



Seánad Public Consultation on the Future of Local Democracy

Seánad Public Consultation Committee is seeking your ideas

Background

Local authorities form an essential part of Irish life. Ahead of local elections next year, the Seánad Public Consultation Committee is interested in exploring the Future of Local Democracy across a number of themes:

- Public engagement and participation in the local government process and functions;
- The powers of local authorities; and
- The impact of changes to the local government process, such as the abolition of town councils and the introduction of directly elected mayors.

We have seen a reduction of powers to councillors and towards central government and local authority executives through various forms such as the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and overarching national policy documents and frameworks.

The time is now ripe to conduct such a public consultation on the future of this most important arm of government.

In particular we should seek ways in which we can achieve gender balance on our local authorities, encouraging representation on local authorities from minority groups in Ireland and ensuring that decisions impacting local people are made at a local level.

Seánad Public Consultation Committee Objectives

The Seánad Public Consultation Committee will look at issues in relation to the future of local democracy including the below:

- Challenges of getting candidates for local elections;
- Representation of women, minorities, and new Irish groups;
- Powers of local authority members;
- Impact of overarching legislation and national policy documents on the functioning of local authorities and the role of its elected members and executive;
- Comparisons with other countries' local democratic structures;
- Consideration of the time involved in the role of councillors and how this impacts on their careers, family life and wellbeing;
- How local government can play a greater role and have a positive impact on the challenges we face such as in the areas of climate action, housing, infrastructure, regional development, etc;
- Cross border cooperation at local government level across the island of Ireland;

- Supports available to councillors;
- Address the powers and functions between the executive and the elected council;
- Examine devolving more powers to the local authorities through the legislative process to strengthen and enhance local democracy;
- Examine training provided to elected members of local authorities in order to discharge their duties; and
- Addressing the issue of abuse, threats and harassment in local government, and the importance of civility in public life.

The Process

The Seanad Public Consultation Committee is particularly interested in hearing from, and the views and/or experiences of:

- Members of the public and local community groups;
- Those representing minorities, women for election and young people, and reflective of the diversity of Irish society;
- Academics and experts in the field of local democracy;
- Ministers and members of local authorities past and present;
- AILG & LAMA and their counterparts in Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions;
- Secretaries General and representatives of political parties;
- Responsible Departments;
- Current and former local authority CEOs/Directors of Service; and
- Those working in local government.

In addition, the Committee may invite witnesses to make oral presentations to the Seanad Public Consultation Committee in public hearings.

The Seanad Public Consultation Committee will draft and publish a report in which it will make findings and recommendations. When its report has been published, the Committee will present findings and request a debate with the Minister or relevant Ministers in the Seanad.

Submissions

Submissions should not exceed five pages and should contain the following information:

1. The name, postal address, e-mail address and telephone number of the organisation or person making the submission;
2. A brief introduction indicating any experience, expertise or background you may have in this area;
3. Factual information, observations or opinions that you believe will assist the Committee in drawing conclusions; and
4. Changes that you believe need to be made to legislation or public policy.

IMPORTANT: Submissions will be circulated to all members of the Committee and may be published, in whole or in part, in the Committee's report and/or on the Committee's webpage. If you prefer not to have your submission published in the report or on the Committee's website, please indicate this clearly.

The Committee's Terms of Reference contain a number of conditions, set out below, which govern the content of submissions. Contributors are asked to bear these in mind:

"A submission is admissible unless it –

(a) requests the Seanad to do anything other than the Seanad has power to do;

(b) does not comply with Standing Orders or is otherwise not in proper form;

(c) it contains any matter which is sub judice within the meaning of Standing Order 47;

(d) comments on, criticises or makes charges against a person outside the House or an official, in a manner which is not consistent with the Standing Orders and practices of the Seanad;

(e) contains language which is offensive or defamatory;

(f) is the same as, or in substantially similar terms to, a submission made by or on behalf of the same person or body during the lifetime of the Committee."

Submissions must be received by the Clerk to the Committee not later than 4 p.m. on Friday, 29th September, 2023.

Receipt of submissions by e-mail, and in Microsoft Word format, is preferred. The e-mail address for submissions is: seanadpublicconsult@oireachtas.ie.

Submissions may also be sent by post to:

Ivan Farmer,
Clerk to the Seanad Public Consultation Committee,
Seanad Office,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.