



Kilkenny County Council
Comhairle Chontae Chill Chainnigh

BUISÉAD FAOFA 2022

ADOPTED BUDGET 2022



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KILKENNY COUNTY COUNCIL

- 2022 BUDGET -

15th November, 2021.

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

RE: BUDGET 2022

Dear Councillor,

Enclosed for your consideration is the Draft Budget for Kilkenny County Council for the year ending 31st December, 2022.

The Statutory Budget Meeting to consider the Draft Budget is scheduled for Friday, 26th November, 2021 at 3.00 p.m.

The current year is very challenging for the Council's finances. Our income streams are under pressure. 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. In 2020, the Local Government sector required significant support from the Government to enable us to continue to provide our services, many of which are essential. This support continued to be required in the current year with discussions ongoing to ascertain the level of support that will be available.

The Council continued to operate the national Rates Waiver Scheme in 2021 and €5.9m was approved for Kilkenny businesses under the Scheme. This money is recouped from the Department. I want to compliment the staff in Finance who administered this scheme very efficiently in an effort to support local businesses.

We are awaiting a decision from Government on the level of support for income losses under the Goods and Services heading for 2021, which includes loss of parking income. The estimated outturn for 2021 in the Budget Book reflects our expectation of further financial support to offset this loss of income in the current year.

It is reasonable to expect that the impact of Covid 19 will continue to impact our income streams in 2022. We are in uncharted waters with an unprecedented level of uncertainty. This requires the Budget to be prepared on the assumption that the principle of Government support for the Local Government Sector, including Kilkenny County Council, established in 2020, will continue in 2022 if required. Ministers O'Brien and Burke's statement in November

2020 still holds true *“it is critical that services continue to be delivered to our citizens, that those citizens can maintain confidence in the Local Government system”*.

Supporting our Communities

From the start of the pandemic we have provided our essential services. We operated the Community Call/Forum until it was stood down by National Direction in November this year. 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 over the last 18 months. A big thank you to all who volunteered at community level to support the work of the Community Call.

Our finances are extremely tight and the decision of the Council in July to hold the Local Property Tax at the 2021 level has provided €1.1m towards this Budget which forms a substantial part of the discretionary spend and contributes to funding the following:

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

All of these organisations, services and schemes experienced challenges during the pandemic and the Council’s contribution provides vital support and is also an acknowledgement of the contribution they make in providing services and supporting local communities.

We have also maintained the level of funding for the following grant schemes for 2022:

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

and maintained our funding for the Library Book Fund. Continuation of this level of assistance was made possible by the decision on the LPT.

Challenges

Meeting housing need, social and private, continues to provide significant challenges in Kilkenny and nationally. The delivery of Housing for All and its many schemes will require additional resources in Housing to supplement our current staffing complement. We expect approval to recruit a Capital Office Team in the coming weeks. This team, funded by the Department will be in addition to our current staffing levels in Housing and will not impact on our Revenue Budget. This resource is absolutely essential if we are to achieve our targets under the Plan and avail of the many supports and schemes aimed at activating land and bringing vacant houses and properties into use.

Responding to Climate Change and achieving the ambitious national targets across many areas of our work and services will be challenging. Similar to housing we are awaiting approval to recruit a team dedicated to deliver actions in this area. Meeting the national targets will require significant work in areas like retrofitting of our housing stock and changing behaviour in particular in mobility. We recently received approval for a resource to progress and deliver on Smarter Travel plans. These resources are funded by the relevant Government Departments and do not impact on this Revenue Budget. The preparation of a Climate Action Plan along with developing a Plan for the Designated Decarbonisation Zone in the City will be a priority in 2022.

The Programme for Government and the NDP place significant emphasis on Town Centre First. We expect more detail on this scheme before year end, along with the resources to have a dedicated staff member to work with the stakeholders.

In addition to the above, there are a number of areas where there are increased demands on our services and in an ideal world we would wish to have additional staff funded from our own resources. But in the current challenging financial constraints and income uncertainties, this Budget provides for only one additional post and that is for our Library Service. With the opening of two new libraries in 2023, the Mayfair and Thomastown, our Budgets for 2023 onwards will need to address and provide funding for additional staff for Libraries. I appreciate and support the Council's desire to establish a professional Archive Service in Kilkenny County Council but it was not possible to do so in the constraints of this Budget.

Local Authorities have a limited number of sources of income where there is local discretion to raise income. Commercial rates is one such income source. Prior to the economic crash in 2008, commercial rates were adjusted almost on an annual basis. In Kilkenny commercial rates have not increased since 2008 but it may be necessary to consider returning to pre 2008 practices from 2023 if the Council is to remain on a sustainable financial footing with the capacity to deliver all the required services alongside an ambitious capital programme.

Rates Revaluation

As outlined at the last couple of Budget Meetings, 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 Tribunal's decisions on the appeals. The level of income loss is set to increase in 2022 as more appeals are determined. We estimated in 2017 when the revaluation took place that based on the number of appeals there was a risk of a loss of €1m euro per annum in rates income. With the outcome of 187 appeals known, it is likely that the figure of €1m will be exceeded.

Delivering our Capital Programme

Whilst we are dealing with the Revenue Budget our daily activities and the staffing provision in this Budget support the delivery of an ambitious capital programme. Driving economic development is important and requires resourcing. Whilst the last 2 years were particularly challenging due to the impact of Covid we continued to deliver significant projects and plan for delivery of important strategic projects across the City and County. The delivery of our Capital Programme is having a positive impact all across the County. It is important that despite the financial challenges that we remain positive and work to avail of all national grants schemes to deliver for local communities. The majority of grant schemes require some element of local match funding. Below is just a sample of the many projects being delivered by the Council which are having a positive impact on the quality of life of our citizens.

CALLAN

Conservation Works to St. Mary's Church

Kilkenny County Council successfully secured funding under the Historic Towns Initiative towards the repair of the ornate 19th century iron railings and masonry elements of the Mill Street boundary to St Mary's Church in the centre of Callan. The completed works have received overwhelming positive feedback from the local community leading to further discussions around how the site may be utilised and made accessible to the public in the future.

The Motte Field (*Callan*)

Phase 1 of the Motte Field Looped Walk was delivered under the Rural Regeneration Development Fund. The project creates an off-road high quality footpath along with interpretation of the surrounding historical area including the Norman Motte and Bailey. In 2021, funding was also secured under the Outdoor Recreational Infrastructural Scheme to deliver Phase 2 of the walk on the west side of the Callan Bypass. This section of walk is to be located on private lands and the Council is in discussions with the interested parties to obtain a long-term lease agreement which is required to facilitate the next Phase.

Active Travel

Funding has been secured from the National Transport Authority under active travel measures to proceed to planning and implementation of the temporary one-way system which has proved hugely successful during the pandemic. Additional funding has been secured to further enhance the footpath on the Callan By-Pass which is an important amenity for locals and much used.

Friary Complex & Bridge Street Regeneration Project

We hope to commence work on the preparation of the Plan early in 2022 subject to being successful in the RRDF funding call.

CASTLECOMER

Castlecomer Discovery Park

Two funding applications were submitted in July to help maintain and develop the offering of the Castlecomer Discovery Park under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme. Funding was sought under the Measure 2 of ORIS to rehabilitate and enhance some 2.1km's of the Ardra Looped Walk and Arboretum Walk. The second application was submitted under the new funding category of ORIS for Project Development and if successful will provide the Budget to develop a Masterplan for the complex.

Pedestrian Bridge

The construction of a pedestrian bridge removing pedestrians from the Narrow Bridge on the N78 is not only a necessary safety improvement but also connects the Town to the Discovery Park. By improving connectivity it will help increase visitors to the area and boost the local economy. Work is progressing well and the bridge is expected to open before year end.

Works Across the County

Outside of Ferrybank and the scheduled Towns we are continuing to deliver projects in partnership with communities with funding from national programmes such as Town and Village and CLAR. Many rural walks/paths/recreational amenities have received upgrades with funding attracted under ORIS. These schemes are extremely important to our smaller towns and villages and this Budget provides for the Council's match funding where it is necessary.

FERRYBANK

Kilkenny Greenway

Wexford County Council is the lead authority for the delivery of the Kilkenny Greenway from Waterford to New Ross. The Greenway traverses 3 Counties. The project is being delivered in Lots, with the first 3 sections under construction. A Business Development Officer is now in place to work with local communities to realise the full economic potential of the project. The potential of linking the Greenway to the villages of Slieverue and Glenmore is under

investigation. Additional funding will be required when a route is agreed and planning consent obtained for these links.

