

A Chathaoirleach agus a Chomhairleóirí

The Draft Budget for 2009 is set out in these pages in the new Service Costing statutory format, together with my report on the factors influencing the expenditure and income options proposed. Members will note that this is the first time that the budget will be presented in this format, last years having been converted to the new format after the adoption of the budget.

I also enclose a detailed outline of the proposals for the year under each service heading.

This Draft Budget has been framed in the context of a very challenging economic period, globally nationally and locally. The adverse affect of this downturn on the business community in the county is also expected to have an impact on the business of local government and this is reflected in the budget presented for 2009. The downturn in national exchequer returns has resulted in a reduction in allocations to the local government sector from the Local Government Fund. In Wexford County Council's case the reduction for 2009 will be in excess of €1.4m, equivalent to 6.13%.

The suddenness of the downturn has triggered extensive rationalisation initiatives in all sectors, including the public sector. This draft budget includes proposals to reduce indoor staffing levels while targeting resources towards the safeguarding of essential services by improving efficiencies and flexibilities in work practices throughout the organisation. A significant number of temporary staff will have their contracts terminated during 2009 and vacancies arising will not be filled, achieving savings in excess of the 3% cut in payroll costs recommended by government. Initiatives to reduce overtime and other staff-related costs have been and will continue to be implemented.

Therefore, this draft budget strives to provide for optimum deployment of a reduced level of staff within the Council in order to maintain essential core services together with promoting sound and valuable projects in the county.

Financial Environment

In addition to the prevailing economic conditions, the Council continues to operate in a difficult financial environment, influenced in particular by the following factors:

- **The population of the county has increased by almost 30% in the last 8 to 10 years. This has resulted in a massive increase in demand for the broad range of services provided by the Council.**
- **The ever increasing costs associated with new environmental standards**
- **The significant costs associated with the operation and maintenance of new infrastructure provided under successive National Development Plans**
- **Additional loan charges associated with waste management and the Council's development programme**
- **Increased competition in Refuse Collection and Landfill Operations limits capacity for recovering full economic costs of all environmental services.**
- **Increased costs associated with the commissioning and operating of new Water and Waste Water infrastructural projects and an associated shortfall in state funding.**
- **New regulatory requirements, for example, the introduction of a costly licensing process for waste water networks**

Budget Considerations

It has proven particularly difficult to present a balanced budget for the coming year. While successful efforts were made over the last number of years to keep Rates increases lower than the prevailing inflation rates in endeavouring to promote a competitive edge for the county, it is not possible to do so for the coming year. In the context of the significant financial pressures outlined above, and indicated in detail in the attached tables, an increase of 4.5% is proposed for 2009, (*an increase of 3.5% was adopted by members*) which is broadly in line with inflation.

Notwithstanding the financial pressures, this draft budget proposes an increase of 3% in Water and Waste Water Service charges (*a 0% increase was agreed by members*) while reductions are proposed in the Refuse charges.

In summary, the following are the proposals for some of the main charge-related income areas:

- The Rates increase proposed is 4.5%. (3.5% adopted by members)
- It is proposed to reduce Refuse Bin charges as follows:

Bin Size:	240 litre	140 litre	80 litre
2008 Charge	460	335	250
2009 Charge	399	324	224
Reduction €	61	11	26
Reduction %	13.26%	3.3%	10.4%
2009 Charge with Early Payment Discount	369	299	199

- It is proposed to maintain the landfill charge at €110 (plus levy of €20) per tonne for one-off customers.
- It is not proposed to increase Housing Rents.
- The proposed increase for Water and Waste Water Services is 3%. (0% was agreed by members)

Financial Position

Taking all of the above into account, I set out hereunder the details of gross expenditure and income and the annual rate on valuation proposed for 2009:

	€
Gross Expenditure:	116,834,323
Gross Income:	(78,492,294)
Local Government Fund	(21,990,111)
Excess Expenditure over Income:	16,351,918

This results in a proposed General Annual Rate on Valuation (formerly Rate in the Pound) of 71.52, an increase of 3.5% on the 2008 Rate.

