

LOCAL AUTHORITY TIMES

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THE TIME TO ADAPT IS NOW

**Local authorities take action
on climate change**



Inside: Local Property Tax: Record number of local authorities vary
LPT rate upwards

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THE TIME TO ADAPT IS NOW:

Local authorities take action on climate change

This article is a joint effort of the four Climate Action Regional Offices

Climate change will create new vulnerabilities for Ireland and worsen existing ones. Some level of uncertainty will always exist regarding the exact impacts climate change will have on Ireland however there is sufficient data currently to enable Ireland to start preparing effective adaptation measures to address the likely predicted impacts of climate change now. The all-of-society approach needed to address climate change, including the public sector and local authorities, requires an engaged focus on addressing both climate change adaptation and mitigation.

In order to address these urgent challenges, each local authority in Ireland has developed a **Climate Adaptation Strategy** along with an associated Action List and these have now been formally approved by each local authority. This has followed on from the National Adaptation Framework (NAF) which was published in response to the provisions of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 where all local authorities were tasked with producing a Climate Adaptation Strategy for their functional areas.



The all-of-society approach needed to address climate change, including the public sector and local authorities, requires an engaged focus on addressing both climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Important role of local authorities in tackling climate change

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) have acknowledged the important role that the local government sector plays in planning for and responding to emergency situations. Local authorities can react faster and more effectively to local climate events, due to their close relationship with communities and their local knowledge of the natural and man-made environment. This has been demonstrated in their response to extreme weather events all over Ireland, over the last number of years.

With regard to climate change mitigation, the leadership role that local authorities can play in addressing climate action is also highlighted in the Government's Climate Action Plan 2019. The plan, comprising over 180 mitigation actions, represents a shared outlook and an all-of-society approach to how Ireland will achieve its 2030 climate and energy targets, and sets out a trajectory to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The leadership role the public sector can play in tackling the climate crisis is fundamental to stimulating action across other sectors and by the general public. In this context, the four Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO), have a key role in implementing and supporting various actions in the Climate Action Plan 2019, and will foster and advance the continuing efforts of local authorities in addressing climate action across the country.

The Climate Action Plan 2019 also details the role that local authorities will have in addressing climate change mitigation. In particular, it requires each local authority in Ireland to approve a Climate Action Charter to address a range of principles including advocating climate action in policies and practices, reducing carbon emissions, increasing energy efficiency, staff engagement and partnerships with enterprise and community groups. It is anticipated that all local authorities will adopt a Climate Action Charter by end of 2019. There is also scope for local authorities to become key partners and enablers of an expanded network of Sustainable Energy Communities across the country.

The Climate Action Regional Offices

The DCCAE funded the establishment of four Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) in 2018. The mission of the CAROs is to support and assist local authorities in developing and implementing their climate action strategies and they have been working with the 31 local authorities throughout Ireland in this regard. The CARO Atlantic Seaboard South covers the counties of Cork, Limerick, Kerry and Clare and the lead authority is Cork County Council. Mayo County Council leads the CARO Atlantic Seaboard North and covers the counties of Donegal, Sligo, Mayo and Galway. The Dublin CARO covers the four local authorities in Dublin and is led by Dublin City Council. Kildare County Council is leading the Eastern Midlands CARO and has teamed up with Kilkenny County Councils to cover the region comprising 17 Local Authority, excluding Dublin, encompassing the border, midlands, south east and eastern coastal counties of the country.

Local authorities have a critical role in managing climate risks and vulnerabilities and identifying necessary adaptation actions. Climate change adaptation refers to how we plan for the negative effects of



Pictured at the signing of the Partnership Agreement between Kildare Co. Council & Kilkenny Co. Council to become lead partners for the coordination of Climate Action for the Local Government Sector, in the Eastern & Midlands region are: (l to r back row: Seán McKeown, Director of Services, Kilkenny Co. Council; Joe Bolland, Director of Services, Kildare Co. Council; Alan Dunney, Regional Coordinator, Eastern & Midlands CARO; l to r front row: Colette Byrne, Chief Executive, Kilkenny Co. Council; Eamon Aylward, Cathaoirleach, Kilkenny Co. Council; Suzanne Doyle, Cathaoirleach, Kildare Co. Council; Peter Carey, Chief Executive, Kildare Co. Council).

climate change and take suitable action to prevent or minimise damage caused by climate change.

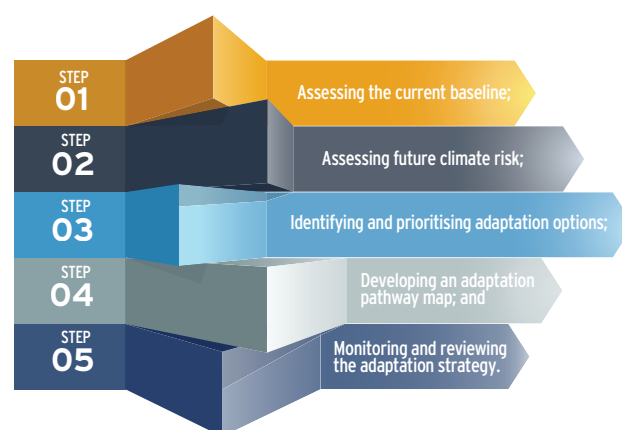
Adaptation can be described as a policy approach which seeks to protect people, buildings, infrastructure, businesses and ecosystems against the negative impacts of climate change. Examples of adaptation actions include adjusting building regulations to take account of predicted future climate conditions; building and reinforcing flood defences and choosing tree species and implementing forestry practices that are less vulnerable to storms, temperature extremes and fires.

As a first step in the process, the CAROs engaged with each local authority and provided them with guidance on preparing their adaptation strategy along with a template that could be used across local authorities offering both a structure for the preparation of the strategy and ensuring that there was a consistency across plans. Staff from each local authority attended a training workshop on preparing an adaptation strategy and developing actions. The workshops were specific to each local authority area. As climate change is a multi-disciplinary subject, staff attended from departments across the organisations including housing, emergency response, waste, environment, planning, transport, parks and public realm and worked together to intertwine the multiplicity of actions together. The workshops focused on available data and predicting the challenges and risks that climate change will pose for each county in the future.



Round table discussion at CARO Atlantic Seaboard South Local Adaptation Action Training, February 2019, Mallow, County Cork

The adaptation strategies were developed using a five step process. The steps in the process were:



This process was supported by data gathered through a number of initiatives including workshops, interviews, literary research and consultation with various stakeholders in addition to undertaking the statutory environmental assessments.

Once the draft strategies were prepared, the CAROs procured a consultant to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and AA (Appropriate Assessment). This is a statutory requirement and involves the systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the plan before a final decision is made to approve it.

A public consultation process was undertaken to allow the public and other organisations to offer feedback through submissions. Each local authority received a variety of submissions on the plans which were reviewed in detail in the context of the overall plan and taken into account in



Some of the Dublin CARO team with Minister Richard Bruton at the 2019 Ploughing Championships



Members of the Atlantic Seaboard North CARO displaying the Local Authority Climate Adaptation Strategies for the region

the final draft. For example, the four Dublin local authority Climate Change Action Plans 2019-2024 had in excess of 560 submissions addressing a wide variety of issues including transport, nature based solutions, flooding, energy efficiency in buildings, citizen engagement and supports for implementing climate action projects.

The adaptation strategies

The product of each of these steps in the aforementioned process has produced strategies that are based on extensive review, research and stakeholder engagement. These strategies are now the main instrument to achieve the overarching commitment by the local authorities to a low carbon, climate resilient and sustainable environment. As part of these strategies, climate risk registers have been compiled and these identify a set of actions to minimise impacts from extreme weather events. The risk register is informed by the hazards and vulnerabilities associated with climate change across each county.

The strategies are high level documents taking account of an overarching strategy and also outline an extensive list of actions to achieve this commitment. The document is designed to mainstream the issue of climate change in local authority plans, policies and operations. Areas covered in the strategies include such examples as: governance and business operations, infrastructure and built environment, land use and development, drainage and flood management, natural environment, built and cultural heritage, community, health and wellbeing amongst others. Strategies can be found on the local authorities' individual websites.

Each action in the strategy identifies the department in the local authority who will lead the action, who they will

Local authorities can react faster and more effectively to local climate events, due to their close relationship with communities and their local knowledge of the natural and man-made environment. This has been demonstrated in their response to extreme weather events all over Ireland, over the last number of years.

partner with, whether the action is currently budgeted for or not and whether the timeframe is short, medium or long term. The Government's Climate Action Plan 2019 commits all sectors to an integrated approach and through the local government charter commits to ensuring that resources are available for local authorities to carry out these actions.

These strategies and action plans demonstrate the commitment of the local authorities to prioritise climate action and to work with all sectors and stakeholders to achieve this.

Training, projects, research and regional specialisms

In addition to the adaptation strategies, the CARO has been focusing on climate-related projects, research, funding, the development of regional specialisms and addressing mitigation. In this context, there has been a strong emphasis on liaison with a number of stakeholders,



including third-level institutions, regional assemblies, the education sector, and energy agencies.

The CAROs in conjunction with the County and City Management Association (CCMA) have developed a training strategy for the sector, which includes general awareness building around climate change, behavioural change training and technical training in the areas of mitigation and adaptation. Phase 1 of the training strategy is based on awareness building and behavioural change and is expected to be rolled out in 2020. Technical training will be developed as requirements emerge and will be informed by the implementation of the adaptation strategies.

In parallel, the CAROs are working to develop spring-board courses to build knowledge and develop skills in the key areas of green enterprise activity and building resilience to the challenges of climate change. To facilitate community liaison and behavioural change through consultation, collaboration, education and awareness, the CAROs are also partnering with stakeholders to develop a community training programme for communities (with funding assistance from LEADER).

Another area of focus is the assessment of what commercial opportunities may arise from climate change, both in this country and internationally. As part

of this, the Eastern and Midlands CARO along with partners Enterprise Ireland (through their Midlands regional office) and Offaly County Council held a national conference in October. The conference entitled 'Creating Economic and Business Opportunities from Climate Change' explored how businesses, in addressing and responding to climate change, have realised unique economic and business opportunities. Topics explored at the event included innovation, new technologies, circular economy, sustainable tourism, clean power and remote working.

The Atlantic Seaboard North CARO have won grant aid under the Public Sector Innovation Fund to develop a GIS (Geographical Information System) App to assist the data capture and reporting of the impacts of climate events on the ground. It is currently in development with the plan to pilot the App in Mayo in early 2020 and with the intention is to roll it out nationally following the pilot.

In early 2020 the CARO website will launch, acting as a signpost for the various agencies and funding streams for climate action, as well as a source of local authority case studies in the areas of adaptation and mitigation.

These strategies are now the main instrument to achieve the over-arching commitment by the local authorities to a low carbon, climate resilient and sustainable environment.

The year ahead

The CAROs will continue to support the local authorities in the implementation of their strategies through training, support, guidance and liaison with stakeholders. They will also continue to develop projects, research, funding opportunities, regional specialisms and to develop strategic partnerships to support the sector in leading on climate action.

A significant obligation has been placed on local government to develop and implement climate action measures, as well as the need to build capacity within the sector to engage effectively with climate change both in terms of mitigation and adaptation. With dedicated teams in the four regional offices, the CAROs aim to offer and facilitate the support needed for the local authorities throughout Ireland to do this.



THE GREAT IRISH BLOCK OFF

**Pierce Richardson, Community Development Worker,
Disability Federation of Ireland**

Make Way Day is not about pointing the finger at local authorities or other agencies. It is also not about the misuse of disabled parking bays, scattered activism or random localised stickering. Make Way Day is about the fact that, across Ireland people with disabilities are confronted by physical barriers. These barriers limit their ability to move around local footpaths and so impacts on them being able to go out and about.

