

LOCAL AUTHORITY TIMES

Vol. 25 No. 2
Summer 2023
ISSN No. 07 91-8267

IPA
AN FORAS RIARACHÁIN
INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION

TURNING THE TIDE FOR NATURE

The Launch of the Local
Authority Biodiversity Officer
Programme in Ireland



Inside: Launch of Updated Customer Communications Toolkit for Services to the Public
■ Moving the Dial on Accessibility ■ Collaboration the Big Winner at Dublin Data Hack

Contents

PAGE 2

Turning the Tide for Nature

The Heritage Council, in partnership with the City and County Management Association, has launched the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme in response to the pressing need for biodiversity conservation and climate action in Ireland.

PAGE 6

Launch of Updated Customer Communications Toolkit for Services to the Public – A Universal Design Approach

An updated toolkit has been launched to support civil and public servants in their approaches to customer communications.

PAGE 8

Co-creating Environmentally Sustainable Futures with geodesign

A new report examines the use of digital technologies to engage communities with local climate action.

PAGE 12

Moving the Dial on Accessibility

In the second of a series of articles from the National Disability Authority (NDA), some of the main accessibility issues on local authority websites are highlighted, as well as some quick wins for improving compliance.

PAGE 18

Mapping Dublin's Air Quality, Street by Street

Dublin City Council recently teamed up with Google for Air Quality Hack 2023, with the aim of optimising air quality in the city.

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

REWARDING RESEARCH

Summer is here, and so is the latest edition of *Local Authority Times*. In this edition, we continue to highlight new and innovative work by local authorities and their partners across the country, as well as providing the latest updates through our news stories and Local Government Gallery.

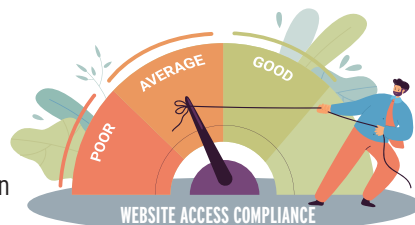
We provide insight on the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme, with thanks to Catherine Casey, Head of Heritage and Climate Change at the Heritage Council. The new programme, established by the Heritage Council in partnership with the City and County Management Association (CCMA), is an innovative initiative, responding to the pressing need for biodiversity conservation and climate action in Ireland.



The launch of a new updated customer communications toolkit for services to the public is covered on page 6. This updated toolkit provides guidance on how to adopt a Universal Design approach to customer communications.

Also featured is a new report examining the use of digital technologies to engage communities with local action, via 'geodesign' - read more on page 8.

The National Disability Authority continues its series of articles examining web accessibility. To help local authorities move the dial on accessibility, the article on page 12 highlights some of the main accessibility issues on local authority websites, as well as some quick wins for improving compliance.



Dublin City Council's efforts to improve air quality through collaboration with data scientists and technologists at Google HQ is showcased on page 18. The Council's Air Quality Data Hack attracted over 100 data scientists and technologists, resulting in truly innovative concepts, solutions or prototypes to unlock the potential of granular and hyperlocal city air-quality data for Dublin City.

If you would like to feature in the next edition of *Local Authority Times*, please get in touch with us at latimes@ipa.ie.

Laura Shannon, Editor



Ireland Marks Fiftieth Anniversary of Joining the EU

The year 2023 marks 50 years since Ireland joined the European Economic Community, now the European Union. Local government has played an important role in bringing the Government's EU50 programme to communities across the country, particularly around Europe Day, which took place in May.

Under the Department of Foreign Affairs' 2023 EU50 Local Government Grant Scheme, the Minister of State for European Affairs, Peter Burke, TD, awarded funding to 17 local authorities and local services who applied with ideas for events. Events taking place in and around Europe Day on 9 May included European film nights, local paper supplements, quizzes, storytelling and food-tasting events. A total of €119,700 was granted to the 14 local authorities and the three library services, with many more counties receiving funding through the Communicating Europe Initiative.

Through the EU50 initiative, everyone is encouraged to reflect upon and celebrate 50 years of membership and contribution to the European Union.

Cruinniú na nÓg Takes Place Across the Country

Saturday, 10 June marked this year's Cruinniú na nÓg. A collaboration between the Creative Ireland Programme, local authorities and RTÉ, Cruinniú na nÓg organises and promotes over 500 free creative activities for children and young people all over the country.

Consistent with the aims of the Government's Shared Island initiative to deepen beneficial cooperation and connections across the island of Ireland, Cruinniú na nÓg 2023 was programmed on an all-island basis, with cross-community events connecting children and young people from both sides of the

Everyone Encouraged to Check the Register as Local Authorities Begin Update Campaign

The Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcolm Noonan, TD, has called on electors and potential electors to engage with the latest Check the Register campaign. The campaign encourages everyone to go to [checktheregister.ie](https://www.checktheregister.ie) and either confirm or update their details. Local authorities around the country are preparing to update the electoral register and further improve its accuracy but every citizen has a part to play in assisting with this by confirming and updating information.

The campaign will be rolled out on broadcast, outdoor and digital channels, with local authorities also undertaking activities in their local area to encourage people to get their details up to date in advance of the opportunities to vote taking place in the year ahead. A paper form will remain available for those who wish to use it, either with a PPSN or with an in-person identity check at a local Garda station.

The Electoral Commission has an oversight role of the electoral register and its processes. All local authorities are required to report annually on the register, and the Commission will then publish a report on its assessment on the overall status of the register and its processes.

With less than 12 months before local and European elections take place, along with a referendum that has been promised, it is important to act now to ensure that all information is correct. <https://www.checktheregister.ie/en-IE/>

border, including via partners Circus Explored and Rhyme Island. This action is an integral part of the Shared Island dimension to the Creative Ireland Programme, which focuses on harnessing the power of culture and creativity to inspire connections between people, communities and places.

The national initiative celebrates and encourages participation in culture and creativity amongst young people, through performance, coding, theatre, readings, screenings, art and music workshops and much more. It gives children and young people the opportunity to express themselves through a specially curated programme of cultural and creative activities where they can share their ideas, learn new skills and have fun. <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/creative-youth/cruinniuna-nog/>

LOCAL ACTION FOR BIODIVERSITY

The Launch of the Local Authority Biodiversity
Officer Programme in Ireland

Catherine Casey, Head of Heritage and Climate Change
The Heritage Council



The Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme, established by the Heritage Council in partnership with the City and County Management Association (CCMA), is an innovative initiative responding to the pressing need for biodiversity conservation and climate action in Ireland. Focused on action at the local level, this is a strategic step towards nurturing our environment, benefiting local authorities and enriching the broader community.

Funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the programme will see a biodiversity officer placed in every local authority in Ireland by the end of 2024. These officers will bring a deep understanding of biodiversity and climate change, along with insights into local ecosystems, to ensure that local authorities have access to relevant knowledge and the necessary support to address the biodiversity crisis actively.

A key component of the biodiversity officers' work is the creation of a local biodiversity forum and development and execution of a biodiversity action plan. Their in-depth comprehension of native species, habitats, and ecosystem services will shape these plans, guiding the management and conservation strategies at a local level. The programme will follow a successful way of working, established by the Local Authority Heritage Officer Network, also supported by the Heritage Council and the CCMA, and in place since 1999.

The biodiversity forum in each local authority will be a platform for discussions involving community members, biodiversity professionals from the state and NGO sector, and local authority staff and elected representatives. The forum will contribute to shaping local biodiversity action plans, steer biodiversity project implementation, and promote community responsibility for biodiversity conservation. The partnerships will drive community-led conservation efforts and enhance awareness about biodiversity, contributing significantly to a more sustainable and ecologically balanced local environment. In addition, their role will be significant in securing funding for biodiversity projects, which could stimulate the local economy and spur job creation in environmentally friendly industries.

Biodiversity officers will aim to instil a sense of environmental responsibility, educating the public on the importance of biodiversity and its links with climate change. Their work in leading community-based conservation initiatives, encouraging participation in biodiversity projects, and reinforcing the bond between people and their local environment will be invaluable, leading to communities becoming more engaged and informed about their local biodiversity. Biodiversity officers will serve as a vital link between the local community and the council, ensuring that local voices are considered when deciding on biodiversity conservation measures, fostering an inclusive, community-centric approach to biodiversity management and climate action.

The Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme's alignment with global responsibilities under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further amplifies its relevance. In particular, it directly contributes to the achievement of SDG 15 - 'Life on Land', which aims to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. By mobilising local authorities and communities towards understanding and preserving biodiversity, the programme also indirectly supports other SDGs such as SDG 13 - 'Climate Action',



Pictured at The Heritage Council Headquarters in Kilkenny are: (L-R) Laura Kehoe, Biodiversity Officer Wicklow; Ricky Whelan, Biodiversity Officer Offaly; Malcolm Noonan, Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform; Usna Keating, Biodiversity Officer Cork City. *Photo courtesy Alf Harvey*



Pictured at The Heritage Council Headquarters in Kilkenny are: (L-R) John Mulholland, Chair of the CCMA Rural Development, Community, Culture and Heritage (RCCH) Committee; Laura Kehoe, Biodiversity Officer Wicklow; Ricky Whelan, Biodiversity Officer Offaly; Virginia Teehan, CEO The Heritage Council; Malcolm Noonan, Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform; Martina Moloney, Chair The Heritage Council; Usna Keating, Biodiversity Officer Cork City. *Photo courtesy Alf Harvey*

SDG 11 - 'Sustainable Cities and Communities', and SDG 14 - 'Life Below Water', given the intrinsic relationship between biodiversity, climate health, sustainable urbanisation and marine life. Hence, while the programme is locally focused, it is poised to make a meaningful contribution to global sustainability goals, highlighting the role local action can play in the grand scheme of global sustainability.

