

Annual Report 2017

June 2018

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Introduction by the Cathaoirleach and Chief Executive

We are delighted to introduce Clare County Council's Annual Report for the calendar year 2017. The details of the council's achievements during the year are set out under each directorate's report, but we would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the many services provided by the council, its departments and the Elected Members during the year.

During 2017, Clare County Council billed a total of €42.5m in rates. The collection of commercial rates continued to improve on previous years.

In the area of planning and economic development, the Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023 became effective and contained key objectives aimed at stimulating the sustainable economic, rural and social development of the county. Elements of the Shannon Green Infrastructure Plan were implemented while 20 residential housing estates were taken in charge by Clare County Council. Three projects outlined under the Clare Heritage Plan were progressed. A net total of 149 new jobs were delivered by small businesses that have been supported by the Local Enterprise Office.

2017 was a year marked by a number of progressive developments relating to the council's role in supporting local tourism. The Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience, Loop Head Lighthouse and the Bird Viewing and Information Point (BVIP) in Mountshannon continued to attract large numbers of visitors. The Burren and Cliffs of Moher UNESCO Geopark and Lough Derg Marketing Group promoted sustainable tourism in the region. A Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan for Inis Cealtra was finalised. Clare Tourism promoted and marketed Co. Clare as a tourism destination, while the council played a key role in the hosting of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Ennis.

Significant progress was made in relation to the maintenance and improvement of the national, regional and local road network, while a number of road safety and flood relief works were progressed. By the end of 2017, a total of €16.1 million had been spent on the coastal remediation programme (€2.5 million in 2017). The 2017 Schedule of Municipal District Works provided for a Roadworks Programme which had a total fund of €18.5m.

In the area of human resources and recruitment, the number of council employees by year's end was 877 with an additional 66 employed through the Retained Fire-Fighter Service. The Recruitment Team continued to stabilise the workforce by filling posts through competition. A substantive wellbeing programme was delivering during 2017.

Clare County Council continued to progress in the following areas:

- Implementation of the Occupational Health and Safety Management System,
- Increase public usage of the online motor tax facility,
- The Print and Graphic Design Service was recommenced,
- Establish an extranet service for external staff,
- Expand Clare County Council's social media following by 250%,
- Produce a monthly staff newsletter and newsletter-based Monthly Management Report,
- Substantial investment in a number of internal systems and network infrastructure.

Under the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Irish Water, the council continued to manage and carry out works to ensure the continuity of potable water supply in Co. Clare's water supply zones.

In the area of environment, the council covered a broad area of activity including waste, litter, pollution, water quality and veterinary services. A wide-ranging environmental awareness programme focusing on a number of target groups including community groups, businesses and schools was implemented. A comprehensive Green Fleadh Awareness Programme was carried out as part of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2017.

In the area of housing, the council worked to address the needs of homeless people and families in emergency accommodation, accelerate the provision of social housing, utilise vacant homes and improve the rental sector. The Social Development Directorate, working with a range of statutory agencies, service providers and advocates, was involved in the construction, purchase, leasing

and renting of homes, traveller accommodation, homelessness as well as the ongoing maintenance and management of our own 2,500 housing stock. Clare County Council was one of 14 local authorities who were successful in securing funding under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund.

During 2017, Clare County Council maintained its core objective of providing quality public services by working closely with community groups, organisations, residents associations and businesses to deliver positive change for communities across Co. Clare.

Other developments:

- The Clare Rural Development Strategy was launched,
- Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) managed the delivery of the 3-year programme to a successful conclusion,
- Lough Derg Blueway was progressed under the REDZ initiative,
- Nine projects benefited from funding under the CLÁR initiative,
- Ennis was named Ireland's Tidiest Large Urban Centre in the Tidy Towns Competition,
- 40 Burial Grounds Priming Grants were paid, 31 projects benefited under the Public Area Enhancement Scheme,
- Community Playground Support Scheme was approved,
- Valuable support was provided to communities involved in Clare in Bloom and IPB Pride of Place.

In 2017, the output of the sports unit increased significantly and assumed responsibility for sports and recreation throughout Co. Clare. Funding was secured for the 'Atlantic Youth Project' while the Active Ennis and Kilrush facilities continued to attract high usage from all sectors of the community.

Work continued on the design and delivery of the new County Library, including a gallery, local studies centre and library head quarters on the site of Glór. 2017 was a busy year for the Clare Arts Office with significant involvement in Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. There were just over 32,000 visits

to Clare Museum during 2017, while the Archives Service continued to digitise material from the Local Authority Archival Collection.

Our Emergency Services were extremely active in 2017 providing an invaluable public service. The Fire Service responded to 850 incidents while there was a full service response to Storm Ophelia. 2017 was the busiest year on record for Clare Civil Defence.

As Cathaoirleach and Chief Executive, we are pleased to confirm that the results achieved during 2017 met and exceeded the expectations at the start of the year.

In Clare County Council, we are confident that the commitment and experience of staff, combined with a supportive and progressive council and continued good relations with local communities and other agencies, will drive the organisation forward in furthering the economic, social and rural development of all of Co. Clare.

Cllr. Tom McNamara
Cathaoirleach

Pat Dowling
Chief Executive

Clare County Councillors

Ennis Municipal District

Cllr. James Breen

Cllr. Johnny Flynn

Cllr. Pat Daly

Cllr. Ann Norton

Cllr. Tom McNamara

Cllr. Mary Howard

Cllr. Paul Murphy

Cllr. Clare Colleran Molloy

Killaloe Municipal District

Cllr. Joe Cooney

Cllr. Pat Hayes

Cllr. Michael Begley

Cllr. Tony O'Brien

Cllr. Pat Burke

Cllr. Alan O'Callaghan

Shannon Municipal District

Cllr. Cathal Crowe

Cllr. John Crowe

Cllr. Gerard Flynn

Cllr. P.J. Ryan

Cllr. Pat McMahan

Cllr. Mike McKee

West Clare Municipal District

Cllr. Christy Curtin

Cllr. Richard Nagle

Cllr. Bill Slattery

Cllr. Ian Lynch

Cllr. Michael Hillery

Cllr. P.J. Kelly

Cllr. Bill Chambers

Cllr. Gabriel Keating

Finance and Support Services Directorate

Finance Department

Non Principal Private Residence (NPPR) Charge

The Local Government (Charges) Act 2009, as amended by the Local Government (Household Charge) Act 2011 and the Local Government Reform Act 2014 introduced a €200 annual charge in respect of all residential property not used as the owner's sole or main residence.

During 2017, outstanding NPPR charges continued to be collected. A total of €754,000 was received by Clare County Council in 2017.

Accounts Payable and Prompt Payment of Accounts Act 1997 / Late Payments in Commercial Transactions Regulations 2002 and SI no. 580 of 2012

In 2017, Clare County Council expended in excess of €89m on non payroll costs, covering both operational costs and capital project expenditure.

During 2017, the sum of €5,740.77 was incurred in prompt payment interest, compared to €3,889 in 2016 and €21,150 was incurred in prompt payment compensation payments as payable under the terms of S.I. 580 of 2012, compared to €28,140 in 2016.

Commercial rates collection

Commercial rates are payable on a diverse range of commercial properties such as factories, offices, shops, hotels and restaurants. The National Valuation Office based in Dublin (www.valuations.ie) determines the valuation that is to be applied to a rated property. Following the consideration of the council budget each year, the Elected Members determine the rate to be levied on this valuation.

Clare County Council billed a total of €42.5m in rates in 2017. Approximately 37% of Clare County Council's 2017 revenue expenditure is raised through commercial rates, reducing from 39% in the previous year. The collection of

rates on commercial and industrial properties is essential in maintaining the range of council services. In 2017, the collection of commercial rates continued to improve on previous years with an 87% of annual demand and arrears collected.

The council is aware of the financial difficulties which some ratepayers are experiencing and it remains committed to adopting a practical approach in terms of facilitating rate payers in their payment arrangements. The council would encourage customers to engage with us in this regard.

In 2017, the council continued the Commercial Rates Payment Incentive Scheme, which commenced in 2016. Through this scheme commercial rate payers could avail of a grant on their property, when all the rates payable on an occupied property have been discharged in the year in line with the scheme. Over 49% of occupied properties were granted this for 2017.

Internal Audit Department

The Internal Audit Department 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 County Council.

The role of internal audit is to provide independent assurance that an organisation's risk management, governance and internal control processes are operating effectively.

An Internal Audit Charter sets out the role and responsibilities of the Internal Auditor and management.

The Internal Audit Department:

- operate to an 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.

Corporate Services Department

This 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 2017, Clare County Council held the following types of meetings:

- Annual General Meeting - 1
- Ordinary Meetings - 11
- Adjourned Monthly Meetings - 2
- Budget Meetings – 1

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, except August, in the Council Chamber, Áras Contae an Chláir, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare.

Corporate Policy Group (C.P.G.)

The Corporate Policy Group consists of the Cathaoirleach of the day together with the chairs of the Strategic Policy Committee. The Corporate Policy Group 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 meet on a monthly basis with the council executive.

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 assist 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 Members

There are 28 members on Clare County Council and they were elected at the May 2014 Local Elections. They represent the following electoral areas:

- Ennis – 8
- Killaloe – 6
- Shannon – 6
- West Clare - 8

The current council is scheduled to be in existence until May 2019 when the next local elections are due to be held.

The political representation on the council following the 2014 Local Elections is as follows:

- Fine Gael - 8
- Fianna Fáil – 12
- Sinn Féin - 1
- Non-Party - 7

The Annual General Meeting is held in June each year and Councillor Tom McNamara, who represents the Ennis Municipal District, was elected Cathaoirleach in June 2017 for the ensuing year. Councillor Pat Burke, who represents the Killaloe Municipal District, was elected Leas Cathaoirleach at that same meeting.

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.

In 2017, a total of five new complaints were made to the Ombudsman by persons who felt aggrieved by a particular decision/action taken by this council.

In 2017, the Office of the Ombudsman concluded 5 of these cases involving Clare County Council. The outcome of these cases was as follows;

- Complaints against Clare County Council not upheld – 1
- Complaints against the council upheld – 1
- Assistance provided to the complainant – 3

Ombudsman for Children

In 2017, one complaint was made to the Ombudsman for Children and this case has now been closed.

Public relations

Clare County Council made considerable progress during 2017 in further enhancing the means by which it communicates with staff, Elected Members and customers.

The Communications Officer issued press releases and photographs promoting the full breadth of services provided by Clare County Council resulting in extensive local, national and international coverage. The local authority adopted a proactive position regarding media coverage of matters pertaining to the work of the organisation.

The number of followers on Clare County Council's social media platforms (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube) expanded by 250% during the year with a fresh focus on media rich postings e.g. video.

Clare County Council's advertising and marketing policy was reviewed with a view to maximising the impact of spends on placed print and broadcast advertisements.

A monthly staff newsletter and newsletter-based Monthly Management Report, reporting the progress made by Clare County Council Directorates during the preceding month, were produced. This monthly management report is available to view on the council's website.

The Print and Graphic Design Service was recommenced, further enhancing the quality of internal and public communications carried out by Clare County Council.

An Extranet Service providing relevant news and information for external staff was established.

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 examined afresh by the Senior Executive Officer, Corporate Services. In 2017, the Customer Care Co-ordinator responded to 11 complaints/comments received and 1 appeal was made on a complaint.

Register of Councillors Expenses 2017

The 2017 Register of Councillors Expenses will be available on the Clare County Council's website at the end of April 2018. This register will include details of the following:-

- Attendance at conferences, seminars and training.
- Payments made in respect of travel and subsistence expenses within or outside the State.
- Salaries, monthly allowances, allowances to Strategic Policy Committees, Chair of Municipal District allowances, Cathaoirleach and Leas Cathaoirleach allowances.
- Payments by other bodies/associations, the members of which were nominated by Clare County Council.
- Attendance at meetings of Local Authorities, Strategic Policy Committees, Municipal District areas, Joint Policing Committee, Audit Committee and Directorate meetings.

Clare County Council Committees

Clare County Council has formed a number of committees, including Strategic Policy Committees, Joint Policing Committee and the Audit Committee.

Strategic Policy Committees

Strategic Policy Committees (S.P.C.s) 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 S.P.C. is chaired by an elected councillor and is supported by a Director of Service. The task of the S.P.C. is to assist and advise the council in the formulation, development and review of policy. Final policy decisions, however, will ultimately rest with the full council acting as a body.

During 2017, some restructuring of the S.P.C.s took place and the current S.P.C.s are:-

- Social Development
- Physical Development
- Economic Development
- Rural Development

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.

The committee has five members, three external members and two Elected Members. The chairperson is Tom Kirby, Director of Water Services National Training Group. The committee met 5 times in 2017.

Memorial Committee

The members of Clare County Council adopted a Memorial Policy at the January 2017 meeting. This policy outlines the council's policy on the erection of civic, community and family memorials to celebrate, honour or remember a person, group of persons or event of significance. It also allows the council to integrate important aspects of the county's past culture and society into the present day and to raise awareness of the subject being commemorated among the public. It was agreed that the members of the Standing Orders Committee, together with a number of executive staff members of Clare County Council, would form the Memorial Committee, to consider applications received in accordance with the Memorial Policy.

Civic Receptions

Two Civic Receptions were held in 2017, as follows:-

- A Civic Reception was held to honour Stocktons Wing as they celebrated 40 years of their contribution to Irish and folk music in Ireland and abroad.
- A Civic Reception was held to honour John Burke on the historical occasion of him being the first Clare man to reach the summit of Mount Everest in aid of his charity "Elevate: Raising The Banner For Youth Wellness".

Records management

Our records management unit archived substantial volumes of records, which require to be retained under the National Retention Policy for Local Authority Records. In addition, records were disposed of in accordance with the above policy.

The photographic digital archive continues and additions to the photographic collection are being done on an ongoing basis to ensure their preservation.

All Chief Executive orders, county council minute books and registers of electors have been gathered, bound and subsequently archived, thus ensuring vital records are permanently and securely preserved.

Joint Policing Committee (JPC)

The Joint Policing Committee serves as a forum for consultation, discussions and recommendations on policing and crime issues within the Clare local authority administrative area. It also reviews levels and patterns of crime and related underlying factors. Five meetings took place in 2017, including one which was adjourned. A public meeting was held in the Vandeleur Centre in Kilrush in November 2017.

The JPC has 31 members including Elected Members, Oireachtas Members, local authority representatives and Garda representatives.

Freedom of information (FOI)

In 2017, there were 107 FOI requests, 8 internal reviews and 2 appeals to the Information Commissioner (1 upheld and 1 withdrawn).

The outcome of valid requests received in 2017 was as follows:-

- Granted – 33
- Part-granted – 32
- Refused – 26
- Transferred - 3
- Withdrawn/outside FOI - 6

The categories of the requests are as follows:-

- Journalists – 34
- Business Interest Groups – 9
- Oireachtas/Public representatives - 2
- Staff – 6
- Clients/others - 56

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 and application form is available on the council’s website www.clarecoco.ie

The following is a summary of the new fee structure in respect of FOI requests:

- Search and retrieval costs - €20 per hour plus copying charges:-
 - Photocopy per sheet - €0.04
 - CD Rom - €10.00
- There is a minimum threshold of €101 below which no search, retrieval and copying fees can be charged. Once the charge reaches €101, full fees apply;
- There is a cap of €500 on the amount of search, retrieval and copying fees that can be charged;
- There is a further upper limit on estimated search, retrieval and copying fees at €700 above which an FOI body can refuse to process a request, unless the requester is prepared to refine the request to bring the search, retrieval and copying fees below the limit.

The Freedom of Information Act sets out appeal mechanisms in the event of a refusal of a request, or in relation to deferral of access, charges, form of access etc. Fees are also payable in certain cases on appeal as follows:-

- The fee for internal review under Section 21 is now €30 (€10 for medical card holders and their dependants).
- The fee for appeals to the Information Commissioner under Section 22 is now €50 (€15 for medical card holders and their dependants).

Data Protection

The Data Protection Act 1988 and the Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003 govern the processing of all personal data.

The purpose of these acts is to protect the privacy rights of living individuals regarding the processing of their personal data by those who control such data.

Clare County Council is registered as a Data Controller and a Data Processor with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (Registration number 0476/A).

There were 12 data subject access requests made under Section 4 of the Act for access to personal data held by Clare County Council in 2017.

There is a fee of €6.35 to make a data subject access request.

Further information on the council's 'Data subject access policy' and 'Code of Practice' in relation to Data Protection matters is available on the Council's website www.clarecoco.ie

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation (EU) 2016/679) is a regulation by which the European Commission intends to strengthen and unify data protection for individuals within the EU. The regulation was adopted on 27th April 2016. It enters into application on 25th May 2018, after a two-year transition period and a new Data Protection Act is also expected by that date.