Obstacles include anything that the public has control over. For example:

- Cars parked on footpaths (blocking the way)
- Wheelie Bins on footpaths (blocking the way)
- Kegs on footpaths (blocking the way)
- Sandwich boards/ signs on the footpath (blocking the way or creating an obstacle)
- Overgrown hedges (creating an obstacle)
- Bikes tied to lampposts/ railings (creating an obstacle)

As one local activist and disability campaigner puts it, 'there have been days when I just had to turn around and go home because my powered wheelchair could not go around a parked car on the footpath. If you come across enough

obstacles like these you eventually don't want to go out at all, and that's leads to social isolation'.

The whole point of Make Way Day is to make the public aware of these issues that are fully within their power to change. 'Hey, this blocks my way!' is our message. So, on 26th September every year obstacles that block the way and makes the lives of people with disabilities more difficult 365 days of the year are highlighted.

On the day of action, September 26th, people with disabilities in different areas of the country, took to the streets and put stickers on all of the obstacles they find. The pictures of the stickered obstacles are shared on social media using **#makewayday**.

In its third year, the Make Way Day campaign is going from strength to strength with support from 25 county councils. This year 1,300 disability activists took to the streets all over the country to ensure that their voice was heard about these obstacles. We also had national and local news coverage with people with disabilities interviewed talking about the issues that they face on a daily basis.

'It's a lack of awareness that leads to these obstacles and once people are aware we find they're willing to help', said DFI spokesperson Clare Cronin. 'For the small minority who need it, we are delighted this year to have the backing of the Roads Policing unit of An Garda Síochána.'

Make Way Day is all about one impactful, coordinated and decisive day of action, which brings the disability and wider communities together.

LOCAL PROPERTY TAX:

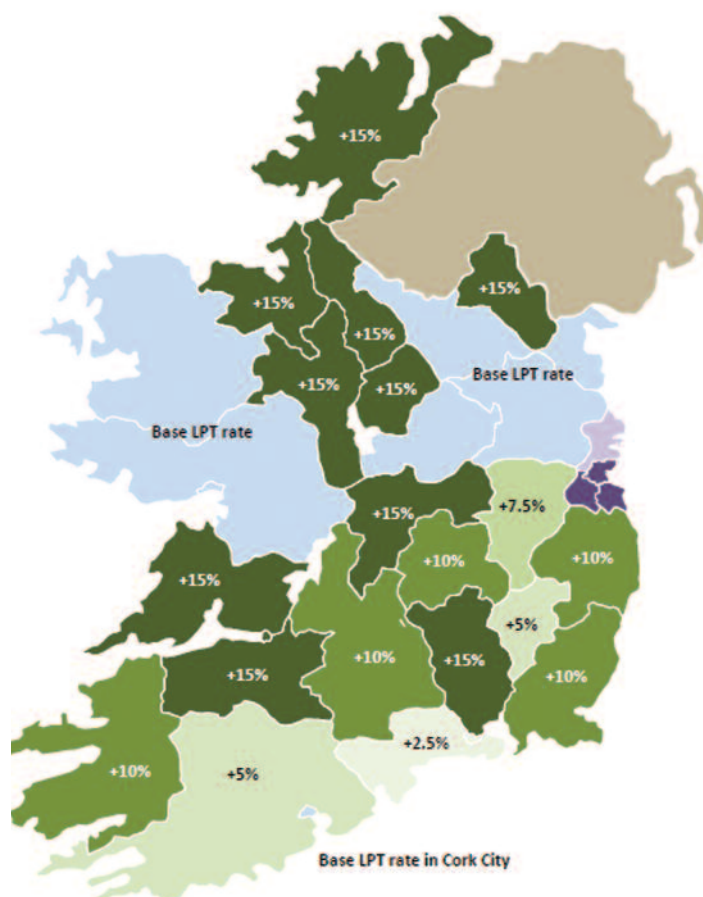
Record number of local authorities vary LPT rate upwards

Laura Shannon

Since 2015, local authorities have had the power to vary the rates of Local Property Tax (LPT) in their areas by -15% to +15% each year. This is referred to as the 'local adjustment factor'.

The local adjustment factor subsequently reverts to the basic rate after the twelve-month period has elapsed and the matter must be considered afresh. Local authorities must notify the Revenue Commissioners and the Minister by 30 September in order to apply a varied rate in the following year.

The map and figures below, provided by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government outline the variations notified to Revenue for the forthcoming year. There were substantially more variations compared to previous years. In 2018, only 5 local authorities varied their rate upwards,

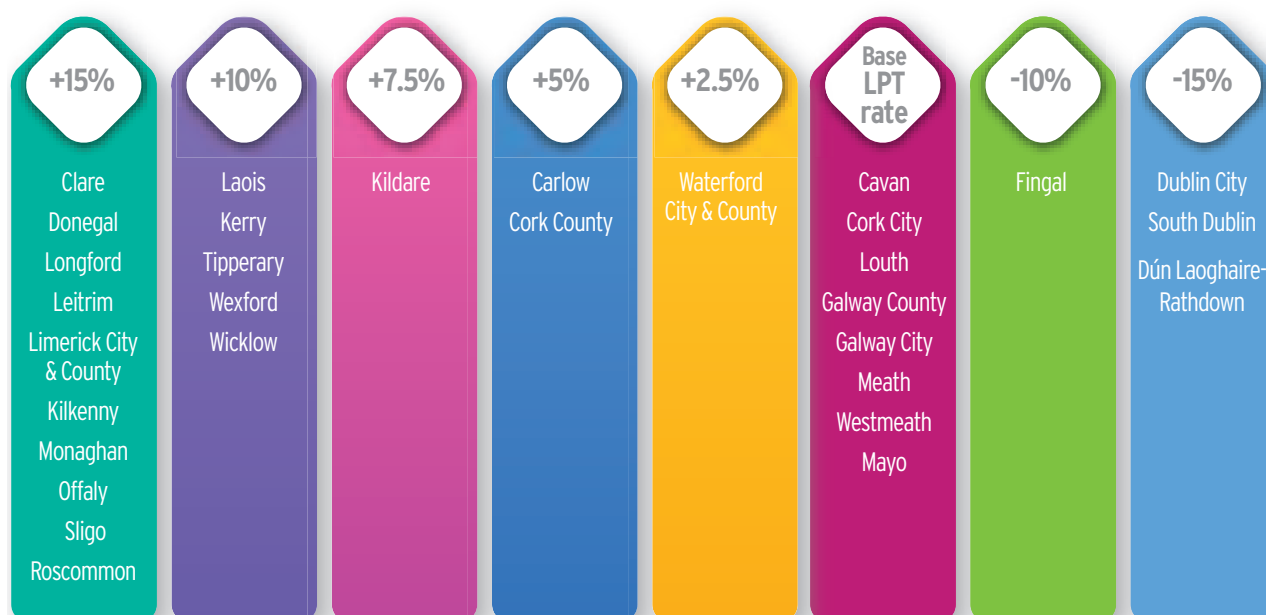


compared to 19 this year. The four Dublin local authorities continued the trend of varying their rates downwards.

What do the media and the public think?

In many local authority areas, the focus from the management side was on improving the council's financial position and ensuring services are maintained, while some councillors emphasised the impact of increased bills on property owners.

LPT variations were widely reported in both local and national



newspapers. In Carlow, for example, the Carlow Nationalist reported that it was 'with a heavy heart' that councillors decided to increase the LPT by 5%. The council had previously retained the base LPT rate. While council management sought an increase of 15%, a technical group of councillors had looked for a 15% reduction.

Owen Ryan of the Clare Champion voiced his opinion that the public are to be 'clobbered as councillors back 15% increase'. The increase was voted for by 16 councillors, with 8 against. It will result in an extra €1.5 million in income for Clare County Council. Over half of all property owners in Clare will see an increase in their bills of between €33.75 and €47.25 per year.

In Cork, a proposal to increase the rate by 15% caused uproar when the Lord Mayor refused to debate the motion before voting, in line with practices from previous years. Michael Clifford reported in the Irish Examiner that there was very little discussion from political parties in the weeks leading up the vote. In the end, the council voted 19-8 to leave the tax at the base rate.

A public consultation process must be undertaken prior to the variation of LPT, in line with statutory requirements. The level of feedback from this consultation is generally quite low. In Galway, for example, where councillors have voted against an increase, the recent consultation process did not receive any submissions. Similarly in Limerick, where the rate has been increased by 15% (compared to +7.5% last year), there were just two submission to their budget consultation process.

Dublin City Council run a survey each year to gather feedback on the LPT variation. This year's survey received 1,630 responses with 77.5% indicating they wished for the LPT rate to be maintained at -15%. Just 22.5% indicated they'd support a change, with more than half of those supporting an increase above the basic rate. While the response rate is still a relatively small percentage of the overall population, it represents an 81% increase on the previous highest level of completion (899 responses in 2015).

Conclusion

This year, with new councils in place, the LPT was varied (upwards or downwards) in 23 out of 31 local authorities. This is the highest number of variations since the local adjustment factor was introduced, with an unprecedented 19 local authorities varying the rate upwards.

While there was strong media reaction, particularly at the local level, the public consultation process prior to the councils' votes received little attention. With property revaluations and reform of LPT on the cards, and Dublin City Council calling for 100% local retention (instead of the current 80/20 split), LPT will be one to watch over the coming year.

NEWS

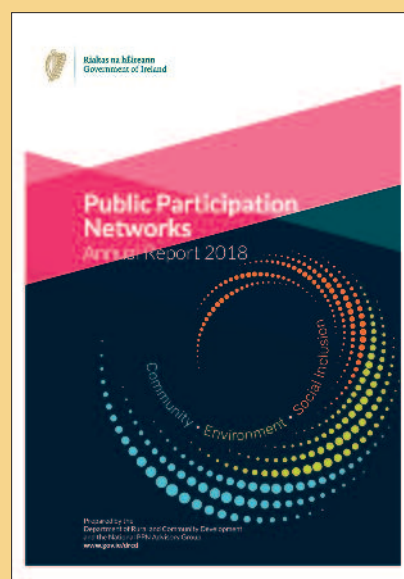
Public Participation Networks (PPNs) continue to increase membership

The latest PPN annual report for 2018 has been published. PPN's are networks for community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental groups in each local authority area. They allow local authorities to connect with community groups around the country. As a result, PPNs provide a mechanism by which citizens can have a greater say in local government decisions that affect their own communities.

At a national level in 2018, there were 14,486 member organisations with 927 PPN representatives on 375 local authority boards or committees. This level of participation shows that citizen engagement is truly taking shape.

At the report launch, Minister of State Seán Canney TD acknowledged the 16% growth in membership in comparison with 2017 reflecting 'what is happening on the ground and the positive impacts PPNs are having for their communities in such a short space of time'.

The full report can be accessed on the Department's website. <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/2c4a7a-public-participation-network-annual-reports/>



YOUR VOTE YOUR VOICE

Monaghan County
Council supporting
voter participation

**Bernie Bradley, Social Inclusion Officer,
Monaghan County Council**



Monaghan County Council enjoys a good relationship with the community it serves. The County Council is committed to the promotion and embedding of accessibility and inclusion across all its functions and services. Over the past number of years Monaghan has taken the lead in the local government sector through highlighting and addressing barriers experienced by people when trying to access information and services. Community consultation has been central to the success of the local authority's work in promotion accessible services and equality. Public consultation gives us an insight into the reality of life for people living in our communities. Local community consultation is hugely significant in small rural border counties like Monaghan. Issues exist in rural Ireland that don't exist in large urban areas or don't match the national trend. That is the important role a local authority plays in its local communities; a local authority can respond to local issues. Monaghan County Council has conducted a number of public consultation sessions with communities in the last number of years on a variety of issues in a variety of locations. Regardless of the issue or the location access to information is a consistent issue among all communities. Complicated language, jargon, small print, cluttered information just some of the issues highlighted.

Your Vote Your Voice - An Easy To Read Guide to Voting

Your Vote Your Voice -An Easy to Read Guide to Voting is an example Monaghan County Council's commitment to the promotion of equality in its customer services.