Building on the success of the Local Authority Heritage Officer Programme, the Biodiversity Officer Programme represents a forward-thinking approach to addressing the biodiversity crisis at a local level in Ireland. The strategic

partnership of the Heritage Council and the CCMA will empower local authorities to drive action for biodiversity and climate, enhancing community engagement in biodiversity conservation, and leading to healthier, more resilient local ecosystems and the preservation of Ireland's unique natural heritage for future generations.

The successful partnership between the Heritage Council and the CCMA is crucial for the Biodiversity Officer Programme's success. The Heritage Council brings technical expertise and strategic guidance, drawing from its extensive experience in heritage management. The CCMA, with its understanding

of local governance issues, ensures that the biodiversity officers integrate well into the local council structures and align their initiatives with local development plans.

Welcoming the appointments already made under the national programme, John Mulholland, Chair of the CCMA Rural Development, Community, Culture and Heritage (RCCH) Committee, said:

'The County and City Management Association is delighted to support the important Biodiversity Officer Programme and very pleased to see these appointments being made and the programme moving forward. The expertise of biodiversity officers strengthens significantly our efforts at local authority level to protect and encourage appreciation of biodiversity in our areas. The appointment of biodiversity officers will help the local government sector to build on our ambition to integrate biodiversity considerations across all of our operations and strengthen our capability to address biodiversity loss and promote climate action in our work and in our communities.'

Together, these organisations combine their unique strengths to form a formidable force in combating climate change and biodiversity loss. Through this joint initiative, they drive the programme forward, paving the way for a sustainable, biodiversity-rich Ireland.

The Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme is an initiative of the Heritage Council in partnership with the CCMA, with funding from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Details of all biodiversity officers appointed to date are at <https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/our-work-with-others/biodiversity-officer-programme>. The Heritage Council aims to have Biodiversity in all local authorities by the end of 2024.

For information on the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme, please contact Catherine Casey, Head of Heritage and Climate Change, The Heritage Council ccasey@heritagecouncil.ie.

NEWS

Healthy Homes Ireland Presents Policy Report to Government to Address Poor Indoor Environments

Healthy Homes Ireland (HHI) is an initiative promoting the case for healthier, greener homes. At the beginning of June, HHI presented its extensive report of policy recommendations on indoor environmental quality to Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Kieran O'Donnell, TD, cross-party representatives and key stakeholders.

HHI is a steering group of building and environmental experts from the housing industry and academia. The report, *Our Place: Towards Healthier, Greener Homes*, represents research into how public policy, building industry practice and other factors have helped or hindered the achievement of healthy homes.

The report outlines policy recommendations across six key areas:

- Leadership
- Education and upskilling
- Occupant empowerment
- Regulation
- Knowledge
- Funding.

A key finding of the research is the need to create a central leadership body, as the issue of healthy housing and developing policies involves several government departments and agencies. In the report, HHI also recommends defining Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ) best practice in Irish homes and promoting the skills, funding and policy mechanisms that can deliver healthy and energy-efficient homes. IEQ refers to a building's indoor conditions that affect the health and wellbeing of those who occupy it. IEQ includes factors such as temperature, lighting, air quality and acoustics.

The report can be found at: https://www.igbc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2.-HHIReport_Final_Digital.pdf



Pictured are: (L-R) Neil Freshwater, Public Affairs Manager GB & Ireland, VELUX; Kevin O'Rourke, Chair, Healthy Homes Ireland; Minister of State Kieran O'Donnell, TD; and Marion Jammet, Head of Policy, Irish Green Building Council. A copy of the report is available on www.igbc.ie. Photo courtesy Shane O'Neill, Coalesce



CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS

Launch of Updated Customer Communications Toolkit for Services to the Public – A Universal Design Approach



The Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform, in partnership with Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) at the National Disability Authority (NDA), is delighted to have launched the updated *Customer Communications Toolkit for Services to the Public – A Universal Design Approach*. The launch took place online at the spring Quality Customer Service Network (QCSN) event.

The launch included speeches from Ossian Smyth TD (Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform, with special responsibility for Public Procurement and eGovernment; and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, with special responsibility for Communications and Circular Economy) and Dr Aileen Hartney (Director, NDA). James Hubbard (Senior Design Advisor, CEUD) gave an overview of the main updates to the *Toolkit*, while Colleen Dube (CEO, National Adult Literacy Agency) discussed why and how a Literacy Friendly Public Service should be developed. Dr Donal Fitzpatrick (Senior ICT Advisor, CEUD) spoke about how applying Universal Design to communications can improve the lived experience for customers.

Since it was first developed by the CEUD and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, in 2017, the *Customer Communications Toolkit* has been a vital support for all civil and public servants. It has provided guidance on adopting a Universal Design approach to customer communications, which has helped to create services that can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by everyone. The *Toolkit* is also useful to NDA's work, particularly in relation to monitoring compliance with the Web Accessibility Directive.

As stated in the foreword of the *Toolkit*, members of the public expect to receive the best possible customer experience when they contact the public service, no matter what form that communication takes. That is why it is important for organisations to provide communications in more than one format where possible, and also to be prepared to offer alternative formats when they are requested. Statutory obligations require that communications do not exclude or discriminate.

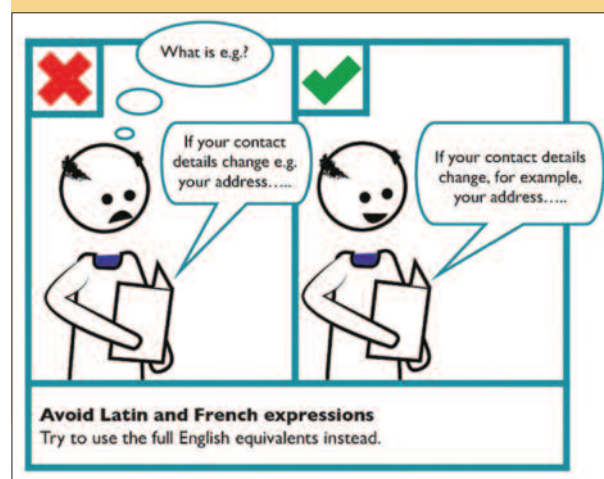
As Dr Donal Fitzpatrick noted when he spoke at the launch of the *Toolkit* about his lived experience:

'It is important to have information in alternate formats but equally it is important to know the correct way to prepare and provide that alternate format.'

The design guidance in this *Toolkit* was developed from the information sections of national and European standards. The *Toolkit* gathered information provided in these standards and transformed it into guidance that is easy to understand and use. This guidance can help organisations to plan their communications, train their staff, inform their suppliers and procure (buy) communication products and services that are accessible to everyone.

This extract is an example of some of the design guidance in the *Toolkit*:

- ✓ **'Use plain language. Always use the simplest and clearest language possible.'**
- ✓ **'Keep sentences short. Aim to use no more than 15 to 20 words in any sentence.'**
- ✓ **'Avoid Latin and French expressions. There can be confusion around abbreviations such as e.g. or i.e.'**



This third edition of the *Toolkit* reflects ongoing developments in how services to the public are delivered, ensuring that it remains relevant in the rapidly changing environment of public service delivery. As James Hubbard stated at the launch:

'Universal Design is based on continuous improvement.'

And the *Toolkit* itself needs to ensure that it continues to meet the changing needs of its users.

The update of the *Toolkit* includes improvements made as a result of user feedback and updates to reflect recent changes in legislation and terminology. To inform the updates, a series of consultation activities were conducted across a range of sectors. A number of communications

experts and Disabled Persons Organisations were also consulted to gain their insight into how communications should be designed to meet a wide range of needs.

A key change to the title of the toolkit, *Customer Communications Toolkit for Services to the Public – A Universal Design Approach*, is intended to reflect the obligation and importance of use of the *Toolkit* by private sector suppliers to the public service, and other providers of services to the public.

The separate 2020 *Toolkit* supplement, containing guidance for online meetings, prepared in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has been integrated into this version. This reflects the shift to online and hybrid means of communicating and delivering services, even after the pandemic has ended. Other changes made to enhance the use of, and improve navigation in, the *Toolkit*, include:

- Addition of a new glossary
- A separate list of self-assessment checklists
- Further links to external resources
- Internal hyperlinking in the digital copies of the *Toolkit*.

As Minister Smyth noted at the launch:

'When we inform the public about our services and how to access them, and as we deliver those services, we have important opportunities and indeed we have obligations to ensure that the way that we communicate results in trusted, effective and accessible public services will make a real difference to people's lives.'