Health and Safety

In 2017, Clare County Council continued to implement its Occupational Health and Safety Management System and seek continuous improvement in Health and Safety. A particular focus in 2017 was on Health and Safety Communication and in the preparation for Managing Serious Incidents. A criminal legal advisor was appointed, a Serious Incident Management Team established and Serious Incident Checklists and Wallet Cards issued to relevant staff at a number of seminars with Senior Management, line managers and all staff. In addition, working groups have been established to

develop and implement procedures for the Management of Work Equipment and Work Related Vehicle Safety and to ensure that the correct Traffic Management Plans are developed, documented and implemented for all traffic management scenarios, with work ongoing.

Performance Indicators

The council's performance is measured by a series of Performance Indicators, set nationally by the National Oversight and Audit Commission. While the indicators for 2017 are not yet compiled, the indicators for 2016 are available on <http://noac.ie/noac-reports/>

Human Resources Department

The Human Resources (HR) Department has a corporate wide role supporting both management and staff in the planning, organisation and management of the human resources employed by the local authority. This role is critical in this period of substantial change and in the particular context of the Public Service Modernisation Agenda and Local Government Reform.

Each of the following service areas operate within the Human Resources Department to implement the HR strategy and agreed HR policies.

Workforce Management

Over the last two years significant effort has been made to stabilise staffing levels within Clare County Council. This follows the economic downturn and the subsequent national recruitment embargo which resulted in reduced numbers and uncertainty in business planning. Staffing levels and skills diversity as well as the level of permanency in the workforce has improved steadily over the last two years.

In this context, people management and business support through welfare support, learning and development, systems development, industrial relations and recruitment are critical functions carried out by the Human Resources Department.

Ongoing change within the organisation facilitates staff development. This is necessary in order to achieve a balance between service areas in accordance

with organisational priorities, Health and Safety, the council's Mobility Policy, in addition to the wider national change such as Haddington Road and Irish Water. Achieving this balance, while maintaining service delivery and planning for further local government reform, is a significant challenge for the council.

The number of employees in Clare County Council as at 31st December 2017 was 878 which included 66 staff employed in the Retained Fire Service. The increase in economic activity both regionally and nationally has naturally placed renewed pressure on staff levels across all sections and a focus on recruitment remains a high priority into 2018.

Staff learning and development

Continuous employee development is a management priority. Investment in learning and development benefits the organisation, resulting in higher levels of employee engagement and better decision makers. The objective is to ensure that all staff would be adequately trained in the skills and competencies needed to achieve organisational, team and individual objectives.

In the latter half of 2017, an audit was carried out of the Health and Safety requirements for staff. This was carried out with the assistance of the Health and Safety Unit and line managers across the organisation. Specific Health and Safety related training continues to be delivered based on this audit.

In addition to formal training courses, a number of staff are participating in the community based Junior Achievement Programme, a new mentoring programme supported by the Partnership Committee, Leadership Development and Project Management. The Learning and Development Unit is also co-ordinating the council's applications for the NSAI Excellence through People certification.

The enhanced Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) was rolled out in 2014, which saw more structured engagement and discussion between line management and staff. PMDS continues to form the core development system within the organisation with an emphasis being placed on team development into 2018.

Employee Welfare

The Employee Welfare Service is a significant support structure for staff. The confidential service includes a number of supports available to employees and presents an opportunity for early intervention should issues arise. The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 places obligations on the council as an employer to safeguard employee's welfare and to act proactively by exercising its duty of care.

A substantive wellbeing programme was delivered during 2017, with a variety of supports and initiatives involving cross directorate teams being delivered in 2018.

The council's Employee Assistance Policy provides details of the free and confidential Professional Counselling Services available to staff at times of need, as well as the opportunity to discuss any difficulties with the Employee Welfare Officer should the need arise.

Industrial Relations

The council is committed to meaningful consultation with the unions representing staff in accordance with the national Public Service Agreements as they unfold. The Industrial Relations function is dealt with corporately by the Human Resources Department who regularly liaises and consults with the recognised Trade Unions on a wide range of issues and the implementation of change.

In 2017, the Human Resources Department promoted 'mediation' supports and will continue to consider early intervention measures in dealing with matters as they arise - every effort is made to deal with issues in a co-operative and open manner at a local level. The Human Resources department also represents the council at all third party hearings in accordance with best practices with ongoing support from the Local Government Management Services Board.

Superannuation

2017 saw the final migration steps of the 'payroll' and 'superannuation' functions to the national shared services centre in Laois – 'MyPAY'. Clare County Council continues to prepare and manage the data entry and storage systems, but the payments process is delivered through this national services centre.

Workplace Partnership

The Partnership Committee is a positive forum for the discussion between management and staff outside of the industrial relations arena. The committee remained proactive in 2017, with the promotion of the development of a new extranet website, suitable for use on smart-phones, being launched as part of the on-going commitment to strengthen communication across the organisation and particularly to those staff working in remote locations. Staff notices, employment opportunities and policies are available through the extranet.

Partnership talks, presented by the Chief Executive, were held across the county at 6 locations in late 2017, with supporting presentations given on Human Resources, Health and Safety, Data Protection and Business Review. Long service and recent retirements will be celebrated at an awards event in 2018.

Motor Taxation Department

The usage of the online motor tax facility www.motortax.ie continues to grow incrementally. Over recent years, Co. Clare's uptake has gone from 47% in December 2013 to 65% in December 2017. In the one year between December 2016 and 2017, there was a 2% increase in the number of people doing their motor tax online in Co. Clare using www.motortax.ie. The 65% statistic at the end of 2017 ranks Co. Clare 15th in terms of online usage, with Dublin City having the highest overall online business at 84% and Kildare and Meath ranking second and third, being in the 80% online bracket. Online statistics are increasing in every county and a majority of people do their motor tax online now in every one of the 27 motor tax authorities.

Physical Development Directorate

Environment Department

The Environment Section covers a broad area of activity including waste, litter, environmental awareness, pollution, water quality and veterinary services. The 2017 work programme was largely driven by an extensive regulatory framework. As one of the constituent members of the Southern Waste Region, Clare County Council is governed by the waste policy and objectives set out for the region in the Southern Region Waste Management Plan which was adopted in 2015.

Waste and litter management

The enforcement priority areas during the year related to the following:-

- Illegal dumping and littering;
- Permitted waste facilities;
- Waste tyres;
- Food waste;
- End-of-life or scrap vehicles.

In addition, work has focussed on the operation of the Presentation of Waste Bye Laws. Other enforcement activities carried out include monitoring of waste collection and facility permits and use of CCTV and mobile camera surveillance to counter illegal dumping and littering and unauthorised burning. Enforcement procedures of a judicial nature were continued in relation to unauthorised waste disposal. Checking for compliance with various waste-related regulations concerning waste electrical equipment, waste batteries, plastic bags, solid fuel regulations (smoky coal) and farm plastics were also carried out by the Waste Regulation and Enforcement Section. Roadside checkpoints were carried out in conjunction with An Garda Síochána to check compliance of waste operators, create a visible waste enforcement presence, to identify and obtain information on illegal waste collectors and to increase public awareness.

Funding of €40,000 was secured under the National Anti Dumping Initiative and used to remove illegally dumped waste and to secure a number of sites around Clare, including the installation of CCTV and lighting. Almost 40 tonnes of illegally dumped material was removed from sites.

Education and awareness

A wide-ranging environmental awareness programme focusing on a number of target groups including community groups, businesses and schools was implemented in 2017. A significant number of environmental education events took place including the launch of National Tree Week, Gum Litter Challenge and continuation of the Green Schools Programme, and events at each of the 9 blue flag beaches in Clare. A Green Business Seminar took place in Glór in June and the Environment Section worked in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and ENVA Ireland in providing a household hazardous waste collection day in November. A number of upcycling workshops were provided across the county, funded from a new Waste Prevention Grant, to promote re-use and repair to demonstrate to people that waste can also be a very valuable resource.

A Green Festival Ambassador training programme was developed in conjunction with Clare Tourism. The Green Dog Walkers Initiative, promoting dog responsibility in relation to dog litter continued. There were over 590 people signed up as Green Dog Walkers by the end of 2017.

A series of workshops on Japanese Knotweed facilitated by Dr. Frances Giaquinto, were held in Ennis, Ennistymon, Scarriff, Shannon, Kilrush and Killaloe during July.

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2017

A comprehensive Green Fleadh Awareness Programme was carried out as part of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2017, which included the segregation of waste to recyclables; food waste and general waste. Thirty bin frames were put in place as part of a pilot project to help increase awareness and improve waste segregation. Signage for the bin frames and additional bins were designed and developed as part of the Green Fleadh programme. The Green

Fleadh team assisted visitors to the town with waste segregation, encouraged people to choose to re-use coffee/tea cups and advised people of the steps that they could take to support the Green Fleadh and a Green Fleadh webpage was developed, along with a comprehensive media campaign. Forty four businesses signed up to the Green Fleadh Business Programme. Casual traders were also conditioned to use compostables.

A wide survey of all the 2016 Fleadh's activities was used to calculate its carbon footprint. This found that the biggest source of carbon emissions is from visitors' travel, while the largest source from the Fleadh's own activities are the diesel generators powering the Fleadh's various activities. For Fleadh 2017, the Green Fleadh team explored the generators in more detail to see if there can be savings for future Fleadhs. The EPA's Local Authority Prevention Network programme supported this work in conjunction with Clare County Council and Cork Institute of Technology.

Central Waste Management Facility (CWMF), Inagh

The Central Waste Management Facility (CWMF) in Ballyduff Beg, Inagh, is an operational civic amenity (CA) site and green waste composting facility. There is an engineered landfill located within the site, which closed in November 2011. The site operates under EPA waste licence W0109-02.

With the exception of green waste, all waste received at the facility is removed by contractors for offsite landfill/recycling/recovery. Green (garden) waste received at the facility is processed at the site into a mature, stable compost product which is currently used for site landscaping works.

The filled area of the landfill is now fully lined, capped and sealed. Gas is continuously extracted from wells within the landfill to the site enclosed flare. Leachate is pumped via an automated system to leachate holding tanks and is removed as required by road tanker for treatment in approved offsite wastewater treatment plants.

A draft site restoration plan has been approved by the EPA. The proposal aims to maximise habitat diversity by constructing a wetland system in the

unfilled area of the original proposed landfill footprint. It is intended to advertise for final detailed design drawings during 2018.

Applications were invited under the CWMF Community Fund in 2017, in relation to works to be carried out in early 2018.

Landfill monitoring

The Central Waste Management Facility (CWMF), Doora Landfill, Lisdeen Waste Transfer Station and Scariff Civic Amenity Site were monitored on an ongoing basis during the year in accordance with waste licence requirements.

Recycling

Clare County Council provides five recycling centres. These 'Civic Amenity Sites' are situated at the following locations:-

- Central Waste Management Facility at Ballyduff Beg, Inagh
- Ennis Recycling Centre
- Lisdeen Recycling Centre, near Kilrush
- Scariff Recycling Centre
- Shannon Recycling Centre

Improvement works to site layout at Scarriff Recycling Centre were completed.

In addition to the recycling centres there are 54 bring bank sites within the county accepting green, clear and brown glass and aluminium cans. Of the 54 sites, 6 accept plastic bottles. Currently there are 13 sites which accept textiles (clothing).

Environmental monitoring and enforcement (water)

This section spans the following areas of activity: water, wastewater, agriculture, waste, air, planning.

Rivers and lakes

Forty river sites and ten lakes are monitored in accordance with the EPA monitoring programmes, a requirement of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) (implemented under the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations, 2003, as amended by SI 350 of 2014). Details of the sites can be accessed on www.shannonrbd.com. The water quality data is used in the WFD classification schemes and provide the basis for describing the state of the aquatic environment and for assessing the effectiveness of the programmes of measures established through the river basin management planning process.

River sites upstream and downstream of EPA licensed wastewater treatment plants were also monitored and the results of the latter were uploaded to Irish Water on a quarterly basis.

Drinking water

During the year 19 public water supplies, 19 private supplies and 96 group water schemes were monitored. Tests were carried out to meet the statutory requirements of the EU (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 122 of 2014).

Shellfish water

There are 5 designated shellfish waters in County Clare; Aughinish Bay, Poulnaclogh Bay (part of Ballyvaughan Bay), Poulnasharry Bay, Carrigaholt Bay and Rinnevilla Bay. These were designated under the European Communities (Quality of Shellfish Waters) (Amendment) Regulations 2009, S.I. No. 55 of 2009.

Clare County Council's waste water treatment plants

Thirty plants were monitored during the year. All plants with a population equivalent (P.E.) of greater than 500 were monitored and the results of monitoring were sent to the E.P.A. for publication in the report "Urban Waste Water Discharges in Ireland". Plants with a P.E of less than 500 were also monitored.

Water pollution discharge licences - Section 4

Section 4

During the year, 147 audits and inspections were carried out at facilities licensed under Section 4 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act, 1977 & 1990. Inspection reports were sent to these facilities and warning letters and/or statutory notices were issued where appropriate.

Water/Air/Noise Pollution Complaints

A total of 92 complaints relating to water/air pollution were received and responded to in 2017.

Planning, agriculture and septic tank inspections

300 planning inspections were undertaken during the year as part of the assessment of domestic, commercial, industrial and forestry applications. 28 National Inspection Plan septic tank inspections were also undertaken.

River Basin Management Plan (RBMP 2018-2021)

Investigations were carried out during the year on a number of water bodies where water quality is at risk of failing to meet Water Framework Directive objectives. Staff from the Environment Section also worked with the EPA on desk based assessments to assist in identifying pressures responsible for placing water bodies in the county at risk of failing to achieve WFD objectives.

The Shannon and Western River Basin District Plans covered the period 2009 – 2015. The next RBMP will cover the entire country from 2018 to 2021 and will be reviewed in six year cycles up to 2027. The catchment characterisation process undertaken since 2015 by the EPA with the assistance of the Local Authorities assessed the risk of a waterbody not meeting the objectives of the Water Framework Directive, and identified significant pressures that need to be addressed. Waters include rivers, canals, lakes, reservoirs, ground waters, protected areas (including wetlands and other water-dependent ecosystems), estuaries (transitional and coastal waters).

Beaches and amenities

Bathing water

Twelve bathing areas (nine with blue flags, two with green flags) were monitored from June to September. All results were sent to the EPA. They are visible to the public on the EPA website www.beaches.ie. The 12 bathing areas monitored are as follows:-

- Kilkee,
- Fanore,
- Cappagh Pier (Kilrush),
- Whitestrand (Doonbeg),
- Lahinch,
- Whitestrand (Miltown Malbay),
- Quilty,
- Spanish Point,
- Bishops Quarter (Ballyvaughan),
- Ballycuggeran (Lough Derg),
- Mountshannon (Lough Derg) and
- Ballyalla Lake.

The following nine Co. Clare beaches achieved blue flag status in May 2017:-

- Ballycuggeran,
- Cappa,
- Kilrush,
- Fanore,
- Kilkee,
- Lahinch,
- Mountshannon,

- Spanish Point,
- Whitestrand, Doonbeg,
- Whitestrand Miltown Malbay

The international blue flag symbolises high standards in water quality, safety and services as well as environmental management, information and education. The award is made by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), an independent non-profit organisation. The Irish Green Coast Award was awarded to beaches at Bishops Quarter at Ballyvaughan and Seafield, Quilty. Planning Part 8 was completed for improved amenities at Lahinch and Spanish Point in 2017.

Oil pollution management

A training exercise testing the response capabilities of Shannon Foynes Port Company, local authorities and other organisations who operate in the vicinity of the Shannon Estuary took place at Spanish Point from 26th to 27th April, organised by Environment Section.

The simulated event, hosted by Clare County Council on behalf of the Shannon Estuary Anti-Pollution Team (SEA-PT), centred on a hypothetical major spillage of crude oil having occurred from an oil exploration platform located approximately 220km off the south west coast of Ireland and oil coming ashore at Spanish Point.

There was a practical element on site at Spanish Point involving operation and demonstration of equipment while a technical briefing was carried out on equipment on site for officials. The second day of the event consisted of the management of a simulated large scale event for senior management of Local Authorities, SEA-PT members and the Coastguard in Clare County Council's headquarters at Áras Contae an Chláir, Ennis, which acted as the Incident Command Centre. Over 70 people attended the event.

Gardening section

The council's Gardening Section continued to maintain very high standards in ensuring the attractiveness of our towns and villages in the county and in

supporting and assisting various Tidy Towns Committees. In 2017, the Gardening Section team had the town of Ennis looking very well for the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann music festival.

Veterinary services

Clare County Council is an official agent of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. By way of a Service Level Agreement, Clare County Council is responsible for supervising and granting approval for all abattoirs and meat plants in the county including one wild game establishment. Legislation requires that all animals destined for human consumption undergo a full veterinary ante mortem and post mortem examination. Last year 18,362 beef animals and 30,466 sheep were slaughtered in County Clare plants.

