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Local government collaborating strategically

by *Orla O'Donnell, IPA*

Given the current economic climate of tightened resources, complex community expectations leading to ever increasing demands on overstretched services, it is important that councils look at strategic collaborations and partnerships as ways to respond to these challenges. Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:2) emphasise that 'what in the past would have appeared as a straight forward administrative problem now more than not requires working with other programs, agencies, citizens, and multiple stakeholders across policy arenas.' Bryson, Crosby and Middleton Stone (2006:44) note that cross-sector collaboration occurs for many reasons. 'The first is simply that we live in a shared-power world in which many groups and organisations are involved in, affected by, or have some partial responsibility to act on public challenges. Beyond that, in the United States, advocates of power sharing across sectors are often responding to a long-standing critique of the effectiveness of government when it acts on its own.' (Crosby and Bryson, 2005)

What is strategic collaboration?

For the purpose of this article, the focus is on strategic collaboration, which Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:2) define as 'an intentional, collective approach to address public problems or issues through building shared knowledge, designing innovative solutions, and forging consequential change. When used strategically, collaboration produces positive impacts, stakeholders committed to policy or program change, and strengthened capacity of individuals and organisations to effectively work together.' While it is noted that resource sharing is not a new concept as local

government organisations have been working together and sharing resources for many years, at a time of fiscal challenge such as the present it is useful to think more strategically about collaboration.

The NSW DLG guidance paper on Collaboration and Partnerships between Councils (2007: 6) suggests that 'strategic collaboration is where councils enter into arrangements with each other for mutual benefit'. The guidance paper also emphasises that strategic collaboration is an umbrella term for how councils work together and that it can take many forms including alliances, partnerships, business clusters, and so on. The paper points out that the purpose of strategic collaboration is to reduce duplication of services, provide cost savings, access innovation, enhance skills development and open the way for local communities to share ideas and connect with others. Strategic collaboration offers participating councils a way to achieve their goals and objectives in cost effective and innovative ways.

Bryson, Crosby and Middleton Stone (2006:45) emphasise that the perceived need to collaborate across sectors has provoked two general responses.

'On the one hand, our own view is that organisational participants in effective cross-sector collaborations typically have to fail into their role in the collaboration. In other words, organisations will only collaborate when they cannot get what they want without collaborating (Hudson et al. 1999; Roberts, 2001). The second response is to assume that collaboration is the Holy Grail of solutions and always best. Often, governments and foundations insist

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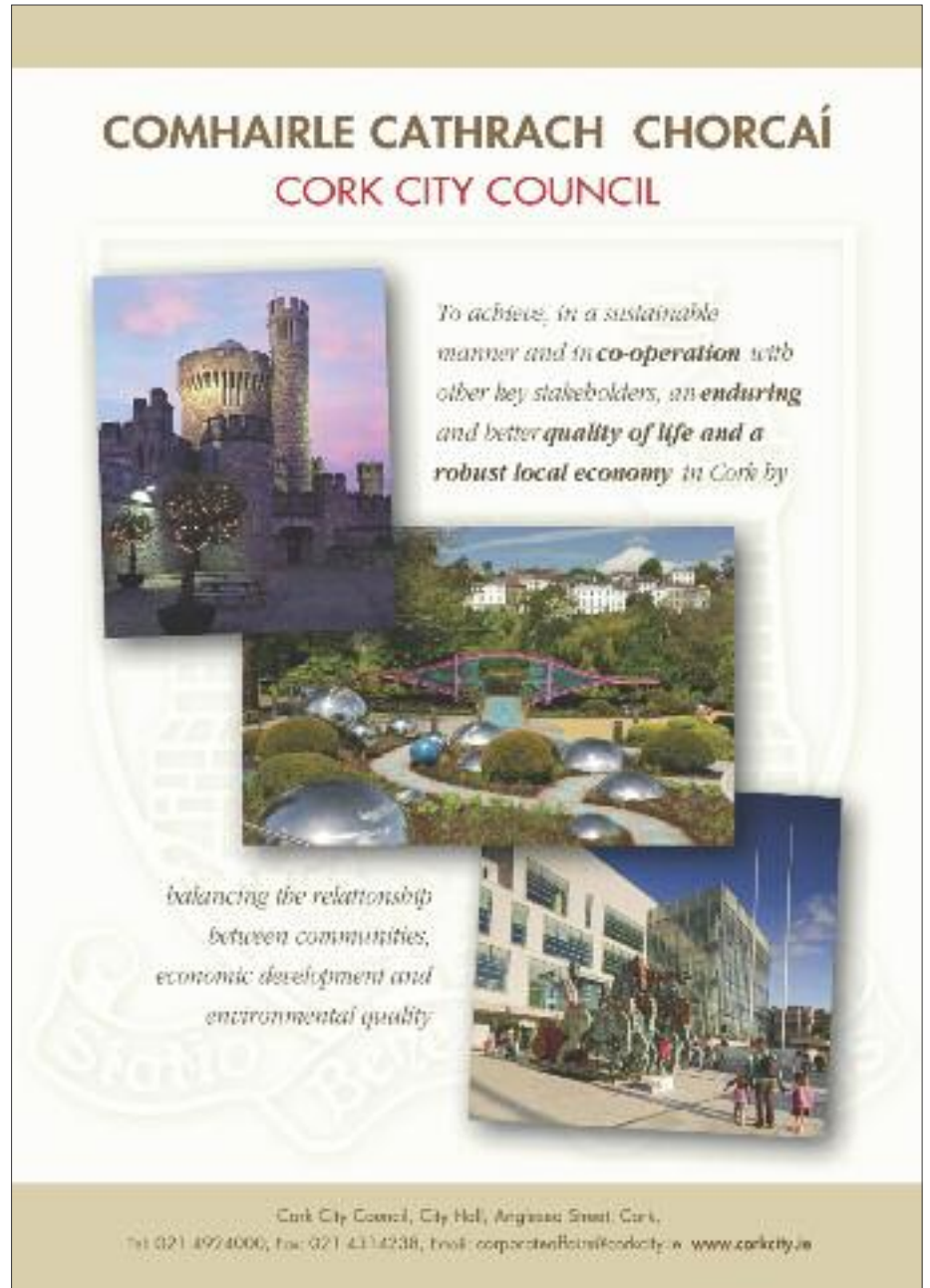
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that funding recipients collaborate, even if they have little evidence that it will work (Barringer and Harrison, 2000; Ostrower, 2005).”

Similarly, Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:73) outline that moving from silos to collaboration requires public and non-profit managers to think differently about working beyond discipline, organisation, and sector boundaries.

Collaborative activity, as previously noted, falls on a continuum:

‘On the far left of the continuum are pure silo-based activities, where issues are seen as solely and appropriately placed with the agency. As boundary-spanning functions increase in magnitude, the activities move to the right along the collaborative continuum, from simple collaborative activities to full-blown strategic collaboration. The issues at hand may require only minimal level of collaboration that is more short-term in nature and simpler in its purpose. In contrast, thorny problems that are interconnected with other policy arenas and have high investment on the part of other agencies, sectors, and interests may require a strategic approach to forming and building collaboration. All too often, decisions about building or joining a collaboration are not strategic in nature and lead to what can be labelled ad hoc collaboration...This common approach mirrors the notion of “muddling through” and “hoping for the best.”...Unfortunately, collaborative inertia, fatigue, and frustration are the more likely outcomes from this non-strategic approach...To advance public service practice and reach long term solutions, collaborative activity needs to be appreciably more strategic in its approach to assure intentional, systematic, and inclusionary collaboration, as public and non-profit



managers wrestle with trying to manage upward, downward, and outward within their particular context.’ (Norris-Tirrell and Clay, 2010:4).

This article assesses the spectrum of strategic collaborations in existence provides a guide as to what are the core elements of best practice in terms of

establishing successful mutual collaborations. The Report outlines a number of international case studies along the continuum of collaboration that have proved successful in other countries. (For the international case studies outlined in the Report, see: <http://www.ipa.ie/pdf/StrategicCollaboration.pdf>)

Why the need for strategic collaboration and partnerships?

The NSW DLG Guidance Paper advises that the aim of strategic collaboration is that communities benefit from the productive use of cumulative resources available to councils but, if there is no benefit to the community either directly or indirectly, a collaborative approach should not proceed. The paper also notes that strategic collaboration is not just about savings and sharing resources but, it is also about maximising capacity in addressing community expectations and enhancing staff skills and experience. It underlines that collaboration is not simply or solely about reducing staff numbers or council autonomy. The primary aims and potential benefits of strategic collaborations are summarised in Box 1.

In recent times, as governments try to cut public deficits, there has been a reduction in budgetary allocations to local authorities in many countries. There is a greater focus on collaborations, partnerships and outsourcing as a means to cut costs, improve efficiency and productivity. For example, Jepp (2011) highlights that in the UK, Swansea County Council plans to outsource almost all of its services in order to cut its £1.1 billion budget by 30 per cent. Kent and Reigate plan to save £4 million through collaborating or linking up on four services (personnel, finance, benefits & revenues and IT). Suffolk County Council is outsourcing adult social services in a £20 million per annum plan. Jepp (2011) also emphasises that in the UK 'as the coalition government continues to make changes to cut the public deficit, it is likely that the

number of local authorities embarking on new and different relationships will rise – along with the breadth of risks they face. If these partnerships are undertaken without proper commissioning and risk management skills, there is every likelihood that costs will rise and service quality will decrease'. Jepp also notes that recent research conducted highlights that only 29 per cent of public sector leaders felt they were able to deal with the kinds of risks associated with working with other organisations (Tough Choices Report, 2011).

In many instances, intergovernmental collaboration allows localities to achieve better results than they could by working alone. A 1994 study of more than 50 instances of community collaboration found that successful collaborations have four major

Box 1 Aims and benefits of strategic collaboration

The aims of strategic collaborations are to:

- Capture and share knowledge and innovation
- Connect councils in maximising service delivery opportunities to meet common community needs
- Reduce costs through elimination of duplication
- Access economies of scale
- Develop an effective local platform to work with other levels of government to achieve better whole of government outcomes for the community

The benefits of strategic collaboration include:

- The provision of more comprehensive services at the local and regional level
- Promotion of joint cultural and economic development
- Strengthened relationships between councils and other government entities
- Improved local governance through modelling, information exchange and joint problem solving
- Opportunities for integrated planning across local government
- Increased access to a wider range of skills, knowledge and specialist services
- Better use of and access to available technology
- Better utilisation of capital and other assets, including improved investment strategy options
- Improved economies of scale resulting in better products at a cheaper price, freeing up resources for other uses (NSW Department of Local Government, 2007: 6)

outcomes: they achieve tangible results, generate new processes that lead to solutions where traditional approaches have failed, empower residents and groups, and fundamentally change the way communities deal with complex issues. (NLC, 2006:5-6).

