Editorial

An excessive focus on local issues in Irish politics is blamed for weakening parliament's capacity to hold the Government to account and scrutinise legislation. This localism has been attributed, in part, to the weak system of local government.

This Spotlight aims to connect Members with these arguments at a time when local government reform is on the legislative agenda.

It considers how the Government's programme of local government reform might affect the constituency workloads of parliamentarians.

Spotlight no 8, 2012 examined how the Action Programme on Effective Local Government (2012) addresses the weaknesses in local government. Spotlight no 2, 2011 considered whether changing the electoral system can end excessive localism in Irish politics.

February 2013
Central Enquiry Desk: 618 4701/4702
A 2010 survey found that Irish TDs, on average, spent 53% of their working week on constituency-based work and 38% on parliament-based duties.\(^1\) Dealing with queries from individual constituents accounted for 40% of time spent on constituency work (Fig.1). While this focus promotes a strong voter-representative link, 69% of TDs surveyed in 2009 said that the level of constituency work compromised their legislative duties.\(^2\)

**Figure 1: Time spent on different aspects of Constituency Work\(^3\)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working on constituents’ cases</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying on behalf of the constituency</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting Constituency and delivering leaflets</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabling PQs on behalf of constituents</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advocates of political reform argue that excessive focus on local issues by parliamentarians has reduced parliament’s capacity to collectively hold the Government to account and to play an active role in the legislative process.\(^4\)

Political parties have argued that weak local government leads to locally-focused parliamentarians. Fianna Fáil’s Niall Andrews TD blamed weak local government for creating ‘a power vacuum which is filled by a TD.’\(^5\) Fine Gael, Sinn Féin and Labour TDs have argued that a reduction in constituency workloads is dependent on the reform of local government.\(^6\)

Political scientists offer explanations for localism in Irish politics including:

- electoral incentives particular to PR STV
- unresponsive public administration
- weak local government and\(^7\)
- executive dominance of the legislature.\(^8\)

This Spending considered how weaknesses in local government may lead to excessive localism in Irish politics. It examines how the Government’s local government reform programme will address these weaknesses.

**How does weak local government affect the constituency workloads of TDs?**

Weaknesses in Irish local government may be summarised as:

1. Narrow range of functions for which local government is responsible and the dominant role played by central government agents in local service delivery;
2. Complexity of institutional structures at the local level,

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\(^1\) 9% of time was spent on ‘other’ duties. Survey conducted by political scientists in Trinity College Dublin for the Joint Committee on the Constitution, 30th Dáil, Third Report


\(^7\) Farrell (1985) and 2011 (politicalreform.ie)

3. Weak and less visible political leadership at a local level
4. Dependency of local government on central government funds.

We consider how each of these weaknesses can cause parliamentarians to be locally-focused.

1. Narrow range of functions and central government dominance

Irish local authorities possess three out of nine core competencies associated with local government in ten other European countries (Table 1). They are town planning, housing and roads (secondary roads only). It should be noted that Irish local authorities do have competency in core functions omitted from the study: environmental planning, waste collection and sewage treatment, and culture. This is generally also the case for the other ten countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Town Planning</td>
<td>All 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany, Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spain, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>France, Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italy, Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>8 of 10 (excluding Italy and the Netherlands. Note that in the UK, only housing benefits is a competency).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>All 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social welfare and social services</td>
<td>All 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads and public transport</td>
<td>All 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>9 of 10 (excluding the UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity supply</td>
<td>8 of 10 (excluding the UK and Hungary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas supply</td>
<td>6 of 10 (excluding the UK, Portugal, Hungary and Finland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development including grants to industry</td>
<td>7 of 10 (excluding Germany, Hungary and Sweden).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike most other European countries, social welfare, health and education do not come under the remit of local government. Local representatives have no direct connection to the network of social welfare offices or HSE centres operating throughout the country. The Department of Education is responsible for delivering primary and secondary education.

