
April 2017
CONTENTS

Chairperson’s Foreword.............................................................................................................. 4

1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 8
  1.1 Establishment and membership of the Expert Advisory Group ............................................ 8
  1.2 Approach taken by the Expert Advisory Group ...................................................................... 9

2 Context ....................................................................................................................................... 11
  2.1 Local Government in Ireland.................................................................................................. 11
  2.2 Recent developments in Irish local government ..................................................................... 13
  2.3 Cork Local Government Committee (2015).......................................................................... 15
  2.4 Subsequent Developments since the publication of the report of the CLGC ...................... 17
  2.5 Local Context ........................................................................................................................ 22

3 The limitations of the status quo ............................................................................................. 32
  3.1 Challenges for Cork ................................................................................................................ 32

4 The case presented by the CLGC for a merger / unified authority........................................... 36
  4.1 Arguments presented in favour of a unified authority by the CLGC ...................................... 36

5 The case presented by the CLGC minority for a boundary extension ..................................... 39
  5.1 Arguments presented in favour of a boundary extension by the CLGC minority .................... 39

6 Options Identified by the Group ............................................................................................... 42
  6.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 42
  6.2 Option 1 – Status Quo ............................................................................................................ 43
  6.3 Option 2 – A unified authority for Cork city and county ...................................................... 46
  6.4 Option 3 – Boundary extension of Cork City to include developed areas in the north and south environs of the current city ................................................................................. 48
  6.5 Option 4 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include Cork city and suburbs as defined by CSO ................................................................................................................................. 48
  6.6 Option 5 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include ‘Cork Metropolitan Area’ ............. 51
  6.7 Option 6 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include Metropolitan Cork as defined in CASP ................................................................................................................................. 54
  6.8 A single executive to serve two councils .............................................................................. 54

7 Criteria used to assess different options ................................................................................. 56
  7.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 56
7.2 Cork as the engine of development and a counterweight to Dublin ........................................ 56
7.3 A unified voice for Cork .............................................................................................................. 56
7.4 Effective planning and delivery of development and infrastructure ........................................... 57
7.5 Providing for differences between metropolitan and rural areas ............................................. 57
7.6 Financial viability and sustainability ....................................................................................... 58
7.7 Capacity to maintain, improve, and expand services into the future ....................................... 58
7.8 Clear and readily understandable governance ........................................................................... 58
7.9 Effective local democratic representation, subsidiarity and accountable leadership ............... 58
7.10 Potential for efficiency savings and improved value for money ........................................... 59
7.11 Costs and complexity of transition from existing structures .................................................. 59
7.12 Summary ................................................................................................................................. 59
8 Financial analysis .......................................................................................................................... 61
  8.1 Approach taken by the Expert Advisory Group to financial analysis ........................................ 61
  8.2 Status quo ................................................................................................................................. 61
  8.3 Unified authority ....................................................................................................................... 61
  8.4 Boundary extension .................................................................................................................. 62
9 Assessment of different options ...................................................................................................... 64
  9.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 64
  9.2 Option 1 – Status quo ............................................................................................................... 64
  9.3 Option 2 – A unified authority for Cork city and county ......................................................... 67
  9.4 Option 3 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include developed areas in the north and south environs of the current city ................................................................. 71
  9.5 Option 4 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include Cork city and suburbs as defined by CSO ................................................................................................................................. 73
  9.6 Option 5 – Boundary extension of Cork City to include the ‘Cork Metropolitan Area’ ....... 76
  9.7 Option 6 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include Metropolitan Cork as defined in CASP ................................................................................................................................. 80
  9.8 Further option – a single executive to serve two councils ....................................................... 82
  9.9 Recommended option ............................................................................................................. 84
  9.10 A unified voice for Cork ......................................................................................................... 88
  9.11 Financial implications of a boundary change ......................................................................... 90
10 Political leadership in Cork ........................................................................................................... 94
11 Devolution of Functions to Local Government .......................................................................... 96
12 Democratic representation and district-based decision making..........................98

13 Conclusions .............................................................................................................101
   13.1 A cohesive Cork City and a cohesive Cork County .............................................101
   13.2 Implementation and transitional arrangements .................................................102
   13.3 Government action .........................................................................................104
   13.4 Summary of Recommendations.......................................................................105

14 References ..............................................................................................................108

Appendix 1 Terms of Reference – Expert Advisory Group on Local Government Arrangements in Cork ..................................................................................................................111

Appendix 2 Stakeholder Meetings................................................................................114

Appendix 3 Shared Service Arrangements between Cork City Council and Cork County Council ......................................................................................................................................115
Simon Coveney TD,
Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

Dear Minister,

It is with great pleasure I submit the report of the Expert Advisory Group on Local Government Arrangements in Cork.

The Group did not call for further public submissions and concentrated, instead, on testing the assumptions underlying, and the implications of, the various options for the future geography of local government in Cork and the related governance arrangements. In the course of our work the Group met a range of individuals and organisations; these are listed in Appendix 2.

We were extremely grateful to everyone who gave of their time, knowledge and experience. Arguments were presented with passion and eloquence. It was clear that the differing views were motivated by what is considered best for Cork as a whole. Everyone we met shared a belief that the area was underperforming in economic terms with a corresponding desire for Cork to prosper and fulfil its potential as Ireland’s second city and act as a genuine counterweight to Dublin.

In the light of this common purpose the Group hopes that once a final decision is taken to determine the matter both Councils and their executives will implement the new arrangements in a manner that will minimise any disruption and will not impede Cork’s continued economic and social progress.

In evaluating the various options against a range of criteria from the status quo through city boundary extensions in various guises to merger and the creation of a unitary authority, we could – with the exception of retaining the current boundaries – see advantages and disadvantages in all the scenarios. As a result, we focused on what we regarded as the key question, namely what governance and delivery arrangements would best drive sustainable economic growth and strengthen Cork's position as Ireland's second city. The term “growth”
is deliberately used, as there is a widely shared aspiration that Cork should increasingly become the economic engine for the South of Ireland, with all the implications this has for business development, population growth, housing provision and associated infrastructure, particularly sustainable transport.

On balance we felt that an expanded City Council offered the best solution. It provided a clearer identity for the structure of local government and a stronger focus on the needs and demands of the metropolitan area, including regeneration, while also recognising the specific service needs of rural areas. We have not put forward precise boundaries, but Figure 9.1 in the report provides a diagrammatic illustration of the area we have in mind. This area reflects not just the current extent of urban Cork but also provides scope to accommodate future development, while not extending too far into areas that are predominantly rural in character.

The Group recognised that the needs of rural areas must not be neglected or marginalised. We felt that this was best achieved by a dedicated local authority that could address the distinctive challenges and opportunities in these areas, including their constituent county and market towns. The County Council, which will still be one of the largest in Ireland, is best placed to do this.

We recognised that the financial implications of a boundary extension would be significant and sought the assistance of Des Bruton (formerly A/Head of Finance with Fingal County Council) and Niamh Larkin (Director of Audit with the Local Government Audit Service) to consider this further with officials from the City and County Councils. While more detailed work will be required if it is decided to proceed with a boundary extension, there are various ways in which this can be achieved. It is important, however, that long-term solutions be found to provide the County Council and the communities within the revised area with the confidence that their service needs, which differ from those in the metropolitan area, will continue to be met into the future.

However, simply having a local government structure that more closely aligns with the issues facing metropolitan Cork is not enough. As a result, the Group has advocated a new Cork Metropolitan Area Plan be placed on a statutory basis, with its preparation and implementation overseen by a Board of 10 members drawn equally from City and County
Councillors. We believe that the Board should elect a Chair who, along with the other members, would serve for 5 years and be the political figurehead to champion the sustainable growth of the wider Cork Metropolitan Area, including acting as the conduit for securing policy changes and funding commitments from national government and its agencies. A Chief Officer of the Board should be appointed through the public appointments process, with other members of a small team seconded largely from the 2 local authorities. In addition, the Board should appoint 2 (non-voting) individuals from the business community to ensure that the economic, commercial and property perspectives are embedded within the Board’s approach, policies, decisions and actions.

It is critical that the Cork Metropolitan Area Plan is focused on a very limited range of development and infrastructure issues and is accompanied by an Action Plan that is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that aims and aspirations are turned in to reality. This may mean different financial delivery models than currently exist, particularly for meeting the diverse challenges around housing and infrastructure provision, including regeneration. We think that such a plan provides an opportunity to turn the rhetoric around Cork’s growth ambitions into reality and to produce a model for strategic metropolitan planning from which comparable cities and their hinterlands, in Ireland and beyond, will take inspiration and seek to emulate.

The Group was tasked with looking at a range of other matters such as the scope for an Elected Lord Mayor, devolution of greater powers to local authorities, democratic representation and more local decision making. We did not have time to consider all these issues in great detail but we felt strongly that the issues of the elected Lord Mayor and transfer of powers go well beyond the future of local government arrangements in Cork and are matters for national government as part of a wider process of public sector reform. However, we have made some recommendations in respect of the terms of office and functions of the Lord Mayor and County Mayor and with regard to the need to increase the number of Councillors in rural Cork to support improvements in the representation of local communities.

In respect of a directly elected Lord Mayor, the Group considered this would represent an undue risk to the stability of the system with regard to the role of elected members and the
chief executive. However, a Lord Mayor elected for five years by the city councillors is one means by which democratic leadership and external representation could be strengthened.

The report is very much a team effort, with the conclusions and recommendations arrived at through frank and robust discussion and debate. I was extremely grateful to my colleagues Gillian Keating and John O’Connor, who brought a knowledge of Cork in its many and diverse facets along with an empathy and understanding for the traditions and culture of the area. Our Expert Adviser, Paul Martin, Chief Executive of Richmond and Wandsworth Councils, gave a fresh perspective and range of practical insights to the work of the Group. We were also indebted to the financial expertise we received from Des Bruton and Niamh Larkin, which was carried out expeditiously and thoroughly in the time they had at their disposal.

Our Secretariat from the Institute of Public Administration – Dr Mark Callanan and Laura Shannon – were truly exceptional. I cannot thank them enough, not just for their organisational flare and drafting abilities but for their individual and combined energy, work ethic, tolerance and (last but not least) their sustained good humour.

The recommendations of the Group can be accepted, accepted with modifications or rejected. Whatever you and your colleagues decide, I urge you to do so expeditiously and proceed as a matter of urgency in setting up an implementation group to flesh out the details of the new arrangements. There was a strong view that the prolonged uncertainty has not been helpful and is arguably damaging to the long-term interests of Cork and to Ireland as a whole.

Jim Mackinnon CBE
Chair
Expert Advisory Group

April 2017
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Establishment and membership of the Expert Advisory Group

1.1.1 In October 2016, the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government established an Expert Advisory Group to advise the Minister regarding relevant options in relation to future local government arrangements for Cork, having regard particularly to the review carried out by the Cork Local Government Review Committee (September 2015).

1.1.2 The mandate of the Group included:
   a) undertake further comprehensive and rigorous examination and analysis in relation to the issues dealt with in the review of local government arrangements for Cork and in the report (including the minority report) in that regard by the Cork Local Government Review Committee;
   b) provide relevant views, assessments, and advice arising from the matters at (a) and having regard to the work carried out by the Cork Local Government Review Committee in relation to relevant aspects of local government arrangements for Cork and the implications of these, including assessment of the implications of recommendations in the report of the Cork Local Government Review Committee;
   c) provide advice to the Minister as to how best to address the issues on which the Cork Local Government Review Committee was unable to provide agreed recommendations, including the consideration of any relevant options in addition to those considered in that committee’s review;
   d) report to the Minister in relation to the foregoing matters as required by the Minister, or as the Group considers appropriate.

1.1.3 A full copy of the Terms of Reference are included as Appendix 1. The members of the group were: Mr Jim MacKinnon, CBE, former Director for the Built Environment and Chief Planner at the Scottish Government (who acted as Chairperson of the group); Mr John O’Connor, former Chairman of An Bord Pleanála and current Chairman of Eirgrid; Ms Gillian Keating, Partner at Ronan Daly Jermyn Solicitors and former President and Board Member of Cork Chamber of Commerce. Mr Paul Martin, Chief Executive, Richmond and Wandsworth Councils, was appointed by the Minister as an External Adviser to the Group.
1.2 Approach taken by the Expert Advisory Group

1.2.1 During the course of its work, the Group met formally on 9 occasions. The first formal meeting of the Group took place in Cork on the 21st October 2016, and the Group concluded its work at a final meeting on 12th April 2017, after which its report was submitted to the Minister. The Group, or individuals within the Group, also met with a number of key interests and stakeholders. A list of those that the Group met is attached at Appendix 2.

1.2.2 The Group undertook a rigorous examination of the issues dealt with in the review of local government arrangements for Cork and in the report in that regard by the Cork Local Government Committee (CLGC) (including the view presented by a minority of members of the Committee).

1.2.3 The Group reviewed information, documents, records and other relevant material of the CLGC made available to it. Following a public invitation for submissions, the CLGC received 96 written responses, including submissions from both Cork City and Cork County Councils. The Group did not request any further written public submissions, instead it focused on testing the assumptions and implications of a range of options for the future of local government in Cork.

1.2.4 As part of their deliberations the Group met a number of parties, including elected members and management teams of both Cork City Council and Cork County Council and representatives of the CLGC. The Group also met with a number of TDs based in the Cork area, potential and existing investors, and business representative groups in Cork. The Group was also interested in assessing citizen and community perspectives on the future of local government in Cork – to that end it met with representatives of the Public Participation Networks for both the City Council and County Council areas. The Group also met with representatives of the Planning Division of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to discuss the preparations for the new National Planning Framework, and the place of Cork therein (see Appendix 2).
1.2.5 The Group also invited both Cork City Council and Cork County Council to expand on and update their estimates of the financial implications of pursuing different options of a unified authority (as proposed in the report of the CLGC) and a boundary extension (as proposed by the CLGC minority), as well as supplying medium-term financial projections under a ‘no change’ scenario (see section 8).

1.2.6 The Institute of Public Administration was requested by the Department to perform a secretariat function on behalf of the Group. The secretariat role involved servicing of meetings, e.g. minutes, preparation of documentation, etc., and carrying out any ad hoc research as necessary at the request of the Group.

1.2.7 The Group would like to express its thanks to the two local authorities in Cork for facilitating its work, arranging meetings with both the elected members and senior managers, and supplying additional data. The Group are grateful to all those who took time out of their schedules to meet and explore different options for the future of local government in Cork. Our thanks also to Des Bruton and Niamh Larkin who assisted the Group in the analysis of some of the financial data presented.
2 CONTEXT

2.1 Local government in Ireland

Local government functions

2.1.1 Local authorities provide a range of services in relation to:

- Economic development and enterprise supports
- Local community development
- Social housing
- Roads and traffic management
- Spatial and land use planning
- Environmental protection and waste management
- Fire services and civil defence
- Recreation and amenity services, including public libraries, parks and local arts and cultural services
- Some residual service responsibilities in areas such as veterinary inspection and the coroner service
- Maintaining the register of electors

2.1.2 Some functions traditionally carried out by local government in Ireland have been centralised (such as water or higher education grants) or privatised (such as refuse collection). Local authorities, however, continue to undertake certain functions under service level agreements with newly created central agencies, e.g. maintenance of roads on behalf of Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly the National Roads Authority) and water services on behalf of Irish Water. There is also an increasing trend towards the use of shared services among local authorities for a range of functions such as payroll, procurement and ICT back office functions.

2.1.3 The elected council is the policy making forum of the local authority; the municipal district members (see structures below) act as a decision-making body of the overall council in respect of their municipal district area. Elected councils (operating at local authority or municipal district level) exercise ‘reserved functions,’ which are identified as such in law.
These include adopting the development plan, agreeing the local authority’s annual budget (including setting the level of commercial rates and variations on the local property tax rate applying in the area), approving the local authority’s corporate plan and a policy framework for most service areas, the adoption of local bye-laws, and nominating councillors onto committees and other bodies.

2.1.4 Any function of a local authority not identified in law as a reserved function is deemed to be an ‘executive function’ – one exercised by the chief executive or his / her staff. Examples relate to much of the day-to-day management of the local authority, including staffing, enforcement actions, revenue collection, housing allocations, and development control. The chief executive has a duty to advise and assist the elected council in the exercise of their functions.

**Local government structures**

2.1.5 There are currently 31 local authorities in Ireland: 26 county councils; 3 city councils; and 2 city and county councils. Apart from the local authorities in the counties of Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin and the cities of Dublin, Cork and Galway, all other local authorities are subdivided into municipal districts, with councillors representing simultaneously the municipal district and the local authority. In total, there are 95 municipal districts in the country. However, municipal districts are not a separate tier of local government or separate legal entities – rather they are considered as a sub-unit of their respective county council or county & city council.

