

Local Government and Local Services Division

► Report 2017-2019



FORSA

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COVER PHOTO

Luke and Mark McLoughlin pictured at the Fórsa rally in Roscommon town last June, organised in protest at management's refusal to implement a flexi leave program in the council.
Photo: Reg Gordon.



DIVISIONAL EXECUTIVE

Front (L-R): Julie Flood, Sean Reid – Cathaoirleach, Linda Casey, Peter Nolan – Head of Division.
 Back (L-R): Tom Browne – 3rd rep, Gerry O’Quigley – leas cathaoirleach, Ann Marie Maher, Ray Kennedy, Pat Considine, Michael Whyms, Catherine White, Susan Gherin, Vincent Savage, Padraig McGivney, Seamus Smith.

Missing from photo: Declan Connolly and Orla Murrin.

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Organisation

Creation of Fórsa

Fórsa came into being on 2nd January 2018 through an amalgamation of the Civil, Public and Services Union (CPSU), the Irish Municipal, Public And Civil Trade Union (IMPACT), and the Public Service Executive Union (PSEU). The new union represents over 80,000 members across the public services, commercial and non-commercial semi-state organisations, the community and voluntary sector, and private companies in aviation, telecommunications and elsewhere. Fórsa is the second largest union in the country, and by far the strongest and most influential trade union voice in the public service and semi-state sector.

Members gave the amalgamation, which was the result of over two years' work and consultation, a strong endorsement in ballot results announced in November 2017. Public Service Executive Union (PSEU) members voted 70% in favour of the move, while those of the Civil, Public and Services Union (CPSU) gave an endorsement of 76%. IMPACT members who voted backed the merger by a margin of 86% to 14%. A fuller report on the amalgamation was published in an update to the union's first national conference, which took place in May 2018.

Divisional Executive Committee

The following people were elected to the Local Government and Local Services Divisional Executive Committee (DEC) for the period 2017-2019:

Tom Browne (Galway branch, also elected third divisional representative to the union's National Executive Committee), Declan Connolly (Cork Branch), Pat Considine (Clare Branch), Julie Flood (Dublin City Branch), Ray Kennedy (Offaly Branch), Pádraig McGivney (Cavan Branch), Ann Marie Maher (Laois Branch), Orla Murrin (Sligo Branch), Gerry O'Quigley (Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Branch, also elected Leas-Cathaoirleach), Sean Reid (Donegal Branch, also elected Cathaoirleach), Vincent Savage (Tipperary Branch), Susan Sherin (Limerick Branch), Seamus Smith (Kerry Branch), Catherine White (South Dublin Branch) and Michael Whymys (Fingal Branch).

Arising from the terms of the Fórsa instrument of amalgamation, Paul O'Halloran and Michael Barry joined the Divisional Executive Committee in May 2018.

Kevin O'Malley was elected to the position of Fórsa honorary treasurer at the new union's inaugural conference in May 2018.

Divisional Council

The Local Government and Local Services Divisional Council comprises one delegate from each branch that has members in the division. The Council met quarterly throughout the period under review.

Staffing

Head of Division Peter Nolan has responsibility for supporting the activities of the Divisional Executive Committee. Linda Casey is Head of Administration in the division.

Michael McCabe and Dympna Reilly

It was with the deepest regret that the division learned the news of the deaths of Michael McCabe, former Cathaoirleach and former Chairperson of the Louth branch, and Dympna Reilly of the union's Dun Laoghaire Rathdown branch and national libraries vocational group. Both Michael and Dympna served their members with distinction and integrity. The division extends condolences to their friends and families, and to all the friends and families who have suffered bereavements during the period.

Local Authority National Council

The Local Authority National Council (LANC) processes claims on behalf of unions and employers in the sector. The council is chaired by Damien Cannon of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). Fórsa Head of Division Peter Nolan is staff side secretary for the council.

Local Authority National Partnership Advisory Group

Discussions have taken place with the LANC in relation to the future of LANPAG. While unions and management have agreed to a rationalisation of its nature and size, Fórsa vigorously opposed attempts by management to eliminate the national group that oversees the

process. The body is the agreed forum for the provision of information and consultation under the terms of the Employees (Provision of Information and Consultation) Act 2006. The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) ultimately agreed to maintain a national forum.

Local government campaign

Early in 2019, Fórsa and other unions, which together represent over 30,000 local council workers, launched a campaign for substantially increased revenue and powers for local authorities. The union published research that shows Irish councils have less autonomy from central government than their counterparts in 39 European countries.

The 'More Power To You' campaign also calls for legislative changes to facilitate directly-elected mayors and restore and expand town councils, which were abolished in 2014. *Democracy Works If You Let It* by Dr Mary Murphy of Maynooth University, found that only 8% of Irish public spending occurs at local government level, compared to an EU23 average of over 23%, and that a quarter of the Irish spend is not fully under local authority control. It also found that, with just one city or county council for every 148,500 people, Ireland has far fewer local municipalities than similar-sized European countries. The study says Irish local authorities perform fewer functions than municipalities across Europe, with their roles largely confined to physical infrastructure, and environmental and recreational services. The research says local democracy has been eroded by:

- A decade of austerity, which cut budgets and slashed council staffing by a quarter
- The centralisation of services like water, driving licences and higher education grants
- The privatisation of services like refuse collection and housing, and
- Excessive executive direction and new management processes that have increased bureaucratic powers at the expense of political representatives.

The campaign is seeking commitments from political parties, and candidates in the upcoming council elections, on a range of local government reforms covering waste, water, housing, and energy services. These include:

- Legislative changes to facilitate directly-elected mayors
- The return and expansion of the town council system, which was abolished in 2014
- Increased revenue and funding powers, with parallel systems of accountability and transparency, to move the percentage of local authority-managed public spending towards the European average
- An immediate end to the outsourcing of council housing maintenance and a medium-term shift to a new local authority-led public housing model
- Stronger regulation of the waste sector to ensure that every household has access to an affordable waste disposal service, as a precursor to the reintroduction of improved public provision

- A constitutional referendum on the right to water, which should ensure that water and waste water services remain in public ownership and control, and
- Investment in local authority environmental and sustainable energy infrastructure and staff, to facilitate the maximum use of the SEAI 'Better Energy' programme.