As such, many issues affecting citizens’ everyday lives are not controlled by local government. If local government were itself responsible for administering social welfare payments and health services, for example, rather than local offices of the department, locally-elected representative might be the more obvious contact point if citizens required a brokerage service.

Compare Ireland to Finland. Finnish parliamentarians, like Irish TDs, have electoral incentives to focus heavily on the constituency. Finland has a candidate-

10 Water Services Bill 2013 provides that local authorities will no longer be water authorities but agents of Water Ireland the new central body.
focused proportional representation electoral system like PR STV and local, as opposed to national, party selectors are largely in control of candidate selection. However, where Irish and Finnish political systems differ is in the strength of local government. Finnish local government has an extensive range of functions and has a high degree of financial autonomy to raise funds.15

Strong local government explains at least in part why Finnish parliamentarians focus first and foremost on influencing national legislation.16 The ‘welfare officer’ role, which generates casework, is ‘practically non-existent.’ Parliamentarians do not tend to have designated constituency offices and regular clinics are very much the exception. A summer tour of the constituency’s municipalities is a more typical way to retain contact with the electorate.

Constituency problems tend to be directed to the parliamentarian only as a last resort. Instead, the agencies of local government which deliver the wide range of services can be contacted and, it would appear, answer directly to citizens.17

If the narrow range of functions is a key explanation for the extent of localism in Ireland, we would expect the vast majority of queries received by TDs to concern services delivered by central government.

**Does the evidence support this?**
A survey of TDs (2009) found that two of the three types of issues most frequently brought by constituents to TDs – social welfare and health - are indeed under the remit of central government (Fig.2). This finding is consistent with earlier research by Gallagher and Komito.18

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**Figure 2: Prominent Issues in the average TDs’ caseload**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of TDs for whom this issue arises daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It suggests that local government’s narrow range of functions explains at least part of the demand for TDs to be ‘welfare officers’ or mediators. However, the question remains as to why people contact public representatives at all about services instead of those actively engaged in delivering the service?

Political scientists point to the poor (though improving) interface between citizens and the agencies or Departments delivering services. The practice of using TDs as mediators is reinforced by the special access they are granted to service deliverers. For example, the Department of Social Protection’s special hotline enabling TDs to enquire about individual cases has existed for 20 years.20

Former Minister and TD, Noel Dempsey, suggested in 2002 that helping citizens to engage with the State might be better undertaken by local councillors.21 If local councillors or Citizens Information Bureaus had this type of access to Departments, constituents may not look for TD’s assistance. Or if, as in Finland,
citizens themselves directly contacted the service provider with queries particular to their individual cases, the need for the TD as a broker may disappear. That some TDs attributed a reduction in certain types of queries to technological advances which aid the application process for benefits lends support to this argument.\textsuperscript{22}

In sum, it would appear that the demand for a constituency service from TDs would reduce (a) if more competencies were devolved to local government and (b) if local agents delivering services were more responsive to citizens’ inquiries.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Effect of other weakness in local government on demand}

Equally striking in Figure 2 is the regularity with which TDs are contacted about issues which are, in fact, under the remit of local government.

TDs are slightly more likely (76\%) to be contacted daily about housing issues as they are about social welfare issues (74\%). Queries about education and agriculture, both largely relating to grants which were administered by local government at the time of the survey, also featured regularly in a TD’s constituency caseload as did queries about planning permission.\textsuperscript{24} Unlike social welfare and health, these queries would more logically be raised with local representatives. Therefore, local government’s narrow range of functions is not the only explanation for constituency workloads.

\textit{Why do constituents contact TDs about issues for which local government is responsible?}

Two further weaknesses in local government help to answer this question: the complexity of institutional structure and weak political leadership at local level.

