

# Tipperary Local Government Merger

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**Organisation:** Tipperary County Council

**Country:** Ireland

**Level of government:** Local government

**Sector:** General public services

**Type:** Organisational Design

**Launched in:** 2014

**Overall development time:** 3 year(s)

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# Description

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In July 2011, the Irish Government announced the establishment of a unified county council in Tipperary, coming into effect with the 2014 local government elections, to replace the existing North and South Tipperary County Councils.

The merger was part of a local government reform initiative that also included the merger of Limerick and Waterford city and county councils.

The merger happened within the context of an extensive programme of public service cost reduction and local government reform. The merger represents a major innovative reform of local government arrangements.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- In response to the Irish economic crisis from 2008 on, reducing public sector spending became a central component of the Government's response to an unsustainable national debt and budget deficit. Furthermore, the Programme for Government (2011) had indicated that greater cooperation across local government was a priority as a means of reducing costs.
  - The merger was recommended in the Report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2010). The efficiency review group was set up to identify innovative means of reducing public expenditure while maintaining public services.
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## Objectives

Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Support economic growth

- Deliver the merger effectively and on time
  - Maintain delivery of services across the county
  - Maximise resource deployment and savings
  - Maximise economic development opportunities for the county
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## Main beneficiaries

General population, Government bodies

- Citizens of Tipperary (158 754 – Census 2011)
  - Staff of the merged authority (1150 employees)
  - Agencies and individuals involved in local economic and social development
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## Existing similar practices

### Merger of local authorities in Waterford and Limerick

In public administration of my country

Waterford City and County Council, Limerick City and County Council

At the same time as the merger of the two Tipperary local authorities, mergers were also taking place in Waterford City and County councils and Limerick City and County councils.

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# Results

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## Results not available yet

- It is too early to reach definitive conclusions with respect to the longer-term impact of the merger. Progress in relation to the objectives has been made as follows:
  - Deliver the merger effectively and on time: The establishment of Tipperary County Council happened on schedule on 3 June 2014.
  - Maintain delivery of services across the county: The merger happened without disruption to services and without the unforeseen closure of any public desks. Considerable care was taken to support citizens and local politicians with regard to the merger.
  - Maximise resource deployment and savings: The implementation plan estimated that gross savings of EUR 6.1 million a year would be achieved over an extended period. The realisation of these savings is occurring at a faster rate than anticipated by the implementation plan. By February 2015, savings in excess of EUR 3 million have been achieved.
  - Maximise economic development opportunities for the county: A new corporate plan was adopted by the Council in March 2015. A local economic and community plan has been developed. These plans set the context for enhanced economic and community development in the merged Tipperary County Council.
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## Evaluation

Council management commissioned the Institute of Public Administration to undertake a review of the merger. Their report, A Case Study of the Tipperary County Council Merger, was published in 2015.

[http://www.ipa.ie/pdf/TIPPERARY\\_MERGER\\_REPORT.pdf](http://www.ipa.ie/pdf/TIPPERARY_MERGER_REPORT.pdf)

# Development

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## Design

A Tipperary Reorganisation Implementation Group (TRIG) was established in July 2011. The TRIG consisted of the two county chief executives plus two retired senior public servants with extensive experience of public service reform. They produced an implementation plan in July 2012.

Within the councils, a joint management team (JMT) was established to oversee the merger, comprising of the management teams of the two councils and jointly chaired by the two county managers.

On a day-to-day basis, the merger was coordinated by a merger implementation team, consisting of a director assigned full-time to the project, and the HR manager and a senior executive officer from corporate services from each of the two authorities.

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## Implementation

### Tools used:

- The merger implementation team was expanded during the implementation phase to include a full-time senior executive planner with strong project management skills. The team is widely acknowledged, by management, staff, trade unions and elected members, to have worked exceptionally well. Assigning a director full-time to the project was considered imperative.
  - The implementation plan set out a time-line of activities required to achieve the merger. These were mapped out over four phases from mid-2012 to December 2015 to also cover the post-merger period.
  - It was recognised that the merger afforded an opportunity to implement a new service delivery model. In particular, a decision was made to put in place customer service desks and a CRM system in the main centres of Clonmel and Nenagh.
  - Significant time and attention was paid to ensuring the political merger went well. Several briefings were made by the county managers to the two councils to ensure that all members were kept informed. In addition, a joint committee of elected members was established to address merger issues on behalf of the two councils.
  - From the outset of the project and the preparation of the implementation plan, with its decisions in relation to the location of services in the unified council, the trade unions were consulted. This engagement continued throughout the implementation phase.
  - Considerable preparation and attention was put into the workforce plan with roles and the aptitudes and preferences of those being assigned to them considered on a person-by-person basis.
  - The Council has been active in sharing the experience of the merger, with managers involved in making presentations at seminars and meetings. The Council also commissioned a study of the merger by the Institute of Public Administration which was published and disseminated across the local government system.
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## Challenges and solutions

- Following the announcement of further local government reforms in a policy document Putting People First (2012), the merger project became far bigger and more complex. It now also involved the closure and amalgamation of the staff of the county's six town councils and borough council and the establishment of five new municipal districts within the new merged authority. This required extensive further work and planning on the part of the JMT and merger implementation team, and adaptation of the implementation plan.
- On one level, great care and attention was given to communication, for example informing staff affected of their new role and work location. However, in other respects the approach to communication was somewhat unsatisfactory from the perspective of staff and also to some senior managers. A communications strategy was developed in early 2013 and signed off by the management team in April 2013.
- A risk management plan was developed in February 2013. Governance issues were addressed with the identification of a risk officer. The role of the risk officer was to ensure that the JMT were kept informed of risks so that they could respond appropriately.
- More details of challenges and solutions are set out in the review of the merger, particularly Chapter 4, available at [http://www.ipa.ie/pdf/TIPPERARY\\_MERGER\\_REPORT.pdf](http://www.ipa.ie/pdf/TIPPERARY_MERGER_REPORT.pdf)

# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

- The importance of resourcing the merger at a very high level. It is essential to put a senior manager full-time on the merger. This person will be supported as needed by other senior managers, but responsibility for the day-to-day oversight of the merger project resides with said person.
  - As with any change management project, leadership from the top is critical. The fact that this requires two chief executives and two management teams, possibly with different priorities, to work together effectively makes it both more challenging and more necessary.
  - Effective merger leadership requires a very high degree of involvement and time from the chief executive/s. As such, personal effort on the part of the chief executive/s, for example visiting staff in all organisation sites, is very worthwhile.
  - Communication with staff was good but could have been better. While challenging in large organisations, ensuring that staff hear messages directly from senior management, rather than a top-down approach via line managers, is desirable.
  - Adequate care needs to be taken to ensure that communications of a personal nature, e.g., changes in roles or work locations, are managed in a very sensitive manner. Failures in this regard have the potential to cause huge resentment.
  - Recognising and addressing cultural differences between the merged organisations has a huge bearing on merger consolidation. In particular, different management styles and different approaches to service delivery need to be reconciled. It is important, though this takes time and energy, that neither organisation's way of doing things is imposed on the other organisation, but instead that a new way of doing things that draws on the best of both emerges.
  - Identifying key staff and giving them responsibility for delivering on specific merger projects is essential, as is recognising the considerable work effort and contribution of staff.
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## Conditions for success

- A coherent implementation plan
  - Committed top management
  - An implementation team with a full-time dedicated senior project manager
  - Emphasis on communications
  - Recognising there is no 'quick fix'
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