



LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL SERVICES DIVISION

Growing Fórsa
Fighting for Local
Government Services

**FÓRSA**

REPORT **2021-2023**

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Organisation

Divisional Executive Committee

The following people were elected to the divisional executive committee (DEC) for the period 2021-2023:

Tom Browne (Galway H&LG branch), Pat Considine (Clare H&LG branch), Julie Flood (Dublin City LG branch, also elected Cathaoirleach), Finbarr Keaney (Leitrim H&LG branch), Ray Kennedy (Offaly H&LG branch), Pádraig McGivney (Cavan H&LG branch, also elected as 3rd divisional representative on the National Executive Committee), Ann Marie Maher (Laois H&LG branch), Liam O'Briain (Cork H&LG branch), Gerry O'Quigley (Dun Laoghaire Rathdown branch), Sharon Ryan (Wexford H&LG branch), Vincent Savage (Tipperary LG branch), Seamus Smith (Kerry H&LG branch), Catherine White (South Dublin branch), Michael Whymys (Fingal branch also elected as Leas Cathaoirleach).

Séamus Smith resigned from his position on the Divisional Executive Committee to take up a position in Fórsa in July 2021.

Catherine White resigned from her position on the Divisional Executive Committee in December 2021.

In May 2022, Julie Flood was elected at the biennial conference to the position of national treasurer. Leas Cathaoirleach Michael Whymys took up the position of Cathaoirleach and Pádraig McGivney took up the position of Leas Cathaoirleach.

In February 2022, Margaret O'Dwyer and Noel McCarthy were nominated to fill the vacancies created by the resignation of Catherine White and Séamus Smith.

Bernard McNeely took up the position of third divisional representative on the NEC, in July 2022.

Kevin O'Malley was elected to the Divisional Executive Committee in July 2022.

Divisional council

The Divisional Council comprises of one delegate from each branch with members in the division and the divisional executive committee. The council meets quarterly throughout the year.

Staffing

Peter Nolan retired in July 2021 and Dessie Robinson was appointed national secretary for the division.

Richy Carrothers was appointed national secretary and took over the role in June 2022 following the retirement of Dessie Robinson. Richy serves as national secretary/head of division for Local Government and Local Services and the Municipal Employees' Divisions.

Divisional strategy

The Local Government and Local Services Divisional Executive Committee agreed in September 2022 that all industrial priorities for the division must be underpinned by a membership growth and capacity/density building strategy. The division is committed to ensuring that our work complements and contributes to the overall union effort to achieving the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan has a core mission to create:

- A union where members feel involved
- A union where activists feel empowered
- A union where staff feel heard and involved.

The division's bargaining objectives and priorities are aligned with activities aimed at growing the union by developing strong branches and member involvement in activity designed to improve pay, conditions, and influence. The division reviews membership levels regularly and has agreed membership growth targets.

EPSU local and regional government

Fórsa is a member of EPSU, the European Federation of Public Service Unions, representing eight million workers in 54 countries. Ríchy Carrothers represents Fórsa on its Local and Regional Government Standing Committee.

Local Authority National Council (LANC)

Fórsa national secretary, Ríchy Carrothers is the union side secretary to the Local Authority National Council (LANC), the negotiating forum made up of recognised trade unions and the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA). The group is chaired by the WRC's Damien Cannon. The local authority oversight group reviews the implementation of the sectoral elements of the Building Momentum national pay agreement.

Fórsa has sought to improve structures and engagement to ensure that national bargaining arrangements in the sector are functional and fit for purpose.

Future of local government services

Fórsa, SIPTU and Connect, representing over 30,000 local authority workers, continued to mobilise the *More Power to You* campaign, for increased revenue and powers for local authorities. The campaign strives to strengthen and improve local government services to communities and citizens and focuses on reforms covering waste, water, housing and energy services.

Remunicipalisation of domestic waste services

Fórsa wrote to all 31 local authorities seeking an opportunity to make a presentation at their council meetings, and several facilitated a virtual presentation, which was well received by all parties. Most expressed interest in the outcome of the research on the remunicipalisation of domestic waste.

At Dublin City Council (DCC), a working group involving the unions commissioned the research division of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), to submit a proposal in respect of the remunicipalisation of domestic waste. The request covered two key areas for the research as follows:

1. A comparative analysis that reviews DCC's waste collection system to other comparable European cities, with specified criteria including coverage, cost of service, quality of service, public satisfaction, terms and conditions of employment and environmental impact.

2. Consideration of evidence in the context of waste management arrangements in Dublin city and Ireland, including a description of the current legal and regulatory context. It is intended that the research will draw attention to legislative and other changes required to enable DCC to re-enter the domestic waste collection service.

The research team indicated that the work would be carried out in two phases. Phase one was completed by February 2022, reviewing the available data. The initial report is to be discussed with the SPC sub-committee to enable an informed decision on the approach to be taken in phase two.

Key finding – phase one

In general terms, it has been challenging to identify directly comparable data from the cities chosen for this project. Within each location there are varying administrative structures. There are also variances in how and why data is collected, making it difficult to establish uniformity across the agreed criteria for a comparative analysis. In addition, there are significant variances in terms of population, population density, and housing types, all of which influence how waste collection methodologies are determined.

There are also important historical, cultural, political and economic reasons why waste management has evolved the way it has in the various jurisdictions. Notwithstanding these limitations, the research has identified some key findings and data to inform discussions on a more detailed phase two analysis. These are:

- A kerbside waste collection service is availed of by 82% of households in the DCC administrative area. This compares with 100% of households for the other cities assessed.
- The proportion of households living in apartments, rather than houses, in the comparative cities is very high, almost the reverse of the situation in Dublin. This has a significant impact on waste collection.
- The average volume of waste produced by households in Dublin appears to be higher than in other cities studied.
- All households in the other cities examined

are required to pay for waste collection, with those on low incomes supported through social security.

