



**MORE POWER TO YOU**

The road map for  
a better and more  
democratic Ireland.



**MORE  
POWER  
TO YOU**

Make Government Local,  
Improve Your Local Services.





# STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNMENT – IMPROVING LOCAL SERVICES

## The simple solution to our greatest challenge

Enshrined in our constitution is the simple principle that strong, effective local government is the foundation of a prosperous and progressive society.

Austerity, privatisation, executive direction and centralisation have hollowed out our public services and stripped local authorities and local communities of their democratic power.

Ireland now has the worst level of local representation and the weakest local government of any country in Europe.

Today our local government is actively being degraded. Essential public services like housing, water, energy and waste are being undermined and trust in our system of government is being eroded day by day.

Action must be taken.

Strengthening Local Government is not just the most direct and effective way of improving services, providing for communities and restoring trust in our society – it is the only way.





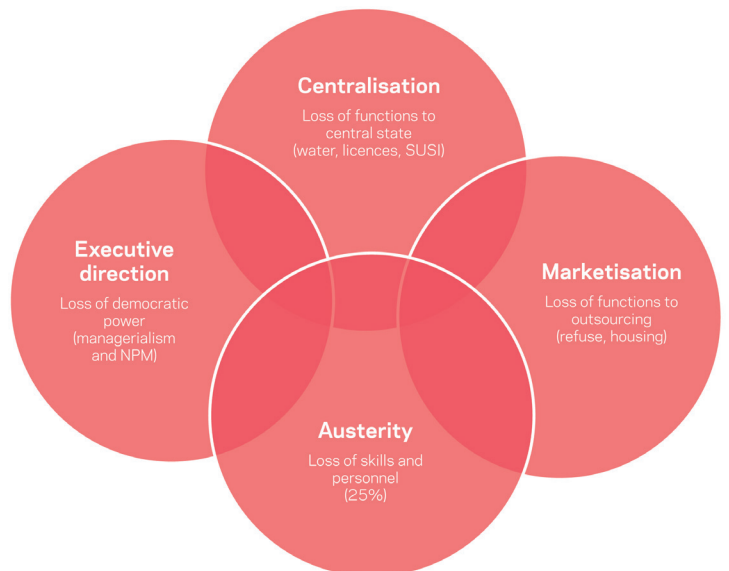


# THE FOUR KEY FORCES THREATENING OUR DEMOCRACY.

Over the last few decades, local government in Ireland has been undermined by a perfect storm of negative forces that have stripped local authorities of their function, power and relevance. Today, those forces remain the greatest threat to our democracy.

- **Centralisation** in national government has been a consistent experience for Irish local government. Functions have been lost to central (for example water) or regional government, or to new quangos – for example responsibility for higher education grants (to SUSI) and driving licences (to NDRL).
- **Executive direction** has occurred as new public management processes and changes in administration, evaluation and control mechanisms have increased executive power at the expense of political representatives.
- **Privatisation** of former local government services such as domestic refuse services – which has not led to improved services for citizens but has led to poorer quality of employment for workers.
- **Austerity** has led to declining funding from central government and this, combined with difficulties in collecting commercial rates and a drastic fall in revenue from development levies, has led to a vicious cycle of cumulative erosion of local authority power and capacity.

Fig 1:  
Local authorities undermined by overlap of Centralisation, Executive direction, Privatisation, Austerity



# 'POOR COUSIN' IN IRELAND'S DEMOCRACY

Irish local government scores poorly – compared to our European neighbours – in relation to:

- Relative strength, size and structure of local authority units;
- Balance of power between the administrative and elected parts of local government;
- Range of functions for which local government has responsibility;
- Relationship between central and local government;
- Financial autonomy of local government.

