



**Preliminary Mayoral Programme,  
Limerick City and County Council**

Dr Laura Keyes, Mayoral Candidate

2024

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# 1. Forward

The newly appointed Directly Elected Mayor will need to produce and agree a Mayoral Programme within 16 weeks of taking office. The Mayoral Programme will set out the key priorities and objectives for their five-year term of office.

To support people in having an informed vote, I have developed this preliminary mayoral programme. It is positioned as preliminary as it is subject to formal input from key stakeholders in Limerick and debate and agreement once the new council is elected. It is also a living document as it evolves as I speak to people and groups, bring back their priorities and ideas and integrate them into the plan.

This preliminary mayoral programme is written as a series of mission statements. These mission statements and actions. They will be converted into strategic objectives and deliverables to form a full Mayoral Programme, if I were elected as Limerick's first Directly Elected Mayor.

Accessibility is hugely important to me. I know from my work and from my own experience of living with multiple sclerosis that if you design for the least able and the furthest from power, everyone benefits.

My overarching aim, if I were elected, is to facilitate the co-design of Limerick, with the people of Limerick. I believe in the philosophy of "with us not for us". This is about not making decisions for people but with them. The people of Limerick know best what is needed and how to solve the problems Limerick faces. Approaching leadership from a "with us not for us" perspective gives agency to people and places the voice of the people of Limerick at the heart of everything we do.

I cannot achieve this vision alone. We need to work hand-in-hand to co-create a brighter future for ourselves and generations to come. With your support and trust, we can make Limerick the shining beacon of progress and prosperity that she deserves to be.

Laura Keyes

## 2. Réamhrá

Beidh ar an Méara nuacheaptha atá tofa go díreach, Clár Méara a tháirgeadh agus a chomhaontú laistigh de 16 seachtaine tar éis dó dul i mbun oifige. Leagfaidh Clár an Mhéara amach na príomhthosaíochtaí agus cuspóirí dá dtéarma oifige cúig bliana.

Chun tacú le daoine vóta eolasach a bheith acu, tá an Réamhchlár Méara seo forbartha agam. Tá sé suite mar réamhobair mar go bhfuil sé faoi réir ionchur foirmiúil ó phríomhpháirtithe leasmhara i Luimneach agus, díospóireacht agus comhaontú nuair a bhíonn an chomhairle nua tofa. Is doiciméad beo é freisin de réir mar a fhorbraíonn sé agus mé ag labhairt le daoine agus le grúpaí, ag tabhairt a dtosaíochtaí agus a gcuid smaointe ar ais agus iad a chomhtháthú sa phlean.

Scríobhtar an réamhchlár méara seo mar ráitis mhisin. Déanfar na ráitis misin seo a thiontú ina gcuspóirí straitéiseacha agus ina spriocanna inghnóthaithe chun Clár Méara iomlán a chruthú, dá dtoghfaí mé i mar an céad Mhéara Tofa go Direch, i Luimneach.

Tá inrochtaineacht thar a bheith tábhachtach domsa. Tá a fhios agam ó mo chuid oibre agus ó mo thaithí féin ar chónaí le scléaróis iolrach, má dhearann tú do na daoine is lú cumas agus iad siúd is faide ó chumhacht, go mbainfidh gach duine leas as.

An aidhm uileghabhálach atá agam, dá dtoghfaí mé, ná éascú a dhéanamh ar chomhdhearadh Luimnigh, le muintir Luimnigh. Creidim san fhealsúnacht “le linn, ní ar ár son”. Séard atá i gceist leis seo, gan cinntí a dhéanamh do dhaoine ach leo. Is fearr a thuigeann muintir Luimnigh cad atá ag teastáil agus conas na fadhbanna atá roimh Luimneach a réiteach. Nuair a théann muid i dtreo na ceannaireachta ó pheirspictíocht a, “le linn, ní ar ár son”, tugtar gníomhaireacht do dhaoine agus cuireann sé guth mhuintir Luimnigh i gcroílár gach a ndéanaimid.