- Transition to a more environmentally friendly approach to waste collection is of moderate priority in the comparator cities. For example, in Stockholm, the extent to which potential contractors use environmentally friendly vehicles is taken into consideration in the evaluation process.
- Data on traffic congestion attributable to waste collection vehicles is not monitored by any of the cities. Early starts are a tacit acknowledgement that waste collection does cause some traffic challenges and that having streets free of traffic allows for more efficient collection. However, early starts may also suit employees.
- Data from two operators suggest that householders in Dublin city pay on average €243 per annum in waste collection costs. In Copenhagen, the average is €284, in Oslo €258, and in Salzburg €232. Average annual waste costs in Stockholm are significantly lower (€88), though the 10% of households living in houses it's €205.
- Average salary figures are significantly higher in all of the comparator cities. Data on the cost of living shows that Stockholm and Dublin are very similar, with Copenhagen somewhat higher and Oslo is about 20% higher. When rent is factored in, Dublin is on a par with Copenhagen and much closer to Oslo.

The phase two report has been completed and subsequently presented to DCC. There will be a formal trade union launch of the report on the 10th May 2023 and it will be shared with branches at that point.

Veterinary services

A dispute arose in 2020 regarding the continued provision of services by the local authority veterinary inspectors under a service level agreement. The union had raised concerns regarding the failure of the Food Safety Authority Ireland (FSAI) and the County and City Management Association (CCMA) to agree to the renewal of the existing service level agreement beyond September 2020. The intention was to redeploy staff under transfer of undertakings (TUPE) legislation.

Following a ballot of members to take industrial action, up to and including strike action, the union secured an agreement that ensured funding for the service level agreement to continue throughout 2021. Discussion would continue on seeking an alternative to the service level agreement. The LGMA has proposed that the staff would be redeployed to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. A number of meetings have taken place with the staff, the LGMA and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Management to date has failed to respond to issues pertaining to a long-running dispute in respect of professional added years. To that end, the union was left with no option but to pause all engagement on the prospective transfer to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in order to protect the position of members. The instruction remains in place as management have failed to respond meaningfully to the union's concerns.

Fórsa continues to raise concerns about 11 wholetime veterinary inspector positions that became vacant over the last five years. Out of a complement of approximately 40, only one has been replaced. The remaining posts have been vacant for between three months and five years, leaving a severely weakened service with no wholetime local authority veterinary presence in five counties and a much-reduced presence in five other counties.

Civil defence officers

The union has been actively attempting to address member concerns in respect of the control drug policy which would result in the unilateral change to contracts of employment, making civil defence officers the "responsible" person. Management representatives negotiated with the Department of Defence and the national civil defence branch about the introduction of a memorandum of understanding which would govern the HPRRA registration and license for controlled drugs without the engagement of civil defence officers. This is a clear breach of contract and industrial norms. The union constantly requested that management furnish Fórsa with documentation in respect of the negotiations and the memorandum.

The document never materialised. Utilising FOI (freedom of information) legislation, Fórsa sought details directly from the Department of Defence. The department duly released all the information that had previously been denied to members and a non-cooperation instruction remains in place.

Professional committees

The pandemic significantly impacted Fórsa's organisational ability to engage meaningfully with professional committees. The divisional executive committee has decided that we need to reboot and relaunch many of the committees with the view to assessing and refocussing on industrial priorities. The division intends on re-establishing these important committees to advise and shape our work with the union and the sector more widely.

Fire services

The Fire Services National Oversight Implementation Group (FSNOIG) continues. Fórsa represents firefighters and senior officers in Dublin Fire Brigade and senior officers outside Dublin on FSNOIG. The group agreed to separate the retained firefighters and the full-time firefighters. The retained firefighters' group is chaired by David Begg, and the full-time group is chaired by Kevin Duffy. Fórsa has representation on both these groups and continues to represent members on issues including the review of internal organisational fire service structures.

Water

Fórsa has been involved in discussions with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the LGMA and Irish Water following the proposals by Irish Water to transfer 3,500 local authority staff to a new single entity. Prior to entering negotiations, Fórsa sought and secured a commitment from the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage that no legal measures would be used to compulsorily transfer staff to the new entity.

Following several meetings in early 2021, six days were set aside by the WRC in July 2021 to deal with the industrial relations strand on pay, pensions and related. No real progress was made. Talks adjourned until November 2021. Irish Water produced a working document in November 2021 implying the transfer of staff would take place despite the union sides insistence that talks had only taken place on the basis that there would be no forced transfer of staff to Irish Water. The document contained a provision that Irish Water would take complete control of staffing by 2026. Management made a number of presentations on the pay structure currently operating for staff working directly for Irish Water. Unions outlined their concerns around timelines. Management is to review its document and revert.

The unions met with the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O' Brien, to discuss the various strands of the transformation process. Following that meeting, unions received a paper from the department which commented on each strand as follows:

- **Strand one: Constitutional referendum**
The Minister committed to holding a referendum. Preference is to hold a referendum in conjunction with a referendum on the right to housing. No date or schedule for a referendum has yet been proposed, despite Government plans for a referendum on gender equality in November 2023.
- **Strand two: The future of local government**
No response to key union asks but acknowledgement that numbers employed have not recovered to 2009 levels.
- **Strand three: Status and governance of the new entity**
The entity will be publicly owned with oversight by a board and accountable to the Oireachtas and the comptroller and auditor general. Defining the new entity as an "authority". Composition of the board is under consideration, and it is expected to have a worker representative on the board.

Discussions on the WRC-facilitated process have been protracted over many years. Talks intensified and the WRC subsequently issued the "Framework for the future delivery of water services on the 23rd June 2022."

