

LOCAL AUTHORITY TIMES

Vol. 27 No. 1
Summer 2025
ISSN No. 07 91-8267

IPA
An Foras Riaracháin
Institute of Public
Administration

BLUEPRINT FOR

FUNDING DUBLIN

Inside: Implementing Ireland's Water Action Plan ■ Universal Design Homes
■ Regional collaboration key to unlocking Ireland's bioeconomy

Contents

PAGE 2

Funding Dublin

A priority area for the proposed Local Democracy Taskforce is likely to be the financing of local government. Given the importance of the Dublin city region, this article by Ger Turley and Stephen McNena from University of Galway examines the financing of Dublin, and recommends a set of funding proposals for a Dublin of the twenty-first century.

PAGE 6

Implementing Ireland's Water Action Plan

The Water Action Plan 2024 sets out the measures that are necessary to protect and restore water quality in Ireland under the EU Water Framework Directive up to the year 2027. LAWPRO will be central to the implementation of the Plan.

PAGE 10

Universal Design Homes

Working in partnership, the National Disability Authority's Centre for Excellence in Universal Design and Age Friendly Ireland have published an Internal Layout Checklist for Universal Design Homes.

PAGE 12

The benefits of workforce planning

A Strategic Framework for Workforce Planning was introduced for local government in spring 2025. This article, by Dr Arpita Pal of the IPA, looks at how the framework is helping local authorities take a more consistent, forward-looking approach to workforce planning by aligning decisions with changing service needs and policy priorities.

PAGE 16

Regional collaboration key to unlocking Ireland's bioeconomy

The bioeconomy plays a vital role in meeting Ireland's climate targets, supporting biodiversity, and creating sustainable jobs across regions. Significant progress has been made through the National Bioeconomy Action Plan 2023-2025 and the updated National Planning Framework. However, ensuring these national strategies are effectively embedded into local and regional planning remains a priority.

PAGE 18

Tenant purchase, a policy that has shaped Irish housing, and still does

Following the publication of her book on tenant purchase by the IPA, Dr Aileen Hayden writes about a trend that continues to shape the Irish housing landscape.

Thank you to all of our excellent contributors featured in this edition of Local Authority Times. To be involved in the next edition, contact us at latimes@ipa.ie

ACTION AREAS

2025 is likely to be a big year for local government. Councils, elected a year ago, have settled in and are trying to ensure effective implementation of policy and to deliver on commitments made to citizens. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is developing terms of reference for the Local Democracy Taskforce identified in the *Programme for Government 2025*. We hope to be able to share with you more information on the Taskforce later this year. However, a prominent issue is likely to be local government financing. The article by Dr Ger Turley and Stephen McNena of the University of Galway explores a number of possibilities in this regard.

Environmental policy remains a vital concern for local government. Sadhbh O'Neill, the Communications



and Engagement Lead at the Local Authorities Water Programme (LAWPRO), explains the priorities in the Water Management Plan and LAWPRO's role in supporting the achievement of the measures included in the new Plan. Policy implementation was also an important theme at a conference on Ireland's bioeconomy, organised jointly by Teagasc, the South-East Regional Assembly and Munster Technological University.

Housing is also of vital importance for local government in 2025. In this issue we include a review of the 2025 IPA/Housing Agency annual Housing Conference, an article on universal design, and a contribution from Dr Aileen Hayden on her recently published book on tenant purchase.

My sincere thanks to all our contributors, and colleagues in the Institute of Public Administration. If you would like to feature in the next issue, do get in touch.

Joanna O'Riordan, Editor



2025 Blue Flag and Green Coast Awards

On 16 May, An Taisce announced the International Blue Flag and Green Coast Award recipients for 2025. The awards were presented by Mr. James Browne TD – Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage at the presentation ceremony held in the Ravenport Resort in Curracloe, County Wexford.

Speaking at the ceremony, Minister Browne, who presented the award flags said, 'Given that the Blue Flag programme is an internationally recognised symbol of high standards in water quality, environmental management, environmental education and safety, I am honoured to present a record number of awards today – 99 Blue Flags and 70 Green Coast Awards'.

Minister Browne continued, 'this didn't happen by magic. Great credit must go to local authorities, An Taisce, coastal communities and particularly all those local volunteers who have worked tirelessly around the country to keep so many of our coastal areas, beaches and marinas in pristine condition for us all to enjoy'.

Ms. Cathy Baxter, Director of Education and Community Action at An Taisce said, 'We were delighted to be back in the sunny south-east once again, to present The Blue Flag and Green Coast Award Flags for the 2025 season. There are an unprecedented number of sites receiving awards this year. We would like to congratulate all the Local Authorities, marina operators and Clean Coasts groups responsible for managing the awarded beaches and marinas to the excellent standards required.'



Tramore beach

'Never again should a people starve in a world of plenty'

The historic town of Kilmallock and the wider Limerick community were deeply honoured to host the National Famine Commemoration 2025 on 17 May. President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins officiated at the commemoration, which featured military honours and a solemn wreath-laying ceremony. The National Famine Commemoration 2025 was held at the Kilmallock Famine Memorial Park, a site of profound historical significance, located within the Kilmallock Union Workhouse complex. The local community in Kilmallock established the Park on the grounds of a mass Famine grave. A plaque at the entrance to the park carries the hopeful message: 'Never again should a people starve in a world of plenty.'

Mayor of Limerick, John Moran, delivered the welcoming address. Following the commemoration, he commented: 'Today, we remember a period in our history that changed Ireland forever, even up to this day. This National Famine Commemoration being

hosted in Kilmallock has represented an opportunity for us in Limerick to pause, reflect and take time to remember our past and the journey to today. Limerick was not spared during the Great Famine. Indeed, it was one of the counties most acutely affected by it. As we commemorate all who died during that time, we now have an opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved as a nation.'



President Michael D Higgins speaking at the National Famine Commemoration 2025 in Kilmallock, County Limerick



Since the end of 2022, a number of reports have been published on the theme of local democracy and the devolution of fiscal powers to local government in Ireland.

Dr Gerard Turley and Stephen McNena, J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics, University of Galway

BLUEPRINT FOR

FUNDING
DUBLIN



We had the report of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly (DCA) in December 2022,¹ followed by the Dublin City Taskforce² and the Seanad Public Consultation Committee reports³ (both in October 2024), and in January of this year the *Programme for Government 2025–Securing Ireland's Future*. A common recommendation is for the establishment of a Local Democracy Taskforce, which will examine, among other considerations, the financing of local government. Given the importance of the Dublin city region, this article examines the financing of Dublin, and recommends a set of funding proposals for a Dublin of the twenty-first century.

