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ADMINISTRATION



RATES, REGULATION AND REFORM

Inside: Innovation examples showcased at NOAC good practice seminar
■ Directors of the Regional Assemblies outline the challenges of governing effectively at the regional level, and much more!

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Regional Assemblies: The Challenge of Governing Effectively at the Regional Level in Ireland

At the annual conference of the Irish section of the Regional Studies Association, held in Maynooth University, the directors of three regional assemblies outlined the roles of their organisations, and the challenges of governing at the regional level.

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

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

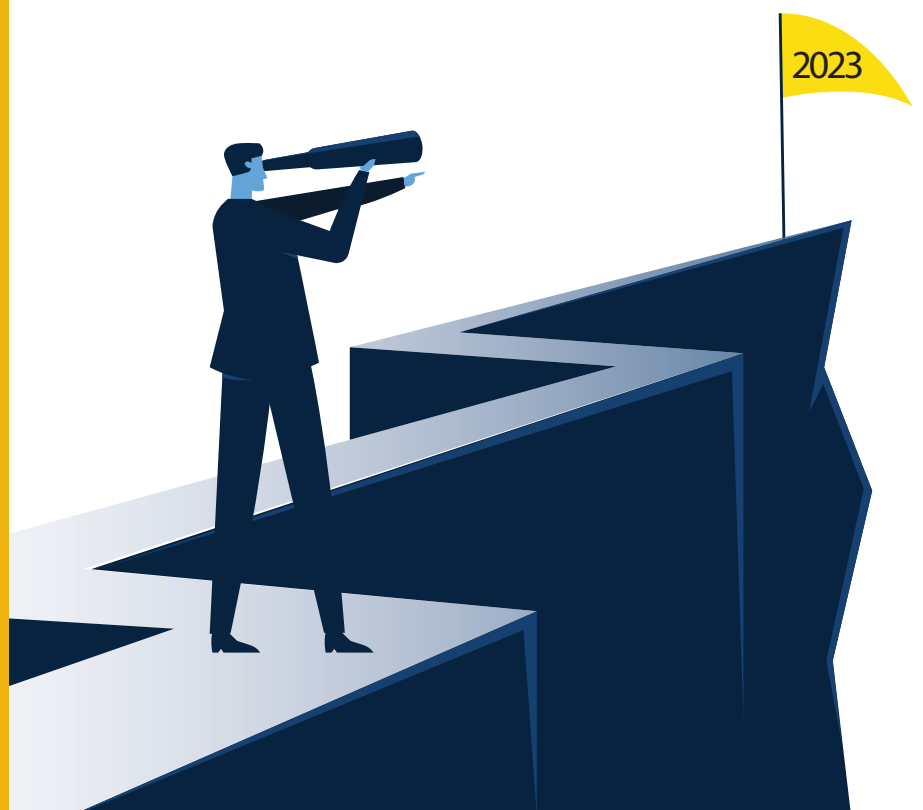
The year 2022 is almost behind us, so it is fitting that many of the articles in this last *Local Authority Times* edition of the year are forward looking - what does the future hold for public transport, for inclusive politics, for funding of local government and delivery of its services, and for tackling biodiversity loss? These are just some of the issues explored in this edition's articles.

In looking ahead to 2023, it is clear that there are many challenges ahead for all of us, and our local authorities will be at the forefront of tackling many of these. Unfortunately, they will be operating in an environment of rising costs and potentially reduced revenues, which will add to the challenges of, for example, transforming active travel and mobility, and tackling housing, homelessness, climate change and biodiversity loss.

I invite readers of *Local Authority Times* to reflect on their own efforts over the course of 2022, to acknowledge achievements and to celebrate and showcase them. Events such as the NOAC good practice seminar, covered on pages 13 - 15, are a great opportunity to do this. As is this magazine, which allows local authority practitioners and others to share their experiences.

We look forward to reporting on the continued efforts of local government in 2023, and welcome your feedback on our own efforts to highlight this work!

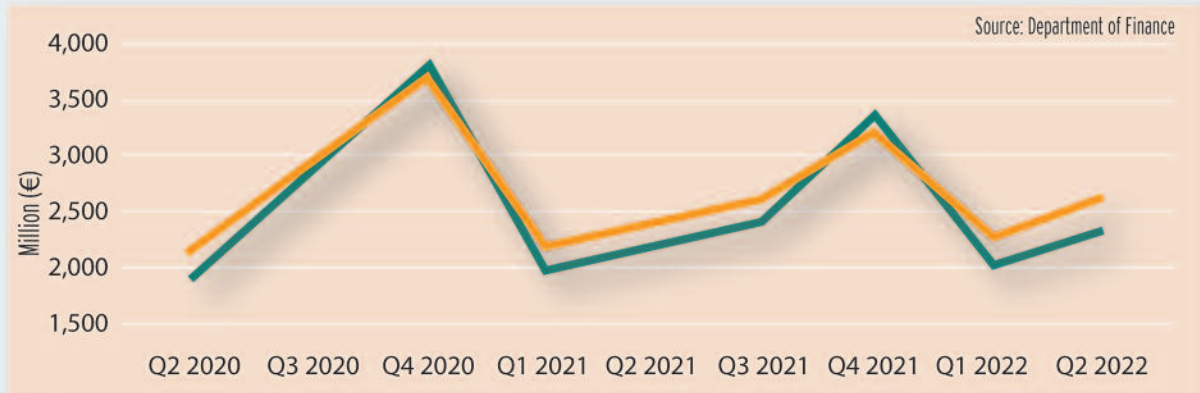
Laura Shannon, Editor



Local Government in Numbers: An overview of key indicators

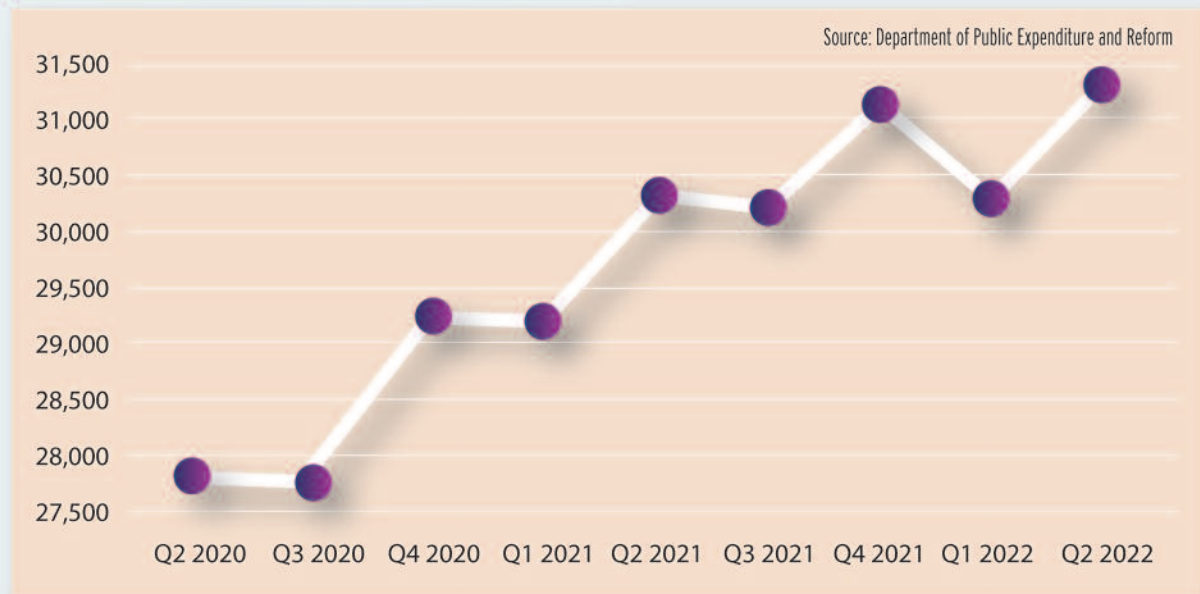
Key Quarterly Data

Quarterly fiscal data for Local Government



TOTAL REVENUE was €2,281m for Q2 2022; up 21% on Q2 2020. **TOTAL EXPENDITURE** was €2,758m for Q2 2022; up 31% on Q2 2020.

Total number of local authority staff

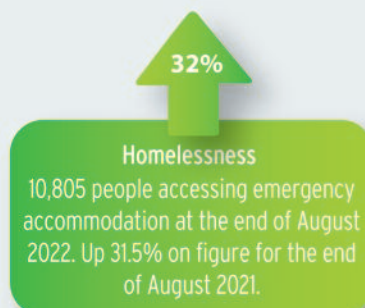


31,277 staff working in the 31 local authorities for Q2 2022; this figure is 10% higher than the corresponding figure for Q2 2020

Housing & Homelessness



Source: Central Statistics Office



Source: Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government



Source: Central Statistics Office

RATES, REGULATION AND REFORM

What's in store for 2023, and beyond?

Alice Kelly,
Research Assistant, IPA¹

The Local Property Tax (LPT) allocations to local authorities for 2023 have been published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Local councillors have been voting on the rate of their local adjustment factor (LAF) for the LPT for 2023, and their decisions were outlined to the Revenue Commissioners and the Minister by 15 October. Under the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act, 2012 (as amended), the basic LPT rate can be increased or decreased by up to 15 per cent, depending on the outcome of a vote conducted in each local authority.

LPT can fund essential local services, such as public parks, leisure amenities, maintenance and cleaning of streets, as well as planning and development. However, the current reality of increasing bills, rising energy costs and other financial burdens currently faced by many homeowners has taken precedence for many councillors voting on the variance rate for their constituencies.

