

BOUNDARY EXTENSION CHANGES LEESIDE'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The local government landscape in Cork is changing significantly and hopefully for the better, writes Dr Aodh Quinlivan, Director of UCC's Centre for Local and Regional Governance. With the city's boundary extension deemed more preferable than maintaining the status quo, during the bedding down process he hopes the misguided view that a merger would be a better option does not resurface.

An extract from a letter issued by the Department of Local Government to both Cork Corporation and Cork County Council in August 1964, which noted the following:

'The Minister is satisfied that developments over the past 25 years have strengthened the case for the extension of the Borough Boundary in Cork. The population of the city has fallen while that of the suburban perimeter has expanded considerably.'

The Minister for Local Government, Neil Blaney TD, had concluded that an extension of the boundary in Cork city was required, though not of the magnitude requested by the Corporation. The issue of the Cork boundary extension had been

protracted and bitter.

The starting point came on 31 May 1960 when Cork Corporation petitioned the Minister for Local Government to extend the boundary and increase the city's jurisdiction from 3,346 to 12,936 acres with a population increase from 80,000 to approximately 113,000. The corporation's argument was that the city had outgrown its boundary with resultant social and financial imbalances in the city.

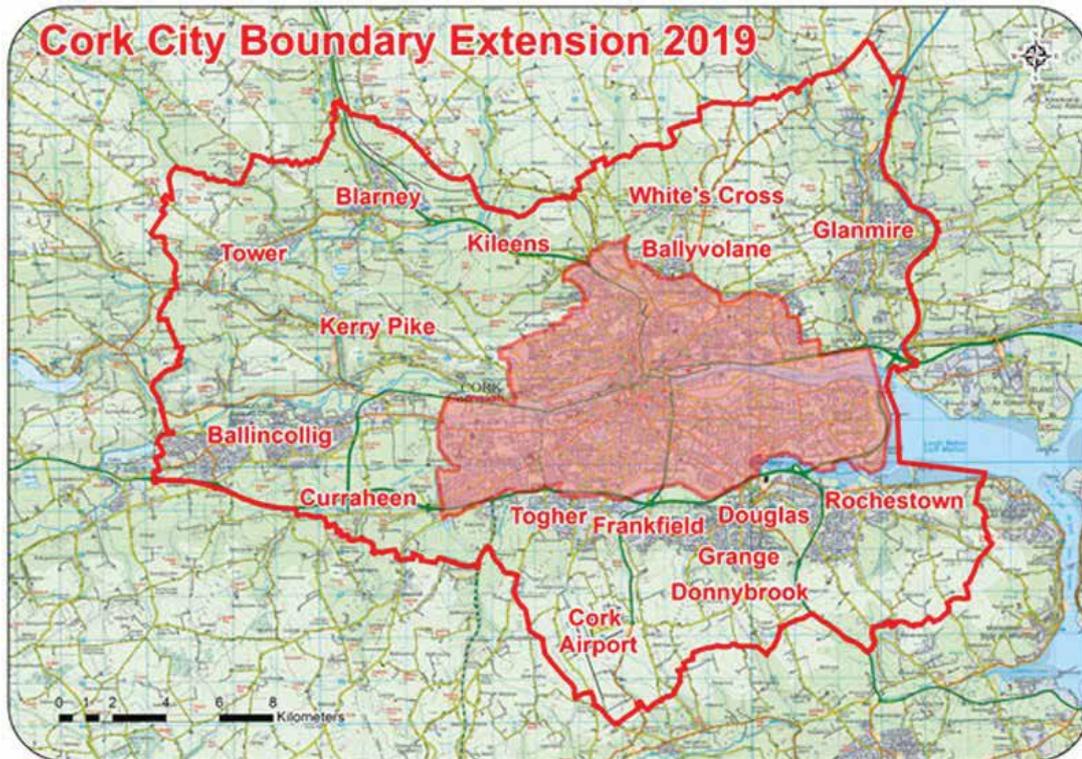
The Minister decided that a public sworn inquiry was needed to resolve the issue. The inquiry opened in City Hall on 24 May 1961 and was chaired by Gerard Meagher, Principal Officer in the Department of Local Government.

It closed on 2 February 1962, although it should be noted that it only sat for 21 days during these eight months. Aside from Cork



Cork County Council HQ: The increase in size of the city is designed to allow the city council to play a dominant role in leading the growth of the city and metropolitan region – driving improvements in investment, public transport, infrastructure and housing.

CORK CITY BOUNDARY EXTENSION



On Saturday 1 June 2019 – as a result of the Local Government Act 2019 – Cork city will grow to nearly five times its current size taking in areas including Douglas, Rochestown, Ballincollig, Blarney and Glanmire. As part of this planned expansion, the population of the city will grow by 85,000 to 210,000.

Corporation and Cork County Council, the main group to present evidence before the inquiry was the Cork Suburban Ratepayers' Association.

