

# LOCAL AUTHORITY TIMES

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**IPA**  
AN FORAS RIARACHÁIN  
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ADMINISTRATION

# UP FOR DEBATE

THE IRISH CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY



## **Inside:** Time for change?

Dr Diarmuid Scully outlines how Ireland has one of the weakest systems of local government in Europe, and why it is time for change.

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See what the Association of Irish Local Government got up to during its recent visit to the Council of Europe.

Thank you to all of our excellent contributors featured in this edition of *Local Authority Times*.

# TALKS AND TAXES

Citizens of Dublin have been gathering in Malahide to discuss what type of Directly Elected Mayor will best serve the people of Dublin, and what local government arrangements are needed in future. The Dublin Citizens’ Assembly runs concurrently with the Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss. On page 2, IPA interns Alice Kelly and Cliodhna Moore explain the background to citizens’ assemblies.



I had the privilege of delivering a short presentation to the Dublin Citizens’ Assembly members, alongside many expert speakers, elected representatives and others. There was excellent discussion and questions from the Assembly members and I look forward to seeing what innovative recommendations emerge. Cliodhna Moore covers the Assembly meetings to date, on page 4, while Diarmuid Scully, on page 7, outlines his strong views on why our system of local government needs to change.

This edition of *Local Authority Times* also grapples with key issues in housing, with articles from David Rouse, Housing Agency, on what the growth in apartment numbers means for local authorities, and Gerard Turley and Stephen McNena outlining how vacant properties are taxed in Canada.

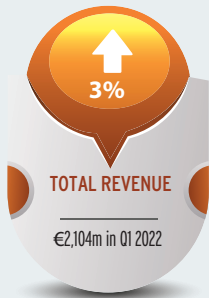


A new regular feature is our ‘Local Government Gallery’ (see page 16), where we showcase the work of local authorities across the country. If you would like to be featured in the next Gallery, email us at [latimes@ipa.ie](mailto:latimes@ipa.ie)

**Laura Shannon**  
Editor

## Local Government in Numbers: An overview of key indicators

### Key Quarterly Data



Up 2.6% on Q1 2021  
Source: Department of Finance

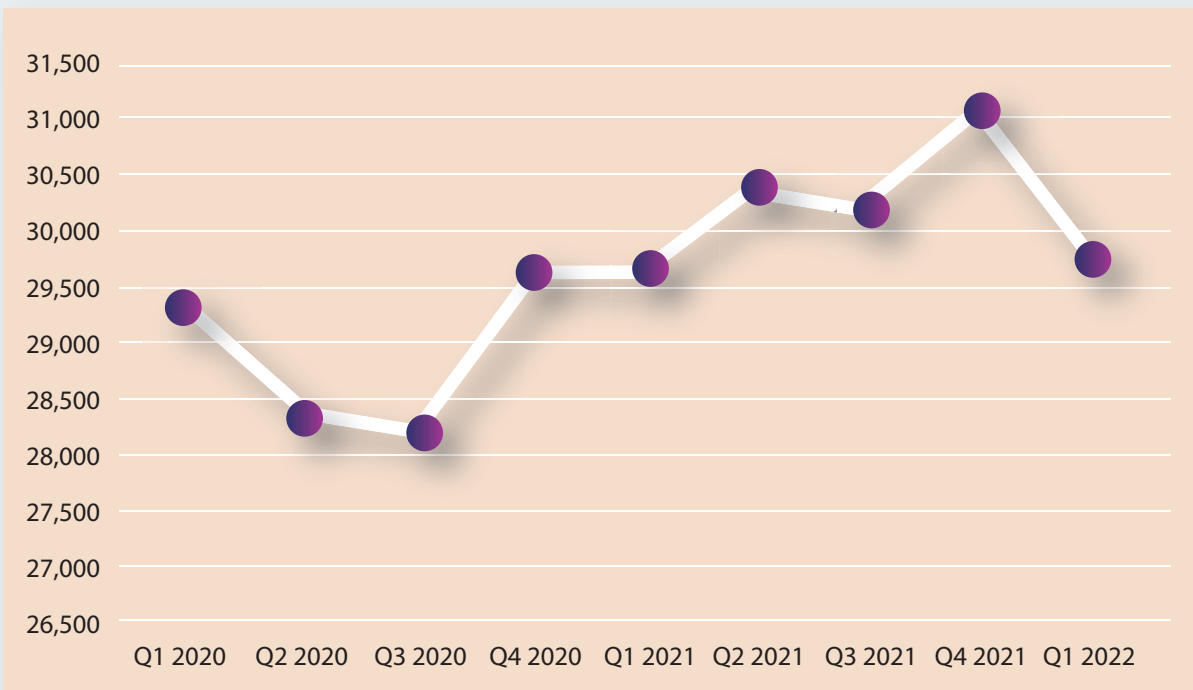


Up 15.3% on Q1 2021  
Source: Department of Finance



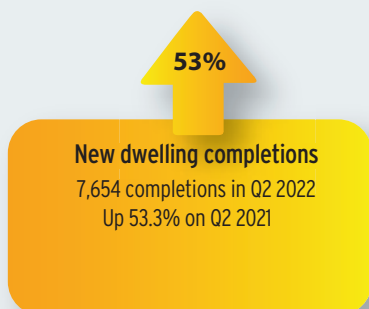
Up 0.8% on July 2021  
(\*data provisional and will be revised)  
Source: Revenue

### Total number of local authority staff

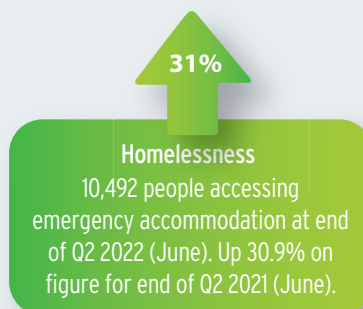


30,299 staff working in 31 local authorities for Q1 2022. Source: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

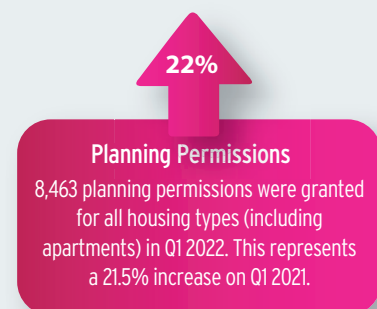
### Housing & Homelessness



Source: Central Statistics Office



Source: Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government



Source: Central Statistics Office

# UP FOR DEBATE

## THE IRISH CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

The Citizens' Assembly (CA) was set up originally in 2016 to deal with the five items of: abortion, an ageing population, fixed-term parliaments, referendum formations and climate change. This has since expanded into other areas; at present, there are two Citizens' Assemblies running in parallel to consider (1) the type of directly elected mayor and local government structures best suited for Dublin, and (2) biodiversity loss. The CA is a form of deliberative democracy whereby a group of randomised citizens are brought together to discuss an issue to make recommendations to the Government.

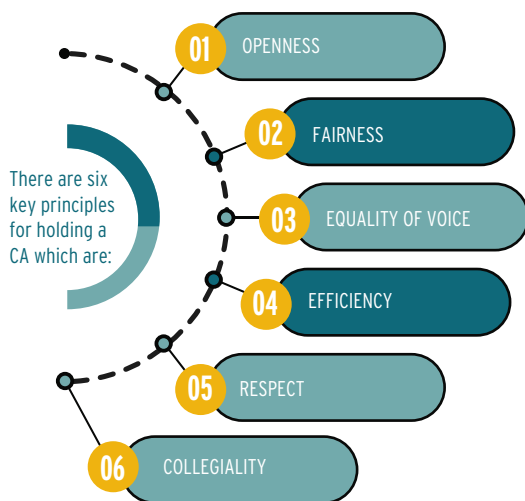
Alice Kelly and Clíodhna Moore, IPA Research Interns



## How does it work?

Assembly members meet and discuss each issue, receiving presentations from relevant experts, advocacy groups and sometimes personal testimonials. Following the information-gathering and discussion stage, the Assembly drafts recommendations and holds a vote, with the results being submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Recommendations from a CA can sometimes result in a referendum being held. This will depend on the specific issue. For example, following the CA in 2016-2018, a referendum was held on the issue of abortion and the Eighth Amendment. CA in this way represents how deliberation can play a vital and meaningful role in the referendum process as well as the wider political system (Farrell *et al.*, 2018, p. 8). All involved citizens get a chance to voice their thoughts in a fair and rational way, with information being shared in an unbiased manner.



## Recruiting Assembly members

In previous Assemblies, the members were recruited from the electoral register and on a door-to-door call basis, meaning that many groups, such as migrants, were excluded from the process. However, the latest round of Assemblies has reformed the recruitment process, with any adult who is resident in the State being eligible for membership, and written invitations being sent out to the randomly selected households, improving the overall geographic and demographic representation of the CA. The members are to be broadly representative of wider society, stratified by targets such as age, sex, region, and social class. This ensures that views across various groups in society are considered when deliberating on an issue. An independent chairperson is also appointed.

Citizens not involved in the Assembly can make submissions on the topic at hand, which are subsequently published on the CA website. The public sessions of the Assemblies are also recorded and livestreamed for all to access, allowing for full transparency of the process.

## Benefits

Holding a CA produces greater democratic legitimacy and can bring many benefits to both citizens and Government. Citizens, through the Assemblies, have access to professional and expert material, leading them to become more educated on a topic and to be better equipped in contributing to discussions and making informed decisions. Government, for its part, has access to public opinion that is informed and diverse. A CA provides members with plenty of time to form and test opinions, surrounded by people from all backgrounds.

Incorporating deliberative democratic practices such as a CA in the decision-making process encourages citizen participation that would typically not take place otherwise. It reinforces trust among citizens and voters who feel that their views are being considered, which may encourage them to get involved in other areas of political activity.

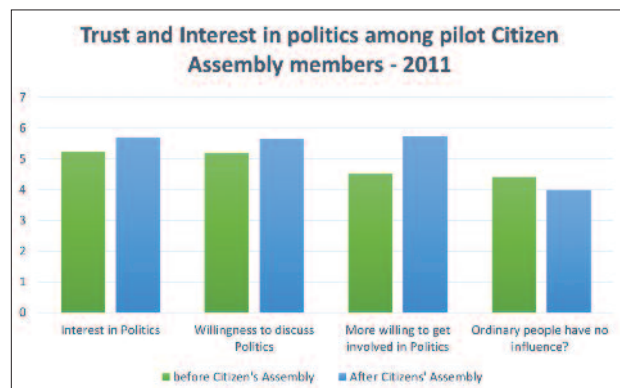


Figure 1. This graph demonstrates the benefits of deliberative democracy. Participants reported an increased willingness to discuss and become involved in politics following their participation in a pilot Citizens' Assembly.

