



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development

Annual Report

2020



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Minister's Foreword



I am delighted to share the annual report for 2020 for the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The Department was strengthened with the addition of the Islands remit in 2020.

That decision was matched by an increase in the level of supports and funding to island communities across the country.

Nationwide, the Department continued to deliver positive outcomes for our rural communities.

This report will outline the programmes and initiatives which were put in place in order to support our towns and villages.

It should be noted that the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the lives of all of our citizens.

The Department's funding provides strong support for communities throughout Ireland - ensuring that vital supports and services are maintained both throughout the pandemic, and as we recover from its impacts.

In addition to the continuation of existing funding streams, a number of specific targeted measures were introduced as a direct response to Covid-19.

Through the establishment of the €45 million Covid-19 Stability Fund, my Department engaged with a wide array of local representatives and community groups in 2020 to ensure critical services continued to be delivered to vulnerable groups.

While all the programmes funded by my Department are important to communities, I am especially proud of some key achievements.

For example, The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) delivered funding of €168 million for 139 projects.

Total expenditure under the LEADER Programme in 2020 was €45.4 million. This funding has played a critical role in supporting rural communities to implement a local-led 'bottom-up' approach to developing their own areas.

In December 2020, I extended the deadline for commitments under the 2014-2020 LEADER programme to the end of March 2021 in order to facilitate the full allocation of funds available under that programme.

Meanwhile, significant investments in rural development continued through the 2020 Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Local Improvement Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Scheme and the CLÁR Programme.

Local organisations also received increased supports through our community development programmes such as the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), the Community Services Programme and the Seniors Alert Scheme.

While all of these programmes continue to deliver for their beneficiaries, I am always conscious that we can do more to increase awareness of the supports that are available.

On the policy front, I was delighted to launch the country's first National Volunteering Strategy, a five-year strategy for the Community and Voluntary Sector. The development of the next phase of rural development policy and the development of the national islands policy were also substantially advanced during the year.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleague, Minister of State Joe O'Brien, for his dedicated work during 2020 and also mark the invaluable contributions of the staff and management team in the Department, particularly during challenging times.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heather', followed by a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line that ends in a small loop.

Heather Humphreys T.D.
Minister for Rural and Community Development

Introduction by the Secretary General

I am very pleased to present the 2020 annual report for the Department. The report provides a comprehensive overview of the wide range of policies, programmes and initiatives developed and delivered over the course of what turned out to be an extraordinary year.

The pandemic brought about huge challenges for everyone across society. As a Department, it impacted enormously on what we did and how we did it during 2020. This report highlights important elements of our response, as we moved quickly to play a pivotal part in the combined efforts of central and local government, the community and voluntary sector, social enterprise and volunteers to meet the needs of the vulnerable in our communities.

As an organisation, we had to move quickly to a remote working environment and to re-model our working arrangements accordingly. Staff throughout the Department adapted successfully to this, while simultaneously focusing on the new demands of the Department's wider Covid response and ensuring that we maintained progress on our core work in delivering for communities. In that regard, 2020 was another highly productive year across the range of supporting activities and investments that are delivered in pursuit of our mission to promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland.

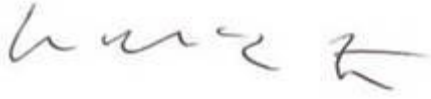
In addition to significant continuing investments through programmes such as the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, LEADER Programme, Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme and Community Services Programme, 2020 was another notable year for the Department in policy development.

The country's first *National Volunteering Strategy 2021 - 2025* was published in December. Its aim is to recognise, support and promote the unique value and contribution of volunteers to Irish society. Throughout 2020, significant work was undertaken in developing Ireland's rural development policy for the coming five years, and in implementing the *National Social Enterprise Policy* and the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland (*Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*). Our policy functions were also widened with the addition of responsibilities for the Islands, following the establishment of the new Government in 2020.

All of these areas involve extensive engagement, consultation and partnership with communities, stakeholders, and colleagues across Government. We continue to value, enhance and build on these relationships as a vital means of delivering on our mandate.

I would like to thank Minister Heather Humphreys T.D. and Minister of State Joe O'Brien T.D. for their leadership of the Department's programme of work following their appointments in mid-2020. I would also like to pay tribute to the work of our partner

organisations and the agencies under the Department's remit. Finally, my sincere appreciation is due to all my colleagues in the Department for their commitment and dedication throughout the year, particularly in light of the major challenges posed by Covid.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kevin McCarthy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kevin McCarthy
Secretary General

Our Mission and Remit

Established in July 2017, our mission as a Government Department is:

“To promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland”

The remit of the Department includes supporting rural and community development in all communities across Ireland. This involves a mix of policy initiatives and funding actions to improve the economic and social development of both rural and urban areas, and to address gaps in meeting the social needs of those areas.

Our mission is fulfilled through delivering on the following Strategic Goals outlined in the Department’s first Statement of Strategy, which covers the period 2017-2020:

1. Work across Government to advance the economic and social development of rural areas in order to enhance the quality of life for people who live in rural Ireland.
2. Contribute to enhanced regional development, with a view to strengthening the potential of all regions to contribute to economic recovery.
3. Support local communities to develop, empowering them to identify their needs and aspirations and providing them with the opportunities, skills and confidence to influence, shape and participate in decision-making processes which affect them.
4. Support the Community, Voluntary and Charity Sector to strengthen its capacity to contribute to civil society and support the growth and development of philanthropy.

This Annual Report details the measures delivered and the progress made in respect of each of the above goals in 2020.

As a Department we continue to build and develop our organisation to make a positive difference for individuals and communities across Ireland. In 2020 we continued to invest in our people, focus on our communications with stakeholders and further advance our systems and procedures to deliver our work, including improving our research and evaluation capacity to measure the impacts of our programmes. Details of progress in these areas in 2020 are also outlined in this Report.

Our Values, Behaviours and Culture

The Department of Rural and Community Development at all times seeks to instill, develop and maintain values and behaviours that maximise the organisation's capacity to deliver upon its stated mission and strategic goals in the interest of the public. The Department's culture is inherent in its structures and the way it engages in the delivery of its functions and its services.

Reflecting the wider ethos of the Civil Service, the Department is committed to:

- upholding the values of the Civil Service, including a deep-rooted public service ethos of independence, integrity, impartiality, equality, fairness and respect
- the highest standard of human rights, equality and anti-discrimination in accordance with the Public Sector Duty obligation of the Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014 to further the development of our staff and the working environment.
- supporting and implementing a culture of accountability, efficiency and value for money.

Cross-Government Work

Rural and community development is a cross-Government priority that involves influencing and collaboration on work being undertaken by a large number of Departments and State agencies. This Department is central to this work.

A key function of the Department is the development of policies that meet the needs of rural Ireland and local communities and their economic and social development. The Department continues to collaborate across Government at all levels on **key policy documents** such as the new strategy for rural development for Ireland and for the community and voluntary sector, the first *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025*, which was published in December 2020.

The Department also continues to contribute to the work of Government across a wide range of areas in relation to the impacts on, and opportunities created for, rural Ireland and communities resulting from ongoing policy developments.

The Department continued to actively support the delivery of measures in the **Climate Action Plan**, which sets out an ambitious course of action to address the serious and wide-ranging impacts of climate change on the Irish economy and society. This Department collaborated with other Government Departments on the Plan, and has lead responsibility for a number of actions therein, in addition to contributing to several actions led by other Departments. At the end of 2020 the Department submitted interim actions for the upcoming 2021 Climate Action Plan. The Department is also contributing

to important cross-Government work on fairness and a Just Transition and will continue to do so.

Additionally, given the importance to the success of Climate Action measures of engagement and support with communities, specific Climate Action commitments have been included in the *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025*

The Department is represented on the interdepartmental working group on **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) led by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The Sustainable Development Goals provide an important frame of reference for the *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025* to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. There are specific actions in the strategies that strengthen and build understanding and capacity to support the implementation of the SDG National Implementation Plan. Measures in the new Rural Development Policy for Ireland are clearly mapped to specific SDGs. The *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025* outlines the importance of the contribution of the voluntary sector in underpinning the Government's commitments to the achievement of SDG policy objectives. The Department was also proud to see the Irish Men's Sheds Association, a recipient of Departmental funding and an important presence in many Irish communities, awarded the status of a Sustainable Development Goal Champion for 2019-2020.

The Department has continued to implement actions and initiatives under the **Green Government Initiative** and has been actively involved in disseminating information on the Green Agenda, both to staff in the Department and to the Department's four agencies. The Department has maintained constant communication with the Office of Public Works (OPW) Optimising Power @ Work campaign in 2020, the core principle of which is to encourage behavioural change in energy use. Staff awareness was raised throughout 2020 on measures to reduce energy and waste inefficiency in the home environment. Facilities Management representatives also attended the 2020 Public Sector Energy Conference where Public Sector bodies met to learn about new developments in energy efficiency policies, technologies and the strategic supports available to them.



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Department of Rural and
Community Development

2020 Highlights

Launch of €45 million
COVID-19 Stability
Fund



Publication of the
National Volunteering
Strategy 2021-2025



200 participants on
first virtual public
consultation for new
rural development
policy



Key Milestones

€41 million in funding to
597 organisations



288 (Full-Time
Equivalent) new jobs
created in LEADER
supported enterprises



264,851 passengers
travelled on subsidised
ferry services to
islands



733
Parliamentary
Questions
Answered



692 Written Responses



41 Oral Responses

Covid-19 Response and Business Continuity

In 2020, a €50 million Covid-19 support package for the Community and Voluntary Sector, Charities and Social Enterprises was launched by Government and administered by Pobal on behalf of DRCD. This funding was made available from the Dormant Accounts Fund and consisted of the €45million **Covid-19 Stability Fund** and the €5million **Innovate Together Fund**.

The **Covid-19 Stability Fund** was intended to be a targeted once-off cash injection for organisations and groups delivering critical front-line services to the most at need in our society and in danger of imminent closure due to lost fund-raised or traded income as a direct result of restrictions to counter the spread of Covid-19. In 2020, 597 organisations were supported with over €41million in funding.

The Department also played a central role in the Government **Community Call**, initiative which assisted communities during the Covid-19 restriction. In particular the Department was a member of the national oversight committee which oversaw the community response in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and providing funding and support for many elements of the community response. Community Call provided a State organised and community-based support programme for the vulnerable during Covid-19. Under this programme, each local authority established a Covid-19 Community Call Forum, and a telephone helpline. Each Forum worked with State agencies and community and voluntary groups to provide supports or services to any vulnerable person needing them.

In 2020 the Department also announced a **€2.5 million Covid-19 emergency fund** for Community and Voluntary groups taking part in the Community Call. Local authorities distributed the funding to community groups supporting vulnerable people. Such supports and services include collection and delivery of essential items like food, 'meals-on-wheels', household items, fuel or medicine, and support for those experiencing social isolation.

Volunteers have very much been to the forefront of this community reaction to Covid-19, and, in response to the significant extra demand on their services, such as Garda Vetting of volunteers, the Department provided additional financial support of €500,000 to volunteer centres through Volunteer Ireland. The Department, along with The Wheel and Irish Rural Link, supported the Community Outreach Project. Funding of €450,000 was provided to support 31 Community Champions who work closely with local authorities to ensure that all local organisations in every community are linked together. An additional €200,000 for a new befriending phone-call initiative was also provided, this initiative allowed older people to receive regular phone calls to check on their wellbeing and needs. The befriending scheme was operated in conjunction with POBAL and ALONE. In December 2020 a second €1.7m round of this fund was launched to support

community and voluntary groups. **In total, the Covid-19 Emergency Fund provided €4.2m of small grant support to community and voluntary groups.**



Galway Rural Development Covid-19 Grants SICAP Tuam

In 2020 social enterprises significantly stepped up and diversified their activities to adapt to local needs, as part of their contribution to the Community Call. Due to the disruption to business caused by the pandemic, significant flexibility was shown by the Department in administering the Dormant Accounts funded Training and Mentoring Scheme for Social Enterprise, and Small Capital Grants Scheme for Social Enterprise. This flexibility included extending the deadlines for both schemes into 2021, and in allowing changes to be made to the projects funded, particularly where these changes allowed social enterprises to react to the effects of the pandemic more effectively

In December 2020 funding was allocated to the **Covid-19 Social Enterprise Regeneration Programme** to be delivered in partnership with the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN). This Dormant Accounts funded scheme helps social enterprises to strengthen their own resilience and enable them to continue to address the challenges facing our economy and society in a Covid-19 environment. The programme provides free training and mentoring to social enterprise managers, directors and staff across the country, with a focus on strategic planning, digital innovation, capacity building and governance.

The **Innovate Together Fund** was launched in May 2020 as part of a wider suite of Covid-19 supports for community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises. The Fund is a collaboration between Government, Rethink Ireland, who administered the Fund and the philanthropic community. It consists of a €5 million commitment from the Department from the Dormant Accounts Funds and €0.6m raised from philanthropic donations. The purpose of The Fund is to assist organisations working with vulnerable people and communities by fostering innovative and adaptive solutions to both existing and emerging social challenges presented by Covid-19.