Municipal finance and the funding of cities

Cities are engines of knowledge, innovation, and growth. Per capita, cities generally spend more than other municipalities because of larger spending needs and ever-growing demands for a broader range of public services. How cities are funded is very diverse, and depends on a number of factors, including size, economic conditions, demographics, and the extent of urbanisation. The practice also deviates from theory and so-called best practice, due largely to political, administrative, and country-specific factors.

Globally, cities fund operating expenses and the delivery of public services using a combination of local taxes, user fees and charges, and transfers/grants from central government. To finance infrastructural investment, the usual sources of capital income are development levies, assets sales, central government transfers, and loans.

Taxes are usually defined as local if the municipality has rate-setting powers, at the margin. This leads to greater accountability, more transparency, and better decision-making at the local level. Common local taxes worldwide are property taxes, sales taxes, business taxes (in a variety of forms), motor vehicle taxes, and miscellaneous taxes (examples include gambling taxes, advertisement taxes, and entertainment taxes). In some countries there is a local personal income tax, whereby the municipality piggybacks on the national personal income tax regime by applying a surtax on the national income tax rate.

Local government funding in Ireland and Dublin

The funding of Ireland's local authorities depends on whether it is for current or capital spending. The main income sources for recurring spending are property tax, user fees and charges, and inter-governmental transfers in the form of central government grants.

¹ Dublin Citizens' Assembly (2022). Report of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly, <https://citizensassembly.ie/previous-assemblies/dublin-citizens-assembly/report/>

² Taoiseach's Taskforce for Dublin (2024). *Dublin City Taskforce report - Capital City* <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/capital-city-dublin-city-taskforce-report.pdf>

³ 'Seanad Public Consultation Committee launches Report on the Future of Local Democracy; recommends setting up Local Democracy Taskforce after the next General Election'. Report on the Future of Local Democracy

Property tax is the only local tax, with separate tax systems for residential property (the LPT, imposed on owners) and commercial property (rates, imposed on users/occupiers). The main charges for goods and services are local authority housing rents, water charges (from Uisce Éireann), parking, charges for use of amenities, planning fees, fire charges, landfill charges, and others. Central government grants for operating expenditures are almost exclusively specific purpose (earmarked/conditional) in nature.

In contrast, capital spending is funded by capital grants from central government, development contributions, asset

disposals, and loans borrowed primarily from the state-owned Housing Finance Agency (HFA). Betterment levies, aimed at defraying the full or partial cost of new public infrastructure investment, are in the form of development contributions. There are no shared taxes and no municipal bond issuances.

Dublin accounts for just over 30% of recurring expenditures by local authorities in Ireland. Based on 2024 budgetary data, local authority spending per person in Dublin was €1,590, as compared to €1,437 nationwide (for all 31 local authorities), and €1,377 for local authorities outside the Dublin city region. The biggest differences between Dublin and the other local

Taxes and charges

1 Commercial rates

To widen the rates base, currently-exempt government buildings should be subject to rates on the basis of the benefit principle - taxes levied linked to benefits received, or simply put, 'he who benefits pays' - as they are users of municipal services. The proposal here is to revise the current legislation (amendments to Schedule 4 of the 2001 Valuation Act) relating to properties not rateable with a full rates valuation and liability for State buildings.

2 Local Property Tax (LPT)

Ensure the periodic revaluations every four years as promised in the legislation take place as the LPT as a residential property tax where bands are continually widened and rates are repeatedly lowered falls short of its revenue potential. If not politically feasible, indexing to the rate of inflation is another option, albeit inferior given the differences in property price changes by region and type. Although a feature of recurrent property taxes, this would address, at least partly, the lack of buoyancy commonly highlighted by the local authorities.

3 Vacant Homes Tax (VHT)

Currently, the VHT is a central tax, and is collected by Revenue. In our view the legislative definition of what constitutes a vacant home, namely any residential property in use as a dwelling for less than 30 days, is too generous, and the rate (currently at seven times the basic LPT rate) is too low, for it to effect change. We propose that this tax be reassigned to local authorities (including Dublin) with local taxing powers. This would allow Dublin to set the base and rate based on the extent and profile of vacant residential properties in Dublin city and region.

4 Derelict sites levy

The derelict sites levy was introduced by national government, with the rate currently at 7%. Again, as with the VHT, given the differences in dereliction around the country, we propose that this levy be reassigned to the local authorities. Currently they keep a derelict sites register. However, the local authorities need increased powers in relation to this levy, including compulsory purchase, rate-setting, enforcement, and collection powers.

5 Visitor tax

A visitor or hotel occupancy tax is usually levied to compensate urban governments for the expanded services provided to tourists and visitors. It is common in many cities around the world, and is becoming more popular as a way of raising revenue and promoting sustainable tourism. Cognisant of the work undertaken in 2023 by Dublin City Council's Finance Strategic Policy Committee on a visitor accommodation tax, we recommend that Dublin be given the power to levy such a tax, and to consult with national government on its design features to reflect local conditions in Dublin.

6 Motor tax

Given the link between the ownership of motor vehicles and the use of local services and infrastructure, there is a strong case that motor tax be assigned to local authorities. Before 2018, receipts from the motor tax were paid into the Local Government Fund (LGF). Motor tax is now paid into the central exchequer. Our proposal is that the yield from motor tax be shared between local and central government. Revenue-sharing arrangements between tiers of government are common in other jurisdictions. Furthermore, in many countries, motor tax is typically a shared tax. The actual share is a decision for central government, in consultation with the local government sector.

7 Congestion charge

According to the INRIX 2024 Global Traffic Scoreboard, of over 900 cities worldwide, Dublin ranked 15th highest in terms of congestion and traffic delays.⁴ In terms of the number of hours lost, Dublin loses 81, third only to London and Paris in Europe. Many congested cities, including London, Stockholm, Milan, Singapore, and New York as recently as January 2025, have imposed a congestion charge. The rationale here is not as a revenue-raising measure but to change behaviour and reduce the congestion in the centre of Dublin city. We propose a congestion charge assigned, designed, levied, collected, and enforced by Dublin.

authorities are the rates share of revenue income (36% for Dublin as opposed to 25% nationwide and only 20% for outside Dublin), and the grants share of revenue income (37% for Dublin as opposed to 44% nationwide and 48% for outside Dublin).