The framework will ensure that:

- There will be no compulsory transfers of staff to Irish Water
- There will be no compulsory redundancies
- Existing pay is protected, with the chance to earn more through individual or collective Irish Water performance rewards
- Existing pension benefits are legally protected, with all local authority service taken into account for pension purposes
- Other working conditions, including hours of work, annual leave, sick pay, allowances, overtime, and work location will also remain the same or be enhanced
- Staff who transfer to Irish Water will receive a €3,000 incentive payment
- Local authority water workers can also opt to remain in local authority employment on their existing terms and conditions
- There is a voluntary redundancy option for local authority water workers
- Collective bargaining rights will remain in place.

Three other strands were outstanding as part of this process and to that end, the union side continued to engage with officials from the Department and the Minister directly. The department issued a document “Irish Water Transformation – The Wider Policy Context” on the 18th July 2022.

Draft Master Agreement

The ICTU has written to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on-behalf of the group of local authority water service unions expressing concern that the final master agreement on the transfer of water services from local authorities to Uisce Éireann fails to take account of feedback provided by unions.

The ‘Master Agreement’ is essentially an asset and business transfer process between local authorities and Uisce Éireann, designed to replace the service level agreement which has been in place since the national water body was created, and unions had been invited to provide feedback on its content. Trade unions have been consulted on this framework but are not being requested to agree or otherwise.

In a letter sent to the department in February 2023, unions outlined a number of the provisions set out in the agreement that were an unnecessary intrusion by Uisce Éireann into the employment relationship between staff who do not wish to transfer, and their local authority. We also raised concerns regarding the maintenance of staff files and are of the view that what is stated in the document could lead to significant breaches of general data protection regulations (GDPR).

Fórsa has advised members of its concerns, primarily contained in section five of the draft ‘Master Agreement’ to continue with existing reporting relationships. The union will continue to work with the implementation of the framework as the most effective tool to protect our members and their pay and conditions.

Referendum

Government has stated that the public ownership of water reflects the clear will of the Irish people and is firmly established as a core principle attaching to delivery of water services. All parties to the water sector transformation process recognise the fundamental importance attaching to public ownership as a core principle at the heart of the reform process.

Having consulted with his colleagues in Government, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage has signalled his willingness to support a referendum on public ownership.

It is most disappointing that Government has yet to honour its commitment to hold a referendum on the public ownership of water. Fórsa and other unions have advocated that Government seize the opportunity to hold the referendum to forever enshrine the public ownership of water in the Constitution at the same time as the gender equality referendum scheduled for November 2023.

Governance of Irish Water

Strong oversight and accountability arrangements go hand-in-hand with public ownership and are highly valued by Government and unions alike.

The Government has now approved the publication of the Water Services (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2022. This Bill will provide for the separation of Irish Water from the Ervia Group as planned in 2023. It also provides that it will be known by the Irish name Uisce Éireann. The bill will be enacted in the Autumn.

In anticipation of this planned legislative reform, separation has already effectively been put in place on a non-statutory basis following the recent appointment of a CEO for Irish Water. The Bill also provides a role for the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee in scrutinizing Irish Water. Patricia King, former general secretary of the ICTU was nominated by Congress to the board of Uisce Éireann.

This legislation will reference Uisce Éireann as being a state authority – the “national authority for water services”. This gives proper recognition to the nature of Uisce Éireann/Irish Water as it, in effect, inherited local water services authority functions, including statutory powers of direction and compulsory purchase.

Industrial relations

The future of local government

The Minister noted the concerns raised by the unions relating to the continued and future role of local authorities and the outsourcing of services which would have been traditionally undertaken by them.

The document is light on detail and commitment. It fails to meaningfully detail any plans to reinvigorate the sector and the services provided to citizens and communities. The latest offering from Government on the revitalisation of the sector is disappointing. It is an opportunity lost to reimagine local democracy and local service provision.

The unions continue to drive the response by reinvigorating the *More Power to You* campaign.

Job evaluation

In November 2017, the Labour Court rejected the union claim for the implementation of job evaluation in the sector on the basis that the business case had not been made. The Court suggested that it would be prepared to consider such a case if made by the union. The Court also noted that the LGMA was to conclude job descriptions for clerical/administrative grades within six months of the hearing. The union business case was finalised.

The long-awaited return to due process on job evaluation in the sector recommenced under the auspices of the WRC on the 8th July 2022. The LGMA confirmed to the WRC that, by October 2022, they would produce the job descriptions and furnish a written response to the union business case.

Fórsa was back at the WRC on the 26th January 2023. The meeting ended as soon as it began and the LGMA, advised the WRC, that it had no intention of negotiating or conciliating on the dispute.

To that end, the DEC voted unanimously to commence a ballot of members for industrial action. The ballot commenced on the 30th March 2023.

Blended working

The union concluded a blended working framework in June 2022 with the sector. The framework includes a policy review. Since the policy issued nationally, the union has been focussed on progressing implementation of blended working across the 31 city and county councils.

Many local authorities are tabling two remote days per week on the blended working policy. There had been no indications previously from management that this was the prevailing view. Fórsa has had it confirmed by the LGMA via the WRC that there was no policy decision or instruction nationally that remote working should be restricted to two days. The application of blended working is subject to local consultation.

Updates will issue at conference and the DEC has outlined a strategy for the next steps to embed blended working in the local government sector.

PRSI classification

Approximately 130 staff are affected by the misclassification between A and D stamp in Dublin City Council, resulting in a huge financial disadvantage to workers and their families. This issue is of grave concern to many Fórsa members in Dublin City Council.

The Department of Social Protection has disallowed the right to appeal for one Fórsa member – incorrectly in the union's view – and that matter is now with Counsel. Dublin City Council has engaged the services of Alex White SC and we are awaiting the outcome of his deliberations from the employer's perspective.

