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EDITOR'S COMMENT

If a week is a long time in politics, a whole year must feel like a lifetime. It is one year since the 'new' Government came to power, but report cards and placards have been out en masse for both coalition parties lately.

The most recent public demonstration to hit the streets of the capital saw up to 1,000 protestors march from O'Connell Street to Dáil Éireann. People from all corners of Ireland were in town to protest over a wide range of austerity measures from schools closures, septic tanks legislation to health service cuts, as additional charges for services and the users hit home.

Those who have to cough up are simply asking where will the monies go? Could more funding be returned to local level services, where the fee-paying public could see more direct investment in their local communities? Bear in mind that all this is before we even know the outcome of the voluntary registration for the household charge/property tax.

In his recent address to the AMAI Spring Seminar, featured in this issue of 'Council Review', Environment Minister Phil Hogan maintained that local government needs to go beyond performance issues and justify its very existence. There will be a further widening of the role of local government including economic development and enterprise support, particularly in the wake of the abolition of County Enterprise Boards.

However, can local government thrive if central powers are mired in economic woe? Are reforms at local level likely to be in the shape of further cutbacks? Financing local government from the central tax take and user charges requires a delicate balance.

Is the new administration getting this balance right? After only a year at the helm, it will take time to right the wrongs, but is such stringent local government reform really the answer in the long run? Clearly 'Joe Public' doesn't think so!

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17 IRISH WATER AUTHORITY

With water and drainage services due to be taken away from local government and put under the charge of a new national agency, the man at the centre of the changes, Tom Leahy, Executive Manager with Dublin City Council, has the details.



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Laura Burke, the new director general of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is facing challenging times ahead as the agency's role expands while budgets remain tight.



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Toilet protests outside the Dáil and potty-mouthed speeches from deputies inside the chamber are all zoning in on an unwelcome increase in septic tank legislation and inspections.

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Phil Hogan, Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government, outlined the main components for the reform programme at the recent AMAI Spring Seminar.



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Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that the information included is correct, the publisher cannot accept responsibility for errors, omissions or discrepancies. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the publisher.

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Waterford and Cavan were named the top City and County Councils in Ireland for 2011, with Dundalk Town Council taking the honours for the Town/Borough Council, at the 8th Annual Excellence in Local Government Awards last November.



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