

# LOCAL AUTHORITY TIMES

Vol 25 No. 1  
Spring 2023  
ISSN No. 07 91-8267

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

## SITE ACCESS

EU Web Accessibility Directive:  
What it Means for Local Authorities



**Inside:** Shining a Light on Climate - Líní na Farraige raises awareness of sea level rise  
■ Dublin Citizens' Assembly recommends devolution of major policy areas

# Contents

PAGE 2

## EU Web Accessibility Directive: What it Means for Local Authorities

In the first of a series of articles from the National Disability Authority, we learn how local authorities are faring in terms of web accessibility, and where to go to find out how to ensure that all communications are accessible and understood by all users.

PAGE 8

## Dog Fouling and Potholes: Can relying on citizen reports make neighbourhoods worse?

Dr Peter Matthews, University of Stirling, and Alex Parson, mySociety, explain what their research on citizen reporting platforms means for local government and citizens. The UK-based research examines whether neighbourhood deprivation levels affect how people engage with their local councils.

PAGE 14

## Shining a Light on Climate Change

Dave Dodd, Coordinator, Dublin Metropolitan Climate Action Regional Office (CARO), discusses how the popular Linte na Farraige initiative came about, and how it hopes to raise awareness about what we can all do to reduce carbon emissions and take action to adapt to climate impacts.

PAGE 20

## Enforcement Actions Must Be More Targeted to Improve Local Air and Water Quality and Waste Segregation

This article briefly outlines the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) most recent report on the environmental performance of local authorities in 2021.

PAGE 22

## Dublin Citizens' Assembly Recommends Devolution of Major Policy Areas

The final report of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly has now been published. This article provides an overview of the process and lays out the Assembly's key recommendations.

*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](mailto:latimes@ipa.ie)*

# DIGITAL DELIVERY & DEBATE

Local authorities are at the frontline of delivery of services to citizens.

The variety of articles in this edition of *Local Authority Times* demonstrates the breadth of their role - from dog fouling and potholes to environmental enforcement, to raising awareness of, and responding to, climate change. And this role is constantly evolving. The final report of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly is a must-read for anyone concerned about the future of local government and how we can make things better.

While, of course, these recommendations relate only to Dublin, the conclusions have the potential to be far-reaching. The onus is now on the Government to respond. In her article on page X, Cáit Ni Chorcra has helpfully summarised the main points.

We have had some excellent contributors to this edition. I am delighted that Dr Peter Matthews of the University of Stirling and Alex Parsons from mySociety took the time to write about their research on citizen reporting platforms. The UK-based research examines whether neighbourhood deprivation levels impact on how people engage with their local councils. Their findings will be interesting to anyone concerned about how best to deliver services to all of our citizens.

David Dodd, Coordinator Dublin Metropolitan Climate Action Regional Office (CARO), tells us the story behind Linte na Farraige and describes how local government is shining a light on climate change. We also have the first in what will be a series of articles from the National Disability Authority, which outlines how local authorities are faring in terms of web accessibility; it also details where to find out how to ensure that all communications are accessible and understood by all users.

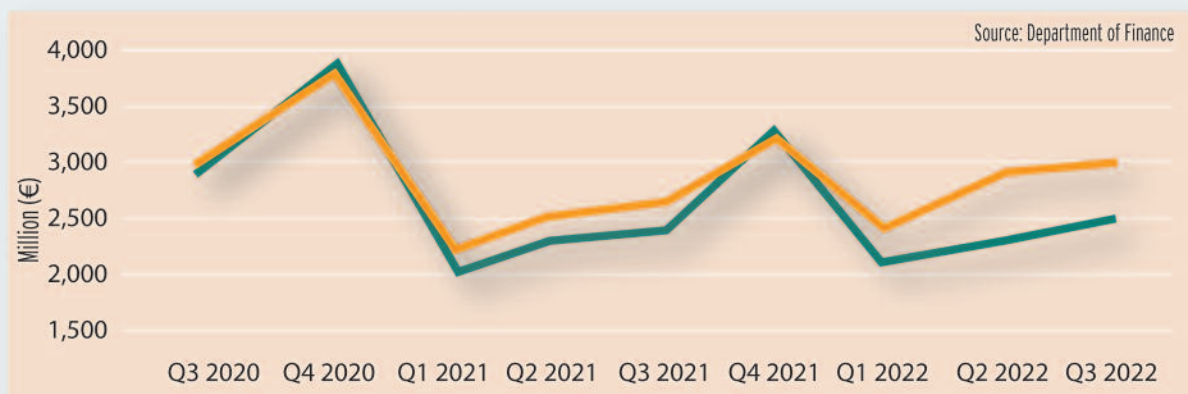
My sincere thanks to all of our contributors, and our team in the Institute of Public Administration. If you would like to be involved in the next edition, get in touch.

**Laura Shannon, Editor**



## Local Government in Numbers: An Overview of Key Quarterly Indicators

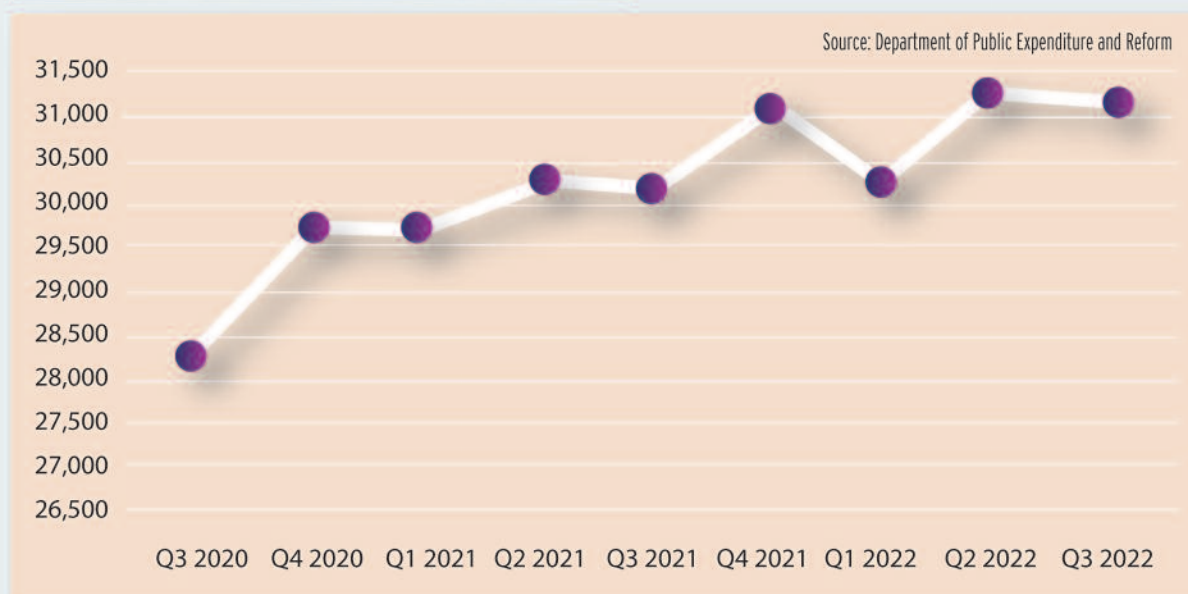
### Quarterly fiscal data for Local Government - trend



**TOTAL REVENUE** was €2,492m for Q3 2022; down 12% on Q3 2020.

**TOTAL EXPENDITURE** was €2,910m for Q3 2022; down 1% on Q3 2020.

### Number of local authority staff - trend



31,073 staff working in the 31 local authorities for Q3 2022; this figure is 10% higher than the corresponding figure for Q3 2020.

### Housing and Homeless



Source: Central Statistics Office



Source: Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government



Source: Central Statistics Office

# EU Web Accessibility Directive: What it Means for Local Authorities

# Director of the World Wide Web.



An illustration on a blue background showing two people. On the left, a person with dark hair in a ponytail, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt under a blue vest and blue pants, is seated in a wheelchair. They are using a silver laptop. On the right, a person with dark hair in a ponytail, wearing a green t-shirt, black shorts, and a black backpack, is standing. They have a prosthetic leg on their right side. The background is a solid blue color with a subtle gradient.







Over the past two decades, there has been a rapid growth in the provision of information and services through websites and mobile applications. Today, online shopping, provision of public services such as a passport application or accessing your local library, online banking, or booking a holiday are commonplace throughout the private and public sectors. However, Tim Berners-Lee's vision of a fully open and inclusive web has yet to be realised. Many sites and apps are developed with accessibility barriers that make them difficult or impossible for some people to use. During 2021 and 2022, most local authorities were subject to monitoring by the National Disability Authority (NDA) against the accessibility standards mandated in the EU Web Accessibility Directive. Dónal Rice, head of monitoring for the Directive in the NDA, highlights that: 'Our monitoring found that, on average, local authority sites had nearly twice the average number of errors found across all other sites monitored.'

**'Our monitoring found that, on average, local authority sites had nearly twice the average number of errors found across all other sites monitored.'**

Dónal Rice, head of monitoring for the Directive in the NDA

Web and app accessibility is essential for disabled people to enable them to participate fully in society. It is a key component of a Universally Designed service, and the EU Web Accessibility Directive and related Irish regulations mandate that public sector bodies take a planned and systematic approach to making their websites accessible to persons with disabilities. Dr Ger Craddock, head of the NDA Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) explains: 'Universal Design is about the design of environments - physical or digital - that can be accessed, understood and used by all people, regardless of a person's age, size, ability or disability.'

In the European Union, there are an estimated 100 million people with some form of disability, while in the Republic of Ireland, the 2016 Census tells us that 643,131 members of the population have some form of disability. Web accessibility allows everyone, including disabled people, to perceive, understand, navigate and interact freely with the internet. Web accessibility encompasses all disabilities that affect access to the Web, including auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, speech and visual. Web accessibility also benefits people without disabilities - for example, older people with changing abilities due to ageing, people with 'temporary disabilities' such as a broken arm or lost glasses, and people with 'situational limitations' such as in bright sunlight or in an environment where they cannot listen to audio.

