CORPORATE SERVICES
SEIRHÍSÍ CORPARÁIDEACHA

INTRODUCTION

The paragraphs below outline the principal achievements in 2006 and highlight the priority areas to be tackled in 2007.

Over the past number of years, the provision of customer services by the Council has been transformed through the development of the Public Service Centres. Details of the numbers of customer contacts are set out later in the report. While the number of personal callers shows a marginal increase on 2005, there is an increase of approximately 4.5% in contacts by phone. There has also been a significant increase in the cash collected (€18.71m in 2006 versus €13.32m in 2005 – 40% increase). While all of this represents significant progress, we recognize, however, that much remains to be done in order to provide our customers with a consistent, high quality service. An essential element of this will be the development of the sixth Public Service Centre in the Stranorlar Electoral Area.

During 2006, a Draft Customer Action Plan was prepared and is currently the subject of extensive consultation with staff and elected members. The Plan sets out a range of ambitious objectives by reference to the following principles:

- Informing our customers of the standards of service they can expect from us;
- Treating all of our customers in an equal and fair manner;
- Providing accessible outlets for our services;
- Ensuring that all information and advice is clear, timely and accurate;
- Continuing to improve our ability to deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and minimum delay;
- Providing customers with the opportunity to make complaints / appeals in the event that they are dissatisfied with the service they receive;
- Consulting with our customers to get their views on the services we provide;
- Providing every customer with the opportunity to choose how, when and where they would like to do business with us;
- Developing our capacity to deliver services through the Irish language;
- Providing a more "joined up" or integrated service to customers where they require more than one service.

The Plan will be adopted and published in the early part of next year and will provide the blueprint for continuous improvement of service quality over the next three years.

A key element of our approach to service delivery has been the support and co-operation of partner agencies such as the HSE, Dept of Social Affairs, Comhairle and FAS in the development of customer-centric public services. During 2006, an independent review of the Integrated Services Project was completed and the recommendations of this report will provide the basis for further development, including the roll-out of a number of specific projects, over the coming months.

The publication of the 2005 report on the national Service Indicators (the second year of this initiative) confirms that Donegal County Council continues to perform very well on a number of fronts, but that there is room for significant improvement in others. It is anticipated that the 2006 report, when published next year, will provide evidence of further improvement.

Much of the performance improvement agenda will be driven through the continued roll-out of the Performance Management Development System, which will be completed in 2007. PMDS, together with the implementation of the performance verification elements of the Towards 2016 agreement, provides a basis on which the strategic objectives and prioritized work programmes as agreed by the members are translated into work assignments for managers and staff.

The Council has been very pro-active in maximizing the benefits of information technology, as will be evident from this report. Details of an ambitious programme of further improvements for 2007, including the pilot implementation of a national Human Resource system, are set out in this report.

The key role of the elected members in providing strategic direction, oversight and governance will continue to be further supported. An innovation introduced during 2006 was the implementation of quarterly reviews of progress and funding of all capital programmes. Further enhancements to streamline the operation of the elected Council and its Committees will be reviewed with the members in early 2007.

CORPORATE SERVICES
SEIRHÍSÍ CORPARÁIDEACHA

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €26,894,100
Draft Budgeted Income: €13,766,000

The following pages set out the above as per each relevant Programme Group.

Programme Group 1

HOUSING, SOCIAL & BUILDING SERVICES
SEIRBHÍSI TITHÍOCHTA, SÓISIALTA AGUS FOIRGNÍOCHTA

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: **€**541,800
Draft Budgeted Income: **€ Nil**
(Pages 1-3 of Blue Pages)

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €541,800 in expenditure under this heading.

Programme Group 2

ROADS & TRANSPORTATION SERVICES
SEIRBHÍSÍ BÓITHRE AGUS IOMPAIR

Budgeted Expenditure: €3,653,600
Budgeted Income: €50,000
(Pages 4-6 of Blue Pages)

MOTOR TAXATION SERVICE

Motor Taxation and related services continue to be available in the five Public Service Centres at Carndonagh, Milford, Letterkenny, Dungloe and Donegal Town as well as Lifford. All these offices issue motor vehicle licences (generally known as motor tax discs), driving licences, trade plates for motor traders etc., duplicate registration books, duplicate vehicle licensing certificates and duplicate motor tax discs are also issued. A full service is available from any of the centres, irrespective of the customer's place of residence.

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €1,302,700 under this heading.

Projected Motor Tax Receipts and Transactions for 2006

	Revenue	Revenue %	Transactions	Transactions %
Lifford	€3,168,629	13%	25,360	14%
Carndonagh	€4,780,135	19%	33,915	18%
Letterkenny	€7,442,278	30%	56,711	30%
Milford	€1,848,488	7%	14,240	8%
Dungloe	€2,768,757	11%	20,237	11%
Donegal Town	€5,062,746	20%	35,740	19%
Total	€25,071,033	100%	186,203	100%

It is projected that overall activity will increase in 2006 by 7%.

Year	Transaction	Revenue
2002	134,261	€17,640,249
2003	143,355	€21,042,391
2004	142,766	€22,324,869
2005	168,201	€23,276,317
2006	186,203	€25,071,033

87% of motor tax revenue has been collected in the Public Service Centres and 86% of motor tax business in the county is being transacted there.

POSTAL APPLICATIONS

93% of motor tax transactions are dealt with over the counter although driving licence applications are always posted out the next working day. The total number of postal applications received in 2005 was 14,395. The total number of postal applications received to date in 2006 (10th Nov 2006) is 11,783. Indications are that the total number of applications received by post in 2006 will be similar to 2005 but the increase in the number of transactions means that there has been a year on year increase of 8% in the number of applications that have been processed over the counter, which continues to highlight how convenient the new PSCs are for customers. 97% of postal applications are dealt with on the day they are received with the remaining 3% (usually exchange driving licences which have to be verified with the relevant issuing Authority before they can be processed) dealt with within three days.

The national Service Indicators report shows that the Council's performance in processing postal applications with same day turnaround leads the standard for the Country.

TAXING ON THE INTERNET WWW.MOTORTAX.IE

The online motor tax service now provides the option to renew tax on private cars, motorcycles, vehicles adapted for use by disabled persons, first taxation of new or second hand imported vehicles in the following tax classes - private, motorcycles, agricultural tractors/excavators and vehicles adapted for use by disabled drivers. Entering the vehicle registration number and PIN which is provided with tax renewal notices allows access to the Motor Tax Online service or in the case of first taxation of the above mentioned vehicles the owner will have to enter a portion of the chassis number as the PIN. Vehicle insurance details (name of insurer, policy number and expiry date) and Laser/Credit card details are required to avail of the service

On line renewal in County Donegal will show an increase of between 3 and 4% in take up in 2006 with approximately 12% customers with options to renew on line availing of the facility. Donegal remains the lowest online motor tax user countrywide, a contributory factor presumably being the convenience of the decentralisation of the services. The Council continues to actively promote the use of the online service.

