lough Boora Sculpture Park

The Festival of Change took place in early April this was a joint project between Offaly County Council, Mayo County Council, and Visual Artists Ireland and supported by the Arts Council's Invitation to Collaboration Scheme. The Festival took place at Esker Arts and Lough Boora Sculpture Park and included the opening of two exhibitions of internationally acclaimed artists, as well as a number of workshops, talks and performances. *A Tionól – a gathering of ideas*; was a feature of the day, a creative space to share ideas and an opportunity for participants to share their 'big' or 'small' ideas around Art in the Landscape.



Events at Lough Boora Sculpture Park took place in June including a guided walk and talk, by Dr. Eileen Hutton, artist and lecturer at The Burren College of Art, who discussed the temporary installation of soil chromatography 'trail markers' located along sections of the Sculpture Trail in Lough Boora. The workshops offered an immersive way to approach the unique landscape of Lough Boora.



'La na Mona,' was a curated theatrical experience by Rita Duffy and Nuala Hayes, a performer and storyteller, who offered a whimsical journey through Lough Boora Sculpture Park, with much diversion, entertainment, and inspiration for participants. This surreal and multisensory adventure in the rejuvenated natural setting featured surprise guests including renowned whistle player Séan Ryan, storyteller Michael Creagh and Druid/Seanchai Eimear Burke. Séan Craven and Seamus Barnes brought the past to life with their recounting of the working lives of Bord na Móna workers, whilst actors from local drama group TADS brought fictional characters, inspired by the surroundings to life, to the delight of the audience present.



The Art in The Landscape: Festival of Change Project was shortlisted in the annual Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards under the category Diversity & Inclusion

Creative Places - Edenderry



Creative Places, Edenderry, a project funded by the Arts Council, led by Creative Lives in partnership with Offaly County Council Arts Office and Edenderry Municipal District, continued to host an array of different arts-based activities, workshops and events in a wide range of art forms including Visual Arts, Music, Poetry, Playwriting, Creative Movement; Dance; Ceramics; Drama; Radio, Photography.

Creative Places Edenderry ran an open call for their community seed funding scheme, which saw 7 projects receiving funding of up to €1,000 for creative projects in the Edenderry Community. Grants were awarded based on the strength of the project idea; how well it engaged with the local community in Edenderry; and the artist or group's connection to and interest in Edenderry and the surrounding area.



Creative Places Edenderry also ran a competition for professional artists / creatives or arts organizations/ collectives that wished to collaborate artistically with individuals or groups in Edenderry on creative projects that will create an artistic impact for the people and place of the area. Grants were made available of between €3,000 – €12,000 for up to 4 projects. The following four projects that received funding included:

- **Sarah Walmsley and Elizabeth Drwal | Reflections and Resonance** an intergenerational performance-making project to celebrate living in Edenderry with the canal used to symbolise the enriching and fluid experience of change.
- **John Maguire - Children's Halloween Event** working with St. Mary's Primary School, four different local dance troupes for a performance that includes Ballet, Irish, Line, and Hip-Hop dancers.
- **Laura Phillips - Community Doodle Mural** – a collaborative mural to be displayed at the Youth Café in Edenderry. The mural took shape over a series of engaging workshops held throughout the summer, where children were invited to contribute their unique doodle designs, bringing together their shared creativity while honouring each child's individual style.
- **Eden FM Community Radio | Echoes of Edenderry: Embracing Diversity Through Shared Stories** - with a passion for community development, inclusivity, and diversity the project offered the people of Edenderry to have a chance to have their stories told.



In 2024 Creative Places, Edenderry, was **awarded a 4th year of funding** by the Arts Council and goes from strength the strength engaging communities in Edenderry

Arts Office Supports

ARTS ACT GRANTS

The Arts Acts Grants 2024 were presented and approved in the February council meeting to a value of €19,966. Grants through this scheme were awarded to: Riverview Resources, Banagher Drama Group, Colaiste Naomh Cormac, Coolderry Central School, Crinkill N.S., Dochas Offaly, Eden Chorale, Gemini Players, Irish Midlands Youth Orchestra, Irish Wheelchair Association, Killeigh Comhaltas, Midland

