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ADMINISTRATION

MORE WOMEN NEEDED

#MoreWomen in our Local Authorities

Inside: Eighth Annual Public Lecture Series of UCC's Centre for Local and Regional Governance (CLRG) ■ Buildings for Everyone: Central Bank of Ireland

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

REWARDING RESEARCH

As we come to the end of 2023, it is a good time to reflect on the achievements of local authorities across Ireland. There has been great work done throughout the country this year and this issue reflects the dedication and amazing initiatives that have been carried out by local authorities.

Looking forward to 2024, it is set to be a busy year, with the local elections due to take place in June. This feeds nicely into the topics of some of our articles in this issue. On page 2, Brian Sheehan, CEO of Women for Election, highlights the ongoing journey to gender equality in politics and we gain some insight into the role of councillors and their experiences. As we gear up for the 2024 elections, it is important to consider both the challenges and the positives of local government and the councillors that make up our councils and strive to promote inclusivity and representation.
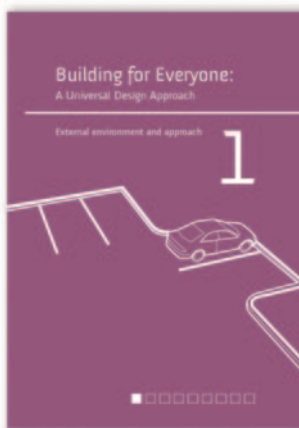
On page 4, the National Disability Authority (NDA) concludes its series of articles illustrating the importance of Universal Design in buildings, and what that looks like in practice. The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, which is part of the NDA, has developed an eLearning module that uses the Central Bank as a case study of excellence in Universal Design. We thank the NDA for its brilliant submissions to each of our editions this year.

My sincere thanks to all of our contributors and to our team in the Institute of Public Administration. We look forward to reporting on the continued efforts of local government in 2024; if you would like to be involved in the next edition, please get in touch with us at **latimes@ipa.ie**. Have a wonderful New Year.

Alice Kelly, Acting Editor

Local Property Tax 2024

The Local Property Tax (LPT) allocations to local authorities for 2024 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 2024, with their decisions being outlined to the Revenue Commissioners and the Minister. 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 council.

Until 2022, a local variation decision applied for one year only. The Local Property Tax (Local Adjustment Factor) Regulations, 2022 having come into effect in July 2022, elected members can now set an LAF for a period of their choosing.

The Local Adjustment Factors for 2024 are as follows:

Local Authority	2024 Increase or Decrease on Base Rate
Carlow County Council	+5%
Cavan County Council	+15%
Clare County Council	+15%
Cork City Council	+9%
Cork County Council	+7.5%
Donegal County Council	+15%
Dublin City Council	-15%
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	-15%
Fingal County Council	-7.5%
Galway City Council	0%
Galway County Council	0%
Kerry County Council	+10%
Kildare County Council	+10%
Kilkenny County Council	+15%
Laois County Council	+10%
Leitrim County Council	+15%
Limerick City and County Council	+15%
Longford County Council	+15%
Louth County Council	0%
Mayo County Council	+10%
Meath County Council	0%
Monaghan County Council	+15%
Offaly County Council	+15%
Roscommon County Council	+15%
Sligo County Council	+15%
South Dublin County Council	-15%
Tipperary County Council	+10%
Waterford City and County Council	+10%
Westmeath County Council	0%
Wexford County Council	+15%
Wicklow County Council	+6%

First Citizen Book Launch

First Citizen was launched in Cork City Hall on Tuesday, 14 November, by Lord Mayor Cllr Kieran McCarthy. The book, co-written by Aodh Quinlivan and John Ger O'Riordan, tells the story of Seán French, Cork's longest-serving, twelve-term Lord Mayor. French came to prominence during a period of revolutionary change and turmoil, earning a deserved reputation as an eloquent, intelligent and passionate man who possessed an unyielding fidelity to principle. His extraordinary political life unfolded against a backdrop of the war of independence, the burning of Cork, the civil war and the dissolution of Cork Corporation. French was also a founding member of Fianna Fáil and was twice elected to Dáil Éireann.

Co-authors Aodh Quinlivan and John Ger O'Riordan.
Photo courtesy Rob Lamb

MORE WOMEN NEEDED

#MoreWomen in our Local Authorities

Brian Sheehan, Women for Election

Nevertheless, they persisted. In the ever-evolving landscape of Irish politics, the persistent efforts of women to secure election to local authorities are slowly paying off, although, we would argue, far too slowly. Over the decades, women across Ireland have engaged actively in political discourse, challenging stereotypes and pushing for increased representation. The invaluable contributions made by women in their pursuit of political roles within local authorities and the strides they have taken to break down barriers are creating a more inclusive political landscape.

With women making up about 25 per cent of councillors, our local government system is still part of an 'unfinished democracy'. Women's underrepresentation has consequences for the quality of our local democracy, for whose voices are heard in local government, how policy is made and implemented, and in the level of trust people have in local government.

The next local elections can be another landmark moment in the evolution of our local democracy. Will women constitute more than the 29 per cent of candidates in 2019? Will the work done by government, all political parties and organisations like Women for Election, to encourage, support and train women, prove to have been effective, or enough? Will women feel safe and supported coming forward for election? Will the broader public support more women and vote for #MoreWomen.

Historically, Irish politics has written women out, with women facing numerous obstacles in their quest for political office. However, in the last few decades we have witnessed a transformative shift that reflects a broader societal change, challenging traditional gender norms and recognising the importance of diverse voices in shaping policies that affect communities at grassroots level.

One of the significant challenges faced by women in Irish politics has been gender-based stereotypes. Female candidates often find themselves confronting preconceived notions about leadership and political acumen. However, these challenges have not deterred many determined women, who

have utilised their skills, experiences and unique perspectives to challenge stereotypes and prove that gender is not a determinant of effective political leadership.

Women candidates have been instrumental in transforming local authority election campaigns into community-centric endeavours. Women for Election provides training to equip women with the skills to focus their campaigns on issues directly affecting the daily lives of constituents, ranging from healthcare and education to environmental concerns, building local business and economies and local infrastructure, fine tuning the knowledge and experience that most women already have.

Recognising the importance of solidarity, women in Irish politics have actively worked to establish programmes and support networks and to increase the diversity of women in politics. Women for Election recently undertook a programme in partnership with the National Traveller Women's Forum, giving Traveller women who want to get involved in politics the network and skills to do so, paving the way for a new generation of leaders who can navigate the intricacies of political life.

The work of organisations such as Women for Elections in Ireland is a testament to the evolving nature of Irish politics. Through determination, resilience and community-focused

25%

of councillors in Ireland are women
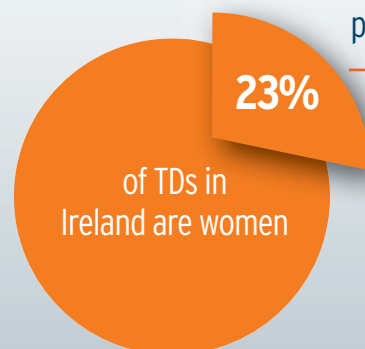
We want to see an Ireland with balanced participation of women and men in political life.

23%

of TDs in Ireland are women

campaigns, women have emerged as powerful forces in shaping the political landscape at the local level. As we celebrate their contributions, it is essential to recognise that the journey towards gender equality in politics is ongoing. By acknowledging the achievements of women, we pave the way for a more inclusive and representative political future for Ireland. And by voting for more women in 2024's local elections, we can play a part in bringing about that future.
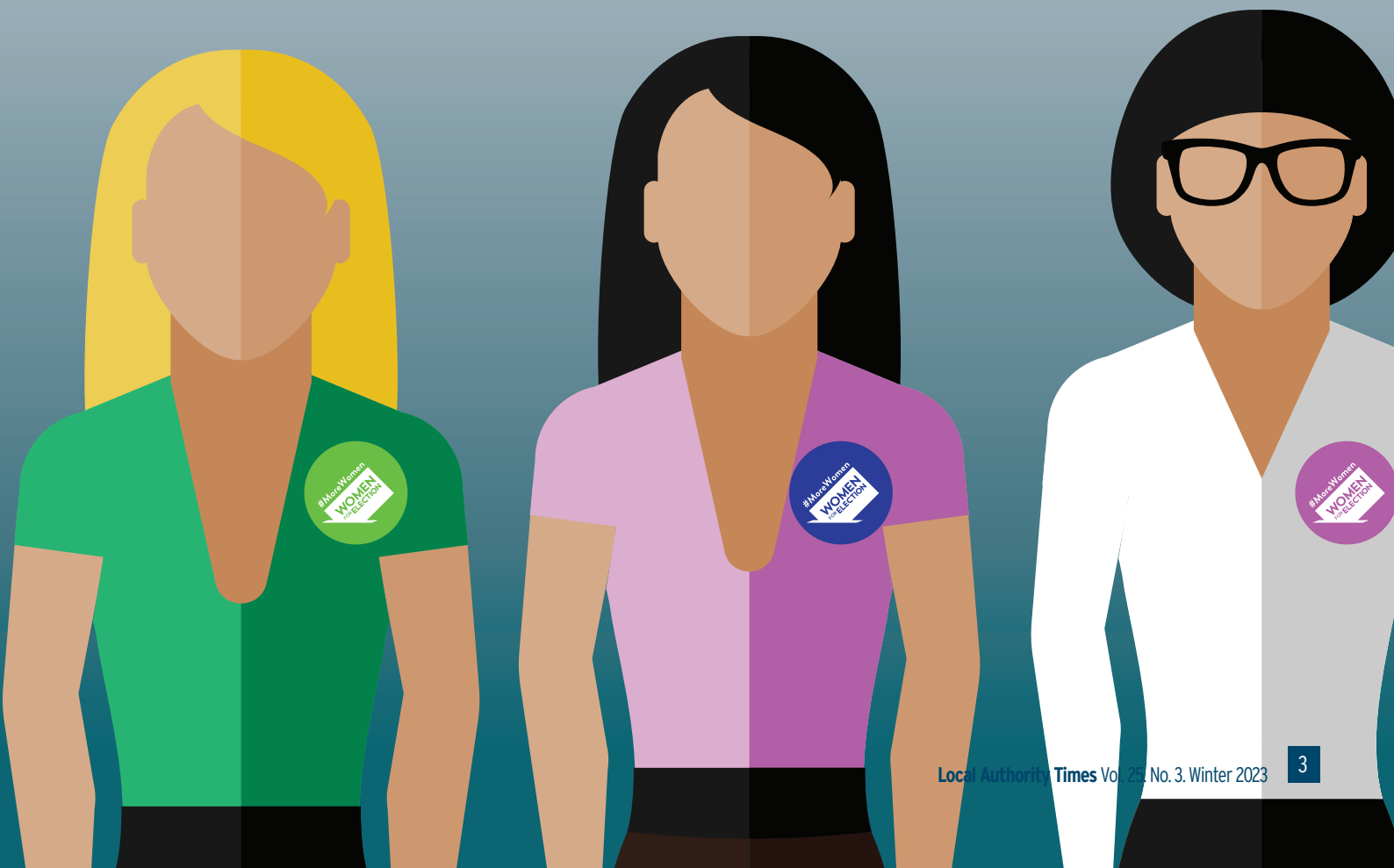
BUILDINGS FOR EVERYONE