## Web and mobile app accessibility requirements in EU and Irish law

The Web Accessibility Directive (Directive [EU] 2016/2102) came into force in Ireland in September 2020 through regulation S.I. No. 358/2020 (2020 Regulations). Under the 2020 Regulations, public sector bodies are required to do four main things:

1. Ensure that websites comply with the harmonised European standard - EN 301 549 V3.2.1 (2021-03), which is broadly equivalent to the more commonly known Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1.
2. Publish and maintain an up-to-date 'accessibility statement' in a prominent place on the website(s), or link to it from their mobile app. This accessibility statement must state the level of compliance with the standards above and list the known accessibility issues on the site.
3. Ensure that the accessibility statement contains clear information for customers on who to contact to request assistance or provide feedback about the accessibility of the website. The statement must also include details of the organisation's complaints procedures under the Disability Act, 2005 or Equal Status Act, or both, depending on the status of the organisation. As per the Disability Act, 2005, the Access Officer is the designated person for complaints and their contact details should be displayed prominently on all Accessibility Statements.
4. Take the necessary steps to improve capacity and awareness of web accessibility among relevant staff and to ensure that accessibility is included in relevant policies and plans. Public bodies are required to consult with disability stakeholders in this regard.

Guidance for writing an accessibility statement can be found on the NDA's website:  
<https://nda.ie/monitoring/eu-web-accessibility-directive/accessibility-statements>

### How is the Web Accessibility Directive monitored in Ireland?

The 2020 Regulations name the National Disability Authority as the national monitoring body for the Directive. The NDA completed Ireland's first monitoring report under the EU Web Accessibility Directive and submitted it to the European Commission in December 2022. During 2021 and 2022, most local authorities were subject to 'simplified review'. A simplified review is an automated scan of an average number of a website's pages and can test for approximately 57 per cent of the 60 'success criteria' of the WCAG 2.1 AA, the standards with which public bodies' websites must comply under the Directive. In reviewing an average of 900 pages for each of the 29 local authority websites that were scanned, the NDA identified an average of 18,586 errors per site.

Dónal Rice considers that the large number of errors is due, to some extent, to the complexity and size of these sites, which contain a mix of content and online services and have typically been developed over a number of years. 'As a result, there is a lot of inconsistency in the base-level of accessibility that our monitoring tends to find,' Dónal observes, adding, 'There is a lot of what we call "housekeeping" required to address these errors which may have persisted for some time.'

Read the NDA's Monitoring Report to learn more about the performance of all local authority websites reviewed:  
<https://nda.ie/publications/monitoring-report-eu-wad-ireland-2021-nda-report>

The NDA issues a 'Notice of Monitoring' to public bodies subject to monitoring. Once they engage, the public bodies are provided with all data gathered by the NDA. This includes a report and dashboard which gives detailed information on each error identified and advice on how to fix it. A dashboard includes an 'accessibility score' for each website, which is calculated based on the number of errors and their impact on users.

The dashboard shown here is an example of one provided to each local authority subject to monitoring. In this example, the website achieved an accessibility score of 78.25 per cent, which is based on the number of critical errors (96) and serious errors (31) identified. In July 2022, the NDA took a snapshot of the performance of all 29 local authorities subject to monitoring and used this data as the basis for its periodic monitoring report to the European Commission. This included a snapshot of the accessibility score for each site, which allows public sector bodies to benchmark themselves against their peers.

Dónal emphasises the value of the data NDA provides to public bodies: 'The monitoring results we provide to local authorities are a really good place to start planning for improving compliance.' While some local authorities performed poorly in last year's monitoring, with nine scoring below 10 per cent, Dónal points to some significant improvements. Sligo County Council increased its score from just below 40 per

Snapshot for:-		Score	Issues Per Page	Total	Pages			
		78.25%	13	527	Critical 96	Serious 31	Moderate 0	Good 400
<a href="#">View Issue Assignments</a>								
Automated issues								
Grouping	Standard	Priority	Description	# Issues	# Pages	% of Pages		
Color				2	2			
Color	Success Criterion 1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum)	Serious	Ensures the contrast between foreground and background colors meets WCAG 2 AA contrast ratio thresholds 1	2	2	0%		
Name Role Value				10	9			
Name Role Value	Success Criterion 4.1.2 Name, Role, Value Success Criterion 2.4.4 Link Purpose (In Context)	Serious	Ensures links have discernible text 1	10	9	2%		

Sample of dashboard

cent to above 80 per cent over the past number of months. Mayo County Council was the best improver, with its most recent accessibility score at 99 per cent. 'We're seeing strong improvements by some local authorities,' Dónal continued. 'And it's not just among the larger councils. Tipperary County Council is innovating with a new website based on the LocalGov Drupal project, and the accessibility results from this new site are really impressive.'

Gerry McDermott, Media and Communications Manager with Fingal County Council, explains that web accessibility requires a cross-departmental approach and should not be siloed to just one team:

'As we strive to understand and implement changes based on NDA's monitoring results, it is clear that accessibility requires input from our Digital Services department, as well as people from other departments across the Council who provide content for the website, and the Communications team who have responsibility for ensuring the quality of what we publish to the site. We are firmly focused on removing the errors identified in the monitoring from the site as well as avoiding new ones going forward.'

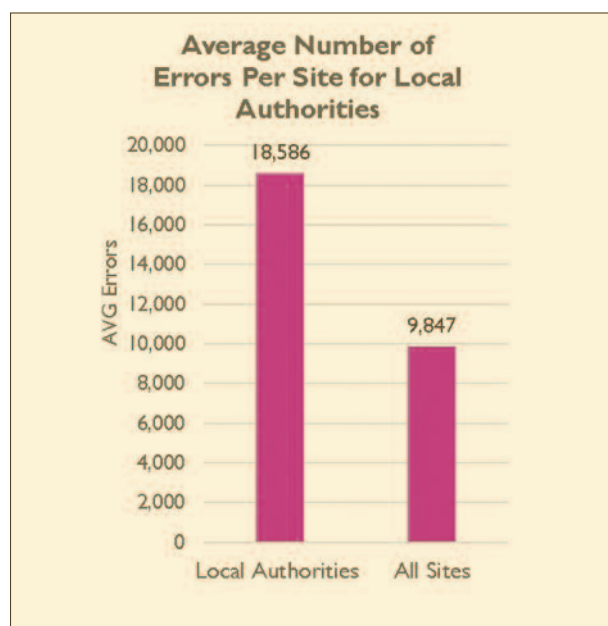
### Compliance and accessibility are just the start

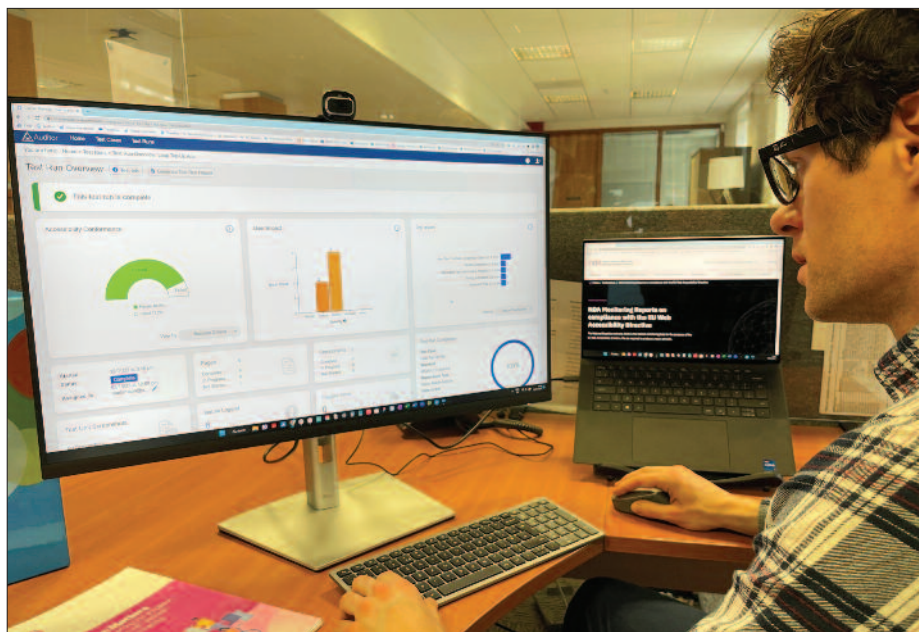
Dónal warns against getting fixated on the accessibility score. 'Local authorities need to understand the nature of the errors identified and start fixing the critical ones first,' he says. This may involve working with an accessibility partner or upskilling staff or having their web design agency undertake work to fix the errors.

'Getting a good accessibility score is not the end goal - it's just the beginning!'

Read NDA's Web Accessibility Techniques and view recordings of previous web accessibility events: <https://universaldesign.ie/technology-ict/web-accessibility-techniques1/>

At the end of the day, accessibility is about people, not numbers. If you remove all the errors from your site, you still need to engage with people to understand their experience of using that site. The Directive requires public bodies to engage with real people to get their feedback and learn about their experience in accessing, understanding and using the contact and services in the site. 'In my experience, there is no substitute for engaging with people when it comes to designing online services,' Dónal added.





Member of the monitoring team conducting an accessibility review.

The NDA recommends that once an organisation has confirmed that its websites and mobile apps are compliant with the Directive, they should continue to focus on ensuring that all communications can be accessed, understood and used by all users through taking a Universal Design approach.

Dr Ger Craddock points out:

'Local authorities should consider compliance with standards set out in legislation as the minimum level of accessibility that a website, service or building should aim to achieve. Our Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service goes beyond minimum compliance and advocates a Universal Design approach to ensuring information and services work for all customers.'

The Customer Communications Toolkit was developed by the CEUD with the support of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. It is designed to be used in the public service for planning, training and informing staff and contractors on best practice in inclusive customer communications. A third edition is due to be published in early 2023.

Local authorities can register on the NDA EU Web Accessibility Directive Monitoring and Reporting Platform to receive their monitoring data and be notified of upcoming events and trainings: <https://euwad.nda.ie/s/login>



You can contact the NDA's Web Accessibility Monitoring team at [webaccessmonitor@nda.ie](mailto:webaccessmonitor@nda.ie) or through your account at NDA's EU Web Accessibility Monitoring platform: <http://euwad.nda.ie>

Look out for more on this topic, and others, from the NDA in future editions of *Local Authority Times*:

- Going from Zero to Hero: Improving Compliance and Making Your Website More Accessible For All
- Participation Matters: Guidelines on Implementing the Obligation to Meaningfully Engage with Disabled People in Public Decision-Making
- eLearning Module - Buildings for Everyone: Central Bank of Ireland.