Dog control

The contract for provision of Dog Warden Services was awarded to Midland Animal Care Limited, Ballyshane, Cloghan, Co. Offaly in 2015 and the new contract took effect from 1st January 2016. Midland Animal Care Limited carry out the council's statutory functions in this area with the exception of the making of byelaws and the taking of prosecutions.

Strategic Policy Committee

The Strategic Policy Committee for Environment and Transportation held four meetings in 2017. This committee has a membership of fourteen, comprising of nine Elected Members and a representative from each of the following sectors:-

- Agriculture
- Farming
- Environmental
- Business employers
- Community/voluntary
- Trade union

The Chairperson was Councillor Joe Cooney. Environment related policies formulated and developed and issues discussed included the following:-

- Water Framework Directive
- Climate Change
- Energy

Water safety

Clare County Council's Water Safety Development Officer was appointed by Minister Simon Coveney to the 5th Council of Irish Water Safety for the period 2017-2021. 21 Lifeguards provided a lifeguard service on Clare's beaches for the summer season. A pilot project to investigate the feasibility of using drone technology to provide assistance to lifeguards commenced at Spanish Point in 2017. Six County Clare lifeguards attended the European Lifesaving Championships in Belgium bringing home a total of 8 medals.

The 2017 summer season was a busy season for the Co. Clare lifeguard service as reflected in the statistics outlined below:-

- Rescue - 91
- First-Aid – 665
- Lost child – 39
- Advice given – 19952
- Accident prevented – 10728
- Other - 77

Energy

Clare County Council energy cost, consumption and efficiency measures

Energy cost details for 2017

- Total energy spend - €2,164,107

- Total annual spend on electricity - €1,428,242
- Total annual spend on electricity – Water Services - €53,933
- Total annual spend on public lighting - €904,348
- Total annual spend – electricity other than water and public lighting - €469,960
- Total annual spend on road fuels (diesel/petrol/biofuel) - €555,214
- Total annual spend on heating fuels (gas/oil/biomass etc.) - €180,652

Consumption details for 2017

- Electricity – Grid – 10,986.5 MWh
- Fossil fuels – 7,115.2 MWh
- Renewable energy – 718.1 MWh
- Total energy – 18,819.7 MWh

Actions undertaken in 2017

In 2017, Clare County Council undertook a range of initiatives to improve the energy performance, including:

- Building fabric and services upgrades – 15 MWh of savings
- Public lighting – 11 MWh of savings
- Transport/vehicles – 52 MWh of savings
- Total – 78 MWh of savings

In 2018 Clare County Council intends to undertake a range of initiatives to improve the energy performance, including:

- Water services upgrades
- Building fabric and services upgrades – 16 MWh of savings
- Public lighting – 33 MWh of savings
- Transport/vehicles – 50 MWh of savings
- Total for 2018 – 99 MWh of savings

In 2017 Clare County Council undertook a range of initiatives to improve the energy performance including:-

- Upgrading of public lighting to LED efficient lamps
- Upgrading of lighting and heating controls in Áras Contae an Chláir and other buildings
- Energy awareness training days for staff in house
- Energy management training for the ISO 50001 standard.

Clare County Council is an active participant in the national monitoring and reporting programme and is on target for the 33% increase in energy efficiency. This target is set by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Water Services Department

Service Level Agreement with Irish Water

A twelve year Service Level Agreement (SLA) came into effect on 1st January 2014 between Irish Water (IW) and all local authorities including Clare County Council, which essentially sets out how Water Services are to be delivered over the lifetime of the agreement and the various roles and responsibilities of both parties. In late 2017, Irish Water advised that they do not wish to enter another SLA with the sector on the expiration of the current one in late 2025 and in fact their preference is to terminate the current one earlier, at the end of 2021, and transfer to a single utility model at that stage. Discussions in this regard are ongoing at a national level, with a progress report due to the Minister by Easter 2018.

While the SLA is the national document between all local authorities, what sets the local context in terms of budget, headcount and objectives is the Annual Service Plan (ASP). This document includes a series of key performance indicators (KPI's) and targets for the specific calendar year for each local authority. These KPI's are constantly reviewed, changed to include new indicators as required and are measured on a monthly basis.

Irish Water's transformation programme

The various transformation initiatives contained within the Irish Water Plan continued to be progressed throughout 2017. Once complete and agreed, they will specify how water services (operational and capital) will be delivered to customers into the future. Among the most significant of the projects are the establishment of Regional Capital Offices, a National Laboratory Strategy, and the Water Industry Operating Framework (WIOF).

Water and wastewater operations

Under the SLA the council continues to manage, operate and maintain plants and networks to ensure the continuity of potable water supply to each water supply zone and collect and treat wastewater in the towns and villages which are serviced by public waste water treatment systems throughout County Clare. Council staff responds to work orders despatched by Irish Water through their call centre as a result of customer contacts and also through the identification of issues by council staff. In addition, considerable work was carried out in the areas of water conservation, leak detection and repair, as these are key activities for Irish Water and for Clare County Council in terms of reducing unaccounted for water and ensuring adequate capacity is available for the public that expect and deserve a quality supply.

Water Services capital projects

Capital Projects are included in either (i) the Capital Investment Programme for single major projects, or (ii) one of Irish Water's national capital programmes for smaller or repetitive works. These are detailed further below:

Capital Investment Programme (CIP)

(CIP) 2017-2021

The 2017-2021 CIP currently incorporates three agglomerations in Clare (Shannon, Ennistymon and Newmarket on Fergus) while Lahinch Wastewater Treatment Plant has now also being included for improvement works. Mott MacDonald has been appointed as Consulting Engineers for the 2017-2021 Capital Investment Programme (CIP). In addition, Quin and Kilfenora

Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrades remain from the previous 2014-2016 CIP and are now at detailed design stage following site investigation and survey work being completed.

Untreated agglomerations (UTAS)

UTAS are major capital projects in addition to the CIP 2017-2021. In Clare, these include five areas with less than adequate wastewater treatment facilities discharging to the sea or to the estuary. These include Ballyvaughan, Clarecastle, Kilkee, Kilrush and Liscannor. RPS consulting engineers have been appointed by IW and the UTAS project has commenced with a review of the Gate 1 studies and the submission of the Design Inception Report. Pre-planning meetings with Clare County Council's Planning Department have concluded with planning applications proposed to be lodged in Q2 of 2018.

National Capital Programmes

Under this programme, smaller works can be bundled countywide and indeed regionally, in order to offer a critical mass of work as a larger contract attracting a number of tenders and thereby ensuring better value for money due to economies of scale. In 2017, Clare County Council carried out various projects under the following headings:

- Local water mains replacement.
- Replacement of components of water and wastewater treatment plants.
- Installation of new pumps.
- Upgrade of water disinfection systems.
- Decommissioning Rockmount Water Treatment Plant, Miltown Malbay.
- Flow metering at wastewater treatment plants.
- Completion of HSQE tracker items.
- Identified locations within Co. Clare with less than 6 hours water storage to allow for future improvements in capacity.

- Assessment of Whitegate Wastewater Treatment Plant as a potential site for a Constructed Wetland.
- During 2017, IW appointed a contractor to the Water Network Programme, which is driven by leak reduction and includes mains replacement, leak detection and DMA establishment. To compliment this work, Clare County Council appointed an additional 5 staff to a new Find and Fix team.

Planning also continued on the following:

- Long-term options for Corofin water supply.
- Upgrade of Miltown Malbay Wastewater treatment plant.
- Progressing the Mains Rehab works at Bealaha, Doonbeg.
- Advancing the upgrade of Francis St. Pump station.
- Assessment of Wastewater Treatment Plants operating under Certificates of Authorisation from the EPA.

Rural Water Programme (RWP)

The Rural Water Programme (RWP) remains outside the remit of Irish Water and continues to be managed by Clare County Council and funded by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. It encompasses both capital and operational work.

Rural Water Capital

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government provides 100% funding for the takeover of schemes which are at an acceptable standard. For new and upgrade works, the max grant funding available from the Department is 85% with the remaining 15% coming from the group's own resources.

There are 6 different headings that funding can be allocated for upgrading and takeover of existing group schemes and in 2017, the total spend under the Rural Water Multi Annual Programme in Co. Clare was €410,000 and broken down as follows:

Measure 1

Water quality (100% Funded) – Killone Group Water Scheme (GWS) and Carrowcore GWS

Measure 2

Water conservation and upgrade works (85% Funded) – details of GWS as follows:

- Quinspool
- Kilmaley Inagh
- Toonagh Dysert
- Lissycasey
- Coolmeen-Kildysart
- Cappalaheen
- Lakyle
- Kilnaboy
- Raheen
- Carrowcore

Measure 5

New technologies (100% funded) - Kilmaley Inagh GWS

No allocation was made to Clare County Council for the taking in charge of Group Water Schemes. Retention was paid out to 5 no. schemes during 2017 for works carried out in 2016.

Following agreement on a process for taking in charge with Irish Water in late 2016, three schemes were taken in charge in 2017 (Moyglass/Treanmanagh, Cree/Clonina and Derryfadda) with a further two approvals awaiting completion of land transfer (Cahermurphy and Ardeamish/Poulnagun).

Currently, there is no formal process for the taking in charge of Group Sewerage Schemes, however, work in this regard is ongoing and a pilot set of

taking in charge documents were issued to a group sewerage scheme in Co. Clare in late 2017 with a view to submitting an application to Irish Water in 2018.

Bored wells grants

A grant up to a maximum of €2,031.58 per application is funded by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. In 2017, 37 applications for bored well grants were received and grants were paid out on 14 of these, amounting to a total of €27,681.

The balance of applications were either withdrawn, awaiting works to be completed or refused due to proximity of public or group scheme mains to the applicants property.

Rural water operational

The Rural Water Programme also provides an Annual Subsidy Grant to group water schemes for the operational and maintenance costs of group schemes with all subsidies recoupable from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. In 2017, there were 54 subsidy applications administered by Rural Water staff with a total of €999,325 paid out. This included €677,125 under Subsidy A and €322,200 under Subsidy B.

Non-domestic metering and billing

Throughout 2017, council meter readers continued to carry out this service on behalf of Irish Water. Billing and collection of non-domestic water charges migrated to Irish Water in late 2016, but the council continue to have a role in dealing with non domestic queries and repairs.

Other water services works outside the scope of Irish Water

The council continue to have a role in the operation and management of a number of Water Services associated plants and networks which currently sit outside of the SLA with Irish Water but provide a valuable service to the public and communities of County Clare. These include plants and networks serving some council estates, the former Rural Housing Organisation (RHO) housing,

some obsolete assets and a growing number of Developer Provided Infrastructure (DPI) serving estates which have now been taken in council charge but which Irish Water have not yet taken responsibility for.

There can be significant work and cost involved in bringing some of these systems up to an acceptable standard which places a strain on council resources. Until such time as agreement is reached with Irish Water in this regard, provision in the council's own annual budgets will continue to be necessary.

Roads and Transportation Department

Roads and transportation is responsible for 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, roads capital projects, parking management, flood relief works, coastal protection, insurances and arterial drainage.

Schedule of Municipal District works 2017

The 2017 Schedule of Municipal Districts Works provided for a Roadworks Programme which had a total fund of €18.5m. This programme was to all intents and purposes completed and all approved allocations drawn down, with the exception of the major remediation project at Latoon Bridge which didn't get underway as early as had been planned. However, the project is now well advanced and the funding required to complete the project is incorporated in the 2018 allocations and the new bridge is proposed to be opened in May 2018.

Listed hereunder are a number of the highlights/works that took place:-

- Strengthening/surface dressing of more than 188km of road network.
- Continuation of enhanced bridge remediation programme.
- Continuation of remediation works at a number of coastal sites affected by the coastal storms of early 2014.
- Latoon Bridge rehabilitation works
- Road Safety Programme.

Public lighting

Clare County Council has responsibility for the management and maintenance of almost 14,000 public lights in the county (with the exception of those pertaining to the motorway network). Public lighting is by far the largest energy consumption component of Local Authority infrastructure. The key priorities from a public lighting point of view include complete changeover to LED technology, achievement of the 2020 carbon footprint reduction target

and replacement of supporting infrastructure where required. Present indications are that financial arrangements may be put in place to facilitate local authorities in upgrading to LED technology which in turn would support very significant energy savings. The aspiration is that this upgrading would be achieved on a cost neutral basis, but over the coming years the council will have to find significant additional funding to cover the cost of replacement of other infrastructure such as defective columns, ducting, etc. – which will be significant and much of this work needs to be undertaken urgently. It is likely that, for the purpose of LED retrofitting, the county will be divided into 3 regions with the southern region, which would probably include Co. Clare, being the first to go to tender – possibly by 2019.

Coastal storm damage

The programme of remediation following the 2014 coastal storms continues. By the end of 2017 a total of €16.1 million had been spent on this programme (€2.5 million in 2017), which involved an array of repair and reconstruction works to sea walls, revetments, roads, piers and tourism infrastructure at several locations around the entire county coastline. The sum remaining to be spent in relation to the coastal damage repair programme at the end of 2017 was €2.9 million. The programme pertaining to same should be substantially completed in 2018 during which the main focus will be construction of the second phase of the Lahinch revetment project.

Separately, the strategy pertaining to coastal strengthening proposals is ongoing. The entire programme was completed within budget and to a high standard – thanks to the dedication and expertise of our workforce and the implementation of strict quality control.

Flood relief schemes

Arising from previous extreme flood events, including those of the 2015/2016 Winter period, the council has been pursuing feasible solutions in a number of areas with a view to minimisation of risk in the event that situations of a similar nature occur again. Among the locations under consideration in 2017 were

Springfield, Milltown Malbay, Ballyvaughan, Murtyclough (near New Quay), Kilkee and Clarecastle.

Roads capital projects

Killaloe By-Pass

Approximately 50% of this project is located in County Tipperary and so, a Section 85 Agreement is in place with Tipperary County Council. Following a series of interactions through the courts arising from an application for Judicial Review pursuant to the An Bord Pleanála approval to the project in early 2013, the Supreme Court cleared the way for the project to proceed in late 2016. The main focus through 2017 was on land acquisition. This will continue to be the case in 2018. It is envisaged that the land acquisition will be substantially completed by the end of 2018 – an allocation of €6,500,000 has been confirmed by Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to cater for this. The detailed design of the project is expected to get underway in the second quarter of 2018 – with a view to going to tender and commencement of construction of the entire project as a single contract in 2019.

Limerick Northern Distributor Road (Phase 2)

A Section 85 Agreement is also in place with Limerick City & County Council in relation to the proposed Limerick Northern Distributor Road (Phase II) – most of the project site is located within the jurisdiction of Clare County Council. Following on from Limerick City and County Council's successful variation of its Development Plan to reflect the Route Corridor location, the Preliminary Design work resumed and should be completed by the middle of 2018. Preliminary Design phase facilitates the design of the new road within the route corridor which is now reflected in both the Clare and Limerick Development Plans. The design process will take account of, in so far as is feasible, local concerns by locating the road as appropriately as possible within the corridor and by incorporating whatever mitigating measures are required to ensure that any adverse environmental or other impacts which may evolve are negated.

Blake's Corner, Ennistymon

A determination was confirmed in 2016 by An Bord Pleanála that neither an Environmental Impact Statement nor a Natura Impact Statement would be required and, therefore, the formal planning process to apply in determining the outcome of the proposal was the Part VIII process. Works advanced in 2017 in preparing the design to submit to Part VIII. The Part VIII Planning Application was formally submitted to Clare County Council in early January 2018 and the public consultation stage of same concluded in February 2018. It is hoped to be in a position to bring a firm recommendation in relation to the proposal before the April 2018 meeting of the council for consideration/approval.

N85 Kilnamona Realignment Scheme

Design work was ongoing throughout 2017 and a preferred route was identified. In early 2018, Preliminary Design will reach a conclusion and Ennis Municipal District Councillors will be briefed regarding the preferred route proposal. There was consultation during 2017 with effected property owners and further survey and assessment will be ongoing in 2018. Ennis Municipal District Councillors will be briefed before the planning process for the project gets underway in mid 2018.

Doolin Pier

The Doolin Pier Construction Project was completed in mid June of 2015 and the level of activity in terms of ferry operations has increased significantly over the past three tourist seasons, as a result of the additional flexibility and opportunity afforded by the development. The council appointed a team of consultants in 2016 to facilitate design and ultimate implementation of an overall master plan for the harbour and village areas to incorporate the development of an accommodation building, enhanced parking, traffic management etc. The council hopes to be in a position to submit formal planning proposals in relation to the development of a new accommodation building, parking and other ancillary facilities at Doolin Pier in the second half of 2018.

West Clare Railway Greenway

Construction work is completed on the 3km section from Ennis Town Centre to Lees Road Sports and Amenity Park. One to one consultation has been ongoing with potentially impacted property owners throughout 2017 and at this stage approximately 55% have been engaged with. The process of identification of the most appropriate route and associated deliberations with land owners will, by its nature, be time consuming and will be followed by the preparation of a briefing document to facilitate liaison with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport regarding a strategic approach to be adopted in relation to the development of the overall project – almost 50km of cycleway along the route (in so far as is feasible) of the West Clare Railway.