Confined recruitment

The new system of confined promotion competitions for local authority grades IV to VII, was introduced in January 2021 and will be fully operational when all current panels have been exhausted.

The agreement provides that 20% of promotion posts are confined to eligible candidates in their own local authority, while 50% of promotion posts are confined to eligible candidates in the local authority sector nationwide, and 30% of promotion posts are open to public competition.

The agreement increases the percentage of grade IV posts to be filled by confined competition from 50% to 70%. The union is seeking to have the same application of a confined competition operate for the positions of senior executive officer in local authorities. Fórsa is going to conciliation for an initial hearing in the WRC. The LGMA is reluctant to consider the claim, and it is likely that the Labour Court will decide the outcome.

Flexitime

Fórsa lodged a claim for a nationwide scheme of flexitime, similar to the civil service scheme, which has 1.5 day's flexi-leave per flexi period. The LGMA rejected the union's claim. As flexitime was suspended during the covid period and the introduction of blended working, it was decided not to pursue the matter at that point. If local authority staff are treated less favourably regarding flexible working, following the introduction of the blended working policy, Fórsa will pursue the claim through the WRC.

Outstanding awards

Fórsa had sought a review of the mechanism for outstanding awards to senior executive officers under the public service stability agreement (PSSA). Sectoral bargaining measures in the building momentum agreement provide a mechanism allowing the senior executive officer pay scale to be adjusted to ensure the outstanding benchmarking award could be pursued in a future public service agreement.

Libraries

Members accepted the national libraries agreement which covered staffing, amalgamated libraries, library management systems, 'my open library', promotions, flexitime, health and safety, qualifications, non-professional grade V posts and branch librarians.

The agreement ensured that 'my open library' would not be used to reduce staffing levels, and a joint union-management review of the scheme took place between June and August 2020. A review of four open libraries from around the country took place. Management and staff interviews indicated that, apart from some health and safety issues, it was running well, and it was agreed that other proposed schemes could proceed.

However, the pandemic halted any progress, and the union understands that management now intends to proceed. There will be a significant staff consultation process. The feedback in all areas reviewed was positive. The advanced engagement between staff and management provided good foundations for the implementation of 'my open library'. Staff advised that while technology supported open libraries, it changed the nature of the work, but did not reduce the level of work.

Remunicipalisation of services

Fórsa has continued its involvement with the international trade union federation Public Services International's (PSI) global campaign on remunicipalisation of local authority services. The aim of the campaign is to bring privatised services back into public control. To date, over 1,000 local services have been brought back under the control of local authorities worldwide. The union held several meetings with the group and play an active part by highlighting the need to keep local authority employees in all aspects of public services.

IT/ICT

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage issued new qualifications for IT/ICT grades. A representative working group was established and presented a paper to the LGMA. The union is seeking to have a joint management-union working group established to review the role, function and skills necessary to provide a world class service in IT departments throughout the local authority sector. Ongoing engagement takes place with the LGMA.

Grade claims

Fórsa had taken a claim to the WRC and the Labour Court on behalf of tenant liaison officers. The claim was to have an independent evaluation, as the union was aware that officers in other local authorities were being paid at a higher grade. The Labour Court rejected the union's claim on the basis that Fórsa submitted a national claim to have a job evaluation scheme introduced in the local authority sector.

The union recognised that there are groups of employees carrying out roles and functions throughout the sector, but in some cases are paid two grades below their counterparts elsewhere. Based on the Labour Court recommendation, the union has established a working group representing several analogous grades. The aim of the working group is to collate information that will support the claim to have a local authority job evaluation scheme.

Other grades

Fórsa has numerous members who are employed by local authorities across the country undertaking the exact same role but are paid at different grades within the same profession. These individual professional grades undertake the same duties, with the same level of responsibility etc.

The grades concerned are:

- Archivists
- Authorised officers of motor tax
- Architectural conservation officers
- Environmental awareness officers
- Heritage officers
- Housing liaison officers
- Museum curators

They have seen management replace qualified positions with generic posts without consultation with the union and they have no staff support or career pathway. These professionals are standalone in most locations with a high level of responsibility.

The working group is of the view that no other grading structures within the service has seen such disparity in their terms and conditions for undertaking the same roles and duties. Members have not been given any promotional opportunities within their grading structure, even though they have taken on duties of a higher position due to the changes and new projects approved by management within their working environment.

Over the last two years a group of representatives from each of the professions has created a substantive business case outlining their issues as follows :

- Parity of pay, terms and conditions with colleagues within the same profession.
- Protection of grading structures.
- Reinstatement of suppressed positions.
- Review of job specifications

Fórsa would like to thank them for all their hard work and look forward to progressing matters in the future.

Incomes

Public service pay – Building Momentum review

In early 2022, Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan called on the Government to open negotiations on a new public service pay agreement, and said the size and timing of any agreed pay adjustments would “need to reflect the realities of the cost-of-living crisis, which is hurting workers regardless of what sector they work in.”

Kevin proposed seeking a review of the Building Momentum public service pay agreement at the AGM of the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) on 11th March 2022, as Fórsa continued its focus on cost-of-living pressures throughout the union’s AGM season and its biennial delegate conference in May 2022. Inflation had exceeded what had been projected when Building Momentum was negotiated in late 2020.

Average inflation across the whole of 2021 was 2.4%. The value of Building Momentum pay improvements was 0.25% over the same period. The EU predicted that Irish inflation would rise to 4.6% for the whole of 2022. This forecast would mean the annualised value of the Building Momentum increases in the same year would not exceed 1.2%, even when sectoral bargaining was considered.

With the deal due to expire at the end of 2022, Fórsa said talks on a successor agreement would need to prioritise the restoration and improvement of living standards in the context of high inflation.