This updated *Toolkit* will provide practical guidance to organisations to help them achieve these obligations.

The *Toolkit* is available on the CEUD website and from the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform in both HTML and accessible PDF format:

(HTML) <https://www.universaldesign.ie/products-services/customer-communications-toolkit-for-services-to-the-public-a-universal-design-approach/>

(PDF) [universaldesign.ie/web-content/customer-communications-toolkit-for-services-to-the-public-a-universal-design-approach.pdf](https://www.universaldesign.ie/web-content/customer-communications-toolkit-for-services-to-the-public-a-universal-design-approach.pdf)

The video of the launch event can be viewed at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KneqSrSJ5BI>

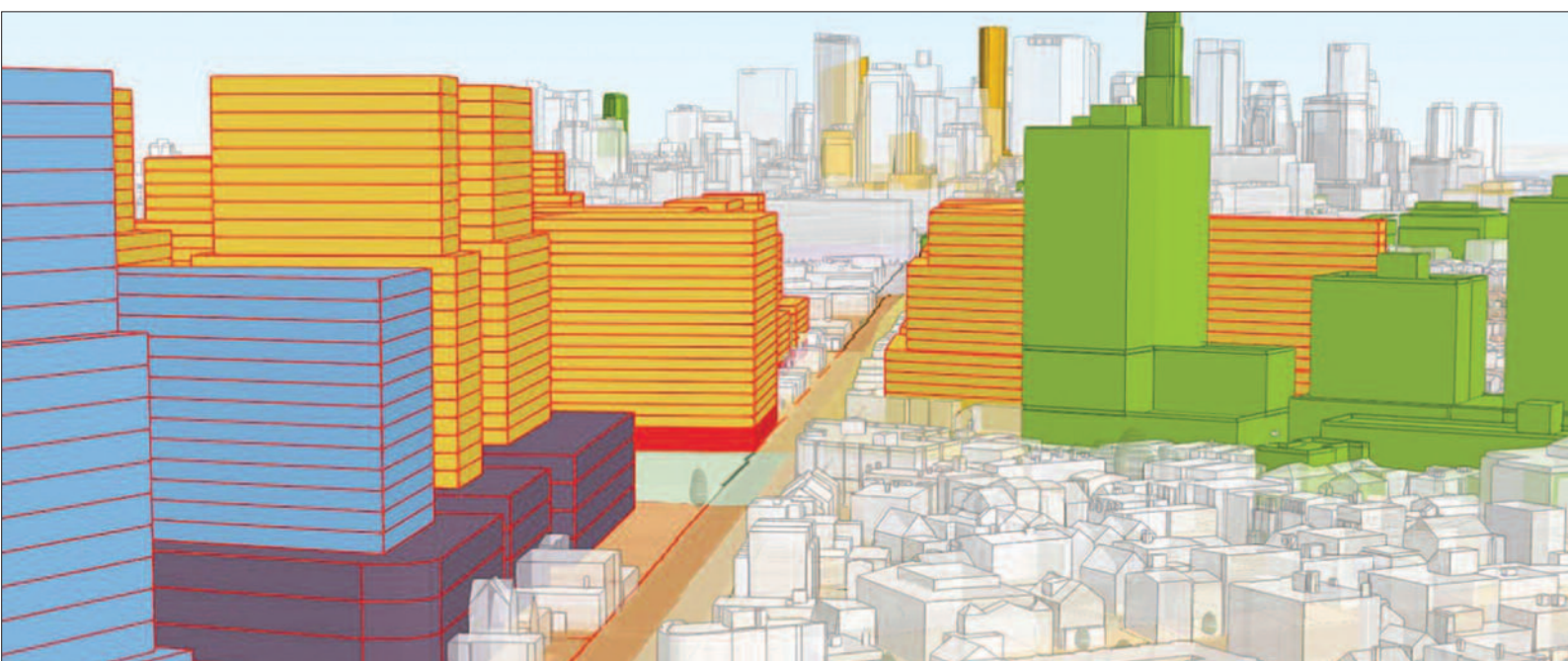
MAPPING OUT THE FUTURE

Co-creating Environmentally Sustainable Futures with geodesign

The growing need for local authorities to address climate impacts has led to increased interest in cocreation processes to support environmental planning and facilitate stakeholder engagement with spatial change. The Climate Action Plan places an emphasis on local authorities to achieve climate action targets. To do so, local authorities will need to engage communities and businesses in discussions about environmentally sustainable planning. geodesign provides a framework and the tools to achieve this, by enabling planners and communities to develop ideas and strategies collaboratively through role-play and negotiation. It applies systems thinking and the co-creation of planning solutions through deliberation with stakeholders, including the local community. In practice, geodesign creates a space for negotiating differing values, worldviews and perspectives on future development in a local area.

While the geodesign method is recognised internationally as producing the transformative change required to address challenging planning issues, little is known about how to implement geodesign in local authorities or the views of local planning staff on doing so. A new report, entitled *Engaging stakeholders in environmentally sustainable planning: Recommendations for implementing geodesign in local government*, explores these issues and is available to download via Research Gate.¹ The authors, Dr Brenda McNally and Dr Chiara Cocco, aim to raise awareness of the use of digital processes for co-creation and deliberation about future planning.

The report offers timely insights for local authorities seeking to achieve their climate targets through collaboration with stakeholders and local communities. It



outlines the benefits of co-creation and geodesign in local development processes and highlights the role of social values in increasing community participation with planning consultations. It presents the findings of focus group discussions exploring local authority staff views and builds on these findings to develop recommendations to assist the implementation of geodesign methods.

The report also sheds light on the organisational, technological and political dimensions of digitalising local government processes. In doing so, it responds to the

broader need for research on the digitalisation of local governance processes.

The research for this report was part of the Coastal Communities Adapting Together Project (CCAT), which was an EU-Interreg project led by the School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy, University College Dublin. Dr Brenda McNally is an environmental communications researcher, specialising in digital participation with climate change. Dr Chiara Cocco is an expert in the development of geodesign methods to support co-design processes.



Participants at a geodesign collaborative workshop.
Photo courtesy Peter Cavanagh

¹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367044280_Engaging_Communities_in_Environmentally_Sustainable_Planning_recommendations_for_implementing_geodesign_in_local_authorities

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

Bealtaine Dawn Chorus

Waterford Libraries kicked off their annual Bealtaine programme with a performance by the Library Bealtaine Choir, led by Anne Woodworth, as part of the Dawn Chorus event. The Dawn Chorus is a nationwide choral event in which older people come together with a choir in their locality to welcome the day and the season. The event was officially launched by Mayor of Waterford City and County, Cllr John O'Leary. The Bealtaine Festival is a partnership with Age and Opportunity, Sing Ireland and Waterford City and County Council.

Waterford City and County Council's new initiative to tackle cigarette waste

In an initiative to encourage smokers to dispose of their cigarette butts properly, Waterford City and County Council recently installed 'ballot bins' in Waterford City, Tramore and Dungarvan. The ballot bins feature an engaging voting system, which is a fun way to get people to vote by placing their cigarette butts in one of two voting slots. The bins feature customisable questions, and smokers can vote on the topic.



Launching Waterford's new initiative to tackle cigarette waste were: (L-R) Ella Ryan, Environmental Awareness Officer; Mayor of Waterford City and County, Cllr John O'Leary; and Niall Kane, Acting Senior Executive Officer, Waterford City and County Council.

Photo courtesy Communications Waterford County Council



Bealtaine Festival Dawn Chorus in Dunmore East. *Photo courtesy DGM Photographic*



Cllr Tom Farrell, Minister Peter Burke, Senior Library Assistant Kathleen Cleary, and Peter from the Irish Heart Foundation team, pictured along with members of the public who availed of the service on the day. *Photo courtesy Sinead Casserly*

Moate Library - the healthy heart of the community

Moate Library welcomed the Irish Heart Foundation mobile unit in May. It was a great opportunity for the public to get a free blood pressure and pulse check and to meet a nurse for a healthy heart chat. Cllr Tom Farrell and Minister of State Peter Burke, TD stopped by the unit to support the initiative and raise awareness of the importance of regular blood pressure checks.

Walk it, Run it, Love it Campaign helps Limerick put best foot forward

A four-week multimedia campaign to promote Limerick's scenic outdoors has encouraged walkers, runners and hikers to discover countryside, mountain trails, forest parks and beautiful scenery around Limerick. The campaign, which was developed by the Marketing and Communications Department at Limerick City and County Council, raised awareness of various walking routes, which received funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development, Fáilte Ireland and Limerick City and County Council under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme.



The campaign raised awareness of newly developed trails such as the one pictured above - Liskennett Forest Trail. *Photo courtesy Gareth Laheen*

Offaly County Council reduces carbon footprint with addition of HVO-powered vehicles

Offaly County Council recently launched two new Velocity Patching units, which will be deployed across the road network countrywide. The two vehicles will operate on Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO), which provides an immediate 90 per cent reduction on their operating carbon footprint when compared with traditional road diesel.