ROAD WORTHINESS TESTING OF RECOVERY VEHICLES

Road Worthiness Testing of Recovery Vehicles will commence in early 2007.

JOINT OWNERSHIP

Following the introduction of new Regulations in March 2006 vehicles can no longer be registered in joint owner names. A vehicle can only be registered in the name of one registered owner. Tax renewal applications cannot be processed either if the application is in joint owner names.

NEW DRIVING LICENCE REGULATIONS

New Driving Licence Regulations were introduced effective from 21st October, 2006.

The main change is in relation to entitlement to Category M (moped).
On or after the 21st October, 2006 an applicant for a full category 'B' licence for the first time will no longer be automatically entitled to category 'M'. Applicants will have to undergo a separate driving test in either categories 'A', 'A1' or 'M' to be entitled to category 'M' on a full licence. If an applicant however has held a full licence in any of the following categories 'B', 'EB', 'C1', 'EC1', 'C', 'D1', 'ED1', 'D' or 'ED' at any time during the 10 year period preceding the commencement date of these regulations they will be entitled to category 'M' on their full licence.

THEORY TEST REGULATIONS

An amendment to the Theory Test Regulations was also introduced effective from 21st October, 2006.

There are now 4 categories:

1. B,W
2. A,M
3. C
4. D

SUPERANNUATION - ROADS

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €2,350,900 in expenditure under this heading.

Programme Group 3

WATER SUPPLY AND SEWERAGE
SOLÁTHAR UISCE AGUS SÉARACHAS

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €823,600
Draft Budgeted Income: € Nil
(Pages 7-10 of Blue Pages)

SUPERANNUATION – WATER SERVICES

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €823,600 for expenditure under this heading.

Programme Group 4

DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES & CONTROLS
DREASACHTAÍ FORBARTHA AGUS STIÚRADH

Budgeted Expenditure: €164,100
Budgeted Income: €Nil
(Pages 11 - 13 of Blue Pages)

CONTRIBUTIONS

A provision of €23,000 is included in respect of contributions to the General Council of County Council (€18,500) and LAMA (€4,500).

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €141,100 for expenditure under this heading.

Programme Group 5

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION
COSAINT NA TIMPEALLACHTA

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €290,600
Draft Budgeted Income: € Nil
(Pages 14-16 of Blue Pages)

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €290,600 for expenditure under this heading.

Programme Group 6

RECREATION & AMENITY
CAITHEAMH AIMSIRE AGUS TAITNEAMHACHT

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €202,700
Draft Budgeted Income: € Nil
(Pages 17 - 18 of Blue Pages)

SUPERANNUATION – RECREATION AND AMENITY

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €84,200 in expenditure under this heading.

FORBAIRT NA GAEILGE

Tá soláthar iomlán de €118,500 i mbuiséad na bliana seo le forbairt a dhéanamh ar na seirbhísí i nGaeilge ó Chomhairle Contae Dhún na nGall.

Mar a bhí anuraidh, leagfar béim ar leith sa bhliain atá amach romhainn ar chur i bhfeidhm Scéim Údaráis Áitiúla Dhún na nGall faoi Alt 11 d'Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003, chomh maith le cur i bhfeidhm eilimintí eile den Acht de réir mar a bhaineann siad le hobair na Comhairle. Is é a bheas i gceist leis seo ná réimse leathan tograí agus dualgas reachtúil ar a n-áirítear oiliúint, aistriúchán, suíomh idirlín dhátheangach, foirmeacha iarratais dhátheangacha, earcaíocht, Scéim Scoláireachta Gaeltachta do dhaoine óga, urraíocht ar dhuais Ghlór na nGael srl.

Mar aitheantas ar na dualgais mhóra atá orainn seirbhís iomlán i nGaeilge a chur ar fáil ón Ionad Seirbhísí Pobail ar an Chlochán Liath, agus le tús a chur leis an obair chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun tosaigh mar theanga oibre na hoifige seo faoin bhliain 2020, leanfaidh an Chomhairle lena tacaíocht do réimse leathan cúrsaí fá choinne ball foirne atá lonnaithe san Ionad Seirbhísí Pobail. Leanfar leis an tacaíocht ón Chomhairle fosta le Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge de chuid Ollscoil na hÉireann, Má Nuad, a chur fáil do bhaill foirne in achan Ionad Seirbhísí Pobail dár gcuid.

Leanfaidh an Chomhairle lena tacaíocht don Scéim Scoláireachta, scéim atá mar chomhpháirtíocht idir Choiste na Gaeilge agus na Coláistí Samhraidh i nDún na nGall. Faoin scéim seo, cuireann an Chomhairle agus na Coláistí líon iomlán de 34 Scoláireacht Ghaeltachta ar fáil do dhaoine óga i nDún na nGall atá idir 10-18 mbliana.

Beidh réimse seirbhísí aistriúcháin de dhíth ar an Chomhairle chomh maith, lenár gcoimitmintí ar fad faoin Acht Teanga a chomhlíonadh. Cuireann an tAcht dualgas ar an Chomhairle réimse leathan cáipéisí polasaí, tuarascálacha, agus ábhar eile srl a chur ar fáil sa dá theanga oifigiúla agus

tá soláthar déanta faoi na Stiúrthóireachtaí cuí le seirbhísí aistriúcháin sheachtracha a fháil leis an obair sin a dhéanamh.

Sa bhreis air seo, déanann an Chomhairle cuid mhór obair aistriúchain go laethúil, agus tá méadú suntasach ar an aistriú seo mar gheall ar Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla agus an Scéim Teanga. Déanann ár mbaill foirne féin cuid mhaith den obair seo go hinmheánach, agus leanfar leis an obair seo. Mar sin féin, tá gá le buiséad beag solúbtha le go mbeifí in ann seirbhísí seachtracha a úsáid le aistriúchán a dhéanamh go héifeachtach.

Féachfaidh an Chomhairle le cur le próifíl, imeachtaí agus gníomhaíochtaí Sheachtain na Gaeilge i mí Mhárta, tríd na hIonaid Seirbhísí Pobail agus na Leabharlanna agus ionaid eile. Féachfaidh an Chomhairle le dul i gcomhpháirtíocht le gníomhaireachtaí eile ar bhonn trasteorann leis an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn ar fud an iarthuaiscirt, Tír Eoghain, Doire, agus Fear Manach san áireamh.

There is a total provision of €118,500 in this year's Budget for the development of services in Irish from Donegal County Council.

As was the case last year, emphasis will be placed this year on the continued implementation of Donegal Local Authorities Language Scheme 2005-2008 under Article 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003, including the implementation of other elements of the Act as they relate to the work of the Council. This will involve a wide range of projects and statutory obligations including training, translation, maintaining and further developing the bilingual website, bilingual application forms, recruitment, the Gaeltacht Scholarship Scheme and the sponsorship of a Glór na nGael award.

