

# LOCAL AUTHORITY TIMES

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**IPA**  
AN FORAS RIARACHÁIN  
INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION

CELEBRATING  
35 YEARS  
1986-2021

**SUSTAINABLE  
URBAN DRAINAGE  
SYSTEMS**

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SUDS



**Inside:** The Story of Ireland's Local Government Management System  
■ Cross-Border Co-operation ■ District Heating ■ PPNs

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A new leaflet series has been published by the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR). Written in a user-friendly style, the series seeks to explain key aspects of the planning system to the wider public.

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It's thirty years since the IPA published the *City and County Management 1929-1990: A Retrospective*. With a new edition of the book on the way in the autumn, this article looks back at the original book.

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## District Heating

In her article, Katie Harrington from Dublin's Energy Agency, Codema, advocates for the greater use of district heating technology as another way to help Ireland meet its targets for decarbonisation.

# REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL



The first edition of the *Local Authority Times* for 2021, it comes out about a year after the first coronavirus lockdown began. But despite the high number of Covid-19 cases and the public health restrictions, the rollout of Ireland's vaccination programme is thankfully gathering momentum. Over the past twelve months, the local authorities have played a crucial role in supporting local businesses and communities and continue to do so. The Community Call programme has been central to the coordinated efforts to support vulnerable people, it sees local authorities collaborate with state agencies and community and voluntary groups to help meet local needs.

Besides helping to deal with the present crisis, the local authorities also have to look ahead and plan for Ireland after the pandemic. The government recently announced funding allocations - through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme among others - for numerous projects that local authorities will help deliver in the coming months and years.

With March's announcement of the landmark Climate Action Bill, it's perhaps fitting that this edition should have an environmental feel to it. It features an article on nature based surface water management, jointly written by LAWPRO, local authority and department staff. Katie Harrington of Codema, an energy agency seeking to accelerate Dublin's low-carbon transition, explores the possibilities of district heating in the capital; Katie also looks at similar efforts in county Mayo to develop a district heating system. There are notes on the Climate Action Bill and an EPA report on local authority enforcement activity.

We also feature articles on new research into local government. The Covid-19 pandemic shone a bright light on the support role that local government plays at community-level. New IPA research considers how the local authorities responded to this unprecedented crisis, and an overview of the report's key findings is provided. It is clear that the structures introduced by the reforms of 2014 helped local authorities to respond in the way that they did. Research undertaken by Colette Benson, Social Justice Ireland, focuses on one of these structures, the Public Participation Networks. Colette looks at the 'on the ground' experiences of PPN stakeholders against the principles of a Council of Europe code of good practice.

Having the capacity and skills are vitally important to bring about local or regional change. In his article, Dr Breandán Ó Caoimh describes a capacity-building programme intended to develop a collaborative and placemaking approach to regional development.

*Local Authority Times* continues to provide a platform for news, information, analysis and opinion pieces from those working in or closely with the sector, and elected members. We are always interested in receiving submissions and feedback from our readers. **Please contact the Editor at [latimes@ipa.ie](mailto:latimes@ipa.ie)**

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NUMBERS

### Key Quarterly Data, April 2021



Up 36.6% on Q3 2019  
Source: Department of Finance

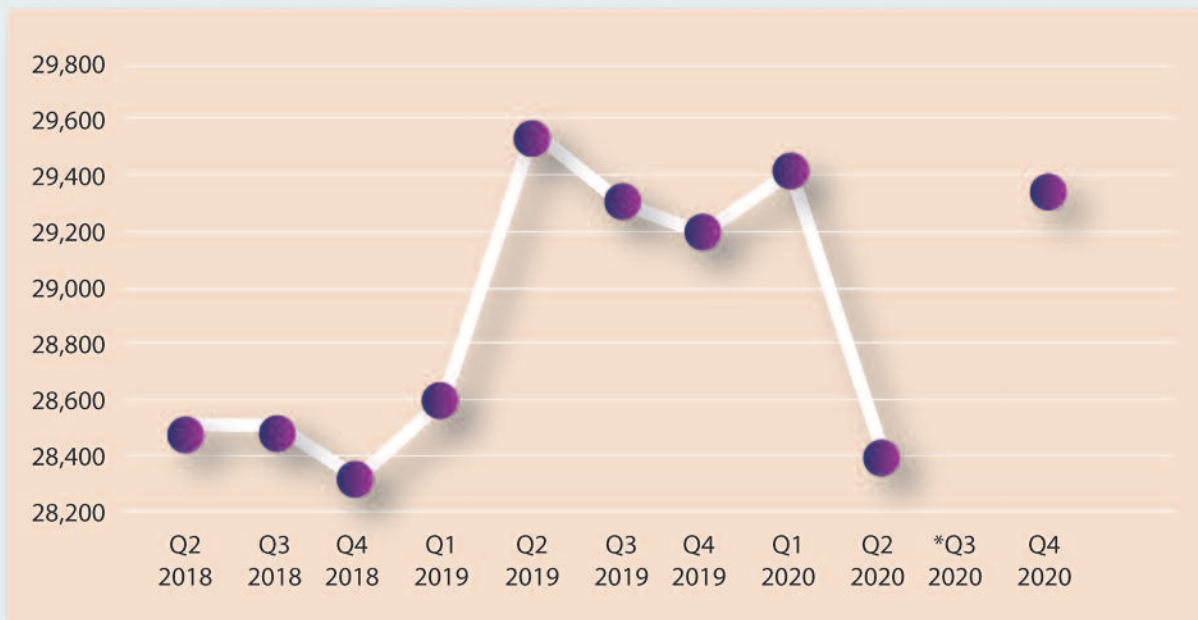


Up 51.4% on Q3 2019  
Source: Department of Finance



Up 1.3% on the same quarter last year  
Source: Revenue

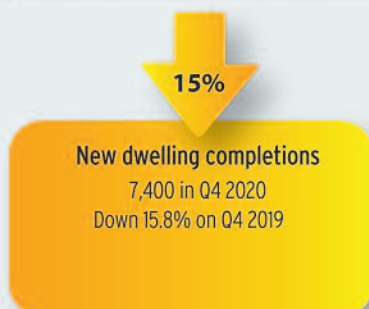
### Total number of local authority staff



Number of staff in Q4 2020 was **29,351**. This is an increase of 190 from Q4 2019. \*Data not available for Q3 2020

Source: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

### Housing & Homelessness



Source: Central Statistics Office



Source: Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government



Source: Central Statistics Office

# INFORMATION GROWTH

Office of the Planning Regulator publishes new planning leaflet series

A new series of online planning information leaflets which contain practical, accessible information on how the planning system works and explain how best to engage with it were published by the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) in January.

**T**he leaflets explain different aspects of the planning system in a clear and concise way. They answer questions and give advice on a range of planning related topics. The aim of the leaflets is to make the planning system clearer from a public perspective and to help inform people on how they can participate in it.

These new leaflets replace a series that was last prepared in the 1990s. Inevitably, a lot has changed since then so their preparation and publication is especially welcome.

Driving public awareness and greater understanding of the planning process is a key function of the OPR, which was established two years ago, and these leaflets are an important contribution to this function.

The leaflets cover 14 key topics in an easy to read and easy to use style with plenty of links to wider sources of guidance and information.



## The leaflets cover:

- **Introducing the Planning System:** Explains the hierarchy of plans and who is responsible for each plan.
- **A Guide to the Development Plan:** Explains how a development plan is prepared, and the important role that the public and communities play in contributing to it.
- **A Guide to Planning Permission:** Gives practical assistance if you want to build or extend your house or if you would like to have a say in a proposed development in your neighbourhood.
- **A Guide to Making a Planning Application:** Provides practical assistance in how to prepare an application for planning permission.
- **A Guide to Making a Planning Appeal:** Defines the roles and responsibilities of the national planning appeals board, An Bord Pleanála and the steps involved in appealing a planning decision.
- **A Guide to Planning Enforcement in Ireland:** Provides an understanding of how planning law is enforced.
- **A Guide to Applying for Planning Permission to Build a House:** Provides information on the main planning issues associated with building a house.
- **A Guide to Doing Work Around the House:** Provides practical guidance on what work you can do around your house without needing to apply for planning permission.
- **Agricultural and Farm Development-The Planning Issues:** Explains the main features of the planning system that farmers and those involved in agricultural development are likely to encounter.
- **A Guide to Planning for the Business Person:** Sets out some of the key planning issues for business owners.
- **Environmental Assessments and Planning in Ireland:** Provides practical guidance on three of the most common environmental assessments; Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA).
- **A Guide to Architectural Heritage:** Provides information on how structures of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest are protected under planning law.
- **Archaeology in the Planning Process:** Provides information on the issues which will arise in the planning process when development is proposed which might affect archaeological heritage.
- **Strategic Infrastructure Development:** Explains Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) by private sector developers, and the procedures involved in applying for planning permission for this type of development

### Launch of Planning Information Leaflets

The leaflets were launched by Peter Burke TD, Minister of State with responsibility for Local Government and Planning on 22nd of January 2021.

Speaking at the launch, Minister Burke commented on the huge benefit that these leaflets will bring.

*'These leaflets are a small but crucial step in the work of the OPR established by Government to, amongst other things, enhance public awareness of the benefits of planning and its role in shaping communities for the common good. These new leaflets produced by the OPR in partnership with my Department and the Irish Planning Institute, will, I believe, be an invaluable tool for the householder thinking of improving their home, the business person in developing their premises or anyone who wants to know more about planning and their role in it.'*

*'As well as a vital public resource, I believe local authority members, Councillors, will find these leaflets invaluable in breaking down the system into approachable segments and highly useful for informing constituents in how the planning process works.'*

The OPR is headed by the Planning Regulator, Mr Niall Cussen. At the launch of the planning leaflets, Mr Cussen said; *'The OPR is working to promote involvement in the planning process. One of our principal roles is to encourage people to contribute to decisions which will have a tangible impact on the places they live and work in, to be aware of how planning impacts on them and be knowledgeable about how to interact with the system.'*

*'Empowering citizens with the knowledge of how planning works will help strengthen Ireland's planning process and*



Peter Burke TD, Minister of State with responsibility for Local Government and Planning



OPR Planning Regulator, Niall Cussen

*generate better planning outcomes for individuals and communities.'*

The leaflets are available in both Irish and English at [www.opr.ie/planning-leaflets/](http://www.opr.ie/planning-leaflets/). They are also available on the website of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and on local authority websites and at libraries and citizens information centres.

### More about the Office of the Planning Regulator

The Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) was formally established in April 2019 on foot of recommendations made by the Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments (the Mahon Tribunal).

The Planning Regulator, Niall Cussen was appointed in April 2019. Prior to his appointment, Niall was Chief Planner at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government from July 2014, having also worked in the Department from January 2000 in a number of professional planning roles.

Before joining the department, Niall had an extensive planning career working for local authorities in Clare, Meath, Dublin City Council and An Bord Pleanála where he worked in all aspects of the planning process.

The establishment of an independent planning regulator is a first in terms of international precedents. Ireland is unique in the world in drawing together planning oversight functions into a new independent public body.