Ferrybank and the North Quays

The following projects are included in the URDF allocation for the North Quays:

- **Belmont Link Road:** The provision of this road, linking from the Abbey Road to the Belmont Road will support residential development by opening up lands and facilitating the planned population growth for the greater Waterford City in a compact manner. It will also provide access to the proposed Greenway Carpark. We expect to proceed to planning in coming months.
- **Abbey Road - Greenway Connectivity:** This will provide greater access and facilitate usage of the Greenway in Ferrybank as a smarter travel option for people living, working and attending school 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.

GRAIGUENAMANAGH

Silaire Wood Loop Walk in Graiguenamanagh

Funding was secured under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme to construct a 400-meter boardwalk along the River Barrow. It replaced the former timber boardwalk that was destroyed by a severe flood event in 2015. Apart from the nuts and bolts the new boardwalk is made from 100% recycled plastic. Trail and carpark enhancements were also completed by the Council in partnership with Trail Kilkenny and Kilkenny LEADER Partnership.

Barrow Valley Outdoor Activity Hub

Works to complete the access road, parking area to service the Barrow Valley Outdoor Activity Hub in Graiguenamanagh were completed over the summer. The works also provided for the provision of 20 no. serviced camper van bays to add to the existing offering of non-services bays. The facility has evolved into a very popular destination for the campervan tourist market and is now considered a key economic driver for the town.

The Turfmarket Car park Graiguenamanagh.

Funding secured under the Town and Village Renewal Accelerated Measure Covid Fund allowed us to deliver a new 15 bay carpark in Turfmarket, Graiguenamanagh, located just off the Main Street in the town. The site was identified and purchased by the Council some years previously for its central location and potential to address the parking need so as to encourage shoppers into the town to support local small businesses.

Abbey Hall Recreational Area - Rehabilitation Scheme

Works to rehabilitate the outside amenity space around the Abbey Hall complex which adjoins the Main Street in Graiguenamanagh are nearing completion. The works include the replacement of the defective tennis/soccer court surface with a multi-games 3G Sports surface along with significant hard and soft landscaping to the surrounding amenity areas. This project when finished will bring a much loved public amenity in the heart of the town back into use for public enjoyment.

The Graiguenamanagh Men's Shed

Works to retro-fit and refurbish the Council's disused toilet block on the Convent Road into a high quality new workshop for the Graiguenamanagh Men's Shed will be completed before end of the year. Whilst the main purpose of the project was to repurpose the existing building into a workshop, works also provide for a new pollinator friendly green living roof along with enhancements to the public space in front of the Health Centre and Library providing a space for visitors to these services to relax in a green comfortable setting.

Consultants are also engaged to undertake a Design Options Report for 2 Pedestrian/Cyclist Bridges over the River Barrow in Graiguenamanagh / Tinnahinch. The provision of these bridges, along with the camper van infrastructure in the Outdoor Activity Hub, were identified as key objectives within the 2019 Graiguenamanagh-Tinnahinch Tourism and Recreational Project Concept Study which was prepared to set out a roadmap to stimulate sustainable economic development and attract inward public and private investment into the area.

Flood Relief Scheme

The Flood Relief Scheme is progressing through *Stage 1 - Options Evaluation and Selection* and will progress to *Stage 2 - Design and Planning* during 2022. The ultimate goal, when the project is delivered is to protect homes and businesses from future flooding and to enhance the amenity of the River to locals and visitors. There will be significant public consultation at Stage 2 of the process and the delivery of the Flood Scheme will have a very positive impact on Graiguenamanagh.

KILKENNY CITY

Breaghagh Valley

Work was completed on the road infrastructure and it opened in 2021. It is having the desired positive impact with a number of planning permissions and applications in the pipeline for residential development in the Breaghagh Valley neighbourhood. A planning application is expected to be lodged by the KCETB before year end for two new secondary schools in the area. We received grant aid of €6.5 million under the LIHAF for this project with the remainder provided from Council resources. The Breaghagh Valley will become home to over 3,000 families over the next 10-15 years.

Abbey Quarter

Phase 1

Work on Phase 1 of **Abbey Quarter** is progressing well. Mythen Construction Ltd. is on site and delivering the renovation of the Brewhouse which will be substantially complete early in 2022 and ready for occupation by Easter. The Brewhouse will bring jobs to the heart of the City. The long awaited Riverside Park and Skate Park opened to the public during the Summer. Work has commenced in recent weeks on the Mayfair Ballroom with the new Library due to open early in 2023. Work is progressing well on the public realm at Horse Barrack Lane and Brewhouse Square and same will be complete in tandem with the Brewhouse. These projects are providing the public with their first glimpse of the quality to which the Abbey Quarter is being developed. Works are underway to bring the 19 Century Tea Houses back into use and the Coach Park will be complete by Easter 2022. The draft Conservation Plan will go out for consultation in the coming weeks. Whilst the necessary Covid lockdowns slowed delivery, all Phase 1 Projects should be complete by end of 2022.

The AQP expects to lodge a planning application for the first new building on the site before the end of this year.

Phase 2

During 2021, we obtained 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. We were successful in attracting funding under the URDF Round 2 Call. This project will be tendered in Q1 2022 and should be completed and opened to the public by the end of 2023. These new public realm spaces will facilitate use by our many festivals and events.

In addition we attracted funding to deliver a board walk under Greensbridge to connect the two existing riverside walkways. Consultants have been appointed to examine the feasibility of same and we expect to proceed to planning in 2022.

Outer Ring Road

The Northern Ring Road Extension is a critical piece of infrastructure for Kilkenny City & County. We have recently appointed Consultants to prepare the Strategic Assessment Report for the project. This report will be key in supporting our application for funding and enabling the project to progress to planning.

Tholsel Project

The recent announcement of €3.2 m in grant aid by Failte Ireland has allowed us to progress the detailed design of this project. In addition to the tourist aspects to the project the works will also make the building universally accessible with the provision of a lift and will reinstate the Mayor's Parlour to its original height.

THOMASTOWN

Public Realm Works at Logan/Low Street

Logan/Low Street, Thomastown received funding under the RRDF with the objective to enhance the visual appearance of both streets and to improve traffic flow in the area.

Works are just completed with an upgrading of the existing streetscape using high quality paving materials, removal of existing overhead service cables relocating and replacing them underground, provision of new heritage public lighting and revision to existing traffic management with new surface and line marking.

Chapel Lane

Pedestrianisation of Chapel Lane allowing safe access for walking and cycling to the Thomastown Scouts Den, St Columba's Hospital and Dangan Terrace from the west side of Thomastown and for safe access to St Mary's Primary School, Church, town centre and housing estates from the east side. Formal realigning of the car park at the Scouts Den and viewing area to allow safe access to outdoor seating in line with the Thomastown Mobility Management Plan.

Pedestrian Crossings under Active Travel

Pedestrian crossings on Ladywells Street and Maudlin Street, Thomastown are now complete.

Sessions House

Construction commenced in September 2021 and is expected to be completed in Sept 2022. Sessions House will become home the Design & Craft Council of Ireland School of Jewellery.

Library at Community Hall

Detailed design is in progress and it is expected to go to tender at end of Q1 2022. Construction should commence in Q3 2022. The new library should open in Summer 2023.

Active Recreation Space

This space at the rear of the Community Hall has been transformed and it extremely well used.

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. We will discuss with the Council over the coming months how we resource the delivery of the Capital programme in a sustainable manner, reflecting all funding sources, grants, development contributions and borrowings.

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 2022, if required.** This Budget facilitates progress to be made on key infrastructure and amenities. 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.

Appreciation

I would like to thank all the Elected Members for your continued support. It has been a challenging year for you as Covid restrictions impacted on your daily work on behalf of the people of Kilkenny.

I wish to acknowledge our staff's contribution, all across the organisation, who work to ensure the public of Kilkenny get the best services for the resources we have available. The staff's efforts as frontline workers in providing essential services is acknowledged and through their efforts we have maintained services and progressed the delivery of our Capital Programme.

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 another challenging year.

A particular thanks is due to Martin Prendiville and his team for their work in bringing this Budget together and to Martin for making himself available to you the Elected Members during the process. I want to acknowledge the work of Anne Maria Walsh, who worked with the Team in Finance to present the first draft of the Budget in Martin's absence. I would also wish to acknowledge the team in Finance for managing the Council's Finances throughout the year with a particular focus on maintaining cashflow.

If our income streams continue to be negatively impacted in 2022, 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 2022 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. Fidelis Doherty for her support throughout the year and Cllr. Andrew Mc Guinness her predecessor. As the First Citizen of Kilkenny they play an important role in providing civic leadership in this challenging time.

