
June 2017
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Chairperson's Foreword

Eoghan Murphy, T.D.,
Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government

Dear Minister,

It is with great pleasure that I present to you an Interim Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Local Government Arrangements in Galway.

The Group met on ten occasions over the past 5 months to examine the technical feasibility and implications of implementing the findings of the report of the Galway Local Government Review Committee (2015), which unanimously recommended the establishment of a new unified Greater Galway Authority combining Galway City Council and Galway County Council.

We undertook detailed analysis of each Local Authority function and any potential impediments to the creation of a Greater Galway Authority, following presentations by senior managers from both councils. The Group would like to acknowledge the professionalism, efficiency and commitment of the staff in producing high quality documents within a challenging time-frame.

The Group unanimously agree that the findings to-date from the analysis of the operational and administrative arrangements of both local authorities demonstrate that the creation of a Greater Galway Authority is technically and administratively feasible. In addition, the Group spent some time considering the economic development implications of the creation of a Greater Galway Authority. The Group see this as a critical element of any change, given the expanded role of local government in economic development, and the implications for growth and development in the region generally.

The next phase of the Group's work will focus on the governance arrangements, including political, management and administrative issues, associated with the potential creation of a Greater Galway Authority, as well as how the challenges and opportunities facing both the city and the county could be addressed. The Group acknowledges that this next phase will require extensive consultation and engagement with all stakeholders, given the complexity of the task of devising the political and administrative structures that can deliver on the vision of a Greater Galway Authority.

Yours sincerely

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan, June 2017
1. Introduction and background

1.1 Establishment and membership of the Expert Advisory Group

1.1.1 In January 2015, the then Minister for Environment, Community & Local Government announced a review of local government arrangements in Galway, and established a committee to undertake the review. The report of the Galway Local Government Review Committee, submitted to the Minister in November 2015, concluded that, on balance, the establishment of a new unified ‘Greater Galway Authority’ combining Galway City Council and Galway County Council, would maximise the potential of the region to maintain, secure and grow a sustainable economic base into the future. The report also recommended the establishment of an expert advisory group to undertake a detailed technical review for this proposed unified authority.

1.1.2 The recommendations of the 2015 report of the Galway Local Government Review Committee received strong support from a wide range of stakeholders, but were opposed by a majority of councillors from both councils whose main concerns centre around representational issues, the scale of the new proposals, and the perceived different requirements of urban and rural service delivery.

1.1.3 In December 2016, the Minister for the Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government established an Expert Advisory Group to carry out further detailed examination and planning arising from the report of the Galway Local Government Review Committee in relation to future local government arrangements for Galway.

1.1.4 The main functions of the Group, as set out in the terms of reference are to:

   a) undertake further detailed and rigorous examination and technical analysis in relation to the implications of the recommendations of the 2015 report;
   b) provide an assessment of the recommendations of the 2015 report, including likely costs and benefits, in light of the examination and analysis at (a);
   c) provide, in light of the assessment at (b), detailed information and recommendations regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the 2015 report and of any further recommendations at (d), the arrangements and measures necessary for that purpose and relevant timescales in that regard;
   d) in the event that the Group concludes, on the basis of its detailed and rigorous examination, that the recommendations of the 2015 report should be supplemented or varied, indicate the reasons for this and provide relevant recommendations in that regard;
e) report to the Minister in relation to the foregoing matters as required by the Minister, or as the Group considers appropriate.

1.1.5 The full terms of reference are set out in Appendix 1. The members of the group are: Professor Eoin O'Sullivan, Head of the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin (chair); Ms Hannah Kiely, former CEO at HC Financial Services; Mr Ned Gleeson, former Manager of Limerick and Tipperary (South) County Councils; Kevin Kelly, chief executive Galway County Council; and Brendan McGrath, chief executive Galway City Council.

1.2 Approach taken by the Expert Advisory Group

1.2.1 During its work to date, the Group has met formally on 10 occasions (see Appendix 2).

1.2.2 At an early stage in the process, the Group decided to split the work into two phases. Phase 1, which forms the basis for this interim report, focused on determining the technical and administrative feasibility of merging existing services in a potential new unified structure and any associated implementation issues that could arise. In phase 2, which the Group will now consider within the terms of reference, all remaining issues including, appropriate governance and other structures to ascertain the feasibility of recommendation of the 2015 report for a proposed Greater Galway Authority, and how the challenges and opportunities facing the city and county would be addressed.

