

CORPORATE SERVICES DIRECTORATE

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INTRODUCTION

The principal areas of activity in the Corporate Services Directorate include:

- Human Resource Management, including Staff Welfare, Health and Safety, Partnership and Organisation Development;
- General Purposes Division, including Meetings Administrator, services for Elected Members, Higher Education Grants, Irish Language Development, Register of Electors, Reprographics and the Communications Office;
- Electoral Areas Division, including Customer Services, Motor Taxation, Income Collection and support to the Electoral Area Committees;
- Information Systems Division.

The Corporate Services SPC has agreed an ambitious programme of work for 2008. Priority area for policy development include:

- Customer services
- Irish language development
- Preparation of Corporate Procurement Plan
- Public Relations policy
- Register of Electors
- Student support grants
- IT Strategic Plan
- Health, Safety & Welfare
- Service Indicators

During the coming months, it is intended to review and revise the committee structure of the Council, to achieve a more effective and streamlined approach to the business of the elected Council. In this context, a review of the operation of the Strategic Policy Committees will also be undertaken in conjunction with the Corporate Policy Group and a report will be brought before the full Council in due course. Revised arrangements are also being put in place to ensure that responses to representations from elected members are dealt with consistently to the highest standards. Overall, it is hoped that these and associated measures will enhance the productive working relationship between members and staff.

Under the terms of the Towards 2016 national pay agreement, a local Action Plan, setting out a programme of priorities over the lifetime of the agreement, has been agreed between management and staff representatives. The Plan includes a range of commitments to be achieved, including:

- Introduction of complaints / appeals systems for customers;
- Further development of annualised hours arrangements;
- Implementation of staff mobility policies;
- Revised attendance / absence management policies;

It is anticipated that the implementation of the Plan will achieve significant benefits in terms of productivity and flexibility.

The following pages review the progress made in 2007 and highlight the key objectives for 2008.

CORPORATE SERVICES
SEIRHÍSÍ CORPARÁIDEACHA

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €30,822,800

Draft Budgeted Income: €17,537,800

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: €762,800

Draft Budgeted Income: €226,700

(Pages 1-3 of Blue Pages)

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €762,800 in expenditure under this heading.

Programme Group 2

ROADS & TRANSPORTATION SERVICES SEIRBHÍSI BÓITHRE AGUS IOMPAIR

Budgeted Expenditure: €3,719,800

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, duplicate registration books, duplicate vehicle registration 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 2008 includes a provision of €1,357,200 under this heading.

Projected Motor Tax Receipts and Transactions for 2007

	Revenue	Revenue %	Transactions	Transactions %
Lifford	€3,292,059	13%	25,139	13%
Carndonagh	€4,877,339	18%	33,971	18%
Letterkenny	€8,085,559	31%	61,419	31%
Milford	€1,921,558	7%	14,912	8%
Dungloe	€2,926,726	11%	21,257	11%
Donegal Town	€5,419,660	20%	37,272	19%
Total	€26,522,901	100%	193,970	100%

It is projected that overall activity will increase in 2007 by 9.3%.

Year	Transaction	Revenue
2003	143,355	€21,042,391
2004	142,766	€22,324,869
2005	168,201	€23,276,317
2006	183,356	€24,765,917
2007	193,970E	€26,522,901E

88% of motor tax revenue has been collected in the Public Service Centres and 87% 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 received over the counter are always posted out the next working day (posting out of licences helps to confirm identity & reduce fraud). The total number of postal applications received in 2006 was 12,883. The total number of postal applications received to date in 2007 (30th Nov 2007) is 11,717. Indications are that the total number of applications received by post in 2007 will be similar to 2006 but the increase in the number of transactions means that there has been a year on year increase of 5.7% in the number of applications that have been processed over the counter, which continues to highlight how convenient the new PSCs are for customers.

94% of postal applications are dealt with on the day they are received with the remaining 6% (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 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.

Approximately 13.8% of vehicle owners in Donegal have availed of the option to renew their motor tax online in 2007, a slight increase over 2006. 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.

NEW SERVICE

The most commonly used application forms such as the tax renewal form and driving licence application forms have been translated by the VRU into a number of foreign languages. These forms are available in laminated form at each of the motor tax area office counters to assist foreign nationals in completing tax & driver licensing applications.

ROAD WORTHINESS TESTING OF RECOVERY VEHICLES

Road Worthiness Testing of Recovery Vehicles & Mobile Workshops with body type van commenced on the 13th August 2007. All vehicles seeking taxation in classes Recovery Vehicle/Mobile Workshop must be inspected in

the first instance by the Inspectorate which is based at the Machinery Yard, Lifford.

AUTHORISED WEIGHBRIDGES

Two new weighbridges have been appointed as Authorised Weighbridges from September 2007 namely Clonleigh Co op, Castlefin & Tinney Transport Ltd, Letterkenny. Donegal Creameries, Letterkenny ceased operating as an authorised weighbridge in May 2007.

ISSUE OF NOTICES FOR UNTAXED BUT REGISTERED VEHICLES

The Vehicle Registration Unit (VRU) has commenced issuing notices to owners of registered vehicles that have not been taxed. All vehicles that have not been taxed but registered 2-4 weeks previously will be issued with a standard notice. These new arrangements have been applied from 2nd March 2007.

END OF LIFE VEHICLES (ELV)

Article 15 of the Waste Management (End of Life Vehicles) Regulations 2006 which commenced on the 1st January 2007 makes provision for the granting of ELV Certificates of destruction.

This means that persons can bring their old vehicle to an Authorised Treatment Facility (ATF) where it will be recycled. The ATF issues a certificate of destruction (COD) to the registered owner and a copy of the certificate is sent to the Vehicle Registration Unit. In the long term it is envisaged that persons applying for refunds for scrapped vehicles will have to submit a cert of destruction with their refund application.

