



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

Annual Report

2018



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Minister's Foreword



I am pleased to be able to share with you the second annual report from my Department. The Department of Rural and Community Development was established in 2017 and I am delighted with the great progress that has been made in a short time.

The Department has established itself as an effective organisation, collaborating and delivering across Government for the general public. Importantly, the supports provided by the Department's programmes and schemes are having positive impacts throughout the country - helping to make rural towns and villages great places to live, work and raise families.

My Department's mission is to promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland. This annual report highlights how we do this through influencing across Government in the interests of rural and community development. Through the delivery of supports under my remit, I aim to ensure that the resources available to the Government are channelled effectively to make a real difference to the people who live in rural Ireland and communities.

I am proud of all the work undertaken by the Department in 2018, but some developments merit particular mention. 2018 saw the first announcements of funding under the €1 billion Project Ireland 2040 Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which has the potential to transform rural Ireland.

The new public library strategy, *Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities*, was published in 2018. It seeks to improve access, use and visibility of our libraries. The Department was successful in achieving an award last year for Excellence in Customer Service with the My Open Library initiative. The 60th anniversary of the TidyTowns competition in 2018 provided an opportunity for my Department to mark the immensely positive impact of this competition on Irish towns and villages over the years.

I want to thank the staff and management team of the Department for their ongoing commitment and diligence. I want to offer special thanks to previous Minister of State Seán Kyne T.D. for his invaluable contributions to the Department's work and I would also like to welcome our new Minister of State, Seán Canney T.D., who joined us as Minister of State for Natural Resources, Community Affairs and Digital Development in October 2018 and to thank him for his valuable contribution to date.

This report gives a comprehensive overview of the excellent work that has been done by everyone in the Department and the bodies under its aegis in 2018 and the continuing effort that is being made to improve upon this and fulfil our mission into 2019 and beyond.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Ring". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping flourish at the end of the name.

Michael Ring T.D.

Minister for Rural and Community Development

Secretary General's Statement

I am very pleased to present the second annual report of the Department of Rural and Community Development covering 2018, the first full year of operation in the Department. The report provides an overview of what was a very productive year for the Department in developing and delivering policies, programmes and supports across a range of rural development, community development and supporting activity.

The period in question was one of continuing significant operational effort to put in place the necessary structures, systems, functions and people to enable the Department to deliver in the interests of communities. The great progress made over the year is due to the very considerable contributions of all staff. I want to express my sincere appreciation to everyone involved.

The Department had a very successful year of delivering on its mission, through growing activity on the various programmes under its remit and by contributing across Government on issues of importance to those in rural Ireland and communities generally.

This report highlights a number of achievements in 2018, including the launch of the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund as part of Project Ireland 2040. This will provide significant investment to support rural renewal, strengthen and build resilience in rural communities and assist in the regeneration of towns, villages and outlying areas across rural Ireland.

I would like to thank Minister Michael Ring T.D. and Ministers of State Seán Kyne T.D. and Seán Canney T.D. (appointed in October 2018) for their strong leadership of our work in 2018. I also want to thank our agencies and partner organisations who support us in our work.

The progress made in 2018 provides a very strong basis for us to build from as we continue to deliver on our mandate in 2019.



Kevin McCarthy
Secretary General

1 Who we are and what we do

The Department of Rural and Community Development was established in 2017 to facilitate economic development in rural areas through a range of programmes, and to support communities, in urban and rural areas, to become sustainable and desirable places to live, work and raise families.

The Department oversaw a gross expenditure in excess of €237 million in 2018, and at the end of 2018 had a staff complement of over 190 across locations in Dublin, Ballina and other regional centres.

In March 2018, the Department published its first Statement of Strategy, setting out our mission, vision, values and strategic goals and objectives.

