DE GRUYTER
OPEN

Administration, vol. 63, no. 2 (2015), pp. 101–117
doi: 10.1515/admin-2015-0012

The development of the Irish management system and the move towards directly elected mayors

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Abstract

The Irish local government system works on a partnership model, with powers shared between the elected members and the appointed manager or chief executive. Within this system, each local authority elects a mayor on an annual basis from among its own members. In 2001 legislation was passed which proposed a drastic change to the office of mayor, and potentially to the role of the manager. The Local Government Act, 2001, provided for the direct election of mayors with executive powers. The proposal was dropped in 2003 but resurfaced in a 2008 Green Paper. This Green Paper never proceeded to legislation but six years later Minister Phil Hogan, TD, provided for the direct election of a mayor in Dublin in the Local Government Reform Act, 2014. The minister, however, inserted a clause that each of the four Dublin local authorities would firstly have to adopt a resolution in favour of holding a plebiscite in Dublin on the issue. Fingal County Council voted against and so the issue of a directly elected mayor was shelved again. Undoubtedly it will reappear at some point in the near future and it is hoped that a meaningful debate on the issue will lead to greater clarity on details, especially the precise powers of the mayor.

Keywords: Irish local government system, directly elected mayors, managers, elected members

Introduction

Ireland has been well served by the management system, dating back to the appointment of Philip Monahan as the city manager in Cork in 1929. The Cork City Management Act, 1929, became the prototype of all subsequent Management Acts and it contained 'virtually all the ingredients that continue to characterise Irish city and county management' (Sheehy, 2003, p. 127). Under the 1929 legislation – and the County Management Act, 1940, which followed – the functions of local authorities were divided into two classes. Reserved functions were performable directly by the elected members, and executive functions were performed by the city or county manager by order. While the law must make an exact division of functions (so that responsibility for their exercise may be clearly defined), it was never the intention that the elected members and the manager would operate independently of each other. In essence, the legal basis for the division of powers in Irish local government follows the classic politics–administration dichotomy. The elected council is formally the policymaking arm of the local authority. One of a council's more significant powers is the adoption of annual budgets, by-laws and development plans. The daily management of a council is the remit of a full-time, appointed chief executive, referred to as the chief executive or city/county manager. The manager runs the local authority within the parameters laid down by the elected members. Legally, any function which is not specified in legislation as a policy/reserved function for the members is an executive function and the responsibility of the manager.

While the legal distinction between reserved and executive functions is clear, a strict separation of powers is usually not adhered to. In truth there tends to be a partnership approach between the elected and administrative arms. As the majority of councillors are not full-time public representatives they rely heavily on the advice and guidance of management and officials. Indeed, some commentators argue that a democratic deficit exists in Irish local government where many decisions and policies are initiated and implemented by a non-elected manager (see MacCarthaigh, 2008; Sheehy, 2003; Weeks & Quinlivan, 2009). According to one former councillor, the balance of power in local government is skewed and 'managers hold all the aces' (Quill, as quoted by Quinlivan, 2011, p. 3).

To understand the power relations in Irish local government it is necessary to describe how the management system emerged.

Historical development of the management system

> The development of the local authority management system, like most innovations in Irish government, was somewhat haphazard. (O'Halpin, 1991, p. 2)

The Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1923, gave the Minister for Local Government the power to order an inquiry into the performance of any local authority and, if he saw fit, to then transfer the property and powers of the authority 'to any body or persons or person' (Section 12). In essence, this meant that the minister could 'dissolve' the local authority, i.e. remove the elected members from office and appoint a commissioner to take over the affairs of the council. On 9 May 1923, Kerry County Council had the dubious distinction of becoming the first local authority to be dissolved under this legislation and Philip Monahan (who was Mayor of Drogheda and a member of Louth County Council) was appointed as Ireland's first commissioner.

