



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

# **CLARE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD WELCOMES ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT**

**- Implementation Plan to have direct impact on lives of people with disabilities**

**County Clare, IRELAND, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2007** – The Clare County Development Board today said that the ongoing countywide accessibility audit of public buildings and amenities would have a significant impact on the lives of people with disabilities, the elderly, advocacy groups and carers of people with disabilities. The Board said that the results of the audit would form the basis of an Implementation Plan under which the needs of people with disabilities would be considered in every aspect of Clare Local Authorities work.

Under the Disability Act 2005, all service providers are obliged to address physical features that make it difficult for disabled people to use their services. The accessibility audit of 224 sites under the control and ownership of Clare Local Authorities includes every public building, car park, amenity area/beach, playground, pier, public toilet, landfill site, civic amenity site, fire station, library, burial ground, road, footpath and pedestrian crossing within fifty-four towns and villages. As part of the review process, Clare Local Authorities this week completed a series of public consultations in Kilrush, Killaloe, Ennis, Shannon, Ennistymon and Tulla.

*“I would like to congratulate Clare Local Authorities for hosting the public information sessions in which people were asked for their input into the audit process”,* stated Cllr. Patricia McCarthy, Chairperson of the Clare County Development Board.

Cllr. McCarthy added, *“The results of the audit and the remedial works to be carried out will be prioritised in terms of best practice while the results of the consultation process will feed directly into the subsequent Implementation Plan for Clare Local Authorities. This*

*implementation plan will then become the basis through which funding is sought under the National Disability Strategy Funding going forward by Clare Local Authorities”*

*“I welcome the development of a clear strategy in this area, which will directly impact on the quality of the lives of the people of Clare. It will also reflect their priorities in the work to be done in the future”, she concluded.*

The accessibility audit forms part of a Draft Sectoral Plan that has been developed by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The Plan requires all local authorities to consult with organisations and people with disabilities, modernise buildings, appoint a designated Disability Liaison Officer and Access Officer, and to appoint of an Equality Officer. Local Authorities are also required to place a strong emphasis on the inclusion of accessibility in all areas of Local Authority work such as the assessment of housing needs, special initiatives, and the implementation of a code of practice for the employment of people with disabilities in the local authority service. Currently, the number of people with disabilities employed by Clare County Council is higher than the national average. Clare County Council is also working closely with the National Disability Authority in the construction of its new headquarters at the New Road in Ennis.

The County Development Board has as a priority action for 2006-2008 that Clare will have completed an access audit of the external environment with respect to accessing public buildings and amenities in the county.

According to Catherine O'Hara, Community and Enterprise, Clare County Council, *“This priority action includes all public service providers in the county. In order to develop an integrated and joined up approach, the County Development Board, through the Community and Enterprise section of Clare County Council has established a network of all access officers in public service areas in the county to progress the action.”*

*“Going forward, the implementation plan that will be drawn up from the findings of the accessibility audit must reflect the needs and priorities of people with disabilities, advocacy groups, the elderly, carers of people with disabilities and the elderly in County Clare. Enough emphasis can't be placed on the importance of the consultation process when carrying out the accessibility audit and we are delighted that those concerned have come forward and engage in the recently held public consultations”, Ms. O'Hara added.*