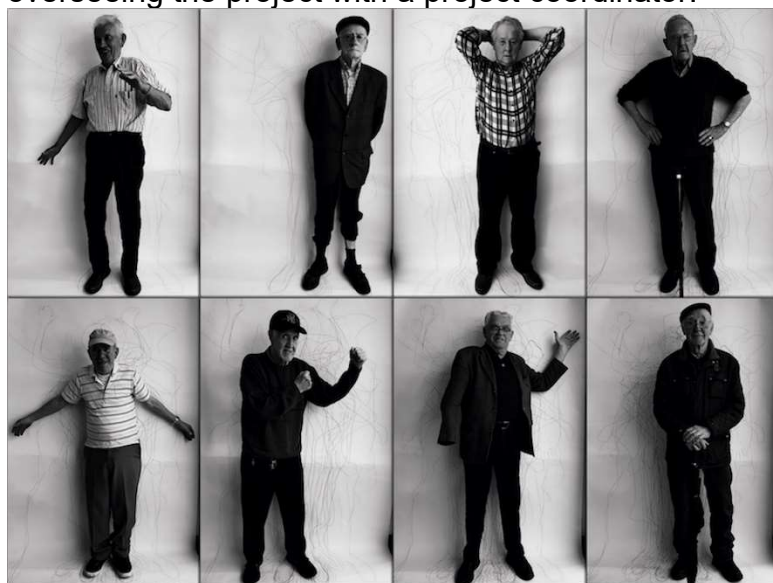
Strings, Co Offaly Federation ICA, Rahan Drama Group, Red Embers, St Brendan's Community School, St Brendan's PS Birr and Tullamore Musical Society.

FESTIVAL ARTS GRANT

Festival Arts Scheme 2024, designed for festivals taking place in Offaly in 2024 that are either dedicated arts festivals or have a strong professional arts element to the festival. The application process closed on the 19th of February 2024 and was assessed by an external panel. The Arts Office received 9 applications, six were funded totalling €13,000, one application was referred to the Arts Acts fund and two were not funded within the criteria of the scheme.

ARTS IN HEALTH

Offaly County Council Arts Office continued to support Anam Beo. Anam Beo, Offaly's Arts and Health organization promotes arts inclusion through the delivery of comprehensive arts projects for older people in community and care settings. In addition to their usual programme in care setting, Anam Beo's Capacity Building Mentorship project is now completed, and in 2024 – 2025 they will be working in tandem with a Creative Ireland project, a cross local authority collaboration between Offaly, Kildare and Westmeath to include local authority partners Healthy Ireland and the HSE. The project will be called **"Did I Ever Tell You..."** and is a storytelling project, focused on collecting the thoughts and memories from older adults in HSE healthcare settings across the three counties with Kildare overseeing the project with a project coordinator.



ANIMATION RESIDENCY

Offaly County Council Arts Service, continued to support the Animation Film Residency through a period of reflection and review in 2024.

PROFESSIONAL & VOLUNTARY GROUPS/INDIVIDUALS

The Arts Office is a resource for artists and organisations that require advice, direction and information on developing and promoting a project or their practice. This element of the Arts Service continued to be busy in 2024. This element of the service is based on best practice principles in all forms of arts development and is

intended to give rise to increased confidence in quality methods and professional approaches.

PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS SUPPORT GRANTS

In 2024 the arts office continued to provide assistance to professional artists from and living in Offaly through the Professional Artist Support Scheme with **29 grants awarded** to professional artists to a value of €15,000.

BIRR WRITERS RESIDENCY

In 2024 Offaly the Arts Office commissioned a review to examine the Arts Office supported, **Birr Writer's Residency** now in its tenth year. Birr Writer's Residency offers professional writers' accommodation and workspaces for six nights, at Brendan House in the centre of Birr, County Offaly. The purpose of the residency has been to provide an opportunity for artists to focus on a writing project (current or new) in a tranquil environment which supports and values high professional artistic development. It is open to professional writers of any genre, e.g. literary fiction, poetry, playwrights, journalism or travel writing. The review will consider the potential growth of the residency going forward and will include a consultation process with key stakeholders. Consultants Culture Works were awarded the commission following on open call and evaluation process. The review will be completed in 2025.

