

KILKENNY COUNTY COUNCIL

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE CHILL CHAINNIGH



DRAFT BUDGET 2021

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KILKENNY COUNTY COUNCIL 2021 BUDGET

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KILKENNY COUNTY COUNCIL

- 2021 BUDGET -

17th November, 2020.

**TO: AN CATHAOIRLEACH
& EACH MEMBER OF KILKENNY COUNTY COUNCIL**

RE: BUDGET 2021

Dear Councillor,

Enclosed for your consideration is the Draft Budget for Kilkenny County Council for the year ending 31st December, 2021.

The Statutory Budget Meeting to consider the Draft Budget is scheduled for Friday, 27th November, 2019 at 3.00 p.m.

2020 has been a very challenging year with all of the Councils income streams under pressure, whilst we incurred increased costs in providing our services due to increases in demand in some areas, coupled with Covid 19 compliance costs across all of our services. We required significant support from the Government to enable us to continue to provide our services in 2020, many of which are essential. This support was critical. We have received confirmation from the Department of compensation for the 9 months Rates Waiver scheme for businesses financially impacted by restrictions imposed to deal with Covid 19 pandemic. We estimate same to be €8.6m. To date we have received payment of €5.78m which is for 6 months of the 9 months waiver.

We are awaiting a decision from Government on the level of support for income losses under the Goods and Services heading, which includes parking, housing rents and planning fee income. The estimated outturn for 2020 reflects our expectation of further financial support to offset this loss of income. In this regard the Ministers letter of the 12th November, circulated to you on the 13th and included in Appendix 3 of this report, is welcome. Based on same it is reasonable to assume additional financial support for 2020.

You will note that the budget outturn for 2020 is significantly more than the budget adopted by the Council in November 2019. This is in the main accounted for by over €11.4m of funds that were paid by the Council to local businesses eligible for the Restart Grant Schemes and recouped from the Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation. In accounting terms, it is a contra item.

Covid 19 will continue to have a significant impact on our income streams in 2021. There is an unprecedented level of uncertainty and this Budget is prepared on the assumption that the principle of Government support for the Local Government Sector, including Kilkenny County Council, established in 2020 to enable us to continue to provide our services will continue in 2021 if required. Attention is drawn to the Ministers letter of the 12th November in this regard. I certainly agree with the view expressed by Ministers O'Brien and Burke that

“it is critical that services continue to be delivered to our citizens, that those citizens can maintain confidence in the local government system”.

During the first phase of lockdown we continued to provide our essential services such as Fire, Housing and Water Services. We established the Community Helpline and with the help of many community and voluntary organisations across the City and County we supported and responded to the needs of the most vulnerable in our society. When the restrictions eased we got back to providing all of our services as soon as was possible. Despite losing 8 weeks in the delivery of our Roads Programme I am pleased to advise that we have made up that time and we expect to complete the roads programme in the current calendar year. In addition, we were successful in getting approx. €3 million in grant aid for Smarter Travel, Climate and Heritage, and you will have observed many of these works happening on the ground over recent weeks. The report for each of the Directorates will outline challenges faced across the organisation in delivering our services whilst we supported the HSE with Testing and Tracing and providing temporary emergency accommodation as needed.

The decision of Council to hold the Local Property Tax at the 2020 level has provided €1.1m towards this budget which forms part of the discretionary spend which contributes to funding the following:

- Watergate Theatre
- Rothe House
- Castlecomer Discovery Park
- Castlecomer Enterprise Centre
- Drum Youth Centre
- Kilkenny Tourism
- Kilkenny Archives
- Keep Kilkenny Beautiful
- Kilkenny Energy Agency
- Kilkenny Recreation and Sports Partnership
- Garda Youth Programme
- Estate Management
- Ossory Youth
- Rural Transport
- Dail na Nog
- Public Partnership Network
- Local Enterprise Start-up Programme

We have also maintained the level of funding for the following grant schemes for 2021:

- Anti-Litter & Anti-Graffiti
- Tidy Towns
- Paint Scheme
- Festival & Events Grants
- Graveyard Grants
- Amenity Grants

and provided for a modest increase in the Library Book Fund.

In addition, this budget provides for an increased allocation for Housing Grants, which subject to the national allocation will provide €2m in funding for the scheme locally. This is reflecting the demand for this grant and its importance in supporting older people to carry out adaptations to enable them to continue to live in their homes.

We have also provided an allocation to carry out an assessment of and prepare a plan to address need for the Council to provide an archive facility and service.

Rates Revaluation:

As outlined at last year’s budget, the national rates revaluation poses a risk to our rates income and this continues to be the case. The process has resulted in loss of rates income following the Tribunals decisions on the appeals. The level of income loss is set to increase in 2021 as more appeals are determined.

Delivering our Capital Programme:

Driving economic development and delivering our Capital Programme is important and requires resourcing. Whilst 2020 has been challenging we have continued to deliver significant projects and plan for delivery of important strategic projects across the City and County.

- (i) **Work on the Breaghagh Valley** is progressing and the road and infrastructure is due for completion Q1 2021. This project opens up the Breaghagh Valley neighbourhood and will enable the delivery of much needed residential development. This infrastructure is necessary not just to meet local housing need but also inward investment and economic development.

In addition, the infrastructure will facilitate the delivery of two secondary schools by Kilkenny/Carlow ETB which are currently at design stage with a planning application expected to be lodged early in 2021 and a primary school, which is currently the subject of a planning application. We received grant aid of €6.5 million under the LIHAF for this project with the remainder provided from Council resources.

- (iii) Work on Phase 1 of **Abbey Quarter** is progressing. Mythen Construction Ltd. is on site and delivering the renovation of the Brewhouse to high environmental standards. Work on the Riverside Park, including the skate park should be complete and open before year end. The delivery of significant public realm is required to enable the redevelopment of the Brewhouse and Mayfair in keeping with the Master Plan adopted by the Council. We were successful in attracting funding under the URDF scheme and work has commenced on Horse Barrack Lane and Brewhouse Square and same will be complete in tandem with the Brewhouse building in Q2 2021.

During 2020 we progressed planning for **Phase 2** of the public realm in the Abbey Quarter, the urban street and a two and half acre urban park around St. Francis Abbey. A Part 10 planning application was submitted to An Bord Pleanala and we expect a decision on same in Q1 2021. We have applied for funding under the URDF Round 2 Call and a decision is expected before year end. This project is very significant in the context of facilitating future development on the Abbey Quarter site.

We have applied for funding and subject to grant aid and planning we intend delivering a board walk under Greensbridge to connect the two existing riverside walks.

- (iv) **Kilkenny Greenway:** Wexford County Council is the lead authority for the delivery of the Kilkenny Greenway from Waterford to New Ross. This greenway traverses 3 County's. Work has commenced on the lifting of the tracks and sleepers. The recent announcement of additional funding of over €7m for the project will enable the main works to be commenced in 2021 with the Kilkenny Greenway due to open in 2022. The potential of linking the Greenway to the villages of Slieverue and Glenmore is currently under investigation. Additional funding will be required when a route is agreed and planning obtained for the links.

- (v) **Ferrybank and the North Quays:** The recent announcement of funding for the North Quays included funding towards the following 4 projects in the Ferrybank area:

- **Belmont Link Road:** The provision of this road, linking from the Abbey Road to the Belmont Road, will support building of houses by opening up lands for development and facilitating the planned population growth for the Greater Waterford City in a compact manner.
- **Abbey Road – Greenway Connectivity:** The Kilkenny Greenway benefitted from an announcement of a significant increase in grant aid recently and this project provides for further connection points to the Kilkenny Greenway. This will give greater access and facilitate usage of the Greenway in Ferrybank as a smarter travel option for people living and working in the area. It will also provide greater connectivity to schools in the area.

- **Abbey Road & Belmont Road Improvement Works:** The delivery of this project will enhance the approaches to the North Quays and will accommodate cycling infrastructure.
- **Port Road:** The planned upgrade works will provide access to open up additional lands for development. This work is considered critical if Belview Economic Area is to develop to its full potential.

We will now move to seek planning and deliver these projects.

The **Ferrybank Park** opened to the public in the last few weeks. Similar to the North Quays URDF application this is a joint initiative between Waterford and Kilkenny local authorities.

- (vi) Significant projects are underway in our scheduled towns and will continue in 2021. The 4 Towns were “deep cleaned” during the summer and all have received an allocation towards Christmas Lights under the Town and Village Programme. Street furniture, including tables and seating, are also being provided.

