



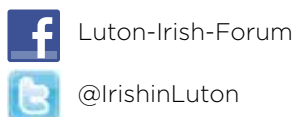
Luton Irish Forum

ANNUAL REPORT 2015



Luton Irish Forum

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Minister Deenihan's Visit

The Charity's Objects are:

To relieve persons in need, poverty or distress, particularly, but not exclusively of Irish descent, through the provision of advice and information concerning health and benefits as well as other support.

To advance the education of the public, particularly in Irish music, drama, arts, the Irish language and through the holding of an annual St Patrick's Day Festival.

Other charitable purposes, particularly the provision of facilities for the benefit of the public, particularly but not exclusively for persons of Irish descent, in the interests of social welfare with the object of improving the conditions of life for those persons in need of such facilities.

LIF Trustees

Tom Scanlon - Chair
Frank Horan - Vice Chair
Marion Curtis - Secretary
Noreen Kellett - Treasurer
Pauline Sylvester - Assistant Treasurer
Joe Ward - Trustee
Pat Leonard - Trustee
Tony Murphy - Trustee
Mick Maguire - Trustee
Siobhan Rooney - Co-opted Trustee
Lorraine Finnegan - Co-opted Trustee

LIF Staff

Noelette Hanley - Chief Officer
Nicola McLaughlin - Advice Service Co-ordinator
Mary Fitzmaurice - Welfare Advice Officer
Anne O'Regan - Welfare Advice Officer
Nikki Kelly - Office Manager
Heather Roy - Modern Apprentice
Pat Wallace - Cleaner/Caretaker

Healthwatch Luton Staff

Nisar Mohammed - Project Manager
Kay Kokabi - Project Officer
Terri Brooks - Project Administrator

Social Work

Student Placements

Judith Ditsho
Sophie Groves

Volunteers

Members of the Board of Trustees
Minibus Drivers - Pat Conaghan and Sharon Gillespie
Minibus Assistants - Pat Turner and Eddie Hannigan
Administration - Gill Grant
Gardening - Ben McElhinney
Irish Passport Application Assistance - Denis Mulligan and Maria Deery
The Tuesday and Wednesday Club Committee and Volunteers
St Patrick's Festival Committee and Stewards
Emerald Pipe Band Members and Committee
Group Facilitators - Marguerite Chishti, Maria Cremin, Bill Grant, Gill Grant, Tony Howe, John Hutcheson, Ann Johnson, Kathleen McElhinney, and Jean Vincent

Plus many further members who volunteered on an ad hoc basis

Funders

Bedfordshire & Luton Community Foundation
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade;
Emigrant Support Programme
Ireland Fund of Great Britain
The Irish Youth Foundation
Luton Airport Limited
Luton Borough Council
The Wixamtree Trust
Your Say, Your Way - Participation Budget

Supporters

LIF Membership
Bushwood Partnership
Macs Plasterboard Systems
Pictons
St Patrick's Festival Sponsors
University of Hertfordshire
University of Bedfordshire

Graphics and Printing

JNB Publishing Ltd -
www.jnbpublishing.co.uk

Images

Mal McNally, Vince Shuel and John Ward
Compiled by Noelette Hanley

Chair's Report

I was honoured to succeed Frank Horan as Chairman of the Luton Irish Forum. Frank has been a founder member and its success owes much to his influence over the years. This success I am pleased to report has continued into another outstanding year of achievement.

Our welfare advisers have successfully dealt with a record number of cases in which can only be described as challenging times. Unfortunately given the recent announcements of further benefits cuts the team will be under constant pressure going forward. They have our continued support and admiration for their professionalism.

In October we were privileged to receive a visit by Mr Jimmy Deenihan TD minister of state with responsibility for the Irish abroad. He experienced firsthand the contribution that Irish emigrants have made to Luton, and the relevance of the Forum in supporting the Diaspora.

The St Patrick's committee once again organised a fantastic week of theatre song and dance, which now places Luton St Patrick's Festival at the forefront of cultural events in Britain. I wish to express my gratitude to the committee for their dedication. The choir and pipe band have also played a large part in our success.

We have continued to attract a large audience to our cultural seminars featuring such dignitaries as the Irish Ambassador to Britain Mr Dan Mulhall, historian Tim Pat Coogan, Jim O'Hara (history lecturer/founder) and Dr Ivan Gibbons (programme director) Irish studies at St Mary's University. We are currently one of the few organisations engaging with and sometimes challenging the established perception of our history. With your support we will continue with these seminars focusing on the decade of commemoration and the forthcoming presentation by the Ambassador on the life of W.B. Yates.

The Elders Project continues to flourish with the usual Tuesday & Wednesday activities plus an exciting number of coach trips planned for 2015. The group is always seeking new ideas to improve participation.