ONLINE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

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

Capital Projects

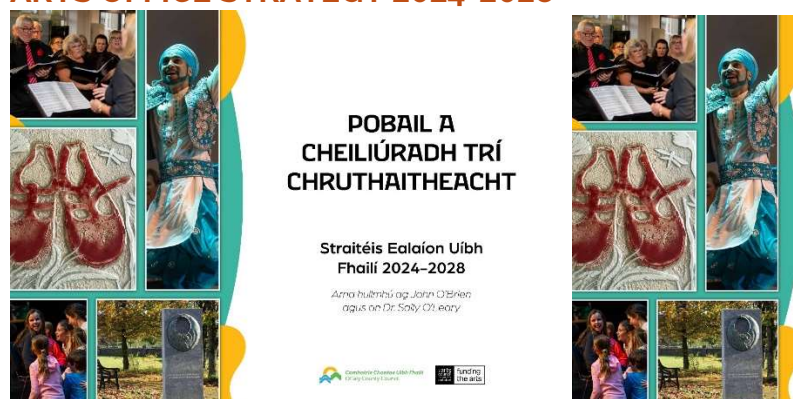
EDENDERRY LIBRARY AND ARTS SPACE

The Arts Office continued to work in collaboration with the county librarian in the development of plans for a multi-purpose arts space and studios to be incorporated into the planning of the new library for Edenderry.

ARTS INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

The Arts Infrastructure Strategy is now in the Implementation Phase. This includes the building of networks and collaborations between Offaly's Arts Infrastructure. This includes projects such as Birr Theatre and Arts Centre working in partnership with Esker Arts for the delivery of the Hullabaloo Children's Art Festival 2024, and Esker Arts working in partnership with Lough Boora Sculpture Park towards the delivery of the Art in the Landscape: Festival of Change Programme.

ARTS OFFICE STRATEGY 2024-2028



CELEBRATING COMMUNITIES THROUGH CREATIVITY

Offaly Arts Strategy
2024-2028

Prepared by John O'Brien
and Dr. Sallí O'Leary

2024 saw the approval and adoption of the new arts strategy by the county council. *Celebrating Communities Through Creativity: Offaly Arts Strategy 2024-2028*. Implementation of this strategy began in 2024 in alignment with the **Arts Infrastructure Strategy 2023-2028**.

BIRR THEATRE & ARTS CENTRE



Birr Theatre & Arts Centre continued to provide an extensive arts programme through its annual performance season, its learning and outreach community projects and as an incubation and administrative hub for a considerable number of prestigious arts festivals in Offaly: Birr Vintage and Arts Week, OFFline film festival, Birr Festival of Music and, as co-producer of the Hullabaloo! Children's Arts Festival. Offaly County Council provided increased funding of €55,000.00 to Birr Theatre and Arts Centre in 2024.

ESKER ARTS CENTRE

Esker Arts continued to deliver a wide range of activities throughout the year. There have been workshops in a wide selection of artforms, as well as popular theatre from



local group TADS, The Film Club, and an exciting exhibition programme in their 2 galleries. In addition to their monthly programme, they also engaged with national programmes such as Bealtaine Festival and Culture Night, and community projects such as the exhibition *The Bigger Picture*, **presented in association with Offaly Traveller Movement**. This photographic project was undertaken by Offaly Traveller Movement Youth Project with photographer Eva Donlon. The focus was to develop a series of photographs to challenge stereotypes, and to showcase the pictures to the wider community. Every photo taken features

only members of the Traveller Community.

LOUGH BOORA SCULPTURE PARK

Lough Boora Sculpture Park. The Arts Office, funded by Creative Ireland and supported by Bord na Móna commissioned a new maintenance programme for Lough Boora Sculpture Park to take place through 2024-2025, starting with a review and report on the sculptures and a maintenance schedule which started in 2024. Artist Michael Burke, Sculpture Works, has carried out a review and report and works have been ongoing throughout the year.

In 2024, Offaly County Council and Bord na Móna, in partnership under a Memorandum of Agreement, saw the continued working of the Lough Boora Sculpture Park Management Committee. The purpose of the Management Committee is to establish a framework that will enable an artistic vision for sustaining and developing the *Sculpture Park* at Lough Boora Discovery Park.

PUBLIC ART

Art Commission For Lough Boora Sculpture Park



The Arts Office in collaboration with Mayo County Council Arts Office and Visual Artists Ireland were successful in securing project funding under the Art Council's Invitation for Collaboration Scheme to commission an artist in Offaly and Mayo. Curator Helen Pheby, who works as an associate director of programming for Yorkshire Sculpture Park, was appointed as Curator for the project. The artists commissioned to work in

Offaly and Mayo were international artists Hardeep Sahota, collaborating with the photographer Tim Smith. As part of their research and community engagement the artists met with a number of artists, individuals and groups in 2023, and the completion and presentation of the commission took place in 2024.