Ní féidir liom an fhís seo a bhaint amach amháin. Ní mór dúinn oibriú as láimh a chéile chun todhchaí níos gile a chruthú dúinn féin agus do na glúnta atá le teacht. Le bhur dtacaíocht agus bhur muiníne, is féidir linn Luimneach a dhéanamh ar an bhfeadóg mhór dul chun cinn agus rathúnas atá tuillte aici.

Laura Keyes

### 3. Remit of the Directly Elected Mayor

The Directly Elected Mayor (DEM) will take on executive functions, at a strategic and policy level, in areas including:

- strategic development, that is, proposing the development plan for the City and County and driving the economic and spatial development of Limerick
- housing and building, for example, developing a housing strategy for Limerick and ensuring its delivery
- road transport and safety, that is, road maintenance and improvement, and traffic management
- environmental services, that is, the services that help to protect and enhance the environment in Limerick

The role covers, among other areas, economic, social and cultural matters, employment, coordinating initiatives, services and funding to support rural areas and measures concerning the regeneration of towns, including agricultural matters.

The Mayor will have a role in the delivery of Project Ireland 2040 via a Limerick Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board and a specific delivery board for Transport under the 2040 Framework. They will prepare and present the Corporate Plan, prepare service delivery plans and prepare a report on the capital programme.

The role of DEM is to enhance local authority accountability, visibility, democracy and responsiveness. DEM will be legally responsible for implementing council policy. They will have a duty to prepare and present the council budget.

Executive functions are responsibilities that relate to the running of the Local Authority. They are similar to the type of responsibilities that a CEO of an organisation would have. For example, when framing and implementing the local authority' strategy (Mayoral Programme), the DEM has responsibility for proposing the overall model and the strategic objectives, and the elected council is responsible for overseeing and approving these objectives and the plan necessary to achieve the objectives. The DEM will be responsible for determining how the Local Authority will meet these strategic objectives and for delivering on the approved plan.

The current model in Ireland is a council-manager model of local government, whereby the elected council sets the policy framework and the budget, and a professional manager is responsible for implementing it and for the day-to-day management of the local authority. The appointment of a DEM in Limerick moves away from this model.

The DEM will in many ways replace the professional manager. As such, they need to have the skills and experience to do so. The skill set required for DEM includes experience in strategic planning, policy development, implementation, financial management, leadership, change management, board experience, chair experience, stakeholder engagement, communication. They will be legally responsible for a range of functions and should have experience of the requirements and ramifications of that. They will also have powers of delegation and should have worked experience of such models.

## **4. Development of a Full Mayoral Programme**

Once the DEM is in office, a Limerick mayoral advisory and implementation committee will be convened. This committee will assist in the preparation, and support the implementation, of the Mayoral Programme.

The mayor must present a draft of their Mayoral Programme for consideration by the elected council and must consider comments or observations made by members of the council in the final Mayoral Programme.

The Full Mayoral Programme must be completed and agreed within sixteen weeks of the Mayor taking Office.

# 5. Preliminary Mayoral Programme

This preliminary Mayoral Programme takes a holistic view of the potential of Limerick rather than a project-based approach.

Five central themes have been proposed: 1) Accessibility for All, 2) Transparent Governance & Open Democracy, 3) Shared Prosperity, 4) Housing, Education & Health for All, 5) Climate for All. The themed mission statements are interdependent and will cover numerous programmes and projects. We have an urgent need for system level, joined-up thinking and a move away from the current siloed, project-based approach to change.

The project-based approach which is the norm, has a tendency to solve a problem here but create a bigger problem over there. Systems thinking is a holistic approach to analysis that focuses on the way that a system's constituent parts interrelate and how systems work over time and within the context of larger systems. Systems thinking can be defined as a holistic and integrated approach to understanding complex problems and situations. It is a way of thinking that emphasizes the interconnections, relationships, and feedback loops between different elements of a system. Unlike linear thinking, which tends to focus on cause-and-effect relationships in a linear sequence, systems thinking takes into account the dynamic and nonlinear nature of systems.



