

CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT

JANUARY 2024 ISSUE

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

A list of Orders made in the last month will be available in the Corporate Department for inspection by the Elected Members.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) 2024 Historic Structures Fund (HSF) 2024

The closing date for the BHIS and HSF is 19th January 2024.

Festivals & Events

Scheme is open for applications until 31st January 2024.

Professional & Emerging ArtLinks Bursary Award 2024

Deadline for applications is 4.00 p.m. Monday 22nd January 2024.

Arts Act Grants & Tyrone Guthrie Residency

Deadline for applications is 4.00 p.m. Monday 22nd January, 2024.

Careers Kilkenny

The 2024 Careers Kilkenny event will take place on **Saturday, February 3rd 2024** from 10.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. in St. Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny

Creative Ireland & Cruinniu na nOg Grants

Closing date proposed for 12th February, 2024.

Green Schools

Deadline for receipt of completed applications is March 15th, 2024.

REPORT AT A GLANCE

CORPORATE:.....	2
ROADS:	3
ENVIRONMENT:.....	3
PARKS/SPECIAL PROJECTS:	7
PLANNING:	10
LEO/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	12
COMMUNITY & CULTURE:.....	13
TOWN CENTRE FIRST.....	14
HERITAGE:	14
ARTS:.....	15
HOUSING:	18
UKRAINIAN RESPONSE UNIT	22
FIRE SERVICES	23
LIBRARY SERVICES:.....	25
FINANCE.....	27

CORPORATE

Yulefest Kilkenny 2023

Yulefest Kilkenny 2023 began on November 25th, with Santa's arrival to the City switching on of the new Christmas Lights and the opening of the Yulefest Christmas Market.

Yulefest Kilkenny 2023 was a spectacular celebration of the festive season from November 25th right through to December 22nd. The festivities commenced with the exciting arrival of Santa Claus who not only lit up the City with his magical presence but also illuminated the streets with the switch-on of the new Christmas Lights. Yulefest Christmas Market officially opened its gates, inviting locals and visitors alike to get into the holiday spirit.

Throughout the festival, people were treated to an array of festive treats, creative crafts and live music at the weekend Christmas Market and Yulefest Bandstand. Special events dotted each weekend, ensuring there was never a dull moment. The City sparkled with new festive Christmas lights. Across the County, Santa made appearances, spreading the Christmas spirit in every corner.

This year's featured events were spectacular. The Medieval Mile Run on December 1st kicked off the physical festivities, while the Santa Truck brought its unique brand of cheer on December 9th. The Yulefest Movie Night on Thursday the 14th provided a cinematic escape followed by the fabulous Rogu Fire Show on the 16th. The festival reached its finale with the Festive Friday on December 22nd, featuring a dazzling display of fireworks, live music, the bustling Christmas Market and family entertainment.



 Comhairle Chontae Chill Chainnigh
Kilkenny County Council

YULEFEST KILKENNY 2023

 Kilkenny THE BEST OF IRELAND

The Yulefest Bandstand serenaded the City with live music every Saturday, while The Parade became a hub for family entertainment every Sunday. Santa Experiences, Markets across the County, Music Concerts and Art Workshops added to the festive appeal, ensuring that joy and Christmas cheer echoed throughout Kilkenny's City and County.

Yulefest Kilkenny 2023 not only showcased the magic of Christmas but also included a transformation of the City's festive lights. Local businesses in Kilkenny played a pivotal role in elevating the festive atmosphere, turning the Christmas lights into an investment that will enhance the Christmas experience in Kilkenny City for years to come.

The City's Christmas lights received a significant upgrade, marking the most substantial investment in festive lighting. The generous contributions from local businesses, combined with substantial funding from Kilkenny County Council fuelled this transformative initiative. The new festive lights added an extra layer of brilliance to Yulefest Kilkenny 2023.

In summary, Yulefest Kilkenny 2023 was a resounding success. As we bid farewell to another year, the memories of Yulefest Kilkenny 2023 serve as a reminder to us of the holiday season in our City and County.

ROADS

MAJOR PROJECTS

N24 Waterford to Cahir Scheme

The Display of Preferred Transport Solution is now scheduled for Q1 2024, with the actual dates to be confirmed subject to and following successful completion of the upcoming Phase 2 TII Project Peer Review process on the Option Selection Report. We are currently planning for a Public Display in January 2024.

Landowners within the Study Area will receive notifications on the Public Display of the Preferred Transport Solution in advance and notices will also be published in local newspapers, on local radio, on County Council social media platforms (*Kilkenny & Tipperary County Council*) and on the Project Website at: <https://n24waterford2cahir.ie/news/>.

An online briefing on the 19th January, 2024 will be held with Elected Members of both Kilkenny & Tipperary County Council in advance of the Public Display, to advise on the Phase 2 Preferred Transport Solution for the project.

MINOR PROJECTS

N24 Tower Road (Safety Scheme)

Works are continuing to progress well. Works are nearing substantial completion.



Overhead drone footage of the compacted grade separated junction under construction (N24)

N77 Ballyragget to Ballynaslee

The award procedures for the construction of the N77 Scheme are on-going. Works are envisaged to commence in early February 2024 with a 12 month construction period envisaged. The overall outturn cost for the project is expected to be in excess of €10m.

N24 Carrick Road

Simultaneous applications to An Bord Pleanála for 177AE Planning approval and Compulsory Purchase Order Approval was made on the 25th November 2022.

There were 5 objections to both the Planning application & Compulsory Purchase Order. An Bord Pleanála have sought some additional information from Kilkenny County Council re the third party submissions. This information has been forwarded back to the Bord.

Pavement Schemes

The design work is ongoing in respect of the N76 Callan By Pass Pavement Scheme. The required PAAR report is in preparation. Design work and the preparation of tender documentation will be on-going during 2024 with a view to issuing a tender for the works during 2024. The overall cost of the scheme is expected to be in excess of €4m with varying sources of TII funding necessary to deliver the scheme.

ENVIRONMENT

CLIMATE ACTION

Draft Climate Action Plan

The public consultation period for the Draft Kilkenny County Council Climate Action Plan is closed. All submissions are now being reviewed and a Chief Executive's Report on submissions will be presented to the Elected Representatives shortly.

Community Climate Action Programme (CCAP)

We are delighted to announce that the Community Climate Action Programme opened to applications on 6th December and will stay open until 12 noon on the 28th February, 2024.

To coincide with the launch the public was notified through various different streams such as email, PPN, our social media pages, local newspapers and local radio interview. There was also a video recorded to explain the programme, which is shared on our social media and on the Kilkenny County Council website.

It is a fund that has been very well received to date by Kilkenny communities with huge interest and it is expected to be a very competitive and oversubscribed programme, highlighting the appetite within local communities for positive climate action.

Information on the Programme, how to apply and Guidance documentation can all be found here: [Community Grants - Kilkenny County Council \(kilkennycoco.ie\)](https://www.kilkennycoco.ie/CommunityGrants)

Climate Action Promotional Campaign (HVO Trial)

Kilkenny County Council's Climate Action teams ongoing promotion through the use of videos, have over the last few weeks included a promo on Kilkenny County Council Climate Action activities and the recently announced Climate Action Community Grant. A third video promo has been completed and will be launched in early January. This promo was completed in partnership with the Kilkenny County Council's Machinery Yard and focuses on Kilkenny County Council's test use of HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) in some of our diesel-powered vehicles. HVO (*Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil*) is a replacement fuel for diesel, made from recycled vegetable oil and can reduce emissions by up 90%. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJpiC87N_KY&t=20s

These Climate Action video promos are uploaded on our newly developed Climate Action website and will play a key role in helping us communicate with the wider community. The videos are also being promoted on social media, with one of the Climate Action videos recently posted having over 10,000 views/impressions on Facebook.

National Climate Action Plan 2024

The Government approved the 2024 National Climate Action Plan on 20th December Public Consultation on the Plan will take place in early

2024. It builds on Climate Action Plan 2023 and outlines how Ireland will accelerate the action required to respond to the climate crisis, putting climate solutions at the centre of Ireland's social and economic development. For more details see <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/fcf90-government-approves-climate-action-plan-2024-for-public-consultation/>



WASTE

Waste Enforcement

In November we carried out a Multi Agency checkpoint along with the Department of Social Protection, An Garda Síochána and Customs. Kilkenny County Council inspected a number of vehicles for the unauthorised movement of waste and a Fixed Payment Notice was issued to one transporter. Our staff also inspected vehicles which were suspected of transporting smoky coal.



Bring Banks Usage

The Council provides and manages 45 Bring Centres across the City and County. A total of 2,020 tonnes of recyclables were collected from our Bring Centres for the year to 29th December 2023. This is a decrease of approximately 2.5% on the 2,073 tonnes collected in 2022. In December, Loughboy Shopping Centre (13 tonnes collected), Aldi Kilkenny City (12 tonnes collected) and Lidl Johnswell Road (11 tonnes collected) were the busiest locations in the City and Graiguenamanagh (9 tonnes collected) was the busiest location outside of the City. Environment staff are continuing to work very closely with our Service Providers to ensure the collection service is in keeping with demand, especially around long weekends and holiday periods.