The context in which the 1923 legislation was framed warrants commentary. Local authorities in Ireland had suffered during the previous four years due to the War of Independence and the Civil War which followed. Some councils had stopped holding meetings and were not collecting rates. Accordingly it can be argued that the 1923 legislation was necessary to restore order and discipline. Equally it can be argued that there were political motives behind the legislation to curtail the activities of troublesome, anti-Treaty local authorities. Essentially the needs of the time ensured a substantial intrusion by the central administration into local government. Strict, centralised control was deemed appropriate for a small, divided country with a new government seeking authority and respect – 'The Ministers were more committed to restoring order, achieving efficiency and putting an end to suggestions of local corruption and abuse than they were to local democracy' (Ewen, 1992, pp. 5–6). It is only fair to assess the 1923 legislation and the drastic power of dissolution against the background of the time. The legislation was passed by 'men of idealistic, often austere views who had been through a revolutionary experience and were progressing towards achieving independence after many attempts over the centuries' (Ewen, 1992, pp. 5–6). The

Free State Government wielded the axe over local councils freely 'and with breath-taking disregard of the antiquity and prestige of the victims' (Roche, 1982, p. 53). The citizens of Ireland, tired after the bloodshed of the War of Independence and the Civil War, quietly accepted this antidemocratic measure, which saw twenty-three local authorities dissolved in the first three years after the passing of the 1923 Act.

Philip Monahan spent just over one year as commissioner in Kerry before he was appointed in the same capacity in Cork, following the dissolution of Cork Corporation after a sworn public inquiry. The Cork Progressive Association (CPA) had recently been set up in the city due to dissatisfaction with the conduct of municipal affairs (see Quinlivan, 2006). The CPA was led by John J. Horgan, a local solicitor and coroner with a deep interest in local government. In March 1920 Horgan had published an article in the journal *Studies* in which he had extolled the virtues of the American City Manager Plan and recommended it for Ireland. Initially there was a lukewarm response to Horgan's proposal, but he continued to research and write enthusiastically on the subject. In September 1923 he produced another article for *Studies* which restated the idea of councils having a power-sharing relationship between a small number of elected representatives and an appointed chief executive officer. In the same article he claimed that Ireland's current local government system 'would disgrace a native village in Central Africa' (Horgan, 1923). By 1926 Horgan was getting some positive signals from central government about creating a sharp legal distinction between policy and administration. He wrote another article that year in which he called for local authorities to be governed by 'an expert bureaucracy under democratic control' (Horgan, 1926, p. 540).

Due in part to Horgan's intense lobbying, the Minister for Local Government, General Richard Mulcahy, TD, told the Dáil on 17 November 1927 that he was willing to talk to interested parties in Cork who had ideas as to how the city should be run. At this stage Philip Monahan had been commissioner in Cork for three years, with the elected members remaining on the sidelines. By June 1928 Minister Mulcahy was in a position to introduce the Cork City Management Bill to the Dáil, containing many of Horgan's proposals. The bill took a torturous route through the Dáil, with small details and minor amendments keenly debated. Eventually, the Cork City Management Act became law in February 1929.

Under Section 10 of the Cork City Management Act, 1929, Philip Monahan was named as the first city manager. Part 4 of the section stated: 'The manager shall hold office until he dies, resigns or is removed from office.' The elected members had the power to suspend the manager if they passed a resolution by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the council present and voting. Only the minister, however, had the power to remove the manager. Monahan was given full charge of all the corporation's staff, the preparation of its budget, the control of its expenditure and all other non-reserved functions. Although Horgan had written in 1929 that 'the greatest difficulty in applying the City Management system to the country is the fact that Monahans do not grow on every bush' (Horgan, 1929, p. 12), city management was extended to Dublin in 1930, to Limerick in 1934 and to Waterford in 1939. The following year, the County Management Act expanded the system throughout the twenty-six counties of the Republic.

The County Management Act, 1940, had 'passed relatively peaceably through the Oireachtas' (Sheehy, 2003, p. 131), but tensions soon emerged as the new batch of local authority members and elected members came to terms with the power-sharing model and the distinction between reserved and executive functions. Councillors claimed that their powers had been diminished, and their protests resonated with Minister for Local Government Patrick 'Pa' O'Donnell, TD, who brought forward the City and County Management (Amendment) Act, 1955, to rebalance the relationship between managers and elected members. The 1955 Act marked 'a turning point in the development of the management system' (Collins, 1987, p. 40), primarily due to the now infamous Section 4 procedure. Section 4 allowed a simple majority of councillors to direct the manager to act in particular cases even though the action may be in the area of an executive function. The full ramifications of this section did not manifest themselves until a decade later following the passing of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act, 1963. The 1963 Act followed the politics–administration dichotomy, with councillors responsible for policy (i.e. development plan) and managers responsible for implementation (i.e. decisions on planning applications). Section 4 – which allowed councillors to direct the manager on how to perform executive functions – was a power which 'achieved notoriety and was regularly used to require the manager to grant planning permissions' (O'Leary, 2014, p. 140). The section also fundamentally changed the balance of powers in local government,

and planning motions in relation to rezoning 'were abused by a minority [of councillors] for clientelist purposes or to create personal wealth at the expense of co-ordinated planning' (Ferriter, quoted in O'Leary, 2014, p. 141).

