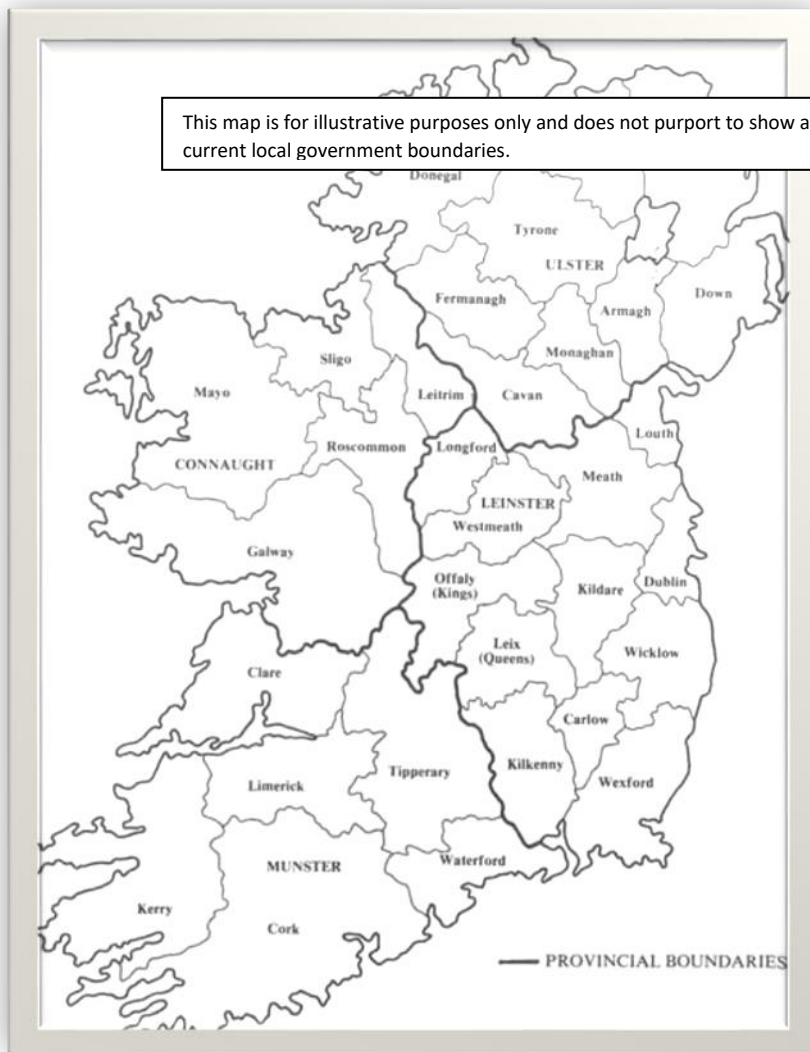


Association of Irish Local Government

Annual Report (Draft Format)

2015/16



This map is for illustrative purposes only and does not purport to show all current local government boundaries.

Association of Irish Local Government (Draft)

Report compiled by Liam Kenny & Tom Moylan

On behalf of Cllr John Crowe, President, Cllr Pat Daly, Vice- President, Cllr Padraig McNally, Past President and Executive Committee Members – Cllrs Nicholas Crossan, Pat Fitzpatrick, Pat Hand, Michael Hourigan, Dermot Lacey, Eithne Loftus, Luie McEntire, Patrick McGowan, Terry O’Flaherty and Rosaleen O’Grady.

June 2015 to September 2016

The Association of Irish Local Government is a training, networking and representative body for the elected members who form the policy-making boards of Ireland's thirty-one local authorities.

Each local authority is represented on the Association plenary council by three delegates; the Plenary Council in turn elects a President and Executive Committee comprising thirteen delegates each year.

A developing and significant service provided by the Association is that of training and education for elected members. Councillors are faced with increasingly complex policy decisions in a time of changing legislation and of multiple pressures and demands. The Association works to equip councillors with a practical knowledge of policy and practices which impact on their role as local government policy makers.

The report which follows covers the twelve months beginning June 2015 and ending May 2016.

