Corporate Recreation & Amenity

The goal of the Corporate Services department is the provision and retention of sufficient professionally developed staff to meet the needs of the organisation. It is also committed to the use of Information Systems to expand and increase efficiency and quality of service delivery to the public. The Arts and Recreation offices in this Directorate work to enhance participation and improve standards in the cultural and sporting life of the community.

▼ Chairman Terry Brennan receiving the Chains of Office from retired Councillor Nicholas McCabe
▶ Ardee Baroque Festival

CORPORATE RECREATION & AMENITY

CORPORATE PLAN

The Corporate Plan was adopted in 2004 following extensive consultation with employees elected representatives, community interests, external stakeholders and other public bodies. It sets out Louth Local Authorities vision for the period to 2009, to ensure social and cultural development and reflects priorities identified in the County Development Board strategy.

RECRUITMENT

Louth Local Authorities continue to be hugely attractive places of work with almost 1000 applications processed in 2004 for 22 separate competitions. The level of recruitment reflects our position as a major employer in Louth as well as the increasing level of service provision to the public. A number of senior appointments were facilitated through Publicjobs.ie. All vacancies in Louth Local Authorities can be viewed at www.louthcoco.ie/jobs

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The good record of Industrial Relations was generally maintained during the year with no time being lost on industrial action. A number of issues were progressed through Industrial Relations procedures without any negative impact on working relationships or service to the public.

TRAINING

The Training Officer, through a formal Training Plan, continued to provide required training, as identified in the Training Needs Analysis conducted in 2003.

The following is an example of some of the training which took place in 2004:

- Assistance was provided to a number of staff who wanted to pursue third level qualifications.
- The Senior Management Team completed an eight day management training course
- Customer Care
- Information Technology e.g. ECDL, Autocad, Word, Excel
- Grievance & Disciplinary
- Supervisory Management
- Telephone Techniques
- Retirement Planning
- Interview Preparation
- Playground Inspection & Maintenance
- Presentation Skills
- School Warden Training
- Literacy Awareness
- Disability Awareness

EQUALITY

The Equality Officer dealt with a number of issues under the Council's Equality Policy.

The Dignity at Work Policy and Programme for Diversity were launched in 2004 and circulated to all staff. These emphasise the Council's continued commitment to the equality agenda and sets out procedures to be followed if any staff member is experiencing difficulty.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Louth Local Authorities responded to requests under the Freedom of Information Act during the year with a total of 37 across the four local authorities being received in 2004.

WORKPLACE PARTNERSHIP IN LOUTH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Louth Workplace Partnership Committee had a successful year

Mobile Welfare Unit purchased for outdoor staff

implementing its 2003-2004 Operational Plan. The current members of the Committee are:

Michael Mc Cabe - IMPACT (Joint Chair)
Mary Murtagh (Joint Chair)
Billy Mc Kee (ATGWU)
Joe Mc Guinness, Louth County Council
Larry Conlon (SIPTU)
Kieran Lawless, Dundalk Town Council
Michael Collins (ATGWU)
Fiona Downes , Drogheda Borough Council
Ray Mc Coy (UCATT)
Joan Martin, Louth County Council

The role of the Workplace Partnership Committee is to facilitate good relations between management and the unions in terms of jointly managing changes.

The members of the Committee are made up equally of union and management representatives. The Committee successfully implemented a number of actions/ projects geared at staff development and customer care, as outlined in its Workplan 2003-2004.

The Committee members consult with local management, employees and their unions and when necessary a Working Group may be formed in order to oversee the implementation of a specific action/ project. The Committee has joint chairs who are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the Partnership Committee is working effectively.

The Workplace Partnership Facilitator is employed to ensure the partnership process is working effectively and to develop commitment and support for the Partnership process across the local authorities, and to co-ordinate the various agreed projects.

Some of the successful projects implemented in 2004 include:

- Health Screening for staff at a subsidised rate
- Smoking Cessation Classes- a 6 week course delivered locally by the NEHB
- Irish Language Classes for 42 staff
- Progress in Education opportunity for outdoor based staff (see pics)
- Promotion of an introduction to computers course for outdoor staff

Staff who Retired in 2004 receive a Retirement Recognition Award from the Workplace Partnership Committee

- Staff Survey to assess staff views on how the Local Authorities are as a place to work
- Customer Survey- conducted by DKIT students which involved interviewing 500 households around the county
- Facilitating staff input into the review of the Flexitime scheme
- Healthy Options in the workplace, including assessing staff views regarding their health at work
- Purchase and launch of Mobile Welfare Units for outdoor based staff to ensure adequate facilities are in place while working away from base - (Drogheda Borough Council – 2 Units, Ardee Area – 1 Unit)
- Promotion of Staff Computer Purchase scheme
- Installing computers in area offices to provide access to outdoor based staff

The Partnership process is expected to be extended to the Fire Service and to the urban authorities in order to manage changes in these areas without taking it into the industrial relations arena.