OUR MISSION

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

OUR VISION

Our vision is that all communities will have the opportunity to grow and develop economically and socially. To help bring this about, the Department will work across Government to:

- Create the conditions to support increased economic opportunities and local employment in all areas of the country
- Deliver schemes and programmes that support the revitalisation of towns and villages
- Improve access to services and social networks that ensure a high quality of life
- Enable communities disadvantaged by location or social issues to reach their full potential now and in the future
- Support all communities to be able to have a voice in shaping their own futures and addressing their common goals

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

- 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.
- Contribute to enhanced regional development, with a view to strengthening the potential of all regions to contribute to economic recovery.
- 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.
- Support the Community, Voluntary and Charity Sector to strengthen its capacity to contribute to civil society and support the growth and development of philanthropy

CO-ORDINATION OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY POLICY

Rural and community development is a Government priority that involves work being undertaken by a large number of Departments and State agencies.

The co-ordination of responses across Departments to the needs of rural Ireland and local communities and the development of policy designed to further the economic and social advancement of these areas of society is a key function of our Department.

This is to be done through collaboration with our Government colleagues at all levels, up to and including Cabinet Committees and Ministerial engagement, with the objective of ensuring that Government policy takes a holistic approach that considers all communities, regardless of location or demographics.

SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

The Department's Management Board consists of the Secretary General, and three Assistant Secretaries, responsible for the Rural Development and Regional Affairs, the Community Development, and the Corporate and Strategic Development Divisions respectively.

Further details on the Department's structure and management tiers is available on www.whodoeswhat.gov.ie

2 Functions of the Department

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

The Community Development Division encompasses three separate units; the Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes Unit, the Social Inclusion and Communities Unit, and the Libraries Development and Community Policy Unit.

The goal of the Community Development Division is to promote and support the development of vibrant, sustainable and inclusive communities in both urban and rural areas, through implementing a coherent policy framework and strategy which supports the community and voluntary sector. A key objective is to bring about a more co-ordinated approach to publicly-funded local and community development interventions by further developing the role of Local Authorities through their Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) and the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs). A further objective is to encourage citizen engagement with Local Authority structures through the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and to support and encourage volunteering.



Social Innovation Fund Ireland announces winners of the Resilient Communities Fund

Other areas of this Division's remit include oversight of the Charities Regulator, Pobal and Water Safety Ireland; Libraries Development; the development of Government's relationship with Philanthropy; administration and oversight of the Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and a range of other funding schemes for community & voluntary groups, including the Community Enhancement Programme, the Community Services Programme and the Seniors Alert Scheme.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT & REGIONAL AFFAIRS DIVISION

This Division is comprised of five units, the Rural Programmes and Policies Unit, the LEADER Policy and Operations Unit, the Inspection Services Unit, the Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise Unit, and the Regional Development and Innovation Unit.

The main goal of the Rural Development and Regional Affairs Division is to promote and facilitate long-term sustainable economic and social progress in rural parts of Ireland through a coordinated approach across Government. A key instrument to deliver this objective is the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development which contains a series of measures to unlock the potential of rural communities and enterprises through a framework of supports at national, regional and local level.

Other areas of the Division's activities include the implementation of the LEADER Programme 2014-2020, the delivery of a range of other schemes supporting outdoor recreation, town and village renewal and minor infrastructural works in rural areas, and the coordination of the Tidy Towns competition.

The Division is responsible for developing policy on social enterprise and also plays an important role in regional development, in particular through facilitating the development of the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative, co-ordinating the Department's input to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and supporting the rollout of high-speed broadband and telecommunications infrastructure across rural Ireland. The Division also has oversight of the Western Development Commission.

CORPORATE AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

The Corporate and Strategic Development Division is comprised of three units: Organisational Development and Human Resources, Finance and Evaluation, and Corporate Support and Rural Fund. The staff in this division are based at both Departmental locations, Dublin and Ballina.

This Division is responsible for leading and growing the Department's strategic policy development capacity and enhancing policy co-ordination within the Department and with

other Departments as required. The Corporate team within the Department aims to follow best practice in its delivery of corporate services in line with the public sector reform agenda. Corporate services includes the oversight of human resources and organisational development; finance and procurement; internal audit; communications strategy and ICT and infrastructural supports. Key to delivering on the Department's strategy, this Division is responsible for leading business process improvement efforts and for building the research and evaluation functions within the Department.