These differences reflect the urban, demographic, and economic profile of Dublin, with a larger revenue capacity and property tax base making it less dependent on central government grants. Indeed, unlike London for example, all of the recurrent property tax rates and revenue in Dublin are set and retained respectively by the four Dublin councils, and are available for spending on local public services. Furthermore, 63% of Dublin's

revenue income is determined locally, in the form of property tax (rates and LPT) and user fees/charges. Nationwide, 44% of local authority rates income accrues to Dublin. In contrast, Dublin receives only 26% of all current grants paid by central government to the local authorities.

Our funding proposals for Dublin

The Report of the DCA comprised 18 recommendations. Significantly, the first two recommendations related to the functions and funding for Dublin. Reflective of an overall desire by its 80 members for greater local democracy, the Assembly recommended that significant spending powers be devolved to Dublin, including in education, healthcare, transport, and childcare. There were fewer details on funding, other than greater devolved powers to introduce or change local taxes, and to raise funds from markets, investment bonds, or loans.

Here we provide more detail on possible future income sources for Dublin. Our specific proposals are based on the need for greater fiscal autonomy and a more diversified mix of funding streams, with income sources that are appropriate, currently underutilised, and easily tapped by local government, in this case Dublin. Divided into two categories, namely taxes/charges and financing for investment, our nine proposals are highlighted here.

Conclusion

Dublin does not have the legal authority to levy new taxes or issue municipal bonds. Enabling legislation by national government will be required. Once enacted, the political feasibility of any new taxes or charges imposed on the Dublin electorate would be the next challenge, and one to be addressed by local policymakers faced with local circumstances, preferences, and choices. For all this to happen there needs to be the political will to devolve powers to Dublin as well as other local authorities. This will require a change in mindset and culture away from the highly centralised nature of our political and administrative system. We wish the Local Democracy Taskforce well in its goal to strengthen local democracy through a programme of local government reform, recognising that, as stated in the *Programme for Government 2025*, 'local government is the beating heart of our democracy'.⁷

⁴ INRIX (2025). Global Traffic Scorecard, <https://inrix.com/scorecard/#city-ranking-list>

⁵ The Housing Commission (2024). *Report of The Housing Commission*, <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f3551-report-of-the-housing-commission/>, p. 75.

⁶ Turley, G. and S. McNena (2019). Local Government Funding in Ireland: Contemporary Issues and Future Challenges, *Administration* 67(4), 1-26.

⁷ Government of Ireland (2025), *Programme for Government 2025—Securing Ireland's Future*, p. 149.

Financing investment

8 Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Land Value Capture (LVC) measures

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Land Value Capture (LVC) measures, involves taxing unearned increments in land values that result from new public infrastructure spending. It is a way for the State to tax some or all of the windfall gain that accrues to landowners benefiting from major infrastructural projects. The Housing Commission report outlined the current LVC-related measures in Ireland, namely development levies, Part V developer obligations, capital gains taxes, residential zoned land tax, and the Land Value Sharing (LVS) scheme (proposed but subsequently lapsed due to the dissolution of the 33rd Dáil in late 2024). By endorsing the LVC/LVS recommendations of the Housing Commission, we urge policymakers to secure for the State (including Dublin) 'a proportionate share of the benefit arising from the zoning and servicing of land'.⁵

9 Municipal bonds

Municipal bonds are debt instruments whereby the local government promises to pay interest and repay the principal on maturity. Muni bonds, as they are often called, have been very successful in raising capital for infrastructure investments in US cities. An alternative to a direct issuance of a bond by a single local authority is for local councils to pool their borrowing requirements and, by doing so, reduce their credit risk and lower the cost of borrowing. This can be done by means of an agency that pools a number of local authorities together. Something similar could be done by the Dublin city region, where resources could be pooled and a muni bond issued by the combined four local authorities.⁶

'local government is the beating heart of our democracy'

Programme for Government 2025

A large, clear water droplet is suspended in the air, just above a pool of water. Inside the droplet, a lush green forest scene is visible, with a large tree in the center. The droplet is perfectly spherical and reflects the light. Below it, a pool of water shows concentric ripples from where the droplet is about to land. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white.

The New Water Action Plan for Ireland

KEEP IT CLEAN

Sadhbh O'Neill, LAWPRO

‘Water is not a commercial product like any other but, rather, a heritage which must be protected, defended and treated as such’

EU Water Framework Directive

The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) is a national shared service working on behalf of the 31 local authorities in Ireland coordinating efforts to achieve good water quality across the country.

On 5 September 2024 the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) launched the Water Action Plan 2024 at the stunning location of the Grennan Mill in Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny. The Water Action Plan 2024 is the third-cycle River Basin Management Plan for Ireland. This plan sets out the measures that are necessary to protect and restore water quality in Ireland under the EU Water Framework Directive up to the year 2027. It can be found online at: gov.ie - River Basin Management Plan 2022 - 2027.

The new plan sets an ambition for an additional 300 water-bodies to achieve ‘good’ status by 2027, with targeted measures to improve over 500 more. Key actions in the Plan include tighter controls on the use of fertilisers that impact water quality, a greater focus on compliance and enforcement with over 60 new staff at local level, and a target of 4,500 farm inspections per year.

LAWPRO was established in 2016 to facilitate a regional approach to coordinate the catchment management and public participation elements of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and to serve as a national WFD office. The WFD is an EU framework for the protection of inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater. It aims to prevent and reduce pollution, promote sustainable water use, protect and improve the aquatic environment and mitigate the effects of floods and droughts.

LAWPRO’s primary role is to support the achievement of the WFD objectives through the development and execution of River Basin Management Plans and accompanying Programmes of Measures. These plans and measures are reviewed and updated every six years, and we are now in the third-cycle River Basin Management Plan.

LAWPRO has six programme areas, which combine to deliver on our strategic goals and the actions assigned under the Water Action Plan 2024. LAWPRO is uniquely placed to work with all stakeholders to deliver on the overall objective of improved and protected water quality.

Commenting on the publication of the Water Action Plan, Anthony Coleman, Director of Services at LAWPRO, said: ‘The Water Action Plan is a further significant step towards protecting water quality across our island. It is LAWPRO’s role to support regional implementation of the “right measure in the right place” on a catchment level. We ensure a consistency in approach to water quality measures across all local authorities in Ireland.

‘We do this through our Communities Team engaging with the general public and the myriad of community and voluntary groups that have a keen interest in their local water bodies; the catchment science and management work in Priority Areas for Action and by implementing the new Farming for Water EIP Project in partnership with Teagasc / ASSAP and Dairy Industry Ireland.

