



AILG

Association of Irish Local Government
Aontas Rialtas Áitiúil na hÉireann

AILG Manifesto for Local Elections June 2024

*Stronger **Local Democracy**,
Stronger **Local Government**,
Better **Local Services**.*

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Who We Are

The Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) is the primary national body representing the 949 democratically elected local authority members across Ireland and our 31 local authority member councils. Our goal is to represent the collective interests of the elected members of the local authorities, which constitute its membership.

As the representative voice of local government in Ireland, AILG aims to protect and support democratic local government and promote democratic leadership of our elected councillors and our elected councils. A strong democratic local government system is vital in order to promote the welfare and good government of the people of Ireland.



Introduction & Executive Summary

Our local government system in Ireland has experienced significant reform in recent years. While that reform has impacted on the structure, functions, resources and organisation of the local government system, the basic purpose of local government has not changed.

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The key purpose of local government is to promote the well-being and quality of life of citizens and communities, through effective, accountable representation, and efficient performance of functions and delivery of services. ”

Outside of the Oireachtas, local authorities are the only bodies whose members are elected by direct vote of the electorate. They are also the only form of government in which everyone can participate irrespective of citizenship – everyone whose name is on the register of electors and who is qualified to vote can exercise their democratic rights at local elections. Councillors are elected by local people to make local decisions, to articulate local views and to identify and meet local requirements. They adopt policies that reflect the needs and legitimate expectations of the people who elect them. A key element of local government is that elected members and staff act in the interests of the people being served,

seeking to meet their needs and give them the best possible quality of life.

With local and national election due within the coming months, this is an opportune time to have an honest conversation about the future of our local democracy and local government system. These elections will afford the opportunity for more powers and responsibilities to be devolved to local authorities and appropriate supports to our elected councillors to enable them to do their important work.

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A strong democratically led local government system is vital to promote the welfare and good government of the people of Ireland. ”

For 125 years, local authorities have successfully served and provided for the Irish population. Our local authorities have a strong record of achievement across all areas of services that are provided at local level. The experience and contribution of local authority members has been and remains central to such achievement and thus the role needs to be recognised, underpinned and emphasised in any future reform efforts directed by the outcome of this particular review process.

Recommendations

- Resources to be provided on an ongoing basis to facilitate councillors and council officials to co-design and roll-out a national public awareness campaign on the role of the councillor/role of local government.
- Consolidate and strengthen the electoral and decision-making functions of Municipal Districts.
- Put Area Committees in the local authorities of Cork City, Galway City and the four Dublin Local Authorities of Dublin City, Fingal, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin on the same statutory footing as Municipal Districts.
- Electoral Commission to carry out an immediate review of voter participation post the 2024 local elections to include public awareness of misinformation, disinformation and manipulative behaviour during the local election period. Need to establish educational and information programmes to help address these issues.
- Need to document, raise awareness of and demonstrate the range and scale of the work councillors do to strengthen democracy, enhance public service delivery, and support communities.
- Central Government to examine devolving more powers to the local authorities through the legislative process to strengthen and enhance local democracy and the delivery of additional local services.
- 100% of Local Property Tax collected in a local authority area should be allocated back to the relevant authority for general purpose spending for the provision of local services.
- Mandate all government departments and public agencies to recognise the important role and contribution of councillors.
- Enable councillors to work collaboratively with local authority executives, public bodies, academia, civil society and other stakeholders to increase public and political trust in local government in general and in councillors in particular, so they can be entrusted with increased powers and responsibilities.

Recommendations

- Immediately reverse the reserved functions/powers recently taken away from the elected council including the Section 183 function for disposal of council-owned land to the Land Development Agency for housing developments and the Part 8 reserved function for local authority own housing developments. This would demonstrate the Minister's and Government's commitment to strengthening local government and democratically elected local government.
- The role of the local authority, as the housing authority in each city and county and as lead providers of social housing throughout Ireland, must be reinforced in order to fully address the housing current crisis.
- Greater emphasis must be placed on a more ambitious, nation-wide local authority house building programme to include both acquisitions and a new build programme and the delivery target of social housing units to 15,000 local authority/AHB social housing units per annum for the period 2025 – 2030.
- Local authorities must be provided with financial resources to invest in direct estate maintenance and social care workers to provide the proper care services to their tenants.
- Local authorities to have a dedicated ring-fenced rolling budget on an annual basis for pre-letting repairs costs.
- Need to further streamline approval procedures for social housing projects in order to fast track these projects for quicker delivery including;
 - Funding for appropriate technical staff to be included in the capital costs of housing projects to ensure that no housing projects are delayed due to a lack of technical expertise.
 - Propose that the shared services model currently operating successfully in the Irish local government environment should be employed to rapidly scale-up the input of specialist housing personnel with local authorities across various regions.

Recommendations

- Need to commit to ensuring that our elected members continue to have the required training, knowledge and tools to lead and champion the local response to climate change.
- Local authorities must embed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their County and City Development Plans, Corporate Plans, Local Area Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans. Local authorities must ensure that the SDGs are integral to council policy development across all departments.
- Additional staff resources must be provided to local authorities to work with communities and the public on local initiatives to achieve our climate targets.
- Support and resource ALLG's Training and Education Programme to respond to councillors' growing recognition of the importance of, and growing need for, training and continuous professional development (CPD).
- Investigate the potential for the establishment of a panel of independent advisors / points of reference for councillors to enable effective engagement with the more technical aspects of their role.
- Resource and support the roll-out of the Women's Regional Caucus Network across all local authorities.
- Ensure that local government and our local authorities fulfill their responsibility to ensure the inclusion of disabled people in communities.

Overview of the Irish Local Government System and Structures

In Ireland, each local authority is divided into local electoral areas within which members of local authorities are elected. Local Electoral Areas, including the number of members to be elected in each, are specified by national law for each local authority area. There are 949 local authority elected members and the breakdown between local authorities at county, city and city and county is as follows:

- 26 County Councils, of which three are in Dublin (Fingal, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin)
- 3 City Councils: Cork, Dublin and Galway
- 2 City and County councils: Limerick and Waterford.

Below local authority level, municipal/borough/metropolitan districts form a key tier of local governance at sub-county level. Each county is comprised of a number of Municipal Districts. Municipal Districts are comprised of one or more Local Electoral Areas (LEAs). Councillors elected to a Local Electoral Area have functions in respect of the specified Municipal District. In total, there are 95 Municipal/Municipal Borough Districts. The Municipal District structure is not applicable in six local authorities, namely Cork City, Galway City and the Dublin local authorities of

Dublin City, Fingal, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin County Councils. Local authorities are multi-purpose bodies responsible for delivering a broad range of important local services. These local authorities have a sub-county/city system of Area Committees with 19 Area Committees in operation in these local authorities. Area committees deal with local issues however; they do not have the statutory or legal structure of Municipal Districts.



Local Authorities are the main vehicle of governance and public service delivery at local level, leading economic, social and community development, delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably. ”

Local authorities currently deliver 1,105 services to citizens at local level on behalf of over 30 government departments and public agencies.

Local Government is also a key delivery agency for much of government policy at local level. Local authority services are delivered through eight programme groups as follows;

1. Housing and Building Management which includes the provision of local authority (social) housing and other housing supports, housing grants and assistance to persons housing themselves or improving their houses, traveller accommodation, homeless etc.

2. Road Transportation and Safety, including the upkeep, maintenance and improvement of roads, public lighting, car parking, traffic management facilities, road safety, collection of motor taxation and licensing of drivers, etc.