This Division also leads on the delivery of the Project Ireland 2040 Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, a €1 billion Government investment in rural Ireland and communities.



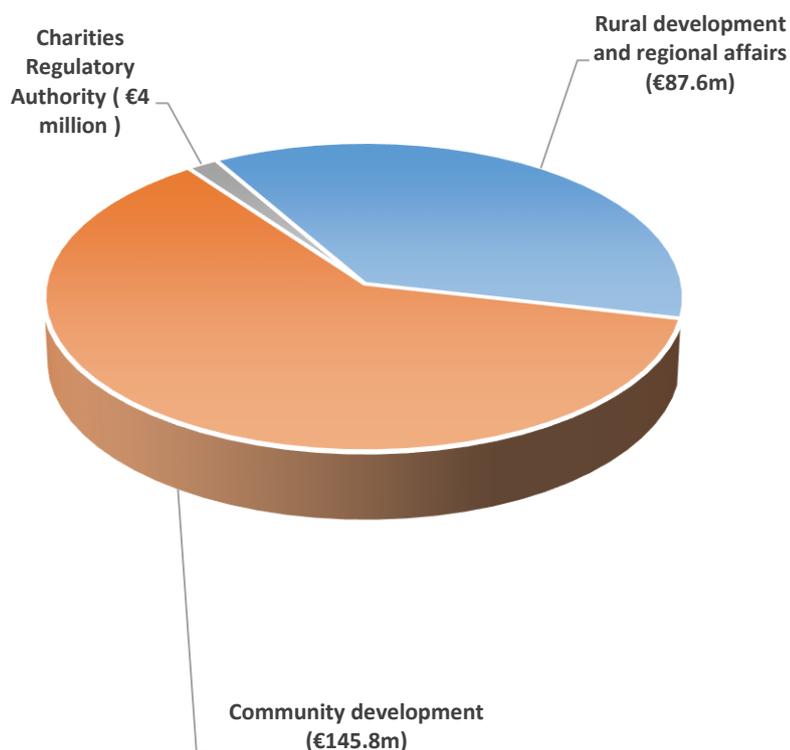
Heather Humphreys, Minister for Business, Enterprise, and Innovation Michael Ring, Minister for Rural and Community Development, Seán Canney, Minister of State Rural and Community Development at the announcement of successful Rural Regeneration and Development Fund projects in Carrickmacross

3 2018 Spending

In its first full year of operation, the Department of Rural and Community Development delivered for communities and rural areas through a wide range of programme and projects.

In 2018, a total of €237.4 million was spent by the Department across three strategic programmes. This included €7.7 million carried forward from 2017.

Rural and Community Development 2018 Gross Spend €237.4 million



4 Key Achievements 2018

- As part of Project Ireland 2040, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund was launched in 2018 and aims to promote rural renewal in order to enable towns, villages and outlying rural areas to grow sustainably as vibrant places to live and work. With a total budget of €1 billion over the period to 2027, 84 projects were announced with support of €86m from the first call for applications to the Fund.
- The new public library strategy, Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities was published in May 2018. It seeks to improve access, use and visibility of the library. Building on the success of the previous strategies it will remove barriers to access by eliminating library fines and supporting activities that encourage use and membership, including investment of €8 million in ICT capacity and the extension of the My Open Library service providing library access to members outside regular opening hours.
- In 2018, the Department achieved its delivery and spend targets across each of its strategic programme areas.
- An Evaluation Unit was established within the Department to strengthen the level of research and evaluation undertaken in relation to policies, programmes, schemes and bodies/agencies under its remit; and to help identify areas of priority for review and evaluation.
- The Learning & Development Unit continued to work closely with staff to develop, and oversee high quality training and education. Over 580 days of training were delivered to staff in 2018.
- The Communications Team continued to work with Units within the Department to develop accessible content for the Department’s website which will transition to the Gov.ie platform in 2019.
- €21.3 million funding was provided for 224 projects countrywide under the 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme.
- A Pilot Town Centre Living Initiative was launched in October 2018, with six towns initially receiving funding of €100,000 to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages.
- The Department continued to work with the Western Development Commission to support their work on the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative and Western Investment Fund.