The OPR exists to improve our planning process in the public interest. Our role is to help ensure that the overall planning system works effectively, efficiently and fairly.

Specifically, the OPR:

- assesses the statutory plans prepared by local authorities for their consistency with strategic national (Government) and regional planning policy and regulatory requirements;

- ensures effectiveness of the systems and procedures used by planning authorities in the delivery of planning services for and on behalf of the public through a programme of reviews of local authorities and examination of any complaints regarding systemic matters; and
- drives programmes of research, training and public awareness highlighting the role and benefits of the planning process and encourages greater public engagement in the process.

### Assessment of statutory plans

Since its establishment, the OPR has commenced work on conducting independent assessments of local authority development plans to ensure that they have properly taken on board national and regional planning objectives. So far, the OPR has assessed 70 plans, in 2021, it will assess in the region of 100.

These assessments ensure that relevant government policies are being implemented. Ensuring that issues like urban regeneration, land zoning, transport, housing, employment and how best to sustain our town centres are reflected in development plans. This will mean that that our cities, towns and villages develop in a sustainable way and grow into vibrant places to live and work.

The OPR has also started conducting reviews of the systems and procedures used by local authorities in the delivery of planning services. The pilot phase of the reviews programme commenced at the end of 2020. It is anticipated that four reviews will be completed by the end of 2021.

The reviews programme will identify good practice and achievements, promoting learning between local authorities, as well as highlighting areas for improvement.

### Training programme

In association with the Association of Ireland Local Government (AILG), the OPR has delivered eight training events for elected members of local authorities. These events have proven to be extremely popular. In total, there were 518 attendees at our two physical events in 2019/20 while 614 people registered for our four online webinars in 2020. An extensive programme of planning training is being delivered in conjunction with the AILG in 2021. The first training events were delivered in January and February and 455 people registered for these events.

The OPR-AILG training will ensure that those who make and implement planning policy are fully informed so that the important decisions they make are based on the best evidence and latest information.

The OPR has a staff of approximately 26 including several senior planners and professionals from, geo-spatial, communications and policy implementation disciplines. The head office is located at Grangeegorman Dublin 7.

**Visit [www.opr.ie](http://www.opr.ie) for further information.**

## EPA Report on Local Authority Environmental Enforcement Activity for 2019

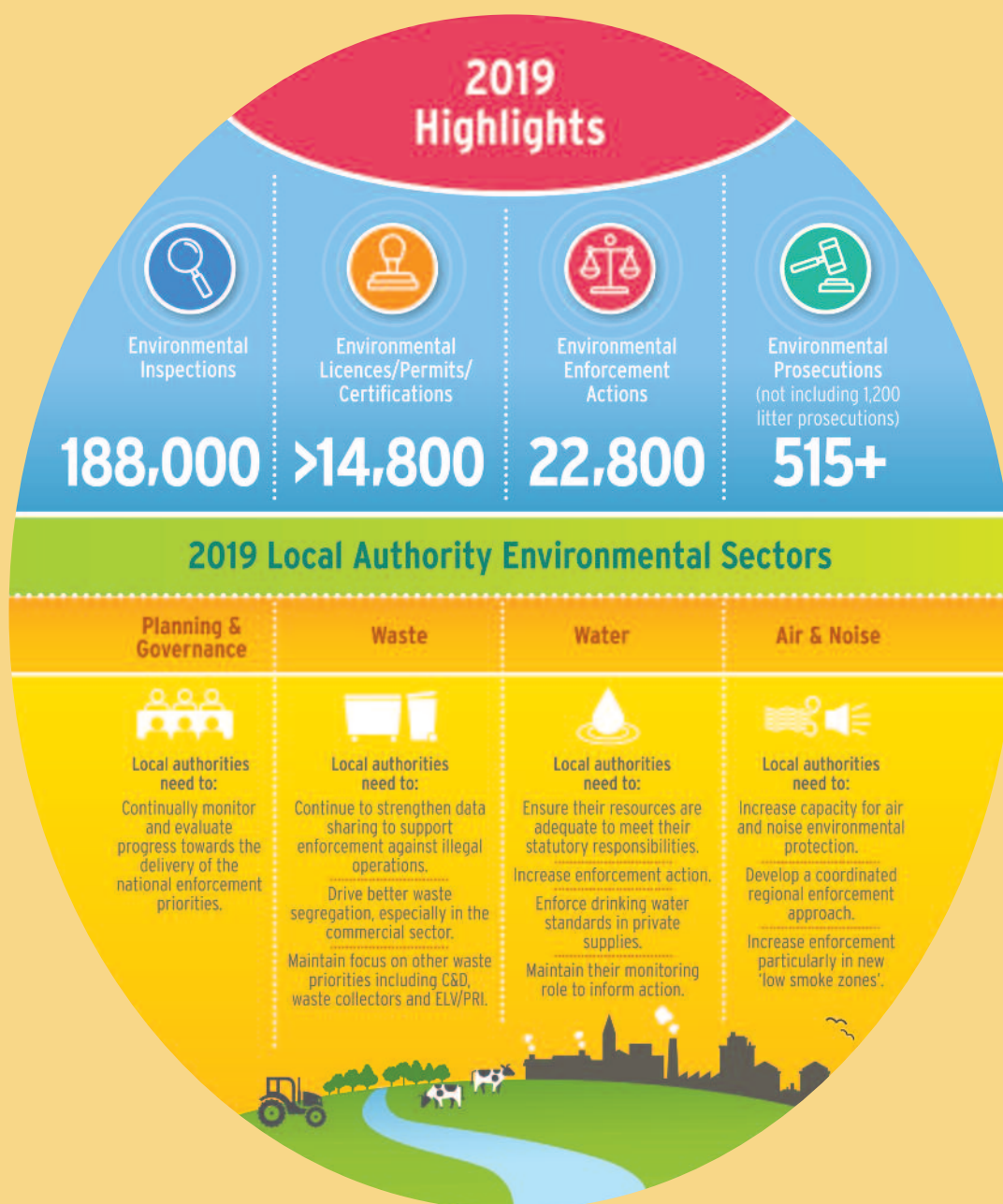
The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently published a report on local authority environmental enforcement activity. Ireland's local authorities have significant enforcement responsibilities to protect our natural environment, more than 500 environmental protection requirements are set out in legislation. The areas of responsibility cover: air and noise quality, water quality, waste management and planning and governance.

The EPA noted that the number of local authority staff working in environmental regulation has increased in recent years; it also

commented upon the better integration of national enforcement priorities into local inspection plans. For 2019, the EPA reported an increase in inspection and enforcement activity by local authorities, especially in litter and waste management. For example, there was a big jump in the number of litter prosecutions initiated in 2019, the figure was 1,200, compared to 350 in 2018. But, the EPA also outlined a series of actions that need to be taken by local authorities to make further progress across their areas of environmental responsibility.

The below infographic sets out the report's highlights:

**A copy of the report can be downloaded from the below link:**  
[http://epa.ie/pubs/reports/enforcement/performanceframework/EPA\\_LAEnforcementReport2019.pdf](http://epa.ie/pubs/reports/enforcement/performanceframework/EPA_LAEnforcementReport2019.pdf)





# CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Local authorities - north and south -  
working together to develop regional assets

**Dr Breandán Ó Caoimh**

Dr Ó Caoimh is a human geographer, who works as an independent consultant in the fields of local and community development, governance, spatial planning and social inclusion. He is also a senior research associate with the ICLRD.



## Enhancing the role of elected members at the regional level

Elected members play multiple roles in local government; these include, *inter alia*, representing communities, setting the policy agenda, providing leadership and performing ceremonial functions. Their roles are fast changing, and they need considerable skills and capacity to keep pace with evolving policy and practice contexts. In addition to representing their electors at municipal, county or city level, elected members are called upon to represent their councils in local authority networks and on regional and inter-regional platforms. Over the past fifteen years, the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) has been supporting local authorities and other actors to enhance their capacity to promote place-making. The ICLRDR is a north-south-USA partnership that involves Maynooth University, Ulster University and the University of Maryland's National Center for Smart Growth (NCSG). Its multi-disciplinary team combines academic and practitioner expertise in spatial planning, geography, local and regional development and good governance, and the ICLRDR has a well-established track record in promoting collaborative and cross-border spatial planning and inter-local authority working. The Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN), which is a cross-border network of eight local authorities, is among those with whom the ICLRDR has worked. This article describes a training and capacity-building programme that the ICLRDR delivered to the ICBAN management board and staff along with senior staff from the region's local authorities.

## Embedding capacity building in local and regional processes

The ICLRDR intervention with ICBAN was developed on the basis of partnership and co-design. Moreover, the capacity-building programme was embedded within ICBAN's wider responses to the needs and potential of the Central Border Region. Since 2018, and with support from the Department of Foreign Affairs's Reconciliation Fund, ICBAN had undertaken research and consultations to capture communities' views on Brexit and the associated negotiation priorities. ICBAN established a Council Senior Officers' (CSO) Forum, and further consolidated cross-border planning linkages. The ICLRDR played a pivotal role in facilitating the work of the CSO - in scoping out opportunities for regional development and in accentuating the merits of a regional approach. The CSO and ICBAN's Management Board identified cross-border and overarching issues and opportunities, including the following: maintaining collaboration in the context of Brexit; becoming carbon neutral; catering for a more diverse and ageing population; promoting connectivity to support innovation; developing knowledge capital; and promoting greater

inclusion. With guidance from the ICLRDR, ICBAN began to frame its responses to these issues within the framework of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), and the Management Board worked to identify and refine regional priorities, through a bespoke capacity-building programme, which the ICLRDR delivered, and which was supported through the Border Animator initiative.

## Capacity Building with Councillors

ICBAN's Management Board comprises twenty-seven councillors from the eight councils in the Central Border Region, namely: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon; Cavan; Donegal; Fermanagh and Omagh; Leitrim; Mid Ulster; Monaghan; and Sligo. Councils put forward nominees on the basis of a DeHondt method, which ensures geographical, cross-party and cross-community representation. The position of chair rotates between northern and southern local authorities annually. Cllr Pat Treanor (Monaghan County Council) served as ICBAN Chair during 2020, and he played an important leadership role; he liaised directly with the ICLRDR in designing the capacity-building programme, and he worked to ensure there was follow-through on the agreed actions that emerged from the various modules. In line with public health guidelines to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, the capacity-building programme was delivered entirely online (using Zoom), during summer 2020. It was formally titled, 'Executive Training and Animation Programme', and comprised three summative modules as follows:

1. Cross-Border Cooperation - the ICBAN Board of Management as leaders and facilitators of Change;
2. Maximising lessons from other regions, including border areas; and
3. From Case-Making to Place-Making.

Module 1 was delivered over two sessions, which looked at:

- a. Governance and planning systems on the island of Ireland - implications, considerations, opportunities and potentials for the Central Border Region; and
- b. Planning and governance opportunities and leverage for the Central Border Region.