Challenges and solutions to strategic collaboration

There are, of course, significant challenges associated with strategic collaborations, outlined in the relevant literature:

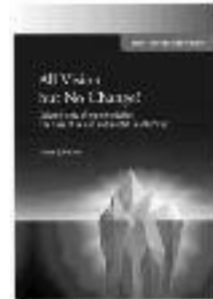
- Too much emphasis on the status quo and protecting turf by participants Recruiting the same participants for every collaborative effort when professionals and volunteers can only actively and effectively engage in a limited number
- Decision making driven by the quest for funding, displacing the collaboration's focus and agreed upon expectations
- Processes that bring everyone to the table but then reinforce the silos that further solidify their resistance to new ideas
- Processes that start over again collecting the same data, setting the same goals, and taking us back where we started, while expending countless hours 'collaborating'
- 'Service vacuums' might be created if financial pressures faced by public sector organisations lead to services failing to be provided by either partner and local authorities cutting services irrespective of what partners have decided
- The impact of both outsourcing and partnerships on staff morale in a local authority.
- The involvement of parties not used to procurement and outsourcing
- Confused sense of authority, delegation, and consensus that all too often results in questions of

ownership, frustration, and paralysis. (Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010) : xii, Preface)

- The integration required, including redundancies associated with service consolidation, raises questions for staff in terms of potential job losses, to changes in roles, structures and workplace culture
- Disparity between the standards and practices of public or private organisations linking-up.

Jepp (2011) suggests a number of solutions to combat many of these risks:

- To safeguard against 'service vacuums,' it is important to draw-up precise service level agreements with clear strategic goals. Before making any agreements, it is important that both parties clearly outline expected standards and ensure they understand those of the other parties
- Once in place, agreements will need constant oversight. Creation of service committees is beneficial in encompassing local public services and bringing together board-level members from across partners: 'Before an authority outsources any service or function they have to know what the long-term organisational strategy and shape for both partners is, ideally, for the next five years. Without this, they run the risk of outsourcing core services and capabilities which might, in the future, have to be brought back in-house at a higher cost'. (Jepp, 2011)
- In terms of allaying staff fears, it is important how managers handle the answers to staff queries by having an open and creative approach to address potential issues, getting buy-in from all levels of staff and clearly communicating proposals to mitigate negative impact of new ways of working
- Many of these new agreements will involve parties that are not used to procurement or outsourcing. It will



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Many acclaimed policies in Ireland have failed to deliver on their aspirations, leading some commentators to talk of a problem of implementation. The failure to fully implement some public service policies has led to frustrations on the part of policymakers, service providers and service users alike. This book reviews the implementation literature from a number of perspectives. There are those who seek to implement policy from the 'top down'. Others seek to influence the implementation of policy from the 'bottom up'. Some seek to bring about implementation through change.

The mental health policy *A Vision for Change* is taken as a case study. The content of reports of an Independent Monitoring Group is analysed.

Interviews are undertaken with people associated with implementation of the policy. These include politicians, public servants, mental health professionals, mental health service users and mental health advocates.

The book concludes that there is a need to acknowledge issues 'below the surface', including beliefs, values and power relationships in implementing policies. Innovation and creativity, along with local leadership, are important but on their own they are not enough to ensure successful implementation. These findings have relevance for the implementation of nationally designed policies which are intended to be implemented across the country in an even-handed way.

be important not to rely on an arm's length procurement approach, treating them as traditional client/contractor relationships. Instead, it is vital to engage everyone in service design from the outset to ensure sustainable and resilient services

Similarly, Austin (2010) recommends developing a Purpose and Fit Statement when embarking on any partnership. A Purpose and Fit Statement is a working document to formalise ideas exchanged throughout the identification phase, akin to a memorandum of understanding. Austin suggests developing answers to the following questions when preparing a Purpose and Fit Statement:

1. What are you trying to accomplish through collaboration?
2. Where does your mission overlap with the potential partner's mission?
3. Do you and your potential partner share an interest in a common group of people (or geographic region)?
4. Do your needs or deficiencies match up with your partner's competencies and vice versa?
5. Would the collaboration contribute significantly to your overall strategy?
6. Are your values compatible with your prospective partner's?

Austin (2010) suggests that each partner answer this set of questions separately and then come together and drafts a joint statement. From the outset this enables a higher level of honesty and transparency. Each partner must be as explicit as possible in answering the questions. Topics that may be uncomfortable will also be addressed, for example:

- Who will bear the costs of what in the partnership?
- Who will provide the staff hours to carry out the project?
- What kind of exposure does your organisation want?

- Where will this partnership fall on the collaboration continuum (philanthropic, transactional, integrative)?

It is important to address whether or not organisations have the capabilities (time, staff, finances, structure) to fulfil their end of the agreement. Jepp (2011) notes that 'it remains to be seen whether outsourcing and partnership working will bring the benefits local authorities hope, and many of the details and legalities have still to be determined. However, risk management should remain a top focus for local authorities.'

It is also important to examine the capabilities of staff dealing with collaboration. Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:314) emphasise that the applied literature underlines that collaboration has become an essential component of governance. They note that management and leadership competence in collaborative settings has consequently become a job requirement of public and non-profit managers. Collaboration governance requires that public and non-profit managers must be skilled at managing vertically, horizontally, and inclusively, within their particular collaborative context, interacting and negotiating with environmental pressures. In particular, McGuire (2006:37) categorises the distinctive collaborative skills needed as those related to activation (identification and integration of the appropriate participants and necessary resources), framing (facilitating roles and responsibilities as well as procedures and structures), mobilising (eliciting commitments), and synthesising (facilitating productive and intentional interactions to build relationships and information sharing). McGuire (2006:37) also argues that managerial skills including managing human and financial resources, managing the

structure, and rules that guide operations, and designing and implementing effective communication, information management, strategic management, and conflict management practices are common in both hierarchical organisations and collaborative contexts.

Accordingly, Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:10) highlight that "the translation of such skills from everyday organisational settings into a collaboration context requires that public and non-profit managers thoughtfully interpret this new orientation and adjust their conduct and behaviours appropriately since collaborations are inherently more unstable, fragile, and idiosyncratic than hierarchical settings." Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:10) argue that "the ability to reflectively read a situation as it unfolds and to be instinctively resourceful as collaborative structures and processes evolve requires that public and non-profit managers act both deliberately and strategically. Moreover, in a collaborative setting, the everyday skills of negotiation, communication, conflict resolution, and facilitation take on added complexity as the degree of control is decreased and engagement levels vary."

Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:10) outline three broad knowledge areas important to effective collaboration built from organisational expertise, which are familiar to public and non-profit managers. They outline that "collectively, the three broad areas – getting things done with and through people, using analytic methods, and managing boundary-spanning activities – serve as a foundation for collaboration practice but need to be transformed to result in effective strategic collaboration practice" (Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:10)). They that

prove useful for collaboration.

Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:319)

also identify a wide range of common analytic skills (summarised in Box 2 linked to these three knowledge areas

further outline six principles of strategic collaboration to provide practical guidance for public and non-profit managers to be more effective in their decisions regarding collaboration. (see Table 1). The principles can act as important guides for those embarked on collaborative activities.

Box 2 Skills essential for collaboration

- Build and sustain relationships with people at all organisational levels
- Facilitate group processes as a leader or team member to accomplish tasks
- Cultivate support for vision and desired outcomes
- Listen to understand and value diverse perspectives
- Communicate effectively in writing and in person
- Create agendas to organise projects, manage meetings, coordinate assignments, and navigate change
- Use transparency and accountability to mediate and negotiate conflict

Analytic skills essential for collaboration

- Facilitate groups to develop shared knowledge and goals
- Perform environmental or needs assessment analysis
- Identify and collect relevant data
- Conduct key stakeholder analysis
- Develop and implement performance measurement and program evaluation processes
- Use a variety of methodologies

Boundary-spanning skills essential for collaboration

- Scan environment for relevant political, social, and economic forces
- Develop and coordinate cross-agency action plans, assignments and timetables, and budgets resources
- Solicit feedback to revise or refine plans and implementation processes
- Ensure accountability
- Perform regular reality check for alignment of expectations and priorities
- Consider roles for citizen, client, and consumer participation
- Communicate with external stakeholders

Source: Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:12,13,14)

Table 1: SIX PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGIC COLLABORATION PRACTICE

Principle 1: Choose strategic collaboration wisely.

Principle 2: Understand the strategic collaboration lifecycle.

Principle 3: Strengthen leadership capacity.

Principle 4: Balance risk and reward transparently.

Principle 5: Cultivate innovation for meaningful change.

Principle 6: Emphasise outcomes and impacts.

Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:319)

Similarly, Bryson, Crosby and Middleton Stone (2006:52) have identified, 22 propositions related to collaboration outcomes and success. 'The variables referenced in these propositions may lead directly to success, but they are more likely to be interrelated with, moderated by, or mediated by other variables; embedded in fairly complicated feedback loops; and change over time.'

Their research argues that ‘for example, it is likely that structural variables such as the degree of network centralization relate to network effectiveness.

However, structural variables appear to be moderated or mediated by environmental factors and may or may not be influenced by (or influence) critical process variables, which have also been shown to influence effectiveness.’ Furthermore, Bryson, Crosby and Middleton Stone (2006:52) note that a quick scan of their propositions shows a mix of environmental factors that managers have little control over and strategic choices that managers may have some control over. ‘Support from the institutional environment is critical for legitimizing cross-sector collaboration but is not easily controlled by local managers. On the other hand, the choice of governing mechanism, stakeholder participants, planning processes, and conflict management techniques, for example, are likely within the purview of managerial choice.’ (Bryson, Crosby and Middleton Stone (2006:52))

Bryson, Crosby and Middleton Stone (2006:52)) emphasise that research must pay attention to the external environment in which cross-sector collaborations are embedded. ‘Many of these components represent strategic contingencies that influence but do not necessarily determine managerial or collaborative action. Leaders and managers, constrained though they may be, are likely to produce independent effects on collaboration success (Agranoff and McGuire 2003).’ Bryson, Crosby and Middleton Stone (2006:52)) emphasise that ‘the research challenges involved in studying cross-sector collaborations and providing practical, research based guidance to policy makers regarding the design and

implementation of cross-sector collaborations are clearly substantial. But the challenges must be met or else effectively addressing the major public problems that confront us will be unlikely, and some of the most important opportunities for creating public value will be missed.’

Conclusion

Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010:314) suggest that the reframing of collaboration to strategic collaboration offers an increased likelihood of success and positive outcomes from the collaborative venture as public and non-profit managers become more purposeful about collaboration design and implementation processes, enable collaboration inclusiveness and effectiveness, decrease collaboration fatigue and frustrations, and proactively steer toward positive outcomes. As noted earlier, Austin (2010) recommends developing a Purpose and Fit Statement when embarking on any partnership. A Purpose and Fit Statement is a working document to formalise ideas exchanged throughout the identification phase, akin to a memorandum of understanding.

