



# COUNCILLORS CONSULTATION PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

JUNE 2019 | MEITHEAMH 2019

TUAIRISC DEIRIDH

# TOGRA COMHAIRLIÚCHÁIN LE COMHAIRLEOIRÍ



## CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
2. Forward	6
3. Executive summary	8
4. Project methodology	12
5. Communications	14
5.1 Party structures	14
5.2 The National Councillors Forum	17
5.3 Strategic support	18
5.4 Internal training supports	18
5.5 Councillors' intranet	20
5.6 Working with our representatives in the political institutions	21
6. Professional training and wellbeing	23
6.1 Councils	23
6.2 Local government representative bodies	24
6.3 External communications	27
7. Implementation of recommendations	29
8. Remuneration	30
9. Appendix	32
9.1 Consultation discussion points	32
9.2 Online survey questionnaire	34



## CLÁR

1. Brollach	4
2. Réamhrá	6
3. Achoimre Feidhmeach	8
4. Modheolaíocht an Togra	12
5. Cummarsáid	14
5.1 Struchtúir an pháirtí	14
5.2 Fóram Náisiúnta na gComhairleoirí	17
5.3 Taca straitéiseach	18
5.4 Tacaí oiliúna inmheánacha	18
5.5 Inlíon na gComhairleoirí	20
5.6 Ag obair i dtaca lenár n-ionadaithe sna hinstitiúidí polaitiúla	21
6. Oiliúnt ghairmiúil agus sláinte	23
6.1 Comhairlí	23
6.2 Comhlachtaí ionadaíocha rialtais áitiúil	24
6.3 Cummarsáid sheachtrach	27
7. IMoltaí a chur i bhfeidhm	29
8. Íocaíocht	30
9. Aguisín	32
9.1 Pointí plé maidir leis an gcomhairliúcháin	32
9.2 Ceistneoir suirbhé ar líne	34



## **1** INTRODUCTION

Councillor Joe Reilly died on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, 2018. Former Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams and a comrade of old described Joe as a small man with a great heart and a big vision. In marking Joe's passing Gerry remembered him as a community activist, a man who loved his family, music, the arts, Samuel Beckett, the Irish language, and the GAA. He was a proud republican, proud of his country and its people.

Joe was the epitome of Irish republicanism. He was humble, decent and could strip back the palaver of politics to get quickly to the crux of the challenge in front of him. Uniquely Joe represented the past, the present and the future of Sinn Féin and was universally loved by us all.

When charged with this project Joe was one of my first ports of call. We met in Navan's Solstice Arts Centre, which was fitting as Joe was instrumental in its creation. Joe emphasised two key themes throughout our meeting - leadership and delivery.

Our Councillors are leaders in their communities, their counties and the party structures. He emphasised that they must see themselves as such and in turn the party must recognise their leadership and demonstrate that it values the work that they do.

Joe held the strong view that our all-island council team must be project driven in their local authority work and in supporting voluntary organisations in their communities. It is through this delivery that they can and do make a lasting progressive impact that better the lives of the communities they represent.

I would like to thank the local authority Chief Executives and their staff who responded to our requests for information and to NILGA, the AILG and LAMA for similarly providing an insight into the work of their respective organisations.

I am enormously grateful to all our Councillors for their constructive engagement with this project. To the Council Group leaders for their logistical support, the Council teams for their frank and friendly discussions with me and to Cllr Seán McPeake who was always so generous in sharing his time and expertise. It has been a unique and gratifying experience to have got to know our Councillors from every corner of the island.

Finally, I want to recognise the positive intent of our party leader Mary Lou McDonald TD in not only initiating this consultation but to visualise it in the first instance. Management of all organisation types too often seek to resolve challenges from the centre. It is to her credit that she choose instead to engage directly with our local government team.

**Sinéad Ní Bhroin**

# 1 BROLLACH

D'éag Joe Reilly an 1 Meitheamh, 2018. Chuir iar-cheannaire Shinn Féin agus comradáí de chuid Joe, Gerry Adams síos air mar fhear beag a raibh croí mhaith agus fis mhór aige. Agus é ag caint tráth bhás Joe chuimhnigh Gerry Adams ar gníomhaí pobail, fear a raibh grá aige dá theaghlach, don cheol, do na healaíona, Samuel Beckett, don Ghaeilge agus don CLG. Poblachtánach stuama a bhí bródúil as a thír is a muintir.

Poblachtánach Éireannach go smior ab ea Joe. Bhí sé uamhal, uasal agus bhí sé in ann an cur is cúiteamh a bhaineann leis an pholaitíocht a ghlanadh le go dtiocfaidh sé ar chroílár an dúshláin a bhí roimhe. Thar aon duine eile bhí rian de Shinn Féin mar a bhí, mar atá agus mar a bheidh amach ó seo.

Nuair a thug mé faoin togra seo, ba é Joe ar na chéad daoine a ndeachaigh mé i gcomhairle leo. Chasamar le chéile i Lárionad Ealaíon an Ghrianstaid san Uaimh, áit a bhí thar a bheith fóirstineach mar bhí Joe lárnach maidir lena bunú. Leag Joe béim ar dhá théama le linn an chruinnithe sin – ceannaireacht agus seachadadh.

Is ceannairí ár gcomhairleoirí ina bpobail féin, ina gcontatethe féin agus i struchtúir cheannasaíochta an pháirtí. Dar le Joe gur chóir go bhféachann na comhairleoirí orthu mar seo agus ar an lámh eile gur chóir don pháirtí an cheannaireacht seo a aithint agus a léiriú gur mór ag an bpáirtí a ndéanann na comhairleoirí.

Bhí Joe go láidir den tuairim nach mór dár bhfoireann uile Éireann de chomhairleoirí bheith dírithe ar thograí ina gcuid oibre san údarás áitiúil trí bheith ag tacú le heagrais deonacha ina bpobail. Is tríd an seachadadh seo gur féidir leo tionchar dearfach a imirt ar shaol na ndaoine a bhfuil said ag déanamh ionadaíochta orthu.

Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a chur in iúl do Phríomhfheidhmeanaigh na n-údarás áitiúil agus a gcuid foirne a thug freagra ar ár n-iarratais ar eolas. Tá mé buíoch fosta de NILGA, AILG agus LAMA as léargas den saghas céanna a thabhairt ar an obair a dhéanann a n-eagraíocht féin.

Tá mé go mór faoi chomaoin ag ár gcomhairleoirí uilig as a gcuid idirghníomhaíochta dearfaí leis an togra seo. Buíochas do Cheannairí ar na Comhairlí as a gcuid tacaíochta praicticiúla, leis na foirne ar na comhairlí as a gcuid comhráití ionraice is cairdiúla agus leis an gComhairleoir Seán McPeake as a gcuid ama is saineolais a roinn go fial liom. Bhain mé fíothaitnemah as aithne a chur ar ár gcuid comhairleoirí ó achan cearn den oileán seo.

Ba mhaith liom aird a dhíriú ar an tiomantas pearsanta atá á léiriú ag ceannaire ár bpáirtí Mary Lou McDonald TD, ní hamháin tríd an togra seo a chur ar bun ach trína shamhlú ar dtús. Go minic déanann an uile saghas eagrais iarracht fadhbanna a shárú trí ghníomhú ón lár amháin. Chun a ceart a thabhairt di, roghnaigh sí dul i gcomhairliúcháin lenár bhfoireann rialtais áitiúil.