Kevin Callinan maintained his call for decisive Government action to protect living standards, and to ensure the public service could compete in a tight labour market: “We need to act now to stabilise the current public service agreement, which is essential to certainty in public service delivery, industrial relations, and public finances.”

As pay talks got underway in June, the initial efforts indicated a significant distance between unions, represented by the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) and Government representatives.

By late June, the process had stalled. The PSC, chaired by Kevin Callinan, said the Government’s initial pay offer – an additional increase of just 2.5% for the (2021-2022) period, when inflation was expected to be at least 9% over that period – could not credibly be put to ballot while low and middle-income workers struggled with soaring prices. Unions told the WRC that an improved offer was necessary to make further talks on public service pay worthwhile.

The then Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar, said the Government wanted to reengage in the WRC-brokered talks, and that it was prepared to make a further offer. However, no further developments took place until mid-August, when unions announced they were preparing industrial action ballots in a coordinated campaign for improved pay terms due to the cost-of-living crisis.

Ahead of the commencement of the planned ballots, the pay talks process resumed at the WRC after a ten-week hiatus, during which the Government said it was reflecting on its position. Unions indicated they would engage positively in the process and were prepared to be flexible. Kevin Callinan restated his position that a significantly improved pay offer from the Government side was essential to any progress.

Progress was swift. By the beginning of September, Fórsa’s elected national executive (NEC) met to consider the details of new WRC pay proposals, engaging in a constructive debate that strongly acknowledged the financial realities facing working people across the economy, as well as their fears for the future. Kevin Callinan said the deal was the best that could be achieved through negotiations.

The NEC subsequently recommend the WRC-proposed public service pay package – to be known as the Review of Building Momentum Public Service Agreement – in a ballot of union members.

The main provisions of the deal are as follows:

- Increases of 3% with effect (backdated) from 2nd February 2022
- An increase of 2% increase from 1st March 2023
- An increase of 1.5% or €750 (whichever is the greater) from 1st October 2023.

These measures are in addition to 1% or €500, whichever is greater, which fell due at the beginning of October 2022 under the existing agreement.

The minimum payment of €750 a year from October 2022 meant the package is of greater value to workers on lower incomes. The payment was worth 8% to a worker earning €25,000 a year and 7% to a person on €37,500 a year.

Fórsa produced a 'frequently asked questions' document, including a facility for members to ask questions, while a series of Fórsa information meetings took place online and in person across the country.

Kevin Callinan commented that neither side achieved all it sought in the negotiations, but that the revised package was a significant improvement on the pay terms of the current agreement, and worth more to those who need it most.

The Government was set to announce the 2023 Budget while the ballot was in progress. Kevin said Government pledges to supplement pay measures with other cost-of-living supports in the Budget would influence the outcome of the vote.

In his capacity as ICTU president Kevin led the trade union delegation at the September meeting of the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) where unions made a strong case for the need for very substantial assistance to help all workers, including public servants, cope with the cost-of-living crisis. At the LEEF meeting in December 2022, Transport Minister Eamon Ryan acknowledged that union representations had had a significant influence on the Government's budgetary approach

Budget 2023 was announced on 27th September 2022, and included a series of short-term measures to help people with the cost of living, including electricity credits, increased social welfare payments and a series of once-off payments.

Fórsa members backed the review of Building Momentum in an electronic ballot by a significant margin (91.3%) on a strong turnout (67%). Kevin Callinan said the result was a strong statement of support for the pay deal, worth 6.5% in addition to existing Building Momentum pay adjustments, with better increases for lower paid workers.

Fórsa's endorsement of the package meant the union supported ratification of the pay measures at a meeting of the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) on 7th October 2022. The revised pay deal would expire at the end of 2023, which meant that pay talks on a successor would need to take place before the end of the year.

Paid salaries averaged over 52 weeks for the first time, including the cash value of job seekers benefit, which means secretaries no longer need to sign on for unemployment benefits during school holidays. The deal also enshrined 22 days paid leave a year, as well as payment for ten public holidays, replacing ad-hoc arrangements that left many school secretaries with no paid holidays.

Collective bargaining

The final report of the high-level working group on collective bargaining was published in October 2022. The group was established in 2021 by the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) in advance of a new EU directive that requires each member state to take action to expand the percentage of workers covered by collective bargaining on wage setting.

Collective bargaining coverage in Ireland is currently around 34%, the new directive requires that countries achieve up to 80% coverage. Non-union employers could potentially face penalties for failing to negotiate with trade unions.

Trade unions were represented on the high-level group by then ICTU general secretary Patricia King. Following its publication, Patricia said the recommendations in the report will, through increased collective bargaining coverage, provide new opportunities to achieve decent working and living standards for hundreds of thousands of workers, and deliver improved outcomes for workers and employers, as well as for society and the economy.

The Executive Council of the ICTU endorsed the recommendations and believes them to be crucial to aligning Irish industrial relations procedures with other EU countries. The group's recommendations will form the basis for the transposition of the directive to comply with EU law, including:

- That existing legislation relating to Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) be strengthened to enable an Employment Regulation Order to be implemented on foot of employers being afforded all reasonable opportunity to engage
- That technical assessors be appointed by the Labour Court to advise the Court in pay comparison claims with the purpose of improving on current mechanisms
- That legislation requires an employer to engage with a trade union who seeks good faith engagement where they represent at least 10% of workers in a grade group or category within the employment. Where an employer refuses such an engagement and ignores the Labour Court decisions on the matter, the trade union can seek a Circuit Court order for implementation against the employer.

The report's recommendations illustrate the potential for radically improved collective bargaining conditions in Ireland. The crucial challenge for trade unions is to continue to build membership density.

The high-level group comprised representatives from ICTU, IBEC and Professor Bill Roche, UCD. It was chaired by Professor Michael Doherty of Maynooth University. A full copy of the report is available [here](#).