INTERNAL AUDIT

The following is a list of audits completed by Louth County Council during 2004:-

Hire Plant - Dundalk Town Council
Valuations – Tenant Purchase Scheme - Dundalk Town Council
Level of Business with Council Solicitor - Louth County Council
Urban & Village Renewal Schemes 2003 - Louth County Council
Higher Education Grants - Louth County Council
Major Contract Files - Dundalk Town Council
3rd Level Education Bursary Grants - Louth County Council
Small Water & Sewerage Schemes
2001, 2002, 2003 - Louth County Council
Arts Office - Dundalk Town Council

In addition to the above audits regular checking was carried out on Rent, Rates, Housing Loans, Water, Fire Fee & Planning Levies arrears across the three Local Authorities. There was also checking carried out on the various cash collection points eg. Pay Parking, Sports Centre, Libraries, Museum etc.

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Some of the main events of the 2004 year include:-
Louth achieved network certification from the Local Government Computer Services Board for its network infrastructure. Security was a focus in 2004 with new hardware, software and procedures implemented.

Another highlight of the year was the introduction of eDirect. eDirect is a customer service database that will enable the local authority to respond effectively to customer queries. It is gradually being rolled out across all the local authorities in the County.

Geographical Information Systems took a leap forward with the installation of servers and software to handle a diverse range of information requirements in Environment, Planning and Community & Enterprise.

The move toward eGovernment was supported further by the

introduction of several e-enabled applications such as ePlan to allow the public to browse for planning information on the website and eReg to allow the citizen to check the electoral register. Internally efficiency was improved by web based products such as the Travel and Subsistence application, Time and Attendance System and eDirect.

IT looks forward to 2005 and to providing continued support of the ongoing process of change and improvement being undertaken in Louth Local Authorities. In particular projects are ongoing with respect to eDemocracy and mobile computing.

MEETINGS ADMINISTRATION

Each Local Authority met regularly during the course of the year with Louth County Council and Ardee Town Council meeting on average once a month as well as holding Special Meetings when considered necessary. Drogheda Borough Council and Dundalk Town Council met on average twice each month during the year.

MEMBERS CONFERENCES

Elected Representatives from Louth County Council were represented at a total of 36 conferences during the year covering a wide range of topical issues while councillors in Dundalk and Drogheda attended 38 and 16 conferences respectively.

JUNIOR COUNCIL

The Junior Council held meetings covering such issues as Nanotechnology, Road Safety, Arts and Sports & Recreation.

A Drug/Alcohol abuse conference took place in April 2004 where approximately 200 students from Secondary Schools throughout the county attended. Minister for Youth Affairs, Síle DeValera launched the conference following which there was a presentation by reformed drug addict Jackie Burke who is now a youth counsellor. The students found the presentation very interesting and said they would be interested in getting Mr. Burke to come to their schools for a talk with their fellow pupils.

LOCAL ELECTIONS

In June the term of office of that council came to an end with the holding of the Local Elections on 11th of that month. This date was to herald the introduction of electronic voting for all future elections and certainly much of the necessary preparation was on the basis of that mechanism being used.

The decision made nationally to revert to the traditional method put particular pressures on the Returning Officers and Staff to prepare and plan the election process in a much shorter timeframe.

For the first time in the case of three of the electoral areas of Louth County Council the counts were carried out and facilitated in the foyer of County Hall. The remaining area was carried out in conjunction with the Drogheda Borough Count in St. Olivers School, Rathmullen, while the Dundalk Town Council Count took place in the Dundalk Institute of Technology.

The elections brought major changes with 8 new members being elected to Louth County Council following the resignation of the outgoing Cathaoirleach Councillor Nicholas McCabe after 49 years service and 7 existing members losing their seats. In Dundalk Town Council and Drogheda Borough Council the make-up of the councils also changed with 4 new members in Dundalk Town Council and 6 new members in Drogheda Borough Council.

ARTS IN LOUTH

Louth Local Authorities Arts Service embarked on an ambitious programme of events and projects in 2004. Working alongside the growing amateur and professional arts sectors, the Arts Service contributed to an extremely busy year for the arts in Louth.