Changes to the Local Adjustment Factor (LAF)

The Local Property Tax (Local Adjustment Factor) Regulations, 2022 came into effect in July and made a number of revisions to the local variation decision process. Until this time, a local

¹ With thanks to officials in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government for their help in outlining the impacts of new regulation and reform, and for providing Figure 1 and the data for Table 1.



variation decision applied for one year only. The 2022 Regulations refer not to yearly decisions but instead to 'a period as specified in the resolution'. This means that from now on, elected members can set an LAF for a period of their choosing. Following this change, the majority of local authorities (seventeen)² decided to 'lock in' their LPT rate for two years, with Leitrim County Council deciding on a three-year period up to 2025. Leitrim County Council's Chief Executive, Lar Power, argued that increasing or decreasing the LPT rate each year makes it more difficult for the Council to plan longterm capital projects. Similarly, in Kilkenny, Councillor Tomás Breathnach of Labour said that voting to keep the rate static provides households with certainty on what they will be paying and also allows the Council to be aware going into 2023 and the budgetary process what its anticipated level of funding coming from the LPT will be.

What has happened on the ground?

Despite concerns voiced by some councillors, only a total of three local authorities have varied their LPT rate this year from last year's figure. Kerry, Fingal and Wexford all voted to change their rate from last year's, with all three voting to increase the

² Carlow, Cavan, Donegal, Limerick City and County, Mayo, Kerry, Offaly, Sligo, Roscommon, Tipperary, Wexford, Clare, Cork City, Cork County, Fingal, Kildare, Wicklow.

Reform of the LPT allocation model

The LPT allocation model for 2023 is changed from previous years in the following key areas:

- The revaluation of LPT that took place in November 2021 has led to changes to the individual yield in each local authority area; however, the overall yield has increased only marginally.
- From 2023, 100 per cent of the estimated yield will be retained locally within the local authority area where it is collected.
- Equalisation funding will now be met by the Exchequer, to ensure that all authorities receive, at a minimum, an amount equivalent to their baseline. Previously, all local authorities contributed 20 per cent of their yield towards equalisation funding.
- The move to 100 per cent local retention will lead to an increased surplus for those authorities with LPT income above their baseline. These authorities will now retain a greater proportion of that surplus for their own use, equivalent to a maximum of 22.5 per cent of the pre-variation yield (20 per cent in 2022). The remainder of the increased surplus will be used to self-fund housing and/or roads services expenditure in the local area. Accordingly, all LPT collected locally will be spent on the provision of services in the local authority's area.

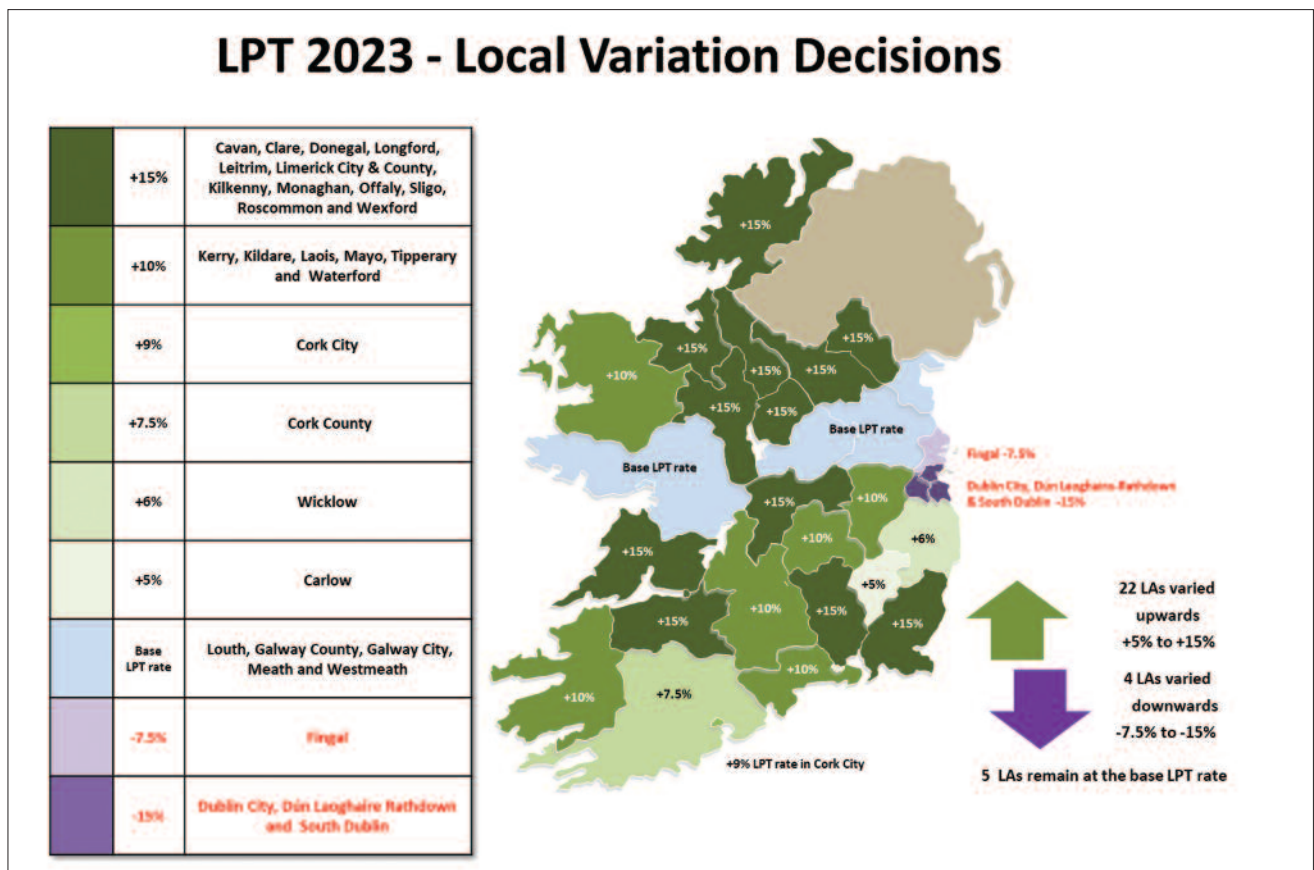


Figure 1: LPT variations by all local authorities for 2023. Source: Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Authority	2019 varied rate	2020 varied rate	2021 varied rate	2022 varied rate	2023 varied rate	(-Loss) or +Gain* from provisional 2023 LPT allocation
Carlow County Council	-	+5%	+5%	+5%	+5%	+ €0.2m
Cavan County Council	-	-	+15%	+15%	+15%	+ €0.6m
Donegal County Council	-	+15%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+ €1.3m
Galway County Council	-	-	-	-	-	Nil
Kerry County Council	-	+10%	+7.5%	+7.5%	+10%	+ €1.3m
Kilkenny County Council	-	+15%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+ €1.1m
Laois County Council	+10%	+10%	+10%	+10%	+10%	+ €0.5m
Leitrim County Council	-	+15%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+ €0.3m
Limerick City and County	+7.5%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+ €2.1m
Longford County Council	+15%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+ €0.3m
Louth County Council	-	-	-	-	-	Nil
Mayo County Council	-	-	+10%	+10%	+10%	+ €0.9m
Monaghan County Council	-	+15%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+ €0.5m
Offaly County Council	-	+15%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+ €0.7m
Roscommon County Council	-	+15%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+ €0.5m
Sligo County Council	-	+15%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+ €0.7m
Tipperary County Council	-	+10%	+10%	+10%	+10%	+ €1.0m
Waterford City and County Council	+2.5%	+2.5%	+10%	+10%	+10%	+ €1.0m
Westmeath County Council	-	-	+15%	-	-	Nil
Wexford County Council	+10%	+10%	+10%	+10%	+15%	+ €1.7m
Meath County Council	-	-	-	-	-	Nil
Clare County Council	-	+15%	+15%	+15%	+15%	+ €1.4m
Cork City Council	-	-	+7.5%	+9%	+9%	+ €1.9m
Cork County Council	-	+5%	+7.5%	+7.5%	+7.5%	+ €2.3m
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	-15%	-15%	-	-15%	-15%	-€8.6m
Dublin City Council	-15%	-15%	-15%	-15%	-15%	-€14.2m
Fingal County Council	-10%	-10%	-10%	-10%	-7.5%	-€3.0m
Galway City Council	-	-	-	-	-	Nil
Kildare County Council	-	+7.5%	+7.5%	+10%	+10%	+€2.3m
South Dublin County Council	-15%	-15%	-15%	-15%	-15%	-€4.8m
Wicklow County Council	-	+10%	-	+6%	+6%	+€1.1m
Net overall loss to LA sector from 2023 variation decisions						-€7.2m

Table 1: Summary of 2023 LPT variation decisions.

*Loss/Gains over the basic rate in the form of reduced/additional income for LA own use. *Source:* Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

LAF. None of the local authorities voted to lower the LAF from last year, and a total of twelve have opted for the maximum LAF of +15 per cent. Figure 1 shows the local variation decisions made by each of the 31 local authorities. In total, 22 local authorities varied the rate upwards, with the four Dublin local authorities continuing their trend of varying the rate downwards.

Each county council's chief executive is required to recommend a rate of variance for the LPT. Sixteen chief executives, including those in Monaghan, Roscommon, Cork

County and Cork City recommended the maximum +15 per cent variation of the base rate, citing budget deficits and project funding as the main reasons for their recommendations. A total of eight local authorities voted differently from what the chief executive had recommended, with all of them choosing to vary the rate lower than what had been recommended to them. For example, Laois County Council Chief Executive John Mulholland proposed to raise the local adjustment factor to its maximum +15 per cent in order to bring in an extra €230,000, which is still only a small fraction of what is needed to ameliorate what he described as a 'dire

situation' in Laois. Councillors unanimously voted not to accept the +15 per cent variation recommended to them, and instead to maintain the +10 per cent variation from 2022.

The Wexford councillors' decision on the local adjustment factor generated a massive amount of anger online and amongst locals as the local authority was one of three that raised their rates. They argued that the additional 5 per cent increase (from +10 per cent in 2022 to +15 per cent in 2023) will have an adverse effect on the individual pocket but it was justified by the fact it will be used to fund smaller, more localised projects in each municipal district over the next two years. The vote was a major source of debate and was passed by a margin of only 20 votes to 14.