3. Water Supply and Sewerage including water supply and sewerage schemes, assistance for private water and sewerage facilities, public conveniences, etc. However, it must be noted that this major function of local authorities has been transferred in its entirety to a single state utility company in Irish Water (Uisce Éireann) since 2023.

4. Development Incentives and Controls which includes physical planning policy, control and enforcement of new development and building, promotion of industrial and other development,

local economic development, local community development, public participation, tourism promotion, heritage and conservation services, etc.

5. Environmental Protection including waste management planning, waste collection and disposal, landfill sites, recycling facilities, litter control including street cleaning, burial grounds, safety of structures and places, fire protection, pollution control, etc.

6. Recreation and Amenity including provision and operation of swimming pools/leisure centres, libraries, parks and open spaces, recreation centres, conservation and improvement of amenities, arts activities, etc.

7. Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare including education supports, land drainage costs, coastal protection, piers and harbours, veterinary services, etc.

8. Miscellaneous Services including financial management and commercial/business rate collection, elections, courthouses, coroners and inquests, consumer protection measures, markets & casual trading, local representation/civic leadership, etc.

Overview of the Irish Local Government System and Structures

Recent research carried out by AILG and Maynooth University demonstrated low levels of support for the reform and restructuring that has taken place in Ireland's local government system over recent decades, and there is considerable dissatisfaction with the provisions and outworking of the 2014 legislation.

The recent reforms and reconfigurations are perceived to have increased central government's control over local government and to have further reduced the power of the councillor. However, while the research findings on the recent local government reforms are generally negative, there are some positive pointers with respect to the formation of local structures, most notably municipal districts. There are also low levels of support, among councillors, for many of the recent systemic reforms, especially the 2014 Local Government (Reform) Act. Uisce Éireann (Irish Water) and the abolition of town councils are generally perceived to have been the most problematic changes.



Most Councillors welcome the formation of Municipal Districts (MDs) and they would like to see their MDs having more powers.

Recommendation

- Need to consolidate and strengthen the electoral and decision-making functions of Municipal Districts.

Recommendation

- Put Area Committees in the local authorities of Cork City, Galway City and the four Dublin Local Authorities of Dublin City, Fingal, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin on the same statutory footing as Municipal Districts.

Representation and Local Election Turnout

In 2012, the then Government launched a comprehensive Action Programme for Effective Local Government - “Putting People First” (PPF). This action plan has brought about fundamental changes to the local government system in Ireland, covering four main areas including structures, funding and accountability & governance, economic development (including job creation) and delivering services efficiently.

Structural changes provided for in the action plan and subsequently legislated for in the Local Government Reform Act 2014, provided for the merger of some county/city authorities into one local authority (North & South Tipperary, Limerick City/County & Waterford City/County). This, along with the abolition of the 80 Town/Borough Councils, has resulted in a reduction in the number of local authorities from 114 to 31 and within those 31 local authorities the establishment 95 Municipal Districts, Borough Districts and Metropolitan Districts, representing 166 Local Electoral Area’s. These changes led to a reduction in the number of councillors throughout the State from 1,627 to 949. This reduction represents a 42% decrease in overall numbers (over 33% reduction in real terms due to some elected members holding both town and county seats).

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Ireland now has fewer councillors per capita than any other EU country and other democracies examined. ”

There are 949 elected councillors in Ireland for a population of 5.1 million. Compared to similar if slightly larger European countries. Denmark, with a population of 5.9m has 2,432 while Finland, with a population of 5.6m has 8,859 councillors.

Country	Municipalities/Local Authorities	Number of Councillors	Population	Head of Population for Each Councillor
Ireland	31	949	5,123,536	5,399
Portugal	308	2,064	10,136,251	4,911
Scotland	32	1,227	5,463,300	4,453
Northern Ireland	11	462	1,903,100	4,119
Greece	332	2,988	10,319,535	3,454
Switzerland	2,172	2,548	8,783,205	3,447
United Kingdom	398	22,943	67,326,569	2,934
England	333	20,000	56,489,800	2,824
Latvia	43	664	1,843,756	2,777
Wales	22	1,254	3,267,501	2,606
Denmark	98	2,432	5,833,692	2,399
Belgium	581	5,370	11,692,086	2,177
Netherlands	344	8,600	17,717,600	2,060
Poland	2,478	39,549	37,762,312	955
Germany	2,627	91,945	84,328,144	917
Spain	8,112	66,000	46,791,659	709
Finland	310	8,859	5,558,227	627
Sweden	290	19,140	10,416,585	544
Italy	8,000	120,000	60,280,780	502
Luxembourg	106	1,484	632,275	426
Slovenia	212	5,512	2,079,520	377
Croatia	555	14,430	4,053,795	281
France	36,500	255,500	65,567,292	257
Austria	2,098	60,741	9,111,075	150

Representation and Local Election Turnout

However, our local government system is a prime example of democracy. Outside of the Oireachtas, local authorities are the only bodies whose members are elected by direct vote of the electorate. They are also the only form of government in which everyone can participate irrespective of citizenship. Councillors are elected by local people to make local decisions, to articulate local views and to identify and meet local requirements. A key element of local government is that councillors act in the interests of the people being served, seeking to meet their needs and give them the best possible quality of life.

At the 2019 local elections, the national turnout for the elections was 50.2%, with the highest turnout in the rural county of Leitrim at 64.5% compared to 40.5% for Dublin City. 225 female councillors were elected representing 23.7% of the total number of councillors. This was an increase from 20.4% at the 2014 elections. In 2019, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council became the first ever local authority in the State to have a fifty-fifty split of men and women in its council chamber. While the gender balance in council chambers

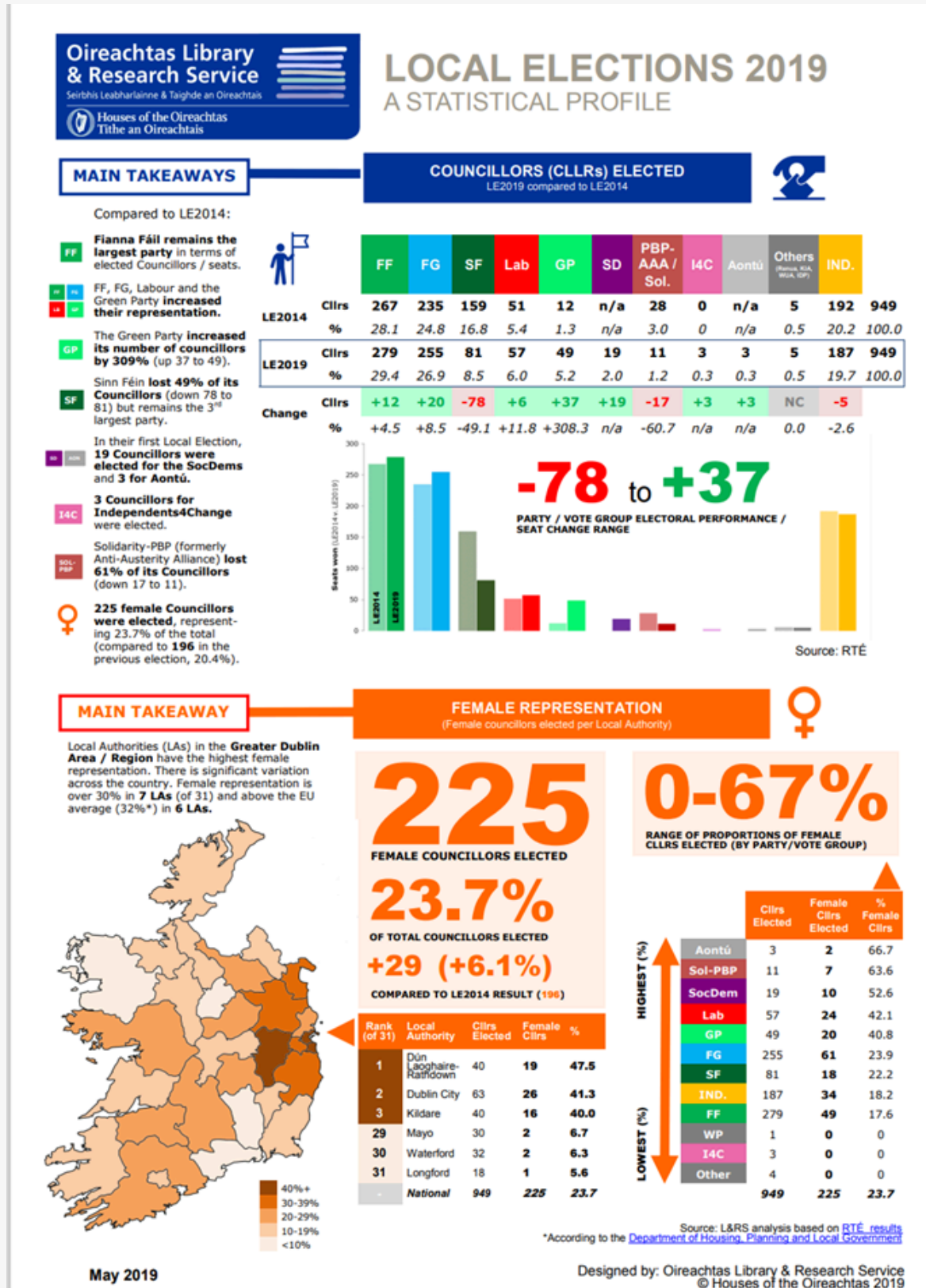
has improved, female representation lags behind that in other EU member states, and there are particular challenges recruiting female candidates and retaining female councillors. Organisations such as “Women for Election” and See Her Elected (SHE) have been working in the area of promoting women’s interest in local government and to encourage more women to stand for election to public office.