Dunmore Civic Amenity Site

Our site at Dunmore continues to be one of the busiest amenity sites in the state. For the first 11 months of 2023 we have seen an increase in the volumes of material delivered to site when compared to the same period in 2022.

National Deposit Return Scheme

Ireland will soon be introducing a Deposit Return Scheme. In February 2024, when you buy a drink in a plastic bottle, aluminium or steel can that features the Re-turn logo, you pay a small deposit in addition to the price of the drink. When you return your empty, undamaged container to any retail outlet, you get your deposit back in full. (Details at <https://re-turn.ie/>).

National Brown Bin Collection Scheme

From January 2024, new EU legislation means every household will be entitled to avail of a brown bin collection service. Approximately 69% of households in Ireland up until now, are able to avail of a food waste collection service from their waste service collector. MyWaste.ie is encouraging everyone, here, there, and everywhere to contact their waste collector and request a brown bin service in 2024, because "you're never too remote to recycle!" (Details <https://www.mywaste.ie/brown-bin-service/>)

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Tidy Towns

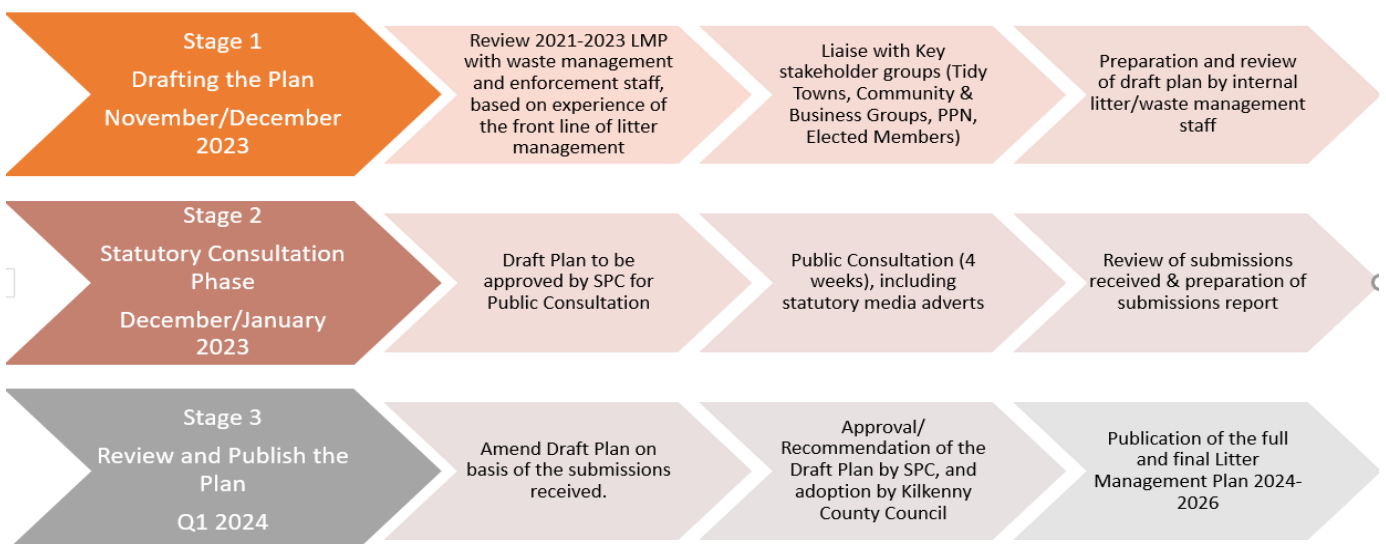
The final Tidy Towns forum for 2023 was held on Saturday 25th November in Thomastown Community Centre.

On foot of the recent National Tidy Towns results, the theme for the Forum was biodiversity. Dr Mary Tubridy, Ecologist and Tidy Towns adjudicator provided a presentation to members on all aspects of the Tidy Towns application process providing practical actions that could be undertaken to increase their points in the competition as well as supporting biodiversity and natural habitat conservation. This was followed by a guided walk around Thomastown, showcasing the work that has been undertaken to date by the Thomastown Tidy Towns and the Upper Paddock's Biodiversity Garden Team.



Litter Management Plan

A draft Litter Management Plan 2024-2026 is now in place. See the below timeline for the remainder of the process.



Green Schools

The Environmental Awareness Officer (EAO) continues to support 92 schools as part of the An Taisce Green Schools Programme to renew or attain a flag. Green Schools is an international environmental education programme, offering a well-defined, controllable way for schools to take environmental issues into the curriculum and apply them to the day-to-day running of the school. Green Schools is a holistic, long-term programme and has a two-year cycle in relation to preparation, assessment and attainment of a particular flag. The EAO is continuing to assist schools around the County to renew their membership as part of the Green Schools programme under their respective themes- Litter and Waste, Energy, Water, Travel, Biodiversity and Global Citizenship. Deadline for the applications for School Flags is March 15th, 2024.

Coil na nÓg- Biodiversity in Schools

Kilkenny County Council is collaborating with Coil na nÓg. Coill na nÓg is a native tree and hedgerow planting initiative delivered by Biodiversity in Schools and funded by a selection of Local Authorities across the island of Ireland.

Additional supplies have been provided to all participating schools in the form of notebooks and colouring pencils to encourage outdoor exploration and monitoring.

WEEE Ireland Recycling

WEEE Ireland are undertaking a Christmas E-Waste Recycling campaign and have asked all Local Authorities to support and publicise this initiative.

To remind those shopping for new appliances or devices, decorating the house or clearing out for Santa - that anything with a plug, battery or cable can and should be recycled for FREE at their [nearest free recycling drop off point](#). And that used batteries can be recycled for free in WEEE Ireland Blue Battery Boxes in newsagents, supermarkets, civic amenity sites and wherever batteries are bought.



Environment Complaints

All Environmental complaints received are logged on the CRM (*Customer Relations Management*) System. The number of complaints that have been received and logged by Environment staff for investigation for the twelve months to the end of December 2023 was 938 compared with 983 for the same period last year (*i.e. a decrease of circa 5% for the year*). The nature of these complaints ranged from littering, illegal dumping, burning of waste and abandoned cars. The majority continue to be related to littering and illegal dumping. Whilst every effort is made to tackle unacceptable environmental practice, Environment Enforcement staff continue to manage significant enforcement cases progressing through to prosecution.

AIR NOISE WATER

Domestic Wastewater Treatment System Inspections 2023

Under the National Inspection Plan for Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems 2022-2026 the Environment Section of Kilkenny County Council has carried out 51 inspections in total. Out of the 51 inspections - 28 Wastewater Treatment Systems conformed to full compliance. 19 Wastewater Treatment Systems Failed and a further 4 need a follow up inspection. From the 1st January, 2024, the [septic tank grant will increase](#) from €5,000 to €12,000. In order to apply for the grant all homeowners must have their septic tank registered and will either have to be inspected by the Local Authority under the National Inspection Plan or be located in a Prioritised Area for Action or High-Status Objective Area.



Farm Inspections

The Environment Section of Kilkenny County Council out 80 farm inspections under our RMCEI Plan for 2023. All farm inspections have now been completed and the Environment Section is currently reviewing all reports to ensure all farms are in compliance with Good Agricultural Practice for the Protection of Water Regulations 2022. Where non-compliances are recorded - advisory notices and warning letters will be issued to individual farmers. Where serious breaches of the Good Agricultural Practice for the Protection of Water Regulations 2022 are recorded - the farmer will be cross reported to the Department of Agricultural, Food & the Marine and depending on the severity of the pollution, the farmer will receive a deduction in their Single Farm Payment.

Discharge License's - Trade Effluents

Currently the Environment Section along with external consultants are reviewing all 25 Discharge licenses in the County Kilkenny. Discharge licences are issued under Section 4 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977, as amended in 1990, in respect of the discharge of trade effluent to surface water or groundwater. Licences set conditions so the discharge is treated and controlled in a manner that protects the receiving environment.

Air Quality

Environment Staff have conducted 81 inspections into the sale, transport and production of Solid Fuel in respect to the Solid Fuel Regulations 2022. These inspections involved compiling a list of all Solid Fuel Merchants and Producers within the County. The new Solid Fuel Regulations state it is illegal to sell or transport bituminous coal in the Republic of Ireland.

Each premises from this list was sent an advisory letter in October stating the intention of the inspection taking place. Each inspection involved inspecting the products for the following criteria:

- (a) The correct product.
- (b) The product was packaged and labelled correctly with the appropriate regulatory language in place.
- (c) The supplier is registered with the EPA.

Of the 81 Solid Fuel Inspections carried out most retailers/suppliers are in compliance with the new Solid Fuel Regulations. A small number had the incorrect bagging on their firewood. While visiting premises, the team was able to gather information into the individuals selling

prohibited products such as turf or bituminous coal.

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PARKS & SPECIAL PROJECTS

Kilkenny Countryside Park

A big crowd turned out to mark the official opening of the new Kilkenny Countryside Park at Dunmore on Friday, 15th December.

Kilkenny's newest amenity offering was opened by Minister Malcom Noonan, Minister for Nature, Heritage & Electoral Reform in the presence of the Cathaoirleach of Kilkenny County Council, Cllr. Michael Doyle and Mayor of Kilkenny City, Cllr. Joe Malone.