- 224 projects worth €20.8 million were approved under the 2018 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme.
- The CLÁR programme funded 389 small infrastructure projects to the value of €11.8 million across 4 measures in 2018: Schools/Community Safety; Play Areas; First Response Support; Mobility and Cancer Care Transport.
- Over €20 million was approved for improvement works under the Local Improvement Scheme in 2018.
- In 2018, Local Action Groups approved funding of more than €38 million for 1,034 individual LEADER projects.
- The €15 million LEADER Food Initiative was launched to provide supports to artisan and small food and beverage producers.
- The new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) was launched with funding of €190 million for frontline services from 2018-2022.
- In 2018, SICAP assisted 31,967 individuals and 2,558 groups in local communities.
- The new Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) was launched and supported over 3,000 projects with total funding of €13million.
- Social Innovation Fund Ireland have opened 24 calls for applications and received over 900 applications from social innovations across Ireland.
- €3.5 million was allocated to volunteering supporting infrastructure nationwide.
- The Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan 2018 included provision of €1.2 million in 2019 for the upgrading of the eight Volunteering Information Services to full Volunteer Centres.
- A review of the Dormant Accounts Fund was completed and launched in July 2018.
- A Call for Input paper was launched in December 2018 as the first step in developing a national volunteering strategy.
- Over 19,000 participants were approved under the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2018, an increase of 56%.
- Plans were announced for the first National Community Weekend, The Big Hello, to be held in May 2019.
- The Second Progress Report of the Action Plan for Rural Development was published in May 2018 with the Third Progress Report published in November 2018.
- €44 million was provided by the Department under the Community Services Programme in 2018.

€13 million
3,000 projects
Community Enhancement Programme

Social Innovation Fund Ireland
24 calls
900 applications received

€8 million
Investment in Public Library Service

Rural Regeneration Development Fund
€1 billion over next 10 years

1,081 Parliamentary Questions answered
502 Representations received
58 FOIs processed
118 Press Releases issued
2 Commencement Debates

Seniors Alert Scheme
19,000 participants approved

CSP
€44 million
2,000 positions
412 organisations

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme
€20.8 million
224 projects

CLÁR
€11.8
389 projects

€21.3 m
Town and Village Renewal Scheme

SICAP
€38 m
2,558 groups
31,967 individuals

LEADER
€38 million
1,034 projects approved

5 Community Development

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORKS (PPNS)

Public Participation Networks have been established in all Local Authority areas. Their main function is to facilitate and enable the local community to interact with local government and other relevant legislation for the good of their communities.

During 2018, the Department continued to provide practical support for PPNS including the on-going provision of funding, the continued roll-out of a Client Relationship Management database for all PPNS and the provision of training. In addition, in late 2018, the Department announced the provision of additional funding in 2019 for a Support Worker in each PPN to assist the PPN Resource Worker.



A member of Westmeath PPN Secretariat speaking at Annual PPN Conference, Athlone

The second National PPN Advisory Group, which is representative of all stakeholders, continued its work with four meetings in 2018. This group provided invaluable input into a number of PPN initiatives including the publication of the 2017 Annual Report and arrangements for the 2018 National PPN Conference.

The second National PPN Annual Report, in respect of 2017, was published on 4 September 2018. The report showed that in 2017, PPN membership had grown to over 12,800 organisations. This upward trajectory continued during 2018, when membership increased to over 15,000.

The second annual PPN Conference took place in Athlone in September 2018, hosted by Westmeath PPN. This conference, which had a varied and interesting agenda of workshops and talks, included site trips to a number of locations in Westmeath, Roscommon and Offaly where delegates met with local community organisations that are involved in and empowered by their PPN, Local Authority and other agencies.