Housing

The union has also been lobbying to ensure that local authorities play an immediate and direct role in the construction of social housing to tackle the housing and homelessness crisis. The union has supported the 'Raise the Roof' campaign, which includes ICTU, other unions, and housing charities and advocacy groups. The campaign has secured the backing of political parties in the Oireachtas.

Pay

Public service pay restoration

Pay and pension levy adjustments under the 2015 Lansdowne Road agreement ensured that, by April 2017, virtually all public servants had experienced some pay restoration, while those earning below €28,000 had gained full restoration of the pay and pension levy-related cuts. A final payment under the deal, which was worth €38.33 a fortnight before tax, was brought forward from September 2017 to April 2017 following negotiations between public service unions and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), which took place between December 2016 and January 2017.

In May 2016, the Government also bowed to union demands for early talks on a successor to the HRA, which was originally meant to expire in September 2018. Negotiations took place in May and June 2017 after the publication of the first report of the Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC), which was established under the Programme for Government in October 2016.

The PSPC report addressed the process of unwinding the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) legislation, which introduced and underpinned the public service pay cuts and pension levy. The PSPC also considered factors that are usually taken into account in public service pay determination including recruitment and retention issues, international comparisons of public service pay and living costs, the value of public service pensions, and security of tenure relative to the private sector. The ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC), which represents the vast majority of the country's public service unions, made two written submissions to the Commission, and PSC officers met with the Commission on a number of occasions.

The Commission made its report to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in May 2017. Talks on a new public service pay agreement started later that month and concluded in June 2017. The outcome was the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), which was strongly backed by members of the three unions that later amalgamated to form Fórsa, along with unions representing a large majority of public service workers. The ICTU Public Services Committee backed the deal by a margin of over 80% in an aggregate ballot in September 2017.

The PSSA, which came into force in January 2018, now governs pay and related matters for virtually all public servants, as well as staff in non-commercial semi-state organisations and 'section 38' agencies where pay scales follow the public service. By the time it expires, on 31st December 2020, over 90% of public servants will earn as much as, or more than, they did when pay cuts were introduced during the crisis.



Dr Mary Murphy delivering the findings of her research paper, *Democracy Works If You Let It*, at the launch of Fórsa's joint #MorePowerToYou campaign.

Summary of income adjustments

- 1st January 2018: 1% pay adjustment
- 1st October 2018: 1% pay adjustment
- 1st January 2019: Additional superannuation contribution threshold up from €28,750 to €32,000 (worth €325 a year). 1% pay increase for those who don't benefit (ie, those earning less than €30,000 a year)
- 1st September 2019: 1.75% pay adjustment
- 1st January 2020: Additional superannuation contribution threshold increased to €34,500 (worth €250 a year). 0.5% pay increase for those who don't benefit (ie, those earning less than €32,000 a year)
- 1st October 2020: 2% pay adjustment
- 31st December 2020: Agreement concludes.

The agreement saw pay increase by 1% on 1st January 2018, and by another 1% on 1st October 2018. Further income boosts were implemented on 1st January 2019, with a 1% pay increase for those earning less than €30,000 a year. Those who earn more benefited instead from an increase in the 'additional superannuation contribution,' which replaced the pension levy as part of the agreement. Further improvements are due on 1st September 2019, 1st January 2020, and 1st October 2020 (see table). Pay scales were updated on the Fórsa website to reflect the 1st January 2019 and earlier adjustments.

As this report was being finalised, Fórsa and other unions were studying the implications of a February 2019 Labour Court recommendation regarding nurses' pay and grading, and awaiting the outcome of a related contract negotiation and ballot. At its February 2019 meeting, Fórsa's National Executive Committee (NEC) noted that, while ministers had expressed the view that the Labour Court recommendation was in line with the PSSA, Fórsa officials had been assured of continued engagement between the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the ICTU Public Services Committee on the broader implications of the outcome. The NEC said this engagement must address any changes in the assumptions underlying the agreement, and noted that clause 8.4.2 of the PSSA allows for this. The executive also took the view that ongoing engagement between unions and DPER must

continue to discuss the possibility of a general pay review mechanism to allow a full examination of the adequacy of current pay arrangements, and to resolve ongoing difficulties with the smooth operation of parts of the agreement.

The union had already told the Government that other grades will expect similar opportunities to have their pay reviewed during the lifetime of the agreement. Throughout 2018 and early 2019, Fórsa reiterated its view that all public servants, and their unions, must be treated equally under the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA).

Additional superannuation contribution

Incomes were also improved in January 2019 by an increase in the threshold for payment of the 'additional superannuation contribution,' which replaced the pension levy under the PSSA. A further increase in the threshold is due in January 2020. Different arrangements apply to members of fast accrual schemes, mainly certain uniformed grades.

The agreement also saw the resolution of two outstanding 'additional superannuation contribution' anomalies. From January 2019, staff who joined the public service after January 2013, and who are in the single public service pension scheme introduced at that time, pay

only two-thirds of the additional contribution rate. This figure will fall to one-third from January 2020, reflecting the fact that the benefits of the single scheme are different from those in the older scheme. And, with effect from January 2019, the 'additional superannuation contribution' is no longer payable on non-pensionable elements of incomes, including non-pensionable overtime payments.

New entrants

The term 'new entrants' refers to people who started work in the public service, and organisations linked to it for pay purposes, after 2011 when inferior pay scales for new staff were imposed by the Government without agreement.

Although those inferior scales, which were worth 10% less at every point of each scale, were abolished at unions' insistence under the 2013 Haddington Road agreement, new entrants continued to have longer pay scales than their longer-serving colleagues, with two lower pay points at the beginning of each scale. In some grades, allowances that made up a significant part of overall income were also abolished for new entrants.

The PSSA established a process, involving the Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC), to address this problem. Following detailed discussions and inputs from Fórsa and other unions, this resulted in a solution of the pay scale issue, though not the allowances issue, in 2018. This was achieved at least two years earlier than the PSSA originally provided for.

Under these measures, new entrants will skip two points - the fourth and the eighth - on each pay scale. Fórsa welcomed this outcome because it ensures a fair outcome for new entrants regardless of their length of service. Fuller details of the outcome are available on the union's website.

