



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Pleanála agus Rialtais Áitiúil
Department of Housing,
Planning and Local Government

Annual Report of the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government 2018

Prepared by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
housing.gov.ie

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An Irish version and an English version of the Annual Report (2018) are available on www.tithiocht.gov.ie and on www.housing.gov.ie

Secretary General's Statement

After two years of significant functional changes in our Department's remit in 2016 and 2017, 2018 was a year of stability in terms of our overall responsibilities, presenting us with opportunities to finesse further our internal configuration and to expand significantly our capacity in a number of areas of activity.



Naturally, much of the Department's activity in 2018 was focused on driving the third year of implementation of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness. Much was achieved in that regard, with overall social housing delivery targets exceeded, a number of affordable housing initiatives getting underway and very significant increases recorded in overall housing supply. While a record number of homeless households were supported in securing sustainable, long-term housing, it was a cause of considerable regret that this did not keep pace with the number of new households becoming homeless. Our work on homelessness continues to be one of our highest priority areas of activity in 2019, with a particular focus on the rollout of the new National Implementation Plan for Housing First and the vitally important work of the Homelessness Inter-Agency Group.

In parallel with that significant programme of short to medium term focused actions, longer-term strategic planning was also high on our agenda during 2018. A key deliverable in that regard was the publication of the National Planning Framework as part of Project Ireland 2040; this was supported by the launch of the €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and the establishment of a new body, the Land Development Agency, to strategically manage public lands to support the implementation of the NPF and the delivery of more affordable housing. The first ever Water Services Policy Statement was also published during the year, as well as a new River Basin Management Plan and a National Marine Planning Framework Baseline Report.

Planning for the future was also a key theme in the local government/electoral areas. New legislation was published to underpin the reform of local government arrangements in Cork and to modernise our commercial rates system. In addition, new local electoral areas were defined for the 2019 local elections, following the completion of reports by two independent boundary committees, and new constituencies were agreed for the 2019 European Parliament elections following on from the independent Constituency Committee's report.

After successfully preparing for, and leading the response to, ex-Hurricane Ophelia in late 2017, we did not expect to be required to again mobilise our emergency management capacity as quickly as we were, when the major snow Storm Emma, the worst snow storm in at least a generation, came our way in March 2018. Once again, the Department's National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management led, with great professionalism, the 'whole of Government' planning for, and response to, this very serious weather event, ably supported by the excellent weather forecasting expertise of our Met Éireann team, with colleagues in the water, homelessness and communications areas all also playing key roles.

I wish to thank our Ministers, for their active leadership of our work over the course of 2018, all of my colleagues across the organisation, who work so tirelessly and professionally day after day, and all of our agencies, local authorities and other bodies, with whom we partner effectively to honour our commitment to deliver the best possible public service to the people of Ireland.

John McCarthy
Secretary General

Who We Are

Our Mission

The Department's mission is to support sustainable development, with a particular focus on strategic planning, the efficient delivery of well-planned homes in vibrant communities and the sustainable management of our water resources, and to ensure effective local government.



Our Strategic Goals

- A. To ensure that planning and building in our regions and communities contributes to sustainable and balanced development;
- B. To provide for a stable, sustainable supply of good quality housing;
- C. To provide a framework for the sustainable management of water resources from source to sea;
- D. To support and enable democratic, responsive and effective local government, effective electoral management and high quality fire services and emergency management; and
- E. To serve society through the production and communication of reliable weather and climate information to protect life and property and to further enhance Met Éireann's role as the authoritative voice on meteorology in Ireland.

Our Values

Our values sit within the wider values and standards frameworks set out in the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour, the Code of Ethics, the Dignity at Work Policy and the Civil Service Renewal Plan. They inform everything that we do in the Department in delivering for the public:

- Integrity and professionalism;
- Consistent high quality performance;
- Openness and transparency;
- Flexibility, responsiveness, innovation and learning;
- Consultation and partnership;
- Commitment to society and citizens; and
- Pursuit of effectiveness, efficiency and value for money.

The work of the Department in 2018 was carried out through six Divisions – Planning, Land and Housing Market; Social Housing; Water; Local Government; Corporate and Business

Support; and Met Éireann – ahead of a restructuring into seven Divisions at year end. The Local Government Audit Service is also based in the Department.

Locations

The Department is based in four main locations:

- Custom House, Dublin D01 W6X0
- Newtown Road, Wexford Y35 AP90
- Government Offices, Ballina Co. Mayo F26 E8N6
- Met Éireann Headquarters, Glasnevin Hill, Dublin 9 D09 Y921



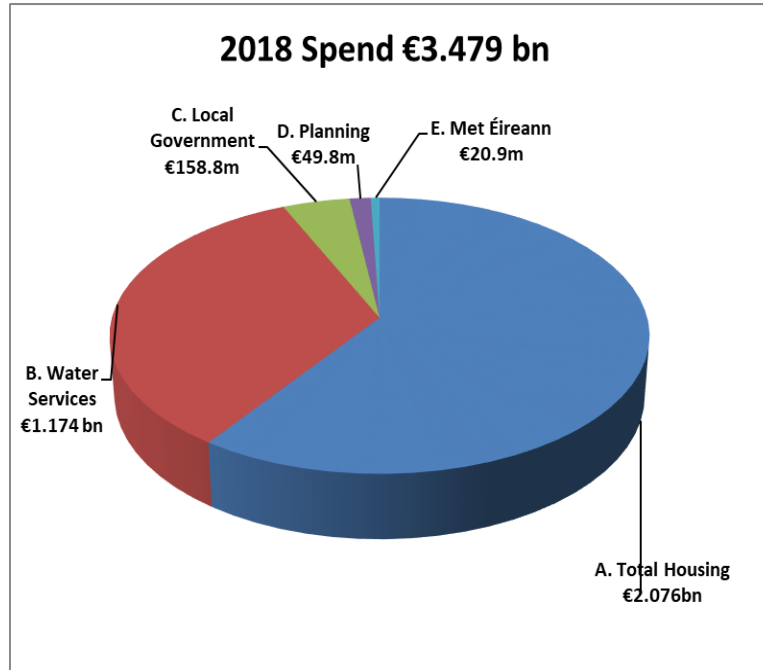
Us and our agencies

Much of our work is carried out in close co-operation with the 31 local authorities and a number of specific agencies that are charged with regulatory, policy support and implementation functions relating to our areas of activity. Details in relation to our main agencies are summarised in the table overleaf.

Body	Accountable Person (Head of Office)	Governing Legislation ^[1]
An Bord Pleanála	Mr David Walsh	Planning and Development Act 2000
Housing Finance Agency	Mr Barry O'Leary	Housing Finance Agency Act 1981
Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency	Mr John O'Connor	Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency (Establishment) Order 2012
Ervia	Mr Mike Quinn	Gas Act 1976
- Irish Water	Mr Eamon Gallen (Acting MD)	Water Services Act 2013
- Gas Networks Ireland	Mr Denis O'Sullivan	Gas Regulation Act 2013
Local Government Management Agency	Mr Paul C. Dunne	Local Government Management Agency (Establishment) Orders 2012 & 2013
Ordnance Survey Ireland	Mr Colin Bray	Ordnance Survey Ireland Act 2001
Property Registration Authority	Ms Liz Pope	Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006
Residential Tenancies Board	Ms Rosalind Carroll	Residential Tenancies Act 2004
Valuation Office	Mr John O'Sullivan	Valuation Acts 2001 and 2015
Land Development Agency	Mr John Coleman	Land Development Agency (Establishment) Order 2018
Office of the Planning Regulator	Mr Niall Cussen	Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018
Pyrite Resolution Board	Mr. Aidan O'Connor	Pyrite Resolution Act 2013

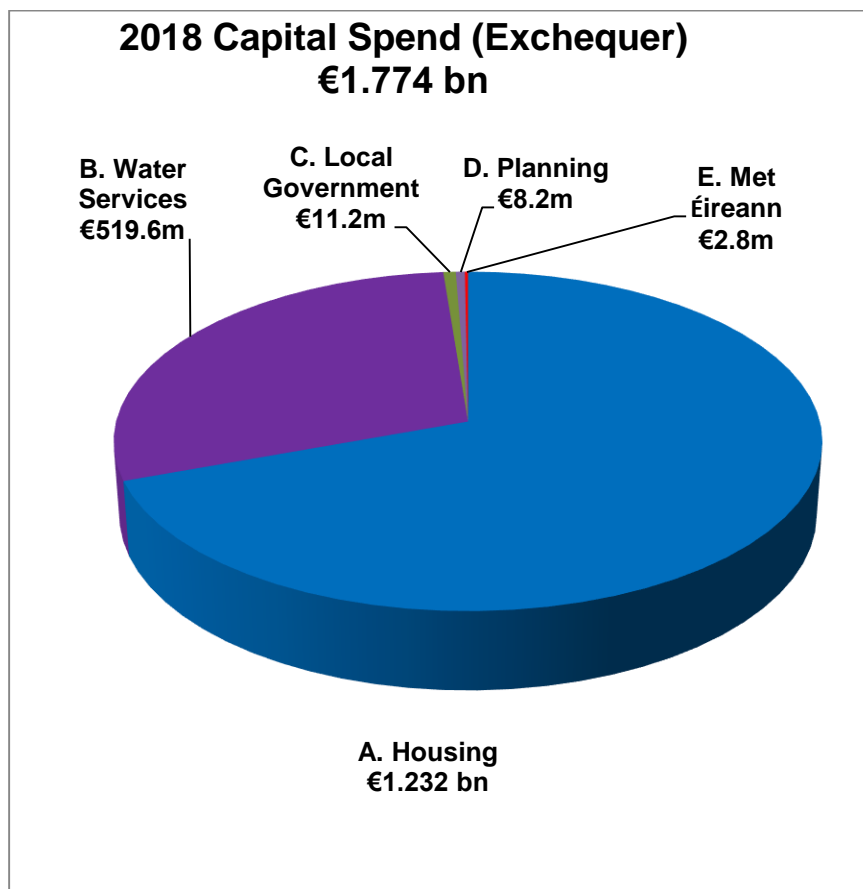
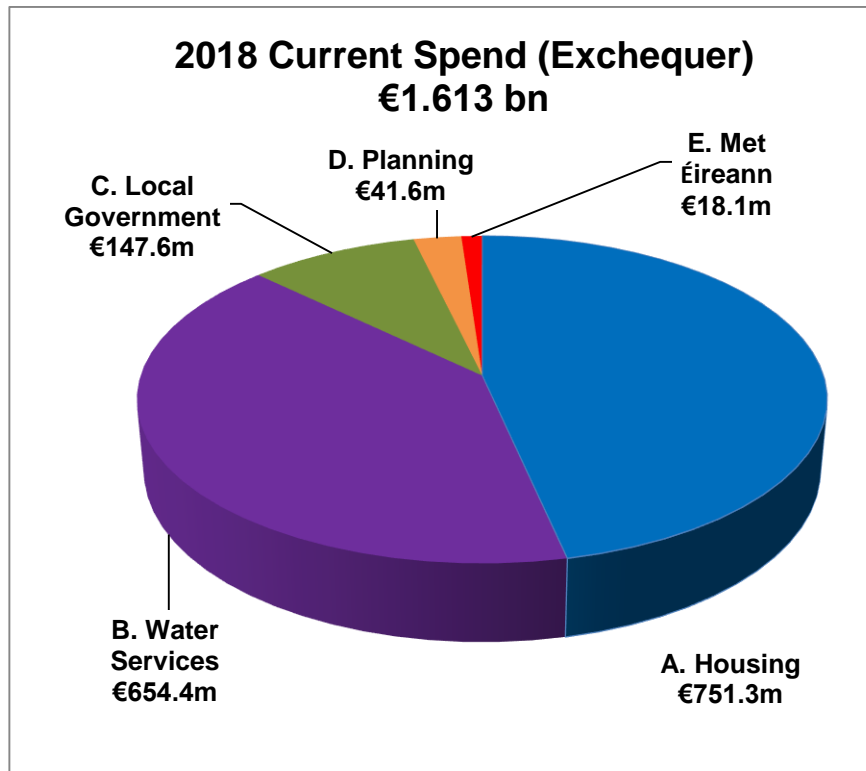
^[1] As amended.