Throughout the year, a series of Residencies by artists of different media took place in the County, each working with groups and communities in Carlingford, Collon, Drogheda and Dundalk. Schools, disability groups, youth groups, a sports club and older people took part in workshops and activities through the visual arts, creative writing, contemporary dance, and film. These projects were a continuation of the Artist in Residence initiative, which enables communities to work with artists for up to six months, while supporting artists in continuing

Junior Council Training Day

the development of their own work at the same time.

A number of new festivals were premiered in the county during the year, including Leanbh, the children's arts festival in Drogheda, and Ardee Baroque. The latter saw Ardee playing host to the Irish Baroque Orchestra for a week, culminating in a series of concerts by Irish and international ensembles using Ardee's wealth of historical and atmospheric venues. Louth Local Authorities supported a diverse range of Festivals within the county including Feile Ui Mheith, Drogheda Traditional Weekend, Dundalk Maytime Drama Festival, Kavanagh 100, the Táin Rhythm & Roots Festival, and Dundalk Summer Sounds. New work was commissioned by the Arts Service and the Archives Service from Calipo Theatre Company to mark the 150th anniversary of the building of the Old Gaol, and a new theatre piece by actor/director Tony Coleman entitled "I'm a Dad, Get me out of Here" received production investment, which allowed for this monologue to be toured nationally.

Louth Local Authorities recognise the importance of funding for groups and individuals in the arts, and a new branding for the various funding opportunities offered by all three local authorities was launched during the year. CreateLouth enables applicants to apply for the same funding categories, wherever they are living in Louth.

Artist Shauna Swords works with clients of the Drogheda Day Care Centre, Fair Street

CreateLouth has resulted in greater awareness of the available funding opportunities, with more applications and greater funds distributed.

Developmental work through projects in communities saw a wide range of artforms and approaches being deployed. The Environmental Art Project in Cox's Demesne, the Travelling Light Project sited in Dundalk Railway Station, a new film summer school in Drogheda entitled From Script to Screen, Bealtaine, and the National Chamber Choir's Composition Workshops in three schools throughout the county – these were some of the partnerships where participation was encouraged and facilitated.

2004 was the first full year in which the three Arts Offices in the county worked together, while answering the needs of the individual communities which they serve. Links have been strengthened with other local agencies such as Dundalk Institute of Technology and Craftmark, and with initiatives such as the adoption of the first Arts Plan, Drogheda Arts Festival, and the launch of the Louth, Newry and Mourne Film Commission planned for 2005, the high quantity and quality of work looks set to continue in the years ahead.

SPORTS & RECREATION

Children's Play

In order to improve play opportunities for Children in Louth, in keeping with the County Development Strategy and in line with the National Play Policy, initial consultations on the drafting of a Play Policy /Play Action Plan for Louth were commenced in the latter part of this year. An annual inspection by an independent registered Playground Inspector of all existing local authorities' playgrounds in the county was initiated under the Councils' new Playground Operational Policy and carried out in May.

New playgrounds in Drogheda and Omeath (Omeath Recreation Park) were opened, increasing the number of Local authority playgrounds available in the county, and discussions commenced with a number of other local community groups seeking Playgrounds.

Partnership Projects

The pilot programme to provide sporting/ activity opportunities for young people with special needs continued during 2004 with Activity Camps organized in partnership with the NEHB held at Dundalk Sports Centre during the Summer and mid-term breaks. Linkages established through the County Sports and Recreation Officer between local Special Needs schools, the NEHB and the DKIT Community & Sports Leadership Course developed further.

County Sports, Recreation and Leisure Strategy

The need for Louth Local Authorities to develop a strategic plan for the provision of and access to Sports, Recreation and Leisure opportunities and facilities throughout the County was identified as an essential step to meeting many objectives within the County Development Strategy. Interviews were initiated late in 2004 for the appointment of consultants to develop an integrated Sports, Recreation and Leisure strategy for Louth to be published during 2005.

LIBRARY

April 2004 saw the launch of the Learning Centre in Dundalk Library. Courses available in the Learning Centre include Internet Skills, Word Processing, Databases, Powerpoint, Distance Learning Courses, Dyslexia and Literacy Resources. Groups from the VEC, FAS, NTDI, and a local Dyslexic group have been using the centre as a venue for their classes. The centre is also available and used by individuals wishing to improve their skills in any of the above areas. Booking is essential.

Longer opening hours have been introduced in all of the smaller branch libraries, with Ardee branch now open 31 hours a week, while Dunleer and Carlingford branches are open 23 hours a week.

The library catalogue is available on-line, and with the use of pin numbers to access their accounts borrowers can now renew or request books from home.

A Children's Book Club has been set up in Dundalk Library, which is open to 10-12 year olds.

