

Fingal Chamber Submission on the Proposal for a Directly Elected Mayor for Dublin

Introduction

Cathaoirleach and members of the Committee,

Fingal Chamber welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the matter of a Directly Elected Mayor for Dublin. Our organisation represents over 500 businesses and organisations, supporting more than 30,000 jobs in the Fingal region.

As the independent voice of business in Fingal, we have a near 30-year history of advocating for business, facilitating networking, providing advice, and working with local authorities to deliver pro-business and employment initiatives.

Our members are spread across the North Dublin region, and we have a vested interest in ensuring that any decision regarding a directly elected mayor takes into account the unique needs and dynamics of our business community.

Background

The recent debate surrounding the introduction of a directly elected mayor for Dublin has been of significant interest to us and we would like to acknowledge the extensive work conducted by the Citizen's Assembly on this issue.

At this moment, Fingal Chamber neither supports nor opposes the idea of a directly elected mayor, but we believe it is essential that a comprehensive and balanced perspective is provided to the citizens, and the business community, in advance of any plebiscite on the matter.

Key Considerations

Clarity of Roles: It is essential that roles, duties, and decision-making procedures be clearly defined if a directly elected mayor is to be established. To guarantee equity in the distribution of funds and to encourage ease of doing business, this should involve distributing authority, allocating funds, and cutting bureaucracy - all of which will ultimately boost economic well-being.

Economic Challenges: The COVID-19 pandemic, the lingering effects of international conflicts, and the cost of living crises have all presented serious obstacles for Dublin's business community in recent years. Any improvements to governance in light of these difficulties should prioritise boosting economic growth, simplifying procedures, and removing bureaucratic roadblocks.

Devolution of Powers: The Citizen's Assembly recommended that a new mayor of Dublin take immediate charge of fifteen areas, including emergency services, housing, homelessness, community healthcare, transportation, and

the environment. Since the management of these services would be greatly impacted by this proposal, the transition needs to be carefully thought out and financially supported.

Funding and Structure: The new office's finances, as well as any associated organisations like the Dublin City and County assemblies, must be transparent and cost-effective. The impact on local service delivery, the level of staffing required, and the sources of revenue for the new mayor's office should all be well-defined.

Accountability and Transparency: Accountability and transparency should be central to the design of a directly elected mayor's office. The mechanisms to ensure responsible governance and prevent potential drawbacks must be robust and well-implemented.

Concerns and Questions

We have several concerns and questions that need to be addressed:

Complexity and Cost: We are concerned that adding another layer of government could increase complexity and costs, which may ultimately be borne by local taxpayers, including businesses paying commercial rates.

Revenue Raising Powers: While the idea of revenue-raising powers for a directly elected mayor is discussed, the details surrounding this, as well as the allocation of funds, must be clarified.

Planning Oversight: How a directly elected mayor would impact planning oversight and land use, especially in addressing housing supply issues, is a matter that requires careful consideration.

Coverage Area: We believe that if a directly elected mayor is to be introduced, their jurisdiction should cover the entire Dublin County to ensure a cohesive approach to governing the region.

Accountability vs. Continuity: The introduction of a directly elected mayor could potentially shift the focus towards a more populist style of politics. Balancing accountability with institutional continuity is a critical consideration.

Conclusion

At this stage, Fingal Chamber maintains a neutral position regarding the concept of a directly elected mayor for Dublin. We contend that any decision should be underpinned by clear costing, well-defined pathways for legislative changes, and a comprehensive understanding of the areas affected by a new mayor. The potential benefits, risks, challenges, and opportunities linked to this change should be thoughtfully analysed.

In the interim, we stress the importance of increased collaboration among the various entities that influence our daily lives and local communities. Furthermore, we believe that empowering citizens to engage at the local level is paramount for effective governance.

We appreciate the opportunity to engage in this discussion and look forward to further participation as this process unfolds.

Thank you for your attention.