# Mission: Accessibility for all

People with disabilities make up a quarter of the population of Limerick. If we add to that older people and people with children in buggies, we have an enormous proportion of people in Limerick that would benefit from more accessibility.

Improving accessibility brings about increased quality of life, creates more independence and better social integration. Developing everything, from public spaces and houses, to forms and webpages, for the least able in society, means they are accessible to all. It requires a culture shift. A culture shift that the Mayor can lead and champion across all council actions and plans.

Workers and carers, whether they are elderly, disabled, parents or in other ways reliant on accessible public spaces, must be able to enjoy a safe and healthy city. There are many ways to do this in homes, workplaces and communities. Solutions as simple as benches, public toilets, the provision of public space and reliable public transport can make a huge difference to people's lives.

The business and decisions of council, its resources, services and assets must be accessible to the least able, and the furthest from socio-economic power, to be accessible to all.

The concept of accessibility is not simply about catering for people with disabilities. It is about catering for all people. Accessibility crosses into inclusivity, transport options, access to services and feeling safe to participate wholly in one's community and use public amenities. We need to build an accessible environment to support inclusive communities. One that ensures that everyone is treated equally and with dignity and respect.

<b>Actions</b>
Improve public transport connections for rural areas.
Revisit the new bus connects plan for the city and identify further areas for improvement, particularly around accessible bus stops and bus stops near housing rather than focused on arterial roads.
Upgrading and widening footpaths, reviewing existing stock for obstacles such as poles. Building new footpaths with a focus on improving walkability in rural areas, towns and villages. Increase pedestrian priority zones.
Increase active travel routes, working towards a cycle network rather than disparate cycle lanes.
Tackle illegal parking e.g. bus lanes, cycle paths, taxi ranks, on footpaths. This blocks emergency service access, is dangerous to pedestrians and cyclists, blocks wheelchairs, prams etc. It also disrupts the flow of traffic.
Secure funding to support development of bus stops used by private bus companies. An example is Arthurs Quay bus stop. As it is used predominantly by private bus companies, the infrastructure at this heavily-used bus stop has never been developed.
Introduce a “Youth Talks” programme. Youth talks programmes are youth led reviews of activities and facilities available in a community. They have a double benefit of giving agency to young people and reducing anti-social behaviour, empowering safe communities. In Edinburgh, where it was first introduced, it led to a youth café, a parent/carer group at the school, a youth awards programme for positive contribution to community, a life skills programme aimed at school leavers, amongst other initiatives. It also led to a 13% reduction in anti-social behaviour.
Redesign the Council website from an accessibility perspective.
Simplify Council related forms.
Support ISL interpretation at events.
Ensure accessibility is a core underpinning of all planning.
Introduce a programme of education and awareness-building focused on accessibility, both for council staff and the public.
Build outward facing infrastructure to support connectivity and inclusivity.

# Mission: Transparent governance, open democracy

People face closed doors when dealing with the Council all the time, while the doors are routinely flung open for corporations' and developers' plans like, Limerick 2030. The Mayor can use existing levers, such as Local Area Committees to ensure that developments in the city are open and transparent to all.

As the city grows, transparency and evidence-based decision-making are essential to ensure that social and ecological objectives are prioritised to reflect peoples' everyday needs. The Mayor can ensure open democracy through a co-design approach that empowers communities by involving them throughout the decision-making processes.

Co-design is when people most impacted by a decision, a policy, an intervention or a change, are involved in the whole process, from conception to delivery. It is the opposite of one-time public consultation on already near complete plans. It is an iterative and ongoing process.

Good governance is when decisions made by bodies are made in direct conversation with those affected by those decisions. Where decisions are made out in the open, for all to see, in the spirit of fair play. Processes around decision making should be accessible, so everyone gets to have their say. That means that processes should be pro-active, and easy to participate in.