Thomastown: Work on the upgrade of the Car Park on the Inistioge road is complete and works are underway on the public realm in Lowe Street and Logan Street and will be completed in 2021. The renovation of Sessions House to become the new home for Design & Crafts Council of Ireland’s School of Jewellery should commence in Q1 2021. Planning for the conversion of the Community Hall to a Library and Community/Enterprise Centre will come before Council in November for decision, and subject to planning approval and a successful grant application under the RRDF works should commence in 2021.

Callan: Works on the Fairgreen were completed with the upgraded playground and amenity area. This project has been well received by locals and it is well used. The provision of paths and heritage signage on the Motte Field and the Abbey Field is nearing completion. These amenities are important in the context of peoples health and well-being and are very positive interventions for the people of Callan and the wider area. Plans are progressing to bring the Friary Complex into Council ownership and we will progress plans for the redevelopment of same.

Graigenamanagh: Works on the reinstatement of the board walk in Silaire Woods is complete and the walk re-opened to the public on the 14th of November. The contract to convert the former toilets for use by the Mens Shed should commence in Q1 2021. In addition, works have commenced in the last week on the development of the Turf Market car park.

Consultants are being appointed to look at options to resolve the issue of safer pedestrian crossings between Graigue and Tinnahinch and Byrne Looby Consultants have commenced work and consultation on plans for the much needed Flood Relief Scheme for Graigue.

Castlecomer: Planning was obtained for the pedestrian bridge to improve linkage from the Discovery Park to the town and work should commence on same early in 2021. In addition, the Council is working with Discovery Park to support the upgrade of the very popular Tree Top Walk which is the subject of an ORIS grant application in 2020. We continue to support Foroige to provide services locally with use of the former Court House and provide subvention to the Enterprise Centre.

- (vii) Outside of Ferrybank and scheduled Towns we are continuing to deliver projects in partnership with communities with funding from national programmes such as Town and Village and CLAR and many rural walks have received upgrades with funding attracted under ORIS. These schemes are extremely important to our smaller towns and villages and this budget provides for match funding, as necessary.

We will seek to attract additional national funding for the library project at the Mayfair and a grant from Failte Ireland for the Tholsel project. Subject to same delivery will move a step closer.

Priorities

We will focus on investments that are essential to generate and drive economic activity while protecting and promoting our social and cultural objectives and protecting our heritage. In delivering the Capital Programme, a balance is required between borrowings (mindful that every €1m borrowed requires a provision of €70,000 in the revenue budget), development contributions and provision in the Revenue Budget.

The Council will adopt a new Capital programme over the coming months and as part of that process Council will need to consider how its delivery will be funded in a sustainable manner.

Recommendation

Having regard to the challenging and uncertain environment we are operating in, this is in my view a fair budget that strikes a balance between competing demands for limited resources. **The budget is prepared on the assumption that the principle of Government support established in 2020 will continue in 2021, if required.** This budget facilitates progress to be made on key infrastructure, Abbey Quarter, Breaghagh Valley, Kilkenny Greenway which are necessary to drive economic development. It supports our work at community level across Kilkenny and provides for the continued delivery of our statutory obligations and delivery of our day to day services. We would all wish to do more but we must operate with the resources available.

Thanks

I would like to thank all the Elected Members for your continued support. It has been a challenging year as you had to adapt to new ways of carrying out your Council business and show leadership in addressing Covid 19 issues.

I wish to acknowledge our staff's contribution to ensuring the public of Kilkenny get the best services for the resources available. The staff's efforts as frontline workers in providing essential services is acknowledged. Through staff efforts we have maintained services and progressed the delivery of our Capital Programme. Whilst there has been delays on our work sites we will have exceeded our Housing Capital Programme targets upto 2020.

I want to thank the Management Team, Tim Butler, Mary Mulholland, Sean McKeown and their teams for their work in preparing the budget and all their work throughout what has been a very challenging year.

A particular thanks is due to Martin Prendiville and his team for their work in bringing this budget together and for making himself available to you the Elected Members during the process. I would also wish to acknowledge Martin's team in managing the Council's finances throughout the year with a particular focus on maintaining cashflow. In addition to their normal work, staff also managed the Restart Grant and processed payments in excess of €11.4m to local businesses.

In 2021 if our income streams continue to be negatively impacted we may need to postpone discretionary spend for the first Quarter, whilst we await details on the level of national support.

Our focus as we face into an uncertain 2021 is to continue to provide our services in a safe manner and support the most vulnerable in our community.

Finally, I want to thank the Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Andrew MCGuinness for his support throughout the year and Cllr. Chap Cleere his predecessor. We face 2021 with a high degree of uncertainty but I am confident if we continue to work in partnership we will deliver for the people of Kilkenny.

Yours sincerely,

Colette Byrne,
Chief Executive.

BUDGET 2021 - FINANCE OVERVIEW

The details of the draft budget for 2021 are set out in the attached tables on pages 36 to 68. The total estimated expenditure for 2021 is €89.96m compared with €83.56m for 2020.

The most significant challenge that had to be considered when preparing the draft budget for 2021 was covid-19. The pandemic has had a severe impact on the finances of the Council. The challenge presented is unprecedented. All of the main income streams have been negatively impacted in 2020. Additional expenditure was also necessary to maintain delivery of services by the Council. It is expected that the impact of Covid-19 will continue into 2021 and will continue to cause downward pressure on income sources.

It is difficult to predict with any level of accuracy what the impact will be in 2021. Commercial rates is the income source that has been most severely impacted. Based on a detailed analysis of the rate book it is estimated the income reduction for 2021 could be at least €3.3m. In addition, it is estimated that income from goods and services could be reduced by over €1m.

The draft budget has been prepared on the assumption that income will be available either from source or from compensation from Government. This is a critical assumption underlying the budget for 2021. Government has acknowledged that compensation may be required by the sector in 2021 but that any support provided will be more targeted than has been the case in 2020. It will be necessary to defer committing on expenditure of at least €3m for a number of months in 2021 until more clarity is available on the projected income for 2021. This is similar to the approach taken in 2020.

There is no change to the income derived from local property tax in 2021 which remains at €11.8m.

The total additional income available for 2021 amounts to €547k. €327k of this relates to an insurance rebate being provided by IPB in 2021 and €220k relates to additional income from commercial rates mostly arising from a national revaluation of Utility companies and some additions to the rate book.

The draft budget does not provide for any change in the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) on commercial rates. The ARV remains unchanged at .2 for 2021 and is one of the lowest of all Local Authorities. The effective ARV has not been increased by Council since 2008 with the exception of a relatively small increase in the former county ARV as part of the harmonisation process. The effective ARV for the former Borough rate payers has decreased by 11% over the period since 2008. The prompt payment incentive of 3% (subject to a cap of €250) remains unchanged for 2021.

The Valuation Tribunal is continuing to assess the appeals on the full revaluation of all properties carried out by the Valuation Office in 2017. A total of 196 accounts were appealed to the Valuation Tribunal. To date 165 of these appeals have been heard. These appeals have resulted in a loss in annual income to the Council of €768k. The total estimated loss in annual income when all appeals have been heard is expected to be in excess of €1m. This loss was provided for in the 2020 budget.

The vacancy refund of 90% remains unchanged for 2021. This will impact approximately 700 properties throughout the City and County. 70% of these properties have an annual rate demand of €2,000 or less.

Kilkenny County Council has the second highest collection level in the country for commercial rates at 94%. The collection rates for rents at 95% and housing loans at 90% are also among the highest of all local authorities. It is expected that covid-19 will have a negative impact on income collection rates for 2020.

The draft budget does not provide for any changes to car parking charges for 2021.

The discussions with Irish Water on the 2021 budget are ongoing. The draft budget assumes a recovery of €5.64m on payroll, other services and the central management charge.

There is a reduction of €55k on insurance costs for 2021. Kilkenny County Council continues to maintain a strong focus on claims management with our insurers Irish Public Bodies.

The estimated balance at the end of 2020 on outstanding commitments on completed capital projects is €9.1m. The 2021 budget provides for a write down of this balance amounting to €1.5m.

Housing rents have been increased by €280k from Budget 2020. This represents an increase of €600k from the projected outturn for 2020. The increased rent is based on the assumption that a full rent review will be carried out in Q1 2021. The extra rental income allows for an increase in the housing maintenance spend of €50k to €2.5m and an increase in housing grants to €2m from €1.5m with 20% of the cost being funded by the Council.