## An Coimisiún Toghcháin (The Electoral Commission) Formally Established on a Statutory Footing

February saw the formal establishment of the Electoral Commission which will be independent of government, reporting directly to the Oireachtas. The Commission will be chaired by the Hon. Ms Justice Marie Baker, who will be joined by four ordinary members, and the Clerk of the Dáil and the Ombudsman who will sit as ex officio members of An Coimisiún. Art O'Leary, former secretary general to the President, has been appointed as Chief Executive Officer.

The establishment of An Coimisiún Toghcháin follows from the Electoral Reform Act, 2022 and a commitment in the Programme for Government, Our Shared Future. The functions of An Coimisiún include:

- Providing the public with information on electoral processes (including referenda) and encouraging participation
- Reviewing Dáil Éireann and European Parliament constituencies and local electoral area boundaries

- Preparing and maintaining the Register of Political Parties
- Conducting research on electoral policy and procedure and making recommendations to the Minister
- Overseeing the management of the electoral register
- Reporting on how electoral events are administered
- Regulating online political advertising
- Protecting the integrity of elections and referenda against online disinformation, misinformation and manipulative or inauthentic behaviour.

The Commission, which will take over the work of the Referendum Commission, Constituency Commission and the Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees, has been welcomed ahead of next year's local elections.



Ms Justice Marie Baker pictured with President Michael D Higgins.

## €290 million Made Available for Walking and Cycling Infrastructure This Year

Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan has confirmed that the National Transport Authority (NTA) has allocated funds to Ireland's local authorities with plans to spend €290 million on walking and cycling infrastructure in 2023. In total, the 2023 fund allocation for Active Travel will allow for the progression of 387 projects in the Greater Dublin Area, 250 across other regional cities, and a further 502 projects across rural Ireland. This includes the development of segregated cycle lanes and widened footpaths, new walking and cycling bridges, and new pedestrian crossings.

Active Travel funding will ensure that the Safe Routes to School programme will continue to provide for safer cycling and walking facilities for many more schools across the country. The initiative

will make cities, towns and villages greener and more liveable, while helping to reduce Ireland's carbon emissions. The expenditure of Active Travel, funded by the Department of Transport, has increased substantially from €45 million in 2019 to the expected €290 million in 2023.



Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan pictured at the Dodder Greenway development with the CEO of the NTA, Anne Graham, and the Minister of State at the Department of Transport and at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, Jack Chambers. *Photo courtesy Julien Behal.*

# GOING TO THE DOGS?

## POTHoles AND DOG FOULING

Can relying on citizen reports make neighbourhoods worse?

Dr Peter Matthews, University of Stirling, and  
Alex Parson, my Society

Complaints about dog-fouling and potholes on the road are well-known to make up a large chunk of the postbag of local councils and local elected representatives. There are even social media accounts - notably 'Angry People in Local Newspapers' - devoted to gently mocking these irate residents.



**M**anagers and elected representatives may, anecdotally, be aware that they get more of these requests from some residents than others, but there has been surprisingly little research into these patterns. Researchers from mySociety, a British social enterprise, research consultancy Automatic Knowledge, the University of Stirling and Oxford Brooks University have analysed data from across the UK to understand who reports 'place-keeping' issues (e.g. roads maintenance and local cleanliness) the most.

The research team analysed reports from 2011 to 2015 to understand who was reporting what type of issue. In particular, the researchers were interested in whether people in deprived neighbourhoods reported more or less, or on different issues, than people in less deprived neighbourhoods. Levels of neighbourhood deprivation were measured using the national indices of deprivation in England, Wales and Scotland, equivalent to the National Deprivation Index for Ireland. The research was also interested in whether people in rural areas might report less because of poorer internet access. While managers and elected representatives might have an indication of these patterns, this research allowed for an exploration across the UK.

The research team analysed reports from 2011 to 2015 to understand who was reporting what type of issue. In particular, the researchers were interested in whether people in deprived neighbourhoods reported more or less, or on different issues, than people in less deprived neighbourhoods. Levels of neighbourhood deprivation were measured using the national indices of deprivation in England, Wales and Scotland, equivalent to the National Deprivation Index for Ireland. The research was also interested in whether people in rural areas might report less because of poorer internet access. While managers and elected representatives might have an indication of these patterns, this research allowed for an exploration across the UK.

The results show that it was actually people in neighbourhoods in the middle of deprivation rankings who reported the most. This matches patterns found in previous similar research in the US, which has suggested that residents of such neighbourhoods would have lots of things to report, combined with knowledge about how to report problems, and they trust that problems will be fixed when they are reported. People in less deprived neighbourhoods are likely to have fewer issues to report; and people in more deprived neighbourhoods may struggle in finding the time or knowledge to report problems, or they may have an expectation that problems will not be fixed even if they are reported.

---

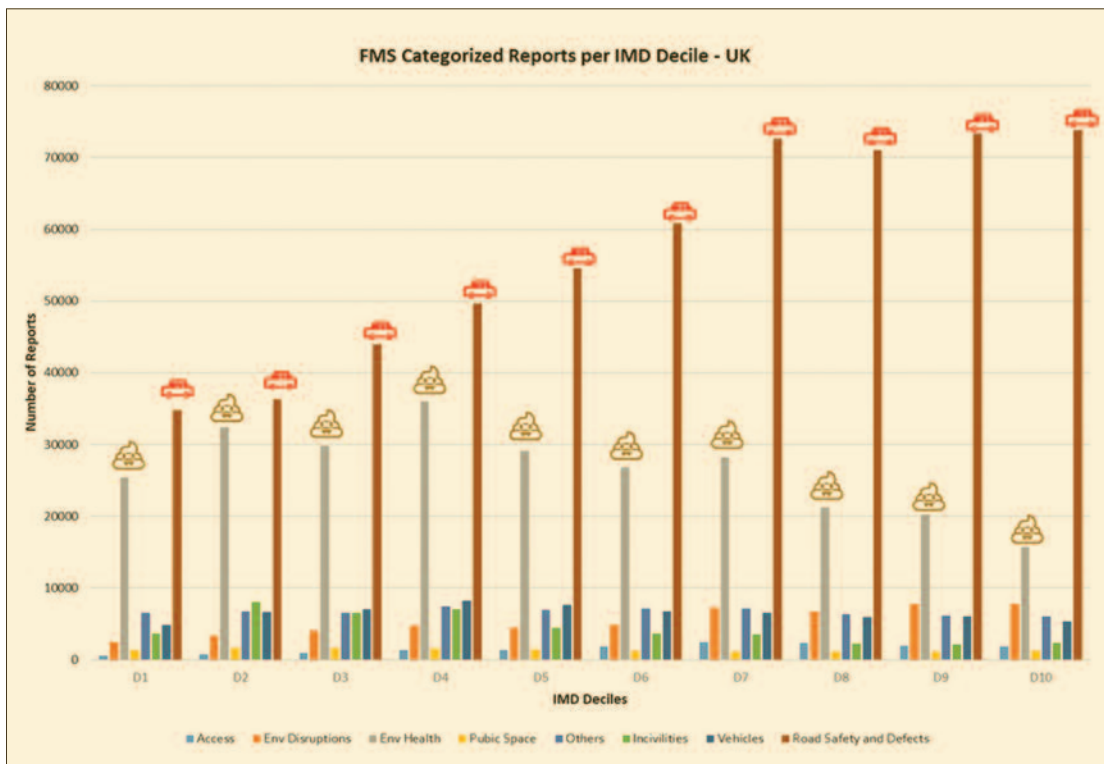
**mySociety runs a UK-based digital reporting service called FixMyStreet, available to use both as a website and an app. FixMyStreet enables anyone in the UK to report a local issue without needing to know which authority is responsible. There is no cost to councils to receive email reports from FixMyStreet. Some local authorities pay a small fee for an integration to be set-up between FixMyStreet and their own customer relationship management system, or they can use it as their own reporting system by procuring FixMyStreet Pro. Provided by SocietyWorks, mySociety's wholly owned subsidiary, FixMyStreet Pro is a fully integrated version of the platform, which is branded to look like the authority's own site and which sends reports directly into internal systems.**

---

However, looking a bit deeper into types of problems reported, the researchers discovered a further interesting pattern. The reports from less deprived neighbourhoods were more likely to be road defects, such as potholes. People in deprived neighbourhoods were more likely to report environmental issues such as dog-fouling, littering and fly-tipping. This reflects a mixture of the actual problems present, existing service provision, and how people use their neighbourhoods differently - with different modes of transport affecting the problems people are aware of. For example, we know that people in more deprived neighbourhoods tend to walk for more journeys, so are more likely to encounter problems of dog-fouling as a personal inconvenience, rather than being inconvenienced by potholes in the road surface.

In terms of rural access to such online reporting services, the research found no difference in reporting rates, suggesting that people can still use and access them even in more remote locations. However, the researchers noticed different kinds of issues being reported in rural areas. In general, areas with a higher population density had fewer reports made per person, possibly reflecting the idea that in denser areas, people may be more likely to believe that someone else will report a problem. This shows that so-called 'smart city' technology is perfectly adaptable to problem-reporting outside urban areas, where the greater amount of ground to cover can actually increase the importance of the role of citizens in spotting issues to be fixed.

This research is particularly significant because previous research tended to focus on individual cities or local authority areas, whereas the data from FixMyStreet is UK-wide, telling us that these patterns of reporting are persistent across different types of towns and cities.



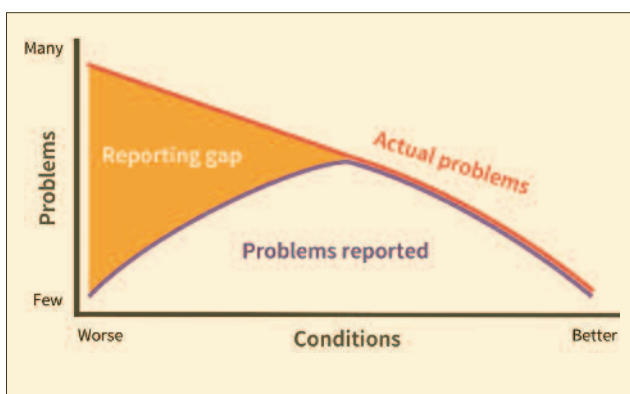
**FixMyStreet categorised reports per Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Decile**

This graph ranges from the most deprived 10% (Decile 1) to the least deprived 10% (Decile 10).

