



# Chief Executive Report October 2023

# Contents

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October Highlights	3
Library, Arts, Heritage and Archives	4
Corporate Services	9
Local Enterprise Office	13
Fire Services	14
Regeneration	15
Planning	17

# October Highlights

## Dead of Night Festival returns bigger than ever for 2023

An estimated 13,000 people came to Longford for Dead of Night which took place across the bank holiday weekend. The Council joined up with Fáilte Ireland, Milestone Inventive and street theatre company Sproai to deliver this spooktacular event.



## Longford Dream Space recognised nationally

Longford Dream Space was highly commended at a recent Good Practice in Local Government Seminar organised by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC).



## Annual All-Ireland Occupational Safety Awards win

Longford County Council won the Local Authority/Council Award and was again recognised as a 'Consistent High Achiever' at Annual All-Ireland Occupational Safety Awards. The awards were held in Killarney on Friday, 13 October.



## Plain English Mark for Data Protection policies

The Data Protection office were awarded the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) Plain English Mark for their Data Protection Privacy Policy and Service Privacy Notices.



# Library, Arts, Heritage and Archives

## Libraries

In October, Edgeworthstown Library employees represented Longford Libraries at a multicultural event organised by Enda Ward, Home School Liaison, and St Mary's National School, Edgeworthstown. At the event, the libraries were promoted to people in the community.

## Longford Dream Space

Longford Dream Space, which received Creative Ireland funding, was highly commended at a recent Good Practice in Local Government Seminar organised by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC).

This initiative is supported by the Council's Digital Strategy which outlines objectives to become the first county in Ireland to offer Computer Science as a Leaving Certificate subject in all secondary schools.

## Children's Book Festival

Longford Libraries hosted the Children's Book Festival with author visits, storytelling, and arts and crafts. Local schools took part.

Part of the Right to Read programme, this initiative gives children access to authors and creative activities in libraries. It encourages engagement with schools and fosters a love of storytelling while encouraging reading for fun.

## Healthy Ireland at Your Library

Healthy Ireland at Your Library events include art workshops by Angela Tuite. With high demand, more workshops may run in the coming months.

Life coach Mark Fennell gave an inspiring talk at Edgeworthstown Library. Both attendance and feedback were great.

In Longford Library, an 'Understanding the Menopause' talk was given by Deirdre Forde from Ceile Medical, Athlone. It included a questions and answers session with attendees.

Further Healthy Ireland at Your Library events are planned, including a talk on stress for adults, a sustainability and reducing kitchen waste demo, play therapy workshops with play therapist Eleanor Glennon.

Longford Library attended the first Community Safety and Wellbeing Expo. Keynote speaker Niall Breslin is seen below with library employees Eimear and Mary, along with one of his children's books on mindfulness.



# Library, Arts, Heritage and Archives

## Halloween at Longford Libraries

Longford Libraries celebrated Samhain with several fully booked Halloween events. A big hit with parents and children, the events showcased the many online library services. Feedback was very positive.

## Black History Month

Longford Libraries hosted a Black History Month event on Monday, 23 October, organised by the Longford Africans Network. Black History Month is an opportunity to share, celebrate and understand black heritage and culture. Representatives of many African nations attended and donated books by African writers to the library.



Starting in the United States by Howard University professor Carter G Woodson, a son of former slaves, the first Black History Month in Ireland was in 2010. It became a national event in 2014.

## Crossing the Divide book launch

GAA President Larry McCarthy officially launched *Crossing the Divide*, the seventh book by Seamus McRory.

The book tells the stories of prominent figures in the worlds of sport, politics and music. It includes Seán MacEoin, Albert Reynolds, Sir Henry Wilson, Philomena Begley, David Trimble, Minister Heather Humphries, Tommie Gorman and Fr Bernard McGuckian. It also looks at the careers of alumni of St Patrick's College, Armagh, where the author studied.