Decision-making processes should be easy to understand. How many times have we seen decisions made that appear devoid of common sense? By listening carefully to the people affected by decisions we can improve on public projects as well as reduce delays that come about through lack of consultation.

Evidence-based decision-making draws on sound sources and removes biases. It can increase civic engagement and public trust as it encourages decision makers to consider the thoughts and feelings of those impacted. It also saves money and improves efficiency as it reduces the need for experimentation and increases the likelihood of successful outcomes. Evidence-based decisions ensure policies and actions are grounded in reliable data rather than intuition or ideology.

<b>Actions</b>
Expansion of “My Point” and removal of the need for registration. My Point is Limerick City and County Council’s portal for public engagement.
Introduction of a co-design approach to planning and strategy development including, townhalls, resident assemblies, resident representatives in projects.
Streaming of Council meetings without the need for prior registration to view.
Publish easy-read budget statements of income and spend of Limerick City and County Council.
Bring about a culture shift towards evidence-based decision making by introducing requirements for robust research for initiatives.
Expand relationships between the third-level institutes in Limerick and Limerick City and County Council to improve the evidence base for decisions by Council.
Establish an ethos of publishing all data from the Council in a findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable way (FAIR data).
Support Citizen Science initiatives with funding and frameworks.

## Mission: Shared prosperity

Regional development and urban regeneration have failed in Limerick. Limerick needs a new approach that generates value through robust future-oriented economic planning, which the Mayor's office is mandated to coordinate. Voices from the health and education sectors, trade unions, industry, agriculture and communities need to be at the centre of decisions.

The new office of the Mayor can foster cooperation to establish the Council as an anchor institution for Limerick with the ability to attract economic activity which is durable and valuable to the community. The office can also be used to build relationships internationally, especially in the research sector. If this is what we want, then public services need to reflect the real needs of workers and carers, the people who generate value and are the backbone of Limerick's economy.

Limerick City and County can be a prosperous place for everyone, with the right supports. Currently the only people who can take risks are those who already have their own networks to support them. Limerick can provide an even better opportunity for everyone if the local authority takes a more proactive role in creating an environment for innovation. What this means is a focus on rejuvenating our villages, towns and city as urban hubs for the development of entrepreneurialism to benefit all people who live in Limerick. This will be supported through a focus on education, developing centres of research excellence and community hubs.

<b>Actions</b>
<p>Purchase buildings in rural and urban communities and gift the buildings back to the communities to be run as a community enterprise, governed by a voluntary board of residents. All proceeds from the enterprises would stay in the community to support other community initiatives. These could be community hotels, indoor markets, event spaces, sports and recreation facilities for example.</p>
<p>Develop research excellence in Limerick, particularly around sustainability, biodiversity, energy efficiency, recycling, climate change preparedness and other similar areas. The aim is to make Limerick an international knowledge centre and the 'go to' place for robust and forward thinking on these topics, thus attracting innovation and business to Limerick.</p>
<p>Expand existing programmes aimed at upskilling builders in sustainable, ecologically mindful development.</p>
<p>Support sustainable development of SMEs, who may lack the time, knowledge, capacity or funds to do so independently. Adopting a co-design approach to identify and establish solutions to their needs.</p>

# Mission: Housing, education, health for all

Limerick should be an excellent place to live, where housing moves from a problem of underdevelopment to an opportunity to build homes and outward facing community, where there are education options for everyone, and health and social care services meet need.

In terms of housing, we need to address the pressing issue of not enough availability for rent, to buy or in terms of public and social housing. One action that would benefit Limerick in dealing with the housing crisis is to build more public housing. Public housing provides secure, affordable, long-term accommodation. It takes pressure off the private rental market, reducing competition for properties thus curtailing spiralling rents.