Central Bank of Ireland

A module to help you learn more about Universal Design in the built environment

National Disability Authority

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (part of the National Disability Authority) has produced a short eLearning module called *Buildings for Everyone: Central Bank of Ireland*. The module illustrates what Universal Design looks like in practice; it is a case study of the Central Bank of Ireland, a winner of the 2017 RIAI Universal Design Award.

The module is free to access at www.universaldesign.ie

Buildings for Everyone: Central Bank of Ireland is a self-paced eLearning module that was created in response to user research. It is aimed at professionals involved in the design and procurement of buildings but is open to anyone interested in Universal Design in the built environment. Fully accessible, it takes up to one hour to complete (1 CPD point). A short quiz at the end of the module enables the learner to receive a certificate of completion.

Feedback on the module has been extremely positive. In evaluations to date, 96 per cent of learners agreed that the course was easy to use and navigate and 97 per cent said that they would recommend the course to others. One learner gave this specific feedback:

This article is the third in a series from the National Disability Authority (NDA) covering issues relating to Universal Design in the digital and built environments. The first article was published in *Local Authority Times* in spring 2023, the second in summer 2023 and the fourth will be featured in the spring 2024 issue.

'I liked the real-life approach to this eLearning course. It was very interesting to hear people with lived experience talking about the aspects of the Central Bank that work for them and why. It was very informative in a clear, concise and engaging way.'

The importance of Universal Design

We all experience changes in our abilities as we move through the different stages of life. A Universal Design approach places people at the heart of the design process so that buildings and environments can be accessed, understood and used, to the greatest extent possible, by all people, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. Good design works well for everyone. Universal Design in the built environment creates a more inclusive society. Simply put, Universal Design is good design.
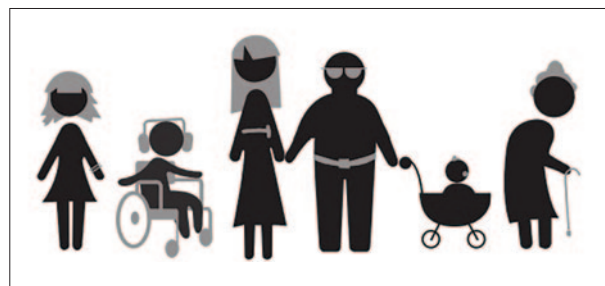
Diverse human needs and characteristics.

Universal Design is part of legislation and policy in Ireland. The publication *Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach* – available at www.universaldesign.ie – provides good practice guidance on the design of inclusive buildings, places and facilities for all.

Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach comprises ten booklets.

Circulation routes at the Central Bank of Ireland are defined using floor surfaces with visual and tactile contrast to adjoining spaces.
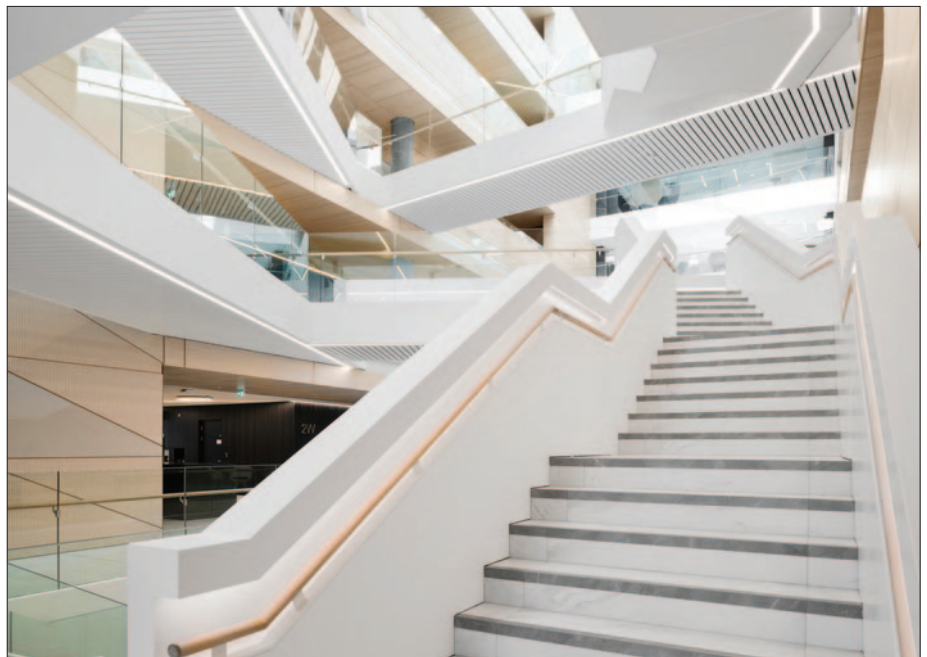
A stairs in the atrium at the Central Bank of Ireland.

Building users demonstrate Universal Design features

The focus of Universal Design is the experience of people using the environment. The *Buildings for Everyone: Central Bank of Ireland* eLearning module features direct testimony from staff at the Central Bank of Ireland, explaining features of the building that work well for them. Interactive videos highlight those features to the learner and link to the principles of Universal Design.

Tony Murray works in the Information Management and Technology Directorate of the Central Bank of Ireland. In the module, interactive videos of Tony (who is blind) using the

building illustrate how the flooring design gives cues under-foot to enable him to navigate the building with ease and confidence. Tony also explains details of the stairs and lift design in the building that enable him to move from floor to floor easily. He notes:

'To work in an environment, which is so accessible and so usable like this, it enables me to not have to consider my disability in any way.'

A video with closed captions enabled, with an option to enable audio description or Irish Sign Language (ISL).

The risk of bumping into somebody who's on the way up or on the way down is minimised.

Enable Audio Description | Enable ISL

Remember to make sure you've watched **all four videos** before you continue.

These 'user stories' in the module were developed in response to a research finding that direct testimony and engagement with diverse building users is an effective way to build empathy. Designing with empathy is key to taking a Universal Design approach.

Taking a Universal Design approach
A key aspect to the success of the Central Bank of Ireland was the client's commitment to Universal Design from the outset of the project. In the eLearning module, Liam McMunn, Environment Health and Safety Manager at the Central Bank, explains their approach:

'We considered the opportunities for making it accessible for everybody, and this is obviously much easier done when you do it from the beginning.'

Peter McGovern, Director at Henry J. Lyons, architects for the building, reiterates this view:

'What really worked was to take Universal Design as an early design principle. It was built in from the beginning, it is not a bolt-on solution. It was part of our conceptual approach to the building.'

A Universal Design approach involves users in the design process from an early stage. It prioritises the involvement, to the greatest extent possible, of users with the most diverse abilities and characteristics. Eoin O'Herlihy, Access Consultant on the project, describes user involvement in the design process at the Central Bank of Ireland:

'A key part of the project was to carry out stake-holder engagement with staff members with disabilities to identify the barriers or challenges that they faced within the workplace. It was really important to identify those barriers and to make sure that they were designed out of the new offices.'
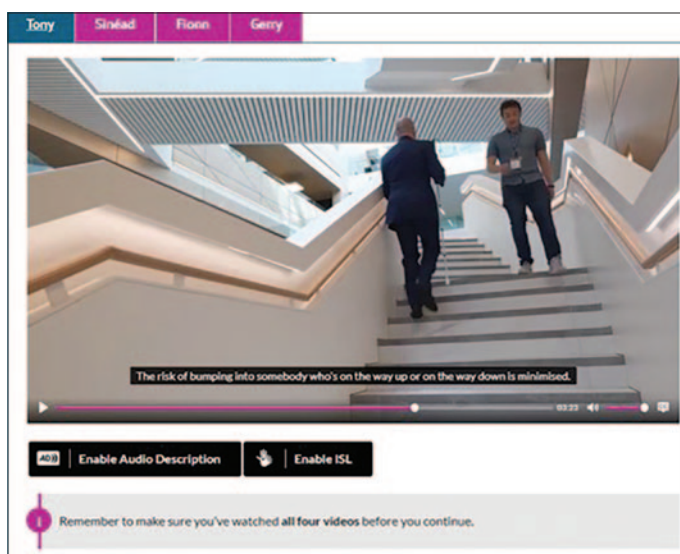
Making an accessible eLearning module
It was important that the eLearning module would be accessible to all learners, as well as being appealing and engaging to its key audience of architectural professionals. Aurion Learning, who developed the module, worked closely with the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design to ensure that the module design would meet these criteria. Most of the content in the module is video based, including inter-active features. Learners can choose the video format that they prefer, with closed captions, Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpretation and audio description options available.