1.2.3 To determine the technical feasibility and implications of implementing the findings of the report of the Galway Local Government Review Committee, the Group decided that the most appropriate approach for the initial phase was to engage directly with officials from the two councils. This was seen as the best way of establishing the practicalities and potential benefits and problems associated with the creation of a Greater Galway Authority. Accordingly, the two councils established small working groups to co-ordinate the information required, and link with their colleagues from the other authority. Senior managers from each of the programme/service areas were asked to liaise with their staff and produce

(a) reports giving an overview of the programme/service area as it exists in each authority, and

(b) joint reports from the two authorities on the implications of the creation of a Greater Galway Authority for each programme/service area. Senior management groups from each programme/service area made presentations to the Group outlining their findings

The extensive information received from the senior management teams was rigorously examined by the Group, and used to inform the Group’s conclusions.
1.2.4 To ensure consistency, each programme/service area was asked to address the following issues when considering the implications of the potential establishment of a Greater Galway Authority: cost/finance; customer service; organisational efficiency; staffing implications; and a general overview of the issues associated with establishing a Greater Galway Authority in the context of service provision.
2. Technical analysis in relation to the implications of establishing a Greater Galway Authority

This chapter summarises the main points arising from the deliberations of the Group to date, following the template outlined in section 1.2.4, addressing the following issues: cost/finance; customer service; organisational efficiency; staffing implications; and a general overview of the issues associated with establishing a Greater Galway Authority.

2.1 Cost/finance implications
2.1.1 The main point that emerged from an assessment of the cost/finance implications of the creation of a Greater Galway Authority is that it is likely to be broadly cost neutral. No significant financial savings were identified from the exercise, with some areas identifying limited cost savings and others highlighting potential additional costs. The experience of most departments demonstrated that it is difficult to foresee any savings, on the basis that departments in both authorities are currently significantly under-resourced, even in the context of areas currently considered a priority.

2.1.2 The Group recognise that the revenue budgets and the staff complements of both local authorities have reduced by between 20% and 35% from their 2008 levels which is reflected in the findings on finance and staffing implications. The Group formed the view, based on the analysis undertaken, that the level of resources currently available to the city and county is not sufficient to achieve the vision for the Greater Galway Authority as set out in the 2015 report. The Group also recognises that where there are demand-led services, the possibility of achieving savings is constrained by the nature of the service, with demands in most areas growing rather than reducing. Concern was expressed that where funding is provided on a per local authority basis, that a unified structure could result in only one payment leading to a reduction in resources, a scenario that would be to the detriment of a potential unified Greater Galway authority.

2.2 Customer service implications
2.2.1 The potential to offer one point of contact and bring greater clarity to managing and enhancing customer relationships across the city and county was seen as a potential benefit of a Greater Galway Authority. At the same time, it was noted that the distinct needs of city, towns and rural areas would have to be recognised in any new authority. For example, a continued network of services and offices in the municipal districts in the county would be essential in terms of access to services, given the geographical scale of the county. No major difficulties with, or obstacles to, amalgamation were identified by the Group from a customer service perspective.
2.2.2 The important role of ICT in terms of supporting the changing nature of service delivery was recognised by the Group. Much work has already been done, for example in the development of online services, and this work would need to be accelerated and enhanced in the context of a Greater Galway Authority.

2.3 Organisational efficiency implications

2.3.1 The Group is of the view that there is considerable promise for organisational efficiencies arising from the creation of a Greater Galway Authority. While current structures are working well, there is potential to enhance existing arrangements, such as through the combined use of resources (human, financial and ICT) providing a critical mass and the basis for new integrated developments in the future. The improvement/re-design of back office processes is one particular benefit, with other benefits identified, including a combined approach to tendering, joint procurement, and operational control.

2.4 Staffing implications

2.4.1 Both councils have lost a significant number of staff since 2008 and notwithstanding the lifting of restrictions on recruitment, the financial situation of the councils still makes recruitment a formidable challenge. Consequently, as with cost, the Group acknowledge that there is limited, if any, potential for staff savings arising from the creation of a Greater Galway Authority. The new authority would, however, offer the potential for change in some areas, with staff being deployed more efficiently, thus increasing the potential for the acquisition of appropriate expertise and enhanced capacity. However, this is in the context of what the Group view as a level of under-resourcing of staff to meet needs that exists at present in both the county and city.

2.5 Overview of issues associated with establishing a Greater Galway Authority

2.5.1 In summarising our views, and having reflected on the information received in the presentations from senior management, the Group identified several opportunities and challenges associated with the creation of a Greater Galway Authority.