The same justification for raising the rate was used in Kerry where councillors, following a heated debate, voted 17 to 13 in favour of a 2.5 per cent increase of the figure from last year (from +7.5% per cent to +10 per cent). Councillors in favour of the increase argued that the revenue stream from the LPT was worth more than what was described as the small amounts people would get back by a reduction.

In Fingal County Council, councillors voted to increase to -7.5 per cent for 2023. While this is Fingal's sixth successive discount on the full rate of LPT, it is a 2.5 per cent increase on the previous rate of -10 per cent that has been in place since 2018. Chief Executive AnnMarie Farrelly said that the decision will benefit both householders and the communities in which they live. The decision not to apply the full 15 per cent reduction means that Fingal County Council will have an

additional €2.26 million to spend on local services. However, Sinn Féin Councillor Ann Graves argued that the highest number of people who replied to the public consultation on the LPT requested an 11-15 per cent reduction on the rate.

In Dublin City, they voted to keep the LPT at its lowest possible rate of -15 per cent, despite concerns that services may have to be cut to fill a hole in the budget. The year 2023 will be the first when all of the LPT collected from Dublin will be given to Dublin City Council (DCC). Previously, the local authority retained only 80 per cent of the revenue, with 20 per cent of it being spent in other local authorities across the country. However, Housing Minister Darragh O'Brien has directed DCC to spend 83 per cent more of its LPT revenue on capital projects in 2023; these were previously funded from central government grants.

Conclusion

As the cost of living continues to rise, many councillors have taken into account the effect that raising the LAFs could have on their constituents. However, following extensive debates and votes in every county council, just three out of the 32 local authorities voted to vary their LPT rate for the coming year, with all three varying upwards. With extra funding for local projects and budget deficits being used as rationale for retaining higher rates of LPT for the majority of local authorities, the four local authorities in Dublin remain the only ones varying their LPT below the base rate. A total LPT allocation of €609,875,921 for use in the local authorities is to be generated in 2023 following the application of the local variation rates.

Ten Years On – Reviewing the Local Property Tax (LPT)

Ireland's local residential property tax, the LPT, was introduced in 2013, 35 years after the abolition of domestic rates. Almost ten years on, it is now part of the normal business of Revenue, property owners and local authorities. From the perspective of municipal finance and local taxation, Dr Gerard Turley of the University of Galway has written a review of the LPT to appear in the December issue of the Institute of Public Administration's journal *Administration*.

Property taxes are common worldwide, with revenues assigned to local governments to pay for the provision and delivery of local public services. Using the theory of local government and tax assignment, the author outlines the story of the LPT, with a focus on design features (namely tax base, liability, rate, assessment/valuation and collection/enforcement), potential lessons and future challenges.

Although recurrent property taxes in jurisdictions around the world have some similarities, they are often characterised by their differences. Ireland's LPT has some unusual system features, most notably a very low tax rate by international norms; the use of valuation bands as opposed to discrete values; self-assessment

rather than assessment by a professional valuation agency; the absence of any property classes; deduction at source as a payment method; and in the case of non-compliance, mandatory deduction at source.

Potential lessons include a focus on the key principles of simplicity and public acceptability, the importance of tax administration and the role of Revenue, and the need to tailor the design to country-specific circumstances and local conditions, rather than replicating all aspects of international best practice in property tax design and implementation.

This article is a must-read for anyone in the local government community interested in the rationale for local government and property taxes, the history of property taxes (including commercial rates) in Ireland, the design features of the LPT, the local elements and the link to equalisation payments, as well as its strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. 'A Review of Ireland's Local Property Tax' will be published in the December edition of *Administration*, which is open access via <https://sciendo.com/journal/ADMIN>

THE FUTURE OF TAXATION AND WELFARE IN IRELAND

What does the *Report of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare* mean for local government?

Dr Gerard Turley,
J.E. Cairnes School of Business and
Economics, and the Whitaker
Institute, University of Galway



The report of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare, titled *Foundations for the Future*, was published this autumn. As part of its remit was to examine the merits of a Site Value Tax (SVT), albeit as a way to achieve housing policy objectives rather than to fund local government, here we summarise the specific contents of the report that may have an impact in the future on local government finance and council revenues. Aside from an SVT, this includes recommendations on commercial rates, the Local Property Tax (LPT), an accommodation tax and congestion charges.

Overall, the Commission was tasked to take a strategic, wideranging, medium- to long-term approach to the suitability and sustainability of the taxation and welfare systems in Ireland. Guided by five principles - of sustainability, reciprocity, adequacy, equity and efficiency - the core policy objectives are fiscal sustainability, income adequacy and equity, the promotion of enterprise, innovation and employment, and climate change. The key messages and recommendations of the report include the need to increase the overall level of taxation as a share of national income, broaden the tax base, and rebalance taxation away from taxes on labour to taxes on consumption, capital and wealth, including land and property.

Local Property Tax - room for improvement

As for specific proposals on land and property, we begin with the LPT. According to the Commission, while not perfect, the LPT is a well-functioning tax, and as it represents a fair approach to raising taxes from residential property and is generally well understood by the public, its current structure and broad features should remain. They include the market-value basis, minimum exemptions and regular revaluations.

With regard to specific recommendations, LPT revenues should be increased substantially over time, via an adjustment of the basic rates and, potentially, through an adjustment of valuation bands. Additional recommendations include the removal of the discretionary power of local authorities to decrease the basic rate, an LPT surcharge for vacant properties, and in the case of multiple property owners, an LPT surcharge applying to properties not occupied as the principal primary residence of the property owner or a registered tenant.

Broadening the tax-base - congestion charges and tourist taxes?

Moving to a low-carbon economy where the yield from taxes on fossil fuels will decline, the Commission recognises the need for road-usage charges. In the short term, it supports the introduction of congestion charging in key urban areas. Separately, to ensure base broadening, the Commission recommends the introduction of an accommodation tax (also known as a tourist or hotel tax) as is common in many European cities. Although congestion charges and an accommodation tax can be local in design - where local councils have rate-setting powers or, at the least, revenues from these taxes are assigned to local



authorities - the Commission did not express a view on which level of government should be assigned these taxes, as its term of reference did not extend to consideration of local authority financing.

Commercial rates - significant reform required in the short term

Regarding commercial rates, the Commission's view was that 'the current commercial rates system is in need of significant reform as it applies differential rates across council borders and the yield collected by a local authority is a function of its specific budgetary needs, vacancy levels in a council area, delays in bringing new properties into the charge, and delayed

revaluations'. Aside from the strange or odd criticism of local authorities applying different rates (as they should, given the local nature of commercial rates reflecting local circumstances and choices of local councils), the Commission, in examining an SVT, concluded that over time, commercial rates would be replaced by an SVT.

Site Value Tax (SVT) should replace commercial rates

The Commission also stated that there was some merit in incorporating the (policy objectives of the) new Zoned Land Tax within the SVT in due course. As for the SVT, which formed the major recommendation by the Commission in respect of potential changes to local government finance, the SVT

proposal is outlined in Chapter 14 of the report. A site or land value tax is an annual tax on the value of a parcel of land, excluding the value of any structure, building or improvement on that land.

According to the Commission, as it would apply to all land, regardless of use, it promotes the efficient use of land as improvements are not discouraged by higher tax liabilities. It also discourages land hoarding and the purchase of land for speculative purposes by levying a recurring tax on undeveloped or unimproved land. However, as acknowledged by the Commission, a site value is not as easily assessed or understood as currently applies, i.e. market value of the combined land and buildings.



A briefing paper for the Commission on a site value tax outlined the merits of an SVT. Compared with the LPT, an SVT ranks highly in terms of neutrality and efficiency (in that it does not affect economic decision-making and does not act as a disincentive to invest in property), and also scores well with respect to supply as it encourages the activation of land.

Although the Commission recognises the potential costs and the implementation challenges, these are outweighed by the potential benefits of a 'single, efficient and equitable tax based on the site value'. The report's recommendation is for an SVT on all land not subject to the LPT, to include all commercial (developed and undeveloped), mixed-use, agricultural, undeveloped zoned residential lands, state-owned lands, as well as all land on which derelict and uninhabitable premises sit. The recommended features are:

- SVT to be levied annually on the owners of the land, with the owner required to pay the liability;
- Tax base is the unimproved value of land, i.e. estimated site value only;
- Tax to be centrally administered by Revenue, with the Valuation Office conducting site valuations;
- Rate-setting powers to be at the national level, with no local discretion;
- Exemptions to be minimised, but with deferrals for owners with limited means to pay;
- Agricultural land to be taxed differently due to its unique role in the production process.

The Commission highlighted the time needed to design and implement an SVT, requiring collation of a number of data sources on land, property prices and other property characteristics, a comprehensive register of sites, the development of an appropriate estimation model, and additional resources for Revenue and the Valuation Office. To ensure that taxpayers do

not face any sudden increase in liabilities, the Commission recommended that the tax be introduced on a graduated basis.

The Commission recommended that the yield from an SVT would be significantly greater than commercial rates income (and other existing taxes in this area), and that over time, the SVT would replace the commercial rates system. As for the assignment of SVT revenues, because the terms of reference don't include the funding model of local government, the Commission 'do not have a strong view on how revenues from a SVT should be utilised'. However, the report does conclude that an SVT could potentially subsume all existing recurrent property taxes that apply at national and local government level, with the exception of LPT.

The challenge ahead...

While the Commission's review of and recommendation for an SVT is laudable, significant challenges need to be overcome before an SVT could be introduced. Often argued as an ideal tax in theory, the practice is very different, highlighted by the very small number of jurisdictions worldwide that currently have an SVT in place, as opposed to the more common property tax on combined land and buildings. Reasons for this vary from the political resistance to taxing land, to the complexity of assessing site values, combined with the likely need for a higher tax rate than currently applies (to commercial rates and the LPT) given the smaller tax base under an SVT system. Despite these obstacles, an SVT is worth further consideration, not simply as a funding source for the local authorities, but as a measure to improve land use, housing supply and affordability in tackling Ireland's housing crisis.