The draft budget provides for an increase in non-mortgage term loan repayments of €200k to fund an additional €3m of loans to part fund the capital programme. This will bring the total non-mortgage loan balance to €24.2m. When added to the balance on outstanding commitments on completed capital projects the total outstanding liability amounts to €33.3m.

The main objective in the budget is to maintain the level of overall discretionary expenditure similar to 2020. This can only be achieved if sufficient income is available in 2021.

Some of the key provisions in the 2021 Budget are as follows:

- Housing rents increased by €280k to fund additional expenditure in housing.
- Housing maintenance increased by €50k to €2.5m.
- Expenditure on homeless services maintained at €600k.
- Expenditure on RAS/Leasing increased to €7.9m in line with current trends.
- Housing grants increased by €500k to €2m - 20% of funding from Council sources.
- Local roads funding maintained at 2020 levels.
- Municipal District funding allocation included at €200k, down €50k from 2020.
- Provision of €350k for repayment of non-mortgage loan finance on Breaghagh Valley infrastructure.
- Provision of €463k for write-down on outstanding balance in St. Francis Bridge.
- Provision of €125k included to replace on-street parking machines.
- No change in planning fee income of €546k.
- Kilkenny Tourism Subvention - €75k, no change.
- Festivals/Events support - €112k, no change.
- Christmas Festival - €115k, no change.
- St Patrick's Day - €40k, no change.
- Paint the Shop Scheme - €10k, no change.
- Tidy Towns - €14k, no change.
- Woodstock Maintenance - €270k, no change.
- Castlecomer Discovery Park - €20k, no change.

- Callan Friary Trust Plan Development - €25k, increase of €5k.
- Drum Youth Centre - €50k, no change.
- Traveller Horse Project - €25k, €10k increase.
- Castlecomer Enterprise Centre - €8k, no change.
- Provision for match funding for Town & Village and other grant scheme- €85k, no change.
- Regional Assembly Contribution €103k, no change.
- Archives including preparation of Plan - €17k, €5k increase.
- Provision of €200k to fund additional non-mortgage loan finance of €3m for the capital programme.
- Derelict Sites - €20k, no change.
- Heritage Programme - €100k, no change.
- Medieval Mile Museum Subvention - €230k, decrease of €10k.
- Historic Landfills - €110k, increase of €15k.
- Recycling Centres & Bring Banks - €162k, increase of €15k.
- Dunmore Civic Amenity site operating costs - €855k, increase of €55k funded from increased income in Dunmore.
- Illegal dumping - €45k, no change.
- KKB - €10k, no change.
- Street Cleaning - €1.39m, increase of €20k.
- Burial Grounds Maintenance - €305k, increase of €35k.
- Burial Ground Grants & Improvements - €33k, no change.
- Civil Defence - €189k, increase of €34k which is fully grant funded.
- Fire Service - €4.4m, increase of €130k.
- Library Service - €2.9m, increase of €84k
 - Book fund increased by €20k to €120k.
- Maintenance of Parks and open spaces - €1.54m, increase of €114k.
- Amenity Grants - €140k, no change.
- Playground Maintenance - €80k, no change.
- Support for sporting bodies - €76k, no change.
- Arts Expenditure - €380k, reduction of €10k.
- Watergate Subvention - €154k, no change.
- Rothe House Subvention - €60k, no change.
- Veterinary Expenditure - €300k, reduction of €12k
 - Increase in grant funding by €27k to €265k.
- Control of Dogs - €160k, no change.
- Control of Horses - €75k, increase of €25k.
- Coroner - €186k, increase of €12k.
- Motor Tax Office - €445k, no change.
- Central Management Costs - €7.8m, increase of €300k.
- Pension Charge - €5.0m, increase of €350k.

It is critical that the Council continues to ensure that expenditure is in line with the income available. This will be challenging for 2021 due to the level of uncertainty with Covid-19. As previously stated it will be necessary to defer committing on expenditure of at least €3m for a number of months until greater clarity becomes available regarding the level of income for 2021.

Rebuilding Ireland 2018 – 2021

2020 represented a challenging year for the delivery of housing under the Rebuilding Ireland housing delivery programme. Where targets in delivery were exceeded in both 2018 and 2019 restrictions on construction during 2020 resulted in delays in project delivery. While we remain on target to deliver in excess of 800 housing units under the Rebuilding Ireland Programme, this delivery may extend into 2022.

Kilkenny County Council, in partnership with the voluntary sector, will provide 98 newly built social housing units by the end of 2020. The current building programme has more than 150 units under construction with a further 130 in the process of getting to construction via planning and procurement. Developments underway include 33 houses at Donaguile, Castlecomer, 18 apartments and houses at The Broguemaker, Castlecomer Road, Kilkenny and 16 units at Kilmacow.

These new homes together with an additional 100 units targeted under acquisition and leasing by the Council and its partners, will add in excess of 140 new units for allocation by the end of 2021. Capital delivery is the key challenge to addressing the growing need for social housing solutions for all approved housing applicants and the increased construction of new units of accommodation to meet the needs of smaller family units during 2021 is essential.

Housing Stock and its Maintenance

The Council has a current housing stock of 2,400 units and receives and responds to an average of 5,000 maintenance requests per annum. During 2020 initiatives to implement a planned maintenance approach were delayed due to Covid-19 restrictions with only essential reactive maintenance provided. The number of calls during 2020 did not decrease significantly and there will be real challenges in addressing the increased demand for non essential maintenance works when restrictions are removed in 2021. The proposed progression to a planned maintenance system remains an objective of KCC to achieve improved efficiencies in stock management and customer service but delivery of this objective will take longer due to a backlog of issues resulting from 2020 restrictions. An incremental increase in stock condition and programmed maintenance funding in the coming years remains essential to support a programme to improve the fabric of our accommodation, to improve energy efficiency and to progress the planned and cyclical maintenance programmes currently in place.

Rent Review

The full rent review proposed for 2020 based on income and household details submitted from tenants and the rent calculated in accordance with the Councils Differential Rent Scheme 2020 did not take place as intended. As no review of rents has taken place since 2018 it is important that a full rent review be carried out in 2021 to ensure equity and to avoid excessive increases which would result from lack of reviews for more than a 3 year period.

Letters will issue to tenants early in 2021 seeking income details and the new rents will come into effect during May 2021. The Council will keep under review any rent re-assessments required due to changes in Covid-19 income supports.

No further clarifications have been received in respect of a national rent scheme.

Homeless Assistance

The Housing Section continues to support households in need of emergency accommodation. The provision of own door short term accommodation by KCC has reduced the need for hotel and B&B solutions. The emergency homeless accommodation budget is funded 90% by Department of Environment grant and 10% from local provision in the County Councils annual budget under a South Eastern Regional Management structure. Difficulties in sourcing smaller affordable private rented accommodation in Kilkenny City has resulted in challenges for our Placefinder and Social Care service who work to prevent homeless presentations.

The table below illustrates the education in homeless presentations over the last 4 years and the success of prevention measures.

MONTH	2017	2018	2019	2020
January	29	37	25	23
February	26	32	12	27
March	26	21	16	24
April	25	18	16	19
May	28	29	20	14
June	24	20	14	12
July	34	15	30	19
August	27	26	28	22
September	24	19	26	26
October	27	27	22	26
Total	270	244	209	212

Housing Grants

The draft budget provides for an increase in €500k in funding of housing grants for the elderly and disabled. This increase is comprised of €100k from KCC resources to facilitate an additional €400k in Departmental allocation. 2020 saw a significant increase in applications for housing adaptation grants for the elderly to allow people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible with many applications to be dealt with in 2021.

Housing Loans

The Council continues to provide Housing Loans to eligible housing applicants to provide accommodation from their own resources. The challenge continues to be the availability of houses and apartments to purchase in Kilkenny. On average, €3.3ml is advanced annually to applicants in Kilkenny as outlined below.

YEAR	ANNUITY LOANS PAID	
	NUMBER PAID	AMOUNT PAID €
2012	22	2,316,961
2013	37	2,890,886
2014	38	2,672,364
2015	44	4,440,996
2016	29	3,565,752
2017	45	4,369,542
2018	28	3,173,678
2019	24	3,007,655
2020 (YTD)	17	2,426,230

Vacant Homes

The Vacant Homes Officer continues to assess vacant properties with the potential to be brought back into use as residential dwellings and to assist landowners through that process. During 2020 a number of sites identified by the vacant homes officer have been brought through, design, planning and procurement to construction with the provision of social housing units in existing communities. During 2021 a further 3 sites will be progressed to construction with more than 11 properties currently under Compulsory Purchase Order.