Recommendation

- Electoral Commission to carry out an immediate review of voter participation post the 2024 local elections to include public awareness of misinformation, disinformation and manipulative behavior during the local election period. Need to establish educational and information programmes to help address these issues.

Representation and Local Election Turnout

For a full statistical profile of the 2019 local elections please see below.¹



MAIN TAKEAWAY

Local Authorities (LAs) in the **Greater Dublin Area / Region** have the highest female representation. There is significant variation across the country. Female representation is over 30% in **7 LAs** (of 31) and above the EU average (32%*) in **6 LAs**.

FEMALE REPRESENTATION

(Female councillors elected per Local Authority)

225
FEMALE COUNCILLORS ELECTED

23.7%
OF TOTAL COUNCILLORS ELECTED

+29 (+6.1%)
COMPARED TO LE2014 RESULT (196)

0-67%
RANGE OF PROPORTIONS OF FEMALE CLLRS ELECTED (BY PARTY/VOTE GROUP)

	Cllrs Elected	Female Cllrs Elected	% Female Cllrs
Aontú	3	2	66.7
Sol-PBP	11	7	63.6
SocDem	19	10	52.6
Lab	57	24	42.1
GP	49	20	40.8
FG	255	61	23.9
SF	81	18	22.2
IND.	187	34	18.2
FF	279	49	17.6
WP	1	0	0
I4C	3	0	0
Other	4	0	0
Total	949	225	23.7

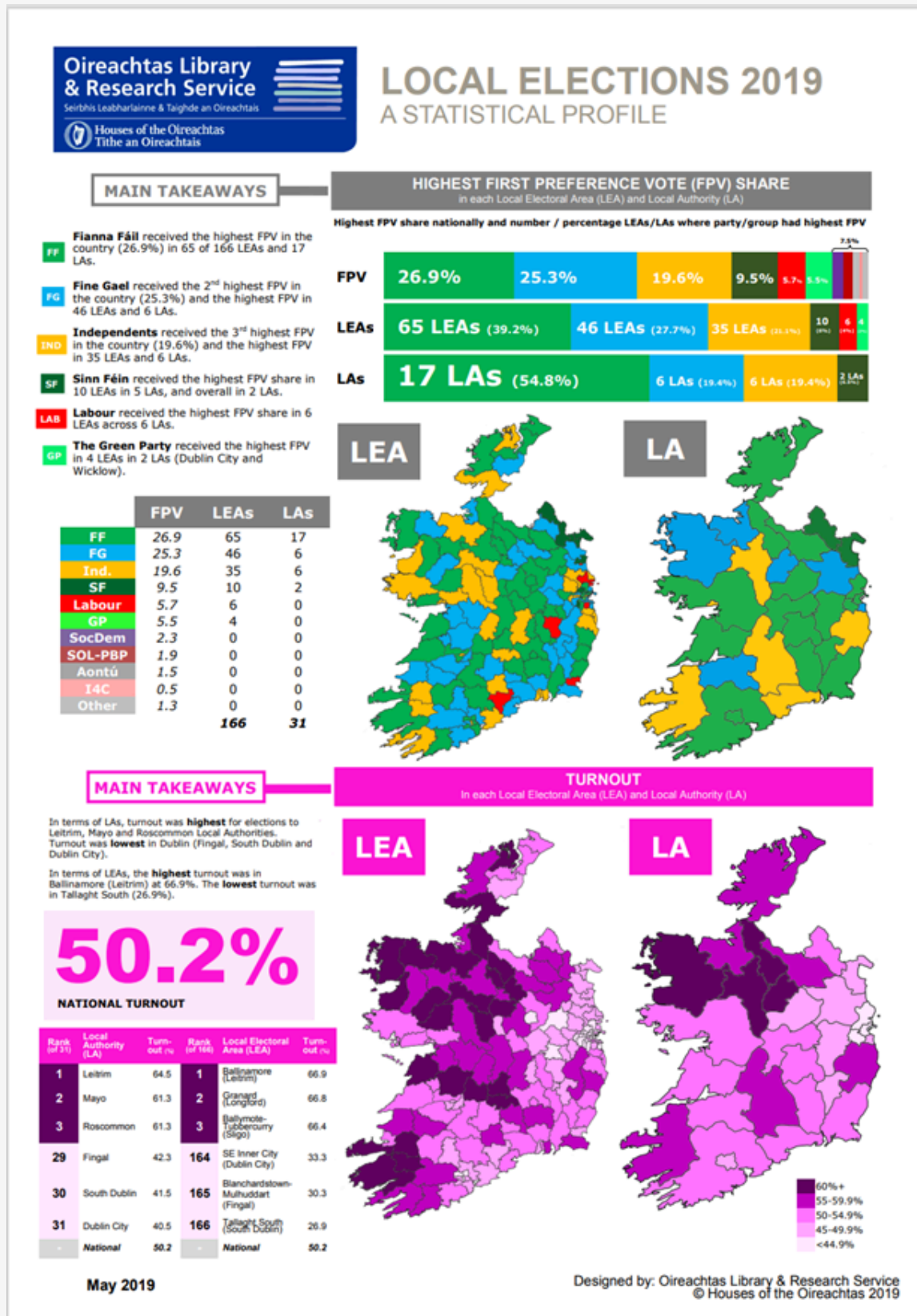
Rank (of 31)	Local Authority	Cllrs Elected	Female Cllrs	%
1	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	40	19	47.5
2	Dublin City	63	26	41.3
3	Kildare	40	16	40.0
29	Mayo	30	2	6.7
30	Waterford	32	2	6.3
31	Longford	18	1	5.6
-	National	949	225	23.7

Source: L&RS analysis based on RTÉ results
*According to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

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[1] https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2019/2019-05-31_L-rs-infographic-local-elections-2019-a-statistical-profile_en.pdf

Representation and Local Election Turnout



[1] https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2019/2019-05-31_l-rs-infographic-local-elections-2019-a-statistical-profile_en.pdf

Role of the Elected Member & Council Executive

Our local government system in Ireland is the most accessible form of democratically elected government in the country.