'Haddington Road' hours

Civil service circular 14/2022 was published at the end of May 2022, outlining the details of the union-negotiated restoration of pre-Haddington Road working hours, with a floor of 35 hours per week.

The circular, which then rolled out across the public service, implements an independent body's recommendation that public service employees' working time should be restored.

Additional 'Haddington Road' hours were introduced in 2013, but most people who saw their working time increased returned to pre-2013 levels, albeit with a floor of 35 hours per week.

The 'Haddington Road' hours ceased to be in effect from 1st July 2022, when working time was restored to pre-austerity levels.

The breakthrough was achieved following the formation of Fórsa, which brought 80,000 public servants – including thousands of activists and workplace reps – into one strong and united trade union.

The union made the restoration of the hours a top priority in the negotiations that led to the Building Momentum public service agreement in 2020, and insisted there'd be no deal unless the issue was addressed.

Fórsa's strategy won support from other unions, and Building Momentum established an independent body to resolve the issue. Its January 2022 report recommended a return to 2012 working time, with a minimum working week of 35 hours.

General secretary Kevin Callinan said the achievement was won because Fórsa had the determination, capacity, belief and collective strength to make it happen, despite dogged management resistance.

[Haddington Road hours FAQs here.](#)

Social dialogue

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions continues to engage at the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF). ICTU is led in the LEEF engagements by ICTU president and Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan. The LEEF meets approximately four times a year and brings together senior Government, trade union and employer representatives to discuss economic, employment and labour market issues.

As cost-of-living pressures mounted last year, unions made a strong case at the September LEEF meeting for the need for very substantial assistance to help all workers, including public servants, cope with the cost-of-living crisis (see Building Momentum review on page 12). Unions highlighted the real risk of energy poverty for workers, including those who rely on social welfare benefits.

Employer representatives at the LEEF also supported very significant government intervention to assist households and businesses, and called for a huge fiscal response utilising buoyant exchequer finances. Unions noted that the Government was moving toward a similar viewpoint, indicating its intention to introduce a further range of 'cost-of-living' measures, which were introduced in Budget 2023 last September.

Fórsa continues to advocate for the State to strengthen its support for social dialogue between Government, unions, employers, communities and civil society organisations, in order to meet the range of challenges facing the country, including the housing crisis, climate response, childcare and education.

Childcare

Responding to the Budget in September 2022, Fórsa said the future of the Irish workplace is being shaped by how working families with young children are forced to weigh the cost of childcare against entering or returning to the workplace.

The union acknowledged that the 25% cut in childcare costs announced in the Budget 2023 would help many families but said many would still be left with “near impossible” choices about the offset of childcare costs against work.

The existing deficit in childcare, a problem which the State has lagged on for several decades, needs more than a temporary crisis intervention. It demands a permanent and radical solution, such as a fully publicly funded universal system.

Failure to tackle childcare comprehensively means a significant block remains to many parents, usually mothers, hoping to enter the workforce or to return to work after having children.

Statutory sick pay

The Commencement Order for the Sick Leave Act 2022 was signed in November 2022, creating a new entitlement to paid sick leave from an employer and which came into effect on 1st January 2023. The legislation followed a campaign by the ICTU for legislation to make sick pay mandatory, which won cross-party support and widespread public support.

Previously, no legal right existed to be paid while someone is on sick leave from work, meaning that half of the workforce, over one million workers, were not covered for paid sick leave in their terms and conditions.

Most Fórsa members are already covered by the public service sick pay scheme, while the new scheme will see many Fórsa members working in the private sector afforded greater protection.

From 1st January 2023, workers have a right to:

- Paid sick leave for up to three sick days per year, increasing to five days in 2024, seven days in 2025 and 10 days in 2026
- A rate of payment for statutory sick leave of 70% of normal wages to be paid by employers (up to a maximum €110 per day)
- Take a complaint to the WRC where they are not provided with a company sick pay scheme.

To be entitled to paid sick leave under the new scheme, an employee must be working for an employer for at least 13 weeks and will also need to be certified by a GP as unfit to work.

The legislation sets out the minimum standard that an employer must provide but does not prevent employers having superior sick pay schemes of their own to attract and retain staff, or on foot of an agreement with a trade union.

Travel and subsistence

Revised rates for work-related travel and subsistence took effect from 1st September 2022. They include changes to the standard domestic subsistence rates, overnight and day subsistence rates. Full details are available on the Fórsa website [here](#) and Revenue website [here](#).

A social wage

income protection for workers is exceptionally weak in Ireland compared to the rest of the EU, and Ireland is the only country in the OECD not to require employers to contribute to a worker's pension. It is also one of the last of the EU's 27 member states to make sick pay mandatory.

In response to the Government's publication of a proposed overhaul of the jobseeker's benefit system – which could change the payment structure to make it directly proportional to the recipient's previous earnings – the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) published its position paper, *The Social Wage*, in March 2023.

The social wage plan proposes a move from a flat-rate to a pay-related benefit payment for workers, linking a person's jobseeker's payment to their previous earnings and work history. It's designed to soften the income shock that a person may face if they suddenly lose their job.

Speaking at the policy paper launch, Fórsa general secretary and ICTU president Kevin Callinan said that there is now a “heightened public demand to strengthen our frayed social safety net” in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A full copy of the position paper is available [here](#).

Domestic violence leave

Fórsa’s conference in May 2022 unanimously backed a conference motion for statutory leave for victims of domestic violence. The conference motion committed the union to actively campaign for an effective statutory entitlement.

As the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill (2022), which included provision for domestic violence leave, made its way through the legislative process, Fórsa supported the call by Womens’ Aid to include ten days of fully paid leave. This is widely considered to be best practice.