Despite abuses of Section 4 procedures, the 1955 Act served its purpose in redefining powers between managers and elected members. Local government entered a period of relative quiet (Roche, 1982), with little airing of the topic of the balance of executive and reserved powers. In time the controversial Section 4 procedure was altered. The Local Government Act, 1991, set limits on the power, requiring Section 4 motions in relation to planning to be signed by at least three-quarters of the members of the electoral ward containing the site in question, and to be then passed by three-quarters of the total membership of the local authority (O'Leary, 2014, p. 141). This did not totally eliminate abuses of the procedure, which was restated as Section 140 of the Local Government Act, 2001. Finally, via the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, the Section 140 procedure was outlawed in relation to planning.

For the best part of forty years following the City and County Management (Amendment) Act, 1955, there was little scrutiny of the management system. Despite the use of Section 4 motions (which later became Section 140 motions) in planning, Irish local government was characterised by a continuing emphasis on a strong management role (Boyle et al., 2003, p. 12). It was not until 1996, when the government published its policy document *Better Local Government: A Programme for Change* (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government), that the balance of powers at local level was again analysed.

Moving towards directly elected mayors?

Better Local Government was published in 1996 as part of the Strategic Management Initiative, the wider public service reform programme (Keogan, 2003, p. 88). Under the heading of 'Enhancing Local Democracy', Minister for the Environment Brendan Howlin, TD, stressed the need to strengthen the role of the elected member. Particular focus was given to policy formulation, with *Better Local Government* stating clearly:

> The policy role envisaged for councillors has not been fully realised because, as part-timers, they have found it difficult to fulfil this role

> in the absence of well-developed support systems. The system as a whole can therefore lean more in favour of the permanent officials. (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 1996, p. 8)

Strategic policy committees (SPCs) were designed to enhance the role of elected members in policy formulation. The basic idea was that each city and county council would establish SPCs to mirror the major functions of the local authority, replacing the antiquated existing committee system. Each SPC would have members drawn from the council, with at least one-third of members coming from external bodies relevant to the committee's work. By definition, the SPCs would focus on policy formulation, as opposed to day-to-day functional matters. Reports from SPCs would feed into full council, where decisions would be taken by the elected members. In addition, there was a managerial strengthening of the local authority structure with the appointment of directors of service, who were given responsibility for service provision in a specific functional area, as well as supporting the policy role of SPCs. The chairs of the SPCs, along with the cathaoirleach/mayor of the local authority and senior officials, also formed the Corporate Policy Group, which is 'a sort of cabinet and provides a forum where policy positions affecting the whole council can be agreed for submission to the full council' (Sheehy, 2003, p. 140). The SPC system has been a limited success to date, with significant variances across the country (see Weeks & Quinlivan, 2009; Zimmerman, 2011). The idea of creating a policy forum for councillors can be effective but, in some instances, the elected members struggle to break from the localist perspective, meaning that functional matters end up being discussed at SPCs, which was never the intention (see Quinlivan, 2011). While *Better Local Government* – by virtue of the establishment of directors of service – did effectively introduce a new managerial grade, the management system itself was left unaltered. However, legislation introduced in 2001 threatened to alter the management system in a significant way.

The Local Government Act, 2001, was heralded in advance by the then Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Noel Dempsey, TD, as the greatest shake-up of local government in the history of the state (Weeks & Quinlivan, 2009, p. 25). It codified existing local government legislation; renamed local authorities as county councils, city councils and town councils; created a general ethics framework for councillors and officials; allowed for the

establishment of a Boundary Commission; put SPCs on a statutory footing; and introduced a representational payment for councillors. The headline act, however, was Section 40, which provided for the direct election of mayors, for a five-year term, with executive functions, to be effective from the following set of local elections in June 2004. The 2001 Act was noteworthy for its lack of detail about the precise functions of the mayor and how the office would impinge on the traditional role of city/county manager. These issues were never clarified and, in a spectacular shifting of positions in 2003, the government repealed the directly elected mayor proposal from the 2001 Act. In presenting the Local Government Bill, 2003, to the Irish Senate on 26 February, Minister Martin Cullen, TD, explained that he was planning major changes to the local government system. Once these changes had time to 'bed down', the issue of the mayor's election and role would be reconsidered (Seanad Éireann, 2003).