Tenancy Management

Funding in respect of estate management has been retained in this draft budget with provision made for three tenant liaison officers to augment tenancy management initiatives and to deal with increased cases of anti-social behaviour. An interagency anti-social behaviour strategy to deal effectively with persistent anti-social behaviour will commence implementation in 2021.

Road Works Scheme 2021

Non-National Roads

Kilkenny County Council's allocation to road maintenance and improvement works amounted to €1.601m for 2020. This allocation covers costs associated with the operational activities of the Road Area Offices and the staff (GSSs, General Operatives etc.) reporting thereto.

Road Improvements are largely funded via the Capital Account and through the Annual Roadwork's Scheme, adopted by the Members in March of each year, following the announcement of Transport Infrastructure Ireland and Dept. Transport Tourism and Sport Grant Allocations. In recent years Kilkenny County Council has benefitted from certain flexibilities afforded to the Council in the assignment of grant allocations. In the context of the 2021 Roadwork's Scheme it is important that this flexibility is retained to support the Council in achieving efficient management and improvement of the road network.

The main road improvements on the Non-National road network are funded from the Road Restoration Improvement and Maintenance Grant Scheme for which the Council received a grant allocation of €10.1m in 2020. Significant progress has been made on the Non-National road network over the years since the Restoration Grant was introduced and the condition rating of the roads in County Kilkenny compares favourably with any other County in the state.

Other key Non-national road funding strands in 2020 included a Discretionary Grant allocation of €2.64m, a bridge rehabilitation grant of €200k, Low Cost Accident Scheme grant of €368k, and Community Involvement in Roadworks (CIR) €640k.

In addition, Kilkenny county Council received addition funding under two new schemes in 2020 Climate change we received €373,000 for 10 projects and Active travel received €1,227,000 for 28 projects.

This year has been significantly challenging for the delivery of Road Works Programme with the requirement to suspend works in March to May 2020 for an 8 week period due to public health requirements as a result of the Covid pandemic. Despite the lockdown, due to good planning and significant work of the area offices and machinery yard, I am pleased to say that the full Road Works Programme will be completed this year.

National Roads

Pavement Improvement and Major\Minor Works Programme

Under the Pavement Improvement and Major\Minor Works Programme, financed by Transport Infrastructure Ireland, Kilkenny County Council progressed the following in 2020

- **N76** The N76 pavement scheme for a total length of 6km costing €3 million was completed on a number of sections between Brownstown and the Callan Bypass.
- **N25 Curraghmore.** This combined pavement/safety scheme on the N25 at Curraghmore to create right turning lanes at three junctions was completed at a cost of 0.56m

- **N24 Tower Road – Tower Road Junction & Inkbottle Junction;** The CPO was approved in 2020. It is the intention to advance the scheme to construction in 2021.
- **N77 Ballyragget to Ballynaslee Minor Improvement Scheme;** Planning and the acquisition of lands required to deliver this Scheme will be advanced in Q1 2021.
- **N25 Waterford to Glenmore Scheme –** Kilkenny County Council will publish the preferred route for this scheme in Q1 2021.
- **N24 Waterford to Cahir –** Consultants have been appointed to this project. They are at the early stages of setting up and information gathering.
- **N24 Carrick Road Improvement (bends west of Mooncoin)**
Planning and the acquisition of lands required to deliver this Scheme will be advanced in Q1 2021.

Other key Infrastructure Improvement Schemes advanced during 2020 included:

Kilkenny Western Environs Phase 1 Infrastructure Scheme (Total Estimated Cost €15.3m)

The project to remove the infrastructural impediment to enable the development of the Breagagh Valley in Kilkenny City consists of the following key elements:

- a) Construction of a roundabout on the N76 Callan Road at the intersection of the proposed Breagagh Valley distributor road.
- b) Construction of Breagagh Valley distributor road, linking the N76 with the existing Circular Road at Robertshill
- c) Construction of a roundabout at Robertshill at the intersection of the proposed Breagagh Valley distributor road and the Circular Road
- d) Upgrade of the existing Circular Road from Robertshill to the R695 Kilmanagh Road.
- e) Construction of a roundabout at the junction of the Circular Road and the R695 Kilmanagh Road.
- f) Upgrade of a section of the existing R695 Kilmanagh Road from the roundabout at the junction with the Circular Road

Construction of this scheme by SIAC Construction Limited (main contractor appointed following public procurement process), commenced on March 4th 2019, with an expected completion date of Q 1 2021.

Kilkenny Northern Ring Road Extension: (1.5 km)

Kilkenny County Council considers the Northern Ring Road Extension project a critical piece of infrastructure for the City and County. Resulting from the outcome of the court proceedings taken by landowners on the permission that had been granted to KCC for the extension in 2014, Kilkenny County Council has commenced a new planning and design process for the Northern Ring Road Extension with a view to progressing this project as soon as is practical.

Public Lighting - Maintenance

Kilkenny County Council maintains approximately 11,000 public lights. The annual investment in public lighting provision per annum is €1.1m of which maintenance approximately accounts for 20% and energy accounts for 80%. This level of funding for lighting provision is expected to be maintained for 2021. Income from Transport Infrastructure Ireland for public lighting on National Roads and under the Motorway MMarC contract in 2020 was €169k and the balance of the funds required comes directly from the Council's own resources. It is anticipated that similar funding will be received from TII, although this may be reduced to account for energy savings arising from upgrades of the existing National Route lighting under TII funded projects in the past 3 years.

Public lighting maintenance is currently carried out under contract by SSE Airtricity Ltd. on behalf of Kilkenny County Council.

Energy Efficiency, Energy Conservation and Climate Change

On foot of the successful delivery of retrofit projects over the last number of years, approximately 55% of the total lighting units in the County are now LED energy efficient lanterns. These retrofit projects were achieved using Better Energy Community (BEC) Grants which provided 33% of the funding with the balance provided by Kilkenny County Council. The achieved energy cost savings finance these projects with a payback period of approximately 5 years. In addition, funding was secured from the TII for projects at locations on the National Road network throughout the County over the past 3 years. In 2020 the retrofit of the final lanterns to be upgraded on the National Route network was completed with all works fully funded by TII.

In 2021-2023, Kilkenny County Council, as Lead Authority for Region 2 of the National Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project (PLEEP), intends to retrofit the balance of the lighting stock through this Project. Work is progressing on the development of the Specifications and Tender documentation for the Project. The Motorway MMarC contract continues to maintain the motorway lighting.

The Kilkenny Street-Light LED Retrofit Pilot Project undertaken in 2017 by Kilkenny County Council in partnership with 3cea (3 Counties Energy Agency) and Hayes Higgins Partnership was shortlisted for the Engineers Ireland Awards 2019 - under the Local Authority Engineering Initiative and in 2020 was awarded first prize in the Best Energy Smart Initiative in the national LAMA All Ireland Community and Council Awards 2020

Kilkenny County Council continues to actively encouraging the use of LED lighting technology in new public lighting installation and retrofits. The use of energy efficient technology is being recommended in new planned developments in the County.

Strategic Policy Committee 2 -

The Transportation Policy/Mobility Management & Water Services Policy Committee

Under the chairmanship of Cllr. Matt Doran met three times to date in 2020. The principle issues discussed included, school safety measures, Water Infrastructure and capacity, Road Safety Plan and the 2020 Road Works Scheme. The committee approved in 2020 a new hedge cutting policy for the County.

Irish Water

Service Level Agreement

The Council continues to manage the transition of Water Services to Irish Water which commenced January, 2014 through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for a period of 12 years. All costs relating to the operation of Water Services in 2021 will be recouped from Irish Water under the terms of this SLA.

