



An Evaluation of the Local Authority Heritage Officer Programme (LAHOP)

May 2021

Final Report

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



CCMA

Cumann Iodait Baintiúchá Contae agus Cathrach
County and City Management Association



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INTRODUCTION

In June 2020, M.CO were appointed by the Heritage Council to undertake an evaluation of the Local Authority Heritage Officer Programme (LAHOP), following an open Invitation to Tender. This evaluation was carried out jointly by the Heritage Council and the local government sector, represented by the County and City Management Association (CCMA).

Taking account the context of the changing role of local government and the emerging policy landscape for heritage, this evaluation considers how the LAHOP contributes towards strategic objectives of the Heritage Council, National heritage policy, and towards local authority objectives in order to inform its strategic direction and resourcing over the next five years.

By appropriately framing the structure and scope of the LAHOP, this evaluation seeks to consider the impact, relevance and effectiveness of the Programme and guide how the Programme can sustain and develop its key role in heritage management in Ireland.

The research and analysis identify a significant number of key considerations for The Heritage Council and the CCMA. Beyond these specific considerations, the report makes five key recommendations:

1. Refine the focus of LAHOP objectives;
2. That the Heritage Council continues to support heritage office salary costs;
3. Develop and support a simple framework for strategic partnership between the Heritage Council and each local authority engaged in the LAHOP;
4. Develop and support new guidance for local authority heritage plans and for heritage forums; and
5. Continue to support the heritage officer network and invest in training aligned to the strategic needs of the LAHOP.



A young man with brown hair, wearing a blue polo shirt and a red watch, is looking at a white marble statue of a seated figure inside a glass display case. The background is a museum setting with other display cases.

Section 1

Policy Context

POLICY CONTEXT

1.1 The Heritage Acts 1995 and 2018

The Heritage Acts 1995 and 2018 are overarching across heritage policies, and aim to promote public interest in and knowledge, appreciation and protection of national heritage.

The 1995 Heritage Act established the Heritage Council to “propose policies and priorities for the **identification, protection, preservation** and **enhancement** of the national heritage”. In terms of technical focus/parameters, this Act remains the core statutory framework guiding the Heritage Council and provides the basis on which the Local Authority Heritage Officer Programme (LAHOP) has been established.

One amendment in the 2018 Act is of particular relevance to this review. Where the 1995 Act (section 6.3.b) sets out a function of the Heritage Council to “co-operate with public authorities, educational bodies and other organisations and persons in the promotion of the functions of the Council” the 2018 Act (section 11.a) amends this to state that the Heritage Council shall “co-operate with, **engage with, advise and support public authorities, local communities and persons in relation to the functions of the Council**”.

These additional (2018) requirements place an onus on the Heritage Council to be proactive in relation to engagement, advice and support at local level.

1.2 The Local Government Reform Act 2014

The 2014 Local Government Act integrates a number of developments in the structure of local government in Ireland. The Act was preceded by Government policy on local government reform articulated through ‘Putting People First’ (2012). Putting People First set out a vision for local government as “the main vehicle of governance and public service at local level - leading economic, social and community development, delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably”.

Much work that was already being undertaken through the LAHOP clearly aligned with this vision for local government. The mechanism of local authority heritage forums provided a strong foundation for heritage involvement in the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) brought about under the 2014 Act, while many local heritage initiatives were at the heart of community development initiatives that could inform Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs).

In addition, the 2014 Act provided the basis for a new framework for planning and development at local level, set out in line with new **Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES)**. Under the 2014 Act (S.27.1) “A planning authority shall ensure, when making a development plan or a local area plan, that the plan is consistent with any regional spatial and economic strategy in force for its area”. The 2014 Act makes clear that the objective of each RSES is to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 (National Spatial Strategy) and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for each region.

This Act notes, inter alia, that the RSES shall take account of:

- S.23.2.c.vi the preservation and protection of the environment and its amenities, including the archaeological, architectural and natural heritage;
- S.23.2.c.vii landscape, in accordance with relevant policies or objectives for the time being of the Government or any Minister of the Government relating to providing a framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes and developed having regard to the European Landscape Convention done at Florence on 20 October 2000; and
- (S.27.7.b) When making a regional spatial and economic strategy which affects the Gaeltacht,

the regional assembly shall have regard to the need to protect the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht.

In line with the structure of Ireland's regional assemblies, there are three RSES across Ireland; one for each of the Northern and Western, Eastern and Midlands, and Southern regions. **Each RSES makes provision for heritage at a strategic level.** In addition, it is noted that the ambition of each RSES goes beyond physical planning and development in articulating an integrated vision for each region.

1.3 The Heritage Council and background to the LAHOP

A **Heritage Officers Pilot Scheme** was first developed by the Heritage Council in 1999 to "raise levels of heritage expertise within local authorities and generally increase awareness of heritage issues" (The Heritage Council Quality Assurance Review, DPER, 2016). This pilot scheme was further expanded to eight additional local authorities in 2000. Since then, the programme has been extended to 29 local authorities across the country in a partnership approach between the Heritage Council and local authorities.

The **Heritage Council's 2018 Annual Report** notes that (since its establishment in 1999) "the Heritage Officer Programme has contributed directly to increased public understanding and awareness of our natural, cultural and built heritage. Heritage Officers have carried out numerous surveys and compiled reports on areas of natural, cultural or architectural significance, adding significantly to the local bank of knowledge about heritage. They have worked at local level to safeguard heritage, strengthen communities and support jobs. They have highlighted the importance of our historic buildings and unique landscapes through collaborative policy development with other local authority officials, while also helping to inform, develop and implement national and regional heritage policy at local level"

1.4 The Heritage Officer Role within local authorities

Since the establishment of the heritage officer role (under the pilot project in 1999), the Heritage Council has drawn significant attention to ideas of **understanding and appreciating heritage**, variously identifying that the role is "to promote enhanced levels of understanding and conservation through improving the status and perception of heritage", (**The Heritage Council Annual Report, 2006**) and "to build a better understanding and appreciation of our built and natural heritage" (**Nurturing your sense of Place, The Heritage Council, 2015**).

On a wider basis, The Heritage Council has noted the increasing importance and potential of local authorities in **managing Ireland's heritage** as well as facilitating public engagement. **The Heritage Council's 2018 Annual Report** also notes that "**local authorities have become central to the management of natural, built and cultural heritage at a local level**". This articulates **a more strategic role** for local authority heritage officers, given the evolving context and direction of local government, "which has oriented increasingly towards community with the public participation networks under the Local Government Reform Act 2014" (ibid.).

The Heritage Council invests in heritage officer salary costs on a reducing scale from 75% in the first year of a local authority heritage officer contract to 50% in the second year and 25% in the third and subsequent years. The Heritage Officer Programme affords the Heritage Council a national network at local level. Currently heritage officers are employed in 29 (of the 31) County and City Councils.

The heritage officer is however an employee of the local authority, therefore operating at the confluence of local, national (and wider) policies and priorities. The ambit of the heritage officer role (although not uniformly defined) reaches across built, natural, cultural and intangible heritage and, therein, **has the potential to offer local authorities a diversity of professional expertise, insight and support in diverse areas,**

depending on local needs. For example, the Heritage Council notes that heritage officers work to ensure that local authorities can take on the new challenges and responsibilities of the growing body of national and international legislation relating to built, natural and cultural heritage (**The Heritage Officer Programme; The Heritage Council, 2015**) and empower local authorities to facilitate community development through social, economic, environmental and cultural projects in their areas (ibid.).

A fundamental role of the heritage officer is the development and implementation of **County Heritage Plans**. These plans are devised through consultation with the community to bring a local focus and ownership of wider national policy objectives. Heritage officers contribute to the development of policy in City and County Development Plans and related plans and strategies, such as the new Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs).

The basis of the Heritage Council's partnership with the local government sector is set out in the **Framework for Collaboration - an agreement between the Heritage Council and the County and City Management Association (2017)**.

The LAHOP partnership between the Heritage Council and the CCMA is governed under this 'Framework for Collaboration'. The agreement is "in recognition of:

- The fact that the local authorities own and manage a substantial percentage of the heritage stock in Ireland, and that most people's direct experience with heritage is mediated through local authority services - towns, heritage sites and parks, museums, archives, libraries, beaches and the increasing public use of and access to the countryside in general.
- The significant role that natural and cultural heritage play in supporting key economic drivers such as tourism and agriculture.
- The importance of heritage in contributing to the

quality of places where we all live and work and for which the local authorities have a primary responsibility.

- The role of local authority heritage officers and other local authority staff in managing Ireland's heritage and citizen engagement"

The agreement identifies "Heritage Officers, County Heritage Forums and County Heritage Plans" (collectively) among 10 areas of partnership. There are eight goals set out under the framework, including a specific goal "to provide a strategic vision for both the local authority heritage service and broader heritage/cultural services at local level". The other seven goals are:

- To provide a framework within which agreements and working relationships between the Heritage Council and individual local authorities can be realised.
- To operate effectively together to support the implementation of key heritage policies and programmes at national and international levels.
- To promote best practice in the sustainable management of the heritage resource by local authority services.
- To facilitate people-centred and participative approaches to managing local heritage.
- To increase opportunities for people to engage with heritage in their localities.
- To optimise the resource requirements for delivering the local authority heritage service including through related initiatives.
- To identify and explore areas of mutual interest relating to national policy and initiatives.

The framework agreement is based on a 10-year timeframe (starting in 2018) with a review after five years. To build on this Framework for Collaboration, consideration should be given to the development of

individual agreements between the Heritage Council and each local authority based on investment (subject to resources) on a shared agenda.

1.5 Quality Assurance and Strategy

In 2016, the Evaluation Unit of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, working with the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, carried out a comprehensive **Review of the Heritage Council**. The review raised questions regarding the Heritage Council's continued part-funding of heritage officer roles, noting that "While the co-funding of Heritage Officer salaries by the Council is undoubtedly successful at leveraging funding from local authorities, the recent changes in the funding model for local authorities, may offer opportunities to further devolve responsibility for funding heritage supports from the Heritage Council. In particular, the (Heritage) Council as part of the development of its new strategic plan should consider examining options for the cessation, over time, of co-funding arrangements for the heritage officers given that the positions are now well established within the local authority system and such incentives may no longer be required allowing the transfer of that funding of circa €0.5 million to other elements of the Heritage Council's annual programme. The experience of the Arts Council which ceased its co-funding arrangements for local authority arts officers in 2010 should also be taken into account as part of this consideration" (p.16).

This review, which forms part of such consideration, suggests that the Heritage Council approach represents a stronger partnership with the relevant officers though investment in the heritage officer role - significantly, including the developmental approach to the role and to policy and best-practice impacting on the role - and within that integrated/holistic approach, through the programme.

As part of this 2016 review a once-off survey was undertaken with findings in relation to the value of 14 local authorities' investment in heritage projects in 2014.

The review notes that "in all cases the leveraging ratio is positive, with more funding provided by the local authority than by the Heritage Council... the majority of authorities saw a leveraging ratio of between 3 and 7 times the value of the Heritage Council's grant. This suggests that there is an on-going value in continuing support for the heritage officer network and indeed the partnership working arrangements in place between the Heritage Council and local authorities. However, gathering more and regular data on the total value of heritage investment by local authorities will be critical in better understanding the value of the network, as well as allowing the Heritage Council to react to changes in the local authority funding environment which may impact on these leveraged funds" (p.17/18).

In addition, the 2016 review highlighted the importance of building partnerships across the broader heritage landscape within local authorities and nationally (e.g. the Architecture, Biodiversity and Climate functions).

The Heritage Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 - Heritage at the Heart, aims to ensure a vibrant heritage sector. This strategic plan states that The Heritage Council will "support the local authority Heritage Officer Network and assess how the range of local heritage services can be expanded to maximise the leadership role of local authorities". In this context, it would be timely for the Heritage Council and CCMA to consider establishing a Heritage Management Liaison Group between representatives of the Heritage Council and the relevant CCMA Sub-Committee. This could provide regular bilateral engagement and review of the implementation of the Framework for Collaboration

1.6 Government Policy on Heritage and the LAHOP

As defined in **Culture 2025**, “the Government will implement its new National Heritage Plan, **Heritage Ireland 2030**, to identify priority actions in the heritage area and will, under **Project Ireland 2040**, use the opportunities presented to maximise sustainable development”.

Heritage Ireland 2030 will set out a plan for the management of Irish heritage under three pillars; National Leadership and Heritage, Heritage Partnerships and Communities and Heritage.

The Department of Local Government, Housing and Heritage acknowledges the role of local authority heritage officers in relation to Heritage Ireland 2030. In the development of this national plan, departmental officials acknowledged that “Heritage Officers were instrumental in organising workshops” across Ireland that brought together over 800 people to engage in consultation, noting that, in many instances, other local authority staff would also have been involved (e.g. through the public libraries).

In relation to implementation of the three pillars of Heritage Ireland 2030, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage acknowledges that heritage officers will have a key role to play: “Heritage Officers work closely with communities and their network has been, and will continue to be, a key partner in delivering this policy”.