The Future of Public Transport and the Built Environment in Ireland

Chris White,
CEO, National Council for the
Blind of Ireland (NCBI)

Ireland has 650,000 people with disabilities, according to the 2016 census. We have another 600,000 people who are over 65 years of age. This huge population is our parents, our families and our friends; it is all of us. But currently this important part of our population is overlooked.

People with disabilities are less likely to use public transport, less likely to engage with the public realm because it poses huge problems for them. These problems then cause difficulties in gaining employment and accessing education. Difficulties around poverty arise because living with a disability is more expensive; it leads to higher levels of mental health issues, and finally it leads to poorer overall health outcomes.

The National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI), supported by the National Transport Authority (NTA), Dublin City Council (DCC) and Smurfit Kappa Ireland (SKI), is developing the world's first total Wayfinding Centre.

The Wayfinding Centre will be located in the 35,000-square-foot structure that used to house the Smurfit printing works on Botanic Road in Glasnevin, Dublin. This iconic piece of architecture, which has been abandoned for over a decade, is now being repurposed and brought back into impactful national public use.

Scheduled to open in Summer 2023, the Wayfinding Centre

uniquely will house examples of all the modes of public transport currently operating in Ireland. These will include a double-decker bus, a Bus Éireann coach, an Irish Rail carriage, a LUAS carriage and an Airbus A319, along with all the associated street, platform and airport furniture that can be such obstacles to the elderly and people with disabilities. As modes of transport change, so too will the Wayfinding Centre, with the proposed Dublin Metro also represented in the centre when it is fully operational.

The Wayfinding Centre has five key purposes, intended to change forever the view of disability, accessibility, and the built environment in Ireland.

Firstly, it will offer transport training to everyone in the country with a disability, building on the impressive work already offered by the transport operators. The Wayfinding Centre will be able to increase the scale and volume of the training currently provided. It will give time and space to people with disabilities to become familiar with the inside of bus, plane or train.

Secondly, the Wayfinding Centre will provide training for the 40,000 people who work for transport operators in Ireland, enabling them to support and understand their customers more effectively.

Thirdly, Wayfinding Centre is partnering with Technological



Image showing the Wayfinding Centre located in the 35,000-square-foot structure that used to house the Smurfit printing works on Botanic Road in Glasnevin, Dublin. *Picture courtesy of FBF Communications.*

University Dublin (TU Dublin), Dublin City University (DCU) and University College London (UCL) to offer training modules on accessibility and the built environment to all their undergraduates who are undertaking courses related to the built environment (Architecture, Engineering, Surveying, Planning). This will ensure that future planning of the Irish built environment includes disability consideration and incorporates accessibility in a way that it currently does not. This approach is also more effective and cheaper than continual retrofitting.

Similarly, we are engaged with the nation's professional bodies who represent qualified engineers and architects, to offer them Continuing Professional Development (CPD) seminars in the centre, again with the intention of raising awareness about accessibility and including it in design from the beginning.

Fourthly, we are looking at engaging with local authorities and local and national policymakers. Inclusive design in the built environment is still a concept that many organisations struggle with, to determine what suits the most/best need, and how to manage differing demands from different groups. The needs of wheelchair users can be different from the needs of people with sight loss, for example, so how can local authorities make the right decision?

The Wayfinding Centre has 10,000 square feet of innovation space - essentially empty space that can be mocked up to represent a proposed new crossing, for example, or a new interchange, a variation of a street layout, or how a bus stop interacts with a cycle lane. All and anything can be prepared and user tested by people with disabilities to see which option works best.

This innovation space - The Wayfinding Lab - is unique in Ireland and offers the opportunity for local authorities to be

innovative, consultative and inclusive, all at the same time. Offering twodimensional maps of proposed changes to people with disabilities leads to limited understanding around the proposal, but the ability to showcase change in full scale makes consultation much easier and more meaningful.

Finally, the Wayfinding Centre will be in a position to lead on National Disability Standards. We currently have very limited national standards around how the built environment supports people with disabilities. Transport operators differ, local authorities differ, interpretations differ, and all these differences lead to poor outcomes for people with disabilities.

The Wayfinding Centre will be in a position to showcase good practice, highlight good standards, and promote the adoption of both by all organisations with responsibilities for our island.

This project is an outstanding example of how not-for-profits can collaborate with the private sector, the state sector, the education sector, local government and the transport sector to improve the experience of one of the most marginalised groups in our society.

The Wayfinding Centre will be available to every local authority in the country to use. It will be available to every person with disabilities, and it will make a generational contribution to how we view our environment.





MISSING THE TARGET?

'Ireland's Transport System Unfit to Meet Carbon Reduction Targets,' says OECD

The OECD has recently published a report, *Redesigning Ireland's Transport for Net Zero*, assessing implemented and planned Irish policy efforts to reduce emissions in the transport sector. The Government has plans to achieve an economy-wide 51 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 (relative to 2013 levels), for which the transport sector is required to reduce its emissions by 50 per cent by 2030. With three out of four citizens (on average) opting to travel by car on a daily basis, current mobility patterns in Ireland are incompatible with the country's GHG reduction targets.

The report highlights that, by design, current Irish transport systems foster growing car use and emissions. It states that like many other OECD countries, Ireland, over decades, has seen car dependency and car culture as an unavoidable consequence of progress. As a result, our road space, towns and cities have developed largely to facilitate cars to pass through, with a focus on mobility - that is getting from **a** to **b** as fast as possible - rather than prioritising easy and healthy accessibility to work, schools or town centres. The report also finds that Ireland could 'unleash enormous opportunities' by prioritising policies with what it calls 'high transformative potential', such as reallocating road space to ensure that walking and cycling are accommodated and are attractive for people, by making on-demand shared services like public transport or rental-bike or e-scooter systems more mainstream across the country, and developing communications strategies that will begin to change ingrained mindsets around car use.



Eamon Ryan, Minister for Transport, welcomed the publication of the report, acknowledging the challenge ahead:

“ The scale of the challenge we face in decarbonising transport, as highlighted in this report, will not be easy and will require a truly transformative level of behavioural and systems change over years. The perspective in this report is rightly on making changes now that will deliver a net zero future for transport to 2050. The longer-term focus should be on reducing demand and systemic changes that address car dependence. I would also reinforce, however, the need to continue our focus on electrification of our passenger and public transport fleet, as set out in our Climate Action Plan, as an appropriate measure for the medium term to 2030. ”

Pathfinder Projects

Over the past summer, the Minister called every local authority in the country and asked them to identify priority-public transport and active travel projects which would have the greatest impact on the people in their areas. He said that these final ‘Pathfinder Projects’ would bring to life the type of highly transformative measures identified in the OECD report. The 35 projects have since been launched and will be delivered in 19 counties across the country over the next three years. They can be split into the following categories:

- National impact - includes CycleConnects, a national brand coordinating high-quality cycle routes in urban areas

- Cycle network/corridor proposals - projects such as West Wexford Urban Cycle Network, Sligo Cycle Corridor and Meath Rural Cycleway Rapid Development
- Public transport - projects such as Moyross Train Station and Athlone Bus Electrification
- 15-minute neighbourhoods - projects such as the Letterkenny Active Travel Town and Naas Mobility Network and the 5 Cities Active Travel Demonstrators
- Serving schools/universities - projects like the acceleration of the Safe Routes to School Programme, Limerick University Connectivity, BusIT2School in Co. Meath
- Workshops and research - includes nationwide Sustainable Mobility Training workshops and Leitrim ‘Green Mile’ mobility pilot.

Key findings of report

- Irish transport system, by design, fosters growing car use and emissions and is thus unfit to allow the country to meet its ambitious GHG goals while improving people’s wellbeing and ensuring a just transition;
- Decarbonising the system via (mainly private) vehicle improvements - i.e. transition to electric vehicles (EVs) - is unlikely to lead to patterns of behaviour substantially different from those observed today;
- Ireland could unleash enormous opportunities by prioritising policies with high transformative potential - road-space reallocation, mainstreaming of on-demand shared services, and communication strategies questioning ingrained mindsets around car use;
- The report also finds that measures to reduce car dependence can greatly enhance wellbeing, improving access to services for both urban and rural isolated communities, improving health and road safety, while also benefiting the environment.

Key recommendations of report

- Road-space reallocation, on-demand shared services, such as ‘dial a ride’ shuttle buses or rental bikes and e-bikes, and better communication of the required changes and their benefits have great transformative potential and need to be scaled up, with increased commitment of financial resources by the Government;
- Transformation is possible but will look different in urban and rural areas. Input from local communities on the reallocation of road space is required for success, while ensuring that access and services are maintained;
- Enhanced provision of public transport and infrastructure for safe and convenient walking and cycling is essential. This must be combined with the transformative potential of road-space reallocation and the widespread expansion of on-demand shared services;
- The electrification strategy should support, rather than hinder, the transition towards sustainable transport systems through allocation of appropriate charging infrastructure for mobility hubs and on-demand shared services.

A number of highly innovative projects to improve local authority services were showcased at a seminar hosted by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC), which was held both in person and virtually at Kilkenny Castle on 25 October.

The fifth annual *Good Practice in Local Government* seminar, organised by NOAC in collaboration with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and the County and City Management Association (CCMA), presented a range of local authority innovations across numerous areas such as digital solutions, sustainability, community engagement and cyber threats.

Malcom Noonan, Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform opened the event and, in his address to attendees, recognised the 'commitment and innovation of local government'.

Held as part of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's (DPER) Innovation Week 2022, the event was attended by chief executives and elected representatives from the

various local authorities within Ireland. It was an opportunity to showcase good practice within the local government sector.

The following seven projects and innovations were discussed at the seminar:

Irish Local Authorities Sharing Cyber Information (ISAC) – Cork City Council

An ISAC allows for improved cyber situational awareness and is a type of information sharing community typically made up of organisations in the same sector.

