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MEETING OF LIMERICK CITY & COUNTY COUNCIL TO BE HELD ON MONDAY 27 JANUARY 2025

Question submitted by Councillor U. Gavan

I will ask the Mayor at the next Meeting has Limerick City and County Council communicated/liased with Uisce Éireann regarding capacity to deal with increased demand for water and waste facilities whilst roadworks will be carried out, to plan for the future and Ryder Cup and ultimately ensure that we do not have one set of long term roadworks followed by another.

REPLY:

The Councillor's point is well made — You are completely right that proper planning and coordination will allow disruption to be kept to a minimum.

I sought a response from the relevant team within the organisation, and was informed that Uisce Éireann is aware of the Ryder Cup in Adare, and that, as Uisce Éireann holds sole responsibility for the operational management and capital investment in water services, the Councillor should direct this query to Uisce Éireann.

I am also aware, however, that there will be a private workshop with senior Uisce Éireann staff on 24th February, and this would strike me as an opportunity for the Councillor to raise this matter, and to seek assurances that Uisce Éireann will work closely with LCCC, the ESB and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that if the road is to be dug up it is dug up once.

As you will know, I am in regular contact with Uisce Éireann with regard to other matters, but I would be happy to keep this issue on my agenda with Uisce Éireann.

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Question submitted by Councillor S. Benson

I will ask the Mayor at the next meeting for an update on the first 3 Expert Groups that are being established, how stakeholders are being chosen to sit on these groups and what other Expert Groups are being planned for the future.

REPLY:

Context: Purpose and Role of Expert Groups

The establishment of Expert Groups represents a shift in how policy is developed and implemented in Limerick in line with the introduction of an Executive Mayor who is not the head of the Council. Historically, policy was primarily developed by the unelected executive, with drafts presented to ensure democratic mandate to the relevant Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) for recommendation to full Council. While effective, this approach sometimes involved less early-stage input from experts, stakeholders, and community representatives.

The revised model is more suited to an elected executive arm and council arm of local government who both have independent policy roles. It also aims to address the gap identified above by seeking broader engagement at the initial stages of policy formation.

The Expert Groups are structured to involve subject matter experts, committees, and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to contribute their insights and recommendations from the outset but also to include council members who have an interest in the specific subject matter. That helps ensure early alignment between the executive and legislative electoral mandates. This model is conceived in line with best practices in EU institutions, where as in Limerick now, policy is proposed by one arm with an elected mandate (EU Commissioners chosen by national governments) and approved by another (the European Parliament). There, policy development is often enhanced and informed by expert working groups comprising outside experts, before being reviewed and approved by the European Parliament. I myself co-led one such group "Finance for Growth" which led to recommendations which were reflected in the Capital Markets Union proposals from the EU Commissioner at the time.

Of course, Limerick is at the beginning of its new journey and I am sure that the current approach will continue to evolve as we learn further but it underscores my commitment to work in as inclusive and transparent a manner as possible.

First Three Expert Groups

- **SME Task Force:**

The work of this task force, established in September 2024, has been led by co-chair Cllr Peter Doyle. It focuses on enhancing Limerick's pro-business environment and supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

- A project initiation meeting was held in November 2024 to outline the programme of work, to include an urgent review of the recommendations from my 2020 SME recovery report, proposals for updating of the report and to re-establish a focus on the delivery of these recommendations.
- Membership selection was carried out by Councillor Doyle and a member of the Trade & Investment Team, ensuring a broad and diverse make-up.
- Findings and recommendations will in time be reported to the Economic Development, Enterprise, and Tourism SPC.

- **Heritage and Public Nature Parks Expert Group:**

Co-chaired by Cllr Sean Hartigan, this group will inform a master plan to improve access to heritage sites and public nature parks across Limerick.