In recognition of the major commitment to provide a complete service through Irish from the Dungloe Public Service Centre, and to continue the work of developing the Irish language as the working language of the office by 2020, the Council will continue to support staff through the provision of a range of Irish language courses for members of staff based in Dungloe. The European Certificate in Irish, provided by the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, will also be supported by the Council for staff in all our Public Service Centres.

The Council will continue with its support for the Gaeltacht Scholarship Scheme, which is a partnership between the Council's Coiste na Gaeilge and the Summer Colleges in Donegal. Under this scheme, the Council and the Colleges provide a total of 34 Scholarships for young people from Donegal between the ages of 10-18.

The Council will continue to require a range of translation services, to fulfil our commitments under the Act. The Official Languages Act, and our Language Scheme, places an obligation on the Council to provide a wide range of policy documents, reports, and other printed material in both official languages and appropriate provisions are being made within each Directorate to commission external translation services to fulfill that role.

In addition to this, the Council requires ongoing daily translations, and the demand for this has greatly increased as a result of the Official Languages Act and our Language Scheme. Our own staff carry out a proportion of this work internally, and this will continue to be the case. However, there is a need for a small flexible translation budget to allow for material to be translated efficiently by external services.

The Council will seek to increase the profile, and range of activities and events during Irish Language Week in March, through our Library Services, Public Service Centres and other venues. The Council will seek to work in partnership with other agencies on a cross-border basis to promote the Irish language in partnership with our neighbours in Tyrone, Derry and Fermanagh

Programme Group 7

AGRICULTURE, EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELFARE
TALMHAÍOCHT, OIDEACHAS, SLÁINTE AGUS LEAS

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €9,815,100
Draft Budgeted Income: €9,742,600
(Pages 20 - 22 of Blue Pages)

HIGHER EDUCATION GRANTS

Donegal County Council administers the Higher Education Grants Scheme on behalf of the Department of Education, for students who intend to pursue undergraduate courses in third level colleges and universities in Ireland, including Northern Ireland and E.U. Member States.

All monies expended on the Scheme are fully recouped from the Department, except for staff salaries and a fixed sum of €7,388.
Maintenance grant levels have increased over the past few years together with a significant increase in the income thresholds, which determine grant eligibility.

Higher Education Grants Scheme 2006 Income Thresholds

Reckonable Income Limits for the ordinary rates of grant
(for the period 1st January 2005 to 31st December 2005 (the tax year 2005)

No. of Dependent Children	Full Maintenance and Full Fees	Part Maintenance (75%) and Full Fees	Part Maintenance (50%) and Full Fees	Part Maintenance (25%) and Full Fees	Part Tuition Fees (50%) only*
Less than 4	*€37,365*	*€39,695*	*€42,030*	*€44,365*	*€46,700*
4-7	*€41,055*	*€43,625*	*€46,190*	*€48,760*	*€51,325*
8 or more	*€44,580*	*€47,365*	*€50,150*	*€52,930*	*€55,715*

**Full Student Service Charge is paid where income is at or below this level.*

In 2006 there was a 5.3% increase in income limits for the "Ordinary" rate of maintenance grant and a 7.18% increase in income levels for the special "Top-up" rate of maintenance grant.

Maintenance Grants Rates

	Non-Adjacent Rate	Adjacent Rate
1 **Full Maintenance**	**€3,110**	€1,245
Part Maintenance (75%)	€2,335	€ 935
Part Maintenance (50%)	€1,555	€ 625
Part Maintenance (25%)	€ 780	€ 310

The adjacent rate of grant is paid to students who live within a fifteen-mile radius of an approved college.

A number of social welfare and health board payments are excluded in the calculation of reckonable income. These include: -
Child Benefit, Family Income Supplement, Disability Allowance (candidate) Blind Pension (candidate), Means Tested One Parent Family Payments, Orphans Pensions, Back to Education Allowance, Foster Care Allowance, Domiciliary Care Allowance and Carer's Allowance.

Special Rates of Maintenance Grant 2006/07

Grant	Standard Grant	Top – Up Amount	Total Grant
Adjacent Rate	€1,245	€1,145	**€2,390**
Non – Adjacent Rate	€3,110	€2,860	**€5,970**

The Special Rate of Maintenance Grant was introduced in 2001 to provide assistance for students from disadvantaged and low-income backgrounds. The reckonable income limit (net of standard exclusions and child dependant allowance) was €16,748.00 in 2006. In order to qualify for this Top-up grant the reckonable income had to include one of the designated social welfare payments specified in the Higher Education Grants Scheme.
340 students availed of the Special Rate of Maintenance Grant in 2006.

Fees

The maximum fees grant payable in respect of grant holders of third level student support schemes assessed under the 2006 Scheme (i.e. where the Free Fees initiative does not apply) were €5,730.00.

The student service charge payable in respect of approved grant holders (in the Republic of Ireland) was €800.

A number of additional courses were approved in 2006 in the following institutions: -

Holy Ghost College, Kimmage Manor, Mater Dei Institute of Education, Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosphy, All Hallows College, Drumcondra, and Carlow College.

HEG application forms were revised in 2006, so as to provide for clarity of information, particularly in relation to reckonable income details. A new grant appeals form was also introduced in 2006 to put the appeal process on a more formal footing, and provide greater clarity for the applicant.

The Minister for Education announced on the 6th June 2006 that the Vocational Education Committees are to be given sole responsibility for the administration of third level student maintenance grants with effect from the 2007/2008 academic year. She also confirmed that plans were in place to introduce new legislation to unify the various grant schemes currently in operation. It is anticipated that Local Authorities will continue to administer the scheme for Renewal Students for the foreseeable future.

Over 1240 applications were processed in 2006. Of these 1136 grants were awarded to undergraduate and postgraduate students in Ireland, and undergraduate students in the U.K.

There was a notable reduction in the number of applications received in respect of attendance at third level colleges in Northern Ireland. This was due to the fact that the Education and Library Boards no longer provided assistance with fees to students from the Republic of Ireland.

Grants Awarded 2006

Student Type	New	Renewal
Grants Awarded	325	**811**

The 2007 Draft Estimate provision of €4,250,000 for maintenance grants/fees shows a reduction of €1,161,000 on the expected 2006 outturn of €5,411,000. This reduction is predicated on all new applications for Higher Education Grants in the 2007/2008 academic year being processed by the Vocational Education Committee.

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €5,500,000 under this heading for retired VEC Personnel. This expenditure is 100% recoupable.

Programme Group 8

MISCELLANEOUS
ÉAGSÚIL

Budgeted Expenditure: €4,213,600
Budgeted Income: €612,800
(Pages 23 - 27 of Blue Pages)

FRANCHISE AND ELECTIONS

The 2007 Draft Budget provision of €207,700 covers salaries of staff (including fieldworkers) engaged in the preparation of the Register of Electors.

