



Annual Report 2023



COMHAIRLE | CLARE
CONTAE AN CHLÁIR | COUNTY COUNCIL

May 2024



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Cllr Joe Cooney
Cathaoirleach



Mr Pat Dowling
Chief Executive

INTRODUCTION BY THE CATHAOIRLEACH AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

We are delighted to present Clare County Council's Annual Report 2023, which outlines the work of the Council in delivering on a wide range of public services and a number of major initiatives during the year.

Clare County Council delivers core local government services across the county that impact on the lives of every person in Clare. The Council is responsible for delivering services to almost 128,000 individuals, with a staff of approximately 984.

In the area of physical development, the 2023 Schedule of Municipal District Works provided for a Roadworks Programme which had a total fund of €52m, which was completed successfully. Works included: strengthening/surface dressing of more than 233km of the road network; continuation of the enhanced bridge remediation programme, with works carried out on 22 bridges; and completion of 13 safety improvement schemes.

Progress continued throughout 2023 across the range of major capital projects being managed and delivered by the Project Management Office (PMO). Much progress was made by the PMO team during the year on its portfolio of projects, such as national and non-national roads projects and flood relief schemes, including the Springfield Flood Relief Scheme, which was completed in September 2023.

The second phase of the Ennis Public Realm Regeneration Project represents a significant investment by Clare County Council and central government to enhance accessibility for all and to encourage continued and future investment. Under the €11.6m scheme, the streets (O'Connell Street, High Street and Bank Place) will become more accessible by replacing conventional streetscapes with shared surface pavements. The project's advancement to construction stage has followed years of extensive planning and consultation with the business community,

residents, the public and Elected Members. The works are scheduled to be completed in late 2025.

During 2023, €787,000 was invested in progressing upgrade works on eight group schemes allocated funding under the Multi Annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021.

Diverse activities continued in the Environment Section, including waste enforcement, waste management, environmental awareness, energy, gardening, scientific services (laboratory, water, air), veterinary services and Blue Flag beaches. The 2023 work programme was largely driven by an extensive regulatory framework, including new legislation such as the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations 2023, S.I. No. 343/2023 - Circular Economy (Environmental Levy) Regulations 2023.

Clare County Fire and Rescue Service attended 1,019 call-outs in 2023, resulting in a decrease of 8.8% on the number for 2022.

In 2023, Clare County Fire and Rescue Service attained reaccreditation to the ISO 45001 Health and Safety Management System Standard for the implementation of their Safety Management System throughout the Service following an audit by the National Standards Authority Ireland.

A new Class B Fire Appliance was completed and delivered to County Clare in May 2023 at a cost of €435,007. The appliance is now operational in Ennistymon Fire Station. The Brigade also took delivery of two previously owned Class B Fire Engines which were delivered to and went operational in Scariff and Killaloe Fire Stations at a cost of €116,414, following refurbishment works.

Approval was granted during 2023 for the construction of a new two-bay storage facility and general upgrade works at Kilrush Fire

Station at a cost of €425,757.

National Fire Safety Week took place from 9th-17th October. Clare County Fire and Rescue Service has an ongoing campaign which involved firefighters visiting the homes of older people and carrying out 'Home Fire Safety Checks'. This includes supplying and fitting smoke alarms if required.

Regional Major Emergency Management training resumed in 2023, and Clare County Council participated in emergency exercises during the year.

2023 proved to be another busy year for Clare Civil Defence with volunteers providing medical cover at various events throughout the county. Civil Defence volunteers continue to provide unwavering support to their communities.

Recruitment of the Climate Action team occurred over the first half of 2023. The Community Climate Action Programme was launched in December, 2023, while the process of developing the Climate Action Plan spanned all of 2023 and into 2024. Consultation was held at both pre-draft and the statutory draft consultation stages. The strategy of engagement utilised by the Climate Action team was rewarded by the large number of submissions received to inform the plan, totalling over 400.

The Social Directorate, which comprises Housing, Cultural Services and the Killaloe Municipal District, continued its work in the provision of appropriate housing supports to those in need and in enabling and fostering access for all our citizens to information, learning, arts, and cultural and recreational opportunities.

2023 was again a challenging year for the Social Directorate as the conflict in Ukraine continued to have an effect on the

availability and cost of building supplies and other necessities. However, despite this, the delivery target of new homes for 2023 was exceeded.

A combination of new properties constructed by the Council and by approved housing bodies (AHBs), turnkey solutions and void refurbishment programmes enabled the allocation of homes to 251 households during 2023.

During 2023, 75 vacant and seven acquired (unoccupied) properties were refurbished and made available for reallocation, throughout the county.

In relation to affordable housing, the Council's team worked with Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage officials in relation to affordability constraints in larger urban areas and in July 2023 received approval in principle on foot of a detailed application to the Department, to prove there is potential for affordable housing schemes in both Ennis and Shannon.

Thereafter the Council was successful in securing approval for the first Affordable Housing Scheme in County Clare under the new Affordable Funding Scheme. Approval has been received for 10 properties in Oakwood View in Shannon. A second proposal is with the Department for evaluation, with further submissions planned for 2024.

The Enhanced Defective Concrete Block [DCB] Grant Scheme went live in mid-July, with the required Department regulations in place. The Council's DCB team has been accepting applications online. A DCB Community Facilitator commenced employment in September 2023, to further assist the homeowners with the DCB application process.

2023 saw an increased number of presentations to the Homeless Action Team (HAT), along

with an increased level of complex needs and challenges being presented by service users. The team continued to work towards building a service that can appropriately meet the needs of homeless clients in Clare.

The year was a busy one for cultural services with all services reverting to pre-Covid numbers and a sense of normality returning to usage patterns and participatory levels. The Clare Libraries Development Plan, "Charting the Future – the hybrid library" 2023-2028 was approved by the Strategic Policy Committee in December.

The new library for Ennis progressed to a substantial level of completion by the end of 2023, the construction phase having commenced in April 2022.

There were increases in all aspects of library provision in 2023, with greater numbers returning to library usage after the disruptive years of Covid. A total of 22,860 physical items and 28,166 electronic resources were added to stock, consisting of new publications and replacement of stock in areas that needed special attention.

Arts Council-supported programmes in 2023 included the Arts and Education programme which delivered arts projects with 10 artists in 20 primary schools. The Embrace Arts and Disability Programme delivered 20 arts projects in disability settings with 12 artists countywide.

Culture Night in September returned to in-person events, which saw 43 events attended by 2,431 people in 21 locations. Artist studios operated at 100% capacity.

Clare County Council maintained its focus on providing quality public services by working closely with community groups, organisations and businesses to deliver positive change for communities in the county.

The Renewed Clare Rural Development Strategy 2030, entitled “Realising Clare’s Rural Potential: Our Life, Our Home”, was officially launched in March, 2023, and was adopted by Clare County Council at its March meeting. The Renewed Strategy reiterates the 2017 Strategy’s commitment to establish Clare as one of the best places in Ireland to live, work, and invest.

An extensive public consultation process took place as part of the development of a new six-year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). The Plan will guide the future economic and community development of County Clare from 2024-2030.

The Department of Rural and Community Development channelled a number of funding programmes through the Council in 2023, including the Town & Village Renewal Scheme, CLÁR, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and the Community Recognition Fund.

Funding of €627,000 was allocated to just over 400 projects being delivered under the Council’s Local Area Grant Scheme in March 2023.

As the conflict in Ukraine continued, 2023 saw the number of Ukrainian Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection living in our county increase. The ‘Offer a Home’ scheme continued through the year with a steady stream of offers coming from across the county. The new Local Authority Integration Team brings a new focus and outlook on migration and integration across our communities.

The Clare Age Friendly Programme, supported by the Clare Older People’s Council, developed a comprehensive guide to the essential services and supports available for older adults and their families in the county. The Directory of Services for Older People

features contact details for public services, community and voluntary organisations and some community based social groups across the county, as well as guidance around entitlements, safety and security, transport and health.

The Healthy Clare Programme and initiatives included the Healthy Clare Micro Fund 2023, the Healthy Clare 2024 Calendar and the Clare Farmers Weaving Stories Together Project. The five mart areas targeted by this initiative were Sixmilebridge, Ennis, Kilfenora, Kilrush and Scariff. Farmers from each of these locations worked together to create a graphic of their past memories, present experiences and future hopes for farming in their communities.

The Healthy Clare team was successful in securing €10,000 funding from the Department of Health to pilot the Local Authority (LA) ‘Free Period Products’ initiative.

Four Clare Joint Policing Committee (JPC) meetings were held in 2023. The aim of the JPC is to serve as a forum for consultations, discussions and recommendations on matters affecting the policing of Clare County Council’s administrative area.

In 2023, Clare County Council completed the takeover of the portfolio of attractions contained within the Shannon Heritage brand, which operated under the ownership of the Shannon Airport Group.

The individual brands trading under Shannon Heritage include Bunratty Castle & Folk Park, Knappogue Castle and Gardens and Craggaunowen Bronze Age Park. Added to these brands is the soon-to-be opened, Mountshannon icon of Inis Cealtra (Holy Island), which will be supported by a rectory museum and café and in the longer term, a comprehensive visitor centre.

The Tourism Advisory Forum and Clare County Council's Tourism Department recognised that 2023 would be another challenging year for tourism, and that a collective effort was required to mitigate all upcoming challenges. The Clare 'Tourism Together' Networking event was organised, which underlined the shared commitment to further developing the tourism economy.

This event saw the official launch of the new tourism website, www.VisitClare.ie. The full development of this new website is an initiative of Clare County Council and is the most comprehensive ever website dedicated to showcasing everything the Banner County has to offer domestic and international visitors.

The Burren Geopark received wonderful news as its re-validation for UNESCO Global Geopark status was granted. This approval of its UNESCO Global Geopark status serves as a testament to the diligent efforts of the team and the affiliated organisations. It is dedicated to furthering sustainability, conservation, education, and the promotion of cultural and heritage values within the region.

County Clare also took centre stage to national and international audiences during the KPMG Women's Irish Open, hosted in Dromoland Castle in August/September.

In 2023, the Cliffs of Moher Experience welcomed 1.38m visitors. A draft of the Fáilte Ireland supported Cliffs of Moher Strategy 2040 and site masterplan has been published and is in the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) phase. The strategy will inform future sustainable developments at the Cliffs of Moher Experience delivered over 20 years.

County Clare has now established itself as a remote working friendly county. 2023 saw the continued expansion and upgrade of

the DigiClare network of remote working hubs. The hubs network itself experienced a 25% increase in footfall in its 11 locations countywide.

2023 was another busy year for the Council's Economic Development Directorate, which comprises the Planning Department, Property Management Unit, Local Enterprise Office, Town Centre First and the Ennis Municipal District.

Work continued on the preparation of the new Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, which was finalised in early 2023.

The primary goal of the Ennis 2040 Economic and Spatial Strategy is focused on the sustainable economic development of the town of Ennis. This strategy coupled with the provisions included in the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 are central planks for realising and delivering the key changes that are needed to cater for a growing population between now and 2040. Over the course of 2023, Ennis 2040 continued to progress a number of key town centre projects.

From a town regeneration perspective, the completion of town enhancement plans in 2023 for Ennistymon, Corofin and Sixmilebridge demonstrates Clare County Council's commitment to regenerating our local towns and villages, focused on both community and economic development, to become better places in which to live, work and visit.

Clare County Council's Property Management Unit advanced a number of capital property refurbishment and acquisition projects during the year, including the acquisition of Inagh Garda Station from the OPW for leasing to the local Housing Association, and successfully working with Clare Cricket Board to find a location for a home ground for it in Shannon.

At the end of 2023, the Derelict Sites team are dealing with 255 properties that are considered derelict. The activity in recent years has substantially increased, with 55 additional derelict properties identified and reported on in 2023.

2023 presented a continuation of economic challenges for businesses in Clare such as inflation, supply chain issues, attracting and retaining labour and a reduction in spending power from consumers. Despite these headwinds, some sectors of our local economy continued to thrive, most notably in the manufacturing and engineering sectors. Our local enterprises now employ 1,279 people throughout the county.

As a progressive local authority, Clare County Council's purpose and vision is to be responsive and agile while leading the development of our county.

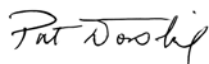
We would like to commend the staff and elected members, and acknowledge the valuable input and participation of our communities, partners and stakeholders across the range of our initiatives and activities.

The Council, working with communities, will continue to be innovative and responsive to ensure our county continues to develop as a place to live, work and visit during 2024 and beyond.

Le meas,



Cllr Joe Cooney,
Cathaoirleach



Mr Pat Dowling,
Chief Executive





CLARE COUNTY COUNCILLORS 2023

Ennis Municipal District



Mary Howard
(FG)



Paul Murphy
(FG)



Tom O'Callaghan
(FF)



Clare Colleran
Molloy (FF)



Ann Norton
(NP)



Mayor of Ennis

Pat Daly
(FF)



Johnny Flynn
(FG)

Killaloe Municipal District



Pat Hayes (FF)



Cathaoirleach
of Clare

Joe Cooney (FG)



Cathaoirleach
of Killaloe MD

Tony O'Brien (FF)



Alan O'Callaghan
(FF)



Pat Burke (FG)

Shannon Municipal District



Pat McMahon
(FF)



Michael Begley
(NP)



P.J. Ryan (NP)



John Crowe (FG)



Cathaoirleach
of Shannon MD

Donna McGettigan
(SF)



Pat O'Gorman
(FF)



Gerard Flynn
(NP)

West Clare Municipal District



Joe Garrihy (FG)



Joe Killeen (FF)



Shane Talty (FF)



Liam Grant (GP)



P.J. Kelly (FF)



Gabriel Keating
(FG)



Bill Chambers
(FF)



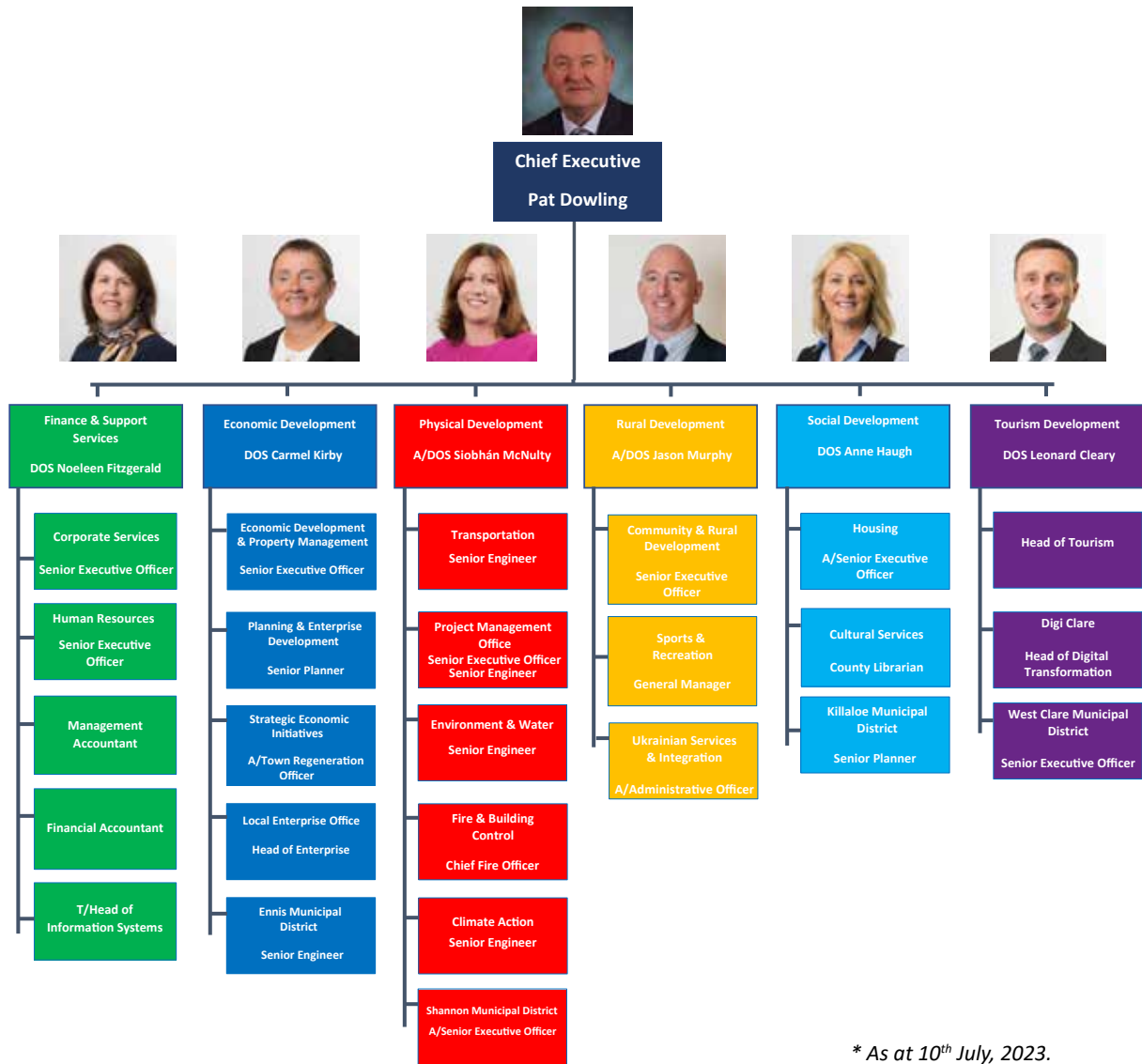
Cillian Murphy
(FF)



Cathaoirleach
of West Clare MD

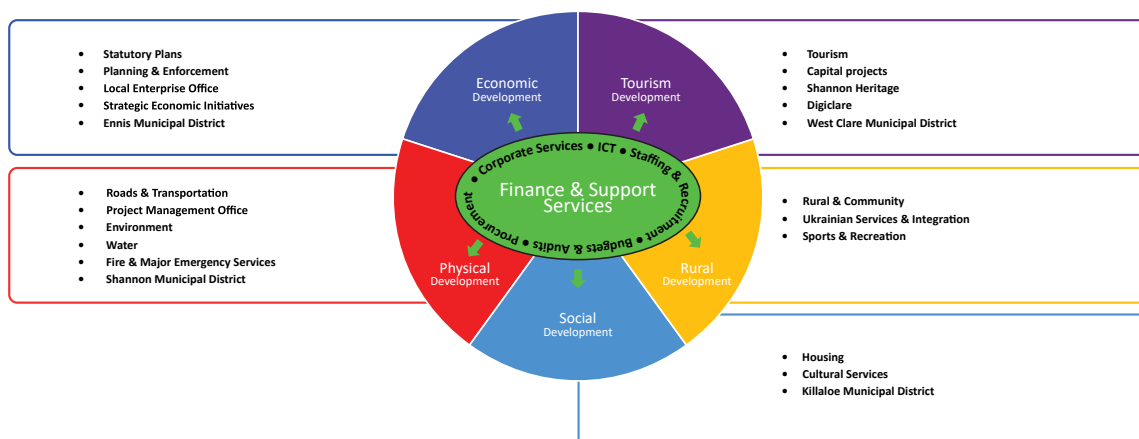
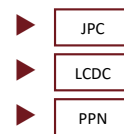
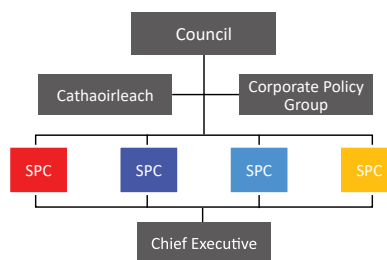
Ian Lynch (NP)

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE 2023



* As at 10th July, 2023.

OPERATING STRUCTURE



Municipal District Areas

Members meet at area level throughout the year to discuss matters relevant to their particular electoral area. Each Municipal District committee has a senior official assigned to it to co-ordinate functions and assists the members in their deliberations. The meetings are attended by the Senior Executive Engineer and a member of the administrative staff in the area. These meetings are generally attended by the press and the minutes of each area meeting are listed on the agenda at a subsequent Council meeting for noting.

Elected Representatives

Clare County Council consists of 28 elected members representing 5 Electoral Areas and 4 Municipal Districts. Local elections were held on 24th May 2019 to fill 28 seats on Clare County Council.

Municipal Districts

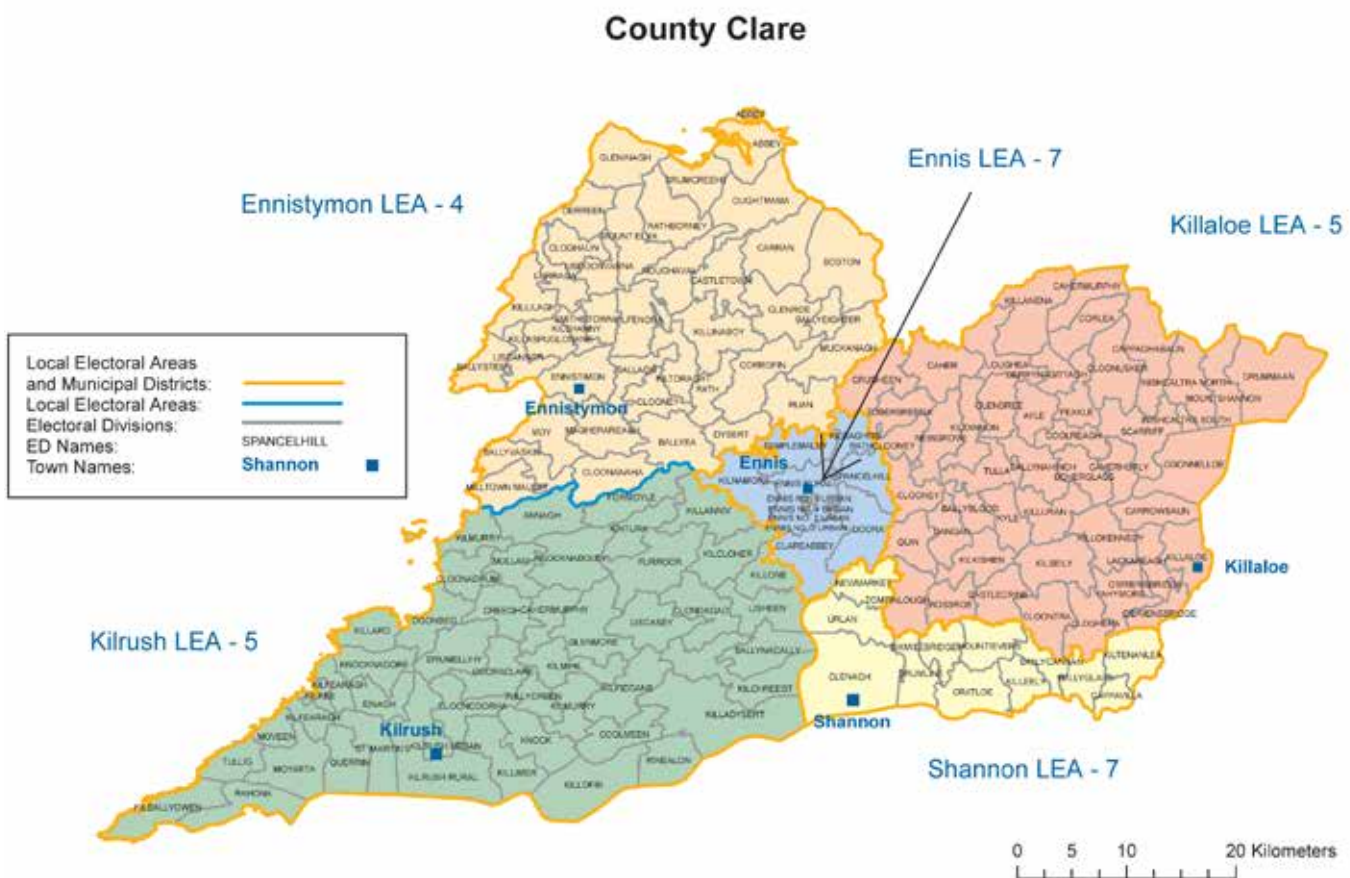
There are four MDs in Clare as follows:

Ennis MD - Ennis Local Electoral Area

Killaloe MD - Killaloe Local Electoral Area

Shannon MD - Shannon Local Electoral Area

West Clare MD - Kiltrush and Ennistymon Local Electoral Areas



Corporate Policy Group

The Corporate Policy Group consists of the Cathaoirleach of the day together with the chairs of the Strategic Policy Committee. Each Municipal District is represented on the CPG. It has a statutory basis set out in Section 133 of the Local Government Act, 2001 and has specific functions in relation to the preparation of the Annual Budget and the Corporate Plan. The Corporate Policy Group meets on a monthly basis with the Council Executive.

Strategic Policy Committees

Strategic Policy Committees (SPC) are structured around the main functions of Council. They are made up of Elected Councillors and other representatives of the social partners and other sectoral interests. Each SPC is chaired by an Elected Councillor and is supported by a Director of Services. The task of the SPC is to assist and advise the Council in the formulation, development and review of policy. The SPCs will not be concerned with individual representational or operational issues. Final policy decisions,

however, will ultimately rest with the full Council acting as a body.

Clare County Council adopted a new SPC Scheme 2019 to 2024 in October 2019. The scheme provides for four SPCs as follows:

- **Economic Development SPC**
- **Physical Development SPC**
- **Rural Development SPC**
- **Social Development SPC.**

The climate change agenda and the biodiversity agenda are key policy areas across all SPCs.

Each Councillor is a member of an SPC and each SPC has at least a third of the membership drawn from sectoral interests. The sectoral representatives for the SPCs are drawn from the agriculture/farming, environmental/conservation, development/construction, business/commercial, trade union, community/voluntary and social inclusion sectors.

The membership of each SPC is as follows:

SPC Membership

Economic Development SPC	Members	
Elected Members	ClIr Pat McMahon (Chairperson) ClIr P.J. Kelly ClIr Pat Daly ClIr P.J. Ryan	ClIr Michael Begley ClIr Gabriel Keating ClIr Johnny Flynn
Agriculture & Farming	Rosaleen O'Reilly	
Environment/ Conservation	Emma Karan	
Development/ Construction	Pat Keogh	
Business/ Commercial	Pat Morris	
Trade Unions	Seamus Ryan	
Social Inclusion	Elaine d'Alton	

Physical Development SPC	Members	
Elected Members	Cllr John Crowe (Chairperson) Cllr Pat O’Gorman Cllr Alan O’Callaghan	Cllr Clare Colleran Molloy Cllr Joe Cooney Cllr Ian Lynch Cllr Liam Grant
Agriculture & Farming	Kieran Woods	
Environment/ Conservation	Aisling Wheeler, Therese O’Donohue	
Development/ Construction	Lorchan Hoyne	
Community/ Voluntary	Damon Matthew Wise	
Social Inclusion	Padraic Hayes	

Rural Development SPC	Members	
Elected Members	Cllr Pat Hayes (Chairperson) Cllr Rita McInerney Cllr Cillian Murphy	Cllr Shane Talty Cllr Joe Killeen Cllr Mary Howard Cllr Pat Burke
Agriculture & Farming	Denis Tuohy	
Business/ Commercial	Niamh O’Callaghan	
Social Inclusion	Jean Tierney O’Keeffe	
Community/ Voluntary	Mary Anne Kearns	

Social Development SPC	Members	
Elected Members	Cllr Gerard Flynn (Chairperson) Cllr Tony O’Brien Cllr Paul Murphy	Cllr Joe Garrihy Cllr Ann Norton Cllr D McGettigan Cllr Tom O’Callaghan
Development/ Construction	Larry Brennan	
Business/ Commercial	William Cahir	
Trade Unions	Tommy Guilfoyle	
Social Inclusion	Noel Kearney	
Community/ Voluntary	Tommy Molloy	

Representation of Elected Members on Committees

Appointment of Chair Designate for each of the four Strategic Policy Committees

Cllrs P. McMahon, P. Hayes, J. Crowe, G. Flynn

Regional Assembly

Cllrs A. O'Callaghan, P. J. Kelly

Education & Training Board

Cllrs A. Norton, P. Murphy, G. Keating, C. Collieran Molloy, J. Killeen

Local Authority Members Association

Cllr T. O'Brien

Association of Irish Local Government

Cllrs J. Crowe, M. Begley, P. Daly

Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances Ltd.

Cllr C. Collieran Molloy

Board of Management of Kilkee Waterworld

Cllr C. Murphy

Board of Management of Lahinch Seaworld

Cllr S. Talty

Hunt Museum Trust

Cllr P. Murphy

Lisdoonvarna Fáilte

Cllr J. Killeen

Board of glór Music DAC

Cllrs L. Grant, M. Howard

Clare Sports Partnership

Cllrs J. Killeen, J. Garrihy

Local Traveller Accommodation Advisory Committee

Cllrs T. O'Brien, C. Collieran Molloy, D. McGettigan, A. Norton, P. Murphy, J. Garrihy

Twinning Committee

Cllrs M. Begley, P.J. Ryan, P. McMahon, P. Hayes, T. O'Brien, J. Crowe, P. Murphy, M. Howard, Cathaoirleach of the day

County Clare Road Safety Working Group

Cllrs C. Murphy, J. Cooney, P.J. Ryan

County Rural Water Monitoring Committee

Cllrs L. Grant, S. Talty, P. Burke

Active Ennis Sports and Leisure Committee

Cllrs T. O'Callaghan, A. Norton, J. Flynn

Audit Committee

Cllrs P. Hayes, G. Keating

Regional Health Forum West

Cllrs L. Grant, C. Murphy, R. McInerney, M. Howard

Joint Policing Committee

Cllrs I. Lynch, A. Norton, M. Begley, P.J. Ryan, R. McInerney, P. Daly, P. McMahon, A. O'Callaghan, J. Killeen (for 2 years), S. Talty (for 3 years), M. Howard, P. Murphy, P. Burke, J. Crowe, G. Keating

Kilrush Amenity Trust CLG

Cllrs I. Lynch, G. Keating

Board of Clare Local Development Company

Cllrs P.J. Ryan, G. Keating, J. Killeen

Local Community Development Committee

Cllrs R. McInerney, C. Murphy, J. Flynn, G. Flynn

Western Inter County Railway Committee

Cllrs A. O'Callaghan, P. Hayes, L. Grant, J. Crowe, G. Keating

Standing Orders Sub-Committee

Cllrs P. Hayes, C. Colleran Molloy, P. Murphy,
J. Cooney, P.J. Ryan, G. Flynn & Cathaoirleach
of the Day

Memorial Committee

Cllrs P. O’Gorman, C. Colleran Molloy, A.
Norton, G. Flynn, P. Murphy, J. Cooney

Rural Development Forum

Cllrs P. Hayes, J. Flynn, G. Keating, J. Crowe, P.
Burke, P.J. Ryan

**Board of Cliffs of Moher Centre Designated
Activity Company**

Cllrs S. Talty, G. Keating

**Governing Body of the National University
of Ireland**

Cllr C. Colleran Molloy

Ennis 2040 Strategic Development**Designated Activity Company**

Cllrs C. Colleran Molloy, A. Norton, M. Howard

**County Clare Heritage and Biodiversity
Forum**

(formed July 2023)

Cllrs G. Keating, L. Grant, C. Murphy



FINANCE AND SUPPORT SERVICES DIRECTORATE



NOELEEN FITZGERALD
Director of Finance
and Support Services

The Finance and Support Services Directorate primarily delivers internal services to the Economic, Physical, Social, Tourism and Rural directorates of the Council in supporting them in the delivery of services to customers in an efficient manner and implement best practice in corporate governance. The directorate's objective is to provide the human resources, financial, information systems and corporate services (in 2023) to support and develop the Council's ability to deliver evolving services to its customers by empowering our staff and enabling them to deliver to their best capacity.