While the framework for Heritage Ireland 2030 actions remains under consideration at the time of evaluation, it is anticipated that local authority heritage officers and local authority heritage forums will be central to a wide range of actions. Some of the key objectives of the Heritage 2030 plan that may affect and influence the role of heritage officers are outlined under the pillar themes, below:

Theme: Communities and Heritage

- **Objective:** Strengthened and well-resourced measures to protect local heritage

Theme: National Leadership and Heritage

- **Objective:** Investment in heritage training at all levels, creating jobs and providing business opportunities across the country.
- **Objective:** Heritage investment at national and local level to deliver the best possible outcomes in terms of public good.

Theme: Heritage Partnerships

- **Objective:** National and local government working effectively together to protect, manage and promote our heritage.
- **Objective:** Effective partnerships between national government, local government, the private sector, NGOs and local communities.
- **Objective:** Strengthened co-ordination with the Office of Public Works (OPW), local authorities and private owners in the management and maintenance of our national heritage estate.

The **2020 Programme for Government, ‘Our Shared Future’**, makes significant commitments in relation to heritage with ‘National Heritage and Biodiversity’ featuring as a section heading under the mission of ‘A New Green Deal’.

Within this section the Programme for Government (PfG) commits to:

- Ensure that every local authority has a sufficient number of biodiversity and heritage officers among their staff complement;
- Review the protection (including enforcement of relevant legislation) of our natural heritage, including hedgerows, native woodland and wetlands

Under the mission of ‘A New Social Contract’ the PfG commits to ‘Facilitate the participation of people with

disabilities in cultural and heritage related activities and programmes.’

The mission of ‘Building Stronger and Safer Communities’ contains a specific section on built heritage, with a series of commitments, including:

- Publish and implement the new all-of-government heritage policy and begin its nationwide implementation.
- Explore multi-annual funding models and ensure adequate funding is made available for the implementation of each County Heritage Plan.
- Continue to support the role of the heritage officers in the areas of heritage education, health and wellbeing and citizen science.
- Encourage each local authority to appoint a Conservation and Repurposing Officer.
- Build on community led schemes such as the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund, which provide grant aid to protect and maintain important historic buildings in our local communities.
- Encourage traditional building skills in devising an apprenticeship programme with the sustainable construction sector focusing on heritage disciplines and crafts.
- Expand the Heritage in School Scheme so that more students can enjoy our rich natural cultural heritage.
- Continue with the expansion of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and include modern and industrial buildings.
- Continue to develop and implement a master plan of our National Parks and National Reserves.
- Establish a scheme for all schools, promoting visits to historic OPW sites in Ireland.

Under the mission of ‘Better Opportunities through Education and Research’ are commitments to:

- Task the NCCA to develop an Irish Cultural Studies Junior Cycle level 2 short course which values the heritage, language, nature, biodiversity and culture, including Traveller culture and history, of Ireland and history of the Irish Language in the global landscape.
- Commit to emphasising and building capacity for green apprenticeships through a Green Further Education and Skills Development Plan, as tackling the climate crisis will require a broad range of skills across the construction, energy and natural heritage sectors.

While the PfG commitments set out above have the potential to shape initiatives that might be undertaken by heritage officers and/or influence demand for local authority heritage services, they also indicate significant backing for the heritage officer role and in relation to the areas of heritage education, health and wellbeing and citizen science, while indicating backing for other roles that would likely have knock-on impacts on the focus of the LAHOP.

1.7 Other Relevant Policies

In addition to policy referencing heritage and/or the local authority heritage officer role/programme, there are a number of other policy areas which can impact upon the LAHOP. These include:

- **National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021:** which recognises a role for the Heritage Council in biodiversity conservation. This plan also highlights a key role for local authorities in biodiversity conservation through the planning system, the wide range of environmental services they provide, the network of biodiversity and heritage officers and the water and communities office, and requires local authorities to review and update their biodiversity and heritage plans, as well as their development plans and policies, giving due

consideration to the protection and restoration of biodiversity;

- **All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020:** which calls (inter alia) for pollinator friendly management of public parks and green spaces, integration of the Pollinator Plan into future county/city development or biodiversity plans, and the raising of awareness of pollinators and existing initiatives at local authority level;
- **The Creative Ireland Programme:** which can be a source of funding for integrated heritage initiatives, and some heritage officers also act as Creative Ireland Coordinators for their local authorities;
- **Climate Action Plans and policies:** including the Climate Action Plan 2019, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2020, the Local Authority Climate Action Charter, the related strategy for local government as a sector alongside individual local authority climate action or related plans. The climate action area is likely to benefit from increased investment at local authority level with the potential to impact upon work carried out under the LAHOP. It could be that it requires increased and integrated heritage office involvement, or that aspects of the heritage office programme dovetail with climate-related work, or that heritage office work in areas related to biodiversity, land-use planning, nature-based solutions, etc. is taken on by others; and
- **Post-Covid-19 plans and programmes:** Noting the extensive work carried out with local communities under the LAHOP, the extent to which Government guidance (through the

Healthy Ireland programme) has encouraged people to reconnect with their locale and the connection set out in the 2020 Programme for Government between heritage, health and wellbeing, post-Covid-19 plans and programmes are likely to create new demands/opportunities for the LAHOP.





A young child with light skin and blue eyes is wearing a blue hooded raincoat with orange lining. The child's hands are covered in brown mud and are held up in front of them. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with wooden planks and debris. The entire image has a semi-transparent blue overlay.

Section 2

Research & Analysis

RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

In addition to the policy analysis, research was undertaken via focus group, survey and interview. The survey of local authority heritage officers, to which there were 27 responses (from a cohort of 29 officers) provided the most extensive detail and this is layered with post-survey feedback from the M.CO Heritage Officer focus group, along with the insights of senior managers from local authorities, from the Heritage Council and from other stakeholders.

The research and analysis are set out as follows:

- Development of the local authority heritage officer role
- Policy-making and integration
- Resourcing
- LAHOP Outputs and Demonstrating Value
- Heritage Officer Network
- Areas for Future Development

2.1 Development of the Local Authority Heritage Officer Role

Scope and Focus

Ambition and evolution

Where the policy context (Section 3, above) charts how the LAHOP was established, interviews with Heritage Council staff and other national partners point out that a key ambition of the LAHOP was to afford heritage and the Heritage Council a national remit, coupled with local insight. The programme was seen as a highly innovative in overcoming constraints placed on the capacity of the Heritage Council. It enabled the organisation to achieve a reach and capacity beyond its size and effect local implementation of national policy. In turn, it provided local authorities with access to specialist expertise and

Heritage Council funding to develop locally important projects.

While the ambition and strengths of the programmes remain largely the same, the experience of 80% of respondents to the heritage officer survey is that the work of the heritage officer in their local authority has evolved significantly since it was established.

Fig. 1 (below) indicates that, compared with their initial period in the role, the largest proportion of respondents now spend less time involved in areas of data collection/information gathering and supporting planning applications.

Comparing then and now, the largest proportion of respondents now spend more time providing best-practice guidance within the local authority, supporting integrated local authority programmes, completing funding applications and developing or managing heritage projects, than was previously the case.

Comparing then and now, the largest proportion of respondents spend a broadly similar amount of time providing best-practice information on behalf of the local authority, raising awareness of heritage best practice, inputting into local and national policies and engaging in research-related activities.

Supporting insights from the survey suggested that the evolution of the role (often linked to the continued presence of a postholder) had led to greater recognition of the role within local authorities and better cross department working, a stronger societal awareness of heritage and greater engagement of heritage office expertise as advisors and partners.

Breadth of the role

While there are broad definitions for the role of the heritage officer (such as those referenced in the policy context section), and each heritage officer has a job description specific to their own role, a shared focus and shared objectives for the LAHOP remain difficult to pin down. National stakeholders consulted in this review noted that the absence of shared definitions for the role

Do you spend more / less time on the following compared with when you first started in your heritage officer role?

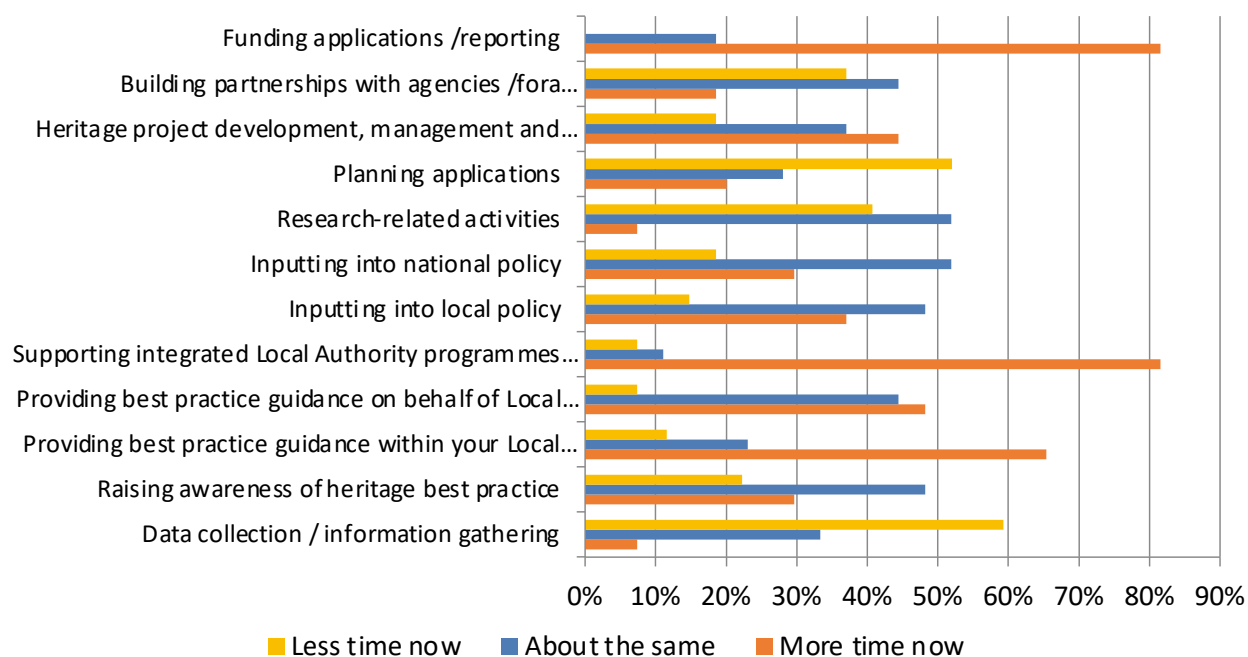


Fig. 1: Consistency/shifts in focus in the evolution of heritage officers' work

raises challenges in terms of reviewing and monitoring the LAHOP.

The breadth, scope and growth of heritage officers' work was acknowledged by many senior stakeholders managing/partnering with the LAHOP. Discussions with these stakeholders highlighted that one of the keys to the success of the role was its flexibility, but that this also led to challenges with the heritage office working across so many avenues that it could be challenging to maintain a strategic focus. It was felt that the lack of role definition could be a barrier to career progression, which could lead to heritage officers becoming disillusioned in the long term.

From the heritage officer survey, 80% of respondents felt that the breadth of the role was a challenge that meant sometimes being "spread too thin" with significant "expectations around expertise".

Engagement with the M.CO Heritage Officer focus group indicated that this challenge (of breadth) was compounded by paucity of resources, particularly core heritage resources. This meant that the heritage programme was sometimes called upon to seek out alternative funding sources, some of which were more directly compatible with heritage than others.

Feedback from heritage officers, senior local government management, and other consultees indicated that the success of the LAHOP has led to an increased workload for heritage officers over time. A challenge of many developmental programmes sees the role focusing on generating awareness, interest, capacity and demand, with success then placing additional demands on those existing resources. Senior local authority management feedback notes that staffing support for delivery of the heritage programme is important; making clear that local authorities, provide

administrative support where possible but this is not always achievable given resource constraints.

It was suggested that part-funding of a resource or long-term integration of the heritage office into a heritage unit or related team could bring together heritage-related roles (e.g. in biodiversity, conservation, climate change, etc.) which could allow for shared administration supports.

Relative focus of work activities

In order to ascertain more detailed insights into the work of the LAHOP, heritage officer survey respondents were asked to estimate their relative time input across 12 indicative activities. Based on the activities proposed, **Fig. 2 (below)** shows the greatest focus of respondents' time is on heritage project development, management and delivery, with an aggregated estimate of 16% of heritage officers' time being spent on such work. Approximately 10% of respondents' time is

spent on each of five further activities; providing best-practice guidance and information on behalf of the local authority, building awareness of heritage and promoting best-practice, funding applications and reporting; supporting integrated local authority programmes (e.g. Centenary celebrations, Creative Ireland Programme, supporting tourism development etc) and providing best-practice guidance within local authorities.

When assessed against respondents' perspectives on how their time should be invested across the same set of activities per **Fig. 3 (below)** the results suggest a broadly similar allocation of time.

Other heritage-related roles

The review also considered the range of local authority professionals/services that align and overlap with the heritage officers, as illustrated in **Fig. 4 (below)**. The graph below gives a representative national picture but across the survey responses there were variations, with

Please estimate your relative % time input for each of the following 12 activities?