**Sinéad Ní Bhroin**



---

## **2 FOREWORD**

Sinn Féin's Councillors are a vital link between the party's activist base and the national leadership. They are the drivers of the party's political objectives within the communities they represent.

Maximising the potential of our all-island council team is fundamental to developing local Government as an effective site of progress for the communities we represent and political advancement for the party.

As leader of the party I am committed to modernise and grow the party and to adapt its approaches and structures to meet these objectives. A cornerstone of this work must be the integration of Councillors into the party's local, national and regional political structures.

On taking up the leadership of Sinn Féin I indicated my intention to initiate a process of engagement with our local government team on key areas of organisational and professional development.

The report was drafted in advance of the May election and will be implemented over the coming Council term. In addition to enhancing and supporting the essential role of Councillors we are committed to winning back seats lost as we continue to deliver real change for communities at local government level.

I would like to thank our Councillors for taking part in the consultation and to Sinéad Ní Bhroin for overseeing the project.

**Mary Lou McDonald TD**

Uachtarán Shinn Fhéin



---

## **2** RÉAMHRÁ

Is nasc an-tabhachtach comhairleoirí Shinn Féin idir ár mbonn taca agus an ceannaireacht náisiúnta. Is iadsan a chuireann spriocanna polaitiúla an pháirtí chun cinn sna pobail a ndéanan said ionadaíocht orthu.

Ní mór dúinn leas iomlán a bheint as ár bhfoireann uile-Éireann de chomhairleoirí le go mbainfimid.

Tá mé tiomanta don pháirtí a athnuachan agus a fhorbairt agus do chur chuige agus struchtúir an pháirtí a leasú le seo a bhaint amach. Cuid lárnach de seo ná na comhairleoirí féin a chomhcheangal le struchtúir lógánta, náisiúnta agus réigiúnacha an pháirtí.

Tar éis dom ceannaireacht an pháirtí a ghlacadh thug mé le fios go raibh sé ar intinn agam próiseas comhairliúcháin lenár bhfaoireann rialtais áitiúil a chur ar bun maidir le gnéithe sainiúla a bhaineann le forbairt eagraíochta agus ghairmiúil.

Scríobhadh an tuairisc roimh an toghchán i mí Bealtaine agus cuirfear i bhfeidhm é le linn na tréimhse Comhairle seo chugainn. Táimid tiomanta do ról fíorthábhachtach atá ag na Comhairleoirí a thacú agus a fheabhsú mar aon leis na suíocháin a chailleamar a bhaint ar ais fhad is atá muid ag déanamh an athrú do phobail i rialtas áitiúil.

Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a chur in iúl dár gcomhairleoirí uilig as páirt a ghlacadh sa chomhairliúchán agus do Shinéad Ní Bhroin as an togra a stiúradh.

**Mary Lou McDonald TD**

Uachtarán Shinn Féin

## 3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On taking up the leadership of Sinn Féin Teachta Dála Mary Lou McDonald announced the establishment of a process of engagement with the party's local government team on key areas of organisational and professional development.

All Councillors were consulted locally onsite and through a supplementary online survey in matters relating to communications, professional training and wellbeing and internal organisational support.

This report is a working document, and the implementation of its recommendations will advance our organisational and political goals from the outset of the new council term.

Significant work has been undertaken in recent years by the office of the Ard Runaí to strengthen the organisational capacity of Sinn Féin's structures in tandem with ongoing initiatives referred to throughout this document. Our Councillors active participation in their local party structures is and will continue to be critical to their success.

The following are the recommendations arising from the consultation process. They are presented in the order in which they appear in the document.

An implementation mechanism is included in this report through the use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Two representatives to be elected by Councillors to the Ard Chomhairle.
2. A representative of the local elected Councillors to have full ex-officio status on each Comhairle Ceantair Officer Board.
3. Roll out training for Councillors on party structures and procedures including our charter of ethics, how the party's complaint process works and how to engage with it.
4. An Ard Rúnaí to convene a representative meeting of Councillors from each Cúige area not less than one month after the conclusion of both local election contests (i.e. on or before the 24 June) to draft a proposal for the Forum's functions and structures to be circulated to all Council group leaders for consideration/amendment by groups and for final approval of the Ard Chomhairle at its September meeting, after which the Forum will be established and the AGM will be held. If agreement is not reached by either the representative meeting or the council groups the deadline for final approval by the Ard Chomhairle may be extended by a period no longer than three months.
5. Appoint a Council Co-ordinator to each of the south's Cúige.
6. Council group leaders to ensure council management (Chief Executive/Service Director) have an appropriate induction programme in place for new Councillors.



7. The party to develop an induction booklet for new Councillors.
8. Formalise a mentoring programme for new Councillors.
9. Have in place a tailored online training programme for local government candidates and new Councillors in advance of the 2024 local elections.
10. Develop a biennial half-day media training programme to include print, broadcast and social media to be delivered through the Cuige structure.
11. Develop an annual half-day policy workshop in consultation with Councillors to be delivered through the Cuige structure.
12. Develop and maintain a Councillors intranet in consultation with a working group of Councillors geographically representative of the all-island team.
13. Develop and implement a procedure for dealing with Councillors requests for assistance from Leinster House offices.
14. Develop and implement a procedure for circulating relevant legislative, policy and political information to Councillors.
15. Formalise a local government working group comprised of institutional local government spokespersons and Councillors from a representative geographic spread to meet bi-annually for the purpose of providing legislative and policy expertise and planned support to the wider council team.
16. Incorporate a one day event for Councillors into the party's annual schedule of national events to include participation by institutional representatives and their support staff.
17. Group leaders to consult with their respective council team to prepare and draft professional training, educational, mental health and well-being needs for submission to council management.
18. Council groups to submit formal request for mental health supports, to include a helpline and counselling, to be provided by their respective council where not already in place.
19. Group leaders to consult with their respective council team to assess, prepare and draft a communications training needs request for submission to council management.
20. Group leaders (south) to collectively consider and combine their respective councils training needs for submission to the AILG and LAMA Executive Committees for consideration by both organisations when preparing annual work programmes.
21. Local government spokesperson through the Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government to undertake a comparative study of the professional training, educational and wellbeing supports provided to elected members of local authorities by their respective councils and local authority representative bodies.



## 3 ACHOIMRE FEIDHMEACH

Tar éid di ceannaireacht Shinn Féin a ghlacadh d'fhógair Mary Lou McDonald próiseas comhairliúcháin lenár bhfaoireann rialtais áitiúil a chur ar bun maidir le gnéithe sainiúla a bhaineann le forbairt eagraíochta agus ghairmiúil.

Chuathas i gcomhairle le comhairleoirí ar an láthair sna ceantair agus trí shuirbhé forlfontach ar líne a bhain le cúrsaí cumarsáide, oiliúnt ghairmiúil sláinte agus tacaíocht eagraíochta inmheánaí.

Is doiciméad oibre é seo a chuirfear i bhfeidhm le súil ar na spriocanna polaitiúla is eagraíochta a chur chun cinn ó fhíorthosach an téarma comhairle nua.

Tá obair nach beag curtha I gcrích ag oifig an Ard Rúnaí le blianta beaga anuas chun acmhainn eagraíochta Shinn Féin a láidriú mar aon le tograí eile dá dtagraítear sa doiciméad seo. Tá, agus beidh amach ó seo, comhpháirtíocht ghníomhúil onár gcomhairleoirí an-tábhachtach maidir le seo.