Departments which fall under this directorate include:

- ▶ Finance
- ▶ Internal Audit
- ▶ Information Systems
- ▶ Human Resources
- ▶ Corporate Services (in 2023).

Finance Department

The Finance Department has primary responsibility for a range of functions including financial accounting and reporting, budgeting, commercial rates billing and collection, supplier payments, payroll administration, procurement compliance, the budget process, treasury management and other accounting and compliance activities. The Finance Department oversees effective expenditure controls and debt collection, with the overall objective of providing support services to the Social, Economic, Physical, Tourism and Rural Directorates of the Council where total annual expenditure in 2023 exceeded €270 million.

Financial Accounting and Reporting

The Annual Financial Statement 2023 gives an overview of the financial position of Clare County Council at 31st December, 2023, reporting a positive result on the Statement of Comprehensive Income (Income and Expenditure Account). The table on page 116 outlines the results for the year in abridged format. The Council incurred total expenditure of circa €272m (excluding transfer for expenditure) during 2023. This comprises revenue expenditure of €156m and capital expenditure of €116m. This total expenditure is a 20% increase on 2022 level of €225.6m. The increase is explained by the take-on of the Shannon Heritage Sites in 2023 and also by the delivery of significant capital projects namely the Shannon Bridge Crossing where expenditure in 2023 exceeded €30m.

Commercial rates

Commercial rates income is this Council's main income source for the delivery of services. Clare County Council billed a total of €44.5m in commercial rates in 2023. There was no pandemic Commercial Rates Waiver in 2023 for customers. It is therefore positive to report that the collection Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of customer payments has improved to 88%, an increase over previous years and the highest in the last ten years. Arrears on commercial rates has also reduced below €10m level with actual arrears reduced by circa. €0.5m in the year, a consistent reduction year on year.

The revaluation of commercial rates for County Clare concluded in 2023 with new market valuations being agreed and in place for 2024. At a macro level this saw the majority of customers in the county experiencing reductions in their commercial rates liabilities. This was however a rebalancing exercise, so there are customers who have experienced

commercial rates valuation increases reflecting their business activity or the rental market valuation of their property. This Council will continue to work with these customers who may experience difficulty in agreeing a payment arrangement for the commercial rate.

Revenue and capital budget planning

In November 2023, the Council adopted its multi-year capital budget 2024-2026 of €725.4m and its 2024 revenue budget of €186.4m. This adoption followed extensive deliberations by members taking cognisance of the economic environment prevailing post the pandemic and in an inflationary environment. This budget was adopted with no increase in additional business charges in 2024.

Procurement

The Council operated to the OGP procurement framework. In 2023 this area was enhanced to provide additional support to sections as expenditure across all directorates reached a level in excess of €270m. Particular emphasis was placed in providing support to sections in capital project planning.

Internal Audit

The Internal Audit unit is part of the Council's corporate governance structure. It is an independent appraisal function within the Council charged with reviewing activities across all areas within Clare Local Authority.

The role of Internal Audit is to provide independent assurance that an organisation's risk management, governance and internal control processes are operating effectively. The Council's Internal Audit Charter sets out the role and responsibilities of the Internal Auditor and Management.

The Internal Audit unit:

- Operates to a Multi-Annual Internal Audit Plan which sets out a schedule of audit reviews and spot checks to be carried out. Recommendations made are followed up with management.
- Interacts with the Council's Audit Committee and the external Local Government Auditor in promoting risk management, good accounting practices and improving the focus on value for money throughout the organisation.

The Council has implemented a hybrid model of working resulting in Internal Audits being conducted in a number of different ways by the Internal Audit Unit, Clare County Council supported by an External Audit Firm. A number of final reports, recommendation tables and the Quality Assurance Report were completed throughout the year.

In August 2023 an online system was developed by the Internal Audit unit to enable Internal Audit, Senior Management and the Audit Committee to keep track on the progress on audit recommendations.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Department

Clare County Council ICT operations department is part of the Finance and Support Services Directorate. ICT operations provide directorates, Municipal Districts, departments, and over 600 users with ICT services and support. Services include ICT Infrastructure, ICT Applications, Enterprise Software Solutions, Graphical Information Systems (GIS), and Web Services.

The ICT Section continued to support sections in achieving their objectives throughout 2023. In addition to the operational activities, such as monitoring security, maintaining infrastructure and systems, and providing user support throughout 2023, the ICT department has embraced new technologies, changed existing services, introduced process automation, and improved the capabilities of existing solutions. This has enabled ICT to support the various business units deliver on business process improvement initiatives throughout 2023. These projects improved CCC employees'



safety, strengthened cybercrime defence, enhanced service quality and delivery to the public and raised staff satisfaction.

Key ICT Operations Achievements in 2023:

- Delivery of remote working solutions to outdoor workers, enhancing the outdoor worker safety program. The solutions enabled digital capture of health and safety information and provided instant access to H&S advice. The department also digitised the housing inspection program, the Fire inspection for Older and Vulnerable Citizens, and provided a solution to digitally capture and map the Urban Tree Profile in Ennis. These solutions reduced carbon emissions by eliminating the need to receive work lists back in the office. They also streamlined the administration process, eliminated the need to transcribe paper forms into digital systems, and provided instant access to MIS and activity reports.
- In 2023, the department increased the provision of ICT support services to over 600 users, up from 520 at the start of the year.
- Delivery of an online application solution to support the Defective Blocks Scheme in County Clare. The solution enabled the public to apply online and provide secure information sharing with the multiple agencies involved in the scheme. Feedback from the Housing Agency, who are a key user of the solution, was very positive: "The online application is very user friendly and homeowners who the Housing Agency have engaged with to date, relay this view also."
- Delivery of an online jobs application and audit control system using Granicus Online development solution. The online jobs application streamlined the recruitment process and improved the user experience for both applicants and HR staff. The audit

control system enhanced the transparency and accountability of the Council's operations and ensured compliance with data protection regulations.

- Responded to 7,700 requests for ICT support, maintaining a high level of customer satisfaction and resolving issues in a timely manner. The ICT team also provided guidance on various tools and support HR systems Learning and Development section to enhance the digital skills and productivity of the Council staff.
- Upgraded online payment solution, providing increased security to protect members of the public from cybercrime. The upgrade also improved the performance and reliability of the payment system and reduced the operational costs for the Council.
- Rollout enhanced security measures for emails, remote access and CCC PC, laptops and tablets to reduce the likelihood of a successful cyber-attack. The security measures included encryption, multi-factor authentication, firewall configuration, and anti-virus software. The ICT team also conducted regular audits and scans to monitor and mitigate any potential threats or vulnerabilities.
- Improved inter-office connectivity for De Valera library in Ennis and Shannon Library, enabling faster and more stable network access for staff and patrons. The improved connectivity also facilitated the delivery of online services and programs, such as e-books, e-learning, and virtual events.
- Support the transition of water services to Uisce Éireann.



Clare County Council was named winner of the 'Embedding a Culture of Workplace Wellbeing' award at the CIPD Ireland HR Awards 2023.

Human Resources

The Human Resources (HR) Department delivers a significant work programme in line with its team plan for the year. The key areas of focus are: workforce planning; recruitment; the Local Authority People Strategy; learning and development; equality & diversity and employee wellbeing supports.

Clare County Council's commitment to workplace wellbeing was recognised at the CIPD Ireland HR Awards 2023 which took place in the Mansion House on 24th February, 2023. The local authority was named winner of the 'Embedding a Culture of Workplace Wellbeing' award. Clare County Council was shortlisted in

the category along with the Department of Defence, the National Treasury Management Agency, Seetec Ireland and William Fry LLP. The award recognises organisations which place employee wellbeing centre stage and have embedded a strong culture of workplace wellbeing. This recognition amongst private and public sector organisations is reflective of the investment in this area by this Council.

The main activities of the HR section are summarised below.

Workforce Planning and Recruitment

A strategic workforce planning process was completed and submitted to our parent

department in 2023 which sets the roadmap for the planning of our staff resources to meet the evolving and developing services of the Council. This document is continuously evolving as the sector meets the additional services and expanding brief of Clare County Council.

The Recruitment Section continues to ensure that the Council is well placed to provide for the business needs of the organisation and the service needs of our citizens. Recruitment of new staff into the Council continued in 2023 with a total of 68 competitions held through a combination of both online and face-to-face methods. Large recruitment processes included those for Clerical Officer, General Operative, Executive Engineer and Library posts amongst others.

The Council planned for the introduction of online recruitment in 2023, with a go-live date in early 2024. This new process facilitates candidates to submit applications online with a user-friendly and easily navigable platform. There are ongoing challenges for the sector for technical, engineering, architectural, ICT and entry level staff in particular owing to the zero unemployment in the economy and the success of the private aviation and pharmaceutical amongst other industries in the region.

The Co-operative Education Programme facilitated a number of third level students to gain invaluable work experience in various departments of the Council.

The Council also supports a number of apprenticeship programmes including the Accounting Technician programme and the Heavy Vehicle Mechanic programme.

Learning and Development

The Learning and Development Unit organised a broad suite of training programmes and workshops to meet the needs of management and staff arising from a combination of requests received through the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) that identified training needs of the organisation. In-person and online training programmes, webinars and information sessions were rolled out throughout the year. There is an extensive range of programmes on offer and some are mandatory training, particularly having regard to health and safety obligations. A specific emphasis was placed on Climate Action and Cyber Incident Awareness training during the year.

The Excellence Through People Gold standard was retained again in 2023. The process included a series of interviews with staff and management and recognises key processes and supports that are in place by the Council.

Performance Management and Development System

The requirement to implement the Performance Management and Development System was notified to staff at the start of the year. The process includes formal conversations between the staff member and the line manager at the start of the year, mid-year and year end. The system promotes the development and implementation of Team Plans and Personal Development Plans and Training Plans.

Policy implementation

The Right to Disconnect Policy was adopted by Management Team on 9th January, 2023. The policy applies to all employees of the Council and working environments, i.e. to employees who work remotely, in the office, another fixed location or at home.

Equality and diversity

Clare County Council has established an Equality & Human Rights Working Group which is led by the Human Resources Department. The group is progressing the development of an Equality and Human Rights Action Plan, in line with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. Public bodies have a statutory duty to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect the human rights of staff and end users. In this regard, Clare County Council is required to assess, address and report on progress in relation to equality and human rights, in a manner accessible to the public.

Industrial Relations

The Human Resources Department, and Clare County Council as a whole, continued to foster a productive relationship with our colleagues in the unions throughout 2023. This engagement occurred through quarterly meetings of the Partnership forum and through regular formal meetings and ongoing dialogue with individual unions.

Employee Wellbeing

An extensive programme of wellbeing initiatives were rolled out to staff over the year and included a Gardening Workshop, a Type 2 Diabetes education event, Sunsmart campaign, promotion of the Cycle to Work Scheme, a remote working and wellbeing course, Parenting Workshops, the Wellbeing Hub and the Flu Vaccine Programme.

Various events were organised for staff to celebrate National Workplace Wellbeing Day, World Mental Health Day, Irish Heart Month, and Menopause Day.

An updated Staff Census on Disability was undertaken in November. The census is a requirement in accordance with the Disability

Act 2005 whereby statistics are compiled and submitted to the Department on an annual basis on the number of staff with disabilities. Under the Employee Assistance Programme, Professional Counselling Services continue to be made available to all staff.

This programme was the basis for the award referenced in the introduction earlier in this report.

Gender Pay Gap Report

Clare County Council published its Gender Pay Gap Report for 2023 on 18th December. The gender pay gap is the difference in the average hourly wage of men and women across the workforce. Employers with more than 250 employees in Ireland are now required to publish their gender pay gap data.

The 2023 report shows a Mean Gender Pay Gap of -9.33%. This means that on average, females occupy higher paid roles than males. The Median Gender Pay Gap of -17.55% means that there is a strong representation of females in upper management roles in Clare County Council.

Partnership Staff Talks 2023

Staff Information Sessions took place in Killaloe, Shannon, Ennistymon, Kilkee and Ennis over a two-week period in March 2023 and were well attended. A total of seven sessions were organised. The sessions, led by the Chief Executive and the Partnership Committee included presentations from the Chief Executive and the Directors of Service. An Employee Information Stand was also available to staff at each session which promoted the many people-centered initiatives available to staff, including employee assistance, health & wellbeing, and learning & development opportunities.

Corporate Services

The Corporate Services Department provides a support service to the Elected Members and to Council management and administers a number of functions directly to the public.

Meetings of Clare County Council

Clare County Council conducts much of its business at meetings of the full Council. Such meetings are regulated by law.

During 2023 Clare County Council held the following types of meetings:

- Annual General Meeting - 1
- Ordinary Meetings – 11
- Adjourned Monthly Meetings – 0
- Budget Meetings – 1
- Special Meeting - 3

Meetings of the full Council are presided over by the Cathaoirleach of the Council. In the event that the Cathaoirleach is absent, the Leas Cathaoirleach chairs the meeting. The public and the media have a statutory right to attend meetings of the Council. Council meetings are held on the second Monday of each month with the exception being August. The statutory meetings are hosted in the Council Chamber, Áras Contae an Chláir, and via MS Teams.

The Annual General Meeting is held in June each year. Councillor Joe Cooney, who represents Killaloe Municipal District, was elected Cathaoirleach in June 2023 for the ensuing year. Councillor Gabriel Keating, who represents West Clare Municipal District, was elected Leas Cathaoirleach at that same meeting.

Corporate Plan 2019-2024

The Corporate Plan 2019-2024 was adopted

on 14th December 2019. Clare County Council will be a professional, responsive and agile local government that will lead the social, economic, physical and rural development of our county, and have sustainable communities at its heart.

Strategic Objectives 2019 -2024

Clare County Council operates under six directorates, namely: Finance and Support Services, Economic Development, Physical Development, Rural Development, Social Development, and Tourism Development. These directorates have agreed strategic objectives and supporting strategies as set out below.

Finance and Support Services

To provide the human resources, financial and information systems to support and develop the Council's ability to deliver evolving services to its customers by empowering our staff and enabling them to deliver to their best capacity.

Economic Development

Facilitate a proactive, sustainable and carbon neutral economic environment where businesses locate and grow and create sustainable employment supporting our communities, thus enhancing the economic capacity of County Clare.

Physical Development

To deliver, maintain and protect key infrastructure to facilitate the economic, social, physical, and rural development of County Clare in a manner which promotes sustainability, accessibility, connectivity, and respect for the environment.

Rural Development

Put in place a process of engagement in a rural development strategy to deliver key projects that will improve the quality of life, social and

economic wellbeing of people in County Clare.

Social Development

To enhance the quality of life for the people of County Clare through the provision of appropriate housing supports to all those in need across the county, to enhance our sporting facilities and outdoor amenity while encouraging participation and to ensure the development of our public infrastructure and community resilience.

Tourism Development

Put in place a process for engagement by key stakeholders with the implementation of the Clare Tourism Strategy 2030 and the Digital and Broadband Plan to deliver key tourism projects that will develop the tourism economy in Clare in a sustainable way to benefit host communities and visitors alike and improve digital accessibility.

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee has an independent role in advising the Council on financial reporting, processes, internal control, risk management and audit matters, as part of the systematic review of the control environment and governance procedures of the Council. It supports the work of the Internal Audit Department and advises the Chief Executive in relation to the operation and development of the department.

The committee is non-executive and is independent in the determination of its work programme and in formulating any recommendations, taking account of the functions referred to above.

Consequent to the 2019 local elections, a new committee was formed. The new committee will run for the full duration of the Council 2019 – 2024. The committee has five members, three

external members and two Elected Members as follows:

- Austin Slattery, qualified Chartered Accountant (Chairperson)
- Ms Rose Hally
- Mr Jimmy Browne
- Cllr Gabriel Keating
- Cllr Pat Hayes.

The committee met 5 times in total in 2023. The committee completes an annual report to Council each year.

Civic/Mayoral Receptions 2023

Civic Reception - Bernárd Lynch

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr Tony O'Brien, hosted a Civic Reception for Bernárd Lynch on 23rd June 2023 in recognition of Bernárd's significant achievements in working for human rights and for LGBTQIA+ and AIDS communities.



Cathaoirleach of Clare County Council, Cllr Tony O'Brien, and Bernárd Lynch.

Mayoral Awards

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr Tony O'Brien hosted Mayoral Awards on 26th May 2023 – conferring awards on the following worthy recipients:

- Darren Byrnes and Ian Bolger – for their courageous efforts in rescuing a child from dangerous waters in Doonbeg last year.
- The Order of Malta Shannon – celebrating their 50th year serving the community of Shannon and its surrounding areas.

- Mick Guinee – for his support of community organisations in the Shannon Municipal District and beyond, while also providing employment in the Shannon Industrial Estate.
- Padraic Flaherty – for writing and producing Clare FM's award-winning tribute documentary to Ennis native and former priest, Bernárd Lynch, titled 'Falsely Accused'.
- June Curtin – the founder of Snámhai Sásta, for her continued positive outlook on life, and her promotion of both physical and mental health for herself and others.
- Diarmuid Nash and Colin Crehan – in recognition of their doubles success this year at the O'Neill's All-Ireland 4-Wall Senior Championships, making it a third senior doubles title for the pair.



Pictured are recipients of the Mayoral Awards with the Cathaoirleach of Clare County Council, Cllr Tony O'Brien.

Civic Reception - Clare Junior Camogie Team and Clare Minor Hurling Team

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr Joe Cooney, hosted a Civic Reception on 4th December 2023 for Clare Junior Camogie Team and Clare Minor Hurling Team to acknowledge the teams' outstanding achievements at national level in winning All Ireland finals as follows:

- Clare Junior Camogie Team on winning the Glen Dimplex All-Ireland Camogie Premier Junior Championship Final 2023.

- Clare Minor Hurling Team on winning both the AIB Munster GAA Hurling Championship Final and the Electric Ireland GAA Hurling All-Ireland Minor Championship Final 2023.



Pictured with Cathaoirleach of Clare County Council, Cllr Joe Cooney, are: (L-R): Clare Minor Hurling manager, Brian O'Connell, and Clare Minor Hurling captain, Eoghan Gunning.



Pictured with Cathaoirleach of Clare County Council, Cllr Joe Cooney, are: (L-R): Clare Junior Camogie captain, Sinéad O'Keeffe, and Clare Junior Camogie manager, John Carmody.

Register of Electors

Clare County Council is responsible for the compilation of the Register of Electors for County Clare. The boundary of the Dáil constituency of Clare is the same as the county boundary of Clare in accordance with the Electoral Amendment (Dáil Constituencies) Act 2017.

The Electorate can now access www.checktheregister.ie to register to vote, and update their details, including PPS number and Eircode. Every person aged 18 years of age or over and who permanently resides at a particular address within the state is eligible for inclusion on the Register of Electors. From the age of 16, people can apply to be on the pending register. Their application will be activated once they turn 18 years of age.

Both national and local awareness campaigns were run in 2023 to highlight the changes to the electoral registration process and invite the public to engage with the process specifically to register for the first time or update their details by adding their date of birth, PPSN and Eircode. The campaigns were publicised across a wide range of platforms, including national and local newspapers and radio channels, and social media to ensure as wide an audience as possible is reached. These campaigns have resulted in a significant increase in the number of individuals, both registering to vote for the first time and those updating their details on www.checktheregister.ie

The total number of Local Government electors on 31st December 2023 Register of Electors in Clare is 92,463.

Protected Disclosures Act 2014

Annual Report of Statistics - Internal Reports made under section 6 of the Act

1 Protected Disclosure was received via internal reporting channels in the calendar year 2023 and was closed with no further action taken.

1 follow-up procedures was carried over from the previous year and was closed in the calendar year 2023.

Annual Report of Statistics - External Reports made or transmitted under sections 7, 7A, 10C and 10D of the Act

No reports were received via the external

reporting channel established under section 7(2B) of the Act.

Business Innovation 2023

Clare County Council's Business Innovation team, consisting of representatives from each Directorate, worked on delivering the actions contained in the Business Innovation Strategy.

At our bi-monthly meetings, the Innovation representatives bring forward Innovative proposals from their Directorate for consideration.

Several business improvement projects were completed in 2023, including the following:

- QR codes at our beaches to facilitate easy access to maps, tidal times and beach byelaws.
- Internal Audit tracker - enables Internal Audit, Senior Management and the Audit Committee to track progress on Audit recommendations.
- Development of Garden Spaces at a number of local libraries which benefit the wellbeing of both staff and patrons. The spaces have also been used to host various events.
- Gardening booklets – these booklets, available to the public, include photos of flower beds around Ennis, details of names of flowers/shrubs planted, type of soil required, maintenance advice, bee and pollinator friendly plants etc.

Customer Care Co-Ordinator

The Council is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers and has a complaints/ comments policy in place. The Council's Customer Care Co-ordinator investigates all complaints/comments received. A person not satisfied with the response provided by the Customer Care Co-ordinator can request to have their case reviewed again by the Senior Executive Officer, Corporate Services. In 2023, the Customer Care Co-ordinator responded to

12 complaints received, 1 of which was dealt with under appeal, to the Senior Executive Officer.

Our Customer Services Team continued to provide excellent customer service, working with members of the public who presented at Aras Contae an Chlair, assisting them with their queries and directing them to appropriate services.

Communications and Public Relations

The Communications Office communicates and promotes Council activities and services and raises public awareness of issues of local and national interest.

In 2023, the Communications Office issued more than 140 media releases, resulting in extensive local and national coverage, and responded to press queries from local and national media.

The Communications Office updates social media channels with creative content to enhance engagement with the public and maintain awareness of the work of the Council. The Council's corporate social media accounts now have a combined following of approximately 32,300.

During 2023's severe weather events, the Communications Office provided regular updates and advice to the public via local and national media, social media channels, and the news section of the Clare County Council website.

Clare County Council supported several worthy causes during 2023, with the Communications Office helping to raise awareness of local and national initiatives.

The Monthly Management Reports, reporting the progress made by Clare County Council

directorates during the preceding month, were produced. 'The Banner Bulletin' staff newsletter was produced and distributed to staff. The Communications Office continued to provide news items for the main Council website, as well as the staff Intranet and Extranet.

The Graphic Design and Print Service staff further enhanced the quality of internal and external communications carried out by Clare County Council, by producing high-quality design and print material.

Office of the Ombudsman

This office was established under the Ombudsman Act, 1980. Its role is to investigate complaints about administrative actions, delays or inactions, adversely affecting persons or bodies in their dealings with state bodies including Local Authorities. The Office of the Ombudsman dealt with 20 Customer complaints in 2023 which were referred to Clare County Council for a response and report.

Ombudsman for Children

In 2023, no complaint was made to the Ombudsman for Children.

Freedom of Information & Data Protection

Freedom of Information

In 2023 there were 156 FOI requests, 4 internal reviews and 4 appeals to the Office of Information Commissioner (OIC). Three of the OIC appeals were finalized in 2023 and in each case the decision of the Council was upheld. One case remains with the OIC.

The outcome of requests received in 2023 was as follows: granted – 27; part-granted – 47; refused – 35; transferred – 2. A further 10 were withdrawn and handled outside the FOI process and 35 requests were received which

were invalid under the Act but which, with requester cooperation, were handled outside of the Act. The categories of requester in 2023 were as follows: journalists – 41; business interest groups – 15; public representatives – 2; staff – 1; clients/others – 97.

The policy of Clare County Council is:

“To give members of the public access to information held by this authority, to the greatest extent possible, in accordance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 and consistent with the public interest and the right to privacy of the individual.” Further information, application form and details of the fee structure is available on the council’s website <https://www.clarecoco.ie/your-council/how-we-manage-information/freedom-of-information/how-to-apply-for-information/>.

Data Protection

Clare County Council processes all personal information in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Acts, 1988 to 2018. There are extensive obligations on data controllers and processors, and strengthened protections and rights for data subjects. During 2023, the data protection officer (DPO) provided advice, guidance and support to departments in relation to GDPR and the Law Enforcement Directive (which was transposed into Irish law by Part 5 of the 2018 Act). The DPO provided training to increase understanding and to meet specific obligations.

Data requests and data breaches are also handled through the DPO. In 2023, there were forty-two data access requests made under the Data Protection Act/GDPR for personal data held by the Council, comprising of thirty (30) third party access requests, ten (10) data subject access requests, and two (2) erasure requests.

Privacy Statement

Clare County Council is committed to protecting and respecting privacy. The Privacy Statement lets you know how we look after your personal data. It also informs you as to our obligations and your rights under data protection law. Clare County Council’s privacy statement can be found at: <https://www.clarecoco.ie/%5binfo%5d/privacy-statement/>

Records Management

In 2023, the Record Management Unit continued to archive large volume of records which are required to be retained under the National Retention Policy for Local Authority Records. In addition, records were disposed of in accordance with the National Retention Policy for Local Authority Records. The ADLIB Records Management database system is used to record all files which are archived and when disposed of.

Archival records are stored at both Quin Road Record Management facility and Beechpark depot.

Records Management has collected all Chief Executive Orders, County Council minute books and registers of electors that will be bound and subsequently archived, thus ensuring vital records are permanently and securely preserved.

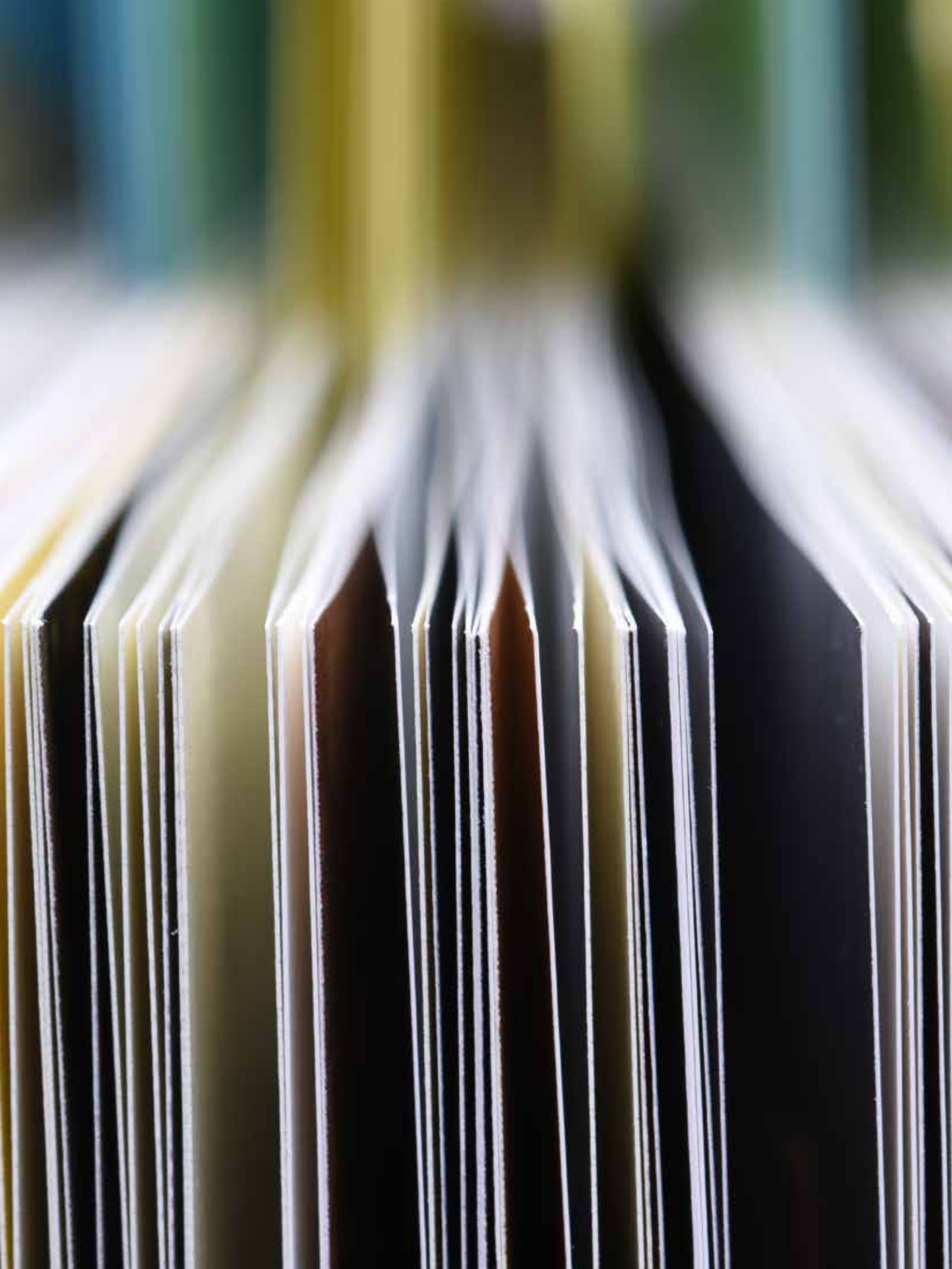
Carbon Emissions

Report for calendar year 2023 under Public Sector Climate Action Mandate in CAP23 on Compliance with Circular 1/2020:

Total KMs travelled via flights: 369,751

Tonnes of CO2 applicable: 25,601.70

Amount remitted to Climate Action Fund, Department of Environment, Climate and Communications for 2023: €1,228.88





Clare County Council supporting new leading-edge innovation.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE



LIAM CONNEALLY
Director of Economic Development
To 9th April 2023



CARMEL KIRBY
Director of Economic Development
From 10th April 2023

2023 was another busy year for the Council's Economic Development Directorate, which comprises the Planning Department, Property Management Unit, Local Enterprise Office, Town Centre First and the Ennis Municipal District.

Despite many headwinds and challenges, businesses in Clare continued to demonstrate strong resilience and are a key driver of a successful local economy. Micro enterprises supported by Clare County Council continue to grow employment with 62 net jobs created in 2023. These small businesses remain a core component of economic activity in our towns

and villages across the county. The Directorate also proactively engages with Enterprise Ireland to support our larger SMEs and with the IDA to attract new inward investment to Clare. These initiatives are supported in collaboration with Shannon Airport Group and Fine Grain Properties. The Council is a key enabler of new technologies emerging e.g. future mobility options, and is a leading regional partner focused on the potential economic benefits of developing our offshore wind capability. Given the strategic importance of our future energy needs, The Clare Economic Task Force is a key advisor in assisting Clare County Council to

identify and harness the economic benefits that will undoubtedly accrue from significant investment along the Shannon Estuary and West Clare.

