

Wexford County Council Annual Report 1999

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ARTS OFFICE

1999 once again demonstrated Wexford County Council's commitment to local arts development within County Wexford.

During the year an even greater number of people in the local community were affected by the work of the Arts Office, not only through the Council's innovative arts programme but also as a result of the many local individuals and community groups who availed of our support services to help realise their own arts projects.

One important area of support is realised through the work of Liz Coughlan in the Print Room. Liz printed publicity and promotion material for a number of community groups throughout the County, a service which helped to increase audiences and provide wider community awareness of arts events.

In addition to helping others realise their own projects the Arts Office also managed and implemented the County Council's Arts Programme. This programme of work complements Wexford County Council's policies for the arts, which reflect our commitment to the fullest possible access to and participation in the arts by the community and our recognition of the importance of the individual creative artist.

ARTS IN EDUCATION

Art Alongside

This visual art project gives recognition to the artists' own creative development and develops the child's creative intelligences. This project was conceived and developed with artist Mary Claire O'Brien. Between September and December five schools were involved: Campile, Courtown, Glynn, New Ross and Rathnure, with some 600 pupils and teachers participating. The beautiful work created by the pupils with Mary Claire was exhibited in each of the respective schools in December.

County Wexford Children's Choir

Over 2000 pupils, teachers, parents are engaging in this initiative with Choral Director Rosaleen Molloy from the schools and communities; Carrick-on-Bannow, Enniscorthy (2 schools), Fethard-on-Sea, Kilmuckridge, Rathangan, Rosslare Strand and Tara Hill.

Such is the reputation of this choir that they were invited to Áras an Uachtaráin in December. The choir was also featured on RTE's Christmas Eve broadcast from Rowe Street Church in Wexford Town.

COMMUNITY ARTS

Summer Fun

During July and August Summer Fun reached over 5000 young people, a 10% increase in participation from 1998. Workshops and performances took place in 32 venues located in both rural and urban areas throughout the County. Through the

evaluation process the quality of the workshops and artists was highlighted by the participants.

St. Senan's, Boolavogue and St Aidan's Tapestry Projects

These initiatives involved over 40 adults working with textile artist Joanne Breen in developing their tapestry skills. St. Senan's Parents' Group completed their research work in preparation for their collective tapestry for 2000 while the Boolavogue Tapestry Group researched their theme based on the Brehon site in their area and completed two thirds of their collective tapestry. The Parents' Group in St Aidan's Primary School worked on their own individual tapestries with the help of Joanne.

Demon Drummers

60 young people from Duncannon, Fethard-on-Sea, Ramsgrange, Bridgetown, New Ross and Wexford worked with percussionist Nicky Bailey on developing their percussion skills. The groups demonstrated the skills they learned by performing to a full house in St Mary's Hall, Fethard-on-Sea in December. The young people developed not only their percussion skills, they also enhanced their personal and social skills.

Bunclody Community Arts and Education Travellers' Project

Running since 1995 this project continued to provide travellers in Bunclody with experiences in drama, music and visual arts. Four travellers were accredited with NCVA certification in music and drama in July and from September Wexford County Council and the VEC worked very effectively together to provide more opportunities for the travellers in Bunclody to engage in the arts.

SUPPORTING THE INDIVIDUAL CREATIVE ARTIST

Wexford County Council Bursary Scheme

This was the first year that Wexford County Council awarded bursaries to artists living in the County in the following disciplines: Visual Art, Music, Dance, Drama and Literature. £1000 was the award for each art form. In the case of Music and Dance the bursary was divided between two people.

The awards ceremony took place in December with the presentation of cheques by Councillor Sean Doyle, Chairman.

The County Council Art Collection

In 1999 the selection panel purchased a piece of sculpture by Sandra Bell.

Cap. for photo: "Harmony" by Sandra Bell, part of Wexford County Council's art collection, purchased in 1999.

Slide Library

This library comprises slides representative of 56 County Wexford artists' works. During the year Mary Corcoran of the Arts Office made a number of slide presentations to schools, organisations, gallery owners and individuals throughout the County resulting in artists' work being purchased and/or exhibited. Following Mary's visit to Wales in November 5 County Wexford artists were invited to take part in a prestigious event in Wales in 2000.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

The Arts Office sent out relevant information to artists, arts venues, schools, community workers and groups.

Artsus

The Arts Office newsletter “Artsus” updated people on developments in the Council’s Arts Programme. It was widely distributed throughout the County leading to many calls requesting more information on projects.

Website

The County Council’s Arts Programme was included on the website.

REMINISCENCE PROJECT

1999 was the final year of this project. There was a resumption of classes in Coláiste Bríd, Enniscorthy, Bridgetown Vocational College and CBS, Wexford with the continuation of folklore collection from tradition bearers throughout Wexford. The high point was a visit from Her Excellency, The President of Ireland to the exhibition – Aon Scéal Eile. The end of year exhibition was held in Bridgetown Vocational College in May . Stories collected had a particular focus on the Yola dialect and the role of women in the 1940s and 1950s.

BLACKSTAIRS BLUES

The Arts Office researched and prepared the ’99 programme with the other members of the Blackstairs Blues Festival committee. The programme featured artists of a high standard. There was a marked increase in audiences at the various gigs in the pubs. The main acts on Saturday and Sunday nights attracted great interest in addition to the blues workshops.