Guests were welcomed by Council Cathaoirleach Cllr Colm Murray and Longford GAA Chairperson Albert Cooney. Ciarán Mullooly was event MC.

*Crossing the Divide* is on sale now.

## Longford STEAM

As part of Longford STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and maths), LEGO clubs are taking place in Granard and Longford libraries.

Events are being planned for Science Week in November.

Longford STEAM is an initiative with the Council's Information Technology section.

## Employee Training

Longford Libraries attended the 'Violence and Agression Seminar' by the Longford Community Garda Sgt Darren Conlon and Solicitor Frank Gearty.

# Library, Arts, Heritage and Archives

## Age Friendly Programme

### Older Person's Council AGM

At an Older Person's Council (OPC) Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Tuesday, 24 October, Kitty Burchill was elected Chair of Longford OPC.

Kitty Burchill replaces Kitty Hughes, who has been Chair. Age Friendly Programme Manager Martina Needham thanked Kitty Hughes for her immense contribution and dedication to the Age Friendly Programme in Longford since it began in 2015. Kitty also served as Chair for the National Age Friendly Programme for the past three years, until 18 September this year. Kitty will remain as an OPC executive member and a member of Age Friendly Alliance.

In her new role as OPC Chair, Kitty Burchill brings great experience as a OPC member for several years. Kitty is also an Age Friendly Alliance member and served on active retirement groups in Newtownforbes and on the Midlands Active Retirement Committee.



### Rocking and Bopping Music Initiative

Since September, 24 music events have taken place in libraries, nursing homes and other venues for older persons from County Longford. Musicians catered for many taste from country, traditional, show bands and opera.



On average, 50 people attended each event. Feedback has been positive, with requests for it to become a regular event throughout the year. This will encourage the Age Friendly Programme to apply for further funding for a similar programme in 2024.

### Wise and Well Information Day

Longford Age Friendly Programme hosted a successful 'Wise and Well' Information Day in the Longford Arms Hotel with over 150 attendees.

Focused on positive health and ageing, it is a collaboration between Longford Age Friendly and the Health Service Executive (HSE) Longford Primary Care Programmes. Several services presented. These included Age Friendly Healthy Homes Coordinator and the Longford County Council Physical

# Library, Arts, Heritage and Archives

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Activity Coordinator. Attendees could also seek further information from the services at the event.

Many Council sections and community organisations supporting older persons attended, including Healthy Homes, Healthy Ireland, Longford Community Resources, Alzheimer's Society of Ireland, Alone and Meals on Wheels.

The evening concluded with music and dancing from Mick Flavin. Attendees' feedback was very positive.

## Handy Helps Launched

At the Wise and Well Information Day, Council Chief Executive Paddy Mahon launched Longford Handy Helps.

This Longford Libraries collection of items is designed to help people to live more independently in their home for longer. Longford Handy Helps items can be borrowed from Longford Libraries.

## Age Friendly Awards

The Community Car is shortlisted in this year's Age Friendly Achievement Awards in the 'Transport' category. This initiative serves the older community of North Longford, helping them get where they need to go. For example, it is used for getting to medical appointments, to go to the shops and to see friends.

The Transport category highlights the importance of access to safe and reliable transport options. This helps people to feel independent which is so important, especially in rural Ireland.

Judging took place in the Dolmen Centre, Aughnaclyffe on Tuesday, 10 October. Judges for the awards toured the rural area served by the Community Car. This was followed by an official welcome from Longford County Council Leas Cathaoirleach Cllr Garry Murtagh, and Longford Age Friendly Programme, Local Link and Rath Mhuire and Dolmen Centre presentations. The judges spoke to users of the community car, sharing stories of the positive impact it has made to their lives.

The Annual Age Friendly Achievement Awards Presentation Night takes place in Wexford on Thursday, 30 November.

## Archives

Several items have been deposited to Archives, including digital copies of a collection of photographs and programmes from St Mary's Gaelic Football Club, Granard, items from an accountancy firm, and an account book from Prunty's shop, Newtownforbes.

