



**DUBLIN  
CHAMBER**

## **Submission to Consultation on the Role & Remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members**

**October 2018**

### **1. Background**

Dublin Chamber is the largest Chamber of Commerce in Ireland, representing businesses across the Greater Dublin Area. The Chamber's cross-sectoral membership base comprises 1,300 firms, spanning the spectrum from micro-enterprises to multinationals, and supporting 300,000 jobs nationally. This gives the Chamber a keen insight into the needs of both businesses and their employees, informing a holistic view of the commercial environment in which economic competitiveness and quality of life are complementary.

We welcome this opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government in respect of its review of the role and remuneration of elected members of local authorities, and thanks Department officials for their regard for business concerns. The Chamber will take this opportunity to highlight several concerns relevant to the leadership role of elected members in relation to major decisions of policy and how this role is influenced by current arrangements, as advised in the terms of reference.

Dublin Chamber's concerns relate to the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the formulation and implementation of its subsidiary development plans – the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies (RSEs) and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) – by elected local authority members. Specifically, they relate to the poor representation of elected officials from cities within Regional Assemblies and the voting process for MASPs, as well as the need for a strong MASP implementation body.

The former concerns were previously expressed in a collective representation by the Chambers of Commerce of the five cities in Ireland to the Minister for Housing, Planning, & Local Government in June 2018. Dublin Chamber was joined by the Chambers of Commerce of Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Waterford, in communicating a shared view that changes are required in order to ensure that city regions will be properly governed and planned at regional and local level. As these concerns have not been addressed, they will be of interest to the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government in the context of its review of the role of local authority representatives with respect to major decisions of policy.

Both of these issues could be addressed through two amendments to the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016. Alternatively, they can be addressed via secondary legislation such as by amendment to the Local Government Establishment Order 2014. Proposals are included in this submission. These amendments would not in any way negatively impact other counties, but would allow the proposed Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans for the five cities to be more effective and make Regional Assembly representation fairer and more proportionate for citizens living in all parts of each region.

## 2. Underrepresentation of urban elected officials in the Regional Assemblies

If the ambitions of the NPF are to be met, the plan must be underpinned by robust economic and industrial strategies at regional level. This job has been given to the three new elected Regional Assemblies. Created in 2014, these bodies now have extensive powers under the Government’s National Planning Framework and National Development Plan 2018-2027. These are tasked with putting the ‘meat on the bones’ of the NPF, through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) yet to be published.

However, Dublin Chamber is concerned about the under-representation of the residents of metropolitan areas in the Regional Assemblies. Residents of Dublin are seriously under-represented on the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly, with almost five times fewer representatives to population than other counties. Despite being home to 60% of the inhabitants in the Region, the four Dublin Councils have just 43% of the membership of the 38-seat assembly. The difference between the current ratio of representatives to residents for different areas under the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly is illustrated in Table 1 below. Similar disparities exist on the Southern Regional Assembly and the Northern & Western Regional Assembly.

*Table 1: Per Capita Representation on the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly*

Local Authorities	Current Number Reps	Residents per Rep (current)
COR	2	
Dublin	16	84,210
Kildare	3	74,168
Laois	2	42,349
Longford	2	20,437
Louth	2	64,442
Meath	3	65,015
Offaly	2	38,981
Westmeath	2	44,385
Wicklow	3	47,475
Total	37	44

This represents a democratic deficit in the Regional Assemblies as currently constituted, as city residents and their interests are seriously under-represented, while those of more rural areas are over-represented. This is surprising, given the centrality of city regions to the NPF. It is clear that reforms are required to ensure that the needs of the capital and the other cities are adequately reflected in the NPF's subsidiary plans and implementation. Dublin Chamber believes that a proposal similar to the amendment below could be made to ensure fairness and proportionality in the method of appointments to regional assemblies.