Civil Defence

Civil Defence members are volunteers who are very dedicated and highly committed to the idea of community service and work in a structured and disciplined way under the direction of the Civil Defence Officer.

Community Events

In 1999 County Wexford Civil Defence provided stewarding, crowd control and first aid cover at a wide range of events.

These included:

- Head of the River Race, New Ross
- St. Patrick's Day Parade
- Gorey 3 Day Cycle Race
- IMES Demonstration, Kilmore Quay
- Enniscorthy County Show
- Enniscorthy Strawberry Fair
- Gorey Summer Fair
- Fethard Street Party
- Fleadh Ceoil na hÉireann, Enniscorthy
- Talbot Car Rally
- Millennium Event Closing Ceremony, Wexford Festival Opera

Civil Defence also provided assistance in searches for missing persons, on land and water, in Enniscorthy and New Ross areas.

Competitions

The Regional A.F.S. Training /Competition Day was held in Carlow in February, with County Wexford winning first place.

The County Casualty Competition was held in May with the New Ross Group proving to be the victors.

The Regional Casualty and Rescue Competitions were held in Waterford City in May where Wexford upheld their reputation in competitions by bringing back the trophies in both competitions.

New Ross Unit won the Casualty Competition and Wexford Town Unit won the Rescue Competition.

To mark the achievement of County Wexford winning three Regional Titles a special evening was held in Cedar's Hotel, Rosslare, where Mr. John Hutchinson, Assistant County Manager made a presentation to the team members.

A team of 20 volunteers also took part in the National Exercise Euro '99

held at Tullamore, Co. Offaly, in April. The theme for the exercise was Response to Major Emergencies. This was the first year the European Commission supported Civil Defence activities and colleagues from the European Emergency Services visited the Exercises and were very impressed with the general competence and keen motivation which they saw among the volunteers.

Our County Exercise Day was held in the New Ross Area on the 28th November and consisted of a number of training sites and workshops followed by our Annual Dinner Dance in the Mount Brandon Hotel, New Ross where a enjoyable evening was had by all.
Intermediate First Aid

Certificates were presented to volunteers who had successfully completed their exams in the summer.

Wexford County Council continued discussions with national, regional and local agencies on employment creation possibilities for the County. The Report “**Economic Strategy for County Wexford**”, commissioned by the Council from Peter Bacon & Associates, Economic Consultants, was presented in May and was well received by the Council, employment creation agencies and sectoral interests.

A deputation comprising Council Chairman Sean Doyle, Oireachtas Members and Council Management met An Tanaiste, Mary Harney, T.D., Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, to inform her of the contents of the Report. As a result, she established the **Wexford Enterprise Initiative** under the chairmanship of Mr. Seamus Dooley, County Manager. The Task Force is currently working through four specialist sub-committees:

- ❑ Human Resources
- ❑ Infrastructure
- ❑ Enterprise Development
- ❑ Co-ordinating Group

Consultations take place with developers on an on-going basis in connection with large-scale developments and continued efforts are made to identify land suitable for industrial, commercial and housing developments. The provision of infrastructural services including water, sewerage and roads also receive consideration.

Details of the National Development Plan 2000-2006 were announced during the year. The main features of the Council’s submission to the Regional Authority and the Government have been included in the Plan, which will involve £40.6bn. expenditure over seven years.

The Council’s submission to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government was rewarded with Urban Renewal Status for New Ross. Town Renewal Schemes, also involving tax incentives, were granted to Gorey, Bunclody, Ferns and Taghmon under the Town Renewal Scheme. Development work in Courtown continued under the Resort Renewal Scheme.

The I.D.A. is planning a new advance factory at Butlersland, New Ross. The Council is facilitating this development by an exchange of land which will also enable the Council to develop industrial property in its ownership.

The Council’s linkage programme was continued in 1999. Meetings were held with our partners in Pembrokeshire and Carrickfergus. Representatives of Wexford County Enterprise Board, Small/Medium Enterprises and Chambers of Commerce attended these meetings. The Council was pleased to host a visit by His Excellency, Mr. Zheng Jinjiong, the Chinese Ambassador, and his wife, to discuss trade and commerce. His Excellency was particularly pleased to visit the Medentech premises in Wexford Town, which exports and imports products to and from China.

The Hungarian Ambassador, His Excellency Dr. Geza Palmai, is a regular visitor to Kilmore Quay. At his invitation, a Wexford Tourism delegation visited Lake Balaton in Hungary to meet tourism representatives. Three Hungarian delegations have since visited Wexford led by the Director of Balaton Regional Development Corporation. The Wexford linkage encouraged the promotion of the new direct flight from Budapest to Dublin and further links between Balaton and Wexford are continuing.

Developments at several tourism centres are continuing with financial and professional assistance from the Council. A new visitor centre will open at Hook Lighthouse early in 2000 and berthing facilities will be put in place in Ballyhack and Duncannon.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Waste Management

The Council's waste management policy is based on the County Wexford Waste Management Plan 1998-2003 adopted by the Council in September, 1998. The Plan adopts the approach of promoting waste reduction, reuse and recycling ahead of the final disposal of residual waste in a secure landfill. The Council has fostered a number of significant initiatives in support of the policy to reduce, reuse and recycle waste.