2.5.2 The Group believe that a Greater Galway Authority has the potential to provide an enhanced opportunity to respond in creative ways to the unique challenges and opportunities of growing the Greater Galway area, while providing a very strong regional leadership dimension. This includes the capacity for the development of strategic policy and providing an impetus to further improve and modernise services. In the context of the new National Planning Framework, a Greater Galway Authority provides a unique opportunity to deliver on being a driver of regional development, and serving as a counter balance to Dublin.
2.5.3 A particular opportunity identified by the Group is the enhancement of economic development through the creation of an economic development unit (see section 3.1.2 for more details). When combined with the potential for the enhanced delivery in other priority areas, such as housing management and supply, a Greater Galway Authority offers the opportunity for a more strategic approach to service development across a range of activities.

2.5.4 There is an opportunity to address staffing resource issues in a structured and coherent manner across the authorities. The existing extensive cooperation in several domains provides a solid basis from which to work towards the optimum deployment of the existing skilled and experienced staff that both authorities are fortunate to have in the service of the citizens of Galway, City and County.

2.5.5 Regarding challenges, the Group recognise that the transition process involved in moving to a Greater Galway Authority would bring significant implementation challenges. For example, it would be necessary to address different arrangements for service delivery, and the different expectations that may arise from the nature of service delivery in the city, towns and the county. It would also be important to address staff buy-in and to maintain staff morale. The Group recognise that a transition process requires time to ensure the alignment of different policies and procedures, address varying needs/priorities, and combine different systems and procedures. Managing this transition period successfully would be crucial to success. The experiences, positive and negative, from the creation of the new authorities in Limerick, Waterford and Tipperary provides a helpful learning opportunity for Galway.
3. Interim Conclusions and Next Steps

3.1 Conclusions

3.1.1 The exercise undertaken by the Group, following extensive input from senior managers from both councils, has enabled a detailed and rigorous examination and technical analysis in relation to the service delivery implications of the creation of a Greater Galway Authority. The findings from the analysis to date suggest that the establishment of a Greater Galway Authority is both technically and administratively feasible.

3.1.2 Based on the work to date, the Group believe that a fully resourced Greater Galway Authority offers the potential for significant opportunities in terms of economic and social development for the Galway region. The Group believe there are benefits arising from a single, unified authority when it comes to fostering economic development. The Group see this as a critical element of any change, given the expanded role of local government in economic development, and the implications for growth and development in the region generally. The 2015 report recommended that a Department of Economic Planning be established. Accordingly, the Group considered how the creation of a single economic development unit might look, and the range of activities that such a unit might oversee. The Group unanimously and unequivocally recommends the appointment of a dedicated head of economic and physical development, supported by teams dedicated to economic development, spatial planning, enterprise and local development. This Unit, with the necessary amount of additional resources (financial and human capital), will operate at the highest strategic level, to engage at national and international levels, and to ensure Galway remains an economic driver for regional development.

3.1.3 The Group see significant benefits to be achieved by such an economic development unit through the advancement of business promotion and attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and the nurturing of indigenous enterprises, working closely with IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the third level educational institutions and other regional stakeholders. The unit would be a recognised driver for initiatives such as identifying economic sectors with potential for growth, driving strategic tourism development and tourism promotion, and leading on the development and delivery of the Economic Development Strategy for Galway. Consequently, in the context of the findings of the 2015 report, the Group unequivocally endorse the creation of a strong, single economic development unit and believe it provides a model for how the benefits of a Greater Galway Authority might best be achieved.

3.1.4 A further consideration of the Group was the effect of the new National Planning Framework due to replace the National Spatial Strategy, and the possible implications for a
Greater Galway Authority. An Issues and Choices paper\(^1\) published by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government highlights the importance of city regions for economic development. This refers to ‘The potential for a nationally significant step-change in the promotion of one or more of the four regional cities through co-ordinated planning and investment that would be long term and transformational’. The Group is of the view that a Greater Galway Authority, with an integrated Urban and Rural Vision, has the potential to become the main driver of Regional Development in the West of Ireland and can by working alongside the Regional Authority become a vital part of the transformational arrangements needed to create a step change in such a development.

3.2 Next steps

3.2.1 The Group will continue with its work in accordance with its terms of reference. In the next phase, the Group will focus on the governance and other arrangements associated with the potential creation of a Greater Galway Authority, and how the challenges and opportunities facing the city and county could be addressed. The Group acknowledges that this next phase will require extensive consultation and engagement with all stakeholders, given the complexity of the task of devising the political and administrative structures that can deliver on the vision of a Greater Galway Authority.