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. A comprehensive review of parking charges took place in Ennis town during 2017, where a unit price of €1.00 for car parking was introduced, the minimum fee on all on-street parking machines was increased from 20 cent to 50 cent and on-street car parking charges at O'Connell Street/Upper O'Connell Street, High Street, Barrack Street and Bank Place were set at €1.00 for 30 minutes. The council continues to invest in staff and resources to improve the service delivery in this area.

Other roads activities

Hedgecutting

Clare County Council provided an allocation of €10,000 to continue the Community Hedgecutting Grant Scheme in 2017. 32 grants were approved in 2017. This initiative is facilitating greater awareness among landowners of their responsibility in relation to management of roadside hedges in their properties.

Community Involvement Scheme

Clare County Council allocated €234,000 in 2017 as part of its Roadworks Programme in respect of Community Involvement Schemes which facilitated improvements being carried out to 14 public roads throughout the county.

Local Improvement Scheme

Clare County Council received an allocation of €866,774 in 2017 from the Department of Rural and Community Development in respect of the Local Improvement Scheme which facilitated upgrade works being carried out to 27 non public roads.

Doolin Harbour Bye Laws 2017

Clare County Council adopted Doolin Harbour Bye Laws for 2017 in respect of ferry operations from Doolin Pier. It is estimated that in excess of 150,000 passengers would have departed from Doolin Pier in 2017.

Fire and Emergency Services Department

A summary of activities in the area of Fire and Building Control in 2017 included:

Fire Service Operations

- 2017 call-outs to the Fire Service were similar to 2016 with 850 calls, down from the 2016 figure of 855 incidents
- There was 1 fire fatality in 2017 in County Clare
- Chimney fire callouts decreased by 24% to a historical low of 96 for 2017
- There was a slight increase in domestic fires in 2017 from 43 to 48. However there is a continuing trend of approximately 20% of such fires which may be due to incorrectly fitted stoves
- Full response to Storm Ophelia, with attendance at a large number of fallen trees, together with the clearance of fallen debris, assisted the

council's response in maintaining the major routes around the county available for use

- Delivery of a comprehensive Training Programme for Fire Service Personnel
- Tender for new Personal Protective Equipment (Fire-Kit) for all personnel
- Approval for a new Class B Fire Appliance worth approximately £350k + VAT given by the Department of Housing, Community and Local Government
- Planning permission obtained from Clare County Council for the upgrade works at Kilkee Fire Station
- Tender completed for upgrade Works at Kilkee Fire Station and submitted to the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management
- Refurbishment works completed at Ennis and Kilrush Fire Stations
- 4 personnel retired from the service, and 12 others resigned, with many of these taking up full-time positions in other sections of Clare County Council. 8 no. new recruits were taken on, with additional personnel being recruited around the county on an ongoing basis

Fire service performance indicators

| | Performance |
|--|-------------|
| Average time taken, in minutes to mobilise fire brigades in part-time stations in respect of fires | 5.53 mins |
| % of cases in respect of fire in which first attendance at the scene is within 10 minutes | 40.45% |
| % of cases in respect of fire in which first attendance at the scene is after 10 minutes but within 20 minutes | 35.99% |
| % of cases in respect of fire in which first attendance at the | 23.56% |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| scene is after 20 minutes | |
| Average time taken, in minutes to mobilise fire brigades in part-time stations in respect of all other (non-fire) emergency incidents | 5.83 mins |
| % of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the scene is within 10 minutes | 32.81% |
| % of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the scene is after 10 minutes but within 20 minutes | 46.69% |
| % of cases in respect of all other emergency incidents in which first attendance at the scene is after 20 minutes | 20.5% |

Health and safety

In February 2017, Clare County Fire & Rescue Service maintained the OHSAS 18001 Health & Safety Management System Standard for the implementation of their Safety Management System throughout the service following a surveillance visit by the National Standards Authority Ireland.

Fire prevention

- Risk Based Inspection Programme continued – Nursing Homes, apartment buildings and Hostels, with initial inspections carried out in recent years. Officers are now carrying out re-inspections on some areas.
- In partnership with the Housing Section, a review of fire safety in Traveller Accommodation was completed.
- Following the Grenfell Tragedy, similar to other fire authorities, a review of tall (>18m) buildings was carried out throughout the county, with external cladding assessments taking place where necessary
- In partnership with the Housing Section a review of fire safety in flats/apartments owned by the local authority was completed

- A large programme of work was carried out for Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Ennis in 2017 including:
 - A program of inspections targeted at venues proposed for the Fleadh was carried out and any necessary remedial works identified
 - Occupancy figures were calculated and monitored during the Fleadh
 - Advised on public safety in relation to many of the venues, stage areas, campsites, businesses and licensed premises
 - Provision of fire safety training to the volunteer venue managers
- 103 Fire Safety Certificate Applications were received in 2017, a slight increase on the 2016 figures
- There were 105 licence applications dealt with during 2017 by Fire Prevention Officers covering pubs, hotels, community centres and events throughout the county
- A successful School's Fire Safety Programme was carried out in 2017 whereby members of the Fire Service visited National Schools, providing them with fire safety advice and handouts to ensure that they could bring home the message of Fire Safety to their homes.

Building control

- Rate of inspections of new building works remained within target and 21% of notified buildings were inspected in 2017.
- With the online submission of commencement notices into the BCMS, the Building Control Section continues to carry out a technical desk study of every commencement notice, and where issues are identified, a follow-up is carried out by the particular Fire Officer involved.
- Increase in Disability Access Certificate Applications from the 2016 figures from 67 to 69 Disability Access Certificates in 2017.

Major Emergency Management

- Clare County Fire & Rescue Service continues to provide secretariat to the council's Major Emergency Management Committee. Clare County Fire & Rescue personnel also participate in the Mid West Regional Working Group and associated sub-committees and Shannon Airport Major Emergency Management Site Specific Group
- Procedures and plans prepared for dealing with major emergencies were put into action by Clare County Council as the lead agency in the response to Storm Ophelia during October 2017
- Ongoing training was provided to personnel who may be involved in delivery of key roles in the response to a major emergency to ensure Clare County Council remain prepared for responding to a major emergency
- Clare County Fire and Rescue Service led a test of the External Emergency Plan of ESB Moneypoint Power Generating Station in September 2017. The site is an Upper Tier Seveso Site under the "Control of Major Accident Hazards involving Dangerous Substances" legislation. The test involved simulating a large scale emergency incident at the site. The response to the incident involved all of the Local Competent Authorities (Clare County Council, An Garda Síochána, Health Services Executive & Shannon Foynes Port Authority).

Dangerous structures

- The number of cases reported to the local authority has reduced in 2017 to 15 from 26 in 2016. The most likely reason for this would be an upturn in property value and management of same.
- Continued difficulty in getting builders/property owners to carry out required works due to financial constraints, with the Local Authority having to provide funds from its own resources to carry out works to remedy dangerous situations on private properties on a number of occasions, with recoupment of the funds being difficult to get.

Civil Defence

Currently there are over 100 active volunteer members trained in a variety of disciplines including:

- Emergency medicine
- Technical rope rescue
- Fire fighting
- Swiftwater rescue
- Boating and search procedures
- Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) (drones)

Ten new volunteers joined the unit in 2017 and they have all completed a Recruit Basic Training course (this course is unique to Clare Civil Defence and is the first of its type in the country) and are now active members of the unit.

2017 was the busiest year for Clare Civil Defence on record (a 17% increase on 2016). This was attributed to in no small way by the massive role played by the unit in Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2017. Clare Civil Defence provided the entire medical cover for the event as well as providing Swiftwater rescue cover of the River Fergus throughout the event. Over 3,500 work hours were covered during the eight days by over 100 volunteers and Clare Civil Defence was very kindly assisted by colleagues from Counties Galway and Tipperary. A system for tracking medical crews on the ground to enable us to respond to calls for medical assistance pioneered for last year's Fleadh was used again in 2017. This resulted in the average response time of 45 seconds from the time of receiving a call to a crew being on scene (an improvement of 25% on 2016 response times). The entire operation for the event was a huge success.

Throughout the year volunteer members assisted various Clare County Council sections, the Irish Coast Guard and An Garda Síochána. The unit was involved in 12 missing person searches and helped to recover two bodies for An Garda Síochána. Members also assisted the University of Limerick on its Undergraduate and Post Graduate Paramedic Degree Courses as well as

providing assistance to 3rd & 4th year medical students for end of year exams. An emergency control room was set up for the duration of the Red Alert for Storm Ophelia and a crew of 12 personnel remained on standby at the unit's headquarters for the duration of the storm. 10 members were also trained as camera operators for the UAV (drone) unit and one other member was trained as a UAV pilot bringing the number of pilots in Clare to 3.

With the generous financial assistance of Clare County Council and the Department of Defence, a crew-cab long wheel base van was purchased in 2017 to improve the capabilities of the unit to assist the Principle Response Agencies. This van is currently being custom kitted to carry swiftwater and technical rescue gear for rapid deployment throughout the county. The unit remains capable and ready to answer calls for assistance as well as providing essential medical cover for a variety of community events into 2018 and beyond.

Social Development Directorate

The Social Development Directorate which incorporates the functions of Housing, Culture, Sport and Recreation commenced a number of new projects during the year including the new Housing Customer Relations Management (CRM), the new Planned Maintenance Plan for the council's entire housing stock, a traveler accommodation audit, and significant advances were made in respect of the new County Library delivery and the upgrade and rollout of new sports facilities in Ennis and Kilrush.

The overarching vision for the Social Directorate (Housing) Team Plan is:

“The Social Directorate will deliver a sustainable, community-centered County, underpinned by a vibrant social housing sector through a high standard of built environment and comprehensive arts, sport and culturally advanced support programme which will be central to the future of social development advancement of County Clare”.

The overarching vision for the Social Directorate (Culture, Arts, Sport and Recreation) Team Plan is:

“Clare will be a regional/national centre of culture, sport, arts, heritage, business and built environment, ensuring Clare is a preferred international destination for investment and innovation where the people and businesses of Clare are supported by the council”.

The Directorate Senior Team and entire staff have worked tirelessly to deliver work outputs set out in the Directorate Team Development Plan 2017. The directorate is responsible for the construction, purchase, leasing and renting of homes, traveller accommodation, provision of homeless accommodation as well as the ongoing maintenance and management of 2,500 housing stock. In the provision of high quality essential housing services to the people of Clare, the council relies on close working relationships with customers and a range of other statutory agencies and external service providers. Allied to this, a close working relationship with the Elected Members of the council is essential as are inputs to policy direction from the Social Strategic Policy Committee (SPC). The Social SPC met on six occasions in 2017 and agreed a range of

policy initiatives that went to the full council and was implemented. With increased financial assistance from Government's Rebuilding Ireland, the council's housing delivery for 2017 was given a renewed focus with the supply of 270 additional social housing units throughout the County.

The following is a synopsis of some of the services and policy initiatives the directorate's respective teams delivered in 2017:

Estate management

There are now 40 residents associations in local authority estates throughout the county. In 2017 the council had excellent participation in the annual Best Kept Estates Competition, which saw a prize fund of €7,450 being divided among 23 residents' groups. The overall winner and the recipient of the Mary Hennessy Memorial Award was Rooska, Lisdoonvarna. Increased year on year estate management activity includes casework referrals to relevant agencies and proactively dealing with issues of tenancy breaches and sustainability.

Tenant Purchase Scheme

A Tenant Purchase Scheme based on incremental purchase principles was introduced during 2016. Under the terms of the scheme tenants with a reckonable gross income of €15,000 per annum or above may apply to purchase the council property they are renting. A minimum of 50% must be in the form of employment income. Discounts available are based on household income and range from 40% to 60% of the market value. The discounts are subject to an incremental purchase charge. There has been significant interest in the scheme and 8 properties were sold under the scheme in 2017.

Housing assessments and allocations

During 2017, a total of 771 applications for social housing support were assessed by the Housing Department. There are now approximately 2,600 approved applicants for social housing support on the housing waiting list. The experience to date tells us it is likely that a significant proportion of these applicants are interested in housing support via the housing assistance

payment (HAP) and do not wish to be considered for standard local authority housing.

The Housing Department allocated 166 new tenancies in the council's standard housing stock during the year.

Resettlement programme

In early 2017, under the UNHCR led Resettlement Programme, Ennistymon welcomed 9 Syrian families into their community. A total of 18 Syrian families have now relocated to Co. Clare. They continue to be supported by an inter agency group coordinated by Clare County Council and chaired by the Director of Service whilst including all relevant agencies such as Tusla, Health Service Executive (HSE), Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB), Clare Local Development Company, the Department of Social Protection, Clare County Childcare Committee, Clare Immigrant Support Centre & An Garda Síochána.

Housing loans

A total of 44 'annuity loan' applications were received during 2017. Work on the restructuring option for Shared Ownership borrowers is ongoing with 46 Shared Ownership Loans currently in this process. Repayment arrangements are to be structured on the basis of affordability and will involve restructuring all outstanding debt into a single Annuity Loan. The term of the loan will be determined by the amount of the monthly repayment deemed to be affordable and sustainable for each Shared Ownership borrower.

The council is continuing to implement the guidance on mortgage arrears under the revised Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP). At the end of 2017 there were 12 customers in the MARP process. The council is also implementing the Mortgage to Rent Scheme and Voluntary Surrender for unsustainable loans and 5 borrowers made agreements under these schemes during the year.

The level of arrears on housing loans reduced in 2017. A 6% improvement in collection levels was recorded at year end with a corresponding reduction of €134,000 in net arrears. This was due to a combination of a number of re-

payment agreements being adhered to including those under MARP arrangements, re-structuring of shared ownership loans and the taking back into stock of dwellings where unsustainable loans were in place.

House acquisitions

During 2017, the council continued with its House Acquisition Programme. While house prices increased over the last year and supply in this delivery area is becoming increasingly limited, nevertheless agreement was reached for the acquisition of 71 dwellings, contracts were signed for 97 dwellings at year end and sales closed in respect of 88 properties. Offers are continuing to be made while there is value in the market. Cumulatively, since mid-2015, when the House Acquisition Programme commenced, it has been agreed to purchase 214 dwellings, contracts were signed for 190 and sales closed in respect of 180 dwellings. The council will continue to purchase dwellings until the Social Housing Construction Programme commences later in 2018.

A new Buy and Renew Scheme was introduced in 2017 to support actions around urban renewal and the work outlined in the council's vacant homes strategy. This scheme allows local authorities to exploit the potential to buy vacant houses and suitable premises in cities and towns where there is a strong demand for social housing. 5 no. dwellings are progressing under this scheme and are also included in the acquisition totals above.

Repair and lease scheme

The council continues to seek properties under this scheme. To date take-up has been slow, which is also a feature nationally, due to the fact that a number of properties have been offered that are not in areas of social housing demand, and the cost of refurbishment work required to bring up to current rental standards is far in excess of the maximum allowable. Enhancements to the scheme are to be introduced in 2018 which it is hoped will encourage more property owners to make applications under the scheme.

Planned maintenance project

During 2017, the Social Development Directorate went to tender for the provision of services to complete condition surveys and a planned maintenance programme for the council's social housing stock. The three elements to the programme are:

- Completion of a condition survey of the council's stock of owned social housing.
- Generation of schedules of works and cost plans from the condition surveys.
- Preparation of a capital expenditure proposal for a multi-annual Planned Maintenance Programme, initially over a 5-year timeframe, but also projecting forward to examine maintenance needs over the next 30 years.

The council has constructed or acquired a substantial housing stock of ~2,500 units including traveller accommodation units, ranging in age of construction from 1930 up to the present time. This represents a significant investment and the council wants to ensure that this housing stock is managed and maintained into the future, to protect the significant asset investment already made.

Consultants have been appointed and the project will be advanced during 2018.

Vacant Homes Strategy

During 2017, the council was requested to prepare a Clare 'Vacant Homes Strategy'. This report considered and analysed the census information which reported a vacancy rate of 19.6% in Co. Clare - higher than the national average of 12.3%. The conclusion of the report is that true vacancy in Co. Clare is significantly less than the reported figure at less than 10% and the significant number of holiday homes in Co. Clare are not taken into account, or the fact that the vacancy that exists is generally detached rural properties in areas of low housing demand. The council has commenced work to bring into

stock vacant homes identified in the compilation of the Vacant Homes Strategy and the initial focus is on Kilrush town which has a significant vacancy rate.

The delivery of social housing was a key priority for the directorate during 2017. The delivery of social housing through new construction is a priority for the Minister and has been reiterated at the recent Housing Summits. In this regard, the details hereunder indicate the current stage of the council projects on hand:

Quilty – 18 units

This project was developed to planning preparation stage during February. The Part VIII is due to be lodged in early March 2018.