The continued uplift in planning and development activity indicates strong signs of a growing economy in the county, this was underpinned by work on the preparation of the new Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, which was finalised in early 2023.

During 2023, the Derelict Sites team continued the level of activity in dealing with Derelict Sites and in particular, commencing compulsory acquisition of properties that were derelict for many years. This is part of a wider Compulsory Activation Programme promoted by the Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government under the Vacant Homes Action Plan. Key to the work programme in 2023 was the promotion and activation of the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant.

From a town regeneration perspective, the completion of town enhancement plans in 2023 for Ennistymon, Corofin and Sixmilebridge demonstrates Clare County Council's commitment to regenerating our local towns and villages, focused on both community and economic development, to become better places to live, work and visit.

Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC)

The Committee comprises seven elected members of Clare County Council and six sectoral representatives. Four meetings of the Committee were held in 2023 with a range of policy areas such as Town Centre First, Local Enterprise Office, Vacant Homes Grants, Clare Tourism, Marine Planning, Climate Adaptation, Biodiversity, planning and offshore renewable energy examined. In 2023, considerable time was allocated to the development of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) with SPC members participating in joint meetings with the members of the Local Community

and Development Committee (LCDC) as both committees progressed the development of the LECP through the various stages. Key focus areas in the coming five years will include a review of Clare actions in the Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024, a review and guidance of the Local Economic and Community Plan, enablement of the offshore renewable energy industry and associated supply chain supports, the implementation of the Shannon Town Masterplan and the Ennis 2040 Spatial and Economic Strategy, climate adaptation and biodiversity will be standing agenda items for the SPC during the length of its tenure.

South Clare/UL Economic Strategic Development Zone (SDZ)

Since 2018, the Council has worked closely with University of Limerick on the preparation of the South Clare/UL Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) application with the objective of transforming 325 acres of greenfield lands beside UL's existing 125-acre campus in County Clare into an education/employment/residential university zone. The University of Limerick is leading out on the unique opportunities for economic development of international scale on the Clare Campus of UL. The objective is to provide the environment and capacity to create at least 3,500 jobs and support University of Limerick to seek the EU designation of Europe's first University SDZ.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region provides significant regional policy priority to the SDZ and identifies the site as a national enabler. It is an objective of the RSES to support the designation and subsequent development of the lands zoned as University in the Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023 as an economic Strategic Development Zone (SDZ). Engagement with the governing Department at national level continued during 2023.

Strategic Integrated Framework Plan for the Shannon Estuary (SIFP)

The Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce Report was published in July 2023. The Report sets out recommendations for the delivery of up to 30GW of Offshore Floating Wind, facilitated through the operational and maintenance phases within the Shannon Estuary by 2050 together with measures to maximise the industrial development opportunities that will accompany offshore wind development. The Report also sets out a vision for the Shannon Estuary to become Ireland's Atlantic Green Digital Corridor with proposed new initiatives in the transport, logistics, connectivity, and tourism sectors.

Clare County Council fed into the first implementation update for the Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce Report in December 2023 and has committed to several key Actions as outlined in the Annex to this report as follows:

Action	Owner	Due Date
Re-establishment and resourcing of the Shannon Estuary Strategic Integrated Framework Plan Steering Committee to recommence preparatory planning and environmental activities for current and potential new SDLs, with adequate support and centrally resourced. Local Authorities to consider collective planning designation for the Shannon Estuary region (potential SDZ or similar) to provide for streamlined and coordinated planning procedures that can meet the industrial and societal needs of the region.	Limerick City & County Council, Clare County Council, Kerry County Council, Shannon Foynes Port Company, DHLGH	Q3 2023
Establish a Maritime Training Centre of Excellence in Kilrush by 2025, with funding supported by government through existing funding routes	Clare County Council	Q4 2024
SEETF lends its support to Clare County Council and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) to complete the West Clare Railway Greenway	Clare County Council/Transport Infrastructure Ireland	Q4 2024
Work with Clare County Council, Kerry County Council, Tipperary County Council and Limerick City and County Council in identifying quality indoor attractions that will strengthen the tourism offering of the 4 DEDPs	Fáilte Ireland	Q4 2024
Establishment of a Working Group led by Fáilte Ireland to include Coillte, the Office of Public Works, National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Limerick City and County Council, Kerry County Council, Tipperary County Council and Clare County Council to identify most appropriate site to develop plans for Forest Park along Shannon Estuary	Fáilte Ireland	Q3 2023
Clare County Council to engage with stakeholders to upgrade the facilities of Bunratty Castle and Folk Park and deliver a world-class visitor experience	Clare County Council	Q4 2024
Establishment of a working group led by Shannon Foynes Port Company with membership comprising Cruise Europe, Limerick City and County Council, Kerry County Council, Clare County Council, and The Shannon Airport Group to develop key targets for number of cruises docking at Shannon Estuary by 2027/2030 with actions identified to realise this target	Shannon Foynes Port Company	Q3 2023

The Economic Directorate is committed to progressing these actions in conjunction with our colleagues across all Directorates to meet the relevant due dates.

Roche Masterplan

As a strategic project for County Clare, Clare County Council continued to work with Roche (Ireland) Ltd in 2023 to identify potential future development and proposed employment opportunities for the site. The Swiss multinational healthcare firm has completed the first two phases of remediation at the 88-acre site and in July Roche Senior Management presented a letter to Clare County Council offering the right of first refusal to the site when remediation works are complete. In return, the Local Authority will develop a masterplan for the site with the goal of attracting foreign direct investment and delivering sustainable jobs.

Planning Department

Forward Planning

Marine Planning Legislation

In May 2023 Minister Darragh O'Brien signed off on Part 2 (with the exception of Chapter 9) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021. Part 2 provides for the preparation and publication of Maritime Spatial Plans, for the designation of public bodies who may make Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs), and for the preparation and publication of Designated Maritime Area Plans.

On July 5th, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage Darragh O'Brien TD designated Minister for the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan TD, as the competent authority for the purposes of preparing and publishing a Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) or Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs) in respect of offshore renewable energy for the Irish maritime area. In accordance with Section 20 (1) (c) of the MAP Act, Minister Ryan is the competent authority responsible for all offshore renewable energy plans (sectoral area) in the Irish maritime area.

While the first Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) will be located off the south coast of Ireland the Economic Directorate have met with the Department of Environment, Climate

and Communications with respect to Clare County being designated as a competent authority in accordance with Section 20 of the MAP Act 2021. Section 21 of the Act requires that the Competent Authority shall only submit a proposal for a DMAP after it has been designated a competent authority.

Clare County Council has acted as Lead Authority working on behalf of all statutory and non-statutory bodies on the SIFP for the Shannon Estuary successfully preparing and publishing, the first of its kind in Ireland providing for an integrated, interjurisdictional sustainable development Plan.

Clare County Council would once again be open to leading on the preparation of a DMAP for a defined geographical area on the West Coast. Should Clare County Council be nominated as a Competent Authority for DMAPs by the Minister of HLGH and given the authority to develop a DMAP this could be undertaken in line with the MAP Act which indicates that a Coastal Planning Authority can be designated in respect of *"Acting as a coordinating body for some or all of the competent authorities for some of their activities"*.

The Minister also has the power to delegate functions and while DECC has already been nominated as the competent authority for all ORE DMAPs this can be delegated (if both DHLGH and DECC agree to it). Through the nomination of Clare County Council as a competent authority acting on behalf of the other coastal planning authorities surrounding the estuary and indeed the west coast there is significant potential for collaboration between coastal planning authorities and regional assemblies to deliver a joint DMAP.

Similar to the approach taken by Clare County Council with respect to the SIFP given the interjurisdictional nature of the Offshore Renewable Energy sector, the competing interests, strategic and economic importance of the Shannon Estuary, the size and scale of the potential developments amongst other factors there is a real and urgent need to progress with the designation of a Competent Authority whom can deliver on the DMAPs

process in a timely fashion to provide for a route to consent for renewable energy projects off the West Coast over the coming decade. Local Authorities and in particular Clare County Council are extremely well placed to achieve such an ambitious proposal given the expertise in terms of Forward Planning in the terrestrial space. Through the application of the principles of sustainable planning and development coupled with our expertise in integrated coastal planning Clare County Council can provide the mechanism through which to deliver on a West Coast DMAP in a timely manner. Designation of Clare County Council as a Competent Authority to prepare a West Coast DMAP would also fulfil the requirement as outlined in the Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce Report together with the Implementation Report to Government which requires that the authorities surrounding the estuary co-ordinate on the preparation of a DMAP.

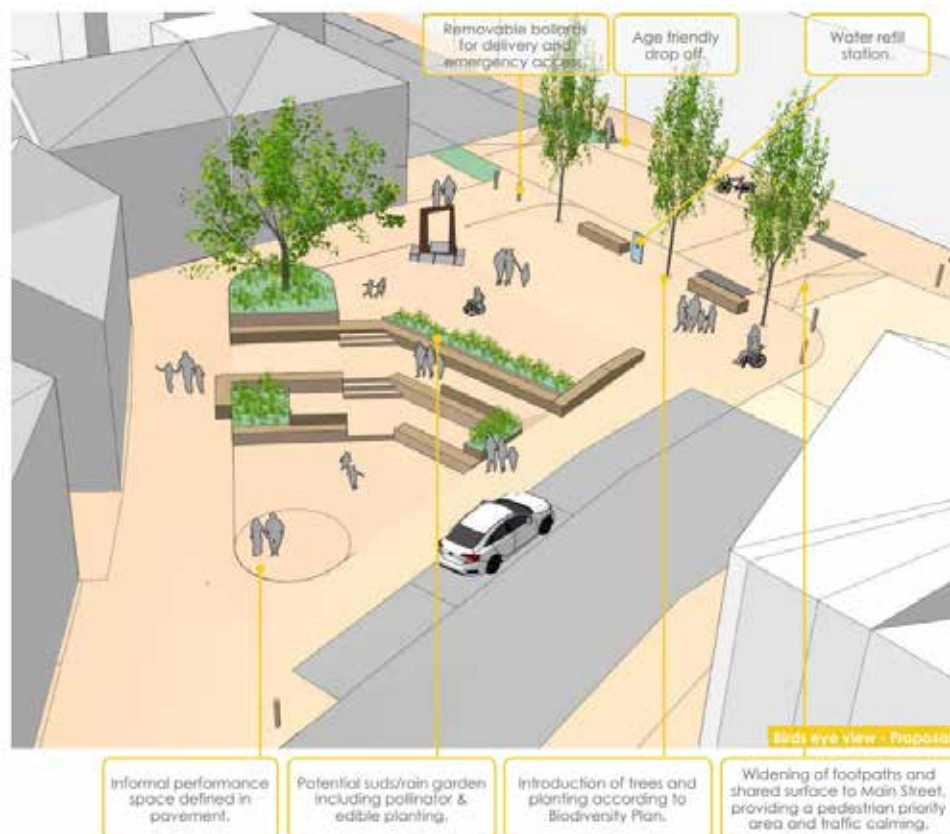
Residential Zoned Land Tax

RZLT together with other initiatives across the Council are aimed at activating zoned and

served lands for residential development. The RZLT was proposed under Housing For All 2021 and was introduced by the Finance Act 2021, with the purpose of activating serviced zoned land that could accommodate residential development to increase housing supply and to ensure regeneration of vacant and idle lands in urban locations. While the administration of the RZLT is the responsibility of the Revenue Commissioners the statutory responsibility lies with the local authority to prepare and publish maps that show zoned lands within scope of the RZLT. During 2023 the development and refinement of the mapping system continued which included periods of public consultation at draft, supplemental and final map stages. As announced in the Budget 2024, liability for the tax was deferred by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage from 2024 to 2025.

Ennistymon Town and Village Funding

Clare County Council, together with its partners Clare Local Development Company and Ennistymon Town Team, and the design



team led by Helena McElmeel Architects, prepared the Ennistymon Enhancement plan which was completed in 2022. In 2023 Town and Village Funding was awarded for a project which emanated from this plan for public realm works at Parliament Street.

A further Town and Village Funding application was also made in 2023 for works at The Square, Ennistymon. It is anticipated that the results of that application will be known early in 2024.

Cappa Town and Village Funding

The Cappa Enhancement Strategy is a plan led initiative completed by the Planning Department in close consultation with the local community. The plan was built upon the principle of maximising the potential of the village, while retaining its distinct maritime character and village scale. In 2023 Town and Village funding was awarded for a new access to the beach and existing playground area which would reclaim this area as part of the coastal walk and address safety concerns of children jumping the wall to shorten their way to the playground. The new access would

provide a wide accessible route and open up an expansive view of the water and Scattery Island from the footpath and road.

Corofin Enhancement Strategy

Over a two-and-a-half-year period the Planning Department together with its partner the National Parks & Wildlife Services (NPWS) worked with an award winning multi-disciplinary team to prepare an Enhancement Strategy for the village of Corofin, which was partly funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. This enhancement plan supports the development of projects aiming to breathe life into these communities, tackling vacancy and addressing dereliction within the village. The completed plan aligns with Town Centre principles and will be utilised as the basis on which to apply for future funding opportunities such as the RRDF announced at the end of 2023.



Architectural Conservation

Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS)

The BHIS is designed to assist with the repair and conservation of structures that are protected under the Planning and Development Acts. In certain cases, the scheme also supports the conservation of structures within Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) where, in the opinion of the local authority, a need for works to enhance the character and appearance of an ACA has been demonstrated. The primary purpose of the scheme is to support privately owned properties in need of repair and conservation.

Works to 10 protected structures were allocated funding of €96,000 under the 2023 Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS). Seven projects were completed. These were:

1. Manus House, Ennis - Works to repair doors and windows of house.
2. Corpus Christi, Lisdoonvarna - Works to repair roof of church.
3. Land Steward's House, Clooney - Works to repair roof of former land steward's house, part of former Clooney House Estate.
4. Besborough House, Killimer - Works to repair walls and roof of outbuildings.
5. No. 1 Bindon Street, Ennis - Works to repoint and lime plaster external wall of Georgian House.
6. Glencairn House, Ennis - Works to repoint and repair external wall.
7. Byrne's Shop, Ennistymon - Works to repair and replaster chimney breast

Historic Structures Fund

The Historic Structures Fund (HSF) is for the conservation and enhancement of historic structures and buildings for the broader benefit of communities and the public. In 2023, funding of €48,000 was allocated to two projects. The projects were:

1. St Flannan's Church, Barefield - Works for the repair and restoration of four distinctive stained-glass windows in the church.
2. St John's Church, Cratloe - Works to repair the roof of church.

Community Monuments Fund 2023

The Conservation Management Plans of the three medieval churches of Kilkeedy, Killoo and Kilfenora were completed in 2023. The Conservation Management Plans are to be used in seeking further funding for capital works to consolidate and protect these medieval churches.

Section 57 Applications

Section 57 Declarations are issued to owners of buildings or structures that wish to conduct works to their protected structures. A Declaration determines whether works would be considered exempt from planning and can also be used to clarify the curtilage of a protected structure, or what elements are to be protected. 27 applications for declarations were received in the year.

Development Management

Planning Applications

The number of planning applications received in 2023 was 1,227. In addition, there were four Part VIII Local Authority own development applications. Determinations were made in relation to 959 planning applications, of which 881 (91.9%) were granted and 78 (8.1%) were refused. Of the 45 applications determined by An Bord Pleanála during the year, 34 decisions (76%) of Clare County Council were upheld.

E-Planning Project

The National Online Planning Portal was launched in Clare County Council in mid-December 2022, with Clare County Council

being part of Phase 1 of the LGMA National Roll-Out. The portal was designed to streamline applications for planning permission and the submission of observations on planning applications across all Local Authorities in Ireland. The online portal is easy-to-use and is moving towards a paperless and environmentally friendly domain where applicants have 24/7 access to their planning applications. There were 584 E-Planning applications received in 2023.

Pre-Planning Enquiries

A total of 174 pre-planning consultations took place during the year, which enables applicants to discuss the principle of their proposals free of charge with a Council planning officer.

Development Contributions

The sum of €2,655,000 was collected during 2023. These contributions provide funding towards capital work programmes on a range of infrastructure including roads, amenity, community, recreation and car parking. The Council continues to collect water and sewerage contributions on behalf of Irish Water on planning permissions granted prior to January 1st 2014.

Enforcement of Planning Law

The Enforcement Section of the Planning Department saw a high level of activity during 2023 and the activity is summarised in the following table:

Number of Complaints Received	194
New Cases Investigated	110
Warning Letters Issued	102
Enforcement Notices Issued	28
Legal Cases Initiated	5
Files Closed	46

Taking in Charge of Housing Estates

Eleven housing estates were taken in charge by the Council in 2023. The taking in charge

team also proactively monitored 12 new developments under construction during 2023. The ongoing monitoring of estates, albeit resource intensive, should ensure that housing developments in the future are finished to a higher standard and that the subsequent taking in charge processes should be more straightforward.



Progress was made on the completion and/or remediation of many other previously unfinished developments, including three large estates, through engagement with bondholders, developers, contractors, and residents. The team continue to finalise site resolution plans and to arrange for remedial works contracts to be put in place on unfinished developments where the Council have claimed and received bond monies.



In developments where the bonds, for a variety of reasons, are insufficient to complete the required works, it is hoped that a national incentive scheme, like that provided by the Department in 2016 would become available

to the Council, which would assist in the completion of these historical developments.

Shannon Town Centre Masterplan

The preparation of the Shannon Town Centre Masterplan, which is part funded by the Government's Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF), was adopted by the Shannon Municipal District in 2022. The Masterplan comprises two elements - a spatial masterplan and an economic viability assessment of the Plan.

As a direct result of that masterplan work commenced in 2022 on the development of The One Shannon Hub, a project envisaged to be a community, civic and cultural hub where multiple uses can coexist to create new synergies and to ensure activity throughout the day and night. This work continued into 2023 where a design team and project management team was appointed to bring the development to Concept Design stage. Stakeholder and public consultation was completed in 2023 with the identification of a concept design, intervention areas and key projects that will transform the economic, social and cultural development of Shannon Town and the built environment and public realm.

Clare County Council continues to actively engage with stakeholders and landowners to deliver upon the objectives of the One Shannon Hub project with funding streams, including the Urban Regeneration Development Fund being targeted for 2024 to enable delivery of this development.

Town Centre First

Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan

The Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan was officially launched in

Sixmilebridge on Wednesday, 2nd August, 2023. It is the first Town Centre Plan in the county completed that received funding under the first phase of the National Town Centre First initiative. Over the past 12 months, Clare County Council has engaged with the community in Sixmilebridge, working collaboratively to establish a local Town Team and gathering feedback to understand what the community wants to see for their town in the future. The Town Team is made up of representatives including elected members, community members, businesses, youth, age-friendly and sports representatives amongst others, who have played a key role in the development of the Town Centre First Plan and will play a key role in supporting its implementation.

The vision for the Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan is to ensure that Sixmilebridge develops as an attractive and desirable place to work, live, visit and do business. Therefore, the implementation and delivery of this plan is now the focus of the Town Team in collaboration with Clare County Council.

Background work has already commenced to identify upcoming funding streams that align to key projects identified in the implementation plan, and the Town Regeneration Officer and Rural and Community Development Officer is working with the Town Team to prioritise these projects.



Left to right: Carmel Kirby, Director of Economic Development; Eileen Moloney, Treasurer, Sixmilebridge Town Team; Colette Myler, Secretary, Sixmilebridge Town Team; Gwen Bowen, Chairperson, Sixmilebridge Town Team; Pat Dowling, Chief Executive, Clare County Council; Linda Earley, A/Town Regeneration Officer; and Niamh Wiley, Rural Development Community Officer.

Ennis 2040 Economic and Spatial Strategy

The primary goal of the Ennis 2040 Economic and Spatial Strategy (“Strategy”) is focused on the sustainable economic development of the town. This Strategy coupled with the provisions included in the Clare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029 (recently adopted) are the central planks for realising and delivering the key changes that are needed to cater for a growing population between now and 2040. Evidence of this population growth has recently been confirmed with the publication of additional information from Census 2022 which shows the population of Ennis is now close to 28,000 people (+ 3,000 since 2016).

Sustainability is and will continue to be central to Ennis 2040 activities and priorities. The transformational projects that have been initiated are key to achieving our goal of a ‘10 minute town’ and demonstrating how a county town the size of Ennis can deliver and respond to climate change and ‘town centre first’ living. Over the course of 2023, Ennis 2040 has continued to progress a number of key town centre projects (estimated total investment of €48m) the details of which are set out below.

Francis St – Affordable Housing

Departmental approval for the construction of Affordable Housing for Ennis was secured by Clare County Council Housing Department during Q1 2023 which presented an opportunity to progress the potential of the Francis St site for an affordable housing scheme. A scheme has been designed to deliver 39 housing units on this site. The necessary planning steps for this development were undertaken by Clare County Council during December 2023. Follow on enabling works are now underway. In parallel, specific funding approval for this

project under the Affordable Housing Scheme is being progressed with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH).

Abbey St – Retail/Office

A detailed design for this development was prepared over the course of 2023. Public consultation on this design and the preparation of a follow on planning application for submission to An Bord Pleanála are underway.

Harvey’s Quay – Residential/Mixed Use

The preparation of a detailed design and planning application for future development of this site is approaching completion. A follow-on public consultation and subsequent planning application will be progressed in 2024. Engagement with DHLGH is also ongoing in respect of this development.

Post Office Field – Amenity Area

This is a key amenity and bio-diverse area located in the centre of Ennis town. It acts as a flood plain at times of high-water levels in the River Fergus. A masterplan to flesh out the remediation and access options for a suitable parkland amenity/recreational development of this area has been completed by Ennis 2040. A follow-on public consultation and subsequent planning application will be progressed in 2024.

Economic Impact Analysis

AECOM on behalf of Ennis 2040 completed an Economic Impact Assessment that sheds light on the transformative potential of a proposed €48 million investment on the four strategic sites outlined above. They cited that the delivery of the projects concerned will be a ‘game changer’ for Ennis and its future progress. This study concluded that the construction phase of these projects has the potential to create 526 jobs, providing a substantial and immediate boost to the

local job market. Beyond construction, the completed projects are expected to generate 231 long term jobs, contributing an additional €3.5 million annually to the local economy.

Planning

Forward Planning

Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029

Following a Special Council meeting on 9th March, 2023, when the Elected Members of Clare County Council agreed by resolution to make the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, the Plan came into effect on 20th April. The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 is now the principal planning document for the functional area of the local authority area over the six-year statutory period of the plan 2023-2029. On 18th April, 2023, the Minister of State in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage issued a draft Direction to Clare County Council, upon the recommendation of the Office of the Planning Regulator. A total of 25 submissions were received during the public consultation period. The Chief Executive's Report on submissions received in relation to the Draft Ministerial Direction to the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 was completed in June 2023 and circulated to the Elected Members, the Office of the Planning Regulator, the Minister and the Southern Regional Assembly. On 3rd August, 2023, the Minister of State in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage issued a final Direction to Clare County Council regarding the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029. The Minister's final Direction remained unchanged from the earlier draft Direction issued.

The Direction was deemed to have immediate effect from the date of issue on 3rd August, 2023. A Special Council Meeting was held on Monday 18th September to which Oireachtas Members were invited to attend, where the

issues relating to the Ministerial Direction and the policies as they relate to the County Development Plan were discussed.

Heritage

Clare County Heritage Plan 2024-2030

The Heritage Council funded the preparation of the 4th Clare County Heritage Plan which commenced in July 2023 which will set out the vision and direction for heritage management for the next six years. The plan will deliver on an objective of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and give effect to its goals and objectives for heritage across the county. The Clare County Heritage and Biodiversity Forum was also established in 2023 to inform the preparation of the Heritage Plan and guide its implementation. Pre-draft, and draft plan public consultation provided valuable input from a range of stakeholders. The plan preparation process will conclude in early 2024.

Lisdoonvarna Heritage Plan and Design Guide

In 2023, Clare County Council and Lisdoonvarna Fáilte successfully published the Lisdoonvarna Heritage Plan and Design Guide. Developed by Drake Hourigan Architects alongside a multi-disciplinary team, this comprehensive plan focuses on the town's heritage, public spaces, and green infrastructure. It was informed by robust community engagement, including workshops during Heritage Week, and aims to enhance accessibility and connectivity among Lisdoonvarna's hidden and significant heritage sites through a proposed walking trail. The plan includes innovative recommendations like a Heritage Walking App and thoughtful upgrades to the town's streetscape and entry points, emphasizing the Spa Wells Complex's conservation.

Opening the Door to Ireland's Heritage – A collection of Local Authority Heritage Officer projects publication by the Heritage Council

The Hastings Farmhouse project, highlighted in “Opening the Door to Ireland’s Heritage,” showcases the efforts of Dúchas na Sionna in preserving a significant vernacular structure from the 19th century in Shannon. This farmhouse not only reflects traditional Irish rural life but also holds historical importance for its role during the War of Independence. The collaborative preservation work, led by Dúchas na Sionna with support from the Shannon Archaeological & Historical Society, emphasises community involvement and the use of conservation specialists to maintain this heritage site for future generations. This publication can be downloaded at: <https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/Opening-the-Door-to-Irelands-Heritage.pdf>

Reading your Local Landscape 2023

The 2023 “Reading Your Local Landscape” course in Ennis highlighted Clare’s heritage through diverse projects, covering maritime heritage, medieval urban landscapes, ecological diversity, ancient practices, and personal reflections on familiar settings. Participants explored themes like the history of Liscannor’s harbours, the architectural narrative of Ennis, the mystique of Killone Lake, and hidden sacred sites like the Loughaun Mass Rock. The course illuminated the complex relationship between Clare’s community and its environment, culminating in a public exhibition that deepened community engagement and reinforced the importance of heritage education in connecting with local landscapes.

Clare Holy Wells Project

The Holy Wells Project, under Michael Houlihan’s leadership and in close collaboration

with the GIS Officer at Clare County Council, has been on-going and nearing completion with less than ten wells left to document. Launched in January 2022, the project’s webpage now showcases 237 holy wells, offering a wealth of information through maps, photographs, and narratives. This initiative highlights the special place these wells hold in Clare’s heritage, bringing to life their stories and ensuring their preservation for future generations.

Community Heritage Grant Funding in 2023

In 2023, Clare County’s Community Heritage Grant Scheme demonstrated a robust commitment to heritage preservation, allocating funds to seven distinct projects aimed at conserving and enhancing the region’s cultural and natural heritage. These funded initiatives showcased a wide array of efforts from historical preservation to biodiversity conservation. Specifically, the scheme supported:

1. The Quin Heritage Group in preserving the Historic Quin Friary Graveyard.
2. The School of Lost Skills by Common Knowledge in reviving traditional crafts.
3. Dúchas na Sionna in restoring the historic Hastings Farmhouse.
4. The Irish Iron Heritage Foundation CLG in celebrating iron heritage at the Caherconnell International Furnace Festival.
5. The Eldertree Community Group in their ongoing community enhancement efforts.
6. St Fachnan’s Cathedral in Kilfenora for a Photogrammetry Survey and Training Course.
7. The Hogsprickle in wildlife rehabilitation efforts within County Clare.

These seven funded projects reflect the diverse approaches to heritage conservation

adopted by Clare County, underscoring a comprehensive strategy that ranges from architectural preservation to environmental stewardship.

Clare Biodiversity

Local Biodiversity Action Fund (LBAF) Projects

Clare County Council along with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (through the Local Biodiversity Action Fund) funded and supported 10 biodiversity projects in County Clare in 2023.

- County Clare Wetland Survey 2023: This project aimed to field survey, map and evaluate 19 wetland sites within Ennis Municipal District.
- Ennis Circuitscape Study: Clare County Council commissioned a consultant to prepare a circuitscape bat study of Ennis town environs.
- Burren Protected Species Survey: This project aims to determine the current status of rare, threatened and characteristic plants of the Burren and Aran Islands.
- Clare Barn Owl Project 2023: This project assesses uptake and breeding status of all nest boxes installed through this project to date (2022 to present), to determine the number that are occupied and to assess breeding success in these nest boxes.
- Ardnaculla Summer School: In July 2023, Clare County Council supported the Ardnaculla Summer School event organised by Hometree Charity. The Ardnaculla Summer School 2023 hosted twenty-four biodiversity workshops that took place over the weekend of 7th-9th July with over 200 participants in attendance.
- West Clare Invasive Alien Species (IAS) Survey: Survey to detail the distribution and extent of invasive alien plant species (IAPS) along selected regional and local primary roads in West Clare (Kilrush to Kilkee to Loop Head).
- Shannon Dolphin Project: Clare County Council supported a communications work package project led by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (Shannon Dolphin Project) to promote biodiversity awareness of dolphins in the Shannon Estuary.
- Quagga Mussel Project: This project aimed to monitor the invasion of the quagga mussel (*Dreissena rostriformis bugensis*) and other aquatic invasive species in the Shannon River system.
- Killaloe Invasive Species Treatment and Eradication Project.
- Hare's Corner Communications Work Package (Biodiversity Awareness).



Establishment of the Clare Heritage and Biodiversity Forum

In June 2023, a new Clare Heritage and Biodiversity Forum was established consisting of a wide range of stakeholders drawn from a variety of sectors and organisations with a county wide remit, all of whom have a recognised role in the protection and promotion of heritage and biodiversity in County Clare. The forum led by the biodiversity and heritage officers, will inform and provide observations during the preparation stage of the Heritage and Biodiversity Plans and provide feedback and assistance in the implementation and monitoring of the plans.

National Biodiversity Week (19th-28th May, 2023)

County Clare hosted a range of exciting events and talks to celebrate National Biodiversity Week. Clare County Council's Biodiversity Officer organised a walk and talk at Shanakyle Bog located near Parteen.

National Heritage Week (12th-20th August, 2023)

Clare County Council supported a number of events during National Heritage Week (12th–20th August, 2023).

Irish Farmers Association (IFA) presentation

In August 2023, Clare County Council's Biodiversity and Heritage officers gave an in-person presentation at the West County Hotel (Ennis) to members of the IFA Clare Branch examining the potential biodiversity actions that can be undertaken at farm level including best practice hedgerow management, barn owl nest box installation, mowing regimes to benefit pollinators, the role farmers can play in the delivery of actions for the next Clare Biodiversity Action Plan.

Clare Schools Biodiversity Programme (670 Clare Students Participate)

In September 2023, a series of biodiversity workshops for schools called 'Clare Schools Biodiversity Programme' were developed and rolled out to 11 schools. 670 school students in County Clare learned about the important role they can play in tackling the biodiversity crisis.



Community Information Day Clinics – Biodiversity

In October 2023, over 30 community groups were met to discuss biodiversity actions across Clare's Four Municipal Districts as part of a community outreach and engagement programme.