\textbf{2. Complexity of institutional structures at local level}

The demand from constituents for the services of public representatives, whether local or national, is associated with the complexity brought to modern government by the welfare state.\textsuperscript{25}

Political scientists explain that service delivery and governance at the local level is increasingly complex, fragmented and networked. As a result, decision-making depends on a number of key individuals who are located in different organisations and on different levels instead of on the hierarchy of local government.\textsuperscript{26}

In Ireland, this complexity is compounded not only by the extent to which central government delivers every day services such as health and education, but also by the many local structures which exist outside of local government itself.\textsuperscript{27} For example, there are 33 VECs, 35 City/County Enterprise Boards,\textsuperscript{28} 54 integrated LEADER and partnership companies, seven regional fishery boards and 17 harbour authorities.\textsuperscript{29}

With complexity comes a lack of clarity on the part of citizens about which level or agency of government is responsible for delivering particular services. If the agency is locally-based, it may be unclear whether or not the agency is, in fact, a part of the local government system.

In the face of this complexity, a TD stands out as a leader - a high-profile elected representative - with whom citizens identify.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{But why does the TD stand out rather than the local County Manager or a local councillor?}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} O’Leary (2010) p. 146.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Arter, (2011) p.141.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Conversation with the author confirmed the type of queries received under ‘education’ and ‘agriculture.’ Note that responsibility for educational grants has since been moved to a central agency – SUSI.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Norris and Lovenduski, 1995 Political Recruitment, Gender, Race and Class in the British Parliament Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Steyvers et al (2008) Local Government Studies, Vol. 34.2 p. 136.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} O’Riordan, Assessing the local-centre government policy relationship in Ireland PhD Thesis NUI Maynooth (2010).
  \item \textsuperscript{28} The Action Programme (2012) plans to phase these out.
  \item \textsuperscript{29} O’Riordán (October 2010) pp. 201.
  \item \textsuperscript{30} John (2008) Local Government Studies Vol 34.2
\end{itemize}
3. Local political leadership

Spotlight no. 8 (2012) described the institutions of local government and the extent to which the balance of power in local government is weighted in favour of Managers over elected representatives. A Manager has little incentive to deal with individual constituents’ cases.

However, the strength of the County Manager vis-à-vis councillors leads to relatively weak political leadership at local level and local government which is not strongly accountable to local people. The local TD is more visible and perceived to be more powerful than councillors. The dual mandate, which continued until 2004, may have contributed to the established practice of approaching TDs rather than councillors. TDs who were also councillors were seen as the mediators between local and central government. Further, TDs have more resources at their disposal than councillors do.

If weak political leadership at a local level is an explanation for localism amongst TDs, one would expect that (a) constituents are more likely to contact TDs about any issue than councillors and (b) that creating more visible political leadership at a local level would reduce the constituency workload of parliamentarians.

What does the evidence say?

Figure 2 illustrates that TDs are contacted about many issues which relate to services delivered by local government. This may be because citizens, confused about the responsibilities of different agencies at a local level, and in the absence of a clearly accountable local political leader, see TDs as the public representative most likely to address their concern.

There is evidence that citizens approach TDs more frequently than they do local representatives. The Irish National Election Study found that only 6.1% of voters had contacted a councillor in the previous 5 years compared with 22.3% who had contacted a TD and 1% who had contacted a Senator (Table 2). The contacts are not broken down by subject.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Representative</th>
<th>% of respondents contacting public representatives in the last 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillor</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer/not applicable</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have measures to strengthen local political leadership elsewhere affected the constituency caseloads of parliamentarians?

Many countries, including some areas in the UK, have aimed to strengthen political leadership by introducing directly-elected mayors to local government. One individual who is visible and accountable is argued to be less confusing than the traditional collective and consensual forms of leadership typical of local government.

Like Ireland, the UK has a centralised state, relatively weak local government and MPs with high constituency workloads. What has been the effect of introducing directly-elected mayors to local government?

There has been little research into the effect of introducing directly-elected mayors on the constituency caseloads of national parliamentarians in the UK. There is evidence, however, that they dramatically raise the profile of local leaders.

32 INES, Trinity College Dublin, 2002. The question was not repeated in the 2007 or 2011 study.
33 This information dates from 2002. But O’Leary’s research finds that the effect of new media – greater availability of information and easier access to Members – has not resulted in a decline in the level of queries received by TDs. O’Leary (2011) p. 334.
35 Constituency workload of UK MPs is outlined in L&R Spotlight (2011) PR STV and Localism in Irish Politics.