However, the legislation only provides for five days of domestic violence leave. Fórsa wrote directly to the Minister in February 2023, urging him to consider positions on this expressed by several senators at the Seanad Committee Stage debate in January. Fórsa has committed to working with other trade unions to collectively bargain to secure 10 days paid leave for workers who need to avail of domestic violence leave.

Work Life Balance Bill

The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill (2022) was passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas on 29th March 2023. The Government’s draft legislation, published in June 2022, attracted huge criticism from Fórsa and other unions, as well as labour law experts and others.

The revised legislation followed extensive work by the cross-union ‘Make Remote Work!’ campaigning group. Congress welcomed the Government delivering on its commitment to a new workers’ right to request remote work.

The Bill introduces a new workers’ right to paid leave for victims of domestic violence and new rights for workers requesting remote work, both of which ICTU and affiliated unions campaigned for. The legislation includes improvements to support working parents and carers balance paid work with family care, necessitated to give effect to EU law.

Communications

Fórsa's head of communications Bernard Harbor retired from the union at the end of 2022. Under the union's programme of Strategic Change, a number of changes are underway to the configuration of the union's communications activity. There are four main areas of activity: campaigns, digital, membership communications and media relations.

Communications officer Niall Shanahan has assumed responsibilities for media relations. Kate O'Sullivan, formerly of Amnesty International and Save the Children, took up the post of director of digital in July 2022. Kevin Donoghue was appointed to the role of director of campaigns in September 2022, and a new post, director of membership communications, was created in 2023.

Media relations

The union continues to develop its position in national media as an authoritative voice on industrial relations, public services, collective bargaining and a wide range of social issues. Aligning with Fórsa's strategic plan, the union plans to continue the development of boosting local media relations activity, working with branches regionally to create media content and establish local representative voices in the media.

Membership communications

The new post of director of member communications will provide capacity for the union to lead in the direction and delivery of a diverse spectrum of events, outreach, media, and other practical supports and activities to inform and empower Fórsa's membership. The director of member communications will collaborate closely with the directors of media relations, digital, and campaigns teams to coordinate, reinforce, and amplify their work.

Digital strategy

Fórsa's Digital Strategy for 2023-2025 focuses on five main areas:

Recruitment

Driving membership recruitment through increased digital traffic, supporting and improving the Join Online process, and showcasing the value of Fórsa through social media.

Membership retention

Utilising data and digital tools to help retain existing members. This includes data modelling, showcasing Fórsa achievements, and increasing digital communications on membership benefits.

Membership information and services

Enhancing accessibility of Fórsa's digital presence and offering valuable resources to members. This includes redeveloping forsa.ie based on user analytics and tailoring social media content.

Digital campaigning

Fostering online activism, increasing digital activism through strategic planning, and using paid digital ads.

Digital trade unionism

Fórsa aims to embrace best practices from global partners, explore digital opportunities and use analytics to track member experiences and identify growth potential in online trade unionism.

Campaigns unit

Campaigns unit research officer Juliette Cooper started working with the unit in 2022. The role enables the campaigns unit to contribute more broadly to research within the union. Juliette has made significant contributions to the research capacity of the unit since joining the team.

TASC report

The campaigns unit arranged meetings with political parties and officials in relation to the content of the TASC report throughout 2022. Work will continue over the summer of 2023 to meet political parties about the role of the state. Supplemental research to the TASC report is currently underway to examine the physical operating capacity of the public service and civil service in Ireland, compared to other European countries similar in population size.

Just Transition Alliance and climate change

Fórsa is a founding member of ICTU's Just Transition Alliance. Launched in March 2022, the alliance is composed of trade unions and climate change groups seeking a just transition for workers and continues to build political support.

Housing

Fórsa is a member of the steering groups of Raise the Roof, a trade union coalition campaign, and Home for Good, a campaign to have the right to housing recognised in the Constitution. Lobbying for a referendum on the right to housing to be held within the next Government term. The campaign is hosting regional meetings to prepare for a referendum.

Four-day week

The four-day week campaign continues to build support in Ireland and across the globe. A report published in November 2022 provided insights into the experience of Irish companies and workers that took on the four-day week trial. Results were incredibly positive. Workers reported reduced stress and higher levels of satisfaction in their lives and careers. Employers rated their experience of the trial at 9.2/10. The Irish campaign will launch another round of trials in 2023.

Remunicipalisation

A report on the remunicipalisation of waste services in Dublin City Council was commissioned in 2022 and will be publicly available in April 2023. The report explores the current set of waste services in Dublin City and makes recommendations on how to improve waste service provision.

Job evaluation

The campaigns unit has been supporting the local government divisions on the job evaluation campaign, is currently supporting work relating to the ballot on job evaluation. A Valentine's Day publicity event was organised with the support of Fórsa's media relations director, gaining local coverage across the country.

Stop the Stigma: Menstruation and Menopause

After members in Fórsa raised concerns about workplace supports for menstruation and menopause in a motion passed at the union's policy-setting national conference in May of 2022, Fórsa launched a survey to gauge member experiences with periods and menstruation in the workplace.

The stark findings from the research regarding the prevalence of diagnosis with a severe condition and the need to take sick leave from work during menstruation and menopause affirmed the union's position that this is a priority to address in the workplace, both as a negotiating agenda and as a public awareness campaign.

Which is why Fórsa has been working to launch the 'Stop the Stigma' campaign.

Built to support trade unions and employees in advocating for menstrual and menopause policies in workplaces, the new campaign aims to empower workers with the resources they need to ask for supports in the workplace, as well as informing workers about these policies generally so they know to ask for them.

Fórsa is also rallying support for the campaign by partnering with trade unions who are already or beginning to undertake advocacy and organising around these policies and raising it through the industrial relations forums with employers.