Lesser Horseshoe Bat Steering Group

In October 2023, the Steering Group of the Lesser Horseshoe Bat Species Action Plan met in County Clare, visiting two roosts to view enhancement work and discuss future actions.

Return To Nature' Clare Biodiversity Initiative

In August 2023, the Irish Bishops Conference announced to commit to managing 30% of church grounds for Biodiversity by 2030. In September and October 2023, Clare County Council engaged with the Bishop of Killaloe and Trócaire's Laudato Si Officer to sign up 10 parishes across Clare to carry out Biodiversity actions on their church grounds.

‘Winter Wildlife Talks’ series – Biodiversity

A ‘Winter Wildlife Talks’ series was organised during November and December 2023 at Kilrush Public Library, De Valera Public Library Ennis and Shannon (Sean Le Mass) Public Library. Four separate talks were given to children, adults, and community groups on barn owls, bats and peatlands and wetlands.

Irish Garden Bird Survey

In late November, Clare County Council staff participated in the Irish Garden Bird Survey. The Irish Garden Bird Survey is BirdWatch Ireland’s most popular citizen science survey, Council office headquarters on New Road and De Valera Library Ennis were surveyed as part of this initiative and records were logged each week by Council Staff and submitted to BirdWatch Ireland.

Property Management

Property Management and Development

The Property Management Unit advanced a number of Capital property refurbishment and acquisition projects during the year:

- Acquisition of Inagh Garda Station from OPW for leasing to the local Housing Association.
- Successfully working with Clare Cricket Board to find a location for a home ground for them in Shannon, a disused pitch and dressing rooms.
- Significant refurbishment works to Tullyvarraga Hall in Shannon (1960s) in conjunction with the Tullyvarraga Hall Committee who lease the building. Internal and External Painting works, Reconfiguration and modernisation of the male and female toilets and the addition of a Disabled Access Toilet were completed.

Line-marking of Disabled Car Parking Spaces was also done in conjunction with the Shannon Municipal District Team. The overall work has resulted in a much better space with much improved accessibility for all.

- Carrying out of repairs to the Junction building in Cloughleigh, which is leased to Clare Youth Service.
- Concluding the lease of Lisdoonvarna Library from Lisdoonvarna Fáilte / Lisdoonvarna Spa Wells Trust.
- Advertising of Expressions of interest for the Council owned lands at Ballaghafadda, Kildysart Road Ennis, to facilitate development of the following (a) additional sports and recreational activities and facilities in the Ennis/Clarecastle area and (b) a project which adds value to the recreational and sporting use of the site (or part of the site) while allowing space for amenity projects to be also developed on the site.



Tullyvarraga Hall.

Property Transactions and Conveyancing

The table below shows the number of property transactions completed by Property Management Unit in 2023 and the full year 2022.

As the property market in the county is quite

active, we continue to assist many solicitors acting for their clients on issues associated with title, boundaries, old leasehold folios etc.

Transaction type	Year to date 2023	Full year 2022
Lease / Sub Lease of Property / Building	7	4
Licence to use property / building	7	13
Grazing Agreement for Lands	17	22
Deed of Transfer signed	15	19
Contract for Sale / acquisition signed	1	2
Deed of Right of Way / Wayleave signed	2	6
Deed of Rectification / Variation signed	4	10
Allotment Agreements signed	39	39

Facilities and Energy Management

The continual improvement and management of our Corporate Buildings is ongoing and in 2023, works was complete in Aras Contae an Chláir to reserve car parking space for Elected Members and provision of accommodation for additional staff.

In line with the Government's campaign to reduce our energy usage, a range of measures were put in place in our Corporate and other buildings to reduce usage on lighting and heating and IT related equipment. Energy management is closely monitored by the Energy Management Committee and the engagement of staff in this exercise was very positive.

Casual Trading

Under the Casual Trading Act 1995, and the Bye-Laws made thereunder, the Property

Management Unit is responsible for the administration of Casual Trading in Co. Clare. All casual traders, who trade on a public space, must hold a valid Casual Trading Licence. During 2022, the activity and trading levels improved following return to normal activities post Covid-19.

Derelict Sites

At the end of 2023, the Derelict Sites team are dealing with 255 properties that are considered derelict. The activity in recent years has substantially increased with 55 additional derelict properties identified and reported on in 2023. Initial engagement with owners or their representatives is key to resolution of the issues of dereliction and to understand the various reasons why the properties are in a derelict stage. The level of activity in the property market for vacant and derelict properties has increased and of the properties we have identified as derelict, a number of them have been brought to the market and some are at 'sale agreed' stage. We continue the engagement with the new owners of those properties to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities under the Derelict Sites Act, 1990.

We continue to see an increasing number of planning applications for refurbishment works and extensions and works commencing on individual properties. We are advising property owners of the vacant property refurbishment grant, where the property is suitable for residential use. With time and effort, working with owners, financial institutions and other departments, there are definite options for positive re-development and revitalisation of many such derelict sites.

The table below provides a snapshot of the activity in 2023, together with comparative figures for the full year 2022.

Derelict Sites	Year 2023	Full Year 2022
No. of new files opened	58	69
No. of Section 8(2) Notices issued – Intention to enter site on Derelict Sites Register	41	33
No. of Section 8(7) Notices issued – Entry of site onto Derelict Sites Register	24	22
No. of Section 11 Notices issued – Measures required to render the site non-derelict	0	0
Notice of Valuation of Property for Derelict Sites Levy	7	0
No. of files closed / property removed from Derelict Sites Register	15	21
No. of Notices served to Compulsorily Purchase derelict sites (CPO) (see note below)	10	6
No of Vesting Orders signed	9	4

Compulsory Acquisition of Derelict Sites (CPO)

The Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government launched a CPO activation programme for local authorities and has set targets for CPOs for each local authority. We commenced this programme in 2022 and the table below sets out the status of those CPO's commenced in 2022 and 2023.

Year	No of CPOs commenced	Current Status
2022	6	3 - completed and transferred to Housing for refurbishment / re-development
		1 - completed recently and is being put up for sale
		1 - works have commenced and CPO parked for now
2023	12	8 - At Vesting Stage and lodged in PRA
		2 – Early Stage of CPO process
		1 - Objection received and will be referred to An Bord Pleanála
		1 - Works have commenced and CPO parked for now



In addition, the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund will provide funding for CPOs on a rolling basis in the town of Ennis with the objective being that these properties would then be sold on the open market. A particular emphasis will be on properties that have potential for residential use.

Derelict Site Levy

Determination of valuations on the derelict sites which are on the Derelict Sites Register has commenced and notices have issued to four property owners. One of these has appealed the valuation to the Valuation Tribunal and a decision is awaited. The levy is an annual levy while the property remains on the Derelict Sites Register and amounts to 7% of the value of the property, on an annual basis. This will be further progressed in 2024.

Survey of Vacant and Derelict Properties

The Team is currently carrying out surveys of vacant and derelict properties in towns and villages around the county. Based on the Geo-directory data, the Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government has asked the Council to validate the data that they hold. To date 1,500 properties have been surveyed, with the data being uploaded digitally and there are a number of towns and villages yet to be done. The data collected will be the basis for future policy direction by the Department and will guide the work programme of the Derelict Sites Team and the Vacant Homes Team in County Clare.

Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant – for derelict and vacant properties

We continue to have high levels of enquiries

and applications for the Croí Cónaithe Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant. As of 20th December 2023, we had 279 applications and our response time for new applications is generally less than three weeks. We processed three payments of the grant in 2023 and that will ramp up considerably in 2024 as work is being completed on the grants approved in 2022/early 2023.



This measure will boost the supply of rental properties and properties for permanent residence and will deliver on a key priority of 'Housing for All' National Policy and the Vacant Homes Action Plan, the key objective of which is to reduce vacancy and dereliction in our cities, towns, villages and rural countryside and provide more housing options in the process.

Full details of the scheme and eligibility criteria are published on the Council's website. The contact email address for further information and guidance on the grants scheme is vacanthomes@clarecoco.ie. We continue to meet individual owners to guide them through the process and to ensure they have all the documentation when submitting their application.

Based on the applications received and the revised grant levels, there is a potential investment of €6 to €7 million by Government in the refurbishment of vacant and derelict properties in County Clare to be returned to

economic use as permanent homes.

Key items to note include:

- The processing time for applications has reduced with additional resourcing to the Team. Technical inspections are being undertaken on a weekly basis.
- The percentage of the total applications to be made available for rental remains reasonably constant at 25% / 26%.
- Since May 2023, the time period for completion of works is 13 months from the date of grant approval and this may be challenging for applicants to achieve.
- The revised maximum grant amounts introduced in May 2023 are being applied to all existing approved applications.
- The applications in rural areas account for 57% of all applications and those in towns and villages account for 43%. This has remained fairly consistent since the grant was introduced.

Full details of the scheme and eligibility criteria are published on the Council's website. The contact email address for further information and guidance on the grants scheme is vacanthomes@clarecoco.ie. We continue to meet individual owners to guide them through the process and to ensure they have all the documentation when submitting their application.

Local Enterprise Office

2023 presented a continuation of economic challenges for businesses in Clare such as inflation, supply chain issues, attracting and retaining labour and a reduction in spending power from consumers. Despite these headwinds, some sectors of our local economy continued to thrive, most notably in the manufacturing and engineering sectors. Our local enterprises now employ 1,279 people throughout the county.

Training programmes remained a key activity with an increased focus on enhancing the skill set of small business owners and develop their capability to succeed in a very challenging economic environment. 2023 saw a continuing trend of active engagement in our training programmes with 1,279 people availing of this support. Programmes covered topics such as Start Your Own Business, Marketing, Management Development, Financial Management, social media and Digital Marketing. The uptake of our Start Your Own Business Programmes remains strong with 133 participants. Mentoring remained a key support with 289 assignments primarily helping enterprises overcome business challenges, rising costs and developing new markets. The challenging economic backdrop did see a lower demand for funding with 22 enterprises being approved funding totalling €635k. One positive trend was an increase in the number of enterprises availing of a small grant of €2,500 to help them explore export market opportunities.

Local Enterprise Week

The theme for Local Enterprise Week 2023 (6th–10th March) revolved around innovation, digital transformation, and sustainability. During the week we ran 23 events on topics covering Recruitment and Retention, Exporting, Managing cashflow, Sustainability and Innovation.

Student Enterprise Awards

Our Student Enterprise Awards remain a key event in our annual calendar. 2023 resulted in the number of schools participating rising to 14 and 409 students showcasing at the County final on 9th March. The three winners who went on to represent Clare at the national final held in Croke Park were:

- Junior: West Clare Cook Book from St Joseph's Secondary School Tulla.

- Intermediate: Leabhar Grianghraf from CBS Ennistymon.
- Senior: OCM Light Bars from St John Bosco Community College, Kildysart.

National Enterprise Awards

Wild Irish Seaweed Ltd based in Quilty were Clare's representative at national final at this year's National Enterprise Awards. The awards, which took place at the Mansion House in Dublin, are in their 24th year and run annually by the Local Enterprise Offices. These awards are designed to celebrate and recognise the many successful enterprises around the Country. Once again, Clare was a national winner with Wild Irish Seaweed achieving 'Best Exporter Award' recognising their success in winning new business in global markets.

Of particular significance, the trophies were designed and manufactured in Clare specially for the event by Conor Murray, Kilkee Forge.

KPMG Women's Irish Open

For the 2nd year running LEO Clare and Clare Tourism facilitated an exhibition of five local artisan producers and promotion of Clare as a tourist destination. This year we were in a better location adjacent to Dromoland Castle and proximity to the 18th Green. This resulted in a higher footfall leading to improved sales for our participating producers. Overall, the event was a fantastic showcase for all that Clare has to offer.

Clare Business Awards

The final of Clare Business Excellence Awards, hosted by Ennis Chamber and sponsored by Clare Co Co took place at a Gala Dinner on 16th November 2023 where Ennis-based luxury candle and home scents company Wix and Wax scooped top prize, when awarded 'Clare Business of the Year'.



Winner Student Enterprise Awards, Senior Category.



National winner, 2023 Best Export Award at the National Enterprise Awards.



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE



ANNE HAUGH
Director of Social Development

The overarching vision for the Social Directorate is:

To enhance the quality of life for the people of County Clare through the provision of appropriate housing supports to those in need and by enabling and fostering access for all our citizens to information, learning, arts, cultural and recreational opportunities.

The Social Directorate of Clare County Council comprises the areas of responsibility as per the schematic hereunder:



Housing

Provider of housing solutions for people who are in need and who are deemed eligible for social housing support.



Killaloe Municipal District

Area administration of functions with particular focus on the physical environment.



Cultural services

Provision of Library, Arts and Cultural services in County Clare.

The Social Directorate continues to deliver on our objectives and work programme and to that end we work closely with the Elected Members and Sectoral interests on our Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) which met on four occasions in 2023 to discuss and agree a range of policies and initiatives to address housing delivery in Clare.

Housing

2023 was again a challenging year for the entire council and for the Social Directorate as the conflict in Ukraine continued to have an effect on availability and cost of building supplies and other necessities. However, despite this we exceeded our delivery target of new homes for 2023. A combination of new properties

constructed by the Council and by approved housing bodies (AHBs), turnkey solutions and void refurbishment programme enabled us to allocate homes to 251 households during 2023.

Housing for All, launched in September 2021, set out a multiannual funding programme for 2022-2030 to deliver over 300,000 new homes including 90,000 social and 54,000 affordable homes with an anticipated spend of more than €4bn per annum. There is also a firm commitment to ending homelessness by 2030. This document sets the framework for the delivery of housing in the county with an overall build target of 833 new social housing units in the county over the period 2022 to 2026 as per below:

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Target	200	149	153	164	167	833
Achieved	262	151				

2023 Housing Delivery performance

In 2023 we again exceeded our target, and we delivered 151 new properties. Through our own capital build programme and by supporting approved housing bodies a combination of 36 units were provided by the Council and 115 units through AHBs (to include Part V).



Completed development at Clarecastle.

We continue to progress with our ambitious programme of delivery for the coming year which includes direct build, turnkey build,

acquisitions, buy and renew, approved housing body build and acquisition, and vacant property refurbishment, etc, all of which are co-ordinated, supported and delivered by the Housing team in Clare County Council to provide new homes for those on the social housing list.”

Housing stock management

During 2023, 75 vacant and seven acquired (unoccupied) properties were refurbished and made available for reallocation, throughout the county.

Under the Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme, the Council upgraded 54 properties to a BER level of B2 or higher. This brought the total number of upgrades to 117 since the introduction of the scheme during 2021.

Under our Planned Maintenance Programme, various works as identified through our Stock Condition Surveys were carried out to 300

properties. Rollout of this programme will intensify during 2023 now that all restrictions have been lifted.

Responsive Maintenance has returned to normal following the lifting of all restrictions. A total of 4,623, or an average of 385 per month, maintenance calls were logged during 2023.

Affordable Housing Scheme

While affordable housing is a keystone of 'Housing for All', the criteria to qualify for funding of local authority led affordable housing is based on a determination of affordability constraint and in the case of a significant number of counties including Clare the assessment has not evidenced a sufficient constraint to satisfy the eligibility requirements. However, our team continued to work with Department officials in relation to affordability constraints in larger urban areas and in July 2023 we received approval in principle on foot of a detailed application to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), to prove there is potential for affordable housing schemes in both Ennis and Shannon.

Subsequent to this approval we ran an expression of interest campaign for the delivery of affordable housing.

Thereafter we were successful in securing approval for the first Affordable Housing Scheme in County Clare under the new Affordable Funding Scheme. Approval has been received for 10 properties in Oakwood View in Shannon. A second proposal is with the DHLGH for evaluation, with further submissions planned for 2024. A scheme of priorities for allocating properties, should demand for same exceed availability, has been approved by the Minister, and was adopted by Elected Members at the September meeting of the Council. A new online portal went live recently at: <https://affordablehomes.ie/>

Defective Concrete Blocks

The Enhanced Defective Concrete Block (DCB) Grant Scheme went live in mid-July, with the required Department Regulations in place. The scheme is open since and the Council's DCB team have been accepting applications online. A DCB Community Facilitator commenced employment in September 2023, to further assist the homeowners with the DCB application process. The Community Facilitator, and other staff, have held a number of evening workshops to assist homeowners with the application and guide them through the DCB process. Clare County Council's DCB Team have also included a video on the Council's website recently on "how to make on application" to further assist homeowners in the application process. We continue to engage with the DHLGH to ensure social houses affected by DCB also are included in a similar scheme. DHLGH personnel visited Clare in mid-December to view social houses affected and gave an update on the proposed scheme which is planned early next year to commence.

Tenant in Situ Acquisitions

During the year the Government introduced a number of measures to mitigate against the impacts of the ending of the eviction ban. One such measure was the Tenant in Situ Acquisitions. Thirty properties were acquired during 2023 to deal with potential homelessness by tenants due to Notices of Termination having been served by their landlords and for other homeless cases, 14 of these properties were purchased by the Council with the other 16 units acquired by Approved Housing Bodies. These enabled homeowners to stay in their own home and they became tenants of the Council under the scheme. The cost rental model for tenants at risk of homelessness but not entitled to social housing supports was also introduced. This is managed by the Housing Agency with referral

by local authorities and during the year one such household in Clare was referred for assessment.

Newly Qualified Social Housing Applicants

New income limits became effective on 1st January, 2023. 506 new applications were

qualified in 2023 which is broadly in line with previous years. Increased income eligibility bands have not had a noticeable effect on our figures. Clare Co Council continue to process a large volume of applications each month, with an average processing time on valid applications for 2023 of eight weeks.

01-Jan-23	No Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	4 Children	5 Children	6 Children
1 Adult	€35,000	€35,875	€36,750	€37,625	€38,500	€39,375	€40,250
2 Adults	€36,750	€37,625	€38,500	€39,375	€40,250	€41,125	€42,000
3 + Adults	€38,500	€39,375	€40,250	€41,125	€42,000	€42,875	€43,750

Housing Assessments and Allocations

Allocations of social housing tenancies are made in accordance with the Clare County Council Social Housing Allocation Scheme. This Allocation Scheme sets out the priorities and procedures for allocating properties. The scheme is used in the allocation of standard Council housing units, casual vacancies and long and short-term lease properties. A total 220 Council tenancies were allocated in 2023 with a further 31 tenancies created by the AHBs.

During 2023 properties available for letting continued to be advertised on the Choice Based Letting (CBL) website, cbl.clarecoco.ie. CBL gives applicants the opportunity to express an interest in a range of residential properties within their area(s) of preference that are suitable for the size of their household. The list of available properties are displayed from Wednesday to Tuesday every week on the CBL website. The process is designed to be as fair as possible as it gives all housing applicants an equal opportunity to view available properties that meet their needs.

Housing and Disability Steering Group

Clare's Housing and Disability Steering Group met on a quarterly basis in 2023 to review its local Strategic Plan with a primary objective of increasing the level of housing supports provided to those with disabled needs together with the necessary support services. A quarterly update on the progress of the HDSG was provided to both the Housing Agency as well as the Housing SPC. In 2023, Clare County Council allocated 251 properties of which 46 properties (18%) were allocated to people with disabled needs. The national target is 10% and we are operating well above this target. The Local Strategic Plan was reviewed in 2023 following the issuing of the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 and the related Implementation Plan. The objective of the Strategy is to facilitate access for disabled people to the appropriate range of housing and related support services in a timely manner, delivered in an integrated and sustainable manner, which promotes equality and human rights, individual choice, and independent living. The Local Strategic Plan was approved by the HDSG at its meeting

in December 2023 and it will go before the SPC and the full Council in early 2024.

Housing Rents

The collection of housing rent remained strong with an 86% collection rate and a total income of €10,842,977 from 3349 rent accounts during 2023.

Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP)

The Council set up 148 new HAP applications during 2023, including 20 households qualifying for Homeless HAP. The total number of households supported under the HAP scheme at the end of 2023 was 1,160.

Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)

There were 155 households availing of this scheme at the end of 2023. During the year, 11 households left this scheme, six of these were due to notices of termination. The majority of those who left availed of alternative housing supports. In addition, the Council works with 17 Approved Housing Bodies in supporting 199 tenancies through the RAS scheme. This figure includes 24 new tenancies that joined the scheme during 2023.

Social Leasing

In 2023, the Council provided two types of leasing, short-term leasing up to nine years and 11 months and long-term leasing from 10 years to 25 years. Under the Government's Housing For All programme, long-term leasing is being phased out and so the Council can no longer enter new long-term leases. The Council's target for short-term leasing for 2023 was five new short-term leases. In 2023, ease agreements were negotiated on two new short-term leases, therefore this target was not met. The reason for the low uptake is that property owners do not want to be responsible for the day-to-day maintenance

of the property or be responsible for the tenant. During the year, nine households left the short-term lease scheme. This brought the overall total number of households availing of this scheme to 98 by the end of the year. The average lease term is five years.

No new long-term lease agreements were negotiated during 2023, and one property left the scheme. The overall total number of households availing of this scheme was 127 by the end of the year. The average term of lease is 16 years.

Private Rented Inspections

Privately rented properties are inspected by the Council in accordance with the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019. A total of 1,108 private rented properties were inspected in 2023, which includes HAP, RAS, Approved Housing Bodies and leased properties.

Local Authority Home Loan

The Local Authority Home Loan (LAHL) replaced The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL) in January 2022. The loan offers a fixed interest rate mortgage over a 25 or 30-year period for credit worthy, first-time buyers with a view to making home ownership more affordable.

A total of 49 Local Authority Home Loan applications were received in 2023 and 25 loan applications were granted provisional approval during this period. A total of 10 loans were drawn down during 2023.

Interest rates were increased from the 28/09/2023 and the current fixed rates are 4.00% on loans up to a 25-year term and 4.05% on loans up to a 30-year term.

Estate Management

The Council has an Estate Management Unit, available to meet with tenants and tenant associations on a regular basis to deal with issues that may occur. The appointment of

three Tenancy Enforcement Officers in 2021 has had a positive impact in the management of anti-social behaviour and its impact on the community.

The team continue with the programme of engagement with tenants and the residents' committees to support estate management. Residents are encouraged to participate in the management of their estate, to take ownership, and to be proud of where they live. This Unit is committed to the encouragement and formation of residents groups within their housing estates.

The Council's Estate Management team manage anti-social behaviour and its impact on the community. In total, 834 complaints of ASB were investigated and dealt with in accordance with the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy. The Tenancy Enforcement team facilitated a large number of call outs in 2023 to deal with instances of ASB as well as operating regular patrolling and engagement with Local Authority tenants.

Homeless Action Team

The year 2023 brought many challenges and complexities to the Clare Homeless Action Team. This year saw an increased number of presentations to the team, along with an increased level of complex needs and challenges being presented by service users. The demand on our service continues to

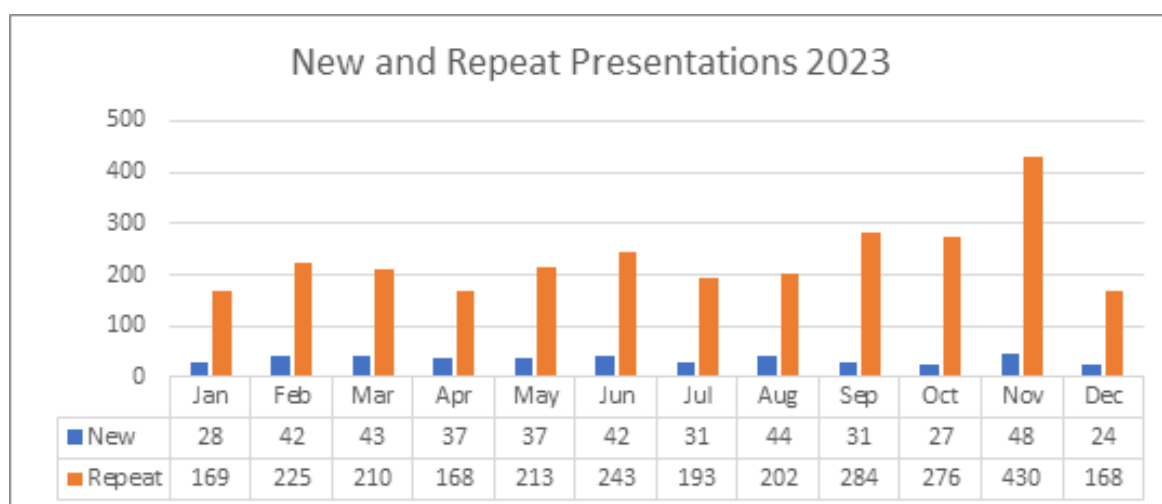
increase each month with significant support around all aspects of homelessness being required from all staff.

The Homeless Action Team has continued to work towards building a service that can appropriately meet the needs of Homeless Clients in Clare. This team provides a wide range of support services including Assessment and Placement, Tenancy Support Services, HAP Place Finder, Housing First, Accommodation Resettlement.

Health services and local authorities are the lead statutory bodies for addressing homelessness and the needs of people who are homeless in Ireland. Clare Homeless Action Team works in collaboration with the HSE in providing a service within Clare, where a full time Community Mental Health Nurse and a Public Health Nurse, which is shared with Limerick are on the team. A multi-disciplinary, inter-agency team approach has been adopted and has proved to be most effective in providing outreach and additional specialist supports and linking with mainstream services.

2023

At the end of 2023, there were 75 adults and 37 dependents in homeless accommodation. This figure does not include the significant number of singles and family units that contacted the HAT team seeking placements in emergency accommodation.



During 2023, 105 households exited homelessness – 40 exiting to new tenancies (LA-18, AHB-8, HAP-2, PR-2, Youth Housing-5, Housing First-5), 18 Discharged from Services, 4 Self-Discharged and 2 Discharged to Residential Accommodation. A further 46 households moved within Emergency Services to best support their identified needs. These figures represent a significant amount of prevention work and this will continue to be the focus of the service going forward.

An additional 20 households who were not in Emergency Accommodation also moved into tenancies. This figure captures the Preventative work carried out by the HAT team during the year, where individuals and families were prevented from coming into Homeless Services.

Exits		64
Housed	Local Authority = 18 AHB = 8 HAP = 2 Private rented = 2 Youth Housing = 5 Housing First = 5	40
Discharged from Services		18
Self-Discharged		4
Discharged to Residential Accommodation		2

Within these figures a significant amount of work continues to support clients to address presenting issues. Consequently, the team is continuing to foster strong working relationships with all of our working partners in the HSE (Primary Care, Disability, Social Inclusion, Mental Health, Safeguarding and Addiction), Gardaí, Tusla (Child Protection, Domestic Violence and Aftercare) Probation and Community Partners to address the ever-increasing complex needs.

Traveller accommodation

Clare County Council continues to progress our Traveller Accommodation Programme (TAP) 2019-2024. A Department Circular issued in December advising housing authorities to commence preparation of the next five-year TAPs for adoption by 31 December, 2024. The existing TAPs will therefore continue to operate to end 2024 while local authorities prepare for the adoption by end 2024 of the Sixth TAPs 2025-2029. The Minister's objective is to ensure that the incoming elected members will have full ownership of the new TAPs including implementation, which is also in line with the advice of the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC).

Preparation of the new plan will require housing authorities to consult with adjoining housing authorities, the HSE, approved housing bodies, the Local Traveller Consultative Committee, other local Traveller representative groups, community and interest groups and the public in general.

Housing authorities, following consultation, must make an estimate of the current and projected accommodation needs of Traveller families arising over the five-year programme. We are currently working with the Traveller Community Development Programme in preparing a detailed traveller led needs analysis in preparation of same.

It is expected that draft plan will be available for public consultation in Q3 2024. Clare Local Community Development Committee oversee a Traveller Community Development Project (CDP) with Clare Local Development Company (CLDC). A project worker has been employed and will be working in collaboration with Clare Local Development Company and Clare County Council to conduct detailed analysis of current and future needs in early 2024 to help inform the LTACC in advance of the next TAP.

A new caravan/mobile home loan scheme was launched in 2022 and Clare have appointed a

number of new tenants under this scheme. The scheme will call close in March 2024 for further review and is expect to reopen later that year.

Housing Grants

A large volume of applications was again approved and paid during 2023. Funds are targeted at essential works only and priority is given based on the medical needs of the applicant and the length of time on the waiting list. The adaptations carried out enable the disabled and elderly persons to live in comfort in their own homes. A total of €3,128,568 was expended on 494 grants as set out in the table hereunder:

Grant type	Number of Grants paid in 2023	Value of works €
Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability	164	1,779,037
Housing Aid for Older People	205	794,359
Mobility Aids Grant	125	555,172
Total in 2023	494	3,128,568

There were also a number of adaptations carried out to our own housing stock during the year. Works completed involved the installation of ramps, level access bathrooms, handrails, stairlifts and other minor works to facilitate the mobility needs of the household. A total of 93 properties were adapted with €721,445 spent on these works, which assist tenants in meeting their particular needs and add to their enjoyment and comfort of their homes.

Cultural services (Library, Arts, Museum and Archives, glór)

Library Service

The year was a busy one for cultural services with all services reverting to pre-Covid numbers and a sense of normality returning to usage patterns and participatory levels. The Clare Libraries Development Plan, “Charting the Future – the hybrid library” 2023-2028 was approved by the Strategic Policy Committee in December. There are three broad themes and 30 actions placing reading, literacy, community and culture at the core of the plan. The Clare Libraries website was upgraded in 2023 to improve accessibility and make it compliant.

The new library for Ennis progressed to a substantial level of completion by end of 2023, the construction phase having commenced in April 2022.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Year	Library Membership	Items issued including renewals	E-resources	Internet sessions	Wi-Fi
2023	19,437	360,527	75,051	15,083	11,187
2022	17,989	338,964	57,862	11,005	8,363

There were increases in all aspects of library provision in 2023 with greater numbers returning to library usage after the disruptive years of Covid. A total of 22,860 physical items and 28,166 electronic resources were added to stock consisting of new publications and replacement of stock in areas that needed special attention. The breakdown of this additional provision is shown below:

Adult fiction	5,433
Adult non-fiction	4,313
Children's fiction	9,152
Children's non-fiction	2,305
Young adult book stock	1,233
DVDs	403
Home Energy Savings kits	10
Toy and sensory resources	10

At the start of 2023 Facebook had a total post reach of 21,000 user accounts. During August, September, October this peaked to 264,000 users. Instagram grew from 1,841 followers to 2,043 followers. X (Twitter) grew from 2,084 to 2,159 followers.

Marketing, outreach & events

Clare Libraries marketing and outreach activities began 2023 under a new Marketing Strategy. Clare Libraries participated in a national marketing campaign devised by "Libraries Ireland" in the LGMA called Ireland Reads, which took place on 24th February. The campaign consisted of targeted marketing online and in local and national press. Local Clare authors, personalities and sports people acted as reading ambassadors and encouraged people to join the library and pledge reading minutes on Ireland Reads day. A range of free events were held in libraries including author visits, workshops and readings.