Inspiring excellence
Overall, the eLearning module aims to motivate architectural professionals to learn more about Universal Design and integrate it into their own design practice. By the end of the module, all learners should be able to:

- ✓ **Recognise the benefits of embedding Universal Design throughout the design process**

- ✓ **Appreciate how a Universal Design approach addresses the needs of people with a diverse range of abilities and characteristics**

- ✓ **Describe how a Universal Design approach can inspire great workplaces**

- ✓ **Cite examples of applying Universal Design principles and guidelines as part of architectural design.**

Sustainable Development Goals Week 2023

Ireland hosted its second Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Week this year from 23 September to 1 October. It formed part of the wider European Sustainable Development Week (ESDW). A European-wide initiative, the ESDW aims to stimulate and make visible activities, projects and events that promote sustainable development. Last year, ESDW saw over 7,000 activities taking place across 24 countries, with over 100 events taking place in Ireland. This year, 196 initiatives took place all over Ireland.

The University of Galway held over 25 events on campus and took the opportunity to act as an advocate and promoter of the SDGs, as well as raising awareness internally among its community of over 20,000 students and staff. In May, the university was named as one of the national SDG champions for Ireland for 2023-2024. Some of its events included a webinar on the implementation of the SDGs in higher education, a lunchtime talk on how data science is making an impact on the SDGs, and a student-led environmental summit.

Organised by the UN, the Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

IN DEFENCE OF COUNCILLORS

Eighth Annual Public Lecture Series of UCC's Centre for Local and Regional Governance (CLRG)

Dr Aodh Quinlivan

The eighth Annual Public Lecture Series of UCC's Centre for Local and Regional Governance (CLRG) took place on Thursday, 9 November, under the theme 'In Defence of Councillors'. The welcoming address was delivered by Dr Mary C. Murphy, Head of the Department of Government and Politics. She was followed by the Lord Mayor of Cork, Councillor Kieran McCarthy, who said that councillors have to be prepared to make sacrifices in their personal lives and in their personal time but that being a local public representative remains an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Next, Dr Aodh Quinlivan presented his Director's Report for 2022/23. He highlighted recent CLRG publications and research outputs, including a report on gender equality in Cork City Council. Marking her immense contribution to the study and understanding of Irish local government, Dr Bríd Quinn was then presented with the CLRG Recognition Award (named after Philip Monahan).

The first of the night's three keynote lectures was delivered by Dr Quinn, who described the 'saga' of Limerick's directly elected mayor (DEM) and what we might expect from the historic mayoral election of 2024. She raised issues about the three Ms - mandate, mechanisms and means – and queried whether the political will exists to enable Limerick to pioneer a strong DEM system. Ending on a positive note, Dr Quinn argued that the draft DEM model for Limerick is ambitious and comprehensive and she expressed confidence that Limerick can make history in 2024 and become an exemplar within the Irish local government system.

Councillor Emma Blain, from Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council, told the audience that it was a great privilege to serve in public life and described being a councillor as a vocation rather than a job. However, being at the coalface of democracy presented challenges, she

Dr Bríd Quinn, who received the Philip Monahan Local Government Recognition Award from Lord Mayor of Cork, Councillor Kieran McCarthy. *Photo courtesy Rob Lamb*

said, especially in relation to emerging issues which are impacting on the wellbeing and safety of elected members. Councillor Blain criticised protests that have taken place outside the homes of councillors, as well as the growing incidents of physical attacks and online abuse. Drawing on recent research by the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG), she drew attention to the fact that over 57 per cent of respondents were worried or extremely worried about the impact of threats, harassment and intimidation on their families. Amongst other safety measures, Councillor Blain called for the postal addresses of councillors to be removed from local authority websites.

As the final speaker, Professor Colin Copus (Emeritus Professor of Local Politics at De Montfort University, Leicester) noted that abuse and intimidation of councillors are unfortunately part of a global trend. He pointed out that the accessibility of elected members is a great strength of local government but also a danger. The effects of abuse and intimidation are such that

councillors may be deterred from making decisions or speaking on certain issues. Many councillors in the United Kingdom have resigned their seats in recent years, often citing concerns about their mental and physical wellbeing. People are fearful of standing for election and this is weakening democratic participation. In terms of improvements that can be made, Professor Copus recommended that local authorities provide training for councillors in responding to intimidating and physically threatening situations. Consideration needs to be given to providing councillors with 'minders' when on site visits or alone on council business, as well as the use of personal alarm systems and a 24-hour emergency phone number. Finally, Professor Copus argued that local authorities need to have specialist staff members with the role of identifying fake sites and news, so as to refute false allegations about or involving councillors.

This drew the curtain down on an illuminating, but also sobering, night of local government conversation.
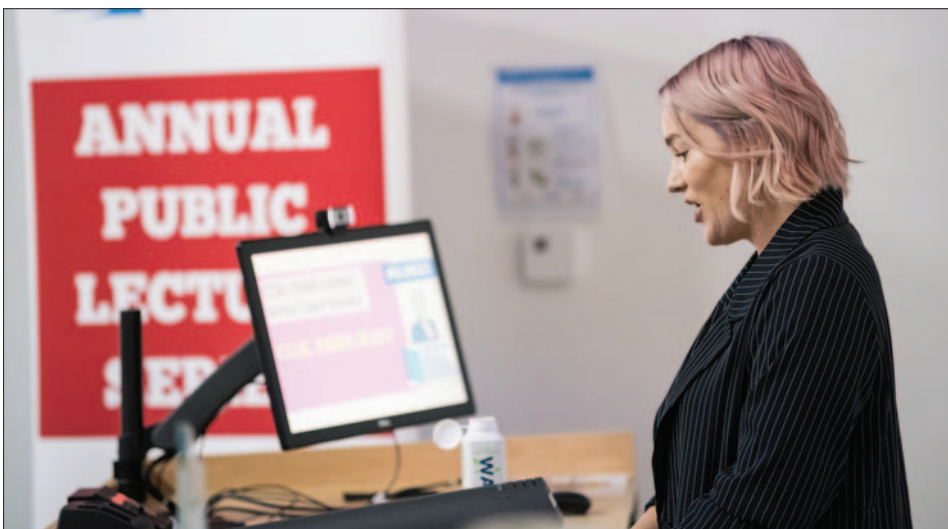
Councillor Emma Blain addressed the issue of security and safety in public life. *Photo courtesy Rob Lamb*

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

Plan to Offer Computer Science in All Nine Longford Secondary Schools

Longford County Council's efforts to work in partnership with Longford schools to offer Computer Science as a Leaving Cert option in all nine secondary schools was showcased at a national event in Kilkenny and commended by Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien TD. Organised by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC), the annual Good Practice Seminar was held on Thursday, 26 October. The project forms part of Longford's digital strategy and consists of a partnership with schools and industry, which hopes to shape Longford's future through technology. Microsoft and Ericsson are supporting the plan and its introduction to primary and secondary schools. The event took place as part of the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform's Public Service Transformation Week 2023. It provided an opportunity for local government to demonstrate good practice within the sector and gave a platform to share innovative projects that could be replicated across Ireland.

Fingal Inclusion Week 2023

The fifth Fingal Inclusion Week took place from Monday, 13 November to Sunday, 19 November, with over 70 events. Inclusion Week is an initiative of Fingal County Council's Community Development Office in collaboration with the Fingal Integration Team. Fingal Inclusion Week aims to highlight the positive work of communities, agencies and other organisations to reduce social exclusion and poverty in Fingal. It is very important in raising awareness of the excellent work being done by community groups, the Fingal Community Development Office and the Fingal Integration Team to combat social exclusion. Fingal Inclusion Week also seeks to raise awareness of the barriers experienced by citizens of Fingal that lead to social exclusion, while promoting an understanding of inclusion in Fingal. Examples of participating organisations and community groups include Rush Senior Citizens, The African Advocacy Network Ireland, Lusk Ladies' Shed, Bayside Community Centre and Sanctuary Runners.

Head of Information Systems with Longford County Council, Daniel Lynch, presenting at the NOAC Good Practice Seminar in Kilkenny. *Photo courtesy Dylan Vaughan*

Photo courtesy Fingal County Council.

Limerick City's Second Inclusive Playground Opens at O'Brien Park

The playground at O'Brien Park on Clare Street in Limerick City is ready to invite children of all abilities to come and play. Having undergone a major transformation, the playground has been officially reopened by the Mayor of the City and County of Limerick, Cllr Gerald Mitchell. The play area has been increased and resurfaced and now includes a number of features to make play more accessible and inclusive, including wheelchair-accessible equipment. The works have been completed by Browne Brothers Site Services, who were successful in securing the contract following a tendering process. The total cost of the project was €88,000. Funding of €50,000 was provided by Limerick City North councillors, with the balance provided by Limerick Sports Partnership and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

Photo courtesy Kieran Ryan Benson

Offaly Culture Night Launch – A Cultural Frame of Mind

Celebrating its thirteenth year in operation, Offaly Culture Night brought a packed programme of events as venues and public spaces opened their doors to host a range of free entertainment for Culture Night 2023 – an island-wide celebration of arts, heritage and culture. This year, there was a 30 per cent increase in the number of events from 2022, with an emphasis on diversity and inclusion.