DRIVING LICENCES

The Vehicle Registration Unit (VRU) is issuing renewal notices from 10th September 2007 to full driver licence holders.

The fee for a duplicate driving licence is increased from €5 to €10. (This provision will apply from 1 December 2007).

INTRODUCTION OF LEARNERS PERMIT & CHANGES TO THE DRIVER LICENSING SYSTEM

Changes affecting learner drivers were introduced on the 30th October 2007. The changes include the replacement of provisional licences with learners' permits.

Summary of the main changes as it applies to provisional licence/learner permit holders.

- A person while holding a second learner permit or second provisional licence can drive unaccompanied in the period up to 30 June 2008.
- A first time learner permit holder on or after 30 October 2007 (except for motorcyclists) must be accompanied by a person who holds a full driving licence in the category for a continuous period of two years.
- As has been the case up to now a person (except for motorcyclists) who currently holds a first, third or subsequent provisional licence must be accompanied by a person holding a full driving licence- no minimum period necessary. This will change on 30 June 2008 when all learner permit (provisional licence) holders must be accompanied by a person who holds a full licence for a two-year period.
- The learner permit system will apply to all licence categories, the duration and fee remain the same as applied to provisional licences.
- It will be a penal offence for a holder of a category W (Tractor/Works vehicle) learner permit (provisional licence) to carry a passenger unless the vehicle is constructed or adapted to carry a passenger and the passenger is a qualified person, i.e. a person who holds a full driving licence for the vehicle category for at least two years.
- All persons with a learner permit (provisional licence) for category A, A1, or M, (motorcycle/moped) must when driving such a vehicle display a yellow fluorescent tabard bearing the letter 'L' not less than 15 centimetres high in red on a white ground, in clearly visible vertical positions worn over the chest clothing. The 'L' plates are to be to the front and rear of the person's torso. It will be a penal offence not to so display L-plates. This regulation takes effect as and from 1 December 2007.
- A person who is a first time holder of a learner permit, for a motorcycle, works vehicle or car (licence categories M, A1, A, W, B and EB) cannot take a driving test for a six month period after the commencement date of the permit.

EXCHANGING FOREIGN LICENCES

With effect from 1st January 2007 Bulgaria and Romania joined the European Union and driving licences from these countries are mutually recognised for driving purposes in the EU. Drivers with a valid licence from Bulgaria or Romania need not exchange, as there is mutual recognition of national driving licences issued by member states without any obligation to exchange licences.

NON-DOMESTIC WATER METERING PROJECT

During 2007, work has been ongoing to install meters on water supplies to all non-domestic consumers.

The Corporate, Finance and WEE directorates have been working together on a range of significant project related issues that needed to be addressed comprehensively, in preparation for a revised way of doing business. This includes devising and implementing arrangements for synchronisation, quality checking, maintenance and exchange of customer data between the Contractor and the Council.

The process has included a review of work practices and procedures to deal with the following:

- (a) Applications for connections to our water/waste water services.
- (b) Customer data collection, maintenance and updating.
- (c) Metering, including meter replacement and meter reading.
- (d) Dealing with customer queries.
- (e) Billing and collection of charges.

The roles and responsibilities of staff in each directorate and the IT systems necessary to automate and streamline workflows have also been examined.

During the analysis a range of specific issues were identified for policy formulation and following detailed analysis an updated set of policies covering the provision of the service has been drawn up and will be implemented from now on.

Similarly, a charter of service has been prepared, which clearly defines, for the first time, the basis on which our services are provided and clarifies the respective responsibilities of Donegal County Council and customers. The Charter has already been circulated to some customers and will be circulated to all customers early in 2008.

Meter reading and billing cycles have also been reviewed and customer billing will be changed in the case of some customers to reflect this. Details will be notified to customers early in 2008.

The work has also included a detailed analysis of consumption data from a substantial sample of customers, which has informed predictions about overall consumption by the non-domestic sector in 2008, for the purpose of formulating charges and projecting income.

Details are included with the report from the Water Environment and Emergency Directorate on the Non Domestic Metering Project.

SUPERANNUATION - ROADS

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €2,362,600 in expenditure under this heading.

Programme Group 3

WATER SUPPLY AND SEWERAGE SOLÁTHAR UISCE AGUS SÉARACHAS

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €1,169,800
Draft Budgeted Income: € Nil
(Pages 7-10 of Blue Pages)

SUPERANNUATION - WATER SERVICES

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €1,169,800 for expenditure under this heading.

Programme Group 4

DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES & CONTROLS DREASACHTAÍ FORBARTHA AGUS STIÚRADH

Budgeted Expenditure: €169,200
Budgeted Income: €Nil
(Pages 11 - 13 of Blue Pages)

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €143,700 for expenditure under this heading.

Members Representative Associations

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €25,500 for expenditure under this heading - see Programme Group 8 in this section of report.

Programme Group 5

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION COSAINN NA TIMPEALLACHTA

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €143,200
Draft Budgeted Income: € Nil
(Pages 14-16 of Blue Pages)

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €143,200 for expenditure under this heading.

RECREATION & AMENITY
CAITHEAMH AIMSIRE AGUS TAITNEAMHACHT

Draft Budgeted Expenditure: €179,600

Draft Budgeted Income: € Nil

(Pages 17 - 18 of Blue Pages)

SUPERANNUATION - RECREATION AND AMENITY

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €51,000 in expenditure under this heading.

FORBAIRT NA GAELIGE

Tá soláthar iomlán de €128,600 i mbuiséad 2008 le forbairt a dhéanamh ar na seirbhísí i nGaeilge ó Chomhairle Contae Dhún na nGall.

