

Inspiring public confidence in elections

Waterford City & County Council

The Challenge

- Provide citizens with easy access to election information
- Validate and improve the quality of the electoral register

The Benefits

- Transparent, accessible information for citizens in both Irish and English
- Greater voter participation in elections
- More focused campaigning and representation
- Improved quality of electoral register

Aiming to increase voter participation in local and European elections, Waterford City and County Council has developed an Election Hub that makes information about electoral areas, polling stations and the electoral register far more accessible and transparent. Built with ArcGIS, the hub and associated web apps educate citizens, inspire public confidence and support Waterford's prospective and elected representatives.

The Challenge

Waterford City and County Council wanted to encourage more of its 127,000 citizens to engage in local elections. To do this, it realised that it needed to make information about elections more accessible to members of the public, help them find their polling station and remove other barriers to participation.

At the same time, the council wanted to take advantage of the Irish Government's national 'Check The Register' campaign to improve the accuracy and completeness of its electoral register. It also aimed to provide better information to existing elected representatives and new electoral candidates, to help them connect with households located within their designated electoral area.

The Solution

More than eight years before, Waterford City and County Council had built a single, integrated intranet and web-based geographic information system (GIS) using Esri's ArcGIS software. Leveraging this strong technology foundation, the council's GIS and Data Transformation Team worked in close collaboration with colleagues from the Franchise Section and Systems Development Team, as well as the council's Irish Officer, to create Waterford's first ever dedicated Election Hub.

The front end of the Election Hub was built with ArcGIS Hub and provides a simple way for citizens, elected representatives and electoral candidates to access information, in both the English and Irish languages. Up-to-date data from the Register of Electors is streamed daily into the hub using FME from Safe Software, enabling the hub to provide a one-stop-shop for authoritative, accurate information.

By clicking on links in the Election Hub website, voters can open an interactive app, built with the ArcGIS Instant App solution, to find their allocated polling station and get directions to it from their home address. Another ArcGIS app embedded in the Election Hub allows voters to enter their Eircode and find their elected representatives, from local councillors to TDs (member of Dáil Éireann). Further down the page, a link to 'Check the Register' encourages people to check and update their information, helping the council to verify and enhance the accuracy of its electoral records.

Elsewhere on the Election Hub website, people can find and explore interactive maps of the six electoral areas within the Waterford region. The maps render well on mobile devices and show users' actual locations, enabling them to see which area they are standing in at the time. People can also download open data directly from the hub to improve their understanding of electoral areas and generate maps for printing. When elections take place, Waterford City and County Council plans to publish ArcGIS Dashboards on the Election Hub to clarify the results.

As an integral part of this project, the GIS Team also built an ArcGIS Enterprise app that allows the Franchise Team to explore the Register of Electors database visually on interactive maps, for the first time. Using this internal solution, staff can now easily spot anomalies where clusters of houses have perhaps been assigned to the wrong electoral area or where a voter has entered an incorrect Eircode.

The entire, integrated solution was developed very simply, in-house, using the GIS and Data Transformation Team's existing knowledge of ArcGIS and availing of Esri templates. "Configuring the hub was very straightforward," says Jon Hawkins, Waterford City and County Council's GIS Project Lead. "It was an intuitive and responsive solution to build."

Learn more at: esri-ireland.ie

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 Councillor Joe Conway, Mayor of Waterford City and County

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 Jon Hawkins, GIS Project Lead, Waterford City and County Council

The Benefits

Transparent, accessible information for citizens

The Election Hub is playing a key role in educating citizens in Waterford City and County about the electoral process. It provides unequivocal transparency about the electoral register, the choice of candidates in elections and elected representatives. At the launch of the hub in February 2024, Mayor of Waterford City and County, Councillor Joe Conway, said: “This is an informative, accessible and easy-to-use resource that will answer the questions Waterford’s electorate is asking.” The mayor added, “We are particularly proud that the hub is also available in Irish. As a Gaeltacht County, this resource will be a valuable and trusted source of information ‘as Gaeilge’ for all our citizens to make informed choices at the ballot box.”

Greater voter participation in elections

The council very much hopes that the Election Hub will encourage more people to vote, by demystifying the voting process. As Hawkins explains, “The design of the hub not only provides voters with relevant ballot information, it also aims to increase participation by helping them to find their assigned polling station and cast their vote on the day.”

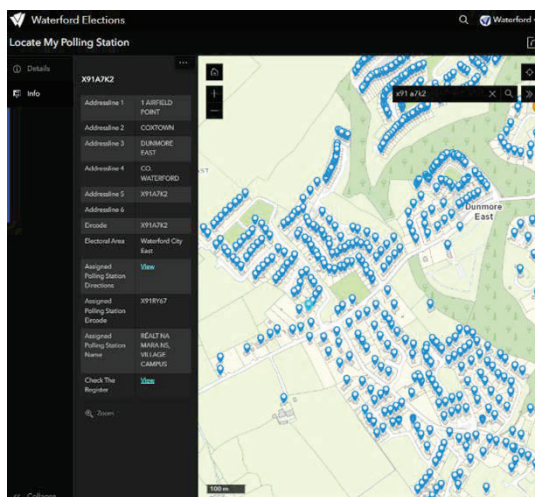
More focused campaigning and representation

Elected representatives and new candidates can view the electoral area maps on the Election Hub to improve their understanding of the areas they represent or seek to represent. They avoid wasting time canvassing at properties that are outside of their area and can instead focus on reaching out to people in the correct locations and listening to their views. The ArcGIS Hub also levels the playing field for new and existing candidates in the lead-up to elections, giving everyone equal access to information about the electorate.

Improved quality of electoral register

Now that staff in the Franchise Section can see the locations of individual households, colour-coded by area and electoral designation, it is far easier for them to correct mistakes and inconsistencies. In addition, the inclusion of the ‘Check the Register’ link in the Election Hub is encouraging more people to verify the information about their households, and this too is leading to greater accuracy in the Register of Electors.

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ArcGIS Hub serves up detailed and accurate information to support the election process in Waterford

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