The Fund received 683 applications from which a total of 71 Awardees were selected and includes a total of 33 different target groups who have all been adversely affected by Covid-19. Projects from all over Ireland were awarded cash grants from €20,000 to €200,000. Among these are some of the most marginalised communities in Ireland, including migrants, prisoners, and people with disabilities, as well as individuals and families experiencing homelessness and substance abuse. It also included groups/sectors that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, such as the elderly and their carers, professionals in the arts sector, and young adults.

Kite Entertainment and RTE ran a charity fundraising campaign relating to Covid-19, incorporating a telethon event titled “**RTE Does Comic Relief**”, which was broadcast on RTE television on 26 June 2020. The Community Foundation for Ireland (CFI) is the charity partner for the project and a standalone, ring fenced fund was set up by the CFI.

The Fund raised €6m which included matching funding of €3m from Government, advanced through the Department via an agreement between the Department and CFI. The purpose of the Fund is to support vulnerable communities in the recovery and rebuilding stage after the Covid-19 lockdown. 672 applications were successful and received grants from €300 to local organisations to €180,000 awarded to a national collaborative project on research and development of the charity sector. It is estimated that potentially more than 17.4 million services to individuals will be improved as a result of the Fund which includes immediate lifeline supports such as meals on wheels, the delivery of aftercare for survivors of strokes and supports for vulnerable children. In addition, digital communication and information infrastructure have been hugely enhanced allowing access to the arts, training and education. Long established community services were also digitally enabled to respond to the immediate crisis presented by Covid-19 and also strengthened for future challenges.

In order to provide guidance to community and voluntary groups regarding reopening their facilities during the pandemic, in 2020, the Department linked with Pobal to prepare information and resources for the sector on reopening and operating their facilities safely in line with public health advice. The guidance continues to be updated on a regular basis in line with recommendations from Government. It is intended as a useful resource to help groups make their own decisions on the steps they need to take when preparing for reopening and then continuing to operate.

While this guidance has been developed to help the sector, considerable emphasis is placed on personal responsibility and the need for people and organisations to exercise judgement in their activities. This is especially important in the community and voluntary sector, given the varied nature of the activities being undertaken. The Department continues to link with Pobal to ensure the information and resources for the Community and Voluntary Sector are up to date based on current public health advice.

The **Inspection, Compliance and Business Development Unit** carries out inspections at Local Development Companies, Local Authority offices and project site visits as part of its control programme. The unit put in place procedures and a Health and Safety protocol consistent with government guidelines on Covid-19 restrictions to ensure business continuity. These are monitored and revised on an ongoing basis to align the Department's approach with public health guidance.

The Department's **Islands Unit** maintained contact with operators and island representatives regarding transport services. At the request of Island communities and ferry operators, and in keeping with travel restrictions, the Department agreed to temporary reductions in scheduled services. Transport services were maintained throughout the year.

From a **LEADER** perspective, the Department introduced a number of administrative flexibilities to the LEADER Operating Rules at the outset of the pandemic in order to permit the Local Action Groups and their Implementing Partners continue to deliver the programme. These included: permitting Evaluation Committee and Local Action Group (LAG) decision making meetings to be held via telephone or video conference facilities; the use of electronic signatures where necessary; the use of photographic evidence in lieu of the Capital Site visit and other day-to-day operational procedures to assist with processing of payment claims. The LEADER programme has remained fully operational throughout the Covid-19 period and payments have continued to be made to the LAGs, their Implementing Partners and to project promoters.

As part of a wider Departmental response to addressing challenges presented by Covid-19, the 2020 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was tailored to assist rural towns and villages respond quickly to the pandemic. In addition to the usual project funding under the scheme, the 2020 scheme included 3 rounds of **Town and Village Renewal (TVR) Scheme Accelerated Measures** which enabled towns and villages to adapt to Covid-19 and to introduce initiatives immediately to support increased footfall and enable people to shop and socialise safely in accordance with public health guidelines.

These accelerated TVR measures successfully assisted businesses with social distancing requirements and also helped to increase footfall as and when such restrictions were relaxed. Examples of projects supported included the use of marquees, awnings etc. to facilitate on street/outdoors trading, and supports to improve shop front facades, to provide public seating, and assist with planting schemes. Under the 3

rounds of the Accelerated Measures funding of €10.39m was approved for 363 projects nationwide.

It was announced in December 2019 that 10 new trails were to be added to the Walks Scheme under Phase 1 of the expansion. This **Walks Scheme expansion** was delayed in 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions as these Walks required an on the ground inspection. The Department responded to this by implementing an online audit system in late 2020 which will expedite the process of the verification of new Walks Scheme participants' work plans in the future.

In 2020, the **supports provided through CLÁR** were tailored to help rural communities respond to the new Covid-19 environment, including through the expansion of the existing School and Community Safety measure to allow for Covid-19-related safety works up to €50,000, and the addition of new funding measures for (i) Community Recreation Areas and (ii) Meals on Wheel and Linked Services. The Community Recreational Areas measure allocated almost €1.2 million to 31 projects and the Meals on Wheels and Linked Services Measure allocated some €0.34 million to 45 projects.

In 2020, the Department faced unparalleled challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The sudden onset of the pandemic meant an immediate requirement for the full workforce to work remotely. This was overseen by the HR unit in collaboration Accommodation and IT unit, who led out on facilities, technology provision and other key supports.

In terms of the Department's response to the pandemic, the **Department's Covid-19 Response Plan** was developed in April 2020 and has been subject to continual update and review in order to align the Plan with emerging guidance.

While the numbers attending our offices have remained very small since the beginning of the pandemic, arrangements were put in place to ensure that attendance at the office, where essential, was safe and fully compliant with Public Health Guidance.

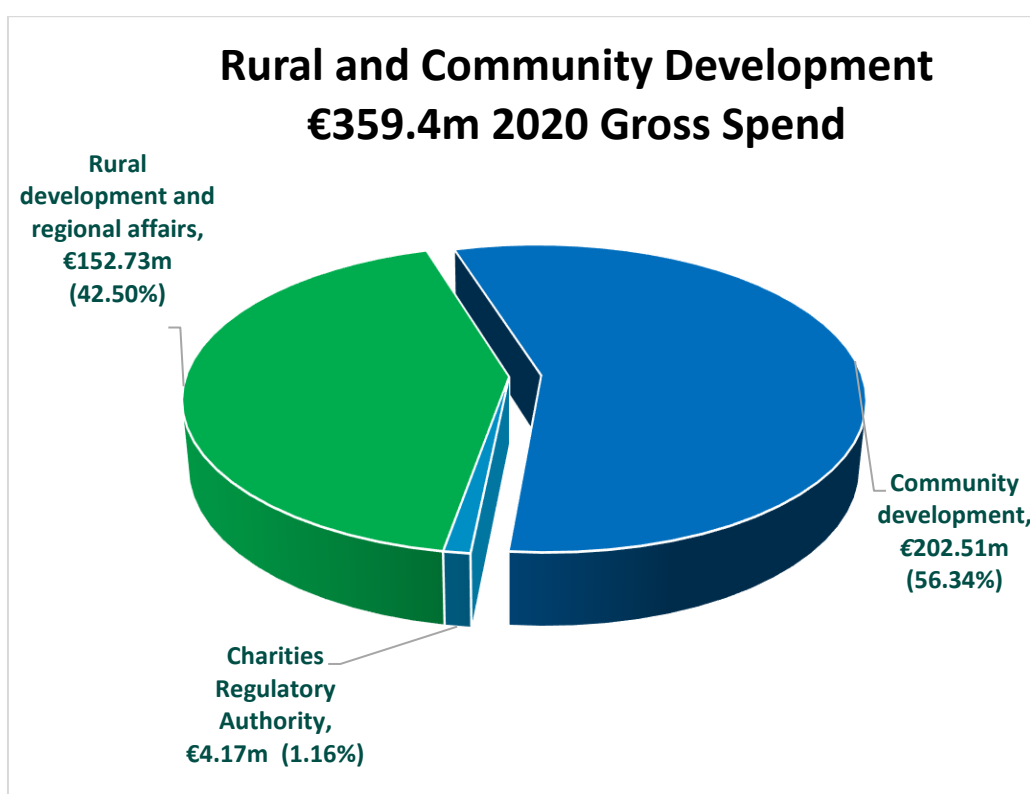
To support the national effort in relation to the Covid-19 crisis, HR Unit liaised across our business units to establish and make available staff for temporary re-deployment and contact tracing purposes and a Covid-19 Response Management Group was established by DRCD to ensure that all Covid-19 risks, to DRCD, were risk assessed and managed. The work of the Department continued seamlessly in a remote environment

Spending

Throughout 2020, the Department continued to deliver for communities and rural areas through a coherent range of strategic programmes and projects.

The gross estimate for the Department for 2020 was €374.8 million including a supplementary estimate of €10 million. The formal transfer of responsibility for the development of the offshore Islands transferred from the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to the Minister for Rural and Community Development with effect from 23 September 2020.

In 2020, a total of €359.4 million was spent across three strategic programmes: rural development, community development, and charity regulation.



In 2020, €152.7 million supported the rural development and regional affairs programme. This programme is capital intensive, with 90% of spend invested in capital programmes including LEADER, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS), Town and Village Renewal, Rural Broadband and the CLÁR programme.

Community development spending is primarily current in nature. In 2020, 89% of the total €202.5 million spent under this strategic programme supported a range of current programmes. This delivered vital support for communities across the country under the

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), the Community Services Programme (CSP) as well as other supports for the community and voluntary sectors.

Assessments of the impact of Covid-19 were carried out in early March and on an ongoing basis throughout 2020 and procedures were put in place to ensure business continuity.



Goal 1: To advance the Economic and Social Development of Rural Areas

The Department works across Government to advance the economic and social development of rural areas in order to enhance the quality of life of people who live in rural Ireland through a whole-of-Government approach under the framework of the Action Plan for Rural Development and Project Ireland 2040.

Realising our Rural Potential, the Action Plan for Rural Development was published in January 2017 as a whole-of-Government approach to supporting the economic and social progress of rural Ireland and came to a conclusion at the end of 2019. The Final Progress Report on the implementation of measures contained in the Action Plan for Rural Development was published in June 2020. Of the 277 actions reported on, 269 were completed or substantially advanced, and five actions were closed.

The year 2020 saw the continued development of the new national Rural Development Policy, **Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021-2025** building upon the initial consultations and drafting process carried out during 2019. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic precipitated a full review of the policy's priorities and content in the course of 2020.

In light of that review, the final policy vision was for a forward looking and ambitious plan, reflecting a whole-of-Government commitment to rural Ireland, with a five-year timeframe to strengthen the resilience of our rural communities and economies. It was developed to complement and reinforce other Government strategies and initiatives such as Project Ireland 2040, the Climate Action Plan, the forthcoming National Economic Recovery Plan, the National Broadband Plan, the **National Remote Work Strategy** and the Town Centre First initiative. The policy outlined measures for delivery to respond to the issues which affect rural Ireland as part of a short-term recovery and longer-term development. It was also deemed important to align each policy measure with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to reflect an underpinning theme of sustainability across economic, social and environmental development.

In further developing *Our Rural Future*, over the course of 2020 a **wide range of consultations** took place with key stakeholders, including Government Departments, State Agencies and rural stakeholder groups.

An online public engagement event took place in September 2020, hosted by Minister Humphreys, as part of the post-Covid-19 consultation process in the development of the new rural policy.

The insights obtained through the extensive consultation process helped to ensure the issues that matter to people living and working in rural Ireland were captured for inclusion in the policy, which was subsequently published in March 2021.

The Department's Rural Strategy team actively participated during 2020 in a number of **national and international groups** including, Dublin Regional Enterprise Action Plans (DETE), Bioeconomy Implementation Group (DAFM), Rural Water (DHLGH), Marine Sector (DoT/DHLGH), Islands Policy Interdepartmental Group (DTCAGSM/DRCD), Just Transition Working Group, North-South collaboration, OECD Rural Development Working Party, and EU Rural Development Groups/Networks amongst others.

The Department contributes to the advancement of long-term sustainable economic and social development across rural Ireland through the further development of policy and the direct delivery of programmes to support rural development.

The €1 billion **Rural Regeneration and Development Fund** is a key element of the Department's Rural Development Investment Programme fund established under Project Ireland 2040 and the National Development Plan 2018-2027. The investment being provided by the Fund is targeted towards revitalising rural towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas. This is being achieved through addressing dereliction, ensuring the re-use of heritage and other buildings and providing essential facilities and infrastructure, including remote working and community facilities.

The Fund supports national large-scale projects that have the greatest potential to support the achievement of national, regional and local strategic development and planning objectives and contribute to the delivery of key policy priorities. Projects are funded under two categories, Category 1 projects are capital projects that are ready to commence while Category 2 projects are proposals that require further development to enable them to apply to the Fund as a Category 1 project.