Meanwhile the genealogy project established to create a database of

Learning Centre in Dundalk Library

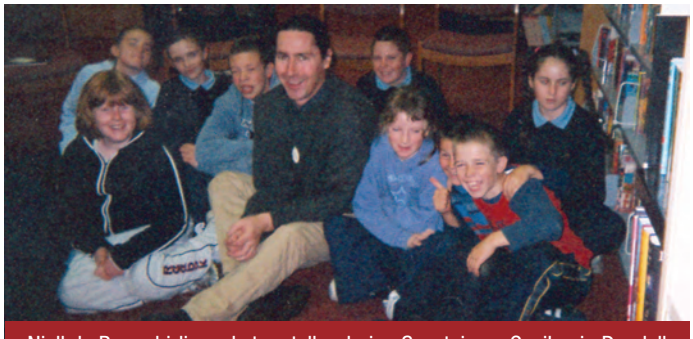
non-Catholic Church Records, pre-1900, is on-going, in conjunction with Irish Genealogy Limited.

Exhibitions and Events which took place during the year include:

- Drogheda Photographic Exhibition (January).
- Table Quiz to coincide with "Bealtaine – Age and Opportunity" for retired people.
- Artisans Exhibition for Maytime Festival, and again in December.
- Community Services Centre Fabric Painting Exhibition, and Bloomsday Display (June).
- The Forgotten Heritage Exhibition, by Barry Sheridan (July).
- The Abbey Theatre held adult and children's drama workshops throughout the summer.
- Professional Photographers Association Exhibition, and National Literacy Awareness Week (September).
- Drogheda Photo Club Annual Exhibition.
- Book launches of local history books.

Activities for Children during 2004 included:

- World Book Day: Author visits to libraries for local school classes.
- Seachtain na Gaeilge: bi-lingual story-telling.
- Oisin McGann Cabinet display: Drawings, photos, and new book.
- Summer activities included story-telling and arts and crafts in all branch libraries.
- Children's Book Festival (14-31 Oct) comprised author visits to Dundalk and Drogheda, story-telling, and magic shows.
- Young adult discussion group, "What do I read next?"
- Throughout the year both pre-school and class groups availed of library tours, story-telling, and arts and crafts sessions.



Niall de Burca bi-lingual story teller during Seactain na Gaeilge in Dundalk

ARCHIVES

- Along with other county archives service's, the Service assisted in the production of a booklet entitled "Local Authority Archives in Ireland" whose purpose was to highlight the types of local authority archival collections that exist, how to use an archives service, and the functions of an archives service. It was widely distributed to schools, tourism offices, libraries, museums, etc.
- As it was an election year, an exhibition entitled "Politics Goes on Record" took place in June to coincide with the elections, showing many archives of a political nature going back to the mid-19th Century. Maintaining the election theme, an entertaining historical re-enactment was held in September, of the 1852 Louth elections, as part of the national Heritage Week & Archives Awareness Month. Archives held in the Service were used in the production where courthouse scenes for the nominations and election of candidates were recreated. Other AAM events included an exhibition entitled "From routes to roots", a history class, an open day, and a set of postcards containing historical images of Louth taken from the archival collections were produced to promote the Service and raise archive awareness.
- To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the historical gaol buildings in which the Service is based, a very successful talk on the history of prisons in Ireland was held in January. Other celebrations included the production of a multi-media theatre piece by Calipo Theatre Company, in conjunction with the Arts offices.
- Conservation of planning application files dating to the late 19th – early 20th centuries was carried out. These cover over 300 properties in the Dundalk urban area, and are of use to those tracing the history of a property, or refurbishing a property. In addition the Archives Service received a grant from the Heritage Council to carry out conservation on the Ardee workhouse material.
- Other developments included the commencement of indexing the Louth County Council minute books to assist in answering queries, with those dating to 1940 – 1960 now complete; the establishment of a local election archive; and the archival processing of various collections namely engineering and correspondence files.

HIGHER EDUCATION GRANTS

Louth County Council administered the Higher Education Grants scheme for Louth Local Authorities for the academic year 2003/2004. Louth County Council also administered the Special Rates of Maintenance Grants Scheme to eligible candidates assessed on their parent(s)/guardian(s) income and eligible candidates assessed on their own income. This scheme is targeted at low income and long term social welfare payment recipients.

Louth Local Authorities building on their developing role in social inclusion have established an Educational Bursary for undergraduate courses. This Bursary is designed to provide an opportunity to study at third level for persons who may not be in a position to undertake a course of study, because of disadvantage. Two students from, Louth County Council, Drogheda Borough Council and Dundalk Town Council were awarded €2,540 each for every year of their undergraduate course.