**Elected members**

2.1.6 Councillors are elected every five years. Elections are held on the basis of a local electoral area (essentially a constituency for the purposes of local elections). In the case of local authorities that are subdivided into municipal districts, these districts are based on one or more local electoral areas. Local councillors in such cases are elected to their respective municipal district, in addition to forming part of the plenary council for the entire local authority.
2.1.7 Each year, each local authority elects a chair called the Cathaoirleach or Mayor for a term of one year and a deputy chair called the Leas-Chathaoirleach or Deputy-Mayor from among its members. Alternative titles can be used in some cases; Cork City and Dublin City Councils are entitled to use the titles of Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor.

2.2 Recent developments in Irish local government

2.2.1 In recent years, local government in Ireland has undergone substantial reform. In October 2012, *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government* was published. It was heralded as the ‘most fundamental set of changes in local government in the history of the State from regional and county level through to the municipal level of governance’ (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012, p. i). Many of the reforms set out in *Putting People First* were introduced with effect from June 1st 2014 under the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The key structural reforms were:

- The number of local authorities reduced from 114 to 31 by dissolving 80 town councils (which had been separately elected as a lower tier of local government) and merging Waterford City Council and Waterford County Council, North Tipperary County Council and South Tipperary County Council, and Limerick City Council and Limerick County Council. The impact of dissolving town councils has been particularly significant in Cork County, which previously had 12 town councils in place, with largely independent status and powers.
- The number of elected members reduced from 1,627 to 949.
- A total of 95 municipal districts established.
- The previous 8 regional authorities and 2 regional assemblies replaced by 3 regional assemblies.
- The number of members of regional bodies reduced from 290 to 83.
Other key actions were:

- The introduction of a local property tax to fund local services, the rate of which can be varied by local authorities
- Expanding the role of local authorities in economic development and closer alignment of local and community development supports with local government
- More robust performance monitoring of local authorities by a new National Oversight and Audit Commission
- Establishment of a public water utility, Irish Water, and transfer of responsibility for all aspects of water services investment and operation from local authorities to the new national agency. Local authorities continue, however, to carry out water service functions via service level agreements with Irish Water.

2.2.2 In relation to Cork specifically, *Putting People First* states that with regard to defining metropolitan areas:

“The need to recognise and define an appropriate metropolitan area is also clearly evident in the case of Cork, having regard to the very significant spill over of suburban development and population in the environs of Cork City located in the administrative area of Cork County Council and adjacent towns. For practical purposes, these areas of development form part of the de facto city, with obvious close linkage for a range of purposes – social, commercial, employment, transport and indeed, in terms of identity - with the urban centre that constitutes the administrative area of Cork City Council. More significantly perhaps, the fact that the administration of what is, in real terms, a largely continuous, or closely connected, urban area is divided between two entirely separate local authorities carries potential future risks, for example, with regard to development, spatial planning, and economic and social evolution, of the type which were identified in the reports of the local government committees in Limerick and Waterford. Such risks can be mitigated by close co-operation between the relevant authorities, which has been a feature of administration in Cork, but a more prudent long-term approach would be to bring the administrative configuration into line with the demographic and developmental reality” (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012, p. 86).
2.3 Cork Local Government Committee (2015)

2.3.1 In January 2015 a statutory committee was appointed to review the Cork city boundary and other local government arrangements in Cork under section 28 of the Local Government Act 1991. The Committee was asked to carry out an objective review of local government arrangements in Cork city and county and to prepare a report making recommendations for improvements in such arrangements with respect to:

a. whether the boundary of Cork city should be altered and, if so, recommendations with respect to the alteration of the boundary; or

b. whether Cork City Council and Cork County Council should be unified

The full terms of reference for the Committee and copies of submissions made to the Committee are available at http://www.corklocalgovernmentreview.ie/.

2.3.2 The Cork Local Government Committee (CLGC) was chaired by Mr Alf Smiddy and its membership included: Mr Tom Curran; Professor Dermot Keogh; Mr John Lucey, SC; and Dr Theresa Reidy. The Committee was independent in the performance of its functions.

2.3.3 The report of the CLGC was published in September 2015. The CLGC accepted that retaining the status quo was not a realistic option and argued that the metropolitan area should be expanded to reflect the growth of the city. A difference of views emerged over whether this expanded metropolitan area was best accommodated within a merged local authority or through retaining separate city and county councils.

**Recommendations of the Cork Local Government Committee**

2.3.4 The CLGC identified a number of criteria against which the options of boundary extension and unitary council were assessed. After extensive deliberations, a majority of three Committee members (Tom Curran, John Lucey SC and Alf Smiddy) favoured amalgamation of Cork City Council and Cork County Council into a unitary council, and the report and recommendations were presented to reflect the majority position. Two Committee members (Prof. Dermot Keogh and Dr. Theresa Reidy) favoured maintaining two separate
local authorities for the city and county areas respectively, but with a substantive boundary extension to Cork city. This viewpoint and an associated set of recommendations were submitted as Appendix 6 to the Report of the Cork Local Government Committee.

2.3.5 A summary of key recommendations reflected in both the CLGC report and by the CLGC minority is presented below. Many of the arguments presented and the rationales that underpinned these recommendations are further explored in sections 4 and 5.

2.3.6 The position adopted by the majority of members of the CLGC was that Cork City Council and Cork County Council should be merged to create a unified local authority to represent all of Cork. The new Cork City and County Council would be based on 3 divisions as follows:

- Cork Metropolitan Division for the city and suburbs, based on Metropolitan Cork as identified under the Cork Area Strategic Plan (CASP) (population in 2011: 289,739)
- Cork North and East Municipal Division
- Cork West and South Municipal Division.

2.3.7 The elected members of the proposed unified authority would meet at plenary level, divisional level and municipal district level. The plenary council would retain responsibility for the annual budget, corporate plan, development plan, and local economic and community plan. The report proposed that the role and status of the metropolitan / municipal divisions “be enhanced beyond that of current municipal districts” and “particular attention should be given to ensuring members can perform an adequate budgetary role at metropolitan / municipal division level” (Cork Local Government Committee, 2015, p. 59). The report proposed that the Lord Mayor position be retained as chair of the Metropolitan Division and that the option of a directly-elected Lord Mayor be considered. Executive functions would be consolidated in the unitary authority, with a deputy chief executive appointed with responsibility for the Metropolitan Division and economic development across Cork City and County. It also suggested that significant powers and functions be devolved from central government and state agencies to the unitary authority.
2.3.8 It further proposed that, following a Government decision, an implementation group be established to prepare for and oversee arrangements for establishing a unified authority, with a view to the new structures being in place for the 2019 local elections.

2.3.9 The position adopted by a minority of members of the CLCG was that two separate local authorities be maintained to represent the interests of Cork city and Cork county, but that the boundary of the Cork City Council area be extended to bring the population of the Cork City Council area from 119,230 to between 230,000 and 235,000 (based on Census 2011 data). This would also mean that a reduced Cork County Council area would have a population of approximately 290,000 (based on Census 2011 data). The CLGC minority proposed that the boundary extension would include Douglas and Togher in the immediate hinterland of the current boundary, and also include Ballincollig, Tower, Blarney, Glanmire, Carrigtwohill, Ringaskiddy, Carrigaline, and Ballygarvan (but not extend to other areas such as Cobh or Midleton). It suggested that the new boundary should apply from the 2019 local elections.

2.3.10 The CLGC minority proposed that compensation arrangements would have to be agreed whereby a payment would be made by Cork City Council to Cork County Council initially at a level set for a five-year term, after which compensation would be reduced on sliding scale to zero over a further ten years (after which payments would cease). The necessary staff transfers should be accommodated over a transitional period from 2019-2024. The CLGC minority also proposed greater horizontal cooperation between local authorities be placed on a formal basis, through joint committees representing both local authorities.

2.4 Subsequent Developments since the publication of the report of the CLGC

2.4.1 The report of the CLGC was welcomed by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Alan Kelly T.D.
2.4.2 Immediately following the publication of this report, a number of Cork City councillors spoke out against the merger recommendations. Subsequently, Cork City Council adopted a resolution under section 140 of the Local Government Act 2001 directing its chief executive to commence judicial review proceedings over the recommendations of the CLGC in the courts. The Lord Mayor of Cork also wrote an open letter to the citizens of Cork concerning the above (O'Sullivan, 2015).

2.4.3 There was considerable media attention surrounding the review of local government arrangements in Cork for the duration of the work of the CLGC and, in particular, following publication of their report in September 2015. The majority of the county council supported the recommendation for amalgamation, while, as noted above, the city council were opposed to a merger. There were also differences of view within most political parties.

2.4.4 Outside of the political arena, opinion was also split. It was widely reported that the two main business groups in Cork, Cork Business Association and Cork Chamber, were ‘at odds over proposals’. While Cork Business Association (CBA) came out against the merger proposals, a former CBA president backed the merger plans (O'Riordan, 2015). The original submission from IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation) to the CLGC had favoured a boundary extension but subsequently endorsed the proposal for a unified authority.

2.4.5 University College Cork (UCC) commissioned an external review of the report of the CGLC (including the minority view) from Prof. Tony Bovaird at the University of Birmingham (Governance International Institute), inviting his opinion of the process, outcomes and recommendations and any professional guidance he might wish to give. The Bovaird Report sets out the merits of the process of the report, with analysis of the economic impacts and
opportunities of the two options considered. Having reviewed and critiqued all parts of the report, as per the terms of reference, Bovaird concluded:

Taking these judgements together, I believe that the option of separate City and County Councils, with a significant extension to the City Council boundary, is much better substantiated by the arguments presented in the reports and by the international evidence base. (2016, p. 29)

2.4.6 Apart from the response to the recommendations of the Cork Local Government Review, other developments since 2015 are also worth mentioning. These include the initial preparations of a new National Planning Framework to replace the National Spatial Strategy, as well as the reports into local government structures taking place in other parts of Ireland.

National Planning Framework

2.4.7 In February 2017, the consultation process to inform the preparation of the new National Planning Framework was launched. The position paper launched at the start of the consultation exercise notes that Cork is one of the areas that has experienced the largest increases in population over the last 20 years, albeit with that growth largely occurring outside the Cork City Council area. The paper also notes that “population growth in the Cork built-up area (28,300 or 16%), Limerick (15,600 or 20%) and Waterford (8,800 or 20%) have been significantly below the national average over the past 20 years, despite recent increases apparent in these three Cities and particularly in Cork, since 2011” (Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 2017, p. 23).

2.4.8 Cork is clearly identified as Ireland’s second city in terms of scale (on a par with peer cities such as Aarhus, Christchurch, Aberdeen and Tampere. Mention is also made of strengthening the regional cities as drivers of growth in key business sectors (including professional, scientific, technical, finance and insurance). Key assets of cities are identified, including their role as major centres of employment and economic development, third level education facilities, healthcare, communications, and transport infrastructure including motorway networks, ports and airports. The paper refers to the need for more compact cities and “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” (p. 25).

2.4.9 Outside of the urban centres, the paper emphasises the comparative advantage of rural areas in the agri-food, creative, clean energy, marine and tourism sectors. It also emphasises the need to distinguish between stronger rural areas located in more geographically advantaged locations, small- and medium-sized towns, and less accessible rural areas, suggesting the need for different approaches to rural development in different areas.

Other boundary reviews

2.4.10 In January 2015, at the same time as the Cork Local Government Committee commenced its work, a separate committee (the Galway Local Government Committee) was appointed to review local government arrangements in Galway. The report of the Galway Local Government Committee was submitted in November 2015, although it was not published by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government until late 2016. The members of the Galway Local Government Committee recommended a merger of Galway City Council and Galway County Council, to be known as the Greater Galway Authority (Galway Local Government Committee, 2015), although this option had been opposed by both local authorities concerned in their submissions to the Committee. At the time of writing, no official decision has been made regarding these recommendations, although an Expert Advisory Group had been appointed to carry out further examination on that report’s recommendations.

2.4.11 Boundary reviews were also announced in June 2015 in Athlone, Carlow, Drogheda and Waterford. The main rationale cited for the potential boundary alterations was to bring administrative jurisdictions into line with the current settlement and development position. In the four cases selected for review, there is an overspill of population from cities / towns into another county.
2.4.12 The report of the Waterford Boundary Review Committee (2016) was submitted in December 2016 and recommended a limited boundary extension of Waterford into Kilkenny to include the suburban area in Ferrybank with an estimated population of 4,500. The Committee proposed that Waterford City and County Council pay compensation to Kilkenny County Council, based on the loss of commercial rates and local property tax income arising from the boundary change, discounted by the relief from the requirement to provide day-to-day services in the area involved.

2.4.13 The report of the Athlone Boundary Review Committee (2016) was submitted in November 2016 and recommended that, subject to adequate progress being made in terms of shared service arrangements and joint planning initiatives, no change to the existing boundary should take place. It proposed that a new programme of structured cooperation be immediately initiated by Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils to develop an innovative governance system for the area under review, including specifying a series of interim deadlines as a means of monitoring progress in this respect. It further recommended that if substantial progress was not made with regard to enhanced cooperation within a four-year timeframe that the Minister should extend the boundary at a future date.

2.4.14 The report of the Carlow Boundary Review Committee (2016) was submitted in December 2016 and recommended that no change be made to the existing boundary between Carlow town and Graiguecullen in south-east Laois. While the development of Carlow town has extended into parts of Laois, the Committee argued that the case for a boundary change had not been made, particularly given the high level of existing collaboration between the two local authorities concerned (Carlow County Council and Laois County Council), including through the adoption of a joint spatial plan for Carlow town that straddles both local authority areas, as well as service level cooperation in areas such as fire and emergency services, housing (including estate management), and ongoing cooperation in areas such as road works and flooding issues.

2.4.15 The report of the Drogheda Boundary Review Committee (2017) was submitted in February 2017 and also recommended that no change be made to the existing boundary of Drogheda,
instead recommending that a new programme of structured cooperation be immediately initiated by both local authorities (Louth County Council and Meath County Council) for the area concerned. Specifically, the Committee recommended that the two authorities working together produce and implement a joint local area plan for the greater Drogheda area, a joint retail strategy for the town, and a service delivery plan (following comprehensive analysis of local authority services and functions, and services delivered by other bodies). The Committee further recommended that the boundary issue should be revisited by the Minister in the event of substantial non-completion of the above-mentioned tasks within a four-year period.

2.5 Local Context

2.5.1 There are currently two local authorities in Cork: Cork City Council and Cork County Council, as shown in Figure 2.2. Cork city is Ireland’s second city, while Cork county is the largest local authority by area and second largest local authority in Ireland by population. Table 2.1 presents key figures for both councils.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cork County Council</th>
<th>Cork City Council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (2011 Census)</td>
<td>399,802</td>
<td>119,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (2016 Census)</td>
<td>417,211</td>
<td>125,657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area (square km)</td>
<td>7,467.97</td>
<td>39.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure 2015 (€)</td>
<td>270,333,574</td>
<td>146,956,396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Rates ARV 2016</td>
<td>74.75</td>
<td>74.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Staff (end 2016)</td>
<td>1,933</td>
<td>1,241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Councillors</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population per Councillor (2011)</td>
<td>7,269</td>
<td>3,846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure per capita (€)</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>1,170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO, Annual Reports, DPER Databank.

2.5.2 At the time the Group was carrying out its work, only preliminary results from Census 2016 were available detailing population at county and city level. The first summary results of the 2016 Census were released in mid-April 2017. They provide final population figures at county and city level, Dáil constituencies and urban areas, but not at local electoral level.
Thus, for the most part, this report refers to population figures based on Census 2011. This facilitated comparison with submissions made to the CLGC and the report of the CLGC itself, which referred to 2011 population figures, as did the Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee which analysed the ratio between the number of Councillors and population level in different local authorities in 2013 (see section 12). However, a Table comparing population figures in 2011 and finalised figures available to the Group for 2016 is presented below.

Table 2.2 Population Figures, 2011 and 2016 compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population 2011</th>
<th>Population 2016</th>
<th>Actual Change</th>
<th>Percentage Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cork City</td>
<td>119,230</td>
<td>125,657</td>
<td>6,427</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork County</td>
<td>399,802</td>
<td>417,211</td>
<td>17,409</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork City &amp; County</td>
<td>519,032</td>
<td>542,868</td>
<td>23,836</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork City &amp; Suburbs (CSO definition)</td>
<td>198,582</td>
<td>208,669</td>
<td>10,087</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO

Cork city profile

2.5.3 Cork city is Ireland’s second city, with a population of 125,657 in 2016, an increase of 5.4 per cent from 2011. The city is served by 31 councillors, representing six local electoral areas. The wider population of the city and suburbs, as defined by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), was 198,582 in 2011 and 208,669 in 2016. The City covers an area of 39.61 square kilometres. Cork city, and the wider city-region, is recognised as the economic driver for the greater South West area; Cork was identified as a gateway in the National Spatial Strategy.