Mr. Dick Roche T.D., Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government announced in 2006 the launch of a nationwide Electoral Campaign comprising a set of actions and a package of measures to assist local authorities to secure significant improvement in the quality of the Electoral Register. This was seen as an interim measure in what is an ongoing process of review that is examining every aspect of the compilation of the register, including, inter alia, the use of the PPS number as an individual identifier.

At a local level, Donegal County Council, engaged in an extensive campaign, employing 51 fieldworkers in addition to the 22 Revenue Collectors. The Council also used the local radio stations and newspapers to promote awareness among electors of the need to check that they were registered. This was supplemented by a national campaign, which is ongoing. Provision has been made for continuation of the campaign in the lead up to the General Election in 2007.

A requirement to produce, annually, an Edited Register came into force in November 2004. This enables electors to choose how their information will be used i.e. they can stipulate that their name be used only for electoral and other statutory purposes. The general version of the register can be procured/viewed by any person on payment of the appropriate fee and the information used for commercial or advertising purposes. The Edited Register is not available for purchase.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government has amended the application form for registration (RFA) to enable applicants to express their preferred form of registration. It will be necessary to provide advice and training in this regard to field staff and public representatives

A facility is now available on the Council's website, www.donegal.ie through which voters can check that their name is on the Register.

ELECTED MEMBERS' SERVICES

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €1,107,200 to cover the following members' costs:

Mayor's Allowance	€42,400
Deputy Mayor's Allowance	€10,600
Representational Payment:	€517,600
Annual Allowance:	€275,900
SPC Chairs Allowance:	€30,000
External Members:	€23,000
Home Travel (Conference etc;):	€145,000
Foreign Travel:	€30,000
Members' Insurance:	€5,300
Mobile Phone Expenses	€17,400
Provision of Broadband Access:	€10,000
Total	€1,107,200

The Annual Allowance has been increased to €275,870. This fixed annual allowance is designed to defray in a structured way reasonable expenses incurred by members in attending meetings associated with their council business, and takes into consideration forthcoming increases in the Councillor's Allowances System.

The maximum annual limit for Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Chairs Expenses will increase to €6,000 per annum from the 1st January 2007,

The Representational Payment provision reflects the cumulative impact of Benchmarking and general increases during 2006. This salary type payment was introduced in January 2002 and is linked to a Senator's basic salary, with increases applied on a pro-rata basis.

From the 1st January 2007 an allowance in respect of expenses incurred by councillors in the use of mobile phones for duties associated with their public office is being introduced, and will amount to 50% of the total, vouched mobile phone costs associated with the public duties of a councillor. This will be subject to a maximum payment of €600 pa for county and city councillors. €17,400 is included in the 2007 Draft Budget for mobile phone expenses.

€10,000 is included in 2007 to defray the cost of providing members with broadband connectivity in furtherance of the Council's objective of maximising the use of information communications technology and reducing

paper communications. Work commenced in 2006 on presenting reports electronically at General Purposes Committee Meetings. It is intended to further develop the distribution of agendas on an electronic basis in 2007.

The Management of Council Business System once again proved to be very successful in the management of replies to members' questions and motions. It is planned to move to the next phase of implementation by extending the system to include follow-ups to Council Meetings.

A sum of €15,000 – the same as in 2006 - is included in the Draft Budget for 2007 in respect of Civic Entertainment.

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €612,200 for expenditure under this heading.

INFORMATION SERVICES

The Draft Budget for 2007 provides for expenditure of €120,900 under this heading:

Communications Office

The Communications Office has responsibility for receiving and co-ordinating requests under the Freedom of Information Act 1997 - 2003, complaints received from the Office of the Ombudsman, annual reports and public relations activity.

Freedom of Information

43 requests were received to the end of November 2006. Requests decreased following the introduction of fees under the Freedom of Information (Fees) Regulations 2003; however, they have been steadily increasing again and many of the requests are more voluminous and of greater complexity requiring, in some cases, extension of deadlines and incurring further fees for search and retrieval.

To ensure that there is a greater understanding of the objectives and provisions of the Freedom of Information Act and that it is implemented in a consistent and effective manner, a review of Decision Makers and Internal Reviewers will be carried out in the near future with appropriate specialist training to be arranged in 2007. It is also intended to hold short introductory sessions to the FOI Act for front-line staff, especially those recently appointed in the 5 Public Service Centres

The FOI Staff Reference Manual is available on the Councils Intranet site. Work is nearing completion on the update of the Section 15 and 16 Manuals which are an excellent reference document setting out the information that we hold and how it can be accessed. It also provides an overview of the structure of the Council, the services we provide and details of legislation, regulations and circulars that are relevant. When finalised, these will be accessible on the Council website

Ombudsman

The Office of the Ombudsman was set up in 1984 to investigate complaints from members of the public who feel they have been unfairly treated by certain public bodies. The Ombudsman has extensive powers and can legally demand any information, document or file from a body against which a complaint has been made and any official to give information about a complaint. The complaints generally are in relation to administrative procedures and include:

- Reasons for decisions made
- Refusal or failure to take action
- Failure to respond to the public

The Communications Officer acts as a Liaison Officer and the first point of contact between the Office of the Ombudsman and the Donegal Local Authorities. She ensures that any written or oral enquiries from the Ombudsman's Office are immediately directed to the appropriate section(s) of the Council and endeavours to ensure that all time limits applying to requests for information, or for responses to complaints, from the Ombudsman's Office are met.

13 new complaints were received from the Ombudsman in 2006, as at 30th November 2006, and two cases have been reopened. There are a further 19 cases from previous years still active. In total, there are 34 cases ongoing, which have not been resolved and are still being investigated. As most of the decision makers under FOI are also responsible for responding to the Ombudsman's complaints, the information sessions on FOI planned for 2007 will also address the role of the Ombudsman.

The Office of the Ombudsman generally is reluctant to investigate a complaint unless the complainant has exhausted all the internal complaints and appeal mechanism of the organisation the subject of the complaint. Reference is made earlier to the fact that a Draft Customer Action Plan has been prepared and is the subject of ongoing consultation. The Plan will be adopted in early 2007. To underpin the plan, the Council will introduce formal Complaints and Appeals procedures, as well as accelerating the roll-out of the Contact Management system E-Direct to the various services, as

without these there would be no meaningful means of measuring adherence to standards set e.g. response times to correspondence.

Public Relations

The Communications Officer normally, is the first point of contact for queries from local and national media and ensures that any query received is immediately directed to the relevant manager.

Online Media Monitoring Software is used by the Council to track media coverage of issues relevant to the Council in local and national newspapers, radio and online news services.

Last years report advised that a Draft Media Relations Policy was under discussion and was planned to come into operation in 2006, following the completion of consultations with all relevant stakeholders including staff, elected members and representatives of the media. A range of issues were raised during the consultations and work is ongoing to address them. The Draft Policy sets out the procedures and protocols on how the Council would propose to interact with the media.