This module placed a strong emphasis on moving ICBAN 'up the value chain'. It emphasised the role of the Board of Management as leaders and facilitators of change as part of this process, and indeed, as delivery agents. It took stock of ICBAN's work over the preceding years, and the opportunities/ challenges facing the region, noting that these had been re-shaped by Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. The guest speakers, Dr Karen Keaveney (University College Dublin) and Dr Gavan Rafferty (Ulster University), both of whom are ICLRDR research associates,



Cllr Shona Haslam



Dr Caroline Crowley



Dr Seán Ó Riordáin

provided insights regarding planning and governance. Their inputs noted the role of cross-border local government networks as enablers of, and vehicles for, collaborative governance, place-making and place-shaping - with sustainable and effective development centred on how place-based assets are harnessed to inform the future development of an area.

Module 2, which was also delivered over two sessions, focused on international best practices in cross-border working led by local authorities. It included three inputs from local government representatives in diverse border regions. Mr Ciprian Barna, Director of Projects and Programmes at Oradea Metropolitan Area, spoke about inter-municipal collaboration between the city of Oradea (Romania) and neighbouring municipalities in Hungary, which has yielded considerable infrastructural and environmental improvements. Mr Stephen Smart, former mayor of Campobello Island (Canada) and volunteer with Roosevelt Campobello International Park provided first-hand observations of cross-border economic flows and service delivery across the Canada - USA frontier. Campobello Island, which is part of Canada, is only accessible, by land, to the rest of Canada, via the USA. Mr Smart spoke from personal and professional experience about the negative impacts and implications of border closures. The third case study came from much closer to home. Cllr Shona Haslam, the then Council Leader of the Scottish Borders' Council spoke about the Scotland - England: Borderlands Partnership and specifically about its governance model, strategic initiatives and ability to leverage external investment. Her messages resonated very strongly with the ICBAN Management Board, and members were very taken by her recommendations in respect of identifying flagship projects, based on tangible local assets. In all, the case studies underscored the merits and

importance of strengthening and sustaining cross-border working among local authorities and of promoting strategic innovation.

Module 3 sought to encapsulate and consolidate the messages and learnings from the preceding modules. Again, it included case study inputs. Prof. Ryan Gibson, from the University of Guelph (Canada), spoke about local authority collaboration in the Hudson Bay Neighbours' Territory and the Yukon. In both cases, inter-municipal collaboration succeeded in turning challenges into opportunities. Furthermore, both sets of local authorities devoted time to capacity-building and to ensuring that communities engaged in dialogue with one another and with public bodies. While the geographical context is very different from that of the Central Border Region, councillors concurred with Prof. Gibson that 'the future is about place'. Dr Caroline Crowley shared useful insights from the Nore Vision (Counties Kilkenny, Laois and Tipperary). Her key messages were as follows: be visionary - take a long-term perspective; discover common ground, and use commonalities as the foundation for making progress; ensure and enable ongoing communication to build trust and strengthen relationships; and keep-on/persist with authentic place-making - our unique people, place and potential for posterity.

The final session included a presentation by Dr Seán Ó Riordáin, Director of the Public Policy Advisors Network, in which he drew together learnings and messages from across the three modules and related them to ICBAN's role, potential and priorities. In discussing the Central Border Region's development opportunities, participants agreed with Seán on the importance of fine-tuning and finalising the Framework for Regional Priorities. They resolved to take stock of the region's place-based advantages, particularly its rurality, and to convey

a positive sense of its territorial assets and organisational ability. The summative effect of the modules was that the elected members noted the importance of moving away from case-making (lobbying on the basis of perceived needs) to place-making, whereby local government plays a more proactive role in leading, coordinating and promoting investment in local territorial and regional assets.

### **From Capacity Building to Planning and Operationalisation**

Having completed the 'Executive Training and Animation Programme', the ICBAN management team worked closely with the ICLRD, and specifically with its director Caroline Creamer and myself, to incorporate the learnings and resolutions into the framework for regional priorities (FRP) (2021-2027). As a result, the framework articulates five regional priorities as follows:

- i. Exploiting new opportunities based on regional strengths and assets (including latent assets), in the bioeconomy, food production and sustainable landscape management;
- ii. Supporting economic development through providing adequate industrial spaces, nurturing inter-firm collaboration and innovation, and strengthening linkages with education / training providers;
- iii. Enhancing citizens' quality of life, through improved and more innovative modes of service delivery, life-long progression opportunities, enhanced community amenities and independent living environments;
- iv. Enabling greater connected/remote working, through enhancing infrastructure and developing a network of digital hubs (in town centres), as part of the rejuvenation of towns and villages; and
- v. Developing the region's tourism offering and quality-of-life infrastructure through connected greenway and blueway networks (including inter-regional) - linked to complementary services and underpinned by increased active travel and improved regional connectivity.

These are supported and given effect through specific catalyst projects, namely:

- i. Farm to fork;
- ii. Greenways and blueways;
- iii. River catchments sustainability;
- iv. A thriving regional bioeconomy; and
- v. An international mountain biking destination.

The FRP has been endorsed by all eight councils in the Central Border Region. Its delivery, including the initiation and promotion of the catalyst projects, will require ICBAN to build

on the visioning and capacity-building exercise promoted by the ICLRD and to work collaboratively with local authorities, the two governments, communities and the private sector, on a regional/cross-border basis, to consolidate local drive and commitment.

### **Reflections on the Experience**

Over the past year, we have all become more adept at using information and communications technologies (ICT). While platforms such as Zoom and MS Teams have been available for the past number of years, the obligations of 2020 brought them into the mainstream, including into the operations of local government. Councillors and local authority staff embraced Zoom as the interface through which this capacity-building programme was delivered. The initial sessions began with instructions on 'how to' zoom, but after a few weeks, everybody was comfortable and competent with the technology, and all agreed that it was convenient and enabling. In ICBAN's case, all participants knew each other well, and while they missed the banter, networking and ancillary business associated with face-to-face meetings, they agreed that the online approach was meaningful, effective and successful. In order to support the application of learnings, the ICLRD produced post-module reports, and ICBAN continues to use these. In reviewing the experience, outputs and initial impacts of the 'Executive Training and Animation Programme', the elected members and officials concur on the merits of the approach pursued by the ICLRD - a bespoke design and delivery that has been embedded in the Central Border Region - institutionally and geographically, and is based on co-design and active participation throughout.



Dr Breandán Ó Caoimh



Nationwide Consultation on  
Ireland's Future Electricity System

# THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

As operator of the national grid, EirGrid has been set a task by the Government - to get the electricity system ready for a future without fossil fuels like coal, oil, peat and gas.

Specifically, it has been asked to prepare for 70% of Ireland's electricity coming from renewable sources by 2030. This is a key step in the journey towards Ireland having net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

EirGrid has embraced this challenge and spelt out how it will meet it through the publication of "Shaping Our Electricity Future".

The purpose of this roadmap is to advise and seek feedback on the optimal pathway to deliver a renewables-based power system. Crucially, the roadmap will help identify the key initiatives required

to reach the next stage in this ambition, namely achieving 70% renewable energy by 2030.

EirGrid chief executive Mark Foley explains: "The electricity grid will require unprecedented change in the next ten years. Over this time, we project that Ireland will require the connection of up to 10,000 megawatts (MW) of additional renewable generation. This power will have to be generated, connected to the grid, and delivered throughout the island."

The transition to clean electricity will affect everyone in Ireland and will sometimes be difficult. Because of this, in



March EirGrid launched a 14-week nationwide public consultation to find an agreed approach to reaching the 2030 targets.

It has identified four draft approaches and is canvassing the views of industry and the public in order to help shape the final strategy.

1. Generation-Led: Put clean generation close to where most power is used.
2. Developer-Led: Let developers decide where to locate clean generation.
3. Technology-Led: Try new ways to move clean power across the country.
4. Demand-Led: Put large electricity users close to sources of clean power.

Mr Foley explains: *“One thing is clear; the electricity grid needs to be made stronger and more flexible. This requires a decade of grid development projects. Without this work, Ireland won’t be able to rely on a secure supply of electricity, and we can’t have 70% of this power coming from clean sources by 2030.”* Preparing Ireland’s grid for the future of clean electricity will be one of the largest

projects in the history of Ireland’s power system.

*“As a society, we need to decide what we value for ourselves, and for our children. We can make a meaningful difference to a global crisis, but it will mean embracing and accepting change, potentially on our own doorsteps,”* he adds.

## Climate Conversation:

### Consultation on the 2021 Climate Action Plan

The consultation phase for Ireland’s Climate Action Plan for 2021 opened and will continue until 18 May 2021. According to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC), the Action Plan will be the country’s ‘roadmap to becoming a climate neutral economy and resilient society by 2050’. The public are invited to offer their views on Ireland’s approach to climate action.

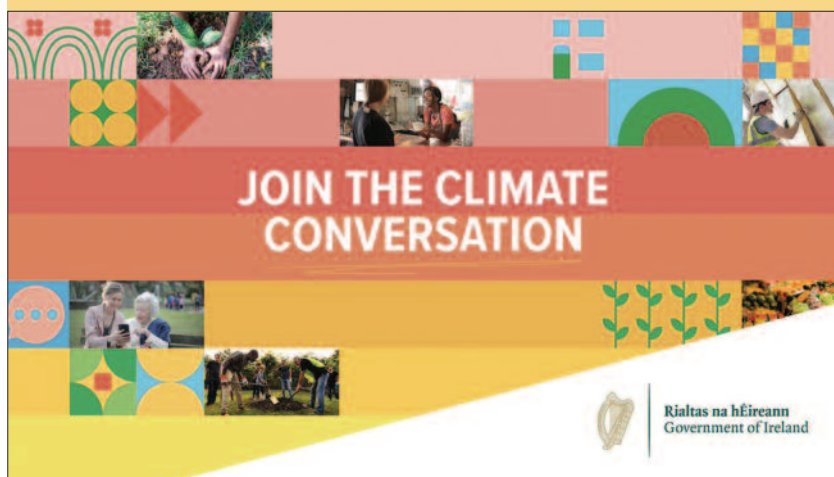
As part of the consultation process, the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) will facilitate and host local conversations on the plan. PPN members will have the opportunity to discuss their concerns, ideas and thoughts on the next Climate Action Plan and in doing so contribute towards the national conversation.

Commenting on the role of the PPNs in the consultation process, Joe O’Brien TD, Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development stated:

*‘This consultation process is very important as Climate Change and our response to it in the form of the Climate Action Plan will affect many aspects of life in Ireland ... I am very glad that the PPNs are involved because they are realising one of their key functions which is bringing valuable on-the-ground, local experience and expertise into national policy-making’.*

A number of PPNs (including Limerick and Kerry) piloted initial Community Climate Action Conversations in collaboration with the DECC.