This guide was identified as a priority by Monaghan County Council in 2019 as part of its ongoing work in the promotion of equality and improving accessibility for all. Following Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with a Disability in 2018 and with local and European elections taking place in 2019, Monaghan County Council felt it was an important time to focus on the rights of people with a disability; in particular their right to vote.

In conjunction with Monaghan Public Participation Network, the Council developed an easy to read guide to voting in Ireland, something that was not previously available within the local government sector. *Your Vote Your Voice an Easy to Read Guide to Voting* explains the voting process in Ireland and how you can exercise your right to vote. The publication responds to issues identified in several different public consultations. Consultations with older people, people with disabilities and migrant communities all highlighted the need for more simplified information on voting. Consultations identified a significant lack of awareness of the voting process among many people in the community.

Monaghan County Council asked, 'As an organisation are we really protecting a person's right to vote, if access to the opportunity to vote wasn't available to everyone?'

Most frequently raised reasons why people typically didn't vote included:

- General lack of awareness or understanding of voting, elections and how government works

- Not being on the register to vote and not knowing how to get on the register
- Difficulties, reading , writing ballot papers and not knowing support was available
- Not knowing if a polling station was accessible.

The survey produced some surprising results, such as the amount of people in the community who were unsure of the voting process and the supports that are available to assist people to vote. Many older people said they were unaware they could apply for a postal vote or have someone assist them at the polling station. Many people from other countries now living in Monaghan didn't know Ireland uses a secret ballot system of voting for many this was the reason they didn't vote.

Prior to this publication, information relating to voting in Monaghan was not accessible. Information was complicated, and dispersed across numerous different documents or locations. Information about supports available to voters with a disability and information on the accessibility of polling stations was not available. This initiative collated all information relating to voting in Ireland into one easy to read information booklet. Each part of the booklet is written in easy to read language, and clear layout and spacing making the information easy to read and understand. The overall aim of *Your Vote Your Voice* is to increase voter participation and active citizenship among people of county Monaghan. This initiative was developed by the social inclusion and corporate services departments in Monaghan County Council, Monaghan Public Participation Network and Monaghan Disability Network. The project team worked closely with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to ensure all the information was up to date and correct. They also linked with the Irish Human Rights Commission UN

disability advisory committee to review draft copies of the publication.

The booklet includes information on the different types of elections and voting that takes place in Ireland; how you register to vote, marking a ballot paper and supports that are in place to help you vote. The booklet simplifies the typical language of voting making it more accessible for everyone. While some of the information in the booklet is relevant to county Monaghan only, most of the information contained in the publication relates to voting in any county. Monaghan County Council shared the booklet with all local authorities to allow the booklet to be reproduced by any other local authority.

This initiative further develops and enhances the role of the local authority in providing inclusive and accessible services. Monaghan County Council has worked continuously over the past decade to improve access to its services for all people in the community. A fundamental aspect of improved service delivery is understanding the needs of your customer. This initiative clearly identified the existing method of providing information on the voting process did not meet the needs of all our customers. It also demonstrates the significant impact easy to read language and information can have on the accessibility of a services and the positive impact accessible services and information can have on someone's opportunity to participate in their local community. This approach has influenced and will further influence the development of information on services of the council in the future.

Copies of *Your Vote Your Voice - An Easy to Read Guide to Voting* are available at: <https://monaghan.ie/your-vote-your-voice-an-easy-to-read-guide-to-voting/> or by contacting Bernie Bradley: 047 73727 bbradley@monaghancoco.ie

Voter participation training session in Drumlin House Training Centre, Cootehill.



THE CLIMATE CHALLENGE

Local government climate change research due for publication

The publication of the Government's *Climate Action Plan* in June 2019 committed the State to achieving ambitious climate action targets. The plan identifies various responsibilities and targets for each of the Government's various departments and agencies. Local authorities are uniquely positioned as key stakeholders who are involved in frontline delivery of climate related services e.g. flood defence projects, major public lighting efficiencies and energy upgrades to social housing, as well as influencing policies and programmes through various regulatory functions. In addition, they have embraced their leadership role and have put huge efforts into ensuring they practice what they preach with initiatives such as monitoring and reduction of water, waste and energy consumption in place across local authorities.

Local government areas of responsibility

As the level of government closest to citizens, local authorities are at the forefront of dealing with climate change, responding in three ways. First, they prevent further climate change from occurring, i.e., **mitigation**. Second, they adjust to changes in the climate that are already occurring i.e., **adaptation**. And third, they deal with immediate **weather-related emergencies** when they arise e.g. flooding/extreme cold. In this context, many of the services local authorities provide have the potential to be significantly impacted by climate change, including social housing, planning, road management and waste management.

Local authority climate change research

Under the *Climate Action Plan* local authorities are required to conduct a survey to establish a baseline of current climate change activities and identify best practices. The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) Research Unit, on behalf of the County and City Management Association (CCMA) Environment, Climate Change and Emergency Planning (ECCEP) Committee has undertaken an extensive research project that reviewed local authority climate actions over the past five years via a detailed survey and identified case-studies to illustrate the range of actions already under way.

The research aimed to quantify local authorities' mitigation, adaptation and emergency response climate actions

between 2014 and 2018. The survey, issued to the thirty-one local authorities, examined climate actions in seven key areas, including critical infrastructure, water resources and flood risk management, nature-based solutions and public engagement (Table 1).

In addition, forty-four case studies detailing climate action best practices were developed by all local authorities across all functional areas in co-operation with the four Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs). The case studies represent the diversity of climate actions that local authorities are involved in, each of which details how local authorities specifically responded to practical climate change issues impacting them.

Climate proofing for the future

The research will inform future climate policies and actions both locally and nationally and support and build upon the national *Climate Action Plan*, while highlighting to the wider public the extensive work local authorities are engaged in with respect to climate action and will be published in Q4 2019.

For further information please contact:

Darren Clarke, research@lgma.ie

The report will be published on the LGMA's website: www.lgma.ie

Table 1: Local authority climate action survey themes

QUESTIONNAIRE THEMATIC AREAS	CLIMATE ACTION THEME
Convening an Adaptation Team	Adaptation
Assessing the Current Adaptation Baseline	Adaptation
Identifying Future Climate Impacts, Vulnerabilities and Risks	Adaptation
Critical Infrastructure	Adaptation; Mitigation; Emergency Response
Water Resource and Flood Risk Management	Adaptation; Mitigation; Emergency Response
Nature-based Solutions	Adaptation; Mitigation; Emergency Response
Services/Public Engagement	Adaptation; Mitigation; Emergency Response

International place-to-place lesson drawing can deliver a number of benefits for policy makers. First, experience abroad can act as an invaluable source of practical and useful ideas.

Faced with external threats of this kind many local government leaders are fighting back by working with colleagues in other countries to strengthen the power of place, cities and city regions in the dynamics of global governance.

IF MAYORS RULED THE WORLD

The international leadership agenda for councils

Robin Hambleton, emeritus professor of city leadership, the University of the West of England, Bristol and director, Urban Answers, outlines how UK local leaders are becoming increasingly active across national frontiers.

In his influential book, *If Mayors Ruled the World*, Benjamin Barber argued that the nation-state was failing us on a global scale largely because it is 'utterly unsuited to interdependence'. Published in 2013 his subtitle - *Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities* - was prophetic.

A glance at the current political chaos in Westminster lends support to his claim that nation states can collapse into quarrelsome, short-term infighting. Elected local authorities, Barber argues, tend to be more pragmatic, more inclusive and more responsive. His analysis shows how city mayors, singly and jointly, are responding more effectively to international problems than national governments.

There are three overlapping reasons why city and regional leaders are becoming increasingly active in international, place-to-place networking, learning and exchange.



International lesson drawing

International lesson drawing for public policy is a key driver. This involves examining experiences in cities and regions in one or more other countries in order to discover relevant new insights for policy and practice.

The adoption of a waterside approach to urban regeneration provides a good example of successful international lesson drawing. Civic leaders in Baltimore, notably Donald Schaefer when he was Mayor (1971-87), had a significant impact not just on the Inner Harbour area of the city, but also on regeneration practice more widely. Mayor Schaefer showed great vision in recognising that the decaying dockland area at the heart of the city was actually full of potential.

The transformation of Baltimore Inner Harbour, from an unsafe, polluted dockland, with many empty warehouses, into a vibrant tourist destination with a wide range of attractions, is now recognised as a classic example of waterside urban renewal.

During the last thirty years regeneration plans in many other countries, including Birmingham's Brindleyplace and Cardiff Bay, have drawn insights from the Baltimore experience and, of course, Baltimore has learnt from exchanges with cities in other countries.

International place-to-place lesson drawing can deliver a number of benefits for policy makers. First, experience abroad can act as an invaluable source of practical and useful ideas. Second, while localities may be faced with common problems, it is clear that these problems do not produce identical policy responses. It is the differences in responses that different localities make to shared problems that can provide stimulating, even inspiring, insights for civic leaders. Third, in a world in which unprecedented numbers of people are now migrating across national boundaries cross-national exchange can lift the level of local inter-cultural knowledge, awareness and understanding.

International relationship building

A second motive for reaching out across borders is international relationship building. Such relationships can be binary pairings, as in sister-city or town-twinning arrangements, or clusters of cities focussing on a particular topic or theme, for example, tackling the climate change emergency.

Since the late 1980s interest in international policy exchange between cities and localities has grown rapidly and, in some cases, these exchanges have led to the creation of robust international networks bringing cities together.

Here's an example: In 1986 EUROCITIES was a new grouping of six big European cities. Now it has 190 members, including 45 partner cities outside Europe. It campaigns for enhanced recognition of the role of cities in EU policy making. Also, it provides support to city leaders and administrations so that they can collaborate in many policy areas - for example, culture, economy, environment and mobility. EUROCITIES operates a first class service for its members, providing access to news, projects, events, webinars, case studies, publications and so on.

Enhancing place-based power

The third purpose of international collaboration, and it is now very much on the rise, is to expand the power of place in our globalising world. The extraordinary growth of place-less power, meaning distant decision-makers, often working for multi-national companies who are not expected to care about the consequences of their decisions for

particular places and communities, has diminished the power of elected place-based leaders in many countries.

The growing centralisation of legal and fiscal power within some nation states, and the UK provides an unhappy example, is a further driving force that is weakening the power of place in some countries.

Faced with external threats of this kind many local government leaders are fighting back by working with colleagues in other countries to strengthen the power of place, cities and city regions in the dynamics of global governance.

Two examples of current international initiatives illustrate the possibilities for enhancing the power of place in our globalising world: In our rapidly changing world it is important that local leaders not only deliver good collaborative governance locally. They also need to shape the international context within which their localities will flourish or decline.

Regardless of whether Brexit proceeds or is rejected in favour of 'Remain and Reform', it is clear that wise local leaders will strengthen their participation in international diplomacy in the period ahead.

*Robin Hambleton, emeritus professor of city leadership, the University of the West of England, Bristol and director, Urban Answers was the founding President of the European Urban Research Association (EURA). His recent book is **Leading the Inclusive City**, see: <https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/leading-the-inclusive-city-1>*

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Useful sources relating to international networking:

EUROCITIES: <http://www.eurocities.eu>

European Urban Research Association: <https://eura.org>

Global Parliament of Mayors: <https://globalparliamentofmayors.org>

Mayors Migration Council: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org>

The Global Parliament of Mayors:

Launched in The Hague in 2016 the Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM), as proposed by Benjamin Barber in his book, aims to strengthen the role of cities in global governance. The most recent Annual Summit of the GPM, held in Bristol in 2018, passed a number of declarations relating to city leadership, migration, urban security and health. The GPM resolution on 'Empowering cities to cope with global challenges' was presented to the UN-Habitat Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya in May 2019.

GPM's migration declaration related specifically to the Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees that the UN was in the process of drafting. Members of the GPM and other city leaders called for the full and formal recognition of the role of local authorities in the implementation, follow-up, and review of both compacts.