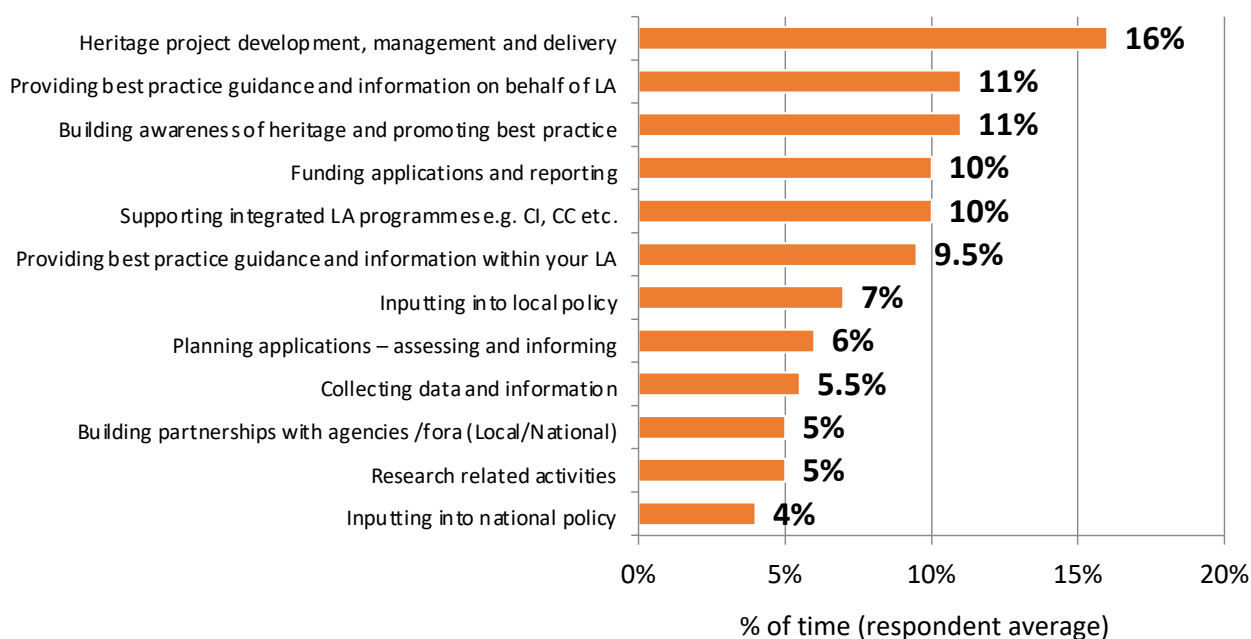


Fig. 2: Average estimated % time input for heritage officer activities

Please indicate the % of time you feel you should ideally be spending on the following 12 activities?

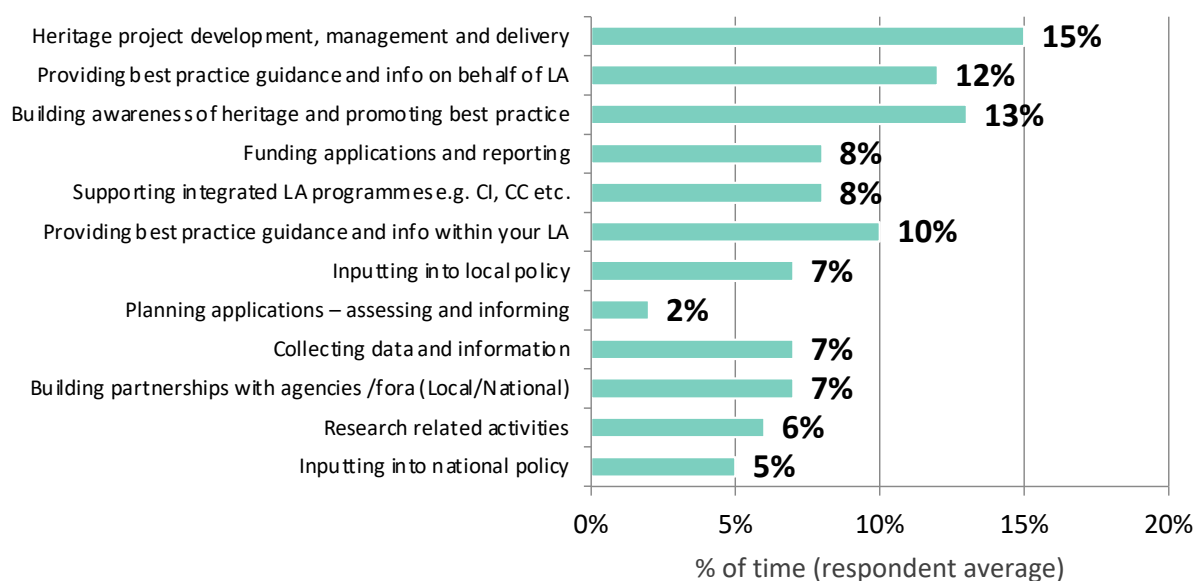


Fig. 3: Heritage officer perspectives on preferred (%) time input for heritage office activities

some local authorities employing many of these roles while others having none or only one or two.

Where local authorities establish new roles that overlap with aspects of the work of the heritage officers, such as climate action officers, conservation and biodiversity officers, this creates a different context within which the LAHOP role/focus may be refined and/or be better supported by the additional expertise.

In addition to specific roles listed in Fig.4, all local authorities have extensive planning expertise. Planners play a key role in relation to heritage, including in the preparation of City/County Development Plans and Local Area Plans which are central in advancing policies and objectives relating to built and natural heritage, biodiversity, climate action, conservation and the environment.

Key considerations arising:

- The feedback on the evolution of the role indicates a maturing and integration of the role into local authorities, where the heritage officer has come to be seen as a trusted advisor and partner within the local authority. While accepting that the programme is 20-years old, this has to be considered a success for the LAHOP.
- This LAHOP success has led to increased demands on the programme and its resources. This is a challenge of all successful developmental work programmes with posts of responsibility created to develop interest, awareness and support best-practice in a specific area. When such interest and awareness is created, the resources need to adapt to meet demand and continue to sustain

Are any of the following professionals currently employed by your Local Authority (and/or jointly employed with other Local Authorities)?

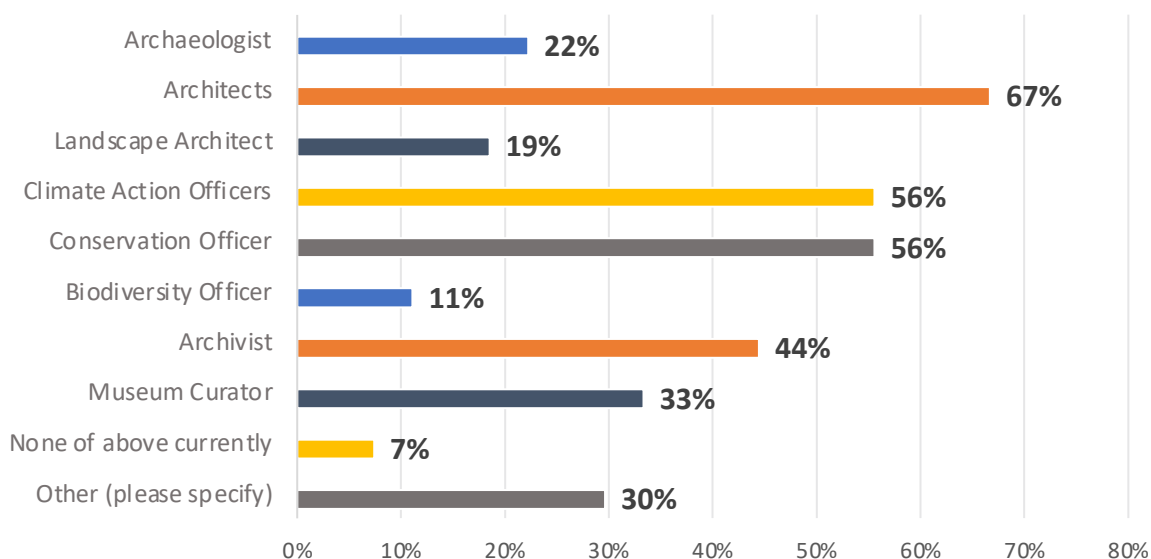


Fig. 4: The percentage of local authorities with specified roles which may align/overlap with the work of heritage officers.

and grow interest. Where meeting such demand is seen to be a priority, the resources applied should grow, but where they do not grow, the approach needs to adapt.

- It is noteworthy that there is limited variance in the relative focus of time invested in current activities and respondents preferred (%) time input for such activities. Aside from variances in relation to planning applications (particularly for three of the 27 respondents) heritage officers are largely focusing on the kinds of activities, on which they believe they should be focusing. The analysis may nonetheless enable the Heritage Council and local authorities to identify whether the focus of the work aligns with intended approaches/priorities.
- Access to administrative support is important to optimising specialist resources and to the sustained development of an accessible heritage service. This is particularly so, where such a service is successful in creating demand, as may be evidenced through heritage events or projects in the city/county and the vibrancy of community engagement through the local heritage forum). In the vast majority of local authorities, the review found that the LAHOP has access to administrative support and it seems reasonable that the heritage programme should have access to administrative support in all local authorities. Where administrative support is not possible, the application of the LAHOP needs to take account of that.

- In terms of other heritage-related roles, local authorities have differing resources. The overlap/complementarity in these differing resources is likely to bring a different focus to the work carried out under the LAHOP. This is a strength of the programme but should be managed proactively to ensure resource optimisation and a holistic approach to heritage.

2.2 Policy-making and Integration

Policy-making

A conduit for policy-making and integration

National stakeholders, from the Heritage Council and elsewhere, highlighted the ability of the LAHOP to give the Heritage Council a national reach with local insight. The value of this national reach echoed in the role that local authority heritage offices have been playing in helping to shape national policy (including Heritage Ireland 2030). It was also acknowledged that the LAHOP can act as a bridge between the local authority and other national agencies, such as the Office of Public Works and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Senior managers from local government also highlighted heritage officers' ability to move between departments and/or stakeholders as one of the role's most valuable

assets. These interviewees agreed that the heritage office plays a critical and positive role in the local authority, noting that the ability to network and develop partnerships is an ability that is "not always understood in other parts of the local authority".

Interviewees from local government (and other stakeholders) also noted that heritage officers are highly regarded for their ability to engage with the public and that such engagement reflects positively on the local authority. There was recognition of the value of the LAHOP in local communities through examples where the heritage offices' unique understanding and knowledge of local issues and sentiment was valuable in engaging with the community: they "understand the local nuances", they can "bridge the gaps" and "have trust on the ground" being considered far less "top-down" than other processes. Heritage officers' local knowledge means they can build a network and goodwill through "community groups that can help them get things done"; that this is something that national / partner agencies, or even other parts of a local authority, can sometimes find hard to match.

Influencing local and national policy

Stakeholders from national agencies, in particular, were quick to point out the critical role played by the LAHOP in national policy and stated clearly that they

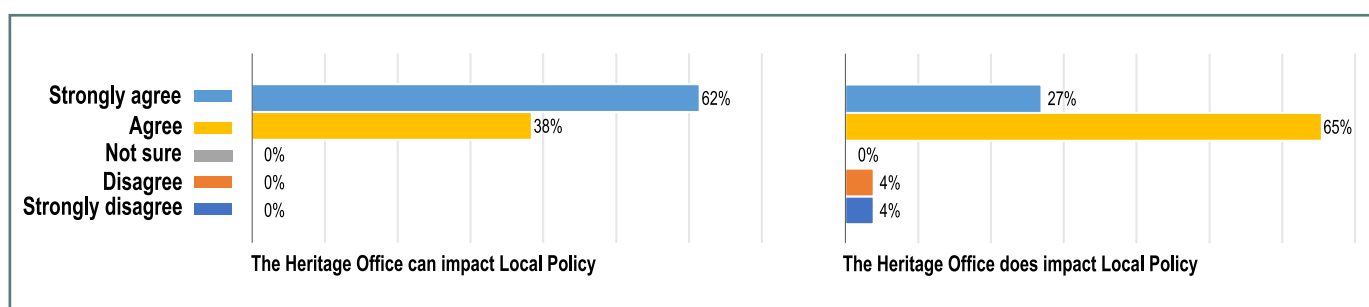


Fig. 5: Perspectives on influencing local policy

felt there was a stronger relationship with heritage officers (compared to other local authority heritage-related roles) given that the LAHOP was a national-local partnership.

When it comes to influencing policy, LAHOP survey respondents (heritage officers) largely agree or strongly agree that heritage offices can impact local policy (**Fig. 5, below**) and national policy (**Fig. 6, below**), but the perspectives are less assured as to whether heritage offices do impact policy locally or nationally.

The reason for the perceived gap in the potential impact and the achievement of such impact may be due to a number of reasons. In interviews with local authority senior managers, it was noted that the strength of the work of the LAHOP in terms of on the ground engagement and policy advocacy, can occasionally mean that they are perceived adversarially within the local authority or viewed as being against progress/development (e.g. in relation to planning issues). One

such senior manager noted however that this frustration is likely to be with 'heritage' rather than the LAHOP; where there can be frustrations regarding heritage ownership, preservation requirements or development proposals relating to buildings/sites, which can impact upon local authority finances.