The following part of my report contains a detailed outline of the proposals for the year under each service heading.

HOUSING SERVICES

Aim

To provide, maintain and manage housing solutions for persons who are unable to do so from their own resources.

Housing Maintenance

A budget of €1.5m is proposed in respect of this item. The number of houses in the Rented Stock is 2352. A total of 61 houses were acquired under Part V this year. As a result a total provision of €35,000 in respect of management fees for houses in private estates has been included.

Extension, improvement works in lieu of re-housing, adaptations to stock to meet needs of disabled are now funded from Internal Capital Receipts. The sale of stock in 2008 has declined and as a result there will be a reduction in the resources available to fund these works.

A review of the housing repairs operations is on-going and significant progress has been made in the elimination of voids in the Council stock.

Where vacancies arise in the rented stock, it is the objective to re-let these houses in the shortest possible time.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has notified the Council that a major House Condition Survey will commence in 2009. It is anticipated that this major initiative will take a period of 3 years and management of same will be undertaken by the National Building Agency.

Traveller Accommodation

Costs relate to the maintenance of accommodation for members of the traveller community – halting sites and traveller group schemes. It is inclusive of costs for security at these facilities. Some of the expenditure relating to care-taking and maintenance is recoupable from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Housing Assessment, Allocation & Transfer

This heading includes salary costs relating to the collection of data and for the assessment of housing needs, house allocations, etc.

The Housing Need Assessment was completed in March 2008 and showed a demand of 1651.

Housing Rents

All costs associated with the collection of rents and tenant purchase including debt collection.

Rental income shows buoyancy. Rents are collected by various methods; direct payment, Post Office Billpay, Pay point, Bank Standing Order and by way of Household Budget System.

A number of applications for rent reductions under the Hardship Scheme were received in 2008. These related mainly to a reduction in income due to illness.

Estate Management & Anti Social Behaviour

The Council actively promotes the involvement of Residents Associations in the maintenance of estates and a budget of €140,000 is proposed to provide incentives to Residents Associations. It is proposed to continue the Annual Estates Competition and Residents Day.

Provision is made to continue the policy of focusing on anti-social behaviour complaints and supporting community relations. There is provision in the Housing Miscellaneous Provision Bill 2008 to strengthen the powers of local authorities in dealing with anti-social behaviour.

Emergency Housing

Provision has been made for emergency housing through provision of rented accommodation and mobile homes in exceptional circumstances. Grants are allowed for recoupment of expenditure on Emergency Housing. This recoupment is 90% in some instances and 50% in a limited number of instances.

Support to Housing Capital

Certain costs relating to technical design, architectural, project management and administrative support to the Local Authority Housing Capital Programme and the Affordable Programme are not recoupable from any source through the Capital Programme.

The Capital Allocation for 2008 was €20.5m and an indicative notification of an allocation of €17m for 2009 in respect of provision of social housing has been received.

Rental Accommodation Scheme

The Rental Accommodation Scheme which provides security of tenure and improves access to employment for those in receipt of rent supplement for in excess of 18 months has been rolled out to 160 households. The payment to landlords is funded through differential rents payment and recoupments from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Housing Loans

Provisions are made for loan repayments by the County Council to the Housing Finance Agency. The Council borrows where necessary to fund the various loan schemes on offer to housing applicants; Housing Finance Agency Loans, Shared Ownership and Affordable Loans. This includes all loan collection associated costs including debt collection, revenue collection and arrears management costs, associated legal costs, strike-offs etc are also included.

The Local Authority has recently received notification regarding the Home Choice Loans announced in the Budget. These will be administered through four designated Local Authorities. Loans in respect of Wexford will be provided through Kilkenny County Council.