Tiocfaidh deireadh le Scéim Údaráis Áitiúla Dhún na nGall, a ullmhaíodh faoi Alt 11 d'Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003, i mí Dheireadh Fómhair. Cuirfear béim ar leith, mar sin, ar na cuspóirí eile sa scéim sin a chur chun cinn, agus ar chur 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 Ghlor na nGael srl. Beidh ar an Chomhairle Scéim Teanga úr a ullmhú i mbliana chomh maith do na blianta 2008-2011.

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 gá le réimse seirbhísí aistriúcháin de dhíth ar bhonn leanúnach chomh maith, agus le cur leis an mhéid ábhar a théann amach sa dá theanga, lenár gcoimintintí 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.

Lena chois 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 himmheánach, 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 €128,600 in the 2008 budget for the development of services in Irish from Donegal County Council.

The Donegal Local Authorities Language Scheme 2005-2008, prepared under Article 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003, expires in October. Particular emphasis will, therefore, be placed on advancing the remaining objectives of the current scheme and 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. The Council will also be obliged to prepare a new Scheme for the years 2008-2011 during the year.

In recognition of the major commitment to provide a complete service through Irish from the Dungloe Public Service Centre, and to work towards 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.

There will be an ongoing requirement for a range of translation services and a need to increase the volume of material provided bilingually, 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 fulfil that obligation.

In addition, the Council requires ongoing daily translations, and 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, 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 and speedily 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: €11,954,700

Draft Budgeted Income: €11,852,200

(Pages 20 - 22 of Blue Pages)

HIGHER EDUCATION GRANTS

Donegal County Council awards grants and pays fees under the Local Authorities (Higher Education Grants) Act 1968 -1992. The Council administers the scheme on behalf of the Department of Education & Science. The 2008 Draft Budget includes a provision of €5,995,100 of which €5,892,600 is recoupable from the Department.

In June 2006, the Minister for Education announced that the Vocational Education Committees were to be given sole responsibility for the administration of third level student maintenance grants. It was also anticipated that legislation would be introduced to unify the various grant schemes in operation. Progress on the matter remained slow during 2007. It is still unclear at this stage whether or not local Authorities will continue to administer the Higher Education Grants Scheme in 2008/2009.

Monies expended directly on the Scheme (grants and fees) are fully recouped from the Department, except for a fixed sum of €7,388. The cost of staff salaries and indirect costs such as telephone, printing & stationery, advertising, travel, provision and maintenance of computer equipment and systems are not recoupable. Another significant hidden cost arises from the delay by the Department of Education & Science in refunding eligible expenditure to the Council as this results in the Council having to carry the expenditure on overdraft in the interim.

The Scheme is advertised annually and the closing date for the receipt of applications is the 31st August each year. In order to qualify for a grant intending applicants must satisfy the requirements of the Higher Education Grants Scheme.

A number of changes were made to the 2007/2008 Higher Education Grants Scheme. These included: -

1. Reckonable Income limits

- a. 3.5% increase in income limits in respect of "Ordinary" rate of maintenance grant.
- b. 7.8% increase in income limits in respect of the Special rate of maintenance grant.

2. Rates of Grant

- a. 10% increase in the "Ordinary" rate of maintenance grant.
- b. 14.3% increase in the Special rate of maintenance grant.

3. Student Service Charge

- a. Increase in student service charge from €800 in 2006/07 to €825 in 2007/08
- b.

4. Maximum Fee Limit

- a. Increase from €5,730 in 2006/07 to €6,110 in 2007/08

5. Eligibility Limit for Postgraduate Scholarships

- a. The eligibility limits for postgraduate scholarships has increased to €16,000.

6. Inclusion of Rural Social Scheme

The "Rural Social Scheme" (RSS) was included as an eligible payment for the Special Rate of Maintenance Grant. The RSS will be considered an eligible payment retrospectively to the 2006 Schemes.

HIGHER EDUCATION GRANTS SCHEME - 2007 INCOME THRESHOLDS

Reckonable Income Limits for the ordinary rates of grant for the period 1 January, 2006 to 31 December 2006 (the tax year 2006):

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	€38,675	€41,085	€43,500	€45,920	€48,335
4-7	€42,490	€45,150	€47,805	€50,465	€53,120
8 or more	€46,140	€49,025	€51,905	€54,785	€57,665

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

In the 2007/2008 academic year, where 2 or more children (or the candidate's parent) were pursuing any of the courses listed below, the reckonable income limits were increased by €4,685, where there are 2 such children €9,370, where there were 3 such children and so on, by increments of €4,685.

The courses in question were:

- Full-time third-level courses
- Recognised PLC courses, student nurse training or student garda training
- CERT courses of at least one year's duration
- Full-time Teagasc courses in agricultural colleges
- Recognised full-time further education courses of at least one year's duration in Northern Ireland

MAINTENANCE GRANTS RATES 2007/2008

	Non-Adjacent Rate	Adjacent Rate
1 Full Maintenance	€3,420	€1,370
Part Maintenance (75%)	€2,565	€1,028
Part Maintenance (50%)	€1,710	€685
Part Maintenance (25%)	€855	€343

The adjacent rate of maintenance grant is payable where the student lives 24 kilometres or less from the college he/she plans to attend. The non-adjacent rate applies to everyone else, including all mature students both dependent and independent.

SPECIAL RATE OF MAINTENANCE GRANT FOR 2007/08

Grant	Standard Grant	Special Rate Amount	Total Grant
Adjacent Rate	€1,370	€1,310	€2,680
Non - Adjacent Rate	€3,420	€3,270	€6,690

The Special Rate of Maintenance Grant was introduced in 2001 to provide assistance for students from disadvantaged and low-income backgrounds. It is essentially a top-up grant and is awarded in conjunction with the ordinary rate of maintenance grant.