Data Protection and the Path to Innovation – Limerick City and County Council

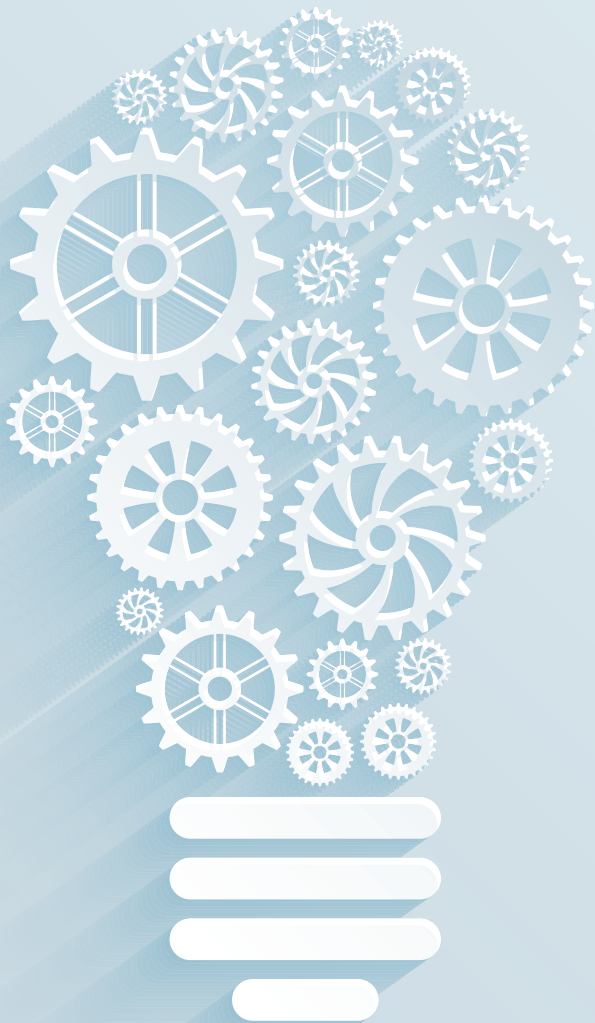
The project aims to tackle the challenges of data and process governance on an enterprise scale, using learnings from the development of guidelines, principles and legislation associated with the processing of personal data.

Accelerating the use of drones for Local Government – Dublin City Council

Funded by DPER's Public Sector Innovation Fund, this project has the objective of better positioning Ireland in the application of drone technology. Drone technology has the potential to enhance and support operations in areas such as emergency response, surveying and mapping, planning and enforcement, and traffic and environmental monitoring.

INNOVATION SHOWCASE

Improved technology to tackle cyber threats, drones for emergency responses, apps for improved community security, and a speedy response to the Ukrainian crisis all feature in a showcase of local authority innovation





Aidan Blighe, Director of Municipal Services, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, sharing the council's work in responding to the Ukrainian Humanitarian Crisis at the NOAC Good Practice Conference. *Picture courtesy of the AILG.*

Sustainable Energy Centre of Excellence – Tipperary County Council

Awarded funding by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, this project seeks to transform a 10-hectare strategic site located in Nenagh by delivering a demonstrator regeneration urban quarter community.

Build to Share – Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council

The concept of 'Build to Share' (BtS) is an approach to the development of digital systems and ongoing governance

structures and a means to showcase solutions so that local authorities can adopt them. The goal is to publicise the seven digital BtS systems that have already been developed, and to encourage the further development and sharing of new solutions.

Leitrim Connected – Leitrim County Council

This app development project unifies communications from Leitrim County Council, Fire and Emergency Services, An Garda Síochána and community alert groups. The project will be of benefit both to the agencies operating the system and to citizens.



Pictured at Kilkenny Castle are NOAC Chair, Michael McCarthy; AILG President and Kilkenny County Councillor, Pat Fitzpatrick; and Minister for Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcom Noonan, T.D. *Picture courtesy of the AILG.*

Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis – Local Authority Response – LGMA

Local authorities have provided significant support to national government in responding to the accommodation and other needs of those arriving from Ukraine. Due to the scale of the crisis, local authorities have adopted innovative approaches to the delivery of services and supports.

Pointing to the above projects, Minister Noonan praised the seminar as 'a wonderful avenue to highlight examples of innovation and best practice' and said that 'the sharing of experiences is essential to continually bring about improvements to the delivery of services to our citizens'. He also noted his appreciation of the work carried out by NOAC in hosting the event and in providing independent oversight of the local government sector. Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) President, Cllr. Pat Fitzpatrick echoed these remarks, adding that '[a]s an Elected Member, we get an opportunity to discuss the performance of our local authority when the NOAC annual report is presented to us... It is important that NOAC and the local authority elected members work more closely together at a local level, and have greater engagement and contribute to the work of NOAC.'



Pictured from left to right at the event are: NOAC Board Members Niall Quinn, Noel Harrington and Declan Breathnach; Head of NOAC Secretariat, Claire Gavin; Minister for Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcom Noonan, T.D.; NOAC Chair, Michael McCarthy; and NOAC Board members Brian Cawley and Ciarán Hayes. *Picture: Dylan Vaughan.*

Speaking at the Good Practice seminar, the Chair of NOAC, Michael McCarthy, welcomed the growth in the audience that the seminar now reaches and noted the tangible value of the event insofar as projects previously showcased have now been adopted by other authorities across a range of topics. He also acknowledged the 'incredible efforts that have taken place to drive innovation and the wider effort to deliver better and more efficient services to the public'.

In his closing remarks, the newly elected Chair of the CCMA, Frank Curran, said:

'Local authorities continually seek to adapt, innovate and provide best in class services. Whether improving our cities, towns and villages or streamlining internal business processes, our focus is always on cultivating efficiency and delivering quality public services to citizens. The projects on display today are just a sample of the innovations and operational excellence happening throughout the country, and we hope they will serve to inspire and further develop innovation within the local government sector.'

NEWS

Dublin Citizens' Assembly Votes in Favour of Powerful Directly Elected Mayor

The Dublin Citizens' Assembly has now concluded its formal meetings and the election of a powerful new mayor for Dublin is to be proposed to the Government following a vote which took place in late September. Members voted in favour of a mayor with responsibility for fifteen policy areas, namely: homelessness; arts and culture; childcare; economic development; planning, land use and strategic development; tourism; waste management; infrastructure and roads; support for the Traveller and Roma communities; the night-time

economy; community healthcare; housing; transport; the environment; and emergency services.

The Assembly supported holding a plebiscite on the creation of the office before it is established. It also recommended a series of new local government structures, such as a cabinet made up of elected local councillors, a Dublin city and county assembly and a permanent citizens' assembly to support and sit alongside the new directly elected mayor.

A majority voted that any directly elected mayor should be limited to two five-year terms of office and should be liable for removal either by a super majority of councillors or through a recall petition.

A full report and recommendations from the Dublin Assembly are expected to be prepared over the coming months, ahead of being sent to the Oireachtas for consideration.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Efforts of One Irish Local Authority to Create a More Inclusive Politics for its County

From 1925 to the present day, there have been only fourteen female councillors elected to Westmeath County Council. It took 42 years for the first female councillor, Aeline Mallon, to be elected in 1967. A female councillor has never been re-elected in the same area or served as the Cathaoirleach of the County. There has never been any representation from ethnic minorities.



Westmeath County Council is among many local authorities that have answered the Government's call for funding to increase the participation of women and people from diverse backgrounds in local government representation in Ireland. Its previous funding proposal to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage was successful. Its proposal aims to encourage and educate potential female and minority candidates who are considering, or may consider, a career as an elected member, and to provide them with a detailed insight into political life in Westmeath. It is hoped that this will help to realise a greater number of female and diverse candidates for the 2024 local elections.

Having successfully been awarded funding for its proposal, Westmeath County Council procured the services of award-winning videographer Noel McIntyre, to create and shoot a video for the project. Titled *A More Inclusive Politics for Westmeath*, the video focuses on the experiences of six of Westmeath's councillors, four of whom are women - Cllr Aoife Davitt, Cllr Emily Wallace, Cllr Frankie Keena, Cllr Frank McDermott, Cllr Hazel Smyth and Cllr Louise Heavin. Amongst the themes highlighted in the video are how the Council is structured, how and why those councillors got involved in local government, and a welcoming call to action to those who, regardless of background, may be interested in running for local election in Westmeath. The aim of this video is to relate to potential female and minority candidates, and to communicate to viewers that they too have the skills and potential to affect positive changes for their communities and their county. *A More Inclusive Politics for Westmeath* is available on the council website (<https://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/currentfeatures/moreinclusivepolitics.html>) and its social media channels.

The council's proposal for funding also included a plan for developing an educational booklet that would detail the supports available for running for election, as well as information for voters. Having collaborated with Dr Michelle Maher from See Her Elected (SHE) in creating its content, the council has now published this booklet. In keeping with the

overall theme and branding of the project, the booklet is also entitled *A More Inclusive Politics for Westmeath*. It gives a more in-depth account of the organisational structure of Westmeath County Council, its various committees and decisionmakers, and details of some of the significant barriers that women face when trying to enter local government as elected representatives. There is information for voters who may be from ethnic minority backgrounds and who are unfamiliar with the Irish electoral system, as well as advice on where to avail of support for running for election and for getting behind a candidate who represents their voice and their community.

The booklet is available to download from the council website, and free physical copies are available throughout the public-facing offices at Áras an Chontae in Mullingar. Both the video and booklet were launched during the council's AGM on 20 June 2022 by Minister of State Peter Burke, with the full attendance of the council. The project was also showcased at two events in November; during the Westmeath Public Participation Network (PPN) plenary meeting, and the the Comhairle na nÓg AGM, both held separately at the Bloomfield House Hotel. Both of these presentations were delivered by SHE, highlighting its collaboration on the project.