2.5.4 Cork city has a diverse economic base with strong concentration of activity in ICT, Life Sciences, International Services, Business Services, Education, Health and Retail sectors and is the main service centre for the South West Region. The wider city-region also has a strong pharma and bio pharma sector. Cork has a strong record of attracting and retaining overseas
companies such as Apple, Dell EMC and Flextronics. In 2014, Cork was ranked the number one small European city for business friendliness by FDI Intelligence (a division of the Financial Times).

2.5.5 The city is home to two third level institutes, University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology, with a total student population in excess of 35,000. There are also three Further Education Colleges, the National Maritime College of Ireland, and a number of research institutes, including Tyndall National Institute and MaREI (Centre for Marine and Renewable Energy).

2.5.6 Cork city’s commitment and contribution to the arts and cultural life is well established. The city is home to the excellent Cork School of Music, several galleries, museums, The National Sculpture Factory, dance theatres and artist workshops. The city also boasts a year-long calendar of festivals ranging from folk, jazz, choral and film. In recognition of this commitment, Cork city was chosen from among other Irish cities to become European Capital of Culture in 2005.

2.5.7 There is a distinct spatial component to disadvantage in the city. RAPID areas (see Figure 2.1) suffer disproportionately from deprivation, as well as the north side more generally. The four RAPID areas within Cork city are identified in Figure 2.1 below and include: Knocknaheeny/ Churchfield (Pink); Farranree/ Fairhill/ Gurrabrahraher (Orange); Blackpool/ The Glen/ Mayfield (Green); and Togher/ Mahon (Blue). Areas around Turner’s Cross and Ballyphehane south of the River Lee also have pockets of deprivation. Recession has led to wider dispersal of disadvantage also. Cork city had the second highest concentration of “unemployment blackspots” in the state (electoral districts where the proportion of unemployment is greater than 35%), based on the 2011 Census. These are concentrated in the Northside RAPID areas. While unemployment levels have fallen since 2011, it is

1 The RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) Programme is a Government initiative, which targets 51 of the most disadvantaged areas in the country. Cork City has four designated RAPID areas. While there is no longer funding available under the programme, RAPID areas continue to be used as a basis for identifying localised areas of disadvantage.
reasonable to assume that this geographic concentration still persists (Cork City Council, 2015).

2.5.8 Cork City Council employed 1,241 staff at the end of 2016 and had a revenue budget of €152.6 million in 2017.

Cork county profile

2.5.9 County Cork had a population of 417,211 in 2016, an increase of 4.4 per cent from 2011. The county is served by 55 councillors, representing eight municipal districts and is the largest elected assembly outside of Dublin City Council. The eight municipal districts are: Ballincollig/Carrigaline, Bandon/Kinsale, Blarney/Macroom, Cobh, East Cork, Fermoy, Kanturk/Mallow and West Cork.

2.5.10 County Cork covers an area of 7,459 square kilometres (2,880 square miles), which is 11% of the Irish State and makes Cork Ireland's largest county. With over 7,500 miles of public roads, Cork County Council's transportation network equates to 14% of the nation's total.

2.5.11 The coastline of county Cork measures approximately 1,100 kilometres (680 miles), which is 19% of the Irish State's coastline. The county also has the greatest number of rivers in Ireland, with 1,200 kilometres (750 miles) of main river channels.

2.5.12 County Cork has the fifth lowest unemployment rate in the country, at 14.8% (2011 census), and is the leading county outside of the Greater Dublin Area in terms of health status, labour force participation and educational attainment. County Cork also has disposable income levels and a per capita GDP above the national average. County Cork’s economy has been underpinned by a range of multi-national companies in such operational areas as electronics and pharmaceuticals, while tourism, the food industry, agriculture, commercial and retail also form important sectors in the regional economy. Deprivation indices for Cork roughly
follow the national trend whereby affluent areas are distributed in concentric rings around the main population centres, mainly demarcating the urban commuter belts.

2.5.13 Cork County Council employed 1,933 staff at the end of 2016 and had a revenue budget of €306.8 million in 2017. At present the Council operates on the basis of 3 divisions (North Cork, South Cork and West Cork), and there are divisional offices in Mallow, Clonakilty and Skibbereen, with County Hall acting as the divisional office for the South Cork Division. The eight municipal districts (MDs) are supported by a network of area offices, which handle customer services such as reports, queries and complaints on different issues. In some cases these can be dealt with directly by the area office. In others, citizens might be directed to the appropriate contact in County Hall or to another service provider.

**Cooperation between Cork local authorities**

2.5.14 The boundary between Cork city and county has been a source of some contention for many years, but no change has been made since 1965. Since then, considerable effort has been put into facilitating greater cooperation between the councils.

2.5.15 One notable and long-standing area of cooperation has been around planning and transportation. This includes a first Land-Use and Transportation Study for the greater Cork city area, LUTS1, published in 1978 and updated as LUTS2 in 1992. The LUTS plan was replaced by the Cork Area Strategic Plan (CASP) jointly commissioned by Cork City and County Councils in 2001, which was updated in 2008. Both local authorities also made a joint submission to Government during the consultation process for the preparation of the new National Planning Framework in 2017.

2.5.16 As part of their submissions to the CLGC, both Cork City Council and Cork County Council detailed a range of services that are delivered jointly by both local authorities, as well as joint strategies adopted by both local authorities (see Appendix 3).
Figure 2.1 RAPID areas within Cork city; Source: Cork City Council
Figure 2.2 Area boundaries

Source: Cork City Council
Different geographical areas:

2.5.17 Throughout this report a number of different configurations of areas within Cork will be referred to. For the purpose of clarity, these areas are represented in Figure 2.2 and described in the following text. For ease of reference, the size of these areas and their populations are also compiled in Table 2.3

2.5.18 Cork city. This is defined by the existing city boundary. The population of the city in 2011 was 119,230, with an area of circa 40 square kilometres.

2.5.19 Cork city and suburbs: This is defined by the Central Statistics Office’s description of what it regards as the ‘city and suburbs’. The 2011 population of this area according to the CSO was 198,582, and it extends to 165 square kilometres.

2.5.20 Cork Metropolitan Area: This is defined by the proposal for a boundary extension put forward by Cork City Council in their submission to the CLGC. It includes the satellite towns of Ballincollig, Blarney, Carrigaline, Carrigtohill and Glanmire. It contained a population of approximately 235,000 in 2011.

2.5.21 Metropolitan Cork: The first Land Use and Transport Study (LUTS) in 1978 identified an area with a defined boundary that has been used consistently as a spatial planning unit by both local authorities. This metropolitan definition was confirmed in the CASP strategy as the basis for development and growth in the city and its metropolitan hinterland, when the area was termed Metropolitan Cork. Metropolitan Cork had a population of 289,739 in 2011 and it covers an area of 834 square kilometres.

2.5.22 CASP study area: The CASP study area covers an area determined by a journey time of about 45 minutes from Cork city. This area has been defined as the Cork city-region and includes Cork city, the satellite towns of Midleton, Carrigtohill, Carrigaline, Ballincollig and Blarney.

---

The following section is substantially derived from the report of the CLGC, pg. 16-18.
and the ring towns and rural hinterlands of Bandon, Macroom, Mallow, Fermoy, Youghal and Kinsale. The population of the CASP study area in 2011 was 408,157 and it covers an area of 4,102 square kilometres.

2.5.23 **Cork County:** Cork County refers to the Cork County Council area covered by the current county boundary (and excludes Cork city). The population of the county in 2011 was 399,802 and it covers an area of 7,465 square kilometres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Size (square kilometres)</th>
<th>Population (Census 2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cork City (current configuration)</strong></td>
<td>39.61</td>
<td>119,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cork city and suburbs (CSO)</strong></td>
<td>165</td>
<td>198,582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Metropolitan Cork (CASP)</strong></td>
<td>834</td>
<td>289,739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CASP study area</strong></td>
<td>4,102</td>
<td>408,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cork County (excluding Cork City)</strong></td>
<td>7,465</td>
<td>399,802</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2.3 Population of different areas within Cork (based on Census 2011)

- Cork County: 399,802
- CASP study area: 408,157
- Metropolitan Cork (CASP): 289,739
- Cork city and suburbs (CSO): 198,582
- Cork City (current configuration): 119,230

Figure 2.4 Size of different areas within Cork (square kilometres)

- Cork County: 7,465
- CASP study area: 3,102
- Metropolitan Cork (CASP): 834
- Cork city and suburbs (CSO): 165
- Cork City (current configuration): 39.61
THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STATUS QUO

3.1 Challenges for Cork

3.1.1 Cork has several key assets and amenities giving it a number of strategic advantages. These include a strong track record of supporting indigenous economic development and foreign direct investment, a competitive cost base for businesses, a range of third-level and further educational institutions, good national and international transport links, a magnificent harbour area with a thriving port, and a strong offering as an attractive place to live with a high quality of life.

3.1.2 However, Cork cannot be complacent about its future. Other city-regions in Ireland are making conscious preparations to grow, develop, and respond to new opportunities, and they could potentially challenge Cork’s place as the natural location to act as a counterweight to the Dublin area and eastern seaboard. While the figures below suggest that in overall terms Cork is performing relatively well, there are certain constraints around the current arrangements that need to be addressed if Cork is to realise its full potential and fulfil its role as Ireland’s second city.

3.1.3 Table 3.2 shows the population of Cork city compared to comparable ‘second cities’ in similar advanced small countries as Ireland, as identified in the issues paper published as part of the consultation on the upcoming National Planning Framework (Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 2017). The population of Cork city is rather small compared to this peer group, largely because the city is highly constrained by its current boundary.
### Table 3.1 Key data, Cork compared to other Gateways

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cork</strong> (City &amp; County)</td>
<td>12.65%</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.48%</td>
<td>42.97%</td>
<td>19,532</td>
<td>42,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dublin</strong> (City &amp; County)</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>28.18%</td>
<td>42.09%</td>
<td>21,633</td>
<td>58,211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limerick</strong> (City &amp; County)</td>
<td>6.04%</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>31.71%</td>
<td>-8.75%</td>
<td>21,116</td>
<td>30,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Galway</strong> (City &amp; County)</td>
<td>11.60%</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>23.64%</td>
<td>35.20%</td>
<td>18,977</td>
<td>28,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Waterford</strong> (City &amp; County)</td>
<td>7.82%</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>2.97%</td>
<td>-12.66%</td>
<td>18,639</td>
<td>26,282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO, IDA  
*Figures presented are for the regional level (NUTS 3), the regions in question are: South-West (Cork County, Cork City and Kerry); Dublin (Dublin City, Dun Laoighaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin); Mid-West (Limerick County, Limerick City, Clare and North Tipperary); West (Galway County, Galway City, Mayo and Roscommon); South-East (Waterford County, Waterford City, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford and South Tipperary).  
**Gross Value Added, at Basic Price.

### Table 3.2 Population of Cork City compared to other comparable ‘Second Cities’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Density (inhabitants/km squared)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cork City (Ireland, 2016)</strong></td>
<td>125,657</td>
<td>3,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aarhus (Denmark, 2016)</strong></td>
<td>264,716</td>
<td>2,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Christchurch (New Zealand, 2016)</strong></td>
<td>389,500</td>
<td>641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wellington (New Zealand, 2016)</strong></td>
<td>405,000</td>
<td>920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Edinburgh (Scotland, 2015)</strong></td>
<td>480,250</td>
<td>4,073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aberdeen (Scotland, 2015)</strong></td>
<td>214,470</td>
<td>3,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tampere (Finland, 2016)</strong></td>
<td>228,274</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: citypopulation.de, NZ.stat.

3.1.4 There is a widely held view that the metropolitan area in Cork is underperforming, and needs to provide more opportunities for economic and residential development. It is generally acknowledged that the existing City Council boundary does not reflect the actual area of the
city and that significant elements of the city suburbs lie within the Cork County Council area. Much of the population growth of the city in the last five years has come from younger age groups who want to live in or near the city, close to their area of work or education, but the city is facing capacity issues around housing supply. There are relatively few immediately and readily developable sites within the current city boundary. The regeneration of many potential development opportunities in the city will be challenging and may require very different delivery models. There is a lack of realism about the prospects of development on some brownfield sites in the short to medium term, which will likely require a significant commitment from central government if the prospects are to be realised.

3.1.5 While the CASP sets out an agreed strategy for development, it has been suggested to the Group that there have been challenges in implementing policies within CASP, not just on the part of local authorities but also on the part of central government and national agencies, who play a key role in implementation of the CASP. For example, until recently population growth in the city centre has been static, whereas by 2012 the ring area around the city had already achieved population figures in excess of the regional planning guidelines target for 2022 (Gateways and Hubs Development Index, 2013). This is seen as operating to the disadvantage of the city in particular. Development has increasingly taken place in satellite and market towns around Cork and in a ‘daisy chain’ of industrial / business parks. This has resulted in high levels of car-based commuting, and the commercial rates that are generated from this pattern of development benefit the county rather than the city. There are also concerns that too much recent and potential future residential development has been / will be at an insufficiently high level of density, making public transport solutions to commuting more difficult to achieve.

3.1.6 All members of the CLGC agreed that retaining the status quo was not a realistic option. The members of that Committee also agreed that expanding the metropolitan area to reflect the growth of the city was required – the difference of views was largely down to whether this expanded metropolitan area was best accommodated within a merged local authority or through retaining separate city and county councils. The arguments presented by the
report of the CLGC (including the minority view) in favour of these two options are further explored in the next two sections.
4 THE CASE PRESENTED BY THE CLGC FOR A MERGER / UNIFIED AUTHORITY

4.1 Arguments presented in favour of a unified authority by the CLGC

4.1.1 The arguments in favour of a unified authority, and against a boundary extension, can be summarised as follows.

4.1.2 A unified council would promote a single vision for Cork, integrate planning for economic development and jobs, eliminate anomalies in service levels, and provide a single point of contact for investors.

4.1.3 Major challenges facing local government, such as infrastructural development, economic development, environmental management, waste management, housing, and spatial planning, require planning at regional or sub-regional levels, which lend themselves to a unitary authority – decisions in these areas in the past have relied on joint decision-making between city and county councils.

4.1.4 An expanded metropolitan division (based on the CASP area with a population of 289,739 in 2011) within a unified council could act as a focus for the growth of the city as the core of a new unitary Cork city and county council.

4.1.5 The unified county & city council would only be responsible for a limited number of major policy and strategic decisions (including the annual budget, corporate plan, development plan, local economic and community plan, and authority-wide issues within service areas). The division level (i.e. an expanded metropolitan divisional area and 2 other divisions within the county) could act as the focus for operational decision-making beyond the role of municipal districts (including an adequate budgetary role and retaining the position of Lord Mayor as chair of the metropolitan division). Below the divisions a municipal district structure would retain responsibility for decision-making at municipal district level in accordance with the Local Government Reform Act 2014.
4.1.6 Executive and corporate responsibilities would be consolidated into a single unified authority – given the savings made in local government generally in recent years, pooling resources and reducing duplication through a merger may deliver only limited efficiencies (for example through eliminating duplicate management tiers and two sets of statutory documents such as plans, reports, accounts, etc.), although amalgamation offers the potential for more significant economies of scope (through pooling knowledge, expertise and professional capacity), providing an opportunity to promote innovation and better services for citizens.

4.1.7 Merging the two local authorities would facilitate the development of the Cork gateway and establish a credible counterweight to the greater Dublin area.

4.1.8 Merging the two local authorities to create the largest local authority in the state in geographical terms, and second largest in population terms, could create a credible case for substantial devolution of powers from central government to the newly established local authority.

4.1.9 A unified local authority would be better able to play a leadership role in coordinating local governance, bringing together different organisations at national and local level.

4.1.10 The experience of other local authority mergers in 2014 has on balance been positive, and there is no evidence to suggest that in Limerick and Waterford the respective cities have been disadvantaged.

4.1.11 It would be difficult to secure agreement on a boundary extension, based on past experience, and retaining two local authorities would mean a continuation of competition along a new boundary line.
4.1.12 Extending the boundary could entail negative spatial planning implications, including the potential encroachment of urban sprawl into the greenbelt and increased pressure on satellite towns.