Some highlights from the Association’s year:*

- More than 1,200 attendances at Training Events organised by the Association
- Lobbying and Representation of Local Government at the highest levels
- Policy Inputs on a wide variety of areas including Housing & Homelessness, Coastal Planning, Flooding and Good Governance in local government.
- Organised a full programme of meetings, events and conferences at which councillors from all parts of the country were facilitated in exchanging knowledge on current issues in local government
- Maintaining a high level of communications with elected members nationwide including provision of updated website www.ailg.ie, broadcast email bulletins, and printed newsletter, and maintenance of a register of all 949 councillors contact details in the State.

*This report covers the twelve months June 2015 to September 2016.

Policy Development & Presentation

Housing & Homelessness

The Association was invited to make a presentation to the Oireachtas Committee on Housing & Homelessness on 31 May 2016 in Leinster House.

A delegation headed by the Association President attended the session of the Committee and presented an eight part submission to the Committee.

The headings of the Association's document were:

1. Commencement of a National Local Authority House Building Programme
2. Increase in Capital Funding & Funding Options for a Local Authority Programme
3. Review of procurement & tendering procedures to speed up delivery
4. Examination of the planning process to eliminate delays
5. Need for recruitment of appropriate staff
6. Opportunities for Housing to complement Urban Renewal
7. More student accommodation to relief pressure on rental capacity
8. Immediate need to deal with vacant units (voids).

The presentation was followed by a vigorous question and answer session with the TDs and Senators on the Committee. The AILG's presentation was reported on the "Today in the Oireachtas Programme" on RTE television and in the national press.

The Association is confident that its proposals will be included in the final report of the Housing Committee which will inform the Government's response to this pressing issue.

Flooding

The Association wrote to the Minister for the OPW urging that more funds be released to local authorities to deal with the flooding which had impacted many parts of the country and particularly the Shannon Basin.

Local Governance

The Association has been contributing to a project involving the Institute of Public Administration intended to produce a framework on local government governance and compliance. The intention of the framework is to inspire all involved with local government - councillors and staff - to achieve the highest standards of accountable governance.

Planning

The Association briefed members on the Local Government Planning Act which became law in December 2015 and which assigned powers to the Minister to give directives in relation to proposed zoning in development plans.

Marine Area Planning Policy

The Dept of the Environment advertised a consultation on planning for the Ireland's coastlines and seas. The Association responded with a submission insisting that any planning strategy for Ireland's near-shore maritime zone should be integrated with the existing local authority planning process. In particular there is a logical case for allying the Foreshore Licence permit regime (currently administered by the Dept. of the Environment) with the local authority Planning Process. The Association input has been acknowledged by the consultation team and its eventual report is awaited.

Congress of Local & Regional Authorities in Europe

The Association supported the work of the Irish local authority members' delegation to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The Irish delegates made an impression in this complex European forum with one of their number being elected a Vice President and others playing a prominent role in the committees and reporting teams of the Congress.

Other policy issues:

The Executive Committee considered requests for AILG inputs into a variety of policy documents having an impact wider than the local government but still relevant to elected members:-

- Review of Lobbying Regulation
- Development of an Open Government Programme

Networking

The Association organises a number of meetings and conference type events to allow councillors the opportunity to exchange information and updates on their experience of addressing policy issues in a diversity of contexts. Principal among such assemblies are the autumn seminar and the spring conference.

The autumn seminar took place in Inchydoney, Co Cork in October 2015 and was centred on the theme of

"Local Government Reform 12 months on - are the new structures working?"

The content comprised:

Local Government Reform Evaluation Process - Tom Barry, Chair, DoECLG Local Government Review Forum

Local Government Reform "12 months on" - Dr Aodh Quinlivan, Dept. of Government, UCC

A Councillor's Perspective - Cllrs Sinead Guckian, Leitrim County Council; Mary Hanna Hourigan, Tipperary County Council; Cllr Rosaleen O'Grady, Sligo County Council

An overview of current terms & conditions of the elected member - Cllr Gerry Horkan, ACA, Dun Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council

Panel Discussion on Improvements to Elected Members terms - Senators Cáit Keane, Denis Landy, Craughwell

The spring conference 2016 focussed on the topical theme of

"Revitalising our villages, towns and cities."

Presenters:

Mr Seamus Neely Chief Executive Donegal County Council

Mr Richard Curran, financial journalist and commentator

Mr Colm Murray, Architectural Officer, Heritage Council

Ms Mary Hughes, Immediate Past President, Irish Planning Institute

The afternoon session of the conference comprised of an open panel discussion by a team of councillors with experience of dealing with renewal in rural, urban and metropolitan contexts.