To build on the momentum created by the previous work on this project, the council has now progressed to submitting its next comprehensive proposal for the 2022 call for funding from Government. Those behind this project maintain an unrelenting vision of a more progressive and inclusive political representation in Westmeath, which can be achieved and maintained only by an equal and proportionate representation of every gender and minority voice in the county; the 2024 local elections will be an important steppingstone to achieving this.

To find out more, visit:

<https://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/ourservices/yourcouncil/votinghowtoregisterandelections/womenanddiversityinlocalgovernment/>



Pictured at the launch of the video and booklet: (L to R) Caroline Byrne, Corporate Services of Westmeath County Council; former Cathaoirleach Cllr Frankie Keena; Dr Michelle Maher, See Her Elected (SHE); newly appointed Mayor of the Mullingar-Kinnegad Municipal District, Cllr Hazel Smyth; Minister of State Peter Burke, TD; Cllr Emily Wallace; newly appointed Leas-Cathaoirleach Cllr Aoife Davitt; Cllr Frank McDermott; Anne Galvin, Corporate Services of Westmeath County Council.

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE THEIR SAY

Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss

Following two weekends of deliberation on the topic, members of Ireland's first Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss presented their 58 calls-to-action to Malcom Noonan, TD, Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform, in Killarney National Park.



The Assembly was set up to inform the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss.³ Art O'Leary, Secretary-General of the Citizens' Assembly, travelled to meet with the young Assembly members and invited them to present their recommendations to the Citizen's Assembly at its upcoming meeting on 5-6 November. The outcome of the two assemblies will inform the development of Ireland's next National Biodiversity Action Plan.

Six key messages were put forward by the Assembly, under which their list of calls-to-action and recommendations falls:

- 1 We must treat the earth like we do our family and friends, and give the earth the right to be treated with kindness and respect.
- 2 Future generations must live in a world where there isn't a crisis and where children don't have to take action because of the incapability of past generations.
- 3 Every decision must take biodiversity into account.
- 4 Children and young people must be included in decisions being made about biodiversity.
- 5 Biodiversity protection must be a shared responsibility, and a global, collaborative effort.
- 6 We must consume resources in a sustainable, moderate way that neither diminishes the environment/ biodiversity, or our rights, wellbeing and livelihoods.

The 58 calls-to-action cut across seven themes, including education and awareness raising, governance, restoring and rewilding, habitat and species protection, energy and transport, overexploitation, and waste and consumption.

The Assembly's design and operation were led by an inter-generational team consisting of a Young Advisory Team and an independent research consortium. The Young Advisory Team comprises nine children and young people from across Ireland, aged 8-16. The research consortium includes experts in children's participation, deliberative democracy, and biodiversity from Dublin City University, University College Cork, and Terre des hommes, an international organisation with a focus on children's environmental rights.

The process mirrored a deliberative citizen's assembly, with a learning phase, discussion phase and decision phase, with facilitators ensuring that all voices and views were captured. The Assembly meetings included nature walks and outdoor activities in the inspiring surroundings of the Wicklow and



Members of the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss deliberate on their calls to action. *All pictures by Fabian Boros.*

Killarney National Parks. A range of creative facilitation techniques was employed to engage the children and young people, including role play, visioning, and community mapping, as well as a graphic artist working with the members to co-create a mural on their ideas and calls-to-action.



Members of the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss discussing the impacts of climate change on biodiversity.

³ See the autumn 2022 edition of Local Authority Times for further information on the Citizens' Assemblies.



Young Assembly members Anabell and Olwyn taking part in a role-play exercise on biodiversity loss.



Minister Noonan hearing the assembly members' calls-to-action on biodiversity loss.

Diarmuid Torney, research consortium lead and an associate professor in the School of Law and Government at Dublin City University, outlined his hope that the Assembly could serve as a template to give children and young people their chance to have their opinions heard and acted upon.

The Assembly, which was commissioned by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, presented an innovative example of engaging often marginalised citizens (children and young people) in decision-making in an inclusive and meaningful way. It could be adapted to many different policy areas at the local level.

Minister Noonan, who spoke directly to the children and young people, assured them that their recommendations would help to inform strong policies on nature protection and restoration. He added:



Young Assembly members using drawing to share ideas on biodiversity loss.

'I am so impressed by your deep understanding of biodiversity and how it connects with the impact of our daily activities - how we live, how we move, how we eat, how we work... Like you, I believe that by working together and trying to make better decisions for nature, we can have the collective response needed to turn the tide on biodiversity loss.'

Kilkenny County Councillor Pat Fitzpatrick Elected AILG President

Castlecomer Municipal District Councillor Pat Fitzpatrick has been elected the new President of the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG).

Speaking after his election, Cllr Fitzpatrick said that he was 'deeply honoured and humbled' to accept the office of President of the AILG and to represent the needs of the 949 elected councillors at government level over the next year.

The AILG is the primary body representing the democratically elected members and their member local authority. It is a networking, policy development and training resource for the elected members of Ireland's 31 county and city councils.

In addressing delegates at the Annual General Meeting (AGM), Cllr Fitzpatrick emphasised the importance of the work that the organisation continues to carry out:

'As elected councillors, we are at the heart of local government. We ensure that we do our best on behalf of every community in Ireland by providing a strong voice for local people and promoting the welfare and good government of the people of Ireland. As a national representative voice of local government in Ireland, AILG will continue to protect, support and champion local democracy and the vital role of elected councillors within our local government system.'



Newly elected AILG President Cllr Pat Fitzpatrick and Vice President Cllr Patrick McGowan at the Association's AGM in September.

'A key priority during my term will be to continue to ensure that the voice of the councillor remains at the forefront of local government issues at all times and that our contributions are represented in government departments and throughout the full range of state agencies.'

Joining Cllr Fitzpatrick at the helm is Donegal County Councillor Patrick McGowan who was voted Vice-President at AILG's AGM.

Green Deal Going Local

In September, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) published the first *Green Deal Handbook*, which focuses on climate adaptation. This Handbook is a component of the CoR's 'Green Deal Going Local' campaign, which aims to support the implementation of the Green Deal at local and regional level.

The Handbook is an interactive toolkit for local and regional authorities, designed to provide them with a set of tools and recommendations to help them to adapt to climate change. It contains information on financial aid and technical instruments available to deploy climate adaptation measures. With step-by-step guidance, it is adapted to each local context based on different geographical areas and regional specificities. A country-specific Handbook is available for every EU Member State.

The first Handbook on climate adaptation provides guidance on implementing the Green Deal on a local and regional level. It also offers guidance regarding case studies, financial aid and technical assistance. Upcoming handbooks will focus on the renovation wave and biodiversity.



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

Dead of Night in Longford Town

Longford's annual Dead of Night Festival returned this Halloween. The free festival is part of a campaign by Longford County Council, Longford Local Community Safety Partnership, An Garda Síochána and the Longford County Council Fire Service to create a frightful and fun Halloween, free from anti-social behaviour, illegal fireworks and bonfires. Activities included the Dead of Night Parade, scream-worthy spook walks, and a bone-chilling Beacon bonfire-alternative.

Pictures by Shelly Corcoran Photography



Boyne Blueway launched by Meath County Council

The Boyne Blueway in Trim has been officially launched which marks the opening of an 8km water stretch from Trim to Bective Mill for water activities, suitable for beginners and intermediate level paddlers. The Blueway was developed by Meath County Council in partnership with a number of organisations including Meath Local Sports Partnership, Canoeing Ireland, Boyne Valley Tourism, Trim Canoe Club, Boyne Valley Activities, OPW along with local landowners and supported by Fáilte Ireland. Pictured at the launch are Leas Cathaoirleach Cllr. Mike Bray with Cllr. Joe Fox, Trim MD Chairperson, Cllr. Aisling Dempsey, Chair Boyne Valley Tourism and Barry Lynch, Director of Services, Meath County Council.



Picture courtesy Meath County Council.

Making Way in Galway City

Galway City invited the people of Galway to 'Make Way' for people with disabilities in the public spaces as part of Make Way Day on the 30th of September. Make Way Day is organised by the Disability Federation of Ireland to raise awareness and to improve access in towns and cities for everyone. On the day, the traffic division of An Garda Síochána adopted a zero-tolerance approach to cars parked on footpaths.



Pictured highlighting Make Way Day are Marion Maloney, Arun Assan and Rose Foley members of Access 4 All Galway.

Picture: Lisa Fenwick, Community Development Officer, DFI



Reuse Republic event returns to Cork County Council

Cork County Council hosted its annual Reuse Republic event on the 25th of October which brought together national and local reuse initiatives to show how individuals and communities can take action to reduce their consumption and positively impact the climate. Workshops themed around reuse and waste prevention including furniture upcycling took place on the day. Pictured at the launch are Katherine Corkery (Cork County Council), Jessica Baron and Anne O'Connor (IRD Duhallow), Trisha Lewis (Trishas Transformation), Deputy Mayor of the County of Cork Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien, and Michelle Green (Cork County Council), of Cork County Council's Reuse Republic event. *Picture: Diane Cusack*



Loop Lighthouse reopened in Clare

The Loop Head Lighthouse Visitor Experience has officially been reopened after a series of upgrade and renovation works were completed. Funding for the project was received through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) from the Department of Rural and Community Development with match funding from Clare County Council. The Visitor Experience was opened by Cllr Tony O'Brien along with Kitty Garvey, whose late husband Brendan was the Loop Head's final lightkeeper. Pictured at the official opening of Loop Head Lighthouse Visitor Experience in Kilbaha South, County Clare, were (l-r): Kitty Garvey, whose late husband Brendan was the Loop Head's final lightkeeper before the lighthouse was automated by the Commissioner of Irish Lights (CIL) in 1991; Cllr Tony O'Brien, Cathaoirleach, Clare County Council; Leonard Cleary, Director of Rural Development, Clare County Council; Deirdre O'Shea, Head of Tourism, Clare County Council; and Colette Costello, Head of Operations, Loop Head Lighthouse & Vandeleur Walled Garden. *Picture: Eamon Ward*

Aylesbury playspace renovation in South Dublin officially opened

Cllr. Emma Murphy, the Mayor of South Dublin County Council, officially opened the renovated playground at Aylesbury Park in Tallaght. The playground's extension was provided as part of the 300k Have Your Say programme, whereby the local community votes on which projects are to be funded. Pictured alongside Cllr Murphy at the official opening are Teresa Walsh (SDCC Director of Service), Cllr Charlie O'Connor, Cllr. Teresa Costello, Laurence Collieran (Senior Executive Parks Superintendent), Suzanne Furlong and the SDCC Public Realm team.