Waste Awareness Measures

- Publication of three issues of the "Envirowex" newsletter in with features on the waste problem and saving money, recycling and home composting. The newsletters are distributed to all households in Co. Wexford.
- Participation in Waste Management Seminars in Wexford and Enniscorthy organised by The Chamber of Commerce.
- Frequent advertising on the recycling theme in local papers and on local radio.
- Co-operation with the Department of the Environment & Local Government's National Environmental Awareness Campaign consisting of radio interviews and the wide distribution of "Christmas and the Environment" leaflet and Enfo's booklet "An Investor and Shopper's Guide to Sustainable Living."
- Launch of the Green Schools Campaign in May, 1999.

Life Recycling Project

This project was initiated in 1995. The amount of recycled material collected is increasing all the time. There were 475 tonnes of glass and 27 tonnes of aluminium collected in 1999. This represents a 36% recycling rate for glass in County Wexford and 26% for aluminium cans.

Home Composting

In partnership with Fás and Wexford Area Partnership, Wexford County Council set up a home composting pilot project in March 1999. A fifteen-member team was employed under a *Fás Job Initiative* to implement the project plan.

The objectives of the project are:-

- Communicating information on waste management, in particular, the financial and environmental benefits of composting to individuals, households, communities, schools and businesses.
- Demonstrating that home composting can be a convenient and practical way of recycling kitchen and garden waste into a nutrient-rich soil improver.
- Documenting results, successes, and difficulties encountered during the project.

Following an initial month of training entailing compost theory and practice, health and safety, the waste problem, presentation skills, communication, team work and site visits, the project team moved to offices in the Wexford Enterprise Centre, Kerlogue Industrial Estate. Volunteer households were recruited through advertising in newsletters, the local press and door-to-door calls. The compost advisors installed the bins and they are monitored on a weekly basis to check the amount of waste diverted from the wheelie bin and the progress of the compost. Results to date have been very encouraging. All the households (150) are still composting and it is estimated that the average household could divert 300kg of waste from the wheelie bin through home composting. This represents about $\frac{1}{3}$ of a household's annual waste.

Samples of finished compost have been analyzed by Teagasc. The indications to date show that the compost advisors have been very successful in disseminating advice and information on recycling and composting.

The compost team set up a promotion stand at the Castlebridge Horticultural Show in August 1999 and had a prize of a compost bin in a free draw on the day.

The Scheme has been expanded to include 12 schools and presentations on composting have been made to the schools involved. The project will be expanded to a further 600 households in 2000.

Other Recycling Facilities

Textile Recycling Ltd. have provided a network of 13 recycling sites for textiles in County Wexford. Wexford County Council offers facilities for the recycling of glass, aluminium cans, scrap metal, white goods (cookers & fridges), waste oil and batteries free of charge at Killurin landfill site. The Council has also financially assisted the establishment of Recycle 2000, a successful company based in Wexford Town who

recycle approximately 500 tonnes of newsprint annually into animal bedding for dairy farmers and the bloodstock industry. The company has a network of collection points in the County. The Council provided facilities for recycling Christmas trees early in 1999.

Waste Collection and Disposal

The Council provides a wheelie bin collection service to over 12,000 customers for residual waste. Private collectors and other local authorities also operate refuse collection services in the County. The Council charges on the basis of volume i.e. smaller wheelie bins are cheaper, thus encouraging householders and businesses to reduce their waste output. The Waste Management Packaging Regulations 1997 require producers to recycle their packaging waste. The Council operates one central landfill site at Killurin, where the waste intake is approximately 55,000 tonnes municipal waste per annum. The E.P.A. granted a waste licence to the Council towards the end of 1999. Infrastructural improvements to the landfill site will be required to comply with the terms of the licence.

South East Regional Authority Waste Management Strategy Study Draft Final Report

Wexford County Council participated in a Regional Study for Waste Management in the South East Region. The other authorities involved were Waterford, Carlow, Kilkenny and Tipperary S. R. County Councils and Waterford Corporation. The aim of the Study was to propose modern and efficient waste management practices for the Region in order to meet EU and Irish Government targets for the diversion of waste from landfill. The Study proposed significant recycling, composting and waste recovery measures together with an anaerobic digestion plant and the thermal treatment of residential waste. The Study was rejected by the Council in early 2000.

Keep Wexford Beautiful

The Keep Wexford Beautiful Campaign aims to foster the formation, development and growth of community groups who wish to improve their own neighbourhoods, villages and amenities. The initiatives undertaken in 1999 included:

- Distribution of over 22,000 trees to community groups for

- spring and autumn planting.
- Payment of Tree Grants of up to £200 to 46 community and voluntary groups.
- Organisation of Clean-Up Wexford Week in conjunction with An Taisce's National Spring Clean Up in the month of April.
- Establishment of links with Tidy Town groups and introduction of a special community bin scheme in some villages to assist with clean-ups and litter management.

Litter Management

Wexford County Council adopted a Litter Management Plan under the Litter Pollution Act 1997 in March, 1998. The Plan covers a range of measures under the headings of litter control and prevention, awareness activities and environmental management. The objective is to combat the litter problem that blights the towns, villages, beaches and countryside.

In combating the litter problem the Council organises street sweeping and emptying of bins in some towns and villages. In smaller villages this is done in co-operation with Tidy Town groups and local development groups. The Council distributed 20,000 leaflets Countywide on "litter and the law." The Council places regular advertisements in local papers and on the radio concerning litter and the "Envirowex" newsletters included features on litter, clean ups, penalties etc.

The Council employed a Litter Warden for the period July-October, 1999. A full-time mobile Litter Warden will be appointed in early 2000. A Litter/Traffic Warden is now employed in Gorey town.