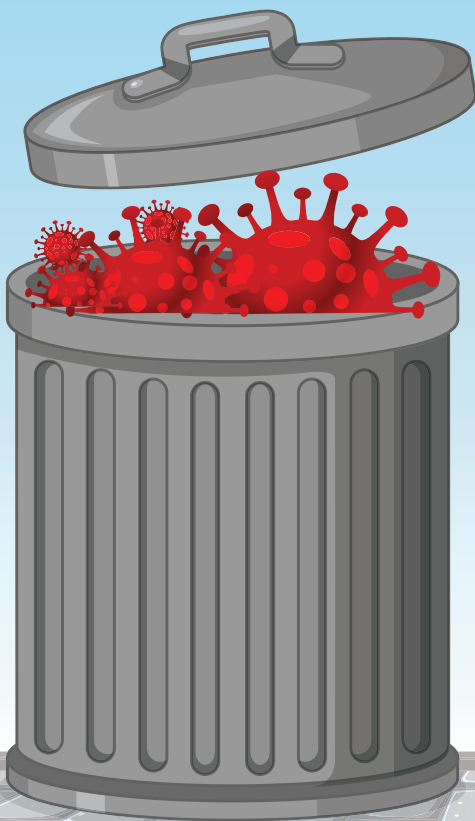
Further information on the consultation can be found at: <https://climateconversations.citizen space.com/decc/climateactionplan2021/>



**Local Authorities Leading the Local Response to the Covid-19 Crisis, observes a new IPA Research Paper**

# KEEPING A LID ON IT

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges for Irish society and continues to do so



**A**s the closest part of government to citizens and communities, local authorities have had to respond quickly in an evolving and uncertain environment to effectively meet needs and provide support locally.

A new IPA research paper looks at how local authorities responded during the first six months or so of the Covid-19 crisis: how they dealt with the impact of the first wave of coronavirus (from March to April), the challenges they faced, and how they supported the subsequent 'reopening' of society and the economy from May on.

The main aims of the research were to document local government's response, and identify and analyse what worked well, and what could have been improved.

The areas of the local authorities' response that the research focused on were:

- Maintaining service delivery and business continuity
- Coordinating community supports
- Reopening society and supporting local economies
- Operating in a system of multi-level governance
- Maintaining local democracy

Interviews were held with local government staff and relevant stakeholders to gather their views on the sector's response to the crisis. A summary of some of the key research findings are outlined below:

### **The delivery of essential public services in an unprecedented environment were maintained**

Given the circumstances, the local authorities overall responded very well to minimise the disruption to workloads and ensure the delivery of essential public services. Contingency plans and an established communications approach were vital to support the initial response. The close working relations between many local authorities and local statutory and voluntary bodies were also crucial in delivering additional social and economic supports.

### **Central coordination and support within the sector was strong and provided consistency**

Central coordination and support provided by the CCMA, the LGMA and a business continuity working group, were pivotal for ensuring coherence in how the local authorities responded.

### **Local government demonstrated good capacity to adapt and innovate**

However, gaps in support and mixed internal capacity and skills are areas that may need to be examined and strengthened.

### **Local and regional emergency management structures and business continuity plans worked well, but should be reviewed in light of the Covid-19 response**

Future-proofing and building resilience should be an organisational priority post-Covid. For example, public health emergencies may need to be included on more corporate risk registers.

### **Financial uncertainty remains, and has proven a challenge**

Uncertainty remains about the state of the Irish economy and public finances post-Covid. Concerns were expressed by interviewees over a reduced future rateable base and the potential loss of other local income. Local authorities need greater certainty and longer term assurances regarding central funding to compensate for any lost income and increased expenditure.

### **Local government acted as a leader and coordinator of community supports**

The Community Call Response Fora, led by local authorities, facilitated coordination and collaboration between a diverse range of stakeholders, who were required to work together to support communities. This experience could be built upon post-Covid to enhance community partnerships and engagement in local areas, particularly in anticipation of future crises, e.g. climate-related events such as flooding. Capacity-building should be a key focus for local government and stakeholders to ensure the sustainability of any additional community support role after the pandemic.

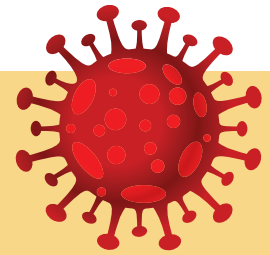
### **Local government effectively acted as the local arm of the State**

Local government effectively implemented new national schemes introduced in response to Covid-19. One example was the roll-out of the Business Restart Grant by the Local Enterprise Offices, which underlined the flexibility of the local government system in being able to quickly respond to policy demands from central government and effectively deliver a new national scheme at the local level.

### **The positive impact of the 2014 reforms in relation to local economic development was evident**

It was broadly felt by interviewees that the economic development structures introduced by the 2014 local government reforms enabled local authorities to better support local businesses. The Local Enterprise Offices were the main point of contact for SMEs, with many good networks

and working relationships in place before the pandemic struck. The development of innovation hubs, hot desk facilities and efforts to improve broadband coverage had progressed under Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), all of which enabled members of the public to work remotely. The preparation phase of the next iteration of LECPs will need to consider the pandemic's implications on local economies and communities.



#### **Conclusion:**

The overall response showed that local authorities are flexible organisations that can quickly adapt and innovate in times of crisis. There were several key elements to their response. For example, central coordination and support within sector helped ensure that the thirty-one local authorities responded coherently to the crisis. The benefits of recent reforms were evident by the ability to provide enhanced community and economic supports, and the network of relationships that local authorities called upon. Experience of dealing with major emergencies as a lead response agency, and collaboration with the HSE and An Garda Síochána, has also been invaluable.

But the pandemic has also highlighted issues of capacity, resources and funding in the local government system. The research paper considered the initial response of local authorities, but there will be more to learn as we continue to live with Covid-19 and plan ahead for a post-Covid world.

A summary of some of the main messages arising from the research has been provided. For a fuller discussion of the local authorities' response, please see the report that's available from the below link:

<https://www.ipa.ie/research-papers/local-government-research.684.html>

# FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

## Urban Planning and Nature Based Surface Water Management

Authors: Fran Igoe (LAWPRO),  
John Stack (Dublin City Council),  
Adrian Conway (formerly with  
Dublin City Council) and  
Colin Byrne (Depart. of  
Housing Local Government  
and Heritage)





Surface water management should form an integral part of urban planning, regardless of scale. As we know, climate change is already resulting in more frequent and intense rainfall, and the impact of this on urban areas is increased as infiltration rates are significantly less through hard surface areas compared to greenfield sites. This brings challenges in terms of drainage, traditionally addressed by hard engineering options (concrete gullies, pipes, drains etc) resulting in increasing flood and pollution risk. Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) to address flood risk were introduced several decades ago and are promoted in The OPW's (2009) Guidelines for Planning Authorities "The Planning System and Flood Risk Management".

More recently, a Nature Based approach to SuDS (or Natural Water Retention Measures) has come more into prominence, in response to the water, climate and biodiversity crisis facing the planet. This approach is promoted internationally by organisations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and supported by the EU's Green Deal.

Nature Based SuDS work with nature (rather than against it) and are now being mainstreamed across the globe. The benefits of taking a nature-based approach includes not just flood risk management benefits but also improved water quality (e.g. can filter out >80% heavy metals), biodiversity (e.g., provide habitat for range of species) and Climate adaptation and mitigation (resilience, micro-climate cooling etc and carbon sequestration).

Currently most County Development plans reference SuDS, but in practice its application across the country varies considerably. SuDS should involve the use of interconnected nature based techniques from source (i.e., hard surfaces such as roofs or roads) to the receptor (e.g., a river or stream) but often only single elements are employed rather than a complete "train" of "treatment systems". Additionally, there is often an over reliance by developers on "the concrete pipe and underground tank" because of their familiarity. They are often reluctant to use nature-based SuDS because of concerns regarding space needed, efficacy, lack of experience, maintenance needs, etc. SuDS planned properly addresses these issues. But the elements should act in an integrated fashion (like urban mini-catchments)-and Nature Based SuDS such as Green roofs, Swales, bioretention areas, rain gardens, wetlands. have the added advantage that they are located overground. They are, therefore, often less expensive to construct and easier to maintain than underground solutions and provide multiple additional benefits (filtering pollutants, biodiversity, amenity value etc).

However, in order to achieve these aims, it is vital that this integrated approach is incorporated into the earliest stages of planning such as Development Plans, Local Area Plans and



Filter strip on N24 provides not only extra surface run off soakage but also biodiversity and amenity benefits.



Simply removing Kerbs and correct cambering allows water to attenuate into a mini-raingarden. Combined with other SuDS features, it is that collective and integrated approach that provides for the best surface water management. Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.

Strategic Development zones. The role of green infrastructure in providing nature-based surface water solutions must be incorporated into these early design stages (e.g., removing kerbs and allowing verges act as swales or lowering the level of a local park or pitch to provide flood storage)

In response to requests from local authority staff consulted by LAWPRO at Water Framework Directive workshops held across the country, a webinar was organised on November 9th 2020 to explore, discuss and learn about the potential of Nature Based Surface Water Management in Ireland.

Organised in association with the Irish Planning Institute, Engineers Ireland and the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage, and launched by Minister of State Malcom Noonan, the webinar approached the above referenced areas of nature based solutions and how best to implement them, having canvassed planners and engineers in particular. The webinar also looked at key overlapping areas such as the Water Framework Directive, and wider Statutory agency objectives (e.g. OPW and Inland Fisheries Ireland). The webinar also included the launch by Inland Fisheries Ireland of their revised "Guidelines for Urban planning along watercourses" - making the case for sustainable development



N24 Roundabout Clonmel. Planted with wildflowers, the roundabout not only provides for increased surface water filtration but also provides for pollinators. A flock of goldfinch took up residence here feeding on the wildflower seeds in autumn 2020 (Goldfinch photos credit Kevin Collins, Birdwatch Ireland)



by making space for water and amenity use. <https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/extranet/fisheries-management-1/1756-ifi-urban-watercourses-planning-guide-2020-update.html>

The event culminated in a discussion moderated by Adrian Conway (former executive manager with Dublin City Council) with Water and Planning representatives from Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the OPW. A subsequent poll of attendees (almost 500) showed a significant percentage of attendees were planners and engineers, mostly from local authorities but also the private sector. Other attending disciplines included architects, landscape architects, environmental, climate action, heritage, biodiversity, community and enterprise. Attendees emphasised the need for a multidisciplinary approach to successful implementation within local authorities and County Development Plans.

Feedback from the attendees also confirmed that Nature Based SUDS would significantly benefit water, climate adaptation, biodiversity, and human well-being objectives. However, 81% of respondents believed that Nature Based SUDS were not being adequately implemented in Ireland. Improvements in factors such as policies, legislation, leadership, governance, technical guidance, training, local government capacity and funding were considered necessary by the majority of respondents. The engagement of other state agencies, Inland Fisheries, Office of Public Works, National Parks and Wildlife and the EPA as well as the private sector was further emphasised. The need for a cross agency and

multi-disciplinary integrated approach was also emphasised, incorporating all aspects of urban planning and design, from strategic and planning phases to the more detailed preparation or assessment of plans and projects.

### Next steps

A key objective of the workshop was to explore the relevance of Nature Based SUDS in the Irish context. This was roundly supported by the attendees. The next steps (as recommended from the post Webinar online poll) will be to scope out the needs for developing a comprehensive national implementation strategy for SuDS. This may culminate in the development of guidance, training, and case studies.

The Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage, will work with local authorities and other relevant authorities to organise the development of guidance with LAWPRO and partners. Training can then be organised using best practice examples. Complementary to this is the Climate Action training being organised by the CAROs which will include some focus on Nature Based SuDS. The Southern Regional Assembly are also coordinating a project with 3 Local Authorities and Irish Water working on best practice case studies for Green and Blue Infrastructure in the Urban environment.

The survey poll will form the basis of an outputs report, which will be available on the LAWPRO website [www.watersandcommunities.ie](http://www.watersandcommunities.ie) together with the WEBINAR presentations. Interestingly it is widely reported that the Covid 19 Pandemic has brought people closer to nature. So this offers an opportunity for us all to promote Nature Based SuDS in a changing climate environment. Let's not waste this opportunity.

*This article was first published in the Local Authority News on 3rd February 2021 and is reproduced with the permission of its editor.*



Green roof on Ballyogan depot addressing stormwater runoff

# Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2020

Fergal O'Leary, IPA

According to figures for 2020, there was a fall in the total number of households on local authority waiting lists for social housing support. The results of the annual Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) were published in March. The count usually takes place each summer, however, with Covid-19 it was rescheduled for early November 2020. The SSHA essentially counts the number of qualified households not yet in receipt of some form of social housing support, and so they are all on council waiting lists.

For 2020, there were 61,880 qualified households, a decline of 9.9% on the figure for 2019. This headline figure represents the net need, so excludes those already in receipt of social housing support, duplicate applications and households on council transfer lists. Some of the other key findings from the SSHA for 2020 include:

- 25 of the 31 local authorities experienced a reduction in the number of households on their waiting lists.
- Dublin's local authorities account for 43.1% of the national net need.
- 52% of qualified households were categorised as single adult households
- 45.6% of qualified households were living in the private rented sector.

- 34.4% of qualified households were living with parents, relatives or friends.
- 27% of qualified households were waiting for 7 years or more

Originally, needs assessments were carried out every three years after its introduction in the late 1980s. However, the process itself and the type of information collected has changed over the years. Since 2016, the SSHA has been carried out annually; the below table shows the net need figure for each year since then:

Total Number of Qualified Households on Waiting Lists				
2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
91,600	85,799	71,858	68,693	61,880

The SSHA gathers together information from all local authorities and it helps inform policymakers on the level of additional housing support required around the country. Details gathered include: household size, waiting times, sources of income, current tenure, age profile, employment status and specific accommodation requirements. Such data, updated annually, can allow for the better delivery of social housing support. The SSHA process involves all local authorities, the Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government, and the Local Government Management Agency and the Housing Agency.

The SSHA findings report for 2020 can be found at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/970ea-summary-of-social-housing-assessments-2020-key-findings/>



# DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

## Delivering Deliberative Democracy

Colette Bennett, Economic and  
Social Analyst, *Social Justice Ireland*

**The Public Participation  
Networks (PPNs) were  
established in law in 2014  
to facilitate participation  
in local decision making**

**T**he main way they do this is through the nomination and election of representatives onto Local Authority Committees and Boards. The framework for participation recommended by the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government was that developed by the Council of Europe, which follows a progression from least participatory (Information) to most participatory (Partnership).

In 2020, Social Justice Ireland conducted research to capture how the various PPN stakeholders engaged in the participation processes 'on the ground' viewed the application of the principles set out in the Council of Europe Framework to participation by the PPN, both overall and at each stage of the decision-making process.

A survey, based on the scale of participation set out in the Council of Europe's Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process and the Council of Europe Guidelines for Civil Participation in Political Decision-making, was developed and circulated to PPN Workers, Representatives and Local Authority staff who engage with Committees and Boards at Local Authority level. Of the 213 respondents in total, 24 were Local Authority staff.

### Results

PPNs are engaging across a range of committees and Boards at local level to influence policies that affect their Member Groups and their communities. While most respondents felt that the principles of participation were being adhered to, it is



interesting to note that an exception was made for the principles statement relating to openness in the decision-making process, and there was significant divergence between Local Authority staff and other stakeholders on this point.

Overall, the responses to our survey indicate agreement or strong agreement that the principles outlined by the Council of Europe are being implemented when it comes to participation at local government level in Ireland. Similarly, a high proportion of respondents felt that the PPNs had moved beyond the 'Information' and 'Consultation' levels of participation, to the Dialogue level for each stage of the decision-making process. There is, however, some work to be done before 'Partnership' can be achieved at all stages of the decision-making process, as this level was indicated by the lowest proportion of respondents for each stage.

It is positive to see that a high proportion of respondents felt that the level of participation across each stage of the

decision-making process was at dialogue stage, however there is a significant proportion who responded that participation was still at the lowest level, that the Local Authority provided the information only to the PPN. This was particularly the case for PPN Representatives on the Strategic Policy Committees and the Local Community Development Committees, two important committees which would benefit from a more inclusive approach to community participation.

It is also clear from the responses, that there is variance among and between stakeholder groups as to the level of participation experienced. This is also evident in the comments included by some respondents. This provides both a challenge and an opportunity nationally. Examples of good practice developed in one area may apply equally well to another, acknowledging the local variances necessary to ensure that participation is specific to the community / Local Authority area concerned.

## Recommendations

### **Structural Support - Dialogue**

The disparity between and among respondent groups presents both a challenge and an opportunity for PPNs and Local Authorities to discuss what is working well in some areas, or for some particular committees, and to develop best practice procedures in partnership. The Report therefore recommends the establishment of a dialogue between the Local Authorities and the other PPN Stakeholders to establish practical, best-practice approaches to implementing the principles of participation and working towards increasing partnership across all stages of the decision-making process.

### **Structural Support - Policy**

The data presented in this Report indicates that Local Authority Staff are both broadly in favour of participation generally and strongly of the view that the structures, as currently constituted, lead to a high level of partnership at all stages of the decision-making process. This is not, however, the view of the majority of Representatives. We therefore recommend a review of the Local Authority Structures against the Council of Europe's Framework be undertaken, with a dedicated resource from within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage,

of at least Principal Officer grade, to ensure meaningful engagement.

### **Further Research**

This research sought to quantify how selected PPN stakeholders applied the principles of participation and the levels of participation across all stages of the decision-making process, in accordance with the Council of Europe Guidelines and the Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014). The disparities identified between and among stakeholder groups in their application of these instruments warrants further, qualitative research with respondents to this survey indicating their willingness to engage in further conversation on this topic.

**The full text of the Report is available on the Social Justice Ireland website: [www.socialjustice.ie](http://www.socialjustice.ie)**

## Local Enterprise Week 2021 – highlights

This year's enterprise week was held from 1-5 March and featured over 270 virtual events organised by the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) around the country. These events included training workshops, information webinars and masterclasses with entrepreneurs and experts, all designed to assist small businesses and those looking to start a new business in 2021. Common topics across the week included starting a new business, resilience and recovery, the green economy, becoming 'leaner', exploring new markets, doing business online and the new trading relationship with the UK.

The Local Enterprise Week featured ten 'Spotlight' events that were open to businesses from across the country.

- 'Benefits of Green for your Business - Launching Green for Micro' organised by LEO Dublin City
- 'Spring Back & Step Forward: Building Leadership & Resilience' organised by LEO Donegal
- 'Building The New' organised by LEO Galway
- 'Growing Lean: One Small Step or One Giant Leap, Getting Started with Lean' organised by LEO Kildare

- 'AgriTech Revolution in Farming and Food' organised by LEO South Cork
- 'Creative Connections: Enabling your B-2-B Online Opportunities' organised LEO Carlow
- 'Engage for Growth with David Meade' organised by LEO Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown
- 'S.M.A.R.Tech for StartUps' organised by LEO Clare
- 'Masterclass: Health checking your business for its forward journey' organised by LEO Wexford
- 'Trading Online Voucher Information Webinar' organised by Local Enterprise Office Fingal

Highlights from year's events can be viewed at the below link: <https://www.localenterprise.ie/Week>



## 2021 AILG Elected Members Training Programme Brochure

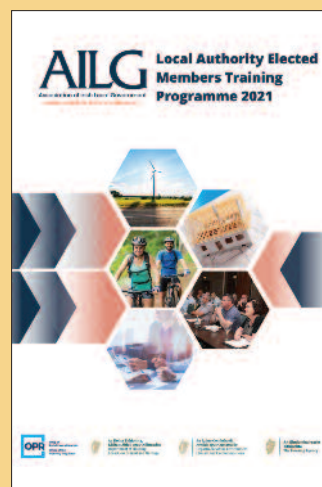


Cllr. Mary Hoade, President of the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG), recently launched the AILG's training programme for 2021.

According to President Cllr. Hoade, *'This year's programme will build on our current strong training programme where we have delivered a number of training modules on the planning and development plan process and will see our training branch out into other areas including a comprehensive housing module, a communications module and a climate action module on renewable energy.'*

President Cllr. Hoade noted during the online launch that the 2021 Training Programme moves AILG closer to their overall goal of developing an accredited Continuous Professional Development

(CPD) internal training programme for its Elected Members. She also acknowledged that AILG would be returning to their physical training programme as soon as public health measures allow and it is safe to do so.



A copy of the programme can be obtained from the below link: <http://ailg.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AILG-Local-Authority-Elected-Members-Training-Brochure-2021-1.pdf>

# POLICY AND RESEARCH IN-BRIEF

Some of the most recent and relevant policy and research publications.



## Irish Maritime Directorate Strategy 2021-2025 (Department of Transport, 2021)

The Department of Transport's Maritime Directorate has put in place a strategy setting out its objectives for the sector over the next five years. It covers maritime safety, maritime trade and connectivity, ship source pollution prevention and emergency response. There are also objectives on organisational

excellence and stakeholder engagement. It notes five ports of Regional significance, Drogheda, Dun Laoghaire, Galway, New Ross and Wicklow, all of which transferred to the control of the relevant local authority under the Harbours Act 2015.

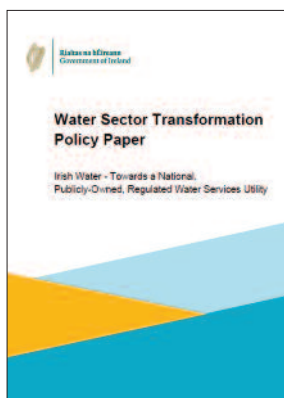
Available from: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publications/>



## Consultation report on the support needs of the non-profit sector

The report presents the findings of research into the support needs of voluntary organisations, community groups, charities and social enterprises. This followed extensive consultation with organisations representing the full diversity of the non-profit sector as well as policy-makers, regulators and funders.

Available from: <https://www.wheel.ie/news/2021/03/new-research-point-way-developing-nonprofit-sector>



## Water Sector Transformation Policy Paper (DHLGH, 2021)

Following commitments made in the Programme for Government, the Department of Housing, Heritage, and Local Government have published a paper setting out the Government's expectations on the transformation of Irish Water into a national, standalone, regulated, water services utility.

Available from: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publications/>



## Community Call - public sector and community & voluntary partnership delivers results (NESC, 2021)

The Community Call initiative was set-up in April 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It represents a partnership between central and local government, and the community and voluntary sector. It delivered co-ordinated support to vulnerable people staying at home during the

Covid-19 lockdowns. NESC's paper looks at how the Community Call initiative was established, how it developed, and the learning from this innovative programme.