Seo na moltaí a d'eirigh as an bpróiseas comhairliúcháin Cuirtear I láthair iad se réir an oird a leagtar amach sa doiciméad iad.

Cuirtear córas feidhmithe san áireamh leis an tuairisc seo trí úsáid a bhaint as.

### Moltaí

1. Beirt ionadaithe le toghadh ag comhairleoirí chuig an Ard Chomhairle.
2. Lán-stádas ex officio bheith ag ionadái de chuid na gcomhairleoirí áitiúla tofa ar gach aon Bord Oifigeach Comhairle Ceantair.
3. Oiliúint do chomhairleoirí a leathadh amach, maidir le struchtúir an pháirtí lena n-áirítear an cairt eiticí atá againn, conas a oibríonn nós imeachta an pháirtí chun gearán a dhéanamh agus conas é a úsáid.
4. Go ngairmeoidh an tArd Rúnaí cruinniú ionadaíocht de chomhairleoirí ó gach ceantar Cúige tráth nach luaithe ná mí tar éis an dá thoghchán áitiúla (an 24 Meitheamh nó roimhe) chun clár a dhréachtú maidir le feidhmeanna agus struchtúir an fhórait. Cuirfear an clár seo chuig ceannairí grúpa ar na Comhairlí le go ndéanfar na grúpaí é a mheas/leasú agus go gcuirfear ar aghaidh chuig an Ard Chomhairle ag a chruinniú I mí Mheán Fómhair chun é a ghlacadh ina iomlán. Ina dhiaidh seo cuirfear an Fóram ar bun agus reacgháilfear an Cruinniú Cinn Bliana. Más rud é nach dtiocfar ar chomhréitiú ag an gcruinniú ionadaíoch nó ag na grúpaí ar na comhairlí, féadfar síneadh nach faide ná trí mhí a chur leis an spriocdháta le haghaidh faomadh an Ard Chomhairle.
5. Co-ordnaitheoir Comhairle a cheapadh i ngach Cúige ó dheas.
6. Ceannairí grúpa ar na Comhairlí le cinntiú go gcuirfidh bainistíocht an chomhairle (Príomhfheidhmeanach/Stiúrthóir Seirbhísí) clár ionduchtúcháin chuí do chomhairleoirí nua.
7. Go bhforbóidh an páirtí leabhrán ionduchtúcháin do chomhairleoirí nua.



8. Clár meantóireachta do chomhairleoirí nua a chur ar bonn foirmiúil.
9. Go mbeidh clár oiliúna saincheaptha ar líne ann d'iarrathóirí railtais áitiúil agus do chomhairleoirí nua roimh thoghcháin áitiúla 2024.
10. Clár oiliúna leathlae débhlantúil a fhorbairt lena n-áirítear na meáin chlóite, chraoltóireachta agus shóisialta a sheac trí struchtúir an Chúige.
11. Saotharlann leathlae polasaí in aghaidh na bliana a fhorbairt i gcomhairliúchán ;le comhairleoirí trí struchtúir an Chúige.
12. Inlíon do chomhairleoirí a fhorbairt agus a chaomhnú i gcomhairle le comhairleoirí atá ionadaíoch de gach ceantar den fhoireann uile-Éireann.
13. Nós imeachta a fhorbairt maidir le hiarratais ó chomhairleoirí ar chuidiú ó ofigí I dTeach Laighean.
14. Nós imeachta a fhorbairt agus a chur i bhfeidh maidir le heolas cuí reachtaíochta, polasaí agus polaitíochta a chur ar fáil do chomhairleoirí.
15. Grúpa oibre um rialtas áitiúil a chur ar bonn foirmiúil arb é a bheidh ann urlabhraithe institiúidí rialtais áitiúil agus comhairleoirí ó dáileadh tíreolaíoch atá ionadaíoch a thiocfaidh le chéile go débhlantúil chun saineolais reachtaíochta agus polasí agus tacaíocht bheartaithe a chur ar fáil don fhoireann chomhairle ina iomlán.
16. Imeacht aonlae do chomhairleoirí a chur le sceideal bliantúil na n-imeachtaí náisiúnbnta atá ag an bpáirtí a mbeidh ionadaithe institiúidí agus a bhfoireann taca páirteach ann.
17. Go rachaidh ceannairí grúpa I gcomhairle lena bhfoireann comhairle féin chun riachtainais a ullmhú agus a dhréachtú a bhaineann le oiliúnint ghairmiúil, oideachas, meabhairshláinte agus sláinte chun cur faoi bhraid bhaintistíocht an Chomhairle.
18. Go gcuirfidh Grúpaí Comhairle iarratas foirmiúil art aca meabhairshláinta, lena n-áirítear líne cúnaimh agus comhairleoireacht a chuirfidh an comhairle áitiúil lena mbaineann ar fáil mura bhfuil a leithéid ann cheana.
19. Go rachaidh ceannairí grúpa i gcomhairle lena bhfoireann comhairle féin chun iarratas ar riachtanais chumarsáide a mheas, a ullmhú agus a dhréachtú agus a chuirfear faoi bhráid bhainistíocht an Chomhairle.
20. Go ndéanfaidh Na ceannairí grúpa (ó Dheas) na riachtanais oiliúna a bhaineann lena gcomhairle féin a chomheas agus a chomhnascadh le cur faoi bhráid Coistí Feidhmeanaís AILG agus LAMA chun iad a mheas agus an dá eagraí ag ullmhú cláracha oibre bliantúla.
21. Go dtabharfaidh an urlabhraí ar Rialtas Áitiúil, tríd an gCoiste um Thithíocht, Pleanáil agus Rialtas Áitiúil, faoi staidéar comparáide maidir leis na tacaí oiliúna, oideachais agus sláinte a chuirtear ar fáil do bhaill thofa ar údaráís áitiúla, ag na comhairlí agus comhlachtaí ionadaíocha údaráís áitiúil lena mbaineann.





## 4 PROJECT METHODOLOGY

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, 2018 Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald TD launched a process to formally consult with Sinn Féin Councillors across the island to inform recommendations in the areas of communications, professional training and wellbeing and organisational development. The outcomes from the consultation process will be the advancement of an enhanced professional approach to preparations for the new council term following the recent local elections.

A project lead was appointed and a project plan and process was developed and presented to An Ard Comhairle in April 2019 and to the north's Council Strategy Away Day held in Belfast on the 19th of May, 2019.

At the time of the consultations Sinn Féin had 243 Councillors elected to 9 of the 11 'super' councils in the north and 30 of the 31 local authorities in the south. We had no representation on Longford County Council, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council and Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Where we have multiple seats on a council a group leader is appointed.

Project outputs included a progress report submitted to the party leader at the end of each of the four phases of the project and a final report with recommendations.

The project was broken into four phases for the purpose of ongoing evaluation of the consultation process by the project lead. The first phase was treated as a pilot with six councils selected to include a representative geographic spread with urban and rural representation again for the purpose of methodology evaluation and refining the consultation questionnaire and online survey.

An onsite consultation took place with each of the Sinn Féin council groups before which standardised discussion points were circulated to Councillors by email for the purpose of preparation. A supplementary online survey was circulated to all Councillors following the consultation. Both can be found in the appendix.

Supplementary information was garnered from the Chief Executive and Service Director of each council relating to the training, educational and mental health and wellbeing supports offered to Councillors by the council and/or related third parties. Information was also provided on request from local government representative bodies, from relevant legislation and associated regulations and Sinn Féin Head Office. Interviews were conducted with Cuige Chairs and party management north and south.