Archives reorganisation continues at Longford headquarters.

## Decade of Centenaries Programme

The 225th anniversary of the Battle of Ballinamuck was marked between 7-10 September, helped by Decade of Centenaries Programme funding.

The last in a series of lectures was an 'Ireland and the League of Nations, 1922-46' talk by Dr Michael Kennedy (Royal Irish Academy) in September.

# Library, Arts, Heritage and Archives

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## Arts

### Awards Shortlisting

Longford Lights has been shortlisted for Festival of the Year at the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards.

The award ceremony takes place in November.

### Culture Night 2023

Culture Night 2023 took place on Friday, 22 September. Events included the Craft Master's Café in Longford Town, showcasing international and local artists. It was organised by Ukrainian artists living in Longford.

In Kenagh, there was an evening of music and performances by emerging artists, musicians, and film makers.

### Dead Of Night Festival 2023

Dead of Night 2023 drew huge crowds for a bigger and better than ever before event to celebrate Halloween.

Longford Arts worked alongside other Council sections, and Fáilte Ireland, Milestone Inventive and Spraoi for this event. Part of Longford's inclusion in Fáilte Ireland's three-year pilot showing Ireland as the home of Halloween, it is also a Night-Time Economy initiative, in partnership with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

## Heritage

The Maria Edgeworth Centre and their Tour of Edgeworthstown Heritage Week event were crowned the County winner at the National Heritage Week Awards.

The Knights and Conquest Heritage Centre's Dúchas Beo Heritage Week event was shortlisted in the Inclusive Heritage category.

These awards celebrate events that share heritage with communities and encourage intergenerational interest. It also celebrates events which encourage those new to heritage, without local roots, or with accessibility needs.

Both the Maria Edgeworthstown Centre's Tour of Edgeworthstown and Knights and Conquest's Dúchas Beo were recipients of Longford County Council Heritage Week Grants in 2023.

### Padraic Colum Gathering

In October, the annual Padraic Colum Gathering took place. Professor Christopher Morash MRIA and Dr Patrick Ryan spoke on several aspects of Colum's writing in Granard Library.

At Colmcille Community Centre, in Aughnacliffe, Colum's poetry was read by Longford poet Margaret Nohilly. There was also a lecture by local historian Benedict Reid and a performance St Colmcille's National School in Aughnacliffe.

Colum family members attended.



# Corporate Services

## Customer Services

Customer Services responded to 1,770 calls in September and October, as well as 134 emails and many in-person customers.

## Check the Register

Across September and October, 270 checktheregister.ie applications were processed, including both new registrations and updates.

## Encouraging registrations

To encourage registrations, Council employees attended the National Ploughing Championships and the Longford Community Safety and Wellbeing Expo. Information sessions were also provided to Rath Mhuire Men's Shed, Dolmen Day Care Centre and St Mel's College students.



## Official Languages Act

Work continues to meet the Official Languages Act (Amendment) 2021 Section 10A obligations. As of the end of October, 300 out of 1,275 advertisements, or 23.5%, were either in Irish or bilingual, surpassing the 20% target.

## Freedom of Information

Freedom of Information (FOI) and Access to Information on the Environment (AIE) requests, as well as Office of the Ombudsman complaints received are detailed below:

	Sep	Oct	YTD*
FOI requests	4	6	52
AIE requests	0	3	13
Ombudsman complaints	2	0	6

\*YTD: year to date

## Data Protection

The Data Protection Officer attended national and regional data protection officer meetings.

Also in September and October:

- Data Protection Commission complaint received: One
- Data Subject Access Request received: One (work ongoing)
- Data protection queries received and closed: 22

## Plain English Mark awarded

Data Protection were awarded the Plain English mark from the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) for their Data Protection Privacy Policy and Service Privacy Notices. They are available on Longfordcoco.ie, and from Longford County Council Great Water Street office.