To avail of the Special Rate of Maintenance Grant the candidates reckonable income had to include one of the Social Welfare Payments listed in Appendix III of the Higher Education Grant Scheme for 2007.

A total of 337 students availed of the Special Rate of Maintenance Grant in 2007.

GRANTS AWARDED 2007

Student Type	New	Renewal
2 <u>Grants Awarded</u>	423	839

A total of 1416 applications were received in 2007. Of these 1262 grants were awarded to undergraduate and postgraduate students in Ireland, and undergraduate students in the U.K.

- 1077 undergraduate students
- 185 postgraduate students

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €5,959,600 under this heading for retired VEC Personnel. This expenditure is 100% recoupable.

Budgeted Expenditure: €4,299,600

Budgeted Income: €347,900

(Pages 23 - 27 of Blue Pages)

FRANCHISE AND ELECTIONS

The 2008 Draft Budget provision of €200,800 covers salaries of staff (not including fieldworkers) engaged in the preparation of the Register of Electors. Preparation of the Draft 2009/10 Register of Electors will commence in the latter part of 2008 and will form the core of the final register that will come into force on 15th February 2009 and will, together with any Supplement, be the register in use for the European and Local Elections in June 2009.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government carried out a nationwide Electoral Campaign in relation to the preparation of the 2007/08 Register 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 in the lead up to the Dail Elections in May 2007. This was seen as an interim measure in what to be an ongoing process of review examining every aspect of the compilation of the register, including, inter alia, the use of the PPS number as an individual identifier. Donegal County Council received recoupment of €170,649.54 under the special measures.

No additional resources were made available to local authorities in relation to the preparation of the 2008/09 Register. It was, therefore, not possible to recruit additional fieldworkers so data gathering has been carried out by Council Revenue Collectors as in years pre 2006. There is no indication at this stage whether additional resources will be made available from central government in 2008. The Draft Budget for 2008 does not contain any provision for recruitment of additional fieldworkers.

The Donegal experience in relation to the Electoral Campaign, together with recommendations on changes to improve the accuracy of the register, were contained in a report to the November 2007 Council meeting. The report has been adopted and will be forwarded to the Department for consideration.

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

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government issued Circular Letter F.04/07 dated 24 January 2007 regarding the provision of electoral system information leaflets in accessible format. Referred to in that Circular was arrangements being made at the time to record the information in Irish. This work has now been completed and information is now available on the electoral system in Ireland, in Irish, in audio CD and cassette format.

This information is identical to that of the eight leaflets published in hard copy format. These are:

- An tSlí a dToghtar an tUachtarán How the President is Elected
- An tSlí a dToghtar an Dáil How the Dáil is Elected
- Mar a Thoghtar an Seanad How the Seanad is Elected
- Parlaimint na hEorpa (An tSlí a dToghtar Ionadaithe na hÉireann) How Ireland's Representatives in the European Parliament are Elected
- An tSlí a dToghtar Comhaltaí na nÚdarás Áitiúil How Members of Local Authorities are Elected
- An Reifreann in Éirinn The Referendum in Ireland
- Eolas do Vótálaithe faoi Mhíchumas Information for Voters with Disabilities

- Clár na dToghthóirí The Register of Electors

The Council has arranged for the display of the CDs and cassettes at Public Service Centres.

ELECTED MEMBERS' SERVICES

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €1,154,600 to cover the following members' costs:

Mayor's Allowance	€43,600
Deputy Mayor's Allowance	€10,900
Representational Payment:	€522,700
Annual Allowance:	€279,000
SPC Chair Allowance:	€30,000
External Members:	€23,000
Home Travel (Conference etc;):	€145,000
Foreign Travel:	€30,000
Member's Insurance:	€5,300
Provision of Broadband Access:	€10,000
Mobile Phone Allowance	€20,100
Member's Gratuity Scheme	€20,000
Civic Entertainment	€15,000
Total	€1,154,600

An annual allowance is paid to both the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor in respect of the reasonable expenses of that office. A budget in the amount of €54,500 is proposed in 2008 to include the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor's Allowances.

The Annual Allowance provision has been increased to €279,000. This fixed annual allowance is designed to defray in a structured way reasonable expenses incurred in connection with the performance of the member's functions and duties.

The annual allowance for Chairs of Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Chairs increased to €6,000 in January 2007. This amount remains unchanged in 2008.

The Representational Payment is a salary type payment, which was introduced in January 2002. It is linked to a Senator's basic salary, with

increases applied on a pro-rata basis. A sum of €522,700 is included in the Draft Budget for 2008 in respect of Member's Representational Payment.

The sum of €10,000 is included in 2008 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. Over the past year considerable effort has been expended in producing electronic versions of agendas for Council, GP and Electoral Area Committees meeting. It is intended to further progress and maximise these efforts in 2008.

A Mobile Phone Allowance was introduced in January 2007. Members are now entitled to a mobile phone allowance of 50% of the total vouched mobile phone costs associated with the carrying out of their public duties (subject to a maximum allowance of €600 per annum). The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €20,100 to cover such expenses.

A sum of €15,000 has once again been included in respect of Members Civic Entertainment. Expenditure on Civic Entertainment during 2007 included the provision of a Civic Reception to honour Packie Bonner, together with the purchase of a number of presentational items, which were distributed to various groups and individuals during the year.