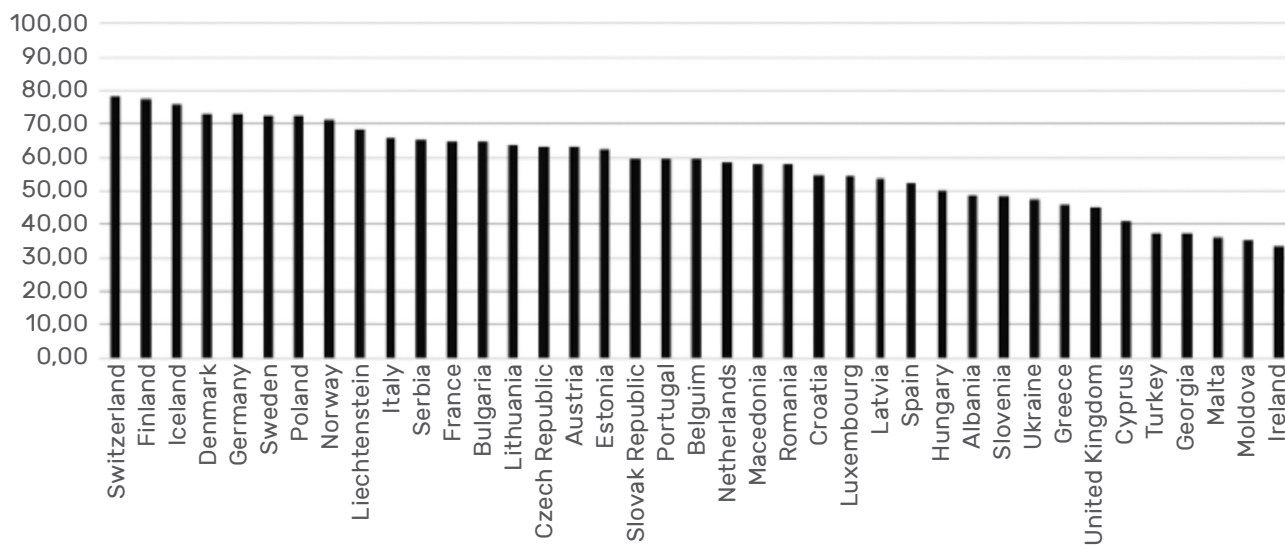
All of these factors have reduced Irish local government's democratic legitimacy and Ireland is now last in the international index of self-autonomy.

Ireland has far fewer local municipalities with only one city or county council per 148,517 people compared to one council per:

- 57,421 people in Denmark;
- 43,152 people in the Netherlands;
- 33,258 people in Sweden;
- 17,416 people in Finland;
- 11,897 people in Norway.

In relation to spending power, on average across the EU, 23.1% of public spending occurs at local government level compared to 8% in Ireland. Likewise, Irish local authorities have a narrower scope than local authorities do internationally with functions revolving around physical infrastructure, environmental issues and recreational facilities. There are few social or care services, primary or specialist education, health or public employment services.

Fig 2:  
Local Autonomy Index: country ranking 2014





# REIMAGINING AND RESTORING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

The Council of Europe (2013) strongly criticised Ireland for its lack of constitutional protection for local government and stressed its importance in articulating shared community interests, and factoring local history, geography, political culture and economy into its decision-making processes. In fact, in Ireland the four key forces have only served to further undermine an already weak system of local government and to worsen the delivery of services to the public.

Take privatisation, for example. International evidence demonstrates that over four decades of privatisation of formerly local public services has failed to deliver on promises of improved investment, performance and efficiency. The innovative Australian Peoples Inquiry into privatisation highlighted the damage to citizens, especially the most vulnerable, when local public services are privatised.

Interestingly, experience with deprivatisation or remunicipalisation has demonstrated the benefits of public services from improved quality of services to greater financial transparency. Local authority-led provision has more capacity to meet environmental and equality objectives and, from an efficiency and equality perspective, to integrate public services and provide affordable services, both of which are crucial for local authorities to meet their public duty to promote human rights and equality.

## Given these benefits, Fórsa, SIPTU and Connect are proposing that:

- A new and more representative system of local government be established, through the introduction of directly-elected mayors and a renewed town council system;
- Revenue and funding powers for local authorities should be increased, moving Irish local government towards the European public expenditure average.