# Corporate Services

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## Elected Members Supports and Meetings Administration

A mix of online and hybrid, the following meetings took place across September and October:

11 September	Placemaking Strategic Policy Committee (SPC)
12 September	Corporate Policy Group (CPG)
13 September	Longford County Council
26 September	Granard Municipal District (MD) In Committee
27 September	Longford MD
28 September	Ballymahon MD
10 October	CPG
11 October	Longford County Council
18 October	Climate Action and Planning SPC
18 October	Governance SPC
19 October	Strategic Infrastructure SPC
24 October	Granard MD In Committee
25 October	Longford MD In Committee
26 October	Ballymahon MD In Committee

## Elected Member Events

Events attended by elected members included:

- Kennedy Summer School, 31 August-2 September
- ALLG Autumn Conference, 13-14 September
- ALLG Module 5 Training, 19 October
- ALLG Module 5 Training, 21 October
- LAMA Autumn Conference, 25-26 October
- Elected Members and Management Workshop on 20 October
- Scoil Mhuire CSPE class visit to the Council Chamber on 26 October

## Communications

### Awards Shortlisting

Communications has been shortlisted for the Communications category for the Rehome a Dog campaign at the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards.

### Press Releases

Seventeen press releases were issued, including:

- Local dedication and commitment recognised as 2023 Garda Youth Awards winners announced
- Bressie for keynote speech at Longford Community Safety & Wellbeing Expo

# Corporate Services

## Events

Communications supported the Longford Community Safety and Wellbeing Expo, including an active social media presence on the day.

Communications supported the Dead of Night Festival 2023, including input into planning meetings, social media and press release output and branding.

Communications are providing input into the planning of a visit of An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar to Longford to open Rose Cottage War of Independence Centre in November.

## Social Media

Short-form video is a growing focus for Council social media communications as it has increased engagement compared to photo content. Videos were made for recent events including Dead of Night 2023.

	*Reach or Impressions	Follower Count
Facebook	59K	6,654 (^241)
Instagram	5K	1,724 (^105)
Twitter	21K	3,449 (^45)

\*Reach: Number of people who had post enter their screen.  
Impressions: Number of times post entered a screen

## Website Improvements

Communications continue to work with Council sections to update and improve content on Longfordcoco.ie. This work was also extended to LongfordLibrary.ie in September and October.

## Health and Safety

### All-Ireland Occupational Safety Awards

Longford County Council won the Local Authority/Council Award and was again recognised as a 'Consistent High Achiever' at Annual All-Ireland Occupational Safety Awards on Friday, 13 October.



Longford County Council has had successive wins at the awards every year since first entering in 2014. The awards are run by the National Irish Safety Organisation (NISO) in conjunction with Northern Ireland Safety Group (NISG).

### Health and Safety Inspections

Nineteen health and safety inspections were completed.

### Health and Safety Internal Audit

Health and safety internal audits were completed in Roads, Housing, and Fire Services.

Temporary traffic management audit took place with Regeneration, Active Travel, and with the road design team.

# Corporate Services

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## **Health and Safety Training**

Health and safety briefings on risk assessments and standard operating procedures were held with Regeneration, Human Resources and Housing.

A 'Violence and Agression Seminar' took place on Thursday, 19 October. Attended by 45 employees, it was facilitated by Sgt Darren Conlon and Solicitor Frank Gearty.

## **Dead Of Night Festival**

Health and Safety assisted with the event management plan for the Dead of Night Festival 2023, which took place between 27-31 October.

## **National Standards Authority of Ireland Audit**

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) re-certification audit for Longford County Council's Safety Management System is scheduled to take place over a four-day period this year due to the shortage of auditors.

The first stage took place on 4-5 October, with the following sections audited:

- Fire Services
- Libraries
- Civil Defence
- Roads
- Housing

The auditor had no findings from this audit.

The remaining sections are scheduled for audit on 22-23 November. This will include a review of the Safety Management System, including Training and Human Resources, Corporate, and Performance Evaluation.