ART COMMISSION LLOYD PARK TULLAMORE



From Within was a newly commissioned piece of contemporary dance created with young people in Tullamore. The commission funding was made available through the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media under the Outdoor Public Space Scheme 2021 and is associated with the development of the new Bandstand in Lloyd Town Park Tullamore.

Following an open call, local professional dancer Amy Donlon was contracted as the selected artist and an ensemble of young dancers from the area. The choreography explores the interplay between water, outdoor space and the connection between water and play. The newly commissioned work was performed

at the Bandstand in Lloyd Park, Tullamore in February 2024.

Offaly Sports Partnership



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

Offaly Sports Partnership continues to deliver its fourth strategic plan (Active Offaly: 2021 – 2025). Under this strategy, a range of activities are delivered each year under the five themes of:

- Instil fundamentals and improve youth fitness
- Increase adult and older adult participation in sport
- Include the least active and underrepresented group in sport
- Integrate and celebrate
- Inform the sports sector and help increase investment in sport

The Sports Partnership's 2024 budget is approximately €740,000. This funding is secured from several sources including Sport Ireland, the Dormant Accounts Disbursement Fund, the European Social Fund, Healthy Ireland, the HSE, CYPSC, Athletics Ireland, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth, and Age & Opportunity.

Actions implemented during the past year included:

Children's programmes

- Implemented fundamental sports programmes and inter school activities catering for over 5,000 children
- Hosted 2 inter-school events designed to increase participation of children of an ethnic minority background in mainstream sport
- Delivered a Community Games support project in four local areas in the county



Young girl who participated on Sports Partnership's programmes claims gold at All Ireland Community Games

Community Based Sports

- Introduced drop and move programmes in 10 GAA clubs in the county
- Delivered adapted physical activity programmes for older people and people with a disability which reached over 1,000 participants
- Implemented a dedicated women in sport week

Capacity Building and Investment

- Provided sports leadership training course for Transition Year classes in post primary schools.
- Managed three grant schemes for clubs, governing bodies working in Offaly, and community organisations. Funding of €60,000 was administered under these schemes.
- Hosted a sports capital workshop for clubs in the county. Over €6.4 million euro was secured by 68 clubs and sporting organisations under the programme.
- Invested in the growth of three sports hubs during the year in Ballycumber, Daingean and Mucklagh.

Healthy Ireland

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

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

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

In addition, two supplementary actions - Community Engagement and a Community Mental Health Fund provided funding to voluntary groups and social enterprises to deliver mental health supports within the Community.

Parks & Playgrounds

Lloyd Town Park

With the support of funding from the Outdoor Public Space Scheme (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media) and Tullamore General Municipal Allocation a Bandstand, caretakers office, storage unit and public toilets have been installed.

The Water feature upgrade was completed and commissioned with the support of funding from Community Recognition fund and Tullamore General Municipal Allocation.

Additional funding for an upgrade to the playground in the Town Park was secured under the Community Recognition fund.

Connolly Park

Funding for an upgrade to Connolly Park playground has also been approved.

Greenway

Tullamore Urban Regeneration Development Call 1 2018 Urban Greenway (URDF €1.7m)

The construction of the Urban Greenway through Tullamore will connect the Grand Canal Greenway at Convent View on the east to join the urban Greenway at Bury Quay to and Srah Road and Srah Bridge, on the west of Tullamore. The contract for the urban section of the greenway was awarded and work commenced in August 2024. Planned completion date of this contract is May 2025.

Public Realm

Tullamore Urban Regeneration Development Call 2 2020 (URDF €2.3m)

The Project incorporates six individual projects building on the successful completion of the Tullamore Street Enhancement project funded under URDF 1.

- Project A: O'Connor Square to Church Street, Urban Garden, Civil Building / RW Hub - TOBIN Consulting Engineers are appointed for the planning design and construction management.
- Project B: High Street to Tanyard New Street Link –contract awarded and works commenced in September 2024, planned completion Quarter 1, 2025.
- Project C: Meath Lane Civic Space - TMD to tender for the Works.
- Project D: Tullamore Regeneration Framework - Brady Shipman Martin Architects, following public consultation, have issued a draft framework report.
- Project E: Tullamore Grand Canal Harbour Masterplan - Grafton Architects, following public consultation, have issued a framework report.
- Project F: Acres' Folly Enhancements - works on the Folly are completed and TMD are preparing the landscape drawings for tender.