Furthermore, Bryson, Crosby and Middleton Stone (2006:52) have identified, 22 propositions related to collaboration outcomes and success. Similarly, the National League of Cities (NLC) Guide to Successful Local Government Collaboration in America’s Regions (2006), report provide a series of steps and tools to assist councils develop effective collaborative arrangements. The NLC (2006) report emphasises that these steps and tools should assist councils in the identification of collaborative options, planning, implementation and evaluation.

This Report highlights a number of examples of different approaches to strategic collaboration. Ultimately, as the NLC (2006) guide argues it is about making strategic collaboration the norm. It is about collaborating across jurisdictional lines becomes the expected approach in dealing with complex issues, not just a one-time event and becomes a natural ingredient in any manager’s set of capabilities.

The NLC guide emphasises that collaborations are based on an understanding among leaders and residents alike that challenges facing communities and regions require a crossing of multiple boundaries (political, geographic, economic, racial, and ethnic). (NLC (2006:53)) Similarly, Bryson, Crosby and Middleton Stone (2006:52) emphasise that success in cross-sector collaborations depends on leadership of many different kinds-they highlight leadership roles such as sponsors, champions, boundary spanners, and facilitators. ‘But, Huxham and Vangen (2005:202-212) argue that leadership –in the sense of what “makes things happen”- also occurs through structures and processes.

Therefore, the leadership challenge in cross-sector collaboration may be viewed as a challenge of aligning initial conditions, processes, structures, governance, contingencies and constraints, outcomes, and accountabilities such that good things happen in a sustained way over time-indeed, so that public value can be created.’

Source: *Local Government Research Series Report 2012, Strategic Collaboration In Local Government, A review of international examples of strategic collaboration in local government, <http://www.ipa.ie/pdf/StrategicCollaboration.pdf>*

Freedom Of Information Act 2014

By Maebh O'Connor, IPA

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2014 was enacted on 14th October 2014. The FOI Act 1997 and the FOI Amendment Act of 2003 have been repealed. Below is an outline of what has changed.

Firstly, the Act has extended FOI to all public bodies (unless specifically listed as exempt) and it also provides a framework to bring under FOI for the first time non-public bodies who receive significant funding from the State.

Exempt Agencies: The Act proposes that most commercial State bodies are fully exempt, such as An Post, Ervia, Dublin Bus, Coillte, ESB and school boards of management.

Partially Included Agencies: Certain bodies are 'FOI-able' in part only. These include the Adoption Authority, Central Bank of Ireland, Garda Síochána, Insolvency Service of Ireland, the Mental Health (Criminal Law) Review Board, NTMA, NAMA, the various Ombudsmen and the Equality Tribunal, the Labour Relations Commission and the Labour Court.

Restriction of the New Act: As with the current FOIA, the Act exempts certain records from the application of FOI, including records held by the Criminal Assets Bureau and records relating to the President, inquiries by a Tribunal of Inquiry and the private papers of Oireachtas members. Also excluded are certain records held by the Courts, the Defence Forces, the Central Bank of Ireland, the Garda Síochána,

the Attorney General, the DPP, and the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Fees: How have the fees changed?

Firstly the €15 application fee for non-personal requests has been abolished. Secondly a new approach has been introduced whereby if the request can be answered in 5 hours or less (€20 per hour) there will be no charge to the requester. This is called the appropriate minimum amount. However, if this is not the case the requester will be charged for the full amount – in a word if the estimated cost is €101 or above they will be charged the full amount. Further to this there is the introduction of a cap on the amount of search retrieval and copying fees that can be charged at €500 (25 hours) called the appropriate maximum amount and lastly there is a further and final upper limit on estimated search retrieval and copying fees at €700 (35 hours) called the overall ceiling limit. If the estimated cost is above this an FOI body can refuse to process a request on grounds of voluminosity (excessive information being sought) or if the FOI body decide to continue, the request can be processed with full fees applying without any upper limit. Examples of fee calculations are:-

- 1) Estimated search, retrieval and copying €550
Actual search, retrieval and copying cost of records released €550
Charge to Requester - €500 (the appropriate maximum charge)

Source: DPER CPU notes

- 2) Estimated search, retrieval and copying €850 - Contact requester to

see can it be brought below €700. If requester refuses and FOI body decides to process request even though overall ceiling limit exceeded the requester may be charged full amount. If the actual cost of search, retrieval and copying of records released is €650 the charge to the requester will be €500 (prescribed appropriate maximum charge).

Source: DPER CPU notes

Publication and disclosure logs

FOI bodies will be required to publish a "publication scheme" to specify the classes of information that each FOI body has published or intends to publish, and the terms under which it will make such information available, including any applicable charge. In preparing, reviewing or revising these schemes, FOI bodies must have regard to the public interest in (i) allowing public access to information held by it, (ii) the publication of the reasons for its decisions, and (iii) publishing information of relevance or interest to the general public regarding its activities and functions. Further to this FOI bodies will be expected to develop a disclosure log of non-personal decisions to share the FOI information (requests and responses) with a wider audience. However this part of the Act will require a commencement order to be enacted and then the FOI Body will have six months in which to implement the disclosure log. An example of a disclosure log from Dept Communications, Energy and Natural

Resources can be seen at www.dcenr.gov.ie/freedom_of_information

Exemptions: The 12 exemptions are virtually unchanged with the exception of Meetings of Government and Deliberations of Public Bodies both of which are reverting to the text of the 1997 Act and removing the restrictions introduced in the Amendment Act of 2003. For example Government records for use solely at a Government Meeting will now be protected for a 5 year period only and the definition of ‘Government’ and ‘cabinet record’ have been amended and are being returned to their 1997 definitions.

bodies, and other non-public bodies in receipt of significant funding from the State’.

Maebh O’Connor Learning and Development Specialist with the IPA has been delivering FOI workshops throughout the public sector since the inception of FOI in 1998.

The 12 FOI exemptions are:-



Name of exemption

| |
|--|
| Meetings of Government - Record has/is going to be submitted to Govt |
| Deliberations of FOI bodies - Info. relating to the deliberative process |
| Functions and negotiations of FOI bodies |
| Parliamentary, court and certain other matters |
| Law enforcement and public safety |
| Security, defence and international relations |
| Conclusiveness of certain decisions pursuant to section 32 and 33 |
| Information obtained in confidence |
| Commercially sensitive information |
| Personal information - Definition included at section 2 |
| Procedure in relation to certain FOI requests which 35, 36 or 37 apply |
| Research and natural resources |
| Financial and economic interests of the State |
| Enactments relating to non-disclosure of records |

Changes in FOI 2014

| |
|---------------------------|
| FULL rollback to 1997 |
| FULL rollback to 1997 |
| no change |
| no change |
| insert (1)(a),(VI), (VII) |
| Significant changes |
| no change |
| insert clause (5)record |
| no change |
| no change |
| no change |
| no change |
| no change |
| insert (c), (p), (q), (r) |
| no change |

In conclusion the objective of the FOI Act 2014 is to modernise, consolidate and simplify the legislation ‘To enable members of the public to obtain access, to the greatest extent possible **consistent with the public interest and the right to privacy**, to information in the possession of public



Service Level Agreements

by Orla O'Donnell, IPA

In the current climate of tighter budgets and pressure on resources, many public sector organisations, including local authorities, are outsourcing services to external organisations under 'service level agreements' or 'service level contracts.' A service level agreement (SLA) is defined as 'a contract between a service provider and a customer, which details the nature, quality, and scope of the service to be provided. It is also sometimes referred to as a 'service level contract.'

(<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/service-level-agreement.html>).

Local authorities are also providing services to others through service level agreements, as in the case of Irish Water. Similarly, service level agreements are being used internally within organisations, guiding interaction between different sections of the organisation such as between central support services and delivery units.

In recent years, local authorities are both commissioners and suppliers when it comes to service level agreements. This report examines the nature, underlying principles and important components required to develop and manage service level agreements, including the advantages and disadvantages involved in their implementation and in some instances, the main reasons for failure. In particular, the findings from the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) report on 'How to prepare

Service Level Agreements' (2005) emphasise 'the purpose of setting service levels is to enable the customer to monitor and control the performance of the service received from the provider against mutually agreed standards. Mutually agreed service levels are benchmarked for both customers and providers. Specifically for customers, the minimum acceptable level of service is that required to meet the present requirements of a particular function, activity or organisation, and against which required levels can be increased, reduced or deleted in the future. Similarly, for providers, service levels indicate promised minimum standards to which they must adhere.' The CIPS report particularly notes that '*when service levels are not met, the onus is on the provider to take appropriate remedial action.*'

Having regard to the CIPS Report, a number of examples are highlighted to reflect the issues and challenges in terms of providing, managing, implementing and monitoring service level agreements, such as, Irish Water and Local Authorities; Enterprise Ireland and City/County Councils; the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the Local Authority Veterinary Service; the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government and the Environment Protection Agency; London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and the local voluntary organisation 'Standing Together Against Domestic Violence.' A number of references to good practice

templates, include, the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (AVECO) factsheet for Third Sector Leaders as *An Introduction to Commissioning and Tendering*; Oakleigh Consulting Ltd White Paper on *Developing Service Level Agreements in Local Government*; Blackwell and Dixon, (2003) report on *Service level agreements: a framework for the quality management and improvement of central support services*; and the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS), (2005) best practice guidance report on *How to prepare Service Level Agreements* and finally, Herefordshire Councils provision of sample SLAs on their website for neighbourhood development plans, orders and community right to build orders.

It is evident from the literature and the examples assessed in this report that service levels are achieved successfully where the service level agreements stipulate specific measurements and indicators of service provision, and include ongoing reviews with partner organisations to ensure a continuous improvement in service. Failures occurred where at the outset, there is a lack of understanding of the level of service to be provided by the local authority and the partner organisation; a lack of consultation with the customer or community from the outset; lack of useful indicators to benchmark service changes and where there was a need for a robust review mechanism as part of an ongoing continuous improvement strategy. As an Attorney General's report (2013) in

New Zealand noted 'a public entity cannot contract out all responsibility for what is done in its name.' Therefore, robust service level agreements embedded in a continuous improvement strategy can provide the necessary bulwark against service level issues and any difficulties that may arise in maintaining and improving service levels.

Service level agreements (SLAs) are not a panacea and will not automatically solve governance relationships, either with external providers or between

internal units. But they do offer the potential to bring greater clarity and certainty to the relationship. The examples outlined in this report demonstrate that it is crucial to the effective operation of SLAs that it is remembered that the process of developing, monitoring and managing SLAs is as important as getting the content of the SLA document right.

Overall, this report is primarily targeted at those local authority staff who are not particularly familiar with or aware of service level agreements as it provides

a short, general introduction to the subject. Equally, it is a useful guidance document for practitioners, particularly, those involved in developing service level agreements, as it summarises the recent findings and developments from international research on this topic.