Liaison with other relevant bodies

The organisation maintains contact with other bodies in the wider local government sphere where relevant including: Local Authority Members' Association; Irish Planning Institute; Northern Ireland Local Government Association.

Representation

AILG Member Survey

In an effort to quantify the workload of Councillors especially given the additional demands - such as enlarged electoral areas - the Association went about a detailed survey of members nationwide. A questionnaire was drawn up designed to help councillors indicate the time per week that they spend both on statutory council business and on representation of their local communities. The questionnaire was despatched nationwide to all 949 elected members. With the valued co-operation of the Meetings Administrators the return of the survey was maximised with over 600 forms or more than 60 percent return rate which, by the standards of survey work, represents an impressive yield of complete questionnaires.

The AILG office team inputted the data from all the surveys and processed the material to produce a report which documented in textual and in graphic form the hours per week which comprised a typical councillor workload. This material was presented as a printed report with the outcome being presented to the Minister for the Environment and the document circulated in newsletter form to all Councillors in the State. Although the survey was a labour intensive process it produced evidential material on which the Association made a case to the Dept of the Environment for improved support services for Councillors. The survey was presented to senior officials of the Dept. of the Environment on 19 November 2015.

Advocacy for Elected Members

The Association represented councillors on a number of fora within the local government community. Chief among these were the Local Government Advisory Committee and the Local Government Forum through which the Association provided feedback to the Dept of the Environment relating to current issues including the interpretation of the new structure of Municipal Districts.

The Association met with the Mr Simon Coveney, T.D., Minister for Local Government, on 25 May 2016 where it put forward representations regarding councillors' workloads and issues following on from the 2014 reforms.

Councillors PRSI

The Association met with then Minister of State at Social Protection, Mr Kevin Humphreys, T.D. in regard to seeking improved coverage for Councillors in return for their PRSI contribution. The Association carried out considerable research in the complex area of the PRSI code in order to make a well-grounded case.

Following the formation of a new Government, a delegation from the Association met with Minister Leo Varadkar, T.D., Minister for Social Protection to re-iterate the case for a change from the current unsatisfactory PRSI classification. The Minister was receptive to the points the Association put to him and was well briefed on the issues involved.

Participation

The Association nominates – when requested by the relevant Government Department - delegates to a number of national committees including:

- Environmental Protection Agency Advisory Group
- National Group Water Scheme Monitoring Committee
- National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Group
- Library Advisory Unit
- Bravery Awards Council (President, *ex officio*)

Administration

Association Office & Staff

The Association office comprises of two staff who handle all the administration backing up the functions and meetings described in this report. The role of the office includes the drafting of policy papers and advising the President, Executive and delegates as regards the policy approach to major issues.

The Association is financed by an annual subscription from its member councils. The Accounts of the Association are prepared to corporate professional standard by independent Chartered Accountants and are further audited by the Inspector of Local Government Audits.

The Accounts are presented to the delegate body of the Association for approval. The Association's financial policy is to balance its books taking one year with another and this objective has been reached since its formation.

Accountancy & Audit Administration

A significant part of the office workload deals with the processing and recording to the highest audit standards of the financial transactions principally related to the paper and electronic work in paying member's expenses. The following is a break-down of the type of transactions involved.

Total No. Accounting Transactions	1,047
No. Sales Invoices processed	402
No Cq Payments processed	205
Sales Receipts processed	171
Direct Debits processed	235
Member's payments processed	728

The Association engages accountants specifically for the preparation of the Final Accounts to best Accounting standards.

The Association's accountants are: PKF O'Connor Leddy, Century House, Harold's Cross Road, Dublin 6w.

The Association's auditors is: Inspector of Audits, Local Government Audit Service, Customs House, Dublin 1.

The Association's bankers are: Bank of Ireland, Lower O'Connell Street, Dublin 1.

The Association's Insurers are: Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances Ltd.

The Association's Audit & Finance Committees meet during the year to oversee financial planning and propriety and report to the Executive Committee

The ultimate audit scrutiny is undertaken by the Inspector of Audits who subjects the AILG accounts to the same kind of audit standards as is the case with the Local Authority.

The accounts are presented each year to the delegates at a Plenary meeting and, are also sent, as required by law, to the Minister for Housing.