This project sees the development of a new countryside park on the site of the closed municipal landfill at Dunmore, which occupies an area of circa. 24 acres and is located just 5km north of Kilkenny City Centre. The new park offers visitors three themed trails, the Mass Path Trail, which starts at Dunmore village along with an Accessibility Trail and a Biodiversity Trail. The new Park also provides a myriad of other attractions, including two ball walls, a bespoke viewing area, play and exercise equipment and novel relaxing spaces that include hammocks, and

loungers along with Kilkenny's first dedicated dog-friendly enclosure.

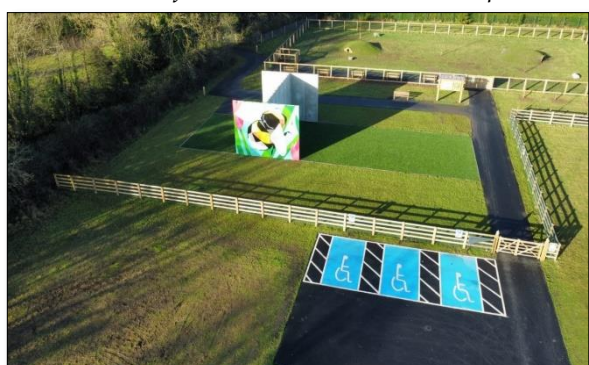


Opening of the Kilkenny Countryside Park – 15th December 2023

The new Park, which was approved planning back in 2021, sees an investment of c.€1.2 million into Kilkenny's newest large scale amenity offering. The funding to deliver this project was secured from the Department for Rural and Community Development, under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) and the Community Recognition Funds, along with Sports Capital funding and the Council's own funds.



Aerial view of novel relaxation break-out spaces



Aerial view of Ball walls with dedicated Dog Friendly Zone in background

South East Greenway

Glas Civil Engineering Ltd., continued works on the construction of Lot 5A, the 5.5km section of the Greenway from Ferrybank to Curraghmore, which commenced in mid - November last. A

Technical Services Tender, for a multi-disciplinary engineering consultancy team, to complete all remaining Lots of the Greenway was advertised in December. This competition is being run via an existing Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) tender framework.

Parks & Playgrounds

The annual independent inspection of all playgrounds under our care was concluded in December. This adds an additional layer of



checks to complement our own in-house weekly and quarterly inspection regime. The importance of same is to highlight any issues which require attention to ensure continued safe play. The Parks staff also continued with general maintenance during the month.



New Play Tower in Ballyragget Playground

Funding secured under the Community Recognition Fund (CRF) allowed for significant enhancement and replacement works to be completed in the playgrounds in Bennettsbridge, Ballyragget and Kilmacow during the month of December. This work was in addition to the CRF funded enhancements completed earlier in the year in the Castlecomer Multi-use Games Area.

In the playground in Mooncoin, a new wheelchair accessible roundabout and associated soft surfacing was installed. The cost of same was funded by the *Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth's* under the Play and Recreation Grant with match funding from the Council's own funds.



Enhancement Works completed in Castlecomer MUGA

The contract to construct a new all-weather Multi-use Games Area in the Ferrybank Neighbourhood Park was awarded in December and works are anticipated to commence on same in early January, subject to weather conditions.

Funding to deliver this project includes grant funding secured under the Sports Capital Programme, Specific Development Contributions and the Council's own funds.



Recently completed enhancement works in Bennettsbridge Playground

PLANNING

Development Management

Planning Summary	Total as at end of December	
	2022	2023
Planning Applications Received	837	880
Planning Applications Granted	643	613
Planning Applications Refused	98	113
Complaints Received	92	96
Warning Letters Issued	82	93
Enforcements Notices Issued	40	41
Cases Closed	85	124

FORWARD PLANNING

Masterplans:

The Abbey Quarter Masterplan User Guide.

A variation to the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021 - 2027 (CDP) is required to incorporate the User Guide into the Plan (CDP). Work will commence on this in Q1 2024. The Variation will require approval by the Elected Members. The publication can be accessed at: <https://www.kilkennycoco.ie/eng/services/planning/development-plans/abbey-quarter-brewery-site/review-of-abbey-quarter-masterplan-2023/>

St Canice's Campus

A draft Masterplan has been completed and the necessary environmental reports are currently being prepared. It is anticipated that the draft Masterplan and environmental documents will be presented to the Kilkenny City Municipal District members in early 2024, before being placed on public display for a round of public consultation. The environmental documents are currently being finalised to allow publication.

Ballyragget/Paulstown/Kilmacow

Masterplans are being prepared for the settlements of Ballyragget, Paulstown and Kilmacow. Three public meetings, one for each town have taken place. The feedback / inputs from these meetings have been incorporated into the draft Masterplans. The Planning Authority received draft Masterplans for each settlement and have reverted back to the consultants with feedback along with the feedback received from Area Engineers, Community and Housing Sections. All feedback is currently being reviewed by Turleys and the draft Masterplans are being currently amended. It is anticipated that the draft Masterplan for Ballyragget and Paulstown will be presented to Elected Members at the January

Castlecomer MD meeting and the draft Masterplan for Kilmacow will be presented at the February Piltown MD meeting, prior to them being placed on public display for a 4 week period. Walk in public meetings will also be scheduled for each settlement during the public display period.

Local Area Plans

Tenders have been advertised for the preparation of a new Local Area Plan for Ferrybank/Belview. Closing date for applications is 12pm on the 22nd January. Tenders are seeking a multi-disciplinary team to prepare the plan. It is expected that consultants will be appointed in Q1 2024 with a new plan in place by Q1 2025.

The tender documents provides for issues paper and public consultation along with the preparation of environmental reports and publication of the draft plan, the statutory public consultation and the final document for approval by the Council.

Taking in Charge

The following estates were taken in charge in 2023:

- Lakeside Housing Estate
- Lakeside Cycleway/Walkway
- Rioch Court, Kilkenny
- College Park, Kilkenny
- Abbeygate, Ferrybank
- Blackchurch Square, Inistioge
- Breagagh Court, Kilkenny
- Patricks Gate, Kilkenny
- The Belfry, Thomastown
- Friarshill, Graiguenamanagh
- Ardmillan, Thomastown
- Steps into Linear Park, Talbotsinch

E-Planning

Applications through e-planning continue to come through the planning system and in 2023, 69% of all planning applications received have been through the e-planning portal.

Active Land Management

There are now 40 sites on the Derelict Sites Register. A site on Rose Inn Street in Kilkenny was added to the Register during December. In addition, a site in Freshford was served notice of intent to be added to the Register. All sites subject to the derelict sites levy will be served with payment demands of 7% of the site's market value in Q1 2024. The CPO process of 3 derelict sites (*in Callan, Thomastown and Mooncoin*) has now commenced.

A Final Map of lands in scope for the new Residential Zoned Land Tax was published on 1st December 2023. Variation 1 to the Development Plan was adopted at November's Council meeting, comprising two minor changes to zoning in the City, to ensure appropriate application of the tax. A new draft RZLT map will be published by 1st February 2024 and submissions will be invited at that point.

A site on the Castlecomer Road, adjacent to the Newpark Hotel was cancelled from the Vacant Sites Register in November, leaving 23 Vacant Sites on the Vacant Sites Register. The number of cancelled entries due to site activation or improvement is 24. The Vacant site levy will be replaced by the Residential Zoned Land Tax from 2025, but any outstanding levies will remain due to the Council. A payment of €105,000 was received recently bringing the total VSL income to €863,900, of which €497,000 was paid by private developers.

Conservation

The Conservation Office manages all protected structures in Kilkenny County and City. These structures are recognised for their Architectural, Historical, Archaeological, Artistic, Cultural, Scientific, Technical, Social special interest. An advisory service on conservation matters is provided to the public and colleagues, while the conservation grants and funding applications are also delivered.

Conservation Grants 2024 were launched in November, they include:

Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) 2024

The aim of the Built Heritage Investment Scheme is to investment in a significant number of small-scale, labour-intensive conservation projects throughout the County and to support the employment of conservation professionals, craftspeople and tradespersons in the repair of the historic built environment. Kilkenny's grant allocation is €156,800.

Historic Structures Fund (HSF) 2024

Funding for the Historic Structures Fund (HSF) is being made available as part of *Project Ireland 2040*. The primary focus of the Historic Structures Fund will be on conservation and enhancement of historic structures and buildings for the broader benefit of communities and the public.

Stream 1 will offer grants from €15,000 up to €50,000

Stream 2 will offer a small number of grants from €50,000 up to €200,000

Vernacular Structures Stream – In the context of *A Living Tradition: A Strategy to Enhance the Understanding, Minding and Handing on of Our Built Vernacular Heritage* (2021), the stream for vernacular structures is being retained for 2024, with funding of €150,000.

The purpose of the stream is to support conservation repairs and small capital works to vernacular structures that are not listed in Local Authority Records of Protected Structures or otherwise legally protected. Such structures may be located within an Architectural Conservation Area. All local authorities can apply for funding for specific projects of between €5,000 and €10,000 for eligible projects.

The closing date for the BHIS and HSF is 19th January 2024. More information may be found at <https://kilkennycoco.ie/eng/services/planning/conservation/conservation-grants/>

Heritage Stewardship Programme 2023: The recording of two 16th Century buildings on Parliament Street, Kilkenny City is now complete. Final reports will be issued shortly.