Chief Executive Anna Marie Delaney, (outgoing) Leas Cathaoirleach Cllr Tony McCormack, Director of Services Tom Shanahan, with municipal district and machinery yard staff, accompanied by Barry Lennon, Senior Engineer, Offaly County Council. *Photo courtesy Offaly County Council*

Tri-county Women in Business networking event

Over 100 women from across Counties Leitrim, Longford and Westmeath came together on Wednesday, 31 May in Carrick-on-Shannon to attend a tri-county Women in Business event. The theme of the event was 'Finding a Balance in Business with Positivity and Style'. The event was organised jointly by the Local Enterprise Offices of Leitrim, Longford and Westmeath, with the aim of further developing relationships within the Women in Business Network across the counties involved.



At the tri-county Women in Business event in Carrick-on-Shannon were: (L-R) Catriona Duffy, LEO Westmeath; Maria Carton, Style Advisor; Lorna Doorley, Your Sacred Space; Sheena Cannon, LEO Leitrim; and Rose McKenna, LEO Longford. *Photo courtesy Westmeath County Council*

LOCAL AUTHORITY WEBSITES

HOW DO YOU RATE?

This article is the second in a series from the National Disability Authority (NDA) covering issues relating to the EU Web Accessibility Directive. The first article was published in Spring 2023, and a final article will appear in the next edition of *Local Authority Times*.

Universal Design and digital inclusion continue to receive attention from public bodies in Ireland. Not only have digital services the potential to reach more people more efficiently, but they also have the potential to 'level the playing field' and ensure equitable access for all people to public services, regardless of their age, ability or disability. While some people might always prefer using more traditional customer service channels, the majority of citizens may be best served online if digital channels are universally designed.

Achieving a universally designed online service starts by ensuring full compliance with minimum accessibility standards set out in legislation, EN 301 549, which is broadly similar to the more commonly known Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 (AA). The EU Web Accessibility Directive (WAD) sets out statutory targets for local authorities to achieve in this regard.

In this article, Dónal Rice, head of monitoring for the Directive at the National Disability Authority (NDA), highlights some of the main accessibility issues identified on local authority websites in the EU WAD monitoring report for 2022. He points to some quick wins in improving compliance for local authorities and gives advice on how to plan for addressing the most critical and high-volume issues first.

- Read NDA's 2022 monitoring report for all local authority websites reviewed:
<https://nda.ie/publications/monitoring-report-eu-wad-ireland-2021-nda-report>

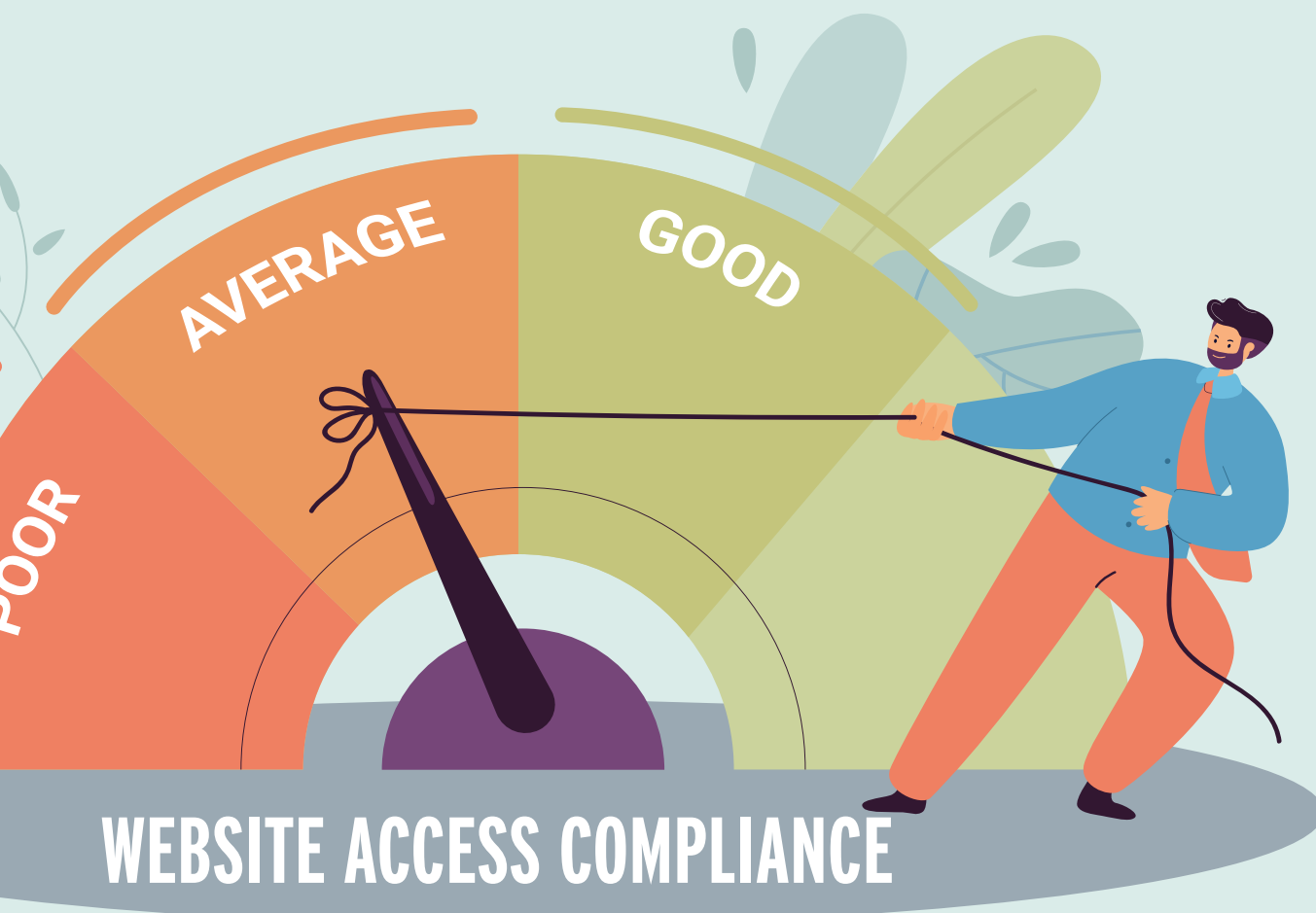
Using data to drive compliance

As outlined in the cover story of the Spring 2023 edition of *Local Authority Times*, local authorities have received an unprecedented amount of accessibility data from the NDA since monitoring began in 2021. Each local authority subject to a 'Simplified Review' has access to the results of scans run weekly by NDA on an average of 400 pages per site. These scans are fully automated and, as Dónal explains, can form the basis of the local authorities' efforts to begin to improve accessibility.

'Simplified Review scans can cover up to 57 per cent of the standard required under the Directive. This is an excellent place to start understanding and remediating accessibility.'

The weekly scans assign each local authority's website an accessibility score. An accessibility score is a useful metric and can help local authorities to prioritise the main issues they should address. Dónal explains:

'The accessibility score is a metric that evaluates a website based on the most serious issue identified on every page scanned and the likely impact on a user of that issue. This means that the higher the number of pages with critical or serious issues, the lower the score.'



As local authorities address the most critical and high volume issues on their sites, they should see immediate improvements in their accessibility score. Dónal recommends approaching the list of accessibility issues identified in a Simplified Review as follows:

1. Review and understand the full Simplified Review results, including issues with the highest volume, the most critical issues and issues that relate to assets such as PDFs.
2. Correct the critical and serious issues as soon as possible. Make changes with the greatest return on investment, such as changes in the website's style sheet (CSS) or common components with the highest severity. Use other metrics available to you - for example, prioritise fixing issues on pages that have the highest traffic.
3. Use an automated testing tool to test automated issues in real-time while remediating.

There is a range of free accessibility tools that local authorities can use, such as:

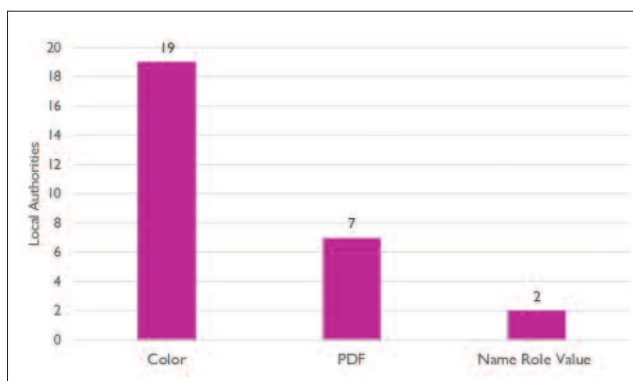
- **Google Lighthouse:** <https://developer.chrome.com/docs/lighthouse/overview>
- **axeDevTools:** <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/axe-devtools-webaccessib/lhdoppojpmngadmndnejejpokejbdd>

While an accessibility score is a useful metric, it should never be mistaken for compliance. Dónal points out:

'We've seen some local authorities equating a high accessibility score with compliance. This is simply not true. A high accessibility score does not equal compliance. The authority still needs to do due diligence by looking for those issues that can only be identified by testing fully with an expert reviewer and assistive technology used by persons with disabilities.'