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The public face of our local authorities are the democratically elected councillors. The elected council is in law the policy-making arm of the local authority with Councillors having the role of creating the overall policy framework which dictate the overall direction and functioning of the local authority that the council's executive and staff work within. ”

Aligned with that, a significant role of councillors is to represent the views of their communities. They identify and track local problems and issues and bring this knowledge back into the council chamber to ensure better outcomes for the well-being and quality of life for the people and communities that they represent. The councillor's role and responsibilities include representing the electoral area for which they are elected and the local authority as a whole, decision-making and developing and reviewing council policy, regulatory, quasi-judicial and statutory duties. They also have a key role in community leadership and engagement.

The performance of local authority functions are shared between the elected members and the chief executive, the elected members carrying out reserved functions and the chief executive carrying out executive functions. The powers of local authority members derive primarily from their reserved functions, which are performed at both Council and Municipal District level. Reserved functions primarily relate to issues of policy.

Examples of principal reserved functions include:

- Adoption of the Corporate Plan at the start of the term of the new council – the Corporate Plan sets the overall strategic direction of the council, its high-level objectives and goals.
- Disposal of land.
- Making a development plan under the Planning Acts and any variations to it.
- Adopting the annual budget, variations in the annual rate of valuation and variation in the level of Local Property Tax.
- Adopting a scheme of letting priorities for council housing.
- Making, amending or revoking bye-laws (e.g. parking, casual trading, etc.).
- Nominating persons to act on committees or on other public bodies.
- Approving the Annual Financial Statement and any areas of overexpenditure.
- Adopting the annual Schedule of Municipal District Works.

Role of the Elected Member & Council Executive

Most of the major decisions of the local authority are reserved for the exclusive prerogative of the councillors including oversight of the financial affairs of the authority. In addition to the reserved functions, councillors have a role in overseeing and directing the activities of the local authority in general. The 2014 Reform Act introduced a structured reporting relationship between the chief executive and the councillors.

It is implicit in their elected status that councillors have the function of representing the people of their area. Councillors are directly elected by the people and therefore have a mandate from the people in relation to the communities they represent. They can initiate action to promote the community interest and are ideally placed to provide civic leadership.

The role of the chief executive is to ensure that resources in terms of personnel, finance, technology and information generally are deployed to implement government and council policies. Executive decisions relate to the day-to-day running of the local authority including staffing matters and the discharge of executive functions within the policy parameters as determined by the councillors. The chief executive ensures that the policy issues adopted by the councillors are implemented. An important role of the chief executive is to advise the councillors in the determination of policy in accordance with agreed national policy.

While there is a clear distinction in legislation in relation to reserved and executive functions in reality the system operates on the basis of a 'partnership' approach between the elected representatives, the chief executive and the staff.

Recommendation

- Need to document, raise awareness of and demonstrate the range and scale of the work councillors do to strengthen democracy, enhance public service delivery, and support communities.

Local Functions and Responsibility

As stated above, local authorities are multi-purpose bodies responsible for delivering a broad range of important local services. They are also the main vehicle of governance and public service at local level, leading economic, social and community development, delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably. Local government in Ireland is big business with an estimated expenditure of €7.4 billion in 2024. The local government sector and the services it delivers play a crucial role in the economic and social life of the State. Every community and all people within those communities benefit significantly from the services provided, directly or indirectly, through local government.

The 2014 reforms did devolve new powers and responsibilities to local authorities under local economic development, local community development, governance and accountability. This included a new dedicated Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) for economic development in each local authority supported by a dedicated Director of Services for economic and community development. The reforms also provided for the establishment of one-stop shops for business support through new Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and a closer alignment of local and community development with the local government system. As a result, local authorities played a significant role in the economic recovery at local level following the 2008 financial and

banking crisis. Aligned with this local authorities played a crucial role in leading the local response to the recent pandemic crisis with the establishment of the Community Response Forums.

The role of the Community Response Forum is to provide a coordination point for the community and voluntary response in their area and enabled all those involved to work together under the stewardship of the local authority.

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The Community Response Forums were highly effective during the pandemic crisis and more recently have led the local authority and community supports to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The forums are an example of how adaptable our local authorities are and how they could play a leading role in social care-type service delivery.”

Therefore based on this evidence there is a strong argument for government to examine devolving more powers to the local authorities through the legislative process to strengthen and enhance local democracy and the delivery of additional local services.

Local Functions and Responsibility

However, in terms of international comparisons, Ireland can be evaluated against other local democracies under several headings as follows;

Representation: As stated above, the decision to abolish town councils in 2014 in accordance with the Local Government Act 2014 reduced Irish local authorities from 114 to 31 compared to 600 when elections were first held in 1899. As a result, we now have one representative per 5,399 citizens, the highest among our European counterparts.

Resources: 8% of overall Irish public expenditure is at local authority level, compared to 23% across 23 comparable EU member states. Ireland is the most centralised state in terms of government expenditure in another authoritative list of 39 European states, trailing after Moldova, Malta, Cyprus and Greece.

Responsibility: Most other European democracies play an active role in the delivery of health, housing, education, transport, policing and childcare services at a local or regional level, where they can be effectively delivered with more political accountability. Ireland's outlier status in these and other areas reveals much about our condition that is not addressed adequately in public debate about potential reforms and political direction. Although this state is one of the richest in the world and classified among its most developed societies, current popular

aspirations for better public and social services may contradict existing methods of governing and taxation to provide them.

A good example for comparison would be the Danish local government system as Denmark has a similar population to Ireland at 5.6m people. Denmark had a relatively centralised system of local government until they commenced a reform programme in 1970, with a strong push for decentralization. A subsequent second wave of reforms took place in 2007. Denmark now has a three-tier system of government, typical of most countries:

- Central Government (Ministries)
- Regional Authorities – 5 Regions – directly elected
- Local Authorities - 98 Municipalities – 2,520 directly elected councillors

The Danish basic unit of local government is the Municipality – main town and its hinterland, with local councils having between 9 and 31 councillors. All local authorities will have a finance committee and other committees, responsible for specific areas (e.g. social welfare). Committees are directly responsible for preparing and implementing Council decisions. The Mayor is elected by the Council for the full term and is the full-time chief executive of the local authority administration.

Local Functions and Responsibility

At local government level, local authorities have direct responsibility for;

- Primary and secondary schools (aged 7-16)
- Childcare
- Care of the elderly (domestic care, visiting nurses, day care centres, meals-on-wheels)
- Non-hospital healthcare (preventative treatment, health promotion, alcohol and drug abuse, dental care)
- Most Social Welfare Benefits (financed/reimbursed by state, administered by municipalities)
- Business support services and local employment and job centres
- Social Housing
- Waste Management
- Water Supply and Treatment
- Planning and Development & Urban Renewal
- Fire Service and Civil Defence
- Public Libraries, Leisure Facilities
- Maintenance of Local Roads

In terms of finance and funding, the Danish local authorities derive their income from a number of sources including;

- Local Income Tax (usually around 20% of income – through levying taxes, local authority decides on the level of service)
- Local Property Tax
- Proportion of Corporation Tax collected in the local area
- General Purpose Grants from Central Government
- Local Charges & Local Service Charges

As evidenced from this comparison, Denmark truly encompasses the “Subsidiarity” principle, compared to Ireland, under the European Charter of Self Local Government in terms of reforms and allocation of responsibilities, where services should be provided as close to the citizen as possible.