A project briefing note was also prepared for the party's organisers.

After initial communications were issued outlining the project objectives and process consultations were arranged through the council group leaders and onsite interviews



were conducted with each council group team. 78 per cent of Councillors attended their consultation and 80 per cent completed the online survey. Project updates were provided to Councillors via email at the end of each phase. GDPR guidelines were followed throughout this process.

Project outcomes will be the advancement of professional supports for Councillors with improved internal linkages institutionally as well as internally and enhanced professionalising of the party at local government level.

Consultations took place at the following locations on the following dates.

	DATE	COUNCIL	LOCATION	
PHASE 1	10 May	Limerick City & County Council	Limerick city	
	12 May	Mid Ulster District Council	Gulladuff	
	14 May	Dublin City Council	Dublin city	
	16 May	Wicklow County Council	Bray	
	17 May	Louth County Council	Dundalk	
	24 May	Belfast City Council	Belfast	
PHASE 2	18 June	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	Dungiven	
	19 June	Mayo County Council	Castlebar	
	19 June	Roscommon County Council	Roscommon town	
	20 June	Derry City and Strabane District Council	Derry	
	27 June	Carlow County Council	Carlow town	
	28 June	Fingal County Council	Swords	
	29 June	Kerry County Council	Moyderwell	
	30 June	Cork City Council	Cork city	
	2 July	Waterford City and County Council	Waterford City	
	3 July	Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	Omagh	
	9 July	Cork County Council	Cork city	
	10 July	Mid and East Antrim Borough Council	Belfast	
	PHASE 3	5 Sep	Monaghan County Council	Monaghan town
		5 Sep	Sligo County Council	Carrick-on-Shannon
5 Sep		Leitrim County Council	Carrick-on-Shannon	
7 Sep		Cavan County Council	Cavan town	
10 Sep		South Dublin County Council	Tallaght	
14 Sep		Donegal County Council	Letterkenny	
17 Sep		Kilkenny County Council	Kilkenny	
18 Sep		Kildare County Council	Naas	
22 Sep		Meath County Council	Navan	
25 Sep		Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	Antrim town	
26 Sep		Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	Warrenpoint	
27 Sep		Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	Craigavon	
PHASE 4		16 Oct	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	Dún Laoghaire
	20 Oct	Galway City Council	Galway city	
	20 Oct	Clare County Council	Shannon	
	22 Oct	Galway County Council	Galway city	
	23 Oct	Laois County Council	Portlaoise	
	1 Nov	Wexford County Council	Enniscorthy	
	3 Nov	Tipperary County Council	Thurles	
	12 Nov	Westmeath County Council	Mullingar	
	19 Nov	Offaly County Council	Tullamore	

This report was presented to the Ard Comhairle on the 9 March 2019.





## **5** COMMUNICATIONS

### *5.1 Party structures*

A series of standardised questions were put to Councillors at the onsite consultation and in the online survey to determine their engagement with Sinn Féin's organisational structures, specifically the Comhairle Ceantair and Cuige and the relevancy of these structures to their work.

#### *Sinn Féin Constitution*

Sinn Féin's constitution determines the organisational structure of the party. The governing body is the Ard Fheis. The Ard Chomhairle is the national leadership body providing direction and governance. Its members are comprised of the National Officer Board and 12 other members with both groups elected by the Ard Fheis. National Officer Board positions include An t-Uachtarán, Leas-Uachtarán, An tArd Rúnaí, two Cisteoirí and Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí.

#### *Ard Chomhairle*

Membership of the Ard Chomhairle also includes elected Comhairle Cúige representatives, one representative each from the Parliamentary Group's north and south, two representatives of the Fóram Náisiúnta na gComhairleoirí, Ógra Shinn Féin. The Ard Chomhairle can co-opt eight members for specific posts and can make additional co-options to ensure that not less than 40 per cent of An Ard Chomhairle positions are held by women and similarly not less than 40 per cent held by men.

#### *Cúige*

Comhairlí Cúige are established on a regional basis which is currently determined by the island's European Union Parliament constituencies and each have charge of all cumainn and Comhairlí Ceantair in their area. The Cúige Officer Board is the regional strategic hub of the organisation and has the function of overseeing, directing and co-ordinating its affairs within its region. The Cúige is subject to the Ard Chomhairle on all matters

#### *Comhairle Ceantair*

The Comhairle Ceantair Officer Board is the local strategic hub of the organisation and has the function of overseeing, directing and co-ordinating its affairs within its area. The Comhairle Ceantair is subject to the Ard Chomhairle through the Comhairle Cúige on all matters.

Officer Board members of Cúige and Comhairle Ceantair include Sinn Féin public representatives and party members.



### *Organisational development*

After the Ard Fheis a document setting out Sinn Féin's structures and organisation is circulated to all members. It provides an over view of the party's national structures, the roles and responsibilities of the National Officer Board, contact information and an organisational chart.

The party is currently undertaking a review of party structures with four counties selected for a pilot scheme. The pilot scheme includes, amongst other things, a schedule of training for Comhairle Ceantair Officer Boards on their roles and responsibilities and the establishment of best practice in regards to communication and administration. The outcomes from this report will complement the work of this review.

### *Consultation findings*

The consultation found that Councillors are supportive of the Cúige and Comhairle Ceantair (CC) structures with a significant majority stating their importance to the party's political and organisational cohesion. However, the relevancy of both to their work varies and this is particularly the case with the Cúige. 77 per cent of Councillors described their CC as relevant or somewhat relevant to their work and 61 per cent found their Cuige relevant and somewhat relevant.

The reduction of the norths councils from 26 to 11 in 2014 has presented an organisational challenge to some council groups as multiple CC now operate within council areas. Chairs of CC's operating within a single council area will need to work together to ensure they are providing consistent guidance and instruction to their respective Councillors.

The party constitution provides for the appointment of a representative of the local elected Councillors (and one parliamentary representative for the area where applicable) to their Comhairle Ceantair. This demonstrates the integrated nature of Councillors relationship with the party's structures. Linkages and reporting mechanisms are not consistent across the south's councils. In the north they are generally formalised and functioning.

Each elected member is bound by the general membership rules of the party organisation, the ethics in public office pledge and party policy as agreed by the Ard Fheis and the Ard Chomhairle.

Sinn Féin elected representatives share common beliefs, values and goals and are united in advancing our policies and their implementation to achieve the required political impact.

General discipline is applied within the respective council groups. Discipline in council voting is maintained by the Sinn Féin council group leader.

If an elected representative fails to follow party directions in relation to minor misconducts it is the group leader's role to deal with it.





Where the Sinn Féin business committee sees regular or repeat misconduct by an elected representative, they may refer this to the party's committee with responsibility for investigating such misconduct, at which point sanctions may be applied as per ordinary disciplinary procedures. These may vary depending on the seriousness and level of any breach.

### *Complaints*

A handful of Councillors raised issues relating to interpersonal conflict in their local areas. The party has developed a robust process to deal with complaints and extensive training has been rolled out among party structures in relation to it. Awareness needs to be enhanced amongst our Councillors of these procedures. It is important that this training is replicated among our council teams so that they are aware how the process operates and how to engage with it.

All complaints shall be made to Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí who shall, in the ordinary course, pass complaints to the Chair of the Committee for processing. There is also an option to resolve issues through mediation before a formal complaint is made if this is appropriate and it is agreed by both the respondent and the complainant.