Recruitment and retention issues

The Public Service Pay Commission's (PSPC) original 2017 report, which preceded the talks that led to the PSSA, identified recruitment and retention issues that had been raised by unions in respect of specific grades. Under the agreement, unions were able to make further submissions to the PSPC in respect of these grades. The Commission was tasked with analysing the causes of the problems in each area, and recommending options to deal with them, by the end of 2018. However, it was not empowered to recommend increases in pay scales.

Fórsa fought for, and welcomed, this provision in the agreement and said all professions and grades must be treated equally by the Government in its response to the Pay Commission's findings.

The Government approved the terms of reference for the PSPC's examination in October 2017, after which the PSPC invited submissions from unions representing grades identified in its original report. The union made submissions for its grades cited in the report late in 2017.

Great support from all around the country for striking workers in Roscommon County Council.



As this report went to print, the Commission had completed its examination of nursing, medical consultant, and some military grades. But its work on Fórsa grades had not begun. In November 2018, the union called on the PSPC to press on with examinations of recruitment and retention difficulties in the other areas cited in its 2017 report.

Gender pay gap

Over the last two years, Fórsa has been at the forefront of the trade union campaign for legislation on gender pay gap reporting to encourage employers into tangible action to bridge the gap, which currently stands at an average of around 14% in Ireland. In November 2018 the union was part of an Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) delegation that gave evidence to the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Justice and Equality, which was examining the general scheme of the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill. The Bill would establish mandatory reporting by employers on the gender pay gap in their organisations. The measure would first be applied in firms with 250 or more employees, but that threshold would drop to 50-plus over time. The legislation would also require reporting on differences in bonus pay, part-time pay and the pay of men and women on temporary contracts.

In June 2018, Fórsa criticised the Government for publishing its own Bill on the issue, rather than amending an existing opposition Bill that was already well advanced. The union said the move would delay the introduction of pay gap reporting. A December 2018 report by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) found that the introduction of the statutory minimum wage had reduced the gender pay gap for lower-paid workers in Ireland, but had not impacted on the wage gap at higher salary levels. This was because women are more likely than men to work in low paid jobs.

The PSSA commits management in each sector of the public service to monitor progress on gender balance in career progression.

Allowances

The legislation that gave effect to the PSSA provides for the restoration of an earlier 5% cut in allowances from October 2020.

Overtime

With effect from January 2019, the PSSA removed 'additional superannuation contributions' on non-pensionable elements of public service incomes, including non-pensionable overtime payments.

Travel and subsistence

The standard overnight rate of civil service expenses was increased to €147, in line with inflation, following agreement at Civil Service General Council in November 2018. There were no changes in motor travel or foreign subsistence rates. An official circular setting out revised subsistence allowances was issued to civil service departments and the wider public service is to follow suit as usual.



Speakers and panellists at Fórsa's 2019 'INSPIRE' training for women activists.

Pensions

Public service retirement age

The age of eligibility for the State pension was increased to 66 in 2014. Because of this, the compulsory public service retirement age of 65 meant that many public servants were forced to retire before they could draw a significant part of their retirement income. The Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA) enabled Fórsa to address this issue in discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER).

In 2018, the Government bowed to union pressure and agreed to legislate to give public servants the option to remain in employment up to age 70 if they chose. Pending the enactment of legislation, limited interim arrangements, which allowed the re-hiring of public servants who wanted to stay in work until they were eligible for the State pension, were put in place. But those who exercised this option were placed on the first point of the non-pensionable pay scale, and were not able to make further pension contributions.

The legislation that increased the compulsory retirement date to age 70 was passed into law over Christmas 2018. It also required the finance minister to outline potential remedies, within three months, for public servants who had been forced to retire between 6th December 2017 and the commencement of the new law. Fórsa had argued that these workers should be given the option to extend their 12-month retention arrangement up until age 70, and get increments due to them during this period, but the Government refused to do this.

Public servants recruited after 1st April 2004, but before January 2013, were not covered by the new legislation because they already either have no compulsory retirement age or the ability to retire up to age 70.

Public service final salary schemes

For the duration of the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), public service pensions have essentially returned to the pay-linked method of adjustment, which was in place until the onset of the financial emergency. This means that basic PSSA pay increases will be passed on to those who retire on or after 1st March 2012 in nearly all cases. The pay increases will be passed on to pre-March 2012 retirees if the pay level on which their pension is based does not exceed the existing pay level of serving staff in the same grade and pay scale point. Fórsa will seek the continuation of this arrangement in any negotiations on a successor to the PSSA.

Changes to the pension levy (now called the 'additional superannuation contribution') introduced under the PSSA saw pensions worth up to €34,132 a year exempted entirely from the additional contribution from 1st January 2018. The exemption threshold was increased to €39,000 in January 2019, and be further increased to €54,000 in January 2020.

Single career average scheme

Staff who joined the public service after January 2013 are members of the single public service pension scheme, which gives accelerated accrual of benefits on earnings up to 3.74 times the contributory state pension. This takes the form of 0.58% of gross pensionable remuneration up to this threshold without any offset for integration with the social welfare system. From the end of March 2019, earnings up to €48,457 will benefit from the formula.

Members of the single public service scheme have paid only two-thirds of the 'additional superannuation contribution' (formerly the pension levy) since January 2019. This figure will fall to one-third from January 2020, reflecting the fact that the benefits of the single scheme are different from those in the older scheme.

Under the single public service scheme, accrued benefits and pensions in payment are uprated in line with annual movements in the consumer price index (CPI), including negative movements. Since the establishment of the scheme in 2013 the following adjustments were made:

- 12 months to December 2014: -0.3%
- 12 months to December 2015: 0.1%
- 12 months to December 2016: 0.0%
- 12 months to December 2017: 0.4%
- 12 months to December 2018: 0.7%

Fórsa has repeatedly called for all members of the scheme to receive annual benefit statements. Although this is required by law, most are not receiving them at present. The union has also demanded that a scheme for the purchase and transfer of pension benefits be put in place. Transfer tables were agreed between the ICTU Public Services Committee and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 2016.

A 'single scheme estimator tool', which indicates the retirement benefits that public servants hired after 1st January 2013 can expect, became available in the autumn of 2018 following pressure from Fórsa. The tool covers standard-grade members of the single public service pension scheme who are currently employed in pensionable posts.