Report is available at: <https://www.nesc.ie/>



## Focus on Local Authority Environmental Enforcement (EPA, 2021)

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a report on local authority environmental enforcement activities for 2019. There has been an increased number of inspections and enforcement actions taken by local authorities since 2018, these mainly relate to waste and litter. Local authorities also handled a significant

volume of environmental complaints in 2019 that were primarily to do with waste. They carried out 188,000 inspections in 2019, an increase of 10 per cent on the previous year.

Report is available at: <http://epa.ie/>



## A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service

This White Paper sets out a new Government policy to replace Direct Provision, which will be phased out over the next four years. The local authorities will have a key role to play and will include the coordination of local services.

Available from: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publications/>

# 30 YEARS ON

## The Story of Ireland's Local Government System, 1929-90

2021 marks thirty years since the IPA published the *City and County Management 1929-1990: A Retrospective*. The book, commissioned by the County and City Managers' Association (CCMA), told the story of Ireland's local authority management system, introduced in 1929.

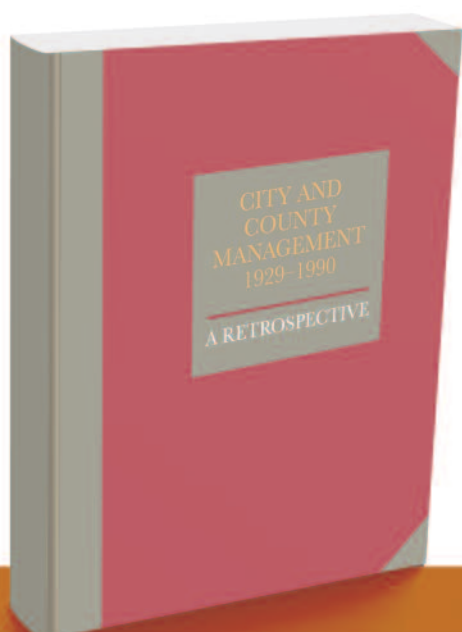
Fergal O'Leary, IPA

In his foreword to the *Retrospective*, the late John G. Ward (then Chairperson of the CCMA and Kildare County Manager) saw the management system as a unique policy response, a successful partnership between an elected council and a local management official. It became a topic of interest outside of Ireland, for international academics, researchers and practitioners, and was something of a model of local government for some post-colonial African states. Indeed, Ward declared the managerial system to be 'one of the outstanding administrative innovations in the Irish system of Government' (Ward, 1991, p. x).

The *Retrospective* book itself was somewhat unique, it was partly academic, with chapters written by scholars on the origins of the city and county management system and its contribution to Ireland's development. But it was just as much a reference book. It featured a chronology of local government, an extensive bibliography of literature, and a chapter with career profiles on all city and county managers up to then. The *Retrospective* has proven to be a key textbook for students of the management system, and an extremely useful reference work for researchers of local government, and for local journalists writing articles on the careers of managers.

### Origins of City and County Management

The chapter by Eunan O'Halpin, now a Professor Emeritus of Contemporary Irish History at Trinity College Dublin, gave a fascinating account of the origins of the management system in the first decades of independent Ireland. The 1898 Local Government Act led to a system of control of local affairs by committees of part-time councillors. However, post-independence, successive Irish governments sought to exert 'greater national or central control' over local affairs (O'Halpin, 1991, p. 2).





The new Free State government, under W.T. Cosgrave, faced considerable challenges in rebuilding and managing a country that had just experienced over four years of warfare. Furthermore, the old British administrative system was defective which didn't help matters. For O'Halpin, the challenges facing local authorities on the ground to reconstruct and repair were acute: lack of financial resources, residual political tensions from the civil war, and local administrative incompetence (O'Halpin, 1991, p. 5). Cosgrave's governments (from 1922-32) were determined to bring change to local government and strengthen central control in the country.

### Centralisation

Early reforms to local government were driven by a desire to restore order after a tumultuous civil war, and to bring about a more professional local administrative system and reduce political and personal influence. Local government acts in 1923 and 1925, and the establishment of the Local Appointments Commission in 1926, were crucial reforms in the process of centralisation, but the new management system took a bit longer. Influenced by the American model of municipal government, the Cork City Management Act of 1929 saw Philip Monahan appointed as Ireland's first local authority manager, but it wasn't until the County Management Act of 1940 that county managers were introduced. However, the city and county managers weren't envisaged as simply 'agents of central government'. O'Halpin argued that they were instead seen as 'skilled technicians, applying the antiseptic standards of scientific administration to matters previously dealt with in unsavoury gutter of local politics' (O'Halpin, 1991, p. 17).

### Contribution of the Management System

A comprehensive chapter in the *Retrospective* by the late Michael J. Bannon, a UCD planning academic, looked at the managerial system's contribution to local and national development from 1929-90. In a changing Ireland, witnessing much socio-economic progress, local authorities had to adapt to manage much of this change and respond to its consequences.

### New approach

From the late 1950s, a new economic approach - instigated by T.K. Whitaker's ideas - led to modernising economic programmes underpinned by capital investment. All of this reinforced the necessity for 'good technical management at every level of the public service' (Bannon, 1991, p. 38). Seán Lemass, as Taoiseach in the early 1960s, wanted to transform the local authorities - as well as government departments and state agencies - into 'development corporations' (Ibid). With the introduction of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act of 1963, local councils took a major step on the path towards realising this vision. By placing statutory



The first manager. Philip Monahan, (1894-1983).  
Cork City Manager,  
1929-1958

responsibilities on local authorities in the area of spatial and land use planning, a more strategic approach was being taken to advance local development. The role of the city and county managers strengthened from the 1960s on, they were increasingly tasked with the local coordination of national services and with fostering local and regional development.

### A developmental role

As Ireland underwent a process of modernisation from the late 1950s, so too did the local authorities. Council work became more technical, concerned with physical, social, economic and cultural development. Such change brought an increase in the number of professional and administrative council staff, whilst the number of semi-skilled and unskilled workers fell. The local authorities became much bigger spenders at the local level, their expenditure increased from £9 million in 1930-31 to over £1 billion in 1990 (Bannon, 1991, p. 35). Bannon wrote, 'As the affairs of local government became increasingly technical, the role of a continuous, well-equipped and involved management system became more important' (Bannon, 1991, p. 43). The developmental role that managers took on was reflected by their 'attached functions' - often non-statutory - to support the work of other agencies and organisations. Bannon placed these functions under several headings:

- Co-operation and interfacing with other state agencies
- Joint ventures with public and private developers
- Urban renewal developments
- Cross-border co-operation
- The implementation of the Community Support Framework
- Community and local development
- Involvement in cultural, educational and artistic initiatives (Bannon, 1991, pp 44-51)

In his final assessment, Bannon believed that in the absence of substantial reforms to local government over sixty years - when the country frequently opted for "muddling through" - Ireland's managerial system performed very well. 'While the success of the manager may, in some instances, derive from



Inaugural meeting of the County Managers' Association held on 20 January 1943

personal flair and tact, more generally it arises from the consolidation of the role within the system, from better management training, and from the advantages of continuity and expertise' (Bannon, 1991, p. 52). Thirty years on from its publication, Bannon's chapter on the management system can now be viewed from an historical perspective - it helps us understand how the role of the city and county manager has evolved over time.

### Career profiles

The *Retrospective* also had a chapter with the career profiles of the ninety-three managers from 1929-1990 - all were men which reflected the times. This chapter provided a glimpse into the careers and achievements of these managers, each of whom contributed to national and local development. Furthermore, the profiles gave readers insight into some of the activities of former managers who made a mark outside of local government. For example, Thomas D. Sinnott (1893-1965) was Wexford County Council's first manager in the early 1940s. During Ireland's revolutionary period, Sinnott joined the Irish volunteers in 1914, fought in the Easter Rising and the War of Independence and at one point was interned at Frongoch Camp in Wales (Boland and O'Donnell, 1991, p. 108). Or Thomas M. O'Connor (1911-2002) who served as Limerick County Council's manager in the 1960s. After his retirement, O'Connor founded the Retirement Planning Council in 1976 and was also part of Ireland's delegation at the Euro-Arab Dialogue meetings from 1975-78 (Boland and O'Donnell, 1991, p. 100).

The book also included an extensive bibliography and chronology of local government from 1929-90, and a succession list for each city and county council, all extremely useful for students and researchers alike.

### The next thirty years of the management system

The *Retrospective* book ends in 1990, before the economic growth of the 'Celtic Tiger' period and before major reforms to local government. So much has happened in local government in the thirty years since then. Not least, there have been many more county and city managers (and subsequently chief

executives under provisions of the Local Government Reform Act 2014), with both men and women represented. In local government itself, there have been significant changes to the role and functions of local government affecting its contribution to local and national development.

Therefore, it is timely to update the information contained in the *Retrospective* and outline developments since 1990. The IPA will publish a new version of the book on behalf of the CCMA.

At the end of his chapter, Bannon hinted at reform to come for local government, but predicted that the management system would continue to play a central developmental role in the coming years (Bannon, 1991, p. 52). In a way, the new book will pick up where the original *Retrospective* left off in 1990, it'll bring the management system's story up to the present by looking at how it was changed by reforms and how its role continues to shape Irish society today. But it will also help celebrate the careers of over 170 local authority managers and chief executives who together have contributed considerably to Ireland's development over the past ninety years.

### The updated *City and County Management Retrospective* book will be published this Autumn by the IPA.

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## St Patrick's Day Celebrations and Councils Go Green



Despite the Covid restrictions, the public were still able to join in celebrations for the national holiday. Councils across the country organised virtual events to celebrate Irish culture and heritage and they also turned many well-known buildings green for the big day.

For example, thousands of people from around the world logged on, tuned in and took part in this year's **Limerick St. Patrick's Festival**. A full programme of events was held online from 13-17 March which culminated in the headline event Wild Atlantic Edge - Music, Conversations and Songs from Limerick City. Limerick Tourism, Culture and Arts Department worked with Fáilte Ireland's Destination Greening initiative to light up buildings across Limerick city and county during the festival which included: King John's Castle, Merchant's Quay, St Mary's Cathedral and the Hunt Museum.

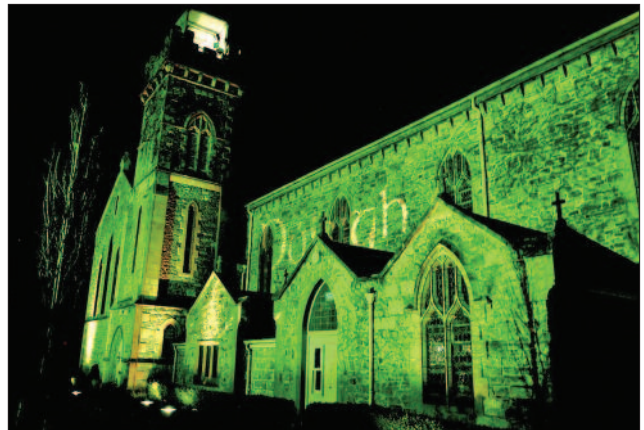


St John's Castle, Limerick City



**Fingal County Council** tapped into the public's creative side by holding a #HomemadeParade Competition. It gave families the chance to get involved in creating their very own St. Patrick's Day parade at home using toys, books or artwork and there were prizes up for grabs.