Healthwatch Luton continues to receive accolades for their amazing work on health and social issues. I have no doubt that the residents of Luton have benefited from their excellent work.

It is very pleasing to report on the involvement of young people in our activities i.e. the large number of GAA players from Luton and Ireland who took

part in the St Patrick's Day parade, the musicians and dancers, the presentation by pupils from Cardinal Newman School and a visit to the centre from a local Islamic faith school.

All this highlights that the Luton Irish Forum serves not one generation but everyone who wishes to improve the quality of life for the Luton community.

Finally this only made possible by the support of the staff, a large group of volunteers, sponsors, supporters, friends, local and national press, radio and TV all who have helped to take the work of the Irish Forum to a wider audience.

Go raibh maith agat.

Tom Scanlon
Chair

“ I enjoyed the evening with Tim Pat Coogan immensely. I tip my hat to all at the Luton Irish Forum for providing the community with such educational, grand, events. I can't wait to return again ”



Welfare Report

This year we have focused on improving systems and ways of working so that we can provide the best quality service whilst meeting high demand. We have further increased our involvement in a local initiative between the local authority and the advice sector called Luton Access which is being developed to improve access to advice for people in the locality. Our involvement has given us an equal standing with much larger organisations such as the CAB (Citizen' Advice Bureau) and secured our status as a key stakeholder in Luton.

We implemented the move to an electronic recording system this year - Advicepro - that is allowing us to provide up to date, timely information to funders and internally to monitor trends and caseloads and overall reduce time spent producing monitoring information.

We continue to represent the Irish community on key forums including Luton Action Against Poverty (LAAP) and the Job Centre Plus (JCP) Customer Representatives Group. In recognition of the value our officers bring to these forums JCP District Manager asked us to take part in a stakeholder group for organisations working with clients with mental health issues as part of their work to improve the way they work with those clients.

We also had coverage of issues faced by our clients who are unable to work in the Irish media including a piece on Patrick, pictured here, who had our help to successfully appeal a benefit decision.

The involvement in the Luton Access programme and continued participation in the Luton Advice Network has made it possible for our team to make use of high level expertise and in turn gain outcomes for clients which they might otherwise have not had access to. We are currently working with the Luton Law Centre to take a complicated case to the Upper Tribunal - a Social Security Appeal for an older vulnerable lady who has 2 grown up severely disabled children. The lady has been to numerous agencies that let her down and would not be able to access the level of support needed if not for the relationship between LIF and the Law Centre.

We have accessed gateway assessment and benefits overview training through a closer partnership with other advice providers which has improved the initial contact with the service for clients coming into or telephoning reception - staff are able to deal with basic enquires and more easily identify issues this allows us to allocate work effectively.

In the period April 2014 to March 2015 we secured a massive £825,430.85 in

financial outcomes for our clients and recorded 1144 positive outcomes. A third of all work carried out was in relation to disability and sickness benefit directly with many of those clients also receiving support with additional issues. Housing cases and housing related benefit work accounted for 28% of our work for the whole period since we have been using Advicepro (January-March) we have also been able to record the type of debt more accurately and 48% of debt work for this period was housing related this included rent arrears, utility debts and housing benefit overpayments.

Client feedback received showed that 52% of people felt that the support they got helped to maintain or improve their health and well being and of those surveyed all were either quite or very satisfied with the service, comments included 'all of the staff at the Irish Forum were helpful and made us feel that someone cared', 'more confident when these people (DWP) send me stupid letters' and 'always telling people-get down the Irish Forum. They will sort you out'.

Nicola McLaughlin
Advice Service Co-ordinator

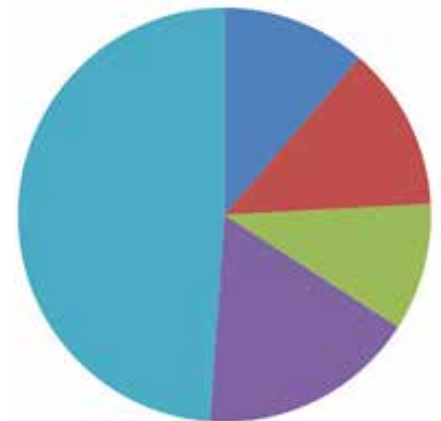
“All of the staff at the Irish Forum were helpful and made us feel that someone cared.”

“Always telling people-get down the Irish Forum. They will sort you out.”

Patrick Masterson - His case study was featured in the Irish Post newspaper



Welfare Enquiries



Community Care
Debt
Other
Housing
Welfare Benefits



Luton's St Patrick's Festival 2015

Friday 13th to Tuesday 17th March

Despite the crisp spring weather, Irish eyes were once again smiling in Luton during the five day celebration.