Pictured at the launch of Offaly Culture Night are Angela Ryan Whyte, Offaly Arts Office and Tim Quinlan, Birr Artist, along with representatives from a variety of community groups, venues and organisations, including Shakefest, Rahan Comhaltas, Offaly Down Syndrome, Creative Places Edenderry, Donlon Dance Company and Music Generation Offaly, along with Esker Arts, who hosted the launch. *Photo courtesy Paul Moore Photography*

At the launch of the Scéal Trail are: (L to R) Séamus and Caitlín Uí Mhéalóid; Barry Lynch, Director of Service; Cllr Mike Bray, Leas Chathaoirleach of Kells MD; Máire Uí Fhaogháin; Mary Uí Churraoin; Tatyana Feeney; Richie Mac Liam; Ciarán Mangan, County Librarian; Nóirín Murphy; Geraldine Monaghan; Maedhbh Rogan; Fiona Lawless, CE Meath County Council. *Photo courtesy Meath County Council*

Raithcairn Playground Scéal Trail

Meath County Council Library Service has recently installed the Scéal Trail in Rathcairn Playground as an initiative to bring together physical activity, the outdoors and the enjoyment of reading. Panels placed in the playground have a QR code on them. When the code is scanned, traditional Irish songs can be heard from the book *Mo Chuid Amhráin Ghaeilge*, illustrated by Trim-based author Tatyana Feeney.

Waterford Receives Purple Flag Accreditation

Waterford has received the Purple Flag accreditation, which represents the gold standard of the management of evening and night-time economies. The award highlights Waterford's blend of entertainment, dining and culture, while ensuring the safety and wellbeing of residents and visitors between the hours of 5 p.m. and 5 a.m. There are 100 Purple Flag destinations globally.

Pictured are: (L to R) Michael Quinn, Waterford City and County Council; Avril Bowe, Waterford Chamber of Commerce; Waterford Metropolitan Mayor, Cllr Jody Power; Julie Walsh, Waterford City and County Council; Jim 'Flash' Gordon, Purple Flag Chair; Eddie Mulligan, Waterford City and County Council. *Photo courtesy Waterford County Council/Waterford in Your Pocket*

LOCALGOV DRUPAL

BUILT TO SHARE

Tipperary County Council is the first Irish council to adopt this new innovative approach to council websites.

ALL SERVICE DEPARTMENTS

NEWS CENTRE

COUNCIL WEBSITE

SERVICES FOR YOU

Have you needed to search online to see whether your local council offers a specific service? Or would you like to create a directory for your council website but know the work and time it would take to add every service manually? If so, then the latest developments at the LocalGov Drupal (LGD) initiative may excite you.

It is now possible, quickly and easily, to add all of your council's services to a site built using LGD. It is also possible to have your council's services and the website's content uploaded in Irish or any other language. These two additions to the LGD library are courtesy of Tipperary County Council, who came aboard the LGD ship a few months ago, developed these two features for its new site, and made them available for any other council to use.

Tipperary County Council joins the LocalGov Drupal project, adding Irish-language translations and the Irish Service Catalogue to the available features.

Why LocalGov Drupal?

LocalGov Drupal was initially started in the UK by councils who realised that if they shared the code for their websites, they could use money they would have spent on the basics for additional features that had not yet been developed. This is similar to the Irish government's Build to Share initiative, which is led by the Office of the Government's Chief Information Officer (OGCIO). This initiative identifies a number of commonly used processes or applications across government and streamlines and digitises them.

Because all councils generally offer the same services to the people using their websites (residents, business owners, tourists, etc.), they realised that they could accomplish more by pooling their resources and sharing the code that each council pays for, rather than working in silos and each council developing a similar code independently. This includes the added bonus of having the centralised services catalogue application processing interface (API) housed on localgov.ie. The standardising of terminology and structure across all local authorities leads to greater accessibility and familiarity for public access.

The LocalGov Drupal code, like that of its Drupal platform, is open source. This means that it is free to use – it has already been paid for by councils that have gone before. Thus, councils save money on the foundations of a website – up to 80 per cent in terms of website costs – and can instead channel their resources into building new features.

When Tipperary County Council asked Annertech for advice on building its new website using LGD, much of what was needed had already been built. What Tipperary County Council did want, which had not yet been developed, was a quick and easy way to add all of the services each of the councils in Tipperary provides. Tipperary County Council also

wanted the option of adding these services in Irish. These two features, funded by Tipperary County Council, are an excellent addition to the LGD initiative, especially for local governments who are mandated to provide information in Ireland's first official language.

Adding a council's services to a site is now as easy as installing the LocalGov Irish Service Catalogue module and selecting the Local Government Management Agency Council ID for which you wish to add the services. Adding Irish translations – which have been done by certified translators – is just as easy. It's a matter of simply installing the LocalGov Multilingual module.

Built to share

Because LGD is open source, the website code and all the features that have been added are free to use. The LGD project was born in the UK after regulations stipulated that all government websites must meet WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standards, and many local council websites were not compliant. Rather than each council rebuilding its website, the idea emerged to share code across councils, starting with Croydon and Brighton and Hove councils.

In a similar vein, in Ireland, councils have seen the vast potential in sharing code and features as part of the Build to Share initiative. As the project gains momentum, five or six other Irish councils have seen the potential and benefits of the approach and are in the process of following Tipperary into LGD.

In a true sense of build-to-share and open-source approaches, these councils can contribute further improve-ments and code to the project, which earlier councils can
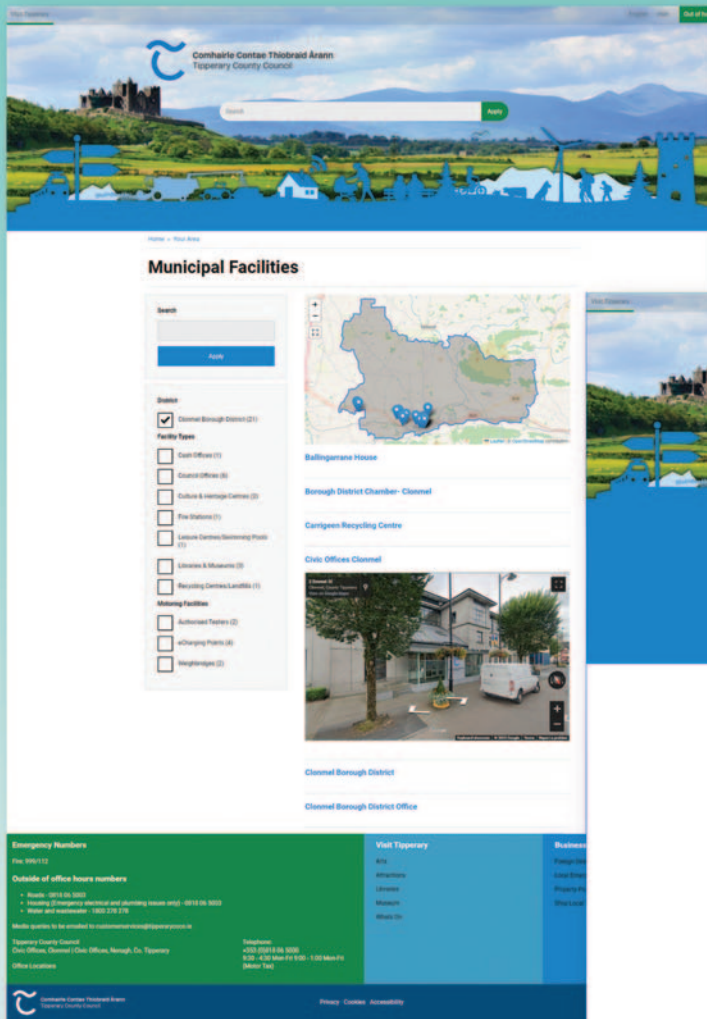
TCC Facilities Page and TCC Home Page.
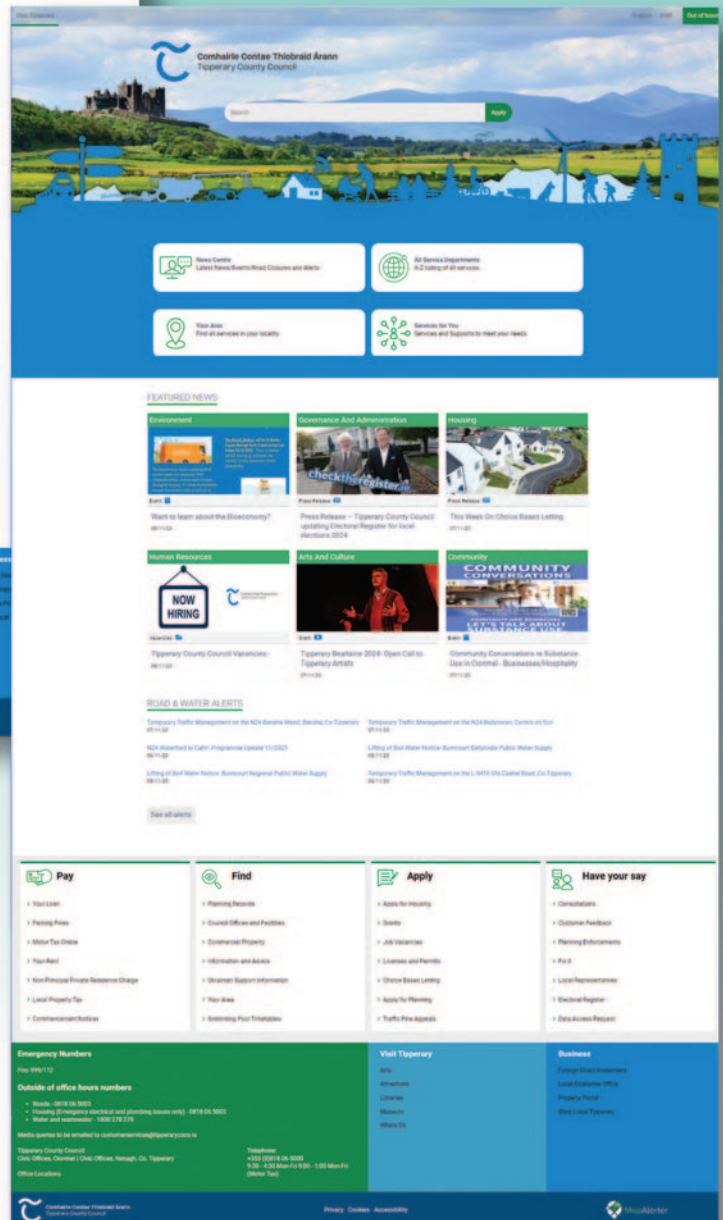
'LGD came at a great time for us in Tipperary. We were looking for a sustainable solution to the redevelopment of our website. In the true sense of build to share and an open-source approach, we could benefit from the strength in numbers LGD gave us, to avail of features and a strong core contributed by other LAs before us willing to share. We, in turn, could focus on how we could add value from an Irish perspective to make the product more appealing to Irish councils. From beginning to end, the full website was developed in less than six months.'