Clare Libraries was featured together with Healthy Clare and the Climate Section of Clare County Council in the Clare Echo in a two-

page spread about Sustainable Development Goals Week. Clare Libraries also featured exclusively in a two-page spread in the Clare Echo detailing all its services and plans for the new library. There were 16 media releases published about services, projects and programmes and eight of these were picked up by local media and published in the Clare Champion, Clare Echo and Clare Herald. As part of an outreach programme, Clare Libraries had a library stand at seven events including the Age Friendly Expo and Clare Pride. There was an investment in paid marketing on five occasions, promoting library services, and specific events such as public consultation for the new Library Development Plan and the Creative Ireland Project Award. There was a total of six radio interviews on Clare FM to promote new services, resources and library programmes.

Marketing material was distributed throughout the library network, and Council offices as well as to outside organisations such as the Citizens Advice Centre, Employability Clare, LCETB College of Further Education and Ennis Outpatients Department. Clare Libraries published three newsletters and two e-bulletins which were distributed in print and via Mailerlite.

No of events held in libraries	Audience Numbers	Class Novels - Sets Issued	Home deliveries
2,566	33,825	207	100

Grants

Clare Libraries service availed of a number of grants in 2023 as follows:

Community Recognition Fund: €6,400 for installing automatic doors in Newmarket on Fergus Library.

Dormant Accounts Fund: Nearly €4,000.00



The first meeting of Birds of a Feather which took place in Belfast in December 2023. Partners from Clare County Council, Galway County Council, Mná ag Gaire Women's Community Hub, Ballinasloe Women's Group and Ballymac Community Group.

was received for new furniture, sensory toys and other resources for Clare libraries in 2023.

Healthy Ireland at your Library fund: €3,753 grant was received from the Local Government Management Agency for Healthy Ireland resources including chairs, reception furniture and audio equipment.

ICT from Department of Rural & Community Development: A total of €109,682.27 was received from a DRCD grant for upgrading IT equipment for the public.

Creative Ireland

Clare County Council's Creative Ireland programme resumed in 2023 with a new five-year Culture and Creativity Strategy. The strategy will guide all Creative Ireland activities and objectives for the period 2023-2027. The Creative Ireland programme supported 107 projects in 2023 with a total fund of €150,315.43 provided from the Department

of Housing and Local Government and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. Projects used creativity to explore themes such as health, biodiversity, climate action, sustainability, mental health, culture and community. A total of 13,624 people participated in or attended a Creative Ireland project in 2023.

In addition, Clare County Council was just one of two Local Authorities to be awarded funding of €250,000 from the Shared Island Fund to carry out a project entitled Birds of a Feather in partnership with Galway County Council and the Ballymac Community Centre in East Belfast. This project will continue up until the end of 2025.

Local Studies

Acquisitions for 2023 included the O'Looney Archive (poems and articles by noted 19th century Clare family), further donations of maps posters, papers, and newspapers from Holohan Auctioneers collection, dispensary

records for Cratloe 1835, a Thomas Steele signed note and other Repeal documents relating to Clare, and several rare books and book collections including “Justice in Ireland” by David John Wilson, an Ennis-published pamphlet from 1838. An exhibition, “Picking up the Pieces: Committees, Claims, Relief and Rebuilding after the Revolutionary Years” was held in the Local Studies Centre for History week in October.

Decade of Centenaries



Mick O'Dea exhibition poster.

2023 was the final year of the Decade of Centenaries programme. Six community groups received grants towards commemorative projects – the Mid Clare Commemoration Group, East Clare Memorial Committee, Lissycasey Historical Committee, West Clare War of Independence Committee, Inis Cathaigh Kilrush and Dúchas na Sionna. Three historians also received grants – Joe Ó Muircheartaigh, Brian Spring and Marie Connole. A successful

History Week was held in October featuring online lectures, exhibitions and library branch lectures from historians including Myles Dungan, David McCullough and Ida Milne. Collaborative events were held with UL Special Collections, Clare Museum and Cuimhneamh an Chláir. The final event of the programme was organised in conjunction with Clare Arts Office, an art exhibition entitled “Divided Loyalties” by acclaimed Ennis artist Mick O’Dea. This glór exhibition included O’Dea’s artworks with themes of the revolutionary period. A commemorative catalogue was published to accompany the exhibition and an Artist’s Talk and film screenings were also held. Events through the year also included a series of local history lectures in library branches including Ennis, Kilrush, Kilkee, Ennistymon, Scariff and Shannon and funded lectures in the Ennis Book Club Festival and the Children’s Book Festival.

Arts

Arts Council supported programmes in 2023 included the Arts & Education programme which delivered arts projects with 10 artists in 20 primary schools. The Artists in Schools programme also created a project with 2 secondary schools in Ennis and Ennistymon. Clare Youth Theatre resumed with a membership of 35 young people and supported the Limerick Clare Creative Youth Partnership with their youth theatre in Kilkee which saw a large increase in numbers due to the newly arrived Ukrainian population. The Embrace Arts and Disability Programme delivered 20 arts projects in disability settings with 12 artists countywide.

The Killaloe Mela took place in June with Fidget Feet Aerial Dance Company. Culture Night in September returned in person which saw 43 events attended by 2,431 people in 21 locations. A total of 36 exhibitions took place and 16 Riches of Clare Concerts, which moved to the Foyer in glór. Arts and Health projects

continued in hospitals, nursing homes and day care centres countywide and the Bealtaine Choirs free open air concert featured 6 choirs from the county performing at the Courthouse Ennis to hundreds of people.

Artist studios operated at 100% capacity with significant demand for more spaces. A total of 83 grants for artists, communities and festivals were approved through the Community Supports Scheme. The Shannon Creative Places Research and Development Award began.

Assistance was provided to 25 film projects in 2023 as well as the Engine Shorts film programme and the Ennis International Film Festival. The WRAP fund continued to attract substantial inward film investment to the county, particularly in East Clare with the production of BlackShore.

Bi-weekly media slots continued with Clare FM to promote arts in the county and capacity building initiatives were undertaken with Ukrainian artists, contemporary musicians and visual artists. A professional development scheme for artists was piloted.

Museum

A total of 500 objects were uploaded to the museum website, and 10 blog entries were written on subjects that included conservation of objects, stories about objects, exhibits and visitors' reactions to objects on display in 2023.



Postcard from the Georgina Frost Collection.

A total of 726 items were catalogued, 708 of which were from the Georgina Frost collection. The official collection currently stands at 4,278 objects. The Museum received funding during the year to host events to support the night-time economy and used the funding to provide four public lectures of experts from various universities and colleges. A display with the digitized representation of the Kathleen Griffin autograph book was installed in the gallery. The total visitors for the year were 22,063, an increase of 3,000 over 2022 visitors.



Portrait of the Armstrong Family.

Archives

The Archives Service in 2023 continued to provide access to its collections through the Local Studies Library. The Archives' Digitisation Project continued in 2023. A total of 50 volumes from the Board of Health and Public Assistance Collection of Manager's Orders and Minute Books dating from 1915-1966 have been digitised, this collection is now fully scanned. Several collections of private papers have been scanned, including the Roger casement, Westropp family, and Inchiquin papers. Material from the digitisation project has continued to be added to the Digital Repository of Ireland.

In the area of acquisitions in 2023, 'The Bindon Blood Family Papers', spanning 200 years and containing material relating to Bindon "the Vampire" Blood (1888-1971) and others, the John Scott Creagh Collection, relating to an estate in Kildysart, and portraits of members of the Armstrong family of Clare have been acquired. A substantial donation of 107 boxes of the Barrett Collection have been accessioned, and a box list created. Additional material has been donated to the National Schools collection from the CBS School, Ennis.

glór

2023 marked the first year since 2019 without Covid restrictions affecting the operation in terms of capacity. A total of 618 individual events were presented and hosted over the course of the year engaging a total audience of over 69,000. As the impetus for glór's foundation, the traditional arts remain an

integral component of focus and 44 different traditional arts events were presented across the year in that genre. glór was delighted to host, partner with, and provide support to a range of local festivals over the course of the year including the Ennis Book Club Festival, Fleadh Nua, Ennis Trad Festival, and the Ennis International Film Festival. glór also continued to provide a home to a wide range of local community and creative groups including Clare Youth Theatre, Music Generation Clare, QuareClare, Inis Creative Writers, Ennis Musical Society, Ennis Players, Pantaloons and many more. A range of supports were offered to artists throughout the year with a focus particularly on Clare's local creative community, including: Artist to Artist mentoring, Creative Circles and a number of artist residency programmes. A new director, Marie O'Byrne, took up her role at glór in June 2023.



RURAL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE



LEONARD CLEARY
Director of Rural Development
To 7th May 2023



JASON MURPHY
A/Director of Rural Development
From 8th May 2023

Renewed Clare Rural Development Strategy 2030

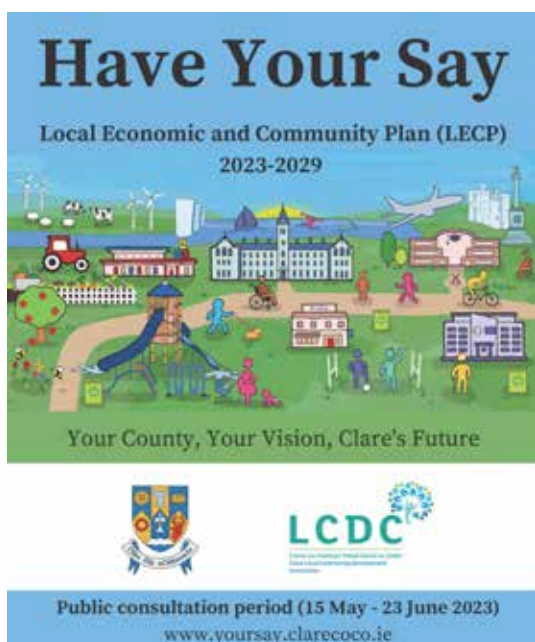
The Renewed Clare Rural Development Strategy 2030, entitled “Realising Clare’s Rural Potential: Our Life, Our Home”, was officially launched in March, 2023, and was adopted by Clare County Council at its March meeting. The Renewed Strategy is based on a review of the implementation of the first Clare Rural Development Strategy by the members of the Clare Rural Development Forum.

The Renewed Strategy reiterates the 2017 Strategy’s commitment to establish Clare as one of the best places in Ireland to live, work, and invest and recommends a renewal of the objectives and targets of the strategy to allow the Clare Rural Development Forum to lead out the delivery of additional actions to 2030, underpinning the successful implementation of the original strategy.

Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2029

An extensive public consultation process took place as part of the development of a new six-year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). The Plan will guide the future economic and community development of County Clare from 2024-2030. In terms of local community development, the LECP aims to meet the needs of individuals, groups, and organisations by developing community infrastructure, programmes and services.

From an economic perspective the LECP will provide a framework to guide local economic growth and stability in specific geographical areas through retaining and attracting new business, creating employment, and supporting people to start their own businesses and social enterprises. The development of a new LECP is being overseen by the Clare Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), which has responsibility for the coordination of local development and community-related activity in County Clare, supported by the Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee.



Clare Comhairle na nÓg

The Clare Comhairle na nÓg initiative,

spearheaded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, serves as a forum for individuals aged 12 to 18 to express their opinions, deliberate on possible reforms, and suggest creative ideas for beneficial transformations. This council collaborates with Clare Youth Service, which oversees a range of initiatives and ventures in partnership with its young participants.

Two Annual Youth Conferences were organised in 2023, hosted in Ennistymon and Ennis, respectively, to accommodate all participants. These gatherings provided a vital forum for young individuals to convene, exchange perspectives, and address relatable community issues. A notable highlight of the year was the involvement of Comhairle na nÓg in the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). Their contribution took the form of a video (The video is available at <https://vimeo.com/834044440>) featuring the young people articulating their views on the various elements of the plan and encouraging their peers to voice their opinions and have their say on the plan. Their participation and input into the new plan was crucial to ensuring that the new LECP is truly representative of the needs and aspirations of young people in County Clare.



Pride of Place

The Pride of Place Awards is an All-Island annual competition. The competition was established to promote and celebrate the best in community development. In 2023 Clare was represented by 3 groups all of which received awards as follows:



MUGA, Lisdoonvarna - Funded under the Community Recognition Fund 2023.

Tourism East Clare were winners of the Community Tourism Initiative category in recognition of their promotion of sustainable tourism practices. Common Knowledge's "Rekindle Festival of Lost Skills" received a Special Award for their project which emphasises the importance of preserving and passing down traditional skills for a more sustainable future. In addition, the Ennis Men's Shed were Runners-up in the Community Wellbeing Category in acknowledgement of their proactive approach in addressing mental health issues at their community facility.

Government Funding - National Schemes

The Department of Rural and Community Development channels a number of funding programmes through the Council. In 2023, the Schemes attracted projects and funds as listed below:

- **Town & Village Renewal Scheme 2023** - 5 Funding applications were submitted in respect of Labasheeda, Querrin, Killlalo, Sixmilebridge and Ennistymon. Funding of just over €1.3m is being sought and a decision on same from the Department

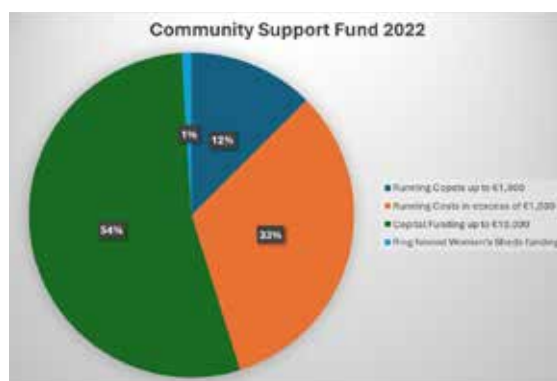
of Rural and Community Development is expected to be announced in Q2, 2024.

- **CLÁR Initiative 2023** - €640,459 for 15 projects located in Bellharbour, Feakle, Inagh, Kilmaley, Kilbaha, Kilnamona, Kilshanny, Kilanena, Kilballyowen, Killaloe, Ballynacally, O'Callaghan's Mills, Lisdoonvarna, O'Briensbridge and Mullagh.
- **Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2023** - €100k was allocated under the Project Development Measure of the ORIS 2023 in respect of a Cycling Hub and Trail in the Slieve Bearnagh's and an activities Hub along the River Fergus in Ennis. In addition, funding applications were submitted in respect of a further 10 projects and a decision on same is expected in early 2024.
- **Community Recognition Fund 2023** - The Department of Rural & Community Development announced the allocation of €2.9 million to community groups and organisations in Co Clare under the

Community Recognition Fund in May 2023. The grant scheme is designed to support and reward communities that have welcomed families and citizens from Ukraine and other countries. In Clare the grant was divided into two different Streams. Stream 1 was for small scale Equipment Grant (<€2,000). A total of €157,603 was granted to 84 projects under Stream 1. Forty-seven projects were awarded funding under Stream 2, ranging from €6,400 up to €272,000.

Community Support Fund

The Community Support Fund 2022 (CSF) was launched by the Department of Rural and Community Development in November 2022. The fund was allocated under the Department's Community Enhancement Programme and administered by the Local Community Development Committee, with support from Clare County Council. The scheme was advertised in January 2023. In March 2023, €301,325 was allocated across 156 successful funding applications with the funding being used to support non-pay running/operating costs, as well as necessary repairs and improvements to community facilities and the purchase of equipment.



Clare Local Area Grant Scheme

Funding of €627,000 was allocated to just over 400 projects being delivered under the Council's Local Area Grant Scheme in March 2023. The allocations to community and voluntary groups supported a broad range of

projects including public realm, grass cutting in private housing developments, the arts, Irish language, tourism promotion and sustainable tourism.

Burial Grounds

The Burial Grounds Unit continues to be responsible for the operation and maintenance of burial grounds in the County. Grass cutting and other maintenance is carried out during Spring and Summer by our own Caretakers and by outside contractors. Work was also carried out on plinth provision, hedge cutting and improving footpaths. In 2023, grant funding was also provided to over 60 community groups who maintain a significant number of burial grounds within their local areas.

The Burial Grounds Unit also provides additional burial capacity where it is required. An application was submitted by Clare County Council to An Bord Pleanála for approval under Section 177(AE) of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended) to carry out proposed improvement works to St Brigid's Section E and extend the existing Burial Ground at Drumcliff. Assistance was also provided in 2023 to several community groups to extend existing burial grounds.

Community Playgrounds

In 2023 a total of €65,000 was allocated to 20 Community Playground Committees to support them in the management and operation of these facilities with a specific focus on the area of insurance and maintenance. Two new community playgrounds were opened in 2023 at Tubber and Fanore and were added to Clare County Council's insurance cover through IPB. There are currently 20 playgrounds covered under Clare County Council's insurance out of 28 community playgrounds in the county, with many others in the process of meeting the requirements of the insurance model.

Community, Biodiversity and Climate Knowledge Share Day

Clare County Council's Rural Development Directorate scheduled a series of walk-in clinics across the four Municipal Districts to support Community Groups/Organisations in project development and funding opportunities in a number of key areas: Community, Climate Action, Biodiversity and Heritage. The workshops were facilitated by the four Rural & Community Development Officers, the Council's Community Climate Action Officer, Biodiversity Officer and Heritage Officer.

Joint Policing Committee

The Clare Joint Policing Committee (JPC) was established in 2009 under the Garda Síochána Act 2005. The overall aim of the JPC is to serve as a forum for consultations, discussions and recommendations on matters affecting the policing of Clare County Council's administrative area.

The JPC also reviews levels and patterns of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour and the factors contributing to such crime. There are 31 JPC members comprising of Elected Members, Oireachtas Members, Community and Voluntary representatives, An Garda Síochána, and Local Authority Officials.

Four JPC meetings were held in 2023. Presentations were given on:

- Safety during storms and emergency weather events
- Clare Youth Service on Youth Diversion Projects
- The Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP).

An Garda Síochána provided updated policing statistics at each JPC meeting. A number of issues were addressed in response to the statistics provided as well as a discussion on

matters relating to a number of issues including anti-social behaviour, shop thefts, domestic and public assaults, feud activity, bogus tradesmen, trade and possession of drugs, Property Marking System and tracking devices, property theft amongst farmers, Speed Limit Bye Laws, fly tipping, Anti-social behaviour, Reboot of "Ask for Angela" campaign, alcohol and drug related offences.

Clare Age-Friendly Programme



Clare Older People's Council hosted a 'Health and Wellbeing, Age Expo' in June 2023, at Treacy's West County Hotel, Ennis. The Age Expo showcased the supports and services available in County Clare that are of interest and use to Older People. In addition to many information stands, guest speakers discussed the new 'Healthy Age Friendly Homes' initiative and 'Preparing for a Healthy Retirement'. There was also an opportunity for attendees to participate in a singing taster session, attend talks on Active Ageing and attend a cookery demonstration. The Irish Heart Foundation also carried out free health checks during the event.

The Clare Age Friendly Programme, supported by the Clare Older People's Council, developed a comprehensive guide to the essential services and supports available for older adults and their families in the county. The Directory of Services for Older People features contact details for public services, community and

of the draft 'Period Poverty in Ireland' report by the National Strategy for Women and Girls Committee. As part of this pilot scheme, free period products (i.e., tampons, period pads) are available in participating Local Authority owned and publicly accessible buildings incl. Clare Libraries, Active Ennis facilities and each Municipal District Office.

- **The second Healthy Clare 2024 Calendar** was created in partnership with Clare County Council's Visit Clare, Clare Sports Partnership and Clare Libraries teams and copies were distributed to communities across Clare via Clare Libraries, the local MD offices, reception at the Áras, the Age Friendly Clare's cultural companions' network, Connecting for Life and Healthy Clare network committees.
- **Clare's Farmers Weaving Stories Together Project** was launched in Sixmilebridge in September, 2023. This was the first of 5 'Creativity for Wellbeing' events with the farming community across the County. The 5 mart areas targeted by this initiative were Sixmilebridge, Ennis, Kilfenora, Kilrush and Scariff. Farmers from each of these locations worked together to create a graphic of their past memories, present experiences and future hopes for farming in their communities. Their words were being visually captured by a graphic harvester and were presented back to participants and the farming community at an event in Glór in November. This was a collaborative project by Clare County Council's Healthy Clare, Age Friendly Clare in partnership with the HSE Connecting for Life programme, Cuimhneamh an Chláir (Clare Memories) and the IFA Clare and is funded by Creative Ireland Clare.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

The Clare Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), a statutory committee of Clare County Council, signed contracts with Clare Local Development Company (CLDC) to deliver the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) for 2024-2028 on behalf of the LCDC, following their successful tender submission. SICAP is a social inclusion programme that assists individuals and groups through a two-pronged approach, supporting communities and individuals, which aims to address high and persistent levels of deprivation through targeted and innovative, locally led approaches.

Sports and Recreation



In 2023 the activity around the Active Ennis Leisure Complex has increased significantly. There are many 6-month and 12-month memberships being purchased as well as Swimming Lessons and Fitness Class numbers were very high. Lee's Road has also seen a large amount of activity over 2023 with almost a quarter of a million cars entering the facility. Sports capital grant funding was announced in 2023. Active Ennis applied for this funding to make improvements to the Lees Road Running Track and Ancillary facilities. We are currently waiting for confirmation of Sports Capital Funding.

Active Ennis is partaking in an energy audit under the Energy Management committee,

responsible for energy saving and climate action within the Clare County Council.

John O'Sullivan Park and Tim Smythe Park have attained their Green Flag status for 2023, The Green flag is awarded by An Taisce and recognises a facility meeting the benchmarked standards for parks and green spaces.

Active Ennis John O'Sullivan Park, Lee's Road

In June 2023 the Council hosted a 5-a-side soccer tournament in Lees Road. Six teams from different departments took part in the tournament. The eventual winners of the Tournament were the "Human League". Every Saturday Morning at 9am a Park Run was held. This run was very popular and gave runners a scenic route for their run through the forested area of the park.

Lee's Road Track and Synthetic Running Track held multiple events throughout the year, Clare Community Games Finals and Regional Community Games Finals were both held during the Summer of 2023 with 4,000+ attendees over these two days. The Clare County Athletics Finals were also held and had 1,500 attendees. The Astro pitch also played host to the FAI Primary Schools Finals in March.

Active Ennis Tim Smythe Park

In June 2023 the "Relay for Life" 24-hour charity walk took place in Tim Smythe Park. This is the fourth year of the "Relay for Life" raising funds for the Irish Cancer Association. The 24-hour event had many cancer survivors taking part. The survivor's lap was an inspirational way to start the event, with cancer survivors of all ages walking the first lap of the relay.

Active Kilrush

Usage for the facility rose significantly in 2023. To further enhance the facility a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) is to be developed.

Works on the MUGA are due to commence in 2024. Sports Capital Funding was attained for this development in 2022 with Clare County Council securing this funding.

Active Ennis Leisure Complex Classes and Fitness Studio

Class numbers for our "Body Blast" and "Lunch Crunch" were very busy in 2023 with upwards of 20 participants in most classes. We continue to promote our classes using social media and encourage all levels to participate. Our fitness studio also remains very busy with a range of classes from Pilates and Yoga to Chair Exercise. We continue to have a lot of interest from Instructors in renting our studio and have a wide variation of classes.

Teen Gym

Teen Gym continued to grow in popularity over 2023, with pre-booking necessary the gym was often booked out for these times. During school holidays the Teen Gym hours are extended to meet the demand while the teens are off school. Teen Gym has been successful in integrating teens into a gym environment and helping improve their fitness and self-confidence.

Christmas Jumper Day

On Friday, 8th December, all staff wore their Christmas jumpers in aid of 'Cystic Fibrosis Ireland' appeal. Christmas Jumper Day for Cystic Fibrosis was great fun. We used it to mark the beginning of Christmas in the Leisure Complex and teach our young users about giving to others. It was a great opportunity to raise awareness and funds for a worthwhile cause.

Ennis invite swimming gala and Community Games

In February 2023 the pool hosted the Ennis invite gala. This gala hosted swimmers from all Munster and had 400 participants. In April the

swimming pool held the St Francis Credit Union Community Games where clubs competed from all over Clare. The winners went on to represent Clare in the National Finals held in Castlebar, Mayo.

Health Wellbeing Age Expo/Clare Farmers Weaving Stories Together booklet launch and Health and Wellbeing Expo

In July, Active Ennis hosted stand at the Healthy Clare “Health and Wellbeing Age Expo”. In this stand we displayed information about our facilities and different classes we run for older adults. We also demonstrated some chair exercises that could be done by older adults.

In November, we hosted a stand at the Healthy Clare “Clare Farmers Weaving Stories Together booklet launch and Health and Wellbeing Expo”. We hosted an information stand on our facilities, memberships, services and classes.

Ukrainian Services & Integration

As the conflict in Ukraine continued, 2023 saw the number of Ukrainian Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection living in our county increase by 1,300 to 5,500. The ‘Offer a Home’ scheme continued through the year with a steady stream of offers coming from across the county and by the year end the number of Ukrainian people accommodated stood at 320 (approx.) in 130 otherwise unoccupied houses.

The Clare Community Response Forum continued to meet monthly with the regional meetings being held in Ennis, Kilrush, Shannon and Lisdoonvarna. The team continued to work closely with the



Members of the Clare Community Response Forum visiting the new Clare Youth Service youth cafe in Lisdoonvarna following a regional meeting.

community team in the Rural Development directorate to keep informed on community issues across the county beyond the insights gained through the Response Forum. The Response Forum represents the backbone of the support structures in Clare with key agencies such as the Clare Volunteer Centre, Lisdoonvarna Failte and the Clare Immigrant Support Centre (SISC) working closely with key regional and national agencies, local volunteers and elected representatives.

The member groups of the Community Response Forum continued to recognise the importance of our wider migrant communities in the county and towards the second half of the year the national response to migration began to adjust with the creation of ‘Local Authority Integration Teams’ in each local authority being announced – funded by the Department of Children (DCEDIY). Clare County Council began a recruitment campaign towards the latter end of 2023 with a new team of 4 joining the organisation, bringing with them a new focus and outlook on migration and integration across our communities – another welcomed development of local government services.



PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE



CARMEL KIRBY
Director of Physical Development
To 9th April 2023



SIOBHÁN MCNULTY
A/Director of Physical Development
From 10th April 2023

Roads and Transportation Department

Roads and Transportation co-ordinate the design, maintenance and improvement of the national, regional and local road network throughout the county and also has responsibility for road safety, public lighting, hedgecutting, parking management, active travel, insurances, health & safety and arterial drainage.

Schedule of Municipal District Works 2023

The 2023 Schedule of Municipal Districts Works

provided for a Roadworks Programme which had a total fund of €52m. This programme was completed and all approved allocations drawn from the TII, DoT and NTA respectively. Listed hereunder are a number of the highlights/works that took place:

- Strengthening/surface dressing of more than 233km of the road network
- Continuation of enhanced bridge remediation programme. Works were carried out on 22 bridges in 2023
- Completion of 13 Safety Improvement schemes.

Public lighting

Clare County Council has responsibility for the operation and maintenance of approximately 15,000 public lights throughout the county. The Council is currently engaged with its maintenance contractor Enerveo and ESB Networks in the replacement of lighting units that reach end of life with replacement of more energy efficient LED lighting. Necessary requirements to meet ESB Networks standard requirements for public lighting infrastructure has placed an additional ask in terms of infrastructure works and resources on repairs and this has resulted in extended repair times. Given that public lighting is the most significant consumer of energy across the Local Authority, gains in energy efficiency in the public lighting sector is hugely welcomed in meeting targets under the recently adopted Climate Action Plan. A reduction in energy consumption of more than 20% has been achieved over the past 3 years through LED replacements with over 70% of all public lighting across the county now comprising of LED lighting. Clare County Council continues its participation in Region 1 of the Local Authority Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project (PLEEP). The contract for the region was tendered in Autumn of 2020 and the Design Build Works Contract was signed with Le Cheile Consortium in late December 2021. Survey works on the project commenced in Clare in June 2023 and survey works continue into 2024. The retrofit of these lights will significantly reduce the level of carbon emissions attributed to the public lighting assets in Clare County Council.

Active Travel 2023

In 2023 Clare County Council received an allocation of €4.5m for 28 projects under the National Transport Authority's (NTA) active travel programme.

Preliminary design work on the Tulla Road Cycling Scheme and the Limerick Road Cycling Scheme was undertaken and continues into

2024.

A variety of other projects were undertaken in 2023, including footpath works in Miltown Malbay, Tulla and Killaloe.

Other Roads Activities

Community Hedgecutting Grant

Clare County Council provided an allocation of €15,000 to continue the Community Hedgecutting Grant Scheme in 2023 and 39 grants were approved. This initiative is facilitating greater awareness among landowners of their responsibilities in relation to management of roadside hedges on their properties.

Community Involvement Scheme

An allocation of €594,000 under the Community Involvement Scheme in 2023 facilitated work being carried out to 11 public roads throughout the county.

Local Improvement Scheme

Clare County Council was allocated total grant funding of €1,367,910 for Local Improvement Schemes from the Department of Rural and Community Development in 2023. The grant funding facilitated the approval and completion of LIS works to 22 non-public roads in 2023.

Traffic Management

The Council has responsibility for the management and enforcement of traffic throughout the county. Parking bye-laws and pay and display facilities are in operation in Ennis, Kilrush, Kilkee, Lahinch and Doolin.



Roads Performance Indicators

Performance Indicators for 2023 are set out below.

R1 % of roads that received a PSCI condition rating

Description	%
% of Regional roads that received a PSCI rating in 24 months prior to 31/12/2023	64%
% of Local Primary roads that received a PSCI rating in 24 months prior to 31/12/2023	63%
% of Local Secondary roads that received a PSCI rating in 24 months prior to 31/12/2023	65%
% of Local Tertiary roads that received a PSCI rating in 24 months prior to 31/12/2023	54%

R1 B % of roads represented by PSCI condition rating

Road Type	1-4 Rating	5-6 Rating	7-8 Rating	9-10 Rating
Regional	3%	13%	60%	24%
Local Primary	4%	22%	59%	15%
Local Secondary	10%	27%	53%	10%
Local Tertiary	35%	25%	34%	6%

R2 Regional Road Works

Km of Regional road strengthened during 2023	14.85km
Amount expended on Regional road strengthening during 2023	€ 4,859,379
Km of Regional road resealed during 2023	12.13km
Amount expended on Regional road resealing during 2023	€ 547,852

R2 Local Road Works

Km of Local road strengthened during 2023	82.55km
Amount expended on Local road strengthening during 2023	€ 8,765,522
Km of Local road resealed during 2023	123.51km
Amount expended on Local road resealing during 2023	€ 2,895,353

Health & Safety

In 2023 a key H&S Objective for Clare County Council was to focus on digitalisation of elements of the Occupational Health & Safety Management System in order to improve efficiency, effectiveness and minimise paperwork through utilisation of the following tools:

- ProWorks/ArcGis
- Meta Compliance
- Online E-learning Modules.