Fixing the main issues

The most recent monitoring report from the NDA, for the 2022 period, showed that the most common issues identified on local authority websites are broadly similar to those found on all sites. Issues related to colour contrast, PDF and 'name, role, value' account for the most common errors on the highest number of websites, as outlined in the figure below. For example, colour contrast was the most common error on 19 of the local authority websites reviewed.



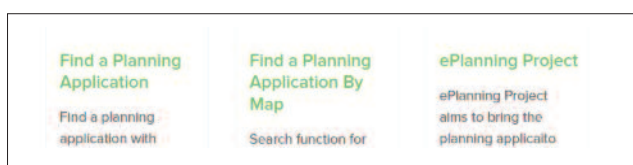
Frequency of main errors - local authority websites.

Colour contrast

When there is insufficient colour contrast between the text and the background colour, it creates barriers for people who are colour blind or have low vision and may not be able to see the text.

Unfortunately, many of the colours in the colour palette chosen when creating an organisational brand are not optimised for the web.

WCAG contains very clear and definable thresholds for colour contrast. This benefits not only people with colour blindness but also people with moderately low vision and it makes the site easier to read for everyone. A colour contrast luminosity ratio of at least 4.5 to 1 is the minimum required for readability on regular-sized text (text sized below 18 point or text sized below 14 point bold). If the text is large (text sized at or above 18 point or text sized at or above 14 point bold) the minimum colour contrast luminosity ratio is relaxed to at least 3 to 1.



Screenshot of poor colour contrast on a local authority website.

The following guidance is key when choosing colour:

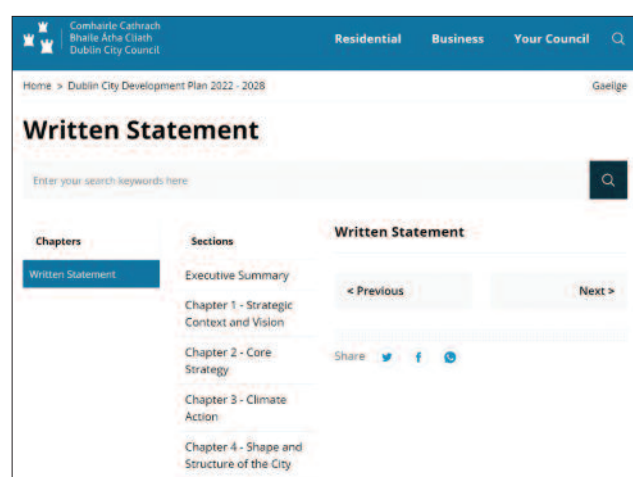
- Make sure that there is strong contrast between the text and the background colour.
- If using white text, make sure that the background colour is dark enough to provide sufficient contrast.
- Avoid combining yellow, green and red, as these are difficult for people with colour blindness to distinguish.
- Avoid placing text in front of an image or patterned background, as this makes it more difficult to read.

Use a contrast analyser to ensure that there is enough contrast between the foreground and background colours. Colour Contrast Analyser: <https://www.tpgi.com/color-contrast-checker/>

PDFs and accessible alternatives

PDF errors accounted for the second highest total number of errors across all sites reviewed by the NDA in 2022. Dónal warns about the overuse of PDFs:

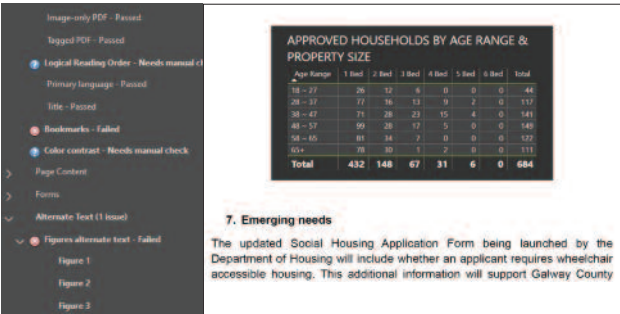
'PDFs are really easy to publish to a website, but really difficult to make accessible. Originally PDFs were invented for ease of print as well as security, and not for reading online. Given the huge number of PDFs on local authority websites, councils need to consider, firstly, if that content needs to be in PDF. Many local authorities have invested in a Content Management System (CMS) that supports accessibility, yet routinely publish most of their content online in inaccessible PDF. This does not seem to be the best use of resources. In general, HTML is much more accessible, user friendly and can be used on a wider range of devices.'



Dublin City Development Plan published in accessible HTML.

Many of the PDFs reviewed by NDA contain small amounts of content (1-2 pages) and these are better suited for publishing in accessible HTML or even Word. While it may be more practical to publish larger documents in PDF, these can be made accessible if certain things are done. For PDFs that start out life in Word, there are tools and accessibility

checkers in both Word and Adobe Acrobat Pro that can be used by local authority staff.



Snapshot of an error in a PDF on disability and housing: An image of a data table contains no alternative text (Tool: Adobe Acrobat Pro).

A PDF produced by print design agencies and other contractors should have accessibility as part of its design brief. NDA suggests the following text for use in defining accessibility in requests for quotations from print design agencies. It also advises on how to incorporate and test for accessibility.

[Local authority name] wishes to make the [report name] accessible by ensuring it meets the 4 principles of accessibility: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable and Robust (POUR principles). The [report] must comply with all relevant Level AA Success Criteria from the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1.

To achieve this, successful contractors will be required to:

- Ensure that the PDF is created using the accessibility tools and following accessibility good practices for InDesign, or similar authoring tool.

Test that the PDF is accessible by:

- Conducting an automated review of the PDF using the Adobe Acrobat Pro Accessibility Checker
- Ensuring that there is sufficient colour contrast in the document (use one of the freely available colour contrast checkers)
- Checking the (logical) reading order of the document

While PDF documents and reports can be made reasonably accessible, NDA recommends that PDF forms should be avoided for all online services and that accessible HTML be used instead. This may require the use of specialist development skills.

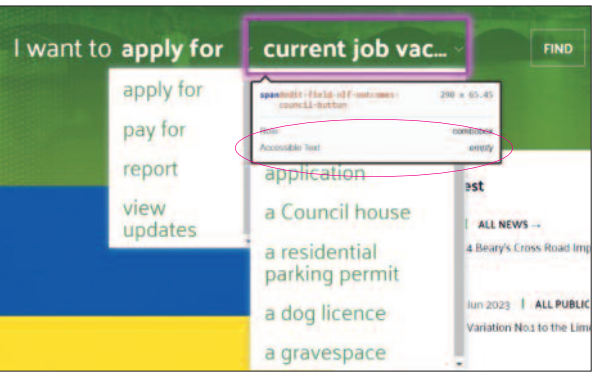
- NDA recommends that public bodies consider the most accessible format in which to publish content. This may require consultation with customers with disabilities or

- Disabled Persons Organisations. While public bodies should aim for full compliance with the standard EN 301 549 for all content published online, public bodies should also consider the provision of content in a variety of alternative formats, on request.²

'Name, role, value'- coding accessible interactive elements

Today's websites have many interactive elements. These include buttons, menus, accordions carousels and forms. The Web Accessibility Directive requires that assistive technologies receive the necessary semantic information from all the interactive elements present on the page. Local authorities' websites must comply with this standard.

Users of assistive technology, such as screen readers and braille devices, must be able to understand what the custom elements of a webpage or online service are and what they do. Each element must have an accessible name, role, value, state and property, which are conveyed to assistive technologies. In turn, this information enables people with disabilities to interact with these elements.



No accessible name assigned to dropdown menus on a local authority website. (Tool: axeDevTools)

- NDA recommends that all interactive elements, including forms and widgets, are designed and implemented to be accessible. Specialised supports from accessibility experts may be required to ensure that forms and online services are accessible from start to finish.

Read NDA's Web Accessibility Techniques and view recordings of previous web accessibility events:
<https://www.universaldesign.ie/technology-ict/web-and-mobile-app-accessibility/web-accessibility-techniques/>

² See, for example, CEUD's Customer Communications Toolkit for Services to the Public - A Universal Design Approach and VVI's Manual on Accessible Communications

Conclusion and next steps

The first step for a local authority in preparing to make the necessary changes as outlined is to assign tasks to the relevant staff members. According to Dónal:

'Content and services delivered via a website are seldom one unit's responsibility and the three most common issues are best addressed with input from staff with responsibilities for marketing, communications and the website's designers and developers.'

For example,

- Colour contrast issues need input from staff with responsibility for the local authority's marketing and branding.
- Issues relating to PDFs are typically a content issue and may need to be addressed as part of how content is created within the organisation and published to the website.
- Issues relating to code on the website may need to be addressed by the website's designers and developers, either internal or external.

This article has looked at addressing the most common identified accessibility errors on local authority websites. To ensure full compliance with the standard, local authorities may need to address accessibility as part of their communications, IT and compliance functions. In the next article, later this year, we will consider how accessibility can be embedded in procurement, website management and maintenance, and communications.



Dónal Rice, head of monitoring for the Directive at the National Disability Authority (NDA).



NEWS

Funding Announced for Local Authority Workplace Wellbeing Programme

Funding to support local authorities to embed workplace wellbeing has been announced by Hildegarde Naughton, TD, Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy.