VOLUNTEERING

The Department's community and voluntary supports and programme provides a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector. Payments of €3.47m were made in 2018 to 21 Volunteer Centres, eight Volunteering Information Services and four national volunteering supporting organisations. Further actions taken to advance volunteering included the grant of €200,000 to support IT upgrades for Boardmatch and Volunteer Ireland platforms in 2018.

The Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan 2018 included provision of €1.2m in 2019 for the upgrading of the eight Volunteering Information Services to full Volunteer Centres in order to provide a consistent level of volunteering infrastructure nationwide. Discussions with stakeholders on the roll-out of this initiative got underway in late 2018.

A Call for Input paper was also launched in December 2018 as the first step in developing a national volunteering strategy.

PHILANTHROPY AND FUNDRAISING

In 2018, the Department continued to provide funding to key organisations for their core costs, on a matched funding basis.

Philanthropy Ireland

The contract with Philanthropy Ireland committed €75,000 pa for both 2017 and 2018. Philanthropy Ireland, through networking events, research and collaboration with appropriate partners are targeting business professionals and potential leaders on giving. Its aim is to communicate the value and potential of philanthropy to key stakeholders, most particularly potential philanthropists, corporates and individuals.

Key Activities in 2018: Philanthropy Ireland

- provision of accurate baseline data and research on philanthropic giving in Ireland
- strategically targeting key cohorts of population to grow the level of giving in Ireland
- supporting long term policy development, both public policy and donor policy

Charities Institute Ireland

The contract with Charities Institute Ireland committed €220,000 annually in both 2017 and 2018

Key Activities in 2018: Charities Institute Ireland

- assisting charities to operate to high standards of practice in fundraising - transparent reporting and good governance underpinned by proportionate robust regulation.
- developing tax policy that incentivises giving
- providing reliable data on the current level of philanthropic giving in Ireland and the potential for growth over the next three to five years.
- support and investment in fundraising education and training
- advocacy for the charitable sector e.g. the introduction of the Charities VAT Compensation Scheme introduced in 2018 Budget.

SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND IRELAND

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 SIFI to receive €5 million in total from the Dormant Accounts Fund over the period 2014 to 2017 to support its set-up and development. This arrangement was extended until May 2018, when the Government's commitment was reaffirmed to match private philanthropic donations raised by Social Innovation Fund Ireland for the next three years to end May 2021.

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.

SIFI drew down €4.8 million from the Dormant Accounts Fund in 2018. In total, by end of 2018, SIFI raised over €15.2 million in funding, 50% from private philanthropy and 50% from Government.

These funds have supported 14 issue-specific programmes and provided growth capital and supports to 61 social innovations in Ireland, which include supporting initiatives to build resilient communities, tackling issues such as youth mental health, technology for social good, social enterprise development, combatting educational disadvantage, elderly independent living, and equality.

Philanthropic funding and supports have been donated by companies such as Google.org, Medtronic, Mason Hayes & Curran, IPB Insurance, AIB and Bank of America, as well as SMEs, foundations, trusts and private individuals.

Age Friendly Ireland

Funding of **€78,100** was granted to this project under the Dormant Accounts Fund 2018 Action Plan.

This initiative involves a joint approach with Age Friendly Ireland (hosted by Meath County Council), Louth County Council, Fingal County Council, Limerick City & County Councils and the Irish Smart Ageing Exchange (ISAX). The purpose of the project is to establish a network of “digitally connected” older persons in different rural towns/villages.

BHome and BWell Technology Pilot

Funding of **€169,365** was granted to this project under the Dormant Accounts Fund 2018 Action Plan.

This proposal is about funding for two Assistive Technology Demonstration Projects which are key elements of ALONE'S BConnect service. **BHome** is a package of Assistive technology which provides important timely information to help people live more independently through emergency response and proactive interventions. **BWell** is a mobile application for older people linked to e-health. ALONE is working in partnership with Galway City Council to install this technology in 60 older persons' homes.