Senate Nomination

Arising from changes in the representative association structure the Association was not registered on the Register of Nominating Bodies for the Seanad. Representations by the Association resulted in legislation being drafted which restored the local government representative association to the Register. Accordingly when the General Election was called

the Association put in place the procedures culminating in a Plenary meeting to nominate a candidate for election to the Seanad.

Organisation Meetings

The Association has a heavy meeting schedule with meetings at all levels of the organisation. The Association Plenary body comprising three delegates from each county convened on six occasions during the year. The Executive Committee met on a monthly basis to deal with immediate issues relating to policy and the administration of the Association. Meetings of the Finance Committee and the Audit Committee took place to review the financial reports of the organisation.

Communications

The Association endeavours to maintain communications with councillors nationwide so that a sense of collegiality evolves between members no matter what the context of their council membership – rural, urban and suburban.

The Association issues a printed newsletter and email bulletins from time to time during the year. On a year round basis it maintains a website www.ailge.ie which hosts all the papers delivered to its training events since autumn 2014 making it a truly valuable resource.

Training & Education Services for Councillors

The Association has developed a model of training modules which draw on the experience of elected members and the knowledge of council and central government officials to deliver a well-rounded and comprehensive training programme dealing with all aspects of council policies and services. The Association acknowledges with gratitude the contribution of the various presenters and their generosity in allowing their papers be published.

A major theme of the Association's training programme had involved interpreting the reforms introduced in the 2014 Local Government Reform Act including clarifying the respective roles of the Municipal District and the Local Authority and the matrix of reserved functions that applies to one or the other and both. Further themes emerging from the legislation included the emphasis on enterprise support, economic development and community participation.

Having dealt in its early training modules with the principles in local government legislation the Association decided to focus its training in the second half of 2015 on issues of a practical nature facing councillors in their day to day roles as policymakers and as public

representatives. The Association is indebted to the staff and staff-networks from both central government Departments and from local authorities who generously gave their time to make presentations at our councillors' training seminars. The training has proved a two-way channel of communication as the generous time allowed for discussion facilitates councillors in robustly giving the views from the "grassroots" to the officials involved in drafting policy.

We are grateful to the Chief Fire Officers' Association; the Heritage Council Local Authorities Network; the Local Authority Road Engineers Network; the Irish Water Safety Association; the Environmental Protection Agency; the Dept.'s of the Environment and of Transport; and, individually, Cllrs Sinead Guckian, Lola O'Sullivan and Damien Geoghegan, among others, who made presentations at the training seminars.

There were over 1,200 attendances at the AILG training events from June 2015 to May 2016.

Training – June to November 2015

The June 2015 module dealt with two topical issues in the local government world - Finance & Housing.

The content of the training module was as follows:

Local Authority Finance & Housing - National Social Housing Strategy

An Update for the elected member:

Local Authority Finance under the 2014 legislation - Jimmy Dalton, Head of Finance,*
Westmeath County Council

Municipal Districts Budgetary Planning - Fiona Quinn, Rory O'Leary and Sinead Kehoe,
Local Government Finance Section, Department of the Environment

National Social Housing Strategy - Pat Leonard, Tom Gallagher, Siobhán Nic Thigernáin,
Housing Division, Department of the Environment

The October module continued the principle of dealing with practical local authority service delivery. This module concentrated on what is the longest established of all council functions namely the maintenance of the public highway.

- *There were various presenters as the training sessions rotated around the country.*

The programme was titled "Roads, Transportation & Safety" and presentations included:

Relationship between Dept. of Transport, TII (formerly the NRA), and the Local Authorities,
Dominic Mullaney, Senior Engineer, Dept of Transport

Role of the Elected Member in Roads Policy - Cllr Damien Geoghegan, Waterford City &
County Council

Local Authority Maintenance Services - Henry Ritchie, Senior Engineer, Roads &
Environment, Laois County Council.

The final Training module incorporated two distinct themes which had developed over the year in a module entitled "Ground Water, Septic Tanks & Water Pollution" and the "Registration of Lobbying Act 2014."