MEMBERS REPRESENTATIVE ASSOCIATIONS

Members of Donegal County Council are represented on the following Associations and contribute to both organisations on a yearly basis. In 2007 the following expenditure was incurred: -

Association of City and County Councils (A.C.C.C) - €17,364
Local Authority Member's Association - € 4,500

An amount of €20,400 in respect of the A.C.C.C together with the sum of €5,100 is included the Draft Budget for 2008 (see Programme Group 4 in earlier section of this report).

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €556,200 for expenditure under this heading.

INFORMATION SERVICES

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €123,600 expenditure under this heading.

The Communications Officer has a co-ordinating and advisory role in relation to the following:

- Requests under the Freedom of Information Act 1997 - 2003
- Complaints received from the Office of the Ombudsman
- Public relations activity, and specifically, acting as the first point of contact for the media with the Council, liaising with Council staff in relation to media queries, issue of Press Releases
- Working closely with Information Services and other staff in maintaining the website for Donegal County Council.
- Preparation of the Council's Annual Report

Online Media Monitoring Software was purchased in 2005 to allow for the effective monitoring of media coverage in local and national newspapers, radio and online news services.

The Draft Media Relations Policy sets out the procedures and protocols on how the Council proposes to interact with the media. It is hoped in 2008 to agree an implementation plan and provide the necessary training for managers to give it effect.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

44 requests were received under the Freedom of Information Act to the end of November 2007.

To ensure that the Freedom of Information Act is implemented in a consistent and effective manner, and to take account of staff changes as well as emerging case law, a review and update of decision makers and internal reviewers will be carried out and appropriate training arranged in 2008. This will supplement training provided in 2005.

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 Council. 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 that all time limits applying to requests for information, or for responses to complaints, from the Ombudsman's Office are met.

15 new complaints were received from the Ombudsman as at 30th November, 2007 with 45 cases ongoing.

Time limits for dealing with complaints from the Ombudsman were introduced in July 2007 as follows: -

- A reply to an initial request from the Ombudsman's for a report on a complaint should be furnished within 4 weeks from the date of the request.
- If a reply has not been received a reminder will issue giving the Council two further weeks to reply.
- In the event that a reply has still not been received a final reminder will issue.
- This reminder will give the Council two weeks to reply and will inform the Council that (a) a notice under Section 7(1)(a) of the Ombudsman Act will issue if the report is not received within that time and (b) a copy of the Section 7 notice will also be sent to the County Manager. A reply to any subsequent request for material or additional information should be furnished within three weeks of the date of request from the Ombudsman's Office.

HEALTH & SAFETY

The effort to improve our management of health & safety continued in 2007. The resources available to this effort were significantly increased in 2007 with the appointment of Safety Advisors to the Housing and the Water, Environment and Emergency Directorates as well as a Health & Safety Project Officer appointed to Corporate Services. The ongoing root & branch review programme to update all current safety documentation, policies & procedures continued in 2007. The process of electing a new Staff Safety Committee commenced towards the end of 2007. The level of staff safety representation is to be doubled from 11 Safety

Representatives to 23. A provision of €194,700 is included in the 2008 Draft Budget.

HSA Improvement Direction

The Council's Improvement Plan for the safe management of traffic on incomplete road surfaces was accepted by the HSA in January 2007, the first local authority in the country to achieve this. The plan was prepared in response to an improvement direction from the HSA. The standard now required by the HSA has significantly raised the level of control required in the management of roadworks. The level of safety management at roadworks significantly improved in 2007. A safety manual for the safe management of non-notifiable minor and routine works was prepared in-house and issued to all roads overseer areas. A programme to for the implementation of site-specific risk assessment was ongoing in 2007. This procedure requires managers and supervisors to pre-plan and document required controls and for operatives to receive an induction before construction work commences.

Incident Reporting System

In 2007 the Council implemented a Council-wide incident reporting system that allows staff in report incidents, accidents and near-misses to a central database. The system allows the measurement of current incident rates in a consistent, coherent and coordinated way. The information on accidents can then be used to investigate control strategies.

Leadership in Safety Training

The Central Safety Committee made the decision to ensure that all senior managers (Divisional/Area Managers) within the Council undergo Leadership in Safety Training. The principle behind the training is this - safety must start at the top. Safety will become a value for all employees only when it is seen, demonstrated and talked about by management and is perceived as something that guides and determines their actions. Commitment must be real, visible and tangible. If this does not happen then translating safety policies, beliefs and principles into meaningful employee behaviour and action will not follow. In this way it is possible to influence the entire organisation and begin the process of developing a robust and sustainable safety culture. By the end of 2007 approximately 80% of Divisional/Area Managers had received the leadership training.

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes provision for the continued strengthening the Council's safety management system. Provision is being made for the establishment of Council-wide safety metrics that can be used to audit performance across directorates and target improvements. Staff safety representation will be strengthened significantly and the development of policies and procedures will continue.

Safety training will be a significant issue in 2008 with various new legislative training requirements that must be met before work can legally proceed.

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 2008 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 2007-2011 will determine our work programme for 2008 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 2008 includes the following:

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

In addition, the County Partnership Committee has agreed to engage in two new projects as follows:

- Lone Working Policy formulation, rollout, provision of software and training
- 'Funcamp' Project in partnership with Co. Donegal V.E.C. and HSE North West

Expenditure in 2008 will naturally be geared towards further deepening the partnership ethos with particular emphasis on achieving improved customer service for the citizens of Co. Donegal. €114,700 is included in the Draft Budget 2008 under this heading of which €80,800 is recoupable.

Programme Group 9

SUPPORT SERVICES/CENTRAL MANAGEMENT CHARGE SEIRBHÍŚÍ TACAÍOCHTA

Budgeted Expenditure: €8,424,100

Budgeted Income: €5,061,000

(Pages 28 - 30 of Blue Pages)

SUPERANNUATION

The Draft Budget for 2008 includes a provision of €597,700 in expenditure under this heading.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Implementation of Integrated Human Resources, Payroll and Superannuation System

The development of an Integrated Human Resources, Payroll and Superannuation System for the Local Government sector is now at a very advanced stage.