Source: Adapted from We The Citizens, *Speak up for Ireland*, 2011.

Of course, there can be downsides to running a CA in that it can cost a lot of money, with previous CAs in Ireland costing upwards of €1 million. Additionally, some view CAs as 'kicking the can down the road' and a way for politicians to delay decision-making or to 'shift responsibility' on contentious issues.

However, as previous Assemblies have shown, the vital policy outcomes that arise out of them are worth the investment. With clear guidelines from the outset on how recommendations are to be dealt with, citizens will be more inclined to provide opinions and their time if they feel that real change can come about from deliberations.

### Deliberative democracy in action

The CA is currently active regarding the issues of a Directly Elected Mayor (DEM) for Dublin, and biodiversity. The Dublin Citizens' Assembly has been tasked with determining what responsibilities the mayor should have and what format the local authorities should assume in the foreseeable future. The concurrent Biodiversity Assembly is tasked with how the state can enhance its approach to biodiversity loss.

CAs are a growing international trend that can be useful for many policy and legislative issues, contributing to the improvement of democratic political systems. It is a format that can (and should) be used not just by national governments but also by local authorities and planning bodies, allowing for greater citizen engagement while dealing with complex issues.

### References

Citizenassembly.ie. 2022. *The Irish Citizens' Assembly Project* [online] Available at: <<http://www.citizenassembly.ie/about/#the-irish-citizens-assembly-project>> [Accessed 23 May 2022].

Citizensassembly.ie. 2022. *Home*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/>> [Accessed 23 May 2022].

Farrell, D., Suiter, J. and Harris, C. (2018), 'Systematizing constitutional deliberation: The 2016-18 Citizens' Assembly in Ireland', *Irish Political Studies* 34(1), pp. 113-123.

We The Citizens (2011), *Speak up for Ireland: Participatory democracy in action - a pilot*, Available at: We-the-Citizens-2011- FINAL.pdf (wethecitizens.ie) [Accessed 23 May 2022].



After the launch of both Assemblies' inaugural meetings, a Q&A was held with Chairs Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin (Biodiversity Loss) and Jim Gavin (Dublin Citizens' Assembly) and gathered experts.

Picture courtesy of The Citizens' Assembly

# TALK OF THE TOWN

## THE DUBLIN CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

Clíodhna Moore  
IPA Research Intern



The Dublin Citizens' Assembly (Citizens' Assembly) was convened in April 2022, to examine the appropriate powers and responsibilities of the future Directly Elected Mayor, and local government designs for Dublin, and to provide recommendations. The Citizens' Assembly consists of 80 participants, including an independent Chairperson (Jim Gavin), 67 randomly selected residents from County Dublin, and 12 councillors from across the four Dublin local authorities. Three meetings of the Citizens' Assembly have been held since the end of June, the Assembly having been initiated during April.

**T**he Assembly will not debate over whether a Directly Elected Mayor (DEM) should be elected; that was already established and is a given. Rather, the Citizens' Assembly will examine several considerations in regard to the duties and responsibilities of the DEM and subsequent local government arrangements, including:

- The advantages and disadvantages of Dublin's existing local government system;
- The advantages, costs, problems, and possibilities that a DEM for Dublin may have;
- What duties in Dublin may be shifted from central to regional or local government, and how can this be financially supported;
- What the local and regional government and councils most suitable system will be. There will be examples and descriptions of structures in other cities, such as London and Paris;
- The opinions of the Assembly members, representative bodies, advocacy groups, current councillors of the four local authorities, the Dublin Teachtaí Dála and Members of the European Parliament and senior officials and staff of local authorities.

As of 27 June, three Citizens' Assembly weekend meetings have taken place. The first, inaugural, meeting gave an overview of the current governmental structure in place, along with what local authorities do and their role. The benefits of different roles of a DEM were also discussed. At the second meeting of the Citizens' Assembly, the four current mayors of Dublin gave presentations to exemplify their roles within the





The four mayors of Dublin (in May 2022) give their views to the Citizens' Assembly, L-R Mayor of South Dublin County Council, Cllr Peter Kavanagh; Cathaoirleach of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Cllr Lettie McCarthy; Lord Mayor of Dublin, Cllr Alison Gilliland; Mayor of Fingal County Council, Cllr Seána Ó Rodaigh.



Poet John Cummins kicks off the second meeting of the Assembly.

*Pictures: Dublin Mayors Citizens' Assembly*

communities, and the Assembly listened to some proposals for directly elected mayors and local government design at a high level. The third meeting focused on the possible powers that the DEM might have, and the financing surrounding the DEM.

Key speakers during the meetings included Laura Shannon, Philip Byrne and Mark Callanan from the Institute of Public Administration. Assembly members were presented to by the four current mayors of the Dublin local authorities, who spoke about their roles. The Assembly members were asked to consider serious reform and to devolve some powers from central government to strengthen local democracy.

Dr Sean O'Riordan was invited as a key speaker to outline different models which could be examined by the Assembly members. Following Dr O'Riordan's presentation, the Assembly received presentations from three different international mayors, each of whom explained their own city's approach to the mayor's responsibilities and duties. The international presenters included the Mayor of Manchester City, Andy Burnham; the Vice-Mayor of Paris, Anouch Toranian; and former member of Boston City Council, Mr Larry DiCara. The key speakers also provided a Q & A session for the Assembly members.

The third Citizens' Assembly meeting introduced the members to the experiences learned from the Limerick DEM, along with stating some of the possible powers of the DEM and the financing of the DEM. Tim O'Connor, Chairman of the Limerick DEM Implementation Advisory Group, spoke about the situation in Limerick and the events that led to the mayor being elected there. He stated that he felt a DEM should be at the heart of everything affecting the wellbeing of Limerick and that this was how the Limerick DEM duties were decided. Dr Brian Caulfield, Associate Professor at Trinity College, suggested the need for the DEM to play a bigger role in policy development oversight related to transport, with the DEM having a board seat on the National Transport Authority.

The Dublin Citizens' Assembly will reconvene in September and again in October, and will conclude its work by year end. When it has run to completion, the Houses of the Oireachtas will receive a summary and proposals for the DEM from the Assembly members, and these will be reviewed. The Government will respond to each suggestion of the Assembly in the Houses of the Oireachtas and, if it accepts some or all of the proposals, will specify the timescale for implementation. Proceedings of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly are streamed live online and available to watch back on the website, [www.citizensassembly.ie](http://www.citizensassembly.ie)



# PADDY LAST... ALMOST!

## Reforms of the Local Government System Needed

**Dr Diarmuid Scully**

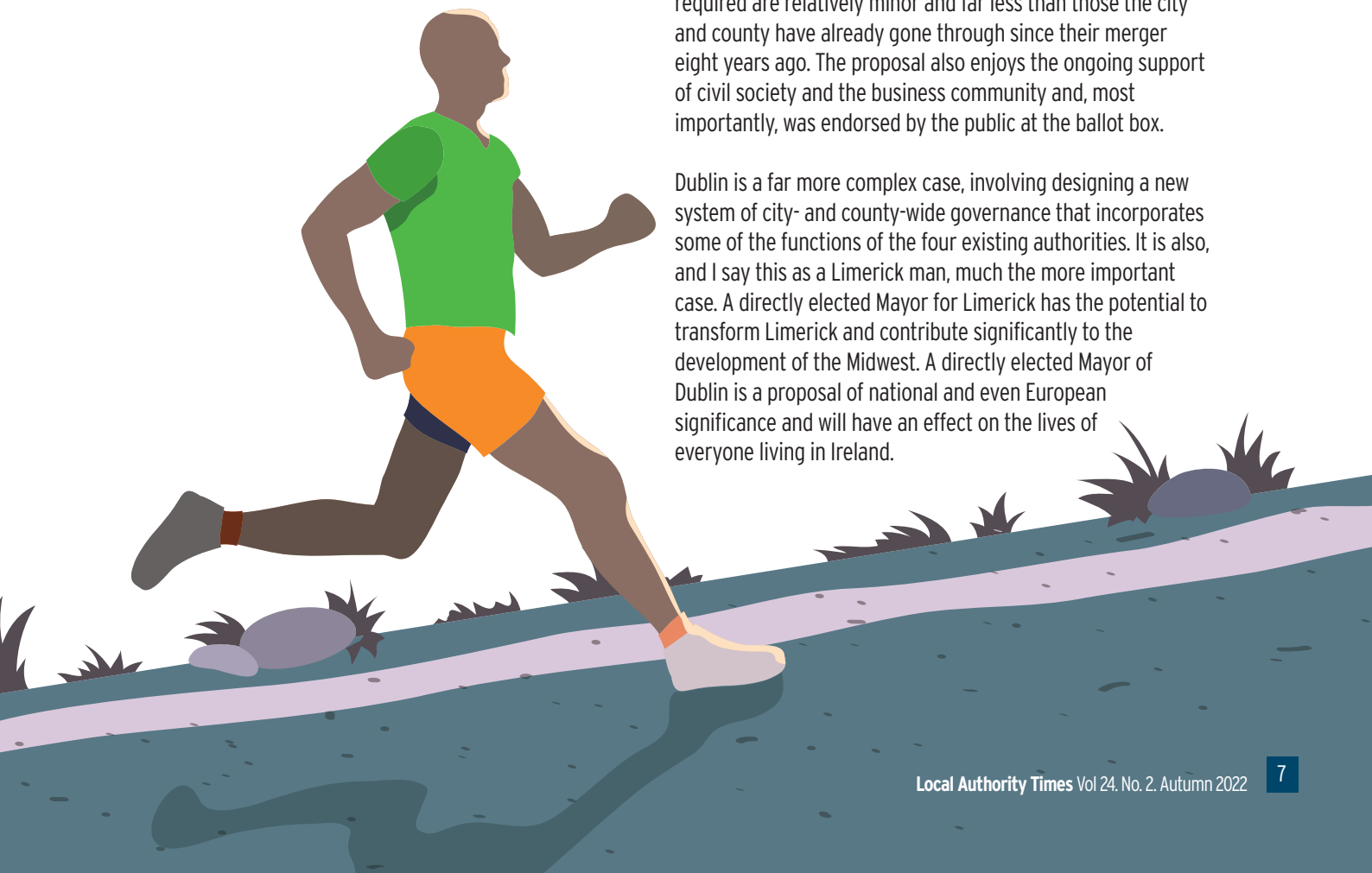
Academic advisor to the Limerick  
Mayoral Implementation Committee

When our system of local government ranks lower in terms of powers, functions and funding than that in an autocratic dictatorship, it is time to ask serious questions about how we got here and what we intend to do about it.