Feakle – 13 units

This scheme was granted planning at the council meeting held on 19th February. The scheme is now being prepared for Stage 3 submission to the Department (pre tender).

Clonlara – 9 units

This scheme was lodged for Stage 3 approval in February and is currently with the Department.

Roslevan, Ennis – 8 units

This scheme received Department Stage 2 approval in February and is now proceeding to planning stage.

Ashline, Ennis – 40 units

Demolition of the existing traveller accommodation site was completed in February. A tender for a consultancy design team was also launched in February.

In late 2017, the department introduced a new Capital Delivery Programming Strategy to accelerate the stage approvals through to signing of a construction

contract within 59 weeks. The council are striving to meet this accelerated timeline with a new enhanced capital delivery programme being established.

In addition, the council has recruited additional staff to focus on securing lands, to ensure a future housing supply. The primary focus for this project is Ennis, as this is the area of greatest housing demand. In September 2017, as required by the department, the council submitted a Strategic Development and Management Plan for local authority lands. The plan provides the status of lands owned and potential acquisitions on an ongoing basis with a view to strategic overview of short, medium and long-term social housing delivery in Co. Clare.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF)

Clare County Council was one of 14 local authorities who were successful in securing funding under this initiative. The aim of the project is to provide upfront funding for local authorities to provide infrastructure to facilitate the development of housing on zoned lands.

Co. Clare was approved for the Claureen Scheme which has a budget approval of €3.66 million. This project is multi dimensional as the initial project is for the provision of new road infrastructure to open up these zoned lands and in tandem, it is required that delivery of housing remains on target. LIHAF includes a significant co-ordination role to ensure the objective of the initiative is met.

Social Housing Public Private Partnership (PPP) Programme - Shannon

The Social Housing Public Private Partnership (PPP) Programme is a collaboration between the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government (DHPLG), the council and a specially formed Project Company. In 2017 the council, in partnership with the National Development Finance Agency, worked to produce a scheme proposal to Stage 2 (pre-planning) with the department. This will deliver 51 housing units for which the council will have full nomination rights. The development will be managed by the private company for the duration of the agreement.

Social Leasing Scheme

Clare County Council leases private housing to meet the housing needs of social housing applicants. At the end of 2017, there were 117 active 'short term' leases and 127 active 'long term' leases in place. The number of leases with approved voluntary housing bodies at the end of 2017 stands at 135 units.

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme continues to provide a viable alternative for social housing in Co. Clare. To be eligible for a Housing Assistance Payment, the person (or both persons for a joint application) applying must be currently on Clare County Council's housing list. The scheme provides assistance for those eligible to pay their rent in private rented accommodation. It is up to the applicant to source the private rented accommodation. The tenancy agreement remains a private agreement between the tenant and their landlord. Where a person(s) is deemed eligible for HAP, a monthly payment is made directly to their landlord by the local authority. A person who is approved for a Housing Assistance Payment is also required to pay a differential rent to the local authority, which is based on income. By the end of 2017, there were 1,193 households receiving assistance under the HAP scheme in Co. Clare.

Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)

There were 386 households on RAS at the end of 2017. 31 additional units were provided during the year with 66 units withdrawn from the scheme. The number of tenancies under this scheme is falling, with transition from this scheme into other social housing i.e. other social housing, private rented housing supported by HAP, long and short term leasing arrangements or a positive change regarding their housing need. The council has a responsibility to inspect private rented properties in accordance with the Housing (Standards for Rented) Houses Regulations 2017. A total of 496 properties, including HAP, RAS and leasing properties, were inspected in 2017.

Voluntary housing

Clare County Council continues to work with the approved voluntary housing bodies to meet the housing supply requirement. Co-Operative Housing Ireland delivered 28 housing units at Lios Anama, Sixmilebridge and 23 housing units at Aisling, Ennis in late 2017. The 51 tenants appointed to these properties were nominated by the council from the social housing list.

Homelessness services

During 2017, the council were proactive in dealing with the increasing homeless presentations in Co. Clare. 494 people were assisted through the homelessness clinics during 2017, an increase from 427 in 2016. To address the homelessness situation in Co. Clare during 2017, sales were agreed on two properties; one to house a Homeless Action Team (HAT) office and the other to provide a family HUB. These facilities in addition to the hostel at Laurel Lodge, Ennis, which provides emergency accommodation and care for homeless men, will greatly enhance homeless services in Co. Clare. The council continues to work in partnership with the Department of Social Protection and the HSE to deliver other homelessness services. The Clare Homeless Action Plan 2013-2018 is due to be renewed in 2018.

Traveller accommodation

Traveller accommodation continues to present challenges, particularly in the context of the rapid growth in the size of young traveller households. The Traveller Accommodation Programme (TAP) 2014 – 2018 will need to be renewed during 2018, therefore the process for the development of the Traveller Accommodation Plan 2019-2023 will shortly commence. It is intended to continue work to achieve the target in the current TAP plan, in the context of rising demand and increasing capital funding availability. The council continues to work with relevant agencies and groups on initiatives to develop a framework to deliver integrated support services to the traveller community.

Housing grants

In 2017, a total of 426 grants were approved for payment to disabled and elderly persons in private accommodation, to facilitate the continued occupation of their houses at a cost of €2,897,226.

Refurbishment of casual vacancies

In 2017, the council refurbished 64 vacant properties and returned these to productive use. Of these properties, 60 were refurbished through department funding, with the balance financed through the council's own resources.

Energy efficiency upgrades

Investment under the Energy Efficiency Programme continued in 2017 which saw the council complete Phase 1 energy efficiency upgrades to all cavity built council owned properties. The completion of Phase 1 works allowed the council to focus on the delivery of the Phase 2 energy efficiency upgrade of circa 100 solid/hollow block construction type dwelling houses in council ownership. However, in 2017 no funding for the Phase 2 energy efficiency upgrade was provided by the DHPLG so the council applied for and received approval under the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's (SEAI) Better Energy Communities Scheme (on the basis of 35% funding from the SEAI) for the upgrade of 20 number Phase 2 houses in Ennis. This included external wall insulation, roof and attic insulation, replacement windows/doors and associated works. Funding was provided by SEAI for 35% of the cost and the remaining 65% being funded by the Department of Housing and council own resources.

Sports and recreation

The output of the sports unit increased significantly in 2017 and the unit now has responsibility for sports and recreation throughout the County of Clare. This involves the strategic development of owned and managed facilities and promotion, development and support for clubs, organisations and volunteers, working for the health and wellbeing of our citizens.

The council is working towards the ultimate goal to make County Clare the Sports and Recreation 'Hub' of the Mid West Region, that the importance of participating in active recreation, sport and physical activity will be recognised and promoted, and that everyone living in or visiting the county will have an equal opportunity to enrich their lives through participation.

One of the main focuses this year has been to work with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Ministers of State, Senators, TD's, Elected Members, European Partners, the Southern Regional Assembly and engage in cross directorate co-operation to investigate various European and National funding streams to assist in our mission.

To this end, the following has been achieved:

- The Social Development Directorate through the Sports and Recreation Unit have secured European Funding from the Erasmus+, Key Action 3 – Initiatives for policy innovation – Social inclusion through education, training and youth. Known as the 'Atlantic Youth Project', the objective is to encourage and develop the maritime culture of young Europeans, through the practice of water sports and maritime education at school. With partners in Spain, Portugal, France, United Kingdom and Ireland (Clare County Council), the 'Atlantic Youth Project' will contribute to the implementation of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy, through the development of the maritime culture among young people, through water sports and maritime education in schools and clubs, which will encourage the upcoming generation to consider maritime sport/recreation and industry as a career path.
- Applications granted under the 2015 Sports Capital Grant Programme were completed in 2017. Namely, the refurbishment of the astro turf at Active Ennis John O Sullivan Park, Lees Road and the refurbishment of the gymnasium at Active Ennis Leisure Complex.
- Funding of €98,500 has been granted from the 2017 Sports Capital Programme towards the completion of the works programme at

Active Ennis Tim Smythe Park. Funding of €82,000 has been granted from the 2017 Sports Capital Programme for dressing room and toilet facilities at Active Kilrush Sports Complex. The council is currently in the process of appealing the Kilrush funding. This decision is backed up on advice from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and should result in additional funding for the project.

- Funding of €10,000 has been granted under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme towards a Fartlek Interval Training System at Active Ennis John O Sullivan Park, Lees Road. Fartlek which means 'speed play' in Swedish is a training method that blends continuous training with interval training. The system will be integrated into the existing woodland walks.
- Funding has been granted through the Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure 2017 Scheme towards 3 x all terrain wheelchairs. Two of which will be based in Active Ennis John O Sullivan Park, Lees Road and one in Active Kilrush Sports Complex. These wheelchairs will enable people with disabilities to tackle challenging surfaces with confidence and safety. The achievement of an inclusive society not only benefits those individuals and communities who are positively impacted but in addition, allows society at large to benefit from their contribution.
- Facilities and services are recognised by the nominations for various awards distributed throughout the year. Active Ennis and Active Kilrush were highly commended in the 2017 'Excellence in the Local Government Awards' for supporting active communities and for disability services provision. Active Ennis Leisure Complex received commendation within the Disability Services Provision category for the outstanding facilities and services that are provided for all clients. Active Kilrush received further acclamation in relation to the Clare County Council International "One Tree Per Child" Initiative. These two projects were also shortlisted for the All Ireland Community and Council Awards. Active Ennis Leisure Complex, for the first time in

2017, applied for the 'National Inclusion Awards' run by CARA. This award recognises organisations and people who enhance participation opportunities for people with disabilities in sport, physical activity and physical education, and the council was shortlisted with two other facilities in this category.

- Active Ennis Leisure Complex has once again been awarded the White Flag Gold Standard Award by Ireland Active, an award held since 2001. The complex has also retained its Gold Standard in Disability Services, continually achieved since its introduction in 2012.
- The relationship with Clare Sports Partnership has grown in strength and the Head of Sports & Recreation joined its Board of Directors last year. A good working relationship with all partners has been achieved and this is further evidenced with the Clare Local Sports Partnership being nominated and short listed by the Federation of Irish Sports Industry Awards.
- The Federation of Irish Sport has announced the shortlist of finalists for the 2018 Sport Industry Awards. The awards were set up in 2015 to highlight the contribution that sport makes to Ireland's economy both directly and indirectly. The winners will be announced at a ceremony on Wednesday, 7th March in the Banquet Hall at Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin 8. The awards recognise and reward excellence in the business of sport, whilst simultaneously highlighting the contribution of sport to Ireland.

This honour shows the commitment to the people of Co. Clare, of setting the standard in becoming one of the healthiest and most physically active counties in Ireland. The council is proud to be working closely with them in achieving this goal. See below details of the award category:-

Category 5 - Local Sport Partnership of the Year Award

- Limerick Local Sports Partnership - Sports Inclusion Club

- Waterford Local Sport – Waterford Sports Partnership Balance Bike Programme
- Laois Local Sport Partnership - Transformation Programme for women over 50
- Clare Local Sport Partnership - Active Primary Schools programme
- Cork Local Sports Partnership - Cork Sports Ability

Library

Clare Library Service activated a full programme of activities for all ages during 2017. The first half of the year, however, was still dominated by lack of staff resources in some branches which necessitated closures for periods of time of Corofin and Lisdoonvarna branches and some short notice closures of full-time branches. The new staff resources were in situ from the latter part of 2017, which enabled all branches to operate full time hours and participate in full programming. Despite the inconsistency in some opening hours of branches, total stock issues were up by 13% on 2016 figures with 46% of issues to adults and 54% of issues to children. The borrowing of e-books and magazines increased by 112% on last year but still remain only 2% of all stock issues. Library membership was down slightly on last year by 5% with a decrease also in static internet PC usage of 10% but an increase in Wi-Fi usage of 5%. Popular e-language courses were German, Spanish, French and Japanese with Excel, Accounting and Book Keeping, Typing and Yoga Courses, which were proving popular among our learners. Women's interest magazines dominated the top five of all magazine issues with Hello, Women's Weekly, 25 Beautiful Homes, BBC Food and Good Housekeeping proving most popular.

A highlight of activities in programming of children's services included the visit of Laureates na nÓg past and present to Ennis in February, welcomed by Clare County Library. At a special schools event for 5th and 6th classes, teachers and pupils attended a live drawing experience by current Laureate PJ Lynch. PJ was accompanied by fellow award-winning, world renowned author and ex Laureate Eoin Colfer. An accompanying exhibition of PJ

Lynch's paintings 'Pilgrims, Princesses and Beardy Old Men' also showed at Glór. "Spring into Storytime", a new national initiative, took place in eight branch libraries in April. Young children and their parents took part in interactive story sessions with a special focus for parents on the importance of sharing stories with children from the earlier ages and growing a reading habit in the home. Seachtain na Gaeilge and World Book Day were marked in all branches with art workshops, author visits, storytelling and illustration workshops. "Summer Stars", the national Summer Reading Programme was promoted throughout July and August, with a launch event for parents and children at Kilrush Library with storyteller Niall de Burca. Award ceremonies for participating children and their parents took place in Ennistymon, Ennis, Shannon, Scariff, and Kilrush libraries in September. Entertainment included balloon twisting, storytelling and art events. 2,600 children visited libraries during Children's Book Festival in October 2017 and participated in a total of 55 events. The main event, featuring authors Caroline Busher and E.R. Murray, attracted a full capacity audience. During Science Week in November hundreds of Co. Clare children enjoyed "The Science Magic Show" facilitated by W5, the award winning Interactive Discovery Centre in Belfast.

Children's bookstock including an eBooks collection was refreshed and maintained throughout the year, in keeping with the library's collection development policy.

Active programming for adult audiences was reflected in attendance/number of visits to the various branches. The number of visits to libraries in County Clare in 2017 was 395,820. The number of events in libraries was 1,000 - these included ongoing activities such as book clubs, storytime, film clubs, craft sessions, computer classes, as well as events marking national activities such as Seachtain na Gaeilge, Bealtaine, Africa Day, Heritage Week etc. 12,565 people attended these events.

One of the most innovative events taking place in 2017 was the launch of 'Libraries Ireland' in May to 'make every library in Ireland your local library service'. The new national service provides access for Co. Clare library members to over 15 million items in the 333 library branches across the country. The service allows members of the library to request books and have

these delivered quickly and efficiently to their local branches. The Libraries Ireland Service also provides free access to library members to a huge range of online resources, e-books, e-audiobooks, e-newspapers, e-magazines, e-courses and e-languages. The Ennis Book Club Festival was a big success in early March, with support from Clare Library.

'Healthy Ireland at your Library' is a new national strategy to improve health and wellbeing, placing a focus on prevention, individual awareness and keeping people healthy for longer. Public libraries are currently delivering the programme that will establish libraries as a valuable source within the community for health information. Training for staff in County Clare is underway. In conjunction with the initiative, an event was held for adults in Scariff Library on 'Heartfulness Meditation' with Rebecca Hussey. The session dealt with finding a balance during the Christmas season and de-stressing with a session of heart based relaxation and meditation. As part of the Outreach Service, Clare Library participated at the Older People's Forum Roadshows in Kilkee, Ennis, Tulla and Ennistymon, providing information on the services and facilities available to older people. A monthly library lending service operates at Kilmaley Daycare Centre where approximately 70 items including books, CDs and audio books are issued monthly during specially designated library mornings to residents.

The library also continues to team up with Friends Ireland, a group that provides volunteers to teach basic computer/laptop/tablet/mobile phone classes on an ongoing basis. The classes are free and were run in Ennis and Shannon libraries. The Surfbox Self-Service Print-Scan-Copy service already available at libraries in Ennis and Shannon has been extended to Scariff, Kilrush and Ennistymon libraries. Users can print from a library computer and/or can remotely print from their laptop, home PC, tablet or Smartphone. Both Black and White and Colour Printing is available. Customers can also use Surfbox to scan documents to email or to USB. This service is proving a great success with customers. Wi-Fi is now available at Kilrush, Miltown Malbay, Ennistymon, Scariff and Sixmilebridge libraries. Prior to the latest installments in 2017, it was already available in Ennis and Shannon libraries.

An exhibition 'Friends in Time of Turmoil' was displayed at the Ennis Library. It highlighted the historic connections between Poland and Ireland. In conjunction with the exhibition, a lecture on the history of Irish-Polish relations by Dr Roisin Healy, NUIG took place and members of the local Polish community attended in traditional dress. An exhibition on the 1917 East Clare By-Election toured the libraries. Talks were held in conjunction with the exhibition. Upgrading of carpets in Shannon Library was completed in 2017. New steps/safety railings were erected at the entrance to the Local Studies Centre – a significant improvement in facilitating public access.