- A Project Charter is nearing completion, and an Executive Parks and Landscape Officer will join the team in February 2025.
- The group's work will be initially informed by the Blue-Green Ring Master Plan and the Limerick Biodiversity Action Plan, and on-going public consultation. This is expected to be completed in Q1 2025.
- Stakeholder meetings and site visits will then begin in Q2 2025, with a final list of ideas for a master plan presented in September 2025.

- **Homelessness and Addiction Expert Group:**

This group is being led by co-chair Cllr Sarah Beasley, and is tasked with addressing homelessness and addiction as part of the Mayoral Programme.

- Membership selection is currently being carried out by Cllr Beasley and a member of the council's Housing Support Services Team, and is expected to be finalised in the coming days. The group will include statutory bodies, experts, and community stakeholders.
- The group's inaugural meeting is scheduled for early February 2025.
- The group intends to first produce a stocktake of the existing situation by the end of H1 2025, which will be shared with the Home and Social Development SPC.
- The group will then work to help inform the preparation of the Mid-West Region Homelessness Action Plan 2026-2029, expected to go to SPC and full council by the end of 2025

City Centre Revitalisation Expert Group

While not among the first of the announced groups, this group has been set up and I have asked Cllr Maria Donoghue to be co-chair. This group will include representatives of trader groups, Limerick Chamber, businesses, youth groups, sports facilities and residents in the City Centre to monitor the implementation of the existing measures affecting the City Centre and develop new actions to respond to new or on-going challenges. Membership of this group is being finalised by myself and Cllr Donoghue and the group is also expected to have its first meeting in mid-February 2025.

You may be aware that I have already engaged with some stakeholders regarding their potential involvement in this group. For example, before Christmas, I met with a representative of the City Centre Traders to discuss their priorities. During our conversation, I highlighted the importance of transparency and fairness for all members participating in this group and that openly sharing information about membership would be most helpful in building trust and equity among all participants.

Future Expert Groups

These groups have already proven to be a valuable way to begin to gather data and diverse perspectives, informing my own thoughts on the relevant policies or actions to be proposed to the full council for approval in line with reserved functions. As my term progresses, new areas of focus may emerge, and I may establish additional Expert Groups to address these needs. For example, I am already considering the creation of a similar group to help me and advise me on actions that support a holistic development of the Ballinacurra, Rathbane, and Toppins Field areas of the city.

Throughout my term, I have already envisioned the following additional groups as set out in the More for Limerick Programme.

1. Mayoral Forum for local SMEs to connect with FDI companies
2. AI Smart Solutions Expert Group (government, academia, and industry collaboration)
3. Expert Working Group for Limerick's creative sector growth
4. Medical Treatment in Limerick Expert Group
5. Colbert Quarter Implementation Committee
6. Limerick 2030 and Development Plan Implementation Committee
7. Local Implementation Subgroup for Limerick 2030 and housing projects
8. Working Group with the Department of Housing for modular housing
9. Steering Group for UNESCO Heritage status for Limerick's residential and industrial heritage
10. Steering Group for a vibrant and safe night-time economy in Limerick City Centre
11. Countywide Night-Time Economy Implementation Group
12. Group for expedited planning processes for sustainable energy projects
13. Group with builders, developers, and construction professionals to address project delays
14. Working Group with hotels and short-term accommodation representatives to pre-plan tourism needs for events like the Ryder Cup
15. Steering Group for city centre stakeholder representation (traders, businesses, youth groups, etc.)
16. Task Force within Limerick PI 2040 Delivery Board to address blockages in primary health care centre development

17. Mental Health Task Force

18. Preventative Medicine Task Force

A number of councillors have already expressed a particular interest in one or more of these subject areas. If others also come forward which they are invited to do, I shall endeavour as new groups are set up to reflect their preferences and willingness to get involved.

Of course, I also expect other subject or geographical areas to warrant new groups over my term but I would prefer to concentrate on getting the ones above established in waves which can be accommodated by the staffing of my office and up and running before adding others.



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