Councillors' engagement with the party structures is vital to political cohesion and delivering on our objectives. Councillors must see themselves as leadership figures in their communities, their Councils and within the party structures. In turn the party must recognise and value their leadership and commitment to advancing our goals at a local level. This recognition should be tangible. The Cuige and Comhairle Ceantair structures have played an important and often undervalued role during the party's development amidst the organisational, political and institutional challenges of partition. Arguably our structures are even more relevant today as party membership and institutional representation continues to grow.

### *RECOMMENDATIONS*

1. Two representatives to be elected by Councillors to the Ard Chomairle
2. A representative of the local elected Councillors to have full ex-officio status on each Comhairle Ceantair Officer Board
3. Roll out training for Councillors on party structures and procedures including our charter of ethics, how the party's complaint process works and how to engage with it

## 5.2 The National Councillors' Forum

Sinn Féin's constitution provides for a dedicated body in the National Councillors Forum for Sinn Féin Councillors from across the island.

The constitution provides that the forum shall elect an officer board consisting of Cathaoirleach, Leas-Chathaoirleach and Rúnaí to preside over its functions and structures and to co-ordinate its functions under the direction of An Ard Rúnaí; meet regularly as directed by An Ard Rúnaí; hold an AGM to elect an officer board and to nominate two representatives to An Ard Chomhairle and to select delegates to An Ard Fheis.

82 per cent of Councillors who took part in the consultation believe there is a value to re-establishing the Councillors Forum. Groups understand the political and organisational value of the Forum in theory but fear it will become a talking shop with little relevancy to their work. Others viewed it as just another meeting that Councillors have to attend. In the round support for the Forum was lukewarm.

There are significantly differing views regarding the purpose of Forum, how often it should meet, where it should meet and the matters it should deal with. A delegate system was suggested, as were policy specific or regional subgroups with an annual meeting of the national forum. With regards to the regularity of the meetings of the Forum monthly, quarterly and bi-annual were all suggested.

Preparation of local election manifestos, workshops on relevant shared areas of responsibility such as annual budget preparation, local infrastructure and planning and an all-island mechanism to imbed shared political institutional goals were just some of the proposals for the Forum's work programme.

Knowledge transfer, networking and relationship building across the all island team and creating a space to support new Councillors were noted as benefits to the Forum's reestablishment.

### *RECOMMENDATION*

4. An Ard Rúnaí to convene a representative meeting of Councillors from each Cúige area not less than one month after the conclusion of both local election contests (i.e. on or before the 24<sup>th</sup> of June) to draft a proposal for the Forum's functions and structures to be circulated to all Council group leaders for consideration/amendment by Groups and for final approval of the Ard Chomhairle at its September meeting, after which the Forum will be established and the AGM will be held. If agreement is not reached by either the representative meeting or the Council Groups the deadline for final approval by the Ard Chomhairle may be extended by a period no longer than three months



### 5.3 Strategic support

Positive references were made by Councillors in the north to the strategic work undertaken by council group leaders. This work has culminated in the appointment of a Council Coordinator and the establishment of a Council Hub.

Deputy leader Michelle O'Neill MLA initiated an engagement with all Council areas across the north which concluded with a Councillor Conference in May of last year. From the conference a draft strategy was prepared which included the development of the Council Hub. The Hubs membership includes council group leaders and representation from the Cuige, Assembly, Directorate and policy department. The Hub will provide greater cohesion and an enhanced strategic approach across the north's Council team.

There are valuable lessons to be learnt from the establishment of the Council Hub and the appointment of a Councillor to the role of Council Co-ordinator in the north, specifically in terms of strategic purpose. The Council Co-ordinator with the support of a small core group drives the work programme of the hub organisationally, politically and regarding to policy development. A similar structure and strategy should be considered for the south.

If the Forum was re-established before first securing a broad consensus amongst Councillors on its functions and structures it could quickly become irrelevant to a significant cohort of Councillors and Council groups across the island. Consideration will also need to be given to the Council Hub in the north to ensure the Forum's work compliments it and the party's broader ten year strategy.

#### *RECOMMENDATION*

5. Appoint a Council Co-ordinator to each of the south's Cuige

### 5.4 Internal training supports

The provision of training related to the statutory functions of Councillors is the responsibility of the local authorities and representative bodies to deliver as outlined in the local government regulations 2014-2017. However in addition to their statutory and community duties Councillors have a responsibility to the party and to the development of their local organisation. This responsibility requires support from the party centrally and this need has been acknowledged by party management and the party leadership.

The vast majority of Councillors who took part in the consultation did not feel they were adequately informed of the role of a Councillor in advance of their first election. Similarly they did not feel they were adequately informed of their role and responsibility to the party once elected. Many noted that their understanding of these roles and responsibilities arose informally from their activism, working alongside existing elected representatives or previous employment with the party. Some felt they were not adequately prepared for the multiplicity



of elected representative work. A significant number voiced the opinion that elected representative work can only be fully 'learnt on the job'.

Following their election new Councillors relied heavily on their Council colleagues. In a handful of instances newly elected members did not have an existing support to draw on and as a result their experience as first time Councillors was unduly challenging. In a small number of isolated cases there were Councillors whose experience within an experienced team was not in the round a positive one. In some instances this was due to inexperience and the challenges of balancing a secondary employment, family and the various demands of council work. In others the negative experience arose from Councillors not adequately drawing on the organisational structural supports or the structures not adequately supporting them. Whilst the percentage of Councillors I am referring amount to less than 4 per cent of the overall team, there are important organisational lessons to be learnt from their experience.

92 per cent of Councillors felt the provision of training on the role and responsibilities of a Sinn Féin Councillor would have improved their experience as a first time Councillor and 100 per cent supported the provision of a formalised mentoring programme for first time Councillors.

Work in underway by party management in the area of training across the party structures. As part of the party's ten year strategy a skills training programme for three sections of the party, members, activists and leadership, will be rolled out in structured format over the next decade. The training programme is based on core skills which will be developed over time and are based on strategy, elections, campaigns and gaeilge.

Overall there are two distinct and tailored training strands. The first is training for party members and elected representatives in general and those specific roles, the second is for activists.

The programme consists of 5 levels which identify an aspect of political management and party organisation to establish a base and then expands and develops knowledge on that topic. Initially members will slot into the training that they need to do their role. In addition to the above, all the 5 levels will have specific elected representatives training aimed at prospective candidates, Councillors and national elected representatives. Other strands of training within the plan will also have aspects of benefit to elected representatives.

This is an important development within the organisational advancement of the party as many of our local election candidates come from the party's activist base. There are additional specific training supports the party should take to compliment this broad and cohesive training approach for Councillors. A standardised online training programme would be a valuable support for candidates and first time Councillors. Large organisations use such programmes to ensure a consistency of application on standard areas of training applicable to their staff. These courses also provide flexibility in delivery recognising that the various demands of people's lives often preclude them from taking part in traditional onsite training.