Hundreds of Irish and other community members followed the traditional route from Manor Road through the town centre led by Luton Irish Forum Emerald Pipe Band and ending with a joint entry of horses and carriages from the Leitrim Association and Macs Plasterboard Systems. This year there were a record number of participants featuring Éire Óg GAA team from County Armagh, The Acorn Players from County Leitrim, Leagrave Comhaltas, Scandalous carnival troupe, the University of Bedfordshire and Harpenden Pipe bands and other walking troupes. The prize for best group parade entry kindly sponsored by London Luton Airport and adjudicated by Barbara Cullinane from the Irish Embassy went to the Merrydowner Morris Men.

On Market Hill, Diverse FM DJ Jim Carway hosted an afternoon of live entertainment including talented London trad band Wraggle Taggle, Ireland's best loved folk band The Fureys and popular local Irish rock band The Skivers.

On the parade day and St Patrick's Day there was an indoor stage at Smiths Square in The Mall with music, song and dance by a host of local dancers and musicians including Whiskey B4

Breakfast, the Conway Lally School of Irish Dancing, Leagrave Comhaltas and many more ensuring there is something for everyone.



Committee member from Éire Óg speaking from the main stage

Cardinal Newman High School pupils took up the challenge of researching their own identities and sharing the results in a six week exhibition at Wardown Park Museum. The pupils also gave a performance based on their own original script exploring the themes of emigration inspired by Brian Friel. The project which was one of the Festival highlights was organised in partnership with Cardinal Newman High School, Luton Culture and theatre company Complicite.

What two of our partners and a dignitary said:

On behalf of myself and St Dymnna I want to say a big thank you to you and the Irish Forum for everything

you did to help our busy weekend run smoothly. The travelling team from Armagh and our kids and parents had a great weekend. Everyone really enjoyed Friday night and the parade on Sunday. I think the highlight was their committee member getting to speak from the main stage... It was an excellent parade this year - Armagh crowd really impressed. Credit to you all involved in the organisation of the weekend, you all did an excellent job.

Gerry Naughton
St Dymnna

On behalf of the Leagrave branch of Comhaltas I would like to extend our thanks to the Irish Forum for inviting our children and musicians to be part of the St Patrick's day celebrations.

Bernie Ballantyne
Leagrave Comhaltas

I am writing to thank you for inviting me to attend the 18th Annual St Patrick's Festival Parade ... I very much enjoyed the event and would like to pass on our sincere congratulations to everyone who was involved with arranging this event. The Parade was superb and I would like to thank you for all your kind hospitality.

Cllr Laura Ellaway
Mayor of Houghton Regis



Minister Deenihan's Visit

The Elders Project

The Tuesday and Wednesday Clubs

The Elders Project facilitates the following activities:

- Weekly Tuesday and Wednesday Clubs
- Monthly chicken and chips
- Soup during the winter months
- Seasonal coach trips
- Turkey & Tinsel
- Holiday Abroad
- Visits to and by other Irish Centres
- Health and wellbeing presentations
- Access to LIF's programme of activities

Over the April 2014 to March 2015 period, there were 100 Tuesday and Wednesday Club sessions. The Clubs attracted an average daily attendance of 46, totalling 4643 attendees. Users attended for tea, brown and currant bread, a chat, 2 games of bingo, a raffle and the 49 club. We also successfully introduced soup during the winter months for the third year running and monthly chicken and chips. Before bingo, we use the opportunity to advise members of other LIF activities and hold short health promotion sessions and 103 people benefited from will writing information.

From May to November, a series of six day trips benefited 294 of our members. The first trip within the period brought a coach load of members to Clacton, followed by Great Yarmouth, Southend

and Brighton seaside resorts and Worcester City. The final day outing of the season was to Dunnes Stores and a Shoe Museum in Northampton in November, when members attended a pre Christmas shopping trip.

We continued to make great use of our minibus [donated by Ballymore Properties in 2007]. The volunteer drivers and assistants have facilitated 396 return journeys for users that cannot easily access public transport to attend our Tuesday and Wednesday Clubs. Unfortunately, the minibus service discontinued in November due to the high running costs. However, we have been able to make alternative arrangements for the majority of people to continue attending through the generosity of car sharers.

“Just a quick one to say thanks for your lovely Irish Forum. My mum takes my granny who has recently moved into sheltered accommodation in Luton every week now.”

The group visited and hosted a trip from the members of Milton Keynes Irish Centre.

Our Christmas party took place in December where 120 members enjoyed a buffet lunch and an afternoon of dancing to Eamons Country Sounds.

Business LINK

In June, LIF facilitated a launch attended by 40 people from local businesses and community groups. 20 Luton based businesses have engaged to date, some of which are Irish or have strong Irish links. Half of these businesses sponsor St Patrick's Festival on an annual basis or support LIF in kind. One of the businesses - Macs Plasterboards is advertising for staff on our social media and has offered to assist clients when moving homes free of charge.