2018 Spending

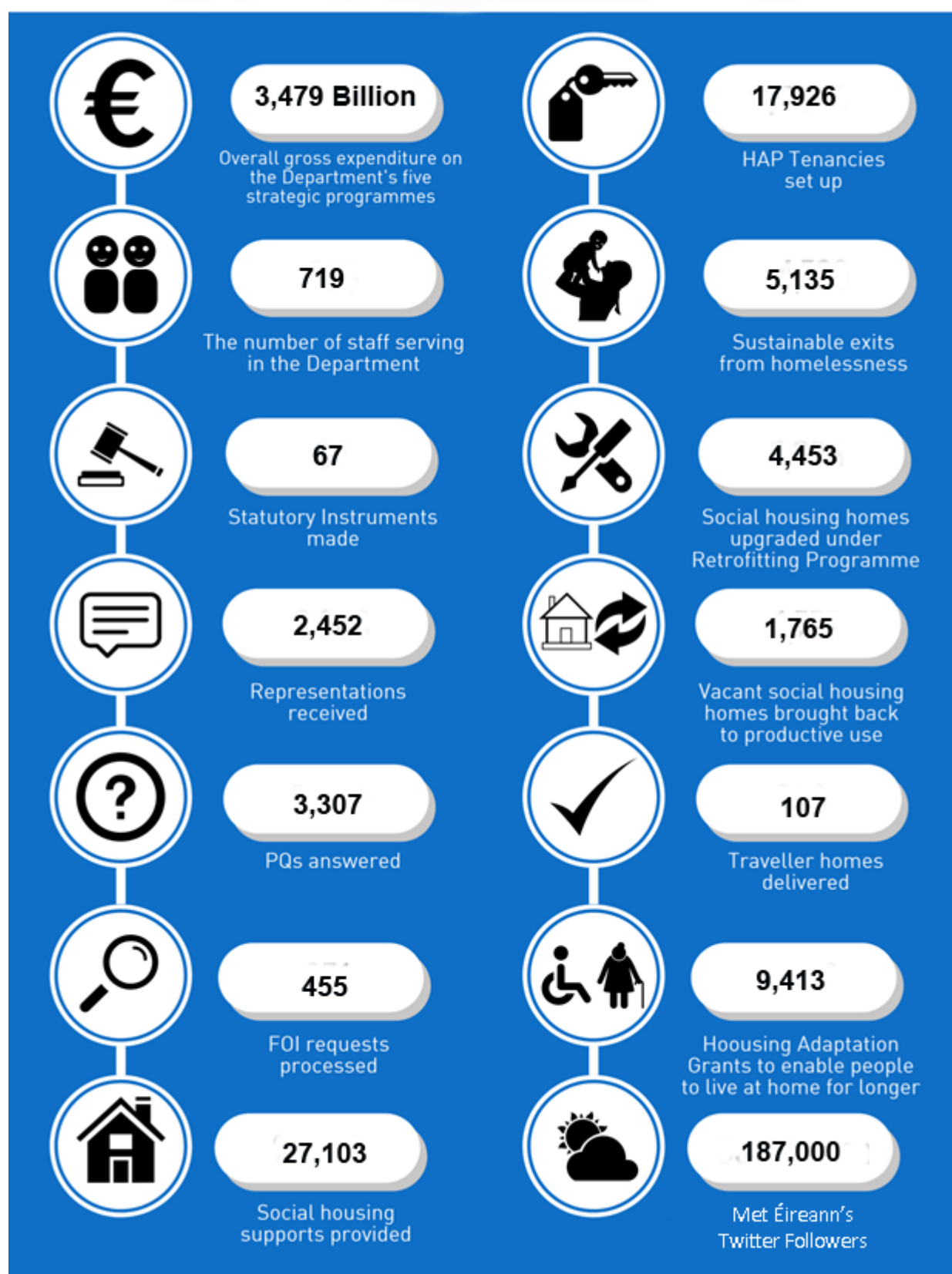


Gross expenditure in respect of the Department's five strategic programmes reached €3.479 billion in 2018, representing an increase of 62% on the outturn for 2017. Departmental (Exchequer) funding of €3.387 billion was supplemented by €92.3 million from Local Property Tax (LPT) receipts, which was used by certain local authorities to fund a range of housing programmes. In addition, expenditure of €621 million was managed through the Local Government Fund in 2018, primarily for the purposes of channelling LPT receipts to local authorities.

The Exchequer funding element (€3.387 billion) comprised €1.613 billion in current expenditure and €1.774 billion in capital expenditure.



THE DEPARTMENT BY NUMBERS IN 2018



Summary of Key Areas of Progress in 2018

Rebuilding Ireland

During 2018, the Department made significant progress in delivering on the commitments in the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, published in July 2016. While further progress remains to be made, much has been achieved in increasing housing supply, one of the central tenets of the Action Plan, keeping us on track to achieve our targets over the six years of the programme to the end of 2021:



- 21,458 new homes available for use in 2018 - up 18%;
- 29,243 homes granted planning permissions in 2018 - up 41%; and
- Commencement Notices submitted for 22,467 homes in 2018 - up 28%.

Not only is overall supply increasing, the social housing needs of many more of our citizens are being met:

- 27,103 new households had their social housing needs met under Rebuilding Ireland in 2018, 6% ahead of target;
- Construction figures from December 2018 show almost 5,000 new social housing homes were being built across 291 sites, a number that is increasing every week;
- 4,251 new social homes were built in 2018, an 18% increase on 2017 and eight times greater than the number built in 2015, the year before Rebuilding Ireland was published;
- 8,422 new homes were brought into the active social housing stock through build (4,251), acquisitions (2,610), voids (560 renovated) and leasing programmes (1,001 long-term leased homes) in 2018;
- Over €2 billion was invested in housing in 2018, up 47% on 2017 - this is increasing by 17% to a record €2.4 billion in 2019;
- Local authorities approved the first 10 projects under the €310 million Serviced Sites Fund, announced in Budget 2019— these will yield over 1,400 affordable homes; and
- The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2018 was published in December 2018, with the key aim of empowering the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to better enforce the rent increase restriction in Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs).

Social Housing Delivery in 2018

27,103 new households had their housing needs met under Rebuilding Ireland in 2018. That equates to just over 100 households each working day and 6% ahead of the target for the year. The 4,251 new social housing homes built in 2018 represented an increase of 85% on 2017. Details of social housing delivery across individual programmes are set out in the table below.

Delivery Method	2018 Output
Build ¹	4,251
Voids	560
Acquisitions	2,610
Leasing	1,001
RAS	755
HAP	17,926
Total	27,103

In addition to the social housing supports set out above, a range of other housing supports were also provided in 2018, as set out in the table below.

Additional Housing Supports delivered in 2018	
107	Traveller Units of Accommodation Delivered
4,453	Homes Upgraded under Retrofitting Programme
5,135	Sustainable Exits from Homelessness
9,413	Grants Awarded to Assist Older People and People with Disabilities to Live at Home

¹ Build refers to Local Authority and Approved Housing Body construction, including traditional construction, turnkeys, rapid build delivery, regeneration and homes delivered through the Part V mechanism.

The significant expansion of the social housing build programme was evident in the Q4 2018 Construction Status report. At the end of 2018, 6,334 homes were completed, 4,992 were under construction and 2,569 further homes were about to go on site, with the remainder progressing through the various stages of planning, design and procurement. Overall, at the end of 2018, the programme included 1,300 schemes (or phases), encompassing over 19,000 homes – a very substantial increase on the 13,400 homes a year earlier.

Overall, taking account of additional funding announced in Budget 2018, the Government has committed well over €6 billion to support the accelerated delivery of 50,000 additional social housing homes by end 2021, through build (33,500), acquisition (6,500) and leasing (10,000) programmes.

Homelessness

In 2018, over 5,135 adults and their associated dependants exited homelessness into sustainable tenancies, an 8% increase on 2017. Regrettably, this record level of activity was not enough to keep pace with the number of families and individuals entering homelessness during the year. Achieving further substantial progress in tackling homelessness will continue to be the focus of sustained action during 2019.



A National Implementation Plan for Housing First was published in September 2018. This Plan, which is a joint initiative of the Department, the Department of Health, the HSE and the local authorities, includes targets for the delivery of 663 additional Housing First tenancies nationally, with targets set for each local authority for the period to 2021.

Acquisitions Fund

The Housing Agency is actively engaged with banks and investment companies in acquiring mainly vacant homes in their portfolios. The revolving Acquisitions Fund of €70m, coupled with Approved Housing Body borrowings, aims to support the acquisition of some 1,600 homes for social housing use over the period to 2021. As of 31 December 2018, the Agency had bids accepted on 827 homes.

Housing Assistance Payment

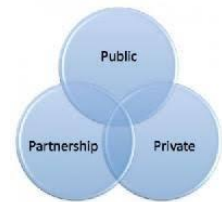
At the end of Quarter 4 2018, there were over 43,400 active tenancies across the country being supported under the HAP scheme, including 17,926 additional tenancies set up in 2018.



The Homeless HAP Place Finder Service was made available to all local authorities in January 2018, providing additional supports for households exiting homelessness into independent tenancies.

Public Private Partnership

The Social Housing Public Private Partnership Programme, which aims to deliver 1,500 homes in three bundles, continued to meet important milestones in 2018. The first bundle, which comprises six sites located in Dublin City, South Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and Louth, progressed to a point that ensured the contract could be awarded in early 2019.



Procurement progressed also on Bundle 2, which comprises eight sites in Cork, Galway, Waterford, Clare, Kildare and Roscommon. The contract for Bundle 2 will be awarded in 2019 and the sites for Bundle 3 will also be selected.

Lending by the Housing Finance Agency

The Housing Finance Agency (HFA) continues to provide long-term fixed-rate finance to Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for the provision of social housing. 2018 was a record year for the HFA in lending for social housing provision. €615m in loan approvals to AHBs represents a remarkable increase of 83% from 2017.



The extension of the Agency's remit into the funding of student accommodation through the Higher Education Institutions came into force in June 2017. A measure of the progress in this

area is evident by the fact that three universities have had loan applications approved in 2018 totalling €157 million for the provision of 1,428 new student bed spaces.

Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL) was launched on 1 February 2018. It allows low-income first time buyers aged between 18 and 70 who cannot secure a mortgage from a commercial lender, to access sustainable mortgage finance to enable them to purchase a new or second-hand property, or undertake a self-build, within a suitable price range. By the end of 2018, 543 loans with a value of just over €92 million had been drawn down under the scheme.

National Planning Framework

A major achievement was recorded in 2018 with the launch of the National Planning Framework (NPF), together with the National Development Plan (NDP), as part of Project Ireland 2040 (PI2040) in February. This marked the culmination of a number of years of work to develop a robust strategic framework to guide the sustainable development of the country for the next two decades. Priorities for the Department in progressing implementation of the NPF in 2018 included supporting the establishment of a PI2040 Delivery Board, overseeing progress on the preparation of three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, launching the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and establishing the Land Development Agency.



Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), launched in 2018 under the NDP, has an overall provision of €2 billion to 2027. A first call for proposals under the URDF issued in July 2018 and 88 projects were approved for some €100 million of funding in November 2018.

Land Development Agency

The Land Development Agency (LDA) was established in September 2018 by way of an Order under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971, pending the development of specific primary legislation to establish the Agency on a fully commercial basis. In December

2018, the Government appointed an interim CEO and approved the General Scheme of the LDA Bill. By end-year, the Agency was actively working on master planning the initial portfolio of eight sites earmarked for it, with the potential to initially deliver 3,000 homes and 10,000 over the longer-term.

Office of the Planning Regulator

The Final Report of the Mahon Tribunal recommended the establishment of an independent Planning Regulator to support the modernisation of the planning system and to enhance confidence and transparency. The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 provided the legislation necessary to establish the new Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR). Following an open competition run by the Public Appointments Service, in December 2018 the Government approved the appointment of a new Planning Regulator, ahead of the formal establishment of the OPR in Spring 2019.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

The Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) is a measure designed to activate housing supply by putting in place enabling off-site public infrastructure. This can relieve critical infrastructural blockages to enable the delivery of housing on key development sites and improve the economic viability and purchaser affordability of new housing projects.



30 LIHAF projects received final approval in late 2017 and early 2018 for €200 million of funding, comprising €150 million from the Exchequer and €50 million of local authority contributions. Summary details of the projects, and the expected 20,000 homes to be delivered by 2021, were published in March 2018 on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/lihaf/>. A total of 679 homes were completed under the LIHAF programme in 2018 and this will ramp up significantly in 2019.

Serviced Sites Fund

Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 was brought into force during 2018 to provide the legal framework for the delivery of a new Affordable Purchase Scheme.

To support local authority capacity to deliver in areas where a demonstrated affordability issue arises, the Government increased the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) to €310 million over the period 2019 to 2021, as part of Budget 2019. The SSF grant funding is made available to local authorities to carry out on-site servicing works to make their land available for affordable housing. Under the Fund's first call for proposals, ten projects received approval in principle in December 2018. These projects have the potential for 1,400 affordable homes, supported by a funding allocation of €43 million. Further projects will be approved in 2019.