A poll conducted shortly after the introduction of directly-elected mayors found that, on average, 57% of voters could name their mayor. In areas without directly-elected mayors only 8% of people could identify their local council leader. Further, many mayors hold open clinics, appear on phone-ins and deal directly with their constituents. This suggests that a directly-elected mayor with a relatively high political profile could serve as an alternative point of contact for citizens and could reduce the demand on TDs to undertake constituency caseloads.

On the other hand, academics have examined the impact on the constituency workloads of Westminster MPs of establishing the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament. They found that constituency casework, especially the demand created from constituents for it, decreased for Scottish and Welsh MPs since the establishment of a new, more local, tier of representation. 63% of Scottish MPs stated that their constituency workload had declined by 2004.

The decline in casework, in particular in Wales, was not as sharp as one might have expected given the level of devolution. The authors explained that the new tier of elected representatives reduced the number of constituents contacting MPs. It did not necessarily reduce the supply side i.e. the political impulse on the part of MPs to continue to undertake constituency caseloads for electoral purposes.

Similarly, research examining fifteen different case studies across Europe, concludes that the introduction of a regional tier generally reduces the constituency caseload of national parliamentarians. The extent of this reduction depends on variables such as personal choice and how marginal an electoral area is.

4. Weak Financial Autonomy

Spotlight no. 8 (2012) described the weak financial autonomy of Irish local government compared with other European countries. Local government depends extensively on central government for funding. Political scientists have argued that this creates incentives for parliamentarians to lobby central government to bring resources to their constituency, as opposed to ‘representing the general interests of their constituency in the legislative process.’

Is this the case in Ireland? TDs have reported spending 25% of their constituency work-time lobbying central government on behalf of the constituency. It is not clear what proportion of this time is spent lobbying about the disbursement of government resources. O’Leary’s survey suggested that TDs belonging to government parties are most likely to engage in lobbying for resources as they are more likely to be successful.

Mayor Michael Murphy of Passage West Town Council criticised local government’s lack of financial autonomy and its effect on the behaviour of elected representatives. Without economic resources, he said, local councils of any kind can do little. Instead, local and national representatives must concern themselves with lobbying central government so that they can offer detailed economic benefits to their localities just in time for election time.

41 Gay Oonagh, ‘MPs go back to their Constituencies’ The Political Quarterly Vol. 76: 1 pp. 55-66 p. 58
42 O’Leary (2011) PhD Thesis on the Constituency Role of TDs, Department of Geography, UCC. p. 182. There were party differences with 66% of Labour Party TDs seeing this role as important.
43 Mayor in his submission to the White Paper and as quoted in the South Eastern Star, 10 July 2010.

36 Lodge Guy (April 2012), Institute for Public Policy Research (UK), ‘Mayors for all major English Cities: a democratic argument’ published on www.opendemocracy.net/print/65281
37 Lodge Guy (April, 2012).
What reforms have the potential to reduce constituency caseloads?

The evidence above suggests that there are a number of reforms to local government that would have the potential to gradually change the role of the TD. Firstly, by reducing the demand from constituents for TDs to serve as a ‘welfare/information officer’ mediating between constituents and the state; Secondly, by reducing the need for TDs to lobby central government for local funds.

These reforms would:
- Devolve more power and functions, to local government while simultaneously
- Reducing the complexity of local governance and enhancing the interface between citizen and those delivering services so that there is less need for brokers,
- Create more visible and accountable political leadership at local level
- Increase the financial autonomy of local government.

However, it must be noted that these reforms would not necessarily change the ‘supply side’ of constituency casework. If political parties and TDs continued to see electoral value in constituency casework, reforms to local government might not reduce them but only change their focus.

Does the Action Programme for Effective Local Government Reform (2012) include the type of reforms which may reduce the demand on TDs to focus primarily on constituency work?