The research team was driven to carry out the analysis because of a concern about possible inequalities in services provision for neighbourhood maintenance. In particular, a trend in the UK following budget cuts has been to move from planned neighbourhood maintenance towards reactive maintenance, 'co-produced' through citizens reporting issues. Given previous research, there was a concern that this would result in more services being delivered to less-disadvantaged neighbourhoods, as they would request more. The findings of this research do, indeed, suggest that this is a risk, and if local authorities want to maintain good-quality local environments, this aim needs to be supported by planned maintenance and regular inspection regimes. This is especially important in more-deprived neighbourhoods, where evidence from other research suggests that regular maintenance can produce a 'virtuous cycle' of reporting and effective management.

Further research involving the University of Stirling, this time using data from North Lanarkshire, Scotland, has also revealed a gendered dimension to this reporting. This research found that it was women in the most-disadvantaged neighbourhoods who reported the most, with 'super-reporters' reporting over 100 issues a year to the local council. This research suggests that local authorities should recognise the work of such women, instead of seeing them as being the 'usual suspects', and that planned maintenance would lift the burden of reporting for these women.

In recent years, Irish local government has been grappling with increased demands and increased costs. A key message from this research is that local authorities should continue to conduct planned maintenance and a regular inspection regime, while recognising the value of citizen reporting and responding to issues as they arise.



**The 'reporting gap'.** Source: Alex Parson, MySociety.

Both pieces of research can be accessed free online: Matthews, P., Parsons, A., Nyanzu, E. and Rae, A. (2022), 'Dog fouling and potholes: Understanding the role of coproducing "citizen sensors" in local governance', Local Government Studies, DOI: 10.1080/03003930.2022.2116575

Hastings, A., Matthews, P., and Wang, Y. (2021), 'Unequal and gendered: Assessing the impacts of austerity cuts on public service users', Social Policy and Society, vol. 1, no. 21, DOI: 10.1017/S1474746421000543



## Citizens' Assembly on Drug Use to be Established

The Government has agreed to establish a Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use. The Assembly will be asked to consider the legislative, policy and operational changes the state could make to reduce significantly the harmful impacts of illicit drugs on individuals, families, communities and wider society. The Assembly will consist of 99 members of the general public and an independent Chair, and they will be asked to take into consideration the lived experience of people impacted by drugs use, as well as their families and communities, and to look at international best practice when considering harm-reduction measures.

The Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use will give effect to a commitment in this area set out in the *Programme for Government* and comes after the success of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly and the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity in 2022. Citizens' Assemblies have now become an important aspect of Ireland's democratic process. Following the approach of previous Assemblies, every effort will be made to ensure equality of voice among the members.



A consultation with young people through Comhairle na nÓg and youth drug projects in disadvantaged areas has been arranged by the Government Chief Whip and Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy, Hildegard Naughton. It is envisaged that the consultations will be presented to the Citizens' Assembly for its consideration in order to ensure that the voice of young people is heard.

Work on the Assembly will commence in April. It is expected to conclude its work by the end of this year.

## Community Recognition Fund

The Community Recognition Fund has been launched and represents a major initiative designed to support communities across the country that are hosting people from Ukraine and other countries who are beneficiaries of temporary protection and/or international protection applicants. The €50 million package will provide funding for sports clubs, community organisations, transport infrastructure and local groups. Every local authority in the country will benefit from the scheme. The money has been allocated across all local authorities, based on the number of new arrivals located there.

The Fund seeks to support the development of facilities that will be used by all members of the community. Projects will be delivered by local authorities in conjunction with community

organisations. Communities are encouraged to engage directly with the local authorities in order to ensure that high-quality projects are delivered. It is essential that the funding proposal submitted by each local authority is developed based on direct engagement with impacted communities and in consultation with the Municipal Districts, Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) and the local Community Response Fora.



# The Local Government Gallery

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

## Digital walking trail in Waterford city

Waterford City and County Council, in partnership with Imvizar and Fáilte Ireland funding under the Destination Town Initiative, launched Waterford's new digital walking trail. With the use of augmented reality smartphone technology, the trail explores the history and culture of 15 different locations in the heart of the city centre, including Reginald's Tower and Waterford Crystal. The trail can be accessed for free by scanning one of the QR codes on signs located throughout the city.



Mayor of Waterford City and County, Cllr John O'Leary, and characters Anastasia Fleming, an eighteenth century silversmith, and Odin Lord of Valhalla with (L-R) Adele Keane and Michael Guerin of Imvizar.  
*Photo courtesy Patrick Browne.*

## Limerick Bike Hub

Limerick City and County Council's Active Travel unit and Limerick Civic Trust have funded a new Bike Hub providing refurbished bikes on St Patrick's Road, Limerick. The Hub is a volunteer-based initiative where donated bikes will be repaired, before being distributed to people across the city and county. Among those who will benefit are newly arrived displaced persons from Ukraine and other parts of the world, including asylum seekers living in Direct Provision. The Bike Hub is a collaboration between a number of stakeholders, including Limerick City and County Council's Ukrainian Response Team, Doras and PAUL Partnership.



Pictured at the launch of Limerick Bike Hub are: (L-R) Sonja Reidy, Ukrainian Accommodation Lead with Limerick City and County Council; Helen Fitzgerald, Social Programmes Co-ordinator with PAUL Partnership; Mayor of Limerick City and County Francis Foley; Donnah Vuma, Project Co-ordinator with Doras. *Photo courtesy Keith Wiseman Photography.*



## Fingal wants everyone to put their #HandsUpFor Kindness

On the back of a recent motion passed by councillors to promote greater kindness, Fingal County Council has launched the #HandsUpForKindness campaign, encouraging people to be kind and compassionate. The campaign coincided with International Random Acts of Kindness Day on 17 February. Participants were encouraged to share their random acts of kindness on the local radio station, with messages being played on air throughout the week.

*Photo courtesy Fingal County Council.*





## Accessibility swings installed in Waterford

Waterford City and County Council recently completed the installation of three wheelchair accessible swings at the People's Park in Waterford city, Walton Park in Dungarvan and the Inclusion Park in Tramore. Located centrally in each park, the swings are part of the Council's initiative to encourage inclusive play and social interaction. The overall cost of the swings was €75,000 with Waterford City and County Council receiving funding from the Disability Participation and Awareness Fund 2021, administered by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. *Photo courtesy David Clynych.*

## DLR launches *Hedgerow Toolkit for Schools*

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage launched the *Hedgerow Toolkit for Schools*. This booklet has been developed to assist teachers in explaining the value of our hedgerows through using interesting activities to engage children in the subject of hedgerows, biodiversity and climate change. The *Hedgerow Toolkit* includes lesson plans with information on curriculum links and integration, learning activities, objectives and outcomes, along with resources such as a classroom wall poster and hedgerow-plants identification sheet.



At the launch of the Hedgerow Toolkit for Schools are: (L-R) Minister Malcolm Noonan, Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform; Mark Nolan, Director, Biodiversity in Schools; Councillor Mary Hanafin, Cathaoirleach, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council; Therese Langan, Director of Community and Cultural Development, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council; Anne Murray, Biodiversity Officer, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. *Photo courtesy Ger Holland.*

## 'Threading the Táin' exhibition

'Threading the Táin' is an inter-county community visual arts project, showcasing five tapestries created in celebration of the Táin Bó Cúailnge. Representatives from each of the five participating counties - Roscommon, Longford, Westmeath, Meath and Louth - were involved in creating the tapestry panels. The project was funded by Creative Ireland and produced by An Táin Arts Centre, in association with Creative Spark.

(L-R) Loreto Guinan, Ina Olohan, MCC Cathaoirleach Cllr Nick Killian, Marie Claire Cowley, Ciaran Mangan.

*Photo courtesy John Sheridan.*



## Conservation works preserve Dromtarriffe medieval church

The remains of a medieval church and graveyard in the north Cork village of Dromtarriffe have been uncovered and restored with the support of Cork County Council's Community Monument Fund. The core aims of the Community Monuments Fund are to conserve, maintain, protect and promote local monuments and historic sites. Following two years of conservation work, the remaining structures have been restored, safeguarding this important historic structure into the future.

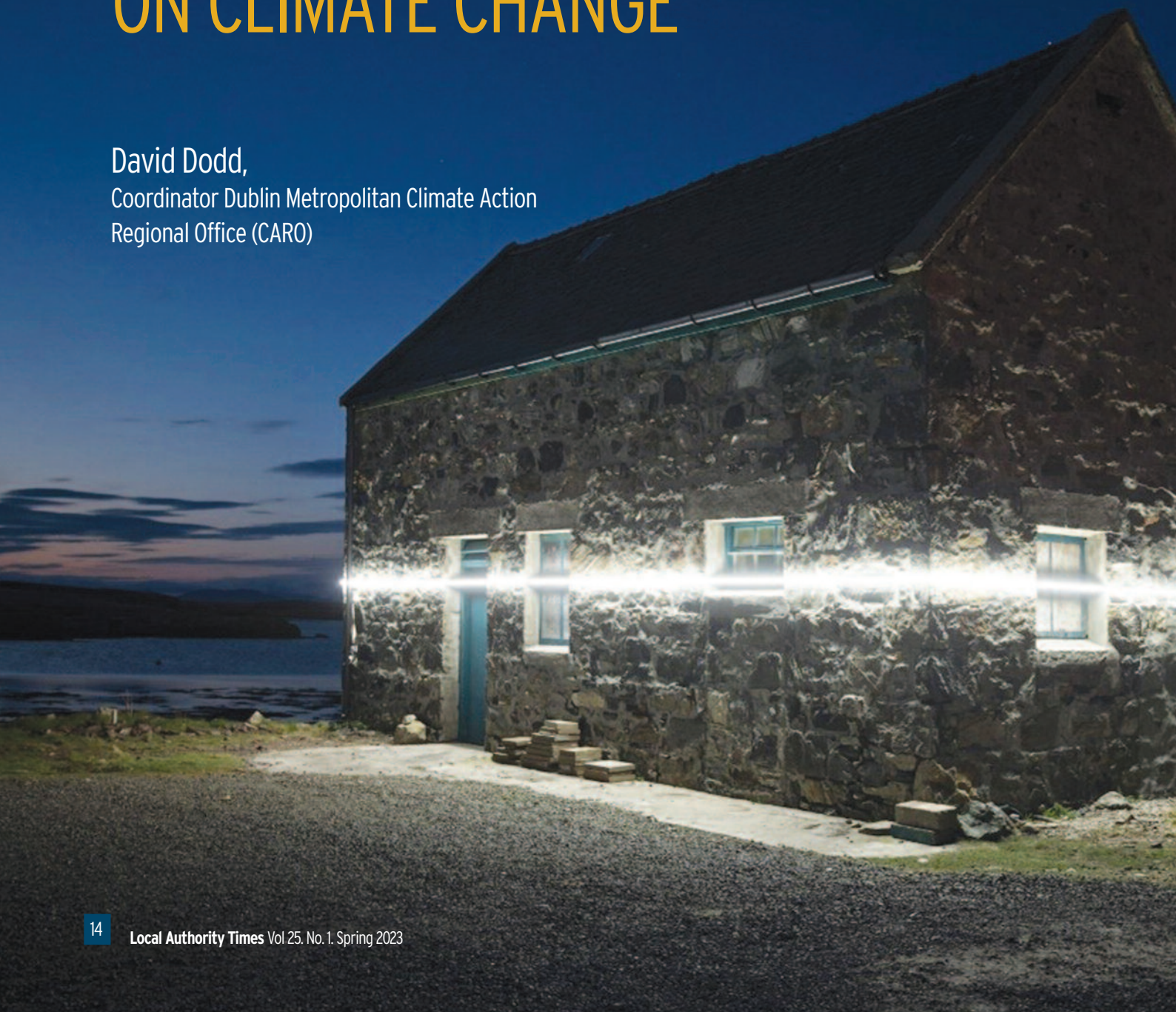


*Photo courtesy Sean Jeffries and Cork County Council.*



# SHINING A LIGHT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

David Dodd,  
Coordinator Dublin Metropolitan Climate Action  
Regional Office (CARO)