# Local Enterprise Office

## 'Connecting our Business Community' event

Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Longford hosted a successful 'Connecting our Business Community' event. Held in the Longford Arms Hotel, many local businesses attended.



RTÉ Prime Time presenter Fran McNulty led proceedings. Economist and author David McWilliams gave a keynote speech. This was followed by a panel discussion with four business leaders: Supermacs owner Pat McDonagh, Sarah Adams of Abbott, Longford County Council Director of Services Barbara Heslin, and John Kiernan of Kiernan Steel.

The event connected large and small Longford businesses, with a focus on increasing local sub-supply opportunities. For this, 12 of Longford's largest companies exhibited, with key decision makers and management ready to meet with small businesses. The great buzz in the room, the opportunities to network and the excellent speakers and discussion led to great feedback for the event.

## National Women's Enterprise Day

National Women's Enterprise Day took place on Thursday, 19 October. Longford, Laois, Offaly and Westmeath LEOs held its joint event in Castle Durrow, Laois, with the theme of 'Empowering Business Together'.

It was a sellout event with over 150 female entrepreneurs from the Midlands attending. It was an opportunity for networking and learning from shared experiences.

Speakers included broadcaster and business woman Terry Prone, celebrity chef and Ballymaloe Cookery School co-founder Darina Allen, and National Ploughing Association Managing Director Anna May McHugh. Event Ambassador was Kelly Ging of Kelly Lou Cakes in Portlaoise, and MC was broadcaster and documentary maker Ann Marie Kelly.

Food producers from each county were featured as part of Darina Allen's cookery demonstration, including Longford's Herterich's Artisan Butchers.



# Fire Services

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## Fire Prevention

Longford Town fire brigade attended the Community Safety and Wellbeing Expo in Longford Sports Hub. This was used as an opportunity to teach important fire prevention information.



Thirteen fire safety certificates and 11 court licence applications were processed.

## Health and Safety

As part of the National Standards Authority of Ireland's (NSAI) Longford County Council audit, Lanesborough Fire Station and head quarters were audited. The Fire Service has retained its accreditation for ISO:45001.

## Training

Breathing apparatus training was completed in Tullamore for five fire stations. In addition, three newly recruited fire fighters passed their initial breathing apparatus course in Bray.

Weekly fire training drills have restarted.

## Recruitment

The Station Officer post and Assistant Chief Fire Officer post for Longford Town have been interviewed for.

There are a number of further vacancies with applications being accepted.

## Equipment

The National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management has sanctioned approval for a new Class B Fire Engine for Longford County Council. The successful supplier is HPMP based in Tullow, Carlow. The expected delivery date is Q1 2026.

The six-month statutory inspection of equipment has been completed in October by Irish Engineering Services.

The annual certification of Road Traffic Collision equipment, pumps, and ladders has been completed.

## Operations

All stations remained fully operational. Total callouts numbered 28 in September and 34 up to 26 October.

Following the Workplace Relations Committee (WRC) proposal to solve the industrial dispute involving the retained Fire Service, trade union SIPTU subsequently held a national ballot. The WRC proposal was accepted, and the retained Fire Service returned to normal duties.

# Regeneration

## Longford Connected opened

The Longford Connected project was officially opened by Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage Darragh O'Brien on Friday, 15 September. The project was funded under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF).



## Bunlahy Car Park

Works on Bunlahy car park are complete. This project enhances the village by connecting local facilities and amenities, and addressing health and safety issues. It was funded by the Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

## Aughnacliffe Heritage Trail

The Aughnacliffe Heritage Trail was opened by Minister Heather Humphreys in September. For this project, funding of €200,000 was received under Measure Two of the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS). This was used to develop and enhance a 4.2km trail connecting the Dolmens and Deserted Village in Aughnacliffe.

## Smear Hill Viewing Bay

Smear Hill Viewing Bay is now complete. For this project, €25,214.90 in ORIS Measure Two funding was received. This was used to develop a safe viewing bay along Smear Hill.