Vacant Homes

The establishment of a Vacant Homes Unit within the Department has provided a focal point for co-ordinating actions in relation to re-introducing long-term vacant properties into the housing stock. All local authorities have a Vacant Homes Office in place (funded by the Department) and have prepared a Vacant Homes Action Plan.



The publication of the *National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy* during 2018 has provided a roadmap for the co-ordination and implementation of initiatives right across Government to:

- ensure that we are utilising our existing housing stock to the fullest extent possible;
- increase the supply of sustainable housing; and
- revitalise the vibrancy of local communities.

Met Éireann

Met Éireann continued the implementation of the 2017-2027 Strategy “Making Ireland Weather and Climate Prepared”, which focuses on scientific, technical and service developments to help Irish society to be ready for and responsive to weather and climate risks.

As well as ongoing projects to develop the meteorological observation and forecasting systems, Met Éireann launched a new website and app in April 2018 providing



localised weather forecast data to the public and an expanded range of climate information services.

Work also continued on the development of a Flood Forecasting Centre with the recruitment of hydrometeorologists and research into hydrological models suitable for flood forecasting on Irish river catchments.

2018 again saw Met Éireann providing critically important meteorological advice and support to the National Emergency Co-ordination Group, particularly in the lead up to and during the Storm Emma severe snow event.

Met Éireann headquarters in Glasnevin, Dublin captured during the extreme snow event associated with Storm Emma in March 2018.

National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management

As chair of the National Emergency Coordination Group, the Department's National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (NDFEM) coordinated the whole-of-Government response to Storm Emma in March 2018. The NDFEM subsequently undertook a review of the event and other severe weather emergencies, with a report to be published in 2019, to identify learning to further enhance the national response to major emergencies.

Key Developments in Local Government

A review of local electoral area (LEA) boundaries was completed in June 2018 by two independent LEA Boundary Committees, who had a particular focus on addressing the size and configuration of existing LEAs.

The Local Government Bill 2018 was published and substantially progressed through the Oireachtas in 2018. The main purpose of the Bill was to provide the legal basis for the movement of an area from Cork County into an expanded Cork City Council area by 31 May 2019. The Bill also provided for the holding of plebiscites in the Cork City, Limerick City and County and Waterford City and County Council areas on Government proposals for directly elected mayors with executive functions.

A further piece of legislation, the Local Government (Rates) Bill 2018, was also published in 2018, containing important proposals for the modernisation of the legislation governing commercial rates.

Water Services Policy Statement 2018-2025

The Water Services Policy Statement 2018-2025 was approved by Government and published in May 2018, drawing together policy on this vital public service for the first time. The policy statement sets out a series of high-level policy objectives across the three thematic areas of Quality, Conservation, and Future Proofing, which must be pursued when planning capital investment and framing current spending plans during the period up to 2025. It is the first Water Services Policy Statement prepared under the Water Services Act 2017 and ushers in a new era of governance, oversight and accountability in relation to the delivery of water services.

River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021

In April 2018, the Minister published the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018 - 2021. The Plan sets out our priority objectives for water quality improvement up to 2021 and outlines a comprehensive programme of measures to achieve these objectives.

Regulation of Water Abstractions

A new system for the registration of water abstractions was introduced in July 2018, with those abstracting greater than 25 cubic metres per day required to register online. This will assist in the long-term management of Ireland's water resources in a sustainable manner. The register was established in advance of legislation to licence water abstractions, which was the subject of preliminary work in 2018. The final Bill is expected to be published in 2019.

New Funding Model for Irish Water

A new funding model was fully implemented from 2018 to implement the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services. Through this model, all State funding to Irish Water in respect of domestic water services is now channelled through the Department's Vote. In November 2018, the Minister approved Irish

Water's Strategic Funding Plan 2019-2024. It outlines Irish Water's business plan for its multi-annual strategic funding requirement of €11 billion to 2024. This is necessary to ensure the continued operation, repair and upgrading of the country's water and wastewater infrastructure to support social and economic development across the State and continued care of the water environment.

Marine Spatial Planning

The Minister for Housing and Urban Development published the National Marine Planning Framework Baseline Report in September 2018. The Baseline Report set out the policy, legislative and regulatory context for marine planning in general and, more specifically, for the development of Ireland's first plan in this area. It provided a description of the "as is" situation in terms of existing sectoral development and activities in Ireland's maritime area, including an identification of the future opportunities and constraints for each. The report was the subject of a consultation period of three months, the first opportunity for the public and stakeholders to formally participate in the planning process.

Marine Environment and Foreshore

Work continued on the development of the Maritime Area and Foreshore (Amendment) Bill during 2018. A number of workshops and bilateral meetings were held with relevant policy Departments and the Office of the Attorney General and a high-level Marine Legislation Steering Group (MLSG) was established, led by the Department of An Taoiseach, to facilitate the further development of this legislation given its cross-Departmental implications.

The Government published the General Scheme of *The Prohibition of Certain Products Containing Plastic Microbeads Bill 2018* in 2018, along with the associated draft Regulatory Impact Assessment. A Public Consultation on the General Scheme took place and drafting of the Bill commenced, ensuring that the Bill remained on track for publication in 2019.

The Amending EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive was transposed into Irish law during 2018. The Department continued to work with the EU and other Member States on the development of Cycle 2 of the Directive, which runs from 2020. In addition, as well as continuing to implement anti-pollution and biodiversity measures under the Oslo and Paris (OSPAR) Convention, Ireland also continued to take a lead role on the OSPAR Marine Litter Regional Action Plan.

Electoral Management

The Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees submitted their reports in June 2018 and Statutory Instruments were subsequently made to give effect to the new boundaries to apply for the 2019 local elections.



In July 2018, the Minister established an independent European Parliament Constituency Committee, which presented its report to the Ceann Comhairle on 24 September 2018.

A referendum on the thirty-sixth amendment of the Constitution was held in May 2018 and a Presidential election and a referendum on blasphemy were held in October 2018. Ballot Paper Templates, which enable blind and visually impaired voters to vote independently, were made available for the first time at these referendums and election.

Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards

The Department was once again successful at the annual Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards in November 2018, with the team behind the National Planning Framework winning in the category 'Excellence in Policy'. This continued the Department's record of winning at least one award each year since the awards were launched.

ICT Developments

The Department continued its roll-out of the Build to Share initiative, a set of applications developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, in 2018. With the Department already using eSubmissions, ePQs and eCorrespondence, implementation of a new document management system, eDocs, commenced in 2018.



The Department has 284 datasets published on the Open Data Portal (<http://data.gov.ie>). This includes the National Planning Application Database and zoning data from Myplan.ie, both of which are used by bodies such as Ordnance Survey Ireland and An Bord Pleanála as well as a range of other public and private sector organisations. In 2018, the National Planning Application Database map service handled over 12 million service requests.

Goal A - To ensure that planning and building in our regions and communities contributes to sustainable and balanced development

National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP) were launched together as PI2040 in February 2018. This sets out a shared vision for coordinated planning and investment, to link our national spatial priorities with increased infrastructural development.

Workshops were held between the Department and all 31 Local Authorities following the publication of the NPF, to set out and consider the 'next steps' regarding the implementation of the NPF. This series of engagements, as well as those with other key stakeholders, led to the development and publication of an 'implementation roadmap'.

To plan more effectively for the compact growth of Ireland's urban settlements, a key objective of PI2040, the Department had established a working group to undertake a focused review of the 2015 Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments – Guidelines for Planning Authorities. The Department updated guidelines for publication under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Further to the launch of PI2040, the Department drafted an implementation plan that formed the basis for a memo to Government. Priorities to progress implementation of the NPF in 2018 included supporting the establishment of a PI2040 Delivery Board, overseeing progress on the preparation of three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, developing, launching and establishing the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, the Land Development Agency and the Office of the Planning Regulator.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) launched in 2018 under the NDP has an overall provision of €2 billion to 2027. The purpose of the Fund is to support the compact growth and sustainable development of Ireland's five cities, regional drivers and other large urban centres. Further to the first call for proposals in July 2018, almost 200 bids for funding

were received, from local authorities and a range of other public bodies, including third level institutions and semi-state agencies. On foot of these, 88 projects were announced in November 2018.

Planning Process

The planning process continued to play a proactive and facilitative role in 2018 in supporting and guiding economic recovery and sustainable national and regional development. With the enactment of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018, the National Planning Framework was given a statutory basis to support sustainable development.



The fast-track Strategic Housing Development (SHD) provisions, which came into effect in 2017 for developments of 100 or more housing units and student accommodation developments with 200 or more bed spaces, continued for 2018. The Minister amended the SHD provisions in 2018 to include shared accommodation developments of 200 or more bed spaces. Applicants for SHD are required to enter into a pre-application consultation with An Bord Pleanála and the relevant local authority prior to submitting a development proposal to the Board. Between 01 January 2018 and 31 December 2018, the Board received 97 valid requests for pre-application consultation relating to proposed developments across the country. It issued opinions in relation to 63 of these, with the remainder issued in 2019. In the same period, the Board received 39 actual applications for SHD permission, with the 39 decisions made in 2018 covering both 2017 and 2018 applications. Of the 39 decisions made in 2018, the Board issued 27 grants of planning permission in respect of a total of 7,102 homes (3,284 Houses and 3,818 apartments) and 4,479 student bed spaces.

Planning Policy

Planning permissions were granted for a total of 29,243 new homes in 2018, an increase of 40% on 2017.

The Department continues to develop and support initiatives to promote participation in the planning process, establishment of the planning regulator, urban renewal and regeneration, including in relation to the



conversion of vacant commercial premises into residential use, derelict sites and operation of the vacant site levy by local authorities. In particular:

- Planning and Development (Fees) Regulations 2018 widened the exemption for fees on submissions on planning applications, to include members of Local Authorities acting in their capacity as members.
- The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 provided statutory underpinning for the establishment of the OPR.

A Working Group was established to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the statutory 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing. This was with a view to ensuring compliance with the relevant provisions of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Following engagement between the Department and the European Commission the working group reconvened in 2018 and deliberations are ongoing.

Vacant Site Levy

From January 2017, all planning authorities began establishing vacant site registers. The necessary preparatory work was undertaken (i.e. identifying vacant sites, notifying registered owners etc.) prior to the application of the Vacant Site Levy with effect from January 2019, as required by the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015. The levy aims to incentivise the development of vacant under-utilised sites in urban areas for residential or regeneration purposes. By the end of 2018, 20 planning authorities had registered a total of 380 vacant sites on their vacant site registers.

Vacant Homes

The primary aim of the Vacant Homes Unit is to drive and coordinate actions at central and local government levels and to support local authorities in identifying the level of vacant homes that are recoverable for use in the habitable housing stock.

The Vacant Homes Unit published the National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy in July 2018, in line with Pillar 5 of Rebuilding Ireland. The Strategy contains a range of objectives and key actions that will be pursued in partnership with stakeholders and agencies across the housing sector to address vacancy in our housing stock. It draws together all of the strands of ongoing work in one document with a clear vision for moving forward in the next few years.

The Department has secured funding for each local authority to support the work of a Vacant Homes Office (for 2018 and 2019). The provision of central funding enables focus to be given to the role of the Office and reinforces the capacity of the Department's Vacant Homes Unit to liaise with and seek information/statistics from a dedicated contact point within each local authority. The Vacant Homes Office is expected to play a key role in the co-ordination of this work within the local authority.

Unfinished Housing Developments

The Department published a report on Unfinished Housing Developments in March 2018. The report indicates that the number of unfinished housing developments was reduced by 91% from around 3,000 developments in 2010 to 256 developments in 2017.

In addition, the report shows that 74% of Local Authority areas now contain less than 10 unfinished developments, with four local authority areas having no occupied unfinished developments.

National Taking-in-Charge Initiative

The Department launched the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative (NTICI) in April 2016 to trial new approaches towards and working methods in supporting and accelerating overall national and local action on the taking-in-charge process of housing estates. A report on the initiative, published by the Department in December 2018, included findings and recommendations from the NTICI process.

Mapping of State Lands for Housing Supply

The active management of the publicly-owned housing land bank is part of a range of complementary actions being progressed under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, designed to accelerate and increase housing output. To this end, the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map published details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership with the potential to deliver some 42,500 homes nationally. A detailed database and GIS map of these sites showing their location, size, boundaries and other information can be accessed on the Rebuilding Ireland website.