Local Government Reform (2012) and Localism

Action Programme, 2012
The Action Programme aims to make ‘local government the main vehicle of governance and public service at local level’ by:
- leading economic, social and community development
- delivering efficient and good-value services, and
- representing citizens and local communities effectively andaccountably.\(^{44}\)

We examine it for evidence of the types of reforms predicted to reduce TDs’ constituency workloads.

Devolve power to local government
Weaknesses caused by unequal representation and inconsistent structures in local government are the primary focus of reform in the Action Programme.\(^{45}\) On the other hand, the devolution of power or functions to local government is limited to its new role in economic and community development. And the establishment of Water Ireland suggests that a trend of centralisation continues.

Most constituency queries about centrally-provided services are about social welfare and health. As such, the devolution of economic and community development functions is unlikely to alter the flow of constituents’ queries to the TD, with the possible exception of queries directed at TDs by local interest groups. The evidence from O’Leary’s study was that while only 3% of regular representations to TDs from interest groups regarded enterprise, 12% regarded local development.\(^{46}\)

It has been argued that genuine devolution only takes place if there is confidence amongst central reformers that Ministers will no longer be held accountable for services at a local level.\(^{47}\) It is possible that the Action Programme’s reforms to enhance both the efficiency and accountability of local government will

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\(^{45}\) See Spotlight no 8 2012


\(^{47}\) Lodge Guy (2012).
increase this confidence and create space for the devolution of more functions to local government in the future.

**Reduce complexity and enhance public interface**

**Reducing complexity**
The Government’s policy is to end the practice of establishing new agencies at the local level outside of the institutions of local government. This would reduce complexity.

In terms of concrete examples of reducing institutional complexity at the local level, the *Action Programme* provides for a greater alignment of local community development supports with local government. Moreover, it makes local government the central player in coordinating local economic development, instead of agencies which are outside of the local government structure.  

However, new structures for the delivery of public services will be established at the national level if there are exceptional reasons to do so. This may increase institutional complexity at the local level.  

**Enhance public interface**

An improvement in the public interface and responsiveness of agencies and Departments would reduce some of the demand for constituency-focused TDs. However, this is outside the scope of a programme for local government reform.

On the other hand, the *Action Programme* does place emphasis on improving the public interface of those responsible for service delivery at a local level. It includes some measures which could reduce the demand from constituents on TDs including:

- Each County/City council will have a dedicated Customer Service Officer and the fixyourstreet.ie customer service initiative will be rolled out in every authority;
- Local authorities will be required to provide good quality public information about local services and how it uses resources.
- Service Level Agreements between Departments and local authorities will be required. They will set out the standards for local services in all of its programme areas. These will have to be approved by elected members of local government.

The extent to which these reforms will lead to improved citizen-local authority interface will vary from council to council. Even in cases where they lead to a significant improvement, the constituency caseloads of TDs may not always decline in volume.

A decline in caseloads would depend, in part, on TDs’ willingness to re-direct relevant queries to the new Customer Service Officer in local authorities and/or to local councillors.

Studies in the UK found that the re-direction of queries by MPs to local councillors is least likely where the parliamentary seat is marginal and where the council is controlled by another party. Evidence from devolution in Scotland and Wales suggests that the higher the profile of the member of the devolved institution, the higher the probability that Westminster politicians will re-direct constituents to them where appropriate. This brings us to the third type of reform which might reduce the constituency caseloads of national politicians.

**Strengthen local political leadership**

The *Action Programme* does not recommend the directly-elected mayor approach (except for proposing that the four Dublin councils hold a plebiscite in Dublin on the issue). In the Irish context, the office of the directly-elected mayor might be an obvious place for local

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48 This alignment is not without its critics. See ‘2,000 jobs at risk in plan for local authority merger’ *Irish Independent* 26 November 2012.
49 See *Bills Digest, Water Services Bill 2013* pp.26-7 for different roles of local authorities and *Water Ireland* in service delivery.
constituents to bring issues. The 51% of Irish local councillors who are in favour of introducing a directly-elected mayor cited improved accountability and political leadership as amongst the benefits. However, there are alternative ways to enhance local political leadership while maintaining the Manager-Council model of local government. These include increasing the collective policy-setting powers of councillors vis-à-vis the County Manager or providing locally-elected representatives with stronger mechanisms for holding the executive (Manager) to account. Further, the visibility and authority of the indirectly-elected mayor/cathaoirleach could be strengthened by making it a five-year position.