Kilkenny's Built Heritage Stocktake 2023: The collaboration between the Conservation Officer and the Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government to undertake a stocktake of protected structures and National Inventory of Architectural Heritage structures in Graiguenamanagh and Castlecomer is now complete. Final findings are currently being compiled.

Building Control

Valid commencement notices submitted: 307 for this year, 2023. Just over half, 157, of the notices received were accompanied by an "opt- out declaration", this type of notice may be used for a single standalone dwelling or a domestic extension. 63 notices lodged by registered construction professionals accounted for just under 400 dwelling units. 41 notices lodged by registered construction professionals accounted for non-domestic projects such as educational, community, commercial and industrial projects.

Valid Commencement Notices Received:

December 2023.....	307
December 2022.....	336
December 2021.....	434
December 2020.....	319

67 Disability Access Applications were received the year 2023.

During 2023 applications included the following ranges of use; hospitals & healthcare; secondary and primary schools, housing in the form of apartments & duplex buildings; community centres and other community buildings; and commercial buildings ranging from hotels, restaurants, shops, gyms, short term lets, multiple occupancy buildings {Ukrainian/Refugee use}, to offices, warehousing, and industrial.

As of 1st June 2023, all Disability Access Applications are now made online via the online Building Control Management System, BCMS.

Disability Access Applications Received:

December 2023.....	67
December 2022.....	72
December 2021.....	54
December 2020.....	85

International Protection

The following premises were notified to the Planning Authority in accordance with the regulations:

Date Notification Received	Name of Premises	Received From
08-Jun-23	Kilkenny Inn, Vicar Street, Kilkenny	Bury Architects, Mayo
14-Jul-23	MacGabhinns Hostel, Vicar Street, Kilkenny	Specialised Accommodation Services Ireland Ltd
25-Sep-23	Kilkenny Hostel, Parliament Street, Kilkenny	Banandel Limited
27-Sep-23	Riverview House, Dublin Road, Kilkenny R95 X978	White Sand Consultancy Limited

LEO/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Summary of 2023 Local Enterprise Office Awards

- €375,342 in direct financial assistance was approved to 19 manufacturing / export service businesses located throughout the County. This includes €107,759 in Business Expansion Grant assistance, €213,190 in Priming assistance and €54,393 awarded in feasibility study grant assistance.
- 11 Technical Assistance for Micro Exporter grants were awarded to support businesses in exploring new export market opportunities.

- 12 Businesses have commenced LEAN one to one consultancy programmes to investigate possible resource efficiencies and process improvements their businesses.
- 4 Businesses availed of the Digital Start programme to prepare and implement a plan for the adoption of digital tools and techniques across the enterprise.
- 39 businesses were approved a Trading Online Vouchers to support the enhancement of their online trading capacity.
- 2 Intellectual Property (IP) Start Grants were approved to support a client company in obtaining expert IP advisory and support services in relation to Trademarks.
- 1 Agile Digital Process Innovation Grant was awarded in the amount of €138,782.
- 9 Green for Business supports were awarded. This scheme supports businesses to become greener and more environmentally friendly. 1 Grant has been approved under the Energy Efficiency Grant scheme.
- 10 applicants were supported to make loan applications to the Micro Finance Ireland loan fund.
- 1,053 people participated on focused small business training, including 149 people participating on the Starting Your Business programme.
- 540 businesses availed of specialised business specific mentoring on a variety of topics including finance, marketing, social media marketing and HR.

Night Time Economy (NTE)

The first Night Time Economy Stakeholder Forum took place in the County Council Chambers on Monday 11th December. Attendees received a presentation from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media on the background to the pilot project and an overview from Conor Sweeney on the approach and timeline for the development of an Action Plan. Following the meeting, the membership of the NTE Stakeholder Forum has been confirmed and the first workshop to support the development of the plan will take place on Tuesday 16th January. A consultation phase will also take place which will include meetings with key stakeholders and the publication of a public and business survey to encourage feedback and ideas on the night time economy in Kilkenny City.

Careers Kilkenny

The 2024 Careers Kilkenny event will take place on **Saturday, February 3rd 2024 from 10am to 2pm**

in St. Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny. #careers Kilkenny will showcase the volume and variety of high-quality jobs on offer in Kilkenny City and County both now and in the future and highlight the advantages that Kilkenny offers as a location to live and work. The event will offer attendees a chance to engage directly with key employers in Kilkenny who will be on hand to answer queries about the roles and opportunities on offer.

TOURISM

Kilkenny County Council Tourism Development Strategy

Kilkenny County Council's Strategy has been renewed and will align with the Failte Ireland Destination Experience Development Plan (DEDP) for Kilkenny. The Council's Plan will be overseen and implemented through SPC1 with regular updates and presentations on progress.

Kilkenny Tourism Marketing

Festivals & Events

Kilkenny County Council continues to support our year-round calendar of events. Work is now complete on a review of the grant scheme and the scheme is open for applications until 31st January 2024. KCC's Festivals Kit is also available to event organisers who might want to consider outdoor events as part of their programme. Budget has been set aside to support organisers to deliver this type of event.

COMMUNITY & CULTURE

Local Enhancement Programme 2024

The Department of Rural and Community Development Local Enhancement Programme 2024 was announced on 6th December, 2023.

The aim of the Local Enhancement Programme (LEP) will be to support groups, particularly in disadvantaged areas, with minor capital works and improvements to their facilities and the purchase of equipment for community use.

Funding of €151,822 was allocated to Kilkenny LCDC (*Local Community Development Committee*) €126,519 capital funding and €25,303 capital funding ring-fenced for Women's Groups.

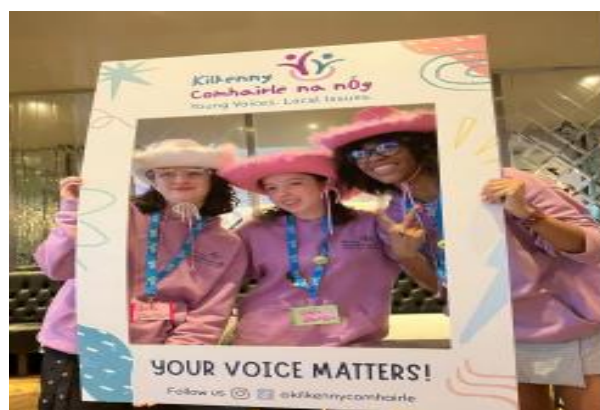
This funding will help communities, community groups and committees allowing them to continue to provide valuable services to the people in their area and in the process strengthen the bonds that tie communities together.

This grant scheme will be advertised in the coming weeks.

Kilkenny Comhairle na nÓg Annual Youth Conference

Empowering Youth Voices

The Community section supports the role of Comhairle na nÓg in Kilkenny. Over 100 young people from secondary schools and community groups from County and City had the opportunity to express their opinions and contribute to discussions on youth matters at the Annual Youth Conference held in Langton House Hotel on the 24th October, 2023. It was a great opportunity to gain valuable insights on diversity and inclusion and other youth-relevant matters which will form the basis of the work undertaken by Comhairle in Kilkenny.



Members of Comhairle na nÓg

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS 2023

- Official Opening of Sessions House in May 2023
- T&V funding (2022 Scheme) of €155,000 announced in 2023 for 3 projects in Thomastown and Glenmore.
- CLAR Funding 2023 of €174,916 for 4 projects announced in 2023 for Tullogher/Rosbercon, Coon and Muckalee.
- RRDF Funding 2023 of €1,744,746 announced in 2023 for Piltown Town Regeneration Project
- Additional RRDF Funding 2023 approved by the Department in December 2023 for Thomastown Library and Community Centre.
- T&V Streetscape Scheme of €100,000 for Callan announced in 2023.
- National Bike Week May 2023 funding of €25,400.
- Period Poverty funding of €14,000 extending the reach of free period poverty products in 2023.
- National Play Day 2023 funding of €3,000.

- National Play & Recreation Grant 2023 of €16,026 for improvements to playground in Mooncoin.
- Kilkenny County Council funded Commercial Premises Paint Scheme for 10 properties in 2023.
- Completion and Official opening of the Freshford Playground funded under the Town & Village Scheme and the Community & Cultural Facilities Capital Grant Scheme.

TOWN CENTRE FIRST

The Butts, Kilkenny City

Following the Loughmacask Local Area Plan Public Consultation process it was agreed that Kilkenny County Council would seek funding to prepare a comprehensive regeneration plan for the Butts area. The Council prepared and submitted a proposal to the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage in June 2023 and was successful in being awarded €850,000 in December, to prepare a detailed plan of actions for the Butts area. The Council will be establishing an Inter-agency Regeneration Task Force over the coming months with all the relevant service providers and representatives from the residents of the area. This is a unique opportunity to do a detailed analysis of the views of people who live, work and socialise in the area and to prepare a plan to deliver on identified priorities.