In addition to this mapping exercise, the Minister has requested all local authorities and the Housing Agency prepare Strategic Development and Management Plans for housing lands in their ownership, with particular emphasis on prioritising those sites with the greatest potential to deliver housing at scale, in the short- to medium-term. These plans are close to finalisation and will be published on the websites of the respective local authorities and the Housing Agency in due course.

National Planning Application Database

The National Planning Application Database (NPAD) project is a joint initiative between the Department and the 31 local authorities, providing a centralised national web service of planning application data.

Planning application data from each Planning Authority is extracted, transformed and loaded to a feature service hosted on the Department's GIS infrastructure. This data is then merged with the spatial element of planning application data on a weekly basis. The merged dataset is published as a web service and is also available in a map viewer, www.myplan.ie.

The web service is open and serves three primary purposes:

1. To support work on numerous housing and planning projects within the Department
2. To provide An Bord Pleanála with a subset of the data via a weekly data feed
3. To make the data available to the wider public and interested groups as Open Data

Student Accommodation Strategy

In July 2017, the Department of Education and Skills, with support from the Department, published the National Student Accommodation Strategy. It includes eight key targets and 27 actions to support the increased supply of Purpose Built Student Accommodation and an increase in take-up of digs accommodation.



At the end of 2018, a total of 6,348 new student bed spaces had been completed since the adoption of Rebuilding Ireland. There were a further 4,432 bed spaces under construction and planning permissions granted for an additional 7,691.

These figures indicate that the objective of delivering an additional 7,000 new bed spaces nationally by end of 2019 will be achieved, with significant potential to provide further Purpose Built Student Accommodation if planned projects proceed through construction.

Statutory Plans

The Department has a role in the review of certain Statutory Plans, taking account of planning policy and legislation including the National Planning Framework, the forthcoming Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and other statutory and non-statutory guidance. In 2018, the Department reviewed 64 plans. Ministerial powers under Section 31 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) were used in two cases.

Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018

In July 2018, the Oireachtas enacted the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018. The Act amended and extended the Planning and Development Acts in order to:

- establish the Office of the Planning Regulator to evaluate and carry out examinations and assessments relating to the Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies, development plans and local area plans, and provide observations and recommendations in relation to such strategies or plans; to conduct reviews of planning authorities in the performance of their planning functions, as necessary; and to conduct education and training programmes and research in relation to planning matters;
- provide statutory underpinning for the National Planning Framework;
- provide for certain planning and development requirements to be taken into account by Irish Water;
- make miscellaneous and consequential amendments to the Planning and Development Act 2000 and to various other Acts insofar as they relate to planning and development;
- amend the Derelict Sites Act 1990; and
- give effect to Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for marine spatial planning.

Office of the Planning Regulator

The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 provided, *inter alia*, for the establishment of the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR). On 19 July 2018, the President signed the Act into law.

The OPR is responsible for the independent assessment of all local authority and regional assembly forward planning, including development plans, local area plans, regional spatial and economic strategies etc. The OPR is empowered to review the organisation, systems and procedures used by any planning authority or An Bord Pleanála in the performance of any of their planning functions under the Planning Acts, including assessing risks of maladministration or corruption.

The OPR is enabled to drive national research, training, education and public information programmes to establish best practice in planning matters and highlight the role and benefit of proper planning.

Following an open competition administered by the Public Appointments Service, the Government approved a nominee for the position of Regulator in December 2018. Interim premises for the Office have been secured and an initial programme of work to support the establishment of the Office is complete.

Land Development Agency

In the National Planning Framework, the Government committed to establishing a National Regeneration and Development Agency to work with local authorities, other public bodies and capital spending Departments and agencies to –

- co-ordinate and secure the best use of public lands and investment within the capital envelopes provided in the National Development Plan, and
- drive the renewal of strategic areas not being utilised to their full potential.

On foot of this, the Land Development Agency (LDA) was established in September 2018 by way of Establishment Order under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971.

The LDA has an immediate focus on managing the State's own lands to develop new homes and regenerate under-utilised sites. In the longer-term, it will assemble strategic land banks from a mix of public and private lands, making these available for housing in a controlled manner, which will bring essential long-term stability to the Irish housing market. The overall objective is for the LDA to be involved in the building of 150,000 new homes over the next 20 years.

The LDA is a commercial State body and will be a national centre of expertise, working with and supporting local authorities, public bodies and other interests, to harness public lands as catalysts to stimulate regeneration and wider investment and to achieve compact, sustainable growth, with a particular emphasis on complex regeneration projects and the provision of affordable housing.

In December 2018, the Government approved the General Scheme of the Bill to establish the LDA on a primary legislative basis, subject to further technical revision with the Attorney General's Office.

On establishment, the Agency had access to an initial tranche of eight sites that have near-term delivery potential for 3,000 new homes and an additional potential for 7,000 new homes. Of these 10,000 new homes, at least 4,000 are intended for delivery as additional social and affordable homes, with the balance as additional new supply to meet the high levels of demands in the wider housing sector.

Reuse of Existing Buildings

In December 2018, the Department published the Report of the Working Group on the Reuse of Existing Buildings and a new Bringing Back Homes Manual for the Reuse of Existing Buildings. The manual is available on the Department's website. As well as increasing the supply of quality and sustainable housing for individuals and families, bringing vacant buildings back into use revitalises our main streets through well designed refurbishment, particularly above shops,

The Bringing Back Homes manual is aimed at property owners, members of the public, local authorities and stakeholders in the construction industry who are interested in redeveloping vacant buildings. It provides clear and detailed guidance on current policy and regulatory requirements that apply to this form of development. The Bringing Back Homes manual

complements a new planning exemption, which allows certain changes of use of vacant commercial buildings to residential use without need for the planning process.

The manual will also support the work of the vacant homes offices in local authorities, which create a central point of contact for those interested in redeveloping existing buildings. These offices will be a useful resource to assist developers and owners in clarifying the relevant regulatory requirements which apply, thus reducing uncertainty and complexity but maintaining safe, sustainable and quality standards for homes.

The Department also introduced the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2018 in December 2018. These Regulations were made following a review of the operation of the Disability Access Certificate requirements of the Building Control Regulations and provide clarity on the application of Disability Access Certificates to existing buildings when brought back into use.

Goal B - To provide for a stable, sustainable supply of good quality housing.

Social Housing Delivery

The Government has committed well over €6 billion under Rebuilding Ireland to support the accelerated delivery of 50,000 additional social housing homes by end 2021, through build (33,500), acquisition (6,500) and leasing (10,000) programmes, and to meet the needs of some 87,000 further households through schemes such as the Housing Assistance Payment. At end 2018, the half way point in the six year Rebuilding Ireland programme, overall delivery was ahead of target, with over 27,100 households having their housing needs met through the range of social housing programmes in 2018 alone.



Social Housing Approval and Delivery- Process and Procedures Review

A Target Programme for advancing social housing capital-funded projects through design, planning, procurement and approval has now been put in place. This overall programme sets a target of 59 weeks from an initial proposal being brought forward by the local authority to the completion of all of the work required to bring a project to the point of awarding the construction, contract, which compares favourably to private sector project development timelines.

Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2018

The Summary of Social Housing Assessments is now carried out on an annual basis and is used to set targets for social housing delivery under Rebuilding Ireland. The objective of the assessment is to identify the number of households in need of social housing support across the country on a specific date each year in order to inform policy and plan for the right types of housing support. The 2018 assessment showed that 71,858 households were in need of social housing support, as at 11 June 2018. This represented a decrease of 13,941 households or 16.2% on the previous assessment in June 2017. Since the publication of Rebuilding Ireland, the numbers have decreased from 91,600 to 71,858, a reduction of 22%.

Supporting Rapid Delivery Housing

By end 2018, over 400 homes had been completed under the rapid delivery programme for social housing, including through the framework put in place by the Office of Government Procurement, which can be availed of by all local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

Dublin City Council (DCC) is developing a rapid delivery programme of apartment developments and began work in 2018 on putting in place a procurement framework of Design Build Contractors for the delivery of these homes. Once in place, the framework will be available to all local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies to use. It is envisaged that over 1,000 fast-track homes will be built using this framework.

Homelessness

Homelessness continued to present a major challenge during 2018, with an increase in the numbers accessing emergency accommodation over the course of the year. The Department worked closely with the local authorities on the delivery of additional emergency accommodation for both singles and families and to support the exits of households from emergency accommodation into tenancies.

During 2018, 5,135 adults and their associated dependants exited homelessness into sustainable tenancies, an 8% increase on 2017. Regrettably, this record level of activity was not enough to keep pace with the number of families and individuals entering homelessness during the year. Achieving further substantial progress in tackling homelessness will continue to be the focus of sustained action during 2019.

In line with the objective to provide more suitable emergency accommodation for families experiencing homelessness, 26 family hubs had been brought into operation by end 2018 (22 in Dublin, with one each in Limerick, Cork, Louth and Kildare), providing almost 600 units of family accommodation.

The Homelessness Inter-Agency Group was established in 2017 to assist in the coordination of the State's response to addressing homelessness. It includes representatives from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the local authorities, the Department of Health, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Public Expenditure and

Reform, the Health Service Executive, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Education and Skills and Tusla.

The Group meets on a bi-monthly basis and has considered a wide range of issues impacting on homelessness. A report from the Group was submitted in June 2018, which includes a range of recommendations. These were accepted by Cabinet and are being implemented by the Government Departments and Agencies represented on the Group. The implementation of the actions is being overseen by the Inter-Agency Group.

A National Director of Housing First was appointed in February 2018 and a National Implementation Plan for Housing First was published on 26 September 2018. Housing First involves the provision of stable housing, coupled with adequate support for people in their homes, according to their needs, as a sustainable pathway out of homelessness. This Plan, which is a joint initiative of the Department, the Department of Health, the HSE and the local authorities, includes targets for the delivery of 663 additional Housing First tenancies, with targets set for each local authority nationally for the period to 2021.

Acquisitions Fund

Under Actions 1.1, 2.5 and 5.6 of Rebuilding Ireland, the Housing Agency is actively engaged with banks and investment companies in relation to its acquisitions programme. A revolving Acquisitions Fund of €70 million has been established which, coupled with borrowings by Approved Housing Bodies, has the objective of acquiring some 1,600 homes over the period to 2021 for social housing use.

As of 31 December 2018, the Agency had bids accepted on 827 homes. Contracts had been signed for 630 of these, the purchase of 583 of which has closed. The process of selling properties on to Approved Housing Bodies also progressed during 2018; at end-year, the Agency had signed purchase option agreements for 230 properties with Approved Housing Bodies and these homes are now under Caretaker Leases.

Long Term Social Housing Leasing

The Enhanced Long Term Social Housing Leasing Scheme was launched in January 2018, a new initiative aimed at long term institutional investors who can deliver at scale. 2018 also saw

a review of the Standard Long Term Leasing Scheme to align it more closely with the Enhanced Lease and Mortgage to Rent lease provisions.

The changes to the leasing programme over 2018 arose on foot of specific actions set out in Pillar 2 of Rebuilding Ireland, which aims to lease 10,000 homes. The role of the Housing Agency was also expanded to provide a central support for local authorities in operating the scheme. The changes to the leasing schemes were carried out on foot of an extensive review and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and provide for an attractive stable long-term investment that will result in the quicker delivery of high quality social housing that will remain in the social housing stock for up to 25 years.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

The Repair and Leasing Scheme was established on a pilot basis in October 2016 and expanded nationwide from February 2017. By end 2018, 89 homes had been brought back into use and were tenanted; 132 agreements for lease had been signed; and many more proposals were under consideration. Following a review carried out in 2017, a number of key changes to the scheme took effect from 1 February 2018, including a reduction in the minimum lease term required from 10 to 5 years; an increase in the proportion of market rent available to property owners for taking on additional responsibilities, and increased funding for the remediation of former bedsits. These changes will improve the operation of the scheme, increasing its attractiveness to owners and resulting in increased take up and delivery.



Review of Payment and Availability (P&A) and Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF)

A formal review of the Payment and Availability (P&A) and Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) funding arrangements was undertaken in 2018. Since the last review in 2014, the landscape within which the scheme operates has evolved in terms of the property market, as increased availability of fixed, low interest rate finance through the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) and other private lenders, the expansion of AHB delivery using P&A/CALF funding throughout 2016, 2017 and 2018 along with an increased focus on oversight and compliance with eligibility for funding.