Housing Grants

At present Wexford County Council are administering five different grant types:-

Old Schemes

Disabled Persons Grants
Essential Repairs Grants

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government funds recoupment of two-thirds of the expenditure in respect of these grants.

New Schemes

Housing Adaptation Grants for People with a Disability

Mobility Aids Housing Grants Scheme

Housing Aid for Older People Grant

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government funds the recoupment of 80% of the expenditure in respect of these grants.

Since the commencement of these schemes in November 2007 the number of applications received and approved is as follows:-

Type of Grant	Applications Received	Applications Approved
Grants for People with a Disability	203	39
Mobility Aids Grants	80	56
Housing Aid for Older People	549	60

Wexford County Council received an allocation of €2,343,210 including provision from own resources.

This allocation is inadequate to fund all applications. It is anticipated that the allocation for 2009 will be in the region of €1,957,091 which will require a local contribution of €460,000

Voluntary Housing

Includes loan charges with the voluntary housing schemes which are 100% recoupable. Provision is also made for costs associated with the voluntary housing schemes which are recoupable. Provision is made for direct technical and office support attributable to voluntary housing schemes where not recoupable.

ROADS DEPARTMENT

Status of County Wexford's National Roads Schemes

Phases of a Road Scheme

The phases by which all NRA projects are undertaken are as follows:

- 1: Overall Project Planning
- 2: Constraints Study
- 3: Route Selection
- 4: Preliminary Design & Land Acquisition Procedures
- 5: Construction Documents Preparation & Tender Award
- 6: Scheme Construction

Up to the preceding phase is fully completed before each new phase is commenced.

COUNTY WEXFORD PPP PROJECT

INCORPORATING

- A N25 New Ross By-Pass and Second River Crossing
- B N11 Gorey to Enniscorthy Project
(including N11 Clogh to Enniscorthy &
N11 Enniscorthy Bypass

OVERALL PROJECT BUDGET - provisional estimate €1bn

The three projects, that were being progressed separately, now form one, non-toll PPP Project. This major project will be the biggest infrastructure project ever undertaken in County Wexford. The CPO/EIS for B & C will be published by late spring 2009 and the statutory process for the overall project is expected to be completed by December 2009. Procurement of the PPP partner will then immediately be pursued and construction on the entire project will commence by late 2010/early 2011.

The following is a brief summary of the present position in relation to the three elements of the Project -

(A) NEW ROSS BY-PASS AND SECOND RIVER CROSSING

The An Bord Pleanála Oral Hearing was held from 2nd-9th April 2008 and the decision of the Board is awaited

(B) N11 GOREY TO ENNISCORTHY

The Ground Investigations on the revised north-eastern section of the N11 element of the bypass have now been completed and the results of the investigations are now being assessed.

The final Preliminary Ground Investigation works for the section of the N11 from Toom to the Gorey Bypass are ongoing and landowners are being kept informed on an ongoing basis. This is the final phase of the Preliminary Ground Investigations for the overall scheme.

OILGATE/ROSSLARE HARBOUR PROJECT

ESTIMATED ALL IN COST – NOT YET AVAILABLE

We have appointed Precise Control Ltd to carry out necessary Geodetic Survey works on the Ballygeary to Rosslare Harbour section of the project. Environmental Surveys on this section are also ongoing.

N30 MONEYTUCKER TO NEW ROSS PROJECT

(ESTIMATED CONSTRUCTION COST (2002) €40M

Phase 4 planning, including surveys that are non-intrusive and largely walk-over, will continue.

The Preliminary Ground Investigation Contract was signed on 24th November 2008 and work has commenced.

Wexford Quays

It is intended to commence the upgrading and surfacing of Wexford Quays in 2009. This project will be dependent on grant allocation.

Road Maintenance

The Department of Transport has indicated that the Grant Levels for Road Maintenance for 2009 will be held at 2008 levels.