Yours sincerely,



**Colette Byrne,
Chief Executive.**

BUDGET 2022 – FINANCE OVERVIEW

The details of the Draft Budget for 2022 are set out in the attached Tables on pages 44 to 77. The total estimated expenditure for 2021 is €93.9m compared with €89.9m for 2021.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the finances of the Council. The income streams from commercial rates and car parking continue to be impacted. Unlike 2021 Government have not given any indication that additional funding support will be available in 2022 to offset the continuing impact of the pandemic. The Draft Budget has been prepared on the assumption that income will be available either from source or from compensation from Government. It will be necessary to defer committing on expenditure of least €3m for a number of months in 2022 until more clarity becomes available on the income for 2022. This is similar to the approach taken in 2020 and 2021.

In addition to the challenges on income there were a number of other challenges that had to be addressed during the Budget process including demand for extra resources (*financial and staffing*) in a number of Directorates, recoupment levels on the RAS housing scheme, cost inflationary pressures, financial support for various community groups and organisations, IT security investment, funding for pension commitments and match funding for the capital Programme adopted by the Council in 2021.

Commercial Rates

The gross rate demand for 2022 is €20.93m which is €120k below the 2021 Budget figure. The provision for rate strike-off has been reduced by €350k offsetting the loss of income resulting in a net gain of €230k over Budget 2021. Government provided compensation of €5.9m for 2021 to support the commercial rates waiver provided to businesses. This equates to approximately 33% of the annual rate demand collected. In the absence of Government support in 2022, this money will have to be collected from businesses.

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 2022 and is one of the lowest of all local authorities. The effective ARV has not been increased by the 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 2022.

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 187 of these appeals have been heard. These appeals have resulted in a loss in annual income to the Council of €836k. The total estimated loss in annual income when all appeals have been heard is expected to be in excess of €1m. This loss is provided for in the Draft Budget.

The vacancy refund of 90% remains unchanged for 2022. 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.

Despite the impact of Covid-19 Kilkenny County Council still has one of the highest income collection rates of all Local Authorities. The actual collection rate for 2020 was 83% compared with the national average of 77%.

Other Income Sources

There is no change to the income derived from Local Property Tax in 2022 which remains at €11.8m.

The Draft Budget assumes that the income from car parking will remain at the 2019 levels of €2.3m. Covid-19 has had a severe impact on this income source in both 2020 and 2021. Up to 20% of the budget estimate could be at risk in 2022 depending on Covid-19. The Draft Budget does not provide for any changes to car parking charges for 2022.

The discussions with Irish Water on the 2022 Budget are ongoing. The Draft Budget assumes a recovery of €5.7m on payroll, other services and the central management charge.

There is a reduction of €100k on insurance premium costs for 2021. Kilkenny County Council continues to maintain a strong focus on claims management with our insurers Irish Public Bodies.

Income from social housing rents has increased by €300k from Budget 2021 reflecting the inclusion of additional houses added to the stock. Planning fee income has increased by €107k reflecting the increase in planning activity levels.

The draft budget assumes that the full cost of administering the RAS scheme will be recouped in 2022. Discussions are ongoing with the DHPLGH regarding changes in the administration of the scheme introduced in January 2021. The impact of these changes could reduce the income by up to €700k in 2022.

Capital Programme

The Council approved the three year Capital Programme in June of this year. The estimated expenditure on social housing is €135m which is 100% grant funded. However, a working capital facility of between €8m and €10m is required to fund the developments.

The total estimated expenditure on projects excluding housing, roads (*100% funded*) and fire services (*100% funded*) is €127m. The estimated match funding required is €33m of which €22.65m has been identified. This amount of €22.65m includes €8.5m of new term loans approved by Council but not yet drawn down. The Draft Budget makes provision for the repayment of the €5m of term loan only as the €3.5m facility for the upgrade of the public lighting stock will not be required until Quarter 4 of 2022. When these two new loans are drawn down the total amount of non-mortgage loans being serviced will amount to €27m.

The outstanding balance on completed capital projects at the end of 2021 is €8.7m with the larger projects being written off over a period of eight years.

The cost inflation currently being experienced in the construction sector presents a significant challenge given the number of large contracts in the pipeline that have yet to be tendered.

It is essential for the longer-term financial sustainability of the Council that a balanced funding model is maintained to fund the capital programme.

A key objective in the Budget is to maintain the level of overall discretionary expenditure similar to 2021. This can only be achieved if sufficient income is available in 2022.

Some of the key provisions in the 2022 Budget are as follows:

- Housing rents increased by €300k to fund additional expenditure in housing.
- Housing maintenance increased by €100k to €2.6m.

- Expenditure on homeless services increased to €620k.
- Expenditure on RAS/Leasing increased to €10m in line with current levels.
- Housing grants reduced by €400k to €1.6m – 20% of funding from Council’s sources.
- Local roads funding maintained at 2021 levels.
- Municipal District funding allocation included at €200k – no change.
- Provision of €463k for write-down on outstanding balance on St. Francis Bridge.
- Provision of €250k for write-down on outstanding balance of Breaghagh Valley Infrastructure.
- Provision of €100k included to replace on-street parking machines.
- Increase planning fee income to €653k.
- Kilkenny Tourism Subvention - €75k, no change.
- Festivals/Events support - €112k, no change.
- Christmas Festival - €85k, reduction of €30k.
- St Patrick’s Day - €40k, no change.
- Paint the Shop Scheme - €10k, no change.
- Tidy Towns - €14k, no change.
- Woodstock Maintenance - €280k – increase of €10k.
- Callan Friary Development - €25k, no change.
- Drum Youth Centre - €50k, no change.
- Traveller Horse Project - €20k, reduction of €5k.
- Castlecomer Enterprise Centre - €8k, no change.
- Provision for match funding for Town & Village Renewal and other grant schemes- €85k, no change.
- Regional Assembly Contribution €103k, no change.
- Archives - €12k, reduction of €5k.
- Derelict Sites - €20k, no change.
- Heritage Programme - €100k, no change.
- Medieval Mile Museum Subvention - €230k, no change.
- Historic Landfills - €120k, increase of €10k.
- Recycling Centres & Bring Banks - €182k, increase of €20k.
- Dunmore Civic Amenity site operating costs - €855k, no change.
- Illegal dumping - €45k, no change.
- KKB - €10k, no change.
- Street Cleaning - €1.39m, no change.
- Burial Grounds Maintenance - €315k, no change.

- Burial Ground Grants & Improvements - €30k, no change.
- Civil Defence - €203k, increase of €14k.
- Fire Service - €4.55m, increase of €113k.
- Library Service - €3.1m, increase of €140k.
 - One additional staff member included.
 - Book fund - €120k, no change.
- Maintenance of Parks and open spaces - €1.74m, increase of €195k.
- Amenity Grants - €140k, no change.
- Playground Maintenance - €80k, no change.
- Support for sporting bodies - €80k, increase of €4k.
- Arts Expenditure - €380k, no change.
- Watergate Subvention - €154k, no change.
- Rothe House Subvention - €60k, no change.
- Veterinary Expenditure - €300k, no change.
- Control of Dogs - €181k, no change.
- Control of Horses - €85k, no change.
- Coroner - €188k, no change.
- Motor Tax Office - €465k, increase of €20k.
- Central Management Costs - €8.25m, increase of €497k.
 - €300k of increase relates new IT security measures.
- Pension Charge - €5.0m, no change.

It is critical that the Council continues to ensure that expenditure is in line with the income available. This will be challenging for 2022 due to the level of uncertainty with Covid-19 and the inflationary pressures impacting expenditure in all service areas. As previously stated, it will be necessary to defer committing on expenditure of at least €3m for a number of months in 2022 until greater clarity becomes available regarding the level of income.

Housing For All

The Housing For All Programme launched in September 2021 sets out the Government’s mission to tackle the housing crisis. A key element of this programme is to increase housing delivery to an average of 33,000 new homes per year in the period 2022-2030. Housing For All includes a target to deliver an average of over 9,500 new build social homes per annum over the next five years, with annual targets increasing year on year.

Kilkenny County Council in partnership with the voluntary sector, under the previous national housing programme. Rebuilding Ireland has delivered more than 800 social homes in the County during the period 2018 – 2021. The current building programme has more than 150 homes under construction at the end of 2021 with a further 143 homes completed and occupied during 2021. These developments include 33 houses at Donaguile, Castlecomer, 18 apartments and houses at Pairc Nua, Castlecomer Road, Kilkenny and 16 units at Kilmacow.