Arts service

2017 was a busy year for Clare Arts Office once again, with significant involvement with Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. The Riches of Clare concert series held 21 concerts (5 throughout the county during the Fleadh). The Arts Office commissioned further artworks for the roundabouts during Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, as well as organising traditional singing workshops for children and supporting the Fleadh generally. The culmination of the traditional Singers in Residence took place on the Fleadh Gig rig with the Mayor launching the CD "Ag Canadh sa Chláir". 22 schools participated in the Artist in Schools Scheme throughout the county, augmented by the work of Music Generation's Music Education Programme, supported by the Arts Office. The traditional Singers in Residence Project further developed with a marked increase in the number of secondary schools participating.

Almost 50 arts projects took place with disability organisations, culminating in a Christmas Concert in Cois na hAbhna and an exhibition and performance in Glór in May. A national arts and disability seminar was organised by the Arts Office in Ennis in October, with speakers from national organisations in attendance. The Arts Office organised almost 30 exhibitions in Kilkee, Scariff and Ennis, as well as professional development sessions for artists in the area of developing proposals. Working with Glór, the Arts Office supported a series of First Friday talks for artists in conjunction with The Artists' Resource Room. Clare Youth Theatre continued to meet weekly and adapted and performed "Ballet Shoes" in Glór, in April. Almost 50 events were organised in 18

locations county-wide as part of Culture Night in September. Over 100 individuals, events and festivals were supported by the annual grants and bursary schemes. Support was given to the development of the Creative Ireland programme and strategy for the county. The “Arts in Health Programme” continued in St. Joseph's Hospital, Ennis and in Raheen Day Care Centre, Tuamgraney. Once again, over 2,000 people attended events in Culturlann Sweeney, Kilkee throughout the year. Tulla Stables Studios operated to full capacity and work began on creating new artist's studios in Ennis.

Clare Museum

There were just over 32,000 visits to Clare Museum during 2017, a figure which includes some 6,400 visits during August, the month that Ennis hosted the All-Ireland Fleadh. Educational workshops were a popular feature, with 1,940 pupils from 32 primary and secondary schools visiting the museum during the year. This figure includes support provided by the museum to several LCETB Adult Education Courses in Ennis and Scariff. The museum made a successful application for Full Accreditation under the Heritage Council's Museum Standard Programme for Ireland during the year and this status will be officially bestowed on the museum in June 2018. This has been a long term objective of the museum and places it among a handful of other local authority museums who have attained full accreditation under the Museum Standards Programme. As part of the application, the museum required an Education Policy and a Care of Collections Policy which were adopted by Clare County Council in December 2017. A total of 275 items were accessioned to the museum collection during the year, the highest number since the museum opened in 2000. The standout item was an autograph book carried by a local woman during the 1917 By-Election, and is now on display.

Archives Service

The Archives Service continued to digitise material from the Local Authority Archival Collections. The Board of Guardian Collection has been completely

digitised in 2017. The project has proceeded significantly and continues to remain on schedule.

The processing of the Ennis Urban Authority Collection is nearing completion. Accruals from the Kilrush Town Council Archival Collection have been transferred to the archives for processing. These archives will add greatly to the existing collection and will ultimately be digitised.

The archives dealt with a large amount of queries in the areas of genealogy, local authority and private collections, particularly in relation to Our Lady's Collection.

The Archives Service continually deals with queries from the public wishing to view material in the Local Studies Library from the archives collection.

Glór

Glór's mission is to be a leading Irish arts centre of excellence for audiences, artists and communities, by presenting quality arts experiences, which enhance Clare's rich cultural landscape and by innovating particularly within the traditional arts.

In 2017, Glór sold 50,000 tickets to over 250 performances including:-

- Acclaimed productions from Irish and international artists,
- A very popular family arts programme,
- A Visual Arts programme that featured an open call exhibition called Halycon Days (which received 213 submissions nationwide) and
- A new Film Programme which 2,200 people attended.

Glór also hosted numerous community events and performances, and in particular presented many productions featuring young talent from local primary and secondary schools, theatre, dance and music schools. Other highlights included; initiating an Associate Artists programme and supporting two high caliber artists, Dave Flynn and Catherine Ireton in the development of new work, with plans to continue these partnerships and increase the number of artists supported. Massive audiences were recorded through the Ennis Book Club Festival, Ennis Street Festival, Ennis Food Festival and

other major events during the year. There was a very successful engagement with both the Fleadh Nua and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann for which Glór provided box office services for all the events selling 23,000 tickets for the Fleadh 2017, as well as hosting over 20 very successful concerts over 9 days. The annual highlight MÓRglór Award Night in October, which honoured the outstanding contribution of Clare musician Geraldine Cotter to the traditional arts, continues to be a successful event. Direct costs have increased in line with this growth in activity and Glór continues to seek to develop other funding streams through public sources, corporate and individual membership, sponsorship and fundraising. During 2017, Glór was successful in receiving funding through the Leader Rural Development Programme which enabled a number of capital purchases. Glór's partnership with Cultúrlann Sweeney Theatre continued, as did the café partnership with Raviolo Verde.

Rural Development Directorate

Rural Development Strategy and Forum

The Clare Rural Development Strategy 2026 was launched on 7th September 2017 by Michael Ring, T.D., Minister for Rural and Community Development, at a ceremony hosted by the Clare Rural Development Forum in Kilmaley Community Day-Care Centre.

The 10-year blueprint targets the creation of 4,000 jobs over the lifetime of the plan, the development of community-run Multi-Service Centres, innovative rural transport initiatives such as a type of 'Rural Uber' and the employment by Clare County Council of Rural Community Development Officers, who will be supporting local and community groups in the county.

Local Community Development Committee

During 2017, the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) managed the delivery of the 3-year programme to a successful conclusion and also concluded a tender process for a new €5.2m five year programme up to 2022. A number of funding supports were also managed and approved by the LCDC during the year and these included the Communities Facilities Scheme, the RAPID Programme and the Healthy Ireland Fund. The LCDC also finalised a CRM for the tracking of the Local Economic and Community Plan Actions and continues to monitor implementation.

Public Participation Network (PPN)

A Service Level Agreement for 2017 was finalised between the PPN and Clare County Council and an annual work plan agreed for the year. The Secretariat supported by a Co-ordinator drives the work of the PPN.

The 2017 operational costs of the PPN were met from a department grant of €50,000 and a contribution from Clare County Council of €30,000.

Age-Friendly Strategy

Clare County Council co-ordinates the delivery of the County's inter-agency Age-Friendly Strategy with eight agencies leading or supporting the delivery of the various actions. Clare County Council is committed to delivering its services in an age-friendly manner. The Age Friendly Alliance Board is supported by the work of the Older People's Council and by the Implementation Team which is directly responsible for the delivery of the Action Plan. In 2017, work commenced on the development of the 2nd Age Friendly Strategy for Clare for the period 2018-2022.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2017

€944,000 was secured in funding to support the enhancement and economic potential of nine towns and villages in the county. These areas include Doonbeg, Kildysart, Kilrush/Kilkee, Miltown Malbay, Newmarket-on-Fergus, Tulla, Clarecastle, Ennistymon and Scariff/Tuamgraney.

CLÁR Initiative 2017

Nine projects benefitted from approved funding of €323,132 under the CLÁR Initiative 2017. Of the nine projects, six national schools (Ballyea, Connolly, Kilshanny, Lakyle, Iniscealtra and Broadford) were afforded the opportunity to develop additional play facilities and the remaining three projects addressed road safety issues in Kilnamona, Ballynacally and Ogonnelloe.

Lough Derg Blueway

With the assistance of a grant of €200,000 from the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs under the REDZ initiative, the Lough Derg Blueway Marketing and Promotional Programme was delivered during 2017. A series of capacity building workshops were organised and marketing and promotional material produced, which included a number of guides, a promotional video and branded materials. This project was a collaboration between Clare, Tipperary and Galway County Councils and Waterways Ireland.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

Six projects were approved funding of €55,917 under this national scheme.

The projects included the following:-

- Upgrade of a parking area at Vandeleur Walled Gardens
- Development of an amenity area and walkway at Cappa
- Installation of a Fartlek training system at Lees Road
- Development of a river walk in Kilrush
- Development of loop walks on the East Clare Way and
- A cycling/mountain bike trail along parts of the existing Mid-Clare Way

Public Area Enhancement Scheme

31 projects benefitted under the Public Area Enhancement Scheme 2017 with total funding of €160,000 allocated to various towns and villages across the county. This has been a very successful and positive scheme in County Clare. The groups were supported and assisted by council staff in the development of their projects.

Tidy Towns

Ennis was named Ireland's Tidiest Large Urban Centre in the 59th annual National Tidy Towns Competition, while Kilrush was awarded a Gold Medal in its category. Ennis was named overall winner of the 'Gum Litter Task Force' and 'Can it' awards and also picked up a County Award along with Kilrush and Mountshannon. Lisdoonvarna won an Endeavour Award, and Bronze Medals were awarded to Quin, Ballynacally, Ballyvaughan and Tuamgraney.

The council organised a briefing session for all Tidy Towns groups on the 6th December. The briefing featured a slideshow presentation and talks by guest speakers, giving advice to the groups on how they can strive to achieve higher marks in the annual competition. Guest speakers included Aileen Campion - Birdhill Tidy Towns (winners of the 2017 Tidy Town's competition), Janice

Fuller – National Tidy Towns adjudicator, Karen Foley - Environmental Awareness Officer, Congella McGuire – Heritage Officer.

Pride of Place and Clare in Bloom Competitions

Pride of Place Competition is an annual all-island competition run by Co-operation Ireland in conjunction with local authorities north and south of the border and Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurance. It aims to recognise and celebrate the vital contributions that communities make to society along with generating awareness, respect and inclusion for every facet of society.

Co. Clare was represented in the competition by An Garda Síochána in Category 6 (Community-Based Youth Initiative), and Cooraclare and Cree in Category 8 (Communities Reaching Out Initiative), with the latter project receiving a special award.

The Clare in Bloom Competition featured again in 2017 and recognises the valuable contribution that local groups make to the continuous improvement and visual presentation of their areas.

Burial grounds

40 priming grants were paid to voluntary committees to assist them in the maintenance of burial grounds throughout the county. The work of these voluntary groups is invaluable. An additional grant totalling €8,000 was paid towards the development of Kildysart Burial Ground extension. The council also purchased lands at Kildysart Road, Ballaghafadda, Ennis in an effort to progress the development of a new public graveyard to cater for the local community.

Community Playground Support Scheme

Clare County Council approved a Community Playground Support Scheme for 2017, which supports community groups who own and manage their own playgrounds. The funding assists with costs of insurance, maintenance, audit fees as well as annual health and safety inspections. 21 community playgrounds benefited from this scheme at a total cost of €28,400.

Clare Comhairle Na nÓg

Clare Comhairle Na nÓg is part of a national initiative from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Comhairle Na nÓg aims to provide an opportunity for young people, in the 12-18 age range, to identify the issues that are important to them, discuss some of the changes they would like to see and bring forward ideas and suggestions for bringing about change.

The members participated in a range of activities relating to mental health, public transport and cyber safety and hosted youths from Iceland on a return international exchange. Comhairle Na nÓg members presented their achievements to the Rural Development Strategic Policy Committee.

The exchange with their Icelandic peers provided great learning from peer mentoring on cyber safety, to establish international best practice.

Broadband, Digital and Information Technology Department

Clare County Council's Broadband, Digital and Information Technology Department is responsible for the provision of Information Communications Technology (I.C.T.) services to all employees of Clare County Council. The council's network now covers 15 different locations throughout the county, supporting 500 users. These sites include local area offices in Shannon, Kilrush and Ennistymon, where the provision of services locally is facilitated through the use of I.C.T. Services. Services delivered locally include:-

- Motor tax
- Bill payment and enquiry
- The planning enquiry system

This department also facilitates the use of centrally hosted systems in the government hosting centre in Dublin. These systems include the Human Resources, Superannuation, Payroll System and the Higher Education Grants and Housing Systems.

In 2017 substantial investment was made in a number of our internal systems and network infrastructure. This included upgrading of our E-Mail and Data Archiving solutions, which has substantially increased the capacity of our systems.

Also following a procurement exercise, Clare County Council has selected the Arc G.I.S solution as its new Corporate Geographical Information Platform. This solution will provide the council with greater functionality and flexibility when utilising its organisational wide mapping solution.

The appointment of a County Broadband Officer in 2016 has also seen the commencement of a number of projects within the county. The role of the Broadband Officer is aimed at providing dedicated resources to promote and support the implementation of the National Broadband Plan and progress the rollout of Broadband throughout the county. The development of a Digital Strategy for the county has commenced with a view to being launched in early 2018. This strategy will identify the role that broadband can play in the future economic and social development of the county and also the role the local authorities can play to facilitate same. In tandem with this, a number of other programmes have commenced such as Wi-Fi enabling the public libraries of Kilrush, Ennistymon, Miltown Malbay, Sixmilebridge and Scariff, Wi-Fi enabling Ennis Town Centre and the establishment of Digital Hubs in Kilrush, Miltown Malbay and Feakle. The hub facilities will be available for the public in early 2018.

Economic Development Directorate

Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience

2017 marked the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience. The official opening date was 8th February 2007 and a 10th year anniversary function took place with all the main stakeholders to celebrate. It was a record year for visitor numbers at the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience with 1,526,440 visitors, a 7% increase year on year. Visitor numbers overall are up 61% since opening in 2007. During this period, the numbers employed by the Cliffs of Moher Centre Ltd and the other businesses on the site has grown steadily, making it one of the largest employers in North Clare.

The growth has not just been in the peak season but across the 12 months of the year. All markets performed strongly, in particular the US and Germany. New developing markets such as China, Australia and New Zealand have seen significant growth in 2017. There has been an increase in visitors booking their visit online to guarantee entry to the popular attraction.

Significant investment has been put in place to improve facilities. A new booking system went live in June 2017, transforming the handling of 48% of all customers to the Cliffs of Moher. A new coach reception building, additional toilet facilities and upgrading of the coach parking and layout commenced in October 2017 and the main coach park is temporarily closed during this period of construction. An organisational restructuring has taken place to manage the increased level of business, to improve functions, operations, and commercial management.

The Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark

The Burren and Cliffs of Moher UNESCO Global Geopark hosted 150 representatives from 70 European Geoparks in March. The 3 day event culminated in a tour of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher.

An Interreg Atlantic Area partnership with 11 other Geoparks launched the Atlantic Geoparks Project in May. This project will develop a tourism route of Geoparks along the Atlantic in Ireland, UK, France, Spain and Portugal.

The Geopark hosted official delegations from Japan, Finland and Hong Kong, looking at best practice in the Geopark.

Four additional Geopark Trails in Doolin, Killinaboy, Cahercomaun/Cusack Centre and Fanore were launched during Heritage Week.

The GeoparkLIFE programme continued to support the development of the Burren Ecotourism Network and developed on-line tools for sustainable tourism as follows:-

- The Code of Practice - a step by step guide for tourism businesses to save resources and contribute to the sustainable future of the Burren.
- The Heritage Map Viewer - a one stop shop Geographical Information System (GIS) for tourism and conservation datasets, reports and research for planners and managers.
- The Heritage Sites and Monitoring App - allows site managers to monitor and survey trails and sites, collate data and produce reports.

The Geopark hosted the final conference of the LIFE programme in November and launched the final reports summarising the outputs of a 5 year partnership between agencies, businesses and community groups.

The Geopark continues to produce and distribute free maps of the region that promotes the Geopark and the businesses in the Burren Ecotourism Network.

Social Media following has increased to 4,100 on facebook and 3,300 on twitter. A quarterly newsletter is produced on line and circulated to 500 readers.

The Geology Evening Course in February, the International Geology Summer Field School in June and the Global Ecology Course were run successfully in partnership with Burren Outdoor Education Centre, Caherconnel Fort and Burren College of Art respectively. The Burren Rocks festival was hosted by the Burren National Park in May.

Dr. Eamon Doyle, the Geopark's geologist, was honoured by having a fossil starfish named after him 'Crepidodoma doylei'.

The Geopark is financed by grants from Clare County Council, Fáilte Ireland and Geological Survey of Ireland and EU LIFE funding matched by these three partners plus contributions from National Monuments Service, Office of Public Works, Heritage Council, NUIG and U.C.D.

Clare Tourism

Clare Tourism continues to promote and market County Clare as a tourism destination with the support of an elected steering group representative of the public and private sector.

County Clare was heavily promoted throughout 2017, in particular in the lead up to and duration of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2017. Clare Tourism leased a premises in the Abbey Street Car Park for the duration of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. The premises was used as a Visit Clare Expo and proved to be a great asset in promoting Co. Clare, giving tourism information about the county and as an exhibition space for tourism providers.

The Clare Tourism Festivals and Events Guide has proven to be a popular marketing tool in recent years. In 2017, Clare Tourism designed and circulated 10,000 copies of the guide and also made a copy available to download on www.clare.ie. The guide was also distributed when representatives from Clare Tourism promoted County Clare at National, European and American consumer and trade shows.

Throughout 2017, Clare Tourism engaged in print, radio and digital promotional campaigns. All campaigns were designed to create awareness of County Clare as a tourism destination.