In July 2020, the second call for Category 2 applications was concluded. Category 2 funding is for projects which require further development to enable them to become ready for full delivery and to ensure a strong pipeline of projects for future calls for Category 1 applications, which relate to capital projects with all necessary planning and consents in place. Funding of €18.5 million was approved for 25 Category 2 projects with a total value of €25 million. Amongst the successful projects were:

- The Re-use and Development of Derelict and Vacant Properties Project, led by Limerick City and County Council, an innovative proposal seeking to bring

derelict properties back into use, with an emphasis on the housing, in the core of towns and villages in rural Limerick;

- Portumna Vision 2030, led by Galway County Council, that will further prepare plans to develop the town of Portumna and its natural and built heritage into a key hub for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands;
- The Kingscourt Regeneration Project, led by Cavan County Council, which will further prepare plans for the transformation of the centre of the town through redeveloping derelict sites;
- The Kildare Town Renewal Plan, led by Kildare County Council, which will prepare plans for the redesign of the Market Square and for a pedestrian link from the Kildare Village Outlet into the Town Centre;
- The Cahersiveen Town Centre Regeneration Project, led by Kerry County Council, which will design the interventions necessary to regenerate key areas within the town centre, including through the preparation of a Daniel O'Connell Quarter; and
- A Pathway to the Regeneration of Cahir Town Centre, led by Tipperary County Council, which will progress plans for the redesign of the town centre, with a firm focus on showcasing Cahir's historic character.

Under the first and second call for applications to the RRDF, 139 projects were approved for funding of €168 million with an overall cost of €239 million.

The third call for Category 1 applications was announced in June 2020 with a closing date of 1st December 2020. The focus of the third call was to support capital projects that could deliver planned regeneration, support economic recovery and the overall economic development of rural towns and villages.

The Department continues to engage with stakeholders with a view to ensuring that local authorities and other organisations and the communities they serve are fully informed of the aims, intentions and requirements of the Fund. This also ensures that the Fund continues to support the best projects in the areas which need them most.

Case Study: Development of Phase 2 of the Ulster Canal Restoration Project



Ulster Canal

The development of Phase 2 of the Ulster Canal Restoration project, led by Waterways Ireland, was allocated funding of €325,000 from the first call for Category 2 applications to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in February 2019.

Category 2 funding enables the development of proposals to bring them to a stage where they are ready to apply for Category 1 funding.

Phase 2 of the Ulster Canal focuses on the restoration of the canal between Clones and Clonfad in Co Monaghan including a canal basin and amenity area in Clones. The Category 2 funding enabled Waterways Ireland to carry out pre-development works necessary to develop the proposal to deliver Phase 2 of the Ulster Canal Restoration Project.

Works included investigating options to obtain a sustainable water supply for the proposed recreational space and section of the canal, completion of hydrological and environmental assessments, preparation and submission of any necessary planning applications and a Benefits Realisation Plan to optimise the success of the final project. The Category 2 project was completed in November 2020.

An application Phase 2 of the Ulster Canal Restoration was submitted to the third call for Category 1 applications which closed on 1st December 2020.

In June 2020, the Islands function became part of the Department's portfolio. Throughout 2020, significant work was done to develop the new **Islands Policy**. This will be the first cross-Government policy developed for the islands in 24 years and will set a roadmap for the long-term sustainability and development of our offshore communities.

A consultation document was published in late 2019, with a series of workshops being held with island communities starting in January 2020. Eleven such meetings were held before the process had to change to a virtual format due to Covid-19. Written submissions from individuals and interest groups were also encouraged. The consultation process included meetings with relevant interest groups, including Comhdháil Oileán na hÉireann, Comhar na nOileán, relevant Local Authorities and Government Departments.

An extensive range of views, thoughts and suggestions were captured through this consultation process, identifying the issues that were of concern to the Island communities, and which will inform the development of the Islands Policy. The development of the policy was substantially advanced during the course of 2020.



Inis Oírr pier, Aran Islands, Co. Galway

The Department also supports island communities by providing subsidised **transport services** between a number of inhabited islands and the mainland to ensure the

continued viability of these communities. These services involve ferry services, air services and, in some cases, ancillary bus services to main towns.

In response to the wishes of the island communities, and in keeping with the Government's guidelines in response to Covid-19, the scheduled services to some of the islands were reduced for short periods throughout 2020. Transport services were maintained and despite travel restrictions being in place for a significant portion of the year, 2020 saw 264,851 passengers travelling on subsidised ferry services, with 17,306 passengers availing of air services. A further 28,500 tonnes of cargo were carried via the cargo services to the islands.

2020 also saw significant progress on a series of **capital projects** on the islands, with €1.1 million being allocated to Local Authorities to undertake capital works, including repair of roads, coastal walls, slipways etc.

The **Town and Village Renewal Scheme** supports the revitalisation of Ireland's rural towns and villages. It funds a diverse range of projects nationwide including public realm improvement, community parks and infrastructure, digital hubs, as well as the regeneration of derelict buildings and enhancement works at tourism attractions and other important local amenities

As part of a wider Departmental response to addressing challenges presented by Covid-19, the 2020 Scheme was tailored to assist rural towns and villages respond quickly to the pandemic. A dedicated additional €10 million supported an Accelerated Measure as part of an all of Government response to support economic recovery.

In total funding of over €25 million was approved under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme for over 500 projects during 2020. This included €10.4 million of funding announced for over 360 projects under three rounds of the Accelerated Measure and €15.4 million of funding for 147 projects under the Standard Measure of the Scheme.

Since the launch of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme in 2016, over €93 million of funding has been approved for more than 1,340 projects across Ireland.

The **Town Centre Living Initiative (TCLI)** was a pilot scheme which aimed to develop innovative proposals to respond to challenges relating to vacant properties in rural towns and villages and encouraging people to live in town centres. An independent report on (TCLI) was published in June 2020. The report outlines the approach taken by each of 6 towns that participated and which had each received €100, 000 to develop proposals.

The Report set out key issues to encourage increased town centre living and the repurposing of vacant properties for residential purposes and highlighted the multiplicity of factors that need to be addressed to encourage town centre living.

An Interdepartmental Group is now considering all of the suggested actions in the report on the Town Centre Living initiative, as well as progressing the commitment in the Programme for Government to develop a **Town Centre First** approach to the

regeneration of our towns and villages. The Group is chaired jointly by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The **LEADER Programme** supports the design and delivery of Local Development Strategies covering all areas of Ireland outside of the five main city boundaries. The strategies are delivered in each area by Local Action Groups (LAGs) which are empowered through the programme to fund a wide range of investments, including in relation to economic development, enterprise development, job creation, social inclusion and the protection and improvement of the environment.

The LEADER 2014-2020 programme contributed to the advance of economic and social development of rural areas in 2020 and project approvals increased in 2020 with the approval of 1,500 projects valued at €69.5 million by LAGs. This brought the total number of projects approved under the multi-annual programme at the end of 2020 to almost 4,200, with an approved value of €170.7 million.

There were a further 334 project applications at various stages of the approval process at the end of 2020, seeking funding of €19.5 million. Total expenditure under the LEADER Programme in 2020 was €45.4 million.

In December 2020, Minister Humphreys extended the deadline for commitments under the 2014-2020 LEADER programme to the end of March 2021 to facilitate the full allocation of funds available under that programme.

The **Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS)** provides funding for the development, maintenance, enhancement or promotion of outdoor recreational infrastructure in countryside areas. The scheme seeks to support recreational pursuits based on the resources available in the countryside that contribute to a healthy lifestyle, a thriving economy and increased tourism. Projects include walking trails, cycleways, upland path repairs and blueways. Funding of over €15.7 million was approved for 226 projects under the 2020 scheme. The projects vary from:

- Small scale projects receiving less than €20,000: 174 successful projects to the value of €3.2 million
- Medium scale projects receiving between €20,000 and €200,000: 38 successful projects to the value of €6.5 million.
- Large scale projects receiving between €200,000 and €500,000: 14 successful projects to the value of €6 million.

In 2020, the Department paid €9.9 million for projects under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and €2 million to Coillte as part of a strategic partnership to enhance recreation infrastructure and facilities for public use on lands owned, or managed by Coillte.

The **Local Improvement Scheme** is a scheme for the repair of non-public roads which do not come under the normal remit of Local Authorities. The scheme directly improves the access to and from farms and homes in rural Ireland.

The Department provided €10 million to local authorities to complete improvement works on over 350 non- public roads in 2020 under this Scheme. Investing in the improvement of these roads is making a positive impact on people's quality of life in rural areas.

The CLÁR (Ceantair Laga Ard-Riachtanais) Programme is a targeted capital investment programme for rural areas which have experienced significant levels of depopulation. In 2020, the CLÁR programme supported a range of measures for small scale infrastructural projects in eligible CLÁR areas.



Stokane Community Park, Co. Sligo received funding under CLÁR 2019 for a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA). This project was completed and funding drawn down in 2020.

A total of 186 projects were approved in 2020 to the value of €5.76 million for the following:

- 84 projects approved to the value of €2,978,000 to support schools/communities safety measures (Measure 1).

- 31 projects approved to the value of €1,180,000 to support community recreation areas (Measure 2).
- 45 projects approved to the value of €339,000 to provide equipment for meals on wheels and linked services (Measure 3a).
- 26 projects approved to the value of €1,266,000 to fund mobility and cancer care transport vehicles (Measure 3b).

In 2020, over €4.6 million was paid to projects under the CLÁR Programme.

The **TidyTown Competition** has become Ireland's most well-known and popular local environmental and sustainable initiative. The SuperValu TidyTown Competition is administered by the Department with sponsorship from SuperValu. The overall winner of the 2019 competition was Glaslough in Co Monaghan. The competition did not proceed in 2020 due to Covid-19 social restrictions.

In 2020, Minister Humphreys announced a €1million grant scheme to assist TidyTown groups with their initiatives. This brings the total funding provided since 2017 to €5.2 million. The announcement of funding in late 2020 provided €1,000 to all eligible groups to assist them with their work

There are also a number of related competitions which include the Ireland's best Kept Town which is an all-island competition, the Entente Florale which is a European competition and the international Communities in Bloom. Irish entrants were nominated for each of these competitions in 2020, however as a result of the pandemic, all of these associated competitions did not proceed.

Throughout 2020, the TidyTown unit increased capacity building and engagement with groups and volunteers through the TidyTown newsletters and postings on social media and the TidyTown website, in a bid to keep the ethos of the competition alive during the pandemic. Information on the various competition categories and the Sustainable Development Goals featured throughout the year.

The Walks Scheme facilitates the development and maintenance by private landholders of key walking trails which are made available for public use. The scheme contracts the landholders, or their nominees, to undertake maintenance work on sections of National Waymarked Ways and other priority walks that traverse their lands. It is managed through 16 Local Development Companies, with 13 Rural Recreation Officers (RROs) employed by the Companies to manage the Scheme and other outdoor recreation priorities. In 2020, the Scheme includes 1,962 landholders in the provision of 39 high quality walking trails. Total costs in respect of the Scheme in 2020 were €2.8 million.

The Department is currently in the process of bringing on 10 new trails which were announced in 2019. These trails run for a combined length of approximately 500km,

with 174 km of this going through private lands. A comprehensive external review of the Walks Scheme commenced in 2020.



Wicklow Way Boardwalk

Comhairle na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council)

In June 2019, a new vision and mandate was presented to Comhairle na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council) to reinforce and strengthen its advisory role in relation to the sustainable development of the outdoor recreation sector in Ireland. The new vision for Comhairle na Tuaithe is:

“To be an effective collaborate body which supports the development of outdoor recreation activities for social, health and economic benefits, and which promotes the responsible use of the outdoors where the rights and responsibilities of both landowners and recreational users are recognised and respected.”

2020 was a productive year for Comhairle na Tuaithe in delivering on the new vision and mandate presented by the Minister in 2019. The Council engaged across a wide range of issues impacting on the outdoor recreation sector. Some of the key achievements in 2020 included:

- The membership and working arrangements of Comhairle na Tuaithe was revised and approved by the Minister. New members will join Comhairle in 2021 and a range of actions to improve the impact of the Council will be progressed.

- A subgroup was established to develop a new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy.
- Other subgroups were established to work on a communications strategy, Guidelines for Responsible Outdoor Events, and a Recreation in the Irish Countryside information booklet.

The new mandate for Comhairle na Tuaithe requested a review and, if necessary, an update of the Countryside Code. Following a review and presentation by Leave no Trace Ireland, the Council confirmed that the Leave no Trace principles continue to deliver as the Countryside Code in Ireland.

The Department is working to improve mobile phone and broadband connectivity in rural Ireland to support economic and social development in all regions, through supports for the rollout of the National Broadband Plan and other connectivity measures.

The contract to deliver the **National Broadband Plan (NBP)** was awarded to National Broadband Ireland in November of 2019. The NBP will bring high-speed broadband to approximately 536,000 premises across the country, predominantly in remote and rural areas.