New housing delivery targets have been set for Kilkenny under the Housing For All Programme as follows:

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Build	170	149	153	164	167	803

There will be many challenges in the delivery of these ambitious delivery targets and the Housing Office will utilise all the provisions of the Housing For All Programme to ensure that targets are not only met, but exceeded over the period to 2026.

Kilkenny County Council will prepare a Housing Delivery Action Plan to clearly indicate where the provision of social and affordable housing is required to meet existing and projected housing need across the county during the next five year period.

Housing Stock and Maintenance

The Council has a current housing stock of 2,500 units. We receive and respond to an average of 5,000 maintenance requests per annum. As Covid-19 restrictions continued into 2021, only essential reactive maintenance works were carried out. The number of calls during Covid-19 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 2022. The proposed progression to a planned maintenance system remains an objective of the Council to achieve improved efficiencies in stock management and customer service. We have commenced carrying out stock conditioning surveys on some of our properties. Recent increases in the cost of construction materials have placed additional pressure on our maintenance budget.

Funding of €700k was secured to carry out energy retro fitting on 32 units by the end of 2021. This includes air to water heating systems, insulation works and upgrading of windows and doors.

Rent Review

A rent review was commenced in 2020 but the income details received were not processed due to onset of Covid-19. The rent assessments were implemented in full in 2021 in accordance with the Council’s Differential Rent Scheme. These rents were based on income details received from tenants in 2020. Any significant changes in households rent were further reviewed to ensure accuracy. Tenants were informed of any adjustments and rents applied on a phased basis from March 2021. Tenants were afforded the opportunity to appeal against any changes to rent.

No further clarifications have been received in respect of a National Rent Scheme.

Housing Allocations

To date in 2021, 256 letters offering social housing have been issued to approved housing applicants. Regrettably, 60 of these accommodation offers have been refused. We had hoped to implement a Choice Based Letting system in 2021 but due to resource issues, this has not occurred. We are committed to implementing this system in 2022, which will reduce the number of refusals and provide administrative efficiencies.

Homeless Assistance

The Housing Section continues to support households in need of emergency accommodation. The provision of own front door short term accommodation by the Council reduced the need for hotel accommodation during 2020. The emergency homeless accommodation budget is funded 90% by Department of Housing grant and 10% from local provision in the County Council's annual budget. 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 changes in homeless presentations over the last 4 years. There has been a notable increase in homeless presentations in 2021. This trend is expected to continue requiring an increase in emergency accommodation expenditure.

MONTH	2018	2019	2020	2021
January	37	25	23	18
February	32	12	27	34
March	21	16	24	26
April	18	16	19	24
May	29	20	14	42
June	20	14	12	37
July	15	30	19	34
August	26	28	22	24
September	19	26	26	41
October	27	22	26	42
Total	244	209	212	322

The recommencement of Notice to Quits in relation to private rented properties post Covid 19 restrictions has increased dramatically the number of families in need of emergency homeless services where alternative rental properties cannot be located.

Housing Grants

The draft budget provides for a decrease of €400k in funding of housing grants for the elderly and disabled. This reduces the funding required from Council resources by €80k. This decrease is a true reflection on the reduced number and value of grants paid out in 2021. While the number of grant approvals increased in 2021, the number of grants paid out decreased. This is due to a number of factors including increased cost of construction materials and difficulty in sourcing suitable contractors to carry out works.

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. The value of the loans paid out in 2021 has reduced due to a number of loans issued in relation to Tenant Purchase Scheme and Incremental Purchase Scheme at a reduced value.

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	20	2,901,730
2021 (YTD)	20	2,502,477

Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)

In previous years, salaries and costs relating to the administration of the RAS scheme were recouped in full. Due to changes in procedures from Jan 2021, these costs are no longer funded through the recoupment process. We are waiting on clarification from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in regard to the funding of the RAS scheme from 2022 onwards.

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 2021, CPO procedures were completed in respect of 5 properties with additional notices issued in relation to 13 further properties. The Vacant Homes Officer has also worked to create infill sites for the development of homes in town centres where privately owned vacant or underutilised properties can be combined to create viable development sites. Locations where such projects are underway include Johnstown, Goresbridge and Piltown. The regeneration of complex town centre brownfield sites remains a core objective of the Housing Delivery Team.

Tenancy Management

Funding in respect of estate management has been retained in this draft budget with provision made for three Tenant Liaison Officers to support 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 commenced implementation in 2021 with an increase in enforcement action and collaborative interagency working in relation to areas where serious anti-social behaviour has impacted on the lives of many residents. Provision has been made for a continued investment in enforcement action to support the tenancy management team in 2022.

Traveller Accommodation

The delivery of housing under the Traveller Accommodation Programme as adopted by Kilkenny County Council has continued in 2021 with a requirement to deliver accommodation solutions for a number of families with medical needs. A review of the housing need in Kilkenny City will be completed before the end of 2021 to clearly identify the housing delivery need in the City and Environs. Plans will be prepared in 2022 to meet this need and will be included in the Housing Delivery Action Plan. The re-establishment of the Kilkenny Interagency Traveller Committee (KTIG) has allowed for closer working relationships to be developed between stakeholder's in the provision of services in Kilkenny. The Local Traveller Accommodation Committee (LTAC) has continued to meet during 2021 identifying measures needed to be prioritised to meet changing needs.

Road Works Scheme 2021

NON-NATIONAL ROADS

Kilkenny County Council's allocation to road maintenance and improvement works amounted to €1.611m for 2021. 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 €10.72m in 2021. 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 2021 included a Discretionary Grant allocation of €2.55m, rehabilitation of declassified National roads grant of €400k, a bridge rehabilitation grant of €200k, Low Cost Accident Scheme grant of €373k, and Community Involvement in Roadworks (*CIR*) €640k.

In addition, Kilkenny County Council received additional funding for the City & rural Towns and Villages for 26 active travel projects/measures with funding allocation of €4,333,000.

Despite the Covid challenges in 2021, I am pleased to say that the 2021 full Road Works Programme will be completed due to good planning and significant work of the MD offices and Machinery Yard.

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 2021

- **The N76 The Riversfield to Ahanure North Pavement Scheme** covering a length of 2.55km was completed for a cost of just over €1m.
- **The N77 Oldtown to Ballyragget Pavement Scheme** covering a length of 1.3km will be completed before the end of Q4 2021 for a cost just over €920,000.
- **N24 Tower Road - Tower Road Junction Improvement Scheme** - The procedures to facilitate land acquisition and advanced archaeological works were advanced during 2021. It is the intention to progress the scheme to construction in mid-2022.

- **N77 Ballyragget to Ballynaslee Minor Improvement Scheme** - Planning and CPO approval was secured during 2021. It is the intention to continue to progress the scheme during 2022.
- **N25 Waterford to Glenmore Scheme** – Kilkenny County Council published the preferred option for this scheme at the end of Q2 2021. Kilkenny awaits TII approval to progress the scheme to Phase 3 during 2022.
- **N24 Waterford to Cahir** – This scheme is within Phase 2 Option Selection. Potential solutions having regard to the constraints identified will be developed by Q4 2021 and a preferred solution will be selected by Q3 2022.
- **N24 Carrick Road Improvement (*Bends West of Mooncoin*)**
The development of the necessary reports to facilitate the application to An Bord Pleanála for both planning and CPO approval continued through 2021. It is expected that the formal application will be made before the end of Q4 2021.

Other Key Infrastructure Improvement Schemes advanced during 2021 included:

Castlecomer Footbridge

Construction of the Castlecomer footbridge commenced in mid-2021 and the bridge is planned to open before the end of 2021 at an overall cost in excess of €1m.

Kilkenny Western Environs Phase 1 Infrastructure Scheme

In September 2021, we had the official opening by Minister Darragh O’ Brien of the Kilkenny Western Environs Phase 1 Infrastructure Scheme. The scheme will open up lands for the development of up to 3,000 new homes for Kilkenny City in the Breagagh Valley over the coming years. The works included

- 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.

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 the preparation of a SAR (*Strategic Assessment Report*) for the scheme. This report will be ready in Q2 2022 for submission to the Department for consideration.

Ormonde Street Improvement

Phase 1 of the Ormonde Street Improvement will be largely completed in 2021 with remaining works to be carried out in 2022. It is envisaged that these works will re-commence in March 2022 and take 6 months to complete. The works will consist of a complete pavement replacement including provision of new footpaths and public lighting.