Recommendation

- Central Government to examine devolving more powers to the local authorities through the legislative process to strengthen and enhance local democracy and the delivery of additional local services.

Local Authority Funding, Finance & Expenditure

Operations and activities of local authorities are divided into two primary accounts, the revenue account and the capital account. Local authorities revenue account covers the day-to day activities of the Council i.e. the provision of local services, while their capital account covers the provision of infrastructure (assets). The funding streams for revenue income for local authorities come from a variety of sources, including central government, Local Government Fund, local charges for goods and services, commercial rates and Local Property Tax (LPT).

At national level, the overall total adopted local authority budgeted revenue income for 2023 is €6.556 billion which is a 7% increase on 2022. This is made up as follows;

2023 Combined Adopted Local Authority Budgeted Income	€'m	% of Overall Income
Government grants and subsidies	2,764	42%
Commercial Rates	1,768	27%
Income from Local Goods/Services	1,598	24%
LPT	426	7%

“LPT helps fund essential local services of local, benefitting all citizens directly. This local funding is the primary means of delivering public service at local level and restoring a degree of fiscal autonomy to Councillors and local councils.”

For 2023, the highest percentage of revenue income for local authorities came from central government funding at 42%, with income from commercial rates at 27%. Income from local goods and services will amount to 24%, with LPT accounting for 7% of current income for local authorities. Therefore, approximately 60% of all local authority income is generated at local level from commercial rates, income from goods and services and the LPT, therefore helping to fulfil the vision set out in ‘Putting People First’ for local government to be the primary means of public service at local level. This also reflects the constitutional and independent nature of our local government system.

Local Authority Funding, Finance & Expenditure

The Local Property Tax (LPT), introduced in 2014, is a self-assessed tax charged on residential properties in the state with the ability for councillors to vary the charge by +/- 15%. LPT helps fund essential local services of local authorities such as public parks; libraries; open spaces and leisure amenities; planning and development; fire and emergency services; maintenance and cleaning of streets and street lighting – all benefitting citizens directly. This local funding is the primary means of delivering public service at local level and restoring a degree of fiscal autonomy to councillors and local councils.

In 2023, changes were made in relation to how LPT was allocated and distributed to local authorities with local authorities now retaining 100% of the LPT collected in their local authority area. Most local authorities received a substantial increase in their baseline allocation from their LPT allocation for general purpose spending. However, for 2024, 10 of our local authorities have a surplus LPT, above their baseline figure, with some of this surplus required to self-finance funding for housing and roads services. AILG would contend that 100% of LPT collected in a local authority area should be allocated back to the relevant authority for general purpose spending and any allocations for self-funding of housing and roads services should be made from other central government funds.

Recommendation

- 100% of Local Property Tax collected in a local authority area should be allocated back to the relevant authority for general purpose spending for the provision of local services.

Powers of the Elected Council & Local Councillors

The range of functions carried out by local authorities in Ireland is quite limited – in many other EU countries, local authorities are responsible for functions such as health, social welfare, tourism, policing, transport, education and even electricity. This in itself limits the scope and importance of local authorities in Ireland. All of the functions carried out by Irish local authorities (housing, roads, etc.) in the eight programme groups account for only between 11% - 15% of a typical Danish local authority's expenditure. An important outcome of this is the limited perceived relevance of the local government system by citizens in general, even though everyone benefits, to a greater or lesser extent, from the services provided.



It is often said that the introduction of the management system in Irish local government was a move towards efficiency made at the expense of democracy.

If the councillors, acting collectively, are not the true policy decision-makers, then what results is local administration rather than local government, because the will of the people may not be properly reflected in local activities/policy outcomes. This is the reality in our current local government system.



Since the 2014 reforms, the position and power of the Chief Executive has increased resulting in a growing imbalance between the executive powers of the Chief Executive and the reserved powers of the elected Councillors. Accordingly, this leads to a democratic deficit where decisions can be made without direct democratic accountability.

Aligned with this imbalance, over the last 10 years, local authorities have seen a number of functions, which were the responsibility of local authorities, transferred to other centralised bodies. Those functions include the following;

- Higher Education Grants Scheme, which was administered by local authorities, was replaced by the new Student Grant Scheme, administered by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI).
- The Road Safety Authority has responsibility for driver licensing since 2013 and has established a National Driver Licence Service (NDLS).

Powers of the Elected Council & Local Councillors

- Irish Water (Uisce Éireann) has been established to bring the water and wastewater services of the 31 local authorities together under one national service provider. Since 2023 local authorities no longer have direct responsibility in the provision of water and waste-water service. This represents the biggest divergence of a major local government function since health was transferred from local government in the 1970's and the abolition of the Regional Health Boards in 1998.
- Responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the motorway and dual carriageway system is transferring to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII).
- Seats occupied by councillors on the boards of third level university institutions were lost in October 2023 as part of wider university governance reforms – seats that councillors have held since at least 1920.
- Proposals for Joint Policing Committees being replaced by Community Safety Partnerships with fewer councillor representation and provision for an independent chair rather than an elected member.

The loss of these functions is in direct contradiction with European norms of de-centralising the provision of services at local level.

“To add to this, Ireland has one of the most centralised systems of local government compared to our European counterparts in terms of powers, functions, service delivery and funding.”

While legal and constitutional provision has been afforded to local government under article 28A of our constitution, this provision identifies local government as being subject to law. Therefore, the national parliament and the government of the day in effect have full control over our local government system and can rearrange its structures and functions, as they see fit. This was evidenced, in the 2014 reforms with the abolition of 80 local authorities and the significant reduction in the number of councillors by 40%. In recent times this has also been evidenced by the direct attack on councillors' reserved powers and functions where the reserved function of councillors approving local authority own housing developments was suspended overnight by a government amendment to the Planning and Foreshore Development Act 2022. While this was a temporary suspension until December 2024, it has now been extended to 2025. This was done without any prior notice or consultation with councillors or their representative body.

Powers of the Elected Council & Local Councillors

A further example of the centralised nature of our local government system can be seen with the increasing power of the Minister through various Ministerial Guidelines now becoming mandatory, especially in relation to local authority planning policy. For example, the new draft Planning and Development Bill 2023, provides for strengthened legal status of Ministerial Guidelines. Under this bill, Ministerial Guidelines and policy directives will be upgraded to 'National Planning Policy Statements' and 'National Planning Policy Guidance' which will be mandatory. While it is recognised that local authorities must work within an overall national framework, councillors have always been responsible in taking account of national policy when formulating local policy and this type of direct interference eliminates the ability for local decision-making.

In addition to this, outside of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage most other government departments and agencies fail to recognise the important role of the councillor within our local government system. In most cases, these outside government departments and agencies set the criteria for the delivery of their service by the local authority and fail to give councillors any input into their delivery. This is a further example of the lack of recognition of the important role of the local councillor and a further dilution of elected member's powers.

Recommendations

- Immediately reverse the reserved functions/powers recently taken away from the elected council including the Section 183 function for disposal of council-owned land to the Land Development Agency for housing developments and the Part 8 reserved function for local authority own housing developments. This would demonstrate the Ministers and Government's commitment to strengthening local government and democratically elected local government.
- Mandate all government departments and public agencies recognise the important role and contribution of councillors.
- Enable councillors to work collaboratively with local authority executives, public bodies, academia, civil society and other stakeholders to increase public and political trust in local government in general and in councillors in particular, so they can be entrusted with increased powers and responsibilities.