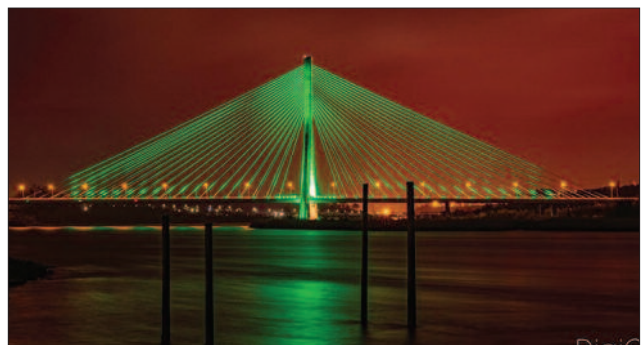
The council's Events Unit also arranged for 12 Fingal buildings to be illuminated in green to create an incredible visual display, and the Fingal's libraries team curated an entertaining online St. Patrick's Day programme.



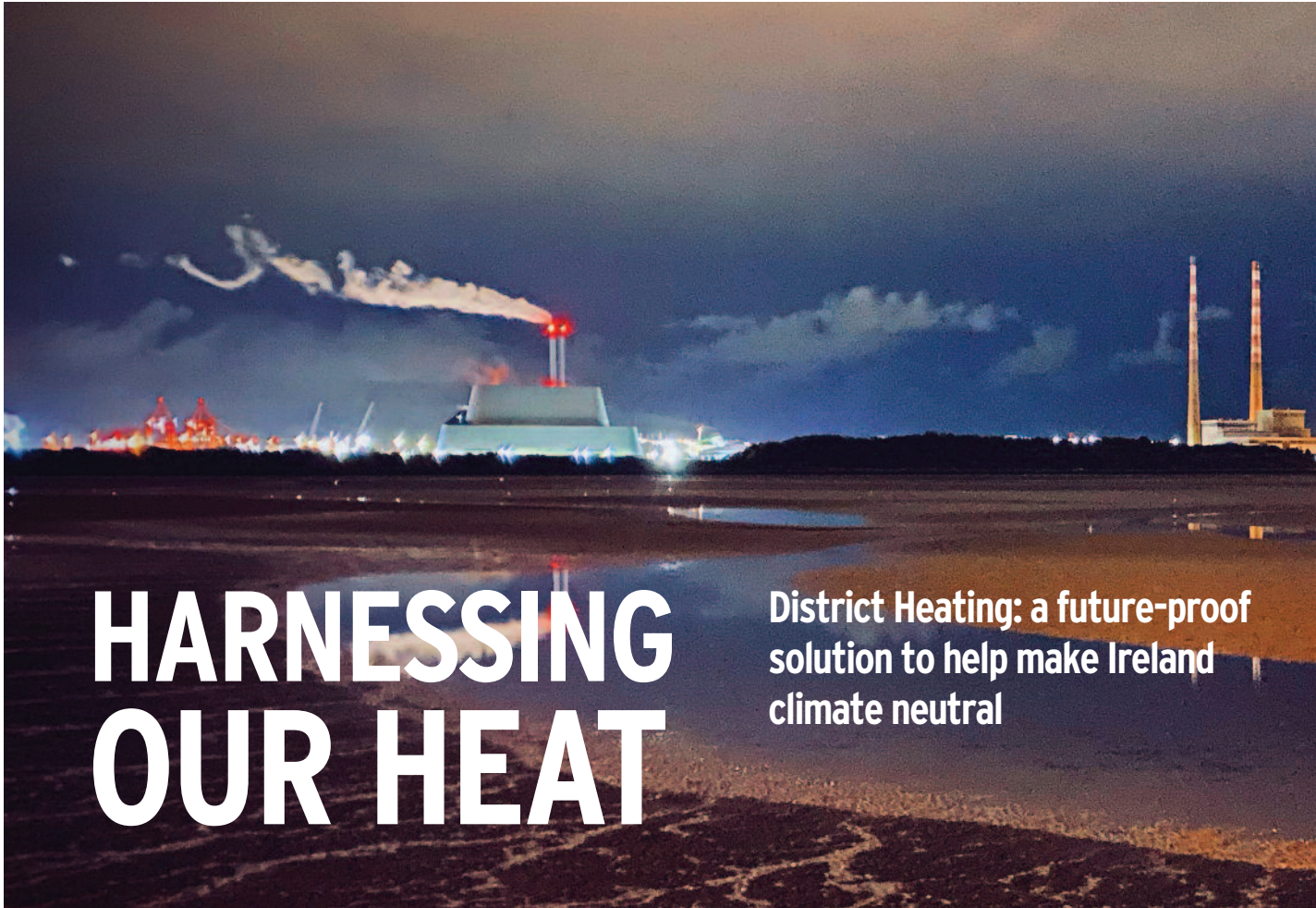
Rush Library

**Clare County Council** presented an online St Patrick's Day event with the theme of 'Connecting Clare'. It encouraged Clare people at home and abroad to celebrate St Patrick's Day together, by actively participating in the online event as a member of a global audience. Performances of music, song, poetry, dance, and backyard parades were recorded and shared online as part of efforts to connect Clare people from around the world on the day.

Similarly, **Waterford City & County Council** undertook an ambitious greening project where many of Waterford's iconic buildings and land marks went green for St Patrick's week. As part of this, the council teamed up with **Kilkenny County Council** to light-up in green one of Ireland's longest bridges, the Thomas Francis Meagher bridge.



Thomas Francis Meagher Bridge



# HARNESSING OUR HEAT

**District Heating: a future-proof solution to help make Ireland climate neutral**

**D**ún Laoghaire, Dublin - Scrambling over the wall of the West Pier in Dún Laoghaire harbour; looking up to an overly familiar skyline. A skyline that, amidst a pandemic, has remained a constant. Moving across the curves and edges of Howth, along the DART line to the Poolbeg chimneys, pausing to watch as the billowing clouds of steam from the Dublin Waste-to-Energy facility float effortlessly into the sky. The thing about energy is that it is not always visible or tangible, so while the plumes of steam denote a facility in operation, what we don't see is the huge potential to recycle the waste heat from the facility, which could be used to heat up to 50,000 homes in the city.

## **Capturing waste heat**

With domestic hot water and space heating (how we heat our homes) accounting for over 70% of household energy use, it's unsurprising that heating contributes to nearly a quarter of Ireland's total greenhouse gas emissions. If we have any hope of meeting our 2050 target of carbon neutrality, it is imperative that pathways are developed to decarbonise the heat sector. One such solution that captures this waste heat - not only from industrial power plants but from data centres, breweries and factories - and facilitates the decarbonisation of heat, is the development of an underground network of

insulated pipes delivering heat from a central source to buildings connected to the network - a network known as district heating.

'Buildings play a big part in our carbon emissions, and the biggest use of fossil fuels in buildings is for heat,' says Donna Gartland, CEO of Dublin's Energy Agency, Codema. She continues in saying that heat is particularly difficult to decarbonise in comparison to other sectors like electricity as "it relies on hundreds of thousands of individual decisions to change from fossil fuel boilers, whereas most of us are blissfully unaware of where our electricity comes from, as we are connected to a grid that delivers renewable electricity directly to our homes.'

Ms Gartland, who also co-founded the Irish District Energy Association (IrDEA), Ireland's first district heating and cooling trade association, and is currently conducting her PhD on the subject, highlights the specific benefits of district heating: 'It's basically a heat grid that delivers renewable heat to your home, and the homeowner doesn't have to worry about where it's coming from.'

'This also means once a building is connected, the grid can continue to deliver low-carbon heat from multiple sources

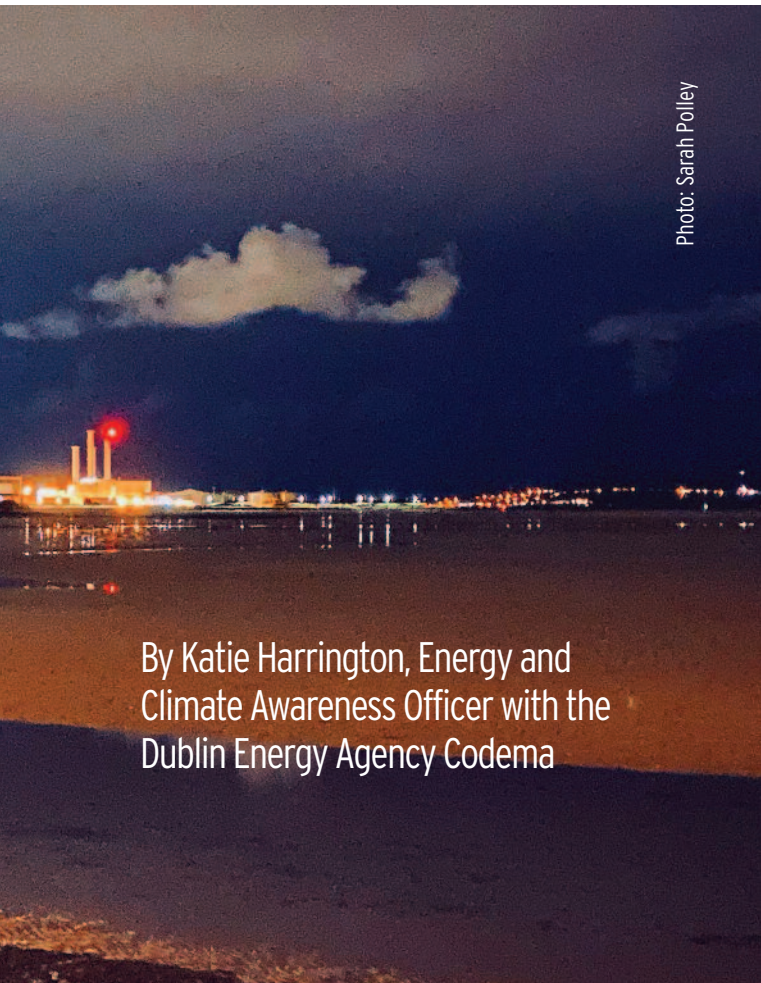


Photo: Sarah Polley

By Katie Harrington, Energy and Climate Awareness Officer with the Dublin Energy Agency Codema

across the town or city for years to come, without requiring the homeowner to make any further changes - it's a future-proof solution that is totally in line with our climate neutrality targets.'

### A climate solution

Interestingly, district heating doesn't involve new technology; in fact, according to research published in the International Review of District Heating, this type of heat network was first introduced in cities such as Lockport and New York in the late 1800s. District heating has come a long way since the 19th century and is now considered a key, local-level solution allowing for the decarbonisation of heat while also incorporating more renewable sources. In other words, district heating is a climate solution.