‘As part of the third cycle, we also welcome the commitment to review the work of LAWPRO to determine the level of resources required to meet Water Framework Directive objectives.’

Catchment Community Fora

An ambition in the Water Action Plan is to determine the supports needed for the formation and capacity-building of local forums which will identify and support implementation of measures to protect and improve water quality that meet the needs of communities and other sectoral interests. New Catchment Management Work Plans and supporting Sectoral Action Work Plans will be developed with an increased level of public participation through new Catchment Community Fora.

LAWPRO ran workshops last summer using one pilot catchment per region to explore and develop a community forum model

that will be rolled out across all 46 catchments in Ireland. The process went very well, and we gathered opinions, ideas and suggestions from passionate individuals across various catchments. These pilots will go on to develop a framework for a model on a national scale.

First National Regional Operational Committees Plenary

On 6 November 2024, after the launch of the Water Action Plan for Ireland, LAWPRO hosted the first National WFD Regional Committees Plenary in Portlaoise, Co. Laois. For the first time ever, this event brought together implementing bodies and members from all five Regional Operational Committees (ROCs), and all five Regional Water and Environment Management Committees (RWEMCs) established under previous River Basin Management Plan governance structures, to inform members on the recently published third-cycle River Basin Management Plan.

A total of 160 people attended the event, representing 53 implementing bodies from across the country. The plenary had three sessions primarily focused on the how the Water Action Plan 2024 will be implemented, and the important role WFD Regional Committee members will play within the governance structure.

A Look to the Future

Over the coming year LAWPRO will be hosting community information meetings in all Municipal Districts in the country. Under the Water Action Plan 2024, LAWPRO carries out work in areas identified as having poor water quality, called Priority Areas for Action (PAAs), to support targeted water quality improvements by state bodies and local authorities. These community information meetings are being held to increase awareness about water quality work in the area and to encourage as much engagement as possible with all stakeholders right across the community, including key agencies, special interest groups, and voluntary, public and private sectors. For further information on the work of LAWPRO visit: www.lawwaters.ie

While the third-cycle River Basin Management Plan is now underway, the DHLGH has recently launched a public consultation on the timetable and work programme for Ireland's fourth-cycle Water Action Plan 2028-2033. It is inviting submissions, observations and comments from the public to help shape the main steps and milestones in the process of preparing for the fourth cycle.

This is the first of three public consultation stages related to the three-year development of the fourth-cycle Water Action Plan. Each public consultation will last for six months. The public consultation will run to 25 July 2025.



At the launch of the Water Action Plan at Grennan Mill in Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny Minister of State for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Malcolm Noonan, TD, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth of Ireland, Roderic O'Gorman TD, Anthony Coleman Director of Services at LAWPRO & Mags Keegan Regional Coordinator at LAWPRO. (Courtesy LAWPRO).

The relevant documents may be accessed by clicking on the links in the section titled 'Documents' for web version: <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/ca50c-public-consultation-on-the-timetable-and-work-programme-for-irelands-fourth-cycle-water-action-plan-2027-2032/>



Some of the River Boyne Workshop Participants at the end of the Catchment Community Fora workshop on Wednesday 26th June in Navan. (Courtesy LAWPRO).



Attendees at the first National Regional Operational Committees Plenary. (Courtesy LAWPRO).

Further investment in Ireland's walking trails

Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Dara Calleary announced 22 new trails that will be joining the Department's Walks Scheme, as well as over €465,000 in funding for projects to support and enhance 49 trails already on the Walks Scheme. The 22 new trails announced are spread over 10 counties and include trails such as Siúlóid an tSáis in Kerry, involving 40 landowners, and the Keenagh Loop in Mayo, with over 20 landowners. There are also two trails located on Clare Island.

In addition, Minister Calleary also announced funding of over €465,000 under the Walks Scheme Development Fund to support and enhance 49 trails that are already on the Walks Scheme.

Making the announcement, Minister Calleary said: 'In Ireland, one of our most valuable resources is our beautiful countryside. We are very fortunate to have wonderful walking trails all across the country and to have generous landowners who are willing to allow the public access to trails that cross their lands. My department is committed to supporting the development, maintenance and promotion of recreational infrastructure in line with the aims of 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors,' Ireland's national outdoor recreation strategy.



Keenagh Loop in Mayo

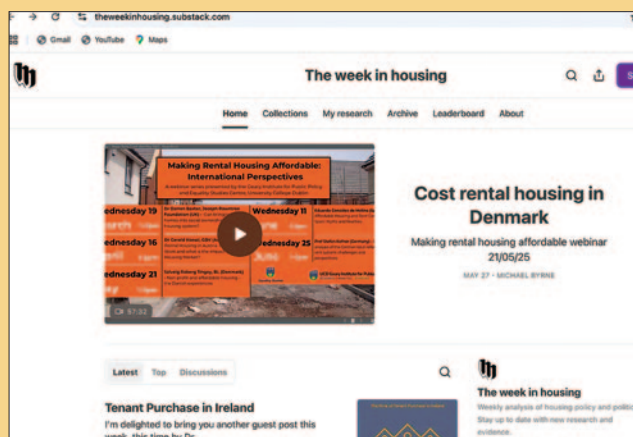
The Week in Housing

The Week in Housing is a regular newsletter on housing politics and policy, with a focus on Ireland. It is compiled by Dr Michael Byrne, a lecturer at the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice at University College Dublin. Articles and updates are mainly for people who work directly in housing research, policy or practice, as well as activists and students. It aims to provide empirical and fact-based analysis.

All content is free; however, Mick does suggest that regular readers subscribe for a modest payment, which supports his ongoing research and the time he dedicates to the newsletter. Paid subscribers receive a weekly one-page analysis of new research and policy. Recent articles include the role of infra-

structure in housing delivery, financialisation of the private residential sector and the impact of cost rental housing.

Mick's newsletter can be found at The week in housing.



UNIVERSAL DESIGN HOMES

Ruth O'Reilly,
National Disability Authority,
and Declan Gaffney,
Age Friendly Ireland



GN

A new
checklist
to support
delivery

Working in partnership, the National Disability Authority's Centre for Excellence in Universal Design and Age Friendly Ireland have published an **Internal Layout Checklist for Universal Design Homes**.