Provision had been made in Budget 2006 for development of a Citizens Newsletter; however, due to staff changes and other constraints it was only possible to carry preliminary work on the project. Further work will be carried out in 2007.

The Communications Officer has also been working closely with Information Services and other staff to develop a new customer-focused website for Donegal County Council. The new website will be an important public relations tool for the Council. It is envisaged that this website will be updated and maintained by each of the Directorates and an internal Web group has been established to co-ordinate the involvement of each of the Directorates in the development of the site.

Programme Group 9

SUPPORT SERVICES/CENTRAL MANAGEMENT CHARGE
SEIRBHÍSÍ TACAÍOCHTA

Budgeted Expenditure: €7,189,000
Budgeted Income: €3,360,600
(Pages 28 – 30 of Blue Pages)

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €193,900 in expenditure under this heading.

HUMAN RESOURCES

IMPLEMENTATION OF BETTER LOCAL GOVERNMENT – A PROGRAMME FOR CHANGE AND THE DECENTRALISATION OF SERVICES BY DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL.

The above programme for change has been underway since the late 1990's and in 2006, the Council in partnership with Staff Representatives bodies, continued to meet to review the entire BLG process. In addition to meetings with the Unions, the Senior Management Team concluded a series of meetings with Area and Divisional Managers in the Electoral Areas and at Headquarters to review a number of key areas including the following:

- Standard of Service Delivery
- Work Processes
- Workloads
- Staffing Resources
- Financial Resources

It is proposed that the review will be concluded in the 1st quarter of 2007.

Throughout this change programme, the Council has demonstrated its commitment to the provision of better quality services by investing heavily in the organisation's most important resource – our staff. The process is being supported through an ongoing programme of training and development, which will continue in 2007.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINING PROGRESS PAY AGREEMENT AND BENCHMARKING

During the past year, the Council in line with all Local Authorities has implemented significant pay increases to employees in accordance with the national wage agreement *'Sustaining Progress'* . The pay increases under the '*Sustaining Progress'* agreement are contingent on an agreed Local Action Plan being developed through local Partnership structures and approved nationally by the Performance Verification Group (PVG). The *'Sustaining Progress'* agreement period has now ended and is followed by the new National Pay Agreement '***Towards 2016***'. It is envisaged that a similar verification process will apply to pay increases under this agreement but to date, the national template for the agreed Action Plan has not been finalised.

As the Elected Members are aware, a separate Parallel Benchmarking process had been agreed nationally in relation to Craftworkers, General Operatives and related grades. The implementation of the Parallel Benchmarking pay awards in Donegal were agreed, following the intervention of the Labour Relations Commission and a full hearing in the Labour Court in June 2005. The recommendations of the Labour Court were approved by the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government in November, 2005. Arrangements were made in early 2006 to implement the full terms of these recommendations, which involve significant productivity gains in return for the pay increases sanctioned. As part of the productivity measures, Donegal Co. Council introduced Annualised Hours/Flexible Working Arrangements in the Roads Service on a pilot basis in 2006. This process is being monitored by a Joint Management – Union Working Group, which meets on a regular basis. A number of issues have arisen and are likely to be progressed through the Industrial Relations forum.

IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATED HUMAN RESOURCES, PAYROLL AND SUPERANNUATION SYSTEM

Donegal County Council as well as other Local Authorities identified an automated Human Resource (HR) system as a priority deliverable. The Local Government Computer Services Board and the Local Government Management Services Board are the lead parties in the identification and implementation of a national HR Project.

A BPI (business process improvement) exercise was completed and the resulting document has been approved by the boards of both LGCSB and LGMSB. A sub-committee that reports to both boards was established to progress the sourcing and implementation of a software package to meet the needs of local authorities.

The project identified 3 key areas as follows.

- Human Resources (contains 10 business areas)
- Payroll
- Superannuation

As of November 06, the tender phase is ongoing and a preferred supplier will be selected by December 06. The project will commence nationally in April 2007. It was decided to have 3 pilot sites and 3 associated validation sites as follows.

Pilot sites	**Validation sites**
Donegal CC	Sligo CC
Kerry CC	Limerick CC
Meath CC	Westmeath CC

The key goals of the project are as follows.

The primary aim is to implement an I.T. solution to manage the whole area of Human Resources, Payroll and Superannuation in the Donegal Local Authorities.

The second objective is to standardise work practices around the country so that a consistent approach is used by the application of best practice as documented by the National BRP exercise.

The third objective is to implement a document management system in parallel with the above.

There is no provision however included in the Draft Budget for 2007 in this regard and may be necessary to deal with in the context of preparing a Draft Budget for 2008.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

During 2006 the Council continued with the implementation of a Performance Management Development System (PMDS), to date the implementation process has commenced in Roads, Planning, Housing and Corporate Services. The system will be implemented in Cultural Services, Finance, Water Services and the Town Councils in 2007. The system has provided a mechanism to identify and deal with performance issues and in parallel with this it has contributed significantly to the development of a more structured approach to the training and development of all staff members.

The Council continued to make a significant contribution towards the various training and development needs of staff during 2006, in particular there has been an increased focus on ensuring that Health and Safety training is comprehensively delivered in accordance with the 2005 Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act.

The Management Development Training Programme, which commenced in 2005, continued throughout 2006, this programme will be expanded in 2007 to include Divisional Managers and Directors of Service. A comprehensive training programme for elected members will be delivered in 2007.

The Stranorlar Regional Training Centre continued to be an excellent resource through which a significant portion of the 2006 staff training programme was delivered, the facilities which were extended in 2005 continue to offer a first class training resource, particularly with regards to the training requirements of the Roads and Water Services Personnel. During 2006 a Roads Materials Testing Laboratory was established at the Training Centre, this facility will in addition to providing a resource to test road materials also provide training to particular staff involved in this area. A total of €250,000 has been provided for training and development in the draft budget. In addition a provision of €500,000 has been made in respect of the Stranorlar Regional Training Centre, which is funded by the training fees paid in respect of the various training courses.

HEALTH & SAFETY

This is now an area of critical importance and one which the Council is giving full and proper consideration to in relation to all its operations, including those carried out on the Council's behalf by contractors etc.

The staffing structure in this area was strengthened in June 2006 with the appointment of a full-time Corporate Safety Advisor. This appointment was complimented with the appointment, in September 2006, of a full-time Safety Advisor to Roads & Transportation Service. The Council is continuing to investigate ways to augment its safety management team.

A new Parent Safety Statement was developed and adopted in July 2006. The Central Safety Committee has endorsed a programme to update all its current safety documentation in order to meets its obligation to provide information to staff. An Employee Safety Handbook, developed by the LGMSB, was issued to all staff members.

A management/staff safety committee has been established and meets monthly. The safety committee provides a means of safety representation and consultation between management and employees through their safety representatives. The committee also provides a forum for management to

address staff's safety concerns as well as providing guidance, advice and support to safety representatives.

