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EDITOR'S COMMENT

Despite opposition to the household tax imposed by the Government in a bid to raise €160 million for local authorities, the household charge is here to stay. And the warning has been firmly issued by the Local Government Management Agency that those who fail to pay up could face legal action.

At the time of going to press, over €97 million in charges and late fees have been collected to date, and those who have not paid so far are already facing penalties and interest charges.

The non-payment warning comes in the wake of over 105,000 letters which the Agency issued to households in recent weeks, with the result that more than 10,000 people have registered for the household charge.

And now a number of agencies such as the Revenue Commissioners, ESB Networks, the Department of Social Protection, Private Residential Tenancies Board are sharing data with the LGMA to identify those who have not paid the charges.

The household tax was introduced on 1 January and property owners had until the 31 March deadline to pay without facing a late-payment charge. The €100 tax and associated penalties rose to €111 in April and by the end of the year it will have risen to €129.

However, household and water taxation is not a new phenomenon in other EU countries, where it has been a reality for many years. So, why should Ireland be any different? Non-payment means late penalties and possible legal action, despite protests from opposition parties and campaigners against domestic taxes and other austerity measures.

In this issue of 'Council Review', one environmental lawyer takes the view that Ireland may have been shirking its legal responsibility to implement effective water charging policies for over 10 years, and claims that there is currently a misguided belief that domestic water charges are exclusively linked to the requirements of the Troika.

With water charges now on the Government's agenda, domestic water use per capita in Ireland is amongst the highest in Europe, and the case is put forward that its essential domestic water charges be re-introduced in the near future.

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Dublin City Council is ploughing €3.6 million into The Tall Ships Festival 2012, which is expected to bring a massive €30 million into the local economy, attracting up to one million visitors over four days in August.

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Three years into his role as Clare County Manager, Tom Coughlan is optimistic about the expansion of renewable energy in the mid-west not to mention economic and tourism developments to help renew the Banner County.

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Thousands of public sector workers will be trained in major emergency management as part of a new e-learning initiative launched by Dublin City Council, with plans to roll it out nationwide over the coming months.

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With all new waste collection permits now processed and issued by a new national office in Offaly, the whole service will be online and centrally operated within another few months by Offaly County Council, in association with its neighbours in Westmeath.

53 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

How realistic it is to think that substantial reform can make a difference to the role local government could and should play in Ireland, wonders Dr Seán O'Riordáin, chairman of Public Policy Advisors Network. He reports on a recent symposium at NUI Maynooth that examined the possibility of local government reform in Ireland.

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The first 'Meet West' business networking initiative, co-ordinated by Galway City and County Councils in November 2011, formed the basis of the three-year programme in the western region. This year's event will be hosted by Roscommon County Council.

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Ireland may have been shirking its legal responsibility to implement effective water charging policies for over 10 years, according to Alice Whittaker, an environmental law expert. She claims there is currently a misguided belief that domestic water charges are exclusively linked to the requirements of the Troika.

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Tom Leahy, Executive Manager with Dublin City Council, gives lowdown on his presentation on DCC's pluvial flood risk strategies project as part of a special Flood Resilient Cities session at the inaugural World Congress of Water, Climate and Energy in May.



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Private finance has the capacity to help thousands on the social housing waiting list, according to Clúid Housing Association. It recently commissioned a report that looked at lessons learned in Canada and England to highlight the key measures needed to successfully fund the provision of social housing.

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Doing business The Green Way doesn't mean only staying in Ireland as exemplified when the Dublin clean-tech cluster recently linked up with an environmental business cluster on the west coast of the USA.

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A resource efficiency initiative, which started late 2008 with funding by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, is rolling out a number of schemes to address unprecedented challenges faced by Ireland to provide economic recovery and achieve sustainable growth.

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Tourist attractions like Waterford Crystal and the Viking Triangle will play a crucial role in putting the south eastern city on the map as a location for business, tourism and economic development in the region.



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