Global Compact on Migration and the new Mayors Migration Council:

In 2018 Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol, became the first mayor to take part in UN negotiations on the Global Compact on Migration. He argued that the leaders of cities and networks of cities should be equal partners with national governments in shaping international policy. As the Global Compact was being adopted in Marrakesh in December 2018 a new Mayors Migration Council (MMC) was launched to elevate the voice of cities in international deliberations concerning refugees and migrants.

New-look ChangingIreland.ie launched by Minister Michael Ring

Minister for Rural and Community Development Michael Ring, TD, recently launched a new look-website - www.changingireland.ie - designed to complement the work by *Changing Ireland*, the most popular magazine published in the community and voluntary sector in Ireland.

Changing Ireland magazine has been publishing quarterly for 18 years. The publication shines a spotlight on good practice in the community and voluntary sector and challenges community work practitioners to always strive to do better. It also provides a platform to debate and challenge government policy.

At the launch, Minister Ring said: '*Changing Ireland* is a unique publication which is based in a community-setting, in Moyross, Limerick. It is a high-quality news magazine which has encouraged all involved for nearly two decades to work harder for the betterment of our communities.'

'For nearly two decades, *Changing Ireland* has kept the flag flying at community level for grassroots organisations, volunteers, workers, and local and central government bodies and agencies working in communities. Long may you continue to catalogue and report on the good work going on nationwide that we might otherwise not hear of,' said the Minister.

Also welcoming the development, Cathy Jones, chairperson of Changing Ireland Community Media CLG, said: 'In *Changing Ireland*, we believe in the principles of community development: seeking social change, empowering people, encouraging participation, collective action, and campaigning for equality and social justice.

'We believe *Changing Ireland* has captured much of the good that happens across Ireland. Being locally based,



Minister Michael Ring (centre) with Changing Ireland editor Allen Meagher (left) and Padraic Sweeney of the Department of Rural and Community Development. Photo: Danny Rowan

we try to reflect views on the ground and, while we promote the positive and best practice, we also provide a platform for people who will call out local or central government - among others - when the need arises. 'I would like to congratulate all who support *Changing Ireland*, past and present: our readers, contributors, occasional volunteers, our host community, fellow board members and, equally importantly, the Department of Rural and Community Development,' she said.

Changing Ireland editor Allen Meagher said, 'Community development by its nature seeks to confront power imbalances in society, so this is an interesting space to work in. And, for me, nothing matches the spirit of activism and volunteering that shores up so many vital services in this country. Those who engage in community development perform a critical role in pushing at local and national level for social change.

'I invite you - if you haven't before - to start reading or following *Changing Ireland* in print and online and find out more about the fabulous work being done by community and voluntary organisations in Ireland.'

Interested in learning more about goings-on in the community and voluntary sector? Check out the latest print issues via the new website (changingireland.ie) to get the bigger picture, through deep dives, profiles and long-reads.

€1.9 million fund
set to unlock the
potential of literary
tourism sector

THE BUSINESS OF LITERATURE



The untapped potential of literary tourism is the focus of Spot-lit, a new three-year project spearheaded by the Western Development Commission in Ireland that aims to grow the literary tourism sector in the Northern Periphery and Arctic region. The new programme will support organisations and businesses in this culturally-rich region to grow, collaborate and better engage audiences together.

Literary Tourism is an emerging niche sector within the wider cultural tourism sector, where places with literary heritage offer author and fiction-related literary tourism opportunities along with opportunities arising from literary festivals, trails and book shops. In Ireland, this would include literary rich locations such as Sligo, synonymous with the poet WB Yeats, Seamus Heaney and Bellaghy in Derry, Cuirt International Festival of Literature in Galway, Doolin Writers' Weekend in Clare.

Funded by Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme 2014-2020, the regions participating in the

Spot-lit programme area are the West of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Eastern Finland and South-West Scotland. Collectively, the region is home to world-class literary icons and landscapes, however, research suggests there is potential for this sector to work together and grow significantly. Current low levels of joined-up literary tourism activity in the Northern Periphery and Arctic Region make it a sector that is ripe for development.

Spot-lit addresses the need for shared development and marketing of existing assets and the development of new ones, which respond to emerging literary and cultural consumer needs. This will result in a better cultural tourism offering and deliver greater economic impact than projects developed in national isolation.

Pictured opposite: Drumcliffe, County Sligo is set against the striking backdrop of the Benbulbin Mountains. It is best known as the final resting place of W.B. Yeats. Found in the churchyard, his grave is marked with a simple headstone with the inscription, "cast a cold eye on life, on death, horseman, pass by:".



The programme will include the development of a cluster network across the regions, a series of support workshops, the development of 20 new literary products or services and shared learning and transnational marketing.

Upcoming workshops in November

In November, the Western Development Commission will deliver a series of workshops for businesses interested in Literary Tourism product development:

- Building successful Literary Tourism experiences for visitors
- Designing and developing your Literary Tourism product or service
- Knowing and growing your market

Following on from the workshops, businesses will be invited to participate in a Literary Business Support Programme. The programme will be open to SMEs, social enterprises, community groups and literary associations with a unique idea for the development of Literary Tourism in their area. This bespoke programme will involve a series of monthly engagement workshops, learning journeys, business advice clinics and individual mentoring supports. The programme will engage with and support 5 businesses and will include €10,000 innovation support. The focus of the business idea/product will be for the development of Literary Tourism through literature, place and performance.

In tandem with the Literary Business Support Programme, a new Literary Tourism Model will be developed and will include a €25,000 business support. The model will be developed by identifying a programme of potential performances linked to Wild Atlantic Way and its literary assets.

Speaking on the launch of the SME Businesses Support Programme, CEO Tomás Ó Síocháin of the Western Development Commission said 'the west has a fantastic story to tell; an area of arresting physical beauty, centres of innovation and economic growth, however Spot-Lit is an opportunity to focus on some of the stories as yet untold. I would urge communities, groups and SMEs to engage with the Literary Business Support Programme, one aspect of the work of the WDC in supporting the Creative Economy.'



The project, which will run until September 2021, has a dedicated website at www.spot-lit.eu. It is also supported in Ireland by the Irish Central Border Area Network and Arts Over Borders.

Local Community Development Committees - National networking event held in Tullamore

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) hosted a national networking event for Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) on the 9th November 2019 in the Tullamore Court Hotel, Co Offaly. The event addressed one of the actions in the recently published LCDC review¹ as well as Ireland's Climate Action Plan and focussed on the theme of Leadership and Collaboration with a particular focus on Leadership in Climate Action.

The purpose of the event was to support LCDC members to recognise themselves as Leaders of their communities and to encourage them to collaborate fully with other Leaders as they engage with the work of their LCDC. It is important that each LCDC speaks with one voice as it works to implement the actions identified in the community elements of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). With this event DRCD provided support to individual LCDC members to

recognise their own individual role and the role of their LCDC in the development of their areas.

The event was divided into two main sessions. The morning session explored the importance of effective leadership and collaboration in general and it was led by Dr Rob Worrall, Leadership and Management Specialist, Institute of Public Administration (IPA). Rob provided an overview of his place-based leadership development practice. This included consideration of why 'public leadership' of place needs to involve participants from all sectors working towards collective impact - optimizing outcomes and opportunities for citizens, communities and a sustainable environment. Rob was joined by Mr Stephen Gallagher, Director for Local Government and Communities, Scotland who provided an overview of the collective experience of implementing the Collective Leadership Programme in Scotland; why it is core to the Scottish Government achieving its strategic objectives; achievements, lessons learnt and challenges ahead. Finally, Hayley Lever, Strategic Lead Greater Manchester, MovingLeaders in Greater Manchester shared her lived experience of being a strategic actor within the Leading GM Programme involving ten local authority



Hayley Lever, Strategic Lead Greater Manchester, MovingLeaders in Greater Manchester and Stephen Gallagher, Director for Local Government and Communities, Scotland, with Bairbre NicAongusa, DRCD and Rob Worrall, IPA.

collaboratives from across the Greater Manchester city-region; the achievements to date, lessons learnt from the programme, and priorities from 2020 onwards.

In the afternoon the participants took part in an interactive workshop facilitated by Dr Tara Shine and Madeleine Murray, Change by Degrees. The workshop was designed for members of Local Community Development Committees and will look at leadership in Climate Action. Climate solutions require local level engagement and the workshop helped participants understand the role they can play in leading

partnerships for climate action in their communities. The workshop provided a grounding in climate change, its causes, impacts and solutions, as well as sharing practical examples and case studies of how communities can lead on climate solutions. The event was designed to enable participants to leave the workshop feeling more knowledgeable and empowered to take action in their own lives and lead on climate change in their communities.

¹ DRCD Review of the Local Community Development Committees, July 2019
<https://assets.gov.ie/26971/fc5f55da04ec4574af1db0d87fac84ce.pdf>

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown are winners at prestigious SEAI Energy Awards

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) recently announced the winners of its 2019 Energy Awards at a gala event which saw National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) take away the top prize for Energy Team of the Year. The awards encourage and reward excellence in energy management. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (dlr) won the award in the Public Sector Leadership category.

dlr, which serves a population of 206,000 people, impressed the judges with their dedication to meeting energy and climate change targets and to positively influencing energy efficiency within the constituency. dlr was the first local authority in Dublin to achieve full compliance with ISO 50001 certification and achieving carbon neutrality is central to the County Development Plan. Exemplar housing upgrades include the retrofit of social housing and other buildings to world leading energy efficiency standards.

Speaking at the event Leas Cathaoirleach, Cllr Deirdre Donnelly, said; 'dlr have consistently shown leadership by being a national test-bed for a wide range of energy innovations, from internal systems to public amenities and housing. I am absolutely delighted that the Council's innovative policies have been recognised with this award'.

Other finalists in the Public Sector category included Dublin City University for its leadership in energy management achieving a 43% energy saving and TG4 for its integration of energy efficiency and renewable projects to help lower its environmental impact.

A total of nine awards were presented to businesses, communities and public sector organisations recognising their commitment and dedication to excellence in energy management and creating a cleaner energy future.

Congratulating all the finalists and award winners, Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Richard Bruton T.D. said; 'How we respond to the challenge of climate disruption will define us as a generation. These awards are a good opportunity to highlight those taking leadership and managing their energy use in a more sustainable way. Those being recognised here today are beacons to their communities, showcasing how we can all step up and change our behaviour. Making these changes not only means less carbon in the atmosphere, but also means healthier lives and more comfortable living.'



Picture shows (l-r) Leas Cathaoirleach Deirdre Donnelly; Minister Richard Bruton TD; Andrée Dargan, County architect Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and Julie O'Neill, Chair of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. Photo: Naoise Culhane

Ireland to host the IFLA World Library and Information Congress in 2020

Mr Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development has welcomed the news that Ireland has been selected as the location for the next International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) World Library and Information Congress. The event will be held in Dublin from August 15 - 21, 2020.

The IFLA World Library and Information Congress is the flagship professional and trade event for the international library and information services sector. It is expected that over 4,000 participants from more than 140 countries will travel to Ireland to attend this conference.

The Minister said 'Dublin is an ideal base for the Congress due to its status as a UNESCO City of Literature; its association with four Nobel Laureates in literature and its hosting of the long-running International Dublin Literary Award'.

Tom Enright, Chair of the National Libraries Development Committee echoed the Minister's warm welcome and said: 'We are delighted that the IFLA Conference is coming to Ireland next year. We have very ambitious plans for our public libraries over the next few years, and the conference will be a wonderful opportunity to share these plans and our innovative service with colleagues from around the world and to learn from international best practice right on our doorstep.'

For further information see:
<https://www.ifla.org/annual-conference>

GOING FOR GOALS

Creating Sustainable Communities: Local Government and the Sustainable Development Goals

Social Justice Ireland

The United Nation's 2030 Agenda and SDGs

In 2015, the UN proposed and adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and identified 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) based on 169 targets and over 230 indicators. In January 2016, the SDGs came into force. The SDGs are designed to refocus efforts towards policies that directly help people and communities in the long run. They aim to provide both a pathway out of poverty for about a billion people in the world, and a pathway to a sustainable future for all countries and peoples. The World Bank, WHO, IMF, OECD and Eurostat have all committed to data collection efforts to support the monitoring of the SDGs.