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Appendix 1  Terms of Reference for Expert Advisory Group on Local Government Arrangements in Galway

The Minister for the Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government hereby establishes an Expert Advisory Group to carry out further detailed examination and planning arising from the report of the Galway Local Government Committee in relation to future local government arrangements for Galway which was submitted in November 2015 (referred to in this document as “the 2015 report”).

1. The main functions of the Group are to:

   a. undertake further detailed and rigorous examination and technical analysis in relation to the implications of the recommendations of the 2015 report;

   b. provide an assessment of the recommendations of the 2015 report, including likely costs and benefits, in light of the examination and analysis at (a);

   c. provide, in light of the assessment at (b), detailed information and recommendations regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the 2015 report and of any further recommendations at (d), the arrangements and measures necessary for that purpose and relevant timescales in that regard;

   d. in the event that the Group concludes, on the basis of its detailed and rigorous examination, that the recommendations of the 2015 report should be supplemented or varied, indicate the reasons for this and provide relevant recommendations in that regard;

   e. report to the Minister in relation to the foregoing matters as required by the Minister, or as the Group considers appropriate.

2. Without restricting the scope or flexibility available to the Group pursuant to paragraph 1, and subject to any additional matters that the Minister may require, the Group shall, in particular, address the following matters regarding future local government arrangements for Galway:

   a. Leadership of local government, at both political and executive levels, including the possible establishment of an office of directly elected mayor and associated authority to perform substantial local government functions;

   b. Governance and representational structures, including the approach to plenary council, municipal district and electoral area configurations;

   c. Local government powers and functions, including potential for devolution of functions to local authorities from central government departments or agencies, and the allocation of powers and functions as between plenary council and municipal district members;

   d. Resource implications of the recommendations in the 2015 report, and where relevant any further recommendations under 1(d), having regard to the income, expenditure, assets, liabilities, functions and services of the local authorities in Galway and to anticipated future trends and requirements in this regard, and to the requirements of addressing such implications;

   e. Metropolitan interests in respect of the city of Galway, and any specific measures or arrangements, including configuration and governance, required to safeguard or enhance such interests, and to maintain the civic status, identity, character and heritage of the city;

   f. The potential of local government to further the economic and social well-being and sustainable development of Galway City and County, including the strategic role and impact of the city, in particular, as a regional and national growth centre, and the need to have regard to the respective characteristics and needs both of urban and rural areas;
g. Cohesiveness, co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration in the context of future local
government arrangements, particularly with regard to strategic policy in areas such as
housing, spatial planning, economic development, infrastructure, transport, and environment;

h. The strength and effectiveness generally of local government in Galway, including in the use
of resources, the organisation of functions and operations, and the provision of services; and

i. Implications of the Group's proposals or recommendations including anticipated costs and
benefits (including potential savings and efficiency improvements).

3. To facilitate the effective performance of its functions the Group shall:

a. have regard to the 2015 report and relevant provisions of the Terms of Reference of the
Galway Local Government Committee;

b. engage with other bodies, as necessary, and where the Group considers that it is necessary
for the purpose of particular research, examination or analysis, the Minister may arrange
for the provision of specialist services to the Group for that purpose.
### Appendix 2  Expert Advisory Group on Local Government Arrangements in Galway – Schedule of Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Main Subject</th>
<th>Merged Departments</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>13th December</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>City Hall</td>
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<td>Friday</td>
<td>27th January</td>
<td>Housing and Organisational Structures</td>
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<td>Friday</td>
<td>10th February</td>
<td>Transportation and Water</td>
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<td>City Hall</td>
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<td>24th February</td>
<td>Environment, Recreation and Amenity</td>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>County Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>3rd March</td>
<td>Planning, Economic Development, Community, Enterprise and Culture</td>
<td>Transportation and Water</td>
<td>City Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>28th March</td>
<td>Finance, Corporate Services incl ICT and Current Shared Services</td>
<td>Environment, Recreation and Amenity</td>
<td>County Hall</td>
</tr>
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<td>Friday</td>
<td>7th April</td>
<td>Corporate Governance Structures, Other External Bodies and Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Planning, Economic Development, Community, Enterprise and Culture</td>
<td>County Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>28th April</td>
<td>Finance, Corporate Services, ICT, HR (incl Organisational Structures) and General Overview</td>
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<td>5th May</td>
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<td>Tuesday</td>
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<td>Review of Interim Report</td>
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