This was achieved by procuring Pro Works Software for 50 users, delivering training in its use, and issuing 38 handheld devices in order to enable staff in the Municipal Districts select routine Traffic Management Plans, complete Safe System of Work Plans and access utility drawings all on site in an electronic format thus enhancing their effectiveness, efficiency and minimising paperwork on site. Meta Compliance and online E-Learning Modules were used to deliver H&S Training to indoor staff in key risk areas.

In addition Serious Incident Simulated Exercises were delivered to 86 senior staff across 7 separate departments in order to refresh staff on the Clare County Council Serious Incident Checklist, Wallet Card and IPB Safe@Work App and communicate learnings from recent serious incidents and simulated exercises.

During 2023 a detailed audit of each of the main depots was conducted in order to enhance Traffic Management arrangements with actions identified assigned to the relevant Municipal District for closure.

The Clare County Council Driving for Work handbook was updated following the publication of National Guidance from the Local Government Management Agency principally around the following areas:

- Driver Qualification and Authorisation
- Smoking

- Trailer Inspections including Mobile Welfare Units
- Electric Vehicle Safety.

The Clare County Council Covid-19 Response Plan was last revised in February 2022 in accordance with Sector and Government Guidance. The LGMA High Level Local Authority Transitional Good Practice Guidance published in February 2022 for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of Covid-19 superseded the Covid-19 Standard Operational Guidance Documents (SOGs) and placed a continued onus on individuals to self-isolate if symptomatic/positive and not to attend the workplace with the employer required to provide Covid-19 signage, hand sanitising stations and infection prevention and control measures to be maintained.

The above initiatives in conjunction with the Annual Programme of Work of Safety Statement/Risk Assessment and Documentation Reviews, completion of 6 Internal Health & Safety Audits and 273 Site Safety Inspections resulted in a total reduction in Dangerous Occurrences with no Underground Electrical Cable strikes recorded in 2023 and 4 Reportable Accidents reported to the Health & Safety Authority.

Physical Development SPC

The Physical Development Strategic Policy Committee held 4 meetings in 2023. This Committee has a membership of 13, comprising 7 Elected Members and representatives from the following sectors:

- Agriculture/Farming
- Environment/Conservation
- Development/Construction
- Community/Voluntary
- Social Inclusion.

The Chairperson as the SPC is Cllr John Crowe.

Issues discussed by the SPC in 2023 included the following:

- Fire & Emergency Operations Plan
- Climate Action Plan
- Bus Connects
- Draft Litter Management Plan 2023
- Draft National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy
- Sustainable Development Goal Champions Programme 2023-2024
- Bathing Water Quality
- Roadworks Programme & Active Travel
- Clare Civil Defence Service
- Water Services Transition
- Community engagement on Climate Action.

Project Management Office

N19 Shannon Airport Access Road

Work continued throughout the year with the design and evolution of the plans for the N19 Shannon Airport Access Road Improvement Scheme with the expectation to progress an application for Development Consent to An Bord Pleanála in 2024.

National and Non-National Roads Projects

Following An Bord Pleanála confirmation of the CPO for the N67/N85 Ennistymon Inner Relief (Blake's Corner) project in late 2022, the decision was subsequently challenged in the High Court. Throughout 2023, the Judicial Review process was ongoing. The outcome of which is awaited and will determine the

next steps in the delivery of this critical infrastructure.

In 2023, Consulting Engineers were appointed as technical advisors for Sections 3 & 4 of the West Clare Railway Greenway project from Ennistymon to Miltown Malbay to Moyasta, while work continued at pace on Route Options Selection on Section 1 (Kilrush and Kilkee), as well as Section 2 (Ennis to Ennistymon). Other Greenway proposals being worked on in 2023 include the Limerick to Scarriff Greenway project in conjunction with Waterways Ireland as well as a number of smaller proposals in the Shannon, Bunratty and Sixmilebridge areas. Other projects being worked on by the PMO throughout 2023 include the Ennis Public Realm Regeneration Project, the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) Road and Housing proposal in Claureen, the Doolin Pier Visitor Services Building, Kilkee Sea Wall, as well as various coastal erosion and minor works schemes.

Killaloe Bypass, Shannon Bridge Crossing & R494 Road Improvement Scheme

The contract for the Killaloe Bypass, New Shannon Bridge Crossing and R494 Upgrade Project was awarded in February 2022. Work on site commenced in August 2022. The project is scheduled for completion in mid-2025.

Following many years in the making, the contract for the Killaloe Bridge, Shannon Bridge Crossing and R494 Upgrade was awarded to John Sisk & Son (Holdings) Ltd in February 2022. Work commenced in August 2022. Completion is expected in mid-2025.

Flood Relief Schemes

The Springfield Flood Relief Scheme was completed in September 2023 with the arrival and installation of the two 400mm diameter Gorman Rupp pumps. Following the completion of the fencing, landscaping and

of the pumping station the site was officially handed over to Clare County Council.



The scheme consists of 850m of flood embankment, twin penstocks, landraising and a pump station. It provides flood protection from the River Shannon to 21 dwelling houses and a farmyard as well as the protection of public infrastructure in the area.

The scheme was required in January 2024 following a period of very heavy rainfall when high water levels in the Shannon caused flooding in the Shannon flood plain. The scheme operated as designed and provided valuable information for future flood event management.

The two other major flood relief schemes in Clare, the Shannon Town and Environs FRS and the Kilkee FRS are progressing well. The Preferred Option for the Shannon scheme has been identified and the Kilkee Scheme is moving to Stage 2 Detailed Design and Planning. Work continues on a number of minor works schemes including a scheme at Quin that is nearing completion and providing protection to three dwelling houses.

Ennis Public Realm Regeneration Project B

Following the extensive consultation with the department over a number of months and the submission of final business case, funding was secured for the complete scheme in the summer of 2023. This enabled award of contract to Shareridge Ltd, and works commencement in October, marking a very important milestone on this project. This, the second phase of the Ennis Public Realm Regeneration Project, represents a significant investment by Clare County Council and central government to enhance accessibility for all and to encourage continued and future investment. Under the €11.6m scheme, the streets (O'Connell Street, High Street and Bank Place) will become more accessible by replacing conventional streetscapes with shared surface pavements. Squares and civic spaces (O'Connell Square, Barrack Square, Cathedral) will be transformed through the delivery of expanded plazas incorporating urban planting, street trees, an interactive public fountain, and provision for performance/event spaces at the Height and at Barrack Square. Barrack Square and Old Barrack Street will be developed as a 'café quarter' which will deliver a higher-quality civic space encouraging people to meet, relax and avail of local retail.

Additionally, the contractor is undertaking extensive refurbishment of the combined sewer on behalf of Uisce Éireann (Irish Water), representing a further €2m investment in the town's infrastructure. We are delighted that these additional works, paid for by Uisce Éireann, can be accommodated as they will resolve longstanding legacy issues with the sewer as well as future proofing capacity in the town for many years to come.

The project's advancement to construction stage has followed years of extensive planning and consultation with the business community, residents, public and Elected Members. The ongoing works, which are scheduled

to be completed in late 2025, follow the successful delivery of significant public realm enhancements at Parnell Street, and town laneways, and bow-ways in 2020 and 2021.

Environment Section

The Environment Section has responsibility for a diverse range of activities including waste enforcement, waste management, environmental awareness, energy, gardening, scientific services (laboratory, water, air), veterinary services and Blue Flag beaches. The 2023 work programme was largely driven by an extensive regulatory framework, including new legislation such as the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations 2023, S.I. No. 343/2023 - Circular Economy (Environmental Levy) Regulations 2023.

Beaches and amenities

The Environment Section monitors 14 bathing areas and has 8 Blue Flags and 4 Green Coast Awards, all checked for compliance with 247 water samples taken during the season. All bathing areas monitored achieved “excellent” quality status. Beaches and related activity are covered by our Beach Bye-laws which were revised and adopted in June 2021. In total, 49 lifeguards provided services on Clare’s beaches for the extremely busy summer season 2023.



Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental inspections (RMCEI)

Across all Environment thematic areas, Clare County Council undertook 5,905 routine and

1,522 non-routine inspections. The Waste Enforcement team received and investigated 1,221 complaints relating to litter and waste. A total of 93 litter fines and fixed payment notices were issued. In addition, Clare County Council served 138 legal notices for breaches of litter and waste legislation. In total, 401 letters were issued under the Waste Management bye-laws. The Council continues to avail of Anti-Dumping Initiative funding to combat illegal dumping. We have investigated 218 complaints relating to water, air and noise pollution. In order to check environmental compliance and to protect water quality, 133 inspections were carried out at licensed facilities. In addition, 136 domestic wastewater treatment systems were inspected. The Environment section also received and reported on 851 planning applications. All the above aims to ensure protection of our local environment.

Waste management and licensed landfills

The waste management section provides five recycling centres, three of these are also waste transfer stations and we provide 54 bring banks sites countywide (including seasonal). The Central Waste Management Facility (CWMF) landfill, Doora Landfill and Lisdeen Landfill continued to be monitored in accordance with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) waste licence requirements.

The Integrated Constructed Wetland, completed as part of the Closure, Restoration and Aftercare Management Plan for the Inagh closed landfill was shortlisted for an award at the LAMA All Ireland Community and Council Awards.



Historic landfills

The Council received a draft Certificate of Authorisation for a closed historic landfill in Whitegate from the Environmental Protection Agency. Progress on funding applications has been made and works including monitoring is ongoing at a number of designated historic landfills. The Relevant regulation is the Waste Management (Certification of Historic Unlicensed Waste Disposal and Recovery Activity) Regulations, 2008.



Water Framework Direction and the River Basin Management Plan

A total of 44 river and 19 lake sites were monitored in compliance with the Environmental Protection Agency monitoring programme. The Draft River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027 is still awaiting sign-off at national level.

Water/wastewater services

During the year, 73 private supplies (public Group Water Schemes, private Group Water Schemes and private commercial supplies) were monitored and achieved a compliance rate over 97.5% across the various parameters measured. We also carried out an audit of 1 private water supply scheme in 2023. In addition, 30 Environment Protection Agency licensed or certified municipal Uisce Éireann plants were monitored.

Education and awareness

Through the Environment Section's Greener

Clare programme, the following initiatives continued to be supported during 2023: National Spring Clean, An Taisce Green Schools, Clean Coasts, Blue Flag Beach Programme, National Spring Clean, Gum Litter Taskforce, MyWaste.ie. Leave No Trace, Circular Economy Academy, and National Food Waste Recycling Week 2023. Awareness raising campaigns developed during 2023 included the promotion of Sustainable Development Goals, cigarette butt litter, Greener Christmas, Invasive Alien Species. Funding received through the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) Anti-Dumping Initiative and Anti-Litter and Anti-Graffiti Grant Scheme supported the promotion of various anti littering messages including, the use of unauthorised waste collector, dog owner responsibility, burning of waste (the exemption relating to this activity ceased in Q4 2023), household waste byelaws, Illegal dumping, waste prevention, littering including cigarette butt littering. Events/initiatives by the Water Community Office were also promoted as well as the DECC Clean Air Campaigns.



Clare County Council was selected as one of 26 organisations to participate in the Sustainable Development Goal Champions Programme 2023-2024.

In July 2023, Kilkee was selected as one of Ireland's first My Waste Green Business Hubs. By becoming a Green Business Hub it will make it easy for both businesses and visitors to Kilkee to take the necessary steps to protect

and improve the environment.



Kilkee was selected as one of Ireland's first My Waste Green Business Hubs.

Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), dog and horse control

Clare County Council is an official agent of the FSAI. In 2023, a total of 3,062 beef animals and 24,992 sheep were slaughtered in County Clare plants overseen by our veterinary inspector. In total, 245 stray dogs were picked up and 195 dogs were surrendered, while 37 dogs were seized by the Dog Warden. In addition, 86 dogs were reclaimed by their owners, 145 rehomed and 201 rehomed in consultation with the Dogs Trust and other rescue groups. 3,143 dog licences were issued during 2023. 15 straying horses were seized in 2023, 14 were reclaimed by their owners.

Gardening section

The Gardening section continued to maintain high standards in ensuring the attractiveness of our towns and villages and work closely with and advising community groups on landscaping matters. The All-Ireland Pollinator policy action items were implemented with increased pollinator friendly species and perennial flowers being planted. The Áras continued to implement the “No Mow May” initiative and was a hub for biodiversity and wildlife.

As part of the Communities in Bloom International Challenge, for Ennis in 2023, the Council won 5 Blooms – Gold Pollinator

Friendly Gardens. The award was achieved through the extensive work by the Gardening Team in developing and implementing a pollinator friendly perennial planting scheme across managed open spaces.



Fire & Building Control Fire Service Operations

The Fire Service attended 1,019 call-outs in 2023 resulting in a decrease of 8.8% on the number for 2022. Unfortunately there was 1 fire fatality in 2023 in County Clare. Chimney fire call-outs decreased by 6% from 66 in 2022 to 62 in 2023. There was also a 13% decrease in domestic fires from 46 in 2022 to 40 in 2023.

Capital/Procurement

A new Class B Fire Appliance was completed and delivered to County Clare in May 2023 at a cost of €435,007. The appliance is now operational in Ennistymon Fire Station. The Brigade also took delivery of 2 previously owned Class B Fire Engines which were delivered to and went operational in Scarriff and Killaloe Fire Stations at a cost of €116,414 following refurbishment works. Approval was

granted for a further new Class B Fire Appliance at a cost of €549,041 and a new Emergency Tender Appliance at a cost of €349,935. Both of these appliances are currently in build and it is intended they will be based at Ennis Fire Station in late 2024. Approval was also received for the purchase and fit-out of 2 new vans for Killaloe and Kilrush Fire Brigades at a cost of €143,350. These vans are currently in build and are expected to be operational by April 2024.

Approval was granted during 2023 for the construction of a new 2-bay storage facility and general upgrade works at Kilrush Fire Station at a cost of €425,757. It is expected these works will be complete by March 2024.

New thermal imaging cameras were procured for all 7 stations in County Clare.

Recruitment & Retention

In 2023, the WRC made recommendations surrounding the terms and conditions of Retained Fire-fighters and the recommended staffing levels in stations. These recommendations have resulted in a significant decrease in the number of personnel leaving the service and have also resulted in the number of retained Fire-fighter posts in the Brigade increasing from 78 to 90 personnel. The process of filling these additional posts is currently underway.

Health & Safety

In 2023, Clare County Fire & Rescue Service retained accreditation to the ISO 45001 Health & Safety Management System Standard for the implementation of their Safety Management System throughout the Service following an audit by the National Standards Authority Ireland.

Fire Prevention

A total of 100 Fire Safety Certificate Applications were received in 2023, an increase of 11% on the 2022 figure of 90. Fire Prevention Officers

carried out 189 inspections and they assessed 72 licence applications, these apply to pubs, hotels, community centres and theatres throughout the county.

National Fire Safety Week took place from 9th to 17th October. Clare County Fire and Rescue Service has an ongoing campaign which involved firefighters visiting the homes of older people and carrying out 'Home Fire Safety Checks', this includes supplying and fitting smoke alarms if required.

Building Control

A total of 13.67% of buildings notified to us through BCMS were inspected by Building Control Staff in 2023, meeting our annual target of 12% to 15% inspections. A total of 56 Disability Access Certificate Applications were assessed by the Building Control Section in 2023.

Major Emergency Management

Regional Major Emergency Management Training resumed in 2023 with training provided in the following roles for council personnel:

- Information Management
- On-Site Co-ordination.

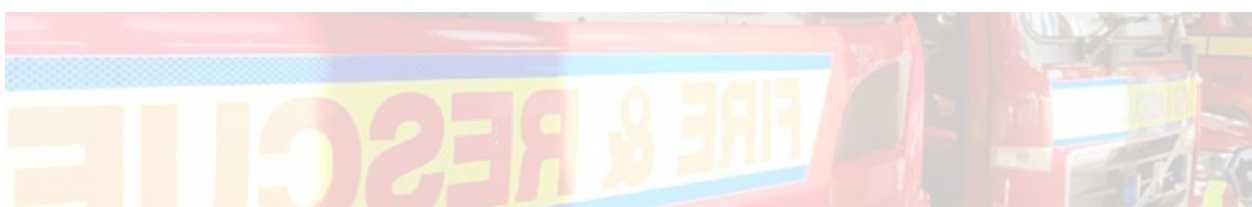
Clare County Council participated in the Emergency Management Exercises in 2023 at:

- Shannon Airport
- ESB Moneypoint.

Dangerous Structures

Building control staff dealt with 7 Dangerous Structure complaints in 2023.

Fire & Building Control Performance Indicators		2023
F1	Cost per Capita	€51.07
F2-B	Average time taken, in minutes to mobilise Fire Brigades in Part-Time Stations in respect of Fires	5.07 min
F2-D	Average time taken, in minutes to mobilise Fire Brigades in Part-Time Stations in respect of all other (non-fire) emergency incidents	5.35 min
F3-A	% of cases in respect of fire in which first attendance at the scene is within 10 minutes	38.21%
F3-B	% of cases in respect of fire in which first attendance at the scene is after 10 minutes but within 20 minutes	38.51%
F3-C	% of cases in respect of fire in which first attendance at the scene is after 20 minutes	23.28%
F3-D	% of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the scene is within 10 minutes	26.10%
F3-E	% of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the scene is after 10 minutes but within 20 minutes	49.60%
F3-F	% of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the scene is after 20 minutes	24.30%
P5-A	% of applications for fire safety certs that were decided (granted or refused) within two months of their receipt	64%
P5-B	% of applications for fire safety certs that were decided (granted or refused) within an extended period agreed with the applicant	36%
P1	Buildings Inspected as a percentage of new buildings notified to the local authority	13.67%



Expectations for 2024

Delivery of the new Class B Appliance is expected in Autumn 2024. It is expected that the new 2 Bay Appliance Storage Shed at Kilrush Fire Station will be complete in March 2024 and 2 new vans will be operational in Killaloe and Kilrush by April 2024. It is intended during the course of 2024 to prepare a Capital Grant Aid Request for funding to carry out significant redevelopment works at Ennis Fire Station. It is intended to retain accreditation to ISO 45001 as part of Clare County Council's Health & Safety Management System.

Full implementation of the Retained Fire Firefighters WRC Proposals will be concluded in 2024, and it is expected that there will be a sizeable increase in the number of firefighters recruited during the year as part of that implementation process.

It is planned that there will continue to be a substantial fire safety awareness campaign which will include a media campaign. The "Home Fire Safety Checks" by the Fire Service will continue to target specific vulnerable groups in 2024 with the installation of smoke detectors and provision of fire safety advice.



Handover of new Class B Fire Appliance at Ennistymon Fire Station.

Civil Defence

2023 proved to be another busy year for Clare Civil Defence with volunteers providing medical cover at various events throughout the county. These events included Clare vs Cork and Clare vs Tipperary in the Munster Senior Hurling championship in Cusack Park with crowds of over 19,000 in attendance on both days. The Junior Cycling Tour of Ireland, Women's Irish Open in Dromoland, 24-hour Relay for Life and Gaelforce were just some of the events covered by members in 2023. Clare Civil Defence volunteers treated over 50 patients during these various events, providing a professional and extremely high standard of care to each patient.

Clare Civil Defence also assisted An Garda Síochána with a number of missing person searches in 2023. The Search & Rescue Team along with Drone and Boat teams played an important role in these search operations which led to the successful recovery of five missing persons' bodies. Search & Rescue teams from Clare Civil Defence also assisted our colleagues from Galway Civil Defence with two missing person searches.

Training for volunteers continues at the Clare Civil Defence headquarters on the Quin Road, with an average of 50 volunteers receiving training every week. In 2023, 14 volunteers successfully completed the Emergency First Responder course with another 12 completing the First Aid Responder course. Training commenced for 14 new volunteers who were enrolled in the Recruits Basic Training (RBT) programme which provides the minimum training standard set out by the Civil Defence Branch of the Department of Defence.

The Civil Defence Branch of the Department of Defence introduced a new Volunteer and Equipment Management System (VEMS), this system replaced the old Volunteer Register. VEMS will enable Civil Defence Officers to manage the unit more effectively. VEMS also allows volunteers themselves to access a portal where they can see their own training records and it allows them to sign up for training courses and duties. In Clare we have begun to roll out training to all volunteers on the use of VEMS.

Ten members attended the 63rd International Military Pilgrimage in Lourdes, France, as part

of a larger group of over 100 Civil Defence volunteers from units across Ireland. Civil Defence volunteers continue to provide unwavering support to their communities through their work with Clare Civil Defence, some of which can be difficult and challenging

at times. It is important to highlight, in particular, the core group of senior staff/ volunteers without whom this work simply can't happen. The knowledge and experience they pass on to the newer volunteers every week during training cannot be measured.



Drone team (Photo: Pat Flynn).



Medical team for Clare vs Cork in Cusack Park.



Volunteers providing medical response to Christmas event in Ennis.



Volunteers before departing for Lourdes, France.

Climate & Energy

Recruitment of Climate Action teams occurred over the first half of 2023. Climate Action Officer Chris Dixon O'Mara commenced with Clare County Council in May 2023. Community Climate Action Officer Kelly Slattery commenced her role in August 2023 and Energy Manager Conor McDonagh replaced the outgoing Energy Manager in September 2023. All roles are fully funded by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications. The Climate Team will be tasked with the successful publication of the Climate Action Plan and the implementation of same over the coming years. The Climate Action Plan is the pathway forward for Clare County Council in realising its own climate targets but also enabling and supporting communities going forward towards achieving their climate goals.

Community Climate Action Programme

The Community Climate Action Programme was launched on 6th December, 2023. Prior to this, the recruitment of the Community Climate Action Officer in July allowed for an expanded approach to engagement with communities

around the programme. Engagement took place with communities all across the county. By year end, the Community Climate Action Officer had engaged with over 80 community groups across the county.

Engagement included:

- 3 information sessions held over MS Teams
- In-person meetings with community groups onsite across the county
- 4 drop-in sessions
- 6 community information clinics held across the Municipal Districts.

This Community Climate Action Programme closed for submissions on 28th February, 2024, and emphasis will be placed on the delivery of multiple climate action projects across the county featuring the thematic areas of Community & Energy, Travel, Food and Waste, Shopping and Recycling.



Climate Action Plan Development 2023



At-a-glance

EVIDENCE BASE

Defining the Plan scope, development of Emissions and Climate Action Risk Assessment Report

JAN - APRIL 2023



PRE DRAFT CONSULTATION

Summary Report Production to inform [Pre Draft Consultation](#).
250 Responses

MAY - JUNE 2023



PLAN DRAFTING

Drafting Plan via engagement with full council and informed by stakeholder submissions

JULY - SEPT 2023



DRAFT CONSULTATION

Statutory Draft Consultation Period of Plan including Public Engagements

OCT - NOV 2023



SUBMISSIONS REPORT

Development of Chief Executives Report on Submissions.
150 Submissions Received

DEC 2023





The Community Climate Action Programme was launched in December, 2023.

Climate Action Plan

The process of developing the Climate Action Plan spanned all of 2023 and into 2024. The adoption of the plan is a reserved function of the Council. The development of the plan centred around engagement, that is the provision of concise, relatable information to relevant stakeholders to allow all parties to inform the plan. Consultation was held at both pre-draft and the statutory draft consultation stage. The strategy of engagement utilised by the Climate Action team was rewarded by the large number of submissions received to inform the plan, totalling over 400. Groups such as students, community groups, Public Participation Network (PPN) and others took part in the submission process. Our consultation process was keen to use the insights gained from these submissions to inform a robust, broad and realistic Climate Action Plan.

Energy

Having successfully being recredited to the ISO50001 standard in November 2022, the focus of 2023 was to begin the journey towards a 51% carbon reduction by 2030. Our Energy Management team is made up of

a cross-directorate team, led by the Energy Performance Officer. In 2023 the Energy Management team met on multiple occasions to analyse consumption and to discuss how to progress energy projects. Analysis includes our significant energy users including public lighting, Ennis Leisure Centre, Cliffs of Moher and Áras Contae An Chláir.

A number of energy audits on our assets took place in 2023. These audits included Ennis Leisure Centre, Áras Contae An Chláir, Cliffs of Moher and the Buttermarket campus.

Energy projects identified to progress in 2024 are photovoltaic energy generation, progress to participating in Pathfinder projects in collaboration with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) with a particular focus on Ennis Leisure Centre.

The public lighting retrofit continued in 2023. The majority of lights in the county are now retrofitted to LED and will continue through the PLEEP project in 2024.

Clare County Council participated in the 'Reduce Your Use Campaign' in collaboration with the SEAI during 2023. This project includes building awareness around the organisation in relation to reduction of energy use both in the work environment and at home.

The Climate section also hosted some Energy Awareness modules over 2023, namely an Energy Awareness Day in Áras Contae An Chláir in October 2023 along with community events such as talks to Shannon Tidy Towns and Kilkee Community Groups at Kilkee Library.

Water Services

Future Delivery Of Water Services

The Master Co-Operation Agreement (MCA) and the Data Sharing Agreement between Uisce Éireann and Clare County Council was signed by the Chief Executive on 5th May, 2023. The MCA replaced the existing Service Level Agreement on the effective date. The effective date for Clare County Council was 20th September, 2023. Under the new MCA Uisce Éireann has now assumed direct management

and control of the staff and the water services functions. In addition, Uisce Éireann is also responsible for the management of health and safety.

Asset Transfer

Following an assessment of the water and wastewater assets in County Clare, 384 sites have been identified for potential transfer to Uisce Éireann to date. Following on site surveys, 71 of these assets have been determined to be duplicate, non-operational assets or assets which Uisce Éireann will not accept. Of the remaining 313 assets, 221 have now been fully transferred to Uisce Éireann. The 92 assets remaining to be transferred are divided into different categories and a pathway has been developed to transfer those assets to Uisce Éireann.

Rural Water Programme (RWP)

During 2023, €787,000 was invested in progressing upgrade works on 8 group schemes allocated funding under the Multi Annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021.

The next capital funding cycle for group schemes the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2024-2026 was announced in January 2024.

The Council in 2023 assisted 2 further schemes to be taken in charge by Uisce Éireann and further applications are at various stages of progression.

The Annual Subsidy Grant was also administered to 38 schemes with overall subsidy funding of €2.5 million provided to these schemes.

In addition, under the Rural Water Programme 84 grant applications were received during the year for bored well grants with €163,000 paid out to householders.





TOURISM DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE



LEONARD CLEARY
Director of Tourism Development

Contract signing for Vandeleur Walled Gardens and Visitor Centre and Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience at the Old Rectory, Mountshannon

Clare County Council signed contracts with Martins Construction Ltd on Monday, 23rd October, 2023, for the development of a 140-seater indoor and outdoor café and restaurant. The new café and restaurant development consists of restoration work and alterations within the existing stable block courtyard to support tourism development, including a café and restaurant, indoor and outdoor dining area, kitchen, office and

welfare facilities. Following a competitive tender process for the restaurant, award-winning Brambles Café chain were awarded the tender for operating the new facility, which will allow for Vandeleur Walled Garden and Visitor Centre to cater for corporate and festive events.

Another very significant tourism project to be undertaken in East Clare has moved a step closer following the signing of a contract for the development of the Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) visitor centre in the heart of Mountshannon village. Overlooking Mountshannon Harbour and Lough Derg, the Old Rectory is an historic period house dating from 1905 and is set to repurposed and extended into a visitor and interpretative centre for Inis Cealtra (Holy Island). Clare County Council signed a contract with M. Fitzgibbon Contractors Ltd for the redevelopment of the visitor centre building, which, once completed in 2024, will comprise of a revitalised exhibition area that interpret local stories and the island of Inis Cealtra, a reception area, an upstairs café and rectory garden. The successful funding awarded for this project which includes the repurposing of the Old Rectory as well as wastewater optimisation works and public



realm works at Mountshannon is €4,290,765 from the Department of Rural and Community Development as part of RRDF 1 Category funding, with an additional 20% match funding committed from Clare County Council.

GEOfood at the Clare Expo



The Geopark organised a fantastic representation of GEOfood at the Burren Extravaganza and Clare Expo on 19th February in the Falls Hotel and Spa. There was a GEOfood counter giving information about the brand, and there were six GEOfood producers in attendance showcasing and sampling the delicious locally sourced and produced food that's on offer in the Geopark. These included: Flaggy Shore Oysters, Linnalla Premium Irish Ice-cream, Burren Premium Beef, Burren Beetroot Chutney, Aillwee Burren Gold Cheese, and St Tola Goat Cheese. The GEOfood brand continues to grow in the Geopark and will be showcased at several more events throughout 2023. Get those tastebuds ready!



Clare 'Tourism Together' Networking Event, 2nd March 2023 and launch of www.visitclare.ie

The Tourism Advisory Forum and Clare County Council's Tourism Department recognised that 2023 would be another challenging year for tourism, and that a collective effort was required to mitigate against all upcoming challenges. The Clare 'Tourism Together' Networking event was organised, which underlined the shared commitment to further developing the tourism economy. The common theme of conversation at the Clare 'Tourism Together' Networking Event 2023 centred around new ways that the industry in Clare can work together to promote the county. It was noted that Clare's reliance on the tourism economy is particularly acute in comparison to many other parts of the country and it is vital therefore, that a collaborative approach to how we market the county at home and abroad is taken.

Key tourism industry personnel in County Clare attended the website launch, which formed part of a networking event focusing

on challenges and opportunities for the local sector in 2023, including marketing the county, accommodation capacity and sustainable tourism. Motivational speakers included Pól O'Conghaile (Irish Independent Travel Editor) and Bobby Kerr (Irish entrepreneur and businessman).

During this event, the Cathaoirleach of Clare County Council, Cllr Tony O'Brien, officially launched the new tourism website, www.VisitClare.ie. The full development of this new website is an initiative of Clare County Council and is the most comprehensive ever website dedicated to showcasing everything Ireland's Banner County has to offer domestic and international visitors. The site features key information on tourism attractions and activities in the towns and villages across Clare, information on local accommodation providers, dining, events and festivals taking place throughout the county. There is also a key focus on the heritage and culture of the county and how visitors can learn more about Clare's rich past and traditions.

RTÉ Today show broadcast from Vandeleur Walled Garden and Visitor Centre



RTÉ's Today show shone a spotlight on the Vandeleur Walled Garden and Visitor Centre and Scatterry Island during an outdoor live broadcast on Wednesday, 24th May, 2023. Representatives of the local community and tourism sector presented at the Vandeleur Walled Garden and Visitor Centre that profiled the extensive restoration works that have been underway since 2021. The programme also profiled food producers from the Burren GEO food and was also host of live performances from local musicians.

Vandeleur Walled Gardens and Visitor Centre was scheduled to open the new Visitor Centre later that month with an Open Weekend taking place on June 3rd and June 4th whereby members of the local community were being invited to get a flavour of what's new at our visitor attraction during an enlightening talk at 10.30am each day.