2020 saw the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) begin in earnest. As part of the NBP, **the Broadband Connection Point (BCP) Initiative** also commenced with the procurement of Vodafone as the retail service provider. BCPs provide onsite access to high-speed broadband to the public in areas that are not currently provided with an adequate service.

Notwithstanding the considerable challenges arising from the pandemic, the BCP programme has progressed well with more than 90 sites installed to date in many rural and isolated locations, including a number of our off-shore islands.



iDesk in Cormeen, Co Meath received broadband connection in July 2020

In addition to deployments, the Department also began planning for the long-term development of the BCP network including a suite of pilot programmes and national activities to be provided at BCPs including eHealth services, skills training and educational courses, remote working facilities and supports for remote workers, and a range of culture and arts projects.

In response to the extraordinary rise in demand for remote working capabilities in areas without adequate broadband services the Department, working with the BCP network's retail service provider Vodafone Ireland, adapted the technical solution at many BCPs to allow for additional remote working capacity.

Following the Department's provision of **Digital Readiness Assessments** in 2018, Local Authorities continued to publish their local digital strategies throughout 2020, with a focus emerging on Internet of Things technologies and on remote and co working facilities.

The Department has worked with Local Authorities and the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications to prepare rural communities for the arrival of high-speed broadband and to identify and address barriers to the NBP deployment. In the main, this has been through the work of the **Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce** which, in turn, led to the establishment of the national network of Local Authority Broadband Officers. Due to the Covid-19 public health crisis it was not possible to convene an Annual Forum in 2020. Work is underway in the two Departments to revisit the format and scope of the Taskforce in 2021.

Throughout 2020, the Department has co-funded the employment costs of **Broadband Officers** in every Local Authority in the country. Broadband Officers continue to play a pivotal role in the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure and have led out on a number of innovative projects to enhance connectivity. Notwithstanding public health-related restrictions on travelling and congregating, the Department held regular Broadband Officer Network meetings via video conferencing and has continued to provide support through dedicated liaison officers. It also co-ordinated, supported and initiated a number of projects in 2020 designed to improve access to telecommunications services, including the **WiFi4EU** initiative, Airband TVWS trial and the Shared Infrastructure Research Group.

Goal 2. Contribute to enhanced Regional Development

The Department works through its policies and funding programmes to enhance regional development, with a view to strengthening the potential of all regions to contribute to economic recovery and supporting the objectives of the National Planning Framework to achieve more sustainable growth across all regions of Ireland.

The **Rural Regeneration and Development Fund** was established as one of the four funds under Project Ireland 2040.

The overarching priority of the Fund is to support projects which exhibit the greatest potential for the achievement of State national, regional and local strategic development and planning objectives and the delivery of significant and sustainable regeneration in rural towns and villages and their hinterlands. Applications under the Fund are open to projects that support the National Strategic Outcomes outlined in Project Ireland 2040, which include Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities. Proposals sought are not limited in terms of sector and have included town centre regeneration, enterprise development, tourism development, digital and co-working initiatives, libraries, arts and cultural facilities and sports and recreation facilities.

The Fund is targeted in a responsive way to deal with existing and emerging issues and to ensure that support is provided for the communities and sectors which are most in need.

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) supports ambitious and strategic projects that can drive sustainable rural regeneration and development, assist in achieving balanced regional growth and deliver on the National Strategic Outcome of Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities set out in the National Planning Framework.

The investment from the RRDF is a key driver for enhancing economic activity at a local and regional level which will contribute to the overall national economic recovery. The projects supported by the fund will provide the necessary facilities and infrastructure, including access to remote working and learning, to strengthen rural towns and villages ensuring balanced regional development and regionally balanced recovery.

The second call for Category 2 applications was completed in July 2020. Much of the funding announced will assist in the development of major regeneration projects in important population centres and areas of economic influence in rural Ireland which will, when fully delivered, assist in supporting the wider regions.

The third call for Category 1 applications was announced in June 2020. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the focus of this call was to support capital projects that could deliver planned regeneration and support economic recovery and the overall economic development of rural towns and villages. 66 ambitious projects, the vast majority of which with a strong regenerative and economic theme, were submitted for consideration on foot of this call in December 2020.

The Island Unit works with **Community Development Groups** on the offshore islands. A funding allocation of €490k made to support 5 island local development companies in Cork, Galway and Mayo, with funding also being provided to Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann to support their representative work for all of the offshore islands.

The **LEADER Programme** contributes to enhanced regional development through its funding theme of Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation. The theme focuses on driving continued local economic development, including diversification of the rural economy, and the creation of employment opportunities for the local community, including those from disadvantaged groups.

In 2020, the LEADER programme contributed to enhanced regional development through the following positive impacts:

- 288 (Full-Time Equivalent) new jobs were created in LEADER supported enterprises
- a further 1,650 (FTE) jobs secured across a variety of sectors in rural Ireland
- works completed on LEADER supported tourist facilities attracted in the region of 1.1 million visitors to rural Ireland.

PEACE IV is a cross-border Programme co-financed by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund and supports peace and reconciliation and promotes social and economic stability in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo) with a specific focus on actions that promote cohesion between communities.

The Department, as an 'Accountable Department' under the Programme, provided some €9.86 million during 2020.

In addition, the Department took part in discussions on the development of the new PEACE Plus Programme 2021 -2027, which will succeed both the 2014 – 2020 PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes.

The Department's work in supporting the roll-out of the **National Broadband Plan**, including through the Broadband Connection Points Initiative which was significantly advanced in 2020, will also make a significant contribution to growth across the regions.

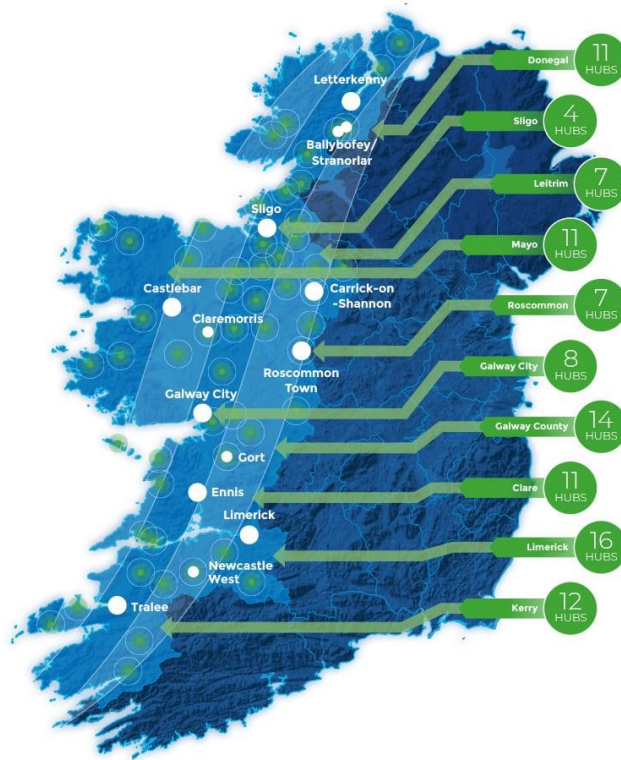
The Department works to progress Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) concept along the western seaboard to attract private investment and enterprise and support the economic development of the region, and to strengthen the role of the Western Development Commission in contributing to regional and national policy objectives.

The **Atlantic Economic Corridor** is the term applied to the linear region along the Western seaboard, stretching from Kerry to Donegal, which has the potential to contribute to effective regional development by providing a counterpoint to the East Coast. The overarching objective of the AEC initiative is to maximise the region's assets and connect the economic hubs, clusters and catchments of the region to generate a value proposition of scale which will attract investment and support job creation and an improved quality of life for those who live in the region.

In 2020, the Department provided funding for the development of a number of **connected working facilities** across the country. Such facilities, particularly in rural areas can have a transformative impact in supporting and developing regional economies and local communities.

The **Western Development Commission (WDC)** is a statutory body established in 1999 to promote both social and economic development in the Western Region (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare).

The WDC ensures Government policy is directed at improving the social and economic situation in the region, through support for projects in a wide variety of sectors. The WDC also plays a central role in the delivery of the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative.



Atlantic Economic Hubs Network map

In 2020, the Department, supported by the Western Development Commission continued to progress the **Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) Hub Network** project. The AEC Hubs project identified the scale of activity and investment in remote working facilities along the Western Seaboard, identifying over 140+ such remote working hubs in the AEC by Q1 2020. The identification and classification facilities operated by a diverse range of private, public and social enterprise stakeholders captured, for the first time, this significant and vibrant ecosystem.



The Portershed co-working space, Galway

This connected working ecosystem has largely developed organically, which has hampered coordinated planning and investment. This suggested the opportunity to co-ordinate and develop these assets as a national infrastructural asset of scale by providing greater collaboration and strategic direction.

These learnings, which emerged in parallel with the wide-spread adoption of remote working in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the significant focus and commitment on supporting remote working within the Programme for Government, underpinned the establishment of the **National Hub Network Working Group**. This group, which held its inaugural meeting in October 2020, is chaired by the Department's Secretary General and is tasked with:

- Developing and mapping a national dataset of hub infrastructure, facilities and services, including funding and ownership models, in line with the DRCD/WDC classifications;
- Identifying current and capital funding and revenue generation arrangements across the network, identify any funding gaps and consider future investment requirements and opportunities;
- Identifying barriers and obstacles to network capacity and development;
- Identifying appropriate development models for remote working facilities in line with the classification model; and
- Raising awareness of hub facilities and the beneficial network effects of the hub ecosystem to support remote working across Ireland.

The Department has also worked across Government to raise awareness of the potential benefits of delivering a National Hub Network, which is included as a key

deliverable in Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment's **National Remote Working Strategy**.

Goal 3. Support local communities to develop

The Department supports local communities to develop, empowering them to identify their needs and aspirations and providing them with the opportunities, skills and confidence to influence, shape and participate in decision-making processes which affect them.

The objective of this goal is to continue to engage with stakeholders to develop an overarching vision for the future of local and community development in Ireland; to enhance the capacity of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs); to roll out the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022; to provide supports to severely disadvantaged communities in urban areas to address their specific challenges; to support the development of the Atlantic Economic Corridor through the SMART Village and Community pilot initiative and to implement the National Social Enterprise Policy.

In 2020, the Department continued to engage with stakeholders to ensure all voices are heard, particularly the marginalised, disadvantaged and those in hard to reach places to improve their quality of life and shape the future of local and community development in Ireland.

Through strategic oversight of both Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), the Department supports the implementation of many cross-Government initiatives at a grassroots level and actively encourages the utilisation of these existing and important participative structures for the delivery of services, the encouragement of best practice and the engagement of communities.

LCDCs supported the rollout of the Community Call which was launched to coordinate community activity, direct community assistance to where it is needed, and marshal the volunteering energy of the country. It has been a cornerstone of the interventions to support local and grassroots community development, and was co-ordinated through LCDCs. LAs have continued to operate normally with their monthly LCDC/LAG meetings and Regional Chief Officer Meetings all being held virtually.

In 2020 in line with recommendations of the LCDC Review additional Staff Resource (ASR) funding of €1.845m was allocated to Local Authorities for the community function within their organisations to support them to deliver the community development function as envisaged in Putting People First. This funding provides resources for the Local Community Development Committees and the implementation of Local Economic and Community Plans in particular.

In addition, a dialogue and collaboration process between the Department and other Government Departments began in 2020 to support a more collaborative approach to the work of the LCDCs at a local level. The initial session aimed to familiarise participants generally with the LCDCs, the PPNs and the LECP in order to support a better understanding of how they work at a local level.

In 2020, DRCD continued the implementation of *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities - A five year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024*. The strategy articulates the values and principles that will guide and shape Government's support for communities and the community and voluntary sector in the coming years, and help realise our vision for communities by the end of the decade. In 2020 progress was made on the development of a Values and Principles document that will provide a foundation for collaboration between the state and the sector. In addition in 2020 work began on a significant training needs assessment for the sector which will be conducted on a phased basis beginning with the LCDCs.

The Department continues to liaise with Local Authorities to provide a programme of supports for members of LCDCs in their engagement with communities and their management and delivery of Government-funded schemes and programmes.

The Social Inclusion and Communities Unit completed work relating to the following Schemes and areas in 2020 –

- The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) including Local/Regional Development Supports, with a budget of €43.9 million.
- The Community Enhancement Programme with a final budget of €7.0 million.
- The Covid-19 Emergency Fund with a final budget of €4.2 million.
- The Dublin North-East Inner City Initiative, with a budget of €6.5 million and
- Dog Control, with a budget of €100,000k.

The Unit also has responsibility for the oversight and governance of Pobal which provides management and support services to approximately 34 programmes across a range of Government Departments and EU bodies.