**T**he Bill establishing the office of Directly Elected Mayor for Limerick is slowly, but inexorably, wending its way through the Oireachtas. In the meantime, the Citizens' Assembly, meeting in Malahide, is making substantial progress in designing the role of the proposed new directly elected 'metro Mayor' for the four Dublin local authorities. Taken together, these two proposed reforms have the potential to transform local government in Ireland beyond anything seen in the last century and a quarter.

The Limerick proposal is considerably further down the road, and is expected to pass into law shortly, with the first election held next year. It is also the easier proposition. Limerick is, since 2014, a unitary authority. The organisational changes required are relatively minor and far less than those the city and county have already gone through since their merger eight years ago. The proposal also enjoys the ongoing support of civil society and the business community and, most importantly, was endorsed by the public at the ballot box.

Dublin is a far more complex case, involving designing a new system of city- and county-wide governance that incorporates some of the functions of the four existing authorities. It is also, and I say this as a Limerick man, much the more important case. A directly elected Mayor for Limerick has the potential to transform Limerick and contribute significantly to the development of the Midwest. A directly elected Mayor of Dublin is a proposal of national and even European significance and will have an effect on the lives of everyone living in Ireland.



In considering such a momentous change it is worth reflecting that introducing a directly elected mayor with executive powers would not be an unusual thing to do. What is unusual, highly unusual, is our current system of local government.

Ireland's local government is ranked last among the Member States of the European Union in terms of powers, functions and funding. This is not unrelated to the fact that Ireland is the only country in the EU to use the old British Council-Manager system - a system that has even been abandoned in England and Wales. Our local government is even weaker than this would suggest. Under the auspices of the European Charter of Local Self Government, the Council of Europe constantly monitors the status of local government among its 47 Member States. Ireland is currently ranked forty-sixth, ahead of Moldova alone and behind countries such as Albania and Azerbaijan. Local government in Vladimir Putin's Russia - prior to Russia's expulsion from the Council of Europe in February - had a better ranking than Ireland.

The origin of our dysfunctional system lies in the Local Government (Ireland) Act of 1898. While this was welcomed at the time as a badly needed and long-overdue reform of the Grand Jury system, the Act contained three serious flaws that affect us to this day. Unionists in Ireland feared that democratic local government would empower Nationalists and threaten the Union. It's fair to say, they had a point. These concerns - the fear that the wrong people might get elected - led to local government being introduced later in Ireland than elsewhere in what was then the United Kingdom, and to local government having fewer powers - particularly in the area of policing - than elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

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### These two factors, late introduction and reduced powers, are at the heart of what is wrong with local government in Ireland today.

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Late introduction meant that many of the services provided by local government elsewhere in the world, such as education and healthcare, were in Ireland provided by charities, principally the churches. Reduced powers meant that others - policing, to begin with, but also notably public transport - were controlled and run at a national level, with no local control or even input. While attempts have been made to resolve these anomalies over the years with the Vocational Education Committees (now Education and Training Boards), joint policing committees, etc. the real issue - where powers, functions and funding rest - had never been properly addressed. The reforms in Limerick and Dublin provide an opportunity to do so.

I mentioned a third serious flaw that still affects us from the

1898 Act and that is our country system. In England and Wales (and indeed across the democratic world), county boundaries are moved all the time to reflect demographic and other changes, or simply to better organise the delivery of services. In Ireland, no county boundary has ever been moved. As a result, we are left with a county system designed for a predominantly rural state with a population of just over two million people, while living in a predominantly urban state with a population of close to five million. A reform of the county system is beyond the scope of the current discussions, but should not be beyond debate.

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### I am hopeful, then, that the introduction of directly elected Mayors for Limerick and Dublin will lead to a devolution of powers, functions and funding to both cities and that this, in turn, will spark a wider reform in a local government system that is an international outlier and not fit for purpose.

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As someone who was a local politician before I became an academic, I am attuned to the whispered political opposition to these reforms. As in 1898, they are essentially a fear that the wrong people might get elected.

In 21st century discourse, this fear is of populists who might pose a threat to the democratic system. As with the 19th century Unionists, those worried about the election of populist candidates to mayoralties have a point, but the answer is not to persist with a flawed and essentially undemocratic system. It is to build democratic safeguards into the new system.

On a broader point, if there is a threat to our democracy, it is not a populist being elected Mayor of Limerick or of Dublin, it is a populist being elected Taoiseach. Should that day ever come, a strong, effective and democratic system of local government is one of the most effective checks against abuse of power at a national level.

I mentioned that local government in Russia enjoyed a better international rating than local government in Ireland, and this is true, but it was only a little better. Russia performed poorly on the Council of Europe measures. Weak local government is a feature of all autocracies. Strong independent local government is correlated with free societies and full democracies. The irony is that while our local government system looks like something from a dictatorship, Ireland is a free society. We are one of only a handful of countries in the world considered, at a national level, to be a full democracy. Our local government system is unworthy of use. Time to change it.

## Electoral Commission to be Established

An Electoral Commission will be established, under new reforms of the electoral system recently passed by Dáil Éireann. The Electoral Reform Bill will bring about the development, modernisation and reform of Ireland's electoral system, structures and processes.

The key elements of the Bill include:

- Establishment of a statutory, independent Electoral Commission for Ireland
- Modernisation of the electoral registration process to deliver greater accessibility and greater integrity
- Regulation of online political advertising to provide for transparency during electoral campaigns and ensure that elections remain free from hidden influences on how we vote
- Provisions to protect the integrity of electoral processes, which will see the regulation of electoral process information and online electoral information in order to guard against manipulative or inauthentic behaviour during electoral campaigns
- Strengthening of the regulatory regime in respect of political donations and accounts, including the provision of new investigatory and enforcement powers to the Standards in Public Office Commission
- Amendments to electoral law to provide that voting on the islands will take place on the same day as for the rest of the country
- The extension of flexible voting facilities, which are currently available to persons with physical illnesses or disabilities, to persons with mental health difficulties.

Dr Jennifer Kavanagh, writing for the Law Society of Ireland in May, noted that the proposals of the Bill are 'welcome and necessary'. With regard to the establishment of the Electoral Commission, Dr Kavanagh added: 'After many years of reports and campaigning in the area, this body, as envisaged, will transform the regulation of elections in Ireland for the better. It will have a role in future debates in the electoral reform space in Ireland.' \*

The Bill has come under some criticism relating both to the 'rushed' nature of its debate and approval in the Dáil before the summer recess, and with regard to a European Commission finding that parts of the Bill are not compliant with the European Union's e-commerce directive. The Bill was signed into law by the President in late July, while the Government continues to liaise



The Bill was signed into law by President Michael D. Higgins in late July.

with the European Commission and consider all comments and observations before commencing certain parts of the Act.

\* <https://www.lawsociety.ie/gazette/in-depth/electoral-reform-bill>

## Irish Water to Become 'Uisce Éireann'

By 1 January 2023, Irish Water will officially become 'Uisce Éireann' as it separates from the Ervia Group. Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien said: 'This Bill provides a significant milestone in giving effect to the Programme for Government commitment to retain Irish Water in public ownership as a national, standalone, regulated utility.'

The Government approved the publication of the Water Services (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2022 in July, providing for the separation of Uisce Éireann (Irish Water) from Ervia and its establishment as the standalone national authority for water services. As part of the change, the authority shall be known by its Irish name, Uisce Éireann. The Bill will be progressed through the Houses of the Oireachtas during the autumn with a view to its being enacted before the end of 2022.





# ON THE UP AND UP..

## What the Growth in Apartment Numbers Means for Local Authorities

### David Rouse

Multi-Unit Developments Advisor with The Housing Agency

**A**partments form an increasing proportion of Ireland's housing stock. Data from the Central Statistics Office record that:

- Grants of planning for apartments increased by almost 300 per cent over the period 2010 to 2020. In contrast, the increase in permissions for houses was just under 60 per cent;
- 2019 was the first year in which more apartments than houses were granted planning permission;
- Quarter 4 of 2020 was the first quarter ever when more apartments than houses were completed;
- In 2021, 25 per cent of all completions in the country were apartments, the highest proportion since CSO records began;

- In the first quarter of 2022 apartments made up 70 per cent of completions in Dublin and 31 per cent of completions nationally.

What does the growth in apartment permissions and completions mean for local councils?

### Linking planning and management phases

The 2018 Guidelines for Planning Authorities, *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments*, link the planning phase of apartments to their long-term management. Included in the application and approval processes for apartments are:

- A building lifecycle report, and an assessment of long-term running and maintenance costs for the estate
- A demonstration of measures considered to manage and reduce costs for the benefit of residents
- Appropriate conditions that require compliance with the Multi-Unit Developments (MUD) Act 2011
- An owners' management company (OMC) and an appropriate sinking fund.

### Buying or leasing homes in MUDs

Matters arising for local authorities acquiring or leasing homes in MUDs include:

#### 1. Financial health of the OMC

- Yearly financial statements should be available online from the Companies Registration Office (CRO). Cash, debtors, the value of the sinking fund, and disclosure notes to the accounts might be reviewed.
- An annual report prepared for existing homeowners is required under Section 17 of the Multi-Unit Developments (MUD) Act, 2011.

## 2. Governing documents

- The head lease may require a tenant under a sublease to become a member of the OMC. Such a requirement may have implications for a local authority, depending on its status under the leasing arrangement.
- House Rules, established in the manner set out in Section 23 of the MUD Act, bind a local authority owner and its tenants.
- A contract between an OMC and a management agent is required by the Property Services (Regulation) Act, 2011. The Property Services Regulatory Authority has published a template contract, explaining the mandatory terms and those that may be varied by the parties. Service levels under this contract can have a bearing on the standard of maintenance and upkeep of estate common areas available to residents, including local authority tenants.

## 3. Building/construction safety

- Meeting the minimum standards for rental accommodation
- Conformance with the building control legislative framework
- Fire safety compliance.