The Estimate as proposed also maintains the Council's contribution at the same level as 2008 with the following exceptions:

1. Provision and Improvement of Public Lights will be funded from a Capital Credit balance. There is a sufficient amount available to do this for one year.
2. The Fund which was available to each Member i.e. €6,000 for Minor Improvements Works has been removed for 2009.
3. The Taking in Charge of Housing Estates has been maintained in Expenditure at €100,000. However an income of €50,000 has been included, the purpose being to allow local residents to contribute to Improvements Works when an estate is being taken over.

Roadworker Training

A comprehensive roadworker training will be completed in 2009.

All staff at supervisory level will be trained in the Construction Skills Certification Scheme for Signing , Lighting and Guarding of roadworks (3 day course).

All other roadworker staff will be trained in Health and Safety at Roadworks (1 day course).

Training will also be provided in:

- Location of underground services
- Patching
- Basic and advanced surface dressing
- Basic and advanced road strengthening

WATER SERVICES

Capital Works

In 2008, Wexford County Council substantially completed the New Ross interceptor sewer, while construction continued on the New Ross Sewage Treatment Plant, due for completion in late 2009. The extension of Wexford Sewage Treatment Plant was completed as were the pipelines in Coolgreaney village. Work continues on Coolgreaney Sewage Treatment Plant, due for completion in early 2009.

The contract for Bunclody Sewerage Scheme pipelines was signed in December 2008 and the contract for the Wastewater Treatment Plant is almost ready for signing. Both contracts will get under way in 2009.

The DEHLG approved the appointment of a contractor for the Gorey Regional Water Supply Scheme (South Wellfield) in November 2008, and construction will commence in 2009.

DEHLG approval for the provision of an alternative drinking water supply source for Taghmon was received in November 2008, and construction will commence in 2009.

Planning and investigation continued on the 11 Villages Sewerage Project, and Foreshore Licence applications were submitted as necessary. This work will continue in 2009, in anticipation of DEHLG approval.

Operations

Some 15.5 million cubic metres of drinking water and 5 million cubic metres of sewage are now processed annually in 2010 km of public water mains, 533 km of public sewerage pipework and 77 treatment plants.

The percentage of unaccounted for drinking water has been reduced from 51% in 1996 to 39% in 2008, resulting in a reduced need for capital works in order to supply a growing demand (12% increase in production since 1996 to satisfy a 57% increase in demand). Extensive upgrading works were carried out at Kilmallock, Creagh and Taylorstown drinking water plants in 2008.

Under 2007 legislation, Wexford County Council are required to obtain EPA licences or certificates in respect of our 54 sewerage networks progressively over the coming years. The second tranche of seven licences were applied for in Sept 2008. The estimated cost of licence application in the period 2007/2009 is €0.91m and it is expected that the licences once issued by the EPA will require significant increased capital and operational

expenditure. The 2007 Drinking Water Regulations impose additional monitoring and reporting duties on Local Authorities.

Operation of water services infrastructure continues to be funded at marginal levels, given the vastly improved levels of service and the increasingly stringent environmental standards and monitoring required. As for last year, there is uncertainty as to whether the DEHLG will adequately fund the domestic element of our proposed Operational budget in 2009.

Rural Water Programme

235 single well grant applications were received and processed in 2008. The Borrmount, Blackstairs and Mullaun GWS's were commissioned in 2008 and are now being operated by the DBO contractor. DEHLG approval has been obtained for connection of Ballymoney and Monamolin Group Water Schemes to the public network and this work will proceed in early 2009. 5km of pipe network on the Askamore Scheme and 3.5km of pipe network on the Monamolin Scheme were replaced in 2008.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Wexford County Council expect to deal with approximately 3,000 planning applications during 2009 – this level of activity will mean that the Planning Authority will continue to be in the top five or six Planning Authorities out of the thirty-four City and County Councils in the country in terms of planning applications.