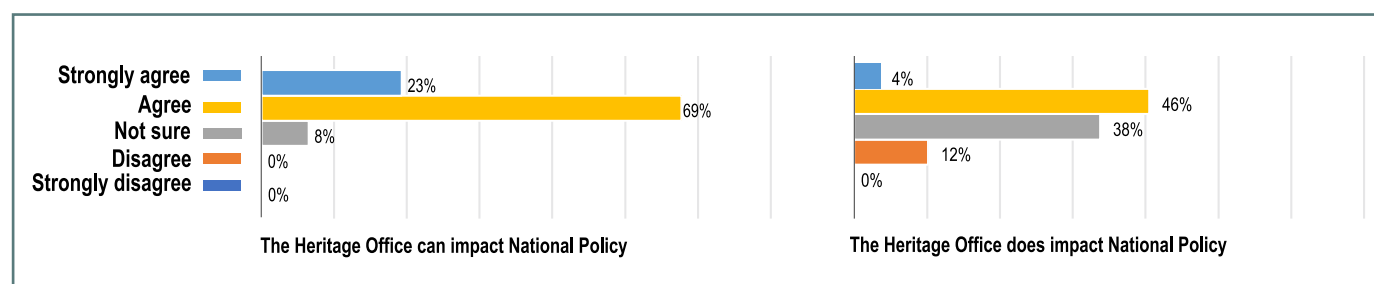


Fig. 6: Perspectives on influencing national policy

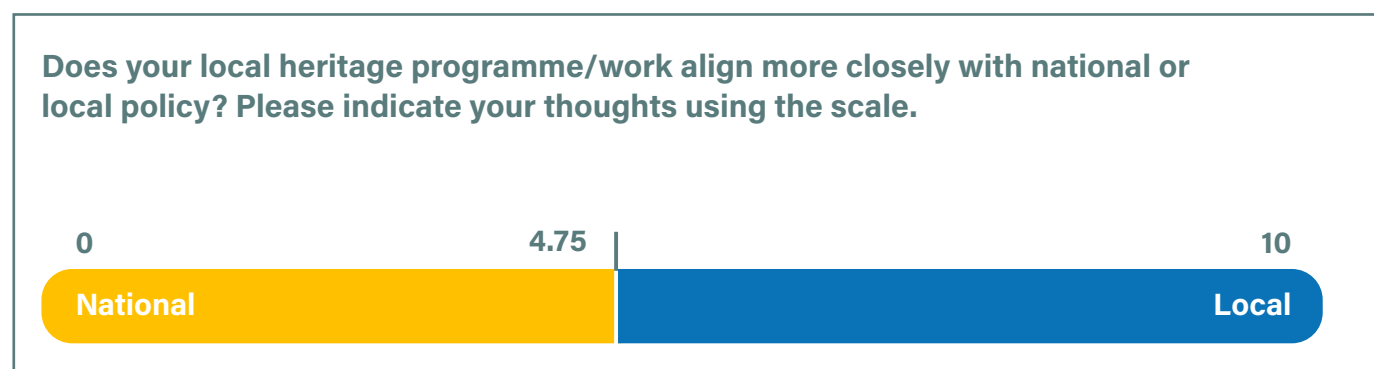


Fig. 7: Response of local authority heritage officers in relation to local/national policy alignment

Other national stakeholders noted that heritage officers were often sought out to support other work or initiatives, and so the gap (between potential/achieved policy impact) could also be a factor of time available to advance policy agendas.

Policy alignment

Feedback from the survey of heritage officers suggests that the LAHOP aligns quite equally with local and national policies (**Fig. 7 below**). Within this policy context, it is also important to take into account that the local government sector is increasingly providing leadership in the delivery of a broad range of national policies and programmes at local level.

Heritage within key local plans

Through the evaluative survey, the research sought to ascertain heritage office perspectives on the place of heritage within key plans at local authority level. The plans included are the City/County Development Plan, where consideration of heritage is a requirement, the Local Economic and Community Plan, and the Corporate Plan.

City/County Development Plans

Fig. 8 (below) indicates over 74% of respondents identify that heritage is strategically prioritised within their local authority's City/County Development Plan, with just under 26% identifying that heritage is referenced, rather than prioritised.

Local Economic and Community Plans

Fig. 9 (below) indicates that 65% of respondents identified that heritage was either prioritised (stated

How is heritage included in your Local Authority's County/City Development Plan?

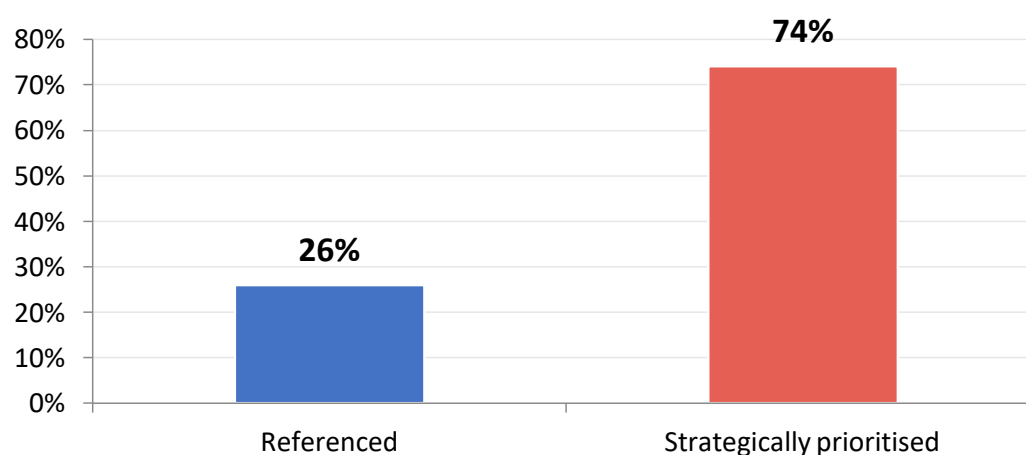


Fig. 8: Integration of heritage into local authority City/County Development Plan

Local Economic and Community Plans

Please indicate the extent to which heritage features in your Local Economic and Community Plan.

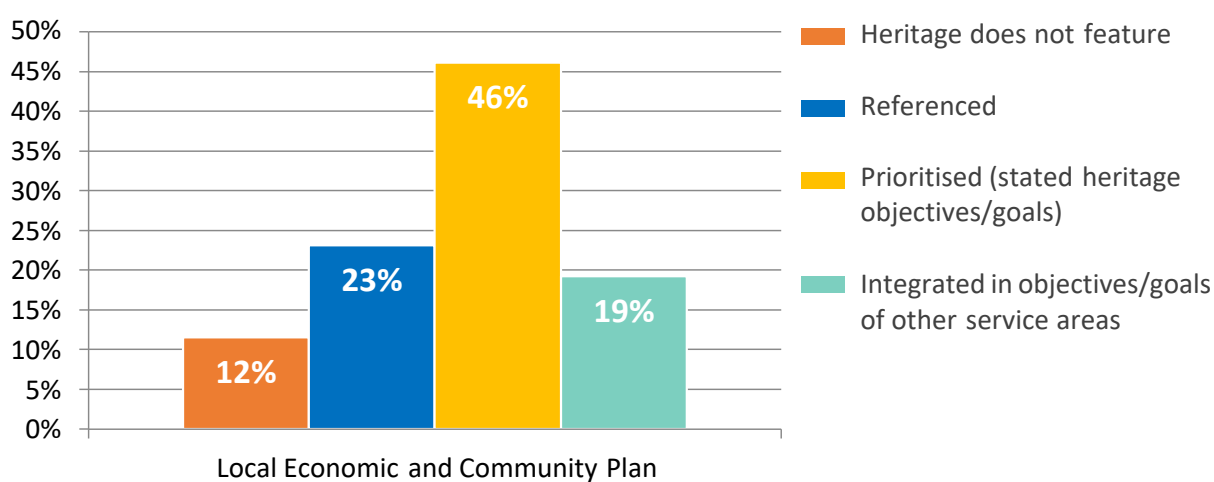


Fig. 9: Integration of heritage into local authority LECs.

Corporate Plan

Please indicate the extent to which heritage features in your Corporate Plan.

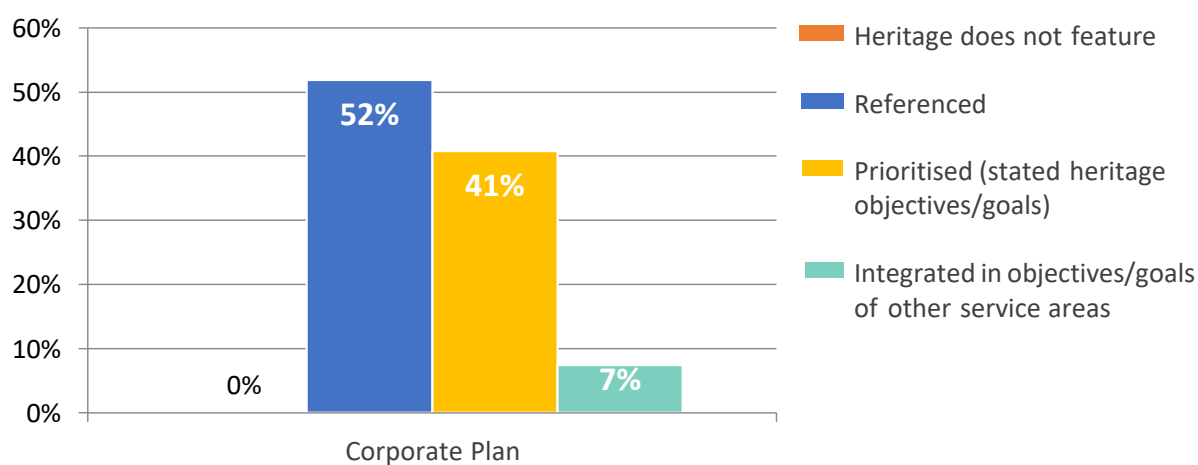


Fig. 10: Integration of heritage into local authority corporate plans.

heritage objectives/goals) or integrated (through objectives/goals of other service areas) into the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). Less than 23% noted that heritage was referenced in the LECP where just three respondents noted that heritage did not feature in the LECP.

Corporate Plan

The survey of heritage officers indicates that heritage is incorporated into all corporate plans of those surveyed with 41% identifying that heritage is prioritised and 7% noting that heritage is integrated through wider objectives/goals (**Fig. 10, below**) .

Key considerations arising:

- There is a broad consensus that the LAHOP partnership, as currently structured, functions effectively in terms of the reach and delivery it provides to national heritage partners and to the local government sector, as well as between local and national partners.
- The potential for the LAHOP to be perceived adversarially may simply be a factor of policy tensions, where such tensions can arise (and be resolved) in the implementation of many policy areas. The issue may nonetheless benefit from attention in terms of:
 - a) Strategic communication on the value of heritage to progress/development, both nationally and through Heritage Council - local government partnership processes; and
 - b) Engagement between the Heritage Council and individual local authorities which
- can help to identify trends, challenges and possible solutions to such policy tensions.
- It appears as if the role/linkages that national partners appreciate between the LAHOP and local/national policy development is not as fully appreciated by all heritage offices. To strengthen this work, the LAHOP may benefit from peer-engagement in relation to the role in helping to shape policy, recognising that 92% agree/strongly agree that the heritage office impacts local policy, with agreement/strong agreement from 50% of respondents that the local authority heritage office impacts national policy.
- While survey responses in relation to heritage inclusion in key local plans are subjective, it is noteworthy that heritage is either prioritised or integrated into other goals and objectives of almost two-thirds of all LECPs and almost half of all corporate plans. It appears reasonable therefore to suggest that a goal of the LAHOP (certainly from the perspective of the Heritage Council) should be to have heritage either prioritised or integrated into broader goals and objectives of corporate plans and LECPs for all local authorities.
- Any such approaches to prioritisation or integration of heritage into local plans would understandably vary between local authorities. In that context, it may be valuable for the LAHOP to consider what such prioritisation or integration could look like, in order for each local authority to be fully informed about the approach that meets their needs. Ideas of prioritisation and integration are not mutually exclusive.

2.3 Resourcing

Return on Investment

Representatives from local government senior management and from national partners shared a clear view that the Heritage Council's 25% salary investment delivered value for money, increasing the profile, reach and implementation of the National heritage agenda on a local and nationwide level. Interviewees were keen to point out that, without the 25% salary investment, the link between local and national policy would be weakened, and that such (national-local) linkages are weaker, less open and less dynamic in areas where such co-funding relationships do not exist (referring to other heritage-related and culture-related roles).

Senior managers from local government also noted the importance of the 25% salary contribution where "local authorities are challenged trying to provide and certainly the Heritage Council subvention is welcomed". It was made clear that, in cases where creating/retaining posts are under discussion, the 25% investment can make a difference in what gets prioritised. It was also noted by local authority senior managers that the heritage office delivers for the Heritage Council, and also for local authorities in how they leverage funding "for local authorities and communities through development of projects which attract support from a variety of sources".

Over a three-year period, the Heritage Council estimates that almost 40% of its resources have been invested with/through partnerships at local authority level. Such investment takes place through LAHOP salary contributions, training and development, county heritage plan grants, Historic Town grants and Irish Walled Town Network grants.

Fig. 11 (below) sets out heritage spending for 2019 in terms of monies secured for spending approved directly by local authority heritage offices (Direct Funding). The Heritage Council has provided this evaluation with

details of its 2019 investment to the 29 local authorities that employ heritage officers. Other figures are based on data provided to this evaluation by 25 local authority heritage officers in response to the research survey.

If the above data specific to 25 research respondents (per Fig.11, note 4) were extrapolated pro rata for 29 local authorities, total direct funding sourced and managed under the LAHOP amounts to an estimated €6,672,866. This excludes salary costs, where the Heritage Council contributed €539,185 across the 29 local authorities in 2019 (including €2,860 in shared training and development costs).