Vicar Street Improvement

The Vicar street Improvement works will commence in Q3 2022. The works consist of making the street one-way for vehicular traffic to facilitate the widening of footpaths. A contra-flow cycle lane will be provided to allow cyclists to continue to use the road in both directions. New pedestrian crossing points will be provided to improve pedestrian mobility and safety.

Public Lighting - Maintenance

Kilkenny County Council maintains approximately 11,000 public lights. The annual investment in public lighting provision per annum is €963k 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 2021 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

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. The Tenders for the Works Contract and the Consultant Contract have been returned. The intent is to award the Contracts in Q1 of 2022 and completion of the installation of the new lanterns in Q4 of 2022.

Kilkenny County Council continues to actively encourage 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.

Flood Relief Projects

In 2021, two major Flood Relief Capital Projects advanced through the Design Stage of the schemes for both the communities of Graiguenamanagh and Ballyhale. Both schemes will advance to Stage 2 in 2022 - Planning Phase. These schemes will provide a standard of protection to approximately 92 properties and will have a significant social and economic benefit to the effected communities of both Graiguenamanagh and Ballyhale.

IRISH WATER

Service Level Agreement

The Council continues to manage the transition of Water Services to Irish Water [IW] which commenced in January, 2014 through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for a period of 12 years. All costs relating to the operation of Water Services in 2022 will be recouped from Irish Water under the terms of this SLA.

Infrastructure Programme

A number of major and minor capital works progressed in 2021. 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

- **Gowran Regional Water Supply Scheme:** Planning for this scheme has been granted along with Compulsory Purchase Order for the required land and wayleaves. 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. It will 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:** In October 2021, Glan Agua were awarded the contract for the upgrade of the Kilkenny Regional Water Supply Scheme which will see a €30 million investment at the Troyswood treatment plant. 28,000 people are served by the scheme. The upgrade works are expected to take around two and half years to complete and will include a new 3 km watermain from Troyswood to the Radestown site to connect to the existing service reservoirs and enable the Radestown plant to be decommissioned.

Water Networks Programme

Pressure Management

In conjunction with Irish Water, 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 and will reduce water loss from the network with an anticipated 15% reduction in burst main frequency.

Mains Rehab Works

- Jerpoint, Thomastown - installation completed on 450m of ageing 100mm Asbestos Watermain with 125mm HDPE watermain on the R448 along the site of Jerpoint Abbey. Permanent reinstatement completed in Q3 2021.
- Detailed designs have been completed on mains rehab schemes at Knocktopher and Norelands respectively with commencement dates scheduled for Q4 2021.

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 was completed in Q3 2021. Decommissioning of old mains resulted in a reduction in leakage and improved pressure for the residents of Fatima Place, Emmet Street and St. Teresa's Terrace.
- Michael Street, Kilkenny - Preliminary design submitted for mains rehab and backyard services project – Commencement date scheduled for Q1 2022
- Lead replacement works completed at Fr. Delahunty Place and Walkin Street, Kilkenny in Q3 2021.

Find and Fix

The Find and Fix process continued through 2021 reducing leakage within the Bennettsbridge, Castlecomer, Thomastown, Inistioge, South Kilkenny, Piltown and Kilkenny City water supply zones.

First Fix

Cold calling resumed in Q2 2021 after Covid-19 restrictions lifted. New regional contractor commenced First Fix works in Q3 2021 on Customer-Side-Leaks in Kilkenny where waivers were received by property owners.

Disinfection and PH Correction Programme

The Disinfection and PH programme was completed in Q1 2021. 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. Source protection design proposals continued for Gurteen and Jamestown Water Treatment Plants with works scheduled for Q2 2022.

Access to Heights and Edge Protection AHEP Scheme

Kilkenny County council, working with IW and appointed contractors to assess works required to address the risk associated with falling from heights and ensure the safety of personnel at designated Waste-Water and Water Sites in Kilkenny continues. Risk assessments have been submitted for 19 sites with necessary works commencing in Q4 2021.

Welfare Programme

In conjunction with IW, Welfare Facilities will be provided at the following Water Treatment Sites in Kilkenny:

- Loon WTP
- Ballyraggett WTP
- Gowran WTP
- Bennettsbridge WTP
- Callan WTP

Civil Works currently progressing with all units to be completed by Q2 2022

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 2022 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 2022 from funding allocated under the Rural Water Programme.

Public Conveniences

Provision of €45,000 has been made in 2022 for the maintenance of public conveniences throughout the City and County.

Small Towns & Villages Growth Programme

The purpose of the Small Towns & Villages Growth Programme is to provide funding for Water & Wastewater Treatment Plant growth capacity in smaller settlements. Kilkenny County Council submitted nine priority schemes. In September 2021, Kilkenny County Council was notified that Bennettsbridge had been approved for funding. It is envisaged that this scheme will utilise Kilkenny's full allocation for 2020-2024. This scheme will continue through Irish Water's capital delivery process and a timeline for delivery will be given in due course.

Strategic Planning

Kilkenny County Council adopted the new City & County Development Plan for the period 2021- 2027 in September 2021. The Plan represents the culmination of a comprehensive process of consultation and engagement over the last 2 years. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, face to face meetings were not possible for most of that period, so public consultation events were held online.

As a further step to facilitate engagement, an interactive Virtual Public Exhibition was developed, which included a synopsis of each chapter of the Plan. The Plan sets out the policy context for all planning decisions in the County for the next six years, as well as how the Council plans to cater for the population growth of the City and County by an estimated additional 11,000 people over that period, to include the housing, commercial, social, climate action, amenity and infrastructural needs.

In parallel, a number of masterplans continue to be 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 was also adopted during 2021.

Development Management

The number of planning applications received year to date to the end of October 2021 had increased by circa 21% compared to the same period in 2020. There was a significant increase in applications during the first half of the year in particular, and the number of applications has since settled to approximately 15-20 per week.

Vacant Site Register

There are currently 31 sites on the Council's Vacant Sites Register (*VSR*). The *VSR* continues to be an effective mechanism for the activation of suitable lands for housing, with a total of 16 sites across the County having been activated since the introduction of the levy. Any monies collected are assigned to the Capital Account and can be used towards the provision of housing on residential land and/or the regeneration of sites that have a negative impact on the character of the area.

Conservation

An advisory service is provided on a continuous basis to the public and internally to Council Departments on conservation issues. The Council also administers a range of funding initiatives including the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (*14 projects were approved total funding of €117,600 under this Scheme in 2021*); the Historic Structures Fund (*6 projects were approved funding of €312,000 under this Fund in 2021*); and the Historic Town Initiative under which funding was secured to carry out works to St. Mary's Church, Callan.

Compliance and Enforcement

The Council's Enforcement Team continues to prioritise the investigation of non-compliance of planning conditions, unauthorised developments, and unfinished estates. The number of enforcement complaints to be investigated to the end of October 2021 is up over 25% compared to the same period in 2020.

Taking in Charge

The Council completed the process of taking in charge of a total of 11 estates in 2021 namely:

The Green, Ballyfoyle, Whitescastle, Knocktopher, Bellfield, Ferrybank, Rath Ullard, Kilkenny City, Banagher Court, Piltown, Brookfield, Ballyhale, Haven Court, Ballyragget, Newpark Crescent, Kilkenny City, Friary Walk, Callan, Roseleigh, Mooncoin, and Lakeside, Kilkenny City.

Building Control

Kilkenny County Council continues to participate in the National Building Control Programme which is managed by the National Building Control Office. Up to the end of October 2021, a total of 391 Commencement Notices had been received through the Building Control Management System (*BCMS*), which represents an increase of almost 35% compared to the same period in 2020. The number of inspections completed by Kilkenny County Council during 2021 will meet the annual NOAC Performance Indicator target range of 12% to 15%.

ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

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 2021 played an integral role in supporting businesses to reopen following lockdown due to COVID-19 and to deal with Brexit related issues impacting their business. Businesses were supported by LEO staff to avail of a number of financial and soft supports to assist them to sustain and grow their business including:

- Financial Supports totaling €680,245 to 31 manufacturing and internationally traded service businesses throughout the County, which will help create 149 new jobs over the next three years;
- Provision of Technical Assistance for Micro Exporter (*TAME*) grants to support businesses to explore their export market opportunities;
- Approval of Grad Start Grants to assist LEO businesses to take on graduates to work within their business to assist with growth plans; and
- Awarding of Green for Micro Grants to support businesses to adapt to the climate action challenge.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Urban Regeneration

The Council secured funding approval in 2021 under Call 2 of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (*URDF*) in respect of two applications submitted.