A local authority will typically consider many of these matters in its financial, legal, and construction technical due diligence processes. Sources of guidance on the issues are noted at the end of this article.

## Taking in charge

When construction of a MUD such as an apartment scheme is completed, most of the common areas will be transferred to the OMC by the developer. Under the scheme's planning conditions,

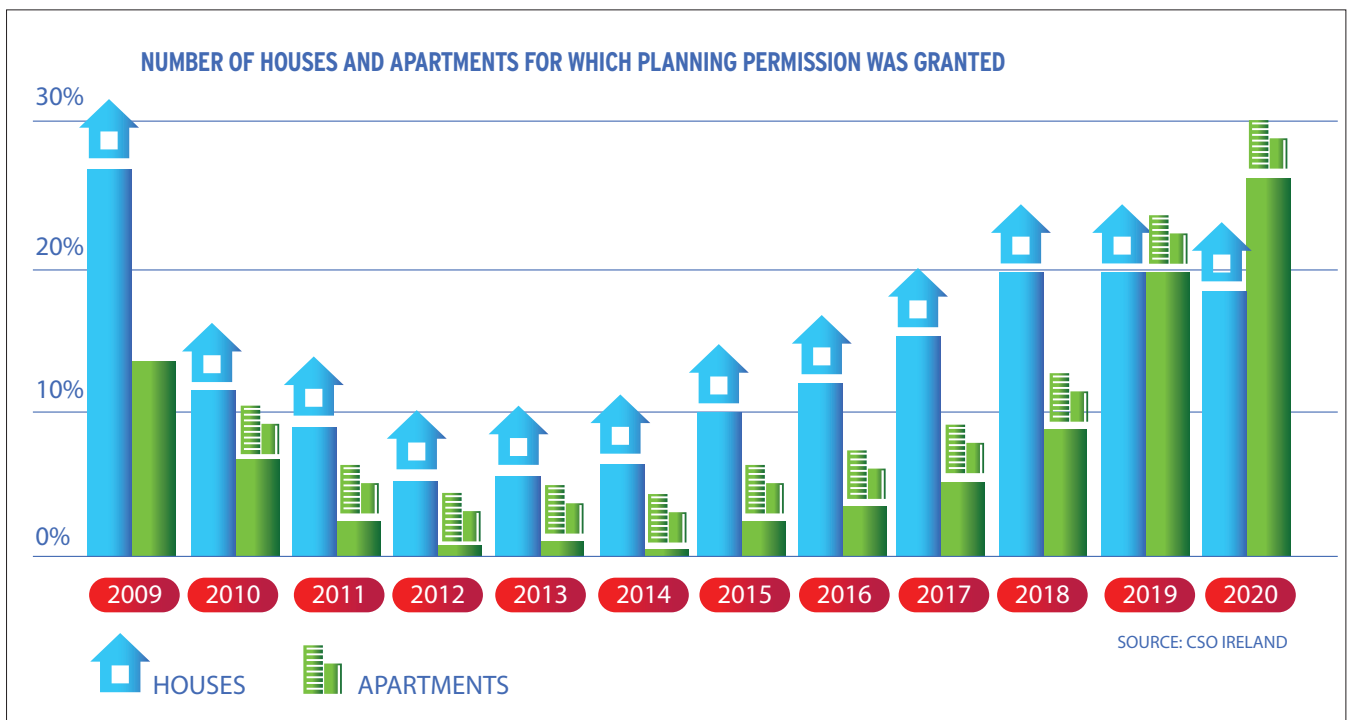
some parts of the development, e.g. main roads and associated services, may be destined to transfer to the local authority. The Office of the Planning Regulator has published *A Guide to Taking in Charge of Completed Residential Developments*, which includes guidance about taking in charge in MUDs.

## Planning and other changes

- In July, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland launched supports for the installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure in existing MUDs.
- The Draft Planning and Development Act, 2000 (Exempted Development) (No. 3) Regulations, 2022 include exemptions from planning permission for solar panels installed on apartment buildings. At the time of writing, a public consultation on the regulations was underway.
- *A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy* flags new planning and tenancy laws for infrastructure in apartments to assist segregation of food waste, e.g. use of brown bins.
- Actions 25.10 to 25.12 of *Housing for All*, the Government's action plan for housing, set out reform in relation to collection of annual service charges, sinking funds, and dispute resolution. These proposals are reflected in actions of *Justice Plan 2022* issued by the Department of Justice.

## Resources for local authorities and stakeholders

The Housing Agency's website, [housing.ie](http://housing.ie), and YouTube channel, [youtube.com/c/HousingAgencyIE](https://www.youtube.com/c/HousingAgencyIE), host resources for MUDs and OMCs. *Owners' Management Companies - A Concise Guide for Directors* is governance guidance prepared by the Housing Agency in collaboration with Chartered Accountants Ireland.



# NO ONE GETS LEFT BEHIND

A new pilot project is underway in four local authorities to support engagement with marginalised communities in planning and decision-making

**Alice Kelly**

IPA Research Intern

In an ever-changing society, with numerous challenges emerging and crises taking place, it is becoming increasingly important to ensure that no one is left behind, whether politically or socially. Ireland has committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and included in this is the promotion of social inclusion and the principle of 'leave no one behind'. Ireland is committed to the ending of discrimination as well as reducing the inequalities and vulnerabilities that many groups experience. In order to do this, meaningful participation and ensuring that everyone has a voice are key.<sup>1</sup>



## What is a marginalised group?

In order for inclusion and integration to be successful, they must be implemented at all levels - local, national and international. The work of local authorities has an impact on all groups of society within their given area and so it makes sense that all groups should be included and considered when making decisions. There are many groups in society that have different issues and needs; these must be taken into account and brought forward into active conversations. These experiences, issues and needs are often overlooked by policy-makers and legislators.<sup>2</sup>

A marginalised community or group is one that is excluded from mainstream social, economic, educational and cultural life. It experiences persistent inequality and adversity resulting from discrimination, social stigma and stereotypes. Some examples of marginalised groups include ethnic minorities, Travellers, immigrants and refugees, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, people with disabilities both physical and mental, elderly people, and groups excluded due to gender identity, age, and sexual orientation.

Marginalised groups are often defined as hard to reach, but well-coordinated collective action via networking and alliance building must take place to overcome these challenges in reaching out to groups and breaking down these long-standing and deeply entrenched divisions and stigma.

## Benefits of inclusion

Democracy is more likely to develop and endure when all groups in society are free to participate and influence political outcomes, without suffering discrimination or bias. Inclusive consultation is a key element of healthy democracies.

All marginalised groups should be involved in designing inclusion strategies, including identifying needs and lack of rights, agreeing objectives, and monitoring progress. Close consultation with the entire community should be ongoing. Research should also understand that many subgroups with different issues and needs exist and, therefore, results should be disaggregated across a range of demographic characteristics in order to account for differences.

## Inclusion in action - the pilot project

The Department of Rural and Community Development has announced that four Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in Clare, Fingal, Galway City and Wicklow are to undertake pilot projects to support engagement with marginalised communities in of the Local Economic and Community Planning (LECP) process that is currently underway in all local authorities. The project aims to ensure that LCDCs have the capacity to target and engage meaningfully with marginalised communities and to continue this on a long-term basis in their wider work.

The four local authorities taking part in the pilot projects are to act as an example and help test engagement strategies to support inclusive participation, as well as developing toolkits that can be adapted and used by other local authorities to enable better engagement and participation by marginalised groups. Funding of up to €40,000 has been approved for each of the four LCDCs. In addition, all local authorities will receive information and resources to support their engagement with marginalised communities. National events will showcase good practice in relation to engagement strategies, with inputs from experts and national advocacy and representative organisations.

This work supports Ireland's commitment to sustainable development, and fulfils a strategic objective under *Sustainable Inclusive and Empowered Communities*, the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. Minister of State for Charities and Community Development, Joe O'Brien, who announced the project, believes that it will have a great impact for the community as well as on policy:

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**'the voice of all members of our communities must be present in the design, implementation and review of decisions that impact on all of our lives - inclusive consultation and meaningful engagement are key to this. Ultimately the best decisions are those which are made together, with the opportunity for everyone to share their perspective.'**

Pobal, who is supporting the project, will produce an end-of-project summary report that will reflect on the learnings from each event and the pilot; it is hoped that this will support comprehensive consultation in the future. A second event later this year will review the pilot's experience and focus on sharing learnings to encourage discussion on the opportunities for engagement, and how they are best embedded in consultation processes.

The inclusion of marginalised groups must not be completed on a once-off basis; it should be continuous and regular, ensuring that inclusion is meaningful and long-term.

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<sup>1</sup> Ireland's Second National Implementation Plan for the SDGs 2022-2024 224776\_32844dfc-d348-4fd5-b605-68c6ee00e7f5.pdf

<sup>2</sup> AMMI marginalised inside (amnesty.ie).



# TAXING EMPTY SPACE

## Taxing Vacant Properties During a Housing Crisis

**Stephen McNena and Gerard Turley**

J.E. Cairnes School of Business & Economics, and the  
Whitaker Institute, University of Galway

Ireland is experiencing a housing crisis, with the problem most acute in Dublin. Although new residential property construction has recovered since the 2008/09 Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, the current rate of new construction is well below the required annual 33,000 homes as stated in the Government's *Housing for All* plan.

Although difficult to define and measure accurately, tackling vacant properties is part of a multi-dimensional approach that can help urban development and address the affordability crisis. More specifically, how might a tax on vacant properties discourage a wasteful use of a scarce resource?

The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage recently launched its report on urban regeneration, with 39 recommendations. One of the recommendations is for the Government to consider a vacant homes tax. In response, the Minister for Housing, Darragh O'Brien, stated his intention to introduce the tax in Budget 2023.

As one of us has just returned from the University of Toronto, we can report on the Canadian experience with vacant property taxes. There, affordable housing is a big issue, with rising property prices, and much higher annual residential





Vancouver was the first city in North America to introduce a vacant homes tax, and other Canadian cities and provinces (and even the Federal government) have followed.

property taxes than here in Ireland. Vancouver was the first city in North America to introduce a vacant homes tax, and other Canadian cities and provinces (and even the Federal Government) have followed.