Infrastructure Programme

A number of major and minor capital works progressed in 2020. The projects will provide significant upgrades to a number of plants and pipe networks which will be essential for the development of Kilkenny into the future. Some of the works ongoing & completed were

- Inistioge Water Supply Scheme - Completed in Q1 2020, this scheme will benefit over 4,000 people across Inistioge and Thomastown, ensuring the delivery of a clean, safe and more reliable drinking water source. This project extended the Thomastown Water Supply Scheme to Inistioge through the construction of new water mains, removing the vulnerable water source in Inistioge, whilst also improving treatment facilities and storage facilities for Thomastown and Inistioge.
- Gowran Regional Water Supply Scheme - Planning for this scheme has been granted and designs have been progressed in 2020. The Compulsory Purchase Order for the required land and wayleaves is expected to be confirmed by the end of 2020. The scheme includes the construction of a new water treatment plant, reservoir, rising mains, development of two abstraction boreholes and decommissioning of an existing plant. The scheme will increase the water supply capacity to Gowran, Goresbridge and Paulstown, enable growth and development in the local area and improve water quality for over 1,225 residential and non-domestic properties.
- Kilkenny City Regional Water Supply Scheme - Planning for this scheme has been granted. Work on the scheme design progressed in 2020 and tenders were issued to the market. It is hoped to award the contract for this scheme by the end of 2020. The Compulsory Purchase Order for the acquisition of required wayleaves is expected to be confirmed by the end of 2020. The scheme involves upgrading the existing Troyswood Water Treatment Plant and ancillary works to facilitate the decommissioning of the existing water treatment plant in Radestown. When complete the scheme will benefit approximately 27,000 people by providing a more secure and reliable water supply for the City and surrounding areas.

Water Networks Programme

Pressure Management

In conjunction with IW, a detailed analysis was undertaken on the City network. Two throttled valves reduce pressure in the network on the trunk mains feeding the City from both Troyswood and Radestown. To deliver a controlled pressure on the network, the throttled valves are being replaced by Pressure Reducing Valves (PRV), with day/night controllers and with remote monitoring through our Scada system. The installation of this equipment on the network both enables the existing network to service the Western Environs development. The works is also predicted to reduce leakage in the City by 0.5-1Ml/day. Both PRV's to be installed and commissioned by end of Q4 2020.

Find and Fix

The Find and Fix process continued through 2020 reducing leakage within the Bennettsbridge, Castlecomer, Thomastown, Inistioge, Callan, Gowran and Kilkenny City water supply zones. The leakage target for 2020 for Kilkenny was to reduce leakage by 1.8ML/day. Currently the actual leakage savings has been 2.4ML/day so the target has been exceeded.

Mains Rehab Works

- Mill Street, Freshford, installation completed on 400m of 180mm HDPE water main completed. Permanent reinstatement completed in Q1 2020.
- Kilkenny Street, Freshford, installation completed on 350m of 180mm HDPE water main.

Water & waste water services are critical services and were maintained and operated at full capacity by our staff during the year while adhering to public health requirements.

Backyard Services

The Fatima Place mains rehab and backyard services project recommenced in Sept 2020. On completion of the project, the benefits will be a reduction in leakage and improved pressure for the residents of Fatima place, Emmet Street and St. Teresa's Terrace. Project to be completed by end of Q4 2020.

Disinfection and PH Correction Programme

The Disinfection and PH programme continued in 2020. This upgrade of works at Water Treatment Plants and reservoirs has delivered a standardisation of disinfection across the County. The programme has improved drinking water quality, by improving the disinfection system and standards, while ensuring compliance with all regulations. Some sites commissioned in 2020 were Clogh WTP, Gorteen WTP, with both Glenmore and Love Lane WTP's to be commissioned by end of Q4 2020.

Rural Water Programme

The Rural Water Programme remains the responsibility of Kilkenny County Council and facilitates the continued support of water and waste water services to over 200 group schemes in the county. The Council will oversee the public and private group scheme sector during 2021, including the delivery of new schemes, the improvement and support of existing group schemes throughout the county and the administration of private well grants. A number of improvement projects will be carried out in 2021 from funding allocated under the rural water programme.

Public Conveniences

Provision of €45,000 has been made in 2021 for the maintenance of public conveniences throughout the city and county.

Strategic Planning

Kilkenny County Council recommenced the formal process of making the City & County Development Plan 2021- 2026, following the adoption of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) in January, 2020. The draft Development Plan will be put on display for the next round of public consultation before year end. The Plan will include a Renewable Energy Strategy, Housing Need Demand Assessment/Housing Strategy and associated Environmental Reports.

In parallel a number of masterplans are being progressed for Loughmacask, St Canice's Campus (the former St. Canice's Hospital) and the Fairgreen area of the City. A draft joint Local Area Plan for Graiguenamanagh and Tinnahinch has also been prepared and will be put out on public display before year end.

Development Management

The number of planning applications received year to date to the end of October 2020 had decreased by circa 11% compared to the same period in 2019. There was a significant reduction in applications lodged during April and May of this year in particular, during the initial phase of Government restrictions. However, the number of applications has steadily increased since then to approximately 18-25 per week, similar to the weekly volume of applications lodged in 2019.

Vacant Site Register

An additional 17 sites were added to the Vacant Sites Register (VSR) in 2020, taking the total number of sites on the register to 30. The VSR continues to be an effective mechanism for the activation of suitable lands for housing, with a total of 12 sites having been activated since the introduction of the levy. Any monies collected are assigned to the Capital Account.

Conservation

An advisory service is provided on a continuous basis to the public and internally to Council departments on conservation issues.

Compliance and Enforcement

The County Council enforcement team continues to prioritise the investigation of non-compliance of planning conditions, unauthorised developments, and unfinished estates.

Building Control

Kilkenny County Council are continuing to participate in the National Building Control Programme, managed by the National Building Control Office. Up to the end of October 2020 a total of 251 Commencement Notices had been received through the Building Control Management System (BCMS). It is noted that the number of New Buildings recorded to date on the BCMS for the county has increased by 3% over the total number recorded in 2019. The number of inspections completed by Kilkenny County Council during 2020 will be within the annual NOAC Performance Indicator target range of 12% to 15%.

Playgrounds

The Parks Department continues to assist communities in developing and maintaining playgrounds across the county. The Council maintains a total of 30 playgrounds. Repairs and replacements to existing, in particular older playgrounds, will be in line with the budget provision for 2020.

Amenity Grants

The Amenity Grants Scheme is invaluable in assisting community groups in towns and villages across the County to maintain and upkeep their local neighbourhoods. The main objective of the scheme is to encourage and aid small-scale works to improve the local environment and community involvement in the upkeep, maintenance and enjoyment of public amenities. 166 groups received grant assistance in 2020. The range of works funded include landscaping, maintenance and development of open spaces, the provision of street and outdoor furniture, small-scale improvement works (e.g. painting) and the development of sporting facilities. These works combined will help to continue to contribute to the overall amenity of County Kilkenny, and help enhance the County's reputation as a quality place to live. The draft budget assumes no change in the allocation for Amenity Grants in 2020.

Ferrybank Neighbourhood Park

The new Ferrybank park and playground opened in 2020. It has been very well received by the local community and is extremely well used, demonstrating it is a much-needed amenity for the area. The playground boasts an activity trail, zipline, adult gym zone and ball wall. The Park was jointly funded by the Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government (50%), Kilkenny County Council (25%) and Waterford City and County Council (25%). The new Park will be maintained by the Parks Department. The draft budget provides for additional resources for the Parks Dept for the maintenance of the new Park along with the other new amenities developed by the Council in 2020, including Sillaire Woods, Graiguenamanagh and Motte Field, Callan.

Taking in Charge

The Council has 44 active taking in charge applications which are at various stages of progression. The Council is proactively engaging with Residents, Receivers and Bondholders to ensure developments are completed and in compliance with permissions granted. A total of 5 developments were taken in charge in 2020. Kilkenny County Council has, and will continue to utilise staffing resources to facilitate remedial works on developments where the bond has been claimed and where the Developer is no longer engaging. The Council will also continue to fund works on estates where there is insufficient funding from bonds to complete works.

Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

The LEO is the first point of contact for all businesses in County Kilkenny. The LEO support services continue to enable the Council to play a positive and proactive role in assisting small businesses to start, to develop and to grow and in 2020 played an integral part of the roll out of government COVID-19 supports to businesses impacted. Businesses were supported by LEO staff to avail of a number of financial and soft support to assist them to sustain and pivot their business during COVID, ranging from:

- Business Continuity Vouchers – a total of 291 businesses received a Business Continuity Voucher of up to €2,500 to help them develop recovery plans in response to COVID-19.
- Trading Online Vouchers – 260 businesses were supported with a Trading Online Voucher to help them develop an ecommerce presence.
- Mentoring – 861 businesses availed of one-to-one mentoring provided by a panel of expert consultants to assist businesses with issues relating to finance, HR and managing your business through COVID-19.
- Online Training and Webinars – as government restrictions were introduced in March, the LEO quickly moved its training and development programmes online and through a series of online webinars, 828 businesses participated on a range of training from Start Your Own Business Programmes to Management Development Programmes.