A fund of €300,000 is available to local authorities for strategic initiatives aimed at supporting and maintaining staff wellbeing. In line with the Government's National Framework for Healthy Workplaces, the funding will help local authorities to promote and protect psychological and physical health in the workplace and to empower employees to make informed choices about their own wellbeing.

The funding will support local authorities' wellbeing strategies, which focus on mental wellbeing, physical wellbeing, social wellbeing and financial wellbeing.

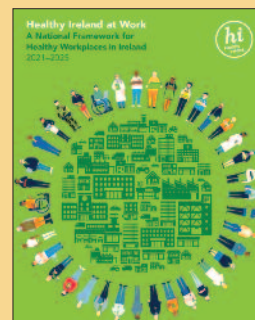
Local authorities can apply for funding for specific programmes and initiatives that form part of their wellbeing strategy or support strategic aims to:

- Create safe and healthy work environments that foster a culture of positive wellbeing
- Improve the general wellbeing of local authorities' diverse workforce and ensure that wellbeing is seen as everyone's responsibility
- Embed wellbeing as a central part of strategic priorities for management across all local authority functions.

The wellbeing funding programme is being coordinated by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA).



Hildegarde Naughton, TD.





European Investment Bank partners with Limerick City and County Council to cut social housing energy bill

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has joined forces with Limerick City and County Council in an innovative partnership aimed at driving investment in retrofit to reduce energy consumption and costs in social housing. Recognising the urgent need to address the social and economic impact of energy poverty, this collaboration aims to replicate successful investment models from across Europe to further accelerate home upgrades and make a tangible difference in the lives of thousands of households.

The initiative has been warmly welcomed by Irish Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien, TD, who recognised the EIB's unwavering support for impactful housing investment in Ireland.

The work is being delivered in close cooperation with Dublin City Council and Cooperative Housing Ireland. By combining resources and expertise, the partnership's focus on energy efficiency will alleviate the burden of energy costs while also contributing to broader climate action goals. With 177,000 social homes across Ireland, there are challenges in addressing energy poverty.

European Investment Bank Vice President Ricardo Mourinho and EIB advisory and financing colleagues with Limerick City and County Council Chief Executive Dr Pat Daly (3rd from left) and Deputy Chief Executive Sean Coughlan (on the right). *(Photo courtesy: EIB Limerick)*

However, this joint project, as Limerick City and County Council's Chief Executive, Dr Pat Daly, explains, 'not only tackles the social and economic dimensions but also contributes to job creation, as hundreds of thousands of employment opportunities are expected to emerge through the upgrading of existing homes.'

In recent years, the EIB has provided more than €1 billion for social housing and urban regeneration investment across Ireland, including streamlined initiatives with the Housing Finance Agency, the National Development Finance Agency, local authorities and regeneration of Limerick City Centre.

<https://www.limerick.ie/council/newsroom/news/european-investment-bank-partners-withlimerick-city-and-county-council-to>

MAPPING DUBLIN'S AIR QUALITY

STREET BY STREET

When more than 100 data scientists and technologists gathered in Google's Dublin HQ last February for Air Quality Data Hack 2023, Dublin City Council was truly giving power to its people. With the aim of optimising air quality in the city, citizens from the worlds of technology, academia and innovation were invited and challenged to make a major contribution to the city they call home - through the power of data and collaboration.

COLLABORATION THE BIG WINNER AT DUBLIN DATA HACK



Looking beyond the smog

Since the industrial revolution, poor air quality in many cities and large towns worldwide has impacted on tourism, investment and, most importantly, the health of citizens. With the arrival of smokeless fuels in recent decades, we see less smoke and smog in our cities, and it has in many ways become an invisible problem. Research tells us that, over time, suboptimal air quality is still having an impact on the most vulnerable in our society.

Dublin City Council has taken key steps to enhance the city's air quality for citizens and visitors alike. Dublin was named as one of the best European cities for air quality, according to a study by the European Environmental Agency (EEA) in April 2023. However, we cannot be complacent, and challenges do exist at certain areas in the city. While statutory regulations are in place alongside the council's own clean-air strategy and policy, the city has gone one step further. According to Jamie Cudden, Smart City Programme Manager Dublin City Council:

'By teaming up with one of Dublin's top tech companies, Google, we have gathered over 50 million pieces of data from Google's first electric Street View car; dedicated to monitoring street by street air quality, throughout the city, over a period of 16 months.'

Offering new insights through new data

Now, there is capability to explore these numbers fully and apply them to help improve the lives and health of Dubliners. As an international hub of technology companies, ambitious start-ups and universities, Dublin is a city that lives and breathes technology and data. And who better to work with this new data than the legions of programmers, statisticians, data analysts and researchers who walk its streets every day? In computer programming, the concept of the hackathon describes a forum where people collaborate over an accelerated period of time, to develop solutions and refine thinking on specific topics. With that, the stage was set for Air Quality Data Hack 2023.

On 24 February, more than 100 data scientists, coders, software developers, atmospheric specialists, research students and urban planners gathered at Google HQ for two days of collaboration, competition and community. Sixteen teams entered, representing universities, workplaces and others who felt they had something to offer their home city. They spent two days thinking, analysing, listening and presenting theories and ideas. Working with such a massive data set was challenging but all groups demonstrated a remarkable ability to come up with a wide range of concepts, solutions or prototypes to unlock the potential of granular and hyper-local city air-quality data for Dublin City.

Saving lives with transformational thinking

With prizes in place for the winner and two runners-up, competition was both fierce and friendly. The first runner-up went by the tongue-in-cheek name of Definitely Not ChatGPT and focused on air quality around four major hospitals in the city, using correlation maps and a combination of air-quality and traffic-light data to identify air-quality concerns around healthcare facilities.





Snapshot from Google EIE Air Quality Explorer of Dublin City. Map of Long Term Average Nitrogen Dioxide Concentration ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) on road.



Air Quality Data Hack participants, volunteers and judges.



Google Street View Car for Project Air View Dublin. (Photo courtesy Google)

Aerlytics were placed second runner-up, with a similar focus on schools and on the urgent need to address air pollution in school zones, to protect the health and wellbeing of children.

The hackathon winners for 2023 were Team Phoenix, comprising six researchers from Trinity's Schools of Engineering and Computer Science and Statistics. They secured the top prize of €1,500. Taking the core Google data and combining it with additional datasets, including CSO statistics, mapping data, vulnerability assessment metrics and technical tools, they successfully assessed vulnerable zones in Dublin with substandard air quality - with a view to feeding these insights into future plans for active travel within the city.

Speaking on behalf of their teammates, a member of Team Phoenix summed up their experience well:

'On the day, the experts were so helpful, giving loads of insights into the data and different approaches that could be taken in analysing it. Through our work, we showed the value of the data and how it can enrich Dublin City Council's decision-making'.

Living and breathing collaboration

The collaboration and connectivity on show at the hackathon summed up so much that is good about Dublin today. Once a small city on the edge of Europe, Dublin is now a global hub for investment, technology and software engineering, attracting talent from all over the world. For the brightest and best in our communities, getting the opportunity to work with key data allows them to give something back to the city they call home. It seems fitting that the democratisation of data is starting to play a key role in developing our democracies in the digital age.



Smart City Programme Manager Jamie Cudden at Project Results Launch at the Mansion House.

For its part, Dublin City Council sees the hackathon as a wonderful illustration of the power of data to drive real societal change. Jamie Cudden continues:

'As we consider major challenges like climate change, it is clear they cannot be resolved by one city council or one citizen. However, by creating models to bring together all the right stakeholders, we can work together to try and solve them. Partnering with companies like Google has given us an opportunity to tap into global data expertise. It provides councils with additional resources to make data-driven and evidence-based policy decisions with clarity and conviction.'

Making home a better place to live

Every city is only as good as the citizens it serves, and when a city is home to a bustling population of data wizards and technical gurus, making the most of these skills and expertise makes sense. What Air Quality Data Hack 2023 says more than anything is that when true collaboration happens,

anything is possible. The power of data is having a major impact on urban living worldwide as we enter the age of digital. Undertaking data-driven initiatives just like this one will drive our cities forward to a healthier, happier and more prosperous future.

Further details about Project Air View can be found here: <https://data.smartdublin.ie/dataset/google-airview-data-dublin-city>

Article by Smart Cities Team, Dublin City Council



CIPD
Approved
centre

IPA
AN FORAS RIARACHÁIN
INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION

CIPD FOUNDATION CERTIFICATE IN PEOPLE PRACTICE

This CIPD qualification is for those looking to take the first step towards becoming a qualified people professional and make a real impact in their organisations. It provides a solid foundation for careers in the people profession, incorporating both Human Resources and Learning & Development.

Now Accepting Applications for September 2023

Online and In Person Programmes Available

Contact the Institute of Public Administration to find out more



01 240 3666



training@ipa.ie



www.ipa.ie

Irish Local Government among weakest in Europe

The representative body for councillors, the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG), has expressed major concerns to the Council of Europe (COE) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLRAE) that Ireland has the most centralised system of local government compared to its European counterparts, in terms of powers, functions, service delivery and funding.

AILG submitted its independent report to a CLRAE European Monitoring Committee during its recent visit to review Ireland, where it examined specific issues related to local and regional democracy.

