

Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government Michael Kitt, T.D., today (17 April) announced his approval for a two year Capital Programme for Public Libraries 2009-2010, amounting to €8.5 million in 2009, which will contribute towards the development and refurbishment of a range of Public Libraries throughout the country.

The Minister said that he was delighted to be in a position to deliver on the important commitment of Branching Out - Future Directions, the Government's policy document on Public Library provision in Ireland which was launched in June 2008. With more than 14 million visits in 2008, Libraries are attracting visitors in ever increasing numbers, not just to borrow books, but to avail of the range of services to be enjoyed in Libraries. "Libraries have a space for everyone", he said. The Minister added "an increasing amount of visitors use internet access, avail of CDs or DVDs, learn a language, engage in a study or research or hang out in the teen zone in their local library."

The Minister added that since the publication of Branching Out – Future Directions in July, 2008 he has also provided funding to Library projects in Gort, Co Galway; Tallaght, South Dublin; Roscommon, Meath, Waterford City, Sligo and Wicklow.

In 2009, the provision of funding will contribute to library projects in Borris, Co Carlow; Ballymote, Co Sligo; Kilmallock, Co Limerick; Tuam, Co Galway; Mobile Library for Galway County Library Service; Mullingar, Co Westmeath and Carrickpherish, Waterford City. Ballyfermot Branch Library in Dublin City will receive funding towards refurbishment. In addition, a number of projects underway will get funding towards completion including Greystones, Co Wicklow; Mountmellick, Co Laois; Clara, Co Offaly and Kildare Town.

Subject to public finances being available in 2010, library projects in Carlingford Co Louth; Wexford Town; Bettystown, Co Meath; Roscommon Town; Ballymahon, Co Longford; Mhuinebeag, Co Carlow and Swinford, Co Mayo will receive grant aid.

The Minister noted that the Programme will further the aims of "Building Ireland's Smart Economy - A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal" launched by An Taoiseach in December 2008. It is estimated that the building and refurbishment of these local libraries will create over 100 local employment jobs in construction, fit out and ICT.

"Taken together" Minister Kitt said "this level of projects in many parts of the country demonstrates continuing commitment by the Government to the Public Library Service despite the current challenges being faced by the public finances." The Minister stated "This shows the Government's appreciation of, and commitment to the valuable educational and social service provided by our Public Libraries."

In conclusion, the Minister thanked all those who had contributed to the Programme, including An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and each of the Library Authorities. He particularly wished to thank the staff of each Local Library for their professionalism, dedication and enthusiasm which "makes every visit to your local library a rewarding one" and for their continuing commitment to providing a valuable and very worthwhile service to all sections of the community at local level.