The formal procurement process, which was conducted by the Local Government Computer Services Board, has been completed and CORE International have been appointed as the suppliers of the new system. The Draft Budget 2008 includes a provision of €270,100 being the amount payable by Donegal County Council in 2008 towards this contract.

All Project Governance structures have been put in place and approved through the Peer Review Process, which is now a requirement for large scale I.S. projects in the Public Sector.

To date, 27 Local Authorities have confirmed their commitment to the new system and a roll out programme has been agreed. It should be noted that it also proposed that the new system will be implemented in each Town Council.

Three Pilot Sites and three validation sites have been selected as follows:

<i>Pilot Site</i>	<i>Validation Site</i>
Donegal Co. Council	Sligo Co. Council
Kerry Co. Council	Limerick Co. Council
Meath Co. Council	Westmeath Co. Council

The following modules will be available:

Organisational Structure & Departmental Returns

This module is concerned with maintaining the People, Posts, Assignments, Hierarchy, Locations, Divisions, Departments, Sections, Sub-sections etc.

Leave and Time & Attendance

These modules are self-explanatory and are concerned with recording all Leave and Attendance at work. The transactions generated by these modules feed into the Superannuation module which operates on total service to date.

Recruitment

This module is concerned with recruitment competitions, interviews and generation of all correspondence associated with recruitment.

Training

The training module is concerned with Training Strategy, Developing Training Plans, Running Training Courses and recording Awards and Rewards following training.

PMDS

PMDS is concerned with recording Departmental, Team and Personal Development Plans. It also feeds into Training Needs Analysis.

Health & Safety

Health and safety is concerned with Accident and Incident reporting, Health and Safety Training, medicals, Fire Inspections and Drills, Appointments of Contractors and Health and Safety Audits.

Identification & Security

Identification and Security is concerned with the Issue of Id cards, Keys, It access, Logging the issue of equipment, Access to buildings.

Industrial Relations

Industrial Relations is concerned with monitoring Industrial Relations issues in local authorities, including pay claims, and LRC issues.

Regulatory Compliance/Equality/Ethics/Conduct

Regulatory Compliance/Equality/Ethics/Conduct is concerned with Quotas on disabilities, disciplinary procedures, Discrimination bullying and harassment, employee assistance programme, e-working, grievance procedures, accommodation, conflict of interest.

Payroll

The payroll system will calculate pay and deductions based on details stored in HR and Payroll modules replacing the existing Acupay system.

Superannuation

The superannuation system will calculate superannuation benefits and produce Benefit Statements based on HR and Payroll data.

The critical dates in relation to the implementation of the new system in Donegal are as follows:

Commence Data Gathering on Pilot Sites	3 rd Sept. 2007
System configuration, training & testing	4 th Sept. 2007
Configuration and Customisation completed	31 st Jan. 2008
Implementation on site (Pilot Sites)	1 st March, 2008
Pilot Sites 'GO Live'	1 st June, 2008

IMPLEMENTATION OF 'TOWARDS 2016' 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 '*Towards 2016 Progress*'. The pay increases under the '*Towards 2016*' agreement are contingent on an agreed Local Action Plan being developed through local Partnership structures and approved nationally by the Performance Verification Group (PVG).

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 continued in 2007 and a further review of the Annualised Hours arrangements is currently underway.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Implementation of the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) continued throughout 2007, the implementation process has now commenced within all Directorates; in addition the system has also been implemented within the 3 Town Councils. It is intended that full implementation will have been completed within all Directorates by early 2008.

The PMDS Process has greatly facilitated the Training and Development Section in identifying the training needs that exist within the organisation,

through the process the training needs that have been identified are linked with the organisational objectives, this ensures that the training being delivered to all staff members is facilitating the attainment of the objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan and the Annual Budget of the organisation.

In addition to these objectives the Health, Safety and Welfare training needs of all staff members are continuing to be addressed through a comprehensive training programme, a wide range of programmes were delivered during 2007 including some of the following, Safe Pass, Manual Handling, CSCS, Safety at Sea etc. A new Induction Programme has also been developed during 2007 and this will be made available to all new staff being recruited from January 2008 onwards, this will ensure that the Health, Safety and Welfare requirements are brought to the attention of all new staff members at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Stranorlar Regional Training Centre has once again performed to the highest of standards during 2007 delivering a wide range of courses for Roads, Water and Housing Staff. During 2007 over 1500 training days were delivered to Donegal County Council Staff alone. A Full Time Trainer has recently been recruited for the Centre and this will ensure that the Centre continues to be at the forefront of Local Authority training provision.

A Total of €305,000 has been provided for Training and Development, including Salary costs in the Draft Budget for 2008. In addition a provision of €750,000 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 delivered.

STAFF WELFARE

During 2007 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 Quinn Healthcare 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 2008. It is intended to hold a Retirement Planning Seminar in May 2008 for members of staff who are due to retire within the next four years, and also to continue our Long Service Award programme commenced in 2007. Finally, whilst the Employee Assistance Programme(E.A.P) 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 was conducted in 2007, and the services of a provider of dedicated open access E.A.P. will be engaged in 2008. The Draft Budget 2008 includes €110,800 under this heading.

CUSTOMER SERVICES PROVISION FROM PUBLIC SERVICE CENTRES

The schedule of customer contacts and activity in the area of cash receipting for 2006 and projections for 2007 are set out hereunder for comparison purposes. The data excludes customers for Motor Tax and related services, which is detailed separately in this report.