The Unit represents the Department on a number of interdepartmental fora, such as Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide and the National Drugs Strategy which are both led by Department of Health, and the National Traveller and Roma Strategy which is led by Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

Through these fora and other engagement with relevant Departments, the Unit plays a key part in promoting the role of community development across government and advancing the Department's strategy, in particular the elements relating to leading and

overseeing whole-of-Government responses to the needs of disadvantaged communities in a range of policy areas.

The **Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)** provides funding to Local Development Companies to work with marginalised groups and individuals, so that they become ready to avail of mainstream services. These include:

- 2,687 Local Community Groups (LCGs) who were assisted
- 448 social enterprises supported
- 26,178 disadvantaged individuals supported on a one-to-one basis.
- 1,057 people progressed into employment.
- 1,274 people started their own business.
- Over 8,700 people participated in Lifelong Learning Courses (6,067 completed in 2020)
- 30,057 children and 9,129 parents and guardians participated in children and family initiatives.
- Over 10,600 people attended lifelong learning or labour market information events

Some of the key achievements for 2020 are shown in this graphic.



The overall national targets KPI 1 and KPI 2 have been exceeded as outlined below:

SICAP 2020	Target	Actual	% achieved
KPI 1 (groups assisted)	2,220	2,687	121%
KPI 2 (individuals assisted)	23,525	26,178	111%

Overall an increased level of collaborative work and referrals has been reported with agencies, organisations and LCGs in the delivery of SICAP, in particular DEASP, ETB, HSE, County Councils and regional and local networks.

In addition, work was completed to help improve the programme:

- Following the successful launch of 'My Journey Distance Travelled Tool' in January 2020 the project entered the implementation phase that included training for frontline staff on the use of the tool. Unfortunately due to the Covid-19 pandemic the implementation phase was paused and alternative mechanisms to face-to-face training had to be explored in order to deliver the training. My Journey is predominantly designed for use in a face-to-face setting with the client and with many Local Development Company staff working remotely and the Government restrictions imposed due to Covid-19, alternative mechanisms on using the tool were explored. An online training platform was developed by Pobal and training was successfully delivered to all 46 Local Development Companies throughout November and up to early January 2021. My Journey is currently being implemented in all Local Development Companies that deliver SICAP supports nationally.
- An Implementation Group is established to oversee the implementation phase of the project and the first meeting will be scheduled for summer 2021.
- Communities of Practice that will provide a platform for learning, peer support and sharing best practice to the frontline workers will also take place during summer 2021.
- The Department and Pobal have received expressions of interest from organisations both locally and internationally on using the My Journey tool. Once the tool has been embedded for SICAP and information on using the tool becomes available, consideration will be given to sharing it with interested parties.
- As part of a series of research projects on the SICAP programme, for which the ESRI was commissioned, the following paper was published in September 2020: *Evaluation of SICAP Pre-Employment Supports, ESRI, September 2, 2020*. The findings of this report show improved employment outcomes among the long-term unemployed who received SICAP employment supports. The report also highlights the importance of SICAPs one-to-one supports which were found to be key drivers of programme success.

- Over the last three years the SICAP Case Study Working Group, which comprises representatives of the ILDN, LCDCs, Pobal and the Department has supported the development of quality case studies to highlight good practice and innovation throughout the programme. The production of video case studies in 2020 increased significantly from the previous year and 21 case studies were produced in video format. In total 51 case studies were submitted in 2020. Covid-19 presented new and magnified existing challenges for people already experiencing disadvantage. It also posed major challenges to Local Development Companies (LDC's) as to how to deliver SICAP supports. 34 case studies highlighted the LDC response at a local level to the Covid-19 crisis in 2020.

While no regional information event took place during 2020 due to the Covid-19 restrictions imposed by Government, online information and support events for LCDCs and LDCs took place during spring 2021.

Separate to the normal programme of work, in 2020, SICAP has been responding rapidly and flexibly to the Covid-19 pandemic, with LDCs and LCDCs working collaboratively to support local communities and individuals during lockdown restrictions. In 2020, we saw SICAP being a key avenue to deliver essential supports and services to the most vulnerable people in the community who were suffering the worse effects of the pandemic.



Monaghan SICAP team delivering Packs for Children to St Patrick's Direct Provision Centre

LDCs have experienced many challenges in delivering SICAP during this period including operational challenges, the cancellation and postponement of supports, client engagement and social distancing, referrals from other agencies and Departments, the re-focussing of SICAP supports and infrastructure.

Both Pobal and the Department have strived to support LDCs in the delivery of the programme and provide clarity through regular updates such as FAQs and guidance on how to work safely and securely for those working remotely.

One of the initial overarching challenges that faced the programme was how LDCs would operate and deliver SICAP within the context of lockdown and promptly respond to the new and emerging needs of disadvantaged communities and families as a result of the crisis. Both Pobal and the Department arranged for a relaxation of certain aspects of the programme requirements. Regular clarifications were issued to LDCs in FAQs format which covered over 50 questions submitted by LDCs. Examples of changed work practices and flexibility in relation to the programme requirements include the client registration process, supports to enable staff to work from home, the re-prioritisation of work. The development of Local Response Plans to meet the emerging need, clarification on how interventions /supports are recorded on the reporting system, *IRIS*, including phone interventions etc.

In addition, eligible expenditure was broadened to respond to the need for flexibility for example, to enable the purchase of technology to facilitate the provision of online supports and the delivery of training to clients through various online platforms. In addition, the provision of counselling supports (in emergency circumstances), stock and food for meals on wheels delivered by Local Community Groups, the purchase of food vouchers, supports for social enterprises to re-open and get staff back to work including the purchase of PPE and costs associated with disinfecting premises and the LCG grant was increased from €1,500 to €2,500.

The Department also provided further **funding to support disadvantaged communities** in 2020, including:

- €1.59 million was provided to St. Vincent de Paul and Protestant Aid
- €448,000 was provided via Dublin City Council to the Dublin Inner City Coop for the Inner City Community Support Programme.
- €100,000 was provided towards the Area Action Plan for the Cherry Orchard area in west Dublin.
- Some €1.3 million funded other initiatives which had a social inclusion focus, which included €304,588 provided to The Wheel for the provision of Community Champions during Phase 1 of Covid-19.

Case Study: Mohill Community Youth Project, Leitrim



The Mohill Community Youth Project was set up to break an inter-generational cycle of educational disadvantage in the town.

It targets disadvantaged children aged 6-12 years who predominantly live in five local authority housing estates in Mohill.

Children are referred to the project by the local primary school or Tusla. A total of 37 children attend the afterschool programme four days a week.

The project offers a range of activities to support children's academic performance, encourage good school attendance and support the transition from primary to second level education.

This includes homework support; school holiday activities, such as sports days and art workshops; and other extra-curricular activities, which children may not get to experience outside of the afterschool programme.

For example, in 2019, the SICAP development officer supported the children to hold an art exhibition, called Hidden Layers, for their families and community members.

This project is made possible due to a collaborative approach between Leitrim Development Company, local ETBs, the local school and the DEASP.

The Department provided €6.5 million to fund initiatives in the **Dublin North East Inner City**. These included family events, youth work, childcare, outreach projects, sports activities, arts projects, refurbishments and other work to improve the area. It also funded a pilot social employment programme for 55 posts in areas such as childcare, after school services, youth work, eldercare and the environment.

Case Study: Kenmare Welcome Group



Activity packs for the Kenmare Direct Provision Centre

In response to the introduction of a new Direct Provision centre in Kenmare in November 2018, South Kerry Development Partnership (SKDP) participated in an inter-agency group that was set up to collaboratively support the people living in the centre. The group included representatives from Citizens Information,

An Garda Síochána, the HSE, Kenmare Family Resource Centre, DSP, Kerry ETB and SKDP. Each agency took on roles that were relevant to their expertise, such as Kerry ETB, who registered people for ESOL classes and Citizens Information, who informed the asylum seekers about their rights. A homework club and coffee mornings were organised by the Family Resource Centre and the HSE organised “Understanding Trauma” Workshops for the local public and support agencies.

SKDP, through SICAP, also played an important role and provided a range of supports to the asylum seekers in Kenmare. Their Community Development Officer provided guidance and support to a newly formed Local Community Group, Kenmare Welcome Group, which received a Pride of Place

award in 2019 in recognition of their work to support the integration of asylum seekers in their community. The asylum seekers were also linked into other community groups in the area, such as the Kenmare Men's Shed and the Lone Parents Group.

SKDP trained 13 tutors to deliver Fáilte Isteach's conversational English classes and individuals were supported to access a range of courses, including financial support to access UCC's Sanctuary Scholarship Fund (e.g. entrance exam fees). Manual handling courses were delivered to 35 people close to the time they were expected to receive their right to work and a Local Employment Service (LES) day (alongside other appointments) was organised to create CVs for those eligible to work.



Taking this comprehensive, inter-agency approach to supporting asylum seekers in Kenmare was one of the key learnings identified by SKDP from this experience. They viewed it as crucial to ensuring a coherent approach by each of the agencies and also for building trust with the residents of the Direct Provision centre.

Case Study: Diverse Food, Diverse Communities

In towns across south-east Cork, SECAD Partnership has organised “SECAD Celebrating Multiculturalism through Food” for the past 3 years – a multicultural food festival with the aim of creating linkages across different nationalities in the community. Transport is provided for residents of Direct Provision centres to facilitate their participation in the event.

This food-based approach is designed to build trust with members of new communities, after which solutions to the challenges that they face can be identified and supported through SICAP. These include improving English language proficiency and promoting access to personal development, education and employment supports.



Participants at a SICAP intercultural food event in Cork

2020 saw the development and funding by DRCD of the **new SMART Village and Community** pilot as an initiative of the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) programme.

The project aims to develop a number of '**SMART Projects**' as pilot projects in towns, villages and communities across the **Atlantic Economic Corridor** that will provide solutions to key regional challenges that have been identified within the regional development policy framework.

The SMART Village and Community pilot was developed using the European Network for European Development's "Smart Rural Village" framework. This defines Smart Villages as communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities. They rely on a participatory approach to develop and implement their strategy to improve their economic, social and/or environmental conditions.

When delivered, the pilot projects will be scalable and replicable across the AEC and should serve as proof-of-concept initiatives to support the case for a large-scale roll-out. The projects are also supporting and advancing the regional development goals laid out in Project Ireland 2040.

The year 2020 saw the continued implementation of the **National Social Enterprise Policy 2019 - 2020**. Under each of the three key objectives of the Policy (Building Awareness; Growing and Strengthening Social Enterprise and Achieving Better Policy Alignment) there have been a number achievements.

A new **Awareness Strategy** has been developed to highlight the critical role social enterprises play in responding to many of our current challenges such as addressing the impacts of Covid-19 and to emphasise their potential to shape a more sustainable and inclusive future. The Awareness Strategy was co-created with stakeholders, and sets out an effective and achievable strategy over a two-year period.

It complements other critical awareness raising efforts including the **National Social Enterprise Conference** which was delivered virtually in November 2020 allowing very **significant participation** and engagement both nationally and internationally. More than 500 people attended the National Conference, an increase of 300 on the previous year.

For social enterprises, as for other businesses, access to capacity building and other supports is a constant necessity. The Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise Unit has worked to grow and strengthen social enterprise in a variety of ways in 2020, including by allocating a further **€1 million for the Small Capital Grants Scheme** which supported 106 social enterprises and **€800k for the Covid-19 Social Enterprise Regeneration Programme**, both funded by the Dormant Accounts Fund.

Significant support was also provided by the Department through the Community Services Programme (CSP), SICAP and LEADER, as well as support provided under

the Social Enterprise Development Fund. The Department ensured social enterprises benefitted from supports such as the **Stability Fund and Innovate Together Funds** in response to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

DRCD also continued to engage with government Departments and agencies including the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Local Enterprise Office Centre of Excellence and Enterprise Ireland in relation to maximising access by social enterprises to mainstream business supports.

To promote and facilitate the inclusion of social considerations in public procurement projects and thereby help enable market opportunities for social enterprises, DRCD actively participates in the **Office of Government Procurement's Strategic Procurement Advisory Group**.

A series of three Procurement training and advice Webinars for social enterprises, in association with the Department of Justice and Pobal took place in November and December 2020.

In 2020, the Department initiated a collaboration with Foróige to develop a SE (social enterprise) module as part of highly successful **Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE)** programme which is expected to be delivered in 2021. Further efforts are also underway to explore areas in which social enterprise can be included in education and training systems.

Internationally, the Department continues to engage with the British Irish Council (BIC), EU, OECD and International Labour Organization (ILO) to ensure that the critical role played by social enterprises in fostering inclusive growth, and a fairer, more sustainable society is mainstreamed at an international level.

The culmination of this engagement came in December 2020, when Minister Humphreys signed the **Toledo Declaration on the Social and Solidarity Economy** as a key driver for an inclusive and sustainable future on behalf of the Irish Government, joining 18 other EU member states in reaffirming Ireland's commitment to the development of this critical sector.

Finally, work was progressed in 2020 on developing a **concept paper regarding data collection on social enterprise in Ireland**, which will help to provide an evidence basis for future policy decisions.

Progress on the implementation of the National Social Enterprise Policy takes place under the guidance of the **National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group**. The group met 4 times in 2020.

The **Community Services Programme**, or CSP supports community-based organisations to provide social, economic and environmental services that tackle disadvantage through a social enterprise model. It typically supports organisations to meet local service gaps and provide access to services and facilities that would

otherwise generally be unavailable due to such areas being geographically or socially isolated or having a level of demand that is not sufficient for the provision of such services by the public and private sectors.

During 2020, some €46 million was provided by the Department under the programme, providing a co-funding contribution towards the cost of over 2,000 positions in over 420 organisations. Nine new organisations were approved entry to the programme in 2020, supporting nine managers and over seventeen Full Time Equivalent (FTEs) positions. A further five existing CSP supported organisations also benefitted from additional funding provided during 2020 towards the cost of one new manager and six new full-time equivalent positions.

In response to the difficulties being experienced by organisations supported under the Community Services Programme (CSP) during 2020 due to Covid-19, the Department and Pobal developed a **CSP Support Fund** totalling €4.75 million which assisted CSP supported organisations to continue to retain their CSP supported employees on their payroll and also provides assistance for the Employers PRSI contribution, during this crisis period up to April 2021. The Fund provided an additional payment to those CSP supported organisations most in need to ensure that they could pay their full-time CSP supported employees a maximum of €350 net per week, with a proportionate amount for part-time CSP supported employees and also provided assistance for the Employers PRSI contribution for the FTE and the manager positions. During 2020, 389 CSP supported services were approved funding of over €2.8 million, with a further commitment from the Department to fund over €1.2 million to the organisations for the period January to March 2021.

On behalf of the Department, Indecon International Economic Consultants carried out an independent review of CSP. The Indecon report was published in September 2020 and was accompanied by a High Level Action Plan, which was prepared by the Department and Pobal and sets out the proposed timeline for delivery of each phase of the redesign of the programme. Following the publication, the Department and Pobal engaged a consultative group and commenced work on the restructuring of the Programme. Pending the transition to the new restructured programme, the open Expression of Interest process was closed during 2020.

In 2020 two rounds of the **Community Enhancement Programme (CEP)** were launched with total funding of €7 million. A €2 million fund was launched in June to provide small capital grants to community organisations. Separately, with funding from the July stimulus package, the Department launched a €5 million fund under the CEP for repairs or upgrades to community centres and community buildings. Both funds provided €7 million of small capital grants to over 3,000 projects across the country, so that community groups could enhance facilities in disadvantaged areas.

The CEP was the result of the first significant exercise in the streamlining of schemes and programmes carried out by the Department. It combined two existing schemes so

that funding is now provided to improve facilities in a manner that is more flexible and responsive at a local level. It is administered by LCDCs, which ensure that it is flexible and can respond to the needs in each area.

The **Libraries Development Unit** supports the strategic development and delivery of public library services by local authorities. To this end, the Department works in partnership with the County and City Management Association (CCMA), local authorities and the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) to lead on the delivery of *Public Libraries Strategy Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities*. It provides a framework for the long-term development of the public library service. It commits to:

- improve accessibility, availability and visibility of the public library services,
- reinforce the local library as a trusted place in the community, and
- continue the roll out of the *My Open Library* service

It also aims to bring forward actions which will include the development of programmes and activities to engage with disadvantaged and marginalised communities. In 2020 **Dormant Accounts funding** of €650,000 was approved to provide Library Supports for **Socially Excluded, Marginalised and Disadvantaged Communities**. The funding enabled local authorities to:

- provide literacy supports in tandem with the national Right-to-Read Programme,
- support digital literacy, digital access and digital capacity,
- provide access to educational supports including STEAM, lifelong learning, social inclusion, and community participation supports, and
- provide supports in tandem with the Sensory Libraries initiative

In 2020, €3m was allocated to a **Small Scale Capital Works Programme** for public libraries to respond and adapt to Covid-19, upgrade facilities, and also to improve energy efficiency. The Department funding was matched by local authorities to the value of some €1.1m giving a total investment of almost €4.1m.

Funding of €600,000 was provided to support the provision of **Sensory Facilities and Equipment** in public libraries to help individuals with sensory impairments, special educational needs and other learning differences, and those on the Autism spectrum.

In 2020 the **Libraries Capital Programme** provided funding of €2.5 million to four library projects including Portlaoise Library (Laois), Kilkenny Central Library, Monaghan Town Library, Wicklow Town Library and the continued rollout of the *My Open Library* service.

My Open Library provides a service that is additional to normal staffed hours, enabling members to access the library from 8am to 10pm, 365 days a year. The My Open Library service was available in 15 branches at the time of closure of public buildings due to the pandemic. Seven more branches have indicated that they are ready to provide the service once Covid-19 restrictions have been removed. The installation of the service in a further 20 branches is at an advanced stage of development and these are expected to be operational by end of December 2021.

€400,000 was provided during 2020 to support the provision of additional **eBooks and eAudiobooks** in order to meet the significant increase in demand for access to the public library online service. A further €20,000 was provided to support the provision of an *EasyReader* collection of books for emerging adult readers and people with literacy needs.

The Department provided €200,000 to the ***Healthy Ireland at your Library*** initiative in 2020. In addition, almost €800,000 was provided towards the cost of renting library buildings around the country.

The Department's revised **Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines**, which were published in July 2018, came into effect on 1 January 2019 and continue to be implemented by Local Authorities.

The Department commenced a review of the relevant legislation in this area with the aim of progressing any necessary legislative amendments to the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010. This work continued in 2020 with a view to inclusion in the Government's legislative programme in 2021.

Work also continued on a consultation on a review of the requirements that are in place for the control of all dogs in Ireland, and for specific breeds of dogs. The Department intends to publish a report on the review, outlining possible next steps such as educational and responsible dog ownership campaigns to highlight the responsibilities of dog owners.

In 2020, the Department collated and published statistics on the 2019 dog control activities of local authorities. These show a continued downward trend in the number of dogs euthanized and the number of dogs entering pounds in Ireland. In 2019 there were **217,261** dog licences issued by local authorities, of which **4,378** were lifetime licences.

Goal 4. Support the Community, Voluntary and Charity Sector

The Department of Rural and Community Development supports the Community, Voluntary and Charity Sector to strengthen its capacity to contribute to civil society and support the growth and development of philanthropy.

The objective of this goal is to expand and support the role of volunteers in civil society; to encourage active citizenship at local level, through the Public Participation Networks; to support the growth and development of philanthropy policy and to ensure best practice in the governance, management and administration of charities.

As part of the strategy, *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: a five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland*, a commitment was made to identify skills gaps and training needs, and support the skills development of key stakeholders, particularly among non-profit organisations, and their supporting structures. In 2020, Pobal was engaged by the Department to conduct a review of the training needs within the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. On its completion, this research will contribute to building a knowledge base that will inform the type and scale of supports provided.

The Covid-19 crisis and its associated restrictions, has had an inevitable impact on the implementation progress of the *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* strategy with focus diverted to providing the sector with more immediate and tangible supports to weather the crisis, such as the establishment and administration of the Community and Voluntary Covid-19 Stability Fund. Through this scheme, up to €45 million in funding was available to community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises, to assist them in meeting operational costs, with the intent of supporting them to continue to deliver vital services.

The Department continues to liaise with Local Authorities to provide a programme of supports for members of LCDCs in their engagement with communities and their management and delivery of Government-funded schemes and programmes.

The Department's **Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes** provide a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector. Payments of €3.5 million were made in 2020 to 22 Volunteer Centres, 7 Volunteering Information Services and 4 national volunteering supporting organisations. Included in this figure was an increase in the 2020 funding levels for those Volunteer Centres who were receiving less than the minimum level recommended in the 2017 McLaughlin report (€121,000).

The **Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan** 2018 also provided €1.2 million for the upgrading of 8 Volunteering Information Services to full Volunteer Centres, in order to provide a consistent level of volunteering infrastructure nationwide. Working with Volunteer Ireland throughout 2020, the new Volunteer Centres have been legally established and will become fully operational in 2021.



*Joe O'Brien, Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development and Charities
launching the country's first National Volunteering Strategy*

The country's first **National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025** was launched on the 5th December 2020. The Strategy was developed through partnership and in consultation with local and central Government, the volunteering community and stakeholders. The purpose of the Strategy is to recognise, support and promote the unique value and contribution of volunteers to Irish Society and represents a whole of government framework to support the volunteering sector. In approving and publishing the Strategy, Government recognises the unique role and value of volunteering and that it is intrinsic to the fabric of our communities.

The revised **Seniors Alert Scheme**, which came into effect in November 2017, has been a resounding success with unprecedented levels of demand. A number of changes were introduced under the new scheme including the provision of free monitoring for the first year and a revision of the living alone requirements.

The revised scheme has been a resounding success with continued high levels of demand, with a total of 16,719 participants approved in 2020.

As this is a demand led scheme, it is kept under continuous evaluation to ensure adequate funding can be made available to meet the requirements of all qualifying applicants. The success of the scheme in the past four years has entailed administering funds from the Dormant Accounts Fund to supplement budget funding.

A review of the scheme is ongoing, looking at a wider cross-departmental approach on future adaptive technology programmes that support independent living and the potential inclusion of the Seniors Alert Scheme as part of this approach.

The **Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO)** provides multi-annual funding towards core costs of national, community and voluntary organisations that demonstrate good governance and deliver services and supports that have a focus on one or more of the following: addressing poverty, social exclusion and promoting equality.

The scheme is a key element of the Department's support for the role of the sector in contributing to the development of a strong and vibrant civil society and in improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged.

The current scheme commenced on 1st July 2019 and runs until 30th June 2022. The scheme is administered by Pobal on behalf of the Minister.

The allocation for the duration of the scheme 2019-2022 is a total of €18.8 million to 74 national community and voluntary organisations, compared to €16.7 million to 71 organisations under the 2016-2019 scheme.

Public Participation Networks (PPN) have been established in all Local Authority areas. Their main function is to allow volunteer-run groups to give input and have their voices heard within the formal decision making structure of their local authority. The PPN is the main link through which the Local Authority connects with the community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sector within its area.

The fourth National PPN Annual Report, which covered 2019, was published by the Department in 2020. The report showed that by the end of 2019, PPN membership had grown to 15,600 organisations. This upward trajectory has continued, with membership increasing to some 17,500 organisations at the end of 2020.

During 2020, the Department continued to provide practical support for PPNs including the on-going provision of funding and the day-to-day assistance required by PPNs and other stakeholders. It facilitated the operation of the National Advisory Group representative of all stakeholders to monitor the operation of PPNs and facilitated the meetings of the Resource Worker and Secretariat networks.

A key achievement in 2020 was the publication of the PPN Handbook in November 2020. The Handbook was developed following extensive consultation with PPN stakeholders to replace the original PPN User Guide. The Handbook is a living

document giving guidance and clarity to PPNs and to support them in the operation of their PPNs.

A national training programme for PPNs was funded by the Department in 2020 in response to an identified need by the PPNs and the Local Authorities. The online training programme commenced in October 2020 with the first group of 100 participants.

PPNs have also played a significant role in the Community Call response to Covid-19 in each local authority area, working with Local Authorities to organise and support vulnerable people and provide much needed supports in communities.

Social innovation has a key role to play at a national and community level in supporting healthy and inclusive communities. Fulfilling this Programme for Government commitment has been a key priority of the Department. In its Strategic Plan 2021-2025, Rethink Ireland outlines its objective to build on the existing model and carry out additional work on identifying barriers to further developing the Rethink model including targeting specific investments towards an inclusive Ireland and the introduction of a new key goal of Climate Justice.

Rethink Ireland (formerly **Social Innovation Fund Ireland - SIFI**) was incorporated in July 2013 to support the establishment and growth of social innovations with the potential for transformative impact on critical social issues facing Ireland, including unemployment and the environment.

As a partnership between the private sector and Government, provision was made for Rethink Ireland to receive €5 million in total from the Dormant Accounts Fund over the period 2014 to 2017 to support its set-up and development. Payments were made on a 50:50 match funding basis (50% from philanthropic sources and 50% from the State).

This partnership has continued and in 2020 a five year funding contract was put in place re-affirming Government's commitment to match private philanthropic donations raised by Rethink Ireland subject to available resources from the Dormant Accounts Funds.

In 2020 Rethink Ireland received €5.5 million from the Dormant Accounts Fund. In addition, they also secured an additional €750,000 from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to support specific funded programmes. This funding supported 17 active funds and enabled the launch of 8 new social innovation funds in areas tackling issues such as health, equality, education, and climate change. Collectively, 160 active awardees worked with 164,735 participants, making positive change in the lives of vulnerable people with the direct creation of 125 new jobs.

In total, from 2013 to end 2020, Rethink Ireland has received €25.5 million in Government match funds through the Dormant Accounts Fund. An allocation of €5.5 million Dormant Accounts Funds from this Department has also been made available to Rethink Ireland for 2021.

With the support of Government and philanthropic donors, Rethink Ireland has launched over thirty funds which address social issues including Tech For Good, Community Resilience and Sustainability, Social Enterprise Development, Access to Education, Health, Mental Health, and Ability to Work (for people with disabilities).

The Department is committed to supporting the Community, Voluntary and Charity Sector to strengthen its capacity to contribute to civil society and support the growth and **development of philanthropy policy**. In 2020, the Department commissioned an independent report to scope the current landscape of philanthropic-giving in Ireland. It is intended that the report will provide an overarching view of the sector which will enable informed and effective policy development. Work on this report has progressed throughout 2020. Funding was also provided to Philanthropy Ireland and Charities Institute Ireland to assist them in their work of supporting and encouraging philanthropy:

Philanthropy Ireland, through networking events, research and collaboration with appropriate partners, targets business professionals and potential leaders to encourage giving. Its aim is to communicate the value and potential of philanthropy to key stakeholders, most particularly potential philanthropists, corporates and individuals.

Charities Institute Ireland (CII) is a membership body for Ireland's leading charities. Its aim is to enhance trust and to foster a vibrant, independent charity sector. CII encourages and assists its membership to operate to the Triple Lock Standards - transparent reporting, good fundraising and governance and to demonstrate openness, transparency and integrity to their beneficiaries and donors.

The Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) was established in 2014 and operates under the provisions set out in the Charities Act, 2009. Key functions of the CRA include the establishment and maintenance of a public register of charitable organisations operating in Ireland and ensure their compliance with the Charities Acts.

Since the establishment of the CRA, Department officials continuously liaise with the Charities Regulator to review the operation of the legislation to ensure that it is operating effectively. On foot of public consultation, and based on the operational experience of the Regulator since its establishment, a number of amendments have now been incorporated to a proposed **Charities Amendment Bill**.

Consultation has been ongoing with a number of key Departments and Offices, including the Department of Justice and Equality, Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Department of Education and Skills and the Revenue Commissioners.

The proposed Bill intends to provide clarity in a number of areas, including:

- Accounting, Audit and Reporting Requirements
- Responsibilities of Trustees
- Operation of the Register of Charities

- Other provisions, including sharing of information, sanctions, trustee remuneration and disposal of assets

Building and Developing our Organisation

Since its establishment in July 2017 the Department has strengthened its corporate capacity in order that it can deliver on its mandate. In 2020, progress continued in this regard in terms of investing in the departments staff, its IT and digital capacity, research and evaluation focus, inspection and compliance and financial processes.

Our first Statement of Strategy outlined the key challenges that were faced by the Department under the following headings:

- Investing in our people,
- Better communication,
- Developing our systems and procedures

Investing in Our People

The work of our Department is hugely important to communities throughout Ireland. We can only deliver on our remit through the commitment and professionalism of all our staff. A key function of the Human Resources (HR) Unit is to ensure the Department has the right staff in place at the right time, with the skillsets required to deliver on its strategic goals. The HR Unit supports the organisation through its focus on ensuring the development of a high performance culture in the Department.

Notwithstanding the challenges posed due to the onset of Covid-19, the Department continued to progress its HR strategic goals and objectives, with key highlights for 2020 outlined below.

The **Learning and Development** Unit provides training to ensure staff are equipped to deliver on their work goals and for career and personal development. Courses are provided through the central OneLearning system and a range of specific tailored courses were also sourced, as required. These are outlined in a structured training programme annually. It was important for the Department to continue to develop our staff in 2020 and the Learning and Development unit worked with stakeholders to move all training to a virtual led training platform in the aftermath of Covid-19. While Staff Health and Wellbeing was always a priority action for the HR unit, the onset of Covid-19 brought particular challenges for some staff, such as anxiety and isolation and keeping staff connected with each other, and with line management and senior management, was a priority at this time.

We continued to work with staff to build a culture and awareness of the importance and benefits of employee wellbeing. The Department developed a new **Health and Wellbeing Programme** in 2020 which is aimed at supporting positive physical, social and mental health within our culture so that staff can reach their full potential in the

workplace and live healthy and balanced lives. During 2020, the number of Health and Wellbeing initiatives delivered to staff increased due to demand. Some of these included topics such as resilience, women's and men's physical health, mindfulness, step challenges, virtual quizzes, photo competitions and staff newsletters. Information sessions were also delivered to staff from the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS). The HR unit supported managers in managing and leading remote teams, and sessions on resilience, communication and management in the remote environment were delivered to managers.

Following on from the results of the Department's Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES) and the Department's Civil Service Renewal Plan, our **Staff Engagement Forum** was established, in early 2019. The Forum is a key mechanism for staff communication and engagement and is representative of all grades, Units and experience in both locations. Staff engagement and open communication with staff remained a priority and our Staff Engagement Forum met on five occasions in 2020.

The management of staffing requirements including movement and promotions is an ongoing aspect of the work of the HR Unit. At end of year 2020, there was a total of 160 staff (77 in Dublin, and 83 in Ballina and regional locations) in the Department. During 2020 the Department hired 21 new staff through various recruitment streams including through the Civil Service Mobility Scheme and internal competitions.

The Human Resources Unit recognises the importance of **contributing to the wider civil service strategic HR agenda** through participation in key interdepartmental and Civil Service HR working groups including the HR Managers Network, Civil Service Industrial Relations Network and Civil Service Employee Engagement Workshops.

Better Communication

During 2020 the activity of the Communications Unit was designed to complement the delivery of the mission of our Department. The Unit complements the goals laid out in the Department's strategy and works to foster a culture which supports communicating effectively with our stakeholders, by considering the information different audiences require and when they need it. Examples of how some of this activity supported the Department's objectives are provided below.

With the onset of the pandemic, the **Department's Emergency Planning Framework** was implemented. The Framework provides clear guidance on how the Department can continue to communicate with its stakeholders when staff do not have access to the offices. Along with a range of other measures undertaken by the Department, the implementation of the plan facilitated full business continuity, most notably in the early weeks of the crisis, but also throughout a challenging year.

Around the same time an **interdepartmental communications group** was established to coordinate the wider Government effort to disseminate Covid-19 public health advice. The Department's Communications Unit contributed strongly to the national communications effort coordinated by this group, ensuring that key messages were disseminated quickly and accurately using the Department's own stakeholder network. This remained a key priority through 2020, with the Department's communications and messaging around volunteering and the community response to the pandemic (Community Call) ensuring that vulnerable sections of the population were kept fully informed and their needs met.

The Department's **Communications Strategy** was finalised, approved and circulated to all staff in Irish and English. Progress was made on implementing the strategy's actions around 'stakeholder engagement', 'monitoring our impact' and 'increasing internal awareness of our objectives'.

With the vast majority of the Department's staff working remotely from March onwards, the Communications Unit sought to implement **increased internal communications measures** that would help ensure that staff were kept informed and that the work and social bonds amongst our staff were fully maintained. One such measure was an increase in the frequency of our internal newsletter, the '*Feature*' which moved from monthly to fortnightly. The Feature allows staff to keep up with ongoing initiatives, announcements and priorities within the Department. The Communications Unit also made greater use of the intranet and social media to ensure that information continued to be accessible in the remote working environment.

In line with public health restrictions, the Department cancelled all in-person events of a non-essential nature. This necessarily led to a significant **increase in online communications** by the Department, with the gov.ie website and the Department's social media channels used to full effect and increased use of video and infographic content. During 2020 there were 2,062 new followers added to the Department's Twitter account and 449,361 page views of our gov.ie content.

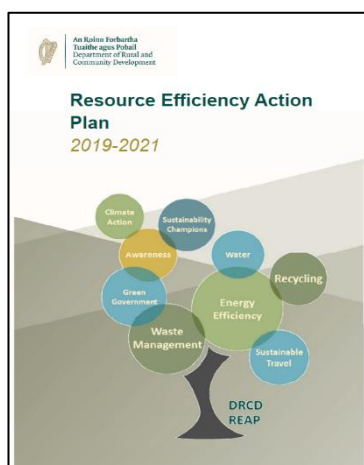
The Department's **Press Office** had another busy and productive year. In total, 71 press releases were issued in 2020. The Department's Irish Language Scheme was approved in April 2019 and, in accordance with the commitment to issue a minimum of 20 per cent of press releases bilingually, 17 press releases were issued in both Irish and English in 2020. These announcements and other work within the Department received coverage in local and national media, resulting in a total of 53 press queries received by the Press Office.

Developing our systems and procedures

Following our establishment in 2017, the Department continued to build its corporate governance and operational capacity throughout 2020 as we strive to attain the highest standards of delivery and governance.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The development of corporate structures continued, led by a full review of the Department's **Corporate Governance Framework** which was completed in 2020.



The Department's Resource Efficiency Action Plan (REAP) was finalised in 2019. The REAP summarises the activities undertaken in the areas of Energy Efficiency, Waste Reduction and Recycling, Water Conservation, and implementing the Green Government Initiative. The Department's REAP is published on the gov.ie [website](#). Between 2018 and 2020, the Department succeeded in reducing its Total Energy consumption for the Trinity Point office by 13%. The Department also succeeded in saving 11 trees in 2020 as a result of the recycling efforts of staff.

One of the commitments outlined in the Customer Service Charter is to provide quality services in Irish and/or bilingually to its customers. Our first **Irish Language Scheme**, prepared in accordance with the Guidelines outlined under Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003, was confirmed by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in 2019. The Scheme commenced on 8 April 2019 and will remain in force for a period of three years from that date or until a new scheme has been approved.

The Department's first **Child Safeguarding Statement** was published in 2019. This was developed in line with requirements under the Children First Act 2015, Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017), and Tusla's Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice. The Child Safeguarding Statement outlines the policies and procedures which are in place to manage and reduce risk to the greatest possible extent to keep children safe from harm while they are using services funded by the Department.

A Children First Oversight Group was also established within the Department. The Group consists of representatives from units of the Department with significant funding of children's services, and from the agencies under the remit of the Department. The focus of the Group is child safeguarding generally and, in particular, supporting the Department and its agencies to oversee compliance with the Children First Act 2015. The Department is also a member of the Children First Interdepartmental Implementation Group.

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 Duty** and is a legal obligation and the Department aims to ensure that equality and human rights are considered, externally and internally, in all our work.

The Department operates an **Internal Audit Unit** that is staffed by a fully qualified Internal Auditor. Under the Audit Charter, the Internal Auditor's role is to support the Accounting Officer and add value to the organisation through independent review.

Outputs by the function during 2020 included the approval of the Audit Universe for the Department and the endorsement of the Audit Plan for 2020. Audits were completed and approved for; Volunteering Centres, Tidy Towns, the Community Services Programme, Learning and Development, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

As part of its governance framework, the Department put in place an Audit Committee shortly after its establishment. This is chaired by a former Secretary General and comprises a majority of non-executive members. The work of the Committee is underpinned by an Audit Committee Charter which sets out its role, membership and function.

In 2020, the Committee held five meetings and received follow-up reviews, from Internal Audit. Full information on the work of the Committee for 2020 is set out in its annual report which is available on the Department's [website](#).

The Department's **Risk Management Committee** met 3 times in 2020. The Committee reviewed updated risks at each meeting including risk scoring and mitigation measures in place. During 2020 the Committee continued a rotating programme of presentations from Heads of Business Units on risks identified and mitigation strategies. This was of particular importance in the context of Covid-19 and the need for ongoing monitoring of risks and the ability to react promptly to identify and take appropriate action to deal with any emerging risks.

The Inspection, Compliance and Business Development Unit contributes to the Department's strategic goals through key strategic enablers, contributing primarily to developing the organisation but also to strengthened policy making, improved service delivery, and improved monitoring, evaluation and research.

The Unit implements an annual control and inspection programme for the Department's public-funded programmes, including an accredited control system for the EU co-funded LEADER programmes. The control and inspection programme, underpinned by a mix of random and risk-based activity sampling, provides assurance to the Management Board that funding provided through the broad range of Department schemes is managed appropriately by grant recipients and relevant intermediary bodies.

The control and inspection programme is complemented by policy and compliance advice and technical supports for programme managers on all aspects of scheme management. Inspection outputs for 2020 and anticipated outputs for 2021 are set out in the table below. The 2021 programme will encompass continuous formal engagement with business units to identify and address emerging issues or trends, advise on enhanced controls and contribute to programme and policy development. The programme will also include supports for funding recipients through communicating compliance requirements and promoting and sharing good practice.