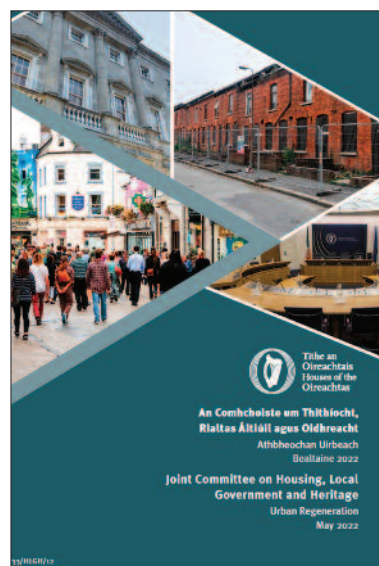
Vancouver introduced its Empty Homes Tax (EHT) in 2017, with the aim of returning vacant properties to the rental market. Owners must make an annual declaration, and if their property is not being used as a principal residence or is not rented for more than six months of the year, it is subject to the tax, unless an exemption applies (for example, property transfer, death of owner, redevelopment, owner in care). The tax rate was 1 per cent of the assessed taxable value, and has been 3 per cent since 2021. Net revenues are reinvested into affordable housing initiatives across the city. City officials claim that the tax is working, with vacancy dropping by 26 per cent and properties occupied by tenants growing nearly 20 per cent over the three years.

British Columbia applies a Speculation and Vacancy Tax in major urban areas (including the City of Vancouver) at a rate that varies depending on the use of the property, the owner's residency status and where they earn and report their income. From 2019, the rates are 2 per cent for foreign owners, and 0.5 per cent for Canadian citizens or permanent residents. Exemptions apply, with the main one being the owner's principal residence. Again, provincial officials claim, the policy goal of adding more units for sale and rent is being achieved.

In Toronto, the Vacant Home Tax was introduced in 2022, and its design, exemptions and administration are very similar to Vancouver's. The tax rate is 1 per cent of their property's Current Assessed Value.

Although they seem to have some support, experts remain divided on the impact of these taxes. It is difficult to disentangle their effects from all the other factors affecting property markets. Earlier evidence from elsewhere, including lower numbers of vacant properties than originally estimated, and their concentration at the higher end of the market, raises some doubts about the effectiveness of such taxes as a tool to tackle the affordability crisis for younger, low and middle-income earners.

More evidence is needed so that our policymakers make the right interventions about one of the defining issues of our time - housing. Given the current state of the property market and housing supply, a vacant property tax seems like a good idea in principle, but as with all good taxes, the devil is in the detail. Design features are important, but so are the administration and enforcement of the tax (remember the Vacant Site Levy!) We look forward to seeing the details in Budget 2023.



Report by the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage regarding Urban Regeneration

# The Local Government Gallery

What has your local authority been up to recently? Our Gallery highlights the work of local government across the country. To be featured in the next edition, email your photographs to [latimes@ipa.ie](mailto:latimes@ipa.ie)



Artwork in Shelmaden's Lane, called 'See like a Bee'.

## Clonmel Borough District

Clonmel Borough District has recently enhanced the laneways of the town, and the dedicated outdoor team continues to maintain the streetscape. The mural on East Lane, by Neil O'Dwyer, depicts faces associated with local culture, while artwork in Shelmaden's Lane, called 'See like a Bee', is lit by ultraviolet lights.



The mural on East Lane.



Umbrellas on Mitchel Street.

## Waterford City and County

Newly elected Mayor of Waterford City and County, Councillor John O'Leary officially launched the new Transport for Ireland (TFI) Bike Share scheme at Arundel Square in Waterford City. The new self-service bike scheme consists of 220 bikes located across 14 bike stations in key areas around the city.

Picture: Patrick Browne.





## Clonakilty

Clonakilty's new civil war mural, by Cork artist Garreth Joyce, commemorates the beginning of the Irish Civil War. It depicts the Austin Clarke civil war poem 'The Lost Heifer' and was a Michael Collins House-led project, funded by Cork County Council's Commemorations Committee in association with The Walls Project. Pictured are Clodagh Henehan, Divisional Manager West, Cork County Council; Tim Lucey, Chief Executive, Cork County Council; and the Mayor of the County of Cork, Cllr Danny Collins. *Picture: John Allen*



## Limerick

Cllr Daniel Butler launching the Limerick Going for Gold competition for 2022 in Askeaton in what was his last engagement as the Mayor of the City and County of Limerick. The community-based competition, managed by Limerick City and County Council with sponsorship from JP McManus Charitable Foundation, returns after a two-year COVID-enforced break, and will see €60,000 distributed to community groups and residents. The competition aims to make Limerick a cleaner, brighter place to work, live and visit. *Picture: Brian Arthur*

## Youghal

The White Horse Vikings in action at Youghal's 12th Medieval Festival at St Mary's College Gardens, Youghal. The annual festival has become one of the country's largest free events celebrating National Heritage Week. Funded by the Irish Walled Towns Network and Cork County Council, the event showcases Youghal's built and living heritage.

*Picture: John Hennessy*



## Donegal County Council

Donegal County Council and Comharchumann Oileán Árainn Mhór CTR celebrated the official opening of the Forbairt Taitneamhachtaí Cois Cladaigh Oileán Árainn Mhór (Arranmore Island Shorefront Amenity Development) by the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD on Friday, 22 July 2022.

The development provides new car parking with accessible beach access, a bespoke children's play park focused around a central pirate-ship play piece, and a unique event and performance space in the shape of a community-inspired amphitheatre. The project is co-funded by Donegal County Council and the Department of Rural and Community Development.

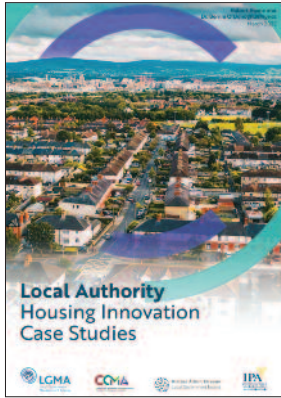
*Picture: Clive Wasson*



# POLICY AND RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Some of the most recent and relevant policy and research publications

Compiled by Cáit Ní Chorcora, IPA



## Local Authority Housing Innovation Case Studies

The LGMA and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) have published the results of a survey of local authority housing departments. The aim of this report was to identify and share good examples of housing innovation and the associated learnings. The survey was carried out in June/July 2021 on behalf of the CCMA housing committee.

A qualitative thematic analysis of the survey results was carried out and the innovations were grouped into five thematic areas. The largest of the thematic areas was 'Digitizing Services' (11 innovation examples), followed by 'Process Change' (nine innovation examples). The other three themes identified were: 'Homeless Services', 'Right Sizing' and 'Energy Efficiency'.

In parallel to this, the IPA has also published an in-depth case study report which examines some of the innovations, identified from the survey responses, currently being implemented by local authority housing departments. The selected case studies describe new or amended practices which have been integrated into day-to-day work. Each example is explored in terms of its development, implementation and outcomes. Lessons learned from the process are also documented for consideration in future planning. The aim of these case studies is to examine the challenges, benefits and costs associated with these innovations and highlight practical lessons of relevance to the local government sector.

Examples of innovative practice were selected based on:

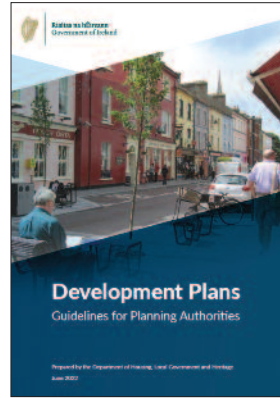
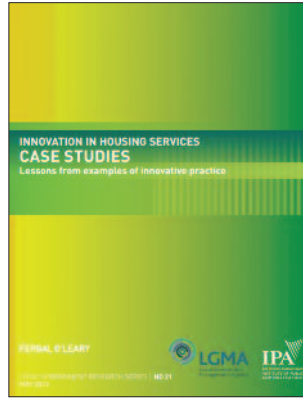
- Relevance to the overall direction of housing policy
- How innovative they were
- Readiness for roll-out
- How transferable they were to other local authorities.

The initial survey report is available at:

<https://lgma.ie/en/publications/local-authority-sector-reports/local-authority-housing-innovationcase-studies.pdf>

The IPA's in-depth case study is available at:

[https://www.ipa.ie/\\_fileUpload/Documents/LocalGovReport\\_No21\\_Innovation\\_Housing\\_Services.pdf](https://www.ipa.ie/_fileUpload/Documents/LocalGovReport_No21_Innovation_Housing_Services.pdf)



## Development Plans - Guidelines for Planning Authorities

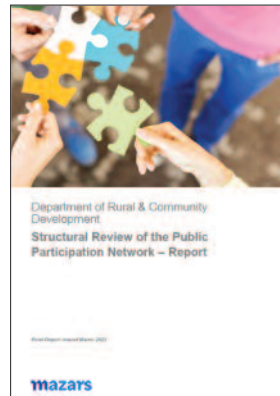
In July, new national guidelines for the preparation of local authority development plans were published. Local development plans outline where housing, infrastructure and services should be located over a six-year period. The guidelines, revised for the first time since 2007, aim to ensure

that development plans take into account the predicted amount of housing in an area and that sufficient new homes can be built in key high-demand areas.

The guidelines are designed as a reference manual for use by local authority planners and councillors who are involved in developing a county or city development plan, but they will also assist citizens and those involved in the development sector.

A copy of the guidelines is available at the link below:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f9aac-development-plans-guidelines-for-planning-authorities//>



## Independent review of the Public Participation Networks (PPNs)

In June, a review of the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) was published. This review was carried out by Mazars in 2021, commissioned by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The purpose of this root-and-branch review was to evaluate the current PPN structures in order to

identify challenges and opportunities and make recommendations on how to improve future effectiveness. The report also highlights examples of current best practice and provides recommendations on how these could be replicated across the PPN network where appropriate.

Strengths of the PPN identified in the report include:

- It gives communities access to local decision makers
- It creates/strengthens relationships between stakeholders
- It delivers ongoing communication, engagement and information-sharing.

Key recommendations include:

- Clarifying roles and responsibilities
- Ensuring independence is maintained
- Providing more proactive and coordinated HR support for Participation Network staff.

The review also recommended introducing a national 'PPN coordination structure', which would engage with local development and the relevant representation structures.

Participatory and co-design processes will be used to ensure a diverse range of views and representatives are engaged in identifying priority recommendations from the report and guiding future action.