4.1.13 Extending the boundary would entail significant financial implications, including agreement over financial compensation transfers, transfers of assets and liabilities, as well as staff transfers.

4.1.14 A boundary change would mean that a newly configured county area would not be a cohesive local government unit.

4.1.15 Based on the arguments presented above, a majority of members of the CLGC proposed a merger of the two local authorities to create a single unified local authority for Cork city and county. To that end, the Committee’s report proposed that, following a Government decision, an implementation group be established to draw up an implementation plan and oversee logistical preparations, with a view to the new arrangements being in place by the local elections due to take place in 2019.
5 THE CASE PRESENTED BY THE CLGC MINORITY FOR A BOUNDARY EXTENSION

5.1 Arguments presented in favour of a boundary extension by the CLGC minority

5.1.1 The arguments in favour of a boundary extension, and against a unified authority for both Cork city and county, can be summarised as follows.

5.1.2 Cities act as the focal point for growth and development for their wider region – this point is generally accepted by stakeholders, submissions, national policy frameworks, and international research. Cities must have autonomy, financial independence and be of a sufficient scale to compete internationally. Relegating the city to ‘divisional status’ within a merged Cork city and county would risk rural county issues taking priority over urban city issues and needs.

5.1.3 Urban and rural areas have different economic and social needs, as is evident from their different spending priorities. The priorities of, and the challenges facing, the city are different to those of the county. For the former, for example, these include industry, urban services, transport, retail, commerce and social inclusion. For the latter, for example, these include agriculture, rural development, agri-business and food, tourism and fisheries. These different priorities and challenges require different levels of service provision in areas such as housing, environmental protection, infrastructure, and economic development, and they are best reflected in maintaining separate local authorities. In practice, the leadership of a combined authority would have to mediate and identify compromises between the competing interests of urban and rural areas, possibly diminishing both in the process.

5.1.4 The area of Cork is too large geographically for a single local authority to address effectively the diverse challenges facing the city and county.

5.1.5 The growth of the city is currently impeded by the current boundary and by inaction over past proposals for boundary extensions. The city at present is radically under-bounded, with
the current boundary dividing Douglas and Togher, with the actual city area stretching to include a number of residential areas currently in the Cork County Council area.

5.1.6 With the retention of two local authorities and an extended boundary for the city, the two local authorities for the city and county would continue to remain amongst the largest local authorities in the state in population terms, and very large by international standards.

5.1.7 There are few savings to be yielded through a merger of local authorities, and most of the potential savings that do exist could be realised through greater use of shared services.

5.1.8 Collaboration, joint working and shared service provision between the two local authorities has been shown to work and should be expanded and placed on a formal basis, with joint committees of both councils to deal with strategic policy frameworks in areas such as economic development, planning, transport and international cooperation.

5.1.9 The position of Lord Mayor is important to the city, both strategically and symbolically, and acts as a representative for the city in interacting with international partners and investors – this position would be devalued to the status of chairperson of a division within a wider local authority, which itself would have its own Mayor / Cathaoirleach.

5.1.10 The problems caused by tax competition (in terms of commercial rates) between city and county authorities in Limerick and Waterford do not apply to Cork.

5.1.11 Creating an amalgamated local authority would make a new unified structure unnecessarily bureaucratic, less responsive, and will increase the role of the executive at the expense of democratic control.
5.1.12 Submissions to the CLGC suggested a lower standard of service provision for citizens in areas served by the county council within the greater Cork city area. It was also suggested that expectations of service delivery differ between urban and rural Cork.

5.1.13 A large boundary extension would take development pressure away from green spaces and help preserve the greenbelt, while a small boundary extension could accentuate pressures on the area.

5.1.14 Based on the arguments presented above, a minority of members of the Cork Local Government Committee proposed a boundary extension of the Cork City Council area to include Ballincollig, Tower, Blarney, Carrigtwohill, Ringaskiddy and Carrigaline. The CLGC minority suggested that a revised boundary for the city should include these areas (but not extend to other areas such as Cobh or Midleton), be consistent with existing townlands and infrastructure, and result in a population of no less than 230,000 (based on Census 2011 figures) for the City Council area. To that end it also proposed that a financial compensation package to reflect the loss in revenue and return on investment be paid to Cork County Council for a five-year period, then reduced on a sliding scale to zero over a further ten years. All debts associated with lands, housing and infrastructure in the changed boundary area would also transfer to Cork City Council. Staff transfers of between 200 and 300 staff should be managed within agreed public service industrial relations frameworks. The CLGC minority proposed that the new boundary arrangements would take effect from 2019, with staff transfers managed over the 2019-2024 period.
6 OPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE GROUP

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The Group considered a series of options for local government in Cork. In particular, as part of our Terms of Reference, we were required to examine the issues and recommendations of the Cork Local Government Committee (including the CLGC minority), as well as those “issues on which that Committee [CLGC] was unable to provide agreed recommendations, including the consideration of any relevant options in addition to those considered in that committee’s review”.

6.1.2 The starting point for the Group was to examine the recommendations in the CLGC (including the CLGC minority). The preferred options that were reflected in different parts of that report, and the associated arguments presented in favour of each of these options, are reflected in sections 4 and 5.

6.1.3 A unified authority (as suggested in the report of the CLGC) and two separate local authorities in Cork (including a boundary extension for Cork City Council to include Ballincollig, Tower, Blarney, Carrigtwohill, Ringaskiddy and Carrigaline) (as suggested by the CLGC minority) were going to form two potential options to be considered by the Expert Advisory Group.

6.1.4 However, the Group also sought to identify other potential options that might be considered as part of its deliberations. These included reviewing the ‘status quo’ or a ‘no change’ option, as well as scenarios (and different variants on same) identified in the submissions to the CLGC, particularly the submissions of Cork County Council and Cork City Council.

6.1.5 After considering the status quo, we move to the option of a unified authority for both Cork city and county. We subsequently examine various other options, including retaining two separate local authorities but with different degrees of boundary extension for the City Council area, in ascending order of scale. Section 7 outlines the criteria used to assess the
options, while section 9 discusses the merits and limitations of each option against these criteria.

6.2 Option 1 – Status Quo

6.2.1 This option would involve maintaining two separate local authorities, with no change to existing boundary arrangements (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2). This option was identified by the CLGC, including the CLGC minority, as well as in the submissions of both Cork County Council and Cork City Council to that Committee. All accepted that the current arrangements are sub-optimal.

6.2.2 One potential variant of this option might be to provide for the successor land use and transport plan for the greater Cork area (i.e. any future CASP) to be placed on a statutory basis. This might go some way to addressing some of the implementation challenges around the current CASP arrangements.
6.3 Option 2 – A unified authority for Cork city and county

6.3.1 This option would involve merging Cork City Council and Cork County Council to create a single local authority to serve both Cork city and county (see Figure 6.3). This was the CLGC recommendation.

6.3.2 Both the CLGC and the Cork County Council submission envisaged a three-tier territorial structure within a unified local authority, consisting of:

- Cork City and County Council level – a unitary council meeting of all Councillors or a subset of Councillors meeting at plenary level
- Metropolitan / Divisional level – Metropolitan / divisional meetings for three divisional areas (a new Metropolitan Cork Division based on the CASP Metropolitan Cork area (Census 2011 population: 289,739); a Cork North and East Division; and a Cork West and South Division). The CLGC proposed that the role and status of the divisions within a unified authority “should be enhanced beyond that of current municipal districts ... ensuring members can perform an adequate budgetary role at metropolitan / municipal division level”
- Municipal District level – Municipal District meetings based on a revised municipal district structure within a unified authority and exercising the powers of Municipal Districts under local government law and possibly additional powers (these structures might include a Metropolitan District or a City Municipality with a population of some 168,000 within the proposed Metropolitan Cork Division).

6.3.3 One potential variant of this option was a four-division structure referred to in Cork County Council submissions (comprised of a City Division to represent the urban core of the city, a second Metropolitan Division to represent suburban areas around the city, as well as a Cork North and East Division, and a Cork West and South Division). While this variant was identified in Cork County Council submissions, the County Council ultimately expressed a preference for a three-division structure outlined above.
Figure 6.3 Possible Revised Divisional Structure in a Unified Authority for Cork City and County Council;
Source: Cork County Council
6.4 Option 3 – Boundary extension of Cork City to include developed areas in the north and south environs of the current city

6.4.1 This option (see Figure 6.4) would involve maintaining two separate local authorities, with a relatively small-scale boundary extension of the city to include the developed areas immediately north and south of the current City Council boundary (involving an increase in the City Council population from 119,230 to 158,688 (Census 2011 figures) and, for example, would include all of the built-up areas of Douglas and Togher within the City Council area. This option was identified by the submission of Cork County Council to the CLGC, but ultimately not favoured by the County Council.

6.5 Option 4 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include Cork city and suburbs as defined by CSO

6.5.1 This option (see Figure 6.5) would involve maintaining two separate local authorities, with a boundary extension of the city to include the contiguous area of Cork city and suburbs, as defined by the CSOs. This would result in an increase in the City Council population from 119,230 to 198,582 (Census 2011 figures) and would include Ballincollig, Little Island and Glanmire within the City Council area. The area would include the Cork Airport Business Park but not the actual airport. This option was identified by the submission of Cork County Council to the CLGC, but ultimately not favoured by the County Council.

Suburbs/environs are defined as the continuation of a distinct population cluster outside its legally defined boundary in which no occupied dwelling is more than 100 metres distant from the nearest occupied dwelling.
Figure 6.4 Boundary extension of Cork City to include developed areas in the north and south environs; Source: Cork County Council
Figure 6.5 Boundary extension of Cork city to include Cork city and suburbs as defined by CSO;  Source: Cork County Council
6.6 **Option 5 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include ‘Cork Metropolitan Area’**

6.6.1 This option would involve maintaining two separate local authorities, with a more significant boundary extension of the city to include several satellite towns of the city (see Figure 6.6). This would involve an increase in the City Council population from 119,230 to between 230,000 and 235,000, depending on the precise delineation of the boundary (Census 2011 figures), and would involve including Ballincollig, Blarney, Glanmire, Carrigtwohill, Ringaskiddy, Carrigaline, and Ballygarvan in the City Council area. This option was advocated by the CLGC minority, as well as the Cork City Council submission to that Committee.

6.6.2 The City Council in its submissions indicated that should this boundary extension be granted, it proposed to move towards an area-based model consisting of 5 areas within an enlarged City Council area.

6.6.3 One variant on this option mentioned in the CLGC report was a boundary extension of the City Council area to include the satellite towns of Ballincollig, Blarney, Carrigtwohill, Glanmire, Passage West and Monkstown, but excluding Carrigaline and Ringaskiddy (see green boundary on Figure 6.7).
Figure 6.7 "Cork Metropolitan Area" Boundary Extension (excluding Carrigaline and Ringaskiddy)
6.7 **Option 6 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include Metropolitan Cork as defined in CASP**

6.7.1 This option (see Figure 6.8) would involve maintaining two separate local authorities, with a very large boundary extension of the city to include Metropolitan Cork as identified in the CASP and earlier LUTS frameworks. This would involve an increase in the City Council population from 119,230 to 289,739 (Census 2011 figures), and including Ballincollig, Blarney, Glanmire, Carrigtwohill, Ringaskiddy, Carrigaline, and Ballygarvan, as well as Cobh and Midleton, in the City Council area. This option was identified by the submission of Cork County Council to the CLGC, but ultimately not favoured by the County Council.

6.8 **A single executive to serve two councils**

6.8.1 One variant on options 3 to 6 would be to maintain two separately elected local councils, but that these would be serviced by a single chief executive and administrative structure. Such a model exists in other jurisdictions and has historic precedents in Irish local government.
Figure 6.8 Boundary Extension of Cork City to include Metropolitan Cork as defined in CASP
7 CRITERIA USED TO ASSESS DIFFERENT OPTIONS

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 In this section, the criteria that informed the Group’s assessment of the options for the future of local government arrangements in Cork are set out.

7.2 Cork as the engine of development and a counterweight to Dublin

7.2.1 It is widely accepted that the Cork city-region (i.e. Cork and its hinterland) acts as the driver of growth and development for the whole of Cork, the South-West, and the wider Southern region. National policy documents (including the papers associated with the forthcoming National Planning Framework) and international research point to the key role of city-regions as a focus for economic development and job creation. Amongst those the Group met, there was strong and widespread agreement that cities drive the development of their wider hinterland. In terms of local government arrangements, this raises the question of what governance arrangements would best facilitate the development of Cork city and its hinterland, for the benefit of Cork as a whole, the South-West, the wider Southern region, and Ireland.

7.2.2 A recent EU study (ESPON, 2013), which included Cork, examined second-tier cities and territorial development in Europe. The study concluded that national investment in second-tier cities offers the highest level of territorial cohesion and competitiveness at a European level, as compared to alternative scenarios that focused on the largest principal cities. This suggests the need to look at Cork differently to other counties and cities in Ireland. The report also recommends more devolution of powers and more integration of functions at the city level, with an emphasis on local leadership.

7.3 A unified voice for Cork

7.3.1 The Expert Advisory Group considers that there are particular matters of strategic interest for Cork, where Cork city and county need a unified voice, particularly with regard to
decisions around economic development and key investment and infrastructure priorities. A unified voice is not the same as a single voice, and of itself does not necessarily imply a single local authority for Cork city and county. Platforms that have been used to develop a unified voice for Cork in the past include the CASP process and the commissioning of joint work on engaging with the National Planning Framework.

7.4 Effective planning and delivery of development and infrastructure

7.4.1 Future local government arrangements should ensure the preparation of spatial plans to guide the development of the city, its hinterland and the wider Cork area. These should be supported by an outline of the arrangements for the implementation of such plans, and associated infrastructure should be set out for Cork to fulfil its potential.

7.5 Providing for differences between metropolitan and rural areas

7.5.1 Cork has a wide variety of assets and amenities, and this diversity makes a significant contribution to the area’s quality of life. Cork includes Cork city and its suburbs, a number of larger county towns, market towns, Cork harbour, a long coastline, strong rural areas, and some structurally weaker rural areas (for example in more remote parts of West and North Cork).

7.5.2 On some issues Cork needs a unified voice, particularly in terms of strategic planning and key infrastructure investment for the area. On other matters, metropolitan and more rural areas are likely to have differing strategic interests. Accordingly, policies and services need to reflect and be tailored to the different needs of different areas. There can be particular challenges for citizens accessing local government services in more remote rural areas. Some submissions to the CLGC referred to ‘anomalies’ in service provision – while some genuine anomalies might exist, some of these are due to the differences in service provision that are bound to occur in an area as diverse as Cork. Local government should be about services that are responsive and tailored to the different needs of local communities.
7.6 Financial viability and sustainability

7.6.1 Any revised local government arrangements should ensure that local government structures in Cork are financially viable and sustainable into the future. Any decision to revise the current arrangements must make provision for dealing with any financial implications that might arise. We expand further on the Group’s approach to financial analysis in section 8 below.

7.7 Capacity to maintain, improve, and expand services into the future

7.7.1 Future arrangements should allow not just for the maintenance of current service levels, but also provide the capacity (including staffing and skills) to improve and expand on the delivery of services into the future, including any new functions that might be devolved to local government in the future. Any new structure should ensure that local government can continue to contribute towards the economic, social and community development of the area.

7.8 Clear and readily understandable governance

7.8.1 Local government structures should be clear and easy to understand for citizens and local communities. They should also allow for transparent and responsive decision-making and for clear responsibility and lines of accessibility to services.

7.9 Effective local democratic representation, subsidiarity and accountable leadership

7.9.1 Any new arrangements should ensure there is a clear and accountable leadership structure, at both political and executive level. They should equally allow for decision-making on operational issues to be devolved as far as possible, with structures closer to the citizen, and for models of service provision that allow citizens to access services at a localised level. They should also ensure that there is a broad balance in terms of the population / Councillor ratio across Cork. Many County Councillors felt that the size of areas they represented made it difficult to represent their constituents as effectively as they would like.
7.10 Potential for efficiency savings and improved value for money

7.10.1 Local government should always strive to ensure value for money. The potential for efficiency savings is a relevant criterion in considering the merits of different options for the future of local government in Cork. In this respect, the Group was clear that efficiency should not simply equate to cost reductions, but rather be considered as the relationship between costs and service outputs and outcomes. Efficiency assessments should take account of developments in local government over the past decade, including the significant reductions in staffing levels and the greater use of shared services. Notwithstanding the significant reductions in revenue and staffing levels within local government (including in Cork) over the past decade, service or performance indicators levels have been maintained or increased (National Oversight and Audit Commission, 2016). This in itself suggests strong productivity gains in recent years, and may mean the potential gains from any future arrangements would be modest.