Division G – Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare

Veterinary Service

Food Safety

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

Control of Dogs - Offaly.

Number of Dog Licences sold in 2024	2,594
No. of Complaints dealt with in 2024 (y-t-d)	74

In the past 12 months 223 dogs were cared for in our Dog Shelter. We successfully rehomed 37 directly from the Dog Shelter, 30 were reclaimed by their owners and 154 were rehomed by our dog welfare charity partners and the remainder continue to be minded in the Dog Shelter.

We have also been upgrading the Dog Shelter under grant funding from DRCD, including replacement of doors with higher energy rated doors, replacement of the heating system, upgrading of the dog play areas, completing a new Whelping and isolation rooms and improved site security.

Control of Horses

Under the Control of Horses Act 1996, all local authorities are responsible for the control of horses in their area including the collection of stray horses on public land. The numbers have been reducing in recent years from a high of 164 horses in 2014 to 10 in 2023, and so far in 2024 we have not had to seize any horses. Fifteen Control of Horse complaints have been managed to date in 2024.

Division J – Central Management Charge

Building Facilities

Overview

The Building Facilities supervisor, working with the Senior Engineer in Housing, maintains the building facilities for Offaly County Council across 19 buildings. The buildings include the county building Áras an Chontae, the three municipal district offices, 8 libraries, Tullamore dog pound, creche and other satellite offices. In 2024 there were a number of ‘one off’ projects delivered:

Additional Office Space

Archive Room conversion: Works included the installation of two new windows facing into the courtyard, additional electrical and IT points, plumbing to accommodate heating and works to existing walls to provide connection to the existing capital office. The proposed works will make more than enough space available to accommodate the 11 desks in total.

Other projects to create more office space include upgrade of training room, comms room and other existing meeting rooms. Additional desks facilitated in Planning, Roads, Community, Human Resources.

Áras Reception Area

Upgrade of the Reception area in the Áras for the comfort and security of the staff on reception including the supply & installation of a counter canopy & glass security screen to existing counter supported on stainless steel posts and frame. All work were carried out with minimum disruption to staff and services.

Maintenance and Upkeep

Cleaning of the exterior of the Áras building; Painting of the Creche; Filing, Records, Data storage; Electrical testing of all buildings, upgrade of fire detection system in County buildings.

Dog Pound Upgrade

Additional viewing areas, isolation room, heating upgrade, new entrance doors, footpaths and boundary fencing.

Libraries

Banagher Library exterior clean and paint, new entrance doors to Birr, Kilcormac and Tullamore (in progress). LED upgrades to Daingean and Edenderry libraries.

Energy Efficiency

LED upgrades: electricity meters installed; Geothermal/Heat pump working

Health & Safety

Radon and electrical testing, replacing and re-location of smoke detectors in Aras; Assessment on sanitation facilities and sufficient facilities in the building for number of employees.

SEAI Pathfinder

Offaly County Council as members of the Midlands Energy Agency (MEA) are currently progressing the SEAI Pathfinder programme aimed at retrofitting existing public buildings in order to increase energy efficiency and reduce emissions in line with national, sectoral and local targets. OCC Cross section Team, led by the Environment section, are working with an SEAI appointed Project Manager and multi-disciplinary design team.

Corporate Services

The Corporate Services section plays an important role in supporting the overall functioning and efficiency of Offaly County Council and encompasses a wide range of activities and functions that are essential for the smooth operation of the organisation.

Corporate Services is a central area of support to all Directorates in Offaly County Council covering the following areas:

- Effective governance ensuring transparency, accountability, and promoting high standards of service delivery.
- Secretariat to monthly Council Meetings and other associated meetings including Corporate Policy Group and Management Team.
- Oversight and management of signing of contractual agreements and affixing of Offaly County Council seal.
- Support for the Cathaoirleach and the elected members.
- Governance and Oversight (including NOAC Service Indicators).
- Civic Events (including Civic Recognitions and Civic Welcomes).
- Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021.
- Freedom of Information requests.
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
- Communications including social media, press releases and media requests.
- Corporate Planning & reporting. Publications e.g. Annual Report, Annual Service Delivery Plan and the Corporate Plan (5-year strategic publication) in line with legislative requirements.
- Oireachtas members briefings twice yearly.
- Ethics Register.
- Customer Services and Customer Charter.
- Service level agreements.