The formal review of the funding arrangements and the processes that support delivery under the CALF was necessary to ensure that these are fit for purpose and can support the delivery of projects, in particular build projects, to maximise value for money for the Exchequer and for the AHB sector, and to enhance co-operation between AHBs and local authorities and to provide for better coordinated and strategic delivery by AHBs under various funding streams across all local authority areas. The recommendations and updated processes will come into operation in Q3 2019.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme

In 2018, 137 households benefited from the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme, remaining in their homes and communities as social housing tenants of Approved Housing Bodies. During the course of 2018, the Department and the Housing Agency continued to work with all stakeholders to ensure that the actions set out in the 2017 Review of the MTR scheme were being effectively implemented to benefit a greater number of households. In addition, new structures and arrangements were put in place to encourage a greater number of entities to take part in the scheme. Following an Expressions of Interest Request inviting parties from the private sector to express their interest in participating in a new alternatively funded long-term MTR lease model, it was announced in July 2018 that Home For Life would participate in the MTR scheme, creating more opportunities to achieve greater scale and to assist a greater number of borrowers.

Increasing awareness and understanding of the scheme has been a priority and a new website www.mortgagetorent.ie is dedicated to guiding and advising borrowers went live in June 2018. The impact of the improvements to the scheme following the 2017 review together with new entities participating in the scheme, should ensure that more borrowers in mortgage distress benefit from the scheme and remain in their own homes.

Regeneration

The Department continued in 2018 to support local authorities in delivering an ambitious programme of regeneration projects, including large scale projects in Dublin, Cork and Limerick. Good progress was made during the year, with 200 new social homes delivered under the programme - 127 in Dublin, 16 in Kerry, and 57 in Limerick. Work also continues in other regeneration projects in Dundalk, Sligo and Cork. Over €68 million was invested under the National Regeneration Programme in 2018.

Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme

The Department's responsibility in relation to energy efficiency upgrades to the housing stock is focused on social housing and in that context, it provides exchequer funding for a programme of energy efficiency/insulation retrofitting to improve the insulation standards and overall energy performance of local authority social housing stock. The programme was launched in 2013 and is being implemented in two phases: Phase 1 provides funding targeted at the less intrusive cavity wall/attic insulation, while Phase 2 focuses on the fabric upgrade works to dwellings with solid/hollow block wall construction and includes the provision of heating upgrades.

Since the programme of support from the Department commenced, over 68,000 social homes have been insulation retrofitted, with a total exchequer spend of €128 million. During 2018, funding of some €12.9 million was provided to local authorities to upgrade some 4,453 homes.

National Voids Programme

The Voids Programme provides additional support to local authorities in refurbishing vacant social housing homes for re-letting. The purpose of the Programme is to ensure that vacant homes are actively targeted, with a view to minimising turnaround and re-letting times and returning homes to use in an energy efficient condition. During 2018, funding of almost €26.25m was provided to local authorities to bring some 1,765 vacant homes back to productive use.

Public Private Partnership

The Social Housing Public Private Partnership (PPP) Programme continued to meet important milestones in 2018. There will be approximately 1,500 homes delivered within an overall budget of circa €300 million under three separate 'Bundles' of the current social housing PPP programme. The first bundle comprises of six sites located in Dublin City, South Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and Louth. They will deliver over 500 social housing homes, with five of the six sites scheduled for completion by Q3 2020 and the final site to follow in Q1 2021. Following the issuance of tender documents in December 2017 and the tender dialogue phase, tenders were received from the three pre-qualified tenderers in June 2018. As a result of an extensive evaluation process, Comhar Housing consortia was selected as Preferred Tenderer in September, and the finalisation of the contract was underway by the end of the year.

Bundle 2 of the PPP programme comprises eight sites, located across Cork, Galway, Waterford, Clare, Kildare and Roscommon. Following the completion of the design process for these developments, Part eight planning approval was granted by the relevant local authorities during 2018. The Public Sector Benchmark value for money tests were completed and approved by the Department in July. Tender documentation was issued immediately thereafter to the four pre-qualified tenderers, with a deadline for return of tenders by February 2019.

A request for potential sites for Bundle 3 of the PPP programme was issued to local authorities in 2018, and a final decision on this will be announced in 2019.

Housing Assistance Payment Scheme

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is a flexible and immediate housing support that is available to all eligible households throughout the State. It plays a vital role in housing eligible families and individuals. At the end of 2018, there were over 43,400 active tenancies being supported under the HAP scheme in 31 local authority areas, including 17,926 additional tenancies set up in 2018.

Also at the end of 2018, 13,221 households had transferred from Rent Supplement to HAP over the course of the year. Through this, these households are now in receipt of a much more secure form of State support, under which they can work full-time without losing their support, with their change of circumstances reflected in an adjustment in their differential rent.

The Homeless HAP Place Finder Service was made available to all local authorities in January 2018. All local authorities have been provided with the option to pay deposits and advance rental payments for any households in emergency homeless accommodation, or who are at immediate risk of entering emergency accommodation, in order to secure accommodation via the HAP Scheme.

Traveller Accommodation

Arising from commitments in 'Rebuilding Ireland' and from the independent review of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes in 2017, an independent Expert Group was established to review the delivery of Traveller accommodation with a particular focus on reviewing the existing legislation in this area, including the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998.

In 2018, capital expenditure on the delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation amounted to €6.3 million, an increase of 30% on expenditure in 2017 (although still below the level of available funding), delivering 107 units of accommodation.

Housing Inclusion Supports

Supports are available to a number of vulnerable groups to enable them to access mainstream social housing. These include measures under the *National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability* (2011-2016), which has been extended to 2020. The fourth Progress Report on the implementation of the Strategy, which details the progress made in 2017, was published in October 2018.

Regulation of the AHB Sector

The transition to statutory regulation of the AHB sector continued, in the form of the Voluntary Regulation Code, administered by the interim Regulation Office. A total of 265 AHBs have now signed up to the Code, including all the larger Tier 3 AHBs. The Department continued to work with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to finalise the text of the Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Bill which will establish a statutory Regulator. It is expected the Bill will be published in mid 2019.

Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL) was launched on 1 February 2018. It allows low-income first time buyers aged between 18 and 70 who cannot secure a mortgage from a commercial lender, to access sustainable mortgage finance to enable them to purchase a new or second-hand property, or undertake a self-build, within a suitable price range.

Applicants must be in continuous employment for a minimum of two years (primary earner) or one year (secondary earner). For single applicants the income limit is €50,000, rising to €75,000 for joint applicants. Applicants may obtain up to 90%, depending on their capacity to repay, of the cost of purchasing or building a house to the maximum value of €320,000 in the Greater Dublin area, Cork and Galway and €250,000 in all other areas. Local authorities can offer a first tranche of fixed-rate annuity finance to eligible borrowers at rates of 2.0% and 2.25% per annum, for twenty five and thirty years, respectively.

The scheme is set up in accordance with regulations approved by the Minister with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, under which a credit policy has been issued setting out the criteria applicants must comply with to be eligible for a loan.

The Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses loan applications that are made to the local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities as to whether loans should be offered to applicants. Local authorities make the final decision regarding approval at a local level and each local authority has established a credit committee for this purpose. By the end of 2018, 543 loans with a value of €92m had been drawn down under the scheme.

Lending by the Housing Finance Agency

Housing Finance Agency (HFA) loan approvals rose by 83% in 2018 to €615 million. There was just over €200 million in net lending in 2018. €430 million in gross lending was advanced in 2018 of which €283 million supported activity by AHBs.

Report of the Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks

The report of the Expert Panel was published in June 2017 and included eight recommendations, which the Department is actively progressing with the relevant stakeholders, prioritising the implementation of Recommendations 1 and 2.

With regard to Recommendation 1, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) established a Technical Committee to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol to inform the course of action in relation to remedial works for all affected householders. The standardised protocol was published by the NSAI on 13 November 2018 and '*I.S. 465:2018 - Assessment, testing and categorisation of damaged buildings incorporating concrete blocks containing certain deleterious materials*', is available at www.nsai.ie.

The standard can be used to assess and categorise the damage in properties where the concrete blocks are suspected to contain the minerals mica or pyrite. Previously, there was no common way for engineers or homeowners to assess the damage caused by defective concrete blocks, in order to decide what, if any, remedial work could be carried out.

With regard to Recommendation 2, the Department has engaged with Engineers Ireland in relation to the establishment of a register of competent engineers for homeowners/affected parties' reference, which it is expected will be in place in 2019.

In October 2018, the Government approved in principle the development of a grant scheme of financial assistance to support affected homeowners in counties Donegal and Mayo to carry out the necessary remediation works to dwellings that have been damaged due to defective concrete blocks. Work on the developing the terms and conditions of the scheme was underway at year end.

Rental Sector

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment)(No.2) Bill 2018 was published in December to enhance security of tenure for tenants and empower the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to better enforce the rent increase restriction in Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs). The Bill is due to be enacted in 2019. The RTB will be given new investigation and sanctioning powers to deal with improper conduct by landlords, such as unlawfully increasing rents or terminating tenancies. The Bill also restricts the existing exemptions from the RPZ rent increase restriction and introduces criminal offences where a landlord unlawfully increases rents. Annual registration of tenancies will also be required.

With effect from 25 February 2018, RTB determination orders are enforced through the District Court rather than the Circuit Court, thereby reducing the costs involved and increasing the speed and efficiency of their enforcement. Also with effect from 23 July 2018, the Director of the RTB, rather than the Board of the RTB, is empowered to prepare and issue RTB determination orders, which speeds up communication of case resolutions.

Other Rental Sector Reforms

In September 2018, the RTB hosted the first session of the Betterlet: RTB Accredited Landlord programme, which was developed as an action under the 2016 Strategy for the Rental Sector. Betterlet is a voluntary accreditation scheme for landlords to gain knowledge on best practice, including a comprehensive understanding of the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants. Being a 'Betterlet: RTB Accredited Landlord' will allow landlords to be recognised as

having an understanding of the rental market legislation, and support them in their rental business.

Energy Performance of Buildings Directive

The EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive requires that EU Member States strengthen their building regulations and introduce energy performance certification of buildings.

Revisions to Parts L (Conservation of Fuel and Energy for Dwellings) and F (Ventilation) of the Building Regulations, together with a Regulatory Impact Analysis, were published for Public Consultation during 2018.

Goal C - To provide a framework for the sustainable management of water resources from source to sea

Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services

The Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee was adopted by both Houses of the Oireachtas in April 2017. This report recommended the removal of direct charges for water services provision in respect of domestic households and confirmed that delivery of water services would be by a national authority. A range of other areas were also addressed, including; funding and cost recovery; public engagement; the role of regulators and compliance with EU law; conservation measures; equity and fairness; metering; and future review of the proposed strategy.



The recommendations of the Committee were legislated for in the Water Services Act 2017, with implementation proceeding throughout 2018. The report continues to inform policy development and implementation within the water sector. It was of particular relevance to the development of the Water Services Policy Statement 2018-2025, published in May 2018, and the Review of Rural Water Services, which commenced in April 2018.

Water Services Policy Statement

The Water Services Policy Statement 2018-2025 was approved by Government and published in May 2018. It represents the first time that policy on this vital public service was drawn together into a single document. It followed a period of considerable public debate around how water services are delivered and paid for. The Policy Statement identifies high-level objectives and priorities for the delivery of water and wastewater services over the period to 2025.

It provides that water services - whether publicly delivered by Irish Water and their local authority partners or otherwise delivered under the Rural Water Programme – are delivered and developed in line with the following set of principles:-

- One single publicly owned national water services authority;
- Fair and efficient delivery with a customer focus;
- Priority health and environmental quality outcomes across the sector; and

- Ways of working to support partnership and excellent stakeholder management.

These key principles reflect the importance of structuring water and wastewater services around Ireland's needs; the expectations of citizens and users; the prioritisation of social, economic and environmental sustainability; and the inter-linked relationships and responsibilities necessary to ensure service delivery and accountability.

The Statement also sets out a series of high-level policy objectives across three thematic areas of Quality, Conservation, and Future Proofing, which must be pursued when planning capital investment and framing current spending plans during the period up to 2025. It is the first Water Services Policy Statement prepared as required under the Water Services Act 2017 and ushers in a new era of governance, oversight and accountability in relation to the delivery of water services.

New Funding Model for Irish Water

A new funding model was put in place fully from 2018 to implement the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services whereby all State funding to Irish Water in respect of domestic water services is now channelled through the Department.

Irish Water Exchequer funding in respect of domestic water services is now being provided by the Exchequer as voted annually by the Oireachtas consistent with the allowed revenue determination by the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities (CRU) in respect of domestic water services. In setting the allowed revenue, the CRU distinguishes revenue to be recovered from the non-domestic and domestic sectors. The element relating to the domestic sector will fall to be funded from the Department's Vote, save for any revenue arising from the excessive usage charge introduced by Part 3 of the Water Services Act 2017. In overall terms, some €1.1 billion was required to meet the cost of domestic water services in 2018 of which €500m related to capital investment, with €600 million in respect of operating costs.