## Old Bog Line

Works on the second phase of the 'Old Bog Line' is now complete, with a walking trail for the local community provided. This project received €30,000 funding under ORIS Measure Two.

## Trail Shelters

Five shelters along exposed sections of trails have been installed. This project received €30,000 ORIS 2022 Measure One funding.



# Regeneration

## Active Travel

### R198 Battery Road Pedestrian and Cycle Scheme

Work continues on the R198 Battery Road Pedestrian and Cycle Scheme. Currently confined to one side of the road, sub-surface works is complete in this section. It is on track for kerbing and surfacing in November. This project will deliver 1.2 km of new walk and cycleway into Longford Town.

Works include signaling at Lisbrack road junction, carriageway and junction tightening, undergrounding overhead services, public lighting upgrades and road surfacing. Works are expected to run to June 2024.

### N63 Ballinalee Road Pedestrian and Cycle Scheme

For the N63 Ballinalee Road Pedestrian and Cycle Scheme, services and public lighting are being installed on the northern side of the N63. Much of the 1km footpath is in place. The new cycle track is on target for surfacing in November. Work will then move to the south side of the N63.



### Ennybegs Shared Path to St Teresa's National School project

Construction is near completion on the Ennybegs Shared Path to St Teresa's National School project. Preparation for the surfacing of the shared path is underway. This involves installing concrete aprons, tactile paving, stone wall and boundary treatments. Surfacing is scheduled for November.

### Scoil Mhuire Newtownforbes project

The Scoil Mhuire, Newtownforbes project is near completion. Delivered under the National Transport Authority Safe Routes to School Programme, it is supported by An Taisce Green Schools. The project will improve student safety at the front and along pedestrian routes to the school.

To date, parking in front of the school has been removed, the front boundary wall has been set back to allow buses to park more safely, and coloured pencil bollards, and buff coloured surfacing has been installed. The construction of the second new zebra crossing on the N4 is underway. Works is expected to be completed by November.





# Planning

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## Planning Applications

Among the many planning applications being considered at present, an application to construct a gas insulated switchgear at the Lanesborough power plant site has been approved.

ePlanning has been fully implemented and is running well and significantly reducing paper waste.

The waiver scheme in relation to development contribution has been implemented with a modest uptake in applications.

## Longford Town Local Area Plan

Preparation of Longford Town Local Area Plan is currently at pre-draft stage.

The Plan is dependent on the preparation of the Longford Transport Plan, which is also being prepared.

Preparation was paused pending the publishing of detailed Census 2022 results at the end of September. These results are now being analysed by the Planning team.

## County Development Plan

A report on the progress achieved in securing the objectives of the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, and a review of the progress achieved in implementing the Housing Strategy was prepared for elected members. It was circulated to members in early October.

## Lough Ree Biosphere Reserve

The application to UNESCO for Biosphere Reserve status for Lough Ree is progressing. Consultants have been appointed to carry out a public consultation, due to start in January 2024, following a ministerial launch.

This project features in the National Climate Action Plan, Shannon Tourism Masterplan, Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 and the Programme for Government. It is a flagship project in the region and aims to help efforts to combat climate change and reverse biodiversity loss.

## Residential Zoned Land Tax

A Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT) draft map was prepared. This is required for the Revenue Commissioners under the RZLT legislation. Submissions were reviewed regarding inclusion or exclusion on the map and possible rezoning.

No additional land has been identified as being in scope. Therefore, it is not required to publish a supplemental map.

A final map will be published on 1 December 2023.

# CONNECTED

People • Place • Opportunity

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Management Report for October 2023 prepared in accordance with Sec 136 (2) of the Local Government Act 2001, as inserted by Section 51 the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The report outlines key aspects of our service delivery and performance in October 2023 in securing the objectives set out in the Council's Corporate Plan.

Signed:   
Paddy Mahon  
Chief Executive