---

A number of Councillors made reference to media training and policy workshops previously provided by the party. Whilst communications training is the responsibility of local authorities to deliver in the first instance, it is clear that Councillors would receive a benefit from an internal training event that deals specifically with their needs as Sinn Féin representatives

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

6. Council group leaders to ensure Council management (Chief Executive/Service Director) have an appropriate induction programme in place for new Councillors
7. The party to develop an induction booklet for new Councillors
8. Formalise a mentoring programme for new Councillors
9. Have in place a tailored online training programme for local government candidates and new Councillors in advance of the 2024 local elections
10. Develop a biennial half-day media training programme to include print, broadcast and social media to be delivered through the Cuige structure
11. Develop an annual half day policy workshop in consultation with Councillors to be delivered through the Cuige structure

### **5.5 Councillors' intranet**

The office of the Ard Rúnaí has developed an extensive online dashboard (intranet) for Comhairlí Ceantair Chairs and Runaí. This is a helpful tool that was referred to positively during the consultation. The dashboard also includes a description of Chairs and Ard Runaí functions, job descriptions and provides training for them to fulfil their duties. This initiative will be replicated for cumann Chairs and Runaí later this year.

97 per cent of Councillors agreed that the provision of an online intranet type tool would support them in their work. In exploring the viability and value of this tool Councillors were asked to provide examples of the information it would be useful for them to access online. There was a broad consensus amongst groups that easy access to council motions, Ard Fheis motions, party policy and position papers, political briefings, party guidelines/policies/procedures, internal and institutional list of contacts, links to websites and legislation relevant to their work would be helpful. An effective and user friendly search function was requested.

At various stages during the group consultations the need for a Councillor specific resource was raised. Some raised it in the context of institutional support, others during the discussion on the Councillors Forum or as a general observation during the process. The function of the resource requested was primarily one of providing information as and when Councillors need it.



Improving institutional responses to requests for support and information (see point 5.6) will address in part the resource gap identified during the consultation. However it is clear that a supplementary support is needed to meet the needs expressed.

As with all political elected representatives Councillors work outside of typical working hours often in the evenings and weekends. Much of the support they need is information related, information that is already available across different platforms that they are not always familiar with or have access to.

The creation of a password protected online intranet would provide Councillors with the information they need to access on a regular basis and a forum to engage with one another on matters relevant to their work. This will require a monetary investment in its creation and also a resource to ensure it is updated regularly. A review mechanism will need to be incorporated into the maintenance cycle of the intranet to ensure its structure and content remains relevant and that resources directed to its updating are being used effectively and efficiently. Such a review could be conducted through an online survey for example.

### RECOMMENDATION

12. Develop and maintain a Councillors intranet in consultation with a working group of Councillors geographically representative of the all-island team

### 5.6 Working with our representatives in the political institutions

Sinn Féin currently has 21 T.D.s, six Senators, 27 MLAs and seven MPs. Our national elected representatives and their offices are an important source of informal support for the party's Councillors. Productive working relationships between Councillors and these offices are of great benefit to the party and to the communities they represent.

When asked 68 per cent of Councillors stated that they seek regular assistance from the offices of the party's frontbench spokespersons. In the north the experience is generally positive, however for Councillors in the south without a TD in their local area or when contacting a TDs office with whom they don't usually request information from a significant minority of Councillors relayed a mixed experience. It was notable throughout the consultation that a small number of Leinster House offices were referred to in exceptionally positive terms by Councillors.

Councillors are not adequately benefiting from the legislative, policy and political outputs from offices in Leinster House relevant to their work locally or on the Council. A similar challenge was identified in the north with regards to policy related supports and work is ongoing between the Council Co-ordinator and the Council Hub to address these concerns.

There is a need for a formalised procedure in Leinster House to respond to requests from our Councillors for assistance or information. As political and community leaders Councillors





require this support to enable them fulfil their internal and external duties to the best of their ability. Consideration should be given to Senators, working with the Leinster House management, taking a more proactive role in disseminating relevant information to Councillors.

### *RECOMMENDATIONS*

13. Develop and implement a procedure for dealing with Councillors requests for assistance from Leinster House offices
14. Develop and implement a procedure for circulating relevant legislative, policy and political information to Councillors
15. Formalise a local government working group comprised of institutional local government spokespersons and Councillors from a representative geographic spread to meet bi-annually for the purpose of providing legislative and policy expertise and planned support to the wider Council team
16. Incorporate a one day event for Councillors into the party's annual schedule of national events to include participation by institutional representatives and their support staff



## **6** PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND WELLBEING

### 6.1 Councils

In the south local authorities are required under local government regulations to adopt a Training and Development Programme for Councillors for the purpose of ‘adopting a more structured approach to supporting the development needs of Councillors so that they can discharge their duties as effectively as possible.’

In reply to a Parliamentary Question (PQ 8328/19) the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government confirmed that he has issued directions to local authorities stating that training and development programmes should have regard, amongst other things, to key policy issues facing elected members, the profile and experience of elected members and the likely resources that will be available to meet training needs.

However as noted by the Minister local authorities are independent statutory bodies therefore it is a matter for each local authority to prepare and adopt its own training and development programme for elected members and to assess this as necessary. This ‘hands off approach’ taken by the Minister and reflected in the regulations has the effect of an inconsistent approach by Council management in the south to their responsibilities in this area.

Local government regulations also set out the courses for which expenses for attendance may be paid to Councillors. These include training events provided by the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG), the Local Authorities Members Association (LAMA) as well as national representative bodies relevant to the functions of local authorities for example the Irish Planning Institute and relevant accredited courses.

In May 2014 the former Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government announced that he had introduced the most radical reform of local government in over 100 years. New governance arrangements meant that elected councils now had greater policy development powers and stronger oversight of the implementation of policy by the executive which will be subject to more rigorous performance and reporting requirements.

Acknowledging the scale of these new responsibilities the former Minister stated that a key element of the reform programme would be to ensure that Councillors have the necessary training enabling them to fulfil this wider role. As the current Minister acknowledged in his recent PQ reply no analysis has been undertaken by the Department to measure the outputs or outcomes of this commitment or indeed if they were in fact delivered.

The majority of Councils north and south circulate a training needs assessment (some on an annual basis) to Councillors. During the consultation Council groups were asked to provide details of the training they had requested from their respective Council management or local authority bodies. A minimal amount of training has been requested and groups are not



collectively considering or prioritising their training needs. Just 38 per cent of respondents to the online survey had attended Council provided training.

Anecdotally there are a number of reasons why this is the case. Balancing demands is a constant challenge for Councillors particularly for those who are employed elsewhere, are self-employed or have caring duties. Many feel they simply do not have time to attend training in addition to their Council, community and party duties. Training is often held during the day which again for those working a second job or with caring responsibilities poses a challenge for them. The quality or relevance of training provided was also raised.

As noted many local authorities in the south take a ‘hands off’ approach to the provision of training. Due to local government regulations authorities view this provision as the responsibility of the AILG in the first instance and LAMA to deliver through the conference or seminar mechanism. In these instances professional development provided directly by Councils is often limited. Others work to provide a greater proportion of in house training on relevant administrative and policy areas. These Councils are to be commended for this work.

Approximately one in five Sinn Féin Councillors have attended gender or diversity training delivered by their Council, local government representative body or another third part supplier. There is a need for greater provision and participation in such training to prepare Councillors for the changing communities they represent.

## 6.2 Local government representative bodies

The provision of professional training in the north is notably more structured and targeted. Professional standards and attainment are actively sought by Council management working the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA). All Councils in the north have met or are close to meeting the Elected Member Development Charter Standard, a national standard of excellence award for local authorities across the north, Britain, Scotland and Wales.

Significantly more training is delivered directly by Councils in the north and in partnership with NILGA when compared to their southern counterparts.