The first relates to Phase 2 of the public realm in the Abbey Quarter (*AQ*) and includes: the development of a new urban street (*with pedestrian and cyclist priority*) through the AQ and development of a 1-hectare urban park and public plaza around the St Francis's Abbey national monument; the construction of a Board Walk at Greensbridge to provide the missing link to connect the 2 existing Riverside Walks in the City; and the further refurbishment of the former squash courts on the AQ as a Cultural Hub.

The second application relates to enhancing the streets and public realm in the City Core area to help transform the quality of place and accessibility of the City Centre and implement the Orientation Strategy that aims to rebalance the perceived center of gravity and attract more visitors from the Castle into the City Centre.

The main projects associated with this application are:

- Upgrading the streetscape,
- Improving the public realm and introducing mobility/smarter travel options (*to include consideration of new one-way systems*) along High Street and Rose Inn Street;
- Upgrading of the streetscape and public realm along Ormonde Street to include provision of a new one-way system;
- Upgrading the streetscape along the pedestrianised Kieran Street and the laneways and slips that connect it with High Street;
- Upgrading the streetscape and laneways in the St Mary's Precinct; and
- Upgrading the public realm in Carnegie Plaza and the streetscape along Barrack Lane linking to John Street.

Kilkenny.ie - The Best of Ireland

The Council continued to promote the new Kilkenny brand – Kilkenny.ie – The Best of Ireland, a priority of The City Centre Task Force. The brand positions Kilkenny as an outstanding destination for customers, visitors and investors. The Council is using the 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 continues to promote 'shopkilkenny - Keep it Local' message asking shoppers to shop locally and support local business and jobs. As many businesses have adopted an ecommerce presence since COVID-19 we have also 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. Funding received from the Department of Agriculture Food and Marine under the Agri Food Tourism call has allowed a number of initiatives to take place in order to promote Kilkenny as a food tourism destination, promoting local producers, restaurants, cafes and all things food in Kilkenny.

Innovation Centre's

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) along with Waterford IT. PACE is a digital innovation hub that delivers advanced ICT software to the Irish agriculture and food sector.

TOURISM

2021 proved to be a difficult year for the tourism and hospitality sector as COVID restrictions remained in place for most of the year. The sector faced enormous challenges due to the global pandemic which resulted in the loss of the overseas visitor market in 2021 again. Kilkenny is no different and as we moved through varying levels of restrictions, the focus of our Tourism offering for Kilkenny was placed firmly on the "Staycation" market and on our Outdoor facilities throughout the County. 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) in 2020. 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 2022 and beyond. Our future tourism growth is contingent on maintaining our reputation as a high standard and high value proposition. Other destinations are now competing for our “staycation” market and we must remain competitive and to the forefront of this market 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 “More to Explore” domestic sales and marketing plan for Kilkenny, commissioned by Kilkenny Tourism under the Destination Recovery Taskforce work plan, offers a pathway to increasing our number of domestic visitors and thereby increasing revenue whilst the current restrictions remain in place. Kilkenny County Council will further progress the Orientation Strategy in 2022 with assistance of funding under Failte Ireland Destination Towns Scheme. 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.

Funding was secured from Failte Ireland in 2021 for the development of the Tholsel project to develop a unified visitor experience in the heart of Kilkenny City incorporating the Medieval Mile Museum and the Tholsel as well as the outdoor spaces in between. The visitor experience and journey require 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. The project is expected to be completed and the attraction open by Autumn 2023.

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 for 2022. 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, when the time is right, as a top class tourist destination.

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 €230,000 by way of annual subvention to be reviewed when the new unified attraction opens.

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 the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) which has yielded significant success since 2018. The promotion and marketing of Woodstock Estate through the social media platforms of Facebook Twitter & Instagram will be ramped up in 2022 to build on our existing on-line presence.

Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme

The Project Office will continue to identify and deliver projects under the Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS). In 2021, 12 funding applications were submitted under the various funding categories.

Water Quality

Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)

The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) is a shared service managed jointly by Kilkenny and Tipperary County Councils. The Programme employs 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 staff based in Kilkenny County Council. LAWPRO is fully funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH).

The River Basin Management Plan 2018 - 2021 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 Duske/Powerstown Stream, River Nuenna, Pockocke (*Brownstown*) River, River Breaghagh, 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.

The draft River Basin Management Plan 2022 – 2027 was published in September 2021 and is undergoing public consultation until 31st March 2022. Consultation meetings will take place across the country during this period including in Kilkenny. A virtual consultation room on the draft Plan is available through the LAWPRO website at www.lawwaters.ie. Further data about the quality of waters in Kilkenny is available from www.catchments.ie. The DHLGH has approved LAWPRO to continue its work for the period of the new Plan until December 2027.

Water Safety

Lifeguard services continues 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 at The Meadows and The Weir and Bleach Road. Kilkenny County Council will continue to provide the service at these locations in 2022.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Dunmore and Granny Recycling and Waste Disposal Centres

The Council operates a full-service waste recycling and disposal centre at Dunmore Civic Amenity Site (CAS). 2021 was one of the busiest years on record for the Dunmore CAS. The staff at Dunmore continue to provide a very high level of service to their customers and the feedback from the general public is always extremely positive. 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.

Bring Centres

The Council manages 46 Bring Bank Centres throughout the City and County. Usage of the bring banks has increased again on the 2020 figures with additional tonnages collected. This resulted in additional costs with respect to the servicing and maintenance of same.

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. During the year, we had 15 enforcement actions under Section 55 and Section 14 of the Waste Management Act along with 7 fixed payment notices issued to waste collection permit holders. Resources will be targeted in 2022 to build on the success of enforcement actions undertaken in 2021. The areas targeted will be in line with the 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. Our Southern Region Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authority (WERLA) will continue to support Kilkenny County Council with legal and technical advice on our enforcement activities.

Street Cleaning

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

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, waste prevention campaigns and community prevention initiatives. In 2021, a number of community initiatives were supported including, Reuse Month Promotions, composting training for members of a community garden at SOS Deenview Centre, Castlecomer, community waste prevention grants including a bee wax wrap project with Freshford Tidy Towns and a graveyard waste prevention project by Callan Tidy Towns focusing on the potential of upcycling old wreaths in Callan and its environs.

Education & Awareness Strategy

The 2021 strategy covered 5 broad themes - Sustainable Development Goals, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Litter and Waste Management. A variety of projects were completed to fulfil the strategy objectives including the "Greening Project" with the Castlecomer Discovery Park, the promotion of the Conscious Cup Campaign to eliminate single use disposable cups and the development of the "Bag It, Bin It" anti-dog fouling campaign in association with Carlow, Wexford and Waterford Local Authorities.

Litter & Illegal Dumping Campaigns

In 2021, two significant campaigns were developed and promoted. The "Bag It, Bin, It" campaign focused on different impacts of dog fouling across society. It is a two-year campaign which will continue into 2022. The second campaign was the promotion of the National Anti-Dumping Campaign promoted over a two-month period in September and October using both national campaign assets and additional assets such as local radio campaign adverts and a social media video created by Kilkenny County Council. The Council also adopted its 3-year Litter Management Plan in April 2021.

Anti-Dumping Initiative

The Council secured funding for nine projects under the Anti-Dumping Initiative (ADI) in 2021. The ADI aims to reduce incidents of illegal dumping nationally by providing funding for projects aimed at tackling the problem using a collaborative approach involving local authorities, communities and other State Agencies.

Tidy Towns

The Council continued the Tidy Towns Forum to support networking and co-operation opportunities for tidy town groups. The forum met once in 2021 but groups have been kept informed electronically of opportunities and any available grant funding by the Environmental Awareness Officer. A practical schedule of activities is planned for 2022 including supports to assist communities that are considering joining the competition for the first time.

IBAL

The Irish Business Against Litter (*IBAL*) Anti-Litter League was set up in 1996. An Taisce monitors towns independently on behalf of IBAL and in accordance with international grading standards. The results of Round 1, 2021 released in October indicated that Kilkenny City retained its perennial status as Cleaner than European Norms coming 6th out of 40 towns and cities surveyed. IBAL praised Kilkenny for its lovely waterside environment, being exceptionally well presented and spotless throughout.