Housing and Homelessness – ‘Building Homes...Building Hope’

As the country continues to face one of the biggest housing and homelessness crisis in its history, AILG continues to support all efforts to-date in trying to address the current crisis. All of our local public representatives are working with people in housing and homelessness difficulties on a daily basis to help them access appropriate social and affordable housing. Housing related issues are a central concern in our members work as public representatives and AILG can safely state that no other local government issue generates so much of a councillor’s workload as is the case with housing. This manifesto outlines the key priorities and recommendations that we believe need to be implemented in both the immediate and longer term in order to address the housing and homelessness crisis currently facing the country.

“

AILG’s key principal, that our manifesto is based on, is that the role of the local authority, as the housing authority in each city and county and as lead providers of social housing throughout Ireland, must be reinforced in order to fully address the current crisis. ”

However, we do of course not disregard the role and contribution of other social and affordable housing providers. For more than a century,

local authorities have successfully been the providers of social housing for the Irish population. Our local authorities have a strong record of achievement in the housing area. Many independent commentators have reiterated that local authorities should be the primary provider of social housing in the country. In the context of any housing policy, the experience and the capacity of the local authority as the housing authority needs to be underpinned and emphasised.

‘Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland’ is the government’s housing policy to 2030. It is a multi-annual, multi-billion euro plan, which aims to improve Ireland’s housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. Under Housing for All, social housing delivery is supported through a number of funding streams and is delivered via local authorities and approved housing bodies. The statistical tables outlined on the next page provide details on the number of social homes delivered across the various delivery streams and funding programmes. The following section provides details on Social Housing delivery across the Build, Acquisition, Leasing, HAP and RAS delivery streams.

Projected Housing Output (New Build) 2022 - 2030

Tenure	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Social Homes	9,000	9,100	9,300	10,000	10,200	10,200	10,200	10,200	10,200
Affordable & Cost Rental Homes	4,100	5,500	6,400	6,400	6,100	6,300	6,400	6,300	6,300
Private Rental & Private Ownership Homes	11,500	14,400	17,750	18,200	19,800	20,400	21,500	23,000	24,000
Total Homes	24,600	29,000	33,450	34,600	36,100	36,900	38,100	39,500	40,500

'Housing for All' aims to provide over 40,000 new homes per annum by 2030, including over 10,000 social homes and 6,300 affordable homes per annum. In 2023, there was a 16% increase in social housing delivery, with 11,939 social homes delivered and over 4,000 affordable homes delivered, which was a 128% increase on 2022. Of the 11,939 new social homes, these were delivered by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHB) and include 8,110 new-build homes, 1,830 acquisitions and 1,999 homes through leasing programmes. This is an increase of 16.33% on 2022 when 10,263 social homes were delivered. When the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) of 8,292 units and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) of 1,542 units are added, 21,773 social housing supports were delivered in 2023. However, as you can see from the figures above, nearly half of the overall social housing delivery is through the private rental market through the HAP & RAS schemes.



Housing and Homelessness – ‘Building Homes...Building Hope’

During the course of the last 15 years, and under various governments, national policy has been over-reliant on the private housing market to deliver social housing units. We believe that now is the time for this trend to be reversed.

“

AILG believes that a greater emphasis must be placed on a more ambitious, nation-wide local authority house building programme to include both acquisitions and a new build programme. ”

With population growth figures set to continue to rise, thus enforcing a high demand for housing, this will inevitably lead to both social housing and private housing clients competing for the same limited supply of units in the absence of a significant increase in the building of social housing units. While we believe that local authorities, in their role as housing authorities, have an important function in facilitating housing provision and development in conjunction with the private sector and the approved housing bodies it is imperative that local government be allowed the freedom to substantially enhance its own capacity to directly deliver housing units. The Summary of Social Housing Assessments for 2023 confirm that the total number of qualified households in need of social housing is 58,824, an increase from 57,842 in 2022.

In order to ensure that local government be allowed the freedom to substantially enhance its own capacity to directly deliver housing units, AILG calls on the Government, to increase its delivery target of social housing units to 2030 and commit to investing in delivering 15,000 local authority social housing units per annum for the period 2025 – 2030, in order to fully address the nearly 59,000 households currently on local authority housing lists.

As stated previously, local authorities have a strong record of achievement in the housing area and are always conscious of the need to create sustainable, integrated communities with accessibility to schools, community facilities, retail centres and employment. A long-term national local authority house building programme will ensure that these sustainable communities will continue into the future. In that regard, we support the commitment contained in ‘Housing for All’ for mixed tenure developments. However, we would propose that the department reconsiders its policy of not sanctioning larger local authority developments unless they are part of a mixed tenure development. This we feel is particularly relevant in the greater Dublin area where flexibility on this policy is needed, to ensure that targets set out in the action plan, in terms of social housing delivery are met.

Housing and Homelessness – ‘Building Homes...Building Hope’

However, the Association would also advocate that in order to sustain a more targeted local authority capital build programme to 2030, local authorities must develop and enhance their estate managements and social supports programmes to their tenants to ensure that the past social legacy problems are not repeated. Local authorities must provide excellence in estate management of their tenants, where the services people need are available, where the neighbourhood is safe and free from anti-social behaviour and where residents feel a sense of belonging and want to stay. Local authorities need to develop an excellence in estate and housing services which is critical to the long-term sustainability of both the communities and the properties. In order for this to happen, local authorities must be provided with financial resources to invest in direct estate maintenance and social care workers to provide the proper care services to their tenants.

To deliver on these more ambitious social housing targets, there is also a need to streamline the approval procedures for social housing projects in order to fast track these projects for quicker delivery. The current process for a turnkey social housing project needs to be further fast tracked in order to eliminate unnecessary delays in giving projects the necessary go-ahead to proceed. Currently the length of time that it takes to deliver a social housing project is unacceptable and needs further urgent reform even after

moving from the previous 9-stage to a 4-stage approval process. While AILG accepts that proper procurement procedures and good governance need to be adhered to at all times, the issue of each stage of the process needing approval at central level before the next stage can commence is leading to lengthy delays in housing projects and is an issue that requires urgent attention.

Another issue which has led to unacceptable delays in the approval process of schemes is the previous moratorium on recruitment in the public sector. As a result of this, local authorities have lost invaluable technical staff over the last 15-20 years and the loss of such experience is also leading to delays in progressing some social housing projects. While acknowledging that this moratorium was lifted in 2015, and despite funding being invested in the recruitment of technical staff since 2021, local authorities are still experiencing difficulty in recruiting the appropriate technical staff needed to progress some social housing projects. We would propose that funding for appropriate technical staff would be included in the capital costs of housing projects to ensure that no housing projects are delayed due to a lack of technical expertise. Short term contracts to recruit appropriate technical staff should be afforded on specific social housing projects if necessary to ensure that these projects are commenced and delivered without delays.

Housing and Homelessness – ‘Building Homes...Building Hope’

AILG also propose that the shared services model currently operating successfully in the Irish local government environment should be employed to rapidly scale-up the input of specialist housing personnel. Design and planning teams could be assembled in a number of core local authorities with their services available across county boundaries to other local authorities. These shared services teams could then work in conjunction with the Housing for All Delivery Unit within the department. This approach of a shared services model was used to good effect in the early years of the national motorway programme where a design team was assembled in a given county and its expertise deployed to other counties so as to create a flexible and rapid response to the need for expertise in an accelerated building programme.

Finally, one issue that AILG has continuously identified that can help with the immediate housing need is tackling the issue of vacant local authority housing units or voids. AILG welcomes that over 2,481 voids were brought back into use in 2023. However, there is a need to continually address the historic and unacceptable re-letting times of up to 35 weeks in some instances of bring voids back into use.