The following are the key areas for the coming year:

Forward Planning

The Planning and Development Section intend to bring forward the largest number ever of Town and Local Area Plans for the County during 2009. This will ensure that structured, speedy and well thought out planning decisions can be made in the current climate to encourage and stimulate good development wherever possible. The towns and villages listed in the 2009 programme for Forward Planning are:

Wexford	New Ross
Gorey	Bunclody
Ferns	Taghmon
Clonroche	Courtown
Rosslare Harbour	Coolgreany
Bridgetown	Castlebridge

All these plans and the Strategic Environmental Assessments required are being carried out by Wexford County Council's own professional staff.

Customer Service

The success of the section's customer service provision will be built upon for 2009 with plans for further engagement with individuals, agents and developers.

The winning of the Chambers Ireland Planning Service Award was due recognition for past improvements. Further streamlining and accessibility/ease of use is planned in relation to e-planning, pre-planning consultations, taking-in-charge procedures and staff training.

Conservation / Built Heritage

The work loads relating to Protected Structures continues to grow due to the publication of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage for the four County Towns. An in-house section from existing staff has been set up to deal with Protected Structures. The review process is currently underway in Wexford Town. This involves assessment of each structure and reports prepared on the Council's recommendations. There are now 313 buildings identified in the Wexford Town Plan as Protected Structures from a total of 677 assessed Structures.

In addition to the designation and conservation areas, the review of the New Ross Protected Structures will have to be carried out in 2009. The increasing number of Protected Structures will also significantly increase demand for Section 57 Declarations.

Planning Enforcement including Bonds and Levies

Planning Enforcement is a significant growth area, with legal requirements on the Planning Authority to investigate breaches of the Planning Acts and non-compliance with planning conditions. Wexford County Council resolves many cases through negotiation but where necessary take legal action to resolve significant irregularities.

The Section is one of the most active and successful in the country and will help bring about further improvements in the standards of development. Improvements are also planned in the area of bonding of developments and collection of planning contributions to allow faster and more effective collection of levies and development charges.

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE

County Development Board

In 2009 the Wexford County Development Board (CDB) will begin the process of carrying out a review of their strategic plan. The review will develop a three year work plan based on priority economic, social and cultural actions for County Wexford from 2009 to 2012. The CDB places a strong emphasis on inter agency collaboration and co-ordination of public service delivery. In 2008 the CDB assisted the successful completion of the Cohesion Process which involves the amalgamation of the 3 local development companies: W.O.R.D.; Wexford Area Partnership and County Wexford Partnership. In 2009 the CDB will work closely with the new Wexford Local Development Company in developing structures with local agencies in conjunction with the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Social Inclusion

The Community & Enterprise section provides administrative and executive supports for the Social Inclusion Measures Working group (SIM). The group has been particularly proactive in the establishment and support of the Traveller Network and the Traveller Interagency Group. Successful funding applications have been made under the Dormant Accounts Fund for Traveller Inter Agency projects which will be completed in 2009. The projects are:

- Traveller Early School Leaving Project
- Supporting the Development of the Traveller Network

The social inclusion strategy for Gorey was launched in December 2008. During the coming year priority will be given to implementation of the strategy. In October, Minister Conor Lenihan launched the County Development Board's report on immigration in County Wexford: 'Merging Cultures in The Model County'. A key focus for 2009 will be on the implementation of the 49 recommendations contained within the report.

Community Forum

The Community & Enterprise Department promotes the Community Development role of the Local Authority and has an ambitious programme planned for 2009. Community & Enterprise provides administrative support to the County Wexford Community Forum which now has 565 member groups. A key focus for the Forum in 2009 will be the implementation of a three

year strategic work plan which will co-ordinate their activities and implement a number of training programmes to build the capacity of the sector.