Service Level Agreements, Orla O'Donnell, Local Government Research Series, No.8, October 2014, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration
http://www.ipa.ie/pdf/ServiceAgreementsReport_2014.pdf
http://www.ipa.ie/pdf/ServiceAgreementsReport_2014.pdf

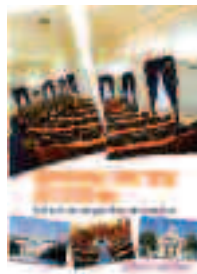
BOOKS FROM THE IPA



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978-1-904541-16-5
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E-learning course on Equality for front-line public sector staff



The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Designate has published a new e-learning course for front-line staff in the public sector. *“Delivering Equality in Public Services: An Introduction for Front Line Staff”* provides public sector staff with the essentials they need to know about Irish equality law in their work. The course was developed by the Equality Authority, which is being merged with the Irish Human Rights Commission to form the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

Head of Research and Development at the Equality Authority, Laurence Bond stated that “in addition to the core parts of the equality legislation, the course provides explanations of diversity, stereotyping and positive action, as well as, why these matter for front-line public sector staff. The course uses case studies that show these principles in practice.”

The case studies are drawn from across the Irish public sector, including government departments, local authorities, the health sector and semi-state companies. The course is available free and takes about 40 minutes.

Mr Bond outlined that the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Designate are “keen to make access to the e-learning course as easy as possible. It does not require access to sound or video, which are blocked on computers in many public sector offices. At the same time, the course uses the case studies to provide interactivity and enable learners to apply the theory and ideas in realistic situations.”

The e-learning course is being made available in a number of ways.



- the title screen
- the course outline
- an explanation of rationale for the course
- the map of the four units
- an explanation of the scope of the Equal Status Acts
- the presentation of a legal definition (of discrimination) in plain English,
- a set of two screen grabs showing an example of the use of a question and the feedback to the learner
- a set of five screen grabs showing the use of dialogue and the subsequent question for the learner, and
- a scenario where the learner will have to decide the appropriate course of action.

Individual officers in public sector bodies can access it on the IHREC Designate’s website at www.ihrec.ie/delivering-equality from 1 September 2014. A limited number of copies are available on CD and USB key. The course will run on an ordinary computer with Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox. Mr Bond also noted that “versions are also available for human resource managers and training managers in public sector bodies who want to provide the course through a staff intranet or an e-learning system such as Moodle or Blackboard.”

The IHREC Designate can also provide screen grabs from the e-learning course for illustrations. They are available as JPEG files, and show how the course presents the learning. The following screen grabs available on request:

The development of the e-learning course was supported by the European Union’s Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (PROGRESS). The information contained in the course does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

The legislation to merge the Equality Authority and the Irish Human Rights Commission was passed by the Oireachtas in July and is expected to commence in the last quarter of 2014. *For more information, contact: Cathal Kelly, Equality Authority, e-mail: cfkelly@equality.ie*

Renting In Ireland



Pictured at the book launch of Renting in Ireland, from left to right, Dr Richard Boyle, Head of Publications and Research, IPA, Minister for Housing, Paudie Coffey, TD, and Dr Lorcan Sirr, (book editor), DIT

In October, Minister for Housing, Paudie Coffey TD launched a new book entitled 'Renting in Ireland: the social, voluntary and private rented sectors', edited by DIT lecturer Dr. Lorcan Sirr. Published by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), Renting in Ireland brings together a range of housing experts and practitioners to discuss and analyse the role and experience of renting housing in

Ireland. Topics addressed in the book include the private rented sector; the social rented sector; and other relevant issues including renting and minorities, legislation, space standards and the experience in Northern Ireland.

Renting in Ireland is published by the Institute of Public Administration, and is available in all good bookshops and directly from the IPA at sales@ipa.ie, priced €28.



ISBN: 978-1-910393-01-7 €28.00

As part of the overall housing sector, renting has seen a considerable increase in the first 14 years of the twenty-first century. Numbers renting are now similar to those of the 1950s, when Ireland was a very different place economically and socially. Today renting is driven by forces ranging from necessity to choice to ongoing urbanisation: it is becoming the tenure of preference for many, while remaining the tenure for others with no choice. Governing legislation, providers of rental accommodation and the various rental sectors' economic value and importance are all in flux. The traditional divide between state supplied social housing and the private rented sector is blurring in the face of political preference for market-led solutions and for the voluntary and private sectors to be the main, if not sole, providers of rental accommodation in Ireland.

Renting in Ireland brings together for the first time a range of housing experts and practitioners to discuss and analyse renting's role in Irish society. It comprises sections on the private rented sector; the social rented sector; and other relevant issues including renting and minorities, legislation, space standards and the experience in Northern Ireland. It is hoped that *Renting in Ireland* will help to contextualise discussions on renting, inform debate, and provide insight into how renting affects society and ideas on where to go next for a sector that has never quite received the attention it deserves.

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Conference Examines Accountability in the Public Service

Speakers included Minister Howlin, Chief Ombudsman of New Zealand, Dame Beverley A. Wakem, and former Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Baroness Nuala O’Loan

Friday, 7th November 2014: The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) in conjunction with the Office of the Ombudsman hosted a conference chaired by Tom Arnold entitled “*Held to Account: Responsibility and Accountability in the Public Service*”. The conference, which took place at the IPA in Dublin, was addressed by a distinguished line-up of speakers including the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Mr Brendan Howlin TD, Chief Ombudsman of New Zealand, Dame Beverley A. Wakem, and former Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Baroness Nuala O’Loan.

Minister Howlin TD, who opened the conference on Friday, said the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is committed to bringing about greater accountability in the public service, as set out in the Civil Service Renewal Plan published last week. “The Government’s objective is to ensure that the systems of accountability are effective, robust, clear, and identifiable. It is important that we in the public service understand this quest for accountability, and that having robust and effective accountability systems are an essential characteristic of a high-performing and high-reputation organisation,” Minister Howlin told the conference.

Mr Brian Cawley, Director General of the Institute of Public Administration said: “Accountability featured highly in the



Pictured at the IPA/Office of the Ombudsman conference, Held to Account: Responsibility and Accountability in the Public Service, which took place in the IPA on the 7th November 2014, were (left to right) Peter Tyndall, Ombudsman; Brendan Howlin, TD, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform; and Brian Cawley, Director General, IPA.

Civil Service Renewal Plan launched last week. We are glad that this conference addresses this important topic of how to ensure citizens can best hold government to account for its actions.”

At the conference Ombudsman Peter Tyndall paid tribute to his predecessors Michael Mills, Kevin Murphy and Emily O’Reilly. “The Ombudsman’s initial remit was to examine complaints against Government Departments and Offices. However, the Ombudsman can now examine complaints from the public about almost all public bodies, including local authorities, the HSE, public hospitals and the third level education sector. Established in 1984 the Office has examined more than 90,000 individual complaints, and provided

advice and assistance in respect of several hundred thousand queries.” The Ombudsman has called for his remit to be extended to some other issues and areas.

Kevin Rafter, who recently chaired a review for the Government on strengthening accountability and performance in the civil service, provided an insight at the conference into the themes that emerged during the process.

Attendees at the conference also heard from Jane Tinkler, research fellow at the LSE Public Policy Group, who outlined the many ways through which citizens seek redress in England.



Pictured at the IPA/Office of the Ombudsman conference, guest speaker Dame Beverley A. Wakem.



Pictured at the IPA/Office of the Ombudsman conference, guest speakers Kevin Rafter and Baroness Nuala O'Loan.

A new Report by Engineers Ireland focuses on *The State of Ireland 2014, A review of Infrastructure in Ireland*

This is the fourth edition of the The State of Ireland report where members of Engineers Ireland have gauged the existing quality and future needs of the Republic of Ireland’s infrastructure. It is underlined that the details contained within the Report are a commentary on Ireland’s infrastructure as opposed to original research. It notes the importance of long-term planning in sustainable economic development, increasing competitiveness and in improving the lives of all Irish citizens. John Power, D.G. of Engineers Ireland, outlines that ‘in preparing this report we are cognisant of our country’s financial constraints and the still limited resources available, but, we believe that every effort should be made to invest in productive infrastructure, which will always have a positive payback. Any infrastructure is by definition economic infrastructure as it is the internal facilities of a country that make business activity possible. Very clearly, given the country’s existing financial limitations, a process of prioritization needs to be undertaken with respect to the recommendations outlined in this report. Therefore, this expert advice is intended to inform those who make investment decisions about infrastructure in Ireland: politicians at national and local level, civil and public servants, regulatory bodies and trade organisations.’

Engineers Ireland has assessed each area of infrastructure using the following grades:

Grading system

- **Grade A** Well maintained, in good

condition, appropriate capacity and planning for future development.

- **Grade B** Acceptable standard, properly maintained, able to meet demand, though investment needed in next 5 years.
- **Grade C** Inadequately maintained, and/or unable to meet peak demand, and requiring significant investment.
- **Grade D** Below standard, poorly maintained, frequent inability to meet capacity and requiring immediate investment to avoid adverse impact on the national economy.
- **Grade E** Unacceptable condition, insufficient capacity, and already impacting on the national economy.

secondary roads, and regional roads, while further work needs to be done to connect the main road network to air and sea ports. The development of rest and refueling stations needs to continue on the motorway network, with only the Gorey M11 PPP scheme under construction and due to open in 2015. Ideally, the road system should be improved to further link the coastal cities of Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Sligo, but this is obviously very much dependent on our future financial outlook and will have to be advanced in the context of prioritisation. Urban streets have been neglected with inadequate lighting provided and poor or no footpaths in

| Infrastructure area | Grade Awarded |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Energy | B |
| Transport | C |
| Water & Flooding | C |
| Waste | C |
| Communications | B+ |

What actions need to be taken in each infrastructure area that was graded?

ROADS

Engineers Ireland Report (2014) underlines that ‘the scale of reduction in capital expenditure by the Government, is unprecedented. If the Government does not reverse that decision, it is most unlikely that there will be any new projects, other than those already identified, commencing in the short to medium term. Therefore, it becomes imperative that maintenance regimes are put in place to continue improving the quality of national primary and

place. Urban areas also require substantial investment to move towards a low-carbon sustainable model. This will involve investment in bus lanes, cycle lanes, pedestrian facilities and facilities for the mobility impaired, as well as initiatives to attract car users onto public transport or other modes of travel. There is also a major deficit in park-and-ride facilities. Currently, Irish road infrastructure is not geared towards environmental and low carbon concerns. Significant investment is

needed to draw people out of their cars for even part of their journey. There are major policy initiatives to develop cycling across Ireland, including the introduction of cycle lanes in new roads. Funding of €32.5 million for sustainable transport projects in Dublin, Kildare, and Wicklow is to be welcomed. The National Journey Planner, which avails of intelligent transport system (ITS) integration, allows journeys of all modes to be planned throughout the country. For example, real-time passenger information for multiple operators, integrated ticketing, and passive safety systems like school speed warning signs all utilise ITS expertise. Dublin City Council's traffic data open platform – Dublinked – enhances the traffic system in the capital. However, there is a lack of cohesion with each city and the NRA developing separately and evolving its own traffic control system, with no standard for the data format. Agreed standards for data formats and communication protocols should be developed collaboratively. There is an overall need to develop a national ITS strategy to co-ordinate technologies, infrastructure and investment while ensuring value for money.'