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes provision for the continued strengthening the Council's safety management system with the appointment of additional personnel, the further development of policies and procedures and the provision of focused training to staff. The total provision is €104,000.

STAFF WELFARE

During 2005 the services of the Staff Welfare Officer were extensively utilised by employees from all departments of the County Council. A wide range of issues were raised including leave entitlements, superannuation and pensions, illness and bereavement, and queries of a more personal nature, both work and home related. Occupational health nurses from BUPA Ireland again carried out health screening for members of staff at Council headquarters and at each of the Public Services Centres and due to its success it is intended to continue this programme in 2007. It is also intended to hold a Retirement Planning Seminar in May 2007 for members of staff who are due to retire within the next four years. Finally, whilst the Employee Assistance Programme has proved successful and offers a valuable support and counselling service to employees who may be experiencing difficulties such as marital, family, relationships, depression, alcohol, substance abuse etc. an extensive review of the programme will be conducted in 2007.

EQUALITY

In 2006 Donegal Local Authorities, adopted an Equality and Diversity Management Policy to replace the existing Equal Opportunities Policy. In the new policy, the Councils recognise the significant social and economic change occurring in Ireland, and the resulting creation of a society that is constantly evolving and is much more diverse than before. A Cultural Diversity Day was organised in October in Letterkenny Public Services Centre during which staff were invited to listen to speakers from a range of cultural backgrounds and to sample food from different cultures. Building on this work to date and to mark 2007 as the Year of Equal Opportunities for All, a series of workshops on diversity will be held in Council Headquarters and each of Public Service Centers throughout 2007. The Equality Action Team also intends to organise a series of events and publish a newsletter for staff covering a range of issues on equality and diversity.

WORKPLACE PARTNERSHIP

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €128,900 in expenditure under the heading of Workplace Partnership.

The key principles that inform and drive the need for change in the Public Service are:

- Quality in the delivery of services;
- The effective management of performance at all levels;
- Flexibility in the development of resources;
- Training and development;
- The effective use of information technology; and
- An open, participative approach by all concerned.

The management of Donegal County Council, its employees and their employee representatives have pledged their collective commitment to the Partnership approach to change. The Mission Statement and Core Objectives adopted by the Donegal County Council Partnership Committee reflect this commitment:

Mission Statement

'To achieve joint ownership of and responsibility for the process of change within Donegal County Council by management, unions and staff based on an open, co-operative process with effective consultation and participation by all concerned'.

Core Objectives

'To play a key role in the process of implementing change through partnership, of issues such as:

- Improved service delivery to our customers
- Putting in place the structures which are required to efficiently deliver the Services on a decentralised basis
- The achievement of best business practice
- The elimination of the "Them and Us" perception
- Better communication
- Investment in the training, development and working environment of the staff'.

Handling Significant Change Through Partnership

The County Partnership Committee and Area Partnerships will continue to mainstream the principles set out in HSCTP in 2007 and apply them to our work programme. As with the *Sustaining Progress* Action Plan, our collectively agreed commitments under the *Towards 2016* National Agreement and LANPAG's related Strategy 2006-2010 will determine our work programme for 2007 and indeed beyond. These commitments will also be reflected in the continuing work of the Area Partnerships and the Fire Service Partnership. The work programme going into 2007 includes the following:

- Staff Mobility Policy implementation
- Customer Action Plan rollout
- B.L.G. Review
- Cross Service Collaboration
- Extended Opening Hours
- Annualised Hours
- Performance Management Development System (PMDS)
- Communications
- Workplace Review
- Health and Safety
- Welfare and Equality
- Miscellaneous policy development and implementation

Expenditure in 2007 will naturally be geared towards further deepening the partnership ethos with particular emphasis on achieving improved customer service for the citizens of Co. Donegal.

CUSTOMER SERVICES PROVISION FROM PUBLIC SERVICE CENTRES

The schedule of customer contacts and activity in the area of cash receipting for 2005 and projections for 2006 are set out hereunder for comparison purposes. The data excludes customers for Motor Tax and related services, which is detailed separately in this report.

2005 Schedule

	Donegal	Dungloe	Carndonagh	Letterkenny	Milford	Total
In Person	9437	12923	6531	6906	3291	39088
By Telephone	28242	33573	31191	36869	20426	150301
No. of Receipts	6517	4707	5654	6294	3677	26849
Value	€3.25m	€1.99m	€2.82m	€3.26m	€2m	€13.32m

2006 Schedule (Projected)

	Donegal	Dungloe	Carndonagh	Letterkenny	Milford	Total
In Person	8160	10963	7830	8646	3793	39392
By Telephone	30543	30546	33930	41430	20721	157170
No. of Receipts	7774	5396	7411	7879	4584	33044
Value	€5.13m	€2.60m	€4.86m	€4.16m	€1.96m	€18.71m

There continues to be a year on year increase in customer contacts. While the number of people calling in person to the offices remains similar to 2005 there is an increase of approximately 4.5% in contacts by phone. There has been a significant increase in the cash collected as apparent from above schedules (€18.71m in 2006 versus €13.32m in 2005 – 40% increase)

The Council is continually reviewing the potential of technology to enhance service provision and provide access to information for customers through our website, e.g. on-line planning, on-line access to the electoral register, on-line payments - parking fines. The on-line payment facility will be further expanded in 2007.

In the context of the new Customer Action Plan, a review will be conducted of the extent to which we are dealing with customer queries at the first point of contact and what changes could be made in this area to improve/increase the number of customers being served in this way. The potential to extend opening hours in 2007 is being explored with staff and their representative organisations.

DEVELOPMENT OF OUTREACH SERVICES

In May 2006 the Ballyshannon Public Services Outreach Centre was officially opened. Services available from the centre include Donegal County Council Services in particular the Library Service and Ballyshannon Town Council Services. Citizen Information Services are also available from the Centre. Early indications suggest that the Centre is attracting a wide range and ever increasing level of business.

It was noted in the 2006 Budget proposal that it was intended to develop the provision of outreach County Council services in the Inishowen Electoral Area through Buncrana Town Council. Initial discussions have taken place with the Town Manager and Town Clerk to advance this based on experience in Ballyshannon. Preparatory work will be undertaken with County Council and Town Council staff early in 2007 to advance this. It is also intended to conduct a similar process in Bundoran.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND OTHER AGENCY SERVICES

In addition to County Council services, the Centres continue to be a focal point for the delivery of a wide range of public services and other services. Health Service Executive staff are now delivering services from Letterkenny, Donegal Town, Dungloe and Milford. Teagasc services are available from Carndonagh and the services of MABS from the Donegal Town Centre. The activity levels in terms of customer contacts are not readily available in respect of these services but it is important to note

that like Motor Tax, they are in addition to those for the County Council which are detailed above.

A number of agencies have also relocated staff to their purpose built accommodation in both the Dungloe & Donegal Town Centres including the Dept. of Social & Family Affairs, National Roads Authority Regional Design, Revenue Commissioners and the Dept. of Agriculture & Food.