Community Grants

The Community Grants Scheme are now amalgamated to include arts grants and the promotion of interest grants into one user friendly scheme for community groups. The following grant schemes are administered by the Department:

- Arts & Amenity grants
- Community Grants Scheme
- Sustainable Community Buildings Scheme
- County Playground Scheme
- Social & Community Facilities Grant Scheme

Youth and Children

Following on from the successful implementation of the County Playground Scheme which targets Young People up to 12 years of age, communities and young people have identified the need to provide youth facilities for the 12 – 18 age group. In 2008 Community & Enterprise oversaw the building of community playgrounds in Ferns and Fethard on Sea. In 2009 further playgrounds are planned for Kilmore Quay, Bree and Monageer.

The Community & Enterprise department work very closely with the Ferns Diocesan Youth Service in overseeing the work of the local Youth Forum. The annual Comhairle Na nOg event took place in November and approx. 200 young people between the ages of 12 and 18 years took part. At this event five young people were selected to go forward to the Youth Forum and a further five were selected to take part in the national Dáil Na nOg event in Dublin. In 2009 Community & Enterprise will continue to work closely with the FDYS in developing the Youth Forum and forging closer links between the Forum and other agencies.

Research

The Research section has built up considerable expertise in the areas of Research, Evaluation and Policy Development within County Wexford both for the CDB and the Local Authorities. 2009 will see the implementation of the Research Strategy for Wexford CDB and Wexford County Council in particular the analysis of the 2006 Census results informing the key trends for the County in terms of demographics and socio economic profile.

Key research projects include a skills audit, education needs of the County and the investigation of bio renewable energy.

Local Sports Partnership

The LSP aims to promote participation and healthy lifestyles for all stages of the life cycle. In January 2008 the new Sports Co-ordinator, Fran Ronan, commenced employment and among her first tasks was the development of a Strategic Plan to co-ordinate sports and recreation activities for the County. In April, Wexford County Council, in partnership with the Football Association of Ireland, recruited a Football in the Community Development Officer, Mr. William Doyle. William works with groups in RAPID areas and other marginalised communities throughout the county developing soccer skills among young people. In 2009 the emphasis will continue to focus on developing the work of the local sports partnership.

RAPID

The Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development Programme is successfully operating in Wexford Town and New Ross. The Programme is managed locally by the Area Implementation Team (AIT) which oversees work in service integration, better service delivery and community participation and training. Representatives of Youth Services, Community Development Projects and Family Resource Centres have joined the AITs.

2008 saw the development of new Strategic Plans in the areas of Community Safety & Anti-social Behaviour, Health, Family Support, Physical Environment and Education. New plans in the areas of Employment & Training and Youth Support will be developed in early 2009. Implementation of the existing plans has already begun and the new plans will be implemented from mid 2009. Graffiti Reduction Programmes were carried out in both towns in 2008. Leverage funding for facilities for older people under the Health Plan and for physical environment improvements under the Physical Environment Plan have been secured for 2009. New programmes and developments in the area of Sport, in conjunction with Sports Active Wexford and FAI, were implemented in 2008. Significant funding under both Sports Capital and Dormant Accounts was secured in 2008 and new projects initiated included a Community Health Project in Wexford and an Allotments Project in New Ross.

ENVIRONMENT SERVICES

Waste Disposal

Expenditure:

Provision is made for:

- Capital repayments, operation & maintenance of Council's Holmestown Waste Management Facility opened in 2008, and the completion of remedial works on the Killurin landfill; the export of almost 5,000 tons of dry recyclables to Waterford County Council's MRF at Dungarvan.
- Remedial works at closed landfills at Ballykeerogue and Gorteen.
- Domestic residual waste and recyclables collection from over 17,300 houses.
- The full costs associated with the Environment Enforcement Unit, which operates on a countywide basis.
- A range of recycling facilities such as 130 glass/can bring centres, sale of home composting bins, 110 battery recycling units in Schools & 37 newspaper bring sites.
- Two full time operational glass recycling trucks to service the expanded bring site network, collecting over 3,000 tonnes of glass and aluminium.
- Two new Civic Amenity (multi item) Recycling Centres – at New Ross and at Holmestown.
- Schools recycling programmes, environment education, awareness and market research.