The 2022 Local Authority Performance Indicator Report by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC), concluded that the average re-letting time for a vacant local authority unit for

2022 was 35.22 weeks, an increase on 34.44 weeks in 2021 and 32.69 weeks in 2020. The average letting cost was €21,886.04, compared to €19,653.39 in 2021 and €19,065.30 in 2020. While the AILG accepts that significant improvement has been made by local authorities in improving re-letting times of vacant properties, a continuous review of their performance in this area is required on an ongoing basis to ensure a timely turn-around of vacant units to meet the significant demand that exists for social housing. AILG recommend that local authorities would have a dedicated ring-fenced rolling budget on an annual basis for pre-letting repairs costs. This rolling budget from central funds could be dependent on matching funding from the local authority's own resources, which would help with the timely re-letting of vacant housing units. This would also give greater autonomy to each local authority to prioritise what level of repairs are required to bring their vacant units to re-letting standards taking their immediate housing needs into account.

Housing and Homelessness – ‘Building Homes...Building Hope’

Recommendation

- Role of the local authority, as the housing authority in each city and county and as lead providers of social housing throughout Ireland, must be reinforced in order to fully address the housing current crisis.

Recommendation

- Greater emphasis must be placed on a more ambitious, nation-wide local authority house building programme to include both acquisitions and a new build programme and the delivery target of social housing units to 15,000 local authority/AHB social housing units per annum for the period 2025 – 2030.

Recommendation

- Local authorities must be provided with financial resources to invest in direct estate maintenance and social care workers to provide the proper care services to their tenants.

Recommendation

- Need to further streamline approval procedures for social housing projects in order to fast track these projects for quicker delivery including;
 - Funding for appropriate technical staff to be included in the capital costs of housing projects to ensure that no housing projects are delayed due to a lack of technical expertise.
 - Propose that the shared services model currently operating successfully in the Irish local government environment should be employed to rapidly scale-up the input of specialist housing personnel with local authorities across various regions.

Recommendation

- Local authorities to have a dedicated ring-fenced rolling budget on an annual basis for pre-letting repairs costs.

Climate Action

Climate change is the defining issue of our time with all sections of society aware that we must deal with the reality of climate change. Society and the economy need to act now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and thus avoid the worst impacts of climate change. The local government sector is no different.

“

Local authorities have long been at the frontline in dealing with extreme weather events and as these extremes become more frequent, local authorities must ensure local adaptation to a changed climate. ”

The “All of Government Climate Action Plan” is a measure of how involved councils will be in addressing the climate challenge. The current Programme for Government commits to an average 7% per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030, a 51% reduction over a decade and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The 2050 target has been set in law by The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act, 2021 with every sector contributing to meeting this target.

In order to ensure that the local government sector plays its part in achieving the 51% reduction in gas emissions within this decade it is essential that we build the capacity of local

authorities to lead locally and engage citizens and communities on climate change and biodiversity. Local authorities are key decision makers regarding choices relating to energy use, buildings, transport, waste management, green infrastructure and the many other initiatives that can help reduce our emissions. The sector has already commenced this work in leading the local challenge to climate change with the establishment of the Regional Climate Action Offices (CARO) in 2018 who have driven climate action responses at local level including building capacity, awareness and training with both local authority staff and elected members.

The CARO offices have developed a comprehensive Local Authority Climate Action Training programme for all local authority staff and in conjunction with AILG for our 949 elected members. This training has been rolled out over the past 3 years with tailored training for councillors and senior local authority staff in championing leadership to harness that local leadership role of councillors in driving effective climate action. A further training plan is being developed for the period 2024 – 2027.

All local authorities including all Cathaoirlioh and Mayors have co-signed the Climate Action Charter for local authorities and they have been formally adopted in each individual council.

Climate Action

The Climate Action Charter commits local authorities to several actions that will ensure that they play a key leadership role locally and nationally in delivering effective climate action including:

- Putting in place a process for carbon proofing major decisions, programmes and projects on a systematic basis, including investments in transport and energy infrastructure.
- Deliver a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030.
- Ensure all suppliers provide information on their carbon footprint and steps they plan to reduce its impact.
- Build local citizen engagement, particularly with young people.
- Partner & collaborate on climate action initiatives with local community groups, local enterprise and local schools and higher level institutions. Local authorities have also prepared and published their Local Authority Climate Action Plans.

Further initiatives for the local authorities will include leading the energy transition by retrofitting their social housing stock as part of the government's commitment to retrofitting over 500,000 homes by 2030 as part of the EU Renovation Wave. Another initiative is to reduce our dependence on high carbon transport systems by providing safe cycling and walking infrastructure, ensuring that local development plans are developed to stimulate economic activity for those areas which were expecting

economic development arising from new fossil fuel infrastructure, and commit to ensuring no sector of society or community is left behind in the movement to a low carbon future.

“AILG are committed to ensuring that our elected members have the required training, knowledge and tools to lead and champion the local response to climate change.”

AILG have had extensive engagement over the last number of years with the Departments, National Emergency Management Directorate and Met Éireann who have provided briefings to councillors on the local authority response to severe weather events and mitigation of severe climate events. As well as working with the CARO offices on the roll-out of their training programme, AILG have also delivered a comprehensive training programme with the Office of the Planning Regulator and Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications on the development plan review process to include areas such as de-carbonisation, focusing on the implementation of national climate policy and the roll-out of new energy sources and active travel, including innovative development plan practice and wider local authority led enablers to promote public transport, walking and cycling. AILG have also just delivered a training module

Climate Action

for councillors on local government and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is important that elected members and local authorities embed the SDGs in their County and City Development Plans, Corporate Plans, Local Area Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans. Councillors must also ensure that the SDGs are integral to council policy development across all departments. AILG has also engaged extensively and participated on the advisory body on the Marine Planning and Development Bill and also currently participate on the advisory body on the new National Waste and Circular Economy Action Plan.

However, as local authorities rise to the challenge of leading the local response to climate change they also face a number of challenges particularly around resources. Over the last 10-15 years, local authorities have seen a reduction on staff numbers and if the targets on climate action set by the government are to be delivered at local government level, local authorities will need much needed additional resources. AILG welcomes the commitment in the Programme for Government that every local authority will have a sufficient number of biodiversity and heritage officers among their staff complement. However, additional staff resources will be needed to work with communities and the public on local initiatives to achieve our climate targets. Additional resources will also be required for the local government sector to the core philosophy of

a “Just Transition” and ensure that no sector of society or community is left behind in the movement to a low carbon future. Local authorities have in the past number of years risen to a number of challenges in our society including leading the local economic recovery post the banking and recession crisis and more recently leading the local response to Covid-19 including the roll-out of our Community Call Programme. They will also rise and deliver on the challenges of climate action and ensure that they lead the local response to this global issue.

Recommendations

- Need to commit to ensuring that our elected members continue to have the required training, knowledge and tools to lead and champion the local response to climate change.
- Local authorities must embed the SDGs in their County and City Development Plans, Corporate Plans, Local Area Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans. Local Authorities must ensure that the SDGs are integral to Council policy development across all departments.
- Additional staff resources must be provided to local authorities to work with communities and the public on local initiatives to achieve our climate targets.

Training and Education for Councillors

Local authorities are multi-purpose bodies responsible for delivering a broad range of important local services. Local authorities are also the main vehicle of governance and public service delivery at local level, leading economic, social and community development, delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably. Our elected councillors are the public face of our local authorities. The elected council is in law the policy-making arm of the local authority with councillors having the role of creating the overall policy framework which dictate the overall direction and functioning of the local authority that the council's executive and staff work within. Councillors are working in a complex environment, making policy decisions across a wide range of functions that effect the quality of life and local service delivery to the public. Therefore, it is imperative that councillors have access to appropriate training and education to enhance their knowledge across all functional areas of local authority delivery.