Treatment of parental leave

Revised arrangements for the accrual of pension while on parental leave have been in place since 9th February 2018. These mean only two days of reckonable service, rather than four, are deducted from staff who take parental

leave that includes the last working day before, and the first working day after, a weekend. It was subsequently agreed that the records of staff who took parental leave before that date should be amended on a case-by-case basis at their time of retirement.

Survivor pensions for same sex couples

The Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill, 2018 amended the 1990 Pensions Act to give a right, in certain circumstances, to spousal pension benefits for same-sex spouses and civil partners who are members of occupational pension schemes.

Auto-enrolment

Employers are to be legally obliged to include their employees in a pension scheme, and make contributions to the fund, on foot of a new Government scheme outlined in late 2018 on foot of union submissions. Ireland is currently one of only two OECD countries without mandatory earnings-related pension savings.

Fórsa backed these 'auto-enrolment' proposals at its national conference in May because they would benefit tens of thousands of workers who currently have no occupational pension, including a small but significant number of Fórsa-represented grades who deliver public and other services. The new automatic enrolment scheme targets low and middle income earners to ensure they save towards a financially secure retirement, with financial contributions from their employer and the State.

In November 2018, the Government issued a draft proposal on how the scheme could work. Under these proposals, workers would have to contribute up to 6% of their salary towards their pension pot, with employers having to match that amount. The state would then pay €1 for every €3 the worker contributes. Participation in the scheme would be compulsory for workers for six months, after which they could opt out. Workers could also suspend their contributions in limited circumstances, but employer and State contributions would also cease if an employee stopped saving.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) welcomed the proposals in principle, but said they should be strengthened significantly. Unions want older workers to be included in the scheme which, as it currently stands, would only include workers aged between 23 and 60 who earn more than €20,000 a year. Congress wants this expanded to 16-60-plus with no income threshold. Congress also wants contributions to be collected by the Revenue Commissioners in the same way as social insurance, and for the State contribution to be valued at €1 for every €2.50 a worker saves, with an employer contribution of 7% on all earnings. It also wants the employee contribution to be graduated up to €20,000 a year with a flat 5% rate on all additional earnings.

ICTU also called for State provision of annuities for small pension pots. This would take the form of a top-up payment on the State pension, similar to an earnings-related pension system. Congress recommended that the scheme be mandatory, with a time limited 'contribution holiday' facility for workers which can be claimed as a single continuous period or a number of separate periods, and says low income workers and sole traders should be automatically enrolled.

Eligibility for State pension

Fórsa was involved in the development of an Irish Congress of Trade Unions submission regarding a Government consultation paper on a 'total contributions approach to eligibility for State pensions.' The Congress submission covered the design parameters of the scheme to be introduced to calculate entitlement to the contributory state pension.

Tax relief on pension contributions

With input from Fórsa, The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) made a submission to a Government public consultation on pension reform, which is focusing on the cost of tax relief on pension contributions. Congress expressed opposition to any fundamental changes, pointing out that some 620,000 workers receive tax relief on pension contributions. Because tax supports are provided at the marginal income tax rate, workers with annual earnings above €34,550 get relief at the 40% rate. In 2017 the average wage for a full-time worker was €45,611. Any reduction in the rating of tax expenditure would, therefore, adversely affect every worker earning more than three-quarters of the average wage.



Gerard McGarrigle and Nick Smyth from the Offaly Branch.

Working conditions

Working time

Fórsa is committed to seeking to reverse increases in working time introduced in the public service during the economic crisis. Although there was no general reduction in working hours under the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), the deal gave staff the option of a permanent return to 'pre-Haddington Road' hours on the basis of a pro-rata pay adjustment. Staff were able to opt into this arrangement at the beginning of the agreement (January-April 2018) and can do so for a period after it expires (January-April 2021). The agreement also contains a provision to enable annual leave to be converted into flexitime. Although these two provisions fall far short of the restoration of additional hours introduced for some public servants under the 2013 Haddington Road agreement, they do give options to staff for whom time is more important than money. However, the uptake of both options has been relatively low.

In November 2018, Fórsa added its voice to international trade union demands for reduced working time to ensure that workers share the benefits of increased productivity from technological change. This is often expressed in terms of the introduction of a four-day week with no loss of pay. In 2018, the union organised an international conference on the

future of working time, which brought together trade unionists and working time experts from Ireland, Germany and the UK. This was part of the union's response to the large number of motions about working time submitted to Fórsa's national conference in May 2018, when an executive motion committed the union to work with others to reduce working time in all sectors of the economy.

The PSSA also commits management to ensuring that work-life balance arrangements, including flexible working, are available to the greatest possible extent across the public service. It says disputes on local and sectoral implementation of work-life balance arrangements can be processed through normal dispute resolution processes.

Parental leave

Fórsa welcomed long-overdue Government plans, announced in late 2018, to increase paid parental leave from two to seven weeks for each parent by 2021. Along with existing paid maternity and paternity leave, the change would increase to 42 weeks the amount of paid leave available to new parents during the first year of a child's life. It followed the announcement that two weeks paid parental leave would be rolled out late in 2019.

The developments stem from a recent EU directive on work-life balance, which obliges governments to increase access to paid parental leave for both parents. Payment will be at the same rate as prevailing maternity and paternity leave, which is currently €245 a week. The paid leave must be taken in the first year of a child's life.

Meanwhile, in February 2019, legislation to extend unpaid parental leave from 18 to 26 weeks and increase the child's qualifying age from eight to 12 years, was again backed by the Government after it appeared to have withdrawn support. Although Fórsa welcomed this development, reports that the proposal would be implemented over a two-year period instead of immediately were seen as disappointing. As this report went to print, the Parental Leave (Amendment) Bill had passed all stages in the Dáil and was set for detailed examination by an Oireachtas committee.

Sick leave

The critical illness protocol (CIP), which governs public service arrangements for those on long-term sick leave, was improved in early 2018 to allow more managerial discretion about what constitutes a 'critical illness' in cases where the precise medical criteria are not met. New 'CIP managerial discretion guidelines', negotiated with Fórsa and other unions, make it clear that managers have the flexibility to accept illnesses as 'critical' even if they have not quite met the threshold on the basis of medical certification. An appeals mechanism against unfavourable management decisions, with access to third party adjudication, was also put in place.

The CIP arrangements for the 'protective year' were also improved. The protective year allows staff who return to work following a critical illness to avail of remaining CIP leave for subsequent non-critical illnesses or injuries within one year of their first date of absence. This protective year period will now begin on the date of return, which means more support for those returning from a serious illness who then suffer a routine health problem in the following 12 months.