Presenters:

Mr Darragh Page, Senior Inspector, Office of Environmental Enforcement, Environmental Protection Agency

Ms Sherry Perrault, Head of Lobbying Regulation, Standards in Public Office Commission

Training February to September 2016

For the early part of 2016 it was decided to highlight the diversity of services delivered to the public by Councils with an emphasis on categories of service which might not often appear on Council agendas and yet are a big part of the public perception of what councils do. Two discrete blocks of services were identified as follows:

Local Authority Safety Services – February 2016

Road Safety Services - Declan Keogh, Road Safety Officer, Kildare County Council

Fire Safety Services - Dave Carroll, Chief Fire Officer, Tipperary County Council

Water Safety Services - Cllr Lola O'Sullivan, Waterford City & County Council & Irish Water Safety Council

This was followed in May 2016 with a block drawing together cultural services:

Local Authority Cultural Services – May 2016

Heritage Services - Liam Scott, Heritage Council & County Heritage Officers

Library Services - County Librarians

Arts Policy - Cllr Sinead Guckian, B.A. Hons in Fine Arts, Leitrim County Council

Planning for the Elected Member – Update, June 2016

Update on Planning & Development Bill 2016

- Brendan O'Sullivan, MIPI, UCC, formerly Clare Co Co.

Briefing on Planning & Development Act, 2016

- Ciarán Tracey FIPI, formerly Leitrim Co Co.

Department Briefing on Land Management including Vacant Sites Levy,

- Terry Sheridan, Principal, Dept of Housing.

Information session for newly co-opted councillors July 2016

Recognising the large number of newly co-opted councillors arising mainly from the Dáil and Seanad elections the Association organised a training morning specifically for the new members. The training morning took place in the Red Cow Hotel, Dublin on 14 July 2016 and included presentations from Cllr Dermot Lacey, Cllr Pat Fitzpatrick, Ms Constance Hanniffy, Mr Tom Moylan & Mr Liam Kenny which concentrated on equipping new councillors with essential knowledge relating to council organisational and financial structures.

Housing Policy – September 2016

National Action Plan for Housing July 2016 & the Role of Local Authorities

- Mr Dave Smith, Asst. Secretary & Mr Niall Cussen, Dept of Housing

Making Ireland a great country to grow old in – forward planning for catering for the housing

needs for an older population – Aisling Costello, Programme Manager & Jack Keyes, Age Friendly Ireland

Local Authority Housing and Voluntary Housing Associations –

- Mr Kevin Ryan, Development Officer, Irish Council for Social Housing

AILG honours Councillors & Staff involved in 1916 Rising

A big theme of 2016 at all levels of Government was the commemoration of the Easter 1916 Rising – the birthplace of the modern Irish Republic that we know today. The involvement of local authorities in the Rising was limited but the Association felt that it should be associated with the national determination to remember those who had sacrificed all in the pursuit of Irish independence. It was decided that in the course of its normal meeting programme the Association would make innovative contributions to the remembrance of the generation of 1916. The logical place to centre the Association's 1916 programme was in Dublin where councillors and council staff were centrally involved in the Rising. One Dublin City Councillor, Cllr Richard O'Carroll lost his life in that tumultuous Easter week while employees of the Council, Thomas McDonagh, and Major John McBride were among the executed.

On April 7th centenary month of the Rising the Executive Committee held its monthly meeting in No 11 Parnell Square in the atmospheric chamber of the old Dublin County Council where for decades the meetings of the old General Council of County Councils had taken place. The Director, Mr Liam Kenny, gave a short account of the General Council's association with the premises and of the chambers links with troubled times including one occasion when armed men burst into the chamber while a meeting of the General Council was under way!

On a grander scale and involving all Plenary delegates the Association held a scheduled meeting in the beautiful chamber of Dublin City Council in City Hall on 28 April 2016. The choice of location and date were highly symbolic because:

- a) City Hall was a garrison of the Irish Citizen Army and within its very fabric some of the most bloody fighting had taken place;
- b) The Association's meeting took place within the true calendar centenary dates of the Rising.

Through the good offices of Dr Mary Clark, of the Dublin City Library Archives Service a number of presentations were arranged on the links between the City Council and the Rising. The Association is also grateful to Cllr Dermot Lacy who facilitated permission for the Association to have its meeting in the evocative location of the City Hall.

To add to the sense of commemoration the Director had arranged for two members of the Irish Citizens' Army Renactor Group to be present at the venue. The two members (members of the Irish Prison Service in their daily lives) came with full uniform and authentic kit of the time.

In this way, and within the context, of its scheduled meeting programme the Association paid tribute to the patriots of 1916 and particularly the local authority members and staff from the then Dublin Corporation who had given their lives in the cause of self-government for Ireland.