Ruth Maher, IS Project Leader, eDevelopment in Tipperary County Council.

also avail of. LGD websites are more like a framework for website service development. Rather than developing a static website, set in time when launched, LGD is more of a collaborative framework for sustainable online public service development, which keeps evolving.

Besides sharing features, LGD has other advantages:

- Quicker to build a website because of the shared code
- Cheaper (councils save on licence costs and developer fees)
- Secure and rigorously tested
- WCAG 2.1 AA compliant
- No vendor lock-in
- Integrated mapping (your council facilities on the ground)
- Audiences – services can be categorised by type of audience, e.g. business/farmer etc.
- Full services catalogue with API link to localgov.ie
- Support for full language translation.

It is also built using the latest version of Drupal code (Drupal 9) and because features are continuously being added, an LGD-built website need never fall behind.

Conclusion
The seeds for the LGD project were first laid in 2018, when Brighton and Hove City Council and Croydon Council started talking about working together. Today, more than 30 councils (and counting) across the UK and Ireland have benefited from the project, with the newest features being the Irish-language translations and the Irish Service Catalogue. But it doesn't stop there. LocalGov Drupal continues to grow as more councils benefit from and contribute to the project, hence the tagline **'by councils, for councils'**.

For more information, visit https://localgovdrupal.org/ or https://www.annertech.com

Comhairle Contae Thiobraid Árann
Tipperary County Council

European Committee of the Regions Annual Report 2023

The European Committee of the Regions has released the EU annual report for 2023, *The State of Regions and Cities: Managing Crises, Bringing Solutions, Building the Future*. Capturing the most pressing challenges faced by regions and cities across Europe, the report also suggests solutions from the ground to inform EU policy decisions. Insights are provided on how regions and cities address crises, such as climate disasters or the Russian war against Ukraine. The report shows how, with the green and digital transition, regions and cities will contribute to the long-term transformation of our societies, while strengthening cohesion. It also features the Regional and Local Barometer, the results of which will be discussed in the next section.

The report features ten key recommendations of the Committee of the Regions:

1. Continue and strengthen support to Ukraine by partnering with EU regions and cities for reconstruction and reform.
2. Ensure a multi-level governance approach to the energy transition. Only with increased EU funds can local and regional projects augment and improve their impact to meet the EU's climate ambition on the ground and strengthen acceptance for the green transition within local communities.
3. Invest significantly in climate adaptation and mitigation with a place-based strategy to preserve cohesion and resilience across regions and cities and in the face of the disruptive and asymmetric effects of climate change, as well as biodiversity loss.
4. Support sustainable local agriculture and partner with local and regional authorities to help make European food systems more resilient and sustainable.
5. Ensure more support to implement the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals at local and regional levels.
6. Unlock investments for the green and digital transitions, supporting people and reducing inequalities, while also fostering the industrial competitiveness of European regions.
7. Reform cohesion policy with a mission and place-based approach, applying the principle of 'do no harm to cohesion' across all policies.
8. Adopt a long-term approach to rural areas to equip them with investment in their green and digital transitions to fight depopulation effectively and attract young talent.
9. Take advantage of citizens' trust in regional and local representatives to reinforce European democracy better and to a greater extent.
10. Involve local and regional authorities, with their experience and networks, to prepare for the next wave of enlargement.

The report can be found at: https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/brochures/Pages/default.aspx?from=01/01/2023&to=01/01/2024

FROM RECOVERY TO GROWTH

Local Authority Role in Economic Development

Fergal O'Leary, Institute of Public Administration (IPA)

Since the reforms of nearly a decade ago, Ireland's local authority sector has taken up a wider and more visible economic development role. The Local Government Reform Act, 2014, which provided the legislative basis for reforms outlined in the *Putting People First* action programme, established new structures and a statutory plan with a clear economic and enterprise focus. This reform initiative was introduced in the context of a policy focus on economic recovery after the 2008 financial crash. It also reflected an international trend towards a more 'bottom-up' approach to local development. Today, as leaders of change at the local level, Ireland's city and county councils are expected to play a broader support role in a coordinated and coherent approach to economic development.

In recent years, local authorities have led, or have been heavily involved in, numerous regeneration and infra-structural projects, promotional campaigns and other economic-related initiatives. However, against the backdrop of delivery pressures in key policy areas, along with an uncertain international economic environment, the IPA carried out research exploring the experiences of local authorities in their enhanced economic development role. Findings from this research project, which are based on key informant interviews and survey feedback, are outlined in this article.

2023

2008

Putting People First (2012) and the Local Government Reform Act, 2014

In Ireland, the years following the fiscal crisis witnessed the return of mass unemployment and emigration; creating jobs, supporting businesses and promoting economic development were therefore policy priorities. *Putting People First* reflected this focus on national economic recovery, stating: 'In current economic circumstances, local government needs to contribute to the national recovery effort'.[1] The reforms proposed in an action programme included:

- The establishment in each local authority of a dedicated Strategic Policy Committee for Economic Development and Enterprise Support
- The establishment of a network of Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) to take on functions of City/County Enterprise Boards
- The introduction of a six-year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) with economic elements to promote local economic development.

Current context for economic development and enterprise support

Ireland's economic fortunes have improved considerably over more recent years. But economic growth also brings domestic pressures, such as housing and labour shortages, while external events and changing global trends create uncertainties for the country's open economy. In this context, developing an economically resilient and sustainable economy remains the overriding policy priority for economic development agencies.

While the stronger economic development role was welcomed by the local government sector at the time, it generated some initial uncertainty and challenges for staff, regarding capacity, resources, and collaboration, especially in the context of a staff recruitment embargo. Many interviewees acknowledged that local government's economic role is today more multifaceted than the traditional focus on planning and infrastructure. Every function of local authorities contributes, in some way, to economic development: from tourism marketing and transport planning to the maintenance of public facilities and placemaking. Increasingly, wellbeing and quality-of-life

[1] Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012a, p. 21.

[2] Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2012b) and Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2021).

LOCAL AUTHORITY CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

€4.51 BILLION
2022

€1.82 BILLION
2013

considerations are driving the work of local authorities as they strive to create attractive places in which to live, work and invest.

Local government's expanded economic development role has been reflected by an increased level of spending in this area. For example, while the budgeted local authority capital expenditure for 2013 was €1.82 billion, the figure had climbed to €4.51 billion for 2022 (these figures relate to expenditure on capital projects in all areas).[2]

In performing their role, local authorities work within an evolving and centralised policy environment, as policy-makers respond to emerging challenges. Local government, in its broader economic remit, now interacts with many government departments and state agencies; consequently, a range of national policies and work programmes influences, to varying degrees, the activities of local councils.

Some key insights into the economic development role

Informal relationships are key to local government's role: Council staff often get things done by having effective relationships with peers in stakeholder organisations, by being able to pick up the phone and speak directly to the individual concerned about a particular matter. From a local authority perspective, developing and maintaining good informal working relations with senior managers in other organisations is important for helping to understand issues

and pressures that stakeholders are facing, which is necessary for progressing projects.

Profile of the LEOs: The contribution of the LEOs to enterprise support has seen the network develop a high profile nationally. As a new structure, it took time for the LEOs to establish relationships with local businesses and entrepreneurs and to raise awareness of their supports. It seems that the strong branding and publicity of the LEOs was important for developing their profile among clients. Many interviewees felt that the LEOs have facilitated positive engagement between local authorities and business owners.

'Soft' skills essential for progressing LECP actions: As local authorities have no powers over state agencies, and given the lack of dedicated LECP funding, effective collaboration with state agencies to advance actions in the plan is essential. As one interviewee noted, progress with the LECP is largely dependent on good personal relationships and 'soft' skills like influencing: 'We get stuff done by relationships ... it's all carrot and no stick'.

Availability of funding for the sector has held up: Despite issues with the application and reporting processes in respect of funding for economic development projects, the high level of grant funding has been maintained in recent years. Indeed, an interviewee noted that traditionally the big challenge for local authorities has been the lack of financial resources, but now there is a shortage of staff to help deliver projects after capital funding has been secured.

Strengthening the economic development role: Strategic challenges and opportunities

Local government, in the economic development field, aims to help address significant policy challenges, such as regional economic disparities and the transition to a zero-carbon economy. However, the ability of the sector to lead change and deliver on projects is hampered by a number of factors. In this context, local authorities need to have a strategic view across a range of areas. Looking to the future, and from a strategic management perspective, participants in the research project were asked to identify the major challenges, opportunities and priorities for the sector in the years ahead.