Income:

Grants are allowed for recoupment of Central Government's element of costs of environment enforcement and recycling services. Subsidies are secured from the Repak system towards the recycling costs for packaging waste. The sale of recyclables does not cover the costs, and current prices on the world market for recyclables will significantly reduce income from the source.

Provision is made for landfill income from the Holmestown Waste Management Facility in 2009.

Income from refuse collection operations should be considered as an all-in-charge for all waste collection, disposal at landfill & recycling.

Water Safety and Coastal Protection

Expenditure:

Provision is made for water safety to cover cost of seasonal beach guards, safety equipment, safety audits and contribution to Irish Water Safety Association.

Provision is made to maintain coastal works throughout the county. The budget continues to provide for co-funding of protection works approved and funded by Department of the Marine.

Pollution Control

Expenditure:

Provision is made for costs of monitoring, control and enforcement of environment protection legislation and regulation.

Provision is also made for contribution to Regional Laboratory costs, groundwater protection and provision of hydrometric stations, and for purchase of scientific equipment for analyses of water samples, noise pollution, dust pollution and air quality control.

Piers and Harbours

Expenditure:

Provision is made for maintenance, improvement and Health and Safety at piers and harbours, and for the ongoing operation and improvement of Kilmore Quay Harbour and Marina.

Control of Horses and Dogs

Expenditure:

Provision is made for ongoing control of Horses and Dogs, including contribution to ISPCA and improvements to Dog Shelter.

FIRE SERVICE

A new Class B Water Tender for New Ross station was delivered in early 2008. The new appliance has the capability to fight fires using a compressed air foam system thereby reducing the amount of water required. A new Class B Water Tender for Enniscorthy station will be delivered in early 2009.

The number of call-outs to fires and other emergencies in County Wexford fell by approximately 7% in 2008. However there was an increase in the number of chimney fires, agricultural fires and false alarms. The number of applications for fire safety certificates also declined in 2008 and it is expected that this trend will continue in 2009.

The training budget for the fire service has been prepared to take account of new firefighting techniques and new equipment introduced to the fire service and to ensure the effective implementation of a safe work practice system in the fire service

The budget for provision and maintenance of equipment will cater for the upgrading and replacement of equipment to meet the fire services obligations under Safety, Health and Welfare legislation. A modest provision for general improvements and on-going maintenance to fire stations is also provided for in the budget.

The new Major Emergency Plan for Wexford Local Authorities was introduced on September 30th 2008. The Plan has been tested for interoperability with the other principal response agencies. Staff from Wexford Local Authorities have been trained in key roles associated with the activation of the Plan in the event of a major emergency.

It is proposed to introduce charges for domestic and chimney fires in line with policy in most fire authorities in the state. In general, domestic fire insurance policies cover fire service charges.

CIVIL DEFENCE

Mission Statement:

“Promote, develop and maintain Civil Defence as an effective volunteer based professional organisation providing Emergency Responses and Community Support Services”.

Main Activities During 2008:

- Covered 60 Civic Duties (Festivals, Shows, and Community Events etc.)
- Runners-up in the AFS Regional Exercise in Waterford.
- Participated in National Exercise (non competitive) in Cork.

Training Courses:

Training courses were provided for Wexford County Council and for the VEC during the year and this service is expected to continue in 2009.

National Input:

- Gabrielle Willis, CDO, was re-appointed as a Member of the Civil Defence Board. She is also on the Review Committee for Command and Control and assisting with the updating of the Welfare Service to meet needs in the Major Emergency Framework Document.
- Our Civil Defence volunteers served on the National Rescue Steering Group and the National Casualty Service Steering Group.
- Civil Defence Training Exercise, December 2008

LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

Funding is allowed for the provision of a new state of the art library in Gorey from early 2009. The extension of opening hours in all libraries throughout the county for the full year is funded also.

During 2009, work will continue on the new County Library in Mallin Street, Wexford. A review of facilities provided in Enniscorthy library will be completed. Enniscorthy, Bunclody and Wexford town library services will be upgraded to improve access for people with disabilities.