SENIORS ALERT SCHEME

Following a review of the Seniors Alert Scheme, a new version came into effect in November 2017. 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.

These changes, and advertising of the Scheme, saw a huge uptake during 2018, with a 56% increase in approved applicants compared to 2017. During 2018, over 19,200 applications were approved, with total expenditure of almost €7m.

As this is a demand-led scheme, it is kept under continuous review to ensure adequate funding can be made available to meet the requirements of all qualifying applicants.



Demand increased for the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2018

SCHEME TO SUPPORT NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

The Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) provides multi-annual funding to national organisations in respect of core costs associated with the provision of their services. The current scheme commenced on 1 July 2016 and runs until on 30 June 2019. The current scheme is administered by Pobal on behalf of the Minister.

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

The allocation for the duration of the scheme 2016-2019 is a total of €16.7 million and the total amount spent in 2018 was almost €6 million to 71 national community and voluntary organisations.

A review of the 2016-2019 Scheme was undertaken in 2018 by the Department, in conjunction with Pobal. A new iteration of the Scheme was announced in December 2018, and is expected to commence in mid-2019.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY ACTIVATION PROGRAMME (SICAP)

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.

In 2018, the new five-year, €190m SICAP was launched following a national consultation process with stakeholders. This significant piece of work contributed to the design of the programme which responds to identified needs, creates more programme efficiency and reduces administration. Key changes relative to the SICAP that ran from 2015 to 2017 are outlined in the above graphic.



SICAP 2018 - 2022
Top Ten Changes

- 5 Years** Longer funding commitment
- Greater focus on quality community development and more intense engagement
- Fewer indicators and targets**
- No age limit**
- Simple and flexible**
- Down from 3 goals to 2
- Easier registration process
- More target groups, plus an emerging needs group
- Grants to support local community groups and individuals
- A new specialised SICAP tool to measure personal progression

SICAP 2018-2022 is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and is co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



In September 2018 the end of programme report for the SICAP 2015-2017 was published. During the lifecycle of the programme, SICAP supported 110,044 individuals and 5,028 Local Community Groups (LCGs). SICAP 2015-2017 distributed over €100m to support the most disadvantaged individuals and communities in Ireland.

Key findings of the report are shown in the accompanying two graphics.

SICAP 2018-2022

The new SICAP covers the period from 2018 to 2022. The programme is funded by this Department, with work completed on the



ground by Local Development Companies. Key achievements for 2018 include:

- 31,967 disadvantaged individuals supported on a one-to-one basis.
- Over 45,364 people attended lifelong learning or labour market information
- Over €46,000 was awarded to 270 enterprise start-ups.
- Over 1,600 people got a job.
- Over 3,000 people started their own business.
- Over 14,500 people participated in Lifelong Learning Courses
- 2,558 Local Community Groups (LCGs) were assisted

To further improve the programme:

- an improved monitoring system has been put in place to capture core data on the engagement with Local Community Groups and individuals receiving support.
- a Distance Travelled Tool was designed in 2018 to capture the progress of individuals that receive supports. It helps SICAP service users to identify areas for personal and professional development and will improve recording of soft outcomes. It is being piloted in 2019
- The ESRI was commissioned to undertake research on the SICAP programme. The following paper was published in July 2018: *The goals and governance of the social inclusion and community activation programme (SICAP) 2015-2017: a mixed methods study*.
- 50 support events were organised by Pobal in conjunction with DRCD in 2018 with 1,073 participants from both Local Community Development Companies and Local Development Companies.

The overall national targets have been exceeded as outlined below:

SICAP 2018	Target	Actual	% achieved
KPI 1 (groups)	2,219	2,558	115%
KPI 2 (Individuals)	27,452	31,967	116%

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

OTHER SUPPORTS TO DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Other funding to support disadvantaged communities included:

- €1.59 million was provided to St. Vincent de Paul and Protestant Aid.
- €448,000 was provided for Inner City Community Support Programme funding to the Dublin Inner City Co-op.
- €100,000 was provided in 2018 towards an Area Action Plan for the Cherry Orchard area in west Dublin.
- €1.879 million funded other initiatives which had a social inclusion focus.