Fórsa was involved in discussions about the calculation of certain types of sick leave in the one year/four year look back periods, and on the application of temporary rehabilitation remuneration (TRR). In the absence of

agreement, the matter was referred to the Labour Court, which issued a recommendation in November 2018. As this report went to print, the union was awaiting departmental regulations to give effect to this outcome.

Outsourcing, agency staffing and related issues

Despite management attempts to water them down substantially, the PSSA retains all the outsourcing protections that unions won in negotiations that led to the earlier Croke Park (2010) and Haddington Road (2013) agreements.

The agreement also requires management to engage with unions with a view to minimising the use of agency staff. And it includes safeguards over the use of internships, clinical placements, work experience, and job activation measures, saying there must be "agreement on protocols" regarding such programmes.

Equality

Fórsa campaigned strongly over the last two years for the introduction of mandatory gender pay gap reporting to compel employers to disclose their gender pay gap. The union gave evidence as part of the ICTU delegation to the Justice and Equality Select Committee in November 2018 on the need to introduce robust legislation that encompassed all employers and required the publication of accurate data on the gender pay gap. The union also said remedial action would be needed to reduce the gender pay gap in each employment.

The union welcomed the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled, and continues to lobby Government to improve the availability of services for the people with disabilities and employment rights for disabled workers.

Fórsa welcomed the new provision of paid parental leave, which was introduced in November 2018. This welcome first step gives parents of both genders access to paid leave. It will involve a new social insurance parental benefit payment for employees and the self-employed, which is to be paid for two weeks for each parent of a child in their first year. The Government proposes to increase this to seven

extra weeks over time. This means that all new mothers and all new fathers with a child under one year of age will be able to apply for this leave, along with the normal maternity, adoptive, paternity and unpaid parental leave entitlements.

The union has established new equality networks to ensure that equality issues are discussed and progressed within workplaces, branches and divisions. The Women's Activist Network was successfully launched by ICTU General Secretary Patricia King in November 2017. Our new Disability Rights Network was launched by Minister for Disabilities Finian McGrath TD in April 2019. Further work is underway to organise national events promoting Traveller rights, greater race equality and improved rights for LGBT members.

Fórsa's workplace representative training programme continues to provide workplace equality training for a large number of local representatives. Our annual Inspire training days, which took place in 2018 and 2019, were very successful in empowering women activists to stand for election.

Health and safety

Fórsa is an active participant in the Irish Congress of Trade Union's Health and Safety Committee, which has been raising awareness of work-related mental health, and has been working with the Health and Safety Authority to increase the number of safety representatives in Irish workplaces.

The number of workplace-related accidents fell by 23% in 2018, according to the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). Thirty-seven people lost their lives in workplaces, which was ten fewer than in 2017 and the lowest figure since the establishment of the HSA in 1989.

A new European Union directive on carcinogens will be put in place in 2019. This has come as a result of more 100,000 deaths attributed to cancers caused by working conditions across EU member states each year.

Zero-hours contracts

In January 2019, Fórsa welcomed the introduction of legislation which bans zero-hour contracts in virtually all circumstances. The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2018, passed through both houses of the Oireachtas in December and was signed into law on Christmas day 2018. The legislation, which came into force in March 2019, includes provisions on minimum payments for employees called in and sent home again without work. It also requires employers to give workers basic terms of employment within five days. Unions, which had campaigned hard for these reforms, said there was still an urgent need for greater protection for workers in the so-called gig economy.

Bogus self-employment

In February 2019, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) released a policy-summarising factsheet on bogus self-employment as part of its continuing campaign on the issue. The factsheet addresses the negative impact of deliberate misclassification of employees on workers, the state and society. The term 'bogus self-employment' describes situations where employers deliberately misclassify workers as self-employed subcontractors in order to pay them less, reduce their social insurance and pension contribution requirements, dodge benefits like sick leave, and avoid meeting basic employment law protections.

Industrial relations

Local government staffing

Local government suffered the biggest staffing reduction of any sector in the public service during the economic and social crisis. The Divisional Executive has noted the significant increase in recruitment that occurred in the sector in the last two years.

Flexitime: Roscommon County Council

Members in Roscommon County Council engaged in a four-day strike in 2018 arising from management's withdrawal of flexitime facilities. The strike was the first ever strike in any Fórsa branch. A well-attended demonstration in support of the striking workers drew support from branches throughout the country, together with the Irish and international trade union movement including the eight million-strong European Federation of Public Service Unions. The dispute secured the reintroduction of flexitime in the council, although difficulties continue with the council in relation to ensuring consistent application of Workplace Relations Commission agreements on the matter.

Online testing

The Divisional Executive expressed concern at the increasing use of online testing as part of the recruitment process in the local authority sector. The committee's concerns related to the fitness for purpose of these tests, and the fact that employers were using them to shortlist staff. Long-serving staff, including those who

had years of experience acting-up into the grades to which they were seeking promotion, were denied interviews.

A ballot for industrial action on the matter received overwhelming support from members. Following this, an intervention at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) resulted in an agreement that staff with more than 12 months service would be allowed to proceed to the next stage of a promotional process without undertaking online tests. The agreement only applies to promotions up to grade VII level. While this agreement is to be welcomed, the union regrets that it did not come in time to assist many members, including clerical officers in Cavan County Council.

The union will continue its campaign to seek similar arrangements for promotions above grade VII level.

Common recruitment pool

The common recruitment pool has provided the criteria for eligibility to compete for positions to grade IV to VII for workers in the local government, health, education and allied employments for over three decades. Developments in the health and education sectors, which secured agreements to confine a proportion of posts to their own sectors, has led to a structure where local authority workers faced competition from the sectors without having reciprocal access to them.

Attempts by the LGMA to open all promotional posts to public competition were resisted by Fórsa's Local Government Division Executive Committee (DEC) which agreed to ballot the relevant members for industrial action.

Members' overwhelming support prompted the LGMA to alter its proposal to include the option of 50% of the promotional posts being filled by competitions confined to eligible staff in the local government sector.