The continued overcrowding situation at University Hospital Limerick requires a regional health plan for the Mid-West region that alleviates the pressure on Limerick health services through provision of acute services in one of the other hospitals in Limerick's hospital group. University Hospital Limerick's overcrowding problem is a result of a lack of suitable community-based care services, and its staffing problem is in part a result of the housing crisis affecting workers and carers more generally.

While the Mayor has no direct remit over the hospital, a housing action plan that uses existing local government powers to procure and produce public housing to meet demand is entirely within the remit of the Mayor. The Mayor can also leverage for more funding for construction and expansion of schools to address the gap between the growth of Limerick and the number of school places.

Air and water quality in Limerick are public health issues. Air and water pollution lead to avoidable health problems, which in turn puts pressure on our health services, including our hospital. These fall into the environmental remit of the Mayor who can take urgent action to improve the overall health and wellbeing of the people of Limerick.

Housing, education and health care services are prerequisites for a thriving Limerick. The Mayor can use the Consultative Forum to coordinate these plans between local and national agencies. The Mayor can coordinate agencies, locally and nationally, to address these related concerns towards a more robust and joined-up thinking approach to housing, education and health.

<b>Actions</b>
Leverage for upgrade of our hospital group to include at least one model 3 hospital to support University Hospital Limerick.
Establish a collaboration with the Universities in Limerick to work together to identify and implement ways of attracting graduates (with an urgent focus on medical, health and social care professions) to stay and work in Limerick after graduating.
Target residential building planning and approvals within easy commuting distance of the hospital, particularly along public transport routes.
Build step down housing for older people in a manner that facilitates them to remain in their own communities but also frees up larger houses for families.
Substantially increase the building of public housing in Limerick.
Secure more affordable housing schemes and cost rental schemes for Limerick.
Protecting the land currently owned by Council, increasing the portfolio of publicly-owned land and limiting the amount of land sold to private developers. Models of tendering to private developers, without selling the land, can be used to support development. This supports more control of development and facilitates joined up rather than project-based planning.
Introducing more air quality monitors for Limerick City and County. Information collection is crucial in supporting development of interventions.
Leverage for more funding for expansion and construction of schools.
Develop an action plan for derelict housing. While good work has been completed on identifying derelict sites in Limerick, little action has been taken on their redevelopment.
Undertake planning in a way that protects the natural and built history of Limerick, protecting historic structures and sites.
Work with Uisce Eireann to ensure the cessation of chlorine as a water treatment option. Chlorine treatment has a by-product of trihalomethanes (THMs) which are increasingly acknowledged to have detrimental health impacts and should not be present in public and private water supplies. The European Court of Justice ruled in January 2024 that Ireland failed to protect drinking water from THMs. Urgent action is required.



# Mission: Climate action for the benefit for all

Limerick already has a Climate Action Plan that the Mayor can build upon and expand. Far too often climate action is reduced to individual action rather than forcing systemic change. There is an alternative to an eco-austerity approach to climate action. The Mayor is in a position to advance a programme of climate projects that are potentially transformative and move beyond a siloed project based approach.

We can have a bottom-up approach rather than the current top-down approach to climate action. A bottom-up approach is one that begins in homes, workplaces and communities, and is led by workers and carers. Co-operative renewable energy schemes, biodiversity initiatives and community gardens are just some examples of bottom-up climate action.

Green public spaces can be both climate action initiatives and recreational spaces that foster inclusive communities. There is a World Health Organization recommendation that all people reside within 300m of green space. Health benefits of green spaces include improved physical, mental and social wellbeing. Co-designing green spaces with local communities has been found to foster a sense of ownership and promote use.

Even though halting climate change and slowing it is an urgent priority, we must acknowledge that the impact of climate change has already reached us. As such, we need to take action to fortify and protect Limerick against the negative effects. The biggest climate change risks to Limerick are flooding, in particular, pluvial flooding<sup>1</sup> and destructive winds. These need to be addressed urgently.