Climate Action

The scientific evidence for global warming is undeniable and the effects of climate change are evident. Greenhouse gases in particular carbon dioxide (*CO₂*) are the biggest contributor to climate change. The most immediate risks to Ireland are those associated with extreme weather events such as floods and storms. Storm Ophelia in 2017 shut down schools, disrupted businesses and left almost 500,000 homes across the country without power and/or water supply. Local authorities led a massive national emergency response to ensure that essential services were provided especially to vulnerable members of society and that critical infrastructure (*such as roads*) remained open and operational. The recently enacted Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act sets out a clear leadership role for local authorities in helping Ireland transition to a carbon neutral economy and in particular requires local authorities to reduce the carbon emissions associated with delivery of services by more than half by 2030. Kilkenny County Council takes its responsibility in this regard seriously. The Council has signed up to a Climate Charter which among other things commits to delivering a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030, is a member of the EU Climate Alliance, and has adopted a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy which is aimed at proactively taking action to minimise the impacts of climate change on local people, ecosystems, infrastructure and buildings and encouraging people to change their behaviour to more sustainable lifestyles. The Council is delivering on a wide range of measures to meet these commitments including:

- deep retrofit of older Council buildings to improve energy efficiency;
- installation of solar panels on Council buildings to produce renewable energy;
- provision of Home Energy Saving Kits through the Council's library branches, available to home owners to help them identify and implement energy savings in their own homes;
- continued upgrade of the almost 11,000 public lights across the county to more energy efficient LED lights (*note c40% already upgraded*);
- delivery of OPW funded flood relief schemes in towns and villages across the County that are exposed to flooding;
- initiatives to promote reduction of waste (*in particular food waste*), encourage recycling and reduce single use plastics; and
- extensive tree planting programme to encourage carbon sequestration initiatives and more biodiversity friendly open spaces and parks, including the development of a new Countryside & Biodiversity Park at the disused landfill at Dunmore.

Decarbonisation Zone

All local authorities are required to identify and nominate a potential Decarbonisation Zone (DZ) to the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage as per the National Climate Action Plan. Kilkenny County Council has nominated South West of Kilkenny City Centre as a potential DZ and await confirmation from the Department that this is acceptable. The potential DZ includes both existing built up areas characterised by mature urban infrastructure, as well as a significant area earmarked for new build, the primary extent of which is now referred to as the Breaghagh Valley. Once Department approval is received, an Implementation Working Group of key staff and relevant stakeholders will be established to develop an Implementation Plan for the DZ which will include a range of climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity measures to address low carbon energy, greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and climate action targets.

Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

The Council reviewed the implementation of its Climate Change Adaptation Strategy during 2021. The 5-year Strategy incorporates 96 high-level actions with 235 associated sub actions under 5 key headings namely: Energy & Buildings, Flood Resilience, Resource Management, Transport and Nature & Communities. To date, 41% of actions have been completed with another 38% ongoing. The remaining 21% of actions are not commenced with the delay being caused by either Covid restrictions and/or financial restraints.

Energy Management

Kilkenny County Council successfully secured ISO 50001 accreditation in 2021. The ISO 50001 standard is the world's leading Energy Management Standard for energy use and consumption and provides a systematic approach for organisations to achieve continuous improvement in terms of energy performance. The Council's Energy Team comprises senior staff from across the organisation and includes the Line Managers of all the significant energy users (SEUs) in the Council from public lighting, the fleet of vehicles and the Council's offices and buildings. Kilkenny County Council received invaluable support from the 3CEA (*the three Counties Energy Agency*) in the process of achieving the standard.

Kilkenny County Council has already achieved the public sector energy efficiency target of at least 33% energy efficiency by the end of last year when compared to the 2009 baseline period. The ISO 50001 certification will be the basis of formulating a pathway to reach the even more ambitious energy efficiency targets that have been set for 2030 and beyond.

The Better Energy Communities Programme (BEC) is SEAI's national upgrade programme to support the retrofit of Ireland's building stock and facilities to high standards of energy, efficiency, thereby reducing fossil fuel, operational costs and greenhouse gas emissions. Kilkenny County Council has a number of projects currently underway which will receive 35% funding support from SEAI. These projects include a lighting upgrade, heating control upgrade and EV charger installation at Kilkenny Machinery Yard, along with roof insulation, pipework insulation and heating control enhancements at County Hall. These projects will support the Council's journey towards 2030 public sector energy and carbon targets.

Historic Landfill Sites

Works progressed on our Historic Landfills during 2021, completing Tier 2 and preparing Tier 3 Assessment Reports, in addition to EPA Certificate of Authorisation (CoA) applications. Out of the remaining 11 eligible historic landfill sites in County Kilkenny - 4 CoA applications will be submitted to the EPA by the end of Q4 2021. An application for funding will be prepared in January 2022 to advance and finalise the assessment and authorisation process on the remaining seven sites. Risk Assessment Consultancy Services and Remediation works are fully funded by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DCCAE) and funding will be available and open for applications early in 2022.

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 143 historic burial grounds vested with the Council is well underway to formalise a strategy for their ongoing maintenance and improvement. We expect that funding will also be made available by Central Government in 2022 through the Community Monuments Fund.

The Council proposes to develop a Columbarium Wall Garden at St. Kieran's Cemetery Kilkenny in 2022 for the respectful inurnment of cremated remains. The Columbarium Wall will contain a number of niches, with each niche incorporating a memorial plaque. The cremated remains are placed behind the plaque in a receptacle or urn designed specifically for that purpose. The project is currently at the Part 8 Planning Public consultation stage.

Fire Services

The Fire Service is an essential public service and has operated and responded to calls during the current pandemic. During this public health crisis our focus continues on:

- (i) Protecting the communities we serve and to limit the spread of COVID 19
- (ii) To ensure the safety and wellbeing of our staff in the pursuance of their duties
- (iii) To maintain an effective Emergency Response.

The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien T.D., announced a new €61 million Fire Service Capital Programme 2021-2025. The programme will see Kilkenny County Council's Fire Service benefit by securing funding of over €8 million for the construction of two new fire stations together with a funding allocation for a new fire engine to complement the continued improvement of the existing fire stations and fleet of emergency vehicles.

Request for tenders for the construction of a new fire station in Urlingford is currently on the eTenders website. The closing date for receipt of tenders is 1st December 2021. It is expected that construction will commence in Q2 2022.

Identifying and sourcing a new site for the Kilkenny City Fire Station is still ongoing. Auctioneers have been appointed to identify and source possible site locations close to the city by end of Q1 2022.

Funding for three 4-wheel drive jeeps was approved by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (*NDFEM*). These jeeps will be located in Castlecomer, Urlingford and Graiguenamanagh fire stations in Q2 2022. Funding for a new fire engine for Urlingford has also been approved this should be delivered in Q1 2023.

The introduction of the online fire Safety certificate process will result in an increase in the administration and workload of both technical and administrative staff.

The area of health and safety has driven a large number of changes in service delivery development in recent years and significant resources have been put in place to meet our requirements. It is also important that the coordination of the effective day to day compliance aspects for health and safety is managed by the structure proposed in the work force plan. Significant work to facilitate the migration of the Fire Service to a new command and control system and nearest available resource (*Risk Based Approach*) will be required.

It is proposed to increase changes in the fire service including the implementation of a new fire management system to improve fire billing, online fire safety certificates and social media engagement. The proposed improvements in the fire service to increase online services is reliant on additional resources within the service and preparations will be made to implement these improvements when resources are made available under the work force plan. The proposed staffing structure will facilitate Kilkenny County Councils Fire and Rescue Service in maintaining the huge level of performance currently delivered and implementing changes associated with the report "Fire Safety in Ireland – Report of the Fire Safety Task Force".

Civil Defence

During 2021 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 2022 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 2022 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 next Plan will be progressed in 2022.
- The LCDC Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme 2018-2022 will continue over 2022. This programme has delivered and will continue to deliver investment of approximately €630k per annum for social inclusion measures over the 5 year period.
- The LCDC supports 5 Healthy Ireland Actions across 5 agencies in Kilkenny. In 2022 the LCDC will be supporting other agencies to deliver Healthy Ireland initiatives continuing and expanding the implementation of agreed actions in the Healthy Ireland Plan for Kilkenny. The current Round 3 Programme is concluding in March 2022 with Round 4 commencing afterwards for another 3 Year Programme.
- We will continue to support many initiatives and programmes all over the County including International Women’s Day, the Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement, 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 under a range of programmes.
- 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 2022, supporting and ensuring project delivery where funding allocations are made. Projects completed in 2021 included a sports and recreational space at Thomastown Community Centre, a civic amenity at the Fair Green in Callan, Health Checks across five towns and villages including Castlecomer, Johnstown/Urlingford, Goresbridge, Mullinavat and Thomastown, village enhancement in The Rower and a walkway in Slieverue.
- 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 2021, there was an increased demand for supports in developing projects which had been paused during 2020, matched by an increase in requests for support in locating funding for project delivery.