Economic Development

KILKENNY.IE - THE BEST OF IRELAND

The Council launched a new brand and website for Kilkenny under the banner – The Best of Ireland. Following a review of the Kilkenny brand, a decision was taken that all stakeholders would benefit from the rollout of a new umbrella brand for Kilkenny which better communicates all that Kilkenny has to offer. The revamped website kiilkenny.ie positions Kilkenny as an outstanding destination for customers, visitors and investors, and the Council will use the new brand to promote Kilkenny as an ideal place to visit, shop, work, set up a business, live and raise a family.

#SHOPKILKENNY - KEEP IT IN THE COUNTY

The Council have been actively promoting ‘#shopkilkenny – Keep it Local’ message asking shoppers to shop locally and support local business and jobs. Many businesses have adopted an ecommerce presence since COVID-19 and many are also providing click and collect services. With government restrictions, we have been focusing the message on #shopkilkenny online – supporting our local businesses by purchasing online locally where possible.

#TASTEKILKENNY - SAVOUR THE EXPERIENCE

Tastekilkenny was established to support our local food producers, local cafes, hotels, gastro pubs and restaurants. Farming, agriculture and food excellence are at the very essence of the story of Kilkenny. This passion for food is evident across the entire County with each town bustling with top food producers, hospitality, brewery’s & distilleries. The Parade in Kilkenny City on Thursday and Saturday mornings gives a sample of this amazing food. The Covid-19 pandemic has hit food and hospitality businesses hardest. We are encouraging the general public to support their local businesses who are offering click and collect and takeaway services and to consider buying local produce.

Innovation Centres

The Council continues to support the development of: the Centre for Design (C4D), along with IT Carlow, Design & Crafts Council of Ireland, Kilkenny Industrial Development Company (KIDCo) and Kilkenny LEADER Partnership (KLP); and the Precision Agriculture Centre of Excellence (PACE), digital innovation hub, that delivers advanced ICT software to the Irish agriculture and food sector.

Small Business Vacant Premises Incentive Scheme:

The Small Business Vacant Premises Incentive Scheme, an initiative aimed to incentivise the use of vacant commercial premises continues to be offered to businesses across the city and county. Subject to criteria, this scheme provides for lower entry costs through a grant related to the level of rates payable on the property.

Tourism

2020 has been a year unlike any other. The Irish tourism sector is facing enormous challenges due to the global pandemic which has resulted in the loss of the overseas visitor market in 2020. Kilkenny is no different, and as we moved through varying levels of restrictions, we have suffered the closure of some of our main tourist attractions, our hotels and hospitality businesses for a large part of the year. Tourism is a critical component of the local economy with over one in six people in the labour force employed in the hospitality sector (over 40% higher than the national average).

We attract approximately 620,000 visitors annually to Kilkenny in normal times and we aim to regain this share of the tourism market and to grow it in 2021 and beyond. Our future tourism growth is contingent on maintaining our reputation as a high standard, high value proposition. Other destinations are now competing for our “staycation” market and we must remain competitive and to the forefront of this market for when people begin to travel again.

We must provide compelling reasons for people to visit by providing immersive experiences and value for money outdoor offerings, together with our established history and heritage experiences, underpinned by quality services.

Our three year international sales and marketing plan for Kilkenny, commissioned by Failte Ireland under the Destination Kilkenny work plan, offers a pathway to increasing our number of international visitors and thereby increasing revenue when the current restrictions are eventually lifted. Kilkenny County Council will further progress our Orientation Strategy in 2021 with assistance of funding under the Failte Ireland Destination Towns scheme. If successful, substantial improvements will result in easing the visitor journey throughout the city, will help spread the commercial dividend for local business, move visitors more easily through the city, showcase the Medieval Mile and streamline signage of our attractions.

Planning the development of the Tholsel project continued in 2020. The visitor experience and journey requires a unified approach to interpreting the unique medieval set piece at the heart of the Medieval Mile, and a branding project is underway to inform the experience.

Woodstock Gardens & Arboretum

Woodstock is a significant tourism and amenity asset, and requires careful management in order to develop its full potential. Kilkenny County Council owns 50 acres, and Coillte are responsible for the remaining Woodstock Demesne, comprising some 900 acres. Kilkenny County Council in conjunction with Coillte have agreed a strategic plan for the development of the Woodstock Demesne. The Council will continue to pursue funding opportunities to assist in the implementation of the plan, including under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS). The draft budget assumes no change in the allocation for Woodstock in 2020.

Local Tourism Structures

Kilkenny County Council continues to invest resources in building the tourism offer county wide through long term partnerships including with Kilkenny Tourism, Destination Kilkenny, Failte Ireland and the OPW.

Kilkenny County Council is the principal supporter of Kilkenny Tourism and the annual subvention of €75,000 remains unchanged from 2020. It is acknowledged that support to the sector is more important now than ever. The Council will continue to proactively support all efforts to market and promote Kilkenny both nationally and internationally as a top class tourist destination.

Kilkenny Greenway

Construction has commenced on the Kilkenny Greenway connecting Waterford to New Ross. The lifting of the rail and sleepers is almost complete and the detailed design of the accommodation works along the 24km route will be finalised by year end. The project received a further welcome boost with the announcement of funding under the national Greenway Fund of €15.5 million, the current estimated cost of the project. The increase in the grant aid recognises the challenges faced by Local Authorities nationally during the Covid crisis in finding the matched funding for significant capital projects. The increased funding will allow the project to be delivered and open for use in 2022. The delivery of the Greenway in partnership with Wexford and Waterford Local Authorities will be a significant game changer for the region.

Medieval Mile Museum

The Medieval Mile Museum is now an established part of the Medieval Mile experience and is an integral component of our overall tourism offer. The operation and management of the Museum continues to be carried out by Kilkenny Civic Trust, who operate the Museum on a commercial basis. This budget includes a provision of €230k by way of annual subvention.

Water Quality

Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)

The Local Authority Waters Programme is a shared service, managed jointly by Kilkenny and Tipperary County Councils. The Programme employs almost 60 specialist staff nationally across a range of scientific, community engagement and other disciplines. These staff are based in 13 Local Authority offices across the country, including five of staff based in Kilkenny County Council. LAWPRO is fully funded by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG).

The River Basin Management Plan prioritises 190 areas for action (PAAs). These are areas that are at risk of not meeting their water quality objectives as set out in the European Water Framework Directive. Seven of the PAAs are wholly or partly in County Kilkenny namely; the River Dinin, River Duiske/Powerstown Stream, River Nuenna, Poccocke (Brownstown) River, River Breagagh, River Erkina and the River Lingaun. As agriculture is a significant pressure in the PAAs, LAWPRO works closely with Teagasc and dairy advisors of the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advice Programme (ASSAP) to assist farmers in understanding pressures on their local catchment and implementing local measures where required.

Water Safety

Lifeguard services continue to be provided each summer at the 5 river locations in County Kilkenny along the Nore and Barrow that are traditionally used by swimmers during the summer months, to ensure public safety. These locations are at: Graiguenamanagh, Thomastown, Inistioge and two locations in Kilkenny City. Kilkenny County Council will continue to provide the service at these locations in 2020. In 2020 welfare units for lifeguard staff were put in place.

Waste Management

Dunmore Recycling and Waste Disposal Centre

The Council operates a full-service waste recycling and disposal centre at Dunmore Civic Amenity Site (CAS). In 2020 a national review of CAS facilities operated by local authorities nationally was undertaken on behalf of the three Regional Waste Management Offices. The report was made available to local authorities in late Q3 2020. The findings of the report are currently being assessed and the recommendations arising out of same will be considered as appropriate. The Granny Recycling and waste disposal centre in the south of the county continues to provide for waste recycling and disposal services, comparable to those available at the Dunmore CAS. While the Centre is privately run, Kilkenny County Council makes an annual contribution towards the operational costs of the facility.

We are also planning the development of the former 17-acre Dunmore landfill site as a recreational and biodiversity park. We want to unlock the potential of this untapped resource and develop a high-quality parkland that will attract visitors from the city, county and beyond, creating an outdoor recreational space that complements the rich natural biodiversity that already exists.

Bring Centres

The Council manages 46 Bring Bank Centres throughout the city and county. Usage of the bring banks increased by circa. 50%, since the restrictions were introduced in response to Covid-19 in March. This resulted in additional costs with respect to the servicing and maintenance of same. Also in 2020, the Bring Bank Centre in Inistioge was relocated as part of an enhancement scheme and new improved signage was also provided at 12 sites across the county. Under the 2020 Anti-dumping Initiative Scheme, 10 additional CCTV cameras were also deployed at our Bring Bank Centres.