During the period of the inquiry, Cork County Council was extremely active and held a number of night meetings each week, with the respected county manager, Michael Conlon, at the helm. After the inquiry and the subsequent report by Gerard Meagher, the Minister for Local Government did not make a decision until 31 August 1964 – the wheels of change in Irish local government turn slowly.

BOUNDARY EXTENSION IN 1965

The reaction of the county council was swift with the unanimous passing of the following resolution: 'Cork County Council objects strenuously to the proposed Provisional Order whereby the Cork City Borough boundary would be extended as the council is of the opinion that there is no justification for any extension whatever'.

Over the coming months, the Minister refused on three occasions to meet a deputation from Cork County Council but, on 25 February 1965, he did invite members of the Oireachtas who represented Cork to a meeting in Leinster House.

Minister Blaney restated his commitment to proceed with a boundary extension and the meeting was mainly concerned with financial implications. Even with a delay caused by the 1965 General Election, the boundary extension came into force from 1 July 1965. The subsequent 'handover' process took years to

complete.

During this time, both local authorities entered into an arbitration process to determine the amount of compensation Cork Corporation should pay Cork County Council. In February 1967 the arbitrators ordered the Corporation to pay £1.5 million.

Following further negotiations, it was agreed that the compensation would be paid over a 15-year period at a fixed rate of 6.5% interest. The last payment was received by the county council in 1982.

BOUNDARY BATTLE

More than 50 years after the last extension in Cork, another protracted and, at times bitter, boundary battle took place over the last few years on Leaside,

culminating in the historic Local Government Act 2019.

In Irish local government, the term 'boundary' is a divisive one as it normally indicates a battle between two forces – one an aggressor and one a defender. Seconds after someone in a local authority utters the phrase 'boundary extension', someone in the neighbouring local authority will be heard screaming 'land grab'.

What is a boundary? Essentially it is something that indicates bounds or limits. In sport, business or our personal lives we are urged to 'push the boundaries' but, of course, the world of local government is different. For local authorities, the boundary is something that shows where one area ends and another area begins. The mind-set in Irish local government is to protect what you have at all costs; accordingly issues around boundary extensions are invariably contentious.

Cork City has five local electoral areas as follows:

Local Electoral Area (LEA)	Population	No. of Councillors
Cork North West	40,181	6
Cork North East	42,174	6
Cork South West	47,041	7
Cork South Central	38,677	6
Cork South East	42,780	6

As a result of the 2019 legislation, on Saturday 1 June 2019, Cork city will grow to nearly five times its current size taking in areas including Douglas, Rochestown, Ballincollig, Blarney and Glanmire. As part of this planned expansion, the population of the city will grow by 85,000 to 210,000.

PLAYING A DOMINANT ROLE

The increase in size of the city is designed to allow Cork City Council to play a dominant role in leading the growth of the city and metropolitan region – driving improvements in investment, public transport, infrastructure and housing.

The journey to get us to this point has been torturous. The first boundary extension in Cork since 1965 followed intense debate, characterised by a lot of misinformation and hysteria.

At one stage it looked as if we were heading towards the merger of Cork City Council and Cork County Council, which, in my view, was a disastrous proposal. The proposal was based on common folklore in local government that big is better and more efficient – a conclusion which is not borne out by research and evidence.

Thankfully, we moved away from the merger madness, and a city boundary extension was deemed more preferable than maintaining the status quo. There are enormous challenges associated with the extension, including the transfer of staff and financial arrangements between the two councils. Inevitably, for a few years, there will be teething problems; hopefully in this period we will not hear the misguided view resurface that a merger would be a better option.

ADAPTING TO NEW REALITIES

There were many anomalies under the old boundary, which did no favours to the county council as it had to manage a large metropolitan over-spill while also managing a massive and diverse rural territory from the Beara Peninsula in the West, Charleville in the North and Youghal in the East, not to mention seven inhabited islands.

The Mayor of Cork County, Cllr Patrick Gerard Murphy, took the right approach recently by speaking of the need for the county council to adapt positively to the changes and seek new and creative ways of promoting business, tourism, and culture in the county's central towns and villages.

Both local authorities need to adapt to the new realities rather than focus on where and why lines were drawn. Politically, it is interesting and surprising that, despite a significant expansion of the city and an increase in population of 85,000 people, the number of elected members on Cork City Council is to remain static at 31.

The average population per local councillor in Cork City is now 6,800. This may not seem significant but, in international comparative terms, it is a massive number. Of course, countries have differing local government models and many have a highly developed municipal tier, of which Ireland does not following the short-sighted decision to abolish the town councils in 2014.

DISCREPENCY IN NUMBERS

Nonetheless, despite varying systems, the discrepancy in numbers

FACTFILE – DR AODH QUINLIVAN

Dr Aodh Quinlivan is a political scientist who lectures in the Department of Government and Politics at University College Cork. His specialist area is local government and he is the Director of the Centre for Local and Regional Governance. The CLRG's Fourth Annual Public Lecture Series, which took place on Thursday 14 March, is featured on pages....