Irish Water was previously funded through a mixture of its own revenue (domestic and non-domestic charges), an operational subvention paid through the Local Government Fund and commercial borrowing.

Irish Water's Strategic Funding Plan 2019-2024, which was approved by the Minister in November 2018, outlines Irish Water's business plan for its multi-annual strategic funding requirement of €11 billion to 2024. This is comprised of €6.1 billion investment in infrastructure and assets and €4.9 billion in operating costs. The funding ensures the continued operation, repair and upgrading of the country's water and waste water infrastructure to support social and economic development across the State and continued care of the water environment.

Irish Water Transformation

The programme of transformation is based on the need to evolve the service over time and to avail of opportunities for increased efficiency and effectiveness. In this context, Irish Water has proposed fully integrating its operations and ending the current operational arrangements for the delivery of water services through service level agreements with local authorities. The principle of one single publicly owned national water services authority is consistent with the recommendations made by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services, and the legislative reforms in the Water Services Acts.

In September 2018, the Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) reported on a process of engagement undertaken at the Minister's request with the parties involved in the transformation programme, including Irish Water, Irish Congress of Trade Unions and relevant affiliated unions, Local Government management and the Department.

In response, the Minister asked the parties to engage in a process to work towards the development of a stable structural and operational framework for the future. This process, assisted by the WRC, has commenced and is continuing through 2019.

The ultimate objective is to ensure that we have modern and effective systems for the delivery of water and wastewater services in Ireland.

Asset Transfer

The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides for the transfer, by Ministerial Order, of the property of a water services authority (a City, County or City and County Council) to Irish Water. The process requires that any land transferred to Irish Water must be clearly and unambiguously identified by reference to the Property Registration Authority (PRA) folio number.

During 2018, two orders were made transferring 379 water services asset properties from local authorities to Irish Water. In total, 14 Ministerial orders had been made, from the establishment of Irish Water in 2014 up to the end of 2018, with some 2,394 asset properties having now transferred to Irish Water. The focus has been on the transfer of larger assets, resulting in assets equivalent to 71% of water supply capacity and 75% of waste water treatment capacity being transferred to Irish Water by end 2018.

Output Monitoring Group

As part of the new funding model, an Output Monitoring Group was established in 2018 to assist the Department in carrying out its role in policy development and financial governance of Irish Water, particularly with regard to capital investment. The Output Monitoring Group aims to ensure that there is a common understanding of the outputs (and related outcomes) expected from and delivered by Irish Water, while respecting the statutory roles of the participants in the group (namely, the Department, Irish Water, the CRU, the EPA and NewERA). The Group met three times over the course of 2018, with much of its early work focusing on establishing a rigorous reporting structure between it and Irish Water.

Water Use Allowance and Excessive Usage

Provisions for charging for the excessive use of domestic water were developed in 2018 and will be implemented in 2019. The purpose of charging for the excessive use of water services is to incentivise the fixing of leaks and the conservation of water.

Excess use is to be determined by reference to a threshold amount of 213,000 litres of water per household per annum as specified by Ministerial Order with effect from 1 January 2018. By monitoring annual consumption patterns against the threshold amount, Irish Water will identify households that appear to be using water excessively. It is intended that the first notices, as required under legislation, will issue during 2019 based on consumption patterns for the 12 months of 2018. Only customers who continue to consume water excessively during the six month period following the issue of a notice will be deemed to be using water services excessively and become liable for charges for excessive use of water services thereafter. Additional water services allowance amounts will be available to larger-sized households of five or more persons, and exemptions based on medical need will also be available.

Revision of Subsidies for Group Water Schemes

In 2018, just over €23.5 million was recouped to local authorities for subsidy payments made to group water schemes as a contribution to the domestic element of the group water schemes' operational costs and towards local authority costs in administering the subsidy scheme.

An integral part of maintaining and improving the quality and reliability of rural water supplies is the annual subsidy. A further aim is to ensure the principles of equity of treatment and equivalent financial support equally between households on public water supplies (Irish Water) and those in group water schemes. Revised subsidy rates took effect from 1 January 2018.

An increased maximum subsidy of €331 per household is now available for small schemes of less than 100 houses that are willing, in the interests of providing in the long-term a more sustainable water supply to their members, to progress towards amalgamation and rationalisation with other schemes.

The scheme of subsidies to support the costs of group water schemes that have long-term Operation and Maintenance Contracts for the delivery of water was also revised with effect from 1 January 2018.

Reform of the Rural Water Sector

In 2018, the Department recouped just over €15.6 million to local authorities for capital expenditure across the six measures of the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2016-2018 and towards local authority costs in administering the programme.

The multi-annual approach provides greater funding certainty for priority investment needs and supports proper planning and sustainable development in rural areas. It also supports a more professional approach to the management of assets as well as for the amalgamation and rationalisation of schemes. Ultimately, it will help Ireland fulfil its commitments under the Water Framework Directive and optimise fulfilment of the drinking water quality requirements of the Drinking Water Directives in group water schemes on a consistent long-term basis.

In April 2018, the Minister established a Rural Water Working Group to conduct a review of investment needs of rural water services. The Working Group, which is chaired by the Department, includes the National Federation of Group Water Schemes, Environmental

Protection Agency, Health Service Executive, Department of Rural and Community Development and local authorities, through the County and City Management Association. The Working Group also consulted with other key stakeholders, including Irish Water.

There is a two-strand approach to the considerations of the Working Group. In 2018, Strand one addressed the composition and distribution of funding for the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme for 2019-2021, while Strand two is considering the more complex longer-focus issues surrounding the long-term future resourcing of the rural water sector. The recommendations from the Working Group on the new multi-annual programme to run to 2021 were made to the Minister in late 2018. Having been approved they will be implemented in 2019. €75 million has been provided under the National Development Plan for the new three year Programme.

A new GIS-based registration system for Group Water Systems was successfully tested in counties Mayo and Galway in 2018. Further rollout across other local authority areas is to take place in 2019. The new system which contains useful standardised information will aid local authorities in meeting their obligations to maintain a register of water supplies under their jurisdiction. Longer-term it will provide a national overview of group water scheme activity.

River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021

Ireland's River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021 (RBMP) was published in April 2018. The Plan, which is prepared in fulfilment of our obligations under the Water Framework Directive, outlines the measures the State and other sectors will take to improve water quality in Ireland's groundwater, rivers, lakes, estuarine and coastal waters over the period to 2021. The Government aims to protect and improve water quality in 726 of Ireland's 4,829 water bodies over this period. The RBMP outlines planned investment by Irish Water of approximately

€1.7 billion in wastewater infrastructure and the progression of projects in 255 urban areas by the end of 2021 protecting both the environment and public health.



The RBMP sets clear priorities, which guide the Plan's Programme of Measures. The following evidence-based priorities have been adopted under the Plan:

- Compliance with EU Directives such as the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive;

- Prevention of deterioration in water status;
- To meet the objectives for designated protected areas such as bathing waters and shellfish growing waters;
- Protection of high status waters; and
- Implementation of targeted actions and pilot schemes in priority areas aimed at
 - (1) targeting improvement in status in water bodies close to meeting their objective and
 - (2) addressing more complex issues that will build knowledge for the next cycle.

The RBMP brings forward a comprehensive and ambitious range of measures for the protection of Ireland's natural water environment. Some key achievements in 2018 include:

- Creation of a Local Authority Catchment Assessment Team, which consists of a 35 strong group of specialists working at catchment level to identify pressures on water quality and drive the implementation of mitigation measures in the 190 *Areas for Action* identified in the RBMP. The Team is part of the local authorities Water Programme shared service, which is headed by Kilkenny County Council and Tipperary County Council.
- Putting in place a new collaborative Sustainability and Advisory Support Programme between the State and the dairy industry, consisting of 30 Sustainability Advisers promoting agricultural best practice across the dairy sector.
- Irish Water commenced a new water leakage reduction programme which will run to end 2021. The programme aims to reduce water leakage by 61 million m³ each year. The saving is equivalent to a reduction in the leakage of drinking water produced in the Greater Dublin Area from 45% to 38%.
- Establishment of a Steering Group of stakeholders and international experts to determine how best to improve fish passage on the Shannon, considering the infrastructure of the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme. The Steering Group will report to the Minister by the end of April 2020
- The development commenced of a Climate Change Sectoral Climate Adaptation Plan for Water Quality and Water Services Infrastructure sectors. This Plan is part of an all-of-Government approach to transitioning to a climate resilient economy. The Plan will identify existing climate-related pressures and assess potential future climate impacts and consequences, and setting out priorities to direct adaptation efforts. The finalised Plan will be submitted to Government in September 2019.

An Fóram Uisce

An Fóram Uisce was established on a statutory basis in June 2018 pursuant to the Water Services Act 2017. Upon statutory establishment, the pre-existing Public Water Forum and the National Rural Water Services Committee were dissolved and their functions incorporated into An Fóram Uisce. The Forum provides an opportunity for stakeholders to debate and analyse a range of issues with regard to water quality, rural water concerns, issues affecting customers of Irish Water and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

Water Advisory Body

The Water Advisory Body (WAB) was established on 1 June 2018. The purpose of the WAB is to advise the Minister on measures needed to improve the transparency and accountability of Irish Water and to report on a quarterly basis to an Oireachtas Committee on Irish Water's performance on the implementation of its business plan. The WAB is also required to provide an annual report to the Minister on the performance of its functions.

Marine Spatial Planning

The Department has responsibility for implementing marine spatial planning in Ireland. The National Marine Planning Framework Baseline Report was published in September 2018. The Baseline Report set out the policy, legislative and regulatory context for marine planning in general and, more specifically, for the development of Ireland's first plan. It provided a description of the "as is" situation in terms of existing sectoral development and activities in Ireland's maritime area, including an identification of the future opportunities and constraints for each. The report was the subject of a consultation period of three months, which was the first opportunity for the public and stakeholders to formally participate in the planning process.

The regulations that originally transposed the Marine Spatial Planning Directive were repealed in 2018 and replaced with primary legislation through the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018, in order to provide a more robust and comprehensive legal basis for marine forward planning.

Marine Environment and Foreshore

The Department operates the consenting regime in respect of developments and activities on the foreshore. Some thirty new consent applications were received in 2018 for a range of projects and activities on the foreshore including applications for waste water outfalls, various one day events and coastal protection works. Revised proposals for a more comprehensive, holistic and robust approach to State consenting and development management in the Maritime Area are currently being developed jointly with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

The Department continues to implement the Monitoring Programme and Programme of Measures as required by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), which includes citizen activation and awareness raising measures and research, with the objective of achieving good environmental status by 2020. A number of EU supported INTERREG programmes were initiated to address marine litter and other marine environmental issues.

An amending EU Directive was transposed into Irish law during the year by the European Communities (Marine Strategy Framework) (Amendment) Regulations 2018. The Department continued to work with the EU and other Member States on the development of Cycle two of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), which runs from 2020. This will include revising the initial assessment of the environmental status of Ireland's maritime area and if necessary, revising targets and indicators, monitoring programme and programme of measures as required.

In conjunction with other Contracting Parties (i.e. other signatory States and jurisdictions), the Department leads and co-ordinates Ireland's implementation of the Oslo and Paris (OSPAR) Regional Sea Convention for the protection of the North East Atlantic environment. An official of the Department was appointed Chair of the OSPAR Commission in 2018.

Ireland also leads the Quality Status Assessment Group, Co-Chairs the Ocean Acidification Group and the Human Impacts Committee. As well as continuing to implement anti-pollution and biodiversity measures under OSPAR, Ireland has taken a lead role on the OSPAR Marine Litter Regional Action Plan. This includes leading or co-leading actions relating to waste and storm water as a vector for marine litter; reducing the impact of expandable polystyrene as marine litter; and assessing various legal and economic instruments to reduce the impact of single use items commonly found as beach litter.

Following approval by Government, the Department published the General Scheme of The Prohibition of Certain Products containing Plastic Microbeads Bill 2018 and drafting of the Bill for publication was underway by year end. This Bill is designed to prohibit the manufacture, import, export, supply and sale of “rinse down the drain” products containing plastic microbeads.

Goal D - To support and enable democratic, responsive and effective local government, effective electoral management and high quality fire services and emergency management.

Supporting and Developing Local Government

Papers on *Municipal Governance – Districts, Towns and Electoral Areas*, and *Local Authority Structures and Governance* were approved by Government and presented to the Joint Oireachtas Committee for consideration in 2018. In the meantime, work on implementing some of the key elements of the reports is under way including the creation of cross-boundary urban area committees, the reduction in the size of local electoral areas arising from the Local Electoral Area Boundary Reviews (completed in late 2018) and most notably, the boundary alteration between Cork City Council and Cork County Council.