7.11 Costs and complexity of transition from existing structures

7.11.1 A further consideration for the Group was the relative ease or complexity in transitioning to any new arrangement, and the associated costs that might be involved. Aside from retaining the status quo, all other options would entail transitional costs in moving to new local government arrangements.

7.12 Summary

7.12.1 The criteria identified above were used to reflect a variety of issues the Group was requested to address in its Terms of Reference, including leadership in local government, governance and democratic representation, service provision and potential future devolution, the cohesiveness, cooperation and effectiveness of local government in Cork, resource implications of different options (including potential efficiencies), the interests of the Cork city-region, the need to have regard to the respective characteristics and interests of both urban and rural areas, and the economic, social and sustainable development of Cork city and county. The criteria in this section also reflect a variety of factors considered by the Cork Local Government Committee in its 2015 report, although for its purposes the Expert Advisory Group sought to develop these further.
7.12.2 In the next section, we outline our approach to financial analysis. Following this, in section 9, we discuss the various options for the future of local government arrangements in Cork that we reviewed and the reasoning for our recommended option.
8 FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

8.1 Approach taken by the Expert Advisory Group to financial analysis

8.1.1 The Terms of Reference of the Group required it to address the resource implications of different options having regard to income, expenditure, assets, liabilities, functions and services of local authorities, as well as anticipated future trends and requirements. As part of the approach to its work, the Group invited both Cork City Council and Cork County Council to expand on and update their estimates of the financial implications of pursuing the different options of a unified authority (as proposed in the report of the CLGC) and a boundary extension (as proposed by the CLGC minority). In addition, the Group wished to understand the financial implications of the ‘status quo’ – to that extent both local authorities were invited to submit income and expenditure data for 2014-17 and financial projections for the medium-term, as well as identifying external national and international factors that could have a material influence on the financial position of their local authority in the medium term. The Group enlisted the assistance of external financial expertise, including a former A/Head of Finance in a Local Authority and the Director of the Local Government Audit Service, to review the figures presented.

8.2 Status quo

8.2.1 As a general comment, the Group believes that, under the current arrangements, both local authorities are facing serious financial challenges – as, it would appear, are local authorities generally across the country. Pension costs are significant in both authorities, as will be any restitution of pay awards for local government employees. The ability of both authorities to fund discretionary expenditure and meet the demands of an increasing population and the consequent requirements and expectations for additional and improved services is quite limited.

8.3 Unified authority

8.3.1 Both authorities are of the view that, given the significant reductions in staff numbers in both authorities since 2008, there are limits to the potential for cost savings that might arise
from a unified authority. That said, both also seem to accept the possibility that some efficiencies should be reasonably expected to arise from a unified authority, particularly in terms of corporate and ‘back-office’ functions, potentially in the order of 2 to 5% over time.

8.3.2 Both local authorities also accept that there would be transitional costs in moving to a unified authority, including issues arising from staff transfers and the integration of systems.

8.4 Boundary extension

8.4.1 The County Council supplied an estimate to the Group of the effect on its income, as well as the reduced expenditure demand, arising from a potential boundary extension as proposed by the CLGC minority. Based on their 2017 budget, this suggested a loss of income to the county (from commercial rates, LPT and other income) of €86 million, with a reduced expenditure of €46 million arising from not having to service the area covered as reflected in the boundary extension proposed by the CLGC minority. This would result in a net loss of €40 million per year resulting from a boundary change of this nature. Having reviewed the method used to arrive at this figure, the Group accepts that this is likely to represent a reasonable estimate of the net financial impact of a boundary change of this magnitude on the county.

8.4.2 The financial implications of a boundary extension of this type are therefore very significant. The financial estimates presented suggest that a boundary extension as proposed by the CLGC minority would add an additional income of €86 million to the City Council budget, which had a revenue budget of €152.6 million in 2017, and a general reserve of €0.8 million in 2016. On the debit side, maintaining the same level of services currently provided by the County Council in the transferred area would add €46 million to the city’s expenditure. In terms of agreeing the financial adjustment payment to the county, the figure of €40 million (which could be subject to a margin of error) is of considerable significance. Although this figure would be reduced on the basis of the more limited boundary extension recommended by the Group, and notwithstanding the potential for buoyancy in terms of City Council
revenue, this would mean that the boundary extension recommended would pose short to medium-term financial challenges for the City Council.

8.4.3 A boundary extension of this nature would also have to be accompanied by the transfer of significant numbers of staff from the County Council to the City Council. The payroll costs have been factored into expenditure figures referred to above. However, additional pension costs would be incurred as they arise.
9 ASSESSMENT OF DIFFERENT OPTIONS

9.1 Introduction

9.1.1 In this section the Group discusses the merits and limitations of different options against different criteria highlighted in the previous section, leading the Group to arrive at a consensus on a preferred option for local government in Cork that it is recommending to the Minister.

9.2 Option 1 – Status quo

_Cork as the engine of development and a counterweight to Dublin_

9.2.1 The Group cannot see how the current arrangements are optimal in terms of facilitating the growth of Cork as the engine of development for the area into the future, or in terms of planning and delivery of infrastructure that the Cork city-region will need if it is to achieve its potential. As noted in section 3, the metropolitan area is generally regarded as underperforming and there is limited development potential in the current City Council area. A greater focus needs to be placed on promoting residential development within the city at a sufficiently high level of density so as to support viable future investment in public transport and commercial office and retail development.

_A unified voice for Cork_

9.2.2 There is a good track record on shared services, joint working and cooperation between both local authorities at present, as well as joint submissions on national issues such as the National Planning Framework. This is most effective where interests are naturally aligned between the two local authorities. However, it can be more challenging in other areas, and the Group suggests that, notwithstanding good examples of cooperation, the current arrangements do place limits (and strains) on the potential for a unified voice for Cork to be presented.
Effective planning and delivery of development and infrastructure

9.2.3 While there are many examples of productive cooperation between the two local authorities (for example through efforts such as the CASP and other areas – see Appendix 3), there is general agreement that the current arrangements are less than optimal, with significant scope for improvement in terms of the breadth and depth of cooperation, particularly around the location, type and density of development.

Providing for differences between metropolitan and rural areas

9.2.4 While the current arrangements reflect to some degree the differences between urban and rural areas, the metropolitan area is effectively divided between the two local authorities. There was general agreement that the current boundary arrangements do not reflect the actual city area. Both advocates of a boundary extension and of a unified authority (with a larger metropolitan division therein) accept this point.

Financial viability and sustainability

9.2.5 Based on an analysis of financial data presented to the Group (including annual financial statements for recent years and projections for the years ahead), both local authorities are facing financial challenges in the years ahead. While there is some prospect of buoyancy in terms of commercial rates, future demands include increased population levels, demands for increased and new services, as well as increased payroll costs (including those arising from national pay awards / pay restitution and rising pensions costs). As noted in section 8, the ability of both local authorities to fund discretionary expenditure and meet the demands of increasing population and the consequent requirements and expectations for additional and improved services is quite limited.

Capacity to maintain, improve, and expand services into the future

9.2.6 The financial challenges facing both local authorities under a ‘status quo’ scenario referred to in the section above could potentially constrain the ability of local government to
maintain, improve and expand services. The artificial fragmentation of the urban area works against coherent and efficient service delivery.

**Clear and readily understandable governance**

9.2.7 This option would have a generally neutral effect on current governance arrangements, although the status quo clearly does not reflect the actual growth of the city and could not be said to be a coherent governance structure.

**Effective local democratic representation, subsidiarity and accountable leadership**

9.2.8 This option would have a generally neutral effect on current levels of representation. One could not anticipate any change in the representational ratio of Councillors to population under a 'status quo' scenario. The County Council currently operates on the basis of a divisional structure and municipal districts, although other counties have devolved a wider set of responsibilities to area or municipal district level. The City Council currently does not operate on an area basis in terms of political decision-making or service provision.

9.2.9 While there is little justification or appetite for increasing the ratio of councillors to population within the city, there is a case for increasing the number of councillors representing the extensive electoral areas in rural Cork. This could be achieved without any boundary change between city and county.

**Potential for efficiency savings and improved value for money**

9.2.10 This option would have a generally neutral effect on efficiency savings.

**Costs and complexity of transition from existing structures**

9.2.11 This option entails no transitional costs.
Conclusion

9.2.12 The Group is firmly of the view that retaining the status quo is not a viable option. The current boundary is by common consent hopelessly out of date, does not reflect the pattern of urban development, no longer has any inherent logic and is not helpful to Cork’s position as the driver of economic development.

9.3 Option 2 – A unified authority for Cork city and county

Cork as the engine of development and a counterweight to Dublin

9.3.1 One key development that has taken place since the report of CLGC was published in 2015 has been the preparations for the new National Planning Framework. This represents an opportunity to promote Cork’s assets and its place as Ireland’s second city and natural counterweight to Dublin. The Group understands that the National Planning Framework is likely to give considerable attention to the role of cities and their hinterlands in driving economic development. A unified authority could risk diluting the focus on the growth of Cork city and the metropolitan area as the engine of development for the wider region. This is particularly so because of the need to serve what is a very large rural part of the county in any unified structure (which makes Cork very different to other areas which have merged separate city and county councils, such as in Limerick and Waterford). There is already a marked level of redistribution between the metropolitan part of the county and more rural areas of Cork. In the context of a unified authority, this could result in under-investment in the city and metropolitan area, to the long-term detriment of Cork as a whole, and reduce its capacity to compete with other city-regions, both in Ireland and internationally.

A unified voice for Cork

9.3.2 A unified authority would facilitate a unified voice for the interests of the city and county – however, this would also have to ensure that the very different and diverse needs and interests of the city and metropolitan area were catered for.
Effective planning and delivery of development and infrastructure

9.3.3 A unified authority might also help facilitate the planning and delivery of development and key infrastructure – again this would have to be based on a sufficiently developed model to cater for the particular needs and interests of the city and metropolitan area.

Providing for differences between metropolitan and rural areas

9.3.4 There would be significant challenges for a unified authority giving due weight to the different needs of Ireland’s second city, a number of large rural and market towns, and both stronger and weaker rural areas. While proposals for a unified authority emphasise the role of divisions and municipal districts, without any real budgetary authority there is a risk that such fora could become mere platforms for demand.

9.3.5 The scale of a unified authority is also a relevant consideration. The joint submission of Cork County Council and Cork City Council on the National Planning Framework forecasts a combined population for Cork city and county of 846,000 by 2050. While one could conceive of a wholly urban local authority with a population on this scale, it would be difficult to envisage, within the Irish local government system or internationally, a local authority serving such a large population and combining large urban, suburban, freestanding market towns and rural areas.

Financial viability and sustainability

9.3.6 A unified authority should be financially viable, for example through the pooling of resources between urban, suburban and rural areas. A continuation of the current approach within the County could reasonably be assumed, through a level of redistribution, broadly reflected in financial transfers from urban to rural areas within a unified authority.

Capacity to maintain, improve, and expand services into the future

9.3.7 A unified authority could be expected to improve the capacity of local government to maintain, improve and expand services into the future, although, again, any such model
would have to provide and allow for tailoring of services for the distinct needs of metropolitan and rural areas.

**Clear and readily understandable governance**

9.3.8 At one level, a unified authority would provide a relatively clear governance structure for citizens in terms of a single local authority for all of Cork. However, at another level, both the political and executive governance structures proposed for a unified authority in the report of the CLGC appear to the Group to be complex and cumbersome (for example with councillors meeting at three levels: plenary, divisional, and municipal district). This structure could also create blurred lines of responsibility and accountability.

**Effective local democratic representation, subsidiarity and accountable leadership**

9.3.9 A large unified authority is difficult to reconcile with the principle of subsidiarity. As noted above, the proposed political arrangements within a unified authority appear to the Group to be over-elaborate. Clear political leadership could be difficult to determine in this arrangement, with a Mayor of the unified authority, a Lord Mayor of the Metropolitan Division (or possibly a City Municipality), and possibly Mayors / Cathaoirligh of the other Divisions, and Mayors / Cathaoirligh of each of the Municipal Districts. A large unified local authority could run the risk of becoming overly centralised—bureaucratic and more remote from and less sensitive to local needs.

**Potential for efficiency savings and improved value for money**

9.3.10 Given the level of efficiency savings and the reduction in staffing levels in local government since 2007, in particular restrictions on compulsory redundancies in public service employment, one would reasonably expect the level of savings to be realised through a merger to be relatively modest. Some efficiencies would be reasonably expected to arise from a unified authority, particularly in terms of corporate and ‘back-office’ functions, potentially in the order of 2 to 5% over time. As discussed in section 7.10, however, efficiency relates not only to costs, but also to how resources can be deployed to deliver
better outputs and improved outcomes. A unified authority might be less equipped to tailor services and investment to the quite different needs of the metropolitan area and of rural areas in Cork.

**Costs and complexity of transition from existing structures**

9.3.11 This option would entail significant transitional costs in moving to a unified structure and the creation of new political and administrative structures, deployment of staff, integrating various systems (including ICT systems), and creating a new organisational culture. This option would be complex and time-consuming, but it would of course be feasible. Some of these challenges are mitigated by the fact that both local authorities already operate some services on behalf of the other through local shared service arrangements or through national arrangements. In addition, a template exists for the merger process in the form of the experience of other amalgamations of local authorities, such as those in Limerick, Waterford and Tipperary, although these are on a significantly more modest scale in terms of both their combined population and area when compared to a potential merger of the two Cork local authorities.

**Conclusion**

9.3.12 The Group recognises the potential strengths and benefits of a unified authority. However, the Group does not believe that a unified authority represents an optimal outcome for local government in Cork.
9.4 Option 3 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include developed areas in the north and south environs of the current city

*Cork as the engine of development and a counterweight to Dublin*

9.4.1 The scale of change proposed under this option would do little to drive the growth of Cork, while the potential for development within the city would remain extremely limited.

*A unified voice for Cork*

9.4.2 This option would accomplish little in the way to facilitate a unified voice for Cork.

*Effective planning and delivery of development and infrastructure*

9.4.3 This option offers little in the way of an effective planning framework and delivery of key infrastructure for the wider Cork area. Competition for development between city and county would remain, and possibly intensify.

*Providing for differences between metropolitan and rural areas*

9.4.4 While this option would eliminate some of the anomalies with the current boundary for example in Douglas and Togher, the metropolitan area would continue to be divided between the two local authority areas.

*Financial viability and sustainability*

9.4.5 This option would entail relatively marginal changes in the financing and expenditure of both local authorities. It is also doubtful how sustainable this option would be into the future, as questions over the boundary between city and county would likely resurface in a relatively short period of time.

*Capacity to maintain, improve, and expand services into the future*
9.4.6 This option is unlikely to involve any material change in the capacity of either local authority to maintain, improve and expand services into the future.

Clear and readily understandable governance

9.4.7 This option would have a generally neutral effect on current governance arrangements, and such a limited boundary extension would still not reflect the de facto area of the city.

Effective local democratic representation, subsidiarity and accountable leadership

9.4.8 This option would have a generally neutral effect on current representational arrangements.

Potential for efficiency savings and improved value for money

9.4.9 Potential efficiency gains are likely to be marginal.

Costs and complexity of transition from existing structures

9.4.10 This option would entail significant transitional costs in extending the boundary, involving identification of assets and liabilities, associated staff transfers, and payment of financial transfers from the city to the county, for relatively little gain.

Conclusion

9.4.11 A boundary extension of Cork City to include the developed areas in the north and south environs of the current city would have only very modest benefits, but with significant transitional costs and upheaval. Ultimately, this would not be a long-term sustainable solution to effective governance in Cork.
9.5  Option 4 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include Cork city and suburbs as defined by CSO

_Cork as the engine of development and a counterweight to Dublin_

9.5.1  A larger City Council area, with responsibility for the city, its immediate suburbs and adjoining settlements, could take a lead role in driving the growth of the city region.

_A unified voice for Cork_

9.5.2  While this option would not necessarily provide a unified voice for Cork city and county without additional incentives and initiatives, it would provide one voice for the existing city and suburbs.

_Effective planning and delivery of development and infrastructure_

9.5.3  A larger City Council area, with responsibility for the city and its immediate suburbs, should support more effective planning and delivery of key development and infrastructural priorities for the area, compared to the current arrangements.

_Providing for differences between metropolitan and rural areas_

9.5.4  This option also has advantages in that two local authorities (one representing the city and some of its immediate suburbs and one representing Cork county) can better identify and respond to the differing strategic needs and priorities of urban and rural areas. The boundary proposed under this option would still mean that large parts of the wider metropolitan area would remain in Cork county, including a number of towns that arguably form part of the natural hinterland of Cork city.