1999 Statistics:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|----|--|
| ▪ On-the-spot fines issued | 88 | <i>60 paid promptly, 28 to be pursued through the courts</i> |
| ▪ Litter prosecutions taken | 12 | <i>9 convictions</i> |

Towards the end of the year, in partnership with BuíBolg Street Theatre Company, the Council created a seven-foot litter bin based on the "Punch and Judy" puppet theatre, complete with anti-litter characters. The mobile litter bin patrolled the streets of Wexford, Enniscorthy and New Ross on some busy Saturdays to spread the anti-litter message. The bin will tour primary schools utilising a specially created puppet show in 2000 to encourage the children to play their part in preventing litter.

Coastal Protection

Coastal protection works were carried out at North Beach, Courtown and at Blackwater Head. A Coastal Protection Design Study was undertaken for Cullenstown Beach and a Coastal Management Study was carried out for Curraclloe.

Blue Flag Beaches

Blue Flags were again awarded to Courtown, Curraclloe, Duncannon and Rosslare Strand beaches. A Blue Flag was awarded to Kilmore Quay Marina for the first time.

Water Pollution

The Council commenced a review of all Discharge Licences early in 1999.

During the year, 33 notices were served on individuals, under the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts 1977-90, requesting information or requiring certain works to be done to prevent water pollution

Air Pollution

As part of Regulations made under the Air Pollution Act 1987 a ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous coal (smoky coal) was extended to Wexford Town from 1st October, 1998. Wexford County Council monitor coal suppliers and retailers on a regular basis. Samples of coal are taken and analysed to determine if they comply with the new regulations. 1 prosecution was taken.

Urban and Village Renewal

Wexford County Council completed a 5 year programme of amenity and streetscape improvements in towns and villages throughout the County.

Towns: Wexford, Enniscorthy, Gorey and New Ross.

Villages: Bunclody, Rosslare Strand, Kilanne, Kilmore Quay, Ferns, Camolin, The Harrow, Foulksmills, Blackwater, Castlebridge, Duncannon, Fethard, Taghmon, Oulart, Ballycanew, Kiltealy and Carrig-on-Bannow.

Control of Dogs

Under the Control of Dogs Act, 1986 the Council is responsible for collecting and impounding stray dogs and checking dog licences.

- Stray dogs impounded 1,200

Control of Horses

The Council operates a pound at Taghmon, Co. Wexford where wandering horses and other livestock are impounded. Owners must pay transportation costs and pound fees before an animal can be retrieved.

- Horses and ponies impounded 120

Housing & Community Development

1999 was another busy year in the Housing & Community Development Section of Wexford County Council. The Council provided for the construction of 100 houses throughout the County during the year, as follows:-

Gorey Area:

Coolgreany:	4 X 2-Bed & 4 X 3-Bed
Ferns:	6 X 3-Bed
Acquisitions:	6
Single Rurals:	6

Total: 26

Enniscorthy Area:

Glenbrien:	4 x 3-Bed
Marshalstown:	4 X 2-Bed, 3 X 3-Bed & 1 X 5-Bed
Ballyhogue:	4 X 3-Bed & 4 X 2-Bed
Single Rurals Or Acquisitions:	6

Total: 26

Wexford Area:

Taghmon:	4 X 2-Bed & 4 X 3-Bed
Rosslare Harbour:	10 X 3-Bed
Single Rurals Or Acquisitions:	6

Total: 24

New Ross Area:

Ballycullane:	2 X 2-Bed & 6 X 3-Bed
Clonroche:	4 X 2-Bed & 6 X 3-Bed
Single Rurals Or Acquisitions:	6

Total: 24

OVERALL TOTAL: 100

The cost of the construction programme amounted to £5,210,000, funded in part by a grant from the Department of the Environment and Local Government and from the Council's own resources.

In order to continue its preparation for future house building programmes, the Council acquired a number of land holdings in various parts of the County, significant acquisitions having been made in Coolcotts, Crossabeg, Killagoley & Garden City, Gorey.

Improvement Works in lieu of Rehousing Scheme

In addition to building houses, the Council also carries out improvements to private dwelling houses, enabling the property owners to remain in their communities, mainly in the rural area of County Wexford.

Substantial improvement works were carried out on seven privately owned dwellinghouses at a cost of approximately £132,000.

Extensions in lieu of Rehousing Scheme

The County Council also provides for the extension of its rented houses, in order to eliminate overcrowding and to accommodate the disabled.

Under the scheme, one extension was provided, at a cost of £11,133.

1995 Tenant Purchase Scheme

During 1999 a large number of applications were received for the purchase of Council houses under the 1995 Tenant Purchase Scheme. 65 houses were sold under this scheme with total proceeds from the sales amounting to £1,439,285.

The Council continued to encourage families, aspiring to home ownership, to purchase houses and the response during the year was most positive.

Rented Dwellings and Dwellings Under Purchase

Following the sale of rented houses under the Tenant Purchase Scheme, Wexford County Council had 1512 houses let to families on a weekly tenancy. The number of rented houses is expected to increase significantly, as a result of the Council's substantial Housing Construction Programme.

The total rent collected during 1999 amounted to £1,404,600.

Wexford County Council also had 517 houses being purchased under Tenant Purchase Schemes. The total income amounted to £790,540.

