

Meeting 3 of the Implementation Advisory Group (IAG) for a Directly Elected Mayor with executive functions for Limerick City and County Council

9 a.m. 19 February 2020, Limerick City and County Council Headquarters

Attendance: Tim O'Connor (Chair), Mayor Michael Sheahan, Cllr Michael Collins, Pat Daly (LC&C), Caroline Curley (LC&C), Dee Ryan (Limerick Chamber of Commerce), Dr. Diarmuid Scully (University of Limerick), Barry Quinlan (D/HPLG), Diarmuid O'Leary (D/HPLG)

Secretariat: Áinle Ní Bhriain (D/HPLG), Grant Couper (D/HPLG), Fiona McCormack (LC&C)

Apologies from: Cllr John Sheahan, Cllr Elena Secas, Cillian Flynn (Limerick PPN), Jack Scanlan (UL Students' Union)

1. Outputs and actions from the last meeting, and matters arising:

- The draft Outputs and Actions document for meeting 2 of the IAG, which took place on 19 December 2019, was agreed.
- The Chair updated the meeting on actions taken by him since the previous meeting, including separate meetings with a number of senior officials of relevant Government Departments.
- The Chair also reported on meetings with community leaders in the Moyross area of Limerick City.
- The importance of the Directly Elected Mayor benefitting Limerick City and County was noted; the view was expressed that " *for Limerick to thrive into the future, every part of every community must thrive*".
- It was also noted that positive feedback had been received from the business community regarding the Directly Elected Mayor project.

2. Public consultation exercise:

- The secretariat reported on the public consultation proposal received from Dr Maura Adshead, Associate Professor in Politics and Public Administration at the Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Limerick. The proposal and the public consultation generally were discussed.
- The importance of consultation was noted, as was the importance of the consultation process having a broad reach to ensure that as many people and communities in Limerick as possible have an opportunity to express their views.
- It was agreed that submissions would also be made by the public using the Council's "MyPoint" portal, as well as using traditional email and postal mail. Any submissions received could then be provided to Dr Adshead, so that a consolidated consultation report can be created.
- The value of working with the Public Participation Network was noted. The Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) could also provide 'reach' in seeking people's views.
- A potential advantage of the consultation process would be that the Directly Elected Mayor project and concept would be further socialised among the people of Limerick City and County.
- In this context, it was observed that there will be a public information campaign to accompany the public events.
- The tight timeline for the public consultation was noted. Work must begin almost immediately in order to be completed by the end of the academic year. The need to ensure that the public consultation exercise (including videos and other materials) is branded appropriately, in line with up-to-date Limerick City and County Council branding protocols, was highlighted.
- It was confirmed that the costs of the consultation exercise would be met by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.
- Mayor Sheahan and Cllr Michael Collins agreed that the councillors on the Group would consider the issue of consultation with the elected council.
- The Chair agreed that the secretariat would answer any questions about the public consultation arising during its development. Representatives and the secretariat of the IAG would be part of the development of the consultation.

- Members of the IAG would also attend the public events as observers.

3. Further consideration of case studies paper:

- Dr Diarmuid Scully informed the meeting that work is ongoing on the case studies paper. The questionnaire is being finalised for translation into German, and the local authority in Flensburg has agreed to participate.
- The Chair informed the meeting that the Political Counsellor at the British Embassy in Dublin has expressed an interest in and willingness to assist the Directly Elected Mayor project, if the IAG wishes to communicate with officials in the United Kingdom.
- There was general discussion of issues related to the Directly Elected Mayor, including what powers the Directly Elected Mayor would need in order to be effective. It was noted that the key output proposed for the Directly Elected Mayor will be to produce a plan for Limerick City and County, within the boundaries of Government policy (particularly Project Ireland 2040). Once the plan is within the boundaries of Government policy, the Directly Elected Mayor and the council should be empowered to make decisions for Limerick City & County, and hold budgetary powers.
- The need for the local authority to have more freedom to achieve goals, within national policies and targets, was discussed; it was noted that accountability would be a key issue in this respect. D/HPLG has been asked to show leadership in examining the transfer of functions to the Directly Elected Mayor.
- The local authority's current role essentially as a bid organiser for funding from central Government, with competition between the local authority and other public bodies, was noted. It was suggested that existing arrangements in this regard may need to be revisited in order to ensure that the Directly Elected Mayor will have control of budgets in relation to Limerick City and County.
- It was emphasised that with increased control of funding comes increased responsibility and accountability, and that the support of councillors will be necessary for enhanced budgetary devolution.
- The potential opportunity for a more joined-up approach to local service delivery was noted, and it was suggested that the potential benefits of the

Directly Elected Mayor in service delivery, for the people of Limerick City and County and for the Government as a whole, should be emphasised.

- The potential role for a Directly Elected Mayor in countering a “silo” affect in the public sector was noted; it was suggested that the Directly Elected Mayor could play a role in providing leadership across the public sector in Limerick City and County.
- The need for proposals for the devolution of powers to the Directly Elected Mayor to be grounded and realistic was underlined. The Directly Elected Mayor will face challenges and difficult decisions in allocating resources.
- The meeting was informed that representatives from public bodies operating in Limerick City and County already meet, but on a non-statutory basis. It was suggested that this could be a vehicle for further proposals for assigning functions to the Directly Elected Mayor.
- It was emphasised that the Directly Elected Mayor must be driven by their mandate. It could facilitate matters if the Government offers aid in establishing the Directly Elected Mayor.
- The needs of the entire local authority area must be borne in mind. The Directly Elected Mayor project is a City AND County project.

4. Technical working groups:

- The establishment of two technical working groups was approved. The first group will consider the transfer of existing executive functions, and the second working group will consider the role of Cathaoirleach and other governance matters.
- Executive functions Group
 - i. The group will be made up of representatives from DHPLG and Limerick City and County Council with secretariat provided by DHPLG.
 - ii. The working group will work from the Government’s proposals which were voted on in last May’s plebiscite, while taking account of the further feedback received and study undertaken by the IAG during its work.

- Role of Cathaoirleach Group
 - i. Mayor Michael Sheahan will chair the working group and the other elected members on the IAG will be invited to participate on the working group.
 - ii. The secretariat will be provided by DHPLG and Limerick City and County Council.
 - iii. The working group will consider the relationship between the Directly Elected Mayor and the elected council, and the Directly Elected Mayor and the chief executive.
 - iv. The role of Chairs of Municipal Districts, and the strengthening of Municipal Districts, will also be considered.
 - v. A Terms of Reference for this working group will be drawn up before the next IAG meeting.
 - vi. All members will be advised when this group is meeting and any member of the IAG who wishes may attend and participate in the group's sessions.

5. Next meeting of IAG:

- The next meeting of the IAG will take place on Wednesday 11 March 2020 at 11am. The Municipal District offices at Newcastlewest were provisionally agreed on, subject to availability. The scheduled meeting for 18 March 2020 was cancelled, in view of the St Patrick's holiday festival.
- A photograph of the IAG will be taken at the next meeting, for publication along with a press release to advise on progress to date.
- A separate press release on the consultation will be drawn up for the IAG's approval.
- The Chair will meet with the Charter Group in the coming weeks.