_Financial viability and sustainability_

9.5.5  This option would entail positive financial implications for the city and negative implications for the county. There would be a significant loss of revenue for the county, even allowing for the reduced expenditure through not having to serve the area in question – in 2015 the
The gap between revenue lost to the county, less the reduced expenditure demand within the area, was estimated by the county to be some €25 million. Any change along these lines would have to take into account the need for payments to be made by the city to the county to reflect the financial adjustment involved. A boundary extension under this option would mean that the revised County Council would still cover a large area with a substantial population, both in domestic and international terms. This option would result in the revised County Council area having an estimated population of some 320,000 (based on Census 2011 figures). This could not be said to be an unsustainable population base for a local authority.

9.5.6 A specific point raised around a boundary change of this nature would be the potential loss of LEADER funding for rural development in those parts of the county that might be subject to a boundary change and incorporated into the City Council area. However, given that Ireland’s LEADER allocation could well be reduced post-2020, the Group is of the view that in future rural development funding may be better concentrated on those structurally weaker rural areas within County Cork, rather than invested in city suburbs or stronger rural areas in close proximity to Cork City.

**Capacity to maintain, improve, and expand services into the future**

9.5.7 A boundary change of this nature would also provide scope for improvements in the capacity of the city to maintain, improve and expand services. It would also allow for the County Council area to focus its services on the distinct needs of market towns and rural areas.

**Clear and readily understandable governance**

9.5.8 A boundary extension to the contiguous area of the city suburbs would ultimately have to take account of the needs of neighbourhoods, townlands and infrastructure, but it could

---

4 LEADER (Liasons entre actions de developpement de l’économie rurale - Links between actions of rural development) is an EU finding initiative targeted at mobilising and delivering rural development in local rural communities.
form the basis of a more understandable governance arrangement. As with the previous option, it would also eliminate some of the anomalies in the current boundary. Such a structure would have advantages in providing much clearer governance arrangements for citizens, with the City Council responsible for an area metropolitan in character, and the County Council responsible for county towns and more rural areas.

**Effective local democratic representation, subsidiarity and accountable leadership**

9.5.9 This option could provide clarity and accountability within both local authorities in terms of both political leadership (through the Lord Mayor / County Mayor) and executive leadership (through the respective chief executive of both local authorities). If an expanded City Council moved to an area-based structure and a newly configured County Council were able to revise its municipal district structure along the lines of more easily recognisable areas, this should also support more effective local democratic representation.

**Potential for efficiency savings and improved value for money**

9.5.10 Greater tailoring of services to the different needs and circumstances should allow for some efficiency gains and value for money and should allow policies and services to be tailored more effectively to these needs and priorities.

**Costs and complexity of transition from existing structures**

9.5.11 There would be significant transitional costs with this option. The transition would be a challenging one for both organisations, involving the identification of assets and liabilities, associated staff transfers, and payment of financial transfers (although these would be somewhat moderated by the fact that some services are already shared between county and city through local arrangements or through national shared service arrangements). It would be a particularly challenging transition for the revised county area, but it could also provide an opportunity for the county to focus on core needs and priorities for those living in its area. This transition would also present major challenges for the city, which would experience a large increase in its population and would be tasked with ensuring that Cork
takes its place as the engine of growth and development for the wider region and acts as a counterweight to Dublin.

Conclusion

9.5.12 The Group is of the view that a boundary extension of Cork City to include the immediate city suburbs and some commuter towns represents the best workable option for local government in Cork, albeit that this should extend beyond the boundary of the city suburbs as defined by the CSO (but exclude the harbour area and Carrigaline). We expand further on this in section 9.9 below. We also expand on the financial implications that arise, in section 9.11 below.

9.6 Option 5 – Boundary extension of Cork City to include the ‘Cork Metropolitan Area’

Cork as the engine of development and a counterweight to Dublin

9.6.1 This should provide the opportunity for a large metropolitan authority to act as an economic engine driving the growth of the city and its hinterland. The Group understands that the forthcoming National Planning Framework is likely to give considerable attention to the role of cities and their hinterlands in driving economic development – a local authority based on the city and its immediate surrounding metropolitan area would be well placed to respond to opportunities arising from the National Planning Framework to promote Cork’s assets and its place as Ireland’s second city, and as a natural counterweight to Dublin.

A unified voice for Cork

9.6.2 While this option would not necessarily provide a unified voice for Cork city and county without additional initiatives, it would provide one voice to champion the growth agenda to the benefit of the wider Cork area.
**Effective planning and delivery of development and infrastructure**

9.6.3 A single authority for the Cork metropolitan area should have a greater capability and capacity to plan and deliver key development and infrastructural priorities for the area, compared to the current arrangements.

9.6.4 The boundary identified under this option would divide Cork harbour, a key strategic asset for the region. However, this could potentially be addressed through delineating the boundary in such a way so that most of the harbour fell within one local authority area.

**Providing for differences between metropolitan and rural areas**

9.6.5 Two local authorities (one representing the city and metropolitan area and one representing county towns and rural parts of county Cork) should better reflect the differing strategic priorities of metropolitan and rural Cork. The inclusion of such an extensive area would have the drawback of including a large rural area within the city boundary and would have an unduly disruptive effect on the county.

**Financial viability and sustainability**

9.6.6 A boundary change of this nature would have major financial implications for the city and the county. There would be a significant loss of revenue for the county, even allowing for the reduced expenditure through not having to serve the area in question – as noted in section 8.4 above, based on their 2017 budget, Cork County Council estimate the gap between revenue lost to the County, less the reduced expenditure demand within this area, at €40 million. Any change along these lines would have to take into account the need for continuing payments to be made by the city to the county to support services in rural areas. Any change of this nature would have to be accompanied by a payment of financial transfers from the city to the county, recognising the investment by the county in the area concerned and reflecting both the loss of revenue accruing to the county and the reduced expenditure demand for the county.
9.6.7 A boundary extension under this option would mean that the revised County Council area would extend over a large area with a substantial population base, both in domestic and international terms. A boundary extension as reflected in this option would result in the revised County Council area having an estimated population of some 285,000-290,000 (based on Census 2011 figures).

9.6.8 As noted in para 9.5.6, the Group consider that future rural development funding may be better concentrated on those structurally weaker rural areas within County Cork, rather than invested in city suburbs or stronger rural areas in close proximity to Cork City.

**Capacity to maintain, improve, and expand services into the future**

9.6.9 A boundary change of this nature could result in improvements in the capacity of the city to maintain, improve and expand services. It would also allow for the County Council area to focus its services on the distinct needs of market towns and rural areas.

**Clear and readily understandable governance**

9.6.10 There could be advantages in providing much clearer and effective governance arrangements for citizens, with a City Council responsible for the governance of an area much closer to the actual city and its metropolitan suburbs (including a number of suburban towns), and a County Council responsible for key county towns and rural areas.

**Effective local democratic representation, subsidiarity and accountable leadership**

9.6.11 This option could provide for clarity and accountability within both local authorities in terms of both political leadership (through the Lord Mayor / County Mayor) and executive leadership (through the respective chief executive of both local authorities). If an expanded City Council moved to an area-based structure and a newly configured County Council were able to revise its municipal district structure along the lines of more easily recognisable areas, this could also have advantages in terms of effective local democratic representation.
Potential for efficiency savings and improved value for money

9.6.12 Greater tailoring of services to the different needs and circumstances of the metropolitan area on the one hand, and county towns and rural areas on the other, should also provide greater efficiency gains and value for money compared to the current situation.

Costs and complexity of transition from existing structures

9.6.13 There would be transitional costs in moving to such an arrangement. The transition would be challenging for both organisations, involving the identification of assets and liabilities, associated staff transfers, and payment of financial transfers (although these would be somewhat moderated by the fact that some services are already shared between county and city through local arrangements or through national shared service arrangements). It would be a challenging transition for the revised county area, but this transition could also provide an opportunity for the county to focus on core priorities for those living in its area. Equally, however, this transition would also be a challenge for the city, which would almost double in population and would be tasked with ensuring that Cork takes its place as the engine of growth and development for the wider region and acts as a counterweight to Dublin.

Conclusion

9.6.14 A boundary extension of Cork city to include the immediate city suburbs represents the best workable option for local government in Cork, albeit that this should not extend as far as the ‘Cork Metropolitan Area’ as proposed by the CLGC minority. We expand further on this in section 9.9 below. We also expand on the financial implications that arise, in section 9.11 below.
9.7 Option 6 – Boundary extension of Cork city to include Metropolitan Cork as defined in CASP

Cork as the engine of development and a counterweight to Dublin

9.7.1 This option would better equip a larger City Council area, encompassing the city and the wider metropolitan hinterland, to take a lead role in driving the growth of the city (which is in the interests of the wider region) and to plan and deliver on key development and infrastructure priorities for the region.

A unified voice for Cork

9.7.2 This option would provide one voice for the growth of the city and its extended hinterland, for the benefit of the wider Cork area.

Effective planning and delivery of development and infrastructure

9.7.3 A significantly-expanded City Council area to drive the development of the city and its wider hinterland and plan for development and key infrastructure. However, the area would still not encompass the full city region and hinterland as defined by a 45-minute commuting time, known as the CASP Study Area (see Figure 2.2).

Providing for differences between metropolitan and rural areas

9.7.4 A newly-configured county under this option would be quite fragmented, and it would be of questionable value to bring strong market towns such as Cobh and Midleton into the city boundary. This option is also unlikely to be a cohesive area, containing a combination of urban, suburban, and rural areas as well as several county towns, and this would likely dilute the ability of the expanded ‘city’ local authority and the newly-configured county to reflect different strategic interests in metropolitan and rural areas.

Financial viability and sustainability

9.7.5 While this option would improve the capacity of the city to maintain, improve and expand services, it would pose significant issues around the sustainability of the reconfigured
County Council area. The size of the boundary extension would have very considerable negative financial implications for the county.

**Capacity to maintain, improve, and expand services into the future**

9.7.6 There are significant financial implications for the County Council. These would present major challenges to maintaining, improving and expanding services.

**Clear and readily understandable governance**

9.7.7 The Group do not regard this option as providing a clear and cohesive governance structure. The ‘city’ authority would include large rural areas, and a boundary extension on this scale could significantly reduce the cohesiveness of the county area.

**Effective local democratic representation, subsidiarity and accountable leadership**

9.7.8 This option could provide for clarity and accountability within both local authorities in terms of both political leadership (through the Lord Mayor / County Mayor) and executive leadership (through the respective chief executive of both local authorities). If an expanded City Council moved to an area-based structure and a newly configured County Council were able to revise its municipal district structure along the lines of more easily recognisable areas, this would also have advantages in terms of effective local democratic representation.

**Potential for efficiency savings and improved value for money**

9.7.9 The potential for efficiency gains under this option could be limited, given that both local authorities under this option are likely to cover less coherent areas. For example, the combination of urban, suburban and rural areas in a newly configured ‘city’ under this option might moderate any potential efficiency savings and value for money that might accrue under these arrangements.
 Costs and complexity of transition from existing structures

9.7.10 There would be very considerable transitional costs in extending the boundary to the extent envisaged under this option, involving identification of a large number of assets and liabilities, associated staff transfers, and payment of financial transfers from the city to the county.

Conclusion

9.7.11 Overall, there are a number of significant drawbacks to this option, including the lack of cohesiveness of the two areas proposed, the negative financial implications, and questions as to whether this option would be effective in terms of governance. The Group is therefore of the view that a boundary extension of Cork City to include Metropolitan Cork as defined under the CASP is not a viable option.

9.8 Further option – a single executive to serve two councils

9.8.1 One final possibility mentioned in section 6 was a variant of options 3 to 6. This would maintain two separate local councils, but both councils would be served by a single chief executive and administrative support. The Group have noted that, previously, two different local authorities have been served by a single chief executive. The Local Government Efficiency Review Group (2010) had also suggested the possibility of joint management and administrative structures to serve two local council areas, based on the ‘pairing’ of 20 neighbouring local authorities into 10 different joint administrative areas. However, the Group notes that Cork City Council and Cork County Council did not feature in the list of proposed paired areas, and that Government did not proceed with this particular proposal of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group.

9.8.2 This option would allow for differences between the metropolitan area and rural areas to be reflected at political level, with tailoring of services in line with the priorities and strategies identified by each of the respective councils. Such an approach could help realise
further efficiency savings. In particular, there would be some scope for rationalising the senior management cadre. A large single staff resource serving two councils should allow the retention of specialist expertise and provide a range of career opportunities.

9.8.3 This model of working that has been implemented in parts of the United Kingdom. It may be considered relevant to the Cork situation, although such an approach would be highly dependent on the necessary levels of political leadership and support to enable the shared arrangement to work effectively. Importantly, the two councils would need to understand and agree that their senior management resource was no longer dedicated to the support of a single council, otherwise this approach might run the risk of a chief executive and management team having split loyalties. Although there would be a 'single voice' for Cork at executive level, this would not be mirrored and sustained at the political level, which could create uncertainty and risk of split loyalties and conflicting objectives.

Conclusion

9.8.4 To be viable this model would need to attract the strong support of the two existing councils, with assurances, indeed guarantees, that the approach could be sustained in the long term. The Group also recognises that this is untried in the context of modern local government in Ireland, with its very different approach to the role of chief executive. It is not evident that the situation in Cork, particularly with regard to the scale and diversity of the area, would allow this approach to work.
9.9 Recommended option

9.9.1 There are advantages and disadvantages arising from the different options identified. A key priority for the Group has been to identify the appropriate governance structure that can provide a focus on both the growth of the metropolitan part of Cork city and its suburbs, and a focus on the growth and development of the harbour area, market towns and rural areas in the county.

9.9.2 The Group has concluded that its preferred option is to maintain two separate local authorities, with an extension of the City Council boundary. The Group see merit in both Options 4 and 5 above and recommend a new boundary between these two areas. It is proposed that the City Council area should be extended to include Ballincollig, Carrigrohane, Blarney, Glanmire, Carrigtwohill, and Cork airport, to reflect the existing development patterns and the planned expansion of the city along the east-west and northern transport corridors. However, we do not think that the city council area should include Passage West, Monkstown, Ringaskiddy, or Carrigaline, to allow the greater harbour area to be treated as a single economic unit. Equally, more rural parts of the hinterland of the city, such as Ballygarvan to the south and Dripsey and Greenfort to the west, should not be included in the city council area – this is because we do not feel that the medium-to long-term needs of the city require extension of the boundary to these areas, while a less extensive area could help incentivise higher density development within the city. Figure 9.1 is not a definition of a specific boundary, but rather reflects those major centres that should be included within a new City Council area. A precise boundary should include the areas referred to above and be based on physical, social and natural borders. It should, for example, reflect local communities, communities of interest, townlands and infrastructure.

9.9.3 The Group had concerns that a merged or unified authority runs the risk of failing to support the growth or development of the metropolitan area while giving insufficient attention to county towns and rural areas. Our proposal seeks to ensure that key urban parts of the immediate hinterland of Cork city are part of the City Council area, while settlements and areas with a rural character should remain within the County Council area. These would be more cohesive local government units and would mean that an expanded City Council can
give a focus to urban development, with the County Council focussed on the needs and potential of rural areas, county towns and the harbour area. We believe it is important to avoid a situation where significant areas with a rural character are incorporated into the City Council area. A delineation along the lines proposed, we believe, strikes the right balance in terms of allowing potential for further development within a new City Council boundary, while also incentivising higher density development and reducing the risk of sprawl. The revised new boundary would have little impact on the key infrastructure asset of Cork harbour, which would remain largely within the county. A boundary extension along these lines would involve an increase in the City Council population from 119,230 to some 215,000, depending on the precise delineation of the boundary (Census 2011 figures). Our best estimate, based on the early results of the 2016 Census, is that the extended City Council area would have a 2016 population of some 225,000.