Corporate Services Priorities for 2025

Looking ahead to 2025, Corporate Services aim to continue supporting organisational development and key functions. In particular oversight and support for the organisation in the implementation of the new Corporate Plan for Offaly County Council 2024-2029 which will be disseminated in Quarter 1 and the ongoing development of Customer Services and supports for the elected members in their role.

Health & Safety

Health and Safety objectives for 2024 were set out at the beginning of the year with the management team after reviewing 2023 both from a local and national level.

The key objectives were:

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

Everyday staff in Offaly County Council are reminded of the risks they face and how to eliminate or reduce this risk. Nationally, during the first nine months of 2024, 28 fatalities have occurred in the workplace.

Industry	Number of Fatalities in 2023	Number of Fatalities in 2024
Agriculture	20	10
Mining and quarrying	0	1
Manufacturing	2	0
Water (Supply, Sewerage & Waste Management)	2	3
Construction	10	4
Wholesale and retail trade, Repair of motor vehicles and Personal goods	2	4
Transportation and storage	2	3
Human health & social work	2	0
Accommodation and Food Service Activities	0	2
Public Administration (Others Arts, Entertainment & Recreation, Education)	3	1
Total	43	28 (As of the 1st of October 2024)

A key target for 2024 was to enhance communication with staff on accidents/incidents and good practices from other Local Authorities and private companies. This was achieved through monthly safety discussions and through refresher health and safety training.

Another key focus for 2024 has been a focus on transport safety and vehicle management in light of the number of serious incidents across the country.

There was an overall reduction in Offaly County Councils accident ratio in 2024 (as of the 30th of October 2024) when compared to the same period in 2023.

Senior management continued to provide leadership in raising the profile of safety within Offaly County Council. A key objective in 2024 involved safety discussion with

all staff and additional line manager meetings with staff. An internal seminar was carried out in Quarter 4 2024 with all staff, including line managers, setting out the targets and the key health and safety points for 2025.

The management team and senior management group carried out a number of inspections during the year, this will remain a key focus for 2025 along with tracking the number of inspections carried out by each department and directors attending key quarterly health and safety meetings in their departments.

Finance

The Finance Department provides a wide range of financial services to the Members, management and staff across all directorates of Offaly County Council including:

- Preparation of the Annual Budget
- Preparation of the report on the Three-Year Capital Programme
- Preparation of the Annual Financial Statements
- Financial control and treasury management
- Processing of payments to suppliers
- Collection of rates, loans and rents income
- Insurance and claims administration
- Procurement

As part of the national budget for 2024, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment introduced an Increased Cost of Business (ICOB) grant. The processing of this grant was handled by the Finance Department who liaised with all eligible rates customers, processed and assessed applications, and paid the grant within the strict deadlines imposed nationally.

A second ICOB was announced in late October – this is currently being processed by the Finance Department and payments to qualifying rate payers will issue shortly.

Internal Audit

The Internal Audit Unit have completed the majority of the agreed Internal Audit Plan for 2024. All completed Audit Reports were circulated to Management Team and the Audit Committee and have been approved. A revised Audit Committee Charter was brought to the November meeting of Council in line with regulations.

Human Resources

Key Objectives and Priorities

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

Legislative Context

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

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

Key Activities

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

Key Priorities 2025

- A Strategic Workforce Plan to be prepared and submitted by the end of March 2025.
- Targeted recruitment based on organisational needs and priorities and robust business cases
- Driving organisational change and development in line with national and local policies
- Managing increasing levels of industrial relations issues
- Continue to invest in the training and personal development of our staff to ensure effective implementation of the on-going local government reform agenda

Digital Services

Information Systems

The Information Systems Department manages the Council's entire ICT hardware and software infrastructure. The infrastructure is spread across approximately forty locations in the County and is utilised by over 500 users.

In 2024 the Information Systems department completed a number of technology-based initiatives and maintained a modern, reliable and secure ICT infrastructure for the organisation.