WASTE

The State of Ireland Report (2014) also notes that 'Ireland is currently landfilling an estimated 39% of our municipal waste, down from 64% in 2007. The waste infrastructure market is changing as the State moves away from the practice of landfilling towards more advanced and sustainable solutions. Ireland has a considerable way to travel before we can stand shoulder to shoulder with the best environmental performing European member states who have corresponding disposal rates of less than 5%. The stalled process of developing the Poolbeg Incinerator in Dublin, and a similar fate for the Cork Incinerator, has meant that the

management of waste in Ireland is being kept in equilibrium by the exporting of black bin waste. Previous editions of this report have suggested that waste management in Ireland was in a form of limbo until a definitive decision on Poolbeg was made. There has been no significant investment in landfills for a few years as a partial consequence of a decision on Poolbeg so the waste equation is balanced by reduced consumerism and the export of black bin waste. Should the economy show signs of recovery with the consequent increase in waste levels, the gap between capacity to manage and volume will grow and the absence of investment will be highlighted. The current trend of exporting residual municipal (and hazardous) wastes for treatment to waste-to-energy, incineration and cement kilns in other European member states reflects the State's inability to date to adequately manage its own residual wastes.'

'The export solution is providing short-term gains, in terms of diverting waste from landfill, but it is a reactive and market-driven approach to a long-term environmental problem, where self-sufficiency is the preferred option for waste management, where possible. Energy generation and job creation are another positive gain. Investment in infrastructure is needed if we are to close the capacity gap and become more self-reliant in terms of treating our own waste. The State's existing capacities are unbalanced with high capacity levels of pre-treatment and mechanical treatment and below capacity levels of final destination facilities, e.g., biological treatment plants and waste-to-energy plants. Investment is needed in collection and treatment infrastructure, e.g., composting facilities, AD plants, if the State's desire to manage organic wastes in a more sustainable and resource-focused manner is to be achieved. The national shortfall in capacity needs to be addressed if the State is serious about achieving self-sufficiency. The upcoming publication of the EPA's review of capacity will be a key

publication in highlighting and quantifying the treatment capacity gaps and will point a way forward. The preparation of new waste management plans will be important in the context of developing a planning framework that encourages the appropriate treatment capacities to be developed. These need to be put in place within the next 12 months so the management of wastes can be properly planned. The involvement of all public and industry stakeholders is needed to ensure that the output of this process is effective and sustainable. The State needs to continue to fund and support national programmes and campaigns that are helping to drive the better use of resources and the prevention of wastes. Programmes and projects such as RX3; the National Waste Prevention Programme; and, reuse initiatives, such as freetradeireland.ie and SMILE, need continued investment if economic growth and waste arising are to be decoupled in a sustained manner. Lastly, the imperative of finding new ways to manage waste demands a rethink on the education of third-level students. Undergraduate courses must be geared to and mirror what the demands in the sector are. The changing landscape of waste management will have to be addressed in the future education of engineering and science undergraduates.'

COMMUNICATIONS

Engineers Ireland Report (2014) notes 'by providing voice and data transmission networks, the communications infrastructure has the potential to reduce the need for travel to attend meetings and to reduce carbon emissions. On the downside, hosting and hot-site facilities for network servers have high energy requirements. Nonetheless, the temperate climate in Ireland reduces the requirements for cooling/air conditioning with reduced environmental impact compared to

other countries. Ireland's future is dependent on our ability to further develop fibre access networks and satellite-based access services. These currently account for only a small percentage of total broadband subscriptions and this needs to be dramatically increased in the short to medium term. Changes in lifestyle with the advent of smartphones and tablets have implications for network usage including shopping, downloading music, and accessing TV programmes from mobile devices. Further investment is required in major network upgrades to cater for the higher speeds of terabytes, which will be required in the future. It is still not clear how the cut by European Union leaders to the Connecting Europe Facility from €9.2 billion to €1 billion will impact on the Irish Government's commitment to investment in broadband services in Ireland. Cloud computing applications hosted in data centres are a key area of growing economic activity and rely on a high capacity, resilient communication service. The Government needs to prioritise connecting Ireland's network to international cities if we are to compete for and with global business. Ireland's intellectual property (IP) and data protection regimes need to keep abreast of international legislation in order to remain competitive in the global marketplace.'

SEA PORTS

Furthermore, Engineers Ireland Report (2014) suggests that 'Ireland needs to develop its commercial ports to facilitate larger vessels, which can deliver economies of scale and improve overall national competitiveness. It is imperative, also, to streamline the statutory planning process to ensure that this infrastructure can be delivered in an integrated and timely fashion. The projects that are currently pre-planning should be supported. Strategic

traffic in the context of the national roads primarily comprises major inter-urban and inter-regional traffic, which contributes to socio-economic development. The transportation of goods and products, especially traffic to and from main ports and airports, both freight and passenger related, is key to the sustainability of Ireland's economy. It stands to reason then that the connectivity, particularly for freight, of our seaports to the overall transport network needs to be prioritised. The capacity of the external road network at all ports can be maximised through demand management to accommodate any expansion. Charging structures to disincentivise shipping and truck movements at times when other pressures are on roads are high, e.g., commuter traffic, could be introduced.'

RAIL

Engineers Ireland Report (2014) also points out that 'if a modal shift in the use of transport is envisaged, then rail is not capable of supporting projected economic development. Further investment is needed to get people out of their cars and onto bus and rail. Such investment should also attempt to link up the existing rail facilities, particularly in Dublin. The Government's decision to defer funding for Metro North, DART Underground, the Navan Railway Line and the Western Rail Corridor leaves the LUAS line as the only major project that will be undertaken. Allowing for this, planning must still recognise the future desirability that the rail network can be linked up in an efficient manner and with other transport modes. Decisions need to be taken and communicated. While rail in its current state is capable of meeting current demand, the system needs further development to improve the linkages between the major centres of population. The business case for

extending the DART to Dublin Airport has been developed and it is estimated that within 15 years, 9.4 million passengers per annum would use the DART extension. This project should be accelerated – not deferred.'

AIRPORTS

Equally, Engineers Ireland Report (2014) acknowledges that 'Ireland is an open economy with substantial inward investment. This investment relies in large part on the ability to access Dublin and the regional gateways from international air transport hubs. International air connectivity is critical for tourism and business travel. In the short-to-medium term, we need to continue to invest in the maintenance of our airports and protect these assets to support economic recovery. In the longer term we need to plan so as to exploit opportunities that present themselves and continue to rectify weaknesses in our existing infrastructure and travel experience. Smaller regional airports should be maintained because of their importance for the economic development of Ireland outside of Dublin.'

WATER SUPPLY AND WASTEWATER

Engineers Ireland Report (2014) points out 'that the consolidation of water services from 34 local authorities to a single vertically-integrated publicly-owned water utility company should benefit the consumer. Irish Water must manage the drinking water and wastewater assets on a national basis to achieve efficient service delivery and capital investment, without jeopardising the skills and knowledge already in the local authorities and supply chain. The complementary introduction of a water regulator should guarantee sustainable water financing and professional consumer



engagement. The Water Services Programme 2010-2013 has now concluded and Irish Water will be responsible for the capital investment programme from 2014. The Regulator must ensure that Irish Water has the means to adequately fund the investment programme. Developing an appropriate and sustainable funding model for water services by the water regulator in the longer term is central to the development of Ireland's water and wastewater infrastructure. Water charges need to be introduced in Ireland for all users, independently of progress on metering, and without costly universal allowances. This is not simply a matter of generating revenue, but is also about improving the

management of the system. Steps must be taken to secure a long-term water supply for the Dublin region as the key economic driver of the country. Bord na Mona indicated during 2013 that the necessary environmental studies have been completed and that it was ready to apply for planning permission to build a reservoir that would extract water from the Shannon to meet demands in the eastern region. The future trend will be to reduce the mass transfer of water from remote reservoirs. More rainwater harvesting at homes and businesses will be required to limit the need for bulk transfers at high energy cost. The Regulator, working with Irish Water, will have to develop tariffs that strike a balance between the need to recover the

high portion of fixed costs in a water service, while giving an incentive through a variable charge for customers to reduce their bills. Ireland must reduce the carbon footprint of the water distribution system, through the use of wind power at pumping stations, for example. Renewal of water pipe infrastructure is vital. In many countries there is a strategic imperative to replace a certain percentage (at least 1%) of water infrastructure on an annual basis. It should be a national imperative that we upgrade at least 1% or more of water and wastewater infrastructure annually.'

WATER QUALITY

Engineers Ireland Report (2014) states that 'the monitoring of water quality by

the EPA is comprehensive, but sufficient resources are not always available to act on the recommendations that come from monitoring. It is important that this situation be resolved. Ireland is expected to comply with EU targets for the provision of secondary treatment in urban wastewater by 2015. The River Basin Management Plans have been adopted, with the objective to increase the proportion of rivers and canals at good or high status from just over 50% to 68% by 2015, with further improvements up to 2027. With the implementation of the Water Framework Directive now the responsibility of one entity, this should allow for more co-ordination. An implementation report and annual progress report should document this process. A properly-resourced programme of catchment risk management plans and of groundwater protection plans is vital for every water source and adequate funding must be provided if Ireland is to meet the targets set for it.'

FLOODING

Engineers Ireland Report (2014) acknowledges that 'the CFRAM studies will be a major addition to the way Ireland manages flood protection and they are scheduled to be finished by 2015. Across the country, the Flood Risk Management Plans will be central to a pro-active approach for identifying and managing existing and potential flood risks. They must be used to develop an appropriate long-term strategy across the country for dealing with flooding. Ireland needs to move towards tailored flood warning systems across the country and towards an agreed approach to the maintenance of water courses. Significant funding is required for the OPW and local authorities if they are to implement the measures (structural and non-structural) which are necessary to alleviate flooding. In

this regard, the Government decision to ring fence the OPW capital budget (that includes provisions for major and minor flood relief schemes) is positive, but further funding to the local authorities is required to address the increasing urban storm water drainage problems. Despite the economic challenges facing the country, it is important that resources and funding be protected in future budget allocations. The difficulty is that failure to resolve the flooding issue will in turn create still more economic challenges.'

ELECTRICITY

The State of Ireland Report (2014) notes that 'grants for energy conservation measures in industry were removed during 2011, while grants for insulation and home energy generation were reduced. Allowing for the current economic climate, these decisions should be reversed. Transmission and distribution systems must be operated and maintained to the highest standard. Following on from the Ireland-UK MoU, the State must seek to

develop market and regulatory mechanisms to facilitate Irish electricity exports to Great Britain. In terms of investment requirements, the new North-South Interconnector and other major transmission projects such as Grid West and Grid Link are important in facilitating Ireland's 2020 renewable energy targets and in ensuring security of supply in the longer term. Further delays to these projects should be avoided but questions regarding any technical issues should be answered clearly to address the concerns of interested parties. The final routes and transmission options should be agreed and progressed. The planning process in Ireland can be especially challenging for the delivery of overhead transmission lines, wind farms, and other network assets. We must address planning issues if we are to deliver infrastructure necessary for the common good. The depletion of oil reserves, concerns about energy security, and the environmental threat of greenhouse gases mean that Ireland



cannot exclude consideration of nuclear power in the longer term. Indeed, if we do not see a nuclear power plant on the island of Ireland, we are likely to depend on nuclear power in some sense via interconnector(s) to the UK and Europe.'