HERITAGE

Launch of Kilkenny's Decade of Centenaries, 1912-23/2012-23 Booklet

Individuals, community groups and organisations from across County Kilkenny gathered in the Set Theatre on Friday morning, 15th December 2023 to celebrate the launch of Kilkenny's Decade of Centenaries, 1912-23/2012-23 and to mark the end of the Decade of

Centenaries Programme in Kilkenny. The booklet, which was launch by Cllr. Michael Doyle, Cathaoirleach collates the wide variety of events, projects and initiatives that were supported by Kilkenny County Council, funded under the Community Strand of the Decade of Centenaries Programme. Minister of State for Nature, Heritage and Electoral Reform Malcolm Noonan also contributed to the event reflecting on the impact of the Decade of Centenaries Programme. Kilkenny's Decade of Centenaries, 1912-23/2012-23 is available free of charge from the Heritage Office at Kilkenny County Council. Contact: heritage@kilkennycoco.ie or 056 779 4289. The booklet is also available on line at <https://kilkennyheritage.ie/2023/12/launch-of-kilkennys-decade-of-centenaries-1912-23-2012-23-booklet/>



Launch of Kilkenny's Decade of Centenaries, 1912-23/2012-23

Installation of New Information Plaques on Kilkenny City Walls

Information plaques have been installed on five additional sections of the Kilkenny City Walls. The locations are as follows: Troy's Gate; Black Friars Gate; Black Abbey Carpark; Ormond Road and Ormond Street. The project was funded jointly through a grant award from the Heritage Council's Irish Walled Towns Network and the Heritage Office of Kilkenny County Council. This is Phase 1 of larger project to develop a trail around Kilkenny's City Walls. Phase 2 will involve installation of further interpretation, and development of a trail route and information.



Plaque installed at Black Friars Gate

South Kilkenny Historical Society Annual Conference

The Heritage Office was delighted to support the South Kilkenny Historical Society Conference held in the Rhu Glenn Hotel, Slieverue on 2nd December, 2023. The well-attended conference was a great success rounding off South Kilkenny Historical Society's rich contribution to the Decade of Centenaries Programme in Kilkenny.

Launch of Kilkenny Naturalists' Field Club

The launch of the Kilkenny Naturalists' Field Club is taking place on Friday 15th January, 7:00 p.m. at Rothe House, Kilkenny. Minister Malcolm Noonan Minister for Nature, Heritage & Law Reform will begin proceedings, followed by a multimedia presentation on 'Ireland's Wildlife Sounds', with Ornithologist Seán Ronayne. There is a €10 cover-charge, which includes membership for 2024, for those who wish to be members. Further details are available from Lorcán Scott npws.ls.2015@gmail.com/0858724741.

The Heritage Office is delighted to support the launch of the Kilkenny Naturalists' Field Club and wishes the club every success in 2024.

Biodiversity

The Biodiversity Officer continues to meet relevant stakeholders informally in order to prepare a position paper on biodiversity for County Kilkenny. In December, representatives from Kilkenny IFA were briefed on the role and vision for the development of the County Biodiversity Plan 2024.



Kilkenny IFA delegation including Jim Mulhall, Jackie Whelan Fagan and Eamonn Sheehan meeting Bernadette Moloney, Kilkenny County Council's Biodiversity Officer

National Biodiversity Officers Network Visit Kilkenny

During the month of December, the national network of Biodiversity Officers were brought on a tour of Kilkenny City to view a selection of biodiversity projects. Catriona Corr, the Active

Travel Officer showcased the active travel project in Cootes Lane. The group also visited the acorn nursery in County Hall. The meeting finished up with Maura Brennan of the Acorn Project speaking about the "Leave the Long Grass Grow" Creative Ireland project which focused on the theme of biodiversity and brought samples of artwork completed by local artists.

ARTS

Waste Not Want Not

Waste Not Want Not, a climate action community project in partnership between Kilkenny Arts Office and Vincent's shop Kilkenny to utilise their waste streams and encourage the public to reuse and to buy second hand. Over six weeks, participants unleashed their inner creativity, turning worn-out denim into unique creations such as aprons, bags and cushion covers as well as learning the beautiful art of Sashiko and Boro stitching techniques. The project afforded participants the opportunity to chat about the positive impact individuals can have on through climate action initiatives and the power of collective action. The beautiful work created can be seen in the window of the new Vincent's shop, Butts Green, R95 VK7X, until 14th January, 2024.



Participants of the Waste Not Want Not Project

Professional and Emerging ArtLinks Bursary Award 2024

Applications have opened for the ArtLinks bursary awards for Professional and Emerging artists. All applicants for this bursary must be registered members of ArtLinks and currently living in Kilkenny, Carlow, Waterford or Wexford. Deadline for applications: 4pm Monday 22nd January 2024.

Applications open for Arts Act Grants and Tyrone Guthrie Residency

The Kilkenny Arts Office have sent the call out for the 2024 Arts Act Grants and Tyrone Guthrie

Residency. The Arts Act Grants are open to groups and organisations promoting the arts in Kilkenny and individual artists in all art forms. The aim of the Tyrone Guthrie Residency is to assist and encourage both established and emerging practitioners, to give them an opportunity to work intensively on a 'project' alongside others in a very unique environment. Deadline for applications: 4pm Monday 22nd January, 2024. Further information and application forms are available on www.kilkennyartsoffice.ie

Poetry Broadsheet 2024

The poet James Harpur has been selected as editor of the Poetry Broadsheet for 2024. James Harpur has published eight collections of poetry, including *The Examined Life*, an odyssey through boarding school, which received the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize; and *The Oratory of Light*, poems inspired by St Columcille. He has won many prizes and awards for his books, including the UK National Poetry Competition and the Michael Hartnett Poetry Prize. An open call for submissions of poetry from Kilkenny based writers will be sent out at the end of January 2024.

Emerging Musicians CPD & Networking Event

On the 5th of December, 2023 a professional development session for emerging musicians was held. Discussion included topics such as what challenges are faced by individuals building a sustainable music career, including gigging, access to venues, funding opportunities and an opportunity for the musicians to network. The session was also invaluable to the Arts Office in developing our 2024 support programme for musicians.

Artist in Residence- Youth Art

This residency was a partnership between Ossory Youth and Foróige / The Drum. The groups worked with artists Carrie Lynam across six weeks experimenting with new materials and art processes. They completed their projects by producing self-portraits which were printed and showcased at our end of project celebration which also included our evaluation. The two groups came together for this and all discussed the final edits they wanted to make on their group video. The video is now on our social media channels and can be found here on YouTube and our blog. Video Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2t0i9ODEa-w>



Self-portraits created by participants of the Artist in Residence – Youth Art

ArtEd

ArtEd is a residency programme for primary schools in the County. The project is a partnership with Kilkenny Education Centre. On completion of the residencies each of the artists and teachers came together on the 12th of December, 2023 in Kilkenny Education Centre to share the work undertaken by the children and to share their experience of the project. Each of the artist teacher partnerships worked very well with strong work delivered and classes highly engaged and excited by the opportunity to try something different. The teachers were impressed and surprised by the amount of freedom the artist allowed in the workshops and how the children positively responded to this, staying focused and producing highly imaginative work. The teachers commented on how having an artist come into the classroom had such a positive impact on the class and encouraged them to try new things.

The 2023 School and artist pairings were as follows:

- Visual artist Kiri Tulloch with Scoil Mhuire N.S Mooncoin 2nd class
- Musician Mark Colbert with Gaelscoil Osrai 6th class
- Writer Tara Heavey with St.Mary's Thomastown 4th class
- Musician / Songwriter Kairen Waloch Presentation Castlecomer 5th/6th

Arts Office 2023 Statistics

The Arts Office had a wonderful year of engagement with the public and artists alike in 2023. Engagement with artists across artforms, aspiring creatives and communities are outlined below:





Creative Ireland

The official opening of the Kilkenny Countryside Park at Dunmore took place on Friday 15th December, 2023. The striking entrance welcomes you with a biodiversity themed mural funded by the Creative Ireland scheme. The park includes trails for walking, running, cycling, and orienteering, along with opportunities to learn about nature and biodiversity.



Mural at Kilkenny Countryside Park at Dunmore

Creative Kilkenny also funded the exquisite Rothe House Miscellany, a wonderful venue, which

hosted a selection of some of Kilkenny's finest poets, writers and musicians. Over 80 people attended setting the tone for a magical Christmas period in Kilkenny.

Creative Kilkenny began a call out campaign to artists, groups and organisations for the Creative Ireland and Cruinniu na nOg grants for 2024. The closing date for grant applications is proposed for 12th February, 2024.

Creative Ireland funded project - Rún na Bóinne 'The Second Chamber' / Rún na Bóinne project was funded under Creative Ireland and features our own Knockroe Passage Tomb.

The project was co-funded by Kilkenny County Council, Meath County Council and Sligo County Council and premiered on TG4 on 20th December, 2023. For more information see:

<https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/event/the-second-chamber/>

<https://www.tg4.ie/en/information/newsletter/december-2023/>

Healthy Ireland / Age Friendly Dementia Awareness Information Session

On December 12th, Kilkenny County Council's Community & Culture and Healthy Ireland teams collaborated with the HSE to present a public talk on Dementia Awareness. The insightful session was led by two Advanced Nurse Practitioners in Dementia for Kilkenny and Carlow, Mary Hickey and Liam Redmond.