Fig. 12 (below) seeks to consider additional monies invested in heritage projects by local authorities, where such monies are not approved by Heritage Officers but by others within the local authority (Leveraged Internally). Such monies may include spending such as capital projects, or heritage-related spending in tourism or community development projects. Fig.12 also sets out an estimate of additional monies invested by other projects and partners, which the heritage office helped to leverage (Leveraged Externally). In each case, heritage officers were asked to note the source of the externally leveraged funding.

In terms of monies leveraged within the local authority, this is estimated to be an additional €818,717. If the above data specific to 25 research respondents (per Fig.12, note 1) were extrapolated pro rata for 29 local authorities, additional internal funding enabled by the LAHOP amounts to an estimated €949,711. In terms of other monies, respondents estimate that a total of €2.75m has been leveraged (external to the local authority) in 2019, noting that this includes 'other' investment of €2.2m, of which one project accounts for €1.6m in that year.

LAHOP Funding Sources	Direct Funding ¹	
	Average	Total
Heritage Council ² – County Heritage Plans	€22,414	€650,843
Heritage Council – Historic Towns Initiative Grants ³	€33,352	€967,222
Heritage Council – Irish Walled Towns Network Grants ⁴	€8,013	€210,090
Local Authority ⁵	€102,501	€2,562,524
Creative Ireland ⁵	€7,244	€443,435
Biodiversity Action Plan Funding ⁵	€13,271	€331,784
Built Heritage Investment Scheme ⁵	€17,961	€449,022
Historic Structures Fund ⁵	€13,014	€325,350
Commemorations Funding ⁴	€6,678	€166,951
Other ⁵	€6,390	€159,741
Total	€230,838	€6,266,962

1. Table does not include heritage officer salaries and/or salary contributions made by Heritage Council.
2. Data provided by The Heritage Council for investment across all 29 (LAHOP) local authorities.
3. This funding is specific to designated towns. The true average for this specific scheme is €161,204 across six local authorities.
4. This funding is specific to designated towns. The true average for this specific scheme is €23,343 across 9 local authorities.
5. n = 25 respondents, where data was provided through a survey of Local Authority Heritage Officers.

Fig. 11: Funding sourced/managed under the LAHOP in 2019

LAHOP Funding Sources ^{1,2}	Leveraged Internally		Leveraged Externally	
	Average	Total	Average	Total
Local Authority	€20,129	€503,237	€2,321	€58,017
Heritage Council			€2,966	€74,156
Historic Towns Initiative			€1,364	€34,100
Irish Walled Towns Network			€2,580	€64,500
Creative Ireland	€4,849	€121,225	€2,036	€50,900
Biodiversity Action Plan Funding	€2,674	€66,861	€3,365	€84,134
Built Heritage Investment Scheme			€3,600	€90,000
Historic Structures Fund	€1,810	€45,253	€2,280	€57,000
Commemorations Funding	€3,278	€81,956	€1,000	€25,000
Other	€7,160	€179,000	€88,652	€2,216,298
Total	€32,749	€818,717	€110,164³	€2,754,105³

1. Total of 25 Respondents.
2. Table does not include heritage officer salaries or salary contributions made by Heritage Council.
3. One project constituted €1.6m of the total figure, impacting on the related average.

Fig. 12: Heritage officers' estimate of funding leveraged as a result of the LAHOP, in 2019

Key considerations arising:

- The Heritage Council's 2019 investment of €539,185 in LAHOP salaries (incl. €2,860 in training and development) enables additional Heritage Council spending of €1,828,155 across the country (based on Heritage Council data). This represents almost €3.40 for every €1 invested by the Heritage Council in LAHOP personnel.
- Based on figures provided by 25 local authorities, it is estimated that non-Heritage Council LAHOP spending on heritage activities across the 29 local authorities (excluding salary costs) is €4,844,711. This represents €8.99 for every €1 invested by the Heritage Council in LAHOP personnel.
- Taking the figures together, the €539,185 invested by the Heritage Council in LAHOP personnel enables combined spending of €6,672,866 (excluding local authority salary contributions). This represents a return of €12.38 in spending power for every €1 in direct spending invested by the Heritage Council on salaries, through the LAHOP.
- If additional monies leveraged within the local authority are included (€818,717), the return on investment is over €14 for every €1 invested in salaries through the LAHOP. This figure increases further to a ratio of over €19:€1 where other monies (external to the local authority) are leveraged. If the individual project of €1.6m were to be excluded on the basis that it is a 2019 anomaly, the ratio of spending to monies invested would be just over €16:€1 of Heritage Council LAHOP salary investment.
- Heritage Council stakeholders are clear that Heritage Council investment in city/county heritage plan programmes is entirely contingent on the LAHOP. They note additionally that,

without the LAHOP, there would be weakened take-up in the Community Heritage Grant Schemes. In such schemes, the LAHOP is not the direct applicant but the Heritage Council can identify a strong correlation in the number of applications to this scheme and the local authorities which have well-established local heritage networks aligned to the LAHOP.

2.4 LAHOP Outputs and Demonstrating Value

LAHOP Outputs

There are no standardised outputs for the LAHOP, although the programme carries an expectation that each local authority heritage office has an up-to-date heritage plan and a functioning heritage forum.

Following a number of meetings of the M.CO Heritage Officers Focus Group, potential output indicators were identified and incorporated into the evaluative survey. Taking figures for 2019, the evaluative survey sought to identify and distil responses regarding possible programme outputs, from status of local authority heritage plans and heritage forums, to person-to-person communication and media outputs.

Local Authority Heritage Plans and Heritage Forums:

Based on the evaluative survey, 77% of respondents have a local authority heritage plan which is in date, and 23% do not. Survey feedback also shows that 69% of respondents currently have a local authority heritage forum and 31% do not. (For each of these questions, n=26).

Heritage Projects:

Heritage officers outlined the number of projects in which they were involved. This included:

- 382 projects led by heritage offices; and
- 311 additional projects with heritage office participation.

While it is acknowledged that the quantum of projects is not a clearly defined indicator (as there can be significant variance in the scale, demand and duration of different projects) it is interesting to note that the breakdown of projects is approximately 55% in-house and 45% projects with heritage office participation.

specific study. There was large variance between uses and engagement on electronic media but respondents utilising social media undoubtedly extended the reach of their communications and their work (and it is noteworthy that 'digital training' was an area of significant interest among respondents).

Heritage Office Communications

A range of data on heritage communications data is set out in **Fig. 13 (below)**:

The communications data, summarised above, estimates that almost 23,000 person-to-person communications took place in 2019.

Interactions through online and media activities also had a very large reach of over 1.8m, noting that the nature and breakdown of such engagement was answered in a variety of ways (e.g. number/type of website views vs followers vs posts vs likes etc) and would require a

Heritage Office Communications

A range of data on heritage communications data is set out in **Fig. 13 (below)**:

Type of Communication	Average no. of communications per heritage office	Total number of communications per type
Heritage programme person-to-person communication activities:		
Number of site visits (n=26)	69	1786
Number of talks given (n=26)	12	304
Number of meetings attended (n=26)	145	3758
Number of phone calls in connection with public queries (n=26)	650	16901
Heritage programme online/media communication activities¹:		
Number of people on heritage mailing lists (n=26)	569	11956
Number of heritage website views (n=23)	28829	403608
Number of press releases (n=25)	10	258
Number of media interviews/promotions (local or national press, radio) (n=25)	19	457
Number of Heritage Week events in your city/county (n=29)*	72	2089

1. Not all respondents included numbers under all sections e.g. they may not use mailing lists; they could not assess the website numbers etc.

2. Figures for social media not included.

* Data provided by Heritage Council.

Fig. 13: Table of estimated total and (mean) average communications for heritage offices in 2019

Views on success and demonstrating value:

Views on success:

Heritage officer performance is managed in each local authority through performance management development systems (as with other local authority officials). The LAHOP does not currently utilise shared measures of success (across the LAHOP) and interviews with senior stakeholders in local government and at national level highlighted the challenge of monitoring and evaluation without shared measures of success.

Within the evaluative survey, respondents were asked to consider and rank ways in which success (and progress over time) could be measured/seen (**Fig. 14, below**), including increased profile and awareness of heritage in the city/county; implementation of heritage plan; increased budget and resources; influencing decisions

and policy relating to heritage in the city/county, and increased participation.

Demonstrating value

Interviewees from senior stakeholders in local government and from national partners agreed that metrics would be of great value, though most agreed that the nature of the role meant it was a challenge. It was highlighted that the value of the heritage officer role would be enhanced by metrics with one interviewee noting that “the role deteriorates in profile and value without metrics”. One interviewee stated, by way of example an example, that a heritage plan without dates against actions had reduced value and credibility.

Heritage Officers responding to the LAHOP evaluative survey indicated a strong willingness and interest in identifying the best ways of monitoring and evaluating their programmes and demonstrating value for money. Some quantitative analysis from the survey respondents

Arrange the following in order of relative importance for success for your Local Authority heritage office.

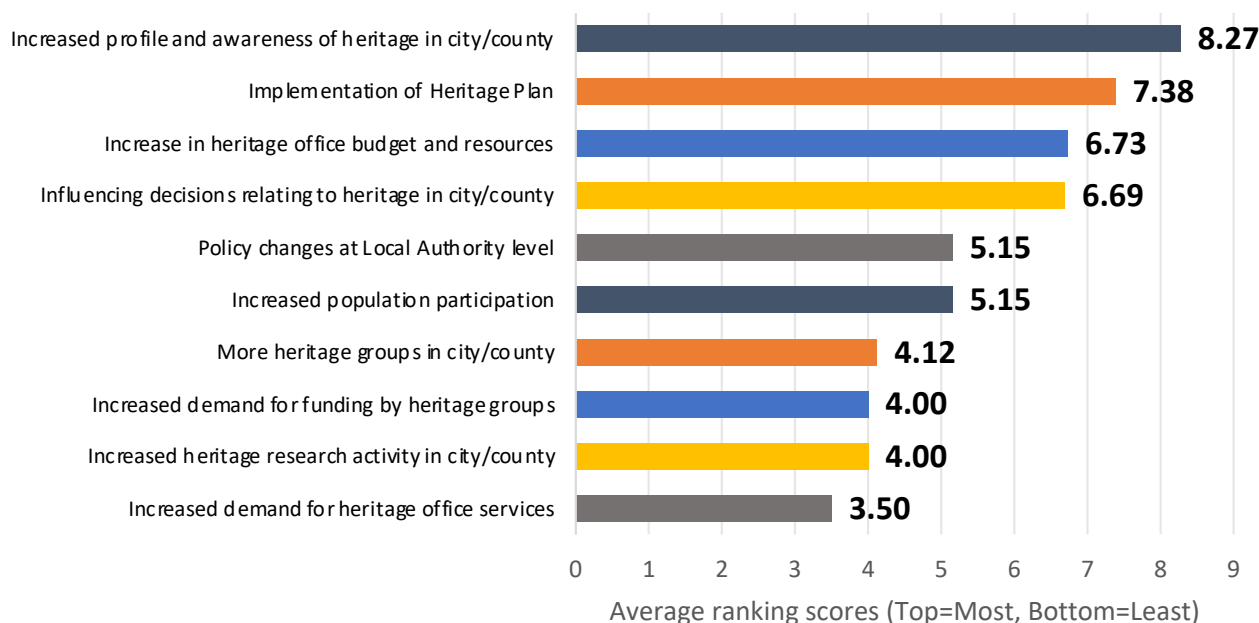


Fig. 14: Heritage officer perspectives on measures of success

notes the potential of programme KPIs (35%) and project metrics (21%) while others recognise the value of socio-economic impact analysis (17%) and attitudinal research (7%).

In addition to this data, respondents noted the potential/need for:

- Annual or frequent Heritage Officer Network conferences focusing on projects and approaches (possibly initiating through webinars in 2021).
- Developing a standardised national heritage data collection programme, such as the UK "Heritage Counts" programme.
- Developing a combined (national) report on our Heritage Plan actions for the year.
- Reviewing annual reporting to The Heritage Council on the implementation of County Heritage Plans to ensure it is fit-for-purpose.
- Appropriate and informed local authority key performance indicators need to be developed and applied.

Key considerations arising:

- From the survey data, the outputs suggest that the LAHOP is pro-active (talks/site visits/ events/press releases) and well-engaged (meetings/calls/emails/other communication).
- The percentage of local authorities without heritage plans (23%) and/or local authority heritage forums (31%) is higher than would have been anticipated (where n=26). It is important to understand the mechanisms for the Heritage Council and local authorities to review progress in these key areas. There may be valid reasoning behind the absence of these core

aspects of the LAHOP, and it is also important to understand the challenges faced by those local authorities where local authority heritage plans/forums are not currently in operation.