The main projects were:

- Introduced a PAM system for contractor logins to protect the network from unknown user logins.
- Removed Citrix servers from Offaly systems to reduce the security risk of using vulnerable CITRIX VPN technology.
- Conducted extensive testing and pilot of an online forms platform to help replace outdated manual processes for both internal and external customer transactions.
- Migrated Mailmeter journalling system to the Cloud to free up space for Housing iDocs server to host digitised Housing records.
- Continued to work on cyber-security in line with the CIS security control standards and increase staff awareness to help combat against emerging cyber threats.
- Carried out measures highlighted in a cybersecurity pen test by our security vendor.
- Upgraded our Financial Management System to allow for LVCP system to be implemented in Finance
- Procured and installed new AV equipment in the Birr Chamber.
- Procured and upgraded network connectivity in small libraries to an SDWAN implementation, providing direct network access from those libraries to the core network.
- Increased capacity in the Áras network by adding new network switches to allow for new desks in Environment and Water services, and Housing areas.
- Procured new GN network connectivity for the Birr MD and Library. This upgrade should happen in Quarter 4 2024.
- Worked on initiatives that support climate action, such as reducing energy consumption of IT equipment and reuse of old Council PC's for schools.
- Removed redundant equipment from Comms rooms in preparation for reconfiguring the main Comms room in the Áras.
- Upgraded Voting register systems (iReg), test eCount software, test and procure councillor devices and setup of new councillors.
- Facilitated over 20 third-level students joining and leaving the Council as part of the Summer Student Scheme
- Assisted Roads staff in introducing new Public Liability system.
- Collaborated with Laois Co. Council on Online Forms tender.

In 2025, the work programme for the IS Department will include work on the following projects:

- Digital Transformation – move to implement digital transformation initiatives such as for internal forms across the organisation using Jotforms. Transformation is the integration of digital technology into all areas of our business, fundamentally changing how we operate and deliver value to customers.
- Upgrade MS Teams to Teams Calling for all Offaly staff.
- Hire a Cybersecurity IS Analyst (Grade 6) to help with the increasing workload from Cybersecurity compliance and cybersecurity incidents.

-
- Rollout government networks in all large sites to replace line of site wireless connectivity (Edenderry) and the MAN network in Tullamore.
 - Procure and implement a new Managed Print service.
 - Work on FMS (Agresso) upgrade in preparation for move to the Cloud.
 - Windows 11 upgrade for all Council machines.
 - Introduce ManageEngine service desk for departments such as Roads and HR.
 - Upgrade Legacy systems such as SCCM.
 - Implement LGMA SOC/SIEM.
 - Move GIS servers to the Cloud.
 - Implement NEMIS Pollution complaints system with the Environment department.
 - Upgrade Meeting Room facilities for better hybrid meetings.
 - Upgrade IT Comms room to reduce floor space and energy consumption.
 - Assist in Fire Service Training Centre ICT requirements and fitout work.
 - Upgrade Áras Chamber network connectivity.
 - Move Department shared network drives to the Cloud.
 - Expand staff Wi-Fi across OCC local authority offices.
 - Library system upgrades and co-ordination.
 - Continue work on Microsoft Defender for Business.

Broadband and Digital Outreach

- In 2023 approximately 13% (1,684) premises had access to a fibre connection. By end of 2024 that will have increased to 50%, with the balance having their connections by mid-2026.
- “Dreambig – To Dream big you don’t have to go far”. The programme is designed to inspire, engage, and support young people in the Midlands to pursue a career in advanced manufacturing. Offaly Dreambig 2024 included companies such as Grant Engineering, Applied Concepts and Irish Manufacturing Research, TUS in Athlone. This unique programme ran from 11th-15th November 2024.
- Offaly County Council is working closely with the LOETB and Laois County Council, to invest in digital skills in the region, making Offaly more dynamic, inclusive and resilient. We support and fund teachers in gaining qualifications that enable them to teach Computer Science as a Leaving Cert subject. Six schools are now offering this programme, four of which started in the 2024/25 academic year.
- Won a number of awards both at the LAMA awards and the Digital Town awards in 2024 under the banner ‘**STEAMing Ahead: How Offaly’s Kids are Shaping our Rural Future**’

Municipal Districts

The three municipal district teams in Tullamore, Birr and Edenderry deliver a wide range of services to the citizens of their MDs both individually, and in collaboration with the other departments of Offaly County Council.

MD specific programmes include:

- Support to the local Tidy Towns/Villages Committees and other organisations throughout the Municipal District.
- Delivery of road and active travel programmes.
- Street cleaning services throughout the Municipal District area.
- Estate Enhancement works were carried out in conjunction with the Housing section on Local Authority housing estates.
- Community Grants: Supporting community and voluntary groups in the Municipal Districts by way of providing funding towards various community and estate enhancement initiatives.
- Support to Christmas Lights committees.