Many articles and news pieces on climate change illustrate its impacts with images of smoke bellowing from chimney stacks, lonely polar bears on sea ice, or floods washing houses away in a torrent. You might wonder therefore how using LED lights powered by solar panels would help to visualise climate change impact. But that's exactly what the Líníte Na Farraige project has been doing since it launched in September last year as part of the Creative Ireland Climate Action programme.

Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum and Arts Centre, Scotland.  
*Photo courtesy Pekka Niittyvirta and Timo Aho.*

**L**íníte na Farraige (Lines of the Sea) aims to connect the public visually and tangibly to the risks from future sea levels, through a series of light installations across Irish coastal locations and heritage sites. The light installations are designed by Pekka Niittyvirta and Timo Aho, Finnish artists who have previously displayed their art in Scotland, the US, the UK and their native Helsinki. The art installations consist of a solar-powered horizontal LED line of light, showing the future risks of rising seas and storm surge. The installations are based on future predictions of sea-level rise from the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report AR6, and historic storm-surge data from around the Irish coast in recent years.

The project originated after I had seen the powerful art installation in an online article in late 2020. An old stone cottage was illuminated and wrapped with a striking LED line that visualised future sealevel rise, and I initially thought it was in Connemara or somewhere on the west coast of Ireland. However, it was actually an arts centre - Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum and Arts Centre, in Scotland. Through the arts centre, I made contact with the artists, Pekka and Timo. During a Zoom call in early 2021, I learned that they had they never worked in Ireland but would like to do so. Around the same time, the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) had an online meeting with research scientists from Trinity College and Maynooth University who were part of the A4 project, funded by the Marine Institute, examining Atlantic change, sea level and decadal climate prediction.

In March 2021, the inaugural Creative Climate Action Fund, an initiative from the Creative Ireland Programme, in collaboration with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, was launched. It was seeking creative projects which could meaningfully connect people with profound changes happening in our environment, society and economy, arising from climate change. With this new funding opportunity, a consortium was formed involving the artists, universities, CAROs, local authorities and other partners. Together we made the applications to Creative Ireland and, in July, we learned that we were one of the 16 successful projects selected from over 150 applications.



Línte na Farraige in Galway. Photo courtesy Pekka Niittyvirta and Timo Aho.

In September 2022, the project launched at the Spanish Arch and adjacent Ard Bia at Nimmos restaurant, as well as a 'pop-up' section at the Claddagh Basin, and will be in place until the end of March 2023. The project then shone from the west coast to the southeast coast, with the second installation, in Wexford Harbour in October, taking advantage of a launch during the internationally renowned opera festival to get good footfall and exposure for the project. The third and final installation location was a beautiful Martello tower in Blackrock Park, Dublin, which launched in February and will remain in place until June.

The project artists, Pekka Niittyvirta and Timo Aho, explain:

'We believe that the topic we are talking about here is one of the most important challenges we are facing. Art has the potential to convey scientific data, complex ideas and concepts in a powerful way that words or graphs fall short of. Visualising something that is incomprehensible for a human, even with the factual studies and data available when talking about causality and climate change, is difficult. We seem to be unable to accept things we have not physically experienced.'

Línte na Farraige at Blackrock Martello tower. Photo courtesy Pekka Niittyvirta and Timo Aho.







Líníte na Farraige Wexford Harbour. Photo courtesy Pekka Niittyvirta and Timo Aho.

Speaking ahead of the installation launch in Blackrock Park, Catherine Martin, TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, said:

*'I welcome the timely unveiling of the Líníte na Farraige installation in Blackrock Park. I hope that it will generate a much-needed dialogue about rising sea levels. While it should give us all pause for thought, it must be remembered that the future is still in our hands. By making key changes in our personal behaviour, we can mitigate against climate change and sea-level rise and build a more sustainable and resilient future for us all.'*

Each installation uses a custom sensor system that detects light levels and links to the daily tide cycle, ensuring that the light installation illuminates for only up to three hours either side at high tide and only when it is dark, so if you want to view the installation, you need to check your local tides. This was an important message – both artistic and scientific – that the sea level is rising due to climate change.

As this is a climate-action project, the team was very keen that it would be as sustainable as possible. To this end, we worked with our project partners, Native Events – a leader in event sustainability in Ireland – who designed solar-panel arrays customised to each location and occasion. We were passionate that the project should use technical solutions such as renewable energy to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, and where excess energy is generated, it goes back into the grid. The materials from the project will also be re-used by the

artists in future installations when the Irish sites have been disassembled. In addition, a contribution will be made to native tree planting programmes in Ireland, to offset additional emissions associated with travel and transport for the project.

Whilst the project is inspired by the art and vision of Pekka and Timo, it would not have been possible without the commitment, interest and support of the local authorities involved, namely, Galway City Council and Galway Museum, Wexford County Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, and Fingal County Council. Two of the project locations – the Spanish Arch in Galway and the Martello tower in Dublin – are protected national monuments, so applications for consent were submitted to the National Monument Service to proceed with the project. Mindful of the impacts that light can have on the natural environment, the project is working with Ruth Minogue and Associates to undertake Appropriate Assessment (AA) ecological baseline screenings to ensure that there will be no significant impacts during the temporary art installations.

Whilst the installations themselves are stimulating conversations and discussions, the project does not just involve turning the lights on and walking away. An interactive website has been designed with the help of Algorithm, an exemplary visual design production studio based in Dublin. Information boards alongside each installation include information on the project in Irish and English and a QR code, linking the reader to [www.lintenafarraige.com](http://www.lintenafarraige.com), leading people on a journey of potential sea-level rise from the present day into the 2100s. Other communication and element events have included school workshops using a game developed by Trinity College Dublin – [www.climatesmart.ie](http://www.climatesmart.ie) – where students pretending to



Solar panels installed on Wexford Tourist Office. *Photo courtesy David Dodd*

be the mayor of Dublin have to take decisions to prevent major flooding from sea-level rise. Project team members have also given talks in universities, libraries and museums. The project has generated strong media interest in all locations, with radio, TV, newspaper and online coverage. As two of the sites are located beside railway lines, also at risk from sea-level rise and coastal erosion, Irish Rail has assisted the project in communicating the project artwork at railway stations as well on board some of its trains during the project's duration.

The project team and partner 1minute40 have used professional drone footage, video footage and vox pop interviews at project launches, together with other photography, to document the project and assist in communicating the work to a broader audience.

We hope that this project will encourage and empower people to #LowerTheLine through actions that we can take individually, collectively and at a government level to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, as well as to take action to adapt to the impacts that climate change has had and will continue to have on us. The installation demonstrates the need to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions collectively and to adapt together to protect our coastlines and communities from the effects of climate change.

*Find out more at [www.lintenafarraige.com](http://www.lintenafarraige.com)  
Twitter @lintenafarraige*



#### About the author

David Dodd is coordinator of the Dublin Climate Action Regional Office, one of four CAROs set up in 2018 with funding from the Department of Environment, Climate and Communication (DECC) as a shared service to work directly with the local authority sector on developing and implementing their Climate Change Action Plans.

To find out more about the work of the CAROs, see [www.caro.ie](http://www.caro.ie)





## More Homebuyers now Eligible for Local Authority Home Loan

Significant improvements to the Local Authority Home Loan have been announced, which will result in more people being eligible to apply for the state-backed mortgage. The prices of homes eligible for a Local Authority Home Loan and income limits of those eligible to apply for a loan have been increased. The Local Authority Home Loan was originally launched in 2022 and supports creditworthy borrowers who are unable to get finance from commercial banks to buy a home. It can be used for new, second-hand or self-build homes. The following changes to the loan will come into effect on 1 March 2023:

### *Increase to house price limits for all local authority areas*

- Increase from €320,000 to €360,000 - Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, South Dublin, Dublin City, Fingal, Wicklow, Kildare
- Increase from €320,000 to €330,000 - Galway City, Cork City, Louth, Meath, Galway County, Cork County

- Increase from €250,000 to €300,000 - Limerick, Waterford, Clare, Wexford, Westmeath, Kilkenny
- Increase from €250,000 to €275,000 - Offaly, Laois, Monaghan, Cavan, Donegal, Tipperary, Kerry, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo, Leitrim, Longford, Carlow.

### *Increased income limits for all applicants in each local authority area*

- Increase from €50,000 and €65,000 to €70,000 for all single applicants nationwide
- Increase from €75,000 to €85,000 for all joint applicants nationwide.



Since 2018, the Local Authority Home Loan and its predecessor, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, have assisted over 3,300 people to get on the property ladder.

## New Public Awareness Campaign for Public Participation Networks (PPNs) Launched

The Minister for State with responsibility for Community Development, Charities, and Integration, Joe O'Brien, has launched a new national awareness campaign to encourage community groups to join their local Public Participation Networks (PPNs). The PPNs allow local authorities to connect with community groups around the country, giving them a greater say in local government decisions that affect their communities. Every city and county in Ireland has its own PPN and more than 18,000 community and voluntary groups are currently members. Through local action, PPNs also contribute to policymaking at a national level - for example, through the development of the Climate Action Plan 2021. Another aim of the campaign is to encourage groups that represent young and marginalised

people to join their local PPN, to ensure that a range of voices is heard and considered. Membership of a PPN provides groups access to benefits such as bespoke training programmes; information on funding and grants; as well as networking and learning opportunities with other local organisations.