One of the primary roles of the AILG is to provide suitable and pertinent training to elected members who govern Irish local authorities, both now and into the future. The "AILG Elected Members Training Programme" offers a comprehensive suite of training that covers various local authority functions and related activities, ensuring that our local authority elected members are well-prepared to meet their governance responsibilities effectively.

Our AILG Elected Member Learning and Training Development Programme has grown from strength to strength over the last 10 years in providing tailored training and education programmes to our 949 elected councillors.

In 2023, AILG delivered the following training;

- 2,653 attendees attended over 26 Training events (including over 850 online attendees.)
- 600 attendees attended our two national Annual Training Conference & Autumn Seminar events.
- The number of councillors who have attended at least one of our online training sessions now stands at 671 elected members or above 70% of our membership.
- 11 online training webinars were delivered to our Members between Sept 2022 - September 2023.
- 18 councillors successfully graduated from the AILG sponsored UCC Level 7 Certificate in Climate Action and Local Government in 2023. This followed 24 councillors who completed the course in 2022.

The training modules focus on a particular subject that is relevant to local authority functions, the elected members' reserved functions and their representational role. Our training programme is delivered by a blended hybrid approach of both in-person and online learning.

Training and Education for Councillors

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It is imperative that our Elected Members have the necessary knowledge, education and leadership expertise to help them to meet their legislated responsibilities and to continue to strengthen and improve our local government system. ”

Our recent research findings, by Maynooth University, in respect of tools and skills revealed that while there is a clear recognition of the importance of training and up-skilling, almost half of Councillors have not availed of continuous CPD. The need for CPD is expected to increase over the coming years, due to the complexities associated with decision-making and multi-level governance. Councillors recognise and value the role of AILG in providing opportunities for professional development, and they are keen to increase their skills and competencies in several areas, most notably in community development, planning, economic development, energy and climate. This will enable them to continue to deliver effectively for their constituents and county / region. Councillors also note the need to ensure that the provision of CDP is accompanied by ancillary supports. Given the full-time nature of the role and their other commitments, councillors face challenges in accessing and availing of training opportunities. However, councillors recognise the importance of, and growing need for, training and continuous professional development. There is a

high demand for training that deals with planning issues and policy matters. Councillors indicate a need for capacity-building to enable them to deal with socio-psychological issues, so they can respond effectively to all constituents, while protecting their own mental health and well-being.

In addition to the growing need for, training and continuous professional development, there is also a need for councillors to have access to independent technical and legal advice, as appropriate, to fulfil their statutory duties within the council chamber.

Recommendation

- Support and Resource AILGs Training and Education Programme to respond to councillors' growing recognition of the importance of, and growing need for, training and continuous professional development (CPD).
- Investigate the potential for establishment of a panel of independent advisors / points of reference for councillors to enable effective engagement with the more technical aspects of their role.

Supporting Gender and Diversity in Local Government

The AILG is committed to developing initiatives that support Gender & Diversity in Local Government, and a key goal of the Association is to help and support existing councillors to ensure that we retain members from diverse and minority groups and in particular women once they are elected.

As part of a broader programme focussing on gender balance and diversity at local government level, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) has brought forward a number of funding streams over the last number of years aimed at supporting activities to increase the number of female and diverse candidates running in the Local Elections in 2024.

In June 2021, following a funding approval from the DHLGH, the AILG in partnership with See Her Elected (SHE) established a WoMeN's Regional Caucus pilot for the Western, Midlands and Northern region of the country, in order to help retain & support women in politics. The caucus encompasses 13 local authorities; Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Galway County, Galway City, Roscommon, Cavan, Monaghan, Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly. Each participating county council was chosen due to the fact that these neighbouring Councils accounted for some of the lowest numbers of female elected representatives across the State.

“

The purpose of the Regional Caucus is to support and retain the currently elected female councillors within our local government system, encourage the participation of women in local government in general and to increase the participation of women in the 2024 Local Elections. ”

The AILG and SHE currently provide joint secretariat to the WoMeN's Regional Caucus from their own resources.

Over the past two years, the Caucus membership have actioned an ambitious programme of work with the support of the Secretariat which include; successfully coordinating flagship events on International Women's Day to raise awareness of role and work of women in local politics, commencing a safety walking audit across the participating counties, advancing policy at the intersection of housing and domestic violence in collaboration with Safe Ireland, an outreach programme to TY Students to highlight the issue of gender and diversity in local politics, an online webinar series aimed at supporting and enabling women to get involved, and stay in politics, and the delivery of training on a range of issues as identified by the membership.

Supporting Gender and Diversity in Local Government

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As a national representative body for councillors across Ireland, one of ALLG's priorities is to support and retain the women councillors that are currently elected & to promote better gender equality & diversity in our local government system. ”

The success of the WoMeN's Regional Caucus was highlighted internationally last year when it was nominated as a finalist for the prestigious democracy prize at the European awards which celebrated 90 finalists from over 400 European entries. The Caucus beat off stiff competition to be selected as one of the 10 finalists in the democracy category. The Chair and Vice Chair of the WoMeN's Regional Caucus engaged in a number of workshops in Poland in May 2023 at the Innovation in Politics Awards which took place at the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw.

A number of distinct advantages have emerged from having a regional caucus structure. Multipartisan working at regional caucus level has demonstrated that projects and initiatives which work at regional level can be mirrored at county level and adapted to suit local circumstances and needs. The WoMeN's Regional Caucus has also found that membership of a regional caucus can strengthen the capacity and

influence of councillors to advance policy initiatives within their local councils. Regional caucuses can also mitigate local challenges by providing a larger group to act as a sounding board and achieve consensus.

The WoMeN's Regional Caucus will be publishing a final report on successes & learnings taken from the pilot project in the summer of 2024 which will help to create a blueprint on how to roll out a Regional Caucus Network across across the full 31 local authorities. The report will also serve as a useful tool in illustrating key learnings and insights which other local authorities and local caucuses can learn from.

Recommendation

- Resource and support the roll-out of the Regional Women's Caucus Network across all local authorities.

Working with People with Disabilities

The 2022 census shows that the number of people living with a disabling condition is currently 1,109,557 people, representing 22% of the population. This is a sizeable electoral demographic, approximately one in five people in each community. Therefore, there is an imperative desire to see positive change for disabled people.

A community that is accessible for disabled people is accessible to all. The AILG's vision for Local Government includes five broad themes in relation to disability:

1. A central role within local authorities, which is properly resourced, is guided by the voice of local disabled people and has responsibility for disability access and inclusion e.g. a full-time disability access officer for each local authority¹
2. Housing for all, including housing for people with disabilities.
3. Full participation of disabled people in public and political life.
4. Accessibility of the built environment and local amenities.
5. Access to information in preferred and accessible formats.

“

Local Government has a responsibility to ensure the inclusion of disabled people in communities. ”

We believe there is an opportunity to build fairer, inclusive, and equal communities – that can be accessed and enjoyed by all. The actions above are not a comprehensive list of all that can be done to improve inclusion and equality for disabled people at a local level. They are some practical ways that real, impactful change can be made immediately.

Recommendation

- Ensure that local government and our local authorities fulfill their responsibility to ensure the inclusion of disabled people in communities.

[1] Access Officers in many Local Authorities divide their time for this role with several other responsibilities, while in a minority of cases the role is full time. The role is not standardised and is not across the country and no budget is allocated centrally to support the implementation of disability focused initiatives. This must be addressed as a priority.



Association of Irish Local Government

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