At that point, the question as to whether Ireland should have directly elected mayors was put on hold but, in the build-up to the 2007 General Election, Green Party leader Trevor Sargent announced that his party, in government, would introduce directly elected mayors to make local government democratically accountable (see Quinlivan, 2008). The Fine Gael and Labour Party manifestos also contained a pledge to introduce directly elected mayors. Following the election, a coalition government was formed with Fianna Fáil, the Green Party and the Progressive Democrats. The three parties produced a programme for government which pledged to introduce a directly elected mayor for Dublin with executive powers by 2011. In addition, the government promised a Green Paper on Local Government Reform to address the issue of directly elected mayors.

In April 2008 the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, John Gormley, TD, published his promised Green Paper, entitled *Stronger Local Democracy: Options for Change*. Though the Green Paper was essentially a consultation document, it contained a useful and well-framed discussion of the directly elected mayor issue (see Callanan, 2008, for analysis of the Green Paper). The Green Paper favoured the introduction of a directly elected mayor not only for Dublin but also across the other city and county councils. With regards to Dublin, two main options were presented.

i. a directly elected mayor for the existing Dublin City Council area;
ii. a 'city-region' mayor for the wider Dublin area.

The second option opened up a jurisdictional discussion about the wider Dublin area. Would Dublin have a regional mayor for the four local authorities – Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, South Dublin County Council and Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council – or for a Greater Dublin Region incorporating Meath, Kildare and Wicklow? Ultimately, the Green Paper indicated a preference for an elected mayor for the four Dublin local authorities (Callanan, 2008, p. 3).

The paper then developed into a discussion on the different options with regard to mayoral powers, with examples drawn from New Zealand, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland and England. Particular attention was paid to the London model, with the mayor having a limited set of strategic functions in areas such as transport, planning and economic development while the thirty-three London Borough Councils carried out their functions within the regional framework established by the mayor. Interestingly, the Green Paper suggested that different mayoral options could be applied in different areas or tested on a pilot basis. The Green Paper ultimately served its purpose in that it presented options for change and it did so in a thought-provoking manner. Alas, by the time the government left office nearly three years later, no White Paper had been produced and none of Minister Gormley's reform ideas had seen the legislative light of day.

It was a further three years before the issue of directly elected mayors came forward in legislation again. The Local Government Reform Act, 2014, received little media attention or public scrutiny in Ireland. However, the one issue to get pulses racing – at least in one part of the country – was the proposal in Part 11 to have a directly elected mayor for the Dublin Metropolitan Area. Minister Phil Hogan's legislation proposed the holding of a Dublin plebiscite on the issue on the same day as the 2014 local elections – 23 May. Controversially, however, the minister included a provision that each of the four local authorities which constitute the Dublin Metropolitan Area – Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, South Dublin County Council and Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council – would firstly have to individually adopt a resolution in favour of holding the plebiscite.

The insertion of this veto power for any one of the four Dublin local authorities was a curious move by the minister, and always had the potential to open up the proverbial can of worms. And so it proved. Three of the four Dublin local authorities comfortably adopted

resolutions in favour of the plebiscite but, critically, the other local authority did not. The process began on Monday 24 March when Dublin City Council approved with fifty votes in favour and none against. One week later, on Monday 31 March, the remaining three councils met to decide the fate of the mayoral plebiscite. The vote in South Dublin County Council was nineteen in favour with three against; in Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council, the elected members voted decisively in favour by twenty-three to zero.

The sting in the tail, however, was spectacularly delivered by the members of Fingal County Council, who voted against the holding of the plebiscite by sixteen votes to six. Accordingly, the proposal died and was not brought before the people of Dublin on 23 May. Advocates of the directly elected mayor idea were appalled by the fact that the plebiscite had been blocked despite the overwhelming majority of councillors in Dublin voting in favour. The combined total vote was 98–19 and yet the minority of councillors against the proposal successfully rejected it (see Quinlivan, 2014). Rather than putting the decision to have a directly elected mayor in the hands of the citizens of Dublin, Minister Hogan placed an unnecessary obstacle into the process.

So why did Fingal County Council reject the proposal? Councillor Gerry McGuire of the Labour Party, one of those who voted against, argued that any directly elected mayor would be based in the city and would ignore rural Dublin, including the residents of Fingal. He added that the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, did not provide enough detail about the role and powers of the mayor and so people would not know precisely what they were voting on.