The County Tourism website www.clare.ie was maintained and updated throughout 2017. This website provides details of places to visit, things to do, accommodation, and dining throughout Clare.

Clare Tourism, supported by Clare County Council, launched the Green Festival Ambassador and Leader programme, the first of its kind in Ireland. A series of introductory training sessions for festival organisers on how to minimise the environmental impact of such events by reducing waste, carbon emissions, and water and energy use, was hosted throughout Clare. From

these sessions, 11 festivals were selected for localised Green Festival Ambassador training after which additional in-depth training was provided to identify Green Leaders.

Clare Tourism held a Social Networking Event with a difference to Clare Tourism providers in December 2017. To celebrate the wonderful experiences of the Star Wars crew in West Clare and the many scenes that have been shot of the stunning Clare coastline, an exclusive box office private showing of Star Wars, The Last Jedi took place in Ennis. The event gave tourism providers in Co. Clare the opportunity to network with each other, form tourism collaborations and make new contacts.

Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

The Local Enterprise Office is a “First Stop Shop” to provide support and services to assist Co. Clare based enterprises start and grow. The key focus is to maximise opportunities for job creation and retention.

2017 was a year of continuing progress in how LEO Clare supports enterprises based in Co. Clare. With additional staff resources, LEO Clare now has an increased capacity to proactively engage with local enterprises, particularly those enterprises with the capability to expand into new markets and create new employment.

Following the success of the first “Local Enterprise Week” in 2016, LEO Clare ran this event again in March 2017. Over the week, a number of events, seminars and workshops took place with an attendance of 262 people.

The focus in 2017 was aimed at helping the enterprises who had the ambition and opportunity to grow. Over €600,000 in actual funding was issued during the year which was an increase of 47% on the previous year. It is hoped that this direct investment in the enterprises will underpin future growth in employment numbers. 2017 also saw the introduction of a new regional competitive fund called Local Investment Innovation Fund and Co. Clare had two successful enterprises in this competition.

The number and variety of training courses continued to evolve. This year the LEO ran 37 training programmes in which 592 entrepreneurs participated. 73

enterprises, up 70%, were assisted by the allocation of a mentor to provide one to one targeted assistance to help the enterprises grow and develop.

In addition to core activities the LEO continues to support and encourage young entrepreneurs through the Student Enterprise Awards for second level students and Irelands Best Young Entrepreneur, aimed at the 18-35 year age bracket. In 2017, nearly 900 students attended the Student Enterprise events. Co. Clare enjoyed national success in Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur, where an entrepreneur from East Clare was second overall in the Best Idea Category.

The primary role of the LEO is to facilitate the creation of employment in Co. Clare. Job numbers for 2017 saw a net increase of 149 in employment among enterprises supported by LEO Clare. Since the inception of the Local Enterprise Office, enterprises supported by LEO Clare have resulted in a net increase in employment of 433 over the past 3 years.

LEO Clare continues to work collaboratively with other job creating agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, Irish Development Authority (IDA) and the Leader programme. LEO Clare activities form a key component of the Mid-West Regional Action Plan for Jobs.

Planning Department

Forward Planning

Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023

The Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023 was adopted on 19th December 2016 and became effective from 25th January 2017 in accordance with legislation. The plan replaces the existing Clare County Development Plan 2011-2017, the Kilrush Town and Environs Development Plan 2014-2020 and the Ennis and Environs Development Plan 2008-2014. The Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023 includes written statements and settlement plans for the settlements of the county and accordingly the West Clare Local Area Plan 2012-2018, South Clare Local Area Plan 2012-2018,

North Clare Local Area Plan 2011-2017 and East Clare Local Area Plan 2011-2017 were deemed to be revoked with effect from 21st January 2017.

Shannon Town and Environs Local Area Plan 2012-2018

At the June council meeting, the Elected Members by resolution deferred the making of a new Shannon Town and Environs Local Area Plan for a period not exceeding 5 years. The existing Shannon Town and Environs Local Area Plan 2012-2018 will now remain in force until 2023.

Ireland 2040 Our Plan: Draft National Planning Framework

In November, the Planning Department on behalf of Clare County Council, made a submission to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government on Ireland 2040 Our Plan: Draft National Planning Framework. The submission noted its support of a strong, holistic and evidence-based national planning strategy that will ensure the long-term prosperity and sustainable development of the country as a whole. However, the submission also highlighted the failure within the plan to recognise the importance of the county in terms of major existing and planned infrastructure and resources which will play a key role in driving investment and economic growth into the future, which in turn will contribute to both the regional and national economy.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region

The first round of public consultation commenced for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region in November, with the invitation to make submissions on the Issues Paper for the preparation of the Strategy. The Planning Department on behalf of Clare County Council will seek a key role in the preparation of the strategy which will be undertaken during 2018, with the finalised Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy scheduled for completion in December 2018.

I-ENVISION: Intelligent Energy Network VISualisation and InteractiON

The Planning Department prepared a submission in conjunction with IES (Integrated Environmental Solutions) for the "H2020 call SMEInst-09-2016-

2017” called I-ENVISION: Intelligent Energy Network VISualisation and InteractiON. The aim of the I-ENVISION project is to create a social energy network software platform that empowers all kinds of users to visualise, understand, engage and interact with the energy system. Core to the success of such a proposal is having robust pilot implementations and therefore the Planning Department has identified Shannon as an important area of economic activity. The Shannon Local Area Plan contains specific aims in this regard. The most relevant being “To ensure that the Shannon gateway continues to develop as a driver of economic growth in County Clare and the Mid-West Region”. All relevant details and templates were completed and the I-ENVISION proposal was submitted for evaluation. The outcome of the assessment will not be known until the spring of 2018. Should the proposal be successful, the activities involving the Shannon pilot would start some time towards the end of 2018.

An Ennis Spatial and Economic Strategy 2040

This strategy was opened for tender in December 2017 seeking consultants to undertake the spatial and economic strategy in 2018. The plan will build on the Clare County Development Plan and will take a longer term view to ensure that Ennis and its environs has a clear economic vision and sets an economic plan and framework to prosper and achieve this vision.

Ennis key opportunity sites

Three key opportunity sites identified within Ennis Town Centre in Volume 3a of the Clare County Development Plan - Ennis Municipal District Written Statements and Settlement Plans – were opened to tender and urban design consultants were appointed in November, to prepare a masterplan for each of the sites. Paul Hogarth Company were appointed to work on two of the sites which include:-

- The Ennis Town Centre Expansion Area (Old Boys National School, Kilrush Road)
- The Post Office Field and analogue building.

Nicholas de Jong and Associates were appointed to progress Riverside Site, Harmony Row and Bank Place (Briar Lane). These opportunity sites represent exceptional opportunities for future town centre development which will contribute to the overall vision for the town centre and for the enhancement of the appearance and amenity of the area and will inform the future Local Area Plan for Ennis.

Strategic Integrated Framework Plan for Shannon Estuary (SIFP)

The SIFP is a major inter-jurisdictional land and marine based framework to guide the future development and management of the Shannon Estuary. Following consultation between the Marketing and Promotional Working Group of the SIFP and the Irish Marine Development Office (IMDO), in relation to promoting and marketing the marine related industry sites in the Shannon Estuary, it was recommended that representatives of the Strategic Integrated Framework Plan Steering Group attend the “Nor Shipping” event in Oslo in May.

Nor Shipping was seen as a key opportunity by the state agencies working to implement the Government’s Integrated Marine Plan for Ireland “Harnessing our Ocean Wealth Strategy” (HOOW). The recently established Marine Development Team, a Government initiated taskforce focused on maximising marine growth opportunities together with development agencies with a marine interest, Enterprise Ireland, the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) and the IDA Ireland are working together to achieve targets for the development of the sector set out in HOOW. In 2010, the marine sector accounted for €1.2 billion or 0.8% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employed approximately 16,300 people. The vision of HOOW is to expand the Irish Ocean Economy to a value of 2.4% of GDP by 2030. The Shannon Estuary is strategically placed to exploit this potential, with the SIFP providing it with a distinct advantage to other locations in Ireland and across Europe.

Nor Shipping was a 4 day event which involved the SIFP having a stand on the Ireland Pavilion. Clare County Council saw this as a key opportunity to promote the Shannon Estuary and in particular the zoned deep water marine related industry sites on the northern shore of the Shannon Estuary.

The SIFP achieved great exposure as a result of our attendance at the event, both from a national perspective with the Irish State Agencies of the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and the IMDO together with Minister Pat Breen and internationally through the Irish Embassy in Norway and the introductions made through their office.

As a result of our attendance at the Nor Shipping event, the Shannon Estuary has established a prominent profile at an international level which will be explored and developed further through sustained follow up with the agency relationships established at Nor Shipping – all of which have resources present in many countries across the globe.

As a follow on from our attendance at Nor Shipping, officials from Clare County Council's Planning Department attended SeaFest which is Ireland's national maritime festival which took place in Galway. SeaFest is part of Harnessing our Ocean Wealth: An Integrated Marine Plan for Ireland (HOOW), and its goal is to increase participation and engagement with the sea. Clare County Council attended the Our Ocean Wealth Summit and the Digital Ocean Conference and provided a stand at the Marine Trade Show and organised follow up meetings with key contacts which were established at Nor Shipping. This served to further enhance linkages and establish opportunities for the Shannon Estuary.

The Planning Department was successful in receiving Enterprise Ireland – Regional Development Funding. This funding is being used to undertake a feasibility study in relation to the potential development of a Maritime Centre of Excellence at Cahiracon, County Clare, which contains one of the sites zoned for marine related industry. Numerous consultations and one to one meetings have taken place with a significant number of stakeholders and potential investors in relation to the feasibility study. Of particular interest are links which have been established with the National Maritime College of Ireland and the Mobile and Marine Robotics Research Centre in the University of Limerick. In addition, the Planning Department are assisting GKinetic Energy Ltd. in their application for a foreshore licence just east of Cahiracon within the Fergus Estuary to establish a tidal energy device test site. GKinetic are looking to deploy a 60kW device in the water for at least 90 days

commencing in September 2018. This device will be removed from the water mid way through 2019.

The Planning Department were invited to speak at a Tidal Energy workshop at the University of Limerick (UL) in relation to the potential of the Shannon Estuary, to accommodate a tidal test device or site in the future. In addition, the Planning Department also participated in a Marine Technology and Renewable Energy Research Day in the University of Limerick in conjunction with the UL MaREI team, Shannon Foynes Port Company and ESB projects. The focus of this is to drive the potential for investment into the Co. Clare shores of the Shannon Estuary.

The Planning Department were invited to speak at an EPA facilitated workshop at the Loughs Agency in Derry in relation to the potential of applying the IMMERSE (Integrated Management and Monitoring of Estuarine and Coastal Ecosystems) to the Shannon Estuary and other estuaries around Ireland. The Planning Department presented the work to date on the implementation of the SIFP for the Shannon Estuary.

The Bird Usage Survey of the entire Shannon Estuary commenced in 2017 and the interim report was completed in November 2017 which outlines the results to date from the first six months of surveys for the estuary. It was presented to the SIFP Steering Group on 30th November 2017. The work was also presented at the 7th Ornithological Conference held in the National University of Ireland, Cork on 25th November through the preparation of a poster presentation. This interim report will inform the preparation of the final report in 2018. Further counts are due for completion in 2018.

Visitor management and sustainable tourism development plan for Inis Cealtra (Holy Island)

Following the acquisition of 41 acres on Holy Island in 2015 and the appointment of Solearth Architecture by Clare County Council in 2016, a draft Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan for Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) was presented for public consultation in March 2017 in Mountshannon Community Hall. A total of 18 submissions were received at the end of the public consultation period, which were considered in the

preparation of the final plan which was then presented one final time to the local community in July. The attendance and feedback on the final plan was very positive and the community can look forward to its future implementation. The plan sets out 28 objectives that aim to increase visitor traffic to Inis Cealtra and other heritage sites and will see the development of a new visitor centre in Aistear Park in Mountshannon. The Elected Members considered and endorsed the plan at the July Council meeting.

Implementation of the Shannon Green Infrastructure Plan and Design Guide

Elements of the Shannon Green Infrastructure Plan were implemented during 2017, through various funding sources received for the development of the Shannon Town Park, Shannon Estuary Looped Walks, the Slí na Mara and the Green Corridor from St. Patricks to the Riverside in 2016. In addition, the Green Infrastructure Plan has lent support to the local community to seek funding to undertake conservation works at the Shannon Town Wetlands.

The Shannon Town Park Scheme is central to the layout of Shannon and the project will support physical enhancement of the town. The development will create community space and contribute to social revitalisation and cohesion. The Elected Members approved Part VIII for Shannon Town Park at the April Council meeting. A detailed urban design scheme was then prepared by Nicholas de Jong & Associates and the tender for the works contract issued in November. It is anticipated that works will commence in March 2018. The proposed works include the creation of a natural water feature, adventure play area and a bandstand /performance area, along with the formal laying of footpaths, lighting and the creation of formal and informal seating areas. The development will also include works to the two junctions on Bóthar Linne along the southern perimeter of the site, and the creation of a pedestrian crossing on same.

Town and village renewal projects

In addition to the Slí na Mara project in Shannon, projects were undertaken to enhance the public realm on Main Street, Clarecastle, Main Street, Scariff and

the redevelopment of the Carrigaholt Roundabout in Kilkee, with funding received under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2016.

Architectural conservation

During 2017, the Architectural Conservation Officer reported on planning issues pertaining to protected structures, Architectural Conservation Areas, vernacular buildings, infrastructural works of built heritage interest and archaeological issues within the county. 30 no. Section 57 Declarations were issued to permit owners to carry out works to protected structures. Support was given to tidy towns and community groups.

Funding for protected structures and buildings in Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) was provided in 2017 by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht through the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) and the Structures at Risk Fund (SRF). In total, grants totalling €112,000.00 were provided to assist works on 13 projects under the BHIS and €27,500.00 to assist works on 3 projects under the SRF, all of which were inspected by the Architectural Conservation Officer.

The Architectural Conservation Officer facilitated a number of meetings in 2017 with various council officials, external agencies and groups to progress repairs to the ESB dry-dock in Killaloe, Whitegate Church, Kilrush Town Hall, Ennis Mill Wheel, Curragh House and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) walls in Ruan area. Meetings were also facilitated to undertake repairs to funerary monuments and boundary walls at graveyards in Quin, Burrane, Coad, Killinaboy, Moneen, Kilrush and Doora and supervised repairs to the northwest corner of Carran Medieval Church.

The Architectural Conservation Officer facilitated a Building Lime Course in Killinaboy in December 2017 which was funded by Burren/Cliffs of Moher Geopark LIFE programme. It was attended by 22 people, most of whom were involved in the construction industry as masons, block layers and plasterers, with many from the local community interested in the repair and consolidation of the numerous historic ruins in the locality. The course comprised of talks and reviews of case studies, site inspections and practical sessions using a mobile lime kiln to demonstrate the manufacture of lime from local limestone.

It was agreed by all that the course was a major success, introducing many alternatives in the use of building materials and showing the advantage in using hydraulic lime for many different applications, in promoting better and more suitable practices in all aspects of building. The advantages of lime and its ventilation properties in improving the general health of those working and living in such buildings was also highlighted. On the completion of the course, participants were presented with Certificates of Attendance.

Heritage and Biodiversity

Funding of €33,000 was approved from the Heritage Council in 2017 towards three projects outlined under the Clare County Heritage Plan 2011-2017 as follows:

- Bird Survey Data on the Shannon-Fergus Estuary as outlined above under SIFP;
- “Stories from the Landscape” were three heritage films produced by the Galway Film Centre for Clare County Council which feature unique aspects of heritage in Clare including:-
 - Loophead Wetlands – Citizen Science Project;
 - Kilkishen Cultural Centre; and
 - The work of Cuimhneamh an Chláir – memories of Clare oral heritage network;
- Ennis Public Realm Projects is the enhancement of Old Barrack Street and Barrack Square and the revitalisation of the network of the town centre laneways in Ennis. These will inform the preparation of a Local Area Plan for Ennis.

“It’s In Your Nature” was the theme of National Heritage Week 2017, which ran from 19th to 27th August with over 102 events taking place around the County. Overall the attendance and feedback from the events were positive.

A bird usage survey of Ballyallia Lake Special Protection Area (SPA) for the winter period commenced in October 2017 and will continue until March 2018, led by the Planning Department. This will inform the future potential planning

and development of the amenity and recreational value of the lake and assist in the development of a masterplan for the lake.