The websites of all local PPNs are available at [www.gov.ie/PPN](http://www.gov.ie/PPN)



*Photos courtesy Public Participation Networks Ireland.*



# HOW GREEN ARE OUR VALLEYS?

Enforcement Actions Must Be More Targeted to Improve Local Air and Water Quality and Waste Segregation

In November 2022, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published its report on the environmental performance of local authorities in 2021. The report shows that the scale of environmental enforcement work carried out by local authorities is significant. In 2021, over 500 local authority staff handled almost 81,000 complaints and carried out over 205,000 environmental inspections.

Local authorities play a vital role in the protection of our environment and are responsible for enforcing much of our environmental protection legislation. The EPA's Local Authority Performance Framework is crucial to ensuring a consistent national approach to the enforcement of environmental standards.

This is the first year of the revised Local Authority Performance Framework, which assesses the effectiveness of inspection activities in targeting key environmental issues. Based on 20 priorities, the assessment measures how local authority actions deliver environmental outcomes – such as better segregation of household and commercial waste, cleaner air through controls on solid fuel sales, and minimising risks to water quality from farming activities. Most importantly, there is an emphasis on assessing the follow-up and closure of issues detected so that real environmental improvements are achieved.

Commenting on the findings of the report, Dr Tom Ryan, Director of the EPA's Office of Environmental Enforcement, noted that 'water quality in our rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters is in decline and there are concerning localised issues that are impacting negatively on the air we breathe.' He added:

'Local authorities need to have a more strategic approach to addressing these issues within their counties so as to protect people's right to the enjoyment of a healthy environment. While local authorities are engaged in a great deal of enforcement activity, they need to have a better focus on priority environmental issues and increase or escalate enforcement action where required.'

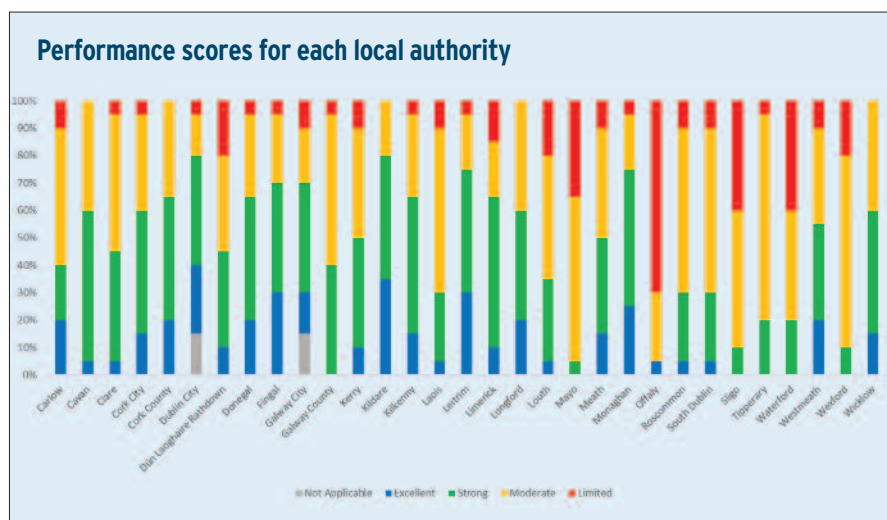
Our water quality is in decline, with just over half of surface waters (rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters) in satisfactory condition. Agriculture is one of the sectors that is impacting on our water quality. The science has identified areas where agricultural measures are required to prevent nutrients, including nitrogen and phosphorus, from leaking into our waterways. Local authorities must target farm inspections in these areas. The proper use of fertilisers and the correct management of slurry will benefit both the farmer and the environment.

According to David Pollard, Programme Manager of the EPA's Office of Environmental Enforcement:

'Local authorities continue to carry out extensive water quality monitoring; however, there is scope to make better use of this monitoring to target enforcement action aimed at improving water quality.'

Air and noise enforcement continues to have the lowest level of dedicated resources within local authorities. Better targeting and coordination of resources in this area are necessary to protect public health. It is crucial that local authorities tackle air pollution issues by making sure that only approved solid fuels are sold.

The scale of waste and litter enforcement carried out by local authorities is significant. However, the range of the waste priorities to be addressed is broad and few local authorities managed to cover the full scope in 2021. In particular, there is a need for increased enforcement efforts to improve segregation of domestic, commercial, construction and demolition waste in order to improve reuse and recycling of materials.



*Focus on Local Authority Environmental Enforcement - Performance Report 2021* is available on the EPA website at: <https://www.epa.ie/publications/compliance--enforcement/public-authorities/focus-on-local-authority-environmental-enforcement-performance-report-2021.php>





Dublin Citizens' Assembly Recommends  
Devolution of Major Policy Areas

# VOX POPULI

Cáit Ní Chorcóra,  
Research Assistant,  
Institute of Public Administration



At the end of January, the final report of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly was presented to the Taoiseach and the Houses of the Oireachtas.

### Terms of reference for the Assembly

The terms of reference for this Citizens' Assembly were to 'consider the type of directly elected mayor (DEM) and local government structures best suited for Dublin, and to bring forward proposals in that regard'. This included the consideration of:

- The strengths and weaknesses of the current local government model
- The potential benefits, risks, challenges and opportunities associated with a DEM for Dublin
- What functions could be transferred from central government to regional or local government in Dublin, and how this should be funded
- The appropriate structure for local and regional government, councils and authorities, looking at models in other capital cities
- The perspectives of stakeholders, including the general public.

### Composition of the Assembly and recruitment of Assembly members

The Dublin Citizens' Assembly comprised a total of 80 members. This included 67 randomly selected members of the public, living in Dublin City and County, 12 councillors from across the four authorities, and its independent Chairperson, Jim Gavin. This was the first time that those not on the electoral register were eligible to apply for membership of a citizens' assembly, facilitating greater inclusion of non-Irish citizens who are resident in Dublin. In addition, the recruitment process for this Assembly was updated to widen the geographic spread of members and increase the quality and inclusivity of the selection process.

Previous assemblies had used polling companies to select members by conducting door-to-door interviews. However, in this case, written letters were sent to randomly selected households. The letter asked each household to nominate an adult from that household to apply to become a member of the Assembly. A total of 14,000 invitations were issued and 1,412 responses were received. This response rate of approximately 10 per cent compares very favourably with international experience of citizens' assemblies, which is typically just 3-5 per cent). Demographic information provided was then used to ensure that the Assembly was reflective of wider Dublin society, in terms of gender, age, geography and socioeconomic status.

For the recruitment of councillors, all political party leaders were invited to make nominations and each independent

councillor was invited to apply. The allocation of seats was representative of the relative strength of the parties or groups across the four Dublin local authorities. In the case of independent councillors, a total of seven applications were received, from which two individuals - one female and one male councillor - were randomly selected.

### Assembly meetings and composition of final ballot papers

The Assembly met on five occasions between April and October 2022. Members unanimously agreed to adopt seven principles to guide the way in which they would operate: Openness, Fairness, Equality of voice, Respect, Efficiency, Collegiality and Psychological safety.

Over the course of the Assembly, members were addressed by a range of local government experts, political scientists, international mayors from cities equivalent in size and scale to Dublin, serving and former politicians and the CEOs of the four Dublin local authorities.

The key topics covered during the meetings of the Assembly were:

- Dublin and its system of local government
- International experience and local perspectives
- Devolution of powers and finances.

The final two meetings of the Assembly focused on generating discussion and getting feedback on the previous meetings. The five ballot papers for members to vote on were also finalised:

- Ballot Paper 1 focused on the powers of the DEM and local government
- Ballot Paper 2 asked whether a plebiscite should be held before the introduction of a DEM for Dublin
- Ballot Paper 3 focused on what the eligibility criteria for DEM candidates should be, who the electorate should be confined to and the role of councillors (including working hours and remuneration)
- Ballot Papers 4 and 5 focused on what new local government structures should be put in place with the DEM.

Votes were cast at the Assembly's final meeting in October.

### Recommendations from the Dublin Citizens' Assembly

The final report contains an overview of the findings of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly and presents 18 recommendations to government and the Oireachtas for consideration.

The report recommends that several powers be devolved to a DEM and local government. This includes policy areas such as housing, homelessness, community healthcare, transport,



Photo courtesy Government Information Service.

climate change, the environment and emergency services. Additional powers in relation to higher education should be devolved in five to ten years following the establishment of the DEM. The Assembly also recommends that the new DEM should have the power to raise funds from markets, to retain funds from taxes paid in Dublin, and to introduce local taxes. Importantly, the Assembly also voted in favour of holding a plebiscite on the creation of the office (and its powers and structures) before it is established.

The report proposes that the term of office for the new DEM should be five years, and a maximum of two terms in office should apply. A mechanism should be put in place to remove the mayor (either by councillors' decision or by the public). Nominations to run for mayor should require an appropriate number (yet to be determined) of statutory declarations of support from the Dublin electorate and the voting electorate for the DEM should be confined to the Dublin local electoral register.

Under the report's recommendations, the existing four local authorities would be retained, with the addition of new local government structures to support the new DEM (and a new deputy mayor, elected on the same ticket). The new structures proposed include:

- A cabinet made up of elected local councillors. Each member of the cabinet would have specific areas of policy

responsibility delegated to them.

- A Dublin city and county assembly. The main functions of the assembly would be to make policy proposals to the Mayor, approve the budget of the Mayor and examine the activities and performance of the Mayor
- A plenary session for local government in Dublin, which all elected members from the existing four local authorities would be eligible to attend. The role of the plenary would be to augment the work of the Mayor, by providing advice and suggestions.
- A permanent citizens' assembly with randomly selected membership, rotated every year.

Other recommendations include that all Dublin councillors be made full-time, that councillors' salaries be more reflective of a full-time commitment, and that all councillors be provided with secretarial support. Details of submissions from the public to the Citizens' Assembly (56 in total) and a survey of councillors (13 responses in total) are also included in the report.

The Assembly asks that the government should respond in detail to the final report within six months and should take no longer than two years to implement its recommendations.