This proposal was also rejected by the DEC which, in December 2018, agreed to a joint referral of the dispute to the WRC. A WRC hearing was convened in February 2019. At this hearing, the union agreed that the proportion of promotional posts to be filled by confined competition should be in line with either the education sector or the Civil Service. The hearing was adjourned to allow the LGMA to consider the union's position. The outcome of any negotiations will be the subject of a ballot of relevant members.

Job evaluation

In keeping with successive conference decisions, the DEC sought the introduction of an agreed job evaluation scheme for the local government sector. This is in line with Fórsa achievements in the health and higher education sectors. An agreed job evaluation scheme would allow employers and unions an agreed system to ensure that any worker is being paid the right rate of pay for the job.

However, this is being vigorously opposed by local authority employers. In view of this, the DEC referred the matter for third party intervention. No progress was made on the dispute at the Workplace Relations Commission, and it was referred to the Labour Court, which heard the case in October 2017. The Labour Court finding required the union to provide a 'business case' for an agreed job evaluation scheme. The union commissioned an independent business case and has asked the Labour Court to establish arrangements to finalise its deliberations on the dispute.

Outsourcing

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA) maintains the protections of previous agreements in relation to outsourcing. Essentially these require employers to notify unions of intentions to outsource core work, which cannot be done on the basis of lower labour costs.

Fórsa has been engaged in a number of disputes with local authorities about the failure to adhere to the terms of the agreement, which allows the local authority oversight group to determine whether the parties are conforming to the terms of the agreement.

In 2018, a dispute in relation to the central claims unit in Dublin City Council was satisfactorily resolved. As this report went to print, a dispute in South Dublin County Council, concerning legal work in relation to arrears, has been referred to the oversight group.

Water services

In 2017, Ervia, the holding company for Irish Water, unveiled proposals to establish a single entity for the provision of water services in Ireland by 2021. This plan would terminate the service level agreements with local authorities, and envisages the transfer of almost 3,500 workers from local authorities to Irish Water.

Fórsa, along with other ICTU unions, met representatives of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, along with Irish Water, Ervia, the CCMA and the LGMA, to ascertain their positions on the proposal. In September 2018 the director general of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) reported on an exercise to scope the issues involved in the Irish Water proposal. The report acknowledged the consensus of the unions.

Separately, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government announced the Government's intention to separate Ervia from Irish Water by 2023, and to establish Irish Water as a commercial state board. In December 2018 the Minister asked unions to engage in a process on the proposal.

After consideration of the invitation, and following a series of meetings of members and a divisional council meeting in February 2019, the DEC agreed to engage in the process based on a series of undertakings for the employers. Principal among these is that there is no predetermined outcome of the process. Fórsa along with the other ICTU unions has sought a constitutional referendum to maintain water services in democratic public control and a plan for the maintenance of a vibrant local government system.



Wicklow Branch Chair
Karen Boyle.

The union has demanded and secured agreement that the legal authority to compulsorily transfer staff to a new entity would not be used in any process.

The full text of the ICTU letter agreeing to enter discussions is included as Appendix Two of this report.

Maximo

The union secured agreement on payment of an allowance for certain grades who hold and operate Maximo hand-held terminals.

Regional capital offices

Irish Water has produced proposals for the development of regional capital offices. Fórsa has said that it will be difficult to advance these while the proposal to establish a single entity remains unresolved.

Local authority laboratories

Irish Water has tabled proposals for laboratory services. Fórsa has stated that it will be difficult to advance these while the proposal to establish a single entity remains unresolved.

Libraries

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) intervened in a major dispute in the library service in 2018. A wide range of issues including staffing, amalgamated libraries, library management systems, staffless libraries, promotions, flexitime, health and safety, qualifications, non-professional grade V posts and branch librarians, had remained unresolved. A comprehensive ballot for industrial action was overwhelmingly supported by library members.

A draft agreement was proposed by the WRC in April 2018. It provided guarantees in relation to staffing levels, assurances that staffless libraries would close if staffing levels were not maintained, promotions confined to individual local authorities, the filling of all county librarian posts, and a path to flexitime for library workers. The agreement was accepted by a ballot of members in June 2018. Discussions are ongoing within branches on the implementation of the agreement.

Fire services

The DEC requested the fire services sub-committee of Fórsa to consider reorganising its structures along the lines of similar groups within the union. The committee has been concerned with matters relating to continuing professional development, the roster, the introduction of new rosters, and changes in incident command procedures. Fórsa is represented on the Fire Services National Oversight Implementation Group (FSNOIG) by National Secretary Peter Nolan and Eddie Ryan.

Technicians

The technicians' vocational group has submitted draft terms of reference to the LGMA for a comprehensive revision of the role of technicians in local authorities. A number of branches have completed reviews of grading structures for technicians in their local authorities. A major national meeting of technicians took place to review these developments in March 2019.

Environmental technicians/scientists

The group is seeking to ensure adequate promotional opportunities for these grades. A Workplace Relations Commission conciliation conference requested the LGMA to give consideration to the union's proposals. A response from the LGMA is awaited.

Veterinary services

LGMA proposals to establish a regional structure for veterinary services were opposed by the group on the basis that they would not adequately protect local authority services. Following a series of constructive meetings with the LGMA, the proposal was put on hold. Fórsa has indicated to the LGMA that it is willing to consider proposals that will introduce further efficiencies for the service in advance of service level agreement discussions with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland.

Arts officers

The union has been pursuing upgradings for seven arts officers who were not graded at grade VII. Following a claim lodged to LANC, the LGMA confirmed that it had no objection to the posts being graded at grade VII level, but that this was a matter for individual local authorities. Progress has been made in all authorities except Cavan and Monaghan. It is likely that these matters will be referred for third party resolution if progress cannot be made locally.

Archivists

The LGMA has rejected a Fórsa claim for upgrading of staff in the archivist service. The group is considering its next steps.

Museum curators

The LGMA has rejected a claim from Fórsa for upgrading of museum curator staff. The group is considering its next steps.

Civil defence officers

Fórsa has sought clerical support for the wide range of additional administrative duties being assigned to civil defence officers. The group is also seeking clarity in relation to the liability to work after hours. The group requested Fórsa to undertake industrial action if the matters are not resolved. A meeting with the LGMA is outstanding.

Social workers and housing welfare officers

Fórsa has expressed concerns over grading and future funding of social work services in local authorities. Local authority social workers have reformed as part of the national social workers vocational group. A number of registered social workers and housing welfare officers have been denied access to the professionally qualified pay scale. The LGMA has agreed to a request from Fórsa to meet to address these issues.