Education & Awareness

In autumn 2020, all primary schools received their Climate Change Pack during An Taisce "Climate Change Week". The pack included climate change themed educational resources, biodiversity resources from the Heritage Officer and a newsletter providing resource links to assist their environmental studies.

Litter & Illegal Dumping Campaigns

In 2020, since the Covid pandemic, new littering patterns developed. There has emerged littering of personal protection equipment (PPE) such as disposable masks and gloves along with a marked increase in illegal dumping. Numerous traditional and social media campaigns, along with enforcement action, were run throughout 2020 by the Environment Section to counteract this practice.

Tidy Towns

The Council continued to support the Tidy Towns Forum to support networking and co-operation opportunities for tidy town groups. Groups have identified the supports they require to succeed further in the competition and a practical schedule of activities is planned for 2021 which will be organised by the Environmental Awareness Officer.

Climate Action

The Council reviewed the implementation of its Climate Change Adaptation Strategy in 2020. The 5 year Strategy incorporates 96 high-level actions under 5 key headings, namely: Energy & Buildings, Flood Resilience, Resource Management, Transport and Nature & Communities. To date, 15% of actions have been completed with another 60% having commenced in the past 12 months.

Southern Region Waste Management Plan

Kilkenny County Council is part of the Southern Region for waste management purposes along with counties Carlow, Clare, Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford. The Regional Waste Management Plan requires each Local Authority to set aside a financial provision for waste prevention projects. In the case of County Kilkenny this amounts to €14.5k and funds both waste prevention campaigns and community prevention initiatives.

Waste Enforcement

The Council continues to place a strong emphasis on enforcement of all environmental legislation, through the implementation of its RMCEI (Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections) Plan. Resources will be targeted in 2021 to build on the success of enforcement actions undertaken in 2020. The areas targeted will be in line with the 2021 national waste enforcement priorities, which include illegal waste activity by unauthorised operators, construction and demolition (C&D) waste, end-of life vehicles (ELVs), waste collection - household & commercial and multi-agency sites of interest. Cork County Council has been designated as lead authority to coordinate the waste enforcement activities of the local authorities in the southern region. The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA) continues to provide a grant to each Local Authority towards these activities. Over the course of 2020, despite restrictions around Covid-19, to mid-November, our increased focus in the prevention of illegal activity associated with waste and litter legislation resulted in the 21 waste enforcement actions, 8 Fixed Penalty Notices and 220 Litter Fines. The Council's Environment Enforcement Team, as part of our greater focus on enforcement, also participated in a number of Gardaí led Operations in 2020. It is our intention to build on this inter-agency approach into the future.

Street Cleaning

The Council continues to provide street cleansing services in the major towns and villages: Callan, Castlecomer, Graiguenamanagh, Thomastown and Ferrybank. These services are essential to ensuring a high level of amenity in the key towns across the County.

Historic Landfill Sites

Works on the Ballyragget (Sherman's) Landfill Remediation Scheme were completed in 2020. Works also progressed during 2020, preparing Tier 2 and Tier 3 Assessment Reports on the remaining 12 historic landfill sites in County Kilkenny. An application for funding will be prepared in early 2021 to advance / finalise the assessment process on these sites. Remediation works are fully funded by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE).

Burial Grounds

The Council manages 14 burial grounds. Each has a caretaker who arranges plot sales, manages the registers and maps for the burial ground and supervises interments. Maintenance is arranged through the Council's Local Area offices.

A survey of all Council owned burial grounds commenced in 2020 to formalise a strategy for the ongoing maintenance and improvement of burial grounds, including the 143 historic graveyards. This will advise future investment requirements and the introduction, subject to available funds, of a multi annual rehabilitation/improvement programme.

Energy Management

In 2019 the Council embarked on the process to gain ISO 50001 accreditation. Obtaining same will enable the Local Authority to achieve cost savings and aid in the Council requirement to achieve national energy efficiency targets. The initial audit by the appointed assessor to obtain accreditation was undertaken in late 2020 and the second and final assessment will be undertaken in early Q1 2021.

Kilkenny County Council exceeded the public sector target set to achieve a 33% reduction in energy usage by the end of 2020 (compared to 2009 levels). The focus is now switched to the 2030 target of 50% and it is considered by obtaining ISO 50001 accreditation, it will ensure that the Council is implementing procedures to the highest standard to reduce energy usage. The Council will also continue to work in partnership with the 3 Counties Energy Agency (3CEA) and SEAI. The continued support of the 3CEA is central to strategic plans to deliver required energy use reduction targets.

IBAL

Kilkenny came out on top twice in 2020 in both IBAL surveys undertaken by An Taisce on behalf of Irish Business Against Litter. The city was deemed cleanest of 40 towns and cities surveyed for a record 5th time and IBAL praised Kilkenny commenting that in addition to the sites that consistently score well the series of interconnecting laneways between the streets and medieval area were excellent.

Operation of Fire Services and Fire Prevention

Kilkenny County Council Fire and Rescue Service

Kilkenny County Councils Fire and Rescue Service – Fire and Emergency Operations Plan 2015-2020 was adopted by the Elected Members in March 2015. This plan sets out a clear blueprint for progress of the Fire Service until 2020 and to fulfil Kilkenny County Council's statutory obligation as a Fire Authority as outlined in Section 26 of the Fire Services Act, 1981 and 2003. The main objective of the Fire Service is to provide for the safety of persons and property by way of prevention, protection and also by having an operational response in the case of fire or emergency. The review of this plan did not take place in 2020 but will be delivered in 2021. The continued provision of high quality emergency services during 2021 has required an increased financial provision for communications equipment.

Civil Defence

During 2020 the civil defence service in Kilkenny has benefited from increased numbers of volunteers and has been an invaluable support to both emergency and health services during the ongoing Pandemic. This service will be further strengthened during 2021 with the provision of an additional staff member to develop the service.

Community, Education & Lifelong Learning

Community Section

The community section within Kilkenny County Council has made significant progress in building relationships and delivering projects throughout the county. It is hoped to further build on this progress in 2021 allowing us to identify and deliver more successful local projects in more communities.

- The Council will continue to support the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in its role and in collaborating with other agencies in implementing the Local Economic and Community Plan.
- The LCDC Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme 2018-2022 will continue over 2021. This programme has delivered and will continue to deliver investment of approximately €632k per annum for social inclusion measures over the 5 year period.
- The LCDC supports 6 Healthy Ireland actions across 6 agencies in Kilkenny. In 2021 the LCDC will be supporting 5 agencies to deliver Healthy Ireland initiatives progressing the implementation of agreed actions in the Healthy Ireland Plan for Kilkenny.
- During 2020 under Covid support measures Kilkenny County Council led and supported the operation of a community forum to implement a community wellbeing plan together with a community support helpline. This forum will continue into 2021 with the delivery of measures under the Governments national resilience programme. KCC will coordinate the delivery of a comprehensive programme under the “Keep Well” campaign to support people and communities to mind their physical and mental health over the coming year.
- We will continue to support many initiatives and programmes all over the county including International Women’s Day, a Kilkenny Horse Project, Kilkenny Citizens Information Centre, The Drum Youth Facility, Comhairle na nÓg, the Garda Youth Diversion Programme, Ossory Youth, The Rural Transport Initiative- Ring - A- Link, Estate Management and the Childrens and Young Peoples Services Committee, amongst others. Kilkenny County Council has a strong commitment to community programmes and events which is evidenced by the continued financial provision to such initiatives.
- The Community section will continue to develop and submit applications for funding under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, Town and Village Renewal, CLAR and other funding streams as available during 2021 supporting and ensuring project delivery where funding allocations are made.
- The Council produces a grants booklet highlighting all Kilkenny County Council and other grants relevant to Community groups annually. This grant booklet has proven to be a valued resource to groups around the county. During 2020 many projects were deferred and it is envisaged that there will be an increased demand for supports developing projects and locating funding for their delivery.

Age Friendly Programme

- The Council will continue to collaborate with various agencies in implementing the Age Friendly Strategy 2017-2022.
- The Kilkenny Older People’s Council will continue to be supported through the provision of office space, administrative and financial support and assistance. Budget provision €4k

County Kilkenny Cultural Strategy 2018-2022 (Arts, Heritage & Libraries)

Kilkenny County Council adopted its Cultural Strategy, 2018 - 2022 for Arts, Heritage and Libraries in 2018 and this strategy will inform activities in the Arts, Heritage and Libraries service areas during 2021 focusing on actions to deliver increased participation and engagement with young people, a focus on best practice and quality and an overall awareness of the value of culture. The Heritage, Arts and Libraries services will deliver an increased variety of programmes during 2021 under the "Keep Well" campaign for community resilience.