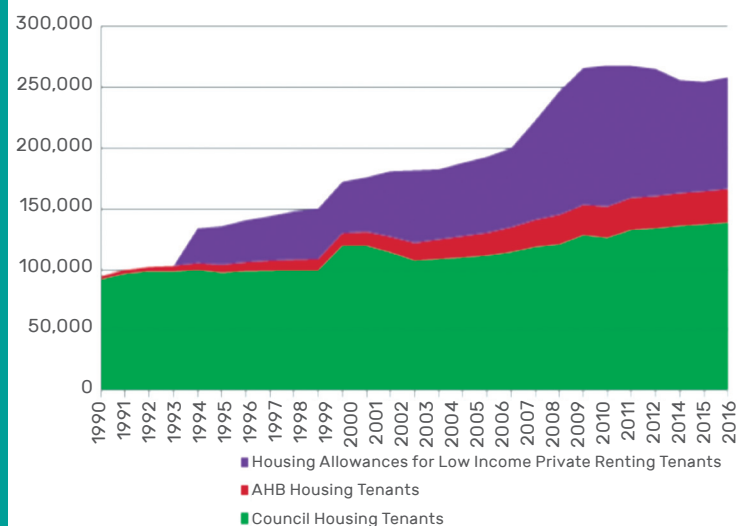
## PUBLIC HOUSING



The shift away from the role of local authorities in the provision of public housing has been a long term trend which began in the 1980s. The traditional provision of council housing has been displaced by the growing importance of private sector rental subsidies including the most recent Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), which Rebuilding Ireland (2016) positions as the primary provider of social housing by 2021.

From the perspective of the citizen, secure social housing is infinitely preferable to insecure private sector housing. Cost rental models of accommodation are at the heart of a sustainable model, in practice this means changing the financial, rental, letting and maintenance model for public housing provision and making this new model the primary vehicle for delivering public housing.

Fig 3:  
Council Housing Tenants, Approved Housing Body Tenants and Private Rental Tenant Subsidies 1990–2016



## Given this background, Fórsa, SIPTU and Connect are proposing:

- A new local authority-led **cost rental public housing financial model**, with no right to buy or successor policy;
- Boosting local employment and economic development by **investing in local authority direct labour** for preventative maintenance, void management and proactive use of SEAI retrofitting grants.

## WASTE



Many councils, faced with an unviable business model for domestic refuse, exited waste management and this has ultimately resulted in a 'quasi market' for waste which is poorly regulated with environmental and other costs. Private refuse services are not only unaccountable, but the current 'quasi market' model has led to cartel-like private bin collection services which have proved uncompetitive, inefficient and unable to provide affordable services or consistent coverage. The lack of competition is evident in that:

- Only 20 main operators service 90% of households that avail of a collection service;
- 18% of households nationally, and 25% in the Dublin region, do not have choice of provision from multiple suppliers;
- 23% of households do not have a waste-collection service at all.

This leaves room for a significant number of illegal practices such as illegal dumping or fly tipping in both urban and rural areas – 44,868 tonnes of waste was unmanaged in 2016 – with the ultimate clean-up costs borne by local councils. A recent Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) report highlights the degree to which the unique Irish waste management market is highly inefficient in enabling a competitive market. The report concludes that domestic waste collection is “a natural monopoly”.

### To tackle the evident problems in the household waste market, Fórsa, SIPTU and Connect are proposing:

- The establishment of a regulator for household waste collection to ensure that every household has access to an affordable waste disposal service;
- This should facilitate the re-entry of local authorities to domestic bin collection.

In this context, it's worth noting that Scotland, having privatised its household waste collection service, has since remunicipalised it with a different economic model.



## WATER



Ireland has had a low level of investment in water infrastructure and, up to 2015, 45% of such investment was delivered through public private partnerships (PPPs) – the 2nd highest use of PPPs in the EU next to Greece. Over 2014/15, as water was centralised from local to national level, investment has increased and Ervia has discontinued the use of PPPs.

Given that water is a public good – which is essential for public health and well-being – such public control over the level of investment in water infrastructure is essential; hence, the public demand to guarantee public ownership of water into the future and the specific demand for a constitutional referendum. It's worth noting that such water-related referendums have been conducted at municipal and national levels across Europe.

The Joint Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services has supported the concept of a referendum on the issue of water services, and a November 2018 ministerial memo to cabinet has proposed a referendum to stipulate that ownership of a water services authority must be retained by the State or a State-controlled body.