We have been campaigning for the introduction of the Safe Pass - the Irish equivalent of the Construction Safety Certificate (CSCS). As a result of our efforts, a minister's question was raised in the Dáil and Toureen Mangan has offered their facilities free of charge for perspective trainees wishing to take the CSCS exam.

We have raised the matter with the Irish Minister for the Diaspora when he visited in October and we are hoping for on-going correspondence to help resolve the issue. We met with Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce to consider joint membership of Business LINK.

We consulted with members and found that they could not commit to monthly meetings and have adjusted our plans to more an informal network and hope to survey members in the coming months.

Emerald Pipe Band

Another year has gone and the Emerald Pipe Band has continued to meet for practice twice every week amounting to over 500 training sessions.

The bands hard work has paid off as this year they were chosen to lead the procession at this year's St Patrick's Festival in Luton. 10 members of the Pipe Band came to perform on the day.

The band also partook in other events such as the Houghton Regis Carnival, Remembrance Sunday, Potters Bar Carnival, private weddings and many more.

The band also held their Annual Fundraising Dance at St Joseph's Parish Centre. The money raised enabled the band to get a well needed upgrade on some snare drums. We would like to thank everybody who has supported us over the years.

The Emerald Pipe Band has enjoyed playing at numerous events in the past year and are looking forward to playing at many more in 2015/16.

Heather Roy
Emerald Pipe Band Secretary

Baby & Toddler Group

Luton Irish Forum Baby & Toddler Group meets on Friday mornings during term time.

The group is a relaxed and an informal way of getting together and meeting other local parents, carers and grandparents and to provide some fun and activities for children.

We provide a safe environment for babies, craft activities for older children and a range of toys and other activities for all ages including a cinema session, clay modelling, drama and song time.

The highlight of the year was when 9 parents and grandparents who completed a Parenting Course ran by Adult Education were presented with a certificate by Lord and Lady McKenzie.



Other highlights

Siobhan Rooney, partner at Pictons law firm, and Lorraine Finnegan teacher and former chair of the Claddagh Gaels joined Luton Irish Forum as co-opted younger Trustees to ensure the needs of our younger community members are met.

LIF held a fundraising dance to raise money for our crisis fund and raised nearly £900 in total after costs. The crisis fund is there to support the people of Luton who are in desperate need. Joe Corrigan and Signature Swing performed on the night at The Celtic Club to a crowd of over 120 people.

We continued to support a young Traveller to provide an insight on the Irish Traveller community to health and social care and prison workers from the statutory, private and voluntary sector.

In partnership with Runaway Media and Luton Culture LIF hosted a showing of the film *Hunger* directed by Steve McQueen and starring Michael Fassbender.

LIF was involved in the organisation of St Georges Day and High Town Festivals.

LIF was asked to deliver an Irish Cultural awareness workshop to Islamic School Jamiatul Uloom Al Islamia as part of an ongoing enrichment of students learning experiences. The programme for the event included an overview of the Irish community's migration to the UK focusing particularly on their migration to Luton, a brief presentation about religion in the Irish community, an introduction to the Irish language, including some words, phrases and letter exploration, an introduction to the Book of Kells and an introduction to calligraphy writing and tasting of Irish food.

LIF launched a new website and has moved ticketing for events online.

Statement of Financial Activities

1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015

	Restricted Fund (£)	Unrestricted Fund (£)	Total Fund 2015 (£)	Total Fund 2014 (£)
Incoming Resources				
Voluntary Income	-	1,940	1,940	5,322
Activities for Generating Funds	-	56,138	56,138	58,995
Investment Income	-	974	974	537
Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities	277,893	-	277,893	356,961
Other Incoming Resources	-	3,676	3,676	1,715
Total Incoming Resources	277,893	62,728	340,621	423,530
Resources Expended				
Cost of Generating Funds Fundraising Trading				
Cost of Goods Sold	-	-	-	-
Charitable Activities	309,709	65,541	375,250	349,696
Governance Costs	-	2,372	2,372	3,134
Total Resources Expended	309,709	67,913	377,622	352,830
Net Movement in Funds	(31,816)	(5,185)	(37,001)	70,700
Transfer of Funds	-	-	-	-
Surplus for the Period	(31,816)	(5,185)	(37,001)	70,700
Total Funds Brought Forward	371,206	272,650	643,856	573,156
Total Funds Carried Forward	339,390	267,465	606,855	643,856

Details of incoming resources and resources used are given in the notes to the financial statements within the full set of accounts; available from LIF on request.



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Luton-Irish-Forum



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Company Number 5651900

Charity Number 1113069