In Ireland, there are currently 64,000 individuals living with dementia. Astoundingly, 30 people are diagnosed with the disease every day, impacting over 500,000 families. The talk highlighted key topics such as the aging brain, an exploration of dementia and its common types, understanding how memory functions, the diagnostic process, and the supports available in the community. Attendees also learned about simple ways to assist individuals living with dementia.

For more information on resources and supports for Living Well with Dementia please see the following:

Dementia Understand Together:

<https://www.understandtogether.ie/>

Alzheimer's Society of Ireland:

<https://alzheimer.ie/>

HOUSING

The Directorate of Housing incorporates a wide range of services for applicants and tenants to facilitate and support the provision of independent and supported accommodation.

The following information gives the up to date progress for 2023 under the various support services.

HOMELESS SERVICES

HOMELESS SERVICES SUMMARY DECEMBER 2023	
Homeless Presentations	33
Homeless Assessment Outcomes	
Prevention & Interventions	25
Emergency Service	8
Not eligible / Did not avail of service	0
HAP Place Finder Service	
No of Homeless HAP tenancies @ 1 st day of month	123
No of Homeless HAP tenancies created during month	0
No of Homeless HAP tenancies in place @ last day of month	123
Number of Homeless HAP tenancy breakdowns	
Other Social Housing Tenancies supported /created during month	15
Households in Temporary Emergency Supported Accommodation @ December 31 st	34
Households in Temporary Emergency B&B accommodation	6
Households in Temporary Emergency B&B Accommodation that are families	5
Households (<i>singles/couples</i>) in Transition Emergency Accommodation (<i>Own Front Door</i>)	32
Households (<i>Families</i>) in Transition Emergency Accommodation (OFD)	12

Homeless Prevention Measures

The Government have put in place a number of measures to prevent homelessness arising from the reactivation of notices of termination of tenancies in June 2023.

We are currently providing advice and directing Tenants to the appropriate services required to prevent homelessness. Where a household is in receipt of a valid notice to quit and requires assistance in establishing what options are available to them to avoid potential homelessness they are advised to contact the Housing Office at its dedicated email address NTQEnquiries@kilkennycoco.ie . Further details are available on www.kilkennycoco.ie.

Any tenants who may have received a notice of termination or a landlord who has issued a notice of termination to their tenants or who may wish to in the coming months should direct any queries to the dedicated email provided and all queries will be responded to in a timely manner.

SOCIAL HOUSING ASSESSMENT

SOCIAL HOUSING SUPPORT APPLICATION SUMMARY DECEMBER 2023	
Number awaiting Social Housing Support at December 30 th (<i>Gross Need</i>)	1,554
Number awaiting Social Housing Support at December 30 th (<i>Net Need</i>)	698
Number of Social Housing Applications received in December	55
Number of applications incomplete / awaiting further information/clarification	14
Number of applications validated and ready for assessment during the month	4
Number of applications assessed during December	14
Number of applications awaiting assessment as at December 31 st	102

HAP SUMMARY YEAR TO-DATE 2023	
Total active HAP tenancies	594
New HAP tenancies set up	64
HAP allocated Social Housing	84
Closed HAP tenancies	160
HAP Rent Reviews	333
Other tenancy amendments	650
HAP calls received	3,400

RENT-A-ROOM SCHEME

The Rent-a-Room scheme has been extended to local authority tenancies.

The broad outline of how the Scheme will to operate is as follows:

- The local authority tenant advertises an available room - gov.ie/roomforastudent provides information to those wishing to rent a room to students in full time education, along with information for students.
- Once the tenant and the student are happy to proceed, they apply to the local authority for consent for the duration of the academic year.
- The local authority may decide to carry out a Garda check in respect of the student.
- The local authority has discretion to approve or refuse the application.
- Grounds for non-approval include, but are not limited to:
- Rent arrears without a payment plan;
- Overcrowding;
- Anti-social behaviour or on good estate management grounds;
- The property is unsuitable on other grounds e.g. size, condition, access, facilities, etc.
- The tenants may charge and receive a rent from the student – such rental income will be considered reckonable income under the local authority’s Differential Rent Scheme, with rent charged by the local authority according to that scheme.
- The student will not be included on the tenant’s rent account, that is any income generated by the student renting a room will not be assessable for differential rent purposes.
- The tenant is ultimately responsible for any breach of the tenancy agreement by any member of their household, and if necessary the local authority may issue a tenancy warning for any such breach.
- At the end of the academic year, the student must vacate the property. Should the tenant and student wish to continue the arrangement into the next academic year, consent of the local authority is required.

TENANCY MANAGEMENT

The Tenancy Management Team deal with allocations, maintenance and anti-social behaviour complaints in relation to our tenants. Below is a summary of activity in December and to date this year:

- LA/RAS/Leasing allocations in December (*offers made*):..... 16
- LA/RAS/Leasing allocations to December (*offers made*):..... 161
- Tenant Liaison Officer cases in December:..... 18
- Maintenance Calls for December:..... 515
- Maintenance Calls year to date 6,808

The Tenancy Management Section has commenced legal proceedings in respect of four tenancies where repossession orders have been sought. Where anti-social behaviour is ongoing, tenancy notifications and warning notices continue to be served and monitored. Where tenants engage in anti-social behaviour relating to offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act or violence and intimidation resulting in criminal charges the local authority will take enforcement action to terminate the tenancy and alternative social housing supports will not be provided.

PRIVATE HOUSE GRANTS

The 2023 housing grants allocation received from the Department of Housing, was **€1,991,076**, comprised of €1,592,861 (80%) grant and €398,215 (20%) Council’s contribution. We requested and were approved additional funding of €9,365 in Dec 2023 bringing total spend to €2,000,441.

Grants Approved & Committed up to 31st December 2023		
Scheme	No.	Amount
HGD - Housing Adaptation Grant	190	€2,029,306
MAG - Mobility Aid Grant	17	€64,934
HOP - Housing Aid for Older Persons	247	€1,243,162
Total	454	€3,337,402

Grants Paid out up to 31st December 2023		
Scheme	No.	Amount
HGD - Housing Adaptation Grant	93	€1,023,532
MAG - Mobility Aid Grant	12	€48,494
HOP - Housing Aid for Older Persons	180	€906,743
Total	285	€1,978,769

HOUSING LOANS

Housing Loan Activity 1st January - 31st December, 2023					
Loan Type	Received	Approved	Amount Approved	Number Paid	Amount Paid
Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan	0	0	€0	1	€62,500
Local Authority Home Loan	43	13	€1,746,240	11	€1,259,740
Caravan Loan	2	2	€80,000	2	€80,000
Total	45	15	€1,826,240	14	€1,402,240

VOIDS

- At the end of December 2023, there were **51 vacant units** of local authority accommodation awaiting refurbishment or remediation works.
- Under the 2023 Voids Maintenance Programme Kilkenny County Council have recently received Department funding in the amount of €528,000 for renovations to 48 units.
- Works are ongoing on this voids maintenance programme and its envisaged that a minimum of 75 units will be complete under this programme during 2023.

HOUSING CAPITAL

Affordable Homes:

Kilkenny County Council, in collaboration with CAIRN, will be advertising an Affordable Purchase Scheme of 3-bedroom homes at Nyne Park, Kilkenny City, set to launch in Q1 2024.

The marketing campaign for this first Affordable Purchase Scheme has commenced. The Council has placed a general advertisement in the Kilkenny People in the lead up to Christmas advising that Affordable Housing in Kilkenny City is coming soon. The Council has also initiated a social media campaign over the Christmas period. This will increase over the month of January.

In tandem, CAIRN has developed an information webpage on the scheme <https://www.cairnhomes.com/nyne-park/>. In addition, they have placed billboards in key locations around the City along with digiboard advertising in MacDonagh Junction. During the month of January, they will be building on their marketing.

It is expected that the scheme will be advertised later in January. Application will be via an online portal only, with the portal for applications opening in February. The Scheme will be advertised publicly via the Council's website, Social Media channels and via print media.

The Affordable Housing Team are continuing to prepare for the roll out of this scheme.

Under the Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme, Kilkenny County Council will make homes available at a reduced price for eligible applicants who are seeking to purchase a newly built home but need additional funds to bridge the gap between their mortgage and deposit to cover the full price of the home. In return, Kilkenny County Council will take a percentage Equity Share in the Affordable Home. Purchasers will enter into an Affordable Dwelling Purchase Agreement with Kilkenny County

Council. The purchaser can redeem or 'buy out' this Equity Share at a time of their choosing but there is no obligation to do so. If the purchaser chooses not to redeem the Equity Share while living in the home, the Council can do so when the property is sold, transferred or after the death of the owner. For more details on the Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme please check out the Kilkenny County Council Information Webpage at <https://www.kilkennycoco.ie/eng/services/housing/local-authority-affordable-purchase-scheme/>

It is advisable that those interested in the scheme review the information carefully where they will find general information on the scheme along with eligibility criteria, how to apply, the documentation required to accompany an application etc.

Inquiries to affordablehousing@kilkennycoco.ie

VACANT HOMES

The Vacant Properties Refurbishment Grant, Croí Cónaithe is one of the measures in order to address vacancy and efficient use of existing stock in Housing for All. The grant is aimed at bringing vacant and derelict properties back into residential use. The scheme was originally for people who were refurbishing vacant properties for use as their principal private residence. The Government has announced that as of 1st May 2023, there will be a number of changes to this scheme including that the scheme will be expanded to property owners who wish to refurbish their vacant property for rental purposes. The detail and guidance regarding the modified scheme have not yet been issued by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. There has been a substantial increase in the number of calls to the Housing Department regarding this scheme and a register of all inquiries to the Council will be kept for follow up when further details of the revised scheme are available.