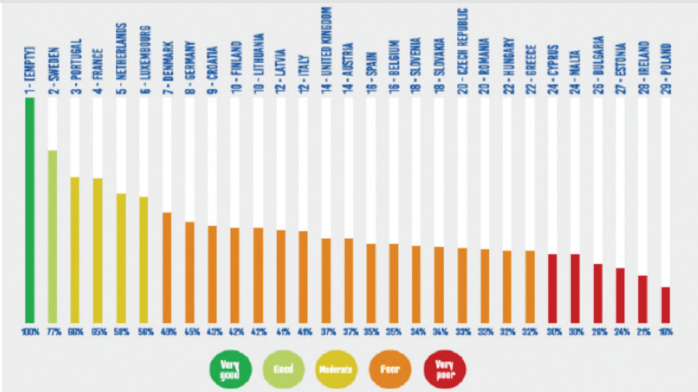
### Fórsa, SIPTU and Connect support:

- The holding of a constitutional referendum to ensure public water ownership;
- Making the right to water real through a local authority-delivered water customer service.

# ENERGY



Fig 4:  
Where do EU countries stand on fighting climate change?



Ireland is ranked second last in the EU (after Poland), for fighting climate change and low-carbon transition. Experience shows that State-based investment is central to realising new forms of renewable energy and, in many countries, processes of local democratic participation recognise the degree to which innovation needs to be vested in local authorities to generate community buy-in, engagement and ownership in transition processes. In addition, local authorities have a key role in promoting and implementing energy efficiency measures.

## To realise the potential of local government in driving Ireland's low-carbon transition, Fórsa, SIPTU and Connect propose:

- That local government plays a key promotional and mobilising role in the low carbon transition, through citizen education and the setting of **county level carbon reduction targets**;
- Advancing the Citizens' Assembly recommendations to facilitate micro generation and **community ownership of renewable energy projects**.



# LOCAL GOVERNMENT OUR GREATEST AND MOST UNDERUSED RESOURCE.

Local Government touches every aspect of our daily lives and impacts upon every citizen – young and old alike.

It is in our schools, our homes, our public parks. It's in our work, our play and our recreation.

Our network of local services and amenities are the very fabric of our society. They are the roots that tie our community together.

Our integrated network of autonomous local authorities is uniquely positioned as the most direct, immediate and democratic mechanism for managing our society both economically and socially.

Yet our local government has never been fully utilised or given the authority or support to fulfil its enormous potential.

Today we have the opportunity to create a new and better system of local government – one which truly reflects and represents the complex and diverse nature of our society.

## A ROAD MAP FOR THE FUTURE

The nature of our society is rapidly changing. How and where we live our lives are constantly evolving. The rigid, centralised system of government and service provision no longer fits the changing face of Ireland.

All over Europe societies are realising that the reality of life in the 21st century requires a new, flexible, responsive and locally based system of government.

Strengthening Ireland's local government offers us the unique opportunity to create the solid foundation upon which we can continue to grow, develop and embrace the changes that lie ahead.

## RECLAIMING TRUST IN OUR GOVERNMENT

Trust in the system of government is the corner stone of any society and community. But years of austerity and financial crisis have eroded people's trust in government and seen the rise of extreme and populist movements all across the world.

That lack of trust is one of the greatest challenges facing our society today.

By strengthening and protecting local government we will be empowering citizens to play a more direct role in shaping communities and tackling the issues that affect them.

Most importantly, strengthening local government is the only enduring way of reclaiming trust in our institutions, our system of government and our society as a whole.



# CONCLUSION

This Case Statement clearly demonstrates the central role that local government plays in our economy and our society.

It also makes a compelling case for renewed investment in local public control and delivery of local services and infrastructure.

It also clearly outlines the simple, practical steps we need to take to create a sustainable future of inclusive growth and dynamic democratic communities and work places.

Go to [forsa.ie/MorePower](https://forsa.ie/MorePower)  
to take the  
**Local Power Pledge**



**MORE  
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## The Local Power Pledge

### I BELIEVE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

I pledge to use my vote to support the full implementation of this simple 5 point plan to strengthen local government and improve services for all.



#### 1 DEMOCRACY

- Introduce directly elected mayors and a new town council system
- Provide adequate investment and independent funding powers for local authorities



#### 2 WASTE

- Establish a regulator for household waste collection
- Enable local authorities to re-enter bin collection services



#### 3 WATER

- Hold a referendum to enshrine public ownership of water in our constitution
- Establish a local authority water customer service to protect the right to water



#### 4 HOUSING

- Establish a new, local authority led, cost rental public housing model
- Increase investment in existing local authority maintenance and retro-fitting schemes



#### 5 ENERGY

- Enable local authorities to lead micro generation and community ownership of renewable energy projects
- Establish a primary role for local government in setting carbon reduction targets and promoting the low carbon transition