Refurbishment works to Lighthouse Keepers Cottage, Loop Head



Refurbishment works of the Light House Keepers Cottage, Loop Head Lighthouse, are underway with Martin Fitzgibbon Construction being appointed as contractors to carry out restoration works to include new floor, wall and ceiling finishes, installation of attic and ground floor insulation together with upgrade to existing mechanical and electrical installations.

When complete the house will be made available for accommodation purposes for short term lets. This project has been prioritised by Clare County Council in line with the current accommodation crisis and will also increase the economic benefits to the local community.

Graiguenamanagh Site Visit to explore best practice in Campervan and RV Parks



A comprehensive assessment of Campervan RV Provision in County Clare is underway by Repucon, who has been commissioned by the Tourism Department of Clare County Council. As part of this, a Study Tour took place to see how a social enterprise has pivoted to take advantage of opportunities for the town whilst creating jobs locally. A group of elected members, community and Council staff attended a very informative Study Tour to the Barrow Valley Activities Hub and Motorhome Aire.

The Barrow Valley Development Group is

very active and engage with visitors and local businesses to develop their product, ensuring it generates benefit for the local community and local businesses in Graigeunamanagh. Surveys have shown the economic return to be more than €1.5 million to the local economy and creating up to 11 jobs.

GSTC Green Team



The GSTC Green Team has been established and the mission of the Clare GSTC Green team is to work collaboratively to develop a common understanding and approach to sustainable tourism. It is also to achieve Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Destination Certification for County Clare, in line with one of the Strategic Objectives of the Clare Tourism Strategy 2030. The Green Team will use the Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Destination Criteria to guide standards and practice and to develop more sustainable services, increase public awareness and engagement, and assist with policymaking at local level. This work is being done in partnership with ATU Sligo who will research the most effective way to apply for and achieve destination certification.

Revalidation - UNESCO Global Geopark

The Geopark received wonderful news as their re-validation for UNESCO Global Geopark status was granted. They extend their sincere gratitude to all those who contributed their

time and support during the evaluation visit in June of this year. This approval of their UNESCO Global Geopark status serves as a testament to the diligent efforts of the team and the affiliated organizations. They are dedicated to furthering sustainability, conservation, education, and the promotion of cultural and heritage values within the region.





Dromoland Castle Hotel & Country Club KPMG Women's Irish Open

Events like the KPMG Women's Irish Open take preparation and dedication, with many strategic partners collaborating to ensure it is a great success. The Tourism Department was delighted and honoured to play our part again, for a second year.

Clare County Council, through Shannon Municipal District, hosted the '19th Hole Community and Family Fun Festival' in Newmarket on Fergus on 2nd and 3rd September, 2023.

Twinning - Phoenix, Arizona & Langenfeld Germany

Ennis celebrates landmark twinning anniversaries with Langenfeld, Germany and Phoenix, Arizona. An Official Welcome reception was held at Áras Contae an Chláir, Clare County Council, on Monday, 11th September, to celebrate key landmark anniversaries of twinning relationships between Ennis and Langenfeld and the US city of Phoenix.

Hosted by Mayor of Ennis Municipal District, Cllr Pat Daly, and Cathaoirleach of Clare



County Council, Cllr Joe Cooney, the event was attended by local government and community representatives from Langenfeld, Germany, and Phoenix, Arizona, who have travelled to Ireland to mark the 10th and 35th anniversaries respectively for their links with the Clare county town. To mark these anniversaries, three days of trips around the county were scheduled to explore our wonderful County, embrace our twinning links, promote, and foster tourism and develop new friendships to flourish into the future.

Digital and Broadband Department

2023 saw the continued expansion and upgrade of the DigiClare network of remote working hubs. The hubs network itself experienced a 25% increase in footfall throughout its 11 locations countywide. In line with demand a continued programme of upgrading and enhancement of the facilities is ongoing. These enhancements include an increase in private offices and privacy booths, the upgrade of audio video facilities and the further refurbishment of buildings to provide meeting rooms and training spaces.

Part of the success of the DigiClare initiative is continued proactive engagement with groups and organisations both locally and nationally which promotes these spaces and facilities within the community and regionally. Community groups and clubs now utilise the hubs' facilities for meetings and projects while they have also been instrumental in providing fit for purpose venues for events such as job fairs, youth projects and training courses.

Plans have also progressed for the provision of a community/digital hub in Scariff and a submission for funding under the Rural Regeneration Development Fund programme is being prepared.

This year also saw the establishment of the Clare Tourism Designated Activity Company (DAC) with the Digital and Broadband Department being tasked with the implementation of the ICT infrastructure supporting Clare Tourism DAC and associated Tourism services. The establishment of this new entity covers the activities of the tourism sites of Cliffs of Moher, Bunratty Castle and folk park, Loop Head Lighthouse, Vandeleur Walled Gardens, Knappogue castle and Craggaunowen Visitors Centre.

Shannon Heritage Attractions

Year 2023 Summary

Overview

Clare County Council completed the takeover of the portfolio of attractions contained within the Shannon Heritage brand, which operated under the ownership of the Shannon Airport Group.

The individual brands trading under Shannon Heritage includes Bunratty Castle & Folk Park, Knappogue Castle and Gardens and Craggaunowen Bronze Age Park. Added to these brands is the soon-to-be opened, Mountshannon icon of Inis Cealtra, which

will be supported by a rectory museum and café and in the longer term, a comprehensive visitor centre.

Multiple structural changes were required in order to address labour costs and efficiencies. These changes were and are underway into 2024. To provide a durable foundation to support the infrastructural developments, the expected cultural improvements and most of all the Visitor experiences, necessary upgrades were identified to uplift standards of operation and presentation.



Throughout 2023, visitor numbers in both admissions and banquets grew impressively. Admission numbers performed strongly across the portfolio from 328k in 2022 to 365k in 2023, resulting in revenue growth from 3.5mi to 4.3mi in that period. Banquet seat sales improved from 55k in 2022 to 71k in 2023, a revenue growth of 900k from 2.8mi to 3.7mi. Retail sales at both the Cliffs and Bunratty together helped revenues grow from 5.3mi in 2022 to 6.7mi in 2023. Overall, revenues grew from 13.1mi to 16.1mi from 2022 to 2023, with the EBITA contribution growing during these said years from 963mi to 1.4mi.

Capital project planning got underway during the summer of 2023 with the appointment of Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH) to survey and audit the portfolio with the objective being to assess the condition and general requirements of all sites. The report will be furnished and

presented in early 2024. The expectations are that a comprehensive and detailed report will direct energies and funding towards the most relevant and important aspects of our business, i.e. the presentation and conditioning of the Attractions. Where obvious opportunities have been identified through general auditing of the sites, it is felt that this LSH report will enhance our knowledge and understanding of additional opportunities, which will assist greatly in targeting the most appropriate tasks across the portfolio, leading to best practice solutions and accuracy in endeavour.

At the latter stages of 2023, Dunguaire Castle was transferred to Galway County Council and it is hoped that a continuation of banquet and tourism services will be delivered. It is a quality asset and should be considered valuable to the industry.

Additionally, decisions were made in late 2023 to discontinue the direct management of Retail and Food and Beverage at all Shannon Heritage sites. The impact will be minimal in terms of product reputation and should allow



for a greater focus on direct tourism and visitor matters. The objective was to lower the risk associated with high volume trading and less profit contributions and concentrate on high yield transactions and property enhancements.

The platform has been set for a comprehensive upgrade to the visitor experience with a new team of professionals intent on delivering outstanding quality and raising standards to benefit the county under the stewardship of Clare County Council.

2024 will see the opening of Knappogue Castle to overnight residents, Craggaunowen celebrating its 50th anniversary, the opening of the initial stages of the Inis Cealtra experience and Bunratty on its way to becoming Ireland's no.1 visitor attraction by 2027.



Cliffs of Moher

Business Activity

The Cliffs of Moher Experience welcomed 1.38m visitors in 2023, 42% of all arrivals came by coach, 54% by car, 1% on public transport and 3% walkers.

Overall numbers remain -14% of 2019 results, the average number travelling on a coach increased by 31% and the total numbers arriving by coach are -19%. Furthermore, there is a 36% reduction in the number of coaches on the roads. Route licenses coach activity make up 13% of all arrivals.

The trend to book a visit in advance is continuing to increase with advances in technology and promotion. All trade group activity is booked

in advance with up to 24% of Fully Independent Travelers (FITs) booking in advance.

Visitor Management practices in place promote distribution of visitors, limit the number of visitors onsite in any one day and limits the number of coaches in peak periods. The peak distribution was down 8% with increases in morning visits of 3% and 5% in the evening.

The main markets are US, Ireland, Germany, France, Canada, UK, rest of the world with visitors coming from 64 countries.

The Visitor Experience and offer available continues to be enhanced and is supported by professionally trained staff, a calendar of rich cultural heritage and events spread throughout the year and with targeted marketing initiatives to support objectives.

Cliffs of Moher Strategy 2040



A draft of the Fáilte Ireland supported Cliffs of Moher Strategy 2040 and site masterplan has been published and is in the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) phase.

The strategy will inform future sustainable developments at the Cliffs of Moher Experience delivered over 20 years focussing on four pillars: Enhanced Economic Benefits Across the Region, Creating Sustainable Access, Optimising the world Class Experience, Transforming the Natural Landscape.

Cliffs of Moher Coastal Walk

Agreement has been reached to develop a new Cliffs of Moher Coastal Walk Management Plan to secure the future of the Coastal Walk. Tobin Consultants have been appointed to work with landowners and stakeholders to develop a working model.

Sections of the Coastal Walk have been identified requiring urgent attention. €500K was awarded to the Department of Rural and Community Development through the (ORIS) Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme to fund the upgrade and repair of a section of the Cliffs of Moher Coastal Walk following a successful application.





MUNICIPAL DISTRICTS

Clare County Council has four Municipal Districts: Ennis, Killaloe, Shannon and West Clare.

Ennis Municipal District

Overview of Works carried out

As well as some notable stretch performances in the delivery of the Council's core services throughout Ennis and environs, 2023 saw a number of very exciting milestones achieved and delivered by the Ennis MD staff. We continued to maintain and upgrade the local and regional road network throughout the District with over 34km of roads either recycled, surfaced dressed or overlaid. Other welcome developments across the MD included the upgrade and installation of much needed footpaths such as in Ballybeg and the access to the Clonroad Business Park as advocated for by the excellent Streetwise representatives. In 2023, Ennis MD continued works on the NTA funded *Connecting and Co-Creating Ennis* project which provides for improvements to footpaths and walkways, drop kerbs and seating areas on walking routes

around and through the town. 2023 works included new raised pedestrian crossings and junction improvements at over 12 locations throughout the town. The completed works will increase the safety and comfort of pedestrians throughout Ennis. The Connecting and Co-creating project is a key element in the strategy to make Ennis Ireland's first '10-minute town'. Furthermore, a number of important projects were delivered under the Department of Rural and Community Development's *Community Recognition Fund* where the aim was to support the development of community infrastructure and facilities in recognition of the contribution made by communities across the country in welcoming and hosting significant numbers of arrivals from Ukraine and other countries. Completed projects included the following:

- Installation of Outdoor Gym Equipment within the People's Park Clarecastle
- Surfacing of car park at Clare Camogie Grounds and Ennis Men's Shed

- Surfacing of car park at Clare Crusaders Ennis
- Installation of public lights from Gort Road to Ballyallia Lake
- Installation of Safety Gates at Doora Bridge end of River Fergus walk.

Some of the MD's other achievements throughout 2023 are included hereunder.

Communities in Bloom

Ennis achieved international success in the 2023 Communities in Bloom (CiB) awards ceremony held at Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada in September 2023 where we picked up five Bloom Awards and the title of overall winner (Gold) in the 'International Challenge Medium' category. Ennis also received a special mention in the 'Pollinator Friendly Gardens' category of the competition. This followed the county town's nomination as the Irish entrant to the international Communities in Bloom (CiB) competition 2023 and a highly successful Judges' Visit to the MD in July 2023. Large numbers of Council staff and various community and volunteer groups were involved and deserve huge credit for bringing this prestigious international award to Ireland and particularly to Ennis. Well done to all involved.



St Patrick's Day Parade

The 2023 St Patrick's Day Parade in Ennis was again a huge success with locals and visitors alike lining both sides of the streets for the best vantage points since early morning. There was a brilliant atmosphere at Áras Contae an Chláir, with over 1,700 participants involved in the Parade.



Rás Tailteann

Barefield National School provided the finish line for Stage 2 of the iconic race between Birr, Co. Offaly and Ennis, Co. Clare, in May. Spectators were treated to a bunch sprint and photo finish with 62 cyclists all competing for a spot on the podium. The race, with cyclists from all over Ireland, UK, Austria and USA, saw over 500 people requiring accommodation in the county town which was a significant boost to business. The following morning saw locals and visitors gathered at glór to mingle with the cyclists before bidding them farewell as they moved on to the next stage of the race from Ennis to Castlebar.



Fleadh Down in Ennis

The hugely successful *Fleadh Down in Ennis* (Fleadh Nua) took place again in late May/early June in 2023 and involved numerous pop-up workshops, street sessions and concerts in and around the town centre. Ennis MD liaised with the Fleadh committee before and during the event to ensure pedestrian and vehicular access was accommodated and that the safety of the musicians and spectators was catered for. Lessons learned will be put to good use in 2024 when the Fleadh celebrates its 50th anniversary.



Twinning

Two significant milestones were also achieved in 2023 in terms of our relationships with our diaspora and friends across the globe. 2023 saw Ennis celebrate its 35th anniversary of being twinned with Phoenix, Arizona in the US while we also celebrated our 10-year anniversary of being twinned with Langenfeld in Germany.





Killaloe Municipal District

Municipal District meetings were held bi-monthly during 2023. The members of Killaloe MD focused on a number of strategic priorities for the MD and wider East Clare area in addition to the enhancement of provision of local infrastructure, services, facilities and amenities in the towns, villages and rural areas of the district.

The AGM of Killaloe Municipal District took place Friday, 30th June, in Craggaunowen Castle, to mark the recent takeover by Clare County Council of this tourism attraction in the MD. Cllr Tony O'Brien was elected Cathaoirleach of Killaloe MD with Cllr Pat Hayes elected Leas-Chathaoirleach.

Elected Members and Staff of Killaloe Municipal District 2023

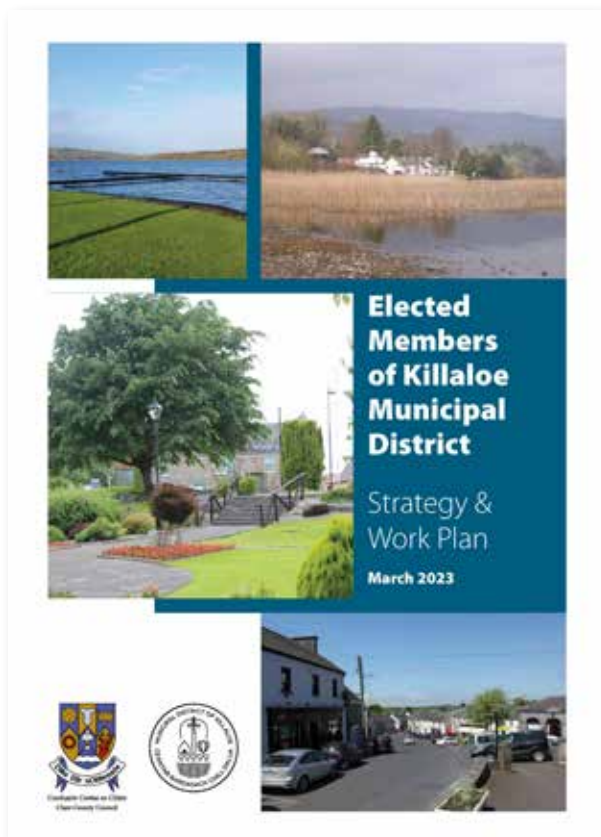
Killaloe MD Elected Members Strategy and Workplan

In March the *Killaloe MD Elected Members Strategy and Workplan* was adopted setting out a shared vision between the Elected Members and staff of Killaloe Municipal District, and defining the strategic objectives and priorities for East Clare and the supporting projects and mechanisms required for implementing and

achieving those objectives.

The 15 priority projects identified in the plan are:

- Town and Village Renewal Schemes and Plans
- Promotion and establishment of Digital Hubs across the Municipal District's towns and villages with a particular focus on Scarriff and Killaloe
- Sustainable housing
- Climate action projects
- Inis Cealtra
- Greenway and Blueway projects
- Further education and skills
- Implement the Killaloe-Ballina Town Enhancement and Mobility Strategy (2022)
- Twomilegate/Ballycuggeran Amenity
- R352 Ennis to Scarriff
- Scarriff Town Project
- Enhance delivery of services to communities and citizens at MD level
- Capacity building communities
- Enhance sustainable mobility and connectivity to East Clare from the Mid-West region
- Wastewater infrastructure deficits.



The strategy and work plan guides the work programme for Killaloe MD and also reinforces the critical role that the Killaloe Municipal District Office in Scarriff and all Local Authority staff play in the planning and delivery of services at the local level for the betterment of East Clare and the county.

Chain of Office and new logo

In 2023 following consultation between Elected Members and staff, the first Killaloe Municipal District Chain of Office and pendant was designed and produced. The design of the pendant reflects the cultural history, landscape, music and infrastructure of Killaloe MD. The chain has the names of all previous Cathaoirligh of the Municipal District since its establishment in 2014, including the current Cathaoirleach Cllr Tony O'Brien.



Killaloe MD Cathaoirleach chain and crest.

Enhancement of services at Killaloe MD office

The enhancement of services to citizens and stakeholders at the Killaloe MD offices continued further in 2023 with the provision of a range of new services including Pre-Planning Enquiry services and the provision of Motor Tax service and facility for payment of rates and rent, in the Killaloe MD Office.

Service provision carried out by the supervisors and outdoor staff included road maintenance of all types on regional and local roads. Works also involved severe weather and winter maintenance emergency callouts, aiding An Garda Síochána and the Emergency Services, Traffic management, and responding to complaints from the general public.

An Age Friendly Car Parking Space was introduced in the car park in 2023.

In line with our obligations under Climate Mitigation, the Killaloe MD office significantly reduced our energy consumption during 2023

with a reduction of almost 30% throughout the year, achieved through a number of initiatives e.g. reduction in heating levels, lighting, etc. Further biodiversity enhancement to the MD office took place throughout the year, in particular during National Biodiversity Week, with schoolchildren from Lakyle National School assisting our Elected Members in planting bee-friendly plants in the car park and the installation of swift boxes on the premises to provide nesting areas for swifts.



Children from Lakyle National School assisting Padraig Myles installing Swift Boxes and assisting Elected members planting Bee-Friendly plants at our Killaloe MD Offices.

GMA

The Elected Members adopted the General Municipal Allocations at the July meeting of the MD with an overall allocation for 2023 of €230,000. This fund enabled the Councillors to work with the Executive to ensure the projects were prioritised throughout the MD where funding streams were not present. Examples of works and communities funded in 2022 from the Elected Members GMA were:

- Footpaths and road improvements across the MD
- Community groups and initiatives such as Tourism East Clare, Scarriff Bay Radio, Michael Cusack Centre Going Well Programme, Clare Walks, O'Briensbridge Community Centre Ltd were some of a number of areas which also received funding.

Delegations and submissions on strategic national and local issues

Throughout the year the Elected Members of Killaloe proactively made submissions and observations on a number of national and local issues that affect Killaloe MD and East Clare. In May 2023 the Elected Members of Killaloe and Senior Planner Brian McCarthy led a delegation to meet the CEO of Irish Rail, Jim Meade and Sinead Clair, Delivery Strategy Manager to advocate for the reopening of Crusheen Railway station, which is a key priority for the Local Authority, while the *Killaloe MD Elected Members Strategy and Workplan* has its reopening as a strategic priority.



Elected Members of Killaloe with the CEO of Irish Rail, Jim Meade, and Sinead Clair, Delivery Strategy Manager.

The Elected Members made a formal submission to the All-Island Strategic Rail Review. Throughout the year the Elected Members of Killaloe MD proactively engaged and made a

formal written submissions on behalf of the MD to a number of plans and programmes. These included submissions to

- All-Island Strategic Rail Review
- Assessment of Campervan and Motorhome Provision in County Clare
- Draft Local Economic and Community Plan.

As part of the focus on strategic issues at MD meetings and to achieve the objectives and work programme as set out in the *Killaloe Elected Members Strategy and Workplan*, updates from agencies were sought by the Members and provided in 2023, including:

- Update from PMO and SISK Consultants on the progress on Killaloe Bypass and Bridge Crossing
- Update from Waterways Ireland on the Limerick – Scarriff Greenway
- Progress on Inis Cealtra tourism project
- Leading the establishment of an Inter-Agency Approach to management of amenities and recreation on Lough Derg
- Update and discussion with LCETB on the expansion of facilities and programmes in East Clare and enhanced linkages between LCETB and Killaloe MD
- TFI Local Link regarding the enhancement of public transport services into, from and around Killaloe MD and East Clare
- Preparation of Clare's Climate Action Plan
- An Garda Síochána regarding new Clare/Tipperary Operating Model.

Statutory Functions

The Elected Members of Killaloe MD exercised their powers throughout the year in:

- Consideration and adoption of the Schedule of Municipal District Works for 2023
- Allocation of General Municipal Allocation in 2023
- Taking in charge of roads in estates in accordance with S11 of the Roads Act 1993
- S183 Disposal of Council owned properties at various locations within the MD

- S38 Traffic calming measures at a number of locations including Scarriff Market Square Enhancement and a number of Low-Cost Safety Schemes.

In line with the objective in the *Elected Members Strategy and Workplan* to enhance access to local democracy and services, Killaloe MD welcomed the attendance of local press and radio including for the first time Scarriff Bay Radio at all the MD meetings throughout 2023.

Scarriff Town Centre Regeneration Project

In January 2022 Clare County Council welcomed the announcement of funding of €524,000 for the Scarriff Regeneration Project under Category RRDF 2. The Scarriff Regeneration Project will provide interventions in the centre of Scarriff that will improve the public realm and provide community, tourism and enterprise facilities in the town centre. It includes the development of a Multi Service Innovation and Engagement Hub and improved public realm for the Market Square in the town centre as well as the development of a town car park.

In early 2023 Killaloe MD progressed to approval under Part VIII for the development of the car park and refurbishment of buildings on the Main Street for the Community and Enterprise Hub. Subsequently, the focus turned to the significant engagement process with community stakeholders including Scarriff Town Team and Scarriff Community Council on the detailed design of Market Square, culminating in November with the adoption of a Section 38 for the Market Square redevelopment.

The leasing by Killaloe MD of additional free 24-hour daily public car-parking in Scarriff town centre, accessed directly from the R352 Mountshannon Road with pedestrian access to our Market Square assisted with town centre regeneration.

The year concluded with the invitation by the

Department of Rural and Community Development for funding application under RRDF Category 1 which due to the significant work undertaken and the availability of planning consent, resulted in Killaloe MD being in a strong position to make a compelling application for RRDF funding.



Proposed Scarriff RRDF Project

Killaloe-Ballina Town Enhancement and Mobility Strategy (January 2022)

The Killaloe-Ballina Town Enhancement and Mobility Plan aims to facilitate a co-ordinated approach to public realm enhancements within Killaloe in County Clare and Ballina in County Tipperary, providing a clear vision for Killaloe and Ballina as linked settlements.

The plan provides opportunities to capitalise on the towns' assets to collectively expand the tourism product, attract increased visitor numbers and maximise local economic benefits. During 2023, Killaloe MD in collaboration

with Nenagh MD, Tipperary County Council commenced background work and studies with a view to preparing an RRDF Category 2 Application for feasibility funding for the next round of RRDF funding.

Killaloe-Ballina Bypass and Shannon Bridge Crossing

During 2023, work continued on the Killaloe Bypass, the new bridge crossing of the River Shannon and an upgrade of the existing R494 regional road from Ballina to Birdhill, with the year concluding with the installation of the first 40m truss across the River Shannon.

Ballycuggeran – Accessibility Improvements - Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS)

On Friday, 22nd September, 2023, in conjunction with Make Way Day 2023, a new floating pontoon and gangway to serve access for persons with disabilities to watercraft, together with a disability hoist and swing-lift, was officially opened at Ballycuggeran/ Twomilegate water amenity.

The facility was installed following a number

Mountain Bike Trail Centre – ORIS Feasibility Funding

In November, funding under the Outdoor Recreation Improvement Scheme was awarded to Killaloe Municipal District, following an application earlier in the year. Feasibility Funding of €50,000 was awarded to examine the potential for a Mountain Bike Trail centre in the Slievebernaghs. The receipt of the funding follows the successful collaboration of Killaloe MD in hosting earlier in April 2023 of a



Official opening of accessible pontoon, disability hoist and accessible canoe launch.

of months of consultation on its design by Killaloe Municipal District with a wide range of disability stakeholders. The facility is one of the first year-round public accessible hoists and canoe-accessible areas for persons with mobility issues and disabilities, and was part funded by Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme funding. This is an important first step in proposals by Killaloe MD to enhance the wider amenity area to enable access for all and create a sustainable tourism and recreational amenity to capitalise on its location and accessibility.

National Enduro Series Event in Ballycuggeran. The feasibility funding also assists with the delivery of an objective in *Killaloe Elected Members Strategic Workplan* which seeks to maximise opportunities for recreation in the Ballycuggeran/Two Mile Gate area for mountain biking.

Schedule of Municipal District Works 2023

Restoration Improvement Programme 2023 – 29km of road upgraded totalling €3,163,709.
Restoration Maintenance Programme 2022 – 38.58km of road upgraded totalling €823,55.

Drainage Works Grant

Works totalling €204,300 carried out including the upgrading of pipework and drainage ditches across the MD.

Footpaths

Multiple upgrades to footpath infrastructure across the MD including footpaths at Crossroads Killaloe, The Green Killaloe and O'Reilly Park, Tulla. This was delivered using the IPB Grant in conjunction with partial contributions from Councillors GMA.

Local Improvement Scheme

Upgrade works to three private roads in the MD were carried out in 2023.

Community Involvement Scheme

Upgrade works to five public roads in the MD were carried out in 2023.

Bridge Rehabilitation Works

Upgrade and repair work to 11 bridges, in the MD were carried out in 2023, totalling €200,000.

Climate Adaptation and Resilience Works Grant

Road and drainage improvement works were completed in 2023 at several locations throughout the MD, totalling €263,000.

Specific and Safety Improvements Grants

Improvements were completed on the R-462 North of Tulla, R-352/L-4036 junction at Cloonamirran and works on the L-3084 in Killaloe, totalling €120,000, in 2023.

Discretionary Improvement Grant

Improvements were completed throughout the MD in 2023, totalling €170,000, including bridge and pavement preventative maintenance, traffic safety works, hedge cutting, signage replacement, road markings upgrades, and unplanned macadam repairs.

Active Travel

The following Active Travel projects were developed and completed in 2023:

- Tulla – Project completed in November 2023
- Drumandoora – Project completed in June 2023
- Clarisford Park – Project completed in September 2023.

Service Provision

Service provision carried out by the supervisors and outdoor staff included road maintenance of all types, including expenditure of €220,000 on regional roads, and €580,000 on local road maintenance. Works also involved severe weather and winter maintenance emergency callouts, aiding An Garda Síochána and the emergency services, traffic management, and responding to complaints from the general public.



Roadside drainage repairs, November 2023.

Shannon Municipal District

Councillor Donna McGettigan from Shannon was elected Cathaoirleach of Shannon Municipal District on 29th June, 2023, with Cllr John Crowe taking on the duties as Leas-Chathaoirleach. Cllr Michael Begley served as Cathaoirleach prior to Cllr Donna McGettigan being voted in at the Annual General Meeting which was held in the historic setting of Bunratty Castle and Folk Park. Cllr McGettigan was the first female Cathaoirleach since the establishment of the new Shannon Municipal District structure in 2014.

The Meetings of the Municipal District are held on the third Tuesday of every second month. Elected Members of Shannon Municipal District include: Cllr PJ Ryan, Cllr Pat McMahon, Cllr Gerry Flynn, Cllr Michael Begley, Cllr Pat O Gorman, Cllr John Crowe, Cllr Donna McGettigan. The Elected Members played a vital role in representing and advocating for their communities and in improving the quality of life for the residents of the Shannon Municipal District through the delivery of various projects and initiatives during 2023. Some of the highlights of 2023 include the following notable projects and events.

Newmarket on Fergus Community and Family Festival & Women's Irish Open

It takes a whole community to make a festival, and this was the case in Newmarket on Fergus when the '19th Hole Festival' was held in the town in early September 2023 in conjunction with the Women's Irish Open.

Community support and dedication were a key success factor in the organisation of the festival. The town presented itself in its very best light with all the hard work paying off. The welcoming environment was evident with bunting, festival lighting, freshly painted buildings, floral displays and signage. Huge crowds attended the programme of events and it was wonderful to see so many people across the County and beyond coming together and having fun and enjoying the diverse range of music and numerous family activities. Events were held in O'Regan Park, Mooghaun and at 'The Green' in the town centre. The sun shone down and made it even more enjoyable with sunglasses and ice cream at the ready. The boost for the local economy was also welcomed. The 2-day event in Newmarket on Fergus offered a shared experience that resonated with people of all ages and created memories for families for years to come.





The MD Crews were involved in the construction of a full-length new footpath during 2023 which now runs from the Inn at Dromoland to Newmarket on Fergus town. The works also incorporate a dedicated cycleway from Dromoland near to the entrance to the village which offers safety to cyclists. Shannon MD worked closely with TII and Colas Ireland regarding enhancement works to the roundabout at The Inn at Dromoland. Safety fencing was also installed near exit points of the roundabout. A mini-road sweeper was also in place to assist with daily cleansing of the area throughout the duration of the Women's Irish Open.

Excellence in Local Government Awards

The Shannon Embankment Scenic Trail was shortlisted for the prestigious Excellence in Local Government Awards 2023 under the

Municipal District Initiative category. The Shannon Embankment Scenic Trail is a 3 km of 7.5km looped accessible route that runs along the southern side of the Shannon estuary in Shannon Town. The views at the trail are truly breathtaking and the starting point is at Illaunamanagh in Shannon. It incorporates a forest area as well as the stunning estuary views which is a special area of conservation. This is a true gem in that its location is one of the most important sites in Ireland for overwintering wildfowl and waders. The trail facilitates a weekly parkrun event which is attended by hundreds of locals and visitors and has proved a huge success. The enhanced Council car park provides secure, safe parking for all participants. Shannon is a cycle, walk and wheelchair-friendly metropolitan town and this Embankment Scenic Route contributes to a higher quality and standard of life for all. Works for this project were funded through



ORIS, GMA and own resources. An emphasis on highlighting the presence of local wildlife has been incorporated on signage along the walk and is reinforced with QR codes on each sign allowing access to the information for walkers with additional needs.