Main strategic challenges facing local authorities

Shortage of staff to deliver projects: The lack of staff can have a detrimental effect on project timelines. One interviewee noted that all local authorities are facing staff shortages in key areas: 'Lack of planners, engineers, technical staff across the board, clerks of works to manage projects, administrative support for governance of projects – staffing is one of the biggest issues, not the funding'. Against the backdrop of full employment, the Irish job market is highly competitive with, currently, plenty of job opportunities in the private market.

Specialist skills required: Particular competencies that are needed to support the work of local councils in economic development were identified. The entrepreneurial nature of the economic role means that it is critical to be able to understand business needs clearly and to network effectively in a business environment. As the local authorities interact with a range of agencies and stake-holders, highly developed 'soft' skills in areas like collaboration and influencing are important. Furthermore, expertise in procurement, bid-writing, the preparation of tender documents, and in the management and oversight of contracts are essential to support the delivery of projects.

Staff movement: The issue of staff moving into and out of economic development units in local authorities was raised during interviews. In some cases, council employees transfer into the unit following promotion from another service delivery area. This means that a newly appointed member of the unit can be somewhat lacking in local development skills or experience. In addition, the lack of opportunities for career progression in economic development units, especially in smaller local authorities, makes the retention of experienced and skilled staff members a challenge. While staff movement is inevitable, what is a key consideration is knowledge sharing among staff in these units and mainstreaming economic development so that as many staff members as possible have exposure to this area.

Funding arrangements for projects: There is a desire within the sector to move away from the competitive funding model for capital investment projects. Several research contributors argued that the processes and rules associated with grant schemes, which can often be technical and resource intensive, overly complicate the funding landscape and ought to be reviewed. Furthermore, it was stated that there is a risk to local authorities of exposure to an unforeseen escalation in project costs, owing to price inflation or economic recession. Ensuring the financial resilience of a project is therefore important. In this context, greater consideration perhaps needs to be given to risk sharing and financial flexibility.

Governance: It was noted during the research that local authorities operate within a very rigid governance

environment. The rules around EU procurement or the public spending code can make the delivery of capital projects a challenge by slowing progress. While adherence to the rules governing public spending is essential from a value-for-money perspective, limited staffing and expertise can make it a demanding process and impact on project delivery. With local authorities facing significant delivery pressures in key areas, a review of these rules is perhaps required to help ensure a balanced approach to governance.

Main strategic opportunities for local authorities in economic development

More can be achieved by the sector: As government departments and agencies maintain a high degree of control over programme delivery at the local level, it was argued that this can undermine the local authority developmental role. There is a view that more can be achieved by the sector in economic development, but the delegation of functions from the centre to the local level is required, along with additional resources.

Need for strategic plans to respond to external events: Recent years have clearly shown how the damaging economic effects of global events and trends can trickle down to the local level. From a local authority perspective, these experiences underline the importance of having strategic management plans in place to support a flexible and speedy response to changing economic circumstances.

Training: To help address competency gaps, it was suggested that a training programme should be introduced to provide new council staff with an overview of the economic development role and how it relates to wider economic and enterprise policies. This would give new staff a grounding in economic development. The provision of more specialist training could help fill knowledge gaps in respect of specific policies or develop 'soft' skills.

Peer learning to develop expertise: To support their work, it is thought that local authority staff should learn more from peer organisations at home and abroad. As part of a peer network, staff can gain much from the experiences and expertise of others. The sharing of knowledge, experiences and best practice is essential to learning lessons and developing more effective approaches. For example, there is perhaps scope for shared learning on the funding and procurement processes.

Strategic approach: Different parts of Ireland have different economic priorities, strengths and weaknesses, necessitating different local responses. One interviewee stressed the importance of a strategic approach to local development: 'I think look at your area in a more analytical way and pursue sectors that are more appropriate to your area as distinct to chasing every rainbow.' There was also a view that local authorities should perhaps focus on fewer projects; instead, they should prioritise projects that are more impactful in the longer term.

Conclusion

Local authorities took up an expanded economic role in the context of a whole-of-government focus on national recovery and the creation of jobs; today, the sector seeks to support Ireland's thriving economy. This article, as part of a wider research project, has looked at recent experiences of the local authority economic development role, highlighting challenges and areas where it could be strengthened.

Notwithstanding the challenges identified by this research, there is greater recognition within the public and private sectors of the economic development contribution of local government. Its response to the economic fallout from Brexit and the pandemic effectively showed that local government is well placed to support local businesses. The research findings indicate a strong desire within the sector to build on recent successes in economic development and achieve more for communities across the country.

The urgency around building a more resilient and sustainable national economy, and addressing regional disparities, necessitates a strengthening of local government's capacity in economic development. By taking a more strategic approach, underpinned by appropriate levels of staffing, funding, and powers, local government can make a greater contribution to the development of areas that are attractive to live, work and invest in.

References

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European Committee of the Regions' Regional and Local Barometer 2023

The results from the European Committee of the Regions' Regional and Local Barometer 2023 that took place from July to September 2023 have been published. The survey provided a platform for local politicians in the EU to share their opinions on Europe's challenges and priorities. The answers reveal what local politicians would prioritise at the EU level, how aware they are of EU-wide initiatives and of EU funding opportunities, what they think of the future of Europe, and what their responses are to the emergency created by the war in Ukraine. In 27 EU member states, 2,907 interviews were completed with local and regional politicians.

Overall findings

In regard to the profile of surveyed local and regional representatives, 68 per cent were male and 31 per cent were female. The largest age group consisted of 55 years and older, which constituted 47 per cent of the respondents, while the 18–24 age group constituted just 1 per cent. When asked if regions and cities should have more influence in EU policymaking and in the debate on the future of the European Union, 91 per cent of respondents agreed that they should have more influence. In terms of which areas of EU policymaking regions and cities should have a greater say in, about half of respondents selected 'a stronger economy, social justice and jobs' (52 per cent), 'education, culture, youth and sport' (51 per cent), and 'climate crisis and the environment' (51 per cent).

Regarding the awareness of EU funding, 23 per cent responded that they were aware of, and had been involved in, EU Cohesion Policy funding received by their city or region in the past two years. In contrast, 36 per cent of respondents replied they were aware of it but had not been involved, and 33 per cent answered that they were not aware and had not been involved; this number ranged from 2 per cent in Croatia to 71 per cent in Denmark.

More than four in ten respondents (45 per cent) considered that regions and cities could contribute to the reconstruction of Ukraine by involving EU regions and cities in a wider European plan for the reconstruction of Ukraine.
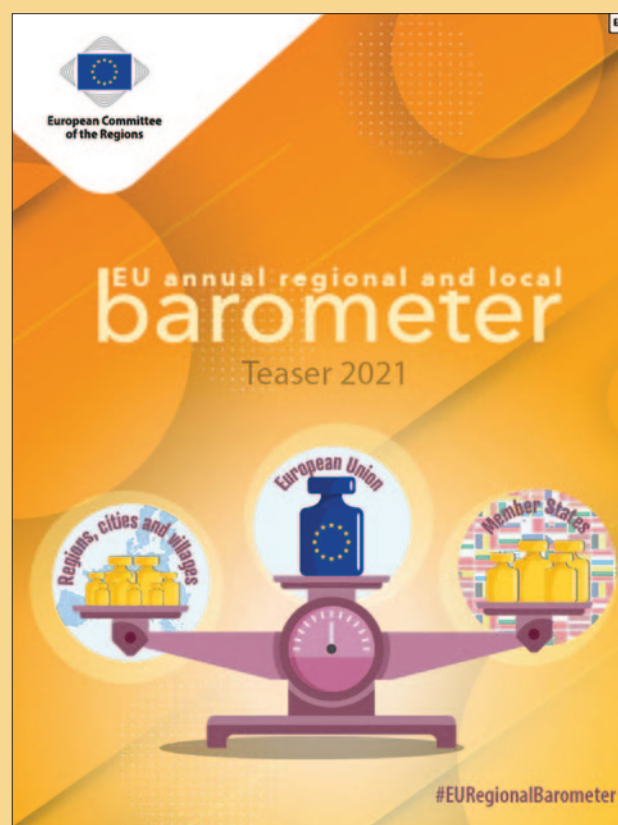
Ireland-specific findings

The Irish-specific findings show that 75 per cent of the respondents were male and 23 per cent female. In comparison to the total respondent figure across the EU of 47 per cent aged 55 years and older, 60 per cent of the Irish respondents were in that age bracket. When asked about how the Cohesion Policy funding brought added value to their city or region, only 15 per cent of the Irish respondents selected that it provided support to specific types of projects, compared to 53 per cent on an EU-wide level. The highest form through which the Irish respondents believed the Cohesion Policy funding brought added value was through cross-border cooperation with other cities and regions (35 per cent).

In relation to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the survey included a question on the most important actions local or regional authorities took to respond to the emergency created by the war against Ukraine. Three quarters (75 per cent) of the Irish local and regional representatives responded that the most important action that they took was the creation of reception centres and provision of housing for displaced people.

More information on the Barometer can be found at: https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Pages/EURegionalBarometer-Survey-2023.aspx

WHO WOULD BE A COUNCILLOR?

POLICY MAKING

OVERSIGHT

LEADERSHIP

LOCAL AUTHORITY

REPRESENTATION

Colette Finn

'Why would you want to be a councillor?' Invariably that is the reaction that I encounter when I tell people that I am an elected councillor. There is usually a look of pity or derision on people's faces. This is not good in a democracy.