9.9.4 The Group acknowledge that a unified authority remains the preferred option of a number of organisations and stakeholders. We wish to place on the record the bona fides of those holding this position and the sincerely held views of those who argue that a unified authority would represent the best interests of Cork. Indeed, the Group wish to emphasise that it sees much merit in such a proposal, particularly the need on certain issues to provide for a ‘unified voice’ for Cork. We put forward an alternative means of achieving this ‘unified voice’ to reflect key strategic interests of both Cork City and County in section 9.10. We also wish to make it clear that our recommended option for an extension of the City Council boundary is made on the basis that this is accompanied by our proposal for a Cork Economic Development and Planning Board to guide the development of Cork and the CASP Study Area in particular, as outlined in section 9.10 below.
Figure 9.1: Diagrammatic Representation of Recommended City Council
9.9.5 The Group believes the balance of the arguments support two local authorities: one dedicated to realising the potential of Cork City and the surrounding metropolitan area, and a separate local authority serving the needs of towns, villages and rural communities that are neither urban or metropolitan in character. In particular, the Group believes that a dedicated local authority serving the needs of the Cork metropolitan area is the best means of ensuring a focus on the growth and economic development of the city and its hinterland, to the benefit of Cork City and County Cork. Given the position set out in the recent issues paper regarding the forthcoming National Planning Framework (Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 2017), if the Government’s intention is to consolidate Cork’s position as Ireland’s second city and driving growth in the wider Southern region, the balance of power and authority for the city must lie with the metropolitan area. In a unified / merged authority, there is a risk of policies and decisions diluting the focus on the city and suburbs and, as a result, the potential of the wider Cork area is less likely to be realised.

9.9.6 The Group’s firm conclusion therefore is that maintaining the two local authorities (with an extended City Council boundary) represents the best governance model for Cork. Moving to that governance structure has of course a number of consequences. Implementing a significant extension of the boundary of the City Council will be challenging and involve considerable further logistical work to identify assets and liabilities, facilitate the necessary transfer of staff, and establish new structures (we expand further on this in section 9.11 below). However, that something is difficult to do does not make it the wrong thing to do. The expanded city must work alongside the county for the mutual benefit of both, and in certain areas of strategic investment a ‘unified voice’ for Cork should bring both local authorities together within the framework set by the proposed Cork Metropolitan Area Plan.
9.10  A unified voice for Cork

9.10.1 An expanded city will still have to work alongside the County for the mutual benefit of both, and in certain areas of strategic investment a ‘unified voice’ for Cork city and county should bring both local authorities together. The case for greater cooperation between the two local authorities is overwhelming. There are some excellent examples of current cooperation between the two local authorities (see Appendix 3). The Group notes the observation of the Waterford Boundary Review Committee (2016) that cooperation between local authorities can work well where the interests of both are particularly closely aligned, but can be more challenging where there are natural rivalries, for example over land-use and development. The future development of Cork will be well served by increased cooperation between both local authorities. While any new arrangements in Cork should build on the current good practice in terms of cooperation between the Cork local authorities, the Group also believe that a ‘step-change’ in the level and intensity of cooperation will be required. The Group recommends that further areas of cooperation and shared services be identified.

9.10.2 A key element of strengthened and more focused co-operation is the establishment of a Cork Economic Development and Planning Board that would span both Cork City and Cork County. The Board, which should be established by statute, should operate in a focused, business-like, coherent and efficient manner. It would be made up of an equal number of nominees from the City and County Councils, nominated to the Board after each local election. Membership of the Board would consist of 10 elected members in total. The Group suggests that a small membership is important to ensure that the Board is a cohesive group and focussed in its work. In addition, a total of two representatives of the business community would be members of the Board in a non-voting capacity.

9.10.3 The Chair of the Board would be elected by the elected members on the Board to serve a five-year term. The Chair would preside at meetings of the Board members, order the business of the board, monitor the preparation and implementation of the Cork Metropolitan Area Plan (see below) and key infrastructural projects, and liaise with national
and local bodies, including the Lord Mayor and County Mayor, irrespective of whether they are members of the Board.

9.10.4 The Board would be charged with the following roles:

- Focusing on strategic planning for economic development, housing provision and strategic infrastructure. The Board should adopt a Cork Metropolitan Area Plan (CMAP) for the CASP Study Area which should be placed on a statutory basis and focused both on major strategic development issues and locations, that acts as a framework for both local authorities and a range of national agencies.
- Ensuring that the plan is brief, focused on key priorities and not a statement of vague aspirations.
- Overseeing and reporting on the implementation of the CMAP and its accompanying Action Plan (see below).

9.10.5 The Cork Metropolitan Area Plan should be accompanied by an Action Plan adopted by the Board determining priorities for key development and infrastructure projects in the area, including economic development, strategic housing provision, major infrastructure (in particular transport) and major regeneration. This should be an action-oriented document, setting out clear priorities and timelines, rather than a series of vague aspirations or an unfocussed shopping or wish list of projects that have little potential of being realised.

9.10.6 The city and county development plans should conform with the CMAP. This Plan would be adopted by the Board, with close involvement of the two local authorities and a wider consultation exercise. There should be a mechanism in place to ensure that planning decisions in the area conform with the Cork Metropolitan Area Plan. There is a role for the Board to play, in association with the proposed new Planning Regulator, in ensuring that planning policies and decisions of the two local authorities are consistent with the Plan.
9.10.7 The Board would have executive responsibilities in these areas and be supported by a small team led by a Chief Officer. The Chief Officer of the Board would be directly recruited through the Public Appointments Service, reporting to the Board members on a regular basis and leading and directing the work of a small team. A small team with relevant expertise in strategic planning and economic development should be made available to support the work of the Board, principally through secondment arrangements from the two local authorities.

9.11 Financial implications of a boundary change

*Local government boundary changes*

9.11.1 Boundary extensions or boundary changes have occurred on a number of occasions in Irish local government. This includes in Limerick city in 2008, the establishment of three new local authority areas in Dublin in 1994, the establishment of Galway city in 1986, Waterford city in 1980, in Louth / Drogheda in 1976, and in Cork city in 1965. Other adjustments have also taken place in the boundary of former town councils.

9.11.2 The longstanding precedent applying to boundary change in Irish local government is that a financial payment is usually paid by one local authority to another to reflect the financial adjustment arising from boundary changes. This is reflected in the provisions of the Local Government Act 2001 (ref. schedule 11).

9.11.3 In general terms, the calculation of this payment is made based on the loss of revenue income to one local authority, less the reduction in expenditure that arises from that local authority not having to serve that area.

---

5 There are a variety of approaches used internationally to implementing local government boundary change. This includes examples of jurisdictions where no financial adjustment is made on the basis of boundary changes, to a range of methods for calculating the financial effects of boundary change.
9.11.4 In the case of Galway county borough (now Galway city) for example, the payment made to Galway county was an indefinite payment to be made each year, although the amount itself was fixed (i.e. it was not index-linked). In other cases, such as in Cork city in 1965, the payment was calculated on the basis of the financial implications over a 15-year period and paid as a one-off lump payment, funded by means of a bond raised by the City Council.

**Income**

9.11.5 On the income side, the calculation of the income loss should involve an initial estimate of the change in the tax base that would result from a potential boundary change. Precedent would suggest that this should include the commercial rates base applying to the area affected. While Local Property Tax (LPT) has not been part of previous boundary extensions, it is a significant source of income and would need to be addressed as part of the implementation of the Group’s recommendations. In terms of other income sources, these would transfer with the services on a neutral basis.

9.11.6 Development contributions would be paid to the authority in whose area the development is located at the time they fall due to be paid. However, where the County Council have incurred expenditure on infrastructure directly related to the development this should be recouped out of the contributions received by the City Council.

**Expenditure**

9.11.7 An estimate should be made of the reduction in expenditure on the part of the county in not having to service the affected area, based on appropriate cost drivers across service divisions at service and sub-service level.

**Other Issues**

9.11.8 As a general rule, assets and liabilities within the affected area would be transferred from one local authority to another. However, land owned by the county that is not in use for public purposes or funded by the Exchequer but has development potential should be transferred at market value.
9.11.9 This would include the transfer of outstanding debts (including commercial rates) and outstanding income due to Cork County Council in the area affected by the boundary change at the time any proposed boundary change would take effect.

9.11.10 A scheme for the transfer of assets and liabilities should be agreed between the two local authorities. In cases where agreement cannot be reached within a pre-determined time frame, the Implementation Oversight Body suggested in section 13.2.6 should act as an independent arbitrator.

9.11.11 Staff providing services within the affected area should transfer to the city, along with their associated pension liabilities. Staff transfers would have to be facilitated over a transitional period, drawing on standard public service industrial relations mechanisms.

9.11.12 The precedent for dealing with these issues is that the two local authorities would be initially asked to negotiate on these matters between themselves in order to reach agreement. Where the local authorities could not reach agreement, an arbitrator appointed by the Minister would seek to settle disputes. The Group are recommending that this arbitration role be played by the Implementation Oversight Body proposed in section 13.2.6.

**General Principles**

9.11.13 In summary, the Group recommend that the proposed boundary extension is contingent on a Financial Reciprocation Payment, which should be agreed as part of the boundary change process, drawing on the general principles presented below.

- The impact of boundary change should be financially sustainable.
- The Financial Reciprocation Payment should be designed with the objective of ensuring that both local authorities are in a position to maintain the public services that they are responsible for.
• The calculation of the Financial Reciprocation Payment should be based on revenue in the affected area, less the reduced expenditure, based on the year immediately prior to the boundary change taking effect.

• Assets should be transferred along with associated liabilities. Separate consideration needs to be given to land with development potential as set out in section 9.11.6.

• Consideration should be given as to how the Financial Reciprocation Payment is funded. This is vital to ensure the County Council receives the payments and does so in a timely manner, and that the City Council is financially in a position to make these payments. This may require the City Council being given the capacity to borrow money particularly in the initial period post-expansion, as an exception to normal rules.

• The Financial Reciprocation Payment should last for 10 years (subject to review) and be index-linked for this 10-year period. An initial review of capacity for payment and payments actually made, having regard to the principles above, should take place within 5 years. A further more comprehensive review should be undertaken before the end of the 10-year period. This would consider having regard to the foregoing principles, whether the amount should be reduced and whether or not the 10-year period requires extension and if so for what further period, including in perpetuity.
10 POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN CORK

10.1.1 The powers of the Lord Mayor of Cork City and the Mayor of Cork County are the same under law. They largely relate to ceremonial and representative functions and chairing meetings of the Council and the Corporate Policy Group. The office-holder is elected by his / her respective Council to serve a one-year term.

10.1.2 The Group were struck by the status and strong sense of attachment to the office of Lord Mayor of Cork, which embodies centuries of history, heritage and tradition. It symbolises pride in place, fosters a strong sense of identity, and acts as a bridge between citizens and their local authority. The report of the Cork Local Government Committee proposed retaining the title of Lord Mayor for the Chairperson of the Metropolitan Division within a unified authority, but this was perceived by opponents as a downgrading of the status and significance of the role. It is not, however, a role that provides city leadership as in other globally competitive cities; heritage and civic pride – important as they are – will not in themselves take the city region forward.

10.1.3 The Group is aware of proposals over the past two decades to establish an office of directly-elected mayor within Irish local government, particularly in the Dublin area. However, in our discussions with different stakeholders, we detected little appetite for an office of directly-elected mayor. Some stakeholders pointed to risks associated with such a move and suggested that there have been mixed experiences with directly-elected mayors. Ultimately, the Group took the view that a decision to establish an office of directly-elected Mayor is a matter to be considered in the context of local government reform in Ireland generally.

10.1.4 The Group does feel that the current system whereby the Lord Mayor of Cork City and the County Mayor of Cork County change each year does not provide sufficient continuity of political leadership. A one-year term is simply too short for this key position to offer effective leadership.
10.1.5 We have noted the proposal in the Barrington report (1991) for retaining the system of electing the Lord Mayor / Mayor by the elected council, but extending the term of office to two to three years. We would suggest extending the term of office of the Lord Mayor / County Mayor for the full five-year term of the council. Legislation would be needed to require elected councils to elect an individual as Lord Mayor / Mayor for five years (rather than one as at present).

10.1.6 As part of this change, different candidates for the office of Lord Mayor / County Mayor should be required to present a policy programme as their platform in advance of the council vote on electing the Lord Mayor / Mayor, setting out his / her key priorities for the office for their five-year term. The Lord Mayor / County Mayor could also receive regular management / progress reports on these priorities from the chief executive. We have also noted the suggestion in the 2008 Green Paper on Local Government (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2008) that mayors could be given some policy initiation responsibilities. The Group would suggest that a five-year Lord Mayor / County Mayor would be able to take on a role in presenting the draft corporate plan, the draft annual budget, the draft development plan for decision by the elected council, as well as ordering the business of council meetings and agreeing agenda items. We believe that this proposal would strike a good balance between political leadership, executive leadership and professional management of local authorities as organisations and service providers.

10.1.7 The current role of Lord Mayor / Mayor is largely ceremonial and representative, albeit one that is extremely demanding on the time of those who have held the office. While the current roles are important and should be maintained, our proposal mean that future incumbents would have to balance those roles with a strategic and leadership role. We believe that extending the term of office to five years and giving the Lord Mayor / Mayor a role in policy initiation would be important features in giving clearer political direction and focus to the local authority. Such a change would enhance both the representational and strategic role of an office that already has considerable status within the community and make the role and position more effective in terms of promoting the general welfare of the area.
11 DEVOLUTION OF FUNCTIONS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT

11.1.1 The Terms of Reference required the Group to consider local government powers and functions, including the potential for devolution of functions to local authorities from central government departments or agencies.

11.1.2 The Group was struck by the relatively limited range of local government functions in Ireland. We consider that there is considerable scope to increase the role of local government in the delivery of public services – both to increase the chances of public services being more tailored to the needs of local communities and on the grounds of subsidiarity. Implementation and delivery of a number of strategic objectives for Cork, for example a number of objectives reflected in the CASP, depends not just on the two Cork local authorities, but also on central government and a range of national agencies and bodies.

11.1.3 We note that Government policy, as expressed in Putting People First, states that: “Local authorities ... must have substantial functions and responsibilities ... elective local government should have a reasonable degree of devolved decision making capacity over a wide range of relevant public affairs and services” (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012, p. 2). As part of its vision for local government, Putting People First states that local government should become the main vehicle for the provision of public services at local level. As a first step in this direction, local government has been assigned greater responsibilities in the fields of economic development and community development. However, in areas such as water and higher education grants there has been a transfer of powers to national bodies, while national agencies have assumed a greater role in areas such as roads and environmental protection.

11.1.4 It would seem to the Group that the rhetoric and the reality of developments in this area diverge from one another. Most are supportive of the principle of devolution, and yet
increasingly responsibilities are being transferred to national bodies, often on an *ad hoc* basis.

11.1.5 We have also noted some of the more ambitious proposals for devolution to local government (reflected, for example, in the Barrington Report (1991) and Devolution Commission (1996 and 1997)), which have included:

- Education (secondary, primary and pre-school, as well as youth and adult education and school maintenance)
- Social services and community healthcare
- Community employment schemes
- Public transport
- Consumer protection

11.1.6 Devolution of functions was an issue the Group raised during its discussions with different stakeholders. Most of those we encountered reacted positively to the idea of greater devolution in principle, although few had clearly thought through potential functions that could be devolved to local authorities and how this could realistically be brought about.

11.1.7 There are certainly potential areas of devolution that link with current local government responsibilities in areas such as planning, economic development and community development, that could be more appropriately exercised at local government level. Other areas that could be considered include health and well-being and social services. The Group regrets that it has not been able to devote sufficient time to exploring these areas in more detail within the timeframe for completing its work. However, the issues raised go well beyond making recommendations on future local government arrangements in Cork and must be decided in the context of national policy on the powers and responsibilities of local councils.
12 DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION AND DISTRICT-BASED DECISION MAKING

12.1.1 The Group was also asked to consider representational structures and the allocation of powers and functions between plenary councils and municipal districts. The Group are of the view that greater delegation of responsibilities, within what are relatively large local authority areas in Cork, is highly desirable, both in terms of delivering more responsive and accessible services to citizens and reflecting the principle of subsidiarity.

12.1.2 The overall number of Councillors in each local authority area in Cork needs to be revised. In particular, we suggest a better balance between the Councillor / population ratio in the county and city. Based on Census 2011 figures, under the current structures the population per Councillor in County Cork with 55 members is 7,269. The population per Councillor in Cork City with 31 members is 3,846. There are currently 86 elected Councillors in total across Cork County and City.

12.1.3 The Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee that reported on local government electoral areas in 2013 worked on the basis that there should be one member for every 4,830 people in each local authority, based on Census 2011 figures (subject to a maximum number of 55 Councillors that the Terms of Reference set for Cork County Council, and a maximum of 40 Councillors for most other local authorities). In addition, its Terms of Reference also provided that in counties with town councils before 2014, that this should be reflected in one additional member per town council, subject to a maximum of 4 additional members per council (Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee, 2013).