NATURAL GAS

Engineers Ireland Report (2014) states that 'the national infrastructure is extensive and major centres of population are well supported by infrastructure. There are, however, a number of towns and areas in cities that are not supplied with natural gas. The availability of gas could make a noteworthy contribution to communities that do not already have it, by facilitating a significant reduction in both energy costs and in greenhouse gas emissions. Gas emits 40-50% less CO₂ than coal or peat and 25% less than diesel. Nonetheless, in terms of future network extensions, these should continue to be evaluated on an economic basis, always taking into consideration the need for a robust and reliable network. Future planning needs to address the question of whether there is the demand to extend gas to every town in Ireland and, where it is not economic to do so due to lack of demand, measures to stimulate this demand should be considered. A report by the Western Development Commission, which examined the benefits of extending the gas grid to a further 11 towns in the north west, estimated that €20.6 million could be saved annually in fuel costs between commercial and domestic gas users if gas were available as an option in these towns. Consideration should be given to similar studies being carried out in other regions of the country to assess the potential benefits and to inform national gas infrastructure strategy. To diversify Ireland's natural gas supply network, it is important to develop a

port facility for the importation of liquefied natural gas. The development of gas from renewable resources should also be considered, including from landfill sites, wastewater facilities, and from grass-based bio-methane. One of the most difficult energy sources to substitute for a greener, more cost effective, and more secure alternative are petroleum products for road transportation. Compressed natural gas (CNG), which can be used on the transport network, offers an alternative to such petroleum products. To facilitate diversification of fuels used in road transport, it should be Government policy to ensure that liquefied natural gas for freight vehicles is available throughout the motorway network. As a first step there is an opportunity to convert fleet vehicles, such as city bus fleets that are used close to their base depots, to CNG, and locating the re-fuelling infrastructure in these depots. This model has been implemented successfully in many European cities, and a 2012 trial on a bus in Cork city proved the benefits of the concept in Ireland also. There is also potential to develop indigenous biofuels from a number of sources to complement or replace CNG as a fuel for vehicles in the future, further reducing the need for imported gas.'

PETROLEUM PRODUCTS

The State of Ireland Report (2014) suggests that 'to minimise risks to Ireland in respect of petroleum products, the State needs to diversify and use sustainable sources for as much of its energy needs as it can. A clear and coherent plan needs to be pursued to meet this ambition. Oil is the primary fuel source for home heating and supplies approximately two-thirds of the heating market. A reduction in this level of dependency on oil for heating is required. The Better Energy Programme should, in particular, be fully supported

as it aims to retrofit homes. Increased levels of biofuel in transportation fuels (ethanol in petrol, and biodiesel in motor diesel) will steadily displace equivalent volumes of hydrocarbon fuels. However, it must be borne in mind that the vast majority of biofuels, like fossil fuels, are also imported. The 2012 mandatory level of 4% biofuels in motor fuels, was increased to 6% in 2013, and will rise over time to closer to 10% by 2020, and this will assist this initiative. The pace of such increase will of course have to be developed in harmony with approved changes to EU motor fuel specifications. The introduction of a grant to allow for the modification of petrol engine cars so that they become flexi-fuel and can receive bio-ethanol or petrol should be considered. Equally, investigation should be undertaken of agricultural capability for bio-ethanol and bio-diesel production, and appropriate incentives and supports provided to encourage sustainable biofuel production. The development of more sustainable energy is laudable and, if acted upon responsibly, the pace of such development will be steady but, most likely, slower than we'd like.'

The Engineers Ireland Report (2014) also suggests that 'in the meantime, we should not lose sight of the fact that we are an island nation with no pipeline connections to mainland Europe, wholly reliant on oil imports entirely by ship. Improvement in oil storage infrastructure is therefore key. The extent to which such improvement will be required is likely to be influenced by the future of the Whitegate Refinery, and the continuity of NORA's programme for the development of further storage on the island of Ireland. The capacity to fuel switch from gas to oil at gas-fired power stations should be increased from the current five days to 30 days. Exploration drilling has been at a historically low level for the past few

years and the State is a long way short of the intensive drilling programmes that would support the development of an indigenous offshore industry. To increase exploration activity, a regulatory and fiscal regime should be maintained which gives confidence to investors and which facilitates a predictable field development process so that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the issues involved and how they are to be addressed. Offshore Ireland needs to be promoted more to the international oil and gas industry. Proactive steps should be taken by relevant industry organisations, public representatives, Government departments and State agencies to increase public understanding of the industry and to assure potential applicants for licenses that their presence and their investments are welcome.'

Source:

http://www.engineersireland.ie/EngineersIreland/media/SiteMedia/communications/publications/EL_Report_TheStateOfIreland_2014_Web.pdf

News items

Academy of Engineering Report calls for a halt to investment in wind farms and power interconnections

A report from the Academy of Engineering calls for a halt to investment in wind farms and power interconnections due to the huge cost it will place on industry. It states that Ireland already has the most expensive electricity in Europe and that this is causing a major problem for national competitiveness, and thereby, putting Irish industry under severe pressure at this critical juncture. The Government has set a target that by 2020 renewable power will meet 40 per cent of the

electricity needs on the island of Ireland. Almost all of this renewable power is set to come from wind farms. A recent study by economic consultants Deloitte, on behalf of the Irish Wind Energy Association, stated that installed wind energy capacity would need to reach 7,800MW to meet this target. The current level on the island is estimated at less than 1,500MW. Some €4bn will need to be invested in the electricity network over coming years to allow this wind power to be connected to the grid. But with wind power exempted from contributing to this cost, the consumer, including industry, will have to pick up the tab.

Calling for a major review of national energy policy, the new Academy of Engineering report was drafted by an independent expert group from the ranks of the academy, including former CRH chief executive Dr Tony Barry and the former Siemens Ireland chairman Brian Sweeney. The Academy underlined that Ireland's industrial electricity prices are now among the most expensive in the EU. "This is causing a major problem for national competitiveness and puts industry in Ireland under severe pressure at a time when export-led growth is the key to our economic recovery. "Current policies, which include large investment programmes in networks, interconnection to the UK and wind generation, costing billions of euro, will increase prices even further and should be deferred until they can be justified."

<http://www.independent.ie/business/irish/engineers-call-for-halt-to-wind-farm-investment-26545863.html>

Additional Funding to tackle Homelessness in the Dublin Region

In mid-November, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local

Government, Alan Kelly TD, announced provision of a €4 million supplementary allocation to Dublin City Council which will be in addition to the Council's normal homelessness (Section 10) allocation for 2014. Minister Kelly underlined that "this further significant allocation demonstrates the Government's commitment to tackling the homelessness problem which is most acute in the Dublin region. I have secured a budget of €55.5 million in 2015 for homelessness across the country. This represents an increase of €10.5 million on the current year. I want housing authorities to continue to work with the non-profit sector to take action to prevent homelessness as far as possible; to provide housing to homeless households, despite the scarce supply; and to support those homeless households as they try to rebuild their lives following their exit from homelessness." "I am very much aware of Dublin City Council's difficulties in funding its homelessness programme and, in particular, the costs of emergency accommodation arising from the increasing number of families presenting as homeless. I recognise the emergency situation that is now presenting and I am responding to it." Minister Kelly also expressed his concern about families being accommodated in emergency accommodation and commented that this situation is not sustainable:

"Families need to be provided with a home environment rather than a hotel. I acknowledge that housing supply, particularly in Dublin is challenging and the Government is addressing the housing supply issue both in Dublin and nationally. We will continue to implement Construction 2020 and I will publish the Social Housing Strategy very shortly. I am confident that we will do everything that we reasonably



can to ensure that we provide sufficient housing to protect the most vulnerable in society and especially the homeless." The Minister complimented Dublin City Council on its approach to dealing with homelessness and especially, "the collaboration with Department of Social Protection on a Tenancy Sustainment Protocol and with the non-profit sector - especially Threshold and its helpline service - demonstrates Dublin City Council's progressive partnership approach in raising awareness of tenants' rights so as to stem the flow of individuals and families becoming homeless." Minister Kelly said "The Government made a significant financial commitment of €30 million in 2014 to bringing back about 1,800 vacant properties into productive use. These

additional properties will assist housing authorities across the country in providing a much-needed supply of social housing. The Minister recently wrote to housing authorities about their housing allocations and he urged authorities to provide greater prioritisation for homeless households in the allocation of housing. Minister Kelly underlined that "this is critical and essential if we want to end involuntary long-term homelessness. The housing-led approach is the way forward. We have to channel our resources to deliver more permanent response in a more focused and strategic way."

Source:

<http://www.viron.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/News/MainBody,39514,en.htm>

A homeless family living in shipping container house in time for Christmas

Ireland's first shipping container home will be displayed in the grounds of the Irish Museum of Modern Arts from November 27 to November 30, 2014, thereafter, the unit will be donated to Saint Vincent de Paul and is expected to be moved to Cork, where it will hopefully be used to house a family in time for Christmas. A low cost model of housing was inevitable after the property market crash, and this container project shows that there are new housing solutions available to accommodate different lifestyle choices for Irish people. The project has seen the 40 sq. ft container undergo extensive refurbishment and is aimed at raising

awareness around the issue of homelessness. Over the past two years more than 40 professionals and trades people have contributed to the build. Most of these have been members of BNI-Ireland, the Irish branch of an international networking organisation. The project has been coordinated by Carol Tallon and and Derek Trenaman of Ceardean Architects. Carol Tallon explains how these homes could offer a solution in a difficult-to-access housing market. Carol Tallon noted that “up to now, Ireland has been left some distance behind the changing global trends for housing, namely the departure from the notion of permanency or lifetime debt which has given rise to a more movable society that needs flexibility in terms of home ownership.”

(<http://www.thejournal.ie/homelessness-conference-trade-union-meeting-1681393-Sep2014/>)

In September, a proposal for use of the shipping containers was put forward by Dáithí Downey, the Head of Policy and Service delivery at Dublin City Council’s Dublin Region Homeless Executive, at a meeting on homelessness organised by IMPACT trade union. The proposal focused on the container’s ability to provide low cost, modern, modular housing and referenced projects involving the conversion of shipping containers into housing units successfully carried out in terms of student accommodation in the Netherlands.

Source: <http://www.thejournal.ie/shipping-container-home-christmas-1792018-Nov2014/>

Grants under the 2014 Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund

At the end of October, Mr Alan Kelly T.D., Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government

announced the recipients of grant funding under the 2014 Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund. This grant scheme promotes sustainable development by assisting small scale, non-profit environmental projects at a local level.

