



COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

Comhairle Chontae
Laoise
Áras an Chontae
Portlaoise
Contae Laoise

Laois County Council
Áras an Chontae
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Arts	8674342
Central Area Office	8664168
Co. Dev. Board	8674338
Driving Licence	8664303
Economic Dev.	8664106
Environment	8674322
	8674332
Fire Charges	8674323
Heritage Office	8674348
Higher Education	
Grants	8664137
Housing	8664110
	8664090
Human Resources	8664219
Internal Audit	8664027
Information	
Technology	8664051
Library	8674315
Loan Repayments	8664119
	8664056
Motor Taxation	8664009
Planning	8664039
Planning	
Enforcement	8664017
	8664057
Rates	8664055
Reception	8664000
Register of Electors	8664093
Rent Repayments	8664084
	8664091
Roads	8664135
Road Design	8664239
Water Charges	8664058
	8664059
Sports, Leisure & Play	8664007
	8664038
Water Services	8664120

OUR REF:

Ms. Chris Gavigan,
Joint Chair,
L.A.N.P.A.G.,
Local Government House,
35 – 39 Usher's Quay,
Dublin 8.

December 13th 2007

YOUR REF:



Re: Performance Verification Under Towards 2016 (June 2007 – February 2008)

Dear Ms. Gavigan,

I refer to the above and attach a copy of the progress report, completed in accordance with the guidelines set out in your letter of the 31st of October 2007. The report has been endorsed by the joint chairs of the Partnership Committee at their meeting held on the 12th of December 2007.

I wish to confirm my satisfaction with the continuing progress that is being made by Laois County Council in relation to the modernisation and change programme, as set out in Towards 2016, and as evidenced in the attached report. This has been made possible by the high level of co-operation from staff coupled with a general willingness to embrace change.

I set out below details of initiatives and actions undertaken by Laois County Council which demonstrate progress under the various headings.

Enhanced Customer Service

Since June 2007, Laois County Council have had a continued focus on extending and improving facilities, access to information, accessibility issues and improving quality of life for the residents of County Laois.

- A new interim Area Office structure is in place. The new Portarlington office opened in May 2007, suitable office accommodation has been sourced in Graiguecullen and the Part VIII process will be completed by the end of 2007 with a view to opening an office at that location in early 2008. On-line facilities for customers are currently available in Mountmellick & Portarlington offices and will be available in the Graiguecullen office also
- Full refurbishment of the Motor Taxation Department was completed by September 2007 resulting in improved customer facilities. The Planning customer service area has also been re-furbished and work in relation to same will be completed by the 31st of December 2007. In both instances, this involved the re-location of staff to temporary office accommodation while works were being undertaken. Further refurbishments to Áras an Chontae to improve customer services are planned for 2008



Tá Fáilte Romhat
Gnó a Dhéanamh
as Gaeilge

'I bpáirt leis an bpobal'



- Consultants were engaged for the purpose of carrying out a Customer Survey and the report submitted in October 2007. The findings will serve as a guide to the Council's efforts to further improve particular areas of customer service delivery
- The number of on-line services available have been increased from seven to ten. The Council's website has been upgraded and achieved the WAI-AA standard for accessibility. The website is currently available in five different languages and further language options are currently under examination. The recent customer survey reflected a high level of satisfaction with the Council's website and on-line facilities generally
- The accessibility of all Council facilities is receiving attention in conjunction with the implementation of the Disability Act and our internal Social Inclusion Action Plan. Works to the value of €61,000 to address a variety of accessibility measures at Áras an Chontae were undertaken during November/December 2007.
- Other measures in place to address the needs of our customers include the Council's support for the locally based Fusion Project which provides support services to the immigrant population. The Council is also funding two non-nationals to attend training at D.C.U. for interpretation skills (Polish/English). Both are committed to working with the Council as interpreters on a voluntary basis in 2008 when training has been completed
- Holding of meetings/consultations outside of working hours is now a regular feature of the work of Laois County Council. This co-operation is organisation wide and involves staff working on the County Development Board process, County Forum process, Cohesion process, various Environmental Projects, Tenant Liaison Initiatives and also the participation of Council staff on the Boards of a variety of new and existing agencies/companies.
- The Library modernisation programme continues to be rolled out with the opening of Abbeyleix Library scheduled for early 2008. Opening hours to the public have been extended at the new Mountrath Library facility and increased opening hours will be made available at Abbeyleix and Portlaoise Branch Libraries during 2008. The construction of a new library in Mountmellick will commence in 2008.
- While the on-line interactive planning enquiry system has worked extremely effectively in terms of improving customer service to planning customers, as reflected in the recent customer survey, further work has been ongoing in relation to the development of an on-line module to assist with pre-planning enquiries. This system will go live in early 2008
- From a quality of life perspective, the Council is committed to a major physical, social & community infrastructural programme which includes provision of key orbital routes, provision of 2 new Leisure Centres, new Library facilities as well as a number of playgrounds and mini-pitches county-wide.

Co-operation with Other Agencies

- Through the offices of the County Development Board, the Council continues to foster a collaborative inter-agency approach addressing a wide range of issues
- The Inter-Agency Strategy for travellers has been completed and is currently being implemented. Similarly, an Anti-Poverty Strategy has been launched and this is currently being implemented
- The roll-out of the Laois Tourism Strategy is being achieved in co-operation with Laois Tourism, Leader, Failte Ireland (East & Midlands Region) and other relevant contributors.
- A joint initiative has been successfully implemented between the National Ambulance Service (NAS) Midland Division and Laois County Fire & Rescue Service – following on the Report on Sudden Cardiac Arrest, for the provision of preventative and control measures.
- Knockmay Housing Regeneration Project supported by H.S.E., V.E.C., FÁS, Gardaí and other agencies.