All queries in relation to this grant should be submitted by email to Vacanthomes@Kilkennycoco.ie and will be responded to in a timely manner.

Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant:

Vacant Homes Refurbishment Grant as at December 31 st 2023	
Number of Applications Submitted to date	118
Number of Approvals / Approvals in Principle to date	56
Grant Drawdown to-date	3
Number of Queries during the month of December	48

Housing Capital - Social Housing Delivery 2023

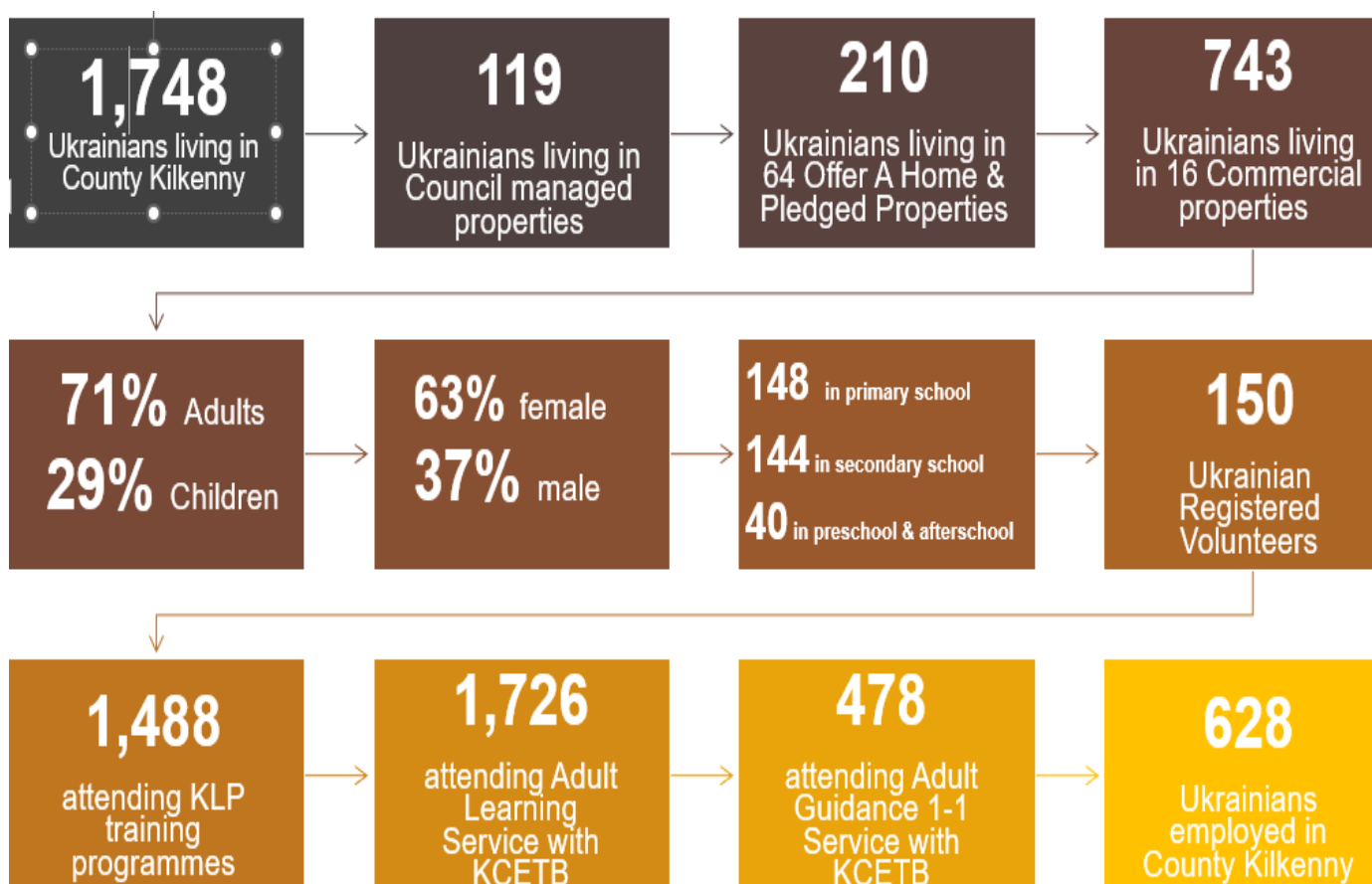
Delivery Stream	Project Name	Number Units
Part V + Turnkey	Old Creamery, Kilmacow, Co. Kilkenny	9
Part V + Turnkey	Village Gardens Waterford Road. Kilkenny City	5
Part V + Turnkey	The Crescent, Belmont, Ferrybank	12
Direct Build Construction	Golf Links Close and Golf Links Road, Kilkenny	6
Direct Build Construction	Legan Grange & Legan Court, Ladywell, Thomastown, Co Kilkenny	25
Direct Build Construction	Haggardsgreen, Callan	1
Direct Build Renewal	18 Wolfe Tone Street, KK	1
Turnkey	Main Street, Piltown, Co. Kilkenny	4
Direct Build Renewal	4 Loughboy Park Kilkenny City	1
Direct Build Renewal	Oldtown, Ballyragget	1
AHB Turnkey + Part V	Cluian Glasson, Granges Road, Kilkenny City - Clúid	43
AHB Turnkey + Part V	Nyne Park, Callan Road, Kilkenny City - Clúid	40
AHB Direct Build	19/21 Blackmill Street, Kilkenny - Kilkenny Voluntary Housing Association	12
AHB Turnkey	Nuncio Road, Kilkenny Phase 3 - Respond Housing	22
		182

Housing for All Target for Social Housing Delivery for 2023 was 154 units.

Housing Capital - Projects on Site as at 31st December, 2023

Scheme	Project Name	Construction Status	Projected Substantial Completion	Total Units
Part V + Turnkey	Marnellsmeadows, Callan Road, Kilkenny	On-site	Q1 2025	22
Part V + Turnkey	Castleoaks Kilkenny City	On-site	Q4 2024	30
Direct Build Construction	Crokers Hill, Kennyswell Road, Kilkenny		Q4 2024	88
Part V + Turnkey	Abbeymeadows, Abbeygate, Ferrybank	On-site	Q1 2025	15
Direct Build Renewal	Cloghscregg, Thomastown	On-site	Q2 2024	1
AHB Turnkey	Barrack St, Goresbridge - Circle Housing	On-site	Q1 2024	4
AHB Turnkey	70-71 Patrick Street, Kilkenny - Clanmil	On-site	Q3 2024	4
AHB Direct Build	8/9 Kilkenny Street, Castlecomer - Kilkenny Voluntary Housing Association		Q3 2024	3
				167

UKRAINIAN RESPONSE UNIT



FIRE SERVICES

Capital Projects

The signing of the contract for the design team for the new Kilkenny City Fire Station took place recently. HLM Architects were awarded the contract for the design consultancy services including project management, client representative services and integrated design team consultancy services for a new fire station in Kilkenny City.



All major construction projects, including major refurbishment projects at Fire Stations require capital funding from the NDFEM. Ongoing day-to-day maintenance of Fire Stations is funded from the Fire Authorities own revenue budget.

Fire Safety Certificate Applications

- 127 applications for fire safety certificates were received to date.
- 91 applications were received for the same period last year.
- Ukrainian Response Unit - Fire Safety Certificate compliance - The Fire Authority Technical Staff have been involved in the newly established Council Ukrainian Response Unit.
- A large number of risk premises throughout Kilkenny City and County have been subject to review and fire safety certification applications to ensure minimum standards.

Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003

- Fire Prevention staff made targeted inspections of premises both to provide advice and to enforce legislation during 2023.
- 1 Fire Safety Assessment was ordered under Section 18(6) of the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003.
- 2 Fire Safety Notices were served under Section 20 of the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003, where the fire safety remedial works has

been completed such notices can be subsequently withdrawn.

- 47 Licence Applications were processed under Section 24 of the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003.
- 66 Fire safety inspections of premises have taken place in 2023.

Fire Brigade Operations

- The Brigades have attended 633 incidents to end of 2023. These incidents included a number of road traffic collisions, public road hazards, flooding domestic fires, ambulance assists, chimney fires and automatic fire alarm activations.
- Kilkenny Fire and Rescue Service maintain fire appliances in all seven (7) Fire Stations throughout the County.
- There are a variety of different types of appliances in operation i.e. Standard Class B Pumping Fire Appliance (*normal fire appliance*), Emergency Tenders, Combined Aerial and Pumping Appliances, Water Tankers, Incident Command vehicle and 4-Wheel Drive Vehicles with off road capabilities.

Major Emergency Management

In the event of a major emergency, the primary role of Kilkenny County Council is to ensure life safety by providing a suitably trained and an equipped response. In general, the Fire Service will likely be the first section of the Local Authority to respond to any Major Emergency.