The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) intervened in a major dispute in the library service in 2018 after a ballot for industrial action was overwhelmingly supported by library members.

Appendices

Appendix one Salary scales



Head of Division Peter Nolan at the launch of the #MorePowerToYou campaign for improved local services.

Revision of salaries with effect from 1st January 2019 (unless otherwise stated).

Local authority operative scales

Director of Service/Executive Manager DCC
92,272 - 96,466 - 100,661 - 104,853 - 109,049

Senior Executive Officer/County & City Librarian/Head of Information Systems/Financial Accountant/Management Accountant/Financial & Management Accountant
66,741 - 67,338 - 69,873 - 72,410 - 74,951 - 77,464 - 79,994 - LSI 1 82,864 - LSI 2 85,725

Grade 7 - Administrative Officer/Senior Executive Librarian
48,978 - 50,176 - 51,576 - 52,979 - 54,384 - 55,637 - 56,922 - 58,166 - 59,405 - LSI 1 61,534 - LSI 2 63,672

Grade 6 - Senior Staff Officer/Executive Librarian/Senior Legal Assistant/Clerk of Works/Building Inspector
46,770 - 47,898 - 49,260 - 51,818 - 53,345 - LSI 1 55,246 - LSI 2 57,157

Grade 5 - Staff Officer/Librarian/Legal Assistant
42,041 - 43,378 - 44,716 - 46,055 - 47,392 - LSI 1 48,942 - LSI 2 50,490

Grade 4 - Assistant Staff Officer/Senior Library Assistant
27,567 - 29,451 - 32,285 - 34,050 - 35,595 - 37,087 - 39,102 - 40,561 - 42,041 - LSI 1 43,403 - LSI 2 44,771

Grade 3 - Clerical Officer/Library Assistant
23,587 - 25,136 - 25,519 - 26,293 - 27,423 - 28,557 - 29,690 - 30,513 - 31,603 - 32,689 - 33,459 - 34,538 - 35,621 - 37,661 - LSI 39,109

Branch Librarian (Hourly Rate*)
12.22 - 13.02 - 13.22 - 13.62 - 14.20 - 14.79 - 15.38 - 15.80 - 16.37 - 16.93 - 17.33 - 17.89 - 18.45 - 19.51 - LSI 20.26

*Hourly rate for a Branch Librarian is based on the Library Assistant salary scale. The rate above, effective from 01/01/2019, is based on a 37 hour working week. Local authorities should amend the hourly rate as appropriate to the authority's working week.

County Engineer
79,944 - 82,817 - 85,683 - 88,554 - 91,424 - LSI 1 94,444 - LSI 2 97,460

Senior Engineer
74,695 - 76,464 - 78,227 - 79,993 - 81,758 - 83,532 - LSI 1 86,198 - LSI 2 88,868

Senior Executive Engineer

64,548 - 66,530 - 67,476 - 69,404 - 71,339 - 73,265 - 75,208 - LSI 1 77,646 - LSI 2 80,079

Executive Engineer

48,691 - 50,462 - 52,233 - 54,008 - 55,783 - 57,556 - 59,331 - 61,097 - 62,878 - 64,646 - LSI 1 66,685 - LSI 2 67,684

Assistant Engineer

38,081 - 40,457 - 42,200 - 43,963 - 45,712 - 47,464 - 49,224 - 50,976 - 52,726 - 54,481 - 56,244 - LSI 1 58,047 - LSI 2 59,852

Graduate Engineer

30,874 - 33,554 - 37,169 - 40,464

Project Resident Engineer

90,481

Senior Resident Engineer

81,686

Resident Engineer

From: 61,900 to: 69,397

Assistant Resident Engineer

From: 44,435 to: 61,498

Graduate Resident Engineer

From: 33,773 to: 44,435

Site Technician Level 1

From: 50,134 to: 54,897

Site Technician Level 2

From: 42,613 to: 50,134

Chief Technician

46,407 - 47,522 - 48,835 - 50,150 - 51,472 - 52,649 - 53,850 - 55,010 - 56,162 - LSI 1 58,172 - LSI 2 60,191

Senior Executive Technician

44,906 - 45,831 - 47,097 - 49,240 - 50,532 - LSI 1 52,330 - LSI 2 54,137

Executive Technician

42,214 - 43,271 - 44,355 - 45,432 - 46,515 - 47,591 - LSI 1 49,148 - LSI 2 50,699

Technician Grade I

39,408 - 40,065 - 40,923 - 41,785 - 42,628 - 43,485 - 44,266 - LSI 1 45,709 - LSI 2 47,156

Technician Grade II

26,773 - 28,218 - 29,635 - 30,405 - 31,453 - 32,495 - 33,199 - 34,241 - 35,260 - 36,305 - 37,340 - 38,320 - 39,408 - LSI 1 40,689 - LSI 2 41,958

Senior Social Worker

66,190 - 68,096 - 70,976 - 73,853 - 76,733 - 79,613

Social Worker

34,022 - 36,664 - 37,687 - 39,621 - 41,627 - 43,630 - 45,615 - 47,646 - 49,647 - 51,182 - 52,718 - LSI 53,738

Professionally Qualified Housing Welfare Officer

45,019 - 47,171 - 49,322 - 51,479 - 53,627 - 55,776 - 57,930 - LSI 59,054

Housing Welfare Officer

35,399 - 37,988 - 39,219 - 41,108 - 43,084 - 45,042 - 46,982 - 48,940 - 50,900 - 52,362 - 53,843 - LSI 54,882

General operatives and related grades (outside the Dublin area)

Foreman

621.73 - after 0.5 years 625.20 - after 1.5 years 628.36 - after 2.5 years 630.17 - after 6.5 years 631.35 - after 7.5 years 633.16 - after 8.5 years 635.09 - after 9.5 years 637.14 - after 10.5 years 639.02 - after 11.5 years 640.92

Driver Plant Operator A

609.20 - after 0.5 years 612.62 - after 1.5 years 615.57 - after 2.5 years 617.35 - after 3.5 years 619.11 - after 4.5 years 620.90 - after 5.5 years 622.53 - after 6.5 years 624.41 - after 7.5 years 626.20 - after 8.5 years 628.07 - after 9.5 years 629.99