In September 2018, the Government also approved the policy paper, *Local Authority Leadership, Governance and Administration*, which was submitted to the Joint Oireachtas Committee for consideration. This paper explores a range of options to strengthen leadership, governance and administration arrangements in local authorities, including proposals for directly elected mayors. The Government also agreed in principle to the holding of plebiscites on directly elected mayors with executive functions in certain local authority areas at the same time as the Local Government Elections in May 2019. This decision was subject to more detailed policy proposals being submitted to Government on the plebiscites and the powers to be given to mayors.

Role and Remuneration for Elected Members of Local Authorities

In June 2018, a review of the role and remuneration of elected members of local authorities was commissioned. The final report of the review, led by Ms Sara Moorhead SC, is due for completion in 2019.

Local Government Finance

The basis for the distribution of Local Property Tax (LPT) to local authorities remained unchanged in 2018. 80% of LPT is retained locally to fund services and the remaining 20% is re-distributed to provide equalisation funding to local authority areas with lower property tax bases due to the variance in property values across the State. Local authorities received LPT allocations of €504.8 million for 2018.

Local authorities also received €59.6m in funding from the Department to assist in meeting additional payroll costs in 2018 associated with the unwinding of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest legislation and the cumulative effect of implementing National Pay Agreements up to and including the Public Sector Stability Agreement.

The Department continued its monitoring and oversight of the financial performance of local authorities throughout 2018. This included reviewing the key financial indicators in their financial reports (Budgets and Annuals Financial Statements) and working with local authorities to address issues impacting on their finances.

Commercial Rates

During 2018, the Department worked with local authorities and other stakeholders to develop the Local Government (Rates) Bill 2018, published on 7 August 2018. The Bill takes account of the recommendations of the Debt Management Project Board, established by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and includes provision for modernisation of rates legislation; the application of interest payments on unpaid rates; minimum charges for vacant commercial premises; and the introduction of rates alleviation schemes by local authorities to support national and local policy objectives. The Bill is the first significant piece of rates legislation to be proposed in many years.

Local Government Boundary Alterations

A review of Local Electoral Area Boundaries was completed in June 2018 by two independent Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees. The review had regard to the population data from Census 2016 and made recommendations on the division of Local Electoral Areas in each council area. The recommendations of the Committees addressed many of the concerns that had been raised by local authority members and their representative organisations in relation to

the territorial size and configuration of some of the existing local electoral areas since they were last reviewed. The Statutory Orders to give effect to the new electoral areas were made in December 2018.

Work on the boundary alteration between Cork City Council and Cork County Council intensified in 2018. The Local Government Bill 2018 was published to facilitate the legal transfer. Meanwhile the local authorities, along with the Implementation Oversight Group, undertook the planning for the operational implementation of the transfer.

Independent boundary reviews in Athlone, Carlow, Drogheda and Waterford formed the basis for the Department's report on local authority structures and governance. An alternative to a boundary alteration has been identified in the form of a statutory cross-boundary urban area committee. Work will continue in 2019 to define and legislate for this committee type arrangement.

The Government decided in June 2018 to accept the recommendations of the Galway Expert Advisory Group, which unanimously recommended the amalgamation of Galway City and County Councils into a single council by 2021. However, a number of key facilitating provisions included in the Local Government Bill 2018 were not passed by the Oireachtas which will impact on the amalgamation.

Local Authority Staffing

There were some 28,281 full-time equivalent posts in local authorities at end 2018, up from 27,450 posts a year earlier.

Shared Services Payroll - MyPay

Local authorities continued to migrate to the MyPay shared service for payroll and pensions during 2018. By the end of the year MyPay was providing payroll services for 30 local authorities and other bodies, and pension services for 15.



The Department continued to oversee the administration of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme in the local government sector during 2018.

National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management

The key role of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (NDFEM) centres on the development and oversight of local authority provided fire services. The Directorate is acknowledged also to have played a key role in devising and developing all aspects of emergency management arrangements in Ireland since it was established in 2009.



The NDFEM has supported local authorities in achieving fire safety and consistent quality fire services for their communities in 2018. Specifically, following the tragic fire in Grenfell Tower in London in 2017, the NDFEM was tasked by the Minister with convening and co-ordinating a high level Fire Safety Task Force to lead a reappraisal of fire safety in Ireland. The work of the Fire Safety Task Force was advanced significantly and a report detailing its findings was presented to the Minister and published in 2018.

Capital funding amounting to €10.9 million was recouped to local authorities in the course of 2018 for Fire Stations, Fire Service Equipment and Fire Service Vehicles. Extensive Fire Safety training programmes were managed and co-ordinated by the NDFEM and delivered to the Fire Services throughout 2018. Fire Safety Promotions activities were also managed and co-ordinated by the NDFEM in 2018, in line with the National Policy “Keeping Communities Safe”.

On the emergency management front, the NDFEM co-ordinated and led the Government response to Storm Emma which struck Ireland in March 2018. A total of €9.4 million was subsequently secured and distributed to local authorities to fund their response and clean-up operations. The NDFEM prepared a review report on the event, and other more recent severe weather emergencies, which is intended to be published in 2019. The report will identify learning points to further enhance the response to major emergencies.

A comprehensive review of the Framework for Major Emergency Management, which commenced in 2017, continued in 2018 but progress was delayed by the severe weather events that occurred during the year. A revised draft of the Framework is complete and this is due to be reviewed by the National Steering Group in Q3 2019, with a view to publishing by the end of 2019, or early in 2020.

Electoral Management

A decision on the number of representatives to be elected to the European Parliament in each Member State for the 2019-2024 parliamentary term was made by the European Council on 28 June 2018. Council Decision (EU) 2018/937 provides for 13 members to be elected in Ireland for the 2019-2024 parliamentary term. This necessitated a review of European Parliament constituencies in Ireland and an independent European Parliament Constituency Committee was established in July 2018 to make a report in accordance with the requirements of Part II of the Electoral Act 1997. The Committee presented its report to the Ceann Comhairle on 24 September 2018.

The Department provided legislative and operational support for a Presidential election and two referendums in 2018.

Goal E - To serve society through the production and communication of reliable weather and climate information to protect life and property and to further enhance Met Éireann's role as the authoritative voice on Meteorology in Ireland.

During 2018 Met Éireann continued the implementation of the 2017-2027 year Strategy "Making Ireland Weather and Climate Prepared" which focuses on scientific, technical and service developments to help Irish society to be ready for and responsive to weather and climate risks.



Weather and Climate Services

Met Éireann launched a new website and app in April 2018 providing localised seven day weather forecast data to the public and an expanded range of climate information services. From its launch in April to the end of the year, met.ie had 4.2 million users and the met.ie app, available on Android and iOS platforms, was downloaded over 346,000 times. The communications reach of Met Éireann's weather warning and forecast services increased during 2018 with followers of Met Éireann's Twitter and Facebook accounts increasing to 187,000 and 59,000 respectively.



The capability and performance of Met Éireann forecasts was enhanced during 2018 through upgrades to the HARMONIE computer based weather prediction model and operational implementation of probabilistic short-range forecasts.

Met Éireann provided meteorological advice and support to the National Emergency Co-ordination Group in the lead up to and during 2018's severe weather events.

The World Meteorological Organisation accredited Met Éireann's Valentia Observatory Centennial Station status acknowledging over 100 years of high quality continuous meteorological observations.

Aviation Services

Designation as Ireland's Meteorological Service provider for International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Annex 3 services and Aviation Services Division's ISO 9001 accreditation have been retained. The project to ensure compliance with the EU Common Requirements Regulation (EC/373/2017), for providers of air traffic management / air navigation services, is ongoing and is expected to be completed by January 2020.

National Flood Forecasting

Met Éireann has continued to support the OPW in the establishment of the National Flood Forecast and Warning Service. Work continued on the development of a Flood Forecasting Centre within Met Éireann with the recruitment of hydrometeorologists and research into hydrological models suitable for flood forecasting on Irish river catchments.

Corporate Information

Corporate Governance

The Department is committed to the following Governance Principles:

- Good governance supports a culture and ethos which ensures behaviour with integrity, a strong commitment to ethical values, and respect for the rule of law;
- Good governance ensures openness, effective public consultation processes and comprehensive engagement with domestic and international stakeholders;
- Good governance helps to define priorities and outcomes in terms of sustainable economic and societal benefits and to determine the policies and interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of these priorities and outcomes;
- Good governance means developing the Department's capacity, including the capability of the leadership team, management and staff;
- Good governance means managing risks and performance through robust internal control systems and effective performance management practices; and,
- Good governance means implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, communications, audit and scrutiny to deliver effective accountability.

The Department's Corporate Governance Framework, which was devised in accordance with the Civil Service Renewal Programme, sets out how these principles are applied and is available on the Department's website.

Internal Audit

The Department's Internal Audit Unit completed five internal audits and seven audit reviews/ follow-ups during 2018. The Department's Audit Committee held four meetings during the year.

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 places a responsibility on all public bodies to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of its staff and customers alike. This responsibility is known as the Public Sector Equality and

Human Rights Duty and is a legal obligation. In 2018, the Department's cross-Divisional internal working group, representative of all Divisions of the Department, continued to address the implementation of our Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

Irish Language Commitments

The Department remained committed in 2018 to providing quality services in Irish and/or bilingually to its customers as set out in our *Irish Language Scheme 2017 - 2020*, and to the statutory obligations arising on foot of the Official Languages Act.

Freedom of Information & Access to Information on the Environment

In 2018, the Department received 455 Freedom of Information requests. In addition, we received 17 requests under the Access to Information on the Environment regulations.

Quality Customer Service

This Department is committed to providing the highest quality service to all its customers. Our Customer Charter and our Customer Service Action Plan outline the standards of service you can expect to receive whether you contact us by phone, email, letter or in person. In addition, we welcome feedback via our webmaster. We aim to resolve all queries within 15 days, unless there are particular reasons why this cannot be done. In 2018, we received 872 queries to our quality customer service mailbox, resolving 90% of queries within this time-frame. We aim to increase this percentage in 2019.

Details of our Charter and Plan are available on www.housing.gov.ie/corporate/customer-service/quality-customer-service. It is intended to review these documents in 2019.

Parliamentary Questions	2017	2018
Questions Received	3,575	3,638
Questions Answered ²	3,349	3,307
Question type:		
Oral	432	401
Written	2,917	2,906
Topical Issues Debates		
	185	185
Commencement Matters		
	75	83
Representations and Invitations		
Representations ³	3,946	3,749
Invitations ⁴	633	1,077

Human Resources - WELL, Our People Strategy

The People Strategy for 2018-2020, 'WELL', was launched at the 100th meeting of the Department's Partnership Committee on 12 July 2018. The strategy contains over 50 separate actions across the four themes/pillars of *Wellbeing, Engagement, Learning & Development and Leadership*. It was developed via an innovative partnership process involving four working groups of over 40 staff from across the organisation. The actions are intended to deliver on our shared vision for the future engagement, development and wellbeing of staff and to make a lasting and positive impact on the Department and its people over the years ahead. The strategy will build on the partnership model, with a "champion" identified for each theme and, with the support of HR, will be delivered through sub-committees comprising staff at all levels and locations.



² The remainder of questions were disallowed, withdrawn or transferred.

³ Represents totals from Minister's and Ministers of State's Offices.

⁴ Represents totals from Minister's and Ministers of State's Offices.

Staff Numbers

The number of staff serving in the Department at year-end 2018 equated to 719.35 Whole Time Equivalent posts. 190 staff were recruited and promoted through a variety of different routes in 2018, including internal promotion and open competitions.

Staff also continued to avail of a range of work/life balance schemes, as set out below:

	Number of staff
Parental Leave	49
Study Leave	26
Worksharing	108
Shorter working year	62
Career break	10

Training and Development

The Performance Management and Development System continued to be used as a key tool in support of improved organisational performance, with a 92.4% compliance rate achieved.



Building capability/capacity through the provision of relevant and appropriate training across all grades and Departmental locations is a priority. Support is provided to staff undertaking formal education in subjects relevant to their work through dedicated learning supports and the Refund of Fees Scheme. In 2018, staff members undertook studies in areas such as housing, law, statistics, human resources management and economics, areas which have been identified as priorities for the business needs of the organisation.