Picture: Courtesy of South Dublin County Council



Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown launch Festival of Inclusion

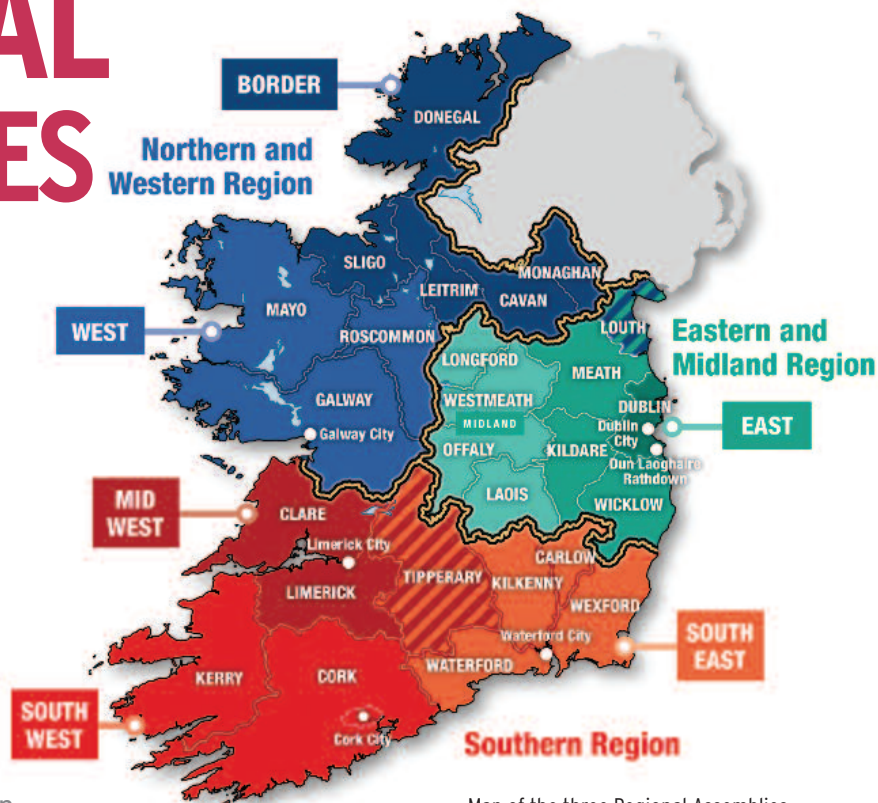
The DLR Festival of Inclusion 2022 was launched in late September to promote the many groups, organisations and volunteers who are organising activities and offering support in the community. 'Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown' was the overall theme with dozens of organisations and community groups hosting activities, coffee mornings, cultural programmes, entertainment, exhibitions, music, open days, performances, information, and talks, as well as free training and workshops. Councillor Mary Hanafin, An Cathaoirleach, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is pictured alongside dlr Volunteers. *Picture: Peter Cavanagh*



REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

The Challenge of Governing Effectively at the Regional Level in Ireland

Chris van Egeraat and Justin Doran,
Regional Studies Association
David Minton, Director of the Northern
and Western Regional Assembly



Map of the three Regional Assemblies.
Source: Southern Regional Assembly.

The Irish Section of the Regional Studies Association, in association with the Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute (MUSSI), held its annual conference on 8 September at Maynooth University. The conference included a special session, focusing on the governance challenges faced by the Regional Assemblies. The Directors of the three Regional Assemblies presented papers focusing on different aspects of the governance challenge.

Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans – The challenges of governing diverse areas

David Kelly of the Southern Regional Authority delivered a paper focusing on the governance challenges related to the Metropolitan Strategic Area Plan (MASP) agenda. The Southern Region includes three MASPs: Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford. David highlighted a number of general and MASP-specific governance challenges.

One issue relates to the cross-boundary element of the MASPs. This requires collaboration across local authorities. There has

been a long history of cooperation in Cork through the Cork Area Strategic Plan (CASP) structure but, in general, the establishment of the MASPs requires new collaborative structures. Related to this, David pointed to the introduction of a directly elected Mayor in Limerick. The administrative boundaries for the Mayor will be different from those of the Limerick-Shannon MASP, which includes parts of Clare for which the new Mayor will have no jurisdiction. This has implications for governance structures, but it is currently unclear what these will look like.

Governance structures for the MASPs will have to involve representatives of all the key agencies to make the decisions or drive actions forward. The question is how to ensure that this includes the right people to drive investment. In addition, the actual role of such structures will need to be established - whether policy or action focused.

Another key issue that needs to be addressed concerns the role of the local elected representatives. The local politicians need to be on board to secure the buy-in of the MASP concept, its policies and actions at local authority level. The review of the National Development Plan (NDP) introduced the concept of Project Ireland 2040 City Delivery Boards to drive investment in the regional cities. This raises the question of oversight in relation to the MASPs. The Regional Assembly, in dealing with the local authorities, will need to secure political buy-in. Finally, the National Planning Framework (NPF) policy is that the three cities in the Southern Region, together with Galway City, will collectively act as a counterbalance to Dublin. However, there is a natural tendency for cities to compete with each other. While this competition can be healthy in some respects, the challenge will be to change this natural tendency to ensure cooperation and collaboration in areas of mutual and regional benefit.

In relation to the more specific challenges, all three MASPs in the Southern Region are starting from a different place and have their own specific challenges. This needs to be managed and coordinated. All three cities are the centres of their respective sub-regions. They see themselves in different spaces. The Cork MASP arguably has the strongest proposition as it is larger than the other regional cities combined and there is an argument that its governance structures should reflect that difference in scale. Nonetheless, all three cities in the Southern Region are targeted with the same rate of growth of 50 per cent plus, and each requires a tailored response reflecting its own scale and challenges.

In pursuit of regional coherence: Progress towards effective regional development

David Minton, Director with the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA), prepared a paper titled 'In Search of Coherence in Irish Regional Development'. Regional develop-

ment in Ireland is finally catching up with that of our European counterparts. It is now playing an increasingly prominent role in the public-policy landscape and through the alignment of investment with evidenced-based planning.

David stressed that the Regional Assemblies are not purely 'planning bodies' but are now playing an increasing role in monitoring, funding, innovation, planning and regional advocacy. The Northern and Western Region is a largely rural region with a weaker urban infrastructure compared to the south and east of the country. Galway City is the notable exception to this. Notwithstanding the stand-out performance of Galway as a regional driver, the region has continued to struggle, resulting in the acquisition of three inglorious titles: Region in Transition, Lagging Industrial Region, and Moderate Innovator.

One of the distinctive challenges facing the region is the economics of agglomeration. The NWRA has adopted a strategy focused on being more urban, green, specialised and connected. It has taken a systems approach to this work, building a 'leadership cadre' to govern work, focusing on:

- Strengthening the urban infrastructure and connecting rural communities
- Recognising and building up the regions' specialties
- Retaining and developing skills
- Extracting value from the knowledge and innovation system
- Accessing capital to fund innovation and indigenous enterprise
- Investing in infrastructure and accessibility, with a focus on sustainable mobility.

David presented three illustrative examples of enhanced national/regional cooperation, concentrating on: (1) Land-use and climate action, showcasing the high levels of consistency between the NPF, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) and the local authority development plans; (2) Smart specialisation, demonstrating the recent success of the new €5.7m European Digital Innovation Hub; and (3) Regional monitoring, focusing on the launch of the new Regional Development Monitor by the three Regional Assemblies, All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) and partners. The paper concluded with a discussion of systems challenges relating to regional and urban governance.

The complexity of regional engagement: Working with stakeholders at a regional scale

The final speaker, Jim Conway, Director of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, gave an overview of the activities of the Regional Assemblies and the engagement of a wide

range of stakeholders. As evidence, he produced some of the detail contained in the EMRA two-year monitoring report submitted to the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) in August 2021. He regards the report as an invaluable tool to use in insisting on that engagement with stakeholders and in ensuring that all stakeholders are delivering.

With regard to the local authorities, Jim touched on the traditional role of the Regional Assemblies in planning policy alignment with the RSES, the progress with regional growth centres and key towns, the various funding mechanisms, and the preparation of the upcoming local economic and community plans, which will be a crucial part of the work of the Regional Assemblies. In relation to public bodies, Jim gave an encouraging insight into the high level of engagement by public bodies, departments and agencies in the delivery of regional development. The Regional Assemblies themselves have conducted many activities towards achieving their strategies. Jim pointed to numerous standalone initiatives enabling regional development, including working with stakeholders such as elected members, local authorities, lead agencies and European partners.

In terms of good practice and opportunities, Jim highlighted the involvement of the Regional Assemblies in several government implementation groups; work carried out by local authorities to align their planning policy with the RSES; the work of the MASP Implementation Group to progress the Dublin MASP; the work of various government departments in working with the Assembly to deliver regional development as set out in the RSES; and finally the establishment of the Climate Action Fund.

Reflecting on the achievements and engagement with the wide range of stakeholders, he pointed to the 28 recommendations for consideration by NOAC, which recognise the challenges faced by the Assembly. In general, the recommendations for consideration focus on ensuring engagement with the Regional Assembly and coordinating policy and funding to align with the RSES. Whilst many government departments engaged, others did not. Jim highlighted an issue with limited resources. 'We started from a very lean base,' he pointed out. 'But additional functions require additional resources.'

