

Cathaoirleach of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage to discuss the Citizens' Assembly report on the Directly Elected Mayor of Dublin

October 2023

Chairman and Members of the Committee, my name is Kate Feeney, Cathaoirleach of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, known as EMRA, and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Councillor.

I am accompanied today by the Acting Director of the EMRA, Clare Bannon.

First, on behalf of the Assembly, I would like to thank the Committee for its invitation.

EMRA was established in 2015 as part of the existing regional tier of governance in Ireland. It covers twelve local authorities and includes 3 subregions or Strategic Planning Areas (SPAs), namely the Dublin, Eastern and Midland SPAs.

EMRA promotes multi-level governance by acting as a bridge between the local, regional, national and European levels. This role revolves around three axes: **strategic planning and sustainable development, European affairs, and effectiveness in local government.**

The Assembly focuses on driving regional development through a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). The RSES for the period 2019 - 2031 came into effect on 28th of June 2019.

Of particular relevance to the matter being discussed today are the Dublin SPA and the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP). The MASP was prepared under the RSES, and sets out a 12-to-20-year strategic planning and investment framework to support job creation and accelerated housing supply in the Dublin metropolitan area which covers Dublin City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin, and parts of Fingal, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow.

The MASP is the first statutory plan for the metropolitan area of Dublin and was prepared in collaboration with the transport agencies, infrastructure providers and the relevant local authorities.

The MASP contains an integrated land use and transportation strategy and also identifies infrastructure investment priorities to coordinate the phased delivery of strategic development sites in tandem with key public transport projects including Metrolink, DART and LUAS expansion, Bus Connects and walking and cycling networks.

The Dublin SPA and the Dublin MASP each has a committee which provide a forum for elected members to advance priorities and policies specific to each SPA. With the objective of overseeing and driving delivery of the MASP, the governance structure for the Dublin MASP also comprises an Implementation Group which includes stakeholders from the infrastructure and enterprise agencies, local authorities and Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage.

There are a number of statutory mechanisms in place that support delivery across the Dublin Metropolitan Area. The Regional Assembly has a statutory oversight function ensuring consistency,

under Section 27 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) regarding the preparation and making of draft development plans and the variation of development plans. In this regard, EMRA works with local authorities in the preparation of City and County Development Plans both formally by way of statutory submissions, and informally through the executive.

In addition, Section 25A of the Act requires that government departments and each local authority prepare and submit a report to the Assembly every two years setting out progress made in supporting objectives of the RSES. These reports form the basis of a Monitoring Report prepared by the Regional Assembly, detailing progress made in implementing the objectives of the RSES. The Monitoring Report is then submitted to the National Oversight and Audit Commission.

For the benefit of the Committee, and as previously highlighted to this Committee by the Regional Assemblies as part of the pre legislative scrutiny of the Draft Planning and Development Bill 2022, it should be noted that both of these statutory provisions are proposed for removal from the Planning Act.

In assisting the Committee in its consideration of the recommendations contained in the Citizens' Assembly report, EMRA would like to bring the following to the attention of the Committee to further inform their consideration;

1. Regarding Recommendation 1: Powers to be devolved to a directly-elected Mayor and local government structures for Dublin

It should also be considered how the functions of the directly-elected Mayor will complement the Regional Assembly role and functions.

When considering this you should have regard to the role and statutory functions of the Regional Assembly including, the RSES and Dublin MASP, oversight and ensuring consistency of County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans, the Dublin MASP Committee and Dublin MASP Implementation Group, the delivery of a biennial Monitoring Report documenting the progress of government departments, agencies and local authorities in delivering the RSES, and functions associated with Regional Enterprise Plans and Climate Action Plan delivery.

You should also consider the establishment of any necessary monitoring and reporting obligations, including, where relevant, reporting obligations from the Office of the DEM to EMRA similar to other government departments and local authorities.

2. Regarding Recommendation 11: Dublin City and County Assembly

Consideration should be given to how the Dublin City and County Assembly will interact with the Regional Assembly including how it will sit alongside existing regional structures and interact with existing governance arrangements, including the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan, its associated Committee and Implementation Group, and the functional City Region approach employed by the EMRA in this respect.

Currently DCC can nominate 7 members to EMRA, DLR, South Dublin, Fingal, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow can each nominate 3 members, while the remaining local authorities can each nominate 2 members. In addition, all members of the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions are members of their relevant Regional Assembly.

You should also consider whether members of any future Dublin City and County Assembly will be represented on the Regional Assembly. In this respect consideration should be given to ensuring balance within the Regional Assembly.

3. Regarding Recommendation 13: The role and resourcing of Councillors

In relation to recommendation 13 that the role of councillors should be made full-time and all councillors should be provided with secretarial support.

EMRA as previously mentioned is comprised of members from twelve local authorities, eight of which are outside of County Dublin. Consideration should be given to how this proposal may result in a two-tier system of elected members on the Regional Assembly.

To conclude, I do not envy the challenging task of the Committee, particularly with regard to the consideration of streamlining the recommendations with the existing myriad of local and regional functions, and any associated statutory provisions. Should the Committee wish to further engage with the EMRA on any of the above, I would be happy to assist in any way possible.