The full text of the submission made by the AILG to the European Committee of Local Self-Government is available on AILG's website: <http://ailg.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/AILGSubmission-to-the-CLRAE-Monitoring-Committee-April-2023-Final.pdf>

Key areas of concern highlighted by AILG in its submission include:

- The growing centralised nature of Ireland's local government system, including increasing powers of the Minister through various ministerial guidelines.
- An imbalance between the elected council and the Chief Executives in local authorities, which leads to a democratic deficit where decisions can be made without direct democratic accountability.
- The limited range of functions being carried out directly by local authorities in Ireland compared to other EU countries.
- The lack of formal mechanisms for consultations between the local government associations and central government.
- The low share of public expenditure by local government in Ireland in comparison to other EU countries.

The final report from the European Committee of Local Self-Government, part of the 46-nation Council of Europe, is expected to be published in July 2023. Two monitoring visits of local and regional democracy in Ireland have previously been carried out in 2001 and 2013 respectively.

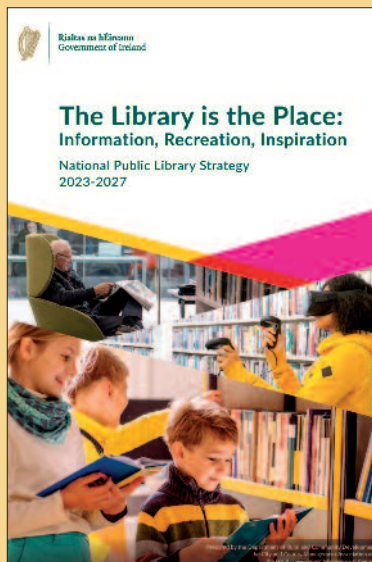
Speaking in relation to the report, AILG President Cllr Pat Fitzpatrick said:

'Ireland has one of the most centralised systems of government of any European international democracy. Put simply, councillors here have fewer powers than in almost every other country and have limited revenue-raising and spending powers. In reality, since the 2014 reforms, the position and powers of the Chief Executive have increased resulting in a growing imbalance between the executive powers of the Chief Executive and the reserved powers of the elected councillors. Accordingly, this leads to a democratic deficit where decisions can be made without direct democratic accountability. This is outdated, anti-democratic, and no longer tenable and was never acceptable.'

COUNTRY	MUNICIPALITIES	LOCAL COUNCILLORS	POPULATION	PEOPLE PER COUNCILLOR
Ireland	31	949	5,123,536	5,399
Scotland	32	1,227	5,463,300	4,453
Denmark	98	2,432	5,833,692	2,399
Norway	428	6,420	5,507,594	858
Finland	310	8,859	5,558,227	627
Slovakia	2,927	20,646	5,465,021	265

A sample of how Ireland compares with other European countries with similar populations.

The Library is the Place



The Library is the Place is Ireland's new national library strategy, developed by the LGMA Libraries Development Team, working with the CCMA, libraries, local authorities and the Department of Rural and Community Development. The ambitious new five-year strategy is designed to support and strengthen our public library

network. It contains 66 actions which will ensure public libraries become multi-purpose social and educational spaces for all members of the community to enjoy.

Highlights of the Action Plan include:

- To develop every library in the country into a multi-purpose education and social space for all members of the community;
- To treble the number of 'My Open Library' facilities to over 90. These provide library access from 8am to 10pm, 365 days per year;
- To provide every library user in the country with access to a book club;

- To increase visitor numbers and the amount spent on books in every library year-on-year;
- To ensure the further roll-out of Outreach Library Services and mobile libraries with a particular focus on rural communities;
- To increase by 50 per cent authors' remuneration through Public Lending Remuneration (PLR) Scheme;
- To roll out the national 'Skills for Life' umbrella programme with a focus on digital skills, financial literacy, sustainable lifestyles and environmental awareness;
- To increase the availability of services and materials in the Irish language in every library facility.



Some statistics which reflect the reach and impact of our public libraries

More than
53.6 million
visits since 2018

13,265,332
items in the collection

A collection of over
110,000
eBooks and eAudiobooks

330
local libraries

More than
76 million
items issued since 2018

23
mobile libraries
(including one cross-border service)

Access to
7,000
eNewspapers and eMagazines from

120+
countries in

60+
languages

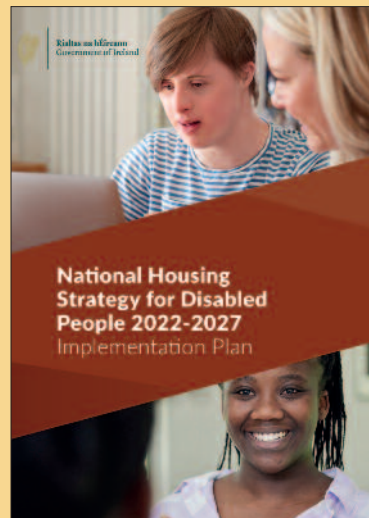
Over
600
online eLearning courses at a variety of levels and comprising a wide range of subjects

Over
110
language courses for speakers of 30+ languages

Launch of *National Housing Strategy for Disabled People*

The Implementation Plan for the *National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022–2027* was launched in June by the Minister of State for Local Government and Planning, Kieran O'Donnell, TD, and the Minister of State with responsibility for Disability, Anne Rabbitte, TD. The Plan will deliver on the primary objective of the National Strategy, which is 'to facilitate disabled people to live independently with the appropriate choices and control over where, how and with whom they live, promoting their inclusion in the community'. The *Strategy* and *Implementation Plan* were developed under the guiding principles of Housing for All – the Government's housing plan to 2030.

An awareness campaign on the *Strategy* and *Implementation Plan* was also launched and it aims to promote awareness locally and nationally with stakeholders, the general public, and throughout the disability sector through various platforms. The campaign will ensure the housing needs of disabled people are afforded a high level of visibility at local and national level, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) principles.



Housing and Disability Steering Groups have been established in each local authority area and they have a key role in acting as the forum for delivery of the strategy's outcomes at local level. It is expected that they will build on the national campaign and undertake awareness-raising activities in their areas.

The *Implementation Plan* for the *National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022–2027* is available to view here:
<https://www.housingagency.ie/sites/default/files/2023-06/NHSDP%20Implementation%20Plan%20.pdf>

The *National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022–2027* was launched in January 2022 and is available here:
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/60d76-national-housing-strategy-for-disabledpeople-2022-2027/>





CERTIFICATE IN MANAGEMENT AND FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING

This CIPFA accredited certificate is for those wishing to develop their expertise in public financial management.

The qualification will equip students with the skills to prepare accounting records per international standards, draw up financial statements and use costing and budgeting techniques to help make decisions and manage public finances effectively.

Now accepting applications for September 2023

Contact the Institute of Public Administration to find out more

 01 240 3666

 training@ipa.ie

 www.ipa.ie

New NESC Report: *Just Transition in Agriculture and Land Use*

As part of its fiftieth-year work programme, the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) has just released its new report, *Just Transition in Agriculture and Land Use* (Council Report No. 162). The report argues that the agriculture and land use sector can increasingly be a part of the solution to addressing urgent climate change and biodiversity loss.

Ireland has committed to a national climate objective of transitioning to a climate-resilient, biodiversity-rich and climate-neutral economy by no later than the end of 2050. All sectors are required to contribute. For agriculture, a 25 per cent reduction in emissions is required by 2030, with the target for land use and land-use change to be put in place following the completion of the Government's Land Use Review.

The starting point for the ambitious transition that is required is a vision towards which all stakeholders can agree to work collectively.

The journey towards this vision must be underpinned by a commitment to continuous learning and will be supported by a just transition process focused on a transition within, not out of, agriculture. NESC identifies the benefit of an inclusive engagement process to develop and deepen a sense of shared purpose for the sector's transition, based upon clear, coherent, and consistent communications.

Speaking on the completion of the report, Dr Larry O'Connell, Director of NESC, said:

'A just transition, focused on a transition within, not out of, agriculture can support the sector to be part of the solution to the climate and biodiversity crisis, whilst also supporting rural communities and farmer livelihoods. Working with the Council and a wide range of stakeholders, including farming, environmental, community and voluntary, employer and trade union representatives, has led to a groundbreaking report that reflects a shared understanding of a complex set of challenges and the solutions needed to address them. We identify now as a key moment of opportunity, where opinions are shifting and a way forward could be within reach to achieve a fair transition in agriculture and land use that tackles emissions while supporting economic and social wellbeing.'

European territories localise the Sustainable Development Goals

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and PLATFORMA have released their annual study on the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), *European Territories Localise the SDGs - Only six summers left to make the most of the Decade of Action*. The report analyses data from 41 associations of local and regional governments from greater Europe and makes seven recommendations. Estimates have shown that at least 65 per cent of the targets of the 17 SDGs cannot be achieved without the involvement of local and regional governments. The report reiterates a strong call to national and European institutions to recognise and include in their reports the progress made by municipalities and regions in achieving the SDGs. More than ever, decentralised cooperation and partnerships are crucial instruments to achieve the 2030 Agenda at the local and regional levels.

