

Councillor Costello is opposed to the massive increases in bin charges that are necessary due to the funding crises in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown. He stated that the focus must be on the Minister who has responsibility for funding local authorities. Despite substantial cut backs the charge this year is €275, an increase of 37%. This exponential growth rate is clearly unsustainable. Councillor Costello stated that the Fine Gael party are strongly opposed to central government's erosion of local government through underfunding of the activities of the Council.

Councillor Costello stated that the current government wants it both ways, to cut headline taxes such as income tax and then recoup this by forcing local authorities to take increasing amounts of money back from people in less visible ways such as bin charges. Councillor Costello believes that councillors are in a lose lose situation, if they don't keep raising the charge the Minister will dissolve the council and if they do keep hiking the charges they are aiding the Minister in avoiding dealing with the problem of funding for the County.

A decision on local government funding has been avoided by successive ministers. To prevent a collapse in services in Dun Laoghaire the decision must be made now and the onus for making the decision lies with the paymasters for local government, the Minister for Environment and Local Government, Martin Cullen. His department decides how much the government is prepared to make available via the Local Government fund to each council to support their services.

Councillor Costello stated that the Minister was on the public record as saying that the public was expecting local government to deliver on a range of critical service issues. The minister stated he was open to suggestions, no matter how radical, to strengthen councillor's involvement in the management of this aim. Councillor Costello believes that this must start with proper funding of local government.

According to Councillor Costello the Minister stated in a radio interview with Radio Kerry that he wished to reform the entire process of local government including its funding basis. The Minister stated that this could be best achieved by separating central and local government. Councillor Costello stated that the ball is firmly in the Minister's court for the 2004 estimates. The Minister is aware of the crises in Dun Laoghaire and the results of a failure to take action on proper funding of the County will be the responsibility of the Minister. A cross party delegation from Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Council has been organized to meet the minister to ensure that the same situation does not arise in the 2004 council budgets.