Even if carbon emissions ceased worldwide tomorrow, we are still going to be faced with sea level rises of 5 meters in the not so distant future. This means that Shannon airport will be underwater and Thomand Park will be an island. We need to work with the natural environment to make changes to prepare for this future and use nature-based interventions where possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Pluvial flooding is caused when rainfall cannot be absorbed by the ground or drainage system. It is most usually the result of high-intensity or prolonged periods of rainfall and is characterised by overland flow and ponding. (Source: <https://hydrologyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/7-An-innovative-approach-to-pluvial-flood-risk-assessment.pdf>)

<b>Actions</b>
<p>Establish wind defences, including substantial tree planting and plexiglass type solutions for exposed roads and bridges. Trees are excellent wind barriers, they have the additional effect of reducing energy demands on nearby buildings, trapping dust and other particles that can cause poor health and are detrimental to native insects and mammals who are essential to maintaining biodiversity. They are also aesthetically pleasing; woodlands, forests, and even small plantations, can be planned with additional purpose as recreational spaces. Plexiglass type solutions for exposed roads are clear and don't block views while also reducing road accidents and protecting pedestrians and cyclists.</p>
<p>Continue and expand on the good work already started on improving the sewerage systems in Limerick to better accommodate the population increase and the heightened flood risks.</p>
<p>Cease all building in flood plains.</p>
<p>Introduce a "Space for the River" programme. This type of programme is in place in countries in mainland Europe. It shifts the focus from attempting to hold waters back and draining land so we can build on it, to acknowledging that the water should go where it wants and we should allow for that and work around it instead.</p>
<p>Expand the proposal for a blue green ring around Limerick City. A blue green ring is a series of joined up natural and semi natural spaces that form a chain and allows for movement of wildlife and supports biodiversity. This existing proposal is commendable however it does not go far enough. A more expansive approach, closer to the forest ring that has been introduced for Barcelona would be more beneficial.</p>
<p>Increase zoning for rewilding, community gardens, green spaces, allotments, pocket forests and other similar community style projects, and secure funding from Europe to support these.</p>
<p>Introduce a net gain biodiversity requirement for planning applications. This requirement would mean that any new development approved for planning would need to demonstrate how they will provide a minimum of a 10% net gain in biodiversity in their development, it would also apply to any Council developments. England and Wales have recently introduced this as a law for all new developments.<sup>2</sup></p>
<p>Upgrade council-owned buildings to become net energy contributors with the long-term goal of feeding the excess energy back into the community. First, excess energy would be used to support facilities and services</p>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-biodiversity-net-gain>

operated by Council, after which excess would be forwarded to small enterprises to reduce their energy costs. This model could be expanded considerably over time. It is not inconceivable that Limerick could eventually support its energy needs, both commercially and residentially, through this model.

Establish a programme with farmers to co-design change aimed at ensuring farming is economically viable in Limerick and that food sustainability needs are met now and into the future.

Prioritise development of existing buildings and brownfield sites over new development of green field sites.

## 6. Final Remarks

Co-design is at the heart of this preliminary Mayoral programme as it harnesses the power of collective intelligence. It has the potential to change Limerick for the better. We have become used to thinking of intelligence as the private skill of individuals, vying against one another in a neoliberal world of relentless competition. What is needed, especially in this age of climate disaster, is a greater emphasis on our ability to work together.

The voices of the people of Limerick need to be at the centre of all decision making. This is people-centred politics.

## 7. Dr Laura Keyes



Dr Laura Keyes (BSc, PhD, FHEA)

Public Health Epidemiologist

Candidate for Directly Elected Mayor, Limerick

Rabharta – The Party for Workers and Carers

Dr Laura Keyes is a public health scientist and works in a senior research management role in the public sector. Her current work involves strategic planning, co-ordinating national level projects and working with the public, national organisations and government departments. She is from Limerick City and is a mother and a disability rights advocate.

## 8. Version Control

Version number	Date	Remarks
Version 1	21st March 2024	First version
Version 2	16th April 2024	Minor updates and reorganisation of text. Addition of Actions tables.