12.1.4 The Group recognises the advantages in having a smaller number of citizens per Councillor in local authorities – it should make Councillors more accessible to their electorate, leading to greater awareness of different views and issues within their community. Applying the approach of the Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee to the new local authority areas recommended in this report, an expanded Cork City Council of some 215,000 people (also based on Census 2011) would have 45 elected members, and a reconfigured Cork County
Council of some 305,000 people (based on Census 2011) would have 63 elected members, plus 4 members in light of the abolition of town councils in 2014 (obviously these figures do not take account any maximum number of members the Minister might fix for either local authority).

12.1.5 While this is for a Local Area Boundary Committee established to determine revisions to local electoral areas, the Group considers that in order to reduce the disparity in the level of representation between the city and county, the ratio for the number of people per Councillor could be set at 5,500 in both the city and county. Based on this ratio, the Group propose that the number of members in a newly constituted Cork County Council should be 56, and that the number of members in a newly constituted Cork City Council should be 39.

12.1.6 The county is considerably under-represented under the existing arrangements, by reference to both the current City Council and national averages. The proposed new arrangements would reflect a better balance in terms of the Councillor to population ratio between the city and county. While this proposal would involve a small increase in the overall number of Councillors across Cork City and County (currently 86), the Group considers that this would be a justified modest increase. In particular, it should ensure that there are a sufficient number of elected members to represent the interests of rural areas, and it should facilitate a realignment of what are extremely geographically large municipal district areas.

12.1.7 There will be a need to revise the current municipal district structures in Cork County in light of the re-drawing of the boundary of Cork City Council. This will likely be based on local electoral areas, which would have to be revised in advance of the next local elections. A County Council of 56 members would allow for the identification of 8 municipal districts of 7 Councillors each in a newly configured county. A revised municipal district structure for County Cork should be based on the hinterland of county towns where feasible. In particular, this reconfiguration of municipal districts in Cork County should address the various anomalies that exist within the current municipal district structure in Cork – for
example some of the current municipal districts which are regarded as somewhat artificial, and the very large area covered by the current West Cork municipal district (which, for example, could be reconfigured on the basis of two districts, with one based on Clonakilty and another based on Skibbereen).

12.1.8 A newly expanded Cork City Council should also move to introduce an area- or district-based structure for the wider city area, based on five areas (including the city centre). This will allow for the devolution of operational decisions at area level and the representation of distinct areas and communities within the city.

12.1.9 A number of decisions, including developing a schedule of works to prioritise capital works at local level and local disposals of property, could be devolved to district / area level. Within the County Council area at present, municipal districts have responsibility for a number of operational services and can receive public queries or complaints regarding areas such as housing, planning, environmental services or economic development, even if in some cases these issues might be dealt with centrally in County Hall and citizens might be directed to a contact point in County Hall or indeed to another service provider as appropriate.

12.1.10 The Group consider that there is potential for both local authorities to give districts / areas greater operational responsibilities. Each municipal district within the county, and each district within the city, should be served by a customer service desk as a single point of enquiry and interaction for those living in that area.
13 CONCLUSIONS

13.1 A cohesive Cork City and a cohesive Cork County

13.1.1 The Group has concluded that Cork would be best served by a City Council that is focused on the development of the city and its immediate hinterland as Ireland’s second city with the potential to drive the development of the city region, and a County Council that is focused on the needs of county towns and rural parts of Cork as well as the harbour area. The governance of the metropolitan area of Cork will be critical in the years ahead. As noted by a recent ESPON study, “second cities” have significant potential to maximise local and national economic performance, especially so where national governments policies support them, and give them significant powers and resources, facilitating greater deconcentration away from capital cities (ESPON, 2013). The evidence suggests that this strategy of investing in second cities can yield considerable benefits at regional and national level.

13.1.2 The emerging National Planning Framework presents a real opportunity for Cork to build on its current assets and develop its role as Ireland’s southern capital and Ireland’s natural counterweight to Dublin. The growth of the ‘city-region’ of Cork will be key in taking advantage of future opportunities and driving growth for the wider Cork area. The Group is of the view that a local authority dedicated to the needs of the metropolitan area of Cork City and its suburbs represents the most effective governance structure to take advantage of these opportunities. Ultimately, this should work to the benefit of both Cork City and the wider County area.

13.1.3 The Group have concluded that the current arrangements are unsustainable and propose an extension of the City Council boundary to increase the population of the City area to some 215,000 (based on Census 2011 figures) and approximately 225,000 based on 2016 Census figures. The precise boundary should be based on physical, social and natural borders, reflecting, for example, local communities, communities of interest, townlands and infrastructure. This will allow the city to consolidate its position and to grow and develop its full potential. It should also allow for a more cohesive and coherent planning approach to be taken towards the city and its hinterland. While a strong case can be made for extending
the boundary, it is unclear what the views of residents living in the current area of the county affected by our proposals are on the issue. All City Councillors were in favour of a boundary extension, while a clear majority of elected representatives on the County Council opposed a boundary extension and were in favour of a unified authority. Representatives of the City and County Public Participation Networks took a similar position to that held by their respective elected representatives on the City and County Councils. Business and development interests also took up different positions.

13.1.4 An expanded city and newly configured county will still have to cooperate and work together on a range of areas. Further areas of cooperation and shared service provision should be identified. More specifically, a key recommendation of the Group is that a Cork Economic Development and Planning Board be established with representatives of both the city and county (and business representatives in a non-voting capacity) to provide a focus on strategic planning for economic development, housing provision and strategic infrastructure in Cork city and its wider hinterland. The Board would adopt a Cork Metropolitan Area Plan for the CASP Study Area along with a focused Action Plan determining priorities for key development and infrastructure projects in the area, including economic development, strategic housing provision, major infrastructure (in particular transport), and major regeneration.

13.2 Implementation and transitional arrangements

13.2.1 Extending the boundary of the City Council will be challenging and will involve considerable further work to identify assets and liabilities, facilitate the transfer of staff, and establish new structures. As the Group has noted above, just because something is difficult to do does not make it the wrong thing to do.

13.2.2 As is the long-established precedent with other boundary changes that have applied in other areas, a financial adjustment will be necessary to reflect the loss of revenue and savings in expenditure that will arise for Cork County Council resulting from the boundary change. This should be based on principles proposed by the Group as outlined in section 9.11 above. The
boundary extension must provide that the long-term financial sustainability of the reconfigured County Council area is maintained, with a view to maintaining current local government service levels in rural areas of Cork.

13.2.3 Other issues that will arise include outstanding debts, including commercial rates, outstanding LPT income and development levies, due to Cork County Council in the area affected by the boundary change at the time the boundary change takes effect, as well as operational assets, land and buildings owned by Cork County Council in the area affected by the boundary change. A scheme for the transfer of assets and liabilities should be agreed.

13.2.4 The County Council Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) applying in the affected area will have to, over a transitional period, align with the ARV in the City Council area, although the differences between the two at present are marginal. Both local authorities also apply the same variation to the Local Property Tax (LPT) for their area. This should also mean that the commercial rate and LPT differential should not significantly impact on commercial rate-payers and households in the affected area. Differences in service charges will also have to be catered for.

13.2.5 Transitional arrangements will also be necessary to ensure continuity of services such as housing, planning, environmental protection so that individuals and communities affected by the changes do not experience any disruption in service during the transition. This should also include arrangements providing for bye-laws and development plans applying to the area concerned. Staff transfers will have to be managed over a transitional period through normal public service industrial relations mechanisms and any existing or future national public service agreements.

13.2.6 It is evident from the foregoing that the implementation of the recommendations in this report will present major challenges for both the city and county authorities. To ensure that these challenges are addressed in an efficient, effective and timely manner the Group recommends that an Implementation Oversight Body be established as soon as decisions on
the main recommendations of this report are made. This body could consist of 3 members with relevant areas of expertise (in particular finance) and should draw up and oversee an implementation plan to ensure that the new arrangements are in place or in train by the 2019 local elections. Each of the local authorities should also establish their own internal project teams to manage the transition.

13.2.7 In the first instance, the two local authorities should endeavour to negotiate the terms of the boundary change between them and seek to reach a fair and equitable settlement by mutual agreement as far as possible. In the event that the two local authorities cannot reach agreement on certain matters, the Implementation Oversight Body could act as an independent arbitrator and mediate between the two local authorities, or propose terms on these issues to the Minister.

13.3 Government action

13.3.1 For Cork to realise its undoubted potential is not solely down to the policies, proposals and decisions of local government. Local authorities in Ireland currently have limited powers and financial discretion to invest in many of the assets and infrastructure necessary to develop gateways and city-regions. National government and national agencies must play their full part in providing policy and financial support to Cork if it is to develop as a real counter-weight to Dublin.

13.3.2 Cork is not benefiting from the current hiatus. The long-standing question-mark and uncertainty over local government arrangements in Cork has distracted both local authorities from their core mandate. In the meantime, the world is moving on, with new challenges and opportunities presenting themselves, including those arising from the new National Planning Framework.

13.3.3 It is time to move on from the debate over future governance arrangements and take the decisions that will allow Cork to fulfil its undoubted potential and consolidate its position as Ireland’s second city.
13.4 Summary of Recommendations

- The boundary of Cork City Council should be extended to include Ballincollig, Carrigrohane, Blarney, Glenmire, Carrigtwohill, and Cork airport (but not including Passage West, Monkstown, Ringaskiddy, Carrigaline, or more rural parts of the hinterland of the city). This would involve an increase in the City Council population to the order of 215,000 (based on Census 2011 figures) and approximately 225,000 based on 2016 Census figures.

- A reconfigured County Council will remain one of the largest in area and population terms and should focus on the needs and potential of Cork’s towns, villages and rural areas as well as the harbour area.

- A Cork Economic Development and Planning Board should be established to present a unified voice on strategic economic development, housing and infrastructure issues affecting the wider Cork area
  - The Board should consist of 10 councillors appointed after each local election for 5 years, together with 2 (non-voting) representatives from the business community. The Board would elect a Chair to drive forward the preparation and implementation of a Cork Metropolitan Area Plan (CMAP).
  - The Board should be supported by a Chief Officer who will lead a small team with strategic planning and economic development expertise (drawn mainly from the 2 local authorities).
  - The CMAP should be placed on a statutory basis and be focused on a narrow range of issues which are fundamental to Cork fulfilling its potential.
  - The CMAP should be accompanied by an Action Plan adopted by the Board determining priorities for key development and infrastructure projects.

- In addition to the focused work of the Cork Economic Development and Planning Board proposed above, other areas of cooperation between the two local authorities should be strengthened and developed.
• A payment should be made by Cork City Council to Cork County Council in recognition of the financial adjustment arising from the boundary change, taking into consideration the loss of revenue and the reduced expenditure on the part of Cork County Council, and based on the principles outlined in section 9.11.

• The Lord Mayor and the County Mayor should continue to be elected by their respective local council, but they should be elected for a five-year term. The office should carry responsibilities over and above the traditional representative and ceremonial roles.

• The number of elected Councillors in both local authorities should be revised to reflect a better balance of representation – based on the recommendations in this report, a newly configured Cork County Council should have 56 elected members and a newly configured Cork City Council should have 39 elected members.

• A separate exercise should be undertaken to identify additional powers and functions that should be devolved to local government in Cork.

• Future rural development funding should be concentrated on structurally weaker rural areas within County Cork rather than invested in stronger rural areas in close proximity to Cork City.

• The municipal district structures within Cork County Council should be revised, in light of the revised Cork County Council area, and with a view to eliminating a number of anomalies within the current municipal district boundaries.

• A newly configured Cork City Council should move to an area-based approach to decision-making, service provision and operations.

• The recommendations of this report should be implemented so that members of the new local government structures can take office following the local elections.
scheduled for 2019, although it is recognised that some of the logistical implications (such as staff transfers) may require a longer time period.

- An Implementation Oversight Body should be established to progress these recommendations, including overseeing the establishment of the new Cork Economic Development and Planning Board, and making preliminary preparations for adopting a new Cork Metropolitan Area Plan.


APPENDIX 1

TERMS OF REFERENCE –

EXPERT ADVISORY GROUP ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT ARRANGEMENTS IN CORK

6 October, 2016

The Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government hereby establishes an Expert Advisory Group to advise the Minister regarding relevant options in relation to future local government arrangements for Cork, having regard particularly to the review carried out by the Cork Local Government Review Committee and its report which was submitted in September 2015.

1) The main functions of the Group are to:

   a) undertake further comprehensive and rigorous examination and analysis in relation to the issues dealt with in the review of local government arrangements for Cork and in the report (including the minority report) in that regard by the Cork Local Government Review Committee;

   b) provide relevant views, assessments, and advice arising from the matters at (a) and having regard to the work carried out by the Cork Local Government Review Committee, in relation to relevant aspects of local government arrangements for Cork and the implications of these, including assessment of the implications of recommendations in the report of the Cork Local Government Review Committee;

   c) provide advice to the Minister as to how best to address the issues on which the Cork Local Government Review Committee was unable to provide agreed recommendations, including the consideration of any relevant options in addition to those considered in that committee’s review;

   d) 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 Cork:

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

b) Governance and representational structures, including the approach to configuration of plenary councils, municipal districts and electoral areas;

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 councils and municipal district members;

d) Resource implications of alternative options having regard to the income, expenditure, assets, liabilities, functions and services of the local authorities in Cork 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 Cork, 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 Cork 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 Cork, 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 the functions of the Group:
   a) The Group shall have regard to –
      i) relevant provisions of the Terms of Reference of the Cork Local Government Committee;
      ii) consultations, analysis, deliberations and recommendations of the Cork Local Government Committee (without prejudice to any further study, examination or analysis which the Group considers necessary) and, for that purpose all available relevant information, documents, records or other relevant material of the Cork Local Government Committee shall be made available to the Group on a confidential basis at the commencement of its work;
   b) The chief executives and staff of the local authorities in Cork City and Cork County are required to co-operate fully with the Group, including through the provision of any available information, and attendance at meetings, as required by the Group.
   c) The Group shall 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.

**Membership of the Expert Advisory Group**

The members of the Group are -

Mr Jim MacKinnon, CBE, former Chief Planner at the Scottish Government

Mr John O’Connor, former Chairman of An Bord Pleanála and current Chairman of Eirgrid

Ms Gillian Keating, former President and Board Member of Cork Chamber of Commerce

Mr Paul Martin, Chief Executive, Richmond and Wandsworth Councils (External Adviser)
APPENDIX 2 STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Alf Smiddy, Chairperson of Cork Local Government Committee
Dr. Theresa Reidy and Prof. Dermot Keogh, authors of Cork Local Government Committee minority view
Elected Council of Cork City Council
Elected Council of Cork County Council
Management team of Cork City Council (including meetings with the chief executive, management team, and finance team)
Management team of Cork County Council (including meetings with the chief executive, management team, and finance team)
Representatives from Cork County Public Participation Network
Representatives from Cork City Public Participation Network
Barrie O’Connell, President, Conor Healy and Sarah Foley, Cork Chamber of Commerce
Pat O’Connell, President, Damian Wallace and Clara O’Neill, Cork Business Association
Michael O’Flynn, O’Flynn Group, and John Cleary, JCD Developments
Ray O’Connell, IDA Regional Manager
Brendan Keating, Chief Executive, Port of Cork
Niall Cussen and team from Forward Planning section, DHPCLG
Joe MacGrath, Chief Executive, Tipperary County Council
Conn Murray, Chief Executive, Limerick City & County Council

In addition to the above, Jim Mackinnon also met with the following Cork-based TDs:

Simon Coveney TD, Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (at very outset of the work of the Group)
Micheál Martin TD, leader of Fianna Fáil
Sean Sherlock TD, Labour Party
Jonathan O’Brien TD, Pat Buckley TD and Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire TD, Sinn Féin
APPENDIX 3

SHARED SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN CORK CITY COUNCIL AND CORK COUNTY COUNCIL

This appendix provides a summary and non-comprehensive list of the shared service arrangements that exist between Cork City Council and Cork County Council. This list does not include the many areas where national shared service arrangements have been put in place, such as payroll, procurement and ICT systems.

Operational Services:

- Cork Main Drainage
- Motor Tax
- Coroner Service
- Veterinary Services
- Laboratory Services
- Homelessness
- Waste enforcement
- Street cleaning
- Park and ride facility
- Road management office
- Fire and emergency services (including mutual support)
- Joint procurement of library stock
- Local authority archives
- Support to various festivals and events

Joint Strategies and Plans:

- Cork Area Strategic Plan (CASP)
- Joint Retail Strategy
- Major Emergency Plan
- Housing Strategy
- Traffic and transport planning
- Waste management
- ICT strategy and common software applications in areas such as planning
- Various economic development initiatives (including the Cork Global Economic Forum, tourism strategy, and initiatives around innovation, information technology, branding and marketing)