Age Friendly Programme

- The Council will continue to collaborate with various agencies in implementing the Age Friendly Strategy 2017-2022. Work will commence in 2022 on preparing a new strategy to cover the period 2023-2028.
- 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 Creative Ireland Programme

The Creative Ireland Programme in Kilkenny supported 16 projects in Kilkenny in 2021 across a range of cultural areas in line with Creative Ireland Programme criteria. These projects included the Knitted Together Age Friendly initiative, skatepark murals, The History Fix radio series on KCLR, an outdoor story trail encouraging reading and literacy amongst many more. The range of projects and the level of community engagement achieved through the Creative Ireland Programme has increased in 2021. The national Creative Ireland Programme will be reviewed in 2022 with an expansion of the programme expected over the next three to five years.

Kilkenny Heritage Forum

A review of the Heritage Forum in Kilkenny has commenced and will be completed with the commencement of a new Forum in 2022 to direct and explore heritage issues and projects for Kilkenny.

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 (*member of the Irish Walled Towns Network Programme*) medieval walls with funding from the Irish Walled Towns Network.

PARKS/OPEN SPACES

Public Realm Maintenance

There has been a significant increase in the requirement for public realm maintenance in the City core with the opening of the Riverside Gardens Linear Park, Skateboard Park, Butler Gallery and outdoor seating areas at Market Yard and Watergate. This increase in maintenance is likely to require a reorganisation of the public realm maintenance section of the area. Outside of the City core, the opening of the LIHAF scheme in the Western Environs has also resulted in additional maintenance requirements.

Playgrounds

The Parks Department continues to assist communities in developing and maintaining playgrounds across the County. The Council now maintains a total of 31 playgrounds with the number growing each year. The most recent playground to be taken in charge is the Piltown Community Playground which opened in October 2021. Repairs and replacements to existing, in particular older playgrounds, will be in line with the budget provision for 2020.

The new Ferrybank Park and Playground was officially opened in October, 2021. 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 Park was jointly funded by the Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government, Kilkenny County Council and Waterford City and County Council and will be maintained by the Parks Department.

The 2022 draft budget provides for additional resources for the Parks Department for the maintenance of the new Park along with the other new amenities developed by the Council in 2021 including:

- Silaire Woods Trail, Graiguenamanagh,
- The Pocket Park at Fairview, Graiguenamanagh,
- Motte Field, Callan, and
- Slieverue Linear Park.

Amenity Grants

The Amenity Grants Scheme is invaluable in assisting community groups in towns and villages across the County to maintain and upkeep their 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. 190 groups received grant assistance in 2021. The range of works funded include landscaping, maintenance and development of open spaces, the provision of street and outdoor furniture, small-scale improvement works 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 and visit.

Kilkenny Greenway

The South East Greenway (*incorporating the Kilkenny Greenway*) will be a state-of-the-art 24km cycling and walking route running from Mount Elliott, New Ross through the scenic countryside of South Kilkenny to Abbeylands, Waterford, which in time will connect with the Waterford Greenway. The Greenway is being constructed along the disused railway line and is being jointly developed by the Local Authorities of Kilkenny, Wexford and Waterford. The project is being funded by the Department of Tourism, Transport and Sport. The construction of the Greenway is being awarded in a number of Lots and construction has commenced on the first 3 Lots, and is on schedule for completion before the end of January 2022. Staff will continue to liaise with adjoining landowners to agree accommodation works for the remaining Lots and it is expected construction tenders will be advertised in early 2022. The expected date for the full completion of the Greenway is Autumn 2023.

Partnership Projects

The Project Office will continue to provide technical design and supervision supports to deliver an agreed schedule of projects in partnership with Kilkenny LEADER Partnership (KLP) under the LEADER Programme. A number of projects have been identified which range in scope from feasibility studies to construction works.

The overall objective of this partnership is to progress additional recreational opportunities, create enhanced amenity spaces and improve pedestrian and cyclist connectivity, thereby enhancing our outdoor recreational offering. Two projects worthy of note are the Design Options Report to assess the connectivity options between the new South East Greenway and the villages of Glenmore and Slieverue; and a Feasibility Study for the development of Pedestrian/Cyclist Bridges over the River Barrow in Graiguenamanagh.

ARTS

Arts Programme

Kilkenny County Council's arts programme is delivered in partnership with The Arts Council to improve the delivery of a successful and increased arts programme in 2022. This agreement requires the continued investment in community arts projects by Kilkenny County Council to ensure the provision of match funding by the Arts Council of Ireland. Community arts projects and support services for emergent artists in our county will continue to be the focus of the arts programme in 2022. The curator in residence programme in Kilkenny has been acknowledged as a major contribution to the development of emergent art curators and is a unique opportunity for young people to develop the skill sets required for a career in the arts.

Music Generation

The Music Generation programme is delivered in partnership with the Education and Training Board and commenced in 2019. The establishment of a schools programme during 2020 and 2021 has been extremely challenging. More than 13 programmes have successfully taken place across schools with more than 1,183 participants. The primary wellbeing initiative was delivered in 21 schools involving 8 musician educators and 2,437 participants. Other

programmes offered by Music Generation in 2021 included a Trad Hub in Castlecomer and Summer Drummer groups at 15 locations around the county. Overall more than 2,400 young people have benefited from programmes delivered by Music Generation in Kilkenny during 2021. Kilkenny County Council's continued support of the programme will allow a further expansion of opportunities for young people and musicians to engage in new musical experiences during 2022.

Contribution to Other Bodies

Financial provision has been made in 2022 to honour commitments made for the support of the Butler Gallery. Additional funding has also been made available to increase support for community engagement projects 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 which was strongly endorsed in 2021 with the delivery of innovative and interactive events during challenging and uncertain circumstances.

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 2021 have been central to the provision of community supports through door to door book deliveries, online programming and many public facing local services. The value of this front line community based service has been evident throughout 2021, adapting to the ever changing environment to provide a personal and effective community resource.

2021 saw the continued delivery of a door to door service for our older customers and a sustained increase in online services and material provided to schools in particular. There has been a large increase in usage of online services such as eBooks and Audio in 2021. The Library Service will continue to encourage and promote all on line services during 2022 to ensure that library users can access as much content as possible remotely. In 2022, it is planned to retain as many existing services as possible including:

- Continued delivery of high quality library programmes which are community focused and cross sectoral supporting literacy, lifelong learning and health and wellbeing.
- Continued participation in Cruinniu na nÓg, the Creative Ireland Programme and The Decade of Centenaries Programme.
- Continued door to door delivery service for older service users.
- The development of a dedicated Age Friendly programme of events and workshops throughout the year will continue.
- 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 into Storytime, Summer Stars, Bookville and Family Time@your library.
- Progress the capital projects in Kilkenny City, Thomastown, Callan and Graiguenamanagh, including fit out specification, catalogue provision, RFID and My Open Library set up.
- 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.
- 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. The service level agreement is due to expire at the end of December 2021 and is currently under review.

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 dog warden and dog shelter services. 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 October, 2021, a total of 137 dogs have been re-homed through the shelter.

Control of Horses

In March 2021, the Council adopted new Bye Laws for the Control of Horses within the county. The Bye Laws incorporate horse exclusion zones within Kilkenny City. The Council also launched the revised 'Animal Welfare Standards for Dog and Horse Owners' Booklet developed by the Council's Animal Welfare Standards Committee. The Standards Booklet provides advice and guidance on responsible dog and horse ownership.

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 each year towards the costs of the local elections which are held every 5 years. The next year for local elections will be 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 €1,123k 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 €10k 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. Our website was enhanced during 2021 to ensure that information is readily available and easy to access.

We have commenced issuing an annual newsletter to all householders in Kilkenny. This has been received very well. A provision of €30k is included towards annual public relations costs.

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.

We are required in 2022 to prepare our 3 Year Plan - "*Scéim Teanga 2022 - 2025*". This is a statutory requirement and will be published for public consultation.

A provision of €13k is included in the draft budget to cover the cost of preparing the new plan, 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 is ongoing work in relation to retention of records to ensure that we comply with national standards. All Council records are stored off site and are managed by a staff member in Corporate. There is a great need to employ an Archivist to ensure that critical records of historic value are protected and archived properly in a suitable building. There are numerous historical records held by other bodies in County Kilkenny which should at some stage become part of a centralised Kilkenny Archive. Due to the pressure of this budget we have not been able to provide an additional budget for the employment of an Archivist. It is hoped that in 2023 a provision can be made.

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Castlecomer

Kilkenny City

Callan

Piltown



Kilkenny County Council
Comhairle Chontae Chill Chainnigh