The seven recommendations that arose from the report are:

1. The European Union should clearly indicate how the different levels of governance and civil society organisa-

tions have contributed to the process of achieving the SDGs in their reporting on progress in its first EU Voluntary Review.

2. National governments and the EU should accelerate the localisation and territorialisation of the SDGs.
3. The production of Voluntary Local Reviews and Voluntary Subnational Reviews, as tools to engage with citizens, must be further encouraged and integrated in the Voluntary National Reviews.
4. Voluntary National Reviews need to include relevant disaggregated data and information for the subnational level. Consequently, Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) call for the unwavering recognition and inclusion by national governments of LRGs and their associations in their monitoring and reporting of progress in the implementation of SDGs.
5. The EU institutions and the European States should give political space and recognition to Local and Regional Governments by establishing regular dialogue with the subnational levels and by including local elected representatives in their delegations to any relevant high-level meetings.
6. International cooperation to achieve the 2030 Agenda at the local and regional levels is crucial and Local and Regional



NESC recommends accelerating action towards a just transition in agriculture and land use, based on taking an opportunities-led approach, recognising and equitably sharing the costs of transition, socially inclusive processes of engaging farmers and other stakeholders, and mechanisms for effectively governing the transition.

The full report can be accessed on the NESC website:
<https://www.nesc.ie/publications/exploring-ajust-transition-in-agriculture-and-land-use/>

Governments are asking for more support to accomplish this, through more innovative partnerships with peers, as well as through a model of governance based on partnerships and decentralised cooperation.

7. The true implementation of SDGs will not transpire without the specific inclusion of youth, women and vulnerable groups in decision-making and all related activities that contribute to achieving the SDGs.

The report can be found here: <https://local-sdgs.eu/>
<https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Local-SDGs-2023-EN.pdf>



€2.7 million of funding announced for local biodiversity projects

Minister Noonan, Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform, has announced that over €2.5 million is being awarded to local authorities to carry out biodiversity projects through the Local Biodiversity Action Fund (LBAF) and €193,000 is being granted to the natural history recording community through the Small Recording Grants scheme. All of the projects being funded support the implementation of the National Biodiversity Action Plan and over 180 community projects across all 31 local authorities have received funding through the fund.

Some of the projects approved for funding include:

- 8 local authorities joining together to monitor the Quagga mussel invasive species in the Shannon
- 3 local authorities supporting the Shannon Dolphin Project, which is 30 years old this year, making it one of the longest dolphin studies in Europe
- Habitat mapping in Cork
- Development of an Invasive Alien Species Strategy for Galway City Council
- Hedgerow survey in Kilkenny county.

The Small Recording Grant scheme aims to help established naturalists recording in Ireland to maintain and enhance their expertise in species identification and it supports volunteers, societies and associations of recorders who have limited or no access to financial supports for their work. 67 applicants have been allocated funding at a combined total of €193,000. This figure is almost three times the amount of funding allocated in 2022, which was €70,000, and demonstrates the growing commitment to develop the next generation of natural history recorders.

Speaking about the funding announcement, Minister Noonan said: *'The Local Biodiversity Action Fund is an enormously impactful scheme that supports local authorities and communities to deliver on Ireland's national objectives for nature... As more and more Biodiversity Officers join the ranks of our local authorities, I know that the benefits for nature and people that this Fund provides are only going to grow.'*

A full list of the projects funded under the Local Biodiversity Action Fund 2023 can be found here:
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/aeb0e-local-biodiversity-action-fund-project-funding-2023/>

€15 Million Fund for 2023 Town and Village Renewal Scheme

Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, has launched the *2023 Town and Village Renewal Scheme* - a €15 million Fund designed to revitalise and regenerate our rural towns and villages.

The Fund will support dozens of projects nationwide with a focus on tackling vacancy and dereliction and bringing additional footfall into the centre of our towns. Grants will be made available to support the development of outdoor projects such as plazas, parks, playgrounds and green spaces. Under the initiative, funding will be provided to local authorities to acquire land for regeneration purposes. Farmer and artisan markets will be supported under the scheme and there will also be funding ring-fenced for projects on our offshore island communities.

Priority will be afforded to projects that align with the objectives of *Our Rural Future*, *Town Centre First* and *Our Living Islands* with a focus on:

- Investment in infrastructure to support town and village centre markets;



Our Rural Future: Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, has launched the *2023 Town and Village Renewal Scheme* - a €15 million Fund designed to revitalise and regenerate our rural towns and villages.

- Bringing vacant and derelict buildings back into use a multi-purpose community spaces, or to address remote working needs.
- A new option to allow local authorities to acquire plots of land to enable development of town regeneration, such as town parks, plazas etc; and
- Refurbishment of existing community centres.

Her Wicklow, Her Outdoors 2023: Encouraging women to embrace the outdoors

HER Wicklow, HER Outdoors Week, the annual event dedicated to celebrating and encouraging women to embrace the outdoors, is back for 2023.

From August 14th to 20th, Wicklow will come alive with a week-long list of events designed to highlight the opportunities for women and girls to engage in outdoor recreation and inspire them to try something new.

HER Wicklow, HER Outdoors 2023 is scaling to new heights with a vast array of activities covering land, sea, and air. Airplane gliding has been introduced as an activity for 2023 with snorkelling and climbing also new additions. These activities will join hiking, biking, walking, swimming and many others to really showcase what Wicklow has to offer in the outdoor recreation sphere.

Wicklow Sports Partnership is also delighted to welcome two national events to the county in the run up to the HER Wicklow, HER Outdoors Week. Volleyball Ireland will host their beach tour in Brittas Bay on Sunday, 13th of August, while Sport Ireland will open the weekend on 12th August with a Her Outdoors Adventure Festival in Russborough House. There will be outdoor recreation activities to book, a picnic zone, yoga area and guided walks of the Greenway.

Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council, Cllr Aoife Flynn Kennedy, highlighted the significance of the programme stating: 'HER Outdoors Week is a very special week. It not only highlights the range of exciting activities that are available in Wicklow but it gives women and girls the confidence to step out of their comfort zone and try something totally new. I would encourage everyone 'find your outdoors' during the week.'

To learn more about HER Wicklow, HER Outdoors 2023 and to register for events, visit www.wicklowsp.ie or follow @ActiveWicklow.

Since the launch of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, over €154 million has been allocated to more than 1,700 projects. The Scheme has made an important contribution to supporting vibrant and sustainable communities in towns and villages throughout Ireland.

The scheme is administered through the local authorities, who are required to work closely with local communities and local businesses to develop and implement proposals. The Scheme typically funds rural towns and villages with a population of up to 10,000 people. Larger rural towns with a population of up to 15,000 people may be eligible where the application is particularly strong and the project will have a significant impact on the town in question.

Speaking at the launch, Minister Humphreys encouraged small towns and villages that have not yet benefited from the Scheme to consider applying for funding under the 2023 Scheme.

Details of the 2023 Town and Village Renewal Scheme can be found here:
<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/01125e-town-and-village-renewal-scheme/#the-2023-town-and-village-renewal-scheme>



Pictured at the launch of HER Wicklow, HER Outdoors Week were: Back - Carol Coad, Rosie Coad, Isla Coad and Aisling Hubbard. Front - Alannah Grace, Sadhbh Mooney and Teagan Mooney.

Special Olympics athletes receive Mayoral Reception in Galway

A Mayoral Reception was held on Monday 17 July to celebrate the historic achievements of Galwegian athletes, Katie Dillion (Athletics), Henry Cloran (Football), Kevin Hardiman (Golf), Máire Connolly (Gymnastics), Michelle O'Keane (Kayaking), Liam Hynes (Kayaking) and Patricia Larkin (Swimming), on their return from the 2023 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Berlin.

Speaking about the achievements of the team, Mayor of the City of Galway, Councillor Eddie Hoare said, 'It is my pleasure to welcome you back from Berlin, where you were competing on the international stage. This group of incredible athletes brought excitement and pride our way in June, and brought home a fantastic haul of medals and participation ribbons for Team Ireland. You are an inspiring group of people and I wish to congratulate you on your fantastic achievement as individuals, as Galwegians and as representatives of your country.'

The Mayor extended congratulations to the coaches and volunteers who made the athletes' journey possible, and shared in the pride of family and friends who supported them. The World Games in Berlin, Germany took place from 17 to 25 June and was the largest inclusive sporting event in the world. Over 7,000 athletes from 190 nations competed in 26 different sports.

Team Ireland was represented by 73 inspiring athletes and over 60 dedicated volunteers, and brought home a spectacular 24 Gold, 23 Silver, 29 Bronze and 3 participation ribbons at the games.



Pictured at the Galway City Mayoral Reception on Monday 17 July 2023 in honour of the Special Olympic athletes on their return from the 2023 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Berlin, is Máire Connolly (Gymnastics), with Coach Angie Griffin and Mayor Eddie Hoare.



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.

Local Authority Times is also published on the IPA website: www.ipa.ie

Laura Shannon, Editor
Local Authority Times
Institute of Public Administration
57-61 Lansdowne Road, Dublin 4
Tel: (01) 240 3600
Email: latimes@ipa.ie