The Independent Information Units within each of the Public Service Centres continue to develop and enhance the range of information and advice available to customers on all public services, which is reflected in the fact that in excess of 50,000 customers will avail of these services in the current year. These numbers are in addition to the visitor numbers outlined above.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS

The Draft Budget for 2007 includes a provision of €2,744,300 for this heading.

Introduction

Implementation of the Council's Information Systems Strategic Plan 2006-2009 continued during 2006. Work ranged from network maintenance and expansion to systems development and implementation as well as the progression of broadband and information society strategies and projects. Opportunities across a wide range of technologies are now routinely explored and exploited for the benefit of Council staff and members as well as the general public.

The importance of Broadband and advanced telecommunications services continue to develop particularly for rural and peripheral regions like Donegal. The Information Systems Department is responsible for promoting the broadband agenda in the county and is currently managing the Metropolitan Area Networks programme as well as a number of complementary projects aimed at stimulating the provision of broadband services in both urban and rural parts of the county.

Technology Infrastructure & Networks

Donegal County Council's technology infrastructure currently comprises 60 various Servers, 1,210 PC's and 640 printers. 32 servers sit on the Local Area Network in Lifford with the other servers located on various office networks throughout the county. 16 PABX telephone systems and 875 telephone handsets are integrated into the County network and are supported on an on-going basis. This infrastructure represents many years

of investment and is amongst the largest Local Authority Networks in Ireland.

Expansion of the network continued in 2006 with the addition of a number of sites including Ballyshannon Town Council and Library, Donegal Town Library, Materials Laboratory Stranorlar, Non-Domestic Metering Project Office Newtowncunningham, Donegal Bay Wastewater Management Scheme Office in the Donegal Town PSC, Mountain Top site office Letterkenny as well as the Eske treatment works in Donegal Town.

Council Members' Computer Project

ICT services to Council Members continued in 2006 with particular emphasis on the provision of broadband facilities. This has been achieved using a range of technologies including Wireless, Group Broadband Schemes and ADSL. To date 24 of the 29 Members have Broadband installed for access to Council Services. Solutions are currently being sought for the remaining 5 Members.

During 2006 the Information Systems Department developed a secure extranet for the sole use of Members. This secure site contains information applicable to Council meetings and also contains links to various associated sites and applications such as e-Planning and e-Register. It is also being used successfully to run electronic based meetings at electoral area and is now being extended to cater for General Purposes Committee meetings. The system will reduce the volume of paper created and eliminate duplication of data entry. It can also be used by staff to make the Members aware of notices, up-coming events etc.

Enhanced ICT services were provided in the Council Chamber during 2006 which included Plasma screens for presentations and videos. A wireless network was also provided which enables Members to access email and extranet facilities during meetings. Continued support and training has been provided to Members on existing services such as email and office automation.

Taobh Tire

The Taobh Tire project was completed during 2006. A total of 14 rural sites including 2 offshore islands have been provided with ICT facilities over the last two years allowing electronic access to the Council's library catalogue as well as general internet access. The award winning project has been very successful in utilising Information & Communications technology to extend the reach of library and information services to peripheral parts of the county.

Inter-Agency Co-operation

The Information Systems Department continued during 2006 to provide the Citizens Information Units in the Public Services Centers with access to the Comhairle network for information uploads via the Council's Government Internet Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection. In conjunction with this service, secure inter-agency connections were established between the Council's networks and Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) systems. The Council provides Internet facilities to FAS, DSCFA, Citizens Information Unit (CIU) and the National Road Design Office (NRDO) in various Public Service Centers throughout the county.

I.S. Support for PABX telephone systems and handsets is also being provided to DSCFA, HSE, NRDO, MABS, CIU Teagasc and FAS. The inter-agency service provision has required much collaborative work to facilitate the different requirements of each agency and ensure integration with the Council's infrastructure.

The use of mobile technology continues to evolve with a range of council staff including traffic wardens, revenue collectors and plant operatives routinely using mobile handheld technology in the course of their work.

Systems Development & Implementation

Council Website - www.donegal.ie

The revamped Council website was launched in 2006. The site is structured around the needs of the public in terms of dealing with the Council rather than department based as in the past with emphasis on life events such as building a house, going to college etc. Accessibility of the site has been improved in the context of users with disabilities and the site has been speech enabled. The volume of traffic to the website continues to grow significantly and has more than doubled in the last six months. Planning is still the most popular service although areas such as online services and housing related information are growing in popularity.

Major improvements on the website this year are the availability of all online planning documents in downloadable adobe format, which has made document content much clearer and allows faster downloads. The Fire Service callout charge has been added to the online payment section and application forms are being standardized. Work has continued on ensuring that structures are in place so that all the services keep content current and relevant. Much work has also been carried out to assist the Council's Irish Language Officer in the provision of a bi-lingual website, which in time will enable the public to access content through the Irish language.

On-Line Planning

The Council integrated on-line planning enquiry system continues to grow in popularity with the public as evidenced with increased usage figures again in 2006. The application won a major national award in 2006 as the best Government to Citizen application at the Inside Government Innovation through Technology Awards in January. The e-planning system allows members of the public to access all details of planning applications over the Internet using a combination of database, document management and geographic information systems technology. The system will be extended to Town Council's in 2007.

Electronic Parking Fines

The electronic Parking Fines system already implemented in Bundoran, Ballybofey Donegal Town and Ballyshannon was extended to Letterkenny in 2006. The manual method of using notebooks by the Traffic Wardens to issue parking tickets, has now been replaced by the use of mobile handhelds and printers, utilising wireless technology to pass information in real time to back-end databases. To complement the expansion of the parking fines system, an online payment facility is available which allows payment of parking fines via the Council website by entering the parking ticket ID, car registration number as well as credit card details. A secure e-mail system has also been introduced to facilitate the transfer of data with Shannon Motor Tax Centre.

Housing - Home

Implementation of a comprehensive new computer system for the Donegal Housing Authorities (HOME) was carried out during 2006. Benefits now starting to accrue from the use of the system are improved service delivery facilitated by the operation of workflow, better recording and tracking of repairs requests, management of the housing list and tenancies.

Town Council Websites

A new website www.buncrana.ie was commissioned during the year to make available to the general public details of the workings of Buncrana Town Council as well as information on the many features which Buncrana town has to offer investors, tourists and locals. The website is now available, and will be of considerable benefit to the Town Council in providing online services in the future. A major project commenced in 2006 aimed at providing websites for the town Council's in Bundoran, Ballyshannon and Letterkenny. Development work is currently on-going as well as data collection. The websites will be available to the public by mid 2006.

Other systems developed or enhanced during 2006 included:

- Public Lighting
- Dangerous Substances
- Managers Orders
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Further roll-out of the eDirect contact management system.

Geographic Information Systems

The Council's substantial database of Geographic Information was used extensively in 2006 for a number of important projects.