County Kilkenny Creative Ireland Programme

The Cultural Services Team prepared a 5 year County Kilkenny Creative Ireland Strategy (Kilkenny Culture & Creativity Strategy 2018-2022) during 2018 and this will be further implemented in 2021. The Creative Ireland Programme in Kilkenny supported numerous projects across a range of cultural areas in 2020 and will aim to broaden that range, in line with Creative Ireland Programme criteria, through the 2021 Programme of investment in the amount of €111,000.

National Biodiversity Action Plan (2017-2022) Implementation

The Heritage Office will undertake actions to raise awareness of Kilkenny's biodiversity with funding from the National Parks & Wildlife Service under the National Biodiversity Action Plan (2017-2022).

Kilkenny Heritage Forum

It is proposed to review both the membership and operations of the Kilkenny Heritage Forum during 2021 to ensure its continued and effective achievement of the objectives of the Cultural Strategy.

Irish Walled Towns Network

The Heritage Office, working in partnership with the Kilkenny Area Office, will undertake an action to raise awareness and conserve Kilkenny City's (members of the Irish Walled Towns Network Programme) medieval walls with funding from the Irish Walled Towns Network.

Arts

Arts Programme

Kilkenny County Council has signed a framework to work in partnership with The Arts Council to continue and improve the delivery of a successful and increased arts programme in 2021. This agreement requires the continued investment in community arts programmes by Kilkenny County Council to ensure the provision of match funding by the Arts Council of Ireland.

Music Generation

A Music Generation Officer was appointed for Kilkenny commencing work on the ground in 2020. The objective to roll out programmes in schools across the county was delayed during 2020 due to covid-19 restrictions. Many online programmes were delivered and it is intended to achieve school delivery during 2021. The Music Generation programme is delivered in partnership with the Education and Training Board during 2021.

Contribution to Other Bodies

Financial provision has been made in 2020 to honour commitments made for the support of the Butler Gallery. Additional funding has also been made available to increase support for community engagement within the Kilkenny Arts Festival which has had a reduction in national funding. The increased support of this festival is considered essential to maintain its international reputation.

Library Service

Kilkenny Library Service continues to be a service at the heart of the local community and provides for the informational, cultural, educational, social and learning needs of Kilkenny citizens. The services provided at local level by this service during 2020 have been central to the provision of community supports through door to door book deliveries and online programming. The value of this front line community based service has been evident throughout 2020, adapting to the ever changing environment to provide a personal and effective community resource.

The Library service will implement and deliver the aims and actions as identified in their 5 year development plan as part of the County Kilkenny Cultural Strategy 2018-2022 and The National Library Strategy: Our Public Libraries 2022.

2020 has seen the introduction of a door to door service for older library users which has been extremely successful and will be continued into 2021. There has been a large increase in usage of online services such as eBooks and Eaudio in 2020 and the library service will continue to encourage and promote all on line services during 2021 to ensure that library users can access as much content as possible remotely. In 2021 it is planned to build on existing services as follows:

- Continued delivery of high quality library programmes which are community focused and cross sectoral supporting literacy, lifelong learning and health and well being.
- Continued participation in Cruinniu na NOg, the Creative Ireland Programme and The decade of Centenaries Programme.
- Continued door to door delivery service for older service users.
- The library will continue to work with the National Age Friendly Libraries recognition programme and build on the Age Friendly Charter awarded to Graiguenamanagh Library in 2019.
- The development of a dedicated Age Friendly programme of events and workshops throughout the year will continue to be developed.
- Continue to develop and work with relevant organisations and partners on the Right to Read Programme, Work Matters and Healthy Ireland @your Library.
- Continue to provide literacy and reading supports to families, children and schools through 4 distinct programmes:- Spring in to Storytime, Summer Stars, Bookville and Family Time@your library.
- Progress the capital projects in Kilkenny City, Thomastown, Callan and Graiguenamanagh.
- Rollout of digital hubs and dedicated spaces across the library network focusing on 3D printing, coding and Makerspaces activities and workshops.
- Continue to support the national library management system and national delivery system to ensure a comprehensive service to all citizens.
- Grant funding received as part of The Dormant Account Fund to establish the library service as a sensory friendly service will be developed further with the aim of obtaining Autism accreditation from AsIAM – Irelands national autism charity and advocacy organization.
- Maintenance of a comprehensive, up to date and relevant stock collection to meet the requirements of individuals, organisations and our communities.
- The provision of regular programming for all ages – book clubs, language circles, craft workshops and exhibitions, music recitals and talks.

Veterinary Services

Food Safety

Kilkenny County Council through the Veterinary Office, acting under a service level agreement with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) continues to support and monitor 19 approved and registered small food producers and abattoirs in the area. This is an essential service to ensure high food safety standards and to assist SMEs seeking to develop or expand in this highly regulated sector.

Shared Service with Carlow

Kilkenny County Council continues to have responsibility for food safety issues within the County of Carlow on a shared service basis. This arrangement has been in place through a Section 85 Agreement to the end of December 2021.

Control of Dogs

Under the Control of Dogs Act, Kilkenny County Council has a statutory obligation to provide a dog warden and a dog shelter. Kilkenny County Council jointly owns and operates, as a shared service with Carlow County Council, the dog shelter at Paulstown, Co. Kilkenny. Midland Animal Care Ltd are the contracted service provider for the dog warden/dog shelter services to Kilkenny and Carlow County Councils. As of the end of October, 2020, a total of 222 dogs have been re-homed through the shelter.

Control of Horses

In November 2020, the Council advertised its intention to make new Bye Laws for the Control of Horses within the county. The Bye Laws will incorporate horse exclusion zones within Kilkenny City. It is intended that the new Bye Laws will be adopted by the Council in Quarter 1 2021.

Miscellaneous Services - Service Division H

Franchise Costs

A budget of €10K covers the costs excluding salaries to publish the annual Register of Electors. A provision of €40K is being set aside over the next five years towards the costs of the local elections due to be held in May 2024.

Local Representation/Civic Leadership

The role of the elected members is critical and is pivotal to the County's development and success. The Elected Members responsibilities and role has expanded over the years as Council responsibilities expanded. Members take an active role in developing policies and strategies together with representations from national agencies and local interests. It is important that the supports available to elected representatives reflect these responsibilities and changes. A total budget of €846k is provided for salaries, chairpersons' allowances, training/conferences and expenses of the elected members. A provision of €2K is included for expenses due to external members on SPC's Committees and Joint Policing Committee.

Town Twinning

Kilkenny City is twinned with Moret-sur-Loing, Malbork, Kilkenny Minnesota and Formigine. The Council through the twinning subcommittee will continue to foster relationships with all our twinned towns and will facilitate and encourage communities/schools/clubs to forge links with these towns in the areas of culture, sport and education. The Draft Budget includes a provision of €7k for the costs of same.

Public Relations

Kilkenny County Council is committed to providing the public and communities with information through our websites and other online media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook. An additional member of staff has been assigned to the Communications Team. It is essential that we provide resources to improve our current website to ensure that information is readily available and easy to access. Work commenced on this in 2020 and will continue during 2021. A provision of €30K is included towards annual public relations costs and costs in modernising our website.

Irish Language

All statutory bodies are legally required to promote the use of the Irish language. Staff are encouraged to avail of any training courses available to enable them to converse with our customers and provide a service to those who wish to communicate through our native language. Kilkenny County Council is endeavouring to publish a number of statutory reports and information leaflets in English and Irish. Every opportunity is availed of in ensuring that our native language is used in our printed material and also in signage throughout the County.

A provision of €10k is included in the draft budget to cover the cost of Irish lessons/training and translations services.

Data Protection

Kilkenny County Council is registered as a data controller and is also a data processor. Under the Data Protection Legislation the local authority is obliged to keep personal information in a secure manner. Any individual is entitled to request data held on them and also had a right to have their data rectified or erased. Policies and procedures in relation to holding data are reviewed regularly or introduced to ensure that the local authority does not hold data not required and does not have any security breach of personal data. A member of Staff in Corporate Services is appointed as Data Controller and this post is shared with Carlow County Council. There will be ongoing work in relation to retention of records to ensure that we comply with national standards.

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