*Table 2: Proposed Reform to Method of Appointment in Regional Assemblies*

**Amendment of Local Government Act 1991 (Regional Assemblies) (Establishment) Order 2014**

“Amendment of section 43 of the Act of 1990 (Local Government Act 1990 [as Amended by section 62 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014]) is amended by the insertion of the following subsection after Section 4(c) (ii)

“(d) Any establishment order or an order amending an establishment order shall take into account the following criteria when specifying the number of members of each regional assembly to be appointed by each constituent local authority, and in particular shall ensure that:

(i) the number of persons to be appointed to be members of a regional assembly by a constituent local authority shall, as far as practicable, be proportionate to the number of residents in each constituent local authority area,

(ii) subject to a minimum total of 2 members per local authority there should be one member for every 55,000 population resident in each constituent local authority area

(iii) in as far as practicable, the ratio of residents to representatives of each local authority area should be no less than 10% above the average ratio of residents to members represented on each respective regional assembly

(v) a review of the number of members appointed from each local authority to each regional assembly shall occur after each local authority election, based on the previous census” “

### **3. Voting rights of non-Dublin representatives on Dublin issues**

The MASP's will be sub-regional plans for the functional areas of each of the five cities, and will set the parameters for important developments within each metropolitan area. As the MASP's will determine the development of Ireland's cities for years to come, it is essential that the decision-making structures are properly configured from the outset. However, Dublin Chamber has serious concerns about proposals for how the MASP's will be drafted and decided upon. As we understand, it is currently proposed to draft the plans with input and voting rights from all elected local authority members on the relevant Regional Assembly as well as with input from all local authority stakeholders. Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans, that will set the parameters for important developments within their areas, will not be decided upon solely by representatives from the affected area.

Since the Regional Assemblies do not have a majority of urban councillors, this means that elected local authority representatives from outside of the affected area in each case will have a majority and will be able to determine the content of the MASP, despite the fact that their constituents will not be directly impacted by the plan. In the Eastern & Midland Region, for example, Dublin’s MASP will be decided upon by non-Dublin elected representatives. Councillors from outside of the Dublin Metropolitan Area may be in a position to impose a plan on the capital city to which the city’s own elected representatives have not consented. Ireland’s other cities will find themselves in a similar position.

This is not only inimical to the principles of democratic decision-making, but also of economic efficiency and good planning. Dublin Chamber believes that an amendment such as that proposed in Table 3 below must be made to protect the integrity of the metropolitan planning process. This amendment proposes that only members appointed from an area – such as the Dublin Metropolitan Area – should vote on a regional plan for that area.

*Table 3: Proposed Reform to MASPs*

**Amendment of Planning and Development Act 2000 (or Alternatively Amendment to Ministerial Order)**

“The Principal Act (Planning and Development Act 2000) is amended by inserting the following subsection after section 21 (3) (b)

“(c) In the case of a regional spatial and economic strategy for one or more parts of a region pursuant to a direction under paragraph (a), only members of a county council or city and county council elected in accordance with this Act for the local electoral areas situated in a planning authority covered by the strategy, collectively comprise the assembly membership for that area for the purpose of the performance of reserved functions and collectively shall be known as ‘area strategic plan members’

(d) In the case of a regional spatial and economic strategy for one or more parts of a region, the plan shall be considered only by the area strategic plan members elected from planning authorities covered by the strategy and be adopted by resolution, with or without amendment, within such time limit and in accordance with such conditions and requirements, as may be so prescribed.” “

**4. The need for an implementation body for the MASP**

The global competition for investment, jobs, and talent is now largely between city regions rather than nation-states, and Dublin is Ireland’s only urban region of sufficient scale to compete realistically with the world’s great cities. The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan will be an opportunity to provide for the future, if it is implemented effectively.

However, the present system of local government is structurally ill-equipped to provide the administrative coordination and accountability that the city requires. Dublin is currently divided into four local authorities with four different mayors, each of whom is replaced every

12 months. All are indirectly elected and possess limited powers. It is increasingly recognised that this model of fragmented governance is un conducive to joined-up thinking, and can foster unhelpful competition rather than cooperation. Ireland's capital deserves better. To realise its potential, Dublin needs not only a clear common vision for its future, but a metropolitan government capable of making the vision a reality.

Dublin Chamber is concerned that there will be no Executive (e.g. a directly elected mayor) to coordinate implementation of the MASP for the capital city region. Strong strategic leadership will be crucial to ensuring that Dublin maintains global competitiveness in the years to come. However, local government reform has been subject to continual neglect and delay. Dublin needs a single point of authority and accountability covering the four Dublin local authorities at a minimum.

Dublin Chamber believes that without a strong executive and political voice for the Metropolitan Regions to coordinate implementation and provide a single point of authority and accountability, the MASPs will not be effective. Therefore Chamber takes this opportunity to strongly encourage a renewed impetus behind local government reform in Ireland's cities.