Light Equipment Operator

591.16 - after 0.5 years 594.34 - after 1.5 years 597.37 - after 2.5 years 599.03 - after 3.5 years 600.73 - after 4.5 years 602.45 - after 5.5 years 604.12 - after 6.5 years 605.85 - after 7.5 years 607.63 - after 8.5 years 609.43 - after 9.5 years 611.39 - after 10.5 years 613.26 - after 11.5 years 615.03

Refuse Collector

595.88 - after 0.5 years 599.03 - after 1.5 years 602.09 - after 2.5 years 603.76 - after 3.5 years 605.37 - after 4.5 years 607.07 - after 5.5 years 608.77 - after 6.5 years 610.56 - after 7.5 years 612.30 - after 8.5 years 614.08 - after 9.5 years 616.01 - after 10.5 years 617.89 - after 11.5 years 619.67

Ganger

600.79 - after 0.5 years 604.14 - after 1.5 years 607.14 - after 2.5 years 609.03 - after 3.5 years 610.70 - after 4.5 years 612.44 - after 5.5 years 614.29 - after 6.5 years 616.01 - after 7.5 years 617.88 - after 8.5 years 619.90 - after 9.5 years 621.66 - after 10.5 years 623.65 - after 11.5 years 625.51

Driver Plant Operator B

623.04 - after 0.5 years 626.31 - after 1.5 years 629.61 - after 2.5 years 631.41 - after 6.5 years 632.49 - after 7.5 years 634.38 - after 8.5 years 636.33 - after 9.5 years 638.29 - after 10.5 years 640.24 - after 11.5 years 642.21

Mobile Library Driver/Assistant

629.76 - after 0.5 years 632.96 - after 1.5 years 636.19 - after 2.5 years 637.99 - after 3.5 years 639.75 - after 4.5 years 641.53 - after 5.5 years 643.30 - after 6.5 years 645.17 - after 7.5 years 647.02 - after 8.5 years 648.89 - after 9.5 years 650.81 - after 10.5 years 652.84 - after 11.5 years 654.69

Water & Sewerage Caretaker Grade 3

621.73 - after 0.5 years 625.20 - after 1.5 years 628.36 - after 2.5 years 630.17 - after 6.5 years 631.35 - after 7.5 years 633.16 - after 8.5 years 635.09 - after 9.5 years 637.14 - after 10.5 years 639.02 - after 11.5 years 640.92

Water & Sewerage Caretaker Grade 5

666.61 - after 1 year 673.33 - after 2 years 679.88 - after 3 years 687.01 - after 4 years 694.12 - after 5 years 701.37 - after 6 years 708.44 - after 7 years 715.11 - after 8 years 721.74 - after 9 years 726.17

General Services Supervisor

729.24 - after 1 year 744.63 - after 2 years 759.99 - after 3 years 775.82 - after 4 years 791.56 - after 5 years 807.27 - after 6 years 823.06 - after 7 years 838.70 - after 8 years 854.38 - after 9 years 869.99

General Operative/Labourer

529.87 - after 0.5 years 542.50 - after 1.5 years 580.75 - after 2.5 years 583.87 - after 3.5 years 586.87 - after 4.5 years 588.58 - after 5.5 years 590.31 - after 6.5 years 592.00 - after 7.5 years 593.69 - after 8.5 years 595.47 - after 9.5 years 597.24 - after 10.5 years 599.12 - after 11.5 years 600.95 - after 12.5 years 602.85 - after 13.5 years 604.66

Part-time fire service personnel

Part-time Firefighter

0 - 2 Years 7,895
2 - 5 Years 8,773
5 - 10 Years 9,838
10+ 10,812

Station Officer

0 - 5 Years 16,121
5 - 10 Years 18,080
10+ 19,868

Sub Officer/Driver Mechanic

0 - 5 Years 12,203
5 - 10 Years 13,687
10+ 15,040

Day Rate

Drill Rate 20.83
1st Hour 41.66
Subsequent hours 20.83

Night/Weekend

1st Hour 83.32
Subsequent hours 41.66

Appendix two

ICTU letter regarding Irish water services



Photo: dreamstime.com



8 February 2019

Mr. Eoghan Murphy TD
Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
Custom House
Dublin 1
D01 W6X0

Dear Minister

You wrote to the unions on 11th December 2018 setting out your view that engagement should commence on all matters relating to the Irish Water transformation plan. In this letter, you referenced the concerns raised by the unions and reiterated your belief that these concerns could be addressed in a multi-strand process as follows:

- Strand One - would seek to develop an understanding on local government's future sustainability and revitalisation;
- Strand Two - would be concerned with consulting the unions on the wording and timing of a constitutional referendum on the future ownership of the public water service;
- Strand Three - would examine the future corporate status, structure and governance of the proposed single public water utility;
- Strand Four - would address all employment and industrial relations issues that arise in the context of the Irish Water proposal.

These strands of discussion have been proposed in the context of assurances that have already been given to the unions which include:

- That there would not be a predetermined outcome to these discussions;
- That there is a strong commitment to a viable and sustainable future of local authorities;
- That there could be a meaningful engagement on the status, structure and governance of the proposed single public water utility;
- A commitment that Government will support the holding of a constitutional referendum on the future ownership of the public water service;

Patricia King
General Secretary

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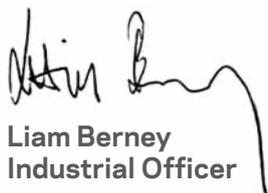
- An assurance that the provisions of Section 19 of the Water Services Act (No.2) of 2013 would not be invoked; and
- That while the discussions are ongoing, all existing agreements will be honoured.

Over the last number of weeks, the unions have been consulting with their members on what you have proposed. At this point, we are willing to commence engagement along the lines you have suggested. However, it is the position of the unions that any final agreement must deal comprehensively with all of the issues that we have raised. To be clear, we will not be in a position to conclude an overall agreement and ballot until the issues contained in each of the strands are addressed to our satisfaction.

I would suggest that initial meetings of each strand be convened and that discussions on each strand be held in parallel.

I have copied this letter to representatives of management in the LGMA and Irish Water and to the relevant officials in your own department and to the the WRC.

Yours sincerely



Liam Berney
Industrial Officer

Patricia King
General Secretary

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