2006 Schedule

	Donegal	Dungloe	Carndonagh	Letterkenny	Milford	Total
In Person	8073	10844	7672	8121	3792	38502
By Telephone	29945	30163	33364	39745	20446	153663
No. of Receipts	7646	5191	7529	7714	4621	32701
Value	€5.39m	€2.73m	€5.37m	€4.39	€1.97m	€19.85m

2007 Schedule (Projected)

	Donegal	Dungloe	Carndonagh	Letterkenny	Milford	Total
In Person	8783	11237	10084	9260	4894	44258
By Telephone	34580	29638	36357	41832	23096	165503
No. of Receipts	7095	4766	6175	7129	4183	29348
Value	€5.49m	€2.56m	€4.26m	€4.60m	€2.06m	€18.97m

There continues to be a year on year increase in customer contacts. Personal callers are up by 15%. There is an increase of approximately 7.7% in contacts by phone.

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. Preliminary work has been completed to enable on line payment facilities to be offered to Rate & Water Rare customers in 2008, subject to a review of the overall cost implications and of existing arrangements for the collection of income due to the Council.

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.

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 2007 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 and following discussions with the Town Council Members and with the Inishowen Electoral Area Committee it was agreed to include a provision for the County Council customers to pay a bill in the Town Council offices. Preparatory work is well advanced to enable these services, including a facility to pay bills, to be available early in 2008.

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 2008 includes a provision of €3,095,600 for this heading.

Introduction

Implementation of the Council's Information Systems Strategic Plan 2006-2009 continued during 2007. Work ranged from network expansion and maintenance 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 continues 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 improving 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 68 locations countywide, 69 various Servers, 1,275 PC's and 722 printers. 33 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 900 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

During 2007 the Council's Revenue Collection Handheld system was upgraded and new equipment was provided to each of our eighteen revenue collectors county-wide. It is proposed to rollout the system to Letterkenny, Buncrana and Bundoran Town Councils in 2008.

Enhanced ICT services were provided to the Stranorlar Regional Training Centre in the past year which included a new network server, twelve replacement desktop computers in the Computer Training Suite as well as the installation of roof-mounted Audio Visual Projectors in the Lecture Rooms for presentations. The availability of broadband in Stranorlar now allows the Council to deliver state-of-the-art computer training at that location.

Expansion of the ICT network continued in 2007 with the addition of a number of sites including the Regional Cultural Centre Letterkenny, Mulroy Bay Bridge Site Office, Ballybofey Library, Bundoran Fire Station, Donegal Town Fire Station and the Water Environment and Emergency services offices at Letterkenny. In conjunction with this expansion, upgrades were made to telecommunications links serving Bundoran Town Council and Stranorlar Training Centre to improve speeds and reduce running costs. A major Microwave telecommunications link between County House Lifford and the Letterkenny PSC working at 100Mbps was installed during the year. The Corporate Internet Firewall was upgraded to improve performance and throughput in conjunction with replacements to key routers on the network. 2007 also saw the implementation of the Council's first IP Telephony phone system which was installed in the Regional Cultural Centre. A number of upgrades took place on existing PABX Phone systems to enhance facilities.

Inter-Agency Co-operation

The Information Systems Department continued during 2007 to provide the Citizens Information Units in the Public Services Centres with access to the Comhairle network for information uploads via the Council's Government Internet VPN connection. In conjunction with this service, secure inter-agency connections were maintained between the Council's networks and Department of Social Community & Family Affairs systems. The Council provides Internet facilities to FAS, DSCFA, CIU and the NRDO in various Public Service Centres throughout the county.

I.S. Support for PABX telephone systems and handsets is also being provided to DSFA, 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.

Council Members' Computer Project

ICT services to Council Members continued in 2007 with particular emphasis on the provision of broadband facilities. This has been achieved using a range of technologies including Fixed Wireless, Group Broadband, Eircom DSL and Mobile 3G. At the end of 2007 all Council Members countywide will have access to high speed Broadband using one of these technologies. This will greatly assist the promotion of the member's extranet and similar web based systems in 2008.

Systems Development & Implementation

The systems programme is quite extensive and diverse. Information is set out hereunder in relation to some selected projects which may be of interest to members.

Council Website www.donegal.ie

The main advance in the development of the website in 2007, was the provision of a fully developed version in the Irish language. All information on the Donegal County Council website is now available in both English and Irish. Donegal County Council was one of the first Local Authorities in the Country to provide a service at this level. The development of the website is an ongoing process which involves ensuring that the content provided on each Council service is current and relevant. Statistics show ever increasing use of the website with Planning being the most popular section.

Future development of the website will include the use of Web 2.0 technologies such as online video, blogs etc. The website will also enable the public to pay for a broader range of services online.

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 2007. The system receives an average of 160,000 hits per month currently. E-Planning received further national recognition in winning the Chambers of Commerce Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards 2007 - Planning Services. Councillor John Boyle, Méara, accepted the award at a major ceremony held on Thursday, 8th November at the Burlington Hotel, Dublin.

The Chamber's award is in addition to previous recognition at national level in 2006 when the e-planning system was adjudged the best government to citizen application at the Inside Government Innovation through technology awards 2006. International recognition also arrived in September 2007 when the system was selected as an example of European e-Government best practice and was showcased with 50 other systems at a major EU e-Government conference and awards ceremony in Lisbon Portugal to co-incide with the Portugese presidency of the EU.

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. A pre-planning module also allows prospective applicants to ascertain the likelihood of obtaining planning permission for a particular site using GIS

technology. The E-Planning system was extended to Town Council's in 2007 as part of the development of new Town Council websites.