My politicisation began in Africa in the 1980s, when I went to work on the Medical Laboratory Training Project. I observed an economy based on subsistence farming and repatriated monies sent by migrants. This experience in Africa taught me that the who, what and why of decision-making matters. Politics really matters. Women can be told that politics is best left to the men. This is untrue; gender also matters.

In 2010, I was one of the founders of the 50/50 group in Cork. The group was set up to raise awareness amongst the public about the underrepresentation of women in politics and why it mattered. We also aimed to put pressure on the Government to live up to its commitments on gender equality. In 1985, the then Taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald, signed the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This committed Ireland to addressing the gender imbalance in Irish politics.

Candidate gender quotas are a mechanism that can help address this imbalance. Ireland enacted candidate gender quota legislation in 2012. This legislation tied public funding to candidate gender balance in general elections. It forced the political parties to pay attention to the gender issue.

Having first come into effect in the 2016 general election, gender-balanced representation is an important issue for our political parties.

Having stood as a candidate for the Green Party in 2019, I was honoured to be elected. However, I did not doubt the challenge of taking on a job where there are lots of different expectations. That is the substance of this article. What does the public really want their councillors to do? What does the political system really want its local councils to do?

The Moorhead report on the role and remuneration of Local Authority elected members[1] concluded that the role of councillor should entail five main areas of work:

- Policy making and local authority performance in the delivery of its services
- Oversight, governance and compliance of and by the local authority
- Representing the local authority and the community on external bodies
- Community leadership and political advocacy
- Representation of individual constituents, as appropriate.

Sara Moorhead SC, the report's author, argued that councillors spend too much time on the public-facing aspects of the job. She contended that they should limit their interactions with the public and maintain their council membership as a part-time role.

Consider the important roles of our local government. These encompass planning, enterprise and economic development, social and community development, climate action, housing, infrastructure, transport, libraries, recreation, and culture. The total number of services provided by local authorities in Ireland is more than 1,100, 'ranging from abandoned vehicle removal to Zoonose monitoring'.[2] Think how much influence all these areas of responsibility have over the lives of our citizens.

Nonetheless, Ireland's local government system has been described as the Cinderella of the political system, a system that is relatively weak in terms of powers and responsibilities. For example, on average, Ireland has one council per 160,000 citizens, contrasting starkly with France where the ratio is one council per 1,600 citizens, or Germany where there is one council for 5,000 citizens. Ireland is typically ranked at, or near the bottom of, the international Local Autonomy Index, which ranks local government systems in terms of their autonomy.

At present, there are 31 local authorities, down from 114 in 2014. The number of elected councillors per head of population has fallen from 1:1,600 in 2014 to 1:4,830 today. It is also underfunded. In 2008, there were 38,000 local authority staff in Ireland, while in 2022 there were just under 32,000, nearly 6,000 of whom are in Dublin City (2022).[3] Local government spending as a percentage of total governmental spending is typically around 8 per cent in Ireland, with the EU average at 23 per cent, and in Denmark it is 64 per cent. Our local government has been starved of resources.

Local authorities have no particular powers to introduce their own levies, such as a bed tax on hotels, or an upper-storey vacant unit charge that is different from a vacant site levy. Those are the kind of levies that could support urban regeneration and increase residential living in the city, but the local authorities at present do not have adequate scope for autonomous, proactive, pro-social decision-making.

In Ireland, we have laboured under the defunding of public administration; public services have been outsourced to the community and voluntary sector rather than directly delivered by local councils. This further erodes public confidence in public administration and politics. One of the good things that came out of the banking crisis is that it undermined – fatally, I hope – the idea that the profit motive would deliver for the public good. Privatisation is not and never will be a solution to public sector reform.

We have to put power back into local politics. This puts power back into the act of voting. That would be good for all of us. Social media pressure and the rise of the far right have added to the demands of the job. Social media is a new phenomenon. Abuse that was always there is now amplified and made more invasive because it can come through your phone. However, I argue that politics is a workplace and, as such, the standards that apply in any workplace should also apply to politics.

[1] Sara Moorhead SC, *Independent Review of the Role and Remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members.* Available at https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d928f-independent-review-of-the-role-and-remuneration-of-local-authority-elected-members-final-report/

[2] The Citizens' Assembly (2022), *Final Report and Recommendations of the 2022 Dublin Citizens' Assembly*, p. 25. Available at https://citizensassembly.ie/reports/

[3] Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Databank. Available at https://databank.per.gov.ie/Public_Service_Numbers.aspx?rep=SectorTrend

Looking to the future

What does the public think a councillor should be doing? What does a councillor think they should be doing? What does the executive think a councillor should be doing? This is the debate that I think we need to have.

I believe that deliberative democracy is about coming up with evidence-based solutions. I show people how to navigate the political and administrative system. I also tell people when I cannot help and point them in the direction of the person who can assist. Can politicians tell people the truth and still get re-elected?

In the citizens' assembly on a directly elected mayor for Dublin, the citizens recommended that a long list of areas should be devolved to the mayor and local government. We have a highly centralised system of government at present. It is difficult to see local government becoming more relevant to the public without a more powerful mayoral role. The citizens' assembly recommended that the role of councillors should be made full-time and that they should be provided with secretarial support.

Think of all the ways in which local councils exercise power and all the ways in which they are involved with other government organisations. These areas can range from drug prevention to sports promotion to education to river basin management. External bodies in which councillors partici-pate include regional assemblies, HSE forums, third level governing bodies, educational and training boards, cross-border bodies, sport partnerships, Drugs Task Forces, river basin management committees, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Forbartha Gaeilge. Should councillors be treated and paid as part-timers when all things are considered? I think not.

Despite everything and my overriding desire to see more reform and more equality for our role, I enjoy being a councillor. I like helping people if I can. I like influencing policy for a more just, equal and sustainable future. I don't like being unable to solve local issues because of the overly centralised system that we have.

Local government provides a forum for local decision-making but is often hampered by obligations and constraints set at central level. By enhancing the role, I believe that we will attract good candidates, which is essential for a thriving democracy. We need good candidates to be willing to put themselves forward. Otherwise, an opportunity for improved decision making is squandered. Local government could be much better, and we should be all working towards making it so.

The views expressed in this article are my own personal viewpoint and are not necessarily those of the Green Party.

Irish Heritage Studies

The Office of Public Works (OPW) is delighted to announce the launch of a new annual research journal, *Irish Heritage Studies*. Published in association with Gandon Editions, the journal will showcase original critical research rooted in the substantial portfolio of material culture in the care of, and managed by, the OPW: built heritage; historical, artistic, literary and scientific collections; the national and international histories linked to these places and objects; and its own long organisational history. Journal articles will contribute to a deeper understanding of this remarkable collection of national heritage and investigate new perspectives on aspects of its history.

Submissions in abstract form are now invited from academics, post-graduate students, allied professionals, independent researchers and OPW personnel. The journal welcomes submissions from those at all stages of their research careers. The deadline for abstracts for the first volume is 15 December 2023.

Further details can be found at:
https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/irish-heritage-studies/

Irish Heritage Studies
The annual research journal of the Office of Public Works

Abstracts for **volume one** due by **15 December 2023**

OPW's Architecture, Archives & Libraries, Demesnes & Parks, Engineering, Fine & Decorative Arts, Historical Botanical Collections, Marginalised & Global Histories, Monuments, Museology, OPW Organisational History, Social History

Planning and Decision Making

Minister of State, with responsibility for Community Development, Charities and Integration, Joe O'Brien TD officially launched an updated, second version of *A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making* in October.

Building on the original version of the guide, it has been updated to include additional case studies and resources to support local authorities as well as any organisations engaged in planning and decision making at a local level. The updated guide was informed by learnings from three pilot programmes and feedback gained from the original process of developing the guide. The reference guide is aimed at ensuring that the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities have opportunities to engage and participate in local planning and decision making.

Training programmes on the guide as well as on inter-cultural awareness and the Public Sector Duty have been rolled out this year, with further training to be provided to local authority staff on facilitation skills, as well as a series of videos to assist in bringing the principles of engagement to life.

The guide was developed in conjunction with Pobal and the community and voluntary sector, as part of a wider Dormant Accounts Funded project on the engagement of marginalised communities at the local level.

Photo courtesy Chambers Ireland

Local Authority of the Year 2023

Limerick City and County Council has been named Local Authority of the Year 2023 at the twentieth annual Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards. The overall award recognised the Council's extensive work in promoting Limerick as a positive, inclusive and sustainable place to live, work, visit and invest. Limerick also received the Supporting Sustainable Communities Award with the project 'Student Planners: Inspiring Future Generations', and the Health and Wellbeing Award with the project 'Limerick on Foot'.

The full list of winners is as follows: Donegal County Council received the Diversity and Inclusion Award, Kildare County Council won the Festival of the Year Award, Waterford City and County Council won the Supporting Tourism Award, Kerry County Council received the Promoting Economic Development Award, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council took home the Local Authority Innovation Award, Dublin City Council was awarded the Sustainable Environment and Biodiversity Award, Fingal County Council scooped the Communications Award, South Dublin County Council received the Climate Change Award, Carlow County Council won the Sustaining the Arts Award, Kildare County Council was awarded the Municipal District Initiative Award, Cork City Council took home the Urban Revival Award, Waterford City and County Council won the Heritage and Built Environment Award, and Wicklow County Council received the Age Friendly Initiative Award.