Sale of Private Sites Scheme

Wexford County Council provided six fully serviced private sites in Bunclody, which will be sold to people who are seeking to provide their own accommodation, at a cost of £10,000 per site. Two of the families purchasing sites are already living in Council

houses, which will be returned to the Council, while the remainder are eligible housing applicants.

Housing (Registration of Rented Houses) Regulations, 1996

The Council is obliged to keep a register of all private rented houses in the County. During the year, 224 private rented houses were registered. These were owned by 179 different landlords/landladies.

Assessment of Need for Housing Accommodation

In 1999, Wexford County Council carried out an Assessment of Need for Housing Accommodation.

At 31st March, 1999, there were 986 applicants on the Council's housing list, categorised as follows:-

Transfer Applicants	74
Applicants for other options under The Plan for Social Housing	82
Living in existing Council housing which is unsuitable, overcrowded, etc.	3
Applicants to County Council and other Local Authorities	97
Traveller households in need of accommodation in Halting Sites	31
Nett need for Local Authority Housing	699

The number of approved Housing Applicants has increased by 156 since the last assessment, carried out in 1996.

Accommodation of Travelling Families

The annual census of travelling families in County Wexford was completed in November. Results showed a total of 329 families living in the County, an increase of 16 since 1998. Nearly half of these families do not have suitable accommodation.

Measures to finally resolve traveller accommodation issues in the County are set out in the Draft Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period 2000 – 2004. The aim is to successfully accommodate travellers in a manner agreeable to all participants concerned. To achieve this aim changes in attitudes and acceptance of different lifestyles will be required.

Successful measures undertaken in 1999 included:

- 14 families housed.
- 6 temporary bays provided at the halting site in New Ross.

- Establishment of a Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee.
- Employment of a traveller caretaker for the group housing scheme at Drumgoold, Enniscorthy.

Official Opening Of Housing Estate

On 23rd March, 1999, Commodore Barry Park Estate in Rosslare was officially opened by Cllr. Leo Carthy, Chairman of the Wexford District Committee. The ceremony was attended by invited guests and residents of the estate. Following the opening ceremony, Cllr. Carthy planted a tree to mark the occasion.

Homeless Persons

During the year the County Council continued to lease 3 apartments at Westlands, Wexford, from the Voluntary Housing Group, RESPOND. These units were used to provide accommodation for persons and families finding themselves homeless, who lacked the resources to provide their own accommodation.

Estate Management and Tenant Involvement

In order to assist and encourage Residents Associations to become involved in the maintenance and management of County Council Housing Schemes, the Council grant-aided various residents groups throughout the County – total expenditure £40,000. The grants enabled residents to purchase machinery and equipment for maintenance and improvement of amenity areas within housing schemes and facilitated the construction of boundary walls and general estate improvements. The residents groups are also encouraged to work with local Tidy Towns Groups and Community Development Associations.

Special funding of £80,000, from the Housing Maintenance budget, was provided for major estate improvement works such as road and footpath replacement, improved public lighting and remedial work.

Housing Loans and Grants

During 1999 Wexford County Council provided loans and grants to 118 families. The total amount paid out in loans and grants was £1,448,243. This brings the total of existing housing loans to 2,100 with borrowers' repayments of £1.9m. each year.

Applicants can take out loans of up to £50,000 from Wexford County Council. Any applicant with an income of less than £20,000 is eligible to take out a loan subject to the income of a subsidiary earner being considered and their ability to meet repayments.

In 1999, the Council was obliged to obtain a number of Court Decrees for possession. Adequate response from the borrowers concerned avoided further action of ejection. In cases involving overdue accounts, the Council will adopt a sympathetic approach where there are extenuating circumstances. In such cases the account holder must:

- Inform the Council immediately of any problems
- Put forward acceptable proposals and honour them

Shared Ownership Scheme

The Shared Ownership Scheme is designed to help households aspiring to home ownership but who cannot purchase outright. 1999 saw a sharp rise in interest in this particular Scheme with 17 applications approved compared to 3 in 1998. Since this Scheme was introduced in 1992, 64 families have been housed.

Disabled Person's Grant

In 1999 a total of £171,820 was paid to 42 households under this Scheme. This assisted in the provision of accommodation or adaptation works necessary for the needs of a member of a household who is either physically or mentally challenged.

Loan Redemptions

The Council is aware of the favourable loan interest rates for housing purposes which are available on the open market. In 1999 all borrowers on fixed interest rate loans were advised to consider their options in this regard. In response, 400 account holders redeemed their loans with the Council.

Information Technology

Year 2000 Project

Work on the Y2K Plan continued throughout 1999 and was completed in October. Although the primary focus was business continuance, the Council's IT infrastructure was enhanced with a modern robust Local and Wide Area Network, faster and more powerful servers, and state-of-the-art Productivity software on each desktop. Organisational and Wide Area e-mail facilities are now available to all staff and Members. The upgrade to the latest versions of the Integra Financial package and Ingres Database software leaves us poised to take advantage of new innovations in these areas.

E-Commerce

A new project was initiated to facilitate use of modern payment methods by the Council's tenants and service customers. Payments by An Post Billpay, and Direct Debits will be introduced, together with increased use of Bank Giro's, and Standing Orders, to replace the traditional door-to-door collection.

The infrastructure to allow electronic transactions and online payments is also being put into place.