Ireland for All

Fórsa joined up with Le Chéile – a cross-sectoral alliance working together to challenge the far right in Ireland – and the NWCI for the #IrelandForAll rally in February. The union's elected officers formally backed Fórsa joining the alliance, and to support its anti-racism rally in Dublin on 18th February 2023.

Participation in the rally is an important statement to oppose attempts by far-right organisations to spread hate, fear and misinformation about refugees and asylum seekers. Far right groups have been targeting working-class communities stoking unwarranted fear and resentment.

The trade union movement has a central role to play in facing down those attempts to frighten and intimidate people who have come to Ireland seeking sanctuary from hunger, poverty, climate catastrophe and war. Fórsa's participation in the rally continues the trade union movement's proud history of opposing racism, bigotry and sectarianism.

Skills Academy training

Fórsa's director of Membership Training & Development is Fiona Dunne.

Since October 2022, Skills Academy has returned to delivering most courses and programmes in person, providing a welcome change for tutors and students alike.

The first of the 5-module Expanded Workplace Representatives Training (November – April 2023) was rescheduled to accommodate a high ballot return and delivered 30 modules across multiple locations to approximately 80 workplace representatives during the period. Two Annual Branch Returns workshops, in December 2022 and January 2023, were ably delivered by Finance staff who also assisted participants in the practical exercise of completing the returns. Other popular courses included Preparing for the AGM for novices, along with one-day courses for newly elected chairpersons, secretaries and treasurers, which was delivered this year in Cork.

Since January 2023, the *Fórsa101* online course, which provides an introductory overview of the union, was opened to all members and will be a permanent feature of our programme running twice on the second Wednesday of every month.

Another new addition is the online *Lunch and Learn* series, again open to all members running on the last Friday of every month and dealing with a different topic each month. This series complements our extensive programme of current courses with previous topics including *Writing a motion*, *Quick guide to public speaking*, *Protecting your data*, and *Menstrual and menopausal welfare at work*, all of which were recorded and are saved to the Skills Academy YouTube channel.

A six-member union learning group, comprising Connect, CWU, Fórsa, FSU, MANDATE and SIPTU, was informally established in November 2022 to develop new training opportunities, share resources, and deliver courses collaboratively across partners.

External bodies provided courses during the year including a mock conciliation by the WRC, a guide to procedures and submissions by the Labour Court, understanding the Public Sector Duty by IHREC, and public speaking for conference delegates and representatives presented by Montague Communications.

A new programme, *Foundational Workplace Representatives Training* is currently being developed with the support of all tutors, for a launch in September. This will form an essential part of our core package of programmes and will be delivered in every location during the next academic year.

Following a series of extensive consultations and discussions with tutors, officials and senior representatives, a permanent calendar of training has been agreed for delivery of core programmes. This will mean that both tutors and branches will be aware of when training programmes are scheduled to take place every year. A printed version of the calendar was published in April 2023 and has been circulated through branches via training officers and at divisional conferences.

Stand-alone tailored branch training days have also been developed throughout the year in collaboration with the branch executive and with the full consultation of the assigned officials.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our students and tutors for their dedication to building capacity and developing new skills to represent our membership to the best of their ability. We would also like to thank all Fórsa staff across the country for their support and help to deliver our programmes successfully and look forward to working with everyone into the future.

For a more detailed explanation of our courses and programmes, please contact the Fórsa Skills Academy [here](#).

Strategic organising

Strategic organising

A strategic organising model was introduced in 2020 throughout sections of the Fórsa divisional and membership network. This approach resulted in the implementation of project-based sectoral initiatives, initially and primarily focused on creating influence and building power at workplace level. The initial implementation of this approach was conducted in several targeted areas, subsequently creating opportunities for significant and proactive ground and membership engagement, issue consolidation and the creation of appropriate strategies to advance agreed strategic organising objectives. It's worth noting that such a model was applied during the Covid pandemic and, despite perceived obstacles to achieving positive outcomes through the utilisation of such methodologies, the application of this model has resulted in consistent density and union leadership growth at employment level, and creating opportunities to address issues that are of concern to workers.

The advancement of strategic organising will continue to broaden scope as appropriate, and in line with central organisational objectives. However, it's worth noting that where this model is applied, significant union activation, growth and participation at ground and workplace level becomes evident, resulting in consistent increases in density, leadership and communications activity, and increased union leverage on matters important to Fórsa members. While extremely labour intensive, the investment in this process by the union, through the utilisation of a specialised group of staff, whom have considerable experience in creating effective and sustainable union change within workplaces. However such success requires the support and expertise of the union's activist and representative structure through all levels of the organisation, including, in some circumstances, divisional support. This methodology will continue to be rolled out in a phased and project-based manner, as appropriate.

Equivalent Grades committees

The continued development and advancement of the existing Equivalent Grades committees (Executive/Grades IV - VII and Clerical Officer/Grade III) is one example of a significant contributor to the growth and influence of Fórsa in workplaces across the divisions during this timeframe. Formed under rule upon the formation of Fórsa, the Equivalent Grades committees are made up of divisional executive nominees, and meet quarterly to identify and discuss issues relevant to all concerned at the appropriate grades. This unique and proactive forum has facilitated the roll-out of several strategic organising and leverage strategies that are championed by the members of the various committees and disseminated through their membership networks. To date, such issue-based strategies have included pay, hours, leave and job evaluation which led to the creating organisational influence on specific national issues which has directly contributed to effecting positive change for clerical and executive officers, not just within their workplaces but beyond. Targeted work progresses for these committees as this cross-union forum continues to influence and amplify the voice of clerical and executive officers through the utilisation of a strategic organising model.

The Equivalent Grades committees form one constituent piece of numerous strategic organising projects that are currently operational in a number of sectors.

Appendix

Local Government Salary Scales

Revision of salaries with effect from 1st March 2023 for local authority employees is available at the Fórsa website [here](#).



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