The full report of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly is available at: [https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/dublinassembly/about/report\\_dublincitizensassembly\\_final\\_lowres.pdf](https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/dublinassembly/about/report_dublincitizensassembly_final_lowres.pdf)

# CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE IRISH MIND

Alice Kelly, Institute of Public Administration



In 2021, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in partnership with the Yale Program on Climate Change Communications (YPCC), began carrying out the 'Climate Change in the Irish Mind' project, which aims to capture the Irish population's beliefs, attitudes, policy preferences, and behaviours regarding climate change. The first wave of this study contains three outputs - the *Climate Change in the Irish Mind* report, a segmentation report, and an online interactive map. These have all now been completed, with the most recent being released in January 2023.

The first report, *Climate Change in the Irish Mind*, presents key findings from a nationally representative survey that was carried out in summer 2021 amongst 4,000 Irish residents. The findings are to be used in support of climate-change awareness-and-engagement campaigns, the design of national policy, and climate action.

## Survey results

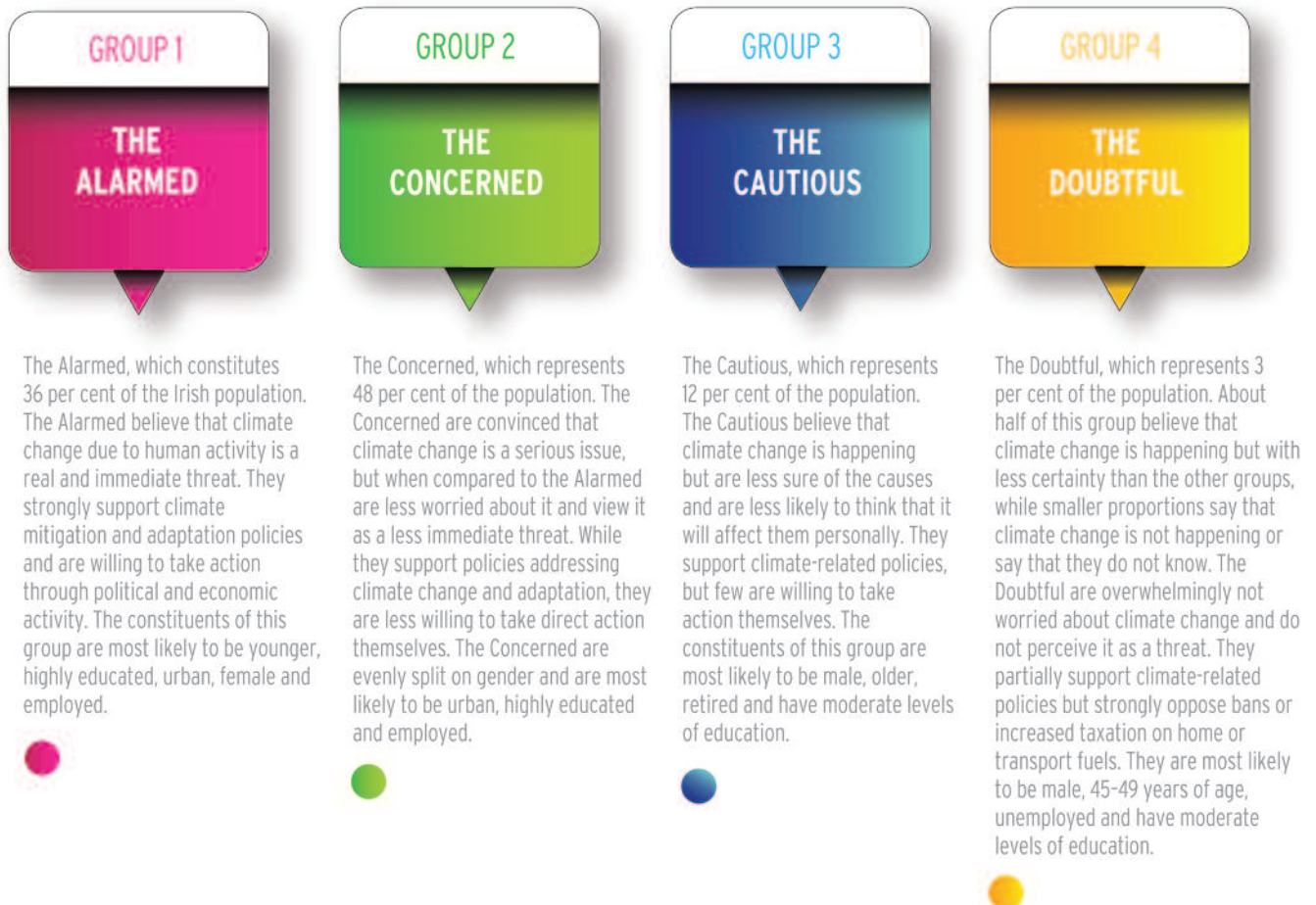
The survey found that nearly all Irish people (96 per cent) think that climate change is happening, and that it is caused, at least in part, by human activities, with 85 per cent of respondents worried about it. There is very little climate-change denial in Ireland, which is a positive trend. Furthermore, 91 per cent of people say that climate change is important to them personally and 71 per cent say that climate change should be either a 'very high' or 'high' priority for the Government of Ireland. According to the findings of the survey, 90 per cent believe that the country has a responsibility to act on climate change and they strongly support a range of policies to address climate change, believing that climate action will increase jobs, economic growth and quality of life. The survey revealed that most people are willing to take political actions to reduce climate change and are also willing to participate in a campaign to convince elected officials to



take action. Scientists are the most trusted source of information about climate change, with more than nine in ten people in Ireland saying that they either 'strongly' or 'somewhat' trust scientists. Other highly trusted sources include the EPA (89 per cent), educators (88 per cent), family and friends (85 per cent), television weather reporters (83 per cent) and community leaders (73 per cent).

### Climate Change's Four Irelands

The second aspect of the project is a segmentation report - *Climate Change's Four Irelands*. This report identifies four distinct audiences, based on views about climate change among the Irish public and analyses the similarities and differences between them. The four groups are:



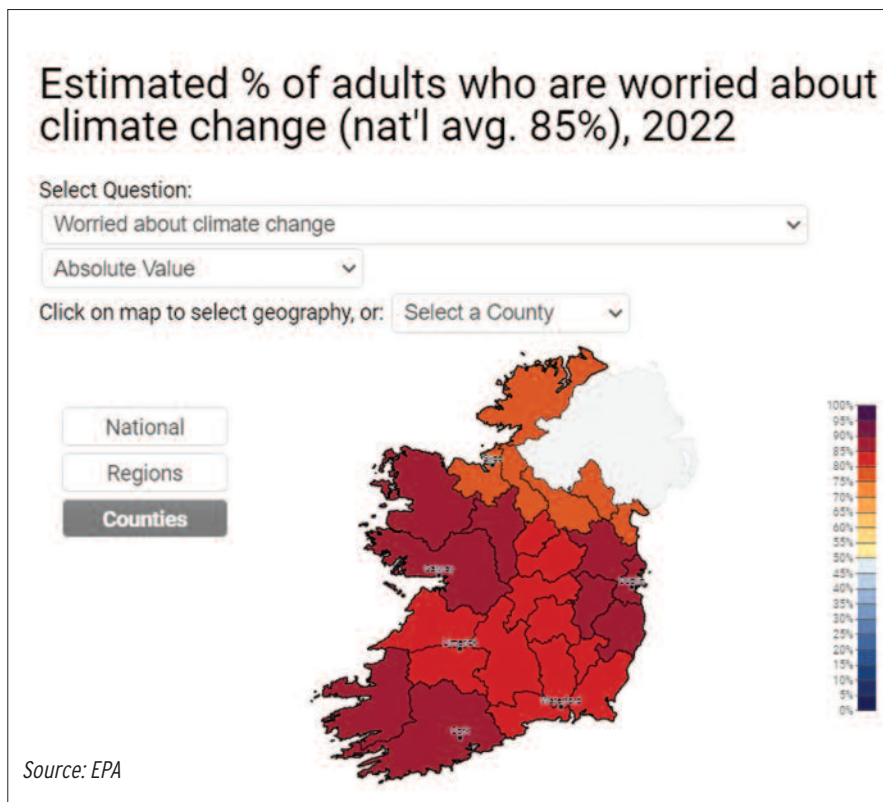
Combining all audiences, the least popular taxation policy was returning fossil-fuel taxes to households in equal amounts. Policies that are framed as redistributive and protective of those in lower socioeconomic groups receive the highest levels of support across all groups. When policies are framed as an outright ban - for example, banning the sale of peat - opposition increases among the Concerned, the Cautious and particularly the Doubtful.

### Climate Opinion Maps

The third and final output arising from the project was the publication of the Climate Opinion Maps. These maps allow the public to examine and view national, regional, and county-level data about Irish people's climate-change beliefs, attitudes, policy preferences and behaviours. The maps are based on the original 'Climate Change in the Irish Mind' study and

survey. The estimates for the maps were generated from a statistical model that incorporates actual survey responses but combines these responses with demographic data from the CSO.

The maps show that people's beliefs, attitudes, policy preferences and behaviours on climate change are consistent across Ireland, with no discernible difference between urban and rural dwellers. However, those who live in counties that are more impacted by environmental hazards such as severe storms and water shortages express slightly higher levels of concern about the impacts of climate change. Across Ireland, people are in almost full agreement that climate change is happening, and large proportions of the population are worried about it.



The maps can be accessed at: <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/climatechange/climate-opinion-maps/> and provide depictions for county, regional and national data, allowing them to be compared and contrasted.