The full PPN Structural Review Report is available at the link below: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f6fe9-ppn-structural-review-report/>



## Sustainable Mobility Policy - a new national framework for active travel and public transport

The Department of Transport's new *Sustainable Mobility Policy* aims to deliver 500,000 additional daily active travel/public transport journeys by 2030 and a 10 per cent reduction in the number of kilometres driven by fossil-fuelled cars. It will do this by making walking, cycling or public transport the most attractive choice.

The policy's associated action plan to 2025 contains a range of initiatives to improve and expand sustainable mobility options by providing safe, green, accessible and efficient travel alternatives. It also includes demand management and behavioural change measures to manage daily travel demand better and to reduce journeys taken by private car. These actions will be supported by other government policies such as *Climate Action Plan*, the *Road Safety Strategy* and *Housing for All*.

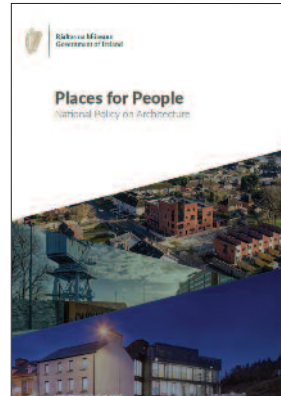
Key action areas include:

- Improving the safety and accessibility of walking, cycling and public transport networks
- Improving rail infrastructure and services
- Reallocating road space to prioritise walking, cycling and public transport.

New measures proposed include:

- A new annual National Household Travel Survey
- A new National Sustainable Mobility Forum to engage with stakeholders
- A public engagement strategy to promote sustainable mobility and raise public awareness.

The Sustainable Mobility Policy and the action plan to 2025 can be found here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/848df-national-sustainable-mobility-policy/>



## National Policy on Architecture to boost public engagement and create new design quality criteria

In May, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage published a new National Policy on Architecture.

*Places for People* aims to support architects and built-environment professionals (especially within the public service), raise design quality,

and improve data/research on our built environment. It will also help progress our national Sustainable Development Goals by providing high-quality, well-designed living environments, bringing economic, social and environmental benefits to cities, towns and communities. The key objectives of the policy relate to improving sustainability, quality, leadership and culture.

Under this policy, a set of national design-quality criteria will be published. This will set out a consistent, objective approach to the assessment of design quality, which will strengthen public procurement procedures and enhance capacity.

The policy also seeks to increase public and stakeholder engagement with architectural design, in order to create and sustain communities. A public sector information-exchange network is also proposed, to facilitate knowledge sharing amongst professionals employed in government departments, agencies and local authorities.

The policy also proposes the establishment of a national research service to stimulate innovation, high-quality design and sustainable construction responses. It will also allow us to measure progress towards our goals.

*Places for People - National Policy on Architecture* is available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f9879-places-for-people-national-policy-on-architecture/>

## A new Roadmap for Local Deliberative Engagements on Transitions to Net Zero Carbon and Climate Resilience

In July, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a roadmap for local engagement on Climate Transition and Climate Resilience. It is increasingly accepted that successful public engagement in climate action requires well-informed and inclusive processes.

This roadmap focuses on the challenge of engaging citizens and communities in climate action and outlines novel approaches for facilitating the transition to climate resilience. A new Deliberative Futures Toolkit for communities and policymakers has been developed in collaboration with local, scientific and policy communities.

The report describes some of the innovative practices and processes developed and tested during the implementation of 'Imagining 2050: Engaging, Envisioning, and Co-Producing Pathways for a Low Carbon, Climate Resilient Ireland', a project funded by the EPA and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

The report is available at: [https://www.epa.ie/publications/research/climate change/Research\\_Report\\_415.pdf](https://www.epa.ie/publications/research/climate%20change/Research_Report_415.pdf)

# INNOVATION LIMERICK

## Limerick's Citizen Innovation Lab

Empowering the people of Limerick in the  
climate and energy transition



Limerick is to become a climate-neutral city by 2050. This process of decarbonisation will mean some significant changes for the people of Limerick, there will be new technologies, new opportunities and changes to people's day-to-day lives. The Citizen Innovation Lab is a physical and digital space that aims to empower the people of Limerick to take part, to navigate and co-create this future together. This new space for observation, co-creation and experimentation places citizen participation and creativity at the heart of Limerick's mission to decarbonise.

Over the last five years, Limerick City and County Council has been the lead partner in a major climate and energy transition project known as +CityxChange. The overall aim of the project was to create Positive Energy Districts and to influence citizen behaviour to meet the challenge of moving to a clean-energy, climate-neutral and sustainable future. Through +CityxChange a series of concepts was developed. Known as Communityx-Change, these frameworks enable top-down and bottom-up processes of engagement, to build the sense of ownership amongst stakeholders and to enable their participation in the process of decarbonisation.

The Citizen Innovation Lab, initiated in 2021 and developed through the +CityxChange H2020 project, operates as a collaboration between Limerick City and County Council and the University of Limerick (UL). Located on a temporary basis at the University of Limerick's new City Campus in the heart of Limerick city, the Lab includes a Citizens' Observatory, an Engagement Hub, a digital platform and a programme of events. It is co-located with the School of Architecture at University of Limerick (SAUL) Fab Lab Limerick.

The three distinct physical spaces work together with a digital platform to provide a space for citizen engagement and participation.

The Engagement Hub is a space for information events and co-creation activities where people can work together to explore local responses to the challenge of climate change.

The Citizens' Observatory provides access to digital tools used to gather information useful to Limerick's decarbonisation process. The Limerick Energy Model is a digital twin of the city that provides a baseline on energy use and will allow the energy transition of the city to be tracked over time. A crowd-sourced mapping tool is available, which enables communities to contribute their knowledge of the city responding to particular questions posed.

The Fab Lab is a space for experimenting with new technologies where you can make almost anything. It has a variety of machines and tools that can be used for digital fabrication and to build prototypes.

Through the +CityxChange project, the Council has already implemented a series of citizen engagement and participation processes which empower and support citizens through meaningful climate action. In 2021, the Positive Energy Champions Campaign saw 20 Limerick citizens take on the challenge of changing their energy behaviour by taking positive energy actions and sharing their experiences with their communities. The campaign empowered citizens and businesses to take a fresh approach to their energy use and explore behaviour change with their communities. The



Understanding energy with Limerick Energy Model. Pictures courtesy of Limerick City and County Council



Creative Climate Action in the Citizen Innovation Lab.

Positive Energy Champions were able to utilise the digital tools developed within +CityxChange, such as the Limerick Energy Model and Community Mapping Tool, to engage with their communities and better understand their energy use.

**Positive Energy Champion Úna Breathnach focused her campaign on low-carbon transport. She used the +Cityx-Change Community Mapping Tool to crowd-source information on the extent of a future bike-sharing scheme in Limerick.** Over 120 citizens contributed to the project. With support from Limerick City and County Council staff, she was able to share the data she collected with the Travel and Transport Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) and influence decision making about the expansion of the scheme in Limerick. This type of bottom-up citizen activation can work in coordination with existing engagement structures, such as the Public Participation Network (PPN) and SPCs, where supported by Local Authority staff.

**As part of + CityxChange, a digital twin of Limerick's Georgian Neighbourhood was created and is available at [limerick.ie](http://limerick.ie) and in the Citizen Innovation Lab.** This 3D model is designed to allow people in Limerick to visualise energy use and carbon emissions across the city. The model contains data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and other sources, and can be used as a Decision Support Tool to help Limerick City and County Council plan scenarios for how to become climate-neutral by 2050. Several of the Positive Energy Champions stories utilised the Limerick Energy Model to plan investments in energy conservation or building retrofit actions.

This summer, the Citizen Innovation Lab will host a Creative Climate Action Fund project, called 'Decarbonising Together'. Limerick City and County Council, in collaboration with UL and other partners, secured funding for the project, which supports creative, cultural and artistic projects that build awareness around decarbonisation and empower citizens to take meaningful action to address climate change. **Five Limerick communities have begun collaborating with a**

**creative partner to explore an aspect of decarbonisation that is meaningful to them.** The creative-community partnerships will develop their projects over the summer, exploring climate change in their community, using the creative process as a catalyst to empower citizens and to enable community action on decarbonisation. Decarbonising Together will focus on learning and doing together and promotes a creative approach to highlighting the urgent need to act at a community level to address climate change. The communities and creative partners will use the Citizen Innovation Lab physical and digital space as a collaborative platform.

Autumn 2022 will also see the launch of the SEAI-funded SmartLAB project at the Citizen Innovation Lab. The SmartLAB collaboration, led by the University of Limerick with support from Limerick City and County Council and other research partners, will explore the adoption of a Smart Readiness Indicator for Ireland's buildings. The project will install wireless sensor technology in 50 to 100 buildings in Limerick city centre, and create a framework for upgrading existing buildings to be smart, using DIY toolkits and off-the-shelf components. City-centre property owners and other stakeholders will be invited to participate in SmartLAB to better understand energy use and to explore how this can be reduced through active management using the Limerick Energy Model and smart sensor technology.

The Council aims to establish the Citizen Innovation Lab as a hub for citizen engagement and participation in the areas of sustainability, energy transition, climate action, biodiversity and city-centre revitalisation. Sinead Hourigan, Administrative Officer with Limerick's Urban Innovation Department, sees the Citizen Innovation Lab as a huge opportunity for the Council to work with citizens to co-create solutions for the challenges we face due to climate change. 'The +CityxChange project has given Limerick City and County Council a head start in terms of citizen engagement on climate adaptation and decarbonisation. **Through the project, we've been able to develop a space and digital tools that will aid the Council in working with citizens and other stakeholders to address some of the complex challenges we face in the next 10 years.'**

The Citizen Innovation Lab is embedded in Limerick but is connected to a number of international networks, including Scaleable Cities and the European Network of Living Labs. Helena Fitzgerald, Research Fellow with the Department of Economics at UL sees this connectivity as being vital to creating local impact through the Citizen Innovation Lab as Local Authorities in Ireland and in Europe mobilise to achieve their climate goals.

**To learn more about the projects being rolled out in Limerick's new Citizen Innovation Lab, go to [www.citizeninnovationlab.ie](http://www.citizeninnovationlab.ie)**



# Census 2022

## Population growth in all counties since 2016 while the overall population is highest since 1841

In June, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) released the preliminary results from Census 2022, which took place on 3 April.

### Population

Commenting on the release, Cormac Halpin, Senior Statistician in the Census Division, said 'The preliminary results show a population of 5,123,536 on Census night. This is an increase of 7.6% since 2016. It is also the highest population recorded in a census since 1841.