Civil Service Financial Management Shared Services

The Department's formal implementation engagement with the Civil Service Financial Management Shared Services (FMSS) project commenced in December 2017. Significant preparatory work for the planned FMSS wave two transition was carried out during 2018 and the Department continued its support to the National Shared Services Office for the FMSS project.



Prompt Payment

In 2018, the Department paid 89.69% of all invoices within 15 calendar days, and 99.13% of all invoices within 30 calendar days.

In respect of the year overall, the Department incurred late payment interest charges of €1,241. The value of all late payments as a percentage of all invoiced payments in 2018 was 0.85%. In addition to the late payment interest, compensation costs amounting to €2,240 were paid in 2018.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Legislative Activity in 2018

Relevant Acts of the Oireachtas in 2018

Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018

Statutory Instruments in 2018

S.I. No. 4/2018 - Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2012 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2018

S.I. No. 25/2018 - Housing (Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 29/2018 - Planning and Development (Amendment) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 30/2018 - Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 31/2018 - Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 37/2018 - Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2018

S.I. No. 65/2018 - European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) (Amendment) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 66/2018 - Referendum Commission (Establishment) Order 2018

S.I. No. 165/2018 - Community Development (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2018

S.I. No. 193/2018 - Water Services Act 2017 (Part 5) (Establishment Day) Order 2018

S.I. No. 194/2018 - Water Services Act 2017 (part 7) (Establishment Day) Order 2018

S.I. No. 200/2018 - Valuation Act 2001 (Vacant Site Appeal to Tribunal) (Fees) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 206/2018 - Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 (Commencement) Order 2018

S.I. No. 233/2018 - Building Control (Prescribed Qualifications) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 255/2018 - Referendum Commission (Establishment) (No. 2) Order 2018

S.I. No. 261/2018 - European Union (Water Policy) (Abstractions Registration) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 266/2018 - Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2018

S.I. No. 279/2018 - European Parliament Constituency Committee (Establishment) Order 2018

S.I. No. 280/2018 - European Communities (Establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE)) (Amendment) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 296/2018 - European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 297/2018 - Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) Order 2018

S.I. No. 329/2018 - Presidential Elections (Forms) (Amendment) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 350/2018 - Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 (Commencement) (No. 2) Order 2018

S.I. No. 352/2018 - Land Development Agency (Establishment) Order 2018

S.I. No. 374/2018 - Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (Section 11) Order 2018

S.I. No. 395/2018 - Presidential Elections (Ballot Paper Template) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 404/2018 - European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) (No. 2) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 436/2018 - Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 (Commencement) Order 2018

S.I. No. 442/2018 - National Oversight and Audit Commission (Number of Members) Order 2018

S.I. No. 456/2018 - Valuation Act 2001 (Laois County Council) (Rate Limitation) Order 2018

S.I. No. 501/2018 - Planning and Development (Fees) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 526/2018 - Building Control (Amendment) Regulation 2018

S.I. No. 573/2018 - Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) (No. 2) Order 2018

S.I. No. 588/2018 - Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 (Section 27) (Commencement) Order 2018

S.I. No. 589/2018 - Derelict Sites Act 1990 (Urban Areas) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 603/2018 - Land Development Agency (Amendment) Order 2018

S.I. No. 604/2018 - Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971 (Designation of Bodies) Order 2018

S.I. No. 610/2018 - County of Carlow Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018

S.I. No. 611/2018 - County of Cavan Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018

- S.I. No. 612/2018 - County of Clare Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 613/2018 - County of Donegal Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 614/2018 - City of Dublin Local Electoral Areas Order 2018
- S.I. No. 615/2018 - County of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Local Electoral Areas Order 2018
- S.I. No. 616/2018 - County of Fingal Local Electoral Areas Order 2018
- S.I. No. 617/2018 - City of Galway Local Electoral Areas Order 2018
- S.I. No. 618/2018 - County of Galway Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 619/2018 - County of Kerry Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 620/2018 - County of Kildare Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 621/2018 - County of Kilkenny Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 622/2018 - County of Laois Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 623/2018 - County of Leitrim Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 624/2018 - City and County of Limerick Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 625/2018 - County of Longford Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 626/2018 - County of Louth Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 627/2018 - County of Mayo Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 628/2018 - County of Meath Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 629/2018 - County of Monaghan Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 630/2018 - County of Offaly Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 631/2018 - County of Roscommon Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 632/2018 - County of Sligo Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 633/2018 - County of South Dublin Local Electoral Areas Order 2018
- S.I. No. 634/2018 - County of Tipperary Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 635/2018 - City and County of Waterford Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018
- S.I. No. 636/2018 - County of Westmeath Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018

S.I. No. 637/2018 - County of Wexford Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018

S.I. No. 638/2018 - County of Wicklow Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018

S.I. No. 646/2018 - European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2018

S.I. No. 648/2018 - European Communities (Marine Strategy Framework) (Amendment) Regulations 2018

APPENDIX 2: Publications in 2018

The main publications produced by the Department during 2018 are detailed below:

Accounting Code of Practice - January 2018

Annual Report 2017

Annual Report 2017 - Section 22 Protected Disclosures Act - Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

Cost Analysis of the Updated Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities

Data Protection Policy

Design Standards for New Apartments - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (March 2018)

European Parliament Constituency Committee Report on European Parliament Constituencies 2018

Fire Safety in Ireland – Report of the Fire Safety Task Force

Report of the Fire Safety Task Force – Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

Fourth Progress Report on the Implementation of the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016

Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment (August 2018)

Ireland's Fourth Nitrates Action Programme - Strategic Environmental Assessment

Ireland's Fourth Nitrates Action Programme - Natura Impact Statement

Homelessness Inter-Agency Group – Report to Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government

Housing First National Implementation Plan 2018-2021

Local Authority Annual Financial Statement 2017

Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee No.1 Report 2018

Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee No.2 Report 2018

Local Government Fund Account - 2017

National Marine Planning Framework Baseline Report

National Taking in Charge Initiative Report - 2018

OSPAR Action 43 - Study to identify and assess relevant instruments and incentives to reduce the use of single-use and other items, which impact the marine environment as marine litter

Overview of Pension Income and Costs in Local Authorities December 2018

Overview of Commercial Rates in Local Authorities December 2018

Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Local Government Arrangements in Galway (April 2018) – 2nd Interim Report

Resolving Unfinished Housing Developments - 2017 Annual Progress Report

Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan Status Report Q4 2017

Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan Status Report Q1 2018

Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan Status Report Q2 2018

Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan Status Report Q3 2018

Repair and Leasing Scheme - Frequently Asked Questions

Review of Rent Predictability Measure - Final Report

River Basin Management Plan - SEA Statement

River Basin Management Plan - Natura Impact Statement

River Basin Management Plan 2018 - 2021

Review of Delivery Costs and Viability for Affordable Residential Developments

Social Housing Construction Status Report – Q3 2018

Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2018 – Key Findings

Supplement to the Register of Electors 2018/2019

Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines for Planning Authorities - Strategic Environmental Assessment Statement

Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines for Planning Authorities - Screening Report for Appropriate Assessment Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines for Planning Authorities - Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement

Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines for Planning Authorities - Appropriate Assessment Determination Statement

Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines for Planning Authorities Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) 2018 - FAQ'S

Value for Money Report No. 31 - Coroners Service in Local Authorities

Voting - The Register of Electors – various languages

Water Services Policy Statement 2018-2025

Bringing Back Homes - Manual for the Reuse of Existing Buildings

Final Report of the Working Group on the Reuse of Existing Buildings

FAQs for Disability Access Certificates - Regularisation Certificates - 7 Day Notices

National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy – Vacant Homes Unit

Housing Options for Our Ageing Population – Policy Statement

Additional Publications from Met Éireann in 2018

Technical Note No. 67

Monthly Climate and Weather Statements

Conference proceedings, scientific reports, book chapters and other publications by Met Éireann staff members

- O'Sullivan L., McConnell B., Scanlon R., Walsh S., Creamer R. (2018) Soil Formation. In: Creamer R., O'Sullivan L. (eds) *The Soils of Ireland*. World Soils Book Series. Springer, Cham
- Coll J, Curley M, Walsh S, and Sweeney J (2018) HOMERUN: relative homogenisation of the Irish precipitation network. [EPA Research Report 2012-CCRP-FS.11](#) Report No. 242. Environmental Protection Agency, Wexford, pp32
- Gleeson E, Whelan E [editors], J Aherne, H Cathcart, L Cooke, J Correia, J de Lacy, F Dias, E Doddy, J Flanagan, G Florence, Gallagher S, E Graham, S Griffin, J Janjic, C Kidd, E Lettice, F McDermott, O Naughton, P Nolan, C Sweeney, C Werner, K Wilkins, 'MÉRA Workshop Proceedings', Met Éireann, 2018-10-09. ([Full text](#))
- Clancy C., Darcy, R., Gallagher, S., Gleeson, E., Hally, A., Hanley, J., Whelan, E. Met Éireann Updates. ALADIN-HIRLAM Newsletter 10: 56-60, 2018. ([Full Text](#))

Peer-reviewed academic journal articles by Met Éireann staff members

- Janjić, J., Gallagher, S., and Dias, F.: "Case study of the winter 2013/2014 extreme wave events off the west coast of Ireland", *Adv. Sci. Res.*, 15, 145–157, <https://doi.org/10.5194/asr-15-145-2018>, 2018
- Keith Lambkin, 'Agricultural Meteorology in Ireland – a historical perspective from the Irish', [journal], *Biological Rhythm Research*, 2018-12-01 <http://hdl.handle.net/2262/85920>
- Jelena Janjić, Sarah Gallagher, Emily Gleeson, Frederic Dias – UCD. 'Wave energy extraction by the end of the century: Impact of the North Atlantic Oscillation', [journal], *ASME 2018 37th International Conference on Ocean, Offshore and Arctic Engineering.*, 2018-12-01 <http://hdl.handle.net/2262/85919>
- Murphy, C., Broderick, C., Burt, T. P., Curley, M., Duffy, C., Hall, J., Harrigan, S., Matthews, T. K. R., Macdonald, N., McCarthy, G., McCarthy, M. P., Mullan, D., Noone, S., Osborn, T. J., Ryan, C., Sweeney, J., Thorne, P. W., Walsh, S., and Wilby, R. L.: A 305-year continuous monthly rainfall series for the island of Ireland (1711–2016), *Clim. Past*, 14, 413–440, <https://www.clim-past.net/14/413/2018/>.
- Ryan, C., C. Duffy, C. Broderick, P.W. Thorne, M. Curley, S. Walsh, C. Daly, M. Treanor, and C. Murphy, 2018: Integrating Data Rescue into the Classroom. *Bull. Amer. Meteor. Soc.*, 99, 1757–1764, <https://doi.org/10.1175/BAMS-D-17-0147.1>
- Eoin Whelan, Emily Gleeson, John Hanley, "An Evaluation of MÉRA, a High-Resolution Mesoscale Regional Reanalysis". *J. Appl. Meteor. Climatol.*, 57, 2179–2196, <https://doi.org/10.1175/JAMC-D-17-0354.1>, 2018 ([Full Text](#))
- Laura O'Brien, Emiliano Renzi, John M. Dudley, Colm Clancy, Frédéric Dias, 'Catalogue of extreme wave events in Ireland: revised and updated for 14680 BP to 2017', *Natural Hazards and Earth Systems Science*, 18, 729–758, 2018 ([Full Text](#))
- Kristian Pagh Nielsen, Emily Gleeson 'Using Shortwave Radiation to Evaluate the HARMONIE-AROME Weather Model', [journal], *MDPI*, 2018-04-26, *Atmosphere*, 9, 163, 2018 ([Full Text](#))

APPENDIX 3: Public Consultations undertaken in 2018

Transboundary Environmental Public Consultation - Wylfa Newydd Nuclear Power Plant, Anglesey, North Wales, UK

Timetable and work programme for third cycle River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027

Proposals to modernise the Electoral Registration Process

Public Consultation on establishment of an Electoral Commission

Draft Water Services Guidelines

National Marine Planning Framework Baseline Report

Transboundary Environmental Public Consultation - Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Plant, UK

Circular FPS 01/2018 - Water Services Guidelines 2018 – Public Consultation

Information Paper on Water Services Policy Statement – Public Consultation

Public Consultation on the Review of Part L (Conservation of Fuel and Energy) Dwellings and Part F (Ventilation) of the Building Regulations

Public Consultation on the General Scheme of The Prohibition of Certain Products Containing Plastic Microbeads Bill 2018, and associated draft Regulatory Impact Assessment

Public Consultation on the General Scheme of the Water Environment (Abstractions) Bill 2018

Public Consultation on DRAFT 'Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines for Planning Authorities'

Public Consultation on DRAFT 'Bringing Back Homes Manual for the reuse of existing buildings'

European Commission - Public consultation on the evaluation of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive

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