Momentarily leaving the issue of directly elected mayors, it is worth mentioning that the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, did introduce a couple of changes in relation to executive management. The title of city/county manager was replaced by chief executive, thus reinforcing the corporate model. Section 54 of the Act deals with the new post of chief executive, and runs to nearly ten pages. The main change introduced was in relation to the appointment of the chief executive. It has always been the case that the elected members formally appointed the manager, but they were obliged to do so, i.e. the legislation stated that the council *shall* appoint the candidate recommended by the Public Appointments Service. Intriguingly, under the 2014 legislation, councillors were given veto powers. Within three months of having received a recommendation from the Public Appointments Service, the council must meet and decide to appoint or not appoint the person recommended. If the council decides not to

approve the appointment, reasons for such a decision must be furnished to the recommended person. Previous legislation insisted on the fact that the elected members had to appoint the recommended person so as to avoid political influence in the process. The new legislation brings the appointment of chief executive firmly into the political arena, which may not be wise. Of course, a strong argument can also be made that the board of directors should have a key role in deciding who their chief executive will be.

International trends

There is validity to the point made by Councillor McGuire about the lack of details in the 2014 Act in terms of the precise role of the directly elected mayor for Dublin. The Gormley Green Paper of 2008 recognised that there are many different models of directly elected mayors, and the powers and influence of the Italian mayor are different from those of the English mayor and the Greek mayor. As Elcock & Fenwick (2007, p. 226) state, 'the office of elected executive mayor has increasingly become a feature of European local government'. This is undeniably the case, and 'the number of countries and cities that have decided to introduce directly elected mayors has increased markedly during the last 20 years or so' (Hambleton, 2013, p. 127). In Europe, countries such as Italy, Slovakia, England, Austria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and Poland have travelled this road. Outside of Europe, we have seen mayoral models introduced in New Zealand, Columbia, Costa Rica and Mexico, and the US has a long tradition of directly elected mayors. While the trend is clear, there is less clarity about the success or otherwise of the model of a directly elected mayor with executive powers. Marsh (2012, p. 611) correctly asserts that 'we lack a strong evidence base to support claims regarding the positive benefits of elected mayors'. This is equally true regarding negative claims made against the model of elected mayors.

The UK experiment with directly elected mayors cannot be deemed a success, in light of the fact that the majority of cities which held referendums voted against having mayors. The respected academic Kevin Orr has claimed that mayoral referendums and elections have not raised the visibility of local government, except in 'faintly embarrassing ways' (Orr, 2004, p. 342). Copus (2013, p. 128) argues that even though over fifty local referendums produced only sixteen mayors, this does not make the idea a bad one. It does beg the question though as to why the public has not taken to the concept. The Conservative/Liberal Democrats coalition government initiated ten

mayoral referendums in selected English cities in 2012, but in only one did the people decide to establish the office of mayor – Bristol, on a 24 per cent turnout.

> Overall, there is no evidence of widespread public support for mayors, yet the prospect of more mayors – indeed, mayors with enhanced powers – remains firmly on the policy agenda. This is interesting but also puzzling. A major continuing policy initiative is built on few empirical foundations. (Fenwick & Elcock, 2014)

Copus (2013, p. 131) claims that the introduction of elected mayors is not a 'busted flush', but has floundered due to the lack of power and meaning of local government in England, and the power of local political elites. He concludes that if governments are convinced that elected mayors are the way to go then they should try to introduce mayors across the country and tell political elites to get on with it. This is an interesting point as international evidence suggests that making the adoption of elected mayors compulsory is effective (Fenwick & Elcock, 2014). An example where this has happened is the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia, which in 1994 compelled all local authorities to adopt elected mayors by 1999. Such an approach contrasts markedly with the Irish situation in 2014 (described above), where the four Dublin local authorities were each effectively given a veto power.

Another reason why the idea of directly elected mayors has struggled for public legitimacy in the UK is lack of clarity. Hambleton (2013, p.126) asserts that citizens struggled to grasp how the mayoral model of governance would work, while Marsh (2012, p. 609) refers to the vagueness of proposals and concludes that it was hard to sell a mayoral model with so few specifics. The Local Government Act, 2000, presented three main options for executive arrangements in councils with populations in excess of 85,000, two of which involved the direct election of mayors:

- Option 1 – Mayor and cabinet: A directly elected mayor who appoints an executive cabinet of councillors;
- Option 2 – Leader and cabinet: An executive leader, elected by the full council, with a cabinet of councillors, either appointed by the leader or elected by the council;
- Option 3 – Mayor and manager: A directly elected mayor with a day-to-day officer appointed by the council.