- The M.CO Heritage Officers Focus Group aired discussions on the approach to developing heritage plans, noting specifically that guidelines for the development of local authority heritage plans were (a) in need of updating and (b) that such updating should take a greater account of the evolution/development in local authority heritage offices over time.
- Respondents commitment to measurement, evaluation and monitoring is an opportunity to be grasped. An up-to-date heritage plan, and a functioning heritage forum would appear to be prerequisites and could be considered as key performance indicators for local authority heritage functions (e.g., within the National Oversight and Audit Commission framework).
- Where local authorities require bespoke approaches to meet local needs, it is neither useful nor appropriate for measures of success to be framed as a means for comparison between local authorities. The appropriate measurement is for each individual local authority over time, where a base-year can be established, and local authorities can target and track progress in areas relevant to their needs.
- Any form of data gathering needs to be aligned and agreed in order that it is user-friendly. If the system is cumbersome, or if different local/national organisations seek data in different ways, measurement is less valuable.

2.5 Heritage Officer Network

As previously stated in Section 4.2, national partners recognise significant value in the LAHOP and the heritage officer network as a means of policy dissemination and/or engagement in national dialogue.

In terms of heritage officers, almost 90% of survey respondents strongly agree that the Heritage Officer Network “is a valuable resource” and over 95% either agree or strongly agree with this statement (**Fig. 15, below**).

A similar combined proportion (95%+) either agree or strongly agree that the Heritage Officer Network enables peer learning and supports heritage officers in the performance of their roles.

Respondents agree, but less strongly, that the network increases their ability to influence national policy, or that it gives them access to training and expertise they might not otherwise access.

When qualitative insights were noted in relation to aspects of the Heritage Officer Network that worked well:

- There was a relatively equal and shared breakdown of key aspects, including: training, support, knowledge sharing, communications and access to diverse expertise.
- Additional common benefits – mentioned by many respondents – included reduced isolation, national representation, and the network as an enabler/mechanism for the development of joint projects and collaborations.
- Other aspects – mentioned by some respondents – included the benefit of the network in terms of helping to identify contractors, the role of the network as a sounding board, and the benefit of honest peer to peer feedback.

The survey also garnered feedback in relation to aspects of the Heritage Officer Network that could be strengthened. These include:

- The need to strengthen the connection between the Heritage Officer Network and the Heritage Council, ideally through a direct/dedicated Heritage Council resource for the LAHOP*.
- Additional areas identified by many respondents included that administrative elements of meetings and the potential for greater use of technology / meetings online and exploring accreditation of courses.

Key considerations arising:

- There appears to be a clear value in maintaining and strengthening the current approach to the Heritage Officer Network. As a network of specialist local authority officers (i.e. one per local authority) the support aspect of the Heritage Officer Network may appear less tangible, but it is important to heritage officers and even more so in the current context of remote working. The role and value of the network/LAHOP is also recognised by other heritage partners (as evidenced elsewhere) in its role as a conduit for development and dissemination of national policy.
- *Follow-up engagement with the Heritage Officer Focus Group suggests that the ‘ask’ for a dedicated Heritage Council resource for the LAHOP may be more reflective of a perceived need to strengthen relationships between the Heritage Council and local authorities at a strategic level (rather than supporting the relationship between the Heritage Council and the network).

Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with each of the following statements – “The Heritage Officer Network...”

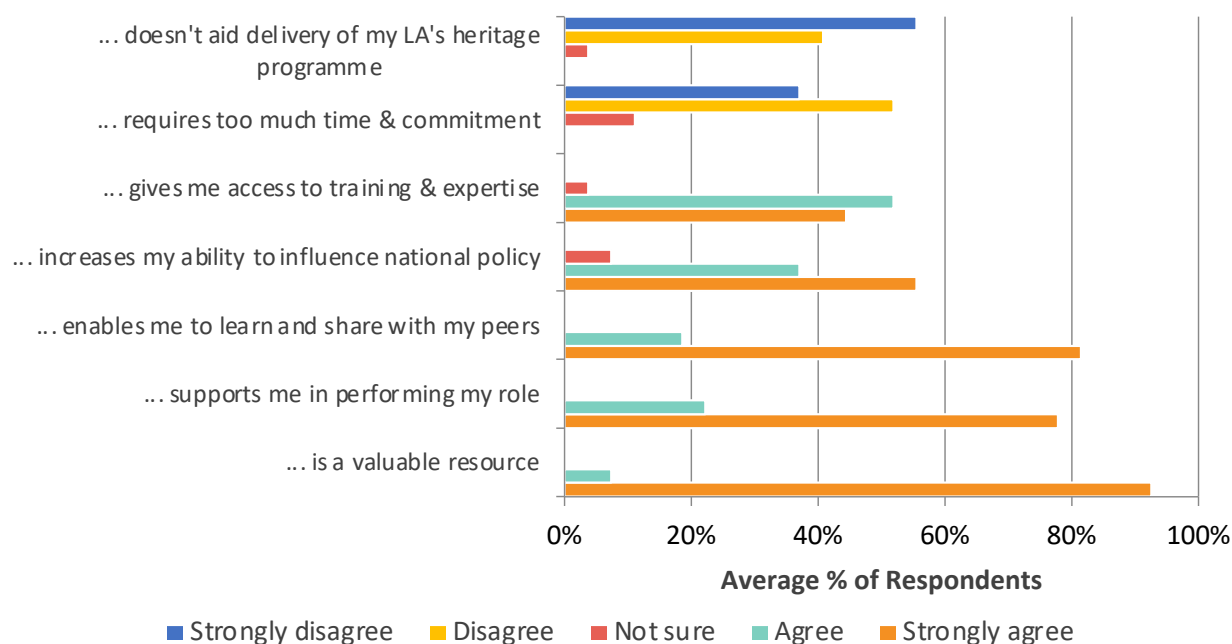


Fig. 15: Perspectives on the Heritage Officer Network

2.6 Areas for future development

Areas of strategic importance

A number of areas of potential strategic importance were identified by the Heritage Council and the Local Government Management Association in the brief for evaluation of the LAHOP. These areas were:

- The challenge of climate change and the collapse of biodiversity
- Heritage within the context of the European Union (legacy of EYCH2018) and the Dept of Foreign Affairs' strategy, Global Ireland.
- Heritage and its role in creating social capital
- Strategic communications around heritage

Working with the M.CO Focus Group, the evaluative study reviewed the list and added other areas of possible importance. The survey of local authority heritage officers then sought to establish an overview of areas of strategic importance for heritage officers (**Fig. 16, below**). From this list, climate change and the collapse in biodiversity was seen as the area of greatest emerging strategic importance. This was followed by heritage led regeneration, strategic communications around heritage, health and wellbeing, new modes of living and working and heritage tourism.

Respondents also suggested additional areas of strategic importance such as: youth and heritage; new communities, heritage and identity; economic value, heritage employment and the importance of traditional skills.

Please rank and prioritise from the list below, what you feel will be the new/emerging areas of strategic importance for heritage.

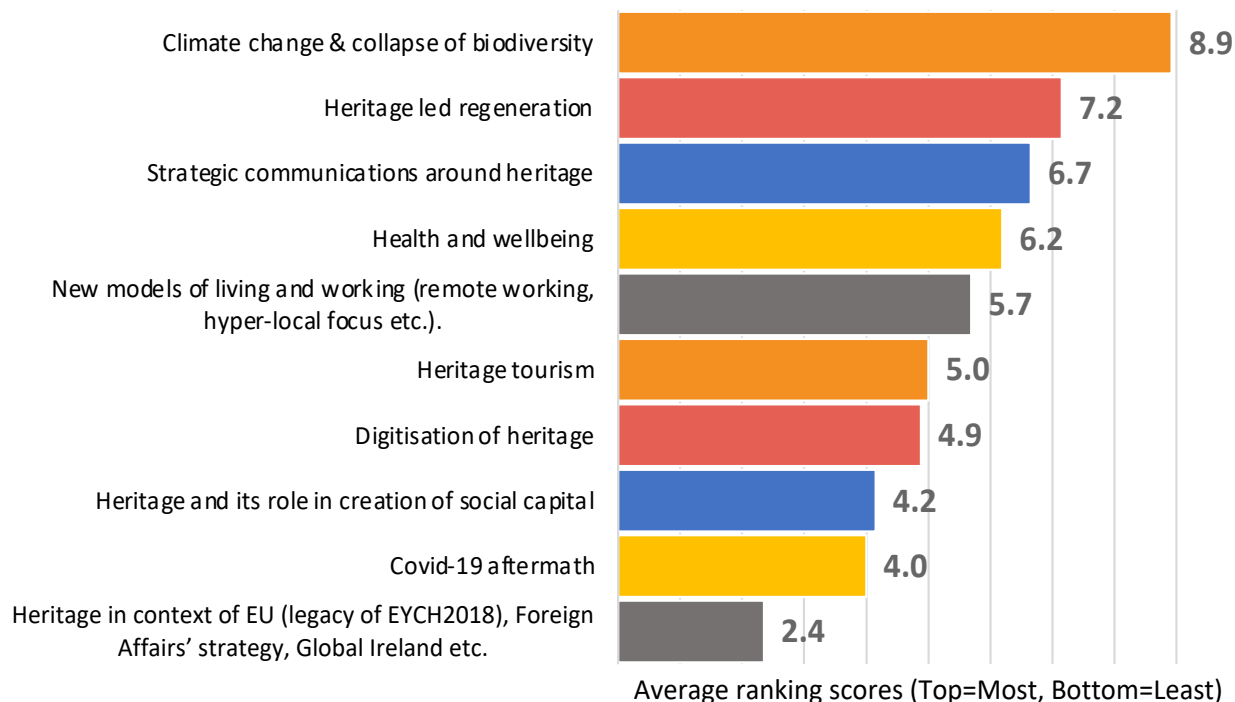


Fig. 16: Heritage officer perspectives on the future new/emerging areas of strategic importance for heritage

Enhancing the LAHOP:

Enhancing the Heritage Office at local authority level

Fig. 17 (below) sets out a range of possibilities and possible impacts of expanding and enhancing the Heritage Officer Programme and/or function at local level. Respondents envisage that expansion and further resources would enable the service to meet current demand, increase the profile of the work and the heritage services, increase community engagement, and increase strategic linkages, amongst other answers.

Within 14 possible scenarios summarised below however, it is noteworthy that 57% of respondents rated 'Meet current demand for heritage service' as the No.1

impact that would arise from expansion and further resourcing of the heritage office in the local authority.

A call for enhanced resources

Respondents were also asked for ways in which the Local Authority Heritage Officer Programme could be improved. The responses showed a strong emphasis on increasing human/financial resources

Beyond the call for increased resources for each heritage officer, the strongest call is for increased Heritage Council resources for the LAHOP via a dedicated officer to engage with the LAHOP and the Heritage Officers Network. This is backed by calls for improved communications with the Heritage Council and increased Heritage Council guidance and support.

**Expansion and further resourcing of the Heritage Office would...
(rated most important to least important):**

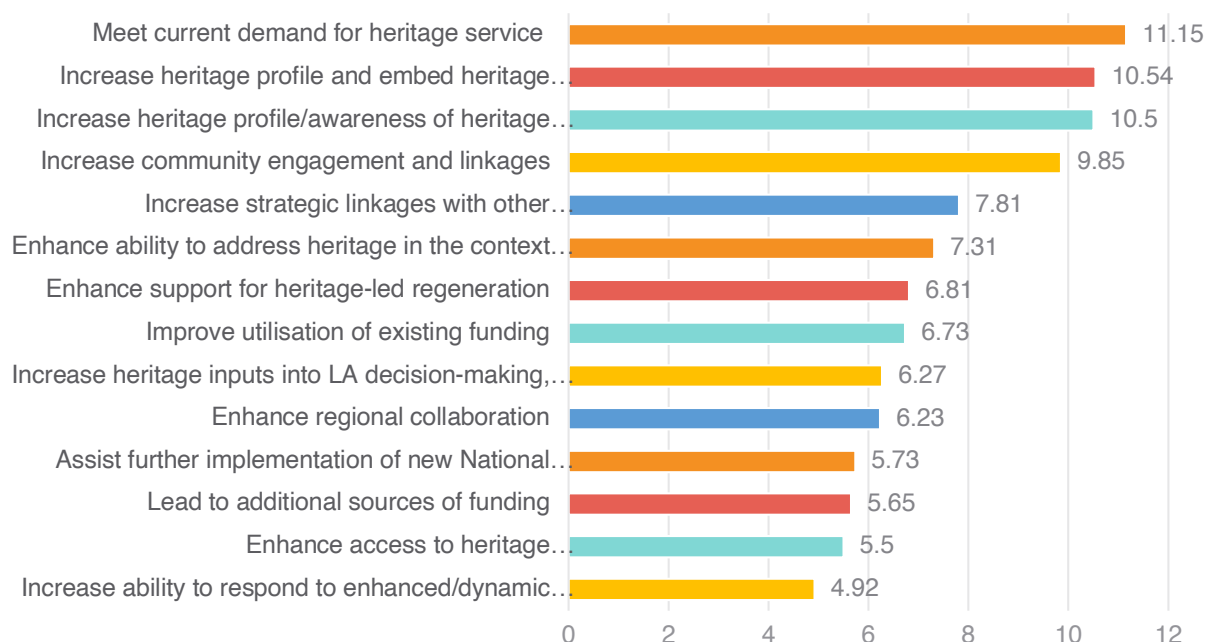


Fig. 17: Heritage officer perspectives on the impacts of expanding and further resourcing the heritage office

Engagement with senior managers in local government indicates that increased investment from local sources will be unlikely in the medium term and that any such increases would therefore have to come through national partners.