The Action Programme includes some measures which affect the relationship between Managers and elected local representatives:

- Manager will be replaced by a Chief Executive
- Consideration to be given to a statutory role for elected representatives in ensuring that the Chief Executive implements the policy they set out.
- Consideration to be given to extending the ‘reserved functions’ of elected representatives.
- New mechanisms which will assist elected councillors (and central government) in holding the Chief Executive to account for performance of the council. They are a National Oversight and Audit Committee for Local Government and a statutory underpinning for Local Authority Audit Committees.

These measures may strengthen the position of elected-representatives vis-à-vis the centrally-appointed Chief Executive. However, they are unlikely alone to fundamentally alter the strength of political leadership at a local level to the extent that local representatives become the focus of citizens’ requirements for a brokerage service. Why?

The policy and legal framework which defines the balance of power between Chief Executive and elected representatives will remain. The Chief Executive will remain accountable to the Minister for the Environment and not to locally-elected representatives and the political leader (mayor /cathaorleach) will remain a one-year, largely ceremonial role.

Financial Autonomy

On the other hand, the Action Programme proposes a significant increase in the financial autonomy of local government through a new local property tax. This may in time affect the constituency focus of TDs in two ways.

First, in terms of demand, if citizens are paying taxes directly to local government, it may in time cause them to seek greater accountability of local government. With this may come a greater focus on the actions of locally-elected leaders and, consequently, they could become the focus of citizens’ queries.

Secondly, it may reduce the time spent by TDs lobbying Government to direct central government resources and funds towards their constituency. However, as long as the centralised nature of service delivery continues, the incentive for TDs to lobby Government to bring resources to their constituency will remain regardless of the enhanced financial autonomy of local authorities.

Supply of locally-focused TDs

This Spotlight has focused primarily on the demand from constituents for the brokerage/information services provided by TDs and on the extent to which reform of local government could reduce this demand. The supply of constituency-focused TDs, which was considered in

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53 See L&RS eOLAS page on Finance (Local Property Tax) Bill 2012
more detail in Spotlight no. 2 (2011), is a separate issue.

The Action Programme’s reform of structures, which are outlined in detail in Spotlight no. 8 (2012), are likely to affect the supply side i.e. incentives to undertake constituency casework. The 80 Town Councils are to be abolished and new Municipal District Councils for all areas (bar Dublin) will be created. There will be an overall reduction in the number of councillors by 667 and there will be significant changes to local electoral areas which will be announced in 2013.\(^5^4\)

The precise impact of these structural changes to representation at the local level on general elections and, consequentially on the electoral strategies of aspiring TDs, is likely to vary from constituency to constituency. For example, as Spotlight no. 2 (2011) discussed, intense intra-party competition is considered to increase the perceived need on the part of candidates to undertake heavy constituency caseloads.

The abolition of the position of Town Councillor could make the local electoral environment more competitive and drive up the supply of public representatives in some constituencies. This could result in large party tickets and, consequentially, more intra-party competition and more perceived pressure to undertake constituency caseloads.

The devolution of many powers or functions to the local level, reforms which together could reduce constituency workloads.

Finally, reforms to local government which reduce the demand for constituency-focused TDs are unlikely to affect the supply side of constituency work i.e. the perceived need to take on constituency caseloads for electoral purposes. However, a reduction in the demand from constituents would allow TDs to represent their constituents in the legislature without spending a large proportion of their working week dealing with constituents’ individual cases.\(^5^5\)

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\(^{54}\) There are currently 258 local electoral areas, 27 of which fall into the Dublin area.

\(^{55}\) Farrell David (2011).