The accuracy of the electoral register was examined in detail by using field workers to verify entries ahead of the production of the draft register of electors in November 2006. To assist this process, GIS was used to develop and print a set of field maps to help identify polling districts, and to geocode the electoral register to townland level.

As part of the County Development Plan review in 2006 GIS technology was used for the design and production of new thematic mapping. Work ranged from overall strategy maps, population maps with latest census data, to local village control point maps. These were all plotted and published in hardcopy and on the website. GIS was used extensively to help elected members visualize proposed policy areas during various consultation workshops.

Gplan (online WebGIS) has been updated to reflect changes in the County Development Plan policies in relation to DED names and Road ID's.

Donegal County Council in co-operation with Mayo County Council launched a Pre-Planning webGIS application in 2006 to support the Pre-Planning consultation system. Using the internet this application allows users to investigate sites and ascertain how different policies can affect planning decisions for that area. This is designed to give the public as much information about their area of interest so that they can submit a best informed application. The Pre-Plan system is another important component of the of the overall on-line planning system.

New GIS applications have been installed for Roads and Sanitary (MapRoad & MapDrain) to help manage their networks. The Corporate planning GIS was updated to the latest version.

Extensive Mapinfo training was carried out in 2006 to educate users in the capabilities and functionality of the Corporate MapInfo GIS.

Major Projects for 2007

The systems development and implementation programme will continue during 2007. Key projects to be developed and implemented include the following:

- Integrated Human Resources for which Donegal County Council is a national pilot site.
- Project & Resource Management System to underpin the Corporate Plan
- Town Council's – Integrated Planning Information
- Document Management Expansion
- Electronic Consultation system for public policy matters
- Non Domestic water billing
- Further extension of electronic payments
- Upgraded library management system
- Managing Council Business – phase 2

ERNACT – INFORMATION Society Initiatives

Through participation in the ERNACT (www.ernact.org) network since its foundation in 1990, Donegal County Council has been involved in a range of European, Interregional, as well as cross border public sector Information Society technology projects. This involvement enables the Council to access EU funding for technology projects within the County. ERNACT has now evolved into a EU network of excellence for developing and implementing ICT-based models of regional development. ERNACT comprises a total of 8 regions - Galway, Donegal and Derry in Ireland, Wirral in England, Zeeland in The Netherlands, San Sebastian and Cantabria in Spain, and Olomouc Czech Republic.

Atlantic Area eCommunity Centres of Excellence Network

During 2006, the ERNACT network completed the "Atlantic Area eCommunity Centers of Excellence Network" (AA-ECONET) project. The project involved the development of a web-based eConsultation tool. The system was tested and piloted in a live environment and will now be used to supplement existing channels of consultation on policy and other topics both internally and externally. Pilot consultation projects include a community groups audit and broadband provision in the Border Corridor.

BRISE Boosting Regional Information Society Experience

The BRISE (Boosting Regional Information Society Experience) project is funded under Interreg IIIC and involves 10 public authorities across Europe. Donegal County Council is engaged in this project under three strands: Citizens and eGovernance in the Information Society, Broadband and ICT-based inward investment. Interaction with more developed central

European authorities under these themes will result in knowledge transfer and improved capability to engage in the knowledge economy with its inherent benefits for the region.

Border Corridor Digital Economy Network

Donegal County Council has been working with ERNACT since 2004 on the Border Corridor Digital Economy Network project. This project seeks to implement the Digital Economy Strategy in the NWCBR, and replicate the process that led to its development within the ICBAN and East Border Regions. The BCDEN project has the following key objectives:

- Improvement of ICT skills development, awareness of new technologies, and accessibility to ICT.

- Increase the number of citizens making use of ICT in their everyday lives.

- Increase the level of research and innovation in new technology by promoting linkages between businesses, third level education and the public sector

- Foster the development of links with other regions in Europe to identify new opportunities and models for exploiting ICT.

- Attract high-tech inward investment into the region.

Work is currently underway on specific actions under BCDEN with Donegal County Council engaged in projects looking at mobile working linked to location based services and inter-agency co-operation in service delivery.

CAPITAL ACCOUNT & ASSET FORMATION

CAPITAL PROGRAMME – BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Broadband – Critical Infrastructure for Donegal

The Metropolitan Area Networks Programme seeks to construct high speed fibre-optic rings in all towns in the Country with a population over 1500 in partnership with Local Authorities. Following construction these networks are managed by a Service Agency on behalf of the state and the Local Authorities, providing open access to all telecommunications providers at agreed rates.

Donegal County Council has long advocated the benefits of broadband as a means of assisting Donegal in the alleviation of its competitive disadvantage and providing a key tool to assist the economic and social development of the County.

In 2003 the County's first Metropolitan Area Network was constructed in Letterkenny and this network is now operational. During 2006 construction work on 6 new networks commenced following an extensive planning phase. The towns in question are:

Ballyshannon,
Bundoran,
Donegal Town,
Ballybofey/Stranorlar,
Carndonagh
Buncrana.

This major construction project is managed by the Information Systems Department. Following construction, the Council will work with the national managed services agency on an on-going basis to promote the networks locally and fast-track applications for connections to services. At the conclusion of this project in mid 2007, all towns in the county with a population over 1,500 will possess fibre based open access networks servicing their advanced telecommunications needs for a considerable period of time.

Another fibre network of strategic importance to the County is the development of a cross-border link in order to provide resilience on the various networks throughout the County. An application has been approved

in principle by DCMNR to construct an open access network between Letterkenny and Derry although approval to proceed to construction phase has not yet been given.

Fibre based wireless broadband will transform broadband availability in the larger towns in the County. Donegal, however, is predominantly a rural county and it is crucial that citizens in smaller towns and in the Donegal countryside can avail of broadband services. The MAN's programme will assist greatly in terms of providing backbone architecture in the county which will allow the provision of fixed wireless and similar broadband services to the rural areas.

The Department of Communications Marine & Natural Resources has recognised this issue nationally and designed the group broadband scheme which promotes the rollout of broadband services in rural areas on the basis of Local Authority co-ordination and community driven initiatives. As of November 2006 a total of 8 schemes have been approved for County Donegal from the two calls for proposals to date.

The Information Systems Department in co-operation with the Council's Community & Enterprise Department have been working with the DCMNR and local communities to assist the formulation of proposals and the establishment of approved projects in the County. Assistance to local communities will continue in 2007 as required.

Community Network Services (CNS) – Rural Broadband Services

Another important rural broadband opportunity for the County is the Community Network Services project funded by Inter-Reg and IFI with contributions from Udaras Na Gaeltachta and Donegal County Council. Community Network Services is a voluntary cross - border organisation supported by ERNACT whose objective is to encourage the provision of broadband and related services in rural areas of the North-West of Ireland.

A public tender for the provision of countywide wireless broadband services has been published and proposals received are currently being evaluated. It is anticipated that service rollout will begin early in 2007.