Training

1999 saw the launch of the Westgate Computer Centre as the first Local Authority computer training facility in the Republic of Ireland. In its initial months, the Centre was dedicated to a major training programme for the Local Authority staff. The first phase of this programme involved 260 participants in a series of 2-day courses in Microsoft Word, Excel and Outlook. A comparison of the cost of these courses with similar training courses in the I.P.A. indicates a saving of £75,000 for this phase alone.

While the Council's Training Plan will continue throughout 2000, the Centre also provides training in many IT areas for the general public, including specialist 'over-50s' courses, and a 'Kids Club'. The Centre's motto will be 'People First, Technology Second', as the Council works to narrow the gap between the technological 'haves' and 'have-nots'.

World Wide Web

The Council's Website was overhauled in 1999 to present a more dynamic user-oriented view to the public.

Staff telephone extensions and e-mail addresses are now shown, application forms for the various services are available, and extensive new sections on the County Library and the Arts Office are included. Employment Opportunities and Tenders are included as they

arise. Also included are links to other local Enterprise, Heritage, Community and Tourism sites. The success of the Website can be measured by its 'hit' rate of 7000+ visitors per month. During 1999 the site won the Telecom/Doras 4-Shamrock Award and the Local Ireland Internet Award. In addition, the site was included in the 'Best of Irish' Section with Ireland OnLine, and was selected as one of their top-10 Irish Websites during December.

NVDF

The National Vehicle and Driver File system was implemented in the Motor Taxation Office, Wexford being the Pilot Site for the project. This system will link all MTOs and the central server in Shannon on a National Network, and will be 'rolled out' to the other Local Authorities during 2000.

Seirbhís Leabharlainne Library Service

Every day, individuals use the public library to pursue personal interests. It may be a farmer researching EU requirements, a grandfather making a birthday present, an office-worker chasing promotion, a parent investigating a health condition, a public representative checking facts, a child working on a school project, an artist researching local history, an entrepreneur sourcing goods. For each person, the access to information that the public library offers is essential. The personalised and discreet nature of this service continues to be fundamental to its effectiveness.

Supporting community development

In addition to individualised, discreet services, library programmes were developed to bring groups of people with common interests together. The success of these programmes continues to highlight information as an essential ingredient in personal and community development, and the library as a forum for informal learning and community meeting.

A selection from the 1999 programme includes

- Focus group meetings on Services for Older People in all branch libraries, and development of a *Directory of Services for Older People* in association with the South Eastern Health Board. This was the library service's major contribution to the United Nations International Year of Older Persons.
- Monthly meetings of the Wexford Reading Circle: Rohinton Mistry's *A fine balance* was selected as the Read of the Year.
- Workshops for teachers on children's literature, and for teachers and parents on the future of the school library service in Enniscorthy library. This contributed to a national research project on the development of school library services for primary schools, commissioned by the Department of Education and Science.
- The *Focus on French Culture* adult learning programme, which combined French novels in English translation with French language learning courses and recommended Internet sites. Four publications were produced.
- The Storytelling community learning programme combined with the Children's Book Festival to deliver storytelling performances for children. The programme developed links with the storytelling houses, organised a series of training workshops for intending adult performers, and culminated in the first Bunclody Storytelling Festival in late November.

Information for everyone - building Wexford's Information Collections

- The library service developed a core collection of traditional Irish music on CD.
- A range of audio-visual European language courses was provided in New Ross & Enniscorthy libraries.
- The Large Print Collection (for readers with sight difficulties) was extended.
- Reading materials for children continued to be an area of significant investment.
- A special collection of cassettes and CDs as well as books and journals supporting Storytelling was begun. Five supporting resource lists were produced.
- Information for everyone – free Internet access – was launched. As part of the national [Netd@ys](#) project, all of the Council's public libraries have been offering free access to the Internet since the autumn. In view of existing access in schools, service is being targeted at adults. They book in, switch on and surf off.

The Council is grateful to have received donations of two collections of local and other newspapers.

Cultural places - improving public spaces

Business has been booming since Wexford town's library moved to Selskar House, off Redmond Square, in July. Usage has increased by 50% on the same time last year.

- Students and researchers have better workspaces and improved access to materials.
- Community activists and educators use the extensive notice boards and the *second-chance basic education* collection.
- Parents and children enjoy sharing the service in the new integrated building.

The transfer of Library Management Headquarters from the Abbey Street premises to Ardcavan in August improved facilities for teachers and parents using the Children's & Schools Library Service, as well as easing management of special collections and improving storage of the County's back-up stock.

MOTOR TAXATION

Wexford County Council's Motor Taxation Office is one of the larger Motor Taxation Offices in the Country, serving a population of over 104,000. In 1999 we processed almost 130,000 transactions by way of issue of driver licences, vehicle tax discs and other documents. This represents a 40% increase in activity since 1993. The predicted rise in car sales due to the booming economy will result in approximately 134,000 transactions in the year 2000.

In order to cater for the anticipated demand, a number of facilities are available in the Wexford Motor Taxation Office:

- Counter Receptionist to check all application forms and deal with queries
- Credit/Laser card facilities
- Express post box to save time queuing
- Secure Postal Application System

National Vehicle and Driver File

The Motor Taxation Office is the first in the Country to install and operate the new National Vehicle and Driver File (NVDF), which came into operation on 13th December, 1999. The NVDF updates Wexford's transactions overnight to a national database, which is then available to facilitate customer queries. It also improves the efficiency of many MTO operations thus providing better customer service.