The Department is also represented 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 Justice and Equality. In 2018, the Department established an informal *Social Inclusion Interdepartmental Working Group*, to build knowledge and to explore opportunities to better co-ordinate and collaborate across Government departments.

DUBLIN NORTH EAST INNER CITY INITIATIVE

In 2018, the Department provided almost €3.5 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 which resulted in 50 posts being created in areas such as childcare, after school services, youth work, eldercare and the environment.

COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME

A review of the RAPID and the Communities Facilities Schemes was undertaken in 2018 with a view to optimising their effectiveness in addressing community needs. The Department decided to merge the RAPID and CFS and decided to make one overall allocation to Local Authorities to address urban and rural disadvantage under a combined scheme, the Community Enhancement Programme, which was launched in 2018.

The CEP provided €13m of funding to over 3,000 projects across the country, so that community groups could enhance facilities in disadvantaged areas. €500,000 of this funding was ring-fenced for Men's Sheds.

The new programme 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 and will run again in 2019.

DOG CONTROL

In 2018, the Department completed its review of the submissions received to a public consultation on revised Guidelines for Dog Breeding Establishment. A summary of responses received was published in February 2018. Following consideration of the responses received and further engagement with relevant stakeholders, the Department published revised Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines in July 2018. They came into effect on 1 January 2019 and are currently being implemented.

The Department then commenced a review of the relevant legislation in this area with the aim of progressing any necessary legislative changes to the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010.

The Department also commenced a review of the requirements that are in place for the control of dogs in Ireland, for all dogs and for specific breeds of dogs. It is intended to publish a consultation paper on this matter during 2019.

In 2018, the Department collated and published statistics on the 2017 dog control activities of local authorities. They show a continued downward trend in the number of dogs euthanised and the number of dogs entering pounds in Ireland. In 2017 there were 200,828 dog licences issued by local authorities, of which 814 were lifetime licences.

COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAMME

Responsibility for the Community Services Programme (CSP) moved to the Department of Rural and Community Development in January 2018. The CSP supports community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model, providing a contribution towards the cost of staff. It typically supports organisations to meet local service gaps and provide access to services and facilities that would otherwise generally be unavailable.

The Department considered that a review of the programme was timely given the Department's role and its policy responsibilities for social enterprise and for local development and community development. The review commenced in 2018 with a stakeholder consultation on the scope of the review. It is expected to be completed in late 2019.

CSP in 2018:

- Some €44 million was provided by the Department under the programme in 2018.
- The CSP provided a co-funding contribution towards the cost of over 2,000 positions in some 412 organisations.
- Approximately 30 new applicants entered the programme during 2018.
- The Department conducted a consultation process on the scope of the terms of reference for the review in October/November 2018. This consultation was the first phase of engagement, with over 80 submissions received.
- On 16 October 2018, the Minister announced the continuation of the CSP Support Fund on a once-off basis in 2019, providing an additional €1 million to organisations most in need, with approximately 260 organisations benefiting under the fund.

COMMUNITY POLICY

The Department has general policy responsibility for cross-government coordination of local and community development supports. It provides guidance and support to local authorities in the development and management of *Local Community Development Committees* (LCDCs) and *Local Economic and Community Plans* (LECPs). It is also responsible for developing and implementing the *Framework Policy on Local and Community Development*.

Local Community Development Committees

LCDCs have been established in each local authority to bring about a more coordinated approach to local and community development in their respective areas, while also planning and overseeing local and community development funding in that area. The primary means for achieving this is through the community elements of 6-year Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), which promote and support the economic development and the community and local development of their areas.

There are 33 LCDCs in total – one LCDC per local authority area, except Cork County where there are three LCDCs.