This practical tool aims to support local authorities and architectural professionals to integrate Universal Design (UD) homes into new housing developments at an early stage. The checklist summarises guidelines from the National Disability Authority's **Universal Design Guidelines for Homes in Ireland** report that impact on the internal spatial layout of dwellings, building accessibility, adaptability and inclusion in every room in the home. These guidelines go beyond the minimum standard of 'visitable' dwellings currently set out in building regulations. Homes that are both 'visitable' and 'liveable' can meet people's changing needs over time, so that they can continue living in their own homes and communities as they start a family, get older or become disabled.

The checklist also complements Age Friendly Ireland's **Ten Universal Design Features to include in a Lifetime Adaptable and Age Friendly Home** report. For example, the technical guidance in the checklist relates to design features such as being connected to the outdoors, a home being easy to enter and move about in, and a home having accessible and adaptable bathrooms and toilets.

Five example floor plans are provided with the **Internal Layout Checklist for Universal Design Homes**, to demonstrate how the universal design guidance can be applied in both UD Home and UD Home+ (wheelchair liveable) dwellings. The checklist booklet is supported by an Excel version which provides planners and designers with a useful means of systematically applying universal design guidelines to a range of housing typologies.

Several County and City Development Plans have specific objectives that require a percentage of dwellings in new housing developments to be age friendly housing, designed with a Universal Design approach. This is in line with the **National Planning Framework**, National Policy Objective 44 ('Support the provision of lifetime adaptable homes that can accommodate the changing needs of a household over time') and the **Housing Options for our Ageing Population Policy Statement**, which sets out government policy to support older people to live in their own homes with dignity and independence for as long as possible. Furthermore, **Housing for All**, the government's housing plan, aims to ensure that people with disabilities and older people have access to suitable housing and the necessary supports to live independently and be included in their communities.

Dr Aideen Hartney, Director of the National Disability Authority, notes: 'The checklist aims to make it easier for planners, architectural and housing professionals to implement Universal Design at the early stages of housing projects. We know from experience that integrating Universal Design from the outset of a project is the most successful and cost-effective approach.'

Catherine McGuigan, Chief Officer of Age Friendly Ireland, comments: 'Ireland has a rapidly ageing population and more people than ever before are living longer. Older people want greater options when it comes to ageing in place and a critical part of that is the supply and delivery of Age Friendly housing which enables older people to age in place. I warmly welcome this checklist which will be a valuable tool in supporting technical practitioners to design more Age Friendly housing across Ireland.'



THE BENEFITS OF WORKFORCE PLANNING

Dr Arpita Pal, IPA



As highlighted in the *LA Times* winter issue, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage launched a new Strategic Framework for Workforce Planning in 2023. Developed collaboratively with the Local Government Management Agency and representatives from local authorities, the framework responds directly to growing challenges faced by councils across Ireland. Increased service demands, ageing workforces and shifting policy priorities have created an urgent need for a clear, consistent approach to workforce planning. The framework provides local authorities with practical guidance to manage these challenges proactively and effectively.

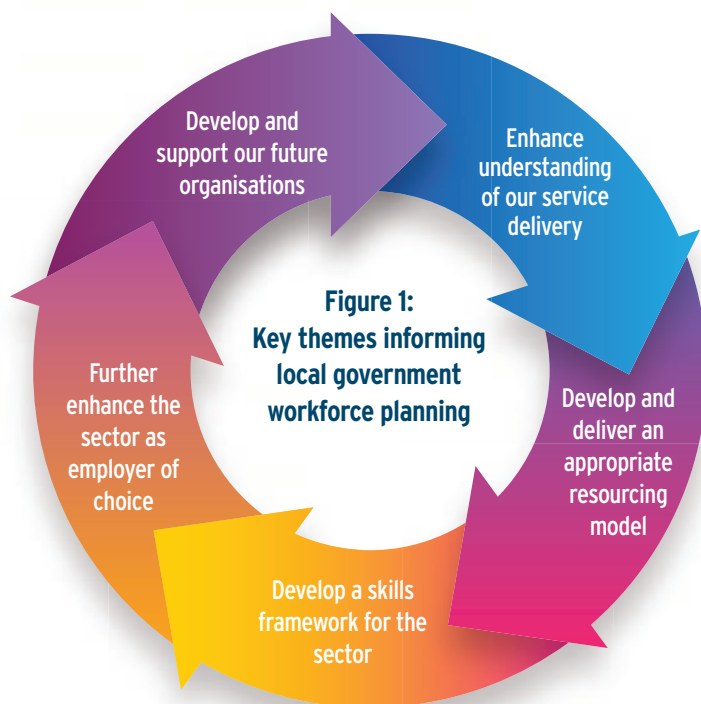
Accompanying the framework are Strategic Workforce Planning Guidelines, published in October 2024. These guidelines offer practical direction on how local authorities can prepare, implement and review five-year workforce plans, ensuring that workforce planning is fully integrated into broader corporate and operational strategies. Local authorities are required to submit their workforce plan within three months of approving their corporate plan—an approach that neatly links staffing decisions with service objectives and resource planning from the outset.

Strategic workforce planning is a regular, iterative process that ensures an authority's current and future staffing aligns with its objectives. It draws on a structured analysis of roles, skills and demographics, alongside an understanding of how services may shift or expand. By encouraging collaboration among different departments and promoting data-driven decision-making, the process helps local authorities remain nimble in the face of changing demands.

Although many local authorities previously engaged in workforce analysis or strategic HR initiatives, the absence of a shared framework meant approaches varied considerably. Staffing decisions were often reactive, shaped by immediate vacancies or service demands, rather than underpinned by long-term planning. The new framework addresses this shortcoming by introducing a unified structure that supports a collective awareness of sector-wide challenges. It also facilitates more purposeful engagement between local authorities and the Department around staff sanctioning, succession planning and capacity-building. Far from treating workforce planning as simply a numbers game, the framework underscores the critical mix of skills, adaptability and engagement that local authorities need to meet their evolving commitments.

Local authorities increasingly face new and complex responsibilities that require specialised expertise and forward-thinking management. Climate resilience, digital innovation and the shift towards more data-driven services demand continuous upskilling of staff and a steady infusion of fresh talent. By placing these emerging policy areas at the forefront of their workforce plans, councils can better anticipate the skill sets needed to design and deliver transformative projects. For instance, a local authority targeting improved energy efficiency may require data analysts who understand energy usage patterns, as well as planners who can map sustainable infrastructure. Similarly, digital transformation initiatives often call for tech-savvy staff capable of implementing cloud solutions or online engagement platforms. In this way, the strategic framework does more than simply fill vacancies; it shapes a forward-focused workforce ready to implement bold new visions for local government.