The absence of a clear mayoral model was a handicap in establishing the system from the beginning.

One of the important 'specifics' referred to by Marsh (2012) is the power of the elected mayor. In the US, within the mayor–council model, there is a distinction between the *weak-mayor* version and the *strong-mayor* version. Under the former, the mayor has limited powers and lacks a veto. Therefore, the council is dominant in the decision-making process. The more popular *strong-mayor* variant shifts the power towards the mayor, who appoints and removes heads of departments, prepares the budget and uses the power of veto (Swift, 2003). Though a strong mayor can offer clear local leadership and decisive decision-making, there is a danger in placing too much power in the hands of one individual, while 'single issue' or 'celebrity' candidates could bring the local government system into disrepute. From Elcock & Fenwick's interviews with mayors from different countries conducted over an eleven-year period, the issue of the abuse of power by individual mayors was identified as a major concern. This was seen as a significant problem in Greece in particular (Elcock & Fenwick, 2007, p. 236). Though strong mayors continue to be popular in large American cities, more and more smaller cities, counties and towns are shifting to the council–manager model, where the council appoints a professional city manager to run services. From their research conducted in 2005, Folz & French note that city managers appear to be more likely than mayors to consult with key stakeholders before they reach a decision that affects a local service or project. They further observe that the mayor–council form experiences more conflict, while the council–manager governments are typically more cooperative.

Where do we now stand?

Mayoral models are embedded internationally (see Denters & Rose, 2005) and have become such a feature of local government that it would be surprising if the introduction of directly elected mayors in Ireland did not return to the political agenda again soon. Certainly, there are compelling arguments in favour of elected mayors:

i. There should be clear political leadership as there is certainty for the public (not to mention the business community and other stakeholders) about who is leading the local area.
ii. Based on the point above, there should be greater visibility for the mayor and accountability would be enhanced.

iii. Following a direct election, the mayor would have significant legitimacy.
iv. There would be increased speed in decision-making.
v. The public would possibly take a renewed interest in the affairs of local government.
vi. Directly elected mayors could emerge as a force for local government reform.
vii. The mayor would be in a position to address strategic challenges faced by the local area and to drive economic development.
viii. In larger city regions where you might have a metropolitan or 'metro' mayor, you could see several councils working together with a coherent strategic focus to tackle issues such as planning, transportation and infrastructural development.

Individually and collectively these arguments are valid but a point which this article is trying to make is that there is a lack of evidence to support the claims made for elected mayors. As such, it is clearly an area that warrants in-depth study and comparative research. For example, as Hambleton (2013, p. 127) points out, the argument that cities need directly elected mayors in order to compete in a rapidly globalising world does not hold up. He cites Copenhagen, Melbourne and Prague as examples of successful cities which do not have directly elected mayors.

If, and when, directly elected mayors come back onto the political agenda in Ireland, there are lessons which can be learned from other jurisdictions:

i. If central government believes in directly elected mayors, it should commit to the idea and legislate for its adoption, rather than taking a hesitant, half-hearted approach.
ii. There needs to be clarity about the mayoral model that is being introduced.
iii. The details are important, especially the precise powers of the mayor and the relationship between the mayor and the elected local legislature, i.e. the council.

Directly elected mayors should not be presented as a panacea for local government reinvigoration. It is clear that the Irish local government system needs urgent reform and the introduction of directly elected mayors is only one potential element of that process. Former Dublin City Manager John Tierney has argued that grafting a directly elected

mayor onto the current system, without any meaningful changes to local government responsibilities and financing, will not make any appreciable difference. This view supports the argument put forward by Copus (2013) that the elected mayor model has struggled in the UK due to the lack of power and meaning of local government. For the time being, the corporate model of local government – with the city/county manager as chief executive officer, the elected councillors as the board of directors, and the electorate as shareholders – remains firmly in place, as it was in 1929 when Philip Monahan was appointed Cork City Manager.

Conclusion

To paraphrase Copus (2013), directly elected mayors in Ireland are an idea whose time has not yet come. The various faltering efforts – from the Local Government Act, 2001, to the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 – have been described in this article. While Ireland has yet to embrace the mayoral model, it seems only a matter of time before the idea resurfaces, as strengthening local political leadership is a consistent and dominant international trend. When Ireland next discusses the introduction of directly elected mayors with executive powers, the debate should include a review of the role of the elected council and a fundamental reappraisal of the purpose of local government, based on the devolution of powers to local communities.

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