Development of Shared Services

Laois County Council is involved in regional initiatives in a variety of areas.

- A flagship project is the Council's partnership arrangement with the Football Association of Ireland and Laois Sports Partnership in the establishment of a regional centre of excellence at Portlaoise at the site of the new Leisure Centre. In conjunction with the F.A.I., a Sports Development Officer is currently being recruited to work with the youth of the local area.
- In the tourism area, there are joint projects ongoing with Offaly County Council.
- Laois County Council is the lead authority for the Midlands Energy Agency which was recently established and a Manager has been appointed. The agency is supported by Laois County Council, Offaly County Council, Longford County Council, Westmeath County Council and the Midland Regional Authority.
- The Council works on a collaborative basis with the local V.E.C. in projects such as the Laois School of Music and the provision and management of a running track at Portlaoise for community use. Two national awards were achieved by Council staff in relation to the Laois School of Music – Chambers Ireland Award 2007 and Allianz Business 2 Arts Awards 2007, providing independent recognition of our commitment to excellence in this area.
- In collaboration with Westmeath County Council, an Environmental Complaints System has been established and will be operational in January 2008.
- The Council has also developed partnerships with local community interests for the management of the two new Leisure Centres at Portarlinton and Portlaoise and Council staff sit on the boards of both Companies

Staff Training/P.M.D.S.

- Arrangements are underway for retention of the Excellence Through People standard for the third consecutive year with the FAS assessment due to be carried out in February 2008.
- A vigorous and responsive training programme has been rolled out during 2007 incorporating key areas such as Health & Safety, Disability Awareness and Equality and Diversity Awareness training. A Capacity Building programme, Interview Skills Programme and a specific Induction Programme for General Operatives are some of the measures put in place to address training needs of the outdoor staff
- Laois County Council is continuing to embed the Performance Management Development System within the organisation. Full roll-out of P.M.D.S. was achieved during the course of 2006. Reviews of all P.D.P.s and T.D.P.s were completed by the 14th of December 2007. An on-line P.M.D.S. solution is currently under examination and the Council has appointed a designated P.M.D.S. Co-Ordinator to drive the process further and deal with any issues that may arise.

Organisational Change/Innovation Under 2016

- Laois County Council is the National pilot for an ICT system for the Planning Development Contribution Scheme. Considerable work has been devoted to progressing this project and it is anticipated that the system will go live first quarter 2008.
- Implementation of Handling Significant Change Through Partnership is working well. A work programme has been agreed for the Partnership Committee for 2007/2008. All key issues on which consultation is required are directed through the Steering Committee, thereby meeting the requirements of the Information & Consultation Directive, the implementation aspects of which are also being managed through this forum.
- There has been a very focussed approach to the enhancement of Health & Safety and it's embedding as an integral aspect of the culture of the organisation, as evidenced in the attached report
- In relation to the implementation of the framework document for Major Emergency Management, Laois County Council has progressed this issue and is on target with the implementation programme
- The introduction of a CRM (Customer Relations Management) System will be further progressed in 2008 on an organisation wide basis. Staff co-operation on this initiative is forthcoming and is cross directorate working group has been established to advance the process.

Value for Money/Efficiency/Effectiveness

- The new financial costing model has been fully implemented and the 2008 budget is being produced in the new format
- Outsourcing of design and contract works in the roads area is continuing with Road Surfacing Contracts on National Roads, Traffic Calming

Schemes and Pavement Overlay Schemes and also Road Improvement Schemes in Urban Areas having been outsourced following the necessary procurement procedures

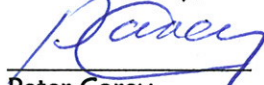
- In the I.C.T. area, the Disaster Recovery Service has been outsourced – this arrangement is working well
- Outsourcing arrangements are also in place in both the recreation and amenity and housing maintenance areas, where this is a more cost effective option for the Council
- The full implementation of the L.A. quote system by Laois County Council will also give rise to increased value for money and efficiency savings and the ongoing rollout of the Low Value Purchase Card is continuing where appropriate.
- The Employee Evaluation Exercise now been completed in respect of three Departments, Human Resources, Corporate Affairs and Planning and has yielded increased efficiencies in the deployment of staff resources
- The Internal Auditor has carried out a number of value for money reviews of all relevant work practices. Nine have been completed to date with recommendations for improvements currently being implemented. A further 9 reports are in progress or at draft stage at present.
- The establishment of the External Audit Committee in 2007 with an agreed work programme will also lead to further independent monitoring of the Council's ongoing commitment to achieve Value for Money and effective use of resources in all its undertakings.

I trust that the above overview demonstrates the willingness of the employees of Laois County Council to co-operate with the Modernisation & Change Agenda and together with the attached progress report, illustrates the progress being made by the Council in meeting the targets set.

With regard to the maintenance of industrial peace within Laois County Council, I wish to confirm that no disputes have arisen and no days were lost to industrial disputes in 2007. However, the protracted nature of the discussions with S.I.P.T.U. in relation to the introduction of an on-call system and the failure to make any significant progress does give rise to some concern. A Working Group has now been established in an attempt to advance the issue.

If further clarification is required on any of the foregoing information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,


Peter Carey
County Manager