Under the guidelines, local authorities follow a six-step approach: beginning with extensive internal engagement and external assessment, continuing through an



analysis of the current workforce and the identification of future requirements, and culminating in the development, roll-out and review of a strategic workforce plan. By anchoring this methodology in each authority's corporate goals, governance structures and financial planning processes, the framework helps local authorities anticipate service pressures and allocate resources more effectively.

Twenty strategic actions, grouped under six thematic headings, form the cornerstone of the framework. These actions focus on strengthening service delivery, refining resourcing models, developing a sectoral skills framework, making the sector a more attractive employer, fostering innovation and future-proofing organisations, and supporting more strategic HR management. Specific measures include refining data on local government service profiles, updating job specifications and entry requirements, broadening learning and development, rethinking recruitment and retention practices, and offering shared planning tools and templates for practical implementation.

The six-step approach outlined in the guidelines is meant to function as a cycle rather than a one-off series of tasks. Each step—be it gathering workforce data, engaging stakeholders or revisiting goals—builds on previous insights and informs the next iteration of planning. As local authorities move through these stages, the lessons learned become opportunities for real-time adjustment and refinement. For example, if the analysis phase reveals unanticipated skill gaps, recruitment strategies can be tweaked before the final plan is set in motion. This cyclical structure ensures that workforce planning remains agile, adapting to new service pressures or policy mandates as they arise. Rather than waiting five years to overhaul plans, local authorities can maintain a continuous loop of feedback and improvement, supporting a culture of innovation and responsiveness across the sector.

Workforce planning recommendations

As local authorities refine their approaches, a number of practical considerations can guide the ongoing development and execution of workforce plans, as follows.

- Ensure workforce planning aligns seamlessly with corporate, budgetary and service priorities, so that staff resources are ready to meet organisational goals.
- Standardise data on demographics, turnover and skill sets, building an evidence base for informed decision-making.
- Identify positions at higher retirement risk and establish succession pathways early on, to guarantee continuity of essential services.
- Adopt targeted hiring strategies for specialist or difficult-to-fill posts, focusing on innovative approaches to attract top talent.
- Position learning and development as a proactive response to skill gaps, investing in career progression and leadership capacity.
- Engage managers from multiple departments in identifying workforce gaps, ensuring solutions respond to real operational needs.
- Leverage job redesign, hybrid working options and interdepartmental cooperation to promote agility in the face of evolving demands.
- Foster open and consistent communication with employees, trade unions and stakeholders to build trust, encourage participation and strengthen overall buy-in.

Responsibility for advancing this work is clearly defined: chief executives, directors of service, HR units and line managers all have central roles, and local authorities are encouraged to set up cross-functional working groups. A standard format for strategic workforce plans ensures clarity and consistency, encompassing a profile of the current workforce, documentation of stakeholder engagement, identified gaps and actionable priorities. Notably, a streamlined sanction request process ensures that local authorities link new staffing needs directly to an approved workforce plan, allowing grouped sanction requests to align with each authority's strategic outlook.

A statement accompanying the guidelines' launch highlighted the importance of strategic workforce planning in sustaining effective local government. By offering a consistent model with room for flexibility at a local level, the guidelines help authorities align workforce decisions, corporate goals and resource planning.

Already, many local authorities are starting to put the framework into practice. Some have completed initial engagement and data analysis, while others have convened project teams to consolidate workforce information across departments. Several are already drafting plans that outline key steps for recruitment, staff training, job redesign and new service models. Most councils intend to review progress on their plans at least once a year, tying those reviews to broader service delivery and budgeting cycles.

- Review and update workforce plans regularly, keeping them flexible enough to absorb new policy priorities and changing service requirements.

By embedding these recommendations into day-to-day practices and monitoring them over time, local authorities can remain adaptable and resilient while meeting the expectations of citizens and communities. The framework, along with its guidelines, will continue to evolve as local authorities share their experiences and lessons learned. Ultimately, the shared goal is to develop and maintain a workforce that is skilled, engaged and prepared to deliver high-quality public services in a changing environment.

NEWS



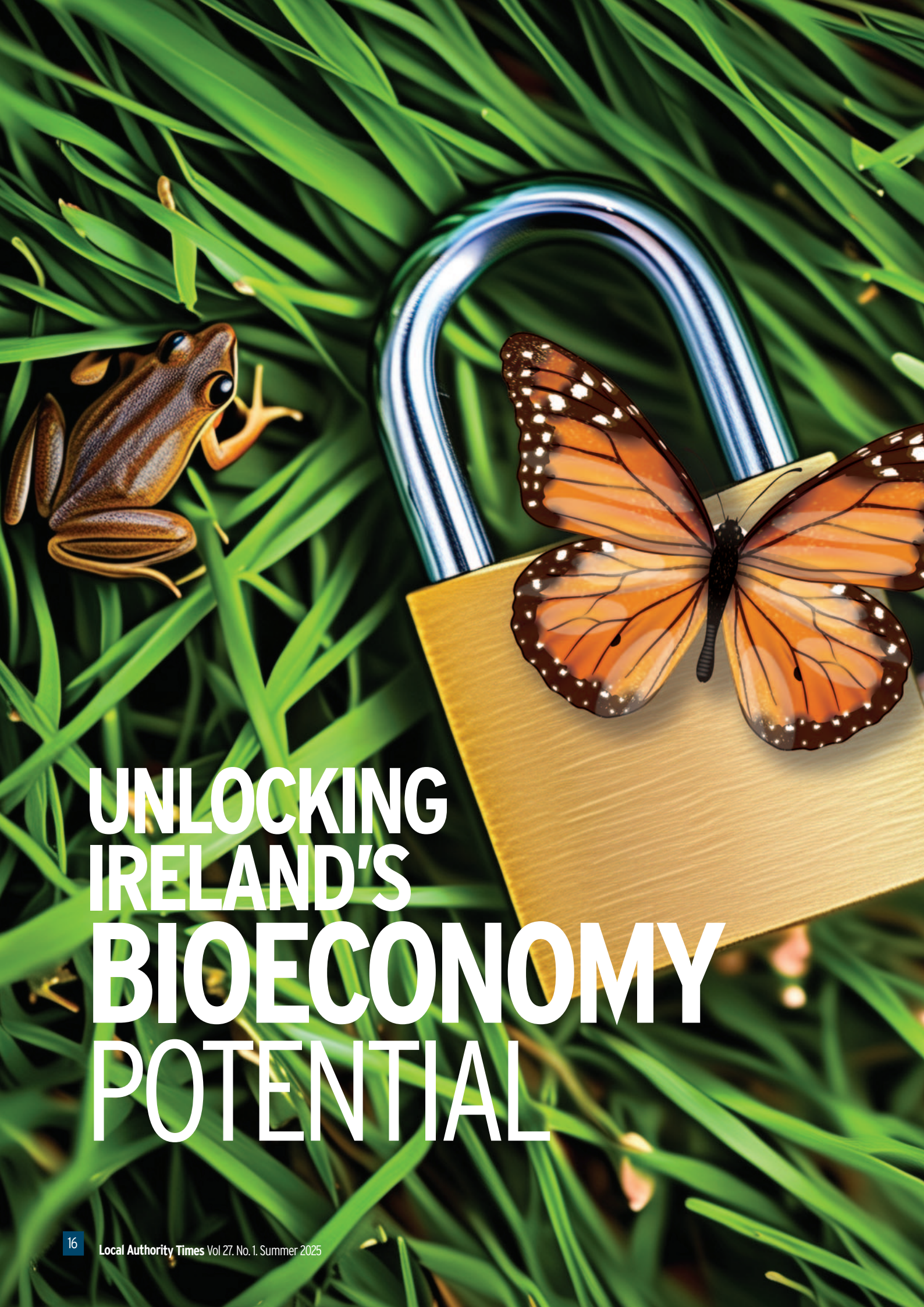
Planners wanted!