As with most future-proof climate solutions, one must look to the Nordic countries to understand the viability of this system in practice. Unsurprisingly, countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Finland have been successfully using district heating as early as the 1930s and have built this underground heat network into the fabric of their cities. Not only this, but they are fulfilling their "trailblazer" status in leading the way in district heating innovation. To put this into context,

Copenhagen is not only on track to meet its ambitious goal of being the world's first climate neutral capital by 2025, it is also the golden child of district heating, supplying hot water to 99% of its citizens through this network. The fact that district heating supplies heated water rather than fossil fuels to buildings makes it extremely attractive to cities with ambitious climate targets.

As the Nordic countries embody their status as leaders in climate action, Ireland equally lives up to the status of climate laggard, with researchers reporting Ireland as having one of the lowest shares of district heating in Europe at less than 1%. With a statistic like this, it would be easy to assume that this type of heat network just isn't viable for Ireland. In fact, there are countless areas throughout the country that are primed for this type of heating network; in Dublin alone, there is enough waste heat and renewable heat sources to heat the equivalent of over one million homes.

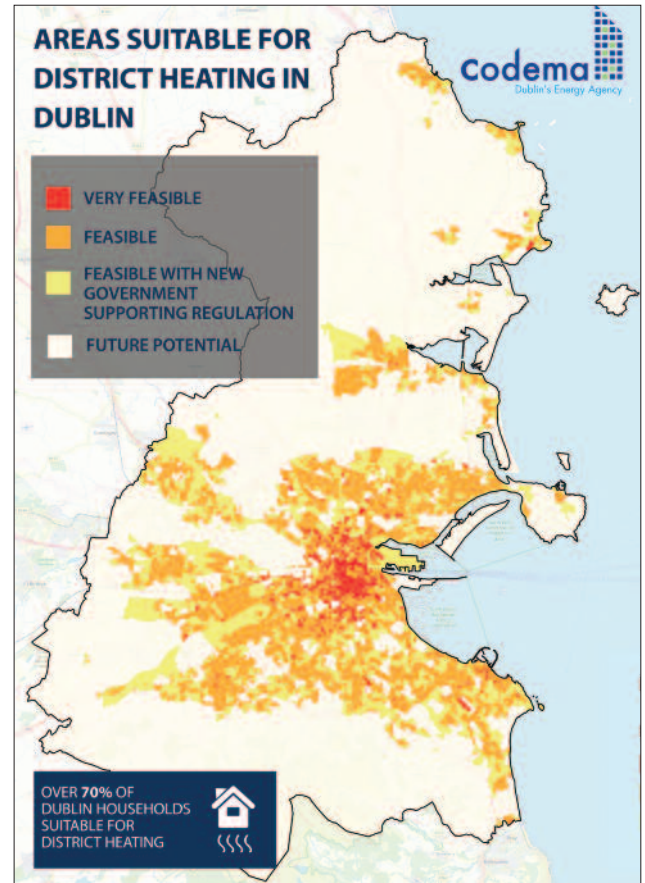
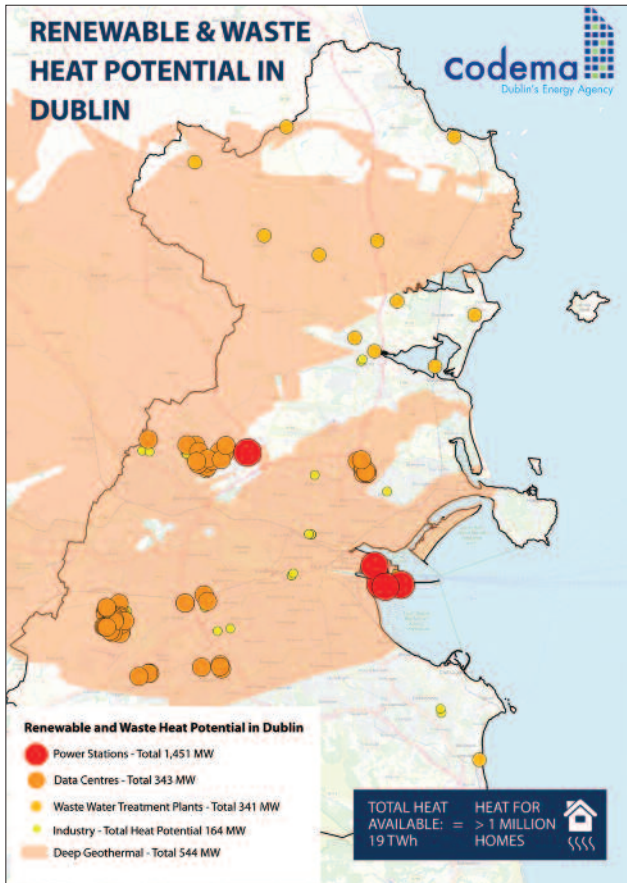
Ms Gartland elaborates on why Ireland hasn't rolled out district heating at scale by explaining that Ireland has traditionally had more single family and one-off housing than in other countries and with that, individual building heating solutions were developed. 'Because we have not had the tradition of district heating, there is a knowledge gap and incumbent technologies and cultural norms that are well established, and not so easy to change.'

### Leading the way

Although there are challenges facing the adoption of district heating, there are local authorities across Ireland leading the way in this untapped sector. Most recently, South Dublin County Council, with support from Codema, announced the roll-out of the Tallaght District Heating Scheme. This is Ireland's first large-scale district heating project and will use waste heat from Amazon's data centre to provide low-carbon heat to commercial, residential and public sector buildings in the area. As part of the process, South Dublin County Council has created Ireland's first not-for-profit energy utility company, which will operate under the name 'Heat Works'.

Dublin City Council is also committed to progressing the Dublin Docklands District Heating System, which has the potential to capture all the waste heat from the Dublin Waste-to-Energy facility. Victor Coe, Senior Executive Engineer for Dublin City Council and project engineer on this project, says that the aim is to get planning for the scheme in the next year, with ambitions for the first customer in the next four years.

District heating is clearly on the national agenda with its potential recognised by local and national government; however, some would argue that this type of network is just another "big-city" solution and doesn't address local communities. Ms Gartland challenges this concept by stating



that ‘while it makes most economical sense to start with the ‘big cities’ that have the highest heat demand densities, the feasibility is very site-specific and a smaller town or village could also have all the right ingredients to make district heating work, such as low-cost, local renewable heat sources or a village energy cooperative.’

### Potential outside the cities

One such community co-op taking the lead, with the ongoing support of Mayo County Council, is Claremorris and Western District Energy Co-operative, which aims to link up four council buildings, 20 social houses and commercial buildings in the area through a district heating network. JP Prendergast, chairman of the co-operative, states that not all towns will engage with district heating; it could be pockets of smaller district heating networks throughout the county that may emerge. According to Mr Prendergast, establishing a zero-waste value chain is the alternative to waste heat in the larger cities. ‘If we address the Green Deal policy, our agricultural sectors become the source supply...I’m a firm believer that energy generation outside of natural generation (wind, solar, etc.) must come from the end of process,’ he says. With that in place, Mr Prendergast sees the opportunity for local businesses, job creation and community participation. ‘The benefits can be as wide or as narrow as we can try to imagine, we just need to daydream a little more!’

As well as building a strong relationship with Mayo County Council, the cooperative has also worked tirelessly to galvanise support from the local community. ‘The key was to involve the consumer as being central to the success of the project and the legacy it would carry. After that, the job became a little easier,’ he says.

Mr Prendergast reveals that there is currently no support from the government in relation to district heating roll-out in local communities. ‘We need an enabling legal framework to remove the obstacles for energy communities,’ he said. ‘Until we get one rural 100% community-owned district heating network up and running in Ireland, which we hope will be Claremorris, this argument will be thrown around for years to come,’ he added.

It’s clear that the recipe for success lies in between the government implementing policy changes at pace and removing barriers to the adoption and execution of district heating projects, and the Irish consumer taking on the necessary role of an “early-adopter”. This is what “meeting in the middle” looks like in practice. There are decisions to be made in the next few years that will impact us for decades to come - this goes far beyond how we heat our homes; however, it’s a solid footing from which to start the necessary journey towards climate neutrality.

**For more information on district heating, visit [www.codema.ie](http://www.codema.ie)**

## Climate Action Knowledge Hub for Local Authorities Now Live

The Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO) have just launched a website [www.caro.ie](http://www.caro.ie) - to support all County and City Councils in leading Ireland's climate action efforts.

This valuable new resource for Ireland's 31 local authorities, will provide up-to-date climate change research, exemplar case studies, training, events and relevant news for the sector. Links to relevant national policy, sectoral plans, funding information and national organisations, such as Climate Ireland, are also available, making this new website an essential resource for local authorities to engage with.

A restricted area, accessible only to local authority staff, will provide practical tools and resources, including reporting templates and ideas-sharing. Each County and City Council is encouraged to engage with [www.caro.ie](http://www.caro.ie), including the submission of case studies to inspire and guide one other.

The Climate Action Regional Offices are part of the local authority structure, funded by the Department of the Environment, Climate

and Communications (DECC) to co-ordinate and support local government to lead transformative change and measurable climate action across our cities and counties. There are four CARO offices:

- Atlantic Seaboard South led by Cork County Council;
- Atlantic Seaboard North led by Mayo County Council;
- Eastern & Midlands led by Kildare County Council and
- Dublin Metropolitan led by Dublin City Council.

Each CARO office works with the local authorities in its respective region to deliver climate policies and behavioural change including by empowering citizens and businesses to embrace the need for climate action.



## Ireland's Climate Action Bill is published

The Government's revised Climate Bill - published in late-March - will enshrine into legislation the requirement for Ireland to effectively halve its carbon emissions by 2030, and to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. When the Bill becomes law, Ireland will join a list of other countries (such as Denmark, France, New Zealand, and the UK) with a legal commitment to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. Unlike 2020's Bill, this version is stronger in its language around the national climate objective (NCO). Rather than simply 'pursue' the NCO, this amended Bill makes clear that it will 'pursue and achieve, by no later than the end of the year 2050, the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy'. The Bill sets out key measures to help meet the NCO which includes:

- Five-yearly carbon budgets - on a 15-year rolling basis - to cover the whole economy with targets for each sector;
- Climate Action Plans - updated annually - with detailed actions to be undertaken by each sector;

- Government ministers will be responsible for ensuring that their sector reaches its legally-binding target;
- Ministers will report to a joint committee of the Houses of the Oireachtas on their sectors' performance;
- A National Climate Action Strategy prepared every five years;
- Strengthened role for the Climate Change Advisory Council;

Of course, the local authorities will have a big role to play. They will each prepare a 5-year Climate Action Plan with mitigation and adaptation measures. Statutory development plans prepared by local authorities will need to be aligned to their Climate Action Plan. In making their action plan, the Bill stipulates that the local authority shall consult and cooperate with adjoining authorities, and where appropriate, coordinate with them in relation to mitigation and adaptation measures. Consultation with the Public Participation Networks will be necessary too.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021 will continue to make its way through the Oireachtas as priority legislation.



# GET INVOLVED.

We are always interested in your views, so if you have any comments, suggestions or ideas for topics that we should address in future issues, please do not hesitate to let us know.

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