The awards were held in association with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
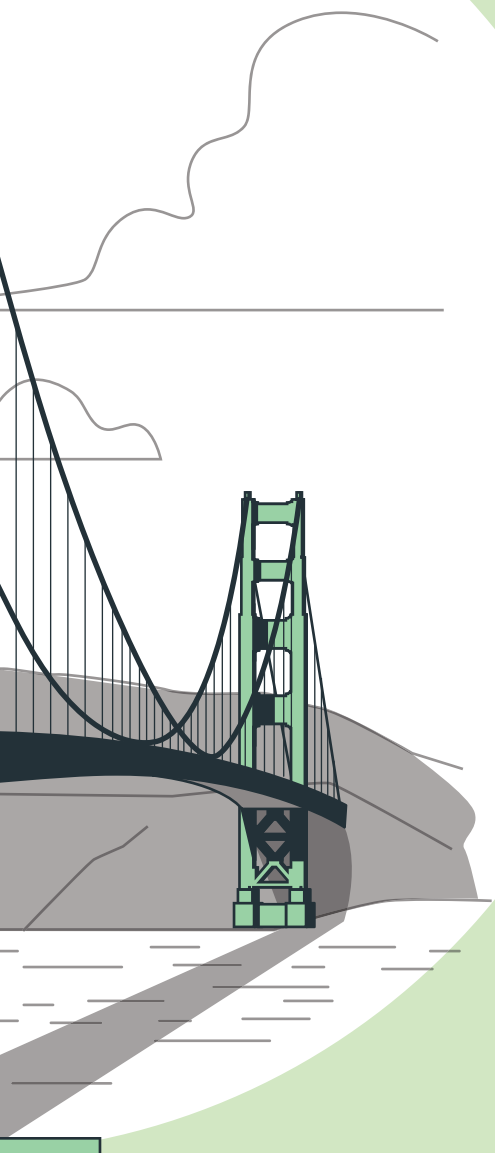
BRIDGE BUILDING

Award-Winning Place Based Leadership Development (PBLD) Pilot Programmes delivering impact in Darndale and Drogheda

Dr Rob Worral, Rob Worral Consultancy
Paul Rogers, Northside Partnership
Dr Laura Knight, Laura Knight & Associates
Siobhán Bradley, *Open*Talk

Following a number of shootings and violent gang-related deaths in Darndale and Drogheda over the course of 2019 and 2020, local politicians and partners realised that they needed to find a new approach to addressing the considerable socio-economic challenges that both areas faced.

In parallel, Northside Partnership (NSP), a Local Development Company operating across the northeast area of Dublin city in which Darndale lies, and which has provided support to the community for over 25 years, also recognised that no one organisation has the capabilities or insights to bring about effective change of its own accord. NSP also considered that since the economic crash of 2008, the increased use of public procurement and tendering for social and community services has led to an increased focus on contract management and transactional relationships. In practice, this led to an undermining of partnership and collaborative approaches. NSP was keen to identify mechanisms to build enhanced capability and capacity for interagency work at a local level. This led NSP to identify Place-Based Leadership Development (P-BLD) as one possible mechanism, prompted by a presentation by Dr Rob Worrall at a national Local and Community Development Committee (LCDC) networking event organised by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) in November 2019. This followed on from the successful delivery of pilot P-BLD programmes for Intersectoral Urban Violence Prevention (IUVP) in Kenya, Guatemala and Uganda.

Leading for collective impact

In April 2020, after initial follow-up discussions, Dr Rob Worrall and NSP worked together and jointly submitted *Leading for Collective Impact* (L4CI) to the Department of Rural and Community Development, which set out their proposal for a pilot P-BLD programme in Darndale and Drogheda. In doing so, NSP and Dr Worrall recognised the similar challenges faced by both communities as well as the opportunities for collaborative learning and action, especially given the founding of the Nolan Implementation Oversight Group (IOG) in Darndale and the Drogheda Implementation Plan Board.

Following a delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 18-month L4CI programme was launched by Minister of State Joe O'Brien TD in January 2022 and was completed in May 2023. The programme had the following aims:

- To identify and recruit potential leaders from across the community, including residents, those working in local community and voluntary organisations and those working in statutory service providers
- To develop their leadership potential through collaborative workshops and one-to-one professional coaching
- To provide an opportunity for participants to take a deep dive into key social, economic and community challenges, while developing their individual and collective understanding
- To enable participants to experience and implement a range of creative and collaborative methodologies to broaden thinking on how to address relevant themes identified by the participants

Two reports for Darndale and Drogheda commissioned respectively by Dublin City Council (DCC) and the Department of Justice (DoJ) sought to identify priority actions to address the issues faced by each area. Both reports, *Darndale, A Long View of an Enduring Challenge*,[1] and *Drogheda: Creating a Bridge to a Better Future*,[2] identified improved interagency coordination and collaboration amongst key local stakeholders as a prerequisite for effective implementation of their recommendations.

[1] J. Nolan (2020), *Darndale, A Long View of an Enduring Challenge: A Socio-Economic and Community Plan*, Dublin City Council
[2] V. Geiran (2021), *Drogheda: Creating a Bridge to a Better Future, Community Safety & Wellbeing: Report of a Scoping Review for the Department of Justice*, Department of Justice

Pictured with their certificates are the participants from the final group session with Darndale and Drogheda. *Photo courtesy Dearbháil Butler*

- ■ To enable participants to understand others' perspectives and the challenges and barriers impacting on individuals and agencies working for the betterment of the community
- ■ To help build a coalition of leaders across the community and strengthen relationships of trust that would enable collaboration and partnership working.

L4CI has been described as 'a pioneering initiative to build individual and collective capacity to lead with courage, creativity and collaboration and drive cross cutting approaches to address complex social issues.' Its overall goal was to enable 48 participants to become more effective local leaders to work collaboratively and to enable collective leadership in their local areas. L4CI focused on challenging people's mindsets to help them realise that they have the capacity to learn new ways of being, thinking and doing, and that effective solutions would emerge from collective working, rather than being imposed from the outside.

In addition, the leaders were given tools to enable them to assess and build their capabilities in key areas, such as conflict management and emotional intelligence. Moreover, L4CI allowed people the time to develop a deeper under-standing of the key challenges affecting their respective areas and to identify, try out and review the learning from possible solutions.

Workshops
Another core element was a 360-degree Leadership Effectiveness Assessment (LEA) for each participant. This was led by Siobhán Bradley of *Open*Talk and included six one-to-one (or individual) coaching sessions for each participant. The aim of coaching was to enable participants to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, other sectors in the community and the challenges they all face in working to support the area. This sparked the confidence and conviction in participants to realise their own and their community's full potential. Leaders are now thinking differently and working collaboratively in joined-up problem solving. Overall, 48 community leaders across Darndale and Drogheda were ignited to drive enduring social change, by enabling new thinking, new leadership, new and renewed sense of purpose and hope for communities long impacted by 'complex' social challenges and economic deprivation.

Following the induction workshops, L4CI consisted of four two-day workshops in each place, each of which culminated in the development of action plans to address core issues identified by participants and aligned to priority themes set out in the Nolan and Guerin reports respectively. This was followed by a three-day workshop bringing together both the Darndale and Drogheda cohorts, enabling an exchange of learning and experiences from collaborative practices. On the second day, Dr Sean Redmond, University of Limerick, shared his practice-based research on Drug Related Intimidation and Violence (DRIVE), setting the context for participants to work in inter-place teams to address a core challenge common to both places.

Impact and evaluation were designed into L4CI from the outset as participants were asked to complete questionnaires sharing their learning after each of the workshops. Mid-term

and final evaluation and impact reviews were carried out by Dr Laura Knight, an independent expert, including one-to-one interviews with a representative sample of participants and their collaborators who worked with them in their respective local areas. Dr Knight's findings were formally presented in the presence of participants and Minister Joe O'Brien, as well as officials from the DRCD. Dr Knight concluded that L4CI had demonstrated considerable impact at individual inter-agency and place-based levels, with intra and inter-place collaborative initiatives continuing to grow and evolve beyond the life of the programmes. Indeed, the leaders who have graduated from the programme continue to collaborate together within their respective areas, and also organise joint events to share their learning from the implementation of their place-based action plans.

Key recommendations

The evaluation and impact reviews also set out a number of key recommendations, based on learning from the programme, including:

- The importance of a backbone organisation, which is committed to leading on development, support, coordination and review as part of the ongoing evaluation and improvement of the initiative. The role played by Northside Partnership in this respect cannot be underestimated.
- The need for pre-development work in supporting community participation. Northside Partnership has considerable experience in the development of leadership potential amongst residents, through initiatives such as the Young Community Leaders Programme
- The need to provide additional pre-programme familiarisation workshops to residents, in order to build their confidence and understanding and ensure that they are fully able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the programme.

Conclusions

The positive impact of the Drogheda and Darndale P-BLD programmes has also been recognised internationally as the programme has recently won the International Coaching Federation's (ICF) Ireland President's Award, for a project which delivers social impact through coaching.

In addition, working in collaboration with DIGNITY (Danish Institute Against Torture) and lead local NGO Citoyen des Rues and a wide range of intersectoral partners, Dr Rob Worrall has just delivered a very impactful two-day pilot P-BLD for Intersectoral Urban Violence Prevention workshop involving 30 young leaders in Fes, Morocco.

In Ireland, it is hoped that further P-BLD programmes will be developed and implemented from early 2024 onwards.

Participants in the Place Based Leadership Development workshop in Darndale. *Photo courtesy Dearbháil Butler*

Darndale and Drogheda cohorts working together at a group session. *Photo courtesy Dearbháil Butler*

Note: *L4CI was funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development. It was delivered in Darndale and Drogheda by Northside Partnership and Louth Local Development respectively, with Northside Partnership acting as the lead agency. Dr Rob Worrall designed and facilitated the programme, which was evaluated by Dr Laura Knight. The coaching element of the programme was delivered by OpenTalk, led by Siobhán Bradley.*

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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