NILGA has developed a successful partnership approach with the norths 11 super Councils through its Regional Elected Member Development Working Group. This group has a work plan and terms of reference. The working group has co-designed and overseen the NILGA Regional Programme of Learning and Development for Elected Members and secured a commitment from the publicly funded Local Government Training Group to 50 per cent fund the Programme.

AILG and LAMA have a significantly different remit to NILGA (so are not easily comparable).





Both have a specific regulatory function to provide training related events to elected members. Whereas NILGA's organisational functions are broader, for example they include national pay, performance and pay regulations negotiation and guidance, for example on a review of the Pay Spine for council workers and the National Living Wage adherence.

Local government in the north is not as dependent on central government. As a result NILGA is more formally involved in designing and delivering policy guidance to Councils as well as performance improvement, shared services and other learning networks.

95 per cent of NILGA's funding comes from member council subscriptions which are determined by the population size of each Council. The organisation employs 10 people. AILG is funded by member subscriptions however the same rate is applied to all Councils and they have two members of staff.

41 per cent of Councillors who responded to the online survey have attended at professional training/seminars provided by NILGA, AILG or LAMA over the last two years. The feedback from Councillors regarding the relevancy and quality of training and seminars provided by AILG and LAMA was mixed. Councillors noted the networking opportunity these seminars offer our Councillors from across the country.

AILG include a wide range of inputs to their training and seminars including from government departments, local authority officials, various state agencies, outside expertise and their own Council members. AILG have noted the value of providing first-hand engagement with senior officials for Councillors and this view was shared by some Councillors during the consultation.

There are a number of specific areas of training Council groups believe they would benefit from including finance, the annual budgetary process, housing and planning.

### *Accredited education*

Councillors across the island have access to accredited educational opportunities, and a number of Sinn Féin's Councillors have successfully completed courses relevant to their statutory responsibilities in the areas of planning, leadership, local Government, community development and mediation.

Councillors in the south can attend relevant accredited courses provided by the Institute of Public Administration and the Irish Planning Institute with the costs offset by the local authority in part or full as provided for in the Local Government Regulations 2014 – 2017.

Last year NILGA began delivery of an eight module ILM accredited Local Planning Programme for elected members in the north, and a six module accredited Councillor Leadership Programme. This was the first time such provision was made available to Councillors in the north. Costs were provided for through NILGA and Council from training and development budgets.





Promotion of accredited training and educational opportunities is not only important to advance the skills sets and capacity of existing Councillors. These opportunities could act as an incentive to encourage a greater diversity of local government candidates particularly for younger people or those from disadvantaged backgrounds and individuals from new communities.

### *Workplace mental health and wellbeing*

Of the 35 Councils who responded 15 extend mental health services to their Councillors. Supports include confidential helplines and face to face Counselling mostly through professional third party suppliers, with some providing through Employee Assistance Programmes.

Of the respondents just 3 provide direct mental health services as well as workplace mental health awareness and wellbeing supports. Some provide workplace awareness of mental health through training or events. Others transfer the responsibility to local representative bodies to deliver related 'training' and a very small number of Councils take no responsibility at all for the provision of these workplace supports typically provided to other public sector employees or elected representatives.

There is an increasing expectation on large employers to provide free confidential counselling services. Such services are provided for staff members across various strands of the public sector north and south, including in the Oireachtas for members and their staff.

Those Councils who provide such services are to be commended. One in four people will experience a mental health problem in their lives. Councillors carry an extra burden of working with and supporting individuals and communities through very stressful or distressing circumstances such as suicide, domestic violence and homelessness. Not only do they require training in how to manage such situations professionally they also need support to look after their own mental health.

Workplace health and wellbeing programmes take different forms. The purpose of such programmes is to improve and maintain healthy physical and mental lives. Organisations increasingly recognise that healthy happy employees perform better.

Programmes where provided take many different forms in the public and private sectors across the island. Some provide seminars for staff on healthy eating, exercise and managing stress or organise wellbeing activities such as yoga or mindfulness. Others provide access to or subsidise various types of health checks provided on site by a third party supplier. Such supports can simply take the form of posters and leaflets in the workplace with signposts for staff who want to find out more.

Provision of direct mental health and wellbeing supports to staff and elected members is an acknowledgment by Council management of their responsibilities to their staff and the regard they hold them in. That some provide these services demonstrates that there is a need





for such services and the Council has the ability to provide them.

It is the responsibility of Council management, local government representative bodies and the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government through the Local Government Regulations 2014-2017 to provide the necessary professional training and educational supports for Councillors to enable them to better deliver on their statutory and governance duties. Building the capacity of elected members in a supportive working environment will increase their productivity, continue to professionalise local government and enhance democracy within our communities.

### 6.3 External communications

During the consultation Councillors were asked what actions were necessary to improve their relationships with local media for the purpose of increasing their coverage. The online survey included a number of specific questions relating to their media related outputs. A majority of Councillors write and issue their own press statements, and a third have a local press officer or person to support them in this work.

A majority regularly engage with their local journalists or radio producers and half view their local coverage as regular. Media training previously provided by the party was referred to in very positive terms. It is clear for a small number of Councillors capacity, capability or confidence remain a challenge in their media work. The provision of media training to include social media engagement and its appropriate use would be of benefit to the wider Council team. Some Councils have provided media training but the feedback from Councillors is that it can be basic and introductory in nature. Strong communication skills are required in the political sphere of work and are accepted as a core strand of a public representative's work.

For many local government members the communications environment has significantly changed over the lifetime of their political careers. Councils should take a more proactive role in providing appropriate levels of training in all mediums of communication at least on a biennial basis if they are to fulfil their responsibility to support the development needs of members' to discharge their duties as effectively as possible.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

17. Group leaders to consult with their respective Council team to prepare and draft professional training, educational, mental health and well-being needs for submission to Council management
18. Council groups to submit formal request for mental health supports, to include a helpline and counselling to be provided by their respective Council where not already in place



- 
19. Group leaders to consult with their respective Council team to assess, prepare and draft a communications training needs request for submission to Council management
  20. Group leaders (south) to collectively consider and combine their respective Councils training needs for submission to the AILG and LAMA Executive Committees for consideration by both organisations when preparing annual work programmes
  21. Local Government Spokesperson through the Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government to undertake a comparative study of the professional training, educational and wellbeing supports provided to elected members of local authorities by their respective Councils and local authority representative bodies

---



## **7 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Key Performance Indicators**

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for this report have been developed to ensure the recommendations are progressed and responsibility for implementation is clearly assigned.

An implementation report will be provided to the party leader by party management with responsibility for implementing recommendations within each reporting period until such point each recommendation is implemented in full.



## 8 REMUNERATION

At the end of each onsite consultation Councillors were provided with an opportunity to raise other related matters not provided for in the discussion points. The specific focus of the areas of consultation were emphasised to the Councillors at the outset and throughout however we wanted to provide an element of flexibility to the process. A number of related matters were raised and have been addressed within the proposed recommendations.

Whilst not within the terms of the consultation the inadequacy of Councillors remuneration was raised by a significant number of Councillors throughout the process both north and south.

In June 2018 the Ard Fheis passed a motion committing the party to review, in consultation with the party's local government spokespersons and with consideration of relevant legislation and regulations, to develop proposals for the introduction of a revised pay structure for elected members' of local authorities.

That same month the Minister of State for local Government and Electoral Reform announced his decision to undertake an independent review of the role and remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members. To note the findings of the review are to include appropriate training needs of Councillors.