He is the author of six books, the most recently published in October 2017 was 'Dissolved: The Remarkable Story of how Cork lost its Corporation in 1924', with two further books due for publication in 2019.

The first tells the story of the dissolution of Dublin Corporation 'Vindicating Dublin – The story behind the controversial dissolution of the Corporation in 1924', while the second examines the impact of public management changes over the past decade on local government 'Public Management and Local Governance in the Republic of Ireland'.



is telling. For example, the average population per local elected member in France is 120; in Austria it is 210, in Sweden it is 260, in Germany it is 350.

Ireland is 'off the charts' which tells its own story about the direction in which our local government system is moving.

INTERACTIVE TOOL MAPS OUT BOUNDARY EXTENSION

An interactive online map has been launched to help people view for the first time the exact detail of the extended Cork City Boundary. And the final Register of Electors 2019/2020 for the extended city has also been published with the total number of electors at 148,780 while 62,567 people will see their vote transferred from the county council to the city council.

The Register of Electors 2019/2020, which came into effect on 15 February, will be in force for the Local and European Elections on 24 May. Cork City Council's Returning Officer, Paul Moynihan, said the franchise teams at both the city and county councils have done a lot of work identifying electors to be transferred into the new city.

"The extension of Cork City means that residents in the newly-extended city may be voting in this year's elections for councillors they are less familiar with, and some councillors will be representing areas they haven't in the past," he said.

The franchise teams, which look after voting protocol, not only had to identify the electors in the newly-extended areas but they also had to re-structure the local electoral areas as the city is moving from six electoral areas to five.

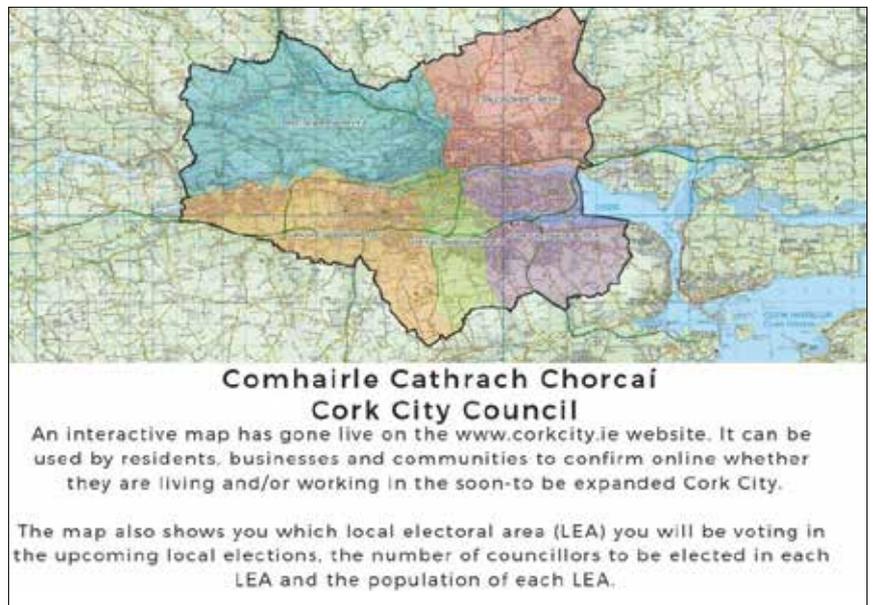
"This is a very complex body of work. However, there may yet be people who are not correctly identified on the register, so we are encouraging all voters to please check their details online at www.checktheregister.ie or by contacting Cork City Hall," noted Moynihan.

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The mapping tool is the first phase of an extensive public awareness campaign which is being planned by the city council ahead of the boundary extension – the city's first since 1965. It will more than quadruple its geographical footprint and increase its population by over 85,000 to just over 210,000, bringing areas such as Ballincollig, Blarney, Glanmire, Douglas, as well as Cork Airport and its surrounds, within the administrative control of the city.

The number of city and county councillors will remain the same at 55 in the county and 31 in the city, yet the boundary change will reduce the city's local electoral areas from six to five.

David Joyce, Director of Services in Cork City Council's



Transition Directorate, said that the publication of the map is the first step in helping people to assess the impact of the boundary extension.

He said users can input an Eircode, using the correct format to include the space between the first three and last four characters, to identify an individual property. The map automatically zooms to the identified building and allows people to zoom into an area of just 30-metres to view individual homes or business displayed in traditional map format or in a satellite or aerial-photo form.

A drop-down menu then displays which Local Electoral Area (LEA) or ward the property is situated in for the local elections, the population living in each LEA, the number of councillors to be elected in that LEA and the population per councillor.

Additional mapping layers can be turned on or off to show the progressive expansion of the city boundary since 1840. David Joyce said they hope to add additional layers of information to the mapping tool over the coming months.

The map can be viewed at www.corkcity.ie.