The Heritage Officer organised a Biodiversity Tidy Towns Workshop in November 2017 which was attended by 35 people. Ricky Whelan of BirdWatch Ireland spoke on biodiversity planning for tidy towns at this workshop. He gave an overview of biodiversity in County Clare and how we can all contribute to its protection and conservation and gain valuable tidy towns points as a result. He outlined a wide variety of possible tidy towns biodiversity projects including the pollinator plan, tree planting, pond making, constructing and erecting bird, bat boxes and insect hotels, along with innovative ideas for signage and interpretation. As many as 15 tidy town groups signed up to be part of an effort to re-establish Swift Conservation to towns and villages in County Clare. The workshop and Swift Project is a joint project funded by the Planning, Environment and Rural Departments of Clare County Council and efforts will be stepped up next year to assist tidy towns to undertake projects for Swift Conservation throughout County Clare.

The Planning Department in consultation with the Elected Members and representatives of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark also made a submission on the Draft Burren National Park Management Plan 2017-2030.

Comments were submitted on the Draft Conservation Management Plan for Scattery Island prepared by consultants on behalf of the Office of Public Works. The profile of Scattery Island has been raised with the recent achievement of attaining the EDEN award and the Planning Department will continue to support initiatives which enhance the Scattery Island experience in a manner which respects and conserves its unique qualities.

The Clare Heritage Plan 2017-2023 and the Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023 were endorsed by the Elected Members at the December Council Meeting, following a period of public consultation on the draft plans during the Summer. The County Heritage Plan focuses on a number of identified actions to be implemented under the following themes:-

- Community
- Training and education

- Sustainable tourism
- Built heritage
- Cultural heritage and biodiversity
- Climate change and green infrastructure planning

The Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023 seeks to promote, protect and enhance the biodiversity of County Clare and to achieve the aims of the National Biodiversity Action Plan - Ireland's Vision for Biodiversity, 2017-2021.

Taking in charge/unfinished estates

20 residential housing estates were taken in charge by Clare County Council in 2017, with significant progress achieved on the completion of many others, through engagement with all relevant parties. Clare County Council has a register of over 190 residential housing estates in the county that are either unfinished, unsatisfactorily completed and/or not taken in charge.

The council continues to work with bondholders and developers to progress the completion of estates to the requisite standard for Taking in Charge.

The Director of Service on behalf of the Elected Members and the estates unit has advised the department of its willingness to pilot an incentive or scheme to assist Clare County Council to complete developments where the bonds, for a variety of reasons, are insufficient to complete the required works. It is hoped that such an initiative, similar to that provided in 2016, would allow the estates team to continue to progress and accelerate the taking in charge of residential developments in the county.

Development management

The number of planning applications received in 2017 was 1,006. In addition, there were 9 Part VIII Local Authority Own Development Applications.

Determinations were made in relation to 853 planning applications, of which 798 were granted and 55 were refused. 30 applications were appealed to An Bord Pleanála and of these, 3 decisions were reversed by the board.

Pre-planning

295 pre-planning consultations took place during the year to enable applicants discuss the principles of their proposals with council planners.

Planning enforcement

The enforcement section received 120 complaints during 2017. 125 warning letters and 61 enforcement notices were issued. Legal action was commenced on 3 cases.

Development contributions

The sum of €1,820,138 was collected during 2017. Such contributions cover a range of services, including water, sewerage, roads, amenity, community, recreation and car parking. The council is obliged to collect water and sewerage contributions on behalf of Irish Water on planning permissions granted prior to January 1st 2014.

Municipal Districts

There are four municipal districts in the county, which provide a range of local services at local service centres in Ennis, Scariff, Kilrush and Shannon.

Municipal District of Killaloe

The members of the Killaloe Municipal District met regularly during 2017 to consider the provision of services and the improvement of facilities and amenities in their district. The members met with representatives from local community groups regularly throughout the year to discuss issues relevant to their areas. Funding was provided towards a number of important projects under the General Municipal Allocation. Cllr. Alan O'Callaghan was elected Cathaoirleach at the Annual General Meeting in June, taking over the role from Cllr. Tony O'Brien and Cllr. Pat Hayes was appointed as Leas Cathaoirleach taking over the role from Cllr. Pat Burke.

Municipal District of Ennis

Ennis is one of four municipal districts in the county of Clare. The Municipal District of Ennis also includes the surrounding environs of Clarecastle, Quin, Barefield, Kilnamona and Kilmaley. The budget for 2017 for the Municipal District of Ennis was €274,000.

The members of the Municipal District of Ennis invited applications for grant assistance under its Community and Arts Grant Scheme in 2017. The objective of the grant scheme was to encourage and support local organisations and groups active in the cultural, artistic and community development needs of the municipal district. Applicant organisations were based within the Municipal District of Ennis area and the projects submitted for grant assistance had a Municipal District of Ennis focus.

The municipal district also supported a number of festivals and events which were held at various times throughout the year. A number of annual contributions were also paid to organisations within the municipal district to assist with their own annual budget for the year. All allocations were approved by the 8 members of the Municipal District of Ennis.

Ennis Streetscape Improvement Scheme 2017

The county capital welcomed the return of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 2017 and a similar initiative to that introduced in 2016, to improve the Ennis streetscape, was launched. The Ennis Streetscape Improvement Scheme provided up to €700 or 50% of the cost of the works to owners/occupiers of new and existing premises in the town centre, to carry out improvement works and external painting, in particular to the front of their properties. A total of €24,870 was provided to 39 successful applicants in 2017. The initiative proved hugely successful over the two year period and was welcomed by businesses in the town.

Casual trading

The council continued its policy of controlling casual trading under the Casual Trading Act 1995. At present the holder of a licence can trade anywhere within the designated trading areas of the county, for where they hold a valid casual trading licence.

Clare County Council is responsible for casual trading in the following areas:

- Ennis Market
- Kilrush
- Ennistymon Town Centre
- Doolin Pier
- Kildysart Square
- Kilfenora Square
- Killaloe Car Park
- The Square, Kilkee
- Miltown Malbay
- Shannon
- Tulla

In addition, Clare County Council is responsible for casual trading at numerous events which take place in the county throughout the year, such as

the Kilrush Horse Fairs, Willie Clancy Festival, Lisdoonvara Matchmaking Festival etc.

The newly covered Ennis Market building showcased various events in 2017 and is fast becoming a key community venue in the heart of Ennis. It is anticipated that this market will grow as a destination for locals and tourist alike, creating unique opportunities for food traders, local designers, artists, performers and local artisans to showcase their wares.

St. Patrick's Day Parade

Thousands of people lined the streets of the Clare County Capital for the 2017 Ennis St. Patrick's Day Parade. The theme for the Parade was 'Ennis – A Multicultural Town', and provided participating groups, organisations, bands, schools and individuals a broad scope within which to reflect on the various cultures in their float or group activity. Mayor of Ennis, Cllr. Ann Norton was the Parade Grand Marshall for 2017 and led the parade in a horse drawn carriage.

Twinning 2017

Clare County Council welcomed a delegation from our twinned counterparts from Langenfeld, Germany for the St. Patrick's weekend festivities on the 16th, 17th and 18th March 2017. A full programme of events was organised by the Twinning Committee which included a trip to the Aillwee Caves and a walking tour of Ennis Town.

Municipal District of West Clare

The members of the West Clare Municipal District met regularly during 2017 to consider the provision of services and the improvement of facilities and amenities in their district. The members met with representatives from local community groups throughout the year to discuss issues relevant to their areas. As well as the statutory meetings, a number of special meetings took place throughout the year. The West Clare Municipal District adopted the budgetary plan and a General Municipal Allocation of €276,700 for 2017 at a special meeting held on 19th October 2017. Funding was provided towards a

number of important projects under the General Municipal Allocation. The Doolin Pier (Parking Places) Bye-Laws 2017 were considered by the West Clare Municipal District members at their meeting in January. Cllr. Michael Hillery was elected Cathaoirleach at the Annual General Meeting in June 2017 and Cllr. Ian Lynch was appointed as Leas Cathaoirleach.

Municipal District of Shannon

At the Annual General Meeting of the Municipal District of Shannon in 2017, Cllr. Mike McKee was elected as Cathaoirleach, and Cllr. Gerard Flynn as Leas-Cathaoirleach.

During 2017, the inaugural community grants scheme of the Shannon Municipal District was completed, with 44 sporting, cultural, historical and community groups receiving grant funding.

The Shannon Municipal District adopted the budgetary plan and a general municipal allocation of €264,100 at the Draft Budgetary Plan meeting in October 2017.

The Shannon Looped Walks Project was completed by the end of 2017 and the Shannon Town Park Project was further progressed in 2017 which is expected to be completed in 2018.

Abridged Financial Statement: Year ended 31st December 2017

| Income and Expenditure | 2017 | 2016 |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| | €'000 | €'000 |
| Income | | |
| State grants | 32.2 | 28.0 |
| Local Property Tax | 6.4 | 3.2 |
| Goods and services | 34.1 | 32.9 |
| Commercial rates | 42.5 | 41.9 |
| Income from other local authorities | 0.1 | 0.1 |
| Pension levy | - | 1.3 |
| Total income | 115.3 | 107.3 |
| Total expenditure | 103.5 | 96.6 |
| Surplus/(deficit) for year before transfers | 11.8 | 10.7 |
| Transfers to/from reserves | (11.0) | (10.0) |
| Overall surplus / (deficit) for year | 0.74 | 0.75 |
| General revenue reserve/(deficit) – opening | 0.5 | (0.3) |
| General revenue reserve/(deficit) – closing | 1.2 | 0.5 |

| Balance sheet | 2017 | 2016 |
|--|--------------|--------------|
| | €m | €m |
| Fixed assets | 2,742.8 | 2,734.2 |
| Work in progress and preliminary expenses | 20.7 | 15.5 |
| Long term debtors | 18.8 | 20.8 |
| Current assets | 56.6 | 57.7 |
| Current liabilities | (35.3) | (38.1) |
| Net current assets/(liabilities) | 21.3 | 19.6 |
| Creditors (amounts falling due after more than one year) | (82.5) | (88.3) |
| Net assets | 2,721 | 2,702 |
| Financed by | | |
| Capitalisation account | 2,742.8 | 2,734.2 |
| Income work in progress | 20.1 | 15.2 |
| Specific revenue reserve | - | - |
| General revenue reserve | 1.2 | 0.5 |
| Other balances | (43.1) | (48.1) |
| Total reserves | 2,721 | 2,702 |

Representation of Elected Members on committees

Regional Assembly

Cllrs. P. McMahon, B. Slattery.

Education and Training Board

Cllrs. M. Hillery, G. Keating, A. Norton, C. Crowe, M. Howard

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

Cllrs. R. Nagle, G. Flynn, P. Hayes, J. Cooney

Local Authority Members Association

Cllr. B. Chambers

Association of Irish Local Government

Cllrs. P. Daly, C. Curtin, J. Crowe, J. Cooney. (Cllrs. P. Daly, C. Curtin and J. Crowe permanent delegates)

Lisdoonvarna Fáilte

Cllr. R. Nagle

Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances Ltd.

Cllr. C. Colleran Molloy

Board of Management of Cahercalla Hospital

Cathaoirleach of the day

Board of Management of Kilkee Waterworld

Cllr. G. Keating

Board of Management of Lahinch Seaworld

Cllr. B. Slattery

Rural Resettlement Ireland

Cathaoirleach of the Day

Hunt Museum Trust

Cllr. P. Murphy

Board of Glór Irish Music Centre

Cllrs. M. Howard, G. Flynn

Clare Sports Partnership

Cllrs. G. Keating, T. McNamara

Local Traveller Accommodation Advisory Committee

Cllrs. T. O'Brien, C. Curtin, G. Keating, R. Nagle, M. McKee, A. Norton

Twinning Committee

Cllrs. M. Howard, M. Begley, T. O'Brien, G. Keating, P. McMahon, P.J. Ryan,
M. McKee, P. Hayes, Cathaoirleach of the day

County Clare Road Safety Working Group

Cllrs. T. O'Brien, J. Cooney, P.J. Ryan

County Rural Water Monitoring Committee

Cllrs. P. Burke, M. Hillery, C. Curtin

Active Ennis/Kilrush Sports and Leisure Committee

Cllrs. C. Colleran Molloy, M. Howard, J. Breen

Audit Committee

Cllrs. P. Hayes, G. Keating

Board of Clare Local Development Company

Cllrs. G. Keating, T. McNamara

Local Community Development Committee

Cllrs. J. Flynn, B. Chambers, M. McKee

Regional Health Forum West

Cllrs. T. McNamara, P.J. Ryan, A. Norton, P. Burke

Joint Policing Committee

Cllrs. I. Lynch, M. Hillery, A. O'Callaghan, P. McMahon, P. Burke, J. Crowe, B. Slattery, A. Norton, M. Begley, P.J. Ryan, G. Flynn, P. Daly, M. Howard, P. Murphy

Governing Body of the National University of Ireland

Cllr. P.J. Kelly

Western Inter County Railway Committee

Cllrs. J. Breen, P. Hayes, P.J. Kelly, J. Crowe, P. Murphy

Standing Orders Sub-Committee

Cllrs. G. Flynn, B. Chambers, C. Curtin, J. Cooney, P. Murphy, C. Colleran Molloy

Rural Development Forum

Cllrs. B. Chambers, G. Keating, J. Crowe/P.J. Ryan, P. Hayes, T. McNamara, C. Curtin, J. Flynn (on behalf of LCDC) and P. Murphy (on behalf of Clare GAA)

Seminars and Conferences attended by Clare County Councillors in 2017

- Japanese Knotweed – Functions of Local Authorities & NRA, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, 27th – 29th January 2017 (8 members attended).
- Association of Irish Local Government Training for Elected Members, Waterford, 11th February 2017 (20 members attended).
- Fair Deal Scheme, Carlingford, Co. Louth, 10th – 12th March 2017 (1 member attended).
- National Tidy Towns Conference, Westport, Co. Mayo, 25th March 2017 (1 member attended).
- Association of Irish Local Government Annual Conference, Ennis, Co. Clare, 6th – 7th April 2017 (7 members attended).
- Local Authority Members Association Spring Seminar, Gormanston, Co. Meath, 28th – 29th April 2017 (19 members attended).
- Association of Irish Local Government Training for Elected Members, Westport, Co. Mayo, 13th May 2017 (17 members attended).
- Association of Irish Local Government – Module 3 – Commercial Rates, Rating Law, Valuations and Revaluations – A Briefing for Elected Members, Killarney, Co. Kerry, 8th June 2017 (19 members attended).
- Local Authority Waters & Communities Office, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, 16th – 18th June 2017 (1 member attended).
- Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, 7th - 9th July 2017 (1 member attended).
- National Tourism Conference, Listowel, Co. Kerry, 5th – 6th September 2017 (4 members attended).
- Annual Rural Water Conference, Claremorris, Co. Mayo, 14th September 2017 (3 members attended).
- Association of Irish Local Government Training for Elected Members, Tivoli, Cork, 23rd September 2017 (19 members attended).

- Local Authority Members Association Autumn Seminar, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, 29th – 30th September 2017 (19 members attended).
- Association of Irish Local Government Autumn Seminar, Sligo, 12th – 13th October 2017 (22 members attended).
- What Does a Hard Brexit mean for Ireland, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, 20th – 22nd October 2017 (1 member attended).
- Association of Irish Local Government – National Public Library Strategy 2018 – 2022 – A Briefing for Elected Members, Kilkenny, 26th October 2017 (15 members attended).
- Rebuilding Ireland – Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, Carlingford, Co. Louth, 3rd – 5th November 2017 (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: info@clarecoco.ie,
website, www.clarecoco.ie

Hours of business: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday to Friday

Note: Planning Department and Cash Office close to the public at 4:00 p.m.

Emergency contact number: (087) 4169496 (outside office hours only)

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

Hours of business: 9:15 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, telephone: (065) 6844661.

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 and Records Management, (065) 6846538
- Arts Office, (065) 6846684
- Broadband, Digital and IT Department, (065) 6846377
- Central Cash Office, (065) 6846208
- Civil Defence, (065) 6822199
- 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) 6846410
- Freedom of Information, (065) 6846405
- Group Schemes, (065) 6866119
- Higher Education Grants, (065) 6846320
- Housing Department, (065) 6846334
- Human Resources Department, (065) 6846415
- Local Enterprise Office Clare, (065) 6846230
- Partnership Facilitator, (065) 6846435
- Planning Department, (065) 6846232
- Register of Electors, (065) 6846363
- Revenue Department, (065) 6846530
- Roads and Transportation Department, (065) 6846312
- Road Design, (065) 6846479
- Rural and Community Department, (065) 6846222
- Tourism Department, (065) 6846511
- Veterinary Services Department, (065) 6846358
- Water Safety, (065) 6846270
- Water Services Department, (065) 6866116

Municipal district offices

Ennis, (065) 6866133

Killaloe, (061) 640815

Shannon, (061) 362319

West Clare, (065) 7072283/9054310

Library branches

Corofin, (065) 6837219

Cranny, (065) 6832070

De Valera Branch Library, (065) 6846353

Ennis Library Headquarters, (065) 6846350, website www.clarelibrary.ie

Ennistymon, (065) 7071245

Kildysart, (065) 6832113

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