

FOUR COUNCILS REACH EU INNOVATION IN POLITICS AWARDS FINAL FOR 2020

County councils from Clare, Fingal, Meath and South Dublin were the Irish finalists in the European Innovation in Politics Awards for 2020, for projects ranging from age-friendly housing, urban rejuvenation to community arts and playground facilities.

Four Irish local authorities – Meath, Clare, Fingal and South Dublin – were among 90 finalists to have been short-listed for the Innovation in Politics Awards 2020, which attracted close to 390 entries from a record number of 22 countries across Europe.

Reflecting on the experience of participating in the European Innovation in Politics Awards, Mayor of Meath Council Cllr David Gilroy said he found it very refreshing to be in a space in which people speak strongly and proudly about politics.

“This is something that’s not done enough. Often politicians, in particular, are a bit shy about talking about politics in any kind of positive way, and this is something we need to look at,” he added.

For the second consecutive year Meath Council Council was a finalist in the EU Innovation in Politics Awards scheme; the council was short-listed in the ‘Quality of Life’ Category for its work on improve housing options for older people through its Age-Friendly Housing Technical Support Service.

This initiative, which was put in place to prepare for population ageing, is a direct action arising from the ‘Housing Options for our Ageing Population’ policy statement, published jointly in 2019 by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and Department of Health.

MEATH’S AGE-FRIENDLY HOUSING

Meath County Council facilitates the Age-Friendly Ireland Shared Service across the local government sector in Ireland. Age-Friendly Housing Technical Specialists have been appointed in each local authority to ensure that older people have



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greater choice by developing a range of housing options suited to their individual needs.

These specialists act as the key points of contact for technical queries, specifically around designing for life and universal design principles. They progress referrals from local authority staff, external stakeholders and agencies, private sector developers, Approved Housing Bodies, social housing tenants and private homeowners interested in right-sizing.

In 2019 Meath County Council was also a finalist in the ‘Human Rights’ Category for its Athboy Walkability initiative, which was led by Cllr Gilroy.

Promoting Athboy as an inclusive and progressive town, he led an Age-Friendly Walkability Audit in the town to address accessibility. A unique aspect of this audit was considering cognitive and sensory impairment as well as physical access issues.

SOUTH DUBLIN’S NATURAL PLAYSPACE

South Dublin County Council was a finalist in the ‘Quality of Life’ Category for its Natural Playspace Programme for

children. With a population of almost 280,000, South Dublin County has one of the youngest populations in Ireland, and faces similar global challenges of sedentary lifestyles, decreased activity and increased childhood obesity.

The six-year project started with play locations close to children’s homes, and children were asked about games they liked to play and what sort of spaces they liked most. Based on their feedback, local playgrounds were converted to natural playspaces, developed in tandem with people in each neighbourhood, and children of all abilities were involved to help make them inclusive and welcoming.

South Dublin County Council first reached the finals in 2018 in the ‘Democracy’ Category for its ‘300K – Have Your Say’ project. Providing €300,000 for this Participatory Budget initiative (the first of its kind in Ireland), the council invited local residents to take part in workshops to generate ideas, identify community needs and develop supportive networks.

Out of the 160 projects submissions; 17 were shortlisted for public voting, of which eight projects (ranging from €5,000 to €120,000) were rolled out.

INNOVATION IN POLITICS



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CLARE'S VISION SYMPHONY

Clare County Council reached the finals for the first time in 2020 in the 'Education' Category for its work on 'The Vision Symphony'. This initiative by Clare Arts Office creates opportunities for national and international visually-impaired musicians who face specific challenges, particularly when it comes to memorising long passages of music.

The Arts Office partnered with Dave Flynn's Irish Memory Orchestra (IMO) and 3L music to support seven musicians with various levels of visual impairments to participate in the research using the IMO's memorisation techniques.

Clare Arts Office commissioned Dave Flynn to compose 'The Vision Symphony', which was performed by the IMO, joined by the visually-impaired musicians and the Visionaries Choir, in Glór Theatre, Ennis, in October 2019.



Clare County Council reached the final for the first time in the 'Education' Category for its work on 'The Vision Symphony' to create opportunities for visually-impaired musicians.

The project won two awards at the 2020 All-Ireland Community and Council Awards, and has received local, national, and international acclaim for offering employment opportunities to these musicians unable to professionally participate in an orchestra. Additional funding has also been secured to develop elements of the symphony for younger visually-impaired musicians to learn and perform with the orchestra in 2021.

FINGAL'S PLANS FOR BALBRIGGAN

Another first-time entrant for 2020, Fingal County Council

reached the finals in the 'Democracy' Category for its work on the 'Our Balbriggan' Rejuvenation Plan and a commitment to deliver 93 action items with the aim of creating a vibrant, inspiring place, where residents to want to live, relax, and work.

According to Mayor of Fingal, Cllr David Healy, the project focuses on community-driven renewal by strengthening relationships between society and the economy to create a more resilient and sustainable Balbriggan. "It is a great honour for Fingal County Council that the project was short-listed for a pan-European award."

Fingal's Chief Executive, AnnMarie Farrelly, said it is one of the council's flagship projects, and has already received awards in Ireland for the innovative way it harnessed the community to participate in the making of a plan for their town. In 2019 the project won an Excellence in Local Government Award for Best Practice in Citizen Engagement and an Excellence in PR Award for Best Public Sector Campaign.



Fingal County Council reached the final for the first time in the 'Democracy' Category for its 'Our Balbriggan' rejuvenation project.

"POLITICS HAS CHANGED DRASTICALLY"

For the first time, the Innovation in Politics Awards took place online on 3 December 2020.

Winners came from Austria, France, the Netherlands, Poland and Ukraine, as well as two winners each from Slovakia and the UK. In response to the coronavirus pandemic a 'Coping with Covid-19' Category was established for 2020.

Commenting on the changing context for the 2020 finals, Edward Strasser, CEO of The Innovation in Politics Institute, said: "Since the awards final in December 2019, politics has changed drastically. For months, politicians at all levels of governance and from across the political spectrum have been in survival mode. So, we are all the more impressed by the outstanding achievements of the finalists and winners for 2020. Their political work will be of great value long after we overcome this virus."

The Innovation in Politics Awards initiative was established in 2017 by the Innovation in Politics Institute to give recognition to political work, showcasing it as an example of best practice for others. This Europe-wide organisation has offices in Vienna and Berlin as well as associated partners in Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

For more information visit www.innovationinpolitics.eu/ and for the full list of award winners and finalists for 2020 visit <https://innovationinpolitics.eu/en/awards/awards-2020/>