## Conclusion

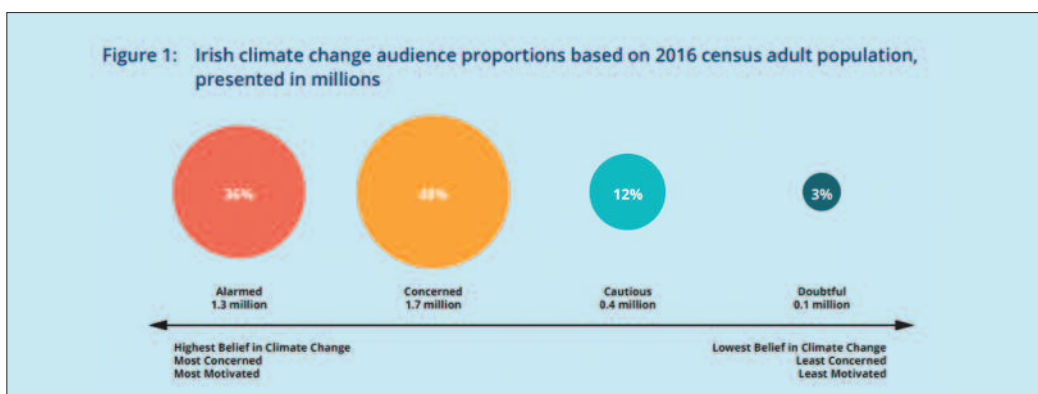
The findings from these three EPA projects demonstrate an appetite amongst the Irish population to address climate change. People in Ireland clearly want to see real policy change. More than half of the population said that they would take action to convince leaders to reduce climate change. Local authorities are gearing up to tackle climate change at the local level through adaptation and building resilience, as well as by reducing carbon emissions. The recruitment of climate action officers and coordinators in every local authority area signals the sector's commitment to addressing these challenges. There is opportunity for the local government sector to use these findings about beliefs and policy preferences to work towards influencing national policy, as well as identifying how change can be made at a local level. Local communities are central to the response to climate disruption and now that there is evidence of large-scale

awareness of climate change and willingness to get involved, the awareness and willingness must be transformed into action.

## References

Leiserowitz, A., Carman, J., Rosenthal, S., Neyens, L., Marlon, J., Desmond, M., Smith, S., Rochford, M.F., O'Mahony, J., and Reaper, L. (2021), Climate Change in the Irish Mind, New Haven, CT: Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. Available at: <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/climate-change/EPA-Climate-in-the-Irish-Mind-REPORT-19.pdf>

Leiserowitz, A., Goldberg, M., Carman, J., Rosenthal, S., Neyens, L., Marlon, J., Finegan, S., Cotter, E., Desmond, M., Smith, S., Rochford, M.F., Quinlan, C., O'Mahony, D., O'Mahony, J., and Reaper, L. (2022), Climate Change's Four Irelands: An Audience Segmentation Analysis, New Haven, CT: Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. Available at: <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/climate-change/EPA-Climate-Change-Four-Irelands.pdf>



Source: EPA

# POLICY AND RESEARCH IN BRIEF

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

Compiled by Cáit Ní Chorcora, IPA



## A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making

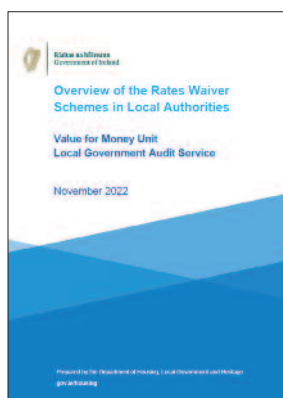
Launched in February, this guide aims to support inclusive consultation and engagement at local level and ensure that marginalised and disadvantaged communities have opportunities to participate in local planning and decision-making.

Inclusive engagement with marginalised communities and their representative organisations will ensure that their views are reflected in local decision-making that affects them. The guide also aims to enable more inclusive measures to support sustainable development at a local level.

This reference guide is a plain-English resource, designed to assist local authorities, public sector bodies, community groups or any organisation committed to inclusive local decision-making. This initiative is part of a wider Dormant Accounts Funded project on the engagement of marginalised communities and is a collaboration between the Department of Rural and Community Development, Pobal, Community Work Ireland and the Irish Local Development Network.

The new guide can be accessed here:

<https://assets.gov.ie/246180/25a3746e-46c1-4b19-8e7fb8cad930079b.pdf>



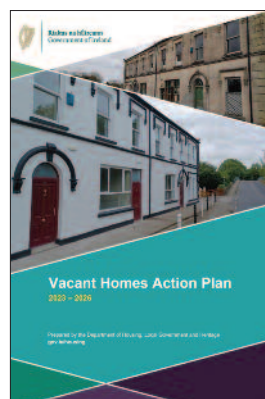
## Overview of the Rates Waiver Schemes in Local Authorities

This report provides a review of the Local Authorities Rates Waiver Scheme, first introduced in 2020 for businesses forced to close because of COVID-19 health measures. A new, more limited, scheme was put in place from Q1 to Q3 2021 with a further, more targeted, scheme for Q4 2021. This was then extended to the end of Q1

2022. This scheme provided financial support for impacted businesses but also to local authorities as to their funding.

The report is available here:

<https://assets.gov.ie/241308/8be19cb7-ca9b-4ce1-886b-325f5bc8f9b1.pdf>



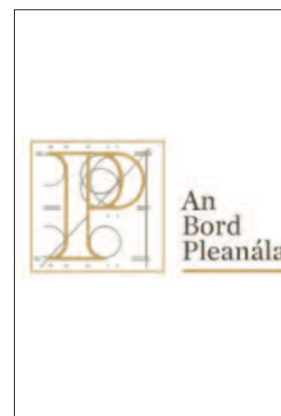
## Vacant Homes Action Plan 2023-2026

In January, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage published a new *Vacant Homes Action Plan*. The Action Plan outlines government measures to be introduced in the coming year to address vacancy and facilitate more efficient use of existing housing stock. This is in line with *Housing for All*, the government housing plan to 2030.

Key measures outlined in the plan to bring more vacant and derelict properties back into use include:

- €150 million in Urban Regional Development Funding for vacancy-related projects. This will involve publication of a call for proposals from local authorities for funding to acquire a vacant or derelict property or site (residential or commercial) and carry out any works to make the site more attractive for re-use or sale. The fund will then be replenished from the proceeds received from sale or use of a site, thereby allowing a local authority to establish a rolling programme to tackle long-term vacancy and dereliction.
- Publication of a guidance document on Compulsory Purchase Orders by local authorities, with an initial focus on derelict properties
- Rollout of a data collection project across all local authorities to capture the number of vacant and derelict properties
- Further development of the full-time role of the Vacant Homes Officer across local authorities.

The *Action Plan* is available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/df86c-vacant-homes-actionplan-2023-2026/>



## Publication of the Draft Planning and Development Bill

This draft Bill, published in January, aims to bring greater consistency in planning decisions and to make the planning system more coherent and user-friendly for the public and planning practitioners.

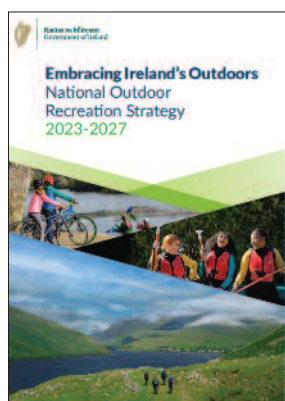
The Bill, if enacted, would strengthen the legal status of ministerial guidelines and introduce statutory mandatory timelines for



all consent decisions and changes to Judicial Reviews of planning decisions. It would also make it more difficult for objectors to challenge planning decisions, with residents' associations barred from taking High Court actions. The Bill proposes a restructuring of An Bord Pleanála and an extension of Local Development Plans from six to ten years, with a review after Year 5. Where appropriate, Local Area Plans would be replaced by specific types of area-based plans to meet particular needs. They would also have a more strategic focus, providing a stronger sense of what is planned for particular areas before any planning applications emerge so that local public engagement would be more focused on the plan-making stage rather than the planning application stage. The new Bill would also provide for increased capacity for local authorities to utilise Compulsory Purchase Orders, e.g. to acquire vacant or derelict properties for onward sale for residential use.

The Draft Planning and Development Bill is available at:  
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c6f60-draft-planning-and-development-bill-2022/>

A policy guide to the draft Bill is also available:  
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1b115-outline-of-the-proposed-planning-and-development-bill/>

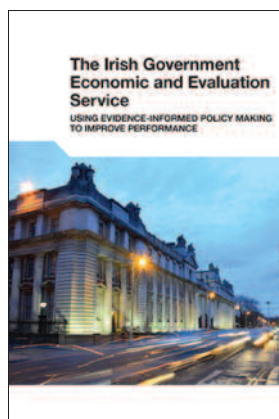


### Embracing Ireland's Outdoors: National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, 2023-2027

In November 2022, the Government published *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors* - the country's first national outdoor recreation strategy. This five-year strategy was developed following crossgovernment consultation and in collaboration with Comhairle na Tuaithe.

The new strategy is designed to support the sustainable development of the outdoor recreation sector in order to deliver economic and health benefits to communities nationwide. It looks to enable a more joined-up approach to the development of Ireland's outdoor recreation infrastructure at both national and local level. As part of the new strategy, Outdoor Recreation Committees will be established in every county to facilitate a more focused and strategic approach to the development of local amenities.

The strategy can be accessed here:  
<https://assets.gov.ie/240596/8f843f7b-c08c-42eb-bc5cf31d6bdea38b.pdf>



### Recent publications from the Irish Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

#### 1. Spending Review: An Overview of the Housing Agency

This paper maps the roles and responsibilities of the Housing Agency in the context of increasing government intervention in the housing market. It examines the Agency's

growth over time, the governance arrangements in place, and the role of the Agency in policy design and implementation.

The review can be accessed here:

<https://assets.gov.ie/242808/8d50cddb-0dfd-43fa-9cfd-2b7adbe936b1.pdf>

#### 2. Spending Review: Focused Policy Assessment: DRCD Library Funding Supports

This spending review outlines the outputs and impacts of the Department's investment in library supports. It also sets out recommendations on how future investment can best support the next libraries strategy and ensure that the impacts of funding are better understood.

The Review is available here: <https://assets.gov.ie/241803/d816c104-64cd-4a56-a595-b762846376cc.pdf>

#### 3. Analytical Note: Review of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme (2018-2021)

In December, IGEES published a review of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL) scheme. This was a government-backed mortgage scheme for first-time buyers, which ran from 2018 to 2021. It has been replaced by the Local Authority Home Loan scheme. This analytical note examines activity under the RIHL scheme, the mortgage values approved under the scheme, and funding allocations across local authorities. It also provides comparisons to market values and makes recommendations for future work and reporting.

The Review is available here: <https://assets.gov.ie/240984/cc74ba65-6d5c-4210-bdfe-3ff56c3f67bb.pdf>

#### 4. Analytical Note: Review of Planning Permissions and Housing Supply

This analytical note analyses local authority planning application data from 2012 to 2022, examining planning refusal rates, decision timing and appeals. It compares urban and rural areas as well as large versus small developments. It also identifies potential factors that could explain the increase in the number of planning permissions for apartments that have yet to commence.

The Review is available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/240985/8094adf4-5746-4e3a-97d9-1976819df5bb.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.

*Local Authority Times* is also published on the IPA website: [www.ipa.ie](http://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](mailto:latimes@ipa.ie)