Inspection Activity	Projected 2020	Achieved 2020	Projected 2021
EU co-funded LEADER 0713	19	18	0
EU co-funded LEADER 1420	120	95	115
CLÁR	18	16	10
Town and Village Scheme	27	17	18
Local Improvement Scheme	32	43	30
Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme	12	15	25
Rural Regeneration and Development Fund	10	7	16
REDZ (Regional Economic Development Zones)	-	1	0
Libraries IT Funding (non-capital programme spend)	10	10	8
Libraries Small Infrastructure Scheme	-	-	10
Rural Schemes Mayo Targeted - ORIS (6) & TVRS (9)	-	-	15
Total	248	222	247

The unit also provides other critical business development and governance supports, including managing the Department's Organisational Capability Review (OCR) process. The OCR was undertaken in December 2019 with the final report presented to the Department in June 2020. The Department's OCR Implementation Plan will be finalised in 2021 – it will be a three-year plan setting a direction of travel for the Department's continuing development and detailing those actions the Department believes will best address the review's findings and recommendations.

An Evaluation Unit was established in late 2018 to strengthen the level of **Research and Evaluation** in the Department. Research and evaluation is also undertaken through

commissioned reviews, and research agreements with external bodies. Furthermore, an internal Departmental evaluation sub-group was established in 2019 to contribute to a greater level of evidenced informed decision-making. The Department undertakes research and evaluation of its programmes and schemes internally through its evaluation unit, and through commissioned reviews and research agreements with external bodies. Some examples of work published through these structures in 2020 include:

- Review of the Community Services Programme (February).
- Evaluation of SICAP pre-employment supports (September).
- A Focussed Policy Assessment of the Local Improvement Scheme (December).
- Quality Assurance Process Report: Review of 2019 Expenditure (December).

In addition progress is being made on establishing the use of Geomapping software in the Department for research, analysis and communicating the impact of the Department's work.

OPERATIONS

As in many other workplaces around the country, in 2020 the pandemic forced a major change in how the Department worked. Following the first lockdown in March 2020, the vast majority of staff in the Department shifted to **working remotely** and have continued to do so since. The Department's **Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Facilities Management** team was responsible for the procurement of all necessary IT infrastructure to ensure business continuity in the home working environment. This required the provision of laptop devices and the rollout of additional software to assist with working in a new environment and to ensure continued access to certain systems.

The Facilities Management unit continued to provide IT support, in conjunction with the OGCI0, to staff as they adapted to the home working environment. The Department worked with the OGCI0 throughout 2020 to ensure that business continuity was fully maintained and that security and other issues arising from the sudden move to remote working were proactively addressed and monitored. As of Q3 2020, all Department staff had been issued the necessary ICT equipment to work remotely.

The Facilities Management Unit also oversaw the distribution of non-ICT equipment to staff for remote working purposes and continues to be responsible for the asset tracking of all assets provided in that regard. The health and safety and ergonomic needs of staff while working remotely were kept under review and addressed as issues arose.

The Department's **Health and Safety Committee** met five times in 2020. Representatives from HR, Facilities Management, senior and Junior Unions are represented on the Committee. Committee meetings in 2020 focused on a number of

areas relating to the Department's health and safety brief. The main points discussed related to Covid-19 planning and facilitating the remote working environment.

The Department's **Safety Statement** for Trinity Point and Ballina was revised in 2020. A number of amendments were made to the Statement to take account of the impacts that Covid-19 has had on the standard safety operating procedures within the Department and the requirements of remote working addressed. The Department conducted a full risk assessment as part of the revision and updated the Safety Statement with emerging guidance from the HSA and HSE and the Covid-19 Response Plan. The updated Safety Statement was finalised in December 2020.

An **internal GEO Committee** was established in 2019, which is responsible for discussing "Green, Energy and Organisation" issues within the Department. The GEO Committee is made up of staff representatives from across the Department, and is responsible for driving forward the Green Government Initiative and the implementation of the REAP within the Department. The GEO Committee met twice in 2020 to discuss issues relating to green, energy and organisational matters. GEO Committee members also attended a number of energy clinics, the content of which acted as discussion points for the GEO Committee. GEO Committee members attended seminars on Carbon Clinics, Energy Team webinars which focused on running energy awareness events and green campaigns internally and an information session on 'demystifying energy savings' in the home. These seminars have assisted staff in understanding both their use of energy in the office and in the home environment, more generally.

The GEO Committee, in conjunction with the Facilities Management team, also oversaw the **DRCD Energy Week** which took place in October 2020. This comprised of a number of tea time talks for staff to better manage energy, dedicated one-to-one clinics for understanding energy use and an Optimising Power @ Work art competition which was made available to the Department's staff. Presentations were also made to the Department on the REAP policy and context by the facilities management team in early 2020.

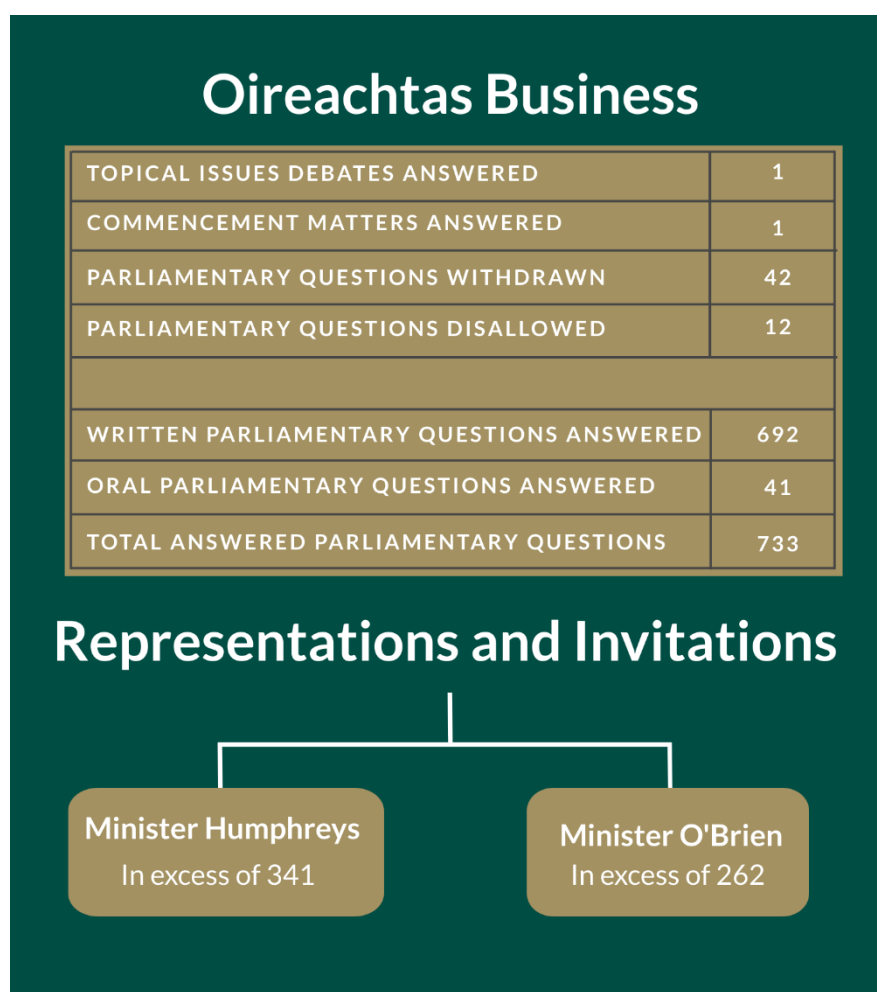
In terms of **green procurement**, the relevant contracts entered into by my Department relate to goods and services needed for our daily operational requirements for example, office cleaning, paper provision. On foot of the reporting arrangements established by Circular 20/2019, the Department will outline progress in relation to Green Public Procurement as part of its Annual Report, commencing with this 2020 report. No new contracts relevant to the circular were entered into in 2020. However, all future procurement in the relevant areas will be carried out in accordance with green procurement guidelines.

In order to strengthen and reinforce the correct use and importance of eDocs (a cloud-based records management system and one of the Build To Share suite of applications), work began on a new **Records Management Policy**. The policy will emphasise proper filing and archiving practices and will be completed in 2021. To facilitate the

implementation of eDocs and the new policy, an internal Records Management Group was formed within the Department.

The Department processed a total of 56 **Freedom of Information** Requests in 2020. Of these, 23 were granted or part-granted and 9 were refused. A further 12 were withdrawn and 12 were handled outside of FOI. One AIE request was received by the Department in 2020.

The Department has a responsibility to its Ministers and to the members of the Oireachtas to support the parliamentary process and facilitate responses to queries and requests to those in Ministerial office. Details of **representations and parliamentary business** handled by the Department in 2020 are contained in this table:



Bodies under the Aegis of the Department

WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body that was set up to promote both social and economic development in the Western Region (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare). It supports the delivery of Government policy towards balanced regional development, through projects and engagement across a wide variety of sectors. The WDC also manages the Western Investment Fund which provides loans and equity to businesses and local communities in the West.

www.wdc.ie

POBAL

Pobal works on behalf of Government, with communities and local agencies, to support social inclusion and local and community development. It is a company limited by guarantee and without share capital; it is also a registered charity. Pobal operates under the aegis of the Department of Rural and Community Development, which has a governance and oversight role in respect of the company.

Pobal is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors. Members of the Board are appointed by Government, on the nomination of the Minister for Rural and Community Development, in line with the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards. The company operates on the basis of a framework agreement with the Department and programme-specific service level agreements with individual Departments.

www.pobal.ie

WATER SAFETY IRELAND

Water Safety Ireland is the statutory body established to promote water safety in Ireland. It operates under the aegis of the Department and seeks to educate people in water safety best practices and develop public awareness campaigns to promote necessary attitudes, rescue skills and behaviour to prevent drownings and water related accidents.

In 2020 Water Safety Ireland had a number of campaigns that delivered practical advice from awareness campaign during county restrictions to safety advice around cold water shock.

Also in 2020:

- An open water swimming campaign targeted a significant increase in novice swimmers taking to cold open water
- Public efforts to socially distance by swimming in remote areas prompted a campaign to swim at lifeguarded waterways (“Let Them Be There For You”) and the dangers of rip currents.
- A safe shore angling and safe surfing campaign was prompted by the increase in those activities at local waterways.
- A National Awards Ceremony hosted by Síle Seoige honoured recipients for their bravery and commitment to drowning prevention.

Restrictions caused by the Covid-19 coronavirus resulted in the cancellation of indoor and outdoor water safety classes, the upsurge in the public use of local waterways made for a very busy time delivering campaigns throughout the pandemic. Specialised lifeguard training and guidance for the Lifeguards and public was introduced.

www.watersafety.ie

CHARITIES REGULATORY AUTHORITY

The Charities Regulatory Authority (the ‘Charities Regulator’) is an independent statutory body which was established on 16th October 2014 pursuant to the Charities Act 2009.

The key functions of the Regulator are to establish and maintain a public register of charitable organizations operating in Ireland, the first formal record of charities in the history of the State, and to ensure their compliance with the Charities Acts and the Charities Governance Code respectively.

The Regulator published six guidance documents for charities in 2020, including two documents in relation to the safeguarding of vulnerable adults and children respectively. These guides intend to provide general information for relevant charitable organisations in relation to registration. Downloadable copies of these documents are available on the Charities Regulator’s website.

The Regulator appointed inspectors to conduct statutory investigations into three registered charities during the course of 2020.

Recognizing the practical impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on registered charities, the Regulator extended the timeframe for the filing of annual reports in 2020. Additional online supports such a Covid-19 FAQs page, as well as information videos for charity trustees, were published. The Regulator also carried out online training for charity trustees to assist them in meeting the core minimum standards set out in the Charities Governance Code.

In 2020, the Regulator published a report into the findings of its '*Impact of Coronavirus (Covid-19) on Charities Survey*'. This report outlines the findings of a survey of over 2,300 respondents, representing a significant cross-section of Irish registered charities. A copy of this report is available on the Charities Regulator's website.

www.charitiesregulator.ie

CHARITIES APPEALS TRIBUNAL

The Department also has oversight of the Charity Appeals Tribunal. The function of the Tribunal is to hear and adjudicate on appeals against certain decisions of the Charities Regulator, under Section 45 of the Charities Act 2009. The Rules of the Tribunal formally came into effect from 4 July 2018. The Tribunal received no appeal requests during 2020.

Appointments to State Boards

A requirement of 40% of each gender has been as a target for gender equality in the membership of State boards. The Department is committed to ensuring gender balance on state boards in accordance with the Department of Justice and Equality's Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Gender Balance on State Boards which outlines a target of 40% representation for females on all State Boards. The following appointments were made in 2020:

Pobal

There were two new appointments to the board of Pobal in 2020. There are currently nine females and six males on this Board representing a 60% female membership and 40% male membership.

WDC

There were six new appointments, five female and one male, to the board of the Western Development Commission in 2020. Representation now stands at 50% for females and 50% males on this Board.

Water Safety Ireland

There was one Board appointment to Water Safety Ireland during 2020. At 31 December 2020 there were eight male and five female members of the Board representing a female membership of 38% and male membership of 62%.

Charities Regulatory Authority

There were no new appointments to the board of the Charities Regulatory Authority in 2020. Currently, female membership stands at 42% while male membership stands at 68%.

Our Structure