Key considerations arising:

- Climate change, biodiversity and increasing local authority climate action is expected have a significant impact on the LAHOP. As local authorities build climate action teams, it is unclear what role that LAHOP might play. In the context of increased human resources for areas of climate action, the local authority heritage office could lean in and be part of climate action, step back from areas related to climate action and biodiversity (with other resources now focusing on this area) to focus on other aspects of the heritage brief, or leverage/dovetail LAHOP work with the climate action agenda.
- The increased role taken on by young people in relation to climate action is, in itself, a strategic communications opportunity for the LAHOP. Other aspects of strategic communication can be coordinated through existing networks.
- New modes of living, post-COVID renewal and urban and rural regeneration are also opportunities/challenges that will continue to present for the LAHOP, and these are linked to the role of heritage in the creation of social capital.

- Alongside broader/societal considerations, areas of strategic importance for the LAHOP will also need to take account of Government policy, and the 2020 Programme for Government clearly sees a role for the LAHOP in relation to health and wellbeing. Heritage 2030 will see a key role for local authorities under heritage partnerships and the LAHOP needs to work out what the role of the local authority heritage office will be in this regard.
- Each local authority heritage office will also need to take account of areas of local strategic importance. While there will undoubtedly be significant overlap in nationally and locally important areas, there may be a variation in emphasis and, given the strengths of the LAHOP (in terms of the diversity of expertise, the strength of the network and the commitment to local government) there would appear to be potential for the LAHOP to strengthen its alignment with the strategic agenda of each local authority.
- It is not surprising that heritage officers would see significant potential within increased resources and staffing. There is broad recognition around the challenge of meeting demand for services. This aligns with the challenge of any developmental role. If resources cannot be achieved to meet increasing demand then the frameworks, strategies, expectations and processes need to adapt to help ensure the potential of the heritage function can sustain and continue to flourish.
- Finally, changes/improvements sought in terms of strategic frameworks for Heritage Council – LAHOP engagement also warrant attention.





An aerial photograph of a city street corner. A large, light-colored building with a prominent, tall, pointed spire is the central focus. To its right, a modern, multi-story building with a glass facade is visible. In the background, several construction cranes are visible against a cloudy sky. The foreground shows a street with a red fire hydrant and some utility poles. The overall scene is a mix of old and new architecture.

Section 3

Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions & Recommendations

This review sets out research and analysis across a number of areas in Section 2. Within this analysis, and highlighted in the key considerations arising, are insights which inform preliminary conclusions in the evaluation of the LAHOP. This evaluation makes five recommendations for the LAHOP.

3.1 The focus of the LAHOP

The Heritage Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 - Heritage at the Heart states that The Heritage Council will "support the local authority Heritage Officer Network and assess how the range of local heritage services can be expanded to maximise the leadership role of local authorities". The forthcoming **Heritage Ireland 2030** also envisages a strong partnership role for local authorities, with implementation likely to require local authority resources to support coordination and delivery.

As recognised by the **Framework for Collaboration** (2017) between the Heritage Council and the local government sector (and exemplified in Fig.4 of this evaluation), heritage-related activities – beyond the LAHOP – are quite extensive within local authorities and the potential for enhanced climate action teams may lead to further specialist resources. The operating context for the LAHOP continues to change.

It is noteworthy also that the **2020 Programme for Government** proposes other heritage-related roles and references specific areas of focus for the LAHOP around county heritage plans, heritage education, health and wellbeing and citizen science. To this, there are emerging areas of strategic importance (Section 2.6). These may vary between local authorities, or change over time, but such varying needs only lend weight to the value of an agile, well-supported and well-networked resource.

Given the widespread acknowledgement of the importance of the LAHOP as a conduit between policy and delivery, locally and nationally, and its integrated approach to built, natural, cultural and intangible

heritage, it is clear that the LAHOP plays a key and valued role in Ireland's heritage. The changing context nonetheless calls for renewed clarity in the future focus of LAHOP.

Recommendation 1:

Refine the focus of LAHOP objectives.

The strengths of the Heritage Officer Programme lie in its broad and integrated heritage remit, its policy and delivery reach, and also its agility (as a role) to meet local/local authority needs. Within the evolution of the LAHOP, there are four possible scenarios:

- A. The LAHOP continues to be the forerunner for heritage within local authorities, helping to make the case for a range of technical roles / heritage-related specialisms which ultimately supersede the requirement for the over-arching heritage officer role;
- B. The heritage officer role becomes a line managing role for other technical roles / heritage-related specialisms within a local authority;
- C. The heritage officer role takes on a strategic/ integrating function within the local authority, ensuring that heritage-related policy and programme initiatives are coordinated and aligned through appropriate strategy, plans and processes; and/or
- D. The heritage officer role focuses primarily outward, on areas such as heritage education, wellbeing, citizen science and community engagement (as outlined in the 2020 PfG).

While the continued employment or positioning of heritage-related roles is a matter for each local authority, this evaluation sees significant rationale for the continued development of the heritage officer role as a strategic and integrating force which can develop and optimise heritage assets for local authorities

and for local communities (per items C and D). The refinement of the focus of each role would need to take account of other heritage-related roles within a local authority. Given the specialist nature of LAHOP work, consideration should be given to core competencies required within the local authority heritage officer role. Where possible, administrative support should also be a consideration.

Reviewing and restating the objectives for the LAHOP will also enable the development of shared and agreed approaches to metrics which can support programme development over time.

3.2 Investment in shared delivery

The Heritage Council's role is to 'propose policies and priorities for the identification, protection, preservation and enhancement of the national heritage' (Heritage Act 1995) with a responsibility to 'engage with, advise and support public authorities, local communities and persons in relation to the functions of the Council' (Heritage Act, 2018). These additional (2018) requirements place an onus on the Heritage Council to be proactive in relation to engagement, advice and support at local level.

It is clear that the LAHOP plays a critical role in informing policies and priorities for the Heritage Council and for Government and its agencies, while supporting delivery on these policies and priorities at local level, with an almost nationwide reach.

The Heritage Council currently makes a contribution of 25% to the salary costs of the LAHOP in each local authority. The fact that some local authorities still do not have a heritage officer – and that there have been gaps in provision over time – indicates that incentivisation continues to be required to ensure that the prioritisation and/or integration of the Heritage Council's agenda at local level. More importantly, the shared investment represents a partnership approach that is yielding a return in terms of a shared agenda, enabling and guiding heritage investment and leveraging additional resources for heritage. (Heritage Council investment in LAHOP

salaries enables a ratio of €1:€3.40 of additional Heritage Council spending, and a ratio of €1:€16 for total heritage programme investment across the country).

Recommendation 2:

That the Heritage Council continues to support heritage office salary costs.

The rationale for continuing this approach also lies in the strong partnership role it enables for others. Alongside the priorities and responsibilities of the Heritage Council, the 2020 Programme for Government (PfG) sets out a clear ambition for the LAHOP to support heritage education, health, wellbeing and citizen science, and the PfG seeks to ensure that adequate funding is made available for local authority heritage plans. Delivery of Heritage Ireland 2030 is also likely to require additional local authority input and the LAHOP appears to be best placed to coordinate and support such input (having already played that role in the development of Heritage Ireland 2030).

Ultimately, this is about optimising resources at local and national level, where local partners have access to best-practice across the breadth of heritage development, and national partners have an assured and cost-effective means to supporting delivery of national priorities, on a nationwide basis. It is important that the Heritage Council would clearly commit to the continuation of investment to elevate the prioritisation of heritage within local authorities, help shape what is prioritised at local level, and protect investment made to date.

3.3 Frameworks for partnership

Local government senior management perspectives make clear that the LAHOP is valued and supports delivery for local government. The priorities of each local authority nonetheless vary to meet local needs and, as one stakeholder stated: "agreement around the priorities need to be better defined".

Where the 2017 Framework for Collaboration provides over-arching agreement between the Heritage Council and the local government sector, there is space for more tailored partnership approaches to meet the respective – and aligned – objectives of the Heritage Council and each local authority.

While the LAHOP has strong backing from local government and National partners, it is important that any evolution of the LAHOP is guided within a clear framework for pro-active development, management and monitoring.

Such mechanisms can also provide the basis for establishing shared measures of success for the LAHOP and setting out how success can be supported in line with the complementary resources and responsibilities of each partner. It is essential that the LAHOP can establish consistent approaches to data collection and, where such a framework is established, it will benefit Heritage Council and local government sector reporting requirements.

Recommendation 3:

Build on the existing agreement between the Heritage Council and the County and City Management Association and develop and support a simple framework for strategic partnership between the Heritage Council and each local authority engaged in the LAHOP.

A Heritage Management Liaison Group should be established between representatives of the Heritage Council and the relevant CCMA Sub-Committee. This would provide regular bilateral engagement and review of the implementation of the Framework for Collaboration, and enable shared consideration / implementation of the recommendations within this review.

Individual framework agreements between the Heritage Council and local authorities should also be put in place to reflect the shared investment in the LAHOP and the local authority heritage plan (and related process, e.g.

local authority heritage forums) that arise from each LAHOP partnership.

It should be noted that the framework agreement with each local authority could remain very straightforward, built around:

- A. An agreed heritage plan and implementation of that plan in partnership with the local authority's heritage forum;
- B. An annual agreement/letter, building from the heritage plan of each local authority backed by shared metrics/targets/key performance indicators;
- C. An annual review meeting in each local authority area to monitor progress, advise of new policy developments, share learnings/insights and consider the framework for the coming year.

Delivery of these partnerships will require additional (most likely dedicated) Heritage Council resource operating at a strategic level. Consideration could also be given to such frameworks being utilised as the basis for local delivery of Heritage Ireland 2030; further aligning partnership approaches and minimising duplication.

3.4 Local Authority Heritage Plans and Heritage Engagement

Local authority heritage plans are key to the management and development of heritage at local level across Ireland, and fundamental to joint working. In some respects, it may be a cause of concern that almost a quarter of local authority heritage offices that responded to the evaluative survey do not have a current heritage plan.

The research highlighted the need for updated guidance in relation to the development of heritage plans and the survey of heritage officers also shows that almost one-third of the same local authorities are not currently operating an active heritage forum, which is considered

to be a key element in the development and delivery of heritage plans.

With local authorities increasingly engaged in a range of heritage activities beyond the work of the heritage office and often involving additional expertise and external stakeholders, it is important that approaches to the heritage management and development remain cohesive and up-to-date.

Recommendation 4:

Develop and support new guidance for local authority heritage plans and for local authority heritage forums.

Such guidance should take account of:

- The development phases for the heritage office function in each local authority over time;
- The strategic approach required to manage success and related increases in demand over time;
- The broader leadership role now played by local authorities: in the safe-guarding of heritage; across a range of heritage-related areas; and across social and economic areas that seek to leverage the potential of heritage;
- Emerging areas of strategic importance; and
- The challenges and insights arising from Ireland's experience of COVID-19 and the expertise within the LAHOP in relation to local engagement.

Having regard to Recommendation 3, it would be beneficial if each city/county heritage plan ensures that heritage-related processes and initiatives are integrated through a clear and agreed framework which can support shared priorities, investment and monitoring.

The evaluation suggests that peer-learning and sharing of best-practice can provide much of the expertise

and insights needed to support development of these guidelines.

In development of new guidance for local authority heritage forums, consideration should be given to engaging new communities living in a city/county and the potential for engaging young people.

3.5 The Local Authority Heritage Officer Network and Training

The LAHOP approach to quarterly engagement with the Local Authority Heritage Officer Network is a fundamental element of this programme. It provides a basis from which individual local authorities (within the LAHOP) can benefit from the expertise, insights and learnings of 28 other local authorities.

The Heritage Council and other heritage partners recognise that the network can continue to play a key role in the development and dissemination of national policies and initiatives. Survey respondents also see enormous value in maintaining and strengthening the current approach and investment in the Heritage Officer Network.

Taking account of the dynamic possibilities for the ongoing evolution of the LAHOP, continued training, development, peer-learning and sharing of best-practice are key to ensuring that the LAHOP continues to be fit-for-purpose. The network and its associated training provide a professional, developmental mechanism through which the LAHOP can maintain momentum.

The structured approach to the quarterly network sessions also provides a valuable reflective space for the challenges, opportunities and implications of policy and practice to be explored and considered, which yields benefits for each participating local authority. It is suggested that one of these quarterly Heritage Officer Network sessions should also enable discussion of new and emerging national priorities. This could be along the lines of an annual plenary meeting, which can be attended by key/strategic stakeholders.

Recommendation 5:**Continue to support implementation of, the local authority heritage officer network, and invest in training aligned to the strategic needs of the LAHOP**

Emerging areas of strategic importance and new guidelines for local authority heritage plans and local authority heritage forums should be priorities in relation to training and development. The research also identified training needs in relation to policy-making, communications and digital / social media.

Ongoing Heritage Council and local government consideration should be given to meeting other training and development that can serve the strategic ambitions of the programme. The proposed partnership and monitoring mechanisms (Recommendation 3) can provide a basis for identification of shared programme needs. The evidence is that the Heritage Officer Network has an appetite for training and development that can support delivery of their heritage plans and programmes.

A photograph of two women in a greenhouse. The woman in the foreground, wearing a light-colored jacket, is sorting through a large, round, woven basket filled with small, round, light-colored produce, possibly cherry tomatoes. The woman in the background, wearing a patterned jacket and glasses, is standing and looking towards the camera. The greenhouse structure with its metal frame and translucent panels is visible in the background.