There were 2,593,600 females and 2,529,936 males recorded, which is an increase of 7.7% and 7.5% respectively. The population increase of 361,671 was made up of a natural increase (births minus deaths) of 171,338 and estimated net inward migration (population change minus natural increase) of 190,333.

The counties recording the highest population growth were in Leinster. Longford grew by more than 14%, with Meath, Kildare, and Fingal also growing strongly. In contrast to Census 2016, when three counties (Mayo, Sligo, and Donegal) had a fall in their population, the preliminary results show that the population of every county has increased since 2016. In Leinster, 10 of the 12 counties showed a higher percentage

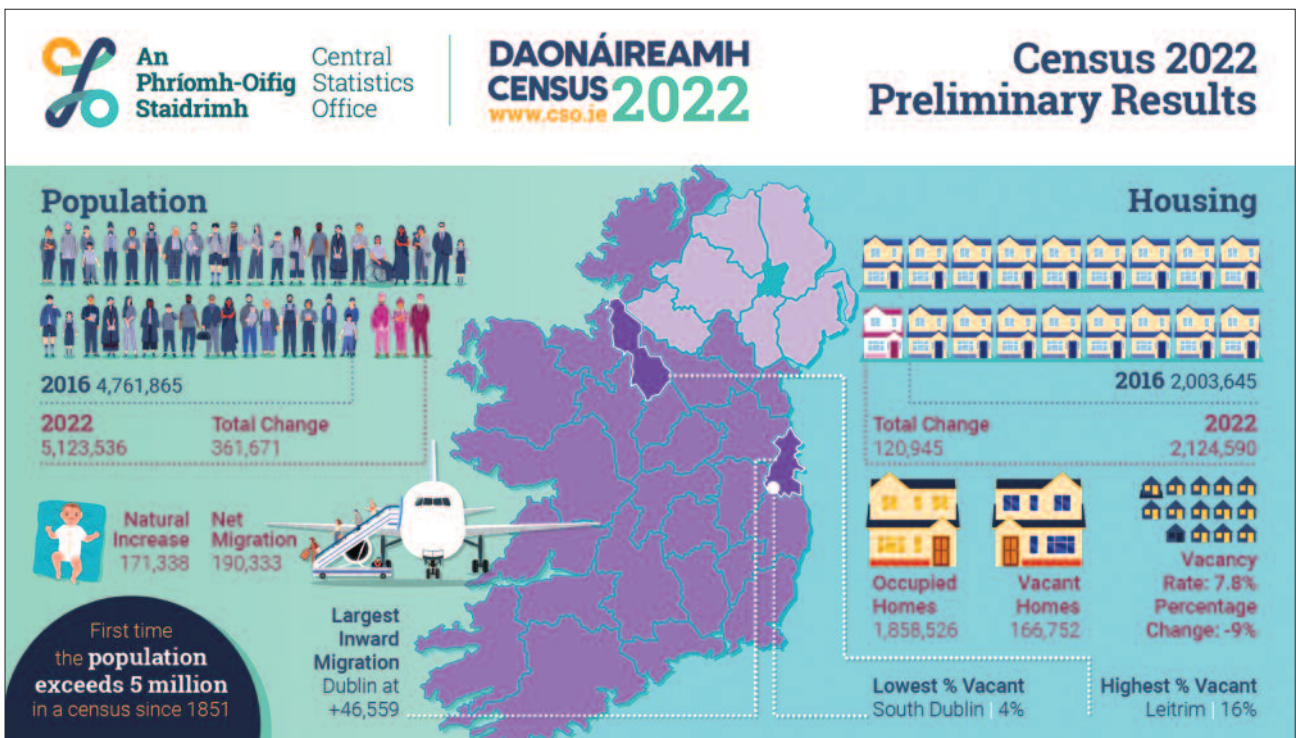
increase than the national average, with Offaly (+6.0%), and Kilkenny (+4.5%), being lower. In Munster, Waterford (+9.4%) had a higher percentage increase than that of the State overall. Both Leitrim (+9.5%) and Roscommon (+8.4%) showed a higher percentage increase than the national rate, while Cavan, Donegal, or Monaghan did not.'

### Housing

Mr Halpin stated that the preliminary results also provide initial figures on the country's housing stock. 'The preliminary results show that the total housing stock on 3 April 2022 was 2,124,590, an increase of 6.0% on the 2016 figure. There were 16,560 fewer vacant dwellings (-9.0%) in 2022 compared to 2016. This does not include holiday homes, of which there were 66,135, compared with 62,148 in 2016.

A dwelling being classified as vacant for census purposes does not necessarily imply that it is available for re-use. Census vacancy is essentially a point-in-time measure, which may be different from other reported measures of vacancy, which may focus more on longer-term vacancy. A dwelling is classed as vacant by census enumerators if it is unoccupied for a short or long period around Census night. For example, it may be unoccupied because it is up for sale or rent, under renovation, or if the owner has passed away, or is in a nursing home. Dwellings under construction and derelict properties are also not included in the Census count of vacant dwellings.'

The more detailed results will be published on a rolling basis between April and December next year. These will include themed publication on housing, health, commuting and a range of other topics.



# MAKING PROGRESS

## Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

On 13 and 14 of June, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (DLRCC) welcomed to Ireland representatives from five regions of Italy, Spain, Latvia, Hungary and Romania.

The meeting took place as part of the Interreg Europe PROGRESS project<sup>1</sup> which promotes improved governance for ecosystem services across partner regions.

Ecosystem services are the material and non-material benefits that people derive from nature, which sustain and fulfil human life. They include everything from the provision of food, building materials and clean water to pollination services, protection from flooding and nature-based recreation.

The objective of the project is to initiate a process of policy change and improve the implementation of policy to maintain



Technical Report Launch: Councillor Lettie McCarthy (An Cathaoirleach, DLRCC) with Dr Owen Douglas (EMRA) and Anne Murray (DLRCC).

nature's capacity to deliver wide-ranging goods and services, through policy-learning and capacity-building activities.

Since August 2019, the project partners have shared Good Practices for promoting the measurement of the costs and benefits of ecosystem services; the horizontal integration of ecosystem concerns into sectoral policies and plans; innovative financial and marketing mechanisms for payment for ecosystem services; and improved landscape governance for economic and environmental sustainability.

Working with local stakeholders, each partner region has developed an Action Plan to transfer project learnings. Discussion and sharing of these Action Plans formed a key element of the June meeting, ahead of the 12-month implementation phase: August 2022 to July 2023.



Visit to the Dublin Mountains Makeover at Ticknock Forest led by Coillte Nature and the Dublin Mountains Partnership.

The EMRA Action Plan focuses on advancing the coordination of a standardised ecosystem services and green infrastructure mapping approach in line with the objectives of the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. This action builds on the successful implementation of a project, Pilot Action, which involved testing the transfer of the SITxell Mapping Approach from the Barcelona region to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. The presentation of the Pilot Action and launch of the associated technical report by Councillor Lettie McCarthy, An Cathaoirleach, DLRCC, were highlights of the June meeting.

The meeting included visits to locations in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, which showcase some of the most popular Good Practices identified in Ireland. Led by Ruairí Ó Dúlaing, Senior Parks Superintendent, and Anne Murray, Biodiversity Officer, the visit to Fernhill Park and Gardens focused on nature-centred design and management for biodiversity, species protection and nature conservation, all in line with key principles of the *All-Ireland Pollinator Plan*, one of the most

popular Good Practices included in partner Action Plans. The second stop was Ticknock Forest, one of the nine forests included in the Dublin Mountains Makeover (DMM).<sup>2</sup> This was led by Karen Woods, Coillte Nature, and Clodagh Duffy, Dublin Mountains Partnership. The DMM will see an area of over 900 hectares transitioning from commercial forestry, to be managed for recreation, biodiversity and climate.

*Dr Owen Douglas, coordinator of the PROGRESS project at EMRA, will discuss 'opportunities for biodiversity management through Regional Assemblies' at the National Conference on 'How Local Authorities can address the Biodiversity Emergency' in Limerick on 21 and 22 September.*

For conference details and to book tickets, see: <https://www.limerick.ie/council/whats-on/citizenengagement/conference-how-local-authorities-can-address-biodiversity>

<sup>1</sup> <https://projects2014-2020.interregeurope.eu/progress/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.coillte.ie/coillte-nature/ourprojects/dublinmountainsmakeover/>



Project Partners with Anne Murray and Ruairí Ó Dúlaing (DLRCC), Fernhill Park and Gardens.



## NEWS

# TIME FOR A NEW LEADER?



A special report published by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) considers that there is a lack of evidence to suggest that the benefits of the LEADER approach outweigh the costs and risks involved.

Auditors examined the LEADER approach and compared findings against a previous ECA assessment in 2010. Improvements have been

identified in some areas and the report confirms that the LEADER methodology can facilitate local engagement in community development. However, the report does not provide significant evidence that LEADER's benefits are sufficiently demonstrated and recommends a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of the approach.

The auditors acknowledge that LEADER tends to facilitate local engagement. However, local action groups are often not representative, with women and young people still being only marginally present. LEADER's participative approach incurs high administrative and running costs. These include activities to engage the local community and support applicants, and entail extra administrative requirements, compared with mainstream spending programmes. According to the European Commission, these costs reached a total of over €1 billion (i.e. a quarter of total spending) by the end of 2020. Project application and approval processes, which can involve up to eight steps, remain too complicated and too slow, the auditors say. As a result, only 39 per cent of projects have been paid for by Member States, and one of them (Slovakia) has not financed any projects at all.

The Commission, in its reply to the ECA, noted that, 'The funding allocated to the functioning of the local actions groups is therefore much wider than "an administrative cost" as it also enables invaluable investment in people, animation and collective learning of rural territories.' They noted that they will 'continue to engage with the Member States to promote a better application of the LEADER method by all local action groups and demonstrate its added value'.

The full report and replies from the European Commission can be accessed here: <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=61355>

# 300k Have Your Say

## South Dublin residents vote for twelve projects in participatory budgeting initiative

Twelve community-led projects have been selected by the public to be funded in the Rathfarnham-Templeogue electoral area, through South Dublin County Council's landmark €300k *Have Your Say* participatory budgeting initiative.

South Dublin County Council was the first local authority in the country to introduce participatory budgeting when the Council launched €300k *Have Your Say* in 2017. To date, over 13,000 people have cast their vote in €300k *Have Your Say* to fund a project, or projects, of their choice. So far, 949 project ideas have been submitted to the Council for consideration, with 104 being put forward to the public vote and 52 being funded.