Since the adoption of the SDGs, there have been several attempts to track countries' progress on achievement of the goals. In February 2019, Social Justice Ireland published its Sustainable Progress Index 2019 (Clark and Kavanagh, 2019).¹ It examines Ireland's performance on the SDGs in the context of its peers in the EU – the focus is the EU15 countries. Comparing relative performance among countries from a similar regional or income group is valuable. Variations observed in small groups of similar regions should encourage policymakers to better understand reasons for divergence and design strategies for achieving the SDGs by 2030.

So, How Does Ireland Compare?

The report finds Ireland is in the top third for three SDGs: Quality Education (SDG 4); Peace and Justice (SDG 16) and Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6). On these Ireland is ranked 2nd, 4th and 5th respectively. Ireland has a good reputation internationally for quality education, and skilled graduates are in high demand. Ireland is also regarded as a relatively safe place to live with lower homicides and crime rates relative to other countries.

However, the report also highlights 4 SDGs are in the bottom third: Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10); Partnerships for the Goals, (SDG 17); Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7); and Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12). Of the 15 countries studied, Ireland is ranked 11th, 11th 12th and 14th, respectively on these. Significant challenges lie ahead if Ireland is to achieve its objectives on these goals.

Table 1 Policy Proposals for Local Authorities

SDG Number	Policy Proposals	SDG Number	Policy Proposals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development of social and affordable housing on State lands. • Seek to replace the Local Property Tax with a Site Value Tax and increase the tax-take while including hardship measures for those who cannot afford to pay it in full. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise the full allocation for Traveller specific accommodation and support the development of sites for this purpose. • Implement the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide funding for research on local initiatives on sustainable food production. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in a deep retrofitting programme for community spaces. • Ringfence continued funding to encourage sports participation and active lifestyle programmes. • Improve the primary road network across the country to support the increased provision of public transport.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the integration of primary care networks and GP led community healthcare services. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate all single-use plastics from Local Authority buildings and public spaces. • Develop open consultation on ambitious waste management plans beyond 2021. • Adopt the principles of a circular economy, particularly for construction and demolition waste.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance community education programmes and life-long learning through the library network. • Ensure full implementation of the 'Our Public Libraries 2022' strategy and ensure that its implementation is inclusive and supportive of smaller branch libraries as a hub for local communities. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Climate Change Adaptation Strategies in each Local Authority area, with the collaborative input of local communities and Public Participation Networks, supported by dedicated sustainable funding in the medium to long-term.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively promote gender equality in Local Authority elections and on Boards and Committees of strategic importance. • Introduce family-friendly working hours and conditions for female councillors. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put a plan in place to tackle pesticides in drinking water. • Implement the 'Nature' programmes set out in the Climate Action Plan published by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a Drinking Water Safety Plan, following EPA Guidelines, for each public water supply identifying all potential risks and detailing mitigation and control measures. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in programmes to rewet the boglands. • Implement the 'Nature' programmes set out in the Climate Action Plan published by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in renewable energy transition programmes for Local Authority offices and community spaces. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a sustainable strategy for public participation, to include medium and long-term objectives and associated budget commitments; and a move from an annual funding model for PPNs to a 3-5 year renewable commitment.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the sustainability of jobs created through LEOs and develop plans to ensure the security of decent work. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strategic partnerships with Local Authorities and local government organisations, in Europe and Internationally, to support the implementation of the Goals.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expedite the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan, commencing with those with the largest proportion of premises dependent on it. 		

Local authorities and the SDGs

Everyone has a role to play in supporting Ireland's progress towards the SDGs. Ireland's National Implementation Plan for the SDGs identifies the crucial role that local authorities have to play in translating the SDGs into practical action at local level. It identifies the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and the Strategic Committees (SPCs) as well as local plans as being especially well placed to integrate the SDGs into their activities. Here we set out a series of proposals for local authorities, covering all 17 SDGs, which could be included by local authorities and their LCDCs, SPCs in their development plans.

Social Justice Ireland is an independent think tank and justice advocacy organisation that advances the lives of people and communities through providing independent social analysis and effective policy development to create a sustainable future for every member of society and for society as a whole.

For more information on this SDG Policy Briefing, contact:

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¹ Clark, C. and Kavanagh, C. (2019). *Measuring Progress: The Sustainable Progress Index 2019*. Social Justice Ireland.



THE WEST AWAITS

Atlantic Economic Corridor - Maximising assets and talent in the western region

Set up in the late 1990s, the Western Development Commission (WDC) was set up to promote both social and economic development in the Western Region by ensuring government policy is directed at improving the social and economic strategy in the region, developing diverse projects and operating the Western Development Fund. In April they launched their latest strategy 'Work Smarter, Live Better'.

A flagship project under this strategy is the establishment of the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC). The objective of the AEC, which runs from Donegal to Kerry, is to maximise the assets and talent in the region. Demonstrating the full economic scale of the region, Ireland can attract investment, improve competitiveness, support job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life for the people who live there.

The AEC also presents an opportunity to develop a strong and recognisable brand to support the development and promotion of the region. The success of the Wild Atlantic

Way has shown the effectiveness that regional collaboration and branding can deliver.

Digital hubs - addressing the broadband deficit

Much of the development of the commercial landscape in the region will depend on the rollout of the long-awaited National Broadband Plan. To support this, the WDC, through the AEC, is currently working on creating a network of digital hubs in rural communities, as a way to address the lack of widespread high speed internet access.

'Right now we can address the issues of access,' says CEO Tomás Ó Síocháin. 'For those who don't have access at home, we can identify, at a reasonable cost, a hub where they can get access. It also means that people thinking of making a move will see that there is fibre enabled broadband here and that they can have the same working conditions that they are currently used to.'

'We're unveiling a network of enterprise hubs all the way from Donegal down to Kerry. We're identifying ways they can work



together, raising their profiles, helping them cope with common issues and finding a way to build a single online point of access for public, private and community hubs in the AEC region. In the longer term, we would hope to create a pipeline of innovation in these communities.'

The hubs are an interim solution - everyone in the AEC region is within reach of one of them. The WDC hopes that this practical solution to rural Ireland's broadband issues will set the groundwork for something bigger that will develop over time.

The shift towards remote working is something the WDC hopes to capitalise on. 'People see that they can move West, take advantage of the better quality of life and join us in making a dramatic change in the future of the region,' says Ó'Síocháin. 'But these individuals will also want to know that they can progress to the next level in their field and we want to ensure that they can build a career here.'

The WDC see themselves as an important part of the solution to the region's issues. 'We are very keen to work with the other stakeholders in our region whether with the Chambers on the private side or the public organisations. We see ourselves as being the glue that can bring all of these stakeholders together to identify and solve the needs we have in the west of Ireland.'

Find out more about the Atlantic Economic Corridor at <https://www.atlanticeconomiccorridor.ie/>

'People see that they can move West, take advantage of the better quality of life and join us in making a dramatic change in the future of the region.'



SUSTAINABLE APARTMENT LIVING FOR IRELAND

Fiona Dunkin – Housing
Policy Adviser,
Clúid Housing

Over two years have passed since the catastrophe of Grenfell Tower in London, which resulted in the loss of 72 lives. On this side of the water, nearly a decade has passed since 250 households were forced from their homes in Priory Hall in 2011, drawing the scale of the legacy of self-certification within the construction sector in Ireland into sharp focus.

Though, in Ireland, as in the UK, lessons have been learned from such events, with the introduction of Building Control (Amendment) Regulations (BCAR) in 2014, and the convening of a national Fire Safety Taskforce in 2017, there would appear to remain serious cause for concern with regard to the management of apartment complexes in Ireland.

A recent report, independently commissioned by Clúid Housing and the Housing Agency, *Owners' Management Companies: Sustainable apartment living for Ireland*, sets out a range of issues raised by various stakeholders within the housing sector in specific relation to the operation of Owners' Management Companies (OMCs) in Ireland. OMCs, which have been in existence in Ireland for approximately 40 years and made obligatory in 2011 for residential developments of five or more units under the Multi-Unit Development Act (MUD Act), represent a form of fractional ownership of common areas and facilities within apartment complexes. OMCs are comprised of owner-occupiers, landlords, and, increasingly, Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) and local authorities. While, in most cases, management agents are contracted to undertake the day-to-day work, ownership and ultimate responsibility for the management of the development lies with the OMC.



Despite the number of apartments in Ireland having increased by 85% between 2002 and 2016, we remain at the bottom of the list in comparison to other EU countries with regard to apartments as a proportion of our overall housing stock, comprising approximately a quarter of the EU average.

While OMCs, in some cases, are formed within housing estates their main relevance relates to apartment complexes, which are more likely to share communal areas and facilities. With increased density high on the agenda across a number of national strategies, including the National Planning Framework, the National Development Plan and the Climate Action Plan, in order to cater to a rapidly growing population, stem the ever-expanding spread of our commuter belts, and fulfil our obligations with regard to climate action, there is an urgent need for a greater focus on apartment-living in Ireland.

Despite the number of apartments in Ireland having increased by 85% between 2002 and 2016, we remain at the bottom of the list in comparison to other EU countries with regard to apartments as a proportion of our overall housing stock, comprising approximately a quarter of the EU average. The ramp-up of delivery of apartments should represent a core aspect of work across the housing sector, both private and social. Indeed, according to targets set out within the National Planning Framework our proportion of apartments should treble - from 13% in 2019 to 39% by 2030. Our work is certainly cut out.

While a greater focus on apartment-living should be welcomed by AHBs and local authorities, if we are to be in a position to stand over our stock, it is essential that this is accompanied by robust examination of how it is managed. With apartments now making up around half of all AHB acquisitions, and an increasing proportion of Local Authority acquisitions,¹ it could be argued that this area has never been more relevant to the social housing sector. The previously-mentioned report, however, strongly suggests that major deficiencies with regard to the effective management of apartment developments by OMCs, on which many AHB and local authority staff sit, exist. Concerns were raised with regard to, for example, an inconsistency of capacity and knowledge among directors on OMCs and difficulties relating to the collection of service charges. Indeed, OMC directors, who put themselves forward on a voluntary basis, often have, according to the report, 'little experience of the complex nature of management companies and [multi-unit developments]', yet, in many cases, are responsible for the stewardship of millions of euro.

Alarmingly, in relation to service charge collection, upon analysis of a sample of 50 OMCs, it was found that debtors represented, on average, 52.04% of OMC income with a 'culture in Ireland of non-payment of charges' presented as a possible rationale for this. 78% of management agents interviewed for the report also felt that less than 25% of multi-unit developments held sufficient sinking fund reserves. Further to this, the report stresses the risks inherent in the weak guidance provided in the MUD Act with respect to sinking fund levels, with a default amount of €200 per unit suggested, but not mandated.

The potential for inadequate sinking fund levels to lead to ramifications, on a continuum of inconvenient to utterly disastrous, cannot be underestimated. Further to this is the issue of inequity inherent in the

¹ Farrell, C and O'Callaghan, D. (2019). Analysis of Social Housing Acquisitions - Spending Review 2019. Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.



L - R : Brian O’Gorman, CEO Clúid Housing; Michael Carey, Chairperson Housing Agency; Paul Mooney, report author.

potential for maintenance/refurbishment costs of common areas/facilities to be borne by future owners/users as opposed to being shared across users/owners across the period of use. Take again the example of the broken-down lift. Where a sinking fund is provided for, both past and present owners/users of the lift will share the costs of replacement. Without statutory obligation, such foresight and fair mindedness may not always naturally prevail.

Jennie Bray, OMC Risk Manager with Clúid Housing, has first-hand knowledge of such issues. Jennie is responsible for the analysis and mitigation of risk identified within the management of 115 multi-unit developments comprising properties managed and/or owned by Clúid. This role, the first of its kind within the AHB sector in Ireland, was seen as vital to the effective management of apartments by Clúid, both now and into the future, to ensure tenant welfare and safety and the sustainability of such properties on a long-term basis. At present, Clúid staff, (mainly housing officers) are represented on 14 OMC boards across the country and are in the process of joining 10 others. While Jennie admits that the presence of AHBs on OMC boards is not always welcomed, mainly on the basis of misconceptions and stigma relating to social housing, she stresses the need for greater involvement of both AHBs and local authorities within OMCs. She feels that this would go some way towards limiting the risks and impact of the issues highlighted within the report and the ever-present repercussions of inadequate regulation within the construction sector. Jennie is enthusiastic about the prospect of a tightened regulatory regime for OMCs and multi-unit developments, saying she would ‘welcome it with open arms’.

Clearly, a range of issues with regard to multi-unit developments and OMCs needs to be addressed, and quickly. The overarching approach proposed in the report is regulation of the sector, that, amongst a wide range of actions, would include; guidance to OMCs; would oblige developers prior to handover of the development to prepare Building Life Cycle Reports that, would, in turn, inform required sinking fund levels; would oblige OMCs to provide details of sinking fund levels as part of their annual returns; would oblige OMCs to carry out fire safety audits every five years, and; would deliver mandatory training to OMC directors.

Such a system of regulation is already in existence in a number of jurisdictions, including in Ontario, Canada where the Condominium Authority of Ontario (CAO) ‘aims to improve condominium living by providing services and resources for condo owners, residents and directors’, and is funded by way of a small fee of \$1 per voting unit per month. Furthermore, in Ireland, with the expansion of the remit of the Residential Tenancies Board in 2016 to include AHBs, and forthcoming statutory regulation, this would not represent wholly new territory for the social housing sector. Whatever form regulation of OMCs may take in Ireland, it should represent a priority for the entire social housing sector – for local authorities and AHBs. Alongside our concerns to not repeat ‘the mistakes of the past’, it is our duty to avoid those of the future.

Owners’ Management Companies: Sustainable apartment living for Ireland was prepared by Paul Mooney for the Housing Agency and Clúid Housing, and published in June 2019.

NEWS

Glaslough is Ireland's Tidiest Town for 2019

A record 918 communities entered competition this year

Glaslough, Co. Monaghan has been named as Ireland's Tidiest Town for 2019. The SuperValu TidyTowns competition is now entering its seventh decade and Glaslough was judged to be the best from a record number of 918 entries to the competition this year. The announcement was greeted with great celebration and excitement at an awards ceremony at The Helix in Dublin.

On hand to present the prizes were Mr. Michael Ring, T.D., Minister for Rural and Community Development and Mr. Martin Kelleher, Managing Director of SuperValu, the competition's sponsor for the 28th year. The Helix was packed with representatives of TidyTowns groups from all over the country, eagerly awaiting the announcement of the winners.

Glaslough, Co. Monaghan also claimed the award of Ireland's Tidiest Village. Other winners included Blackrock, Co. Louth receiving the award for Ireland's Tidiest Small Town. Westport, Co. Mayo received the award of Ireland's Tidiest Large Town, while Ennis, Co. Clare was declared as Ireland's Tidiest Large Urban Centre.

Speaking after the awards ceremony, Minister Ring said

'This is a fantastic achievement for Glaslough who are very deserving winners. Glaslough, who first entered the SuperValu TidyTowns competition in 1966, have great passion and pride in their community. They have been consistently achieving high standards in the competition at local, regional and European level. Today, all that commitment and dedication has paid off with the top prize being awarded to them. This is the second time that Glaslough has been awarded Ireland's Tidiest Town, which is a remarkable achievement and shows that the commitment and enthusiasm of the TidyTowns committees continues to remain strong.'

'I want to congratulate Glaslough and all of the other deserving prize-winners announced today. The work of all those involved in the TidyTowns effort results in the attractive and welcoming towns and villages we see all over the country, and from which we all benefit. It is this passion and pride that has made our towns and villages not only attractive and welcoming for visitors, but have created a 'sense of place' for those who live, work and raise families there. That is why this competition has continued to flourish for more than 60 years.'

A special allocation of €1.4 million was also announced by Minister Ring to support the work of individual TidyTowns Committees around the country to assist them in their continued efforts to enhance their towns and villages.

Full details of all this year's winners are available at www.tidytowns.ie and at www.supervalu.ie



Tidy Towns volunteers on stage in the Helix picking up the winners trophies 2019. Photo source: <https://www.glasloughtidytowns.com/>

BOOK REVIEWS



Social Housing Policy in Ireland: New Directions

Eddie Lewis (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration; 2019)

Reviewed by David Silke, Director of Research and Corporate Affairs, Housing Agency.

I first met Eddie Lewis about 15 years ago. It was an interview panel and he was one of the people asking the questions! Luckily, on that occasion, I was the successful candidate and, as they say, the rest is history. At the time Eddie was a Principal Officer in the Department of the Environment, as it was then called. I was to learn that he was the 'ideas man'.

Eddie clearly cared about social housing, those who needed support with their housing and those who worked in the sector. He was an early believer that housing policy should be evidence based, and an early advocate that housing should be regarded as a professional career. He made a point of keeping up-to-date with general shifts in international housing policy. On his retirement, he continues to teach housing studies and keep up-to-date with policy development.

That is why this book is so important. It's not often that someone who has been at the forefront of policy development also has the academic skills and discipline needed to analyse and produce a book of this nature and quality. You may not agree with everything in the book - but that's fine; it both informs and challenges the reader.

The book is set out in four parts. The first part provides a context for why social housing is important and then provides both historical and comparative perspectives. Chapter four is particularly important as it charts how the traditional model of social housing provision changed over the last twenty years. Lewis outlines the shift in how social housing is funded, the questions asked about its purpose, its delivery and broader links with social welfare.

Part two is entitled 'Social Housing at the Crossroads' and it begins by focusing on the ideas underpinning more recent social housing policy shifts and the often-competing objectives driving these policies. Chapter six looks at housing demand, the demographics underpinning it, and the role of the state in regulating the housing market. As Lewis writes, 'left to its own devices the Irish market is prone to dangerous exuberance'. A social policy favourite,

housing need, is then tackled in chapter seven. This includes homelessness, affordability and measurement of housing need. Allocation of housing is covered later in the book in chapter 11.

Chapter eight follows and is pivotal to the book. Its focus is on alternative housing policy pathways. Here the author sets out three alternatives: i) a version of the existing model based on traditional social housing; ii) radical transformation of how affordable housing is funded and provided along the cost rental model, iii) reform the existing approach to provide greater choice, to see social housing as part of our social infrastructure. The different approaches are well set out and clearly explained.

Part three of the book is by far the longest and sets out the reform agenda. It starts by asking how access to housing support is granted and who should get access? The discussion towards the end of chapter nine, tracing the move from Rent Supplement to RAS (Rental Accommodation Scheme) and then HAP (Housing Assistance Payment), explains the thinking behind the introduction of these new models and the implications of demand-driven rental assistance. The next chapter provides 'under-the-bonnet' details of how social housing is financed and how this has changed as the number of providers and funding channels has expanded. This chapter is data heavy, but this is necessary to understanding the underlying changes.

Chapter 12 covers money-in - rents. The pros and cons of the differential rent system are outlined in a systematic way and alternatives such as cost rental explained. There is also an insightful discussion of the challenges of introducing reforms in this area. The following chapter looks mainly at how local authorities manage their housing stock. Data from the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) showing variations in re-letting times and average costs of refurbishment makes for interesting reading and there is also a good discussion of asset management. Call me greedy, but I would have liked a little bit more here about Approved Housing Bodies.

Chapter 14 is primarily covers tenant purchase. The

different schemes that have operated to allow tenants become home owners, the effects on the social housing stock, the role of tenant purchase in creating sustainable communities, and cost-benefit concerns. This leads to a discussion in the next chapter about sustainable communities - a term that is used by many to mean many things. The move away from large local authority estates is charted back to the early 1990s. There is an interesting discussion towards the end of this chapter about the neighbourhood effect - do mixed communities lead to better outcomes?

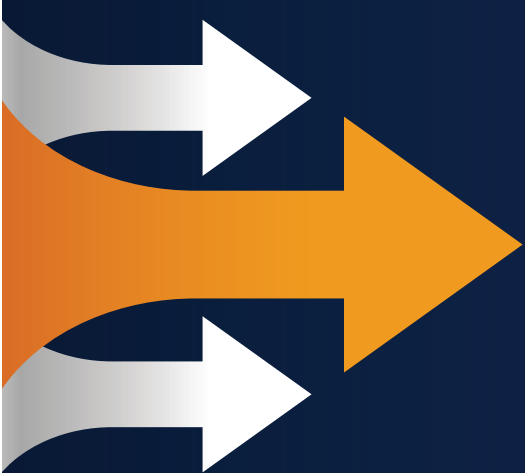
Chapter 16 then turns to regulation of the rental housing market. The sections on regulation of Approved Housing Bodies and the regulation of the private rented sector are most relevant given the amount of activity in these two sectors of late.

Part four of the book has but two chapters, the focus of which is on the reform. Chapter 17 is at the institutional level and outlines the difficulties of achieving substantive change. The final chapter returns to examine the alternative housing pathways and then discusses specific areas

requiring action, such as finance, regulation, and the reform agenda. Lewis concludes by acknowledging the tendency towards incremental change but calls for more radical measures: '... we should certainly be looking for a new direction, one that is more sustainable, affordable and better aligned to the social and economic objectives of the state'.

This book looks back and tries to make sense of a way forward. It does so during one of Ireland's most turbulent periods in housing. It draws both from the author's professional career in housing, and an array of research sources, data, official reports, legislation, and policy documents.


Social Housing Policy in Ireland: New Directions is very readable and should be of interest to a wide audience; those who have an interest in how social policy is developed and implemented and likewise anyone with an interest in social and affordable housing, particularly those working for better housing futures. The book has a very contemporary feel to it, but it will, no-doubt, stand the test of time and be a go-to housing textbook for years to come.



Social Housing Policy in Ireland: New Directions

This book looks at the options available to the state as it seeks to devise a social housing policy capable of meeting the needs of a dynamic economy with a rapidly growing population. With public debate focussed on the amount of available public funding and the level of output needed to address an acute shortage of affordable accommodation, it is easy to lose sight of the wider reforms needed within the supported housing sector. This book explores the possible alternative housing policy options that can lead to better social and affordable housing.

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A life at the coal face of local government

The Wonderful Life of a Councillor: 'What kind of a Gobshite do you think I am?' by Sean O'Grady.

Review and interview by Stephan Fernane.

With over 40 years of service at town council level, retired Killarney councillor Sean O'Grady has a wealth of experiences to share in his new memoir.

The book offers a retrospective appraisal of the retired councillor's life and his involvement in local politics for over 40 years. 'As a political person I thought it was important to say what I experienced in my time as a councillor,' he says. Sean admits he was never a good man at keeping a diary but he always had a good memory. 'My son probably summed it up best when he said of my memoirs 'You want them to know that you were here', which he put in a nutshell. I hope it will give a few pointers to people.'

'What kind of a gobshite do you think I am?' is an interesting subtitle to the book which is intended as an ironic and slightly open question leading to how we interpret differences between democracy and misguided democracy.

As well as local politics, Sean touches on aspects of the national and international vision of democracy in the book with a view to making sense of how local government should be run. He abhors the 2014 abolition of town councils and lays out his assessment as to how and why they should be revived. Sean also decries what he calls 'the imposition of fiscal strategies' in local governance.

'Local politics is not a business. It is a democratic institution mandated by government. Fiscal matters are important but it is not the be all and end all. If it was, then all we'd have to do is get all the Chamber of Commerce groups to look after the country. The basic premise I feel is wrong for serving society's ills when we keep seeking fiscal solutions all the time. There is also the societal factor to consider, such as education and health.'

Sean served as an Independent, Labour and Official Sinn Féin councillor throughout his time in politics. His 'Left leanings' stem from his time representing workers as a Shop Steward in Liebherr. But prior to this, Sean, as a boy, sold coal and turf to the homes of poor people around Killarney. Sean witnessed poverty at the coalface and it stayed with him all his life.

'Donal [his brother] and I used to earn a few bob with the turf man when we were children.

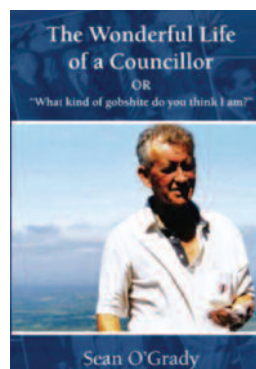
'The housing conditions of some of the people, newly married people, wasn't great. I met lovely young couples who were starting out their lives together in total poverty. It really moved me. I used to read fairly extensively too and I read a lot about workers' rights and nationalistic feelings. That aspect evolved to encompass my views on where people were going and how they lived their lives, and the conditions they lived in. I just felt there had to be something other than fiscal improvements.'

Sean writes warmly about his late father, John, who was a harness maker by trade in Killarney. Originally from a Fianna Fáil background, John served as a Sinn Féin Councillor in Killarney Town Council from 1963 to 1974. John O'Grady was widowed early in life and Sean talks about his father with high admiration for the way he balanced his home life with work and his political career. Sean's father ran a busy workshop where everything from politics to football was debated at length. This workshop became known locally as 'The Dáil' and a place where the young Sean was captivated by the topics of the day. 'It was a place you learned a lot if you listened,' Sean says.

'There was debates and discussion about everything. He [his father] was a great man and I was very influenced by him even though he never spoke to us ideologically about anything. 'He wasn't into that. He never even gave us a lecture on politics. We just knew what he was and with my mother dying young, leaving nine of us, we knew he was a very caring man.

'The fact he was able to care for his family and still be in politics without his wife was tremendous. We had great admiration for him.' Lastly, Sean insists that he has enjoyed the journey of looking back on life and collating its experiences. He says that people are at the heart of this experience and he talks passionately about the diversity of the individual. Sean is a man who believes in celebrating the diversity of the human race. 'To think we can all have our own way of influencing our surrounds is something that intrigues me,' he says. So, is he glad he wrote the book?

'I think that's something I can only answer in 12 months' time. Someone said to me recently that 'I'm brave' to write my memoirs. You don't want to be told this when writing about people. The one thing I can say is that even though the book is hard-hitting in places, there is no malice attached to anything I've written.'



This article first appeared in The Kerryman on March 9 2019. It is reproduced here with the author's permission.

LOCAL AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE:

Improvements, challenges and emerging trends.

Laura Shannon

Local Authorities are improving their performance in a number of key service areas according to the Local Authority Performance Indicator Report 2018 which has just been published. However, the report also highlights areas for improvement and emerging trends.

NOAC (The National Oversight and Audit Commission) was established under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 to provide independent scrutiny of local government performance in fulfilling national, regional and local mandates. One of NOAC's functions is to scrutinise performance of local government bodies against relevant indicators and this is the fifth annual performance indicator report published by NOAC in relation to that function. The report considers 37 different performance indicators and is over 100 pages long.

Some of the main findings from the report include:

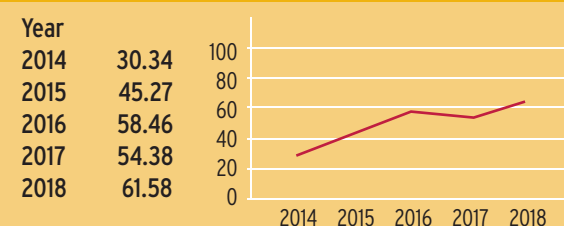
- Ireland's 31 local authorities spent on average **€978.91** per person in 2018, on hundreds of services, from roads and planning to libraries and animal welfare.
- Council-run Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) assisted in the creation of **3,656 new jobs** last year, a 12% increase year-on-year.
- The number of new social homes added to council ownership increased by 57% - from 2,532 new units built or acquired in 2017 to **3,965** added to stocks last year.
- A total of **19,808** new buildings were notified to local authorities in 2018, a 14% increase on the previous year.
- Last year **15,043** community organisations were included in County Registers as part of Public Participation Networks, which enable the public to take an active role in their council's policy decisions.
- The report highlights that some local authorities need to improve the level of property inspections and address the ongoing challenges of adult homelessness.

Challenges

Housing and homelessness remains a challenging area in

many respects for local authorities. While some improvements can be noted in terms of increased social housing stock, there are significant challenges to overcome with regards to meeting housing need and ending long-term homelessness. NOAC note 'the unwelcome statistic' that the number of adults in emergency accommodation at year-end has risen since 2017 to 6,083 persons (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Long-term homelessness (% of total homeless)

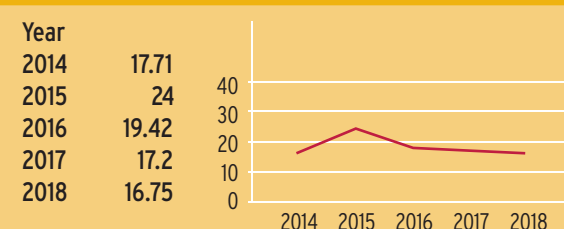


Indicator H6: Number of adult individuals in emergency accommodation that are long-term (i.e. 6 months or more within the previous year) homeless as a percentage of the total number of homeless adults individuals in emergency accommodation at the end of year.

Property inspections remain low

The number of buildings inspected as a percentage of new buildings notified to local authorities has fallen since 2015 (see Figure 2). While the median figure stands at 16.75% in 2018, above the minimum target set for local authorities, the levels of inspection vary hugely across local authorities. Eight local authorities failed to reach the 12% inspection target while on the other end of the scale, the best performers were Waterford City and County Council (63.45%) and Dublin City Council (69.7%).

Figure 2. Building inspections (as a % of new buildings notified)



Indicator P1A: Buildings inspected as a percentage of new buildings notified to the local authority.

In their report, NOAC noted a common reason given by local authorities for the downward trend in inspections was the increase in buildings notified and insufficient staff to maintain levels of inspections. In 2018, local authorities were in total notified of 19,808 new buildings, an increase of 14.4% over 2017 figures. Of these, local authorities inspected 4,649 in 2018, representing an annual increase of 4.9% of new buildings inspections carried out by local authorities.³

(continued over ►)

³ LGMA (2019) LGMA Summary Local Authority Performance Indicators 2018, p.14.

'Demand for council services is increasing. Housing is, of course, one of the major service challenges facing the local government sector and the country at the moment.'

Another area of concern is the inspection of private rented properties. The inspection rate of registered tenancies continues to be low at 7.39%. However, this figure is an improvement from the previous year. Of those units inspected in 2018, 83% were found to be non-compliant with current standards regulations. Local authorities have advised NOAC that the number of non-compliant dwellings that became compliant in 2018 was 5,466, a significant increase on 2017 figure of 3,329.

Jackie Maguire, Chair of the County and City Management Association (CCMA) and Chief Executive of Meath County Council noted these challenges: 'Demand for council services is increasing. Housing is, of course, one of the major service challenges facing the local government sector and the country at the moment. As the NOAC report shows, we are working hard to meet that challenge, adding to our social housing stock and delivering additional social housing solutions, in line with our Rebuilding Ireland targets.'

This article has touched on just a few of the findings from this comprehensive report and examined some of the challenging areas in relation to housing. The publication of the indicators report coincides with the launch of #YourCouncil - a new campaign aimed at informing the public about how their local authority impacts their daily lives and how they can engage with council services. This campaign, and the annual *Local Authority Performance Indicator Report*, are important steps in ensuring that local authorities can provide effective and efficient services that meet the needs of their communities.

The full performance indicator report can be accessed on NOAC's website: www.noac.ie

The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) have also provided a summary of the report and details of the #YourCouncil campaign on their website: www.lgma.ie



Under the theme, *Progress in Housing: Planning, Delivery, Quality & Regulation*, the annual Housing Practitioners' Conference took place in Kilkenny on 4-5 July. With over 160 delegates, the conference - jointly organised by the Housing Agency and the IPA - continues to be hugely popular. The social housing sector was well represented by local authorities and housing associations from across the country. In recent years, the conference's appeal has broadened to attract delegates from various state bodies, the private sector and academia.

There was a busy programme over the 1.5-day conference that lent an energetic pace to proceedings. To keep matters as interactive and as lively as possible, the conference's format varied between panel discussions, presentations and workshops. Furthermore, an exhibition on the Vienna model of housing - a respected approach to cost rental - was available for delegates to view. Carol Tallon was the



conference moderator; she expertly kept proceedings on track and steered the panel discussions along. In an effort to maximise delegate participation, Slido (an audience interaction tool) was used.

Session 1: In Conversation with... Progress in Housing

After the official opening by the Housing Agency's Chair, Michael Carey, and Minister Murphy, an expert panel discussion kicked-off the conference properly. Three years on from Rebuilding Ireland's launch, and in the context of the continuing crisis, this panel focused on progress in the housing sector. Conn Murray (Limerick City and County Council), Mary Hurley (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG)), John O'Connor (Housing Agency), Rosalind Carroll (Residential Tenancies Board) and Donal McManus (Irish Council for Social Housing) were the panellists. Their contributions made for an engaging and insightful conversation - the latest developments in the

sector, ongoing challenges and possible solutions were discussed. Indeed much interest was provoked during the subsequent Q&A.

Session 2: Affordability

Following this, the first presentation looked at the cost rental model in an Irish context. Jointly-delivered by Daragh McCarthy and Jim Baneham from the Housing Agency, the mechanics of the cost rental system were explained. Particularly informative was the section on the elements required to keep rents affordable and the methodology used for their calculation. Current policy commits to developing a cost rental segment in Ireland's housing market. With that in mind, details on a cost rental scheme being built in Stepaside were outlined; this will be the country's first such scheme. Towards the end of the presentation, the audience were told about a working group that is examining the feasibility of a national cost rental model. With spiralling rental costs facing countless households in Ireland, the work being undertaken in this area is certainly to be welcomed.

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Session 3: Workshops

Workshops took place after the coffee break. Each of the five workshops focused on key aspects of housing: rural issues/revitalising Ireland's towns, age-friendly homes, homelessness, mental health and housing and affordability (purchase and rental).

Session 4: Practical Showcase

In the session after lunch, presentations were delivered on the regulation of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), the rental sector and the affordable purchase scheme. A comprehensive overview of the AHB sector's regulation framework was given by Susanna Lyons, Head of Regulation at the Housing Agency. The AHB sector has witnessed much change since 2011's Housing Policy Statement and Susanna's presentation touched on the main regulatory reforms introduced since then. The bigger role for AHBs in the delivery of social housing is reflected by the healthy flow of capital funding

into the sector from public and private sources. The rationale for developing a well-regulated sector was clearly explained – stakeholder assurance being essential for the sector's sustainability. Furthermore, the nitty-gritty of what the regulator is looking for in terms of governance requirements was covered. Given the supply demands being placed on AHBs, a robust system of regulation is key to building confidence in the sector.

Continuing with the topic of regulation, Caren Gallagher, Head of Communications and Research at the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), gave delegates an update on the RTB's hectic work programme. Legislative changes in the rental sector, implemented by the RTB, continues apace. Caren explained their new powers of investigation and sanction and the newly designated Rent Pressure Zones. Against the backdrop of an expanding stock of student units in Irish cities, the implications of new legislation on student-specific accommodation was discussed. At the end of her presentation, Caren reminded the conference that regulation is merely part of the broader solution that is required. To effectively tackle the crisis, the various measures being introduced by policy-makers need to work in tandem.

From the breakdown of figures, building new social houses is clearly the priority. This presents housing practitioners with further considerations. An expanding national stock of social housing brings the matter of asset management to the fore.

Paul Hession (DHPLG) spoke to delegates on the affordable purchase scheme and the serviced site fund (SSF). Following the financial crash, all affordable housing schemes were stood down. However, the escalating house prices of recent years has meant that affordability has returned as a major challenge for many would-be buyers. Paul's presentation gave details on the latest affordable housing scheme. Its difference from the previous incarnations of the scheme, the equity charge and the order of priority for those eligible were all explained. In terms of the SSF, its role in the delivery of affordable housing was discussed, as was its budget. So far, two calls to local authorities for infrastructural funding under the SSF have been made. With a total of €310 million earmarked, as many as 6,200 affordable homes could be delivered with help from the SSF.

Session 5: In Conversation with... What Makes a Good Sustainable Community

The final session of the day saw an engaging panel discussion take place on the topic of sustainable communities. On the panel of experts were: Aileen Hayden (Threshold), Marian Finnegan (Sherry Fitzgerald), James Benson (Construction Industry Federation), Mary J. Holland (Kilkenny County Council) and David Rouse (Apartment Owners' Network). A sustainable community – a stated objective of housing policy – can be a somewhat abstract notion. But the ideas and perspectives shared by the panellists on the characteristics of a good sustainable community helped give the concept a firmer meaning. Day 1 of the conference's formal proceedings concluded.

Later that evening, Kilkenny County Council's Leas-Chathaoirleach, Councillor Andrew McGuinness, gave a warm and welcoming pre-dinner speech to the conference delegates.

Session 6: Asset Management

Day two's opening session dealt with asset management. Nina Murray and Aidan O'Reilly (DHPLG) talked about the social housing delivery programme. One in every five of the social housing units delivered under Rebuilding Ireland will come from leasing delivery streams. The various leasing schemes and their particular features were outlined. Part of the presentation set out the social housing targets for 2019 to be delivered by building, acquiring, and leasing units. From the breakdown of figures, building new social houses is clearly the priority. This presents housing practitioners with further considerations. An expanding national stock of social housing brings the matter of asset management to the fore.

Paul Isherwood's subsequent presentation, therefore, neatly followed. Paul is Director of Asset Management at the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and talked in detail about their management of assets. With a stock of some 86,500 units, and an annual budget of £185 million for its maintenance and investment programme, a strategic approach is vital. The key elements of the executive's asset management strategy were outlined: the asset register, stock condition survey, asset performance evaluation and investment plan. Void management was also touched on. Paul concluded by giving his thoughts on what makes for good asset management. From a practitioners' perspective, the opportunity to learn about current practice elsewhere is always welcome.

The next presentation offered a case study in asset management. Siobhan McNulty, from Clare County Council's housing department, presented on their planned maintenance programme. Siobhan's presentation gave striking visual evidence in support of taking a proactive approach to



Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Eoghan Murphy, inspects a display at the Housing Practitioners Conference

maintenance. The various steps in Clare's programme were clearly explained. Importantly, Siobhan spoke about the advantages - to the council and its tenants - of its ongoing maintenance agenda; the challenges encountered along the way were also addressed. Older housing and underinvestment over the years made the programme of work an even greater challenge. *Rebuilding Ireland* supports a preventative maintenance approach to council stock management, but of course, this requires funding. Siobhan offered valuable advice on the various sources of funding available.

Session 7: Getting Housing Right for the Future

The conference's final session looked towards the future of housing in Ireland. Effective public policies undoubtedly need to be based on sound evidence - gained through research. Roslyn Molloy, Researcher at the Housing Agency, presented on the agency's latest attitudinal survey. The findings were revealing and focused on key areas: housing and neighbourhood satisfaction, affordability and moving home. Roslyn's presentation provided insight into attitudes towards housing in contemporary Ireland. Overall, there is a high-level of housing satisfaction in Ireland - 92% of those surveyed were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their homes. But the survey also drilled down into the problems facing some households. Renters are more likely to face problems rather than owners - shortage of space, heat loss and damp, leaks and noise being problem areas. Positive results were found when it came to neighbourhood satisfaction - again owners were more satisfied than those renting. Questions were asked about housing affordability for mortgage holders and renters. The results underline the growing affordability

problem faced by many. 34% of respondents had 'some difficulty' with the monthly mortgage repayment, with 62% of renters experiencing 'some difficulty' in meeting their rent. The feedback from renters - captured by the survey - show the dissatisfaction and movement within Ireland's expanding rental sector. The presentation gave a very good overview of a detailed report. In keeping with the session's theme, it was pointed out that a housing study on attitudes and aspirations is important as its findings feed into the design of future housing policies. The voice of householders, those who consume housing and have different needs, has to be heard.

In keeping with the session's theme, it was pointed out that a housing study on attitudes and aspirations is important as its findings feed into the design of future housing policies. The voice of householders, those who consume housing and have different needs, has to be heard.

John Flynn, from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, followed-up with a talk on their work in delivering a cleaner energy future. In the battle to mitigate against climate change, high-levels of residential energy consumption is a

concern. Simply put, the national housing stock needs to become more energy efficient. Better ways of generating energy are also required. Older housing can be particularly poor in terms of efficiency. John discussed the energy benefits arising from deep retrofits to older units. Figures were provided on the number of homes retrofitted, the cost involved and the energy savings achieved from the 2012-18 programme. The 2019 funding available to local authorities and housing associations for the retrofit of their stock was highlighted; funding for 2020 will publicised in due course. Older social housing stock will thus continue to be a focus for retrofitting for some time to come.

For the final presentation, the conference heard from Niall Cussen, Ireland's new planning regulator. Only established since April, Niall provided context to the work of the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR). His talk then touched on the challenges that lie ahead for planners in Ireland – the shortage of housing supply, traffic congestion, and carbon emissions among others. A very experienced planner himself, Niall gave an insightful discussion on the evolution of Ireland's planning system over the past 30 years. Clearly, a much more comprehensive planning framework now exists, however, as Niall reminded delegates, the planning challenges facing the country today are greater than what they were back in the 1990s. Driving national research is another of the OPR's functions; evidence helps to ensure that future plans are properly informed when it comes to setting targets, measuring progress and determining actual public need. Niall spoke about the importance of a coordinated approach to research among the relevant state bodies. Other aspects covered by the presentation included: public awareness around planning, training for new councillors, ICT innovation and the review of statutory plans. A lively Q&A rounded-off this final session and indeed the 2019 housing practitioners' conference.

Of course, the conference's purpose is not just about updating delegates on housing policy and practice. The coffee and lunch breaks over the 1.5 days provided ample networking opportunity for practitioners from housing bodies around the country.

Given the quality of the speakers, the venue, and not forgetting the contributions made by delegates, next year's conference will have much to live up to.

All of the speakers' presentations can be found on the Housing Agency's website:
<https://www.housingagency.ie/news-events/housing-practitioners-conference-2019-presentations>
For further information on the Vienna Housing Model, please visit: <http://www.housingmodeldublin.ie/>

NEWS

9 Irish finalists shortlisted for 3rd European Innovation in Politics Awards

Nine finalists from Ireland are in the finals of the annual Europe-wide competition for creative political work which is being awarded for the third year by the Innovation in Politics Institute. The Award winners will be announced in Berlin on 4th December 2019. Out of 402 submitted projects from across Europe, 80 finalists were selected by a jury of more than 1,000 citizens from all European countries.

Five of the nine finalists, featured below, are local authority initiatives from Limerick, Longford, Meath and Monaghan Councils.

The other initiatives shortlisted are the Creative Ireland Programme, a five-year strategy to place creativity at the centre of public policy (Josepha Madigan TD); The new public library strategy for Ireland, Our Public Library 2020: inspiring, connecting and empowering communities (Michael Ring TD); The introduction of the Ireland Strategic Fund to divest money from fossil fuels (Thomas Pringle TD); and the introduction of mandatory inquests for all maternal deaths (Clare Daly TD).

Longford Nua Award category: Community

Longford Nua is a new mapping project using an App that Longford County Council launched seeking to challenge the status quo; to give a voice back to the people, to engage them at an early stage in the decision-making process. This approach through technology allows local people to share stories about places in Longford Town and make suggestions about how some of them could be reused. There are three elements to the App 'past, present and possible' allowing the people of the town to tell the Council their stories, changing the narrative to the positive attributes of the town and to identify opportunities for potential new uses and to involve them in the conversation about the possibilities.

Politicians nominated: Séamus Butler, Gerry Warnock, Joe Flaherty, John Browne, Martin Monaghan, Peggy Nolan, Gerry Hagan, Councillors Longford County Council.

Your Vote Your Voice – An Easy to Read Guide to Voting

Award category: Human rights

Your Vote Your Voice is an easy to read guide to voting in Ireland. The guide is written in plain English and uses an accessible layout. It explains clearly the voting process in Ireland and how any person over 18 can exercise their right to vote. Your Vote Your Voice - An easy to read guide to voting was identified as a priority by Monaghan County Council in 2019. Following the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with a Disability in 2018 and with Local and European Elections taking place in 2019 it felt it was an important time to focus on the rights of people with a disability, in particular, the right to vote.

This initiative is featured in more detail on page 8 of this edition of Local Authority Times.

Politician nominated: Séamus Coyle, Councillor and Cathaoirleach Monaghan County Council.

Moyross Training at The Bays

Award category: Jobs

A low level of economic activity and lack of any significant economic base is a particular problem within the Moyross area of Limerick city. The 2016 census shows that nearly of quarter of the electoral divisions with the highest unemployment areas in Ireland were in Limerick City and County, including Ballynanty (Moyross), with 43.6% unemployment. The target group for The Bays training programme is unemployed adults aged over 18, primarily from within the Moyross regeneration area of Limerick City. There is a high youth dependency rate (about 32%) in the regeneration areas of Limerick. The Bays training facility delivers an integrated service approach to equip unemployed residents of the Northside regeneration area of Limerick City with the skills and confidence to secure employment. The facility provides a trades-based training approach focused on equipping clients with industry-specific skills currently being sought in sectors such as construction and manufacturing. All training modules are certified.

Politician nominated: Frankie Daly, Councillor Limerick City and County Council

Athboy Walkability and Inclusive Town Developments

Award category: Human rights

Promoting Athboy as an inclusive and progressive town, Councillor David Gilroy recently led an Age-Friendly Walkability Audit in the town to address accessibility. A unique aspect of this audit was considering cognitive and sensory impairment as well as physical access issues. Cllr Gilroy works closely with the business community, and Athboy has been nominated as Meath's Friendliest Town in this year's retail excellence awards. Athboy

has a fantastic community centre that features a 'Changing Places' toilet facility, which has a height-adjustable bench and hoists to enable people with more profound disabilities to use facilities. Cllr Gilroy is Chairman of Boyne Valley Tourism, instrumental in the 'Spirits of Meath' festival which will now be supported to develop as an international festival centred on the original site of Samhain/Halloween. In 2019, Athboy is hosting the Leinster Fleadh, a prestigious traditional Irish music competition. Athboy is close to one of Meath's two Gaeltacht areas where the Irish language is spoken daily. Athboy has many other inclusive and progressive developments, including biodiversity zones and a sensory garden. Cllr Gilroy is supporting community consultation for the development of a community recreational area/park in the town.

Politician nominated: David Gilroy, Councillor Meath County Council.

Age Friendly Ireland: A Shared Service of Local Government

Award category: Quality of life

In April 2019, Ireland became the first country ever to have a full country committed to the World Health Organisation's Age-Friendly Programme. Meath County Council takes the lead on developing Ireland as an Age-Friendly country through its establishment of an Age-Friendly Ireland local government shared service. The shared service provides support and guidance to all 31 local authorities in developing their county and city Age Friendly Programmes. Age-Friendly Ireland works in partnership with the public sector, private sector and NGO sector to prepare Ireland for population ageing and to address older people's issues under the eight themes of the World Health Organisation's Age-Friendly Programme. When philanthropic funding for this work came to an end, Meath County Council offered to host the Age-Friendly Programme on an interim basis to ensure continuity to the work. Meath County Council then bid to host the Shared Service for Age-Friendly work in Ireland. This has been in operation as shared service since 2018. Ireland's Age-Friendly Programme is at an advanced stage and well regarded internationally, with continued support from Meath County Council to drive this innovative work.

Politician nominated: Wayne Harding, Councillor and Cathaoirleach Meath County Council

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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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