The projects are being co-funded by the Department and local authorities; with close to €400,000 being provided by the Department and a similar amount by the local authorities. In total €796,000 is being provided under this year’s scheme to 697 projects throughout the country. In addition to the funding provided by the Department and the local authorities, the successful applicants have also raised additional funds locally, bringing the total shared partnership investment to over €1.4 million.

Announcing the recipients of this year’s funding the Minister stated, “This scheme is an important contributor to local small scale environmental projects. I’m delighted that my Department, in conjunction with the local authorities, can help to make these projects happen and can assist the good work that is being done in communities right across the country. Almost 700 environmental projects are being funded through this year’s scheme, and this will help communities to make a real difference to their local environment.”

Projects are selected for funding by local authorities, following an open call for applications. Funding goes to a wide range of local initiatives; including awareness and education projects, community gardens, waste reduction projects and biodiversity projects. A full list of this year’s successful projects is now available on the Department’s website at:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/En>

[virement/Miscellaneous/FileDownload,39302,en.pdf](http://www.environ.ie/en/Environment/News/MainBody,39303,en.htm)

Source:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Environment/News/MainBody,39303,en.htm>

Experts to Review use of Fluoride in Water as many more County Councils vote unanimously against fluoridation of public water supply

On November 10th, 2014, Kerry County Council unanimously passed a motion opposing public water fluoridation. The motion states: “that Kerry County Council will write to the Government calling for the cessation of public water fluoridation.” It was unanimously voted. This is the fifth major Council to adopt a similar resolution this year and comes just weeks after Cork and Dublin, the two largest cities in the country passed motions along with Cork County Council and Laois County Council doing so earlier in 2014. These councils represent approximately 1.5 million residents.

(<https://www.facebook.com/TheGirlAgainstFluoride>) An international group of consultants is to be appointed by the Government to examine the use of fluoride in the public water supply. In mid-March, 2014, Agriculture Minister Simon Coveney informed a meeting of Fine Gael councillors of the review, prior to a Cork County Council vote calling on the Government to ban it. One of the earliest Councils to oppose fluoridation was Cork County Council and councillors voted by a huge majority in March to stop fluoridation. The council wrote to the Health Minister urging him to this practice. Members of the Fluoride Free Towns (FFT), who attended the council meeting, welcomed the council’s decision to seek a ban. Bantry has been designated Ireland’s first fluoride-free

town, following FFT's campaign. Fluoride Free Towns campaign teams are now working with other West Cork towns, including Clonakilty, Skibbereen, Macroom, Kinsale, Castletownbere, and Bandon, to achieve fluoride-free status. The Irish Examiner notes that 'Ireland is the only EU country and one of only two in the world with a national mandatory public water fluoridation policy. The Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the expert body set up to monitor the policy insist that the fluoride concentrations in public drinking water pose no known medical problems to the general population.'

The Fluoride Free Towns Project in conjunction with all persons involved with national effort have three points listed on their website:

1 - Have averted the ongoing widespread cosmetic damage (fluorosis) being inflicted on thousands of Irish people. As many are becoming increasingly aware, one of the conditions of the Health (fluoridation of water supplies) Act 1960 being given the all clear was

that it would not cause dental fluorosis or any other adverse health effect which would violate fundamental rights to bodily integrity. Unfortunately The Expert Body (The Expert Body, setup in 2004 have statutory responsibility for advising the Minister and Department Of Health on all aspects relating to the Health {Fluoridation of Water Supplies} Act 1960) and the IDA (Irish Dentists Association) seem to be unaware of this point yet still reported in 2012 that 38% of 15 year olds in the state suffer from cosmetic damage.

2 - Have mitigated the threat posed to the Irish economy through all food and drinks products being contaminated with a European Biocidal Product through public water fluoridation. The EU banned fluoride (hydrofluorosilicic acid) due to a lack of toxicological data to demonstrate that it was safe for humans and the environment. As a consequence, all food and drinks products made in Ireland are in breach of European Food and Medicinal Product Directives and most seriously, these products when consumed by persons here in Ireland

or abroad are at risk of suffering from cosmetic damage (fluorosis) through their their total daily fluoride intake being elevated to dangerous levels or indeed fluoride overdose which as the EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) have stated, "bone and dental fluorosis occur at an undetectable threshold of systemic fluoride ingestion".

3 - Have secured and in the interests of attaining fair and just society in the 21st century, the fundamental rights of millions of people who are effected by the policy in Ireland and abroad who's rights to consent before medication and bodily integrity restored, rights that are protected by the Irish Constitution and other legally binding international human rights instruments. For further info these three points listed above and other aspects pertaining to the legality of public water fluoridation, please view the link: <http://fluoridefreetowns.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/FFT-Fluoride-Review-2014.pdf>

Source:<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/experts-to-review-use-of-fluoride-in-water-261588.html>



Limerick City and County Council named Local Authority of the Year

On 14th November, Limerick City and County Council was named Local Authority of the year at the annual *Excellence in Local Government Awards*, held in association with the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. These awards, have in existence since 2004 to recognise best practice in Local Government.

In presenting the awards, Alan Kelly T.D., Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government commented “These awards offer a great opportunity to showcase and reward the excellent work being carried out by Local Authorities across the country. The quality of the projects and the dedication of those involved continue to grow year on year and I am delighted that my Department continues to support these awards.” Ian Talbot, Chambers Ireland Chief Executive stated that “while 2014 has been a year of hugely challenging change and transformation for local government, Local Authorities have embraced this opportunity to innovate and develop new approaches to sustaining and supporting their communities. It is an honour for us to host these awards and recognise the hard work that goes on at the heart of our communities on a daily basis. I want to congratulate not just the winners and shortlisted organisations but just as importantly, the people who made all these projects and activities happen.”

There were eleven awards handed out on the night plus the overall award for Local Authority of the Year. Individual awards were sponsored by: AECOM; AIB; An Post; CBRE; EirGrid; ESB Networks; the European Recycling Platform; Fáilte Ireland; Healthy Ireland (Department of Health); and Zurich. Winners were

presented with a specially commissioned trophy designed by Tipperary Crystal.

The full list of winners:

Supporting Active Communities sponsored by EirGrid

Wexford County Council - On Our Own Ground: Wexford’s Treasures, Parish by Parish

Joint Local Authority Initiative sponsored by Zurich

Fingal County Council - National Building Control Management System (BCMS)

Smarter Travel sponsored by AECOM

Limerick City and County Council - Limerick Smarter Travel

Supporting Tourism sponsored by Fáilte Ireland

Galway County Council - STONE WALL WORKSHOP - Féile na gCloch, Inis Oírf

Best Library Service sponsored by CBRE

Mayo County Council - Mayo Musical Instrument Lending Scheme

Best Practice in Citizen Engagement sponsored by ESB

Waterford County Council - Waterford County Comhairle na nÓg

Supporting the Local Economy sponsored by EirGrid

Cork County Council - ‘Taste Cork’ Regional Food Marketing Initiative

Health & Wellbeing sponsored by Healthy Ireland

Cork City Council - Functional Zone @ LeisureWorld

Sustainable Environment sponsored by the European Recycling Platform

Cavan County Council - Citizen

Engagement Strategy for the Domestic Wastewater Assessments (DWWA)

Local Authority Innovations sponsored by AIB

Limerick City and County Council - Creating a new agile public governance model through the merger of Limerick City Council and Limerick County Council

Sustaining the Arts sponsored by An Post

Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council - Musical Memories

Local Authority of the Year sponsored by AECOM

Limerick City and County Council

Judging Panel

The independent judging panel comprises respected individuals working in various fields concerning Local Government.

Judging Panel, Round One

- Donal Enright, Principal Officer, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government
- Tony Lenehan, Head of Stakeholder Engagement, Fáilte Ireland
- Sean Ó’Riordáin, Director, Sean Ó’Riordáin & Associates
- Karen Smyth, Head of Policy, Northern Ireland Local Government Agency
- Geraldine Tallon, Former Secretary General, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government

Judging Panel, Round Two

- Dónall Curtin, President, Chambers Ireland
- Donal Enright, Principal Officer, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government
- Pat McLoughlin, Consultant, PML Consulting
- Yvonne McKenna, Chief Executive,

Volunteer Ireland

- Tony O'Brien, Chair, Chambers Ireland Local Government Policy Council

Source: Chambers Ireland, 2014

Move to Sustainable Local Authority Funding is a Positive Step

In September, Chambers Ireland welcomed the decision to allow Local Authorities to retain 80% of the Local Property Tax (LPT) collected within their area. Mark O'Mahoney, Director of Policy and Communications, Chambers Ireland stated that "it is vital that funds raised through the LPT are used to provide a sustainable funding base for Local Authorities. This will help provide a new level of autonomy for local government, and importantly, it will encourage accountability at a local level." "We welcome the efforts made by Government towards ensuring equitable funding for Local Authorities across the State, particularly in regions where the revenue raised by the LPT would not be sufficient to meet the budgetary requirements of the Local Authority. However, today's research shows that in the majority of Local Authorities, any reduction in the LPT rate would result in a corresponding funding shortfall. We urge any Local Authority considering a cut in the LPT rate to take note of these figures and ensure any reduction does not lead to a decline in the level of services provided by the authority or an expectation that local businesses will make up the shortfall.

Government finalises Implementation of Local Property Tax

In September, the Government finalised the implementation of the Local Property Tax (LPT); 80% of LPT will be retained locally to fund vital public services in 2015. The remaining 20% will be re-distributed to provide

top-up funding to certain local authority areas that have lower property tax bases due to the variance in property values across the State.

Given that local authorities vary significantly from one another in terms of size, population, public service demands, infrastructure and income sources, the Government decided that no local authority will receive less income from LPT in 2015 than they received from the Local Government Fund in 2014. Similarly, the Government noted that people living in certain local authority areas, particularly large cities, will pay proportionately more LPT due to the amount of property tax paid in these areas.

The Government has, therefore, decided that local authorities who stand to receive more income in 2015 from LPT than they received from the Local Government Fund in 2014 will be entitled to use a certain portion of that additional funding for their own discretionary purposes as part of their normal budgetary process. That portion will be an amount equal to 20% of the total expected LPT income for each local authority (before any decision to vary rates) or alternatively the full amount of the additional funding where that is less than the value of 20% of LPT income. Local authority elected members have been given the power to decide whether or not to increase or decrease LPT rates by up to 15% for 2015 and must inform the Revenue Commissioners of their intentions by the end of September.

Minister Alan Kelly, T.D, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, outlined that "these measures will provide certainty and balance to the finances of local Government and give councillors a greater say in how their authorities are funded, ensuring 80% of LPT is spent

locally. All local authorities will be funded to their 2014 levels. The Government has provided certainty in relation to top-ups for those local authorities with lower property tax bases. Nineteen local authorities will benefit from top-ups from the equalisation fund. These measures are necessary to create a balanced system of funding across local authorities. Similarly, we have also recognised the contribution made by other local authorities with property bases with greater values by providing additional discretionary income for them.

