

Opening Statement on behalf of South Dublin Chamber

I would like to thank the Joint Committee for the opportunity to attend today's meeting. South Dublin Chamber covers the same area as South Dublin County Council our main towns are Tallaght, Clondalkin and Lucan. I am a member of the Chambers Council which is the governing board and in common with the other members I do so voluntarily having been democratically elected at our AGM. South Dublin County has benefited greatly since the establishment of South Dublin County Council with its ability to develop the county. Prior to this our area was developed in a city centric manner, it was a mixture of industrial estates and housing for those working primarily in the city. Today there is a vibrancy in the towns, villages, and business parks. Our County Council executive and elected councillors work hard to ensure the success of our county and improve the lives of those living and working in the county. Whilst we still have some way to go in particularly with cross county public transport as most transport is city centric; we are going in the right direction.

So, we can see clearly with local Government for our county, we have growth and development, improvement of facilities with a local university, hospital, and economic success. Would an overarching structure improve what we have the case is unproven, what we do see quite clearly is when shared services are needed such as fire / ambulance that the four local authorities are good at coming together and organising same. What prevents them doing so with other areas that would benefit from cross county cooperation? If we look at land use for example South Dublin County Council and Dublin City Council are current developing CityEdge the largest development in the State again through cooperation not legislation, this development is transformative in how it is being planned and how it will be used.

So, what will a newly established Mayor of Dublin do to improve our economy and the lives of the citizens of our county? Will the government having taken water services away from local authorities and set up Uisce Eireann 10 years ago take it off Uisce Eireann and give it to the new Mayor? I would suggest this is highly unlikely, the same could be said of Eirgrid so what will the new Mayor be doing regarding the energy infrastructure of Dublin. Does it seem feasible that a Mayor of Dublin will be successful in addressing planning anyone who has followed the Planning and Development Bill 2023 will testify to how fraught that can be. Transport is critical for all of us so how will a proposed Dublin Mayor politically divest the Minister of Transport of the crown jewel in their portfolio or ensure agencies such as the National Transport Authority, Dublin Bus or Irish Rail follow their vision or direction.

The Mayor of London is often cited as an example of the success of a directly elected Mayor. London has a population of 9 million. Does that mean one Mayor would cover the whole of Ireland? We are a small country with a small population, we have a centralised Government based in Dublin. Surely our challenge is to ensure better cooperation between the many bodies elected and appointed that impact our lives, rather than creating another layer to add to the complexity and cost of decision making.

Let's talk about the money, when the 0.007% of Dublin's population met to discuss a directly elected Mayor for Dublin, we are unaware how many pay commercial rates. Dublin Businesses pay higher commercial rates than the rest of the country so it is unlikely many of them would recommend increasing this bill. How much will the office of the mayor cost, how many staff will be required, how many people will be on their cabinet, at what level will these staff be. There is also a recommendation for more structures such as a Dublin City and County Assembly. Again, how much will this cost and what value will it add? If some staff are taken from existing local authorities will

this impact on local delivery of services? We have already seen the dismantlement of town councils; the further away Government gets from people the less people are empowered. South Dublin Chamber is an advocate for participative democracy enabling citizens to participate at the level closest to where they live and work.

We also note Recommendation 13: The role and resourcing of Councillors, this recommendation calls for all councillors to have secretarial support and salaries should be reflective of full-time commitment again we ask the question who pays?

The idea of a directly elected Mayor can be seductive, a supreme getting things done, if this is so then how come so many Ministers throughout our history are challenged getting their vision and actions implemented.

We are not against a directly elected Mayor, we await clear costing that ultimately our members will pay for through local taxes, clear pathways for legislative change to empower a new Mayor and clarification of what areas will really be impacted by a new Mayor.

In the interim our County and the other parts of Dublin should be realising their potential through more support for inter county cooperation and engagement, a stronger Government focus on Dublin which is the powerhouse of our Country yet is challenged by this success with the issues of housing supply, water supply and energy supply.

I look forward in participating in the discussion today and very much appreciate the opportunity to convey our views.

Thank you.

Adrian Geissel

Council Member

South Dublin Chamber

Whitestown Business Park, Tallaght, D24K59A, Dublin



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