Kilkenny Fire and Rescue Service main roles in the event of a Major Emergency occurring County Kilkenny are as follows:

- Immediate Response.
- Extinguishing Fires.
- Rescue.
- Dealing with Flooding Incidents.
- Dealing with Spillages /Hazardous Materials.
- Storm /Severe Weather Response.
- Provision of Water Tankers.
- Provision of an On-Site Controller of Operations / On-Site Co-Ordinator.
- Provision of On-Site Co-Ordination Facilities (*including an Incident Command Unit vehicle*).
- Facilitating and Participating in the Crisis Management Team.

The Fire Service prepares itself for large scale and inter-agency operations through participation in appropriate exercises. The Fire Service has

developed its relationships with the Voluntary Emergency Services i.e. Civil Defence as appropriate, in particular in preparation for joint assistance in the event of a Major Emergency occurring.

Primary School Programme

Kilkenny Fire and Rescue Service continue to deliver the National Directorate Fire and Emergency Management Primary Schools Programme. It is targeted at all Third Class Primary School children. The Fire Authority has delivered this programme from inception in 2006 and every year subsequently (*except during the recent pandemic*). Over 20,000 pupils have participated in the Primary Schools Programme to date. The Fire Authority has provided training and refresher training for a number of firefighters in each brigade to assist them to deliver this Programme to all school children in 3rd classes in Kilkenny City and County where the school management accept our invitation to visit their schools.

Training

Kilkenny County Council's Fire and Rescue Service are obliged under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003 and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to ensure that our Fire-fighters and Officers are adequately trained and competent to deal with tasks and varying roles they may encounter in the performance of their duties.

All personnel responding to Fire and Rescue Service incidents require a minimum level of training to meet core requirements. In addition, many personnel also require further training for specialist or supervisory roles. Furthermore, a number of Fire and Rescue Service personnel have completed Instructor courses in order that they in turn can instruct and direct delivery of training sessions / courses. Personnel also require appropriate refresher training in all of the above throughout their careers, generally delivered either through on-station training or through specific refresher courses.

Training has traditionally been delivered at varying levels (*e.g. local station, fire authority, region, national and international*) and through a variety of arrangements.

We delivered quality training to date in 2023 e.g. QQI Initial Firefighting skills, QQI BA, BA

refresher, Emergency Services Driving Standard (ESDS), Emergency First Responder (EFR) and EFR recertification and Chainsaw initial and refresher training and Managing Fire Service Incidents – Module 1.

The “Managing Fire Service Incidents – Module 1” course was run by Kilkenny County Council, as the Lead Authority, and accredited by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management in Castlecomer Fire Station from the 11th to 15th December 2023. The participants and the instructors came from Kilkenny, Kildare and Tipperary.

The aim of the course is to assist Fire Authorities in developing and updating their ability to deliver efficient and effective fire and rescue services by providing fire service officers with the skills and knowledge necessary to allow them to fulfil the command and officer-ship roles assigned to them at smaller-scale fire service incidents.



Instructors and Participants on the “Managing Fire Service Incidents – Module 1”

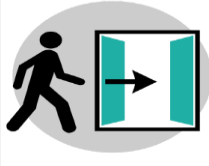


Road traffic exercise on “Managing Fire Service Incidents – Module 1”

LIBRARY



22,495 Items borrowed



13,499 Visitors



1,834 Members

Family Time at Your Library

In December, Kilkenny Libraries held 24 Family Time at Your Library events with an attendance of 700 people. Events included a number of festive craft workshops teaching participants how to make everything from Christmas wreaths to cards. Our Storyteller in Residence, Helena Byrne, and Father Christmas also hosted magical storytime sessions to promote reading as a fun, recreational activity for children and families.

Family Time at Your Library events aim to support a family-focused approach to reading with children as part of the National Right to Read programme.



Digital Archive Project “Castlecomer Pantomime: Down Through the Years”

Kilkenny County Library Service was pleased to mark the launch of the latest addition to our Kilkenny Digital Archive, “Castlecomer Pantomime: Down Through the Years”, at Castlecomer Library on the 5th of December.

This digital exhibit is a collaborative venture with the Deenside Players and aims to record the longstanding tradition of local theatre & pantomime in the Castlecomer community. Over 30 programmes have been digitised to date along with some photos of various productions over the last 60 plus years.

Castlecomer Library staff Aideen O’Reilly and Luke Brennan worked diligently to organise and digitise these programmes and photos to make them available for everyone to enjoy on the Kilkenny Digital Archive. This is an ongoing project which can be viewed at www.kilkennylibrary.ie.

First ‘Comer Pantomime



“The Magic of Local Lore” Exhibition

Kilkenny Library Service was also delighted to host the “Magic of Local Lore” exhibition in Castlecomer Library in December where families and friends of the 5th & 6th class students in the Presentation Covent National School in Castlecomer gathered to hear stories of local lore.

Under the guidance of our Storyteller in Residence and with the assistance of their class teacher Louise Walshe, pupils worked for many weeks to collate stories from a variety of sources.

These stories are a wonderful record of local lore from Castlecomer and further afield with Lithuania, India and Poland also featuring accounts of hurling champions, local shops and shopping, spooky tales, wedding traditions and family memories are all well-documented.

This project is supported by the Creative Ireland programme.



Library Activities

Events	In Branch	Online
124	118	0
Offsite	Live	Numbers
8	116	1942

This month we had lots of activities and events across our libraries. These events included a Christmas Jumper Swap in City Library, a customer appreciation morning in Loughboy Library, a Tiny Tots concert in Castlecomer Library, a light-up card making workshop in Thomastown Library, a back health workshop in Graiguenamanagh Library, a willow wreath-making workshop in Ferrybank Library and a number of community book clubs which were facilitated by Mobile Library staff.



Throughout the month of December, our library branches hosted 124 events with a total of 1,942 attendees both in our branches and on visits to local creches, schools and community groups.

	2,669 eAudiobooks borrowed
	1,287 eBooks borrowed
	22 Class sessions
	346 Online Courses sessions
	1,857 eMagazines borrowed

 **Digital Engagement**

Our staff prepared, recorded, edited and published 255 posts and videos on our social media platforms in December. Our engagements for the month were 3,978 and our videos and reels had 12,137 views. Our virtual newsletter was sent to 5,909 email accounts.

FINANCE

The expenditure by service division to the end of December is set out in Table 1. Total Expenditure for the period was €106.33m compared with the annual budget of €98.75m. The final end of year figure will be reflected in the Annual Financial Statement.

Table 1	Actual YTD November 2023	Budget Full Year 2023
	€'000's	€'000's
Housing & Building	26,456	22,698
Road Transport & Safety	29,845	27,560
Water Services	7,821	7,736
Development Management	12,126	11,754
Environmental Services	13,646	13,520
Recreation & Amenity	7,427	8,091
Agriculture, Education, Health, Welfare	606	692
Miscellaneous Services	8,417	6,698
OVERALL TOTAL	106,334	98,749

Finance Update

Inflation is having a significant impact on the cost of delivering all services and on the delivery of the capital programme.

The draft Financial Statements for 2023 will be prepared in the coming weeks and will be presented to Council at the March meeting. The statement for 2023 will reflect increased levels of expenditure in a number of areas including Housing Maintenance, Road Improvement Works, support for the Ukrainian Community, Street Cleaning, Climate Change and Community Support. This increased expenditure shall be offset by recoupment of matching grant funding and higher collection rates for the major income streams.

The bank overdraft facility was not utilised in the year to 31 December 2023.

Rates

A total of 86% of the rates available for collection have been collected to date. This figure will be adjusted to allow for the 50% vacancy refund and a final figure will be presented as part of the Annual Financial Statement. A 50% vacancy strike off will be applied to eligible commercial rate accounts for 2023 where the customer formally applies, provides proof of vacancy and clears any outstanding rate arrears, where applicable.

Rates Revaluation

Further to Revaluation 2017, 197 customers with a total rate demand value of €4.5m appealed their new valuation to the Valuation Tribunal. To-date 192 appeals have been completed. The following is a breakdown of the appeal outcomes to date:-

Decrease in Revaluation on Appeal	149 cases
Appeal Withdrawn	33 cases
Increase in Revaluation on Appeal.....	1 case
No change to Revaluation on Appeal	9 cases
Appeals outstanding.....	5 cases

The total annual Income lost to date stands at €853k.

New Commercial Rates Legislation:

Following the recent and impending commencement of a number of Sections of the "Local Government Rates Other Matters Act 2019", several important changes are taking place in 2024, the most significant of which are:

- Removal of the two moieties payment dates and replacement with a single charge for the year.
- Rates now due in full, on issue of demand.
- Interest charges falling due on any unpaid rates balance at year end, this will be effective from January 2025. Interest will be applied in 2026 on unpaid 2025 rate bills.

What do these changes mean for Rate Payers?

Removal of the Two Moieties

In previous years, Commercial Rates were payable in two moieties (*halves*), with the first 50% (*plus any arrears due*) being due on issue of the demand, and the second 50% falling due on the 1st July. **Commercial Rates are now payable in full from 1st January, 2024.** Commercial rate payers will be required therefore to make payment of the full amount (*and any arrears due*) upon receipt of your Rates bill.

Alternatively, the cost of the Commercial Rates can be paid over 9 months of the year by availing of Direct Debit option.