APPENDICES

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – METHODOLOGY

a) Evaluation Methodology

In order to meet the objectives of this evaluation, multiple methods of engagement and consultation were devised. This was divided into a five-phase approach, which was informed and validated by the Steering Group.

An overview of these phases is presented in the table below and described in more detail, thereafter.

a.1 Soundings

In the absence of a standard description for the role of the heritage officer and programme objectives, M.CO proposed a framework of understanding, based on existing documentation and initial soundings, for the purpose of this evaluation.

Given that heritage officers come from a range of backgrounds, with their roles often informed by their own expertise or specialist areas of training, as well as the context of the local authority within which they sit, the soundings were used to establish an outline of the role against which heritage officers can be evaluated, across five core areas:

1. Increasing awareness
2. Providing advice and information
3. Promoting best practice
4. Generating data and information
5. Implementing heritage plans

PHASE	DESCRIPTION	OBJECTIVE
1.	Soundings with key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify interviewees Confirm areas of interest
2.	Desk Research of key documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish definitions Identify and make comparisons with international best practise examples Identify, refine and agree LAHOP objectives
3.	Focus Groups with 8 heritage officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop/confirm suitable of survey questions / areas for quantitative exploration Define metrics Identify available information
4.	Online Survey of all heritage officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain quantitative information on aims, outputs, impacts and outcomes Assess resource optimisation (desk-top review, soundings and semi-structured interviews) Evaluate strategic training by HC (desk-top review to consider content, then questionnaire, focus groups)
5.	Interviews with key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain views beyond the heritage officer network Add qualitative input, and assess the validity of outputs, impacts and outcomes Assess Local Authority Heritage Office Programme and delivery in terms of alignment with local and national objectives

The soundings were also used to:

- Inform, key areas for evaluation;
- Inform appropriate research and engagement techniques;
- Identify stakeholders;
- Identify key challenges and successes of heritage office role and programme;
- Identify possible metrics and measurements and outputs, impacts and outcomes; and
- Identify possible additional stakeholders.

a.2 Desk Research

This desk research looked at relevant documentation, identified with the Heritage Council and CCMA.

The key objectives of this phase were to:

- Establish definitions and build a picture of context and objectives of LAHOP since initiation;
- Identify contextual comparators (outstanding at the time of this preliminary report); and
- Identify the strategic objectives of the Local Authority Heritage Officer Programme and their alignment with the objectives of the Heritage Council and key partners in the LAHOP.

In order to establish definitions, the desk research phase involved drafting working definitions relevant to the evaluation. This resulted in a set of working definitions to ensure standardised interpretation during the evaluation process and the identified emerging priority areas.

This phase also looked carefully at the framework agreements and previous training to gain some insight into how the LAHOP is resourced and the strategic approach taken to the delivery of training. Lastly, the desk review considered comparable programmes that exist both nationally and internationally.

a.3 Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with a sample number of heritage officers. The heritage officers involved in the focus groups were identified through the initial soundings phase. The focus Group was then selected to ensure a representative mix of heritage officers, according to size and geographic location of local authority, gender, background and areas of expertise, length of tenure, etc.

The core objectives of this Focus Group engagement were to:

- Agree working definitions;
- Develop and agree survey questions and areas for quantitative exploration;
- Identify feasible metrics which will allow for an accurate assessment of the LAHOP outputs and impacts/outcomes;
- Identify areas where qualitative data could help to highlight delivery against objectives;
- Identify available information; and
- Test and feedback on modes of engagement including the data gathering template and questionnaire.

The membership of the focus group, which met on four occasions, included heritage officers with diverse experience and backgrounds, as presented in the table below:

County	Name	Expertise	Urban/Rural	Location
Offaly	Amanda Pedlow	cultural heritage	small rural	midlands
Monaghan	Shirley Clerkin	natural heritage	small rural	north /midlands
Meath	Loreto Guinan	natural/cultural heritage	semi-urban/rural	east
Roscommon	Nollaig Feeney	natural heritage	small rural	west
Dublin City	Charles Duggan	built heritage	large urban	east
Donegal	Joseph Gallagher	built/cultural heritage	large rural	north
Cork County	Conor Nelligan	built/cultural	large rural	south
Galway County	Marie Mannion	cultural heritage	large rural	west

The focus group included Dearbhla Ledwidge of Kilkenny County Council in the third of the four focus group meetings, owing to her specific expertise in the subject matter of that meeting.

a.4 Online Survey

An evaluative survey was issued to 29 heritage officers. From this cohort, 27 heritage officers responded, a response rate of 93%. A copy of the survey questionnaire is attached).

In this preliminary report, the survey results have been incorporated into wider areas of thematic focus, as follows:

1. Heritage Officer Role and Activities
2. Policy-making and Integration
3. Resourcing
4. LAHOP Outputs and Demonstrating Value
5. Heritage Office Network
6. Areas for Future Development

Each area of focus is also accompanied by a number of insights and considerations.

a.5 Interviews

M.CO conducted a series of semi-structured interviews to get in-depth insights and examine programme effectiveness from a variety of stakeholder views.

The purpose of these interviews is to:

- Garner wider perspectives on the LAHOP;
- Assess the experience of wider stakeholders in relation to the Heritage Officer Programme and its alignment with Heritage Council objectives;
- Assess heritage office projects and overall programme of work in terms of alignment with local and (broader) national objectives; and
- Sense-check/validate insights from qualitative/quantitative research.

b) Analysis

The analysis is based on:

- a. The guidance of relevant policy and framework documents
- b. Insights provided by the heritage officer Focus Group
- c. Insights and data from the evaluative survey
- d. Interviews undertaken to date with key stakeholders in local government, the Heritage Council and other partners organisations.

c) Preliminary Report/Recommendations

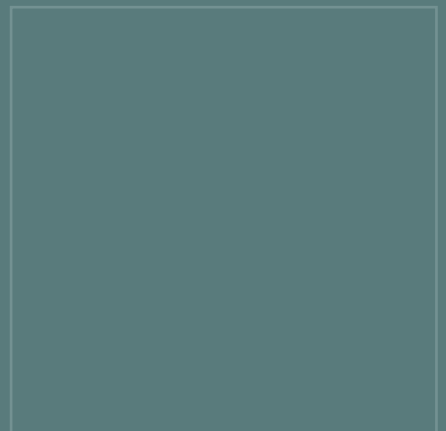
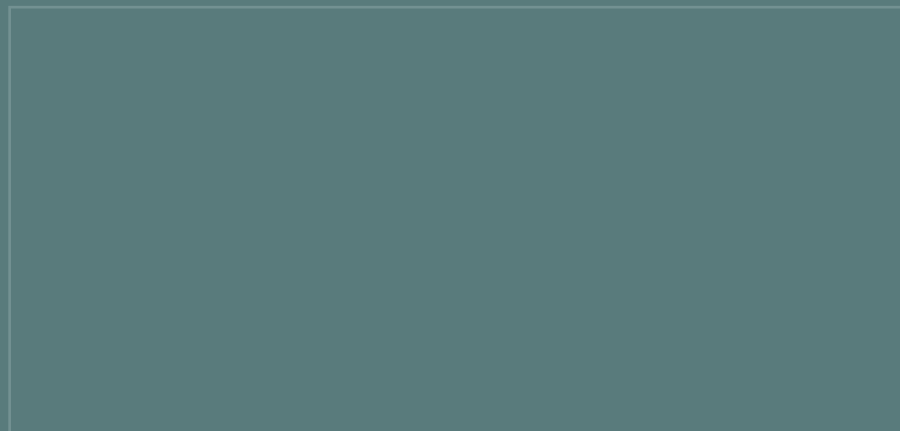
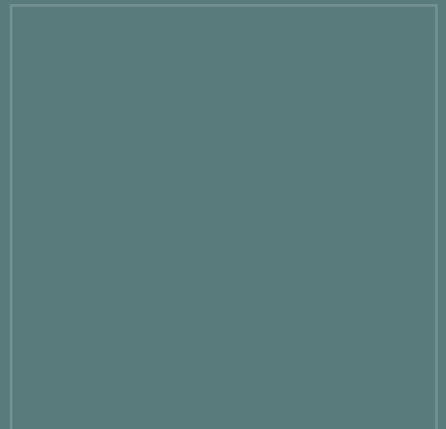
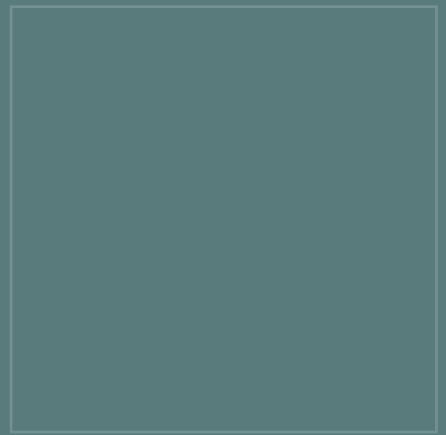
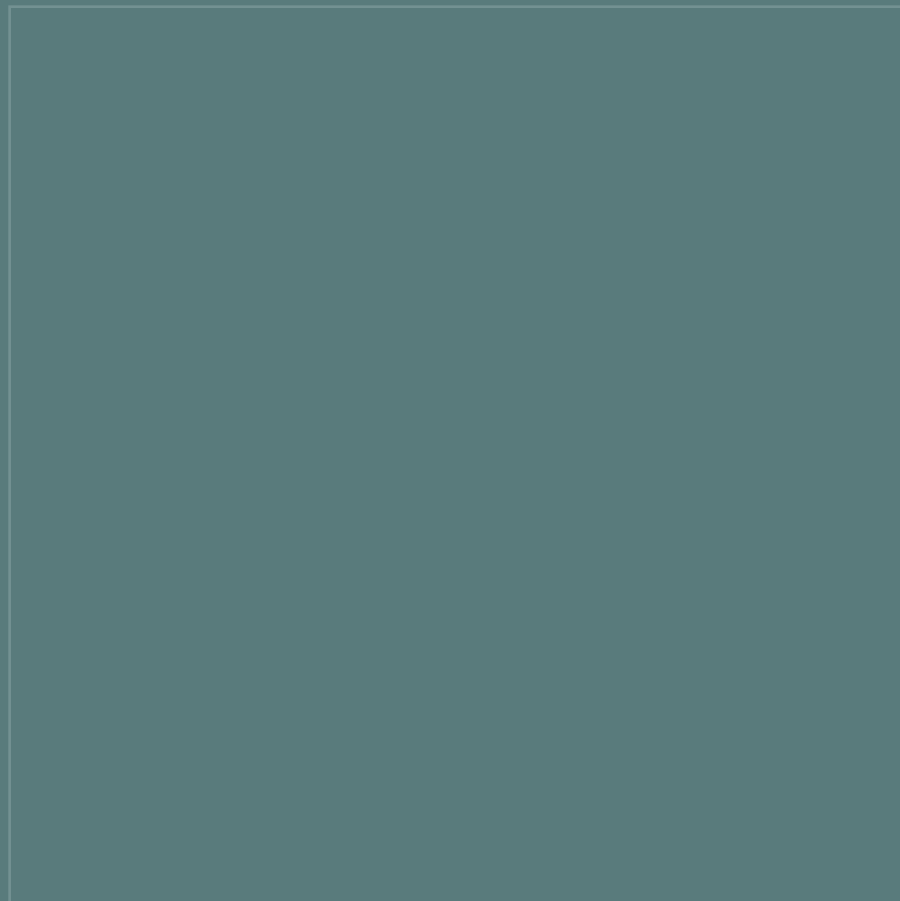
A draft report and recommendations were developed as a key stage in the evaluative process, enabling emerging analysis, findings and recommendations to be tested in relation to their reach and their validity.

APPENDIX 2 – Soundings/Interview List

Name	Role, Organisations
Michael Parsons	Chair, Heritage Council
Virginia Teehan	CEO, Heritage Council
Peter Burke	Manager, Local Government Management Association
Catriona Ryan Sarah Shiel	Principal Officer, Heritage Division, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Assistant Principal Officer, Heritage Division, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Frank Shalvey	Principle Officer National Monuments, OPW
Colm Murray	Architectural Officer, Heritage Council
Ian Doyle	Head of Conservation, Heritage Council
Lorcan Scott	Wildlife Officer, Heritage Council
Simon Shelvin	Director of Service, Mayo County Council
Eoghan Ryan	Director of Service, Kildare County Council
Dorothy Clarke	Director of Service, Sligo County Council
Mary Mulholland	Director of Service, Kilkenny County Council
Brendan Jennings	Director of Service, Cavan County Council
Joe Peoples	Director of Service, Donegal County Council
Joseph Delaney	Director of Service, Laois County Council
Michael Lynch	Director of Service, Cork County Council
Ann Dillon	Director of Service, Offaly County Council
Joseph Gilhooly	Director of Service, Leitrim County Council
Eoin Burke	Acting Senior Planner, South Dublin County Council
Joe Gallagher	Heritage Officer, Donegal County Council*
Conor Nelligan	Heritage Officer, Cork County Council*

The interviews were structured as 30-minute sessions, but interviews generally ran to 40-60minutes with most interviewees generally wishing to offer more insight.

*Joe Gallagher and Conor Nelligan subsequently became members of the M.CO Heritage Officers Focus Group



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