Driver Licencing Regulations

New Driver Licencing Regulations came into effect from 15th November, 1999. These bring the Irish driver licencing system into line with that of our E.U. counterparts. Restrictions have been introduced on the renewal of licences for certain categories and controls on the entitlement of new licence holders to drive more powerful motorcycles.

Driver Licencing Theory Test

The proposed driver licence theory test is currently being developed and will come into effect towards the end of 2000. The test will be on the Rules of the Road. The MTO is currently assisting the Department of the Environment and Local Government by providing a statistical analysis of licences issued.

Statistics 1999:

□ New Registrations	6,802
□ Driver Licences Issued	16,642
□ Tax Renewals (Quarterly)	42,700
□ Tax Renewals (Other)	70,106

Planning

The Planning Department is concerned with the physical development of the County. There are two principal elements: Forward Planning and Planning Control.

Forward Planning

The County Development Plan contains the main policies relating to development in the County. The Wexford County Development Plan 1993 is under review. The Council is also preparing a number of Village Plans to be incorporated into the County Plan. These Plans will deal with specific issues and policies concerning smaller towns and villages.

All of the Plans are governed by the democratic process and involve considerable public consultation. When the Plans are finalised following full consultation, they will be formally adopted by the Members of Wexford County Council.

Planning Control

The continued success of the Celtic Tiger resulted in an increase in planning applications for 1999. A total of 3,849 applications was received, an increase of 899 or 30% on 1998 figures and an increase of 57% on 1997 figures.

This massive increase over the last two years created severe difficulties for the staff in the Planning Department who had to deal with the additional workload. It has been difficult to recruit experienced and skilled Planners as we are in competition with the private sector who can offer better terms and conditions.

However, despite the increased workload and the shortage of staff approximately 70% of applications are decided within the 2-month period.

Planning Enforcement

Enforcement action is taken in cases of unauthorised development, i.e. development without planning permission, or development not in compliance with the permission granted.

Corresponding to the general increase in activity, there is also an increase in the number of complaints relating to unauthorised developments. In response, we are setting up a Planning Enforcement Section within the Planning Department.

1999 Statistics

Enforcement Notices	33	<i>11 awaiting Court Hearing, 13 resolved, 9 pending</i>
Warning Notices	12	<i>6 resolved, 1 awaiting court hearing,</i>

Court Injunction

1

5 pending
Still in force

RATES

1999 Warrant	£6.2 Million
1999 Collection	£5.8 Million
% Collection	94%
Number of Hereditaments	43,958
Number of Accounts	30,478
Number of Demand Notes Issued	1,629
Increase in Effective Valuation	£10,629*
Resulting Increase in Warrant	£452,157
Revision Requests to Valuation Office	154
Appeals to Valuation Office/Valuation Tribunal	40

* **An increase of £3,905.00 in the Global Valuation of E.S.B. & Eircom is included in this figure**

Register of Electors 1999/2000

Number of Voters Constituency of County Wexford	85,860
Number of Special & Postal Voters	305
Number of Voters on Supplementary Register of Electors	1,149
Number of Deletion Notices issued in respect of Voters names being removed from the previous year	4,200
Number of additions, deletions and corrections to the 1998/1999 Register to make up 1999/2000 Register	8,100
Number of Polling Districts (of Units of the Registers)	153

There are 207 Polling Stations.

The changes in the boundaries of the Local Electoral Areas of Gorey, Enniscorthy & Wexford, which affected voters in 12 Electoral Divisions, were incorporated in the 1999/2000 Register of Electors.

The following Polls were held in 1999:

- Local Elections 11th June, 1999
- European Elections 11th June, 1999
- Referendum 11th June, 1999

Roads

As a Road Authority, Wexford County Council is responsible for all National and Regional roads in the County and local roads outside the urban areas.

The County's road mileage is: -

⊗ National Primary Roads	:	168 kilometres
⊗ National Secondary Roads	:	48 kilometres
⊗ Regional Roads	:	438 kilometres
⊗ Local Roads	:	2,681 kilometres
Total	:	3,335 kilometres

Grants from the National Roads Authority, and the Department of the Environment & Local Government, in addition to the Council's own resources, are utilised for all maintenance and improvement works on roads in the County.

During 1999, the funding was as follows: -

⊗ National Roads (via N.R.A.)	:	£5,766,000
⊗ Non-National Roads	:	£9,626,625 (£2,606,660-own resources)
⊗ Total	:	£15,392,625

National Primary Roads

- (i) N25 – Wexford /New Ross Road - Begerin/Assagart:-
Major pavement improvement works have been carried out incorporating a Traffic Calming Scheme at Ballinaboola.
- (ii) N25 - Wexford/New Ross Road - Phase II - Rathskillagh/Harristown Little:-
Tenders were invited for this contract in late 1999, and work is expected to commence in March, 2000.
- (iii) N30 - New Ross/Enniscorthy Road - Moneytucker/Jamestown:-
The Compulsory Purchase Order was confirmed by the Minister on 14th July, 1999, and Notices to Treat were served on the landowners on 5th October, 1999. The contract is expected to go to tender in summer 2000.
- (iv) N11 - Gorey/Arklow Link (incorporating Gorey By-Pass):-
This project is at route selection stage and an Environmental Impact Study has been commissioned on the short-listed routes.
- (v) Enniscorthy By-Pass:-
A number of routes are under consideration for the proposed by-pass. Great interest was shown in the Public Display of the route corridor which was exhibited in November.
- (vi) New Ross Second River Crossing/ By-Pass:-
Consultants are engaged on a feasibility study.