Framework Policy for Local and Community Development

The Framework Policy for Local and Community Development provides an over-arching framework for local development and community development, underpinning the State's relationship with the sectors and setting out "national priorities and a framework for the realisation of a cross-government approach at local and national level". The *Framework Policy* is a key policy pillar of the Department.

Community Policy in 2018

LCDC Review

A review of LCDCs commenced in 2017 with a view to supporting their long-term development as the primary local structure for coordinating the broad range of public-funded local and community development interventions. The review was largely completed in 2018, with draft recommendations agreed by the steering group. It is intended to finalise the review by mid-2019.

LCDC Supports

The Department provided over €2 million in 2018 to aid in the management of LCDCs, the implementation of LECPs and to support the emerging community function of local authorities as part of the local government reform and development process. This included a financial contribution towards the cost of 61 posts in 31 local authorities in 2018.

Framework Policy Strategic Plan

A Cross-Sectoral Working Group (CSG) was established to assist the development of a strategic plan for the Framework Policy for Local and Community Development 2015 and a strategy to support the community and voluntary sector. The group comprises representatives from key stakeholder sectors including community development, local development, and the community and voluntary sectors, as well as representatives from central and local government. After detailed consultation since 2017 that included two CSG meetings and four CSG subgroup meetings in 2018, the CSG have agreed a range of high-level objectives and actions. The Department is currently working on contextualising these actions on the basis of the framework objectives to finalise the strategy. It is anticipated that the strategic plan will be completed in 2019.

PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION 2014-2020

(PEACE IV)

PEACE IV is a cross-border Programme co-financed by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund. It is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) on behalf of the Irish and UK Governments 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 total value of the Programme is some €270 million. It is 85% funded by the EU (€229 million), with a 15% contribution of €41 million by the Irish and UK Governments (c. €9million and €32 million respectively).

The Department of Rural and Community Development is an 'Accountable Department' and, as such, provides funding under four core objectives – Shared Education; Children and Young People; Shared Spaces and Services; and Building Positive Relations.

PEACE IV in 2018:

- Programme activity continued under the PEACE IV themes during 2018 and supported the implementation of action plans by local authorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland, as well as a number of 'shared spaces' initiatives by local authorities and other local and regional groups.
- Some €3.985 million was provided by the Department during 2018 under a number of themes.
- In addition, six "Shared Space" projects across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland were approved allocating over €38.7 million in funding during 2018.

LIBRARIES DEVELOPMENT

The Department's Libraries Development Unit supports the strategic development and delivery of library services by local authorities. To this end, the Department works in partnership with the County and City Management Association (CCMA), local authorities, the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

VISION FOR OUR PUBLIC LIBRARIES 2022

A bright attractive, trusted, welcoming, civic space 

Self-service with extended opening hours 

Centrally located, accessible and visible 

Leading edge digital technologies to enhance the service and available for users with support from staff 

A focal point for all public services 

Free service, no fines or lending charges 

Valued by and essential to communities 

friendly, skilled staff, actively supporting and guiding users throughout the library 

Attracting users of all ages in large numbers 

A wide range of resources and services for work, leisure, learning and creativity, online and in-library 

A meeting place, informally and formally 

Workstation facilities for hot-desking 

The go-to place locally, with national reach 

Attracting and benefiting local residents and users 

Places for creativity and culture 

The Department's new Public Library Strategy
Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities

Libraries Capital Investment Programme

- In 2018, some €710,000 was provided by the Department under the *Libraries Capital Investment Programme* to six library projects including, North Clondalkin Library (Dublin), Portlaoise Library (Laois), Edgeworthstown Library (Longford), Ennis Library (Clare), Kevin Street Library (Dublin), Athy Library (Kildare), and a mobile library for Kerry. The programme was extended to include libraries in Donegal and Stillorgan in October 2018, when additional funding for Edgeworthstown Library, Ennis Library and Portlaoise Library was also announced.
- A new Public Library Strategy was launched – *Our Public Libraries – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities*, on 14 June 2018
- €8 million grant funding was announced for the enhancement of ICT capacity, digital services and facilities