Stock for the two new libraries, Gorey and Mallin Street, will be prepared and added to the library catalogue. Targeted investment in Irish language materials will be made. Within life-long learning, literacy and readership development will focus on community engagement with the enhanced branch library network: this will be the case particularly in the area of services to children. Local library liaison county-wide with primary schools will be mapped and assessed.

In the area of Wexford studies, the microfilming programme is on-going as is the oral history programme and the photographic record. Two essays under the Wexford Impressions commissions programme are expected in 2009. Following the creation of parish maps within the Council's GIS, a Heritage Information Project will be piloted, with a priority given to rural parts of the county. Listing, assessment & conservation work on the paper and other collections of the Enniscorthy Museum is ongoing.

Work will commence on the publication of a commemorative book on the history of Enniscorthy, to be launched in 2010.

A third Computerisation Plan will be initiated in 2009, with a heightened focus on e-learning and access to licensed databases.

The current level of support for sectoral promotions, e.g. Adult Learners Week, Seachtain na Gaeilge, National Science Week, will be maintained as a minimum, as will the current level of library courses provision.

ARTS DEPARTMENT

The Council's 2005 – 2009 5 year Arts Plan *Ó Neart go Neart*, provides a policy framework for the work of the Arts Department for 2005 - 2009. The policy outlines a shift in emphasis from growth to consolidation and sustainability, and will focus on delivering and managing the Arts Service under the following headings:

- Programming & Development
- Partnerships & Sustainability
- Networking & Resourcing

Programming and development will involve devising, directing and delivering an innovative multidisciplinary arts programme, which promotes standards of excellence among artists in their

practice, provides opportunities for artists to create new work in a variety of contexts and provides opportunities for the public to access, to engage with and to participate in high quality arts experiences

Partnerships will involve working in collaboration with individuals, groups and organisations from the voluntary, amateur and professional arts sector in an effort to effect long-term sustainable development for the arts. This approach will involve the promotion and integration of the arts into the social, economic and cultural life of the county with identified strategic partners who share common aims and objectives. In addition to the initiation of new partnerships, existing ones will be consolidated.

Networking and resourcing will involve the continued improvement of information, advice and funding services and the strengthening of the existing networking structure with the arts sector and the general public. The principle of Social Inclusion will continue to be central to the work of the Arts Service.

Conclusion

While this report reflects the range and complexity of the various financial challenges facing the Council, I would like to take this opportunity to outline some of the significant positive developments and proposals for the county at this time.

I am happy to report that progress is being made on the Council's building programme as follows:

New County Hall

Building work is well underway and it is anticipated that this major development will be completed during 2009.

Gorey Civic Square

This multi-faceted development, which will be one of the most important urban renewal projects ever in Gorey, commenced construction late in 2007 and will be completed in early Spring 2009. The new town square includes offices for the County Council and Town Council, public library, courthouse, adult education centre, health service units and 8 social apartments. A public car park 80 cars will also be included.

New Library at Mallin Street, Wexford

During 2008 tenders were received for the construction of this exciting building project, which will be situated in a historic part of Wexford town. It is anticipated that contracts will be signed shortly with completion towards the end of 2009.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my continued appreciation and thanks to you, Chairman, and to all Members, for your continued assistance and support to myself and to the staff.

I would also like to thank the Head of Finance, Directors of Services and all staff for the assistance in preparing the Budget for the upcoming year.

I believe that Wexford County Council continues to provide a quality Local Government service to the people of this County and the achievement of this objective is only possible with the co-operation of all Council members and staff.

Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leatsa, a Chathaoirleach, agus na Comhairleóiri ar fad, as ucht an cabhair agus an cúnamh a thug sibh dom fhéin agus don fhoireann go léir i gComhairle Chontae Loch Garman.

Mise, le meas,

**Eddie Breen,
County Manager.**