Future Mobility Campus

Leas-Chathaoirleach John Crowe attended Electronomous event on 20th September 2023 at the Future Mobility Campus in Shannon. This event brought together global players within the mobility, automotive and aviation ecosystem. A panel of speakers discussed matters such as transportation and mobility research, integrated public transport and shared autonomous mobility for equitable transit coverage, electrifying fleets, west of Ireland as a global technology hub etc. Leas-Chathaoirleach John Crowe hosted a lunch event with Padraic McElwee, Head of Local Enterprise Office, Clare County Council.

Town and Village Renewal Schemes

Clonlara, Drumgeely and Bunratty

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is a key initiative under the Action Plan for Rural Development Realising our Rural Potential and Project Ireland 2040. Clonlara, Drumgeely and Bunratty benefitted from this Scheme in 2023. In Clonlara, the works included a central plaza area in the village centre as well as seating and other upgrade works. The programme of works was carried out in tandem with the upgrade of a watermain which was also of considerable benefit to the Clonlara Area. The Town and village renewal scheme in Drumgeely includes works such as public realm upgrades, paving, stonework, seating, lighting upgrades etc which have greatly enhanced the area for the residents. In Bunratty enhancement works were also carried out which included public realm upgrades, stonework, entrance signs which will further enhance this iconic tourist destination.

Working collaboratively with An Garda Síochána

2023 saw regular communication and collaboration between the Gardaí and the MD in addressing community needs and concerns. Initiatives such as neighbourhood watch and school awareness programmes are spearheaded through this joint approach. This allows for the implementation of multifaceted solutions to address problems like anti-social behaviour and crime.

Building strong networks with key stakeholders: MD meeting at LCETB campus

Shannon Municipal District held its September 2023 meeting at the Limerick Clare Education and Training Board Campus in Shannon and took part in a very informative site visit of the facility after the meeting. LCETB gave a briefing to Members on the various apprenticeship courses available, including plumbing, electrical, aircraft maintenance, spray painting, welding (incl. orbital pipe welding), metal fabrication, refrigeration and air-conditioning etc. All the courses offered carry certification which gives very strong future employment opportunities for the participants.

The main function of the campus is the delivery of Phase 2 apprenticeships with 2500 apprentices awaiting this phase. The Councillors saw first-hand the apprentices at work in the workshops and were impressed by the practical, on the job training where the apprentices were developing specialised skills and knowledge relevant to their chosen field. These programmes offer flexibility, as graduates can work in various sectors such as construction, aviation or manufacturing and can earn very competitive salaries. The LCETB works closely with the secondary TY schools in Clare and provides opportunities for small classes of students to participate in a practical programme over a two-week period. LCETB Campus in Shannon is playing a crucial role in enabling many people to secure long-term

employment through their specialised training programmes.

Community Grants

During 2023, a total funding allocation of €18,000 was awarded to various groups and organisations including sporting, cultural, historical and community groups under the Community Grant Scheme of the Shannon Municipal District. The objective of the grants scheme is to encourage and support local community organisations and community groups active in the cultural, artistic and community development areas of the district.

Official switching on of lights for Christmas

Cathaoirleach Cllr Donna McGettigan switched on the lights in Shannon Town Park on 4th December. There was a fantastic festive atmosphere at this event in the Town Park in Shannon in December and it was a celebration of residents coming together transcending cultural barriers and spreading warmth and cheer. Entertainment was provided by the local Gospel Choir in Shannon followed by the arrival of Mr and Mrs Claus (Cathaoirleach Donna McGettigan) in a surprise vehicle. The children were overjoyed to meet Mr and Mrs Claus who had taken time away from the North Pole to visit Shannon.

Public consultation event on One Shannon Hub

Shannon MD personnel and Councillors were delighted to assist with the 'One Shannon Hub' public consultation event which was held on 7th and 8th December, 2023. This is a catalyst project for Shannon and will deliver on real change for the town. It will enhance Shannon by providing a new social heart for the town. Leaflet drops notifying nearby houses and businesses of the event were carried out by the MD. The information boards on display included material on the masterplan, ongoing works completed and underway in the area, and concept options. There was a large number of attendees over the 2 days and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Some of the feedback comments included:

'Fantastic design ideas! Shannon needs a central focus and this could deliver that.'

'Great plan.'

'Performance alternative to glór, currently travel out of Shannon.'

A URDF funding application will be submitted once this funding stream is announced in 2024.

Shannon Chamber of Commerce: President's lunch event

Leas-Chathaoirleach John Crowe attended Shannon Chamber's annual President's lunch



event at which Minister for Finance Michael McGrath was guest speaker. In his keynote address the potential of the Shannon Town Masterplan was lauded. Minister McGrath stated that it was a very exciting roadmap for the future of the town which includes the One Shannon Hub multi-purpose facility. The initial funding for the Masterplan was sourced

through the Urban Regeneration Development Fund. The Shannon Town and Environs Flood Relief Scheme was also referenced as was the growth of Shannon Airport. It was heartening to hear Minister McGrath confirm that there will be sustained public capital development work in this region.

Summary of Other Works

Schedule of Municipal District Works	Restoration Improvement Programme and Restoration Maintenance Programme carried out during 2023.
Newmarket on Fergus	Repair works to roadway at the rear of houses on Ennis Road carried out.
Slí na Sláinte route	Works have been completed on the Slí na Sláinte route off the roundabout near Town Centre/Lidl in Shannon. This route links in with existing walkways within the heart of Shannon town.
Westbury	New pedestrian crossing in place.
Outdoor Fitness Equipment	Site Works commenced on 30th November 2023 along various locations of the looped walk.
Hedgecutting	Hedgecutting was carried out throughout the MD in 2023.
Pedestrian Crossings	Works on two pedestrian crossings were completed at Sixmilebridge and at Barry's Cross in Ardnacrusha.
Clonlara	New parking spaces (5) in Clonomra, Clonlara.
Shannon Banks	Road overlay restoration improvement works were carried out at many locations in the MD including Shannon Banks and Sixmilebridge.
Tree Maintenance	Tree contractor carried out tree maintenance throughout the MD.
Mini Road Sweeper	The mini road sweeper has been a fantastic asset to the MD and has worked diligently throughout Shannon area - removal of leaves, verges, etc.
Newmarket on Fergus ORIS	A sporting mural was completed as part of this overall outdoor recreational project. The mural celebrates local sporting achievements, adds real value to the neighbourhood and is a must-see focal point in the area.
Sixmilebridge Railway Station	Overhead security barrier was put in place during 2023 along with traffic calming bollards.
Newmarket on Fergus school	New table-top pedestrian crossing, footpath upgrade and traffic calming at school.
Ballycaseymore Estate	New re-installed bollards and surface upgrade in Ballycaseymore estate beside St Aidan's school Shannon.
Shannon Athletics Grounds	Site Clearance works through the Community Recognition Fund.
Green Flag Retained in 2023	Shannon Town Park retained the prestigious Green Flag Award in 2023 – made possible through collaboration with a number of bodies working to ensure the highest standards.

West Clare Municipal District



Cllr Ian Lynch was elected as Cathaoirleach of the West Clare Municipal District at its AGM on Thursday, 22nd June, taking over the role from Cllr Shane Talty. Cllr Joe Killeen was elected Leas-Chathaoirleach for the West Clare MD.

The overarching vision for the West Clare Municipal District is:

The regeneration and sustainability of our towns and villages with a view to making West Clare the best place to live, work and visit in that order of priority.

Municipal District meetings were held bi-monthly during 2023. The members of West Clare MD discussed the provision of services within the area and looked to progress the strategic development of facilities and amenities in the towns and villages in the district. The AGM of the West Clare MD took place on 22nd June, 2023. Cllr Ian Lynch was elected Cathaoirleach with Cllr Joe Killeen elected Leas-Chathaoirleach.

The members also adopted the budgetary plan and agreed a General Municipal Allocation of €441,000 for 2024 at their budget meeting on 14th November, 2023.

Members exercised their powers throughout the year in:

- Consideration and adoption of the Schedule of Municipal District Works for 2023
- Taking in charge of roads in estates in accordance with S11 of the Roads Act 1993
- S183 Disposal of Council owned properties at various locations within the MD
- S38 Traffic calming measures at a number of locations
- Overnight Parking Bye Laws were adopted and came into operation on 23rd August, 2023, in Lisdoonvarna, Doughmore beach and Loop Head Lighthouse.

Strategic Workplan

Elected members along with the Executive continued in the delivery of the Strategy and Work Plan for the West Clare Municipal District which was developed in 2020. The plan sets out thematic based actions and tasks for the period 2019-2025.

Service Provision

Service provision carried out by the Supervisors and Outdoor staff included: road maintenance of all types, emergency callouts, aiding An Garda Síochána and the Fire Service, traffic management, responding to public complaints and dealing with environmental issues.

Continuing service provision in the Ennistymon and Kilrush offices included:

- Collection and receipting of monies e.g. housing rents, commercial rates, motor tax, etc.
- Assisting with customer queries and dealing with customer complaints.
- Accepting and processing various applications – housing applications, scaffolding licences, road opening licence applications, etc.
- Liaison with elected representatives.
- Administration towards the delivery of the Schedule of Municipal District Works.

Amenities

Summer 2023 brought large numbers to the Blue Flag beaches and amenities in north and west Clare. The significant footfall put considerable pressure on the MD crew to prepare and maintain the facilities to the high standard expected.

Ennistymon Local Electoral Area

Works undertaken in the Ennistymon LEA during 2023 included:

- Schedule of MD works – see details below.
- Beaches and Amenities – maintaining and striving to improve our seaside towns and villages and the associated services therein, to a high standard. This included the hiring of seasonal beach operatives. One specific project included the refurbishment of the toilet block at Fanore Beach.



- Footpaths – as well as the Active Travel projects listed below, there were footpath repairs/upgrades undertaken throughout the LEA including in Ennistymon, Lisdoonvarna, Miltown Malbay, Lisdoonvarna, Spanish Point and Inagh.
- Street cleaning – crews deployed to various towns throughout the LEA, often working in conjunction with community groups.
- Other projects include:

Active Travel

The following Active Travel projects were progressed during 2023:

- Miltown Malbay – completion of Ennis Road new footpath, totalling €181,387.

- Spanish Point – new public lighting and extension of footpaths completed in 2023, totalling €117,939.
- Lisdoonvarna – completion of pedestrian crossing, totalling €115,997.

Safe Route to Schools

Inagh National School received funding under the Safe Route to Schools programme to provide a safe walking and cycling route to school in 2022. Works were completed in 2023.



Community Involvement

Assisting various community groups with the implementation of various projects throughout the LEA. One example was, in conjunction with Ennistymon Tidy Towns, the provision of plastic flower planters as an enhancement of the streetscape on the main street.



Malbay Track & Trail project

A 1.6km track and trail route was completed in 2023, working with the local community and landowners. This outdoor walking trail included a section along the route of the original West Clare Railway. Funding was provided under the Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme.



Schedule of Municipal District Works for Ennistymon LEA 2023

Restoration Improvement Programme 2023
24km of road upgraded totalling €2,664,202.

Restoration Maintenance Programme 2023
29km of road upgraded totalling €761,806.

Drainage Grant

Works totalling €446,053 carried out including the upgrading of pipework and drainage ditches across the MD.

Local Improvement Scheme

Upgrade works to nine roads in the LEA were carried out in 2023, totalling €644,247.

Community Involvement Scheme

Upgrade works to two roads in the LEA were carried out in 2023, totalling €126,317.

Low Cost Safety Scheme

Improvement works at two locations in the LEA were carried out in 2023, totalling €72,436.

Kilrush Local Electoral Area

Works undertaken in the Kilrush LEA in 2023 included:

- Schedule of MD works (see below)
- Footpaths, including improved disability access, in Kilkee, Kilrush, Lissycasey, Kilmihil, Killadysert, and Kilmaley
- Emergency repair works following extreme winter conditions including on the N68 in Lissycasey
- Beaches – maintaining our seaside towns and villages to a high standard during the summer season. This included the hiring of seasonal beach operatives
- Street cleaning – A crew in Kilrush and a crew in Kilkee dedicated to street cleaning. Both crews also service some satellite villages.
- Other projects:
 - o Improvement works to the Manchester Martyrs Monument and information board



- o Installation of bike stations at numerous locations along the EuroVelo route



- o Climate change works at Seafield



- o BALAMI works to numerous piers and harbours including at Labasheeda



- o Beach operatives and MD crew on Kilkee Blue Flag Beach



- o Improvement works to the Gate Lodge entrance to the Vandeleur Woods. Works were also completed on the Cykirlush project throughout the Kilrush area and woods, installing signage and improvement works to four waymarked cycle routes in the area.
- o Numerous Low-Cost Safety Schemes completed in 2023 including at Teermaclane.
- o Emergency storm damage repair works were carried out in late 2023 at the sea wall in Knock.
- o Surface upgrade works at George's Head, Kilkee. The works will also facilitate the provision of additional car parking spaces at this scenic location.

Schedule of Municipal District Works for Kilrush LEA 2023

Restoration Improvement Programme 2023

24km of road upgraded totalling €3,253,994.

Restoration Maintenance Programme 2023

39km of road upgraded totalling €913,946.

Drainage grant

Works totalling €235,800 carried out including the upgrading of pipework and drainage ditches across the Kilrush LEA.

Grass Cutting

Contractors were appointed to maintain public green areas in Kilrush and Kilkee.

Local Improvement Scheme

Upgrade works to eight roads in the Kilrush LEA were carried out in 2022, at a cost of €650,000.

Community Involvement Scheme

Upgrade works to three roads in the Kilrush LEA were carried out in 2023, at a cost of €224,000.

Active Travel

The following Active Travel projects were finalised in 2023:

- Footpath works in Kilmaley and Lissycasey (in conjunction with Road Design Office).

Climate Change Adaptation & Resilience

A number of small projects were completed in 2023 including:

- Raised seawall Aillroe
- Drainage works at Cross and Bridges of Ross.

Low-Cost Safety Scheme

Safety Improvement Works carried out in Teermaclane to improve available sightlines at this sub-standard junction.

Additional works were carried out in Cooraclare and Connolly.

ABRIDGED FINANCIAL STATEMENT: YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

Income and Expenditure	2023	2022	2021
	€'000	€'000	€'000
State Grants	64.5	58.0	67.0
Local Property Tax	7.9	8.0	8.0
Goods and Services	58.2	40.5	30.2
Commercial Rates	44.5	43.9	42.0
Income from Other Local Authorities	-	0.0	0.1
Pension Levy			
Total Income	175.1	150.4	147.3
Total Expenditure	151.7	132.5	135.1
Surplus / (Deficit) for year before transfers	23.4	17.9	12.1
Transfers to / from Reserves	(23.1)	(17.7)	(11.9)
Overall Surplus / (Deficit) for Year	0.24	0.21	0.18
General Revenue Reserve / (Deficit) - Opening	3.1	2.9	2.7
General Revenue Reserve / (Deficit) - Closing	3.3	3.1	2.9
Balance Sheet	2023	2022	2021
	€'000	€'000	€'000
Fixed Assets	2,917.2	2,868.8	2,814.3
Work in Progress and Preliminary Expenses	92.0	56.7	60.9
Long term Debtors	49.2	41.7	32.6
Current Assets	111.8	104.4	76.2
Current Liabilities	(60.0)	(61.1)	(43.5)
Net Current Assets / (Liabilities)	51.8	43.2	32.7
Creditors (Amounts falling due after more than one year)	(118.9)	(113.1)	(92.9)
Net Assets	2,991	2,897	2,848
Financed by			
Capitalisation Account	2,917.2	2,868.8	2,814.3
Income Work in Progress	90.7	55.6	59.7
Specific Revenue Reserve	-	-	-
General Revenue Reserve	3.3	3.1	2.9
Other Balances	(20.0)	(30.2)	(29.3)
Total Reserves	2,991	2,897	2,848

SEMINARS/CONFERENCES/TRAINING ATTENDED BY CLARE COUNTY COUNCILLORS IN 2023

Conference entitled “Modular Housing in Ireland” held in Carlingford, Co. Louth on 3rd – 5th February 2023. (1 member attended)
AIR Conference entitled “Regions in Focus” held in Monaghan on 7th – 9th February 2023. (3 members attended)
AILG Elected Members Training Module 1 entitled “A Briefing on the Electoral Reform Act” held in Limerick on 25th February 2023. (1 member attended)
LAMA Spring Training Seminar entitled “Apprenticeship and Future Building Initiatives” held in Bantry, Co. Cork on 2nd – 4th March 2023. (12 members attended)
AILG Elected Members Training Module 2 entitled “Local Authority Climate Action Plans – Building Sustainable Communities” held in Wexford on 23rd March 2023. (12 members attended)
AILG Elected Members Training Module 2 entitled “Local Authority Climate Action Plans – Building Sustainable Communities” held in Dundalk on 25th March 2023. (2 members attended)
The Suck Valley Way Conference entitled “Inspiring Rural Creativity” held in Roscommon on 5th – 6th April 2023. (7 members attended)
AILG Annual Training Conference 2023 held in Kilkenny on 19th – 20th April 2023. (16 members attended)
Climate Conference entitled “Climate Action Economic Opportunities” held in Tullamore, Co. Offaly on 26th April 2023. (1 member attended)
AILG Elected Members Training Module 3 entitled “Overview of Existing Planning Legislation and Policy Guidance” held in Mullingar on 15th June 2023. (3 members attended)
AILG Elected Members Training Module 4 entitled “Uisce Eireann (Irish Water) – A Briefing for Councillors” held in Cork on 20th July 2023. (8 members attended)
AILG Elected Members Training Module 3 entitled “Overview of Existing Planning Legislation and Policy Guidance” held in Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny on 17th June 2023. (10 members attended)
AILG Elected Members Training Module 4 entitled “Uisce Eireann (Irish Water) – A Briefing for Councillors” held in Sligo on 22nd July 2023. (5 members attended)
AILG Autumn Training Seminar entitled “The Future of Local Government in Ireland – Time for an Honest Conversation” held in Sligo, on 13th – 14th September 2023. (15 members attended)
Conference entitled “A Practical Guide to Budget 2024” held in Carlingford, Co. Louth on 13th – 15th October 2023. (7 members attended)
AILG Elected Members Training Module 5 entitled “Elected Member Personal Security – Positive Home, Workplace and Mobile Security Practices” held in Cavan on 19th October 2023. (3 members attended)

AILG Elected Members Training Module 5 entitled “Elected Member Personal Security – Positive Home, Workplace and Mobile Security Practices” held in Tralee, Co. Kerry on 21st October 2023. (8 members attended)

LAMA Autumn Seminar entitled “Climate Action, Sustainable Businesses and Balanced Regional Development” held in Tuam, Co. Galway on 25th – 26th October 2023. (14 members attended)

Conference entitled “Modular Housing in Ireland” held in Carlingford, Co. Louth on 24th – 26th November 2023. (2 members attended)

AILG Elected Members Training Module 6 entitled “Road Safety: New Speed Limit Policy and Safeguarding Road Users” held in Waterford on 16th November 2023. (10 members attended)

Conference entitled “Irish Social Welfare System” held in Carlingford, Co. Louth on 1st – 3rd December 2023. (1 member attended)

Contact information/telephone numbers

- **Clare County Council**
Áras Contae an Chláir, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare Telephone: (065) 6821616,
Fax: (065) 6828233,
email: customerservices@clarecoco.ie,
website: www.clarecoco.ie

Hours of business: 9:00am to 5:00pm,
Monday to Friday

Note:

Public Counters at Planning

Department and Cash Office: 9:00am
to 4:00pm

Housing Department:

9:00am to 1:00pm

Emergency contact number: (087)
2599568 (outside office hours only)

- **Motor Tax**
Áras Contae an Chláir, New Road, Ennis

Telephone: (065) 6844661, 9:00am to
3:30pm Monday to Friday
email: motortax@clarecoco.ie
Public Counter 1:00pm to 3:00pm
Monday to Friday

- **Clare County Museum**
Tel: (065) 6823382,
email: ClareMuseum@clarecoco.ie
- **Active Ennis Sports and Leisure**
Facilities
Tel: (065) 6821604,
Fax: (065) 6823655
- **Glór Music Centre**
Tel: (065) 6845370

Direct dial in facility

To facilitate our callers all sections have a
direct dial in facility. Individual sections can be
contacted by dialling the following numbers:

- Archives, (065) 684 6402
- Arts Office, (065) 6899084

- Broadband & Digital, (065) 6899055
- Central Cash Office, (065) 6846208
- Corporate Services Department, (065) 6846209
- Environment Department, (065) 6846331, fax (065) 6846444
- Environment anti-litter freephone, 1800 606706
- Finance Department, (general queries), (065) 6846329
- Fire and Emergency Services Department, (065) 6846302
- Freedom of Information, (065) 6846405
- Group Schemes, (065) 6866119
- Housing Department, (065) 6846334
- Human Resources Department, (065) 6846415
- IT Department, (065) 6846339
- Local Enterprise Office Clare, (065) 6846463
- Partnership Facilitator, (065) 6846268
- Planning Department, (065) 6846232
- Records Management, (065) 6846387
- Register of Electors, (065) 6846363
- Revenue Department, (065) 6846530
- Transportation Department, (065) 6846333
- Road Design, (065) 6846479
- Rural and Community Department, (065) 6846222
- Tourism Department, (065) 6846283
- Veterinary Services Department, (065) 6846560
- Water Safety, (065) 6846270
- Water Services Department, (065) 6866110

Municipal District offices

- Ennis, (065) 6866133
- Killaloe, (061) 640815
- Shannon, (061) 362319
- West Clare, (065) 7072283/ (065) 9054310

Library branches

- Corofin, (065) 6837219
- De Valera Branch Library, (065) 6846353
- Ennis Library Headquarters, (065) 6846350, website: www.clarelibrary.ie
- Ennistymon, (065) 7071245
- Kilkee Sweeney Memorial Library, (065) 9056034
- Kilmihil, (065) 9050528
- Killaloe, (061) 376062, Fax (065) 376062
- Kilrush, (065) 9051504
- Lisdoonvarna, (065) 7074029
- Local Studies Centre, Ennis, (065) 6846271
- Miltown Malbay, (065) 7084822
- Newmarket-on-Fergus, (061) 368411
- Scariff, (061) 922893
- Shannon, (061) 364266
- Sixmilebridge, (061) 369678
- Tulla, (065) 6835919

Other useful numbers

- Central Waste Management Facility, Ballyduffbeg, Inagh, (065) 6836960
- Scariff Recycling Centre and Transfer Station, (061) 921735
- Shannon Recycling Centre, (061) 364483
- Lisdeen Recycling Centre and Transfer Station, (065) 9060175
- Ennis Recycling Centre, (065) 6893705



COMHAIRLE | CLARE
CONTAE AN CHLÁIR | COUNTY COUNCIL

STATEMENT OF INTERNAL FINANCIAL CONTROL (SIFC)

Introduction

I, Pat Dowling, Chief Executive (CE) of Clare County Council am responsible for the annual financial statement (AFS), prepared by the Director of Finance, in accordance with the accounting code of practice issued by the Minister under section 107 of the Local Government Act, 2001.

I certify that the financial statements of Clare County Council for the year ended 31 December 2023, are in agreement with the books of account and have been prepared in accordance with the accounting requirements of the Minister of Housing Local Government and Heritage.

The AFS is subject to external audit, by an auditor of the Local Government Audit Service, whose purpose is to form an independent opinion of the accounts and state whether the annual financial statement presents *fairly the financial position* of the local authority and of its income and expenditure for the period in question, and whether the transactions of the audited body conform with the statutory or other authorisation under which they purport to have been carried out.

The AFS reports on the day-to-day activity of Clare County Council in the form of the Statement of Comprehensive Income & Expenditure, summarised by Division. The Statement of Financial Position outlines Clare County Council overall financial position as of the 31st of December 2023.

The *Statement of Comprehensive Income* represents expenditure and income on the day-to-day running of Clare County Council.

The key sources of income for Clare County Council are as follows:

	Current Year	Previous Year
	€'000	€'000
Goods and Services	58,205	40,496
State Grants & Subsidies	64,498	58,030
Other Contributions (as appropriate)	0	23
Rates	44,497	43,852
Local Property Tax	7,862	7,997

Oifig an Priomhfheidhmeannach

Áras Contae an Chláir, Bóthar Nua, Inis, Co. an Chláir, V95 DXP2

Office of the Chief Executive

Áras Contae an Chláir, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare, V95 DXP2

Activity on the Income and Expenditure account for 2023 is as follows:

	Current Year	Previous Year
	€'000	€'000
Income	175,062	150,397
Expenditure	151,701	132,475
Transfers to Capital	23,124	17,716
Exceptional Item	-	-
Surplus/(Deficit) for	237	206
Prior Year Adjustment	-	-
Opening Revenue Reserve	3,112	2,906
Closing Revenue Reserve	3,349	3,112

The Annual Financial Statement gives an overview of the financial position of Clare County Council at 31st December 2023. I am pleased to report a positive outcome given the fiscal climate, with the 2023 Statement of Comprehensive Income (Income and Expenditure Account) as summarised above showing a near balanced position in the year. The table compares the 2023 financials with 2022 with a 20% increase in expenditure levels year on year 2022 to 2023 primarily explained by the take on and operation of the Shannon Heritage Clare Sites. A more detailed overview of the year is carried in the Annual Financial Statement 2023 report to members.

The *Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet)* represents the total financial activity of the council for the year together with comparative year figures as appropriate.

The statement includes assets and liabilities as follows:

- Assets both recently constructed/purchased and historical assets
- Work in progress and preliminary schemes- mainly roads and housing
- Long Term Debtors – housing loans
- Current Assets- including Stock, Debtors, Cash at bank
- Current and long term liabilities- mortgage and non-mortgage loan borrowings
- Various Reserves/Balances

The Net Assets of Clare County Council at the end of 2023 total € 2.9bn and are as follows:

	Current Year	Previous Year
	€'000	€'000
Fixed Assets	2,917,178	2,868,779
Works in Progress	91,981	56,710
Long Term debtors	49,219	41,712
Current Assets	111,827	104,361
Current Liabilities	60,030	61,117
Net Current Assets/ (Liabilities)	51,796	43,244
Creditors (Amounts greater than 1 year)	118,945	113,143
Net Assets/(Liabilities)	2,991,229	2,897,301

A Statement of Funds Flow was introduced as part of AFS 2011. While the guidance of International Accounting Standard 7 Statement of Cash Flows has been followed, the business of local authorities is substantially different to most private sector organisations and therefore some minor changes to the format have been agreed to ensure the data displayed is meaningful and useful within the local government sector.

System of Internal Financial Controls

As CE of Clare County Council, I acknowledge my responsibility for ensuring that an effective system of internal financial control is maintained and operated by Clare County Council. This responsibility is exercised in the context of the resources available to Clare County Council. Also, any system of internal financial control can provide only reasonable and not absolute assurance that assets are safeguarded, transactions authorised and properly recorded, and that material errors or irregularities are either prevented or would be detected in a timely manner. Maintaining the system of internal financial controls is a continuous process and the system and its effectiveness are kept under ongoing review.

Financial control environment

As CE of Clare County Council, I confirm that a financial control environment containing the following elements is in place:

- Financial responsibilities have been assigned at management level with corresponding accountability.
- Reporting arrangements have been established at all levels where responsibility for financial management has been assigned.
- Formal procedures have been established for reporting significant control failures and ensuring appropriate corrective action.
- There is an Audit Committee which as part of its work programme regularly review the internal financial control system.
- Procedures for all key business processes have been documented.
- There are systems in place to safeguard the assets.

Administrative Controls and Management Reporting

As CE of Clare County Council, I confirm that a framework of administrative procedures and regular management reporting is in place including segregation of duties and a system of delegation and accountability and, in particular, that:

- procedures for key business processes have been documented
- there are systems aimed at ensuring the security of the ICT systems
- there are systems in place to safeguard the assets of the local authority and
- there are appropriate capital investment control guidelines and formal project management disciplines in operation.

Procurement compliance

Clare County Council ensures that there is an appropriate and ongoing focus on good practice in tendering and purchasing and that procedures are in place to ensure compliance with all relevant procurement guidelines.

Internal audit and Audit Committee

As Chief Executive, I can confirm that Clare County Council has an internal audit function with appropriate training provided to personnel, which operates in accordance with a written charter. Its work is informed by analysis of the financial risks to which Clare County Council is exposed and its annual internal audit plans are based on this analysis. I am satisfied that there are procedures in place to ensure that the reports of the internal audit function are followed up.

I can confirm that Clare County Council has an effective audit committee which carries out an annual effectiveness review of their activities. I can also confirm that an Audit Committee is in place in accordance with the requirements of Section 122 of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended).

The statutory functions of audit committees as set out in section 59 and 60 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 are as follows:

- I. to review financial and budgetary reporting practices and procedures within the local authority that has established it;
- II. to foster the development of best practice in the performance by the local authority of its internal audit function;
- III. to review any audited financial statement, auditor's report or auditor's special report in relation to the local authority and assess any actions taken within that authority by its chief executive in response to such a statement or report and to report to that authority on its findings;
- IV. to assess and promote efficiency and value for money with respect to the local authority's performance of its functions; and
- V. to review systems that are operated by the local authority for the management of risks.

I recognise that the audit committee plays a crucial role in the governance framework of local authorities, particularly in the context of increased public sector accountability. They have an independent role in advising the Council on financial reporting processes, internal control, risk management and audit matters as part of the systematic review of the control environment and governance procedures of the local authority.

I acknowledge the Audit Committee's role in the risk management process and in the continuing review of the control environment and governance procedures in Clare County Council.

Risk and control framework

Clare County Council has implemented a risk management system which identifies and reports key risks and the management actions being taken to address and, to the extent possible, mitigate those risks.

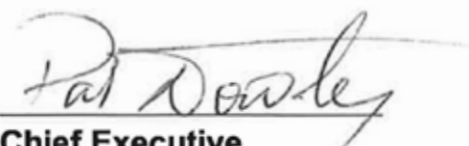
A corporate risk register is in place which identifies the key risks and evaluates and grades them according to their significance. The register is reviewed and updated by the Management Team on a regular basis. There is also a risk register in place for each service division and these are also reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

The outcome of these assessments is used to plan and allocate resources to ensure risks are managed to an acceptable level. The risk register details the controls and actions needed to mitigate risks and responsibilities for the operation of controls are assigned to specific staff.

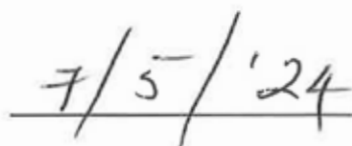
As Chief Executive, I confirm that key risks and related controls have been identified and processes have been put in place to monitor the operation of those key controls and report any identified deficiencies.

The Statement of Internal Financial Control will be included in the draft Annual Report submitted to Council members by 30 April 2023 and thereafter included in the published Annual Report prepared and adopted by the Council by 30 June 2023.

Signed by:


Chief Executive

Dated:





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CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL