LOCAL GOVERNMENT: ENGAGING AND EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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1
INTRODUCTION

The need to encourage greater ownership of, and participation in, local decision-making has been reflected in numerous documents and local and national government reform plans over the years. Putting People First recognises that 'participation of citizens in public life and their right to influence decisions that affect their lives and communities is 'at the centre of democracy' (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG), 2012, p.157).

Through the electoral representative system, local government involves extensive interaction with communities. Alongside this, local authorities also engage with citizens through public consultations and information provision in a variety of forms. Members of the public can also be involved directly in decision-making through the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) system, where membership is drawn not only from elected representatives but also from various sectors relevant to the work of the committees. Other structures, such as Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and Public Participation Networks (PPNs), introduced more recently, also allow members of the public to participate through formal structures.

It is recognised, however, that citizen engagement needs to be further developed. A number of possible participative democracy initiatives were put forward in *Putting People First* including participatory budgeting, petition rights, plebiscites, and town or area meetings. Local authorities are, of course, not limited to the above-mentioned initiatives and, pursuant to powers under the Local Government Act 2001, may pursue other opportunities to enhance engagement with their local communities. There are, therefore, a diverse range of citizen engagement initiatives and methods in place at the local level in Ireland.

This research project aims to:

a) Assess international best practice, identify and highlight a number of cases of good practice with regard to citizen engagement, and outline implications for local government in Ireland.

b) Capture and promote good practice in Ireland through a series of cases studies.

c) Encourage debate on best practice in the area of citizen engagement and consideration of the establishment of principles of engagement nationally to encourage and support local governments.

1.1   RESEARCH APPROACH AND REPORT STRUCTURE

The need to involve citizens in decision-making is an issue faced by governments, both central and local, globally. This research draws on extensive national and international literature, case studies, policies, guidance and principles of engagement, as well as other research recently carried out by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) research team. A number of frameworks of citizen engagement are used to assess and analyse various methods and initiatives. One of the most cited is the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) model (2018), which builds on Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969). The purpose of the spectrum is to demonstrate the different levels of participation, from informing or consulting citizens to involving them in decision-making, collaborating with them and empowering them. This spectrum was used to identify best practice and case studies that reflect the diverse initiatives at local level in Ireland which aim to enhance outcomes through better informing and engaging with the public.

Five case studies were chosen from a range of possible examples. Information was gathered through careful review of relevant documentation and interviews with those directly involved in the implementation of the initiatives. The case studies were assessed using criteria adapted from the 2005 POWER Inquiry, which explored how political participation and involvement might be increased and deepened in Britain (see Chapter 3 for more details).

Chapter 2 provides the context for citizen engagement and examines drivers, barriers and best practice principles. Chapter 3 is divided into four sections, each providing a brief overview of the area of citizen engagement being examined before considering an Irish example in more detail. Chapter 4 examines innovative ways of working that aim to address issues and challenges faced by the public by involving them in policy-making and implementation. The trends emerging from our research are discussed in Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 sets out our conclusions.

2
CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN CONTEXT

2.1 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT'?

Citizen engagement is a widely used term across the public service in Ireland at all levels. It is generally accepted that, as the CCMA acknowledge, 'increased participation by communities in local decision-making is a pre-requisite for improving local democracy' (2013, p.3). In this report, we adopt a broad view of citizen engagement as defined by Steiner and Kaiser:

> 'Citizen engagement is a means of involving citizens in decision-making regarding public policies and administration' (2016, p.167).

In 2014, the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, which was tasked with making recommendations for greater input by citizens into decision-making processes at the local government level, used the term 'public participation' as a broader concept:

> '... we understand public participation to involve structured engagement between members of the public and groups of members of the public and the local authority at elected and official levels, in inputting and contributing to the shaping local government policy as opposed to general community activity' (DECLG, 2014, p.12).

This report similarly focuses on structured engagement initiatives led by local government. The term 'citizen' is used in a broad sense and is not restricted to formal citizenship. The Working Group report addressed a number of general principles for citizen engagement but focused on developing an enhanced framework for public engagement and participation, through the establishment of Public Participation Networks (PPNs). This report examines citizen engagement through a case-study approach, setting out examples at the local level across a spectrum of potential impacts on decision-making.[1]

2.2 OVERARCHING POLICY CONTEXT
Putting People First

The need to encourage greater ownership of, and participation in, local decision-making has been reflected in numerous documents and local and national government reform plans over the years. Putting People First recognises that 'participation of citizens in public life and their right to influence decisions that affect their lives and communities' is 'at the centre of democracy' (DECLG, 2012, p.157).

It was recognised in *Putting People First* that, as part of the 'revitalisation' of local government, the approaches used to engage citizens in decision-making 'may need to go beyond the range of conventional communication, public consultation and citizen participation mechanisms used in the past' (ibid, p.157). In addition to establishing new

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1 For an account of participative reforms in local government in Ireland, including formal structures (such as PPNs) and statutory consultation mechanisms, see Callanan, 2018, pp.192–214.

formal structures for participation, and changes to the structure of local government aimed at bringing decision-making and policy formulation closer to the public (through municipal districts), *Putting People First* also suggested trialling additional mechanisms for citizen engagement such as participatory budgeting, petitions, plebiscites and town/area meetings. These initiatives were first flagged in a 2008 Green Paper, *Stronger Local Democracy* (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2008).

Our Public Service 2020 – citizens at the heart of public services

The current overarching public service reform plan, *Our Public Service 2020* (Government of Ireland, 2017), recognises the need for a public service that is resilient and responsive to the challenges Ireland faces while effectively delivering quality services to the public. A core underlying principle of meeting this commitment is to place the public at the centre of public service. A number of headline actions were identified under three pillars: delivering for our public, innovating for our future, and developing our people and organisations.

Of particular relevance to this report is headline action four, which aims to 'enhance engagement and accountability around the delivery of public services so that the public and businesses have greater input into the planning, design, implementation and review of public service' (Government of Ireland, 2019, p.17). This action focuses on supporting public service organisations in continuing to improve engagement with the public and businesses through available structures, and in seeking new and emerging platforms. In 2019, two case studies of citizen engagement practice were published under this action, aiming to identify aspects of their design that worked well and lessons learned that could inform future citizen engagement initiatives: *€300k Have Your Say* (South Dublin County Council, undertaken by the IPA) and *Comhairle na nÓg and the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015–2020* (undertaken by the University of Limerick).

It is clear that local authorities in Ireland operate within an environment that encourages and supports citizen engagement. They are also required to engage with citizens in many other ways, for example through freedom of information legislation or legal requirements to consult the public before making decisions or adopting certain plans. This is discussed generally below with regard to drivers of citizen engagement but is not the focus of this report.

2.3 WHY SHOULD LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ENGAGE WITH THE PUBLIC?

Putting People First recognises that notwithstanding developments to increase participation at the local level, a 'democratic deficit' exists due to a 'perceived absence of meaningful opportunities for civic participation in decision-making about local issues' (Government of Ireland, 2012, p.158). Recent surveys support this view, showing that only 26 per cent of those surveyed agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area (National Oversight and Audit Commission, 2019).

Furthermore, a survey carried out in 2018 by Ipsos MORI for the Carnegie UK Trust found

that 48 per cent of people in Ireland felt they have too little control over the public services they receive, while 45 per cent felt they had about the right level of control (Cooper, 2019). The same report outlines that while Ireland scores well internationally on community participation, we score poorly on participation in democratic decision-making processes at local, regional and national levels.

Some argue that participation is 'an important end unto itself in a democratic society' (Quick and Bryson, 2016, p.160) while others disagree and instead state that citizen participation 'should not be an end in itself, but a tool to achieve a goal' (Yetano et al., 2010, p.4). Regardless of which view one takes, the overall trend is clearly to provide increased and enhanced opportunities for the public to participate in decision-making. Some of the drivers for this increased engagement are discussed below.

2.3.1   Drivers of citizen engagement
Legal requirements (statutory consultation)

Complying with legislation (i.e. statutory consultation) is one key driver of engagement with the public. In an Australian study of local governments (Christensen and McQuestin, 2019), meeting statutory requirements was the second largest driver of community engagement, behind 'known effectiveness in assisting council with its decisions'. Similarly, in an international study of selected local governments, Yetano et al. (2010) found that while complying with legal requirements was not rated as an important objective of citizen participation by local governments, it was ranked as the most important real use of citizen participation. This may imply that local governments prefer to portray the objectives of their citizen engagement initiatives in a different light to how they actually implement and use these initiatives.

In Ireland, 'traditional' or 'statutory' consultation, in areas such as land-use planning and environmental services, has been criticised for being one-way communication or information provision and ultimately a limited form of engaging with the public (Connaughton, 2014). This has been recognised as an issue both in terms of the nature of engagement and whether it is meaningful, and in terms of the perceived lack of interest by the public, demonstrated through low levels of participation (see Callanan, 2018, p.213). Section 3.2 on consultation initiatives will set out examples of where local government is going beyond the statutory minimum requirements in its consultation with citizens.

Efficiency and effectiveness

Providing quality services in an efficient and effective manner is a central aspect of local government reform in Ireland. The OECD discusses many drivers of citizen engagement; among these are improving the quality of policy and achieving better service delivery by involving citizens and tapping into 'wider sources of information, perspectives and potential solutions' (2001, p.19). Fung also finds that by 'reorganising themselves to incorporate greater citizen participation, public agencies can increase their effectiveness by drawing on more information and the distinctive capabilities and resources of citizens' (2015, p.5). 'Improving existing services' is also rated as a common use and objective of citizen participation by 30 cities surveyed by Yetano et al. (2010).

Co-production, a form of active participation, has become increasingly popular in many countries around the world particularly in countries that experienced prolonged austerity and public service cutbacks. Co-production signals a shift from a government for the public to a government by the public, emphasising the role of the service user or beneficiary in the delivery of services (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012; Bovaird et al., 2019).

Enhancing transparency and accountability
Citizens themselves are demanding enhanced transparency, accountability and participation to meet the challenges of changing economic and social environments. While this demand alone may encourage governments to provide better access to information and more transparent decision-making, as noted above, statutory requirements are also a driver. The underlying motivation is often to improve trust between citizens and governments, which has deteriorated in recent years (OECD, 2001) but is now showing signs of improvement (Boyle, 2019).

There may be a multitude of reasons why local governments are involving citizens in decision-making, and the literature discussed here outlines some of these. Regardless of the drivers, engagement with the public should follow best practice and respect core principles (see section 2.3.3)

2.3.2   Barriers to citizen engagement

Efforts at citizen engagement, the world over, encounter impediments – both internal and external. Strokosch and Osborne (2018) examine some of the challenges to citizen participation within the traditional model of service production. They note that, broadly speaking, public bodies design and deliver a service that is subsequently consumed by service users. Such rigidity means that citizen participation in service production can be something of an afterthought. Demands for greater citizen participation can be seen as a response to the 'closed-shop' method of decision-making promoted under the New Public Management (NPM) model. Yet the effectiveness of a supposedly more participatory approach at countering NPM's weaknesses is questionable. The authors further note that structural changes in the public management model, namely decentralisation, deliberative processes and networks, have failed to deepen the participatory way. Again, attempts to incorporate participation into official decision-making through such reforms appear somewhat piecemeal.

Looking specifically at local government, an international study examined factors influencing citizen participation in 30 local authorities, covering different styles of public administration and levels of economic development (Yetano et al., 2010). The local authorities were asked about difficulties they faced with citizen participation. Questions related to a lack of citizen interest, financial and human resources, political will and examples to learn from, and finally, resistance to change. Not unexpectedly, the results were uneven across the categories of local authority. Inadequate financial and human resources can limit attempts at citizen engagement. Cash-strapped councils may be unable to resource departments or personnel dedicated to furthering civic participation. However, the importance placed by local authorities on financial resources, for the implementation of such initiatives, varied.

Whereas Southern European authorities did not consider finances a barrier, their Latin American counterparts scored it highly. In terms of 'lack of examples to learn from', Germanic authorities ranked it the lowest, yet it was the highest ranked for the Southern European group. 'Resistance to change' and 'lack of political will' were also deemed significant barriers by Southern European authorities.

The chief barrier, across all groups, was the 'lack of citizen interest'. As Yetano et al. note, '[t]his can be considered a paradox: those that benefit most are the principal obstacle to the development of participatory initiatives' (2010, p.15). Arguably, this poses something of an existential question for proponents of citizen engagement: to what extent does the average citizen even want to be involved in local decision-making? Whilst citizens may indicate a preference (perhaps through a poll or a survey) for greater involvement in formal processes, in practice, how well does positive sentiment translate into participation when they are presented with an opportunity to do so? Needless to say, liking the idea of citizen engagement is very different to participating. Active participation requires a deeper level of personal conviction and commitment. Citizens need to be particularly exercised on a public policy issue or possess a certain civic-mindedness.

An Australian study on community engagement in local government sheds further light on the challenges of delivering engagement (Christensen and McQuestin, 2019). The researchers received responses to their survey from 175 local governments in Australia. Similar difficulties to the previous study emerged: insufficient public interest, finances and personnel time were the most common issues. Poor administrative culture, to use a broad term, was also identified as a difficulty. This was evidenced by a lack of leadership commitment to the engagement process, poor planning, poor staff commitment/ engagement, and inadequate levels of councillor support and dedicated staff. External factors that hinder engagement included the geographical distribution of communities, poor telecommunications infrastructure, consultation fatigue, apathy, and difficulties associated with hard-to-reach groups.

Practical barriers to citizen engagement also emerged from our discussions with practitioners. A lack of accessible information and poor communication were thought to obstruct effective engagement. A lack of commitment or seriousness on the part of organisers was cited as another barrier. For instance, this was thought to influence the level of effort and resources devoted to engagement and whether or not participant feedback was constructively used to shape outcomes.

2.3.3   Best practice and principles of engagement

Ilott and Norris (2015), drawing on empirical research, outline six features of successful engagement that provide a useful insight into 'what works':

- 'Be transparent about the terms of engagement – citizens need to be clear what they can achieve through participation, otherwise they can feel alienated if outcomes do not meet their expectations.

- Demonstrate impact – citizens want to see that their involvement has been influential.

- Engage early – early engagement can produce higher-quality outcomes.

- Involve the right people – representativeness should not come at the expense of targeting specific groups.

- Use the right channels – engaging citizens means tailoring engagement to their needs and interests.

- Use tools for creating constructive conversations – there are a number of techniques that can overcome resistance and allow people to approach issues with an open mind' (pp.2–3).

Given the wide range of conceptual frameworks and public participation initiatives that exist, an overarching document focusing on citizen participation in the policy cycle can be an important step towards an integral approach to citizen participation (OECD, 2016).

Such a document could link to a country's national open government strategy, allowing all entities to base their initiatives on a single set of standards. This document, which may take the form of a strategy, directive or guide, for example, can 'be a tool to provide the whole of government with an integrated approach to citizen participation and should include a description of specific tools to involve citizens in all phases of the policy cycle.' In Ireland, this document currently takes the form of guidelines for consultation (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2016), which link to the Open Government National Action Plan 2016–2018, and set out three overarching principles that should inform government departments and other public bodies when engaging with the public in developing policy, services and legislation:

1. Consultation with the public must be genuine, meaningful, timely and balanced, and have the ultimate objective of leading to better outcomes and greater understanding by all involved of the benefits and consequences of proceeding with particular policy or legislative proposals.

2. Consultation should be targeted at and easily accessible to those with a clear interest in the policy in question. There is no 'one-size fits all' approach and the particular requirements of the policy and those who should be consulted should be taken into consideration.

3. Government departments and agencies should make systematic efforts to ensure that interested and affected parties have the opportunity to take part in open consultations at all stages of the policy process on significant policy, service and legislative matters: development, implementation, evaluation, and review.

The document also sets out practical issues that need to be addressed at each stage of implementation of these principles. The OECD also suggests that a national document can be complemented with sectoral documents, providing more specific guidelines for a certain sector, but building on the national framework.

There are some good examples of guidance, or principles of engagement, prepared specifically for the local government sector. A document produced in 2015 by the CCMA and

the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG), assisted by the IPA, outlines a principles-based framework to help local authorities to adopt and implement good governance practices. One of six core principles outlined is that 'good governance means engaging openly and comprehensively with local people, citizens and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability'. In relation to stakeholder engagement, the document suggests that effective arrangements for public participation should include the following:

- The process should be user-friendly and perceived as fair, just and respectful.

- The avenues for public participation should be accessible to all.

- The public participation process should provide participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful and accessible manner.

- The public's role in decision-making and the limits of their influence should be clear from the outset.

- The public should have the opportunity to be involved in and/or monitor the implementation of the decision or outcomes (CCMA, AILG and IPA, 2015, p.27).

In the UK, the Local Government Association (LGA) has prepared a 'guide to engagement' to help local councils 'strengthen trust and build resilience in the face of fast change, low trust and small budgets' (2017, p.4). The guide covers the basics of consultation and engagement, setting out how councils can go beyond this, providing examples and best practice throughout. A similar document could be prepared for the local government sector in Ireland, drawing on existing guidance, outlined above, and case studies examined in this report. Such a document may particularly benefit local authorities with fewer resources or less capacity to do this on their own and encourage all local authorities to follow best practice across the spectrum of citizen engagement.

3
CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

This chapter turns to citizen engagement in practice and examines in depth a number of locally-led initiatives in Ireland. As mentioned previously, the IAP2 spectrum of public participation was used as a framework for analysing practice on the ground. Table 1 outlines this spectrum and the case studies selected to demonstrate the various levels of engagement. It must be noted that the case studies do not neatly align with the spectrum. For example, certain elements of a consultation process may entail greater involvement of the public. This spectrum may be useful for local governments themselves to review so as to analyse their citizen engagement efforts. In Vancouver, for example, the city government has adapted the spectrum, adding local examples and helping the public to see the impact of their involvement on the decision-making process.[2]

The IAP2 spectrum builds on Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, which has been criticised by some as outdated and obsolete as an analytical tool (Fung, 2006). Advancements in theory and practice of participation have challenged assumptions of Arnstein's empirical scale and the goal of reaching the higher rungs of the ladder (i.e. citizen control). Fung notes that while there may be contexts in which public empowerment is highly desirable, there are others in which a consultative role is more appropriate for members of the public than citizen control. This view is supported in our research, with each of the case studies demonstrating their own merit and appropriateness to the particular context.

This report also examines innovation in the area of citizen engagement. Policy labs, which are relatively new to the Irish environment but have proved popular internationally, are examined in Chapter 4. Policy labs (also known as innovation labs) may result in citizen engagement that has a high impact on decision-making, falling into the 'collaboration' or 'empowerment' categories of the IAP2 spectrum; however, given their relative infancy in Ireland, we felt it useful to separately examine their implementation to date and potential for future development.

Four of the case studies are examined using the below criteria, adapted from a report provided to the POWER Inquiry, which was established to explore how political participation and involvement might be increased and deepened in Britain (Smith, 2005). The first set of criteria, the 'selection mechanism,' evaluates whether the initiative has increased the number of citizens engaging. The 'form of involvement' and 'role in decision-making' criteria examine if participation has 'deepened'. Smith explains deepening participation as 'any change which allows a more direct, sustained and informed participation by citizens in political decisions' (p.17). The final two headings consider the transferability of the initiative and the resources involved in its implementation.

Criteria for assessing the in-depth case studies, adapted from Smith (2005)

Selection mechanism

- To what extent does the initiative increase the number of citizens engaging with local government?

- Is the initiative open to all or is there a selection mechanism such as election, random selection, self-selection or appointment? Is the selection mechanism fair?

- Is the initiative inclusive – to what extent are marginalised groups engaged?

Form of involvement

- To what extent are citizens able to set the agenda for the initiative?

- To what extent are citizens informed about the policy area or issues explored in the initiative?

- To what extent do citizens have the opportunity to debate and discuss the policy area or issues explored in the initiative?

Role in decision-making

- To what extent do citizens influence the final decision on the policy or issue being considered? Do they have a final say on a decision, provide a recommendation or generate preferences?

Scale and transferability

- Is an initiative suitable for different levels of governance? (e.g. national, regional, local or neighbourhood level).

- Can an initiative be transferred effectively to another local authority area?

Resource Implications

- What are the financial, administrative and political costs of an initiative?

TABLE 1 IAP2 SPECTRUM OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND SELECTED IRISH CASE STUDIES

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION →

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Irish case study	Removing Barriers, Improving Services (Monaghan County Council)	*The Suir from Source to Sea – a public engagement pilot (LAWPRO)*	Development of *Our Balbriggan Rejuvenation Plan* (Fingal County Council)		*€300k Have Your Say – Participatory Budgeting Initiative (South Dublin County Council)*

3.1 INFORM

According to recent surveys of residents in 21 of Ireland's local authorities, just 40 per cent indicated they feel well informed by their local council (National Oversight and Audit Commission, 2019). This varies between 60 per cent in Kerry to just 11 per cent in Dublin City. On average, only 34 per cent believe their local council is open and transparent. Furthermore, only 26 per cent agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area. These survey results indicate that there is room for improvement in terms of how local authorities are communicating and engaging with citizens.

In 2001, the OECD published a set of 10 guiding principles for information, consultation and active participation in policy-making. They identify information as a basic precondition for open and inclusive policy-making, which can contribute to building public trust in government, raising the quality of democracy, and strengthening civic capacity. Information is defined as a one-way relationship, covering both passive access to information upon demand by citizens and active measures by government to disseminate information to citizens (OECD, 2001). The case study examined below demonstrates efforts by Monaghan County Council to both improve the information citizens may access and actively disseminate information to citizens.

Free access to information related to public authorities has been a key area of reform across many countries in recent decades. In the European Union, legislation has been put in place in many countries, including Ireland, since the 1990s to improve access to information. In a recent study of local democratic reforms across Europe, Vetter et al. (2016) found that changes in the domain of free access to information were more common than far-reaching reforms such as the direct election of mayors or holding locally-binding referenda.

However, while access to information is a necessary feature of good governance and input in decision-making, it is not sufficient in itself. The quality of information and how it is presented and disseminated is an important consideration. Citizens budgets for example, which are a popular initiative globally, are designed to present key public finance information to a general audience (see internationalbudget.org for examples). A citizen budget was published alongside Ireland's Budget 2020 which explains the budget process and some key areas of spending (e.g. Brexit and climate action) in an easy-to-read format (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and Department of Finance, 2019).

At the local level, online communications and use of social media are important tools for local government to inform the public. The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) is working with local authorities and coordinating campaigns aimed at increasing awareness about the services councils provide and how people can engage with their local councils.[3] Individual local authorities are also changing how they present information to the public (see case study from Monaghan County Council below). A recent example from South Dublin County Council (SDCC) shows how mandatory information, the monthly Chief Executive's Report, can be presented in a more accessible and engaging way as a means of keeping the public informed about key achievements, statistical information and financial status.[4]

3 https://www.lgma.ie/en/news/your-council-campaign.html
4 See: https://www.sdcc.ie/en/services/our-council/about-us/chief-executive-s-reports/

3.1.1   Case study: Removing Barriers, Improving Services (Monaghan County Council)[5]

Monaghan County Council has put a lot of effort into improving access to, and quality of, information relating to its policies and services. Bernie Bradley, Social Inclusion Officer, is driving implementation of this approach with support from colleagues and senior management across the organisation. This case study looks at the approach taken, rather than a specific initiative, and therefore does not follow the same layout of the case studies that follow. It will draw on specific examples, however, to illustrate the impact of this approach.

Problem being addressed:

Identifying barriers to accessing information and services in current service delivery methods used by Monaghan County Council.

The approach:

Through engaging with its citizens via consultation on various strategies and plans, Monaghan County Council has identified that access to information is a consistent issue among all communities; complicated language, jargon, small print, and cluttered information are just some of the issues highlighted by citizens.

Your Vote Your Voice:

In 2019, following Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities , and with local and European elections taking place, 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: 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, which identified a significant lack of awareness of the voting process among many people in the community. Consultations with older people, people with disabilities and migrant communities all highlighted the need for more simplified information on voting.

During a survey of citizens, the most frequently raised reasons why people typically did not 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 and writing on 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 number 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, did not know Ireland uses a secret ballot system of voting; for many, this was the reason they did not 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 a clear layout and spacing make the information easy to read and understand. The overall aim of Your Vote Your Voice is to increase voter participation and active citizenship among the people of County Monaghan.

Similar guides have been prepared, in consultation with users, for local authority tenants and for older people.

Public sector duty pilot:
Monaghan County Council was chosen as one of six public sector bodies to pilot projects on the process of implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty ('the Duty').[6] The Duty 'places a statutory obligation on public bodies to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of those to whom they provide services and staff when carrying out their daily work. It puts equality and human rights in the mainstream of how public bodies execute their functions. To that end, it has the potential to positively transform how public bodies engage with members of the public, and their own staff.' (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2019, p.2)

The project allowed the council to examine the organisation from the perspective of the people living in the county, which highlighted the diversity of the community that makes up County Monaghan, a community that includes people with limited spoken and written English language skills, people with no access to internet or use of online platforms, people with disabilities who use many different methods of communication, and older people who due to the natural aging process are having to adapt their methods of communication or how they access information. Too often information does not reach many of these people in the community and they feel they get left behind or do not get to take part.

Key outputs:
One key output highlighted as a result of the overall approach is the development and use of a checklist/template for developing policies across the organisation. The Social Inclusion Officer is available as a common resource to all units across the organisation to assist with the application of this template. Given the varied nature of local authority services, this template serves as a guide rather that a prescriptive document.

6 For more information on the six pilots see: https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/#02

Key outcomes:

A key outcome of this approach, and involvement in piloting the Public Sector Duty process, is an organisation-wide awareness of the barriers, challenges and difficulties experienced by people in County Monaghan when trying to access services, information and support from the local authority and other public services. As a result, Monaghan County Council has developed an inclusive customer service policy and staff capacity and public awareness of how to access services and support. The council has recently signed the 'Declaration on Public Service Innovation in Ireland'[7] which, among other actions, commits the organisation to sharing knowledge and data with citizens in an open and transparent way.

3.1.2   Conclusion

Informing the public should be viewed as a core principle of how local government engages with citizens and not as the bottom rung on a ladder of participation. Examples and the case study examined in this chapter show that local authorities are committed to ensuring open and easy access to information. However, surveys of citizens and research show that improvements can still be made and can help to build trust between local government and citizens.

3.2   CONSULT

Public consultations are the best known and most widely used form of citizen engagement. Essentially, they provide citizens with an opportunity to voice their opinion, in a public setting, on a particular policy or issue. Consultations can have limited public appeal, depending on the topic for consideration and awareness of the process. In the execution of their executive functions, local authorities are statutorily obliged to hold public consultations in their areas of responsibility. But the degree of actual public participation in the consultation can vary. On the IAP2 spectrum, it goes beyond the one-way provision of information to interested parties. The goal of consulting is, '[t]o obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.' The organisers make a promise to their participants: 'We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision' (IAP2, 2018). This necessarily implies a greater level of citizen engagement.

Criticisms of traditional public consultations are well-known: low levels of attendance, participation by a vocal minority and poor facilitation by the organisers – among others. But recent years have witnessed significant strides in terms of how local authorities consult. Efforts are being increasingly made to move beyond the traditional approach, described by an interviewee as simply 'putting maps on a wall [of a community hall], saying that this is our proposed plan, what do you think of it?' While this longstanding method still has a place, local authorities are nevertheless adding to the consultation tools at their disposal. This is necessary because of the breadth of public services they provide, coupled with changing public expectations and lifestyles. When asked about changes in local authority

7 https://monaghan.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Innovation-Declaration-OPS.pdf

consultation, an interviewee remarked: '[I]t's much better now than it was 10–15 years ago. But I still believe that it can go further, and it is going further'. The increased use of digital technology and professional facilitators have been broad trends witnessed in the practice of public consultation.

Civic Tech

'Civic tech' essentially seeks to enhance the level of engagement between government and citizens. A more precise explanation has been offered: 'Civic technology merges technology innovation with civic purpose. Using civic applications, open data platforms, and a range of other technologies, civic tech connects citizens, tourists, and businesses with government services and government workers to make civic engagement and government infrastructure more effective' (Yesner Clarke, 2014, p.1). Its role in the consultation process is likely to intensify as it extends the opportunity to participate in decision-making to an ever-growing number of people.

There has been growth in the number and use of online consultation portals in the local government sector in recent years. These innovations are designed to provide information, gather views, and provide feedback to citizens on matters of public concern.

Citizen Space (DLR – We Asked, You Said, We Did, https://dlrcoco.citizenspace.com/)

Operated by Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council, Citizen Space allows people to identify consultations in their locality, participate in the planning process, and crucially, see what the outcome was. The concept for this user-friendly platform is based on three elements: We Asked, You Said and We Did. It provides a one-stop-shop for key information on local statutory consultations and contributes to a more inclusive and transparent approach.

CiviQ

Several local authorities have adopted CiviQ's software (https://civiq.eu/) to enhance how they consult, and to support various modernisation agendas. For instance, community engagement and participation is a key pillar under Limerick City and County Council's digital strategy. To this end, the development of the MyPoint online platform (https://mypoint.limerick.ie/) was designed to give citizens a stronger voice in the local planning process. By registering with MyPoint, citizens can make and track submissions to public consultations. Furthermore, the platform hosts online surveys to gather opinion on local matters.

Your Dublin Your Voice Research Panel (Dublin City Council)

An online opinion panel was formed in 2010, the first of its kind in Ireland. Citizens, who wish to have their voice heard, are encouraged to register for membership. Panellists are subsequently invited to participate in surveys relating to various aspects of living, working or studying in Dublin. The data gathered through this engagement mechanism is fed into the decision-making process. Participants are also informed, via email, of the results of the survey and how it is being used by the council.

Leuven, maak het mee (Leuven City Council)

CitizenLab (https://www.citizenlab.co/) is a Brussels-based software company that equips cities and governments with the technology to digitally consult with their citizens. One such city is Leuven, in Belgium, which used its digital platform to undertake a citizen engagement exercise entitled Leuven, maak het mee (Leuven, experience it).[8] Through this initiative, over 2,000 ideas were gathered from local people that will inform a multi-annual strategy for the city's development. This data was analysed and presented to the council and mayor for their consideration. The organisers promise to respond to each participant and advise whether or not their idea was deemed appropriate for implementation.

Facilitated consultations

Another trend has been the greater use of external facilitators. Conceivably, this is driven by reputational concerns and a lack of in-house expertise. The POWER Inquiry report argues, 'the best consultation exercises are run independently of government reducing suspicion of manipulation by authorities' (Smith, 2005, p.38). Independent facilitators, acting as a link between the experts and citizens, are used to design, plan and conduct consultations. In her study on the rise of the American public engagement industry, Caroline W. Lee writes that external consultants are thought to bring 'expertise in collaborative process, consensus-building, and public deliberation' to a public participation process (2015, p.42).

What next for O'Devaney Gardens Workshop (Dublin City Council, Connect the Dots and Happenings)

As part of the extensive regeneration plans for the O'Devaney Gardens Estate in Dublin, Dublin City Council worked in conjunction with Connect the Dots (civic engagement facilitators) and Happenings (event organisers) on a public consultation meeting. Held in October 2018, this relatively large session had over 100 participants who represented a broad spectrum of community interests. Through a very carefully planned and methodical engagement process, feedback was gathered, and later analysed, on key aspects of the regeneration proposals. The findings were presented in a detailed workshop report that fed into the tendering process.[9]

Development of Cromane Community Council Socio-Economic Plan

A bottom-up approach to formulating a socio-economic development plan for Cromane, a small community in Kerry, led by the Cromane Community Council, was assisted by external facilitators and utilised innovative spatial-planning software, called 'Geodesign', in a collaborative workshop. The Geodesign process allows communities to prepare a range of thematic maps based on their ideas to address local development needs. This was only the second time in Ireland for a community to use this technology to develop plans for their area, having been first piloted in Mulranny, County Mayo, a community with many similarities to Cromane. The workshop, which was just one part of a much broader consultation process, brought together about 30 people from across the community.

Led by the software developer, participants learned how to use the software to make maps and express their visions for their community, which were incorporated into the plan. Dr Brendan O'Keeffe, who helped prepare the final plan, noted that 'Geodesign has furthered

8 https://leuvenmaakhetmee.be/en/projects/betrokken-en-participatieve-stad/process
9 The workshop report is available at http://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/content/HousingAndCommunity/
   PolicyDocuments/ODevaneyGardens/Next%20for%20O'Devaney%20Community%20Consultative%20Forum%20
   Report.pdf

the capacity of the people of Cromane to collaboratively and constructively engage in dialogue, advance proposals and take decisions regarding the development of their local community. It has been a worthwhile experience, having been situated within a sequenced set of facilitated and community-led interactions' (O'Keeffe, 2017).

3.2.1   Case study: The Suir from Source to Sea (LAWPRO)

The Water Framework Directive (WFD), introduced in 2000, seeks to promote better management of water bodies across EU member states. An integrated approach towards the protection and enhancement of water quality in designated basins (or catchment areas) lies at the heart of the WFD implementation process.

Article 14 of the WFD requires each state to promote active involvement by interested parties in the production, review and monitoring of the River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs). Although not explicitly referenced by the WFD, the concept of public participation underpins the water governance system that has developed since 2000. A review of the first-cycle RBMP (2009–15), and the European Union (Water Policy) Regulations 2014, led to a reorganisation of Ireland's water governance structures. Legislative provision was made for the establishment of regional offices to improve stakeholder coordination and public participation. The Local Authority Water Programme (LAWPRO) was set up in February 2016.[10] Acting as a shared service, LAWPRO is responsible for:

• Networking and collaborating with local authorities and relevant state agencies;

• Engaging with local communities, with support for water-related projects and initiatives;

• Conducting catchment assessments.

Engaging communities during the preparation and implementation phases of the RBMP is therefore a key function of LAWPRO.

In July 2016, LAWPRO began a community engagement exercise focused on the River Suir catchment area. Collectively, these 16 consultations became known as The Suir from Source to Sea: A Public Engagement Pilot. The purpose of LAWPRO's consultations was to encourage local interest in the River Suir, its tributaries and, more broadly, to generate awareness of the WFD's objectives. LAWPRO held its public meetings alongside the Office of Public Works' (OPW) consultations on flood risk assessment and management. By hosting a complementary set of consultations, the OPW in the afternoon, and LAWPRO in the evening, it was hoped to maximise participant turnout and impact. Having only been established several months earlier, these public meetings represented a pilot engagement exercise for LAWPRO ahead of statutory consultation on the draft RBMP from spring 2017.

10 Originally named the Local Authority Water Communities Office (LAWCO), a restructure in 2018 saw LAWCO staff merge with the water catchments team to form the Local Authority Water Programme (LAWPRO). For clarity, only the term LAWPRO is used in this case study.

Assessment using POWER criteria

Selection mechanism:

The initiative was open to the general public. According to an interviewee, '[e]veryone was welcome, we tried to keep it as open as possible'. Considerable effort was made by LAWPRO to generate awareness of the meetings in each community. Both online and traditional advertising channels were used. This enabled a broad demographic to be targeted in terms of age, professional background and interest. Furthermore, local networks (Public Participation Networks and Local Community Development Committees) and community groups were utilised. By taking a comprehensive marketing approach, LAWPRO sought to invite individuals, businesses, farmers, interest groups, anglers and local clubs to their meetings.

Increased number of citizens engaging:

The organisers' expectations were greatly exceeded by the initiative. Initially only six consultations had been scheduled, however, given positive feedback from participants, a further 10 were subsequently organised. It was felt by LAWPRO that the level of interest among communities to get involved in the WFD process warranted additional consultations. Ultimately, 339 members of the public attended the 16 consultations. As this was a pilot project, a similarly thorough engagement exercise across a catchment area had never previously been undertaken. It was noted by an interviewee that the relatively high volume of submissions on the draft RBMP from the Suir catchment can be attributed to the pilot's success – another signal of increased engagement among citizens.

In broad terms, the participants were representative of the catchment area. The consultations were held across the catchment area which ensured a geographical spread amongst the communities that engaged. Moreover, a survey carried out by LAWPRO indicated that the 'participants had a multitude of interests'.

Form of involvement:

The consultations took the form of interactive town hall-style sessions. Attendees were asked to think about their local water body, its potential, and share concerns that they would like to see addressed. Therefore, participants were able to steer the conversation towards local considerations. As an article on the consultations in a local newspaper stated, the intention was to 'get the conversation going on what people want for our River Suir, our local communities and hopefully develop a vision for our river'. (The Nationalist, 7 July 2016).

Expert speakers imparted information to citizens on the approach to water management within the catchment area. The background to the WFD, its objectives and the consultation process for the draft RBMP were explained. Before these meetings, LAWPRO met with local authority staff to identify contentious local water management issues to subsequently raise at the pilot consultations. Besides this transfer of information, there was ample opportunity for the participants to discuss the issues that arose.

From LAWPRO's perspective, a key purpose of its consultation was to broaden out the public discussion on natural water bodies, and in doing so, capture local knowledge. The interactive nature of these meetings meant that participants were able to discuss pertinent local issues in detail.

Role in decision-making:
The extent of citizen influence within the initiative varied. It depended on the nature of the issue raised. Participants brought local matters to LAWPRO's attention that were subsequently addressed. If possible, the problem was answered at the consultation; if not, it was escalated to the relevant authority. However, if it was a broader, more complicated matter, it was fed into the draft RBMP process.

Furthermore, by engaging in the process, several participants secured LAWPRO's support for local projects relating to water bodies in the Suir catchment.

The local information captured by LAWPRO from public participation proved invaluable. Through their input, participants helped LAWPRO develop an understanding of water quality and issues in the catchment area; this prompted official action to be taken as necessary. Local information gathered at the consultations formed the basis of LAWPRO's submission to the Tipperary Heritage Plan. Recommendations from citizens to help promote awareness of water quality were acted upon.

In that sense, through their engagement in the consultation process, participants were able to exercise a degree of influence as their input had an outcome.

Scale and transferability:
The innovation provided LAWPRO with an effective template to use for consultation on the second-cycle RBMP. However, LAWPRO's work is primarily community-based. Its method of citizen engagement drew on a shared sense of community and leveraged support from local actors. Such an approach, by definition, would be less effective for a national engagement innovation.

Resource implications:
The financial implications were relatively modest. Advertising, room-hire and catering were the main costs associated with the innovation. Whilst financial support was necessary, the success of LAWPRO's community engagement pilot can be largely attributed to diligent preparation by its staff.

Discussion of strengths/positives/success factors
Relatively unknown at that point, it was recognised by LAWPRO that developing its public profile, and building trust among communities, would take time. Therefore, a committed and systematic approach was necessary.

From LAWPRO's perspective, its pilot project had many successes. The nature by which it evolved was particularly pleasing. As noted earlier, only six consultations had initially been

planned, however, public feedback led to an extra 10. According to an interviewee: '[I]n a sense it was better, because people looked, and asked, why aren't you doing Clonmel, or Carrick-on Suir, or Waterford city, so it grew organically'. LAWPRO thus capitalised on a latent local interest in the Suir catchment's water bodies. That said, significant effort was made by the organisers to stir up this interest. LAWPRO's promotional strategy, which utilised traditional and modern methods, was designed to reach a broad spectrum of people within each community.

- Posters were designed specifically for each consultation and featured imagery of the relevant water body and local landmarks. A caption asked the viewer what the local river meant to them.

- The postering helped 'grab the imagination' of the public by provoking an almost emotional reaction. Evocative imagery and taglines sought to draw on a strong sense of place among communities.

- Persuasive articles, written by LAWPRO staff in an engaging and relatable manner, appeared in local newspapers. These encouraged anyone with an interest in their local river to attend the meetings where their views and ideas would be explored. Inclusive language helped convey the message that LAWPRO wanted to actively engage with communities and thereby involve them in the co-management of local water bodies.

- Social media was utilised and interviews ¬given to local radio stations; these carried similarly encouraging messages about local water bodies and the upcoming consultations.

- Enlisting the help of local champions (such as angling and environmental groups) helped the promotional campaign. LAWPRO wanted to 'involve and leverage as much support as we could'.

- Getting local groups involved greatly boosted the turnout: 'They will cheer-lead or promote the project locally, so you had that connection as well, that did help, it makes it more real'. By assigning tasks to local people, they felt properly involved in the consultation process, with an actual role to play.

The promotional campaign's effectiveness was partly borne out by the total attendance. As previously noted, 339 people were registered as having attended the consultations, however, the actual number was higher. This turnout exceeded expectations and validated LAWPRO's preparatory work. Indeed, the poor presence at one particular meeting underlined the importance of good marketing; this consultation had been hastily arranged and therefore not promoted to the same extent as the others.

Careful consideration was given to the consultations themselves. It was acknowledged, by interviewees, that the WFD and water quality can be abstract topics, and somewhat unappealing from the public's perspective. To address this, LAWPRO wanted to broaden out the conversation to other topics and, as much as possible, differentiate their engagement approach from traditional-type consultations.

- Pitching the presentation's tone correctly was important. What the attendees saw on the screen, and heard from the speaker, had to be accessible and engaging.

- By adapting each presentation to include familiar imagery and local talking points, it was intended to spark discussion among the attendees.

- The language used during the presentation was kept jargon-free and the presenters shared work experiences and practical funding advice with the audience.

- Given the relatively poor public awareness of the WFD, the consultation discussions were kept broad but relevant to the practical experiences of participants. Topics included: litter, navigation, heritage, tourism and biodiversity.

- A commitment was made by the organisers to, as far as possible, address the pertinent issues raised from the floor.

Being clear with the audience from the outset in terms of what local problems LAWPRO could, and could not, tackle was essential. Furthermore, a database of attendee details allowed LAWPRO to provide them with progress updates in terms of the issues being addressed. This helped continue the community engagement process; it demonstrated follow-through which in turn fostered public confidence in LAWPRO's work. Through its open approach to community engagement, LAWPRO sought to build trust and over time develop local understanding of, and participation in, the wider WFD process.

The organisers met after each consultation to consider what changes, if any, were required for subsequent sessions. These meetings were necessary to validate certain aspects of the consultation itself and amend it as necessary. Through this process of learning and refinement, LAWPRO's method of engagement emerged.

Importantly, LAWPRO's systematic, yet adaptable, approach to community engagement was successful by different measures: the attendee turnout, level of engagement, quality of contributions and, in particular, the relationship-building and community projects that developed as a result.

Discussion of issues/weaknesses/challenges
From the interview data, both personal and professional challenges encountered during the initiative were highlighted.

The *The Suir from Source to Sea* consultations were held throughout the catchment area at evening time. For the staff involved, this meant being away from home, undertaking lengthy journeys and late-night finishes. It was therefore personally 'quite an intense time'. Indeed, as the staff undertook the consultations on their own time, this underscores a personal commitment to the WFD process.

Generating interest in the consultations, and getting people to identify with local water bodies, posed another challenge. As previously noted, LAWPRO was a relatively unknown public body. It lacked any established community-level relationships which posed a problem. 'It's much easier if you have a rapport with a community to get things going',

observed an interviewee. Yet, conversely, public perception proved to be something of an issue. As a representative of local government in the area of water management, LAWPRO was initially met with a degree of scepticism from stakeholders. The broader context is, of course, an important consideration. Incidents of historic mismanagement of natural waters, along with a heated public debate on domestic water charges, meant that there was 'a bit of resistance towards working with us' from environmental groups, farmers, anglers and business owners. However, once LAWPRO's open and inclusive approach to water management was better understood publicly, engagement with communities became easier.

Managing expectations, and developing trust, were vital to LAWPRO's engagement with communities. Attendees had to be clear on what LAWPRO could, and could not, achieve. Furthermore, their role as participants in the process had to be understood. Most importantly, to achieve the necessary buy-in from the attendees on a long-term basis, the value of community input into public debate, and how it contributes to an informed policy response, had not only to be reiterated, but demonstrated afterwards.

Concluding remarks on case study

The The Suir from Source to Sea pilot achieved its key objectives. Community thinking on local water bodies was encouraged, which increased public awareness of the WFD. However, besides animating communities on the issue of water management, the consultations had a more tangible impact. Citizen engagement led to local problems being addressed, recommendations acted upon and several projects secured LAWPRO's support. It makes for an important case study on citizen engagement.

3.2.2   Conclusion

By working collaboratively with state bodies, undertaking a comprehensive and innovative marketing approach, and leveraging the support of local actors, LAWPRO was able to generate a strong level of interest in the consultations. Managing participant expectations, demonstrating follow-through on the issues raised, and helping deliver outcomes locally, were key to building public confidence in its work. Undoubtedly, practical lessons from the *The Suir from Source to Sea* engagement pilot can be drawn for the wider local government sector in terms of the organisation and running of consultations.

But a broader lesson might be taken from the case study. Clearly, LAWPRO was determined to make its consultations distinctive and particular to each community. By localising its engagement approach, it sought to capitalise on feelings of community. In parts of Ireland, the parish and village remain the chief unit through which daily life is experienced. This can give rise to a strong sense of place, underpinned by notions of local loyalty and pride. To exercise citizens and communities on public policy issues, and achieve more meaningful engagement, future consultations might consider the emotional link/connection between people and place. It can prove a compelling force at community-level with the capacity to deepen levels of public participation. As an interviewee asserted: 'Local is what matters to citizens and communities; local issues and addressing local issues'.

3.3   INVOLVE AND COLLABORATE

Involving and collaborating with the public goes a step further beyond consultation. When government involve citizens they are promising that their input and feedback will be 'directly reflected in the alternatives developed' (IAP2, 2018). Collaborating brings this even further, promising that citizens themselves will be directly involved in 'formulating solutions' and their advice will be incorporated into decision-making to the maximum extent possible (IAP2, 2018). These two levels of public participation should have a greater impact on decision-making.

They are examined together in this section for a number of reasons; the IAP2 spectrum is only one of many frameworks for citizen engagement processes and is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that is best suited to a particular context. It is therefore difficult, and unhelpful, to retrospectively pigeon-hole certain initiatives. The case study examined in detail below, the development of *Our Balbriggan 2019–2025 Rejuvenation Plan*, illustrates an ethos of involvement and collaboration. The approach used had aspects of deliberation and co-production, which would be considered to have one of the higher levels of impact on the IAP2 spectrum.

Co-production is seen by some as far more than just consultation or citizen engagement (Bovaird, 2007; Boyle and Harris, 2009). Rather, co-production has the potential to transform how public services are delivered, and mobilise 'the huge untapped resources that people represent' (Boyle and Harris, 2009, p.14). The OECD defines co-production as 'a way of planning, designing, delivering and evaluating public services which draws on direct input from citizens, service users and civil society organisations' (2011, p.32).

The interest in co-production (and other forms of co-governance) has grown in recent years, alongside a more place-based approach to governing. Hambleton (2019) puts forward a new approach, termed the New Civic Leadership, as an alternative to the current dominant public sector management approaches. This approach reimagines the relationship between citizens, the State and other stakeholders. Its distinct aspect is the focus on the power of place in public policy-making, particularly the role of place-based leaders 'in spurring the co-creation of new ways of enhancing the quality of life in a locality' (ibid, p.3). This thinking was central to the approach examined in the *Our Balbriggan* case study.

While the Balbriggan case study presents a more localised approach, the experience in Bristol documented by Hambleton (2019) shows how citizens and civic leaders can be involved at the city level in preparing a 10-year strategy using a novel approach to urban (co-)governance. Drawing on Hambleton's place-based leadership approach, the directly elected mayor of Bristol established a 'City Office'. This office is designed to work with the city's elected government and public organisations in a creative and collaborative way with other interests in the city, such as citizens. The office works alongside and with existing networks and structures, adding value and resources that would not otherwise be available. One specific method used in this approach is 'City Gatherings' which take place every few months and encourage participants, identified as civic leaders, to work together in cross-sectoral teams to examine the major challenges facing the city and to explore ideas on how to tackle them. Typically, City Gatherings attract between 70 and 180 participants.

3.3.1   Case Study: Development of Our Balbriggan 2019–2025 Rejuvenation Plan

Balbriggan is a town in North County Dublin, close to the border with Meath, that falls under the remit of Fingal County Council (FCC). It is one of the fastest growing towns in Ireland and has a younger than average population. It is also one of the most culturally diverse towns with 28 per cent of its population born outside of Ireland. On the economic side, the local economy is relatively weak with a high proportion of residents commuting elsewhere for work.

In 2018, FCC ring-fenced €20 million to support the rejuvenation of Balbriggan in its 2019–2021 Capital Plan. €10 million of this has been ring-fenced in support of certain projects while the remaining €10 million will support some of the priorities identified in a socio-economic plan for Balbriggan called *Our Balbriggan 2019–2025 Rejuvenation Plan*, which was launched in April 2019.

The plan was developed using a 'placemaking' approach that 'draws on the ideas, resources and commitment of a local community along with urban design to create valued places' (*Our Balbriggan 2019–2025 Rejuvenation Plan*, p.44). Placemaking relies on the involvement of citizens, the people living and working in the town of Balbriggan, to be successful.

Assessment using POWER criteria

Citizen Involvement:

In developing this plan citizens were involved and invited to participate throughout the process – from setting the agenda to formulating policy options. The process took place in two phases: a stakeholder engagement process, and an extensive public engagement phase.[11]

Stakeholder engagement took place during Summer 2018, following the establishment of a Leadership Group chaired by Professor Brian MacCraith, President of Dublin City University. Four pillar groups, led by expert chairs, brought together 66 people representing 42 bodies. They identified the key areas for improvement within Balbriggan under four themes or pillars:

- Public realm and placemaking.

- The local economy and enterprise.

- Community affairs and integration.

- Employment, education and training.

A public engagement campaign followed, referred to as 'a call to action' by the Programme Manager. This phase was open to all, with huge efforts made to include all of the town's population. Some of the key outputs from this campaign were:

- Newsletters distributed to every household.

- Three World Café events – 140 adults and 60 school children participated.

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11 Details of these processes are included in the plan. Additionally, a report on the World Café events and analysis of the consultation survey are available on the website, http://balbriggan.ie/

- Online survey – 4,001 surveys completed (25 per cent of the town's population aged over 11).

- Hundreds of local people also engaged through pop-ups at FCC offices and events held in local hotels and community centres.

The engagement campaign gave the public the opportunity to have their say on the priorities that the plan should address and would bring the most benefit to Balbriggan. The survey asked residents to prioritise the ideas formulated by the stakeholder group, allowing them to set the agenda and shape the formulation of the plan.

Increased number of citizens engaging:
In May 2019, FCC launched a statutory consultation process for the updating of a local area plan for Castlelands, an area designated for residential development to the south of Balbriggan. This consultation received 973 submissions, which is a much higher level of engagement than most consultation processes attract. For example, a similar consultation launched for an area in Swords (another large town in the Fingal area) received just 91 submissions. While the high number of submissions cannot be directly attributed to involvement in the Our Balbriggan process, it certainly indicates a highly active and engaged citizenry.

Form of involvement:
Citizens were viewed as partners in this process. The three 'World Café' events, which were facilitated by an external organisation, stand out as particularly good examples of how to capture and analyse citizen input. The World Café is an established, but simple, approach for engaging people in conversations. The methodology used is a simple, effective and flexible format for hosting large group dialogues based on seven design principles (see www.theworldcafe.com). In Balbriggan, residents were given the opportunity to discuss and debate issues and priorities which then fed into the plan:

'At the event... an overview of plans and ideas focussed on the rejuvenation of Balbriggan were shared with the room. People then discussed the ideas in groups at tables with each table conversation facilitated by a "table host". At the end of each topic conversation, a plenary discussion was held whereby the table host shared views and ideas from their individual tables and summary thoughts were then captured by them on templates provided. Once all ideas were discussed, each table was asked to consider what "one" idea would have the most impact for Balbriggan. This process allowed us create a "heatmap", or hierarchy, based on the views of the Balbriggan community.' (Genesis, 2018).

Role in decision-making:
In line with this level of citizen engagement, the public were influential in setting the agenda and developing the priorities and themes of the plan. Four key enabling factors emerged from the engagement process that will guide implementation.

The consultation survey asked residents to prioritise the ideas formulated by the

stakeholder group, but also gave them space to suggest other ideas. One suggestion, for a swimming pool, was extremely common (most popular words mentioned in any 'free text' areas of the survey were 'swim' and 'pool') but was not identified by the stakeholder group and perhaps not realistic for the council to implement immediately under this plan. Given its popularity among residents, however, FCC responded immediately committing in the plan to identifying a site for a swimming pool development in the Castlelands masterplan, and to working with private operators and other interested parties to make it happen. This example highlights the influence of citizens' views.

Resource implications:
This initiative certainly benefitted from having capital funding committed by FCC. It was also supported well with external resources (e.g. public relations and marketing, and external facilitation for engagement events) and internally through dedicated staff resources and support. As well as staffing numbers and financial resources, expertise in community development, particularly the placemaking approach, and other areas such as website development were important resources.

Discussion of strengths/positives/success factors
This process stands out from more traditional consultative approaches in a number of ways:

- The strategy itself is an innovative approach – it is not a local area plan, which are technical documents, or a broader plan such as local economic and community plans. Rather, this plan presents a vision for the town using a placemaking approach with substantial capital funding committed to its implementation.

- Citizens were involved in setting the agenda through the stakeholder group and later through an extensive public consultation phase.

- The placemaking approach and community development expertise brought by the Programme Manager was a core aspect of the success of the initiative.

- The local elected members representing the town, the council executive team, and other key senior stakeholders demonstrated leadership of the project by being involved in the Leadership Group, committing resources, and following through on their commitment to listen to the town's residents.

Discussion of issues/weaknesses/challenges
A common issue in most engagement processes is managing citizen expectations. This was a particular issue in Balbriggan but was handled well by the council (for example, in the case of the popular suggestion of a swimming pool, as mentioned above).

At the outset of this process, rebuilding trust between local residents and the council was identified as a major challenge. Previous plans and commitments to the community had not been fully implemented. The initiative has proved to be one of the most successful public engagement processes ever undertaken by FCC. Implementation of the plan is still in the early stages and undoubtedly its success (or otherwise) will have an impact on the level

of trust between citizens and FCC and whether this initiative has resulted in deepened participation.

Concluding remarks on case study

'If actual achievements are a way off yet, there is an energy' (Hilliard, 2019).

The development of the Our Balbriggan Rejuvenation Plan has been positively received and those involved in its development feel that if the implementation of the plan is successful, it may become a model for others to follow (Hilliard, 2019). The engagement process is one of the most successful ever undertaken by FCC and this been recognised nationally, winning a number of awards.

3.3.2   Conclusion

Involvement and collaboration provide increased opportunities for the public to influence decisions that affect their lives. It also represents increased effort, capacity and potentially resources that local authorities must commit when formulating their plans and policies. However, it can also result in better outcomes for local authorities as they can tap into the potential of their citizens and ensure they are partners in the decision-making process.

3.4   EMPOWER

On the IAP2 spectrum of public participation 'empower' is the last category and the one which theoretically provides the greatest opportunity for citizens to impact decision-making. The promise made to the public is to implement what they decide. There are examples of this type of engagement all across the world, with participatory budgeting being one of the most talked about (see case study below). Other examples include citizens' juries, ballots/ polling in which the results are binding, and delegated decision-making from governments to citizens.

Mini-publics, such as citizens' assemblies, are deliberative processes that bring citizens together to deliberate on specific issues. Deliberative democracy can be defined as 'ordinary citizens using discussion to reach an agreement and make recommendations to government on issues of importance' (We The Citizens, 2011, p.12). Deliberative processes are not meant to replace representative or direct democracy, but to enhance and support it.

Ireland is seen as a 'trailblazer' in its use of deliberative methods in the process of constitutional review (Farrell et al., 2019). The Citizens' Assembly (2016-2018), which followed the Constitutional Convention (2012-2014), was established by the Irish Government to examine five topics.[12] Farrell et al. (2019) examined the response from Government following recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly. Two recommendations have been acted on (by holding a referendum or considering the issue further by means of a parliamentary committee debate) while the three other topics had not received a reaction from Government at the time of the research. This demonstrates a mixed response and

12 The five topics were: 1. The Eighth Amendment of the Constitution (which concerns abortion); 2. How we best respond to the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population; 3. How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change; 4. The manner in which referenda are held; and 5. Fixed term parliaments. See https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/ for further information.

level of follow-through from the Government, and thus a restriction on the potential level of impact of the citizen engagement initiative.

A Citizens' Climate Research Project in Dublin City University has recently examined the Irish Citizens' Assembly approach, and its consideration of climate change. One of the aims of their research is to develop guidelines for policymakers wishing to utilise deliberation for further engaging citizens on the climate crisis. Guidelines and tools created for policymakers in the process of creating climate policy may be useful for local authorities given their increasing role in climate adaptation and mitigation (Devaney et al., forthcoming).

Canada has an established history of running citizens' assemblies. The Ontario Government committed to putting recommendations from its citizens assembly on electoral reform to a public vote via referendum (Institute on Governance, 2007). One hundred and three citizens (one from each of Ontario's electoral districts) were randomly selected to participate in the eight-month process, which was mandated to review the current electoral system, consider alternatives, and make recommendations for the betterment of Ontario's electoral system. The Assembly recommended a mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral system to replace the current single member plurality system. This recommendation was put to Ontario voters in the 10 October 2007 election, when it was voted against in favour of the status quo (Sheedy, 2008).

Deliberative mini-publics are not just carried out at national level. In Ireland, for example, citizen juries have been trialled. For an account of the 'PeopleTalk' Citizen Jury in Galway, see Grace, 2018. In the UK, the Camden Citizens' Assembly was an initiative of the local council to bring residents voices to the fore in the preparation of a vision for the local area. This process, which is akin to a scaled down version of a national citizens' assembly, is highlighted by the Local Government Association (LGA) in its guide to engagement (see below).

Camden Citizens' Assembly

The council recruited over 60 assembly members who met on three occasions. At each meeting, residents shared their experiences of living in Camden, and gave their views about how to make Camden a better place to live. As part of the journey of collaboratively designing a vision for the future, assembly members:

- heard from the Leader of the Council about the role of the Assembly, and why developing a shared vision for the borough is so important;

- met other local people who live in the borough and shared their experiences of Camden;

- developed a shared Citizens' Assembly vision for what the borough should look like in 2025; and

- explored how the vision can be achieved, how challenges can be overcome and what should be the biggest priorities for the borough.

The three events were structured using an appreciative inquiry approach, helping the residents who attended to move from broad, top-line aspirations, through to engaging with some of the hard thinking in terms of the long-term strategic vision. This gave them a genuine stake in decision-making, and feedback from attendees was extremely positive. The assembly outcomes and summary of deliberations were fed back to Camden Council's Cabinet Member councillors, who are using the outcomes of the assembly to help shape *Camden 2025*, the long-term community vision for the area.

Source: Local Government Association, 2019.

3.4.1 Case Study: *€300k Have Your Say* – South Dublin's Participatory Budgeting Initiative.[13]

€300k Have Your Say is a participatory budgeting (PB) initiative, which has been run by South Dublin County Council (SDCC) since 2017. The initiative allows residents to develop project proposals for their local area and vote on shortlisted proposals in order to select winning projects which are then implemented by the relevant section of SDCC.

PB is a 'fiscal decision-making mechanism which involves citizens in the discussion of municipal budgets and/or the allocation of municipal funding' (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012, pp.160–161). It is internationally recognised as a way for people to have a direct say in how money is spent in their local area, and may result in 'a direct, stronger, participative relationship between citizens and local authorities, better public spending decisions, enhanced transparency and accountability, and a greater understanding among citizens of the financial circumstances within which local authorities must operate' (*ibid*).

13 The information from this case study is drawn from previous research conducted by the IPA (see Shannon and Boyle, 2017; Shannon, Boyle and O'Riordan, 2019; Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2019).

Assessment using POWER criteria

Citizen involvement:

This initiative, which was open to any member of the public (including children), engaged a relatively high number of residents during the 2017 and 2018 iterations compared to other initiatives run by SDCC. A large number of proposals were put forward by citizens (160 in 2017 and 230 in 2018). The numbers voting on the final projects to be implemented dropped significantly, from 2,500 in 2017 to 1,500 in 2018. There were various reasons put forward for this decline (see DPER, 2019, p.11). While these numbers only represent a small percentage of the overall population in the respective areas, the initiative is seen as successfully increasing the number of people actively engaged.

The issue of involving marginalised communities and those other than the 'usual suspects' was frequently mentioned during our research. Workshops held to discuss ideas with residents were largely attended by those who are already active and engaged in their community, particularly those aligned to community groups, sporting associations, or those who are politically active. Moreover, information is not currently available on whether submissions, which are all submitted online, are made by individuals or on behalf of groups. Capturing such information in future would help SDCC in evaluating and improving citizen engagement.

The €300k *Have Your Say* initiative is a distinct opportunity for individuals to put forward their ideas and proposals without being part of a group or organisation. SDCC have attempted to reach individuals through various methods and have been quite successful in getting the message out. The key challenge, however, is translating this 'reach' into active and meaningful engagement.

Role in decision-making:

In line with established criteria and principles of PB, residents in South Dublin had the final say on which projects would be implemented by the council by means of a vote. This initiative therefore aligns with the 'empower' category on the IAP2 spectrum by implementing what the public decide.

Some challenges were identified during our research which may be overcome by increasing citizens' opportunity to be involved in other stages of decision-making. Public involvement throughout the process, for example input on the design of the process or on deciding criteria for project submissions could further the extent to which citizens could influence decision-making. However, challenges of determining who should represent members of the public on such fora are significant.

Scale and transferability:

This project is currently run annually at local electoral area level. During an evaluation of the first iteration of PB in 2017, there were a range of views as to whether it should (or could) be applied in one or more electoral areas, across all electoral areas or at the county level (Shannon and Boyle, 2017). It would be important to consider the scale at which any similar initiative is applied, particularly in terms of resources available for implementation.

The structures and process used by SDCC provide a possible template for other local governments in Ireland, however there are various methods and models of PB which could be applied (see Shannon et al., 2019) and which may be more suitable depending on local circumstances.

Resource implications:
The *€300k Have Your Say* process is resource-intensive. The various phases of the process require dedicated staff time and financial resources. It requires significant input and skills across almost all departments of the council to design, plan and carry out the process, and to manage and implement the winning projects. Due to the complexity of the process and the diverse nature of projects being implemented, it is difficult to quantify the full cost of organisational resources invested in the initiative.

The €300,000 in funding committed to implementing the winning projects is a significant sum of money. While this likely had a positive impact on participation levels, allocating this amount of funding to PB would be more challenging for many other local authorities in Ireland.

Discussion of strengths/positives/success factors
A significant challenge with any citizen engagement initiative is how to measure success and, if achieved, to sustain that success. In one sense, the *€300K Have Your Say* initiative has been very successful; it has been completed twice, within the deadlines set, and it was well received by citizens and supported by elected members. Additionally, in comparison to other consultation processes, the initiative has engaged a relatively high number of citizens through online and offline communications, workshops, submission of proposals and voting. In terms of future development, SDCC are committed to developing the PB initiative and continuing to reach out and broaden engagement as much as possible.

The initiative is now in its third year and continues to deliver projects to the local community that have been proposed by local residents, selected by them through voting and implemented by the council.

Discussion of issues/weaknesses/challenges
Some challenges were identified during the course of our research which are summarised below:

- Sustaining engagement and widening the reach beyond the 'usual suspects'.

- Managing the shortlisting process for ideas submitted to the public. Particular challenges were identified in terms of the criteria used for shortlisting and how to combine ideas from the public of a similar nature into one proposal.

- Balancing the role of elected members in supporting and encouraging participation but not actively campaigning for (or against) individual submissions. Governance processes should be transparent and understood by all those participating.

- Implementing winning projects within the prescribed timeframes.

Concluding remarks on case study

The *€300k Have Your Say* initiative has shown that PB works as a means of engaging citizens. International research indicates that those who engage in PB processes 'feel empowered, support democracy, view the government as more effective, and better understand budget and government processes after participating in PB' (Wampler et al., 2018, p.23). Anecdotal evidence from SDCC would suggest that the process has helped to improve the knowledge of citizens in relation to local government and enhanced their trust and goodwill towards the Council. Further research would be required to measure the extent of participation, particularly among marginalised communities, and how participation has impacted citizens.

3.4.2   Conclusion

The IAP2 spectrum of citizen engagement, and other similar frameworks, have been criticised by some who do not feel they truly capture how engagement works in practice. The 'empower' end of the spectrum is particularly criticised as it is questioned how much power is, and should be, handed over to citizens. The OECD refers to just three types of interactions between citizens and government: information, consultation and active participation. Active participation means citizens are actively engaged in decision-making and policy-making while responsibility for policy formulation and final decisions rests with the Government (OECD, 2001). More recently, the OECD (2011) has advocated for partnering with citizens (and civil society) through 'co-production' and is embarking on research around new forms of deliberative, collaborative, and participatory decision-making.

That being said, the case study of SDCC's *€300k Have Your Say* initiative, and other examples such as direct referenda, show how decision-making can be shared with the public. However, PB or other methods that generally fall into the 'empower' bracket of the spectrum need to be carefully considered and planned to ensure they are meaningful engagement initiatives and not viewed by the public as tokenistic. Following best-practice principles of engagement would help to ensure the public trust and value the process and sustain their levels of engagement.

4
INNOVATION

This chapter considers innovative ways of working that aim to address issues and challenges faced by the public, by involving them in policy-making and implementation.

Policy labs

Policy labs (or innovation labs) have emerged as popular initiatives in the last decade or so, promising to provide new ways of thinking and working to address 'wicked issues'. As a relatively new public-policy tool, there is no common definition or terminology to describe these experimental solutions. They can be broadly described as 'dedicated teams, structures, or entities focused on designing public policy through innovative methods that involve all stakeholders in the design process' (Fuller and Lochard, 2016). Olejniczak et al. (2019) identify 146 policy labs worldwide operating at local, regional, national and even international scales that operate under various names and employ a range of methods to achieve their aims.

There are examples of policy or innovation labs in Ireland such as Service rePublic in Cork, DCC Beta in Dublin and the Citizen Open Innovation Lab in Limerick. In Northern Ireland, a public sector innovation lab was established within the Department of Finance in 2014 which aimed to 'improve public services and policy by creating a safe space to co-create ideas, test prototypes and refine concepts with citizens, civil servants and stakeholders' (PDR, 2017, p.6). One senior official outlined how the lab can help to improve the quality of citizen engagement:

> One of the problems we have in policy development is direct citizen engagement. Involving citizens in the policy process is standard practice but we do not necessarily achieve quality citizen engagement. Our desired representative user groups find it difficult to participate in the formalised consultation meetings we usually hold. The methods used by the Lab have transformed our collaboration with citizens and stakeholders to genuinely co-create policy and services; not just tick a box. (PDR, 2017, p.9)

These labs often use innovative methods to engage citizens and stakeholders on the development of public services and policies (Whicher and Crick, 2019). The methods and approaches adopted by policy labs may include 'co-production, co-creation, co-design, behavioural insights, systems thinking, ethnography, data science, nudge theory and lean processes' (2019, p.290). Efforts associated with policy labs, 'plac[e] the end users at the centre of each stage of the policy-making process. After proposals are formulated, they are tested and validated through various forms of experimentation' (ibid, p.292).

Service rePublic

Fuller and Lochard observe that policy labs are mainly 'experimental initiatives undertaken

by members of a public administration, frequently with the support of external designers and experts in public innovation' (2016, p.1). Service rePublic, an initiative between Cork County Council and Cork Institute of Technology, fits this description. In an Irish context, it represented a new departure in public service delivery – the country's first public sector innovation centre. Established in early-2017, Service reRepublic seeks to improve how the council operates, and in turn, the quality of services delivered locally. An inclusive ethos drives the co-design approach to its work programme. This is achieved by: 'looking outwards rather than inwards, by engaging with citizens, users, elected representatives, communities, businesses and other stakeholders (public and private). Through a collaborative process, ideas are tested and refined in an effort to create better services.

By the nature of co-design, the extent of citizen engagement depends on the particular project being worked on. For example, in February 2018, Service rePublic organised a workshop on the future of government, forms of participation and public service delivery. Twenty citizens, representing a cross section of society, were invited to participate. For another project, the team utilised the service design approach to redesign the Community Fund process in Cork County Council. But this project necessitated a greater range of input: staff, members of the public and politicians were all involved. Indeed, the success of Service rePublic has received national and international attention.

Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing is a new method of citizen engagement that has been used by local and national governments across the world. They generally take the form of digital platforms that allow governments to harness public opinions and resources to improve services and outcomes. However crowdsourcing reportedly remains a relatively underutilised tool for citizen engagement; according to a survey of U.S. mayors, only 26 per cent say their cities use crowdsourcing (Bloomberg Philanthropies, 2018). Some recent examples in Ireland include:

- Fix your street (fixyourstreet.ie). This website allows the public to report non-emergency issues to local authorities. It is operated by South Dublin County Council on behalf of all local authorities.

- Vacanthomes.ie. This website is hosted by Mayo County Council on behalf of all local authorities. It allows the public to log properties they believe are vacant, which are then investigated by the relevant local authority. Around 300 properties across the country have been brought back into use as a result of VacantHomes.ie since 2017.

- Longford Nua (https://spaceengagers.org/longford-nua/). Enables local people to play an active part in regenerating Longford Town. It aims to encourage a broad cross-section of the community to think differently about their town, and to see potential for the future. A participatory mapping project was developed that asked people of all ages to share pictures of places in the town in the past, present and future using the Space Engagers app and in community workshops. The data gathered has supported urban planning policy in Longford County Council.

Such crowdsourcing initiatives and policy labs can often be closely linked to smart city initiatives which are led by local governments in partnership with other stakeholders. Cardullo and Kitchin (2017), in a paper examining citizen participation in the smart city, build on Arnstein's ladder of participation to form a 'scaffold of smart citizen participation'. To four main categories (non-participation, consumerism, tokenism and citizen power) they add a number of columns that further unpack the role of citizens, how they are involved, the political discourse and 'modality' (top-down or bottom-up). Using examples from Dublin, the authors discuss their framework in detail.

They note there are relatively few cases in Dublin of 'citizen power' or 'citizen control' which Arnstein (1969) would describe as citizens being fully in charge of the policy or managerial aspects of a program or institution and able to negotiate the conditions under which outsiders may change them. DCC Beta, which is examined in detailed below, is considered a 'partnership' approach to decision-making; while citizens are involved, the 'form and level of participation is often circumscribed' (Cardullo and Kitchin, 2017).

Case Study: Dublin City Council Beta (DCC Beta)

DCC Beta is an innovative method that allows trials and experiments to take place that address key issues the city council is seeking to understand before possibly implementing solutions on a city-wide scale. These trials are called 'Beta Projects'. The method or model that had been established to develop and support the projects is called 'DCC Beta'. The DCC Beta model, also referred to as an 'innovation ecosystem,' provides a consistent and standardised approach for experimentation and innovation within the council. The approach initially began as an internal approach for DCC staff but has since expanded to provide citizens with much greater input and influence.

DCC Beta started life as a part-time initiative of one individual, facilitated by a '10% innovation time' arrangement within the staff member's division. It ran for about three-and-a-half years, was shelved in September 2015 and has now been adopted by DCC at corporate level. In its first iteration it trialled a number of projects which were then successfully scaled and implemented by DCC. One such project is the painting of artwork on traffic light boxes,[14] now being implemented under the 'Dublin Canvas' branding.

All Beta Projects go through the same process. Suggestions (submitted online by the public, elected members or DCC staff) are assessed and given a score by a group of people including DCC staff, a local resident and a business representative, based on transparent criteria. All of this information is contained and updated in a publicly accessible Google sheet.[15] The projects are then prioritised based on their score, but also depending on which projects can be most readily trialled (meaning they may not always proceed immediately with the project at the top of the list).

14 http://dccbeta.ie/project/article/traffic-light-box-artworks
15 https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bO6XmCo7LoGy4j7kB6FfTfAKSXd7ht-fgKs3a-uAF8E/edit#gid=931746801

All projects go through three stages: concept trial (should we do it?), scaling (how do we do it?) and 'local specific' stage (where should we do it and what might the hyper-local issues be?). This is an important exercise as staff (and citizens) tend to jump ahead to specific issues that may be encountered at the later stages and discount a project before giving it any consideration. Going through this process also allows for transparency and building evidence of what works. For example, if a project is deemed worthy as a concept (first stage) but runs into problems during the scaling phase e.g. the funding is not available, then the barrier to implementation is identified and attention can be directed towards the blockage.

Beta Projects at concept stage consist of on-street trials, which are put in place for a defined period of time before being removed and reviewed. If they are proven to work well and solve a particular issue, then they move to scaling stage. One project, which provides secure hangars for residents to store their bicycles close to their home, is currently being scaled, having being successfully trialled for five months at a cost of €4,800.[16] It is still considered a Beta Project, which means the council is seeking to learn more about the delivery model before adopting it formally.

Assessment using POWER criteria
Citizen involvement:
DCC Beta provides a new and innovative way for citizens to be involved in decision-making and implementation of projects in Dublin. It is an open process meaning anyone can be involved. DCC staff and elected members are equally able to participate.

People are invited to take part in three ways:

1.   Suggest Beta Projects (via http://dccbeta.ie/suggest);

2.   Feedback on Beta Projects;

3.   Take part in Beta Projects.

The DCC Beta team actively encourage citizen participation and feedback, whether on a particular Beta Project, on the Beta model, or by suggesting an entirely new idea.

To date, DCC Beta has not captured in-depth information on those using the online platform or providing feedback. This may be useful going forward to assess whether DCC Beta is reaching those other than the 'usual suspects'.

Role in decision-making:
While not originally intended or designed to be a traditional citizen engagement initiative, DCC Beta allows citizens to be involved at a stage of decision-making that they rarely have the opportunity to. By submitting project ideas that can be trialled and providing feedback on Beta Projects, citizens can exercise significant influence over the council's work programme. On the other hand, by its nature DCC Beta is removed from the traditional decision-making structures of the council. It can however lead to wider change if Beta Projects are adopted for implementation and scaling by DCC.

16 http://dccbeta.ie/project/article/residential-bike-hangars

The process for assessing and prioritising projects is carried out by a small group of people (currently three staff, one resident and one business representative) – however this process is transparent. The assessment criteria are published and anyone can see how a suggestion had been judged, where it is on the list of priorities and so on.

Scale and transferability:
Other local authorities could look to implement a similar innovation. It is important to take into account the local context, including organisational structure and resources and capacity available within local government.

The DCC Beta Project Coordinator noted that allowing staff 'innovation time' is a core aspect of the success of DCC Beta. The Beta process should be developed within an organisation from the bottom-up, with senior-level support, and tailored to suit the local context.

Resource implications:
In the first iteration of DCC Beta, between 2012 and 2015 (three-and-a-half years), the expenditure, not including staff costs, was €17,500 (including VAT) (DCC Beta, 2016). It is likely that costs will rise as the innovation scales. However it was noted by the Project Coordinator that the financial resources needed in terms of website development etc. are not extensive. Project costs will also vary. An important aspect of this project is allowing staff dedicated time to work on innovative ideas outside of their day job.

Discussion of strengths/positives/success factors
DCC Beta has been very positively received by all those who have participated and is supported within the council by elected members and senior management. Some of the projects, as mentioned previously, have been very successful and have acted as 'quick wins' for the initiative as a whole, building momentum and positivity.

The initiative gives citizens the opportunity to participate in a meaningful and innovative way and allows them to track their suggestions and give feedback on trials.

From the perspective of DCC, the initiative allows for risk and experimentation while building internal staff capacity. It also provides good value for money with few resources required to implement the initiative.

Discussion of issues/weaknesses/challenges
This initiative has come across, and overcome, many challenges. When initially established it was supported by one staff member, who had to 'build the aircraft while flying it'. Securing buy-in from other staff, including senior management, elected members and the public was key to its success. However, in large part, DCC Beta is still driven by one individual which raises questions about its sustainability.

As with any innovative method of service delivery or citizen engagement, DCC Beta has required staff to think differently about how they work and their approach to certain issues.

Cardullo and Kitchin also suggest that this type of participation is 'often instrumental rather than empowering in a political sense' (2017, p.16). The long-term goal of DCC Beta is to provide a mechanism for citizens to take ownership of a vision for their neighbourhoods, allowing them to make decisions locally within an enabling framework. This would certainly provide further opportunities for citizen engagement and empowerment of local residents.

Concluding remarks on case study

DCC Beta is an excellent example of innovation at local authority level that has led to increased and deepened citizen engagement. Not only can citizens put forward suggestions, they can also track what is happening, participate in on-street trials and provide feedback which directly influences decision-making. The initiative has also greatly enhanced capacity and appetite for innovation within DCC.

5
EMERGING TRENDS AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Local government in Ireland has a strong connection with its citizens. Efforts in recent years have aimed to strengthen that relationship and ensure citizens have the opportunity to participate in decision-making, are well informed by their councils and have their voices heard. These efforts work alongside the system of representative democracy, attempting to enhance and complement political representation and not replace it. The case studies and numerous examples of citizen engagement examined in this report share common features as to what works well and some areas for improvement, which are summarised below.

5.1   EMERGING TRENDS

Capacity, drive & leadership

It is clear that there are many people working in our local government system who have the capacity, the drive, and the support of senior leaders to carry out the initiatives examined in this report. Successful citizen engagement initiatives are driven by champions within the system, often single individuals or small groups of people, and their hard-work, knowledge, expertise and dedication are central to this success. Senior leadership is also crucial – whether that is hands-on or involves giving staff autonomy to lead their own projects. In the case of SDCC's *€300k Have Your Say*, for example, it was crucial that both senior management and elected members actively supported the project. With DCC Beta, the project coordinator was given the space and time to develop the project, and the autonomy to do so by senior management.

Communications and use of ICT

Each of the case studies examined sought to communicate with citizens. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used extensively in most cases, either to relay information to the public or to actively involve them. ICT is frequently used alongside face-to-face engagement and more traditional communication methods (e.g. leafleting). The case studies examined successfully engaged a high number of citizens. However, translating this reach into active participation and meaningful participation can remain a challenge.

Use of external resources

The use of external resources is a clear trend across the case studies and several of the examples referenced in this study. Local authorities may not have the expertise required in-house and may seek external assistance to carry out citizen engagement initiatives. For example, software is often provided by other companies, as are marketing and communications services. However, this is not always the case – DCC Beta, for example, relied on internal resources and staff expertise to develop its platforms.

Another common trend identified is the use of external facilitators during workshops or other engagement activities. Sheedy (2008) notes the ability of external facilitators to 'provide impartial guidance is one key to the success of citizen engagement efforts, as citizens who feel their opinions are not heard will not respect the outcomes of the event' (p.32).

Setting the parameters

Fung (2015) notes that, if not carried out correctly, frustration, cynicism, or apathy can result from poorly designed participation processes, affecting citizens' trust in government's willingness to engage, as well as in the legitimacy of the process. Many of our interviewees noted the importance of ensuring citizens were aware of the parameters of their involvement – what the local authority could (and could not) deliver and how their participation might affect decision-making. This is particularly important in the Irish environment, where local authorities may not have responsibility for a particular service or policy area. This also raises the importance of collaboration and working with other local authorities, state agencies or government departments to ensure the best possible outcome from the engagement process. Working in collaboration may also help to avoid 'consultation fatigue', avoid duplication and make better use of resources.

Measuring and evaluating impact

Providing better services and outcomes for citizens is at the heart of the initiatives examined here. However, the success of the initiatives examined is difficult to measure for a number of reasons. For some, it may simply be too early to examine if the initiative has achieved better outcomes. Nabatchi (2012) describes two forms of evaluation for citizen participation initiatives: process evaluation and impact evaluation. Process evaluation focuses on how the programme was managed and implemented (i.e. inputs and outputs) and this has been carried out well in some of the initiatives examined in this report. Impact evaluation, on the other hand, is an assessment of whether an initiative achieved its goals and produced its intended effects. To measure impact, it must be clear what the initiative was actually trying to achieve through defined objectives and criteria.

By establishing guidelines and principles of engagement that build in evaluation, we may produce a clearer picture of the added value of citizen engagement at the local level, as well as ensuring initiatives are efficient and effective.

5.2   PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Some practical recommendations emerge from our examination of a wide range of citizen engagement initiatives and international best practice. These recommendations are not exhaustive but would support any considerations for establishing best practice guidelines or principles of engagement:

- Establish clear aims for the initiative and ensure they are articulated to citizens. This will help to set the parameters and manage citizens' expectations.

- Plan carefully and choose the appropriate level and method of engagement. Using the spectrum of engagement or existing resources and guidance can help with this.

- Use external resources and facilitators where appropriate and/or feasible, while building internal capacity, support, and appetite for engagement and innovation.

- Do not reinvent the wheel! As this report has demonstrated, there are endless examples and guides for engagement that can be tailored to suit any local context.

- Share learning and experience between local authorities and look to partner with others where possible. This will prevent consultation fatigue and make better use of available resources.

- Finally, build in monitoring and evaluation of engagement initiatives. Being able to demonstrate increased engagement, better outcomes or impact will help to improve future initiatives.

6
CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that local authorities in Ireland understand and value the need for engaging with citizens. The number and variety of citizen engagement initiatives has increased in recent years, with local authorities attempting to engage in new and innovative methods. This report has examined some of the best practice examples from across the spectrum of citizen engagement, ranging from information provision to empowerment and innovation.

The practical recommendations outlined in the previous chapter emerge from analysis of extensive international literature – academic materials, government strategies and legislation, non-governmental documents such as guidance and principles for engagement and so on – alongside in-depth examination of a select number of case studies from across Ireland. However, this is not an exhaustive or prescriptive list of recommendations. Rather, they would support any considerations for establishing best practice guidelines or principles of engagement, in collaboration with stakeholders and local citizens. Local authorities are best placed to decide how they engage with and involve their local communities in decision-making. It is paramount that any guidance or principles of engagement be co-produced with them and allow room for local discretion in how they are applied.

The challenge for local authorities in 2020 and beyond is to deepen their engagement and ensure that residents have the opportunity to influence decision-making in a sustained and meaningful way. This is not to say that every initiative needs to fit into the categories of 'involvement' or 'empowerment'. This is neither practical nor necessary. As our case studies have shown, local authorities can improve how they engage with citizens at every step – for example by improving how they communicate, or by ensuring that statutory consultations are not 'tick-box' exercises. These initiatives are just as important in building relationships and trust with citizens as the more resource-intensive ones at the other end of the spectrum.

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