A major recruitment drive is underway to attract graduate planners into Ireland's county and city councils. The local government initiative, launched in May, aims to attract suitably qualified graduates exiting degree or masters courses in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Britain and internationally. Successful candidates will have the opportunity to positively shape the future development of cities, towns and villages, turning ambitious projects into reality over the coming decades.

The initiative is part of the Government's Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources, which sets out a roadmap to increase the pool of planning expertise in local authorities. A total of 43 new posts are available in 26 of the 31 county and city councils nationwide.

"Planners are critical to tackling the big challenges facing the world in which we live - including housing, protecting our environment, biodiversity and heritage," said Chair of the County and City Management Association's Planning and Land Use Committee, Liam Conneally.

The Local Government Ireland Graduate Planner Scheme is open to recent graduates with an honours Level 8 degree or higher in planning, or those who are due to graduate this year and expect to achieve an honour in a Level 8 degree or higher, and are entitled to work in Ireland. Visit Local Government Graduate Programme - Local Government Jobs for further details. Successful applicants are expected to take up positions in the autumn.



UNLOCKING IRELAND'S BIOECONOMY POTENTIAL



Representatives from local county councils, regional assemblies, and national government departments met during May to discuss regional bioeconomy development in Ireland.¹

The bioeconomy plays a vital role in meeting Ireland's climate targets, supporting biodiversity, and creating sustainable jobs across regions. Significant progress has been made through initiatives like the National Bioeconomy Action Plan 2023-2025 and the updated National Planning Framework. However, ensuring these national strategies are effectively embedded into local and regional planning remains a priority.

To address this, the Irish teams from two EU-level projects—ShapingBio² and ROBIN³—collaborated to deliver an online capacity-building webinar for local and regional authorities. Hosted by Teagasc, the Southern Regional Assembly and Munster Technological University (MTU), the event combined insights from both projects, a panel discussion with policymakers, and networking opportunities to foster cross-sectoral collaboration.



Professor **Maeve Henchion** of Teagasc and ShapingBio highlighted the importance of policy coordination: 'Effective bioeconomy development depends on strong, ongoing alignment between national, regional and local policies. Insights from our research with policymakers and practitioners across Europe, through the ShapingBio project, along with practical tools developed and tested in the ROBIN project, are helping to support this.'



Dr **Noha Mahmoud** of ShapingBio and Teagasc emphasised: 'The webinar tackled the critical challenge of turning national strategies into action. By building knowledge and facilitating exchange across government levels, we can drive meaningful progress.'

¹ Further information: Bioeconomy

² ShapingBio is an EU-horizon 2020 project that aims to support and accelerate bioeconomy innovation and the deployment of new knowledge in the EU and its member states. Project coordinator: Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research ISI (Dr Sven Wydra).

³ Robin is an EU-Horizon 2020 project that aims to empower Europe's regions to adapt their governance models and structures in ways that accelerate the achievement of their circular bioeconomy targets while promoting social innovation and accounting for different regional contexts.

Key takeaways from the webinar included:

- the bioeconomy's potential to address climate action, circular economy goals, and sustainable development
- the ongoing need for improved coordination between sectors and across EU, national, and regional governance levels
- opportunities to expand channels for inter-regional collaboration and learning, both in Ireland and across Europe
- knowledge sharing nationally, regionally, and locally is vital to scale bioeconomy initiatives.

Colm Walsh of the Southern Regional Assembly and ROBIN noted: 'Translating national strategies into local action is vital. Today's webinar was a valuable contribution to enhancing synergies between all levels of government. Initiatives like ROBIN provide practical tools and the building blocks to empower regional and local authorities to accelerate the achievement of their circular bioeconomy targets.'

Dragica Grozdanić of MTU and ROBIN added: 'The session shared ShapingBio's policy-related insights and ROBIN's practical tools, alongside a dynamic panel discussion. It created valuable space for networking and idea-sharing among policymakers.'

The webinar marked a step towards strengthening cross-county collaboration and advancing unified approaches to bioeconomy development, highlighting the importance of local-regional-national alignment in achieving Ireland's sustainability ambitions.

Also in May 2025, the Environmental Protection Agency published research conducted by the IPA on circular economy and bioeconomy governance in Ireland. The report is available on the EPA website: [Research_Report-479.pdf](#)



TENANT

A POLICY THAT SHAPED IRISH HOUSING – AND STILL SHAPES IT

Dr Aideen Hayden, Chairperson Threshold

PURCHASE:

Tenant purchase has played a defining role in Irish housing policy. Introduced to promote homeownership among low-income households, the scheme enabled one in four such families to buy their homes by the end of the twentieth century—one of the largest redistributions of wealth in the state's history.

But this transformation came at a cost. By the late 1990s, two-thirds of all homes built by the state had been sold, often at significant discounts. The result was a dramatic erosion of the social housing stock, with long-term consequences for housing availability and affordability.

Supporters of tenant purchase have long argued that it provides security, stability, and community investment, particularly in areas of high disadvantage. Critics counter that the policy is short-sighted—benefiting one generation while depriving future generations of public housing. As one detractor put it, it's like 'selling off the family silver'.