Human Resources Payroll and Superannuation

Donegal is one of three pilot Counties for a major Local Government Human Resources system which will be implemented nationally over the next three years. A substantial body of work has been carried out in the current year both locally and nationally in terms of procuring a suitable application, agreeing business processes and collecting relevant data. Substantial effort will be required across the organisation in 2008 to ensure that a successful outcome is achieved.

Electronic Parking Fines

The electronic Parking Fines system already implemented in Bundoran, Ballybofey Donegal Town, Ballyshannon, and Letterkenny was extended to Bunrana in 2007. The manual method of using notebooks by the Traffic Wardens to issue parking tickets has now been replaced by the use of mobile handhels 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. A secure e-mail system has also been introduced to facilitate the transfer of data with Shannon Motor Tax Centre.

Members Extranet

This is a secure website which has been developed to provide the Council Members with access to a data repository of interest to them. It is populated with agendas and minutes relating to Council and Committee meetings. It has also been used 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 in the conduct of meetings generally and eliminate duplication of data entry. It can also be used by the Council to make the Members aware of notices, up-coming events etc.

Town Council Websites

New websites for the Town Councils of Bundoran, Letterkenny and Ballyshannon were developed and launched in 2007. A site for Bunrana was launched in 2006. These websites now offer a very comprehensive range of information relating to the services provided by the Town Councils in these towns and also serves the public by highlighting other areas of relevance such as Accommodation, Events and Entertainment. The websites will undergo further development and expansion in 2008.

Housing - HOME

Development continued in 2007 with systems analysis and design work concentrating on enabling the HOME system to provide enhanced support for electoral area-based service delivery. In addition, specification of requirements to streamline the annual rent review were completed together with identification of improvements to the system that would support greater cooperation and integration between the County and Town Council Housing functions.

E-Direct - Contact Management System

E-Direct is a computerised contact management system which allows all contacts from members and the public to be recorded, routed to the appropriate official and responded to within prescribed timescales. The system has been introduced in the Milford PSC for public contacts and in the Information Systems Department for technical support requests.

In 2008, priority will be given to the utilisation of the system to support the handling of members' representations, in accordance with agreed arrangements.

Fire Service Licence Application System

This system was developed for the Fire Services to record details relating to Fire Safety inspections within County Donegal, and was rolled out in 2007. This automates a previously fully manual system.

Non-Domestic Water Metering Project

A large project has been underway within the Council in 2007 to meter all non-domestic properties within the County, and to provide a new billing and customer management system for non-domestic water consumers. There is a major Information Systems element to this project in terms of systems provision and flow of information between relevant systems.

Housing Grants

The replacement of the current DPG and ERG grants has necessitated the development of a new system to handle the changes brought about by the new grants. This system will make it easier to administer these grants and will also benefit the application and award process.

Geographic Information Systems

The Council's substantial database of Geographic Information was used extensively in 2007 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. 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 Letterkenny Plan review in 2007, innovative GIS tools and techniques were used for the analysis of the neighbourhood theme. This involved creating added value datasets to analyse the extent of existing neighbourhoods and comparing them to service zones, access infrastructure and proposed planning policies. These were all plotted and published in hardcopy and used in workshops. GIS was used extensively to help elected members visualize proposed policy areas during various consultation workshops.

Maps were produced to support the Letterkenny Gateway Proposal for the Gateway Innovation Fund.

Agreement has been reached with the Ordnance Survey Ireland re the location of a map agency in the Letterkenny Public Service Centre. This will involve the reselling of Osi Maps through the PSC and the service will commence in January 2008.

SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT

The systems development and implementation programme will continue during 2008. Key projects to be developed and implemented include the following:

- Integrated Human Resources, Payroll and Superannuation system
- Document Management Expansion
- Electronic Consultation for public policy matters
- Non Domestic water billing
- Extension of electronic payments
- New Library Management system
- Managing Council Business - phase 2
- Network and systems upgrades including e-mail.

ERNACT - INFORMATION Society Initiatives

Through participation in the ERNACT (www.ernact.net) 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.

A number of projects were completed in 2007 and preparations have commenced to seek new project funding to coincide with the latest round of EU Inter-Reg funding programmes which begin in 2008. Donegal County Council project priorities include wireless technologies / mobile applications, electronic public service delivery and regional economic development using Information & Communications Technologies.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME - BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

The Government's 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 and advanced telecommunications services as a means of assisting Donegal in the alleviation of its peripheral 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 operational. During 2007 construction work was completed on 6 new networks in the following towns:

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

The phase 2 construction contract cost €11.5m of which an amount of €1.2m represented the required local contribution by Donegal County Council from the Economic Development fund.

The Council is currently working with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to secure backhaul connections to these networks in order to make them operational. In addition, the DCENR are in the process of appointing a managed services entity to manage the networks. Following completion of these matters, the Council will work with the managed services entity and the DCENR on an ongoing basis to promote the networks locally and fast-track applications for connections to services. The completion of this project is extremely significant in that all towns in the County with a population of 1500 people possess open access fibre based networks offering the potential to enable competition and choice in the telecommunications services market.

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. The construction of these links is kept as a standing item on the broadband agenda by Donegal County Council in terms of discussions with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR).

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 in turn will allow the provision of fixed wireless and similar broadband services to the rural areas.

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, Donegal County Council and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. 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. Donegal County Council's financial contribution to this project is €75,000 together with considerable staff time.

Considerable progress was made on this project in 2007 with the appointment of a Service Provider, North West Electronics Derry, in February. At the end of 2007 it is anticipated that construction work on the County-wide distribution network will be completed and fixed wireless broadband services will be available in rural parts of the County and the periphery of towns where DSL services are unavailable. This project will complement the former Group Broadband Scheme which has been discontinued nationally but which had funded 8 Schemes in various parts of Donegal during its existence.