The government's review has been undertaken in consultation with elected members and their representative organisations the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) and Local Authority Members Association (LAMA), County and City Management Association (CCMA) and with wider consultation as appropriate.

It is worth reflecting on the following section from the review's interim report published by the Minister of State in December 2019.

'It is quite clear from engagements to date, that there are very divergent views as to the role of local government in Irish society and while the remit of this report is not to deal with that, it seems that the question of the type of representation which is wanted at local government level is highly problematic. To date, it has become apparent that there are two (and perhaps many more) diverging views regarding how local government should operate. On the one hand, there is a view that it should be a full time position paid accordingly. However, this would deprive persons who are involved in other walks of life from active involvement in their community and forming part of local government. However, as the demands on those persons' time become greater, it appears to be unrealistic to expect them to attend to their functions in the working day. There seems to be a degree of resistance to the concept of going back to part time evening work.

From the discussions to date, (and subject to the surveys and reviews) those two positions are likely to be very difficult to reconcile. Furthermore, there are strong views held by many



parties in relation to each of those positions. All persons engaged with to date do accept that it is important that local government is as diverse as possible and permits the greatest number of people from all backgrounds to become involved. It would be fair to say that much of the engagement to date has not just concentrated on remuneration for Councillors but on support systems for them and how the Executive could support them in such a manner as to diminish the workload.’

In September 2019 Sinn Féin Local Government Spokesperson Eoin Ó Broin made a submission to the Minister of States review which was circulated to all Councillors.

The submission states that the current system of remuneration is neither fair nor sustainable.

Councillors who are currently working a full time week should receive a fair rate of pay.

Councillors who wish to be full time should be remunerated to do so. However where Councillors opt to remain part time they should receive a lower rate of remuneration than their full time colleagues.

Councillors’ remuneration is also a live issue in the six counties. The north’s branch of the National Association of Councillors has called for a review of Councillors’ pay to address what it sees as a huge disparity between the remuneration of Councillors and that of MLAs.



## 9 APPENDIX

### 9.1 Consultation discussion points

TEMPLATE // CONSULTATION DISCUSSION POINTS //

#### GENERAL

Q1. Which European parliament constituency is your Council located within?

Dublin

South

Midlands North West

the north

#### COMMUNICATIONS INTERNAL

Q2. How relevant is the Comhairle Ceantair structure to your work?

Relevant

Somewhat relevant

Not relevant

COMMENTS

--

Q3. How relevant is the Cuige structure to your work?

Relevant

Somewhat relevant

Not relevant

COMMENTS

--

Q4. When requesting assistance from the office of a Sinn Féin MLA/MP/TD how would you describe your experience?

Helpful

Unhelpful

Mixed experience

COMMENTS

--

Q5. Do you receive regular briefings from Sinn Féin MLAs/MPs/TDs?

Yes

No

Don't know

COMMENTS

--

Q6. When requesting assistance from the office your Sinn Féin MEP how would you describe your experience?

Helpful

Unhelpful

Mixed experience

COMMENTS

--

Q7. Do you receive regular briefings from your Sinn Féin MEP?

Yes

No

Don't know

COMMENTS

--

Q8. Do you receive regular briefings from Sinn Féin Senators?

Yes

No

Don't know

COMMENTS

--



**COMMUNICATIONS EXTERNAL**

Q9. What actions are necessary to improve your relationships with local media for the purpose of increasing your coverage?

--

**PROFESSIONAL TRAINING, INTERNAL TRAINING**

Q10. Provide details of the Training and Development your Council Group has sought directly from the Council, AILG, NILGA or another body

--

Q11. Were you adequately informed by the party of the role of a Councillor in advance of your first election campaign as a candidate?

Yes  No  Don't know

COMMENTS

--

Q12. Were you adequately informed by the party of your responsibility to your local organisation and the party structures in advance of your first election campaign as a candidate?

Yes  No  Don't know

COMMENTS

--

Q13. Would the provision of training by the party on the role and responsibilities of a Sinn Féin Councillor in advance of the election have improved your experience as a first time Councillor?

Yes  No  Don't know

COMMENTS

--

Q14. Would the provision of a mentoring programme for new Councillors have improved your experience as a first time Councillor?

Yes  No  Don't know

COMMENTS

--

**ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE WITH ONLINE SUPPORTS**

Q15. Is there a value to re-establishing the Sinn Féin National Councillors Forum? Please select one of the following

Yes  No  Don't know

COMMENTS

--

How should the re-established Sinn Féin National Councillors Forum be constituted, i.e. membership, how often should it meet, format of meetings, measurable outcomes

--

Q16. Would the provision of an online Sinn Féin Councillors tool support your work? Please select one of the following

Yes  No  Don't know

Briefly outline the main areas of content and functionality that would assist you in your political and organisational work.

--



## 9.2 Online survey questionnaire

- 1) Do you agree to take part in this survey sent to you by Sinéad Ní Bhroin, Sinn Féin? The data collected will be anonymised and collective results will be included in the Councillors Consultation Project interim and final reports.
- 2) Enter your name below
- 3) Select the Council you are a member of from the drop down menu
- 4) Which European parliament constituency is your Council located within?
- 5) How often have you requested assistance from the office of a Sinn Féin TD/MLA/MP in the last 24 months?  
  
Frequently  Infrequently  Never
- 6) How often have you requested assistance from the office of a Sinn Féin MEP in the last 24 months?  
  
Frequently  Infrequently  Never
- 7) How often have you requested assistance from the office of a Sinn Féin Senator in the last 24 months?  
  
Frequently  Infrequently  Never
- 8) Do you write and issue your own statements?  
  
Yes  No
- 9) If your answer is No to Question 8, who writes and issues statements on your behalf?  
  
Local Press Officer  National Press Officer  Local Activist  Other
- 10) Do you regularly engage with local journalists and local radio producers?  
  
Yes  No
- 11) How would you describe your media coverage in local papers and local radio?  
  
Regular  Irregular
- 12) How often have you requested assistance from the party's national press office (Dublin or Belfast) in the last 12 months?  
  
Helpful  Unhelpful  Not applicable



- 13) How would you rate your experience when contacting the party's national press office (Dublin or Belfast)?
- Helpful  Unhelpful  Not applicable
- 14) How many training courses or training related conferences/events you have attended in the last 24 months provided by AILG, LAMA or NILGA.
- None  1-5  6-10  More than 10
- 15) How many training courses or training related conferences/events you have attended in the last 24 months provided by your Council.
- None  1-5  6-10  More than 10
- 16) How many training courses or training related conferences/events you have attended in the last 24 months provided by another body or third party supplier.
- None  1-5  6-10  More than 10
- 17) Have you attended gender and/or diversity training during your current term in office?
- Council  AILG/LAMA/NILGA  Other
- 18) If Yes to Question 17, who provided the gender and/or diversity training you attended?
- Council  AILG/LAMA/NILGA  Other
- 19) Provide details of accredited qualifications you have attained or are currently undertaking with funding provided in part or in full by the Council (or NILGA for Cllrs in the north) eg Diploma in Local Government from the Institute of Public Administration.
- 20) Does your Council provide elected members with a mental health counselling support or service?
- 21) What professional qualification, experience, skill set and/or employment do you have outside of your Council duties?
- 22) Please provide a list of the (a) Council committees (b) boards and (c) other bodies you are a member of and the position you hold on these committees, boards and bodies i.e. Chair of the Environment SPC
- 23) Please enter any additional comment you may have regarding this survey or the Councillors Consultation Project