Over the years, numerous official reports—from the NESC, ESRI, and most recently the Housing Commission—have recommended scaling back or suspending the scheme. Yet tenant purchase remains politically resilient and, some would argue, more generous than ever, even as Ireland faces an unprecedented homelessness crisis.

So why does this policy endure?

A new book explores this very question. Drawing on extensive new data and interviews, it traces the evolution of tenant purchase from its rural origins to urban expansion, and from post-independence ideals to contemporary housing economics. The book examines nine case study areas in Dublin, analysing who bought, who sold, and what the long-term outcomes have been.



Pictured (l-r) at the book launch: Aideen Hayden, author, and David Silke, Director of Insights and Operations at the Housing Agency.

It also places Ireland's experience in international context, comparing the scheme to the UK's 'Right to Buy'—a flagship policy of Margaret Thatcher's government that similarly aimed to shrink the role of the state in housing provision.

The book argues that tenant purchase has not operated in isolation. It has interacted with other features of the Irish system—such as differential rents, successor tenancies, and funding regimes—in ways that made selling homes a practical imperative for local authorities.

Finally, the book questions the scheme's future relevance. Today, of the more than half a million renters in Ireland, only 154,000 are in local authority homes. Many of these—in flat complexes, apartments, and Part V units—are effectively excluded from tenant purchase.

So where does that leave us?

This study not only examines the past but asks whether tenant purchase can – or should – continue to play a meaningful role in housing policy. And it considers alternative approaches to supporting low-income homeownership that may also help rebuild and sustain Ireland's social housing sector for future generations.

Written by Aideen Hayden, Chair of Threshold and former senator, A Pathway to Homeownership: The Role of Tenant Purchase in Ireland draws on historical sources, data analysis and original interviews to provide the first comprehensive account of the evolution of tenant purchase, which has shaped Irish housing policy for decades. The book was launched in mid-April at the Housing Practitioners' Conference in Athlone, which was organised jointly by the Housing Agency and the IPA. It is available to purchase on the IPA website.

NEWS

IPA's 2025 Strategic Leadership Programme Launched

The Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Services, Reform and Digitalisation, Jack Chambers, attended the IPA offices at the end of March to launch the Institute's 2025 Strategic Leadership Programme.

Closely aligned to the government's *Better Public Services: Public Service Transformation 2030 Strategy*, this programme provides an immersive learning experience across the Public Service, focusing on personal leadership development and advanced leadership at team and organisation level, while also exploring leadership at a cross-government level.

Delivered in partnership with Trinity College Dublin and the Roffey Park Institute, and led in the IPA by Dr Cedric Chau, Director of Senior Public Service (SPS), the programme will provide almost 200 Public Service leaders at principal officer level and above with an immersive learning experience focusing on personal leadership development and advanced leadership at team and organisation level, while also exploring leadership at cross-governmental level.

Speaking at the launch, Helen Brophy, Director General of the IPA, said, 'Embracing a shared approach to learning and development enables the collective prioritisation of key capabilities and skills in emerging areas including digital transformation, AI, climate change, sustainability whilst also achieving system-wide impact on the core skills required to be effective public servants such as building evidence informed policy, data management and understanding the fundamentals of how our public service operates.'



Pictured (l-r): SPS Director Dr Cedric Chau; IPA Chair George Burke; Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Services, Reform and Digitalisation Jack Chambers; and IPA Director General Helen Brophy.

Housing Practitioners Conference 2025–*Momentum in Housing: Partnerships for Progress*—attracts over 400 delegates

Jessica Hannon, Communications Officer, The Housing Agency

The 2025 Housing Practitioners' Conference, *Momentum in Housing: Partnerships for Progress* took place in Athlone on 10 and 11 April 2025. The hugely successful event, organised by the Housing Agency in collaboration with the Institute of Public Administration, highlighted the importance of agencies and organisations working in partnership to accelerate momentum and delivery in the sector, and the need to build and sustain these partnerships. The conference, opened by Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage James Browne TD, saw over 400 housing practitioners join for a day and a half of insightful panel sessions, expert workshops, networking, and a

discussion between Minister Browne and event MC, broadcaster and journalist Sinead Ryan.

Conference sessions included the key priorities in accelerating momentum, exploring the work of state agencies in supporting the sector, and focusing on areas of delivery. Housing Agency CEO Martin Whelan told delegates that he believes more channels are available today to fund and deliver housing than in any previous time over the past two and a half decades. The conference was rounded out with a discussion on the communities people want to live in, with social inclusion and tenant engagement at the core of sustainable communities.

The conference saw 11 expert workshops, hosted by Housing Agency staff across a range of topics including Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), digital transformation in housing administration, vacancy, trauma-informed care and cost rental housing.

Details on the 2026 Housing Practitioners' Conference will be made available on www.housingagency.ie in the autumn.



(L-R) Martin Whelan, Chief Executive Officer, The Housing Agency; James Browne TD, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage; Michael Carey, Chairman, The Housing Agency; Sinead Ryan, Broadcaster and Journalist.



Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, James Browne TD, opened the Housing Practitioners' Conference 2025.

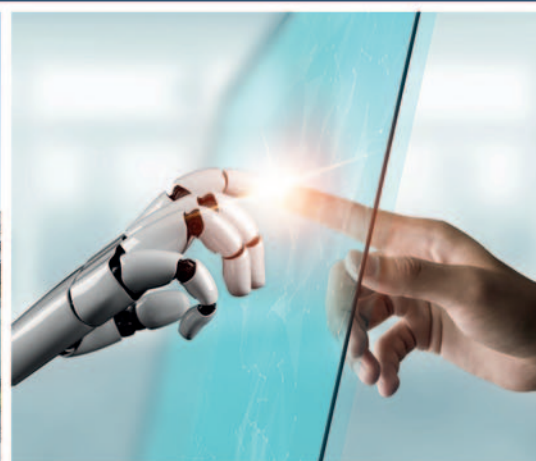


Workshop sessions - Housing Practitioners' Conference 2025.





Building Capability Across the Public Service



The IPA is focused on proactively meeting the current and future workforce needs of our Public Service.

Responsible for advancing the understanding, standard and practice of public administration and public policy, the Institute supports our Public Service to deliver on the complex challenges faced.

Whatever your education, learning and development needs, the IPA's multiple specialist services will support and advise you and your team:

- ✓ NUI-Accredited Academic Programmes
- ✓ Professional Programmes and Advisory Services
- ✓ Leadership Development Services
- ✓ Digital Learning
- ✓ Strategic International Programmes

Learn more at www.ipa.ie