During the Q&A space, Niall Cussen, Chief Executive of the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR), provided an update on the role of this office. Half of the local authorities have fully reviewed their development plans, and the OPR is actively enforcing the NPF. In terms of legislative underpinning, the planning bill is currently with the Office of the Attorney General and will have a major module around consolidating the importance of a plan-led approach and how the different plans and strategies of different levels interlock, as well as the oversight of the OPR and An Bord Pleanála in this.

Cities compete to become the first European Capital of Democracy

One of thirteen cities from eight countries has the chance to become the very first European Capital of Democracy (ECoD). Each city participating in the EcoD initiative becomes a champion of democratic innovation, fostering cohesion, collaborative opportunities and citizen participation.

According to ECoD founder and Advisory Board member Helfried Carl:

'Cities are best placed to safeguard and strengthen democracy and human rights as they are closest to the needs of their citizens. Faced with historic transformations and pressing challenges caused by war and poly-crisis, their power of innovation, their ability to act and strong connection to their citizens make their role more important than ever.'

Antwerp (Belgium), Barcelona (Spain), Bologna (Italy), Braga (Portugal), Brussels (Belgium), Burgos (Spain), Cascais (Portugal), Linz (Austria), Metz (France), Opole (Poland), Rzeszow (Poland), Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Valongo (Portugal) have joined the ECoD City Network to compete for the title European Capital of Democracy.

The European Capital of Democracy will be chosen by 10,000 citizens from all Council of Europe member states. Applications are still open for citizens to have their say and join the Citizens' Jury.

First, based on transparent criteria, an Experts' Jury of five pre-eminent professionals in the field of democracy will review all of the cities' applications and draw up a shortlist of outstanding contenders. Up to five nominee cities will be forwarded to the Citizens' Jury, which has the final say. The first city to carry the title of European Capital of Democracy will be designated in January 2023.



In close cooperation with civil society and citizens, the designated ECoD will host a wide range of activities and events attracting visitors from all over Europe to join and participate in collaborative efforts to strengthen democracy. The winning city will enjoy an international reputation as a centre of education and innovation, which will boost civic pride.

Antonella Valmorbida, Chairperson of the Experts' Jury and Secretary General of ALDA (the European Association for Local Democracy), said:

“Europe should offer more than the current bureaucratic approach to democracy. The ECoD programme encourages good governance in Europe, civil society empowerment, and local democracy. We thank cities for their commitment and applications to the call, and we are honoured to shortlist and announce the nominee cities.”

The ECoD initiative was launched by ECoD gemeinnützige GmbH together with the Innovation in Politics Institute GmbH, based in Vienna and Berlin, with representation in sixteen European countries.

For more information about the European Capital of Democracy, please visit: <https://capitalofdemocracy.eu>

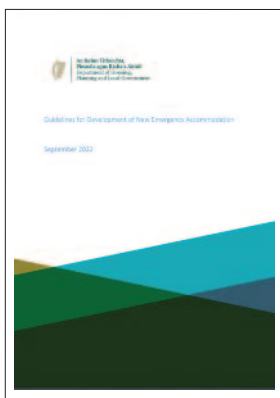
To register as a Citizen Juror and select the European Capital of Democracy, applications are still open: <https://capitalofdemocracy.eu/join-the-citizens-jury/>



POLICY AND RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Some of the most recent and relevant policy and research publications

Compiled by Cáit Ní Chorcora, IPA



Guidelines for Development of New Emergency Accommodation

In September, the Government published guidelines for new emergency accommodation. Action 3.6 of the national *Housing for All* plan focuses on the development of emergency accommodation through facilities owned by local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHB). This includes the acquisition of

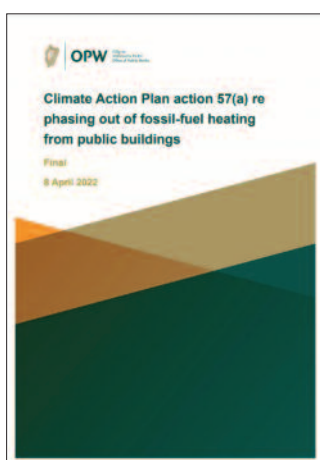
properties or land for purpose-built facilities under the capital funding streams available.

Action 3.6 provides capital funding for the further development of supported emergency accommodation for families and individuals who are homeless. In addition, Action 3.7 of *Housing for All* committed to preparing and publishing guidelines for local authorities and AHBs where they have identified the need to acquire existing buildings for conversion for use as emergency accommodation.

These guidelines have been developed to ensure sufficient good-quality accommodation to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness and to ensure that such accommodation affords those experiencing homelessness dignity and respect.

The guidelines are available at:

<https://assets.gov.ie/236130/2b6ca68b-12b7-4fce-bbd1-da698e1da2b1.pdf>



OPW report on Climate Action Plan action 57(a) re Phasing out of Fossil-Fuel Heating from Public Buildings

The OPW recently published a report on the phasing out of fossil-fuel heating from public buildings. There are approximately 11,500 public sector buildings in Ireland and 99 per cent of the energy they consume comes from fossil fuels. Action 57a of the Climate Action Plan

2021 looks to 'examine how and when fossil fuel heating systems could be phased-out of public buildings to decarbonise energy use in the built environment.'

The report sets out 29 recommendations for implementing an approach based on five pillars:

- Enabling measures to overcome barriers to renewable heat
- No new fossil-based heating systems in new buildings, subject to some limited exceptions
- A portfolio-based approach to replacing fossil fuels in existing buildings as part of a broader retrofitting initiative that improves efficiency, reduces fossil-fuel consumption, makes buildings 'renewables ready' and integrates renewable heat
- Restrictions on leasing buildings with fossil-based heating systems.
- Provision of funding for phased retrofit programmes.

The report is available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/229236/557bf6fd-6734-4cba-8f23-edbf48c989f9.pdf>



National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Ireland, 2022-2027

In July, the Government published Ireland's new *National Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) 2022-2027*. The plan aims to help identify the strengths and opportunities of every region in the country to ensure more strategic investment. The development of an S3 is an essential prerequisite for Ireland to receive its expected €396 million in

funding through the European Commission's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) which will support regional investment.

The S3 strategy will focus on five priority areas:

- Digitalisation and digital transformation
- Green transformation for enterprise
- Innovation diffusion
- International collaboration on research, development and innovation
- Improving the national/regional enterprise research and innovation system.

As part of the strategy development process, stakeholder engagement was focused on identifying regional, economic and research strengths and emerging areas of opportunity. Information and Communications Technology (ICT), pharmaceuticals, agri-food and the renewable energy sector were identified as particular strengths across the country.

To support these sectors, this strategy focuses on investing in

technological universities to support industry-relevant research, as well as initiatives which assist and improve technology transfer between SMEs and higher education institutions. Funding will also go towards encouraging entrepreneurial research and innovation through training programmes, clustering and smart hubs.

Once approved, ERDF will support S3 through multi-annual regionally focused programmes under its policy objective, 'A Smarter Europe'.

The new strategy is available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2aa15-national-smartspecialisation-strategy-for-innovation-2022-2027/>



Launch of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) Annual Report 2021

In July, the Government published the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) annual report.

SICAP is co-funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the European Social Fund (ESF) and currently

employs approximately 600 community workers across Ireland. The aim of the programme is to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality through local engagement between community organisations, public sector agencies and disadvantaged individuals. The Programme was recently awarded the prestigious UN Award for Public Service during COVID-19.

In 2021, 2,646 local community groups and 26,483 individuals were supported by the programme.

Some of key findings from the *SICAP Annual Report 2021* include:

- 542 new local community groups supported by the programme in 2021
- €336,988 in grant funding allocated to local community groups
- 501 social enterprises supported by SICAP in 2021
- 72 people received enterprise start-up grants with a total amount of €44,617 in start-up grants awarded.

The report also acknowledges the role of the Local Development Companies (LDCs) and Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) who deliver the SICAP at county and local area level.

A 'Learning Brief' was also published, which examines the differing experiences of men and women supported by the programme.

The SICAP Annual Report 2021 can be downloaded here: <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2022/07/SICAP-2021-Annual-Report.pdf>

The 'Learning Brief' can be downloaded here: <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2022/07/AComparison-of-Women-and-Men-Supported-by-SICAP-A-Learning-Brief-by-Pobal.pdf>



Built Heritage Investment Review - 2022

In October, the Government published a review of its two built-heritage grant schemes, the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) and the Historic Structures Fund (HSF). The review evaluates the delivery, funding and strategic expansion of these schemes.

The methodology used in the evaluation of the schemes included:

- A consideration of the relevant policy context
- A survey of local authorities to consider the efficiency and effectiveness of the schemes
- Consultation with an advisory group
- A series of interviews with key stakeholders.

The review was also informed by an analysis of sample best practice case studies for each scheme.

These were selected from projects proposed by local authorities. *Built Heritage Investment Review - 2022* makes recommendations for the strategic development of the built-heritage grant schemes.

The report can be accessed at: <https://assets.gov.ie/236857/04f2c58a-ad8c-4427-9591-8bf7bd044ef7.pdf>

Research report on the Role of Irish Policy in Unlocking the Potential of Rural Social Enterprises

In September, a report was published on the role Irish policy can play in unlocking the potential of rural social enterprises. The report was carried out by researchers in UCC and commissioned by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Rural social enterprises contribute to holistic, place-based development of rural areas through their participatory, inclusive and community-based nature and their contribution to a sustainable and integrated development. They also contribute to the social entrepreneurial and innovative character of an area.

The collaborative, multi-sectoral nature of social enterprises and their strong relationship with their particular rural contexts means that a joined-up policy approach is required, along with appropriate governance frameworks that enhance collaboration.

The report provides 31 policy recommendations for maximising the potential of social enterprise in rural development. These recommendations address different areas, including:

- Raising awareness/communication of (rural) social enterprises
- Funding and support for rural social enterprises
- Research
- Digitalisation
- Territorial/place-based development of rural areas.

The report is available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/234902/4a3c586e-ff3d-47d7-a729-967c85729618.pdf>



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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