This will allow local authorities where property tax levels are highest to implement a full 15% reduction of the LPT should the elected members vote for it or alternatively to increase the level of public services that they are providing. The Local Property Tax is designed to become a stable and sustainable source of funding and will enable local authorities to become more self-sufficient in terms of their funding."

Source:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/LocalGovernment/LocalGovernmentAdministration/News/MainBody,38852,en.htm>

The European Commission and its impact on local government

The new European Commission (2014-2019) took office on Saturday 1 November. In the frame of such event, Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) carried out research to provide a local perspective on the newly established Commission and shed light on the impact that the EU has on the daily work of thousands of municipalities, cities and regions. The study findings are available in the following infographic entitled "The European Commission and its impact on local government." Did you know that 11 EU commissioners out of 28

are former mayors or local councillors? Did you know that each citizen contributes on average € 0,27 per day to the European cohesion funds? And did you know that the EU affects 60% of items on local council agendas?

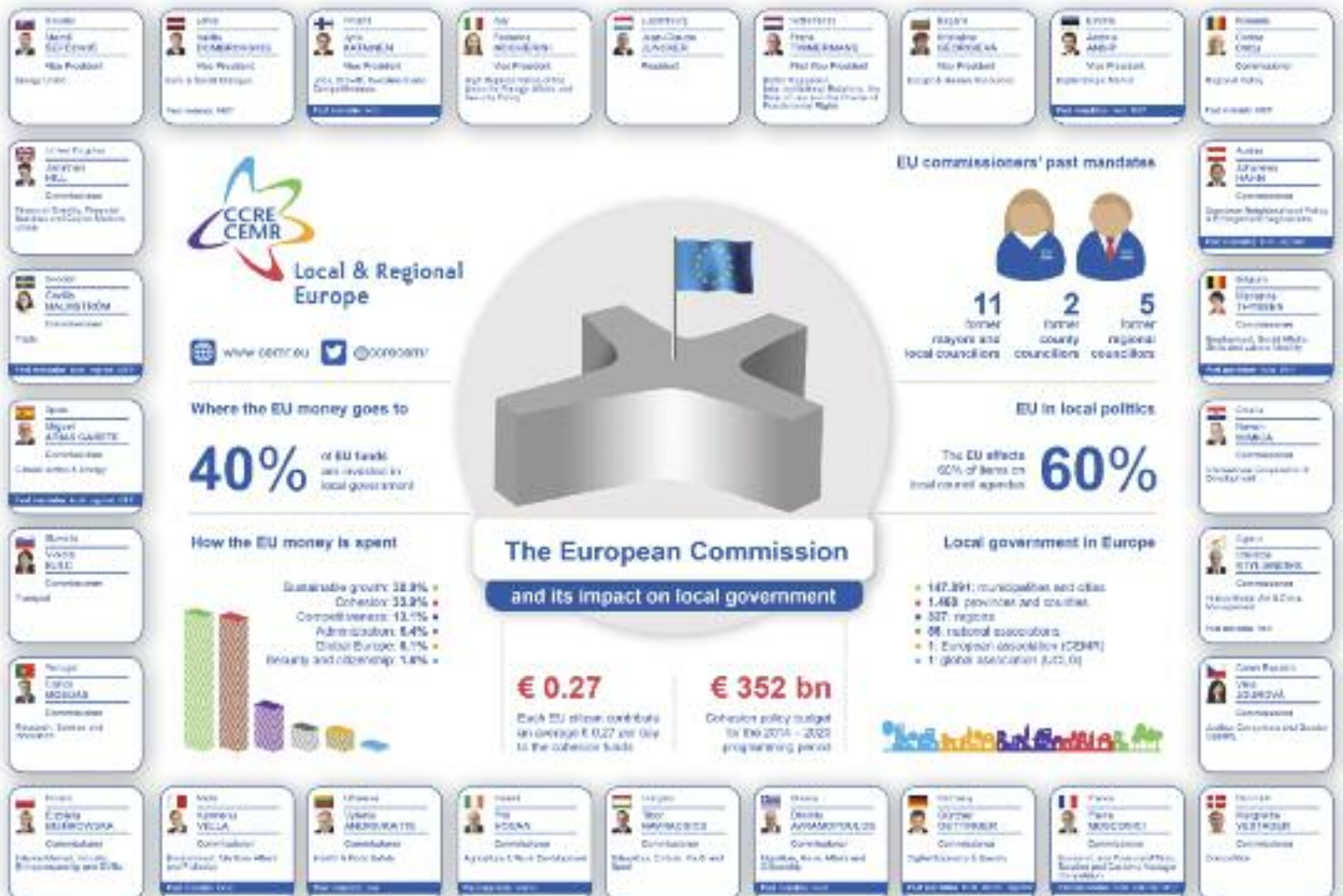
The link existing between Europe and local government is undoubtedly narrow. This is why CEMR carried out research to provide a local perspective on the newly established European Commission. The results shed light on the impact of the EU on the daily work of thousands of municipalities, cities and regions.

Source: *Conseil des Communes et Régions d'Europe, Council of European Municipalities and Regions, www.ccre.org*

N7 Newlands Cross Upgrade scheme

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Paschal Donohoe TD, on Tuesday, November 18th, 2014 officially opened the N7 Newlands Cross Upgrade scheme. The junction is one of the busiest in the country with approximately 80,000 vehicles passing through each day. This means the removal of the last remaining traffic light between Cork and Belfast. “The Newland Cross project is part of the €282m N7/N11 Arklow to Rathnew PPP Scheme. This project was the first PPP road project to be signed since 2007. The opening today is an important signal of our economic recovery and I hope it will significantly assist

economic activity by improving connectivity and journey times for businesses.” Minister Donohoe stated that he was “very pleased to officially open my first PPP road scheme as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport here at Newlands Cross today. The Newlands Cross junction upgrade is open before schedule and it’s an exciting development for regular commuters, for motorists, for hauliers and for anyone who remembers the frustrating delays and frequent tailbacks that used to occur here at Newlands Cross. The new junction will now also connect our major cities, providing a continuous free flowing route between the M50 and the cities of Limerick, Cork, Kilkenny and





Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Paschal Donohoe TD, on Tuesday, November 18th, 2014 officially opened the N7 Newlands Cross

Waterford. Our road network is an important asset for economic growth and preserving this important asset is a key driver for growth and development as the economy recovers. I look forward to opening the final phases of this PPP scheme, the N11 Arklow to Rathnew project before the end of 2015'. Similarly, Fred Barry, CEO of the National Roads Authority reiterated that 'they were "very pleased with the progress made to date on this scheme and this new flyover should provide much need relief for daily road users. I also like recognise and thank the public for their on-going patience during construction of this project." The Mayor of South Dublin County Council, Cllr. Fintan Warfield outlined that 'this Council is very proud to be associated with the N7 Newlands Cross Upgrade Scheme which delivers this grade separation of Newlands Cross. The added benefit of the project is that it will greatly reduce community severance between the historic areas of Clondalkin and Tallaght as well as reducing journey time to the city centre

for all. In particular, I would like to thank the commuting public, the local residents and local businesses for their perseverance through the construction stage and believe that the outcome of the project will deliver beyond all expectations'.

Source: Press Office, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, <http://www.dttas.ie/press-releases/2014/minister-donohoe-opens-n7-newlands-cross-junction-upgrade>

Five projects involving Irish buildings with German energy efficiency technology showcased in Dublin

Five pioneering projects, all Irish low energy buildings with German energy efficiency technology, have been selected to feature in the "Showcase – Made in Germany" event on Thursday 27th November in Dublin. This event consists of a technical workshop, two site visits and an evening networking event. Learn about how the rapid change in Irish building regulations in

the last decade, as well as increased confidence in the payback from investment in innovative German technology, has led to an enhancement in energy efficiency and building quality in Ireland. To register for this event, please confirm your attendance to: aideen.keenan@german-irish.ie; tel: 00353-(0)1-6424330.

These pioneering projects showcase the coming together of German technology and the Irish appetite for energy efficiency:

1. Radiant heating panels from Frenger installed in an Aer Lingus cargo building at Dublin airport
2. Low energy certified Passive House in Mount Merrion Dublin, featuring air tightness system from pro clima and wood fibre insulation from Gutex
3. Two SenerTec micro CHP units installed in an apartment block district heating scheme in Sandyford, Dublin
4. Highly efficient compressed air system from Kaeser Compressors installed in Abbott Ireland in Cavan
5. Highly efficient Waterkotte ground source heat pump for heating, cooling and hot water installed in a performing arts theatre in Belfast

Showcase Event (provisional) Agenda, Thursday 27th November 2014

09.00 – 13.00 Technical Workshop

(location: new Grangegorman campus)

Learn about the building processes, the installed technologies and the energy efficiency solutions achieved when the five projects are presented in a technical workshop. Presentations from German and Irish energy efficiency experts will also feature. The workshop will be followed by lunch.

13.00 – 17.00 Site visits (Dublin area)

A chartered bus will take the group on “Open House” visits to two of the projects:

- Aer Lingus cargo building in Dublin airport
- Passive House in Mount Merrion, Dublin

There will be expert guided tour of the projects, as well as unveilings of the official “Energy Efficiency – Made in Germany” certificates and plaques.

17.00 – 18.00 Networking Event

(location: new Grangegorman campus)
Evening networking event: mulled wine and mince pies with green technology companies.

“Showcase – Made in Germany”

features a wide range of German energy efficiency technologies applied across domestic, industrial and commercial projects on the island of Ireland. They reflect an Irish energy policy and building regulations that are ambitious, progressive and sustainable. In some cases, they show how the rapid change in Irish building regulations in the last decade has led to an increase in energy efficiency and building quality. In other cases, they show how Irish companies understand the commercial benefit of investing in innovative German energy efficient technology to reduce their energy costs. In all cases, the projects are the result of successful fruitful co-operation between German

companies and their Irish partners. All projects will receive an official “Energy Efficiency – Made in Germany” certificate and plaque. More information about the event and information about the projects will also be available on the German-Irish Chamber of Commerce website:

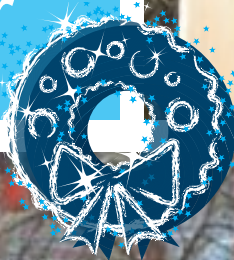
www.german-irish.ie/en

Source: Aideen Keenan, Head of Marketing / Marketingleiterin, DEinternational Ireland, consultancy wing of German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce - AHK Ireland, Deutsch-Irische Industrie-und Handelskammer - AHK Irland, 46 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2, E-Mail: aideen.keenan@german-irish.ie; Web: www.german-irish.ie





Wishing you a Happy Christmas and a Healthy, Happy and Prosperous 2015 for you and your families.





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We are always interested in your views, so if you have any comments, suggestions or ideas for topics that we should address in future issues, please do not hesitate to let us know.

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