EU Specific Projects

The following non-national road improvement projects under the EU Co-Financing Programme were carried out during 1999:

- Bishopswater/Whitford - £300,000
- Kilmore/Tenacre - £100,000
- Wellingtonbridge - £700,000.

Gorey Traffic Management

In an effort to improve the management of increasing volumes of traffic in Gorey town, a pay-parking system was introduced in September, 1999, and a Traffic Warden appointed. There are 15 pay-parking machines in operation and the fees collected to the end of the year totalled £5,670.

Local Improvement Schemes

Wexford County Council is allocated funding annually by the Department of the Environment & Local Government to construct, improve and undertake minor drainage improvements on non-public roads and lanes, under the Local Improvement Schemes Programme.

Eight Local Improvement Schemes were carried out during 1999 - two in each Electoral Area.

The total cost was £99,800 - government funding £79,800

local contributions £20,000

Community Employment Programme

Wexford County Council's sponsorship of the FAS funded Community Employment Programme continued in 1999.

The objectives of the Community Employment Programme are to provide the long-term unemployed with opportunities for temporary work in their own communities, to help them re-enter the workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment via a return to work routine, and to assist them in enhancing and developing both their technical and personal skills.

The Council-sponsored schemes are located in the Irish National Heritage Park, the Wexford, Enniscorthy, Gorey and New Ross engineering areas, Duncannon Fort and the County Library, a total of 100 places. All schemes incorporate a Worker Development Programme.

Projects undertaken include general work of an environmental nature, tree and shrub planting, roadside drainage, hedge trimming, graveyard maintenance, assistance to Community and Tidy

Towns groups and amenity maintenance. In the case of the County Library, participants are involved in stock processing/labelling, information presentation, data preparation and entry.

Machinery Yard

A new Stores Management System was introduced in the Machinery Yard, Enniscorthy, in 1999. Office accommodation at the Yard is being upgraded.

FIRE SERVICE

Wexford County Fire Service operates five Fire Stations at Wexford, Enniscorthy, New Ross, Gorey and Bunclody with a total retained personnel of 55 firefighters. It is planned to provide new Fire Stations in Bunclody and Wexford.

Equipment to facilitate the County Council entering a Computer Aided Mobilisation Project was installed in 1999. This is a Government-initiated scheme and when operational, all 999 fire calls will be routed through Tara Street Fire Station in Dublin.

In September, 1999, the Fire Service participated in a Major Emergency Exercise at Rosslare Port, in conjunction with the other emergency services in the County.

The following statistics refer to the service in 1999:

- No. of fire service incidents 1,249
- No. of chimney fires 30% of total
- Total expenditure £1,835,923
- Fire service charges £72,672

BUILDING CONTROL

Sanitary Services

Wexford County Council is responsible for the provision and maintenance of the public water supply and sewerage schemes in its area.

The actual construction of a scheme is the culmination of a number of stages. Each capital scheme progresses through eight stages from beginning to end. The different stages of a scheme are as follows:

- Project brief
- Preliminary report
- Planning
- Contract documents
- Tenders
- Construction
- Final accounts
- Scheme review

At any given time several different schemes can be progressing through these stages, at different points.

It is anticipated that capital investment in Sanitary Services over the next 5 years will be in the region of £60m.

Major Sewerage Schemes

A number of major sewerage schemes advanced towards construction in 1999. Among these were Courtown Main Drainage, Gorey Main Drainage, Rosslare Harbour Main Drainage, Rosslare Strand, Fethard-on-Sea and Taghmon. In excess of £0.9m was spent on these schemes in 1999.

Major Water Supply Schemes

The Gorey Regional Water Supply Scheme and Fardystown Interim Development Scheme were further advanced in 1999. It is anticipated that both of these schemes will be operational in 2001.

Water Conservation

Wexford County Council, along with Wexford Corporation and Enniscorthy and New Ross UDCs currently supply water to approximately 70,000 consumers throughout the County. At present the distribution network covers over 1,100 km. All mains records have been mapped electronically on the G.I.S. system. The next stage of the

project will commence in 2000, works will include the rehabilitation of pipes in areas which are currently experiencing significant loss of water.

Rural Water Programme

A high percentage of expenditure incurred by the Council under this programme is recouped from the Department of the Environment and Local Government.

The Council has received almost 1,900 individual well grant applications to date. There are 173 Water and Sewerage Group Schemes in County Wexford. These schemes are in receipt of financial assistance from the Council in the form of Capital Grants and Subsidies. A Rural Water Strategic Plan is being developed for the County on a partnership basis by the County Monitoring Committee. This Committee is made up of Council Members and officials, representatives of the private group water schemes sector and rural organisations.

Small Schemes

The Council received an allocation of £391,000 from the Department of the Environment and Local Government towards the provision of sewerage and water supply works in 1999. Overall expenditure was in excess of £755,000.

- Water works were carried out at Taghmon, Johnstown, Courtown and Bun7clody.
- Sewerage works continued at Ballywilliam, Ballycullane, Piercestown, Bridgetown, Ferns, Tomhaggard, Marshalstown, Ballygarrett, Clongeen and Murrintown.

Water Rates

In 1999, 2151 demands were issued and generated an income of £1.04m.

	No. of accounts	Amount Collected
Water meters	1, 015	£859,613
Commercial fixed charge	1,098	£123,203
Caravan park water charges	38	£ 54,588