The twelve projects selected for funding in the Rathfarnham-Templeogue area are:

- Nature trail in Rathfarnham Castle Park
- Fruit trees for the Rathfarnham-Templeogue electoral area
- Green laneways for Rathfarnham
- Christmas lights for Templeogue Village and Rathfarnham Village
- Outdoor nature classrooms on local greens
- Bicycle pump in Templeogue Village
- A STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) Project for children from the Traveller Community
- Drinking-water stations for Rathfarnham
- QR code stands near Templeogue Cemetery and the nearby Old Church
- A poetry competition in Rathfarnham
- New seating for the Crannagh Road area
- Playground and seating for the College Drive/Fortfield Road.

Speaking on announcing the results, the Mayor of South Dublin County, Councillor Emma Murphy, said, 'This initiative is about enabling people in the area to have a greater voice on local priorities that matter most to them. We wanted to give people within the Rathfarnham-Templeogue electoral area the opportunity to send us your ideas and then vote on what you want to see brought here. I am delighted to say that the people of this area rose to that challenge as we received the highest number of project ideas for any electoral area, with 249, and we

received the second-highest turnout of voters, with 3,267. On behalf of the Council, I just want to thank everyone who took part this year and made it such a great success.'

Details of all twelve winning projects were announced on Thursday 30 June and project updates will be given on each on [www.sdcc.ie/haveyoursay](http://www.sdcc.ie/haveyoursay).



Cllr Emma Murphy, Mayor of South Dublin, with Cllr Gus O'Connell, Cllr Yvonne Collins, Cllr Lynn McCrave, Cllr Pamela Kearns and Cllr Lyn Hagin Meade at Ballyroan Library for the final of the €300K *Have your Say*.  
Picture: Ben Ryan

## Ukraine response

### €10.5 million in additional funding

In early June, Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, and Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development, Joe O'Brien, announced an additional €10.5 million in funding to assist the community response to support people arriving from Ukraine.

- €5 million investment in the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)
- A further €5 million for the 'Ireland for Ukraine Fund' - administered by Community Foundation Ireland
- €500,000 to assist volunteer centres to deal with increased demand on services.

This funding will assist the community and voluntary sector in their support of those arriving from Ukraine to Ireland. Both Ministers commended the work of the sector to date who had 'not been found wanting in stepping up to the plate and assisting families' arriving in Ireland, according to Minister Humphreys.

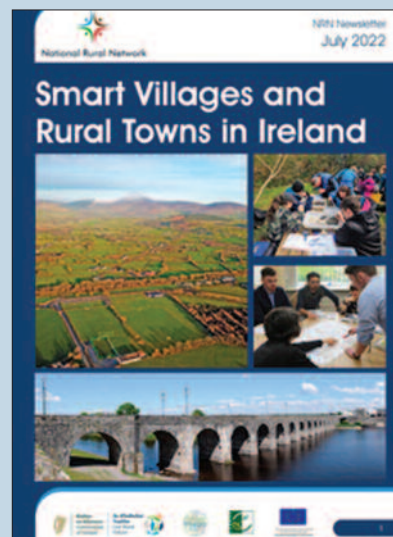
As reported in the Summer issue of *Changing Ireland*, the additional funding was welcomed by local development companies, and would ensure that funds meant for elsewhere would no longer be diverted.

## Smart Villages and Rural Towns in Ireland

The National Rural Network (NRN) published the second edition of its annual *Smart Villages and Rural Towns in Ireland* newsletter in July. This new publication's theme is innovative community-led local development. It reinforces the message that villages and rural towns throughout Ireland and Europe need to adapt, rebuild and reenergise as part of their COVID-19 pandemic recovery response.

The NRN is a membership network for farmers, agricultural advisors, rural communities and others interested in rural development. It provides up-to-date information, case studies, seminars and conferences to maximise the beneficial outcomes of *Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020* for rural stakeholders. The NRN is managed by a consortium led by Irish Rural Link in partnership with The Wheel, NUI Galway and Philip Farrelly & Co.

The newsletter can be accessed here: <https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2022/07/National-Rural-Network-Smart-Villages-Newsletter-2022-Online-Version.pdf>



## New Zealand Survey of elected members in local government highlights experiences of harmful behaviour

A new survey of elected members in New Zealand's local government has found that nearly half of respondents have experienced racism, gender discrimination, or other forms of harmful behaviour while doing their job in public office.

In all, 105 anonymous responses were received from across 56 local authorities. Key findings include:

- 5% of respondents experienced racism and/or gender discrimination in their role
- 43% of respondents experienced other harassment, prejudiced, threatening or derogatory behaviours in their role
- Close to a quarter of respondents were not sure how to report instances of harassment and/or discrimination
- Less than a third of respondents felt connected with other elected members in their workplace.

Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) president, Stuart Crosby, said that, 'The survey results make for tough reading, but to shift the dial, we need to start with acknowledging that there is a problem and find ways to address it.' He noted that progress made over the last number of years with regard to diversity of elected members is at risk. There has been a small increase in the number of Māori, women and young elected members.

As also noted by Mr Crosby, local democracies across the globe are grappling with issue around councillors, mayors and other elected members being bullied or harassed on the job. This has been widely reported as an issue in Ireland.



Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) president, Stuart Crosby.

# PLATFORMA and CEMR

## Localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Available for the first time in an online format, PLATFORMA and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) have just published their fifth annual study on the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Released on the occasion of the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York, this innovative publication can be discovered at [localsdgs.eu](http://localsdgs.eu)

This study gathers the most recent information on how and to what extent associations and networks of local and regional governments have been involved in the localisation of the SDGs, both in Europe and with their global peers, and in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic. This year's survey therefore included questions on the SDGs' implementation since 2015 and the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. In the last two sections, there were also additional questions regarding Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSR) and decentralised cooperation. It gathers 63 answers from 28 European countries, 37 associations of local and regional governments and 18 municipalities and regions.

### Main recommendations

Six main recommendations came out of this study, targeting EU institutions, national governments and local and regional governments and their national associations:

1. The European Commission should report regularly on any progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at EU level and indicate how the different levels of governance have contributed to this process.
2. We encourage associations of local and regional governments to actively take part in the Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSR) process.
3. Local and regional governments (LRGs) are calling for the firm recognition and inclusion by national governments of the role of LRGs and their associations in the monitoring and reporting of progress in the implementation of SDGs at the national level.
4. European states and the EU need to strengthen their dialogue with the subnational levels and include them in any relevant high-level delegation meetings.
5. Strengthen international cooperation to achieve the 2030 Agenda at the local and regional levels.
6. There is still a need to localise and territorialise the SDGs through the deployment of appropriate funds and resources.

## A Right to Housing?

There has been increasing calls to establish a 'right to housing' in the Constitution, given the ongoing housing and homelessness crisis in Ireland. The Government has committed to holding a referendum on this matter, and has established a Housing Commission to consider this and other issues.

The Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage recently debated the topic of a right to housing. The Committee heard from Home for Good, a broad coalition of organisations and individuals advocating for constitutional change, and from Professor Colm O'Conneide, Professor of Law, University College London.

Committee Cathaoirleach Deputy Steven Matthews said: 'Ireland has been living with a housing crisis, lack of accommodation and homelessness for the last

decade. As a consequence there have been increasing calls for a right to housing to be enshrined in the Constitution. This would obviously require an amendment to the Constitution to be put to the people in a referendum. The Committee looks forward to examining the pros and cons of such an approach with our stakeholders, as well as possible wordings of any amendment and the timescale for any referendum.'

In early 2022, the newly established Housing Commission held its first meeting. The Commission has been established on a non-statutory basis by the Government to examine issues such as tenure, standards, sustainability and quality-of-life issues in the provision of housing, all of which have long-term impacts on communities.

The Commission recently held a public consultation on a referendum on housing in Ireland. The consultation asks for submissions to consider whether there should be a constitutional amendment and, if so, what form it should take. The Commission is time-bound and will report to the Government by July 2023.

# AILG Executive Visits the Council of Europe in Strasbourg

From May to November 2022, Ireland will hold the Presidency of the Council of Europe (COE), its first time to hold such a prestigious mandate in 20 years. The Council of Europe was founded in the wake of World War II to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe.

The Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) has a small but valued involvement through its role as the parent body for the Irish delegation of Councillors to the Council of Europe's local government forum - the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLRAE).

In light of this connection, the AILG National Executive Committee, led by current President Cllr Nicholas Crossan, travelled to Strasbourg at the end of June on an educational trip to engage with the European organisation and gain an understanding of the Council of Europe and its agencies.

Over the course of two busy days, the AILG delegation received a warm welcome to the Palace of Europe (Palais de l'Europe), which has served as the seat of the Council of Europe since 1977. The AILG delegation learned about Ireland's current and historic involvement with the Council of Europe and met with a number of key personnel including Minister Thomas Byrne, TD, Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs, and Mr Breffni O'Reilly, Irish Ambassador to the Council of Europe.



AILG Delegation pictured in the Hemicycle, the large debating chamber in the centre of the Council of Europe building.

The busy schedule of engagements also included a rare opportunity to meet with Judge Sifra O'Leary, Vice President of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) at the International Court of the Council of Europe. Judge O'Leary provided a compelling insight into the vital work of the ECHR and the system of European law underpinning human rights and local democracy.

AILG Executive Committee members Cllr Joe Leddin from Limerick City and County Council and Cllr Gráinne Maguire from Fingal County Council also took the opportunity to meet and speak with youth groups at the Palais de l'Europe, as part of a Council of Europe campaign to increase young people's role in the process of revitalising participatory democracy in the Council of Europe.

Speaking during the educational trip, AILG President Cllr Crossan expressed the importance of profiling the important work of the Council of Europe to Irish citizens and, indeed, city and county councillors across the State, and offered the association's full support in this regard.

Across our six-month Presidency term, Ireland will pursue three clear and complementary priorities, with the overarching aim of renewing 'the conscience of Europe' in the wake of the war on our continent.

**For more information about the Irish Presidency of the Council of Europe, visit the website here:**  
<https://ireland.ie/en/coe/>



Cllr Joe Leddin (Limerick City and County Council) and Cllr Gráinne Maguire (Fingal County Council) pictured with youth groups at the Palais de l'Europe (Palace of Europe) as part of a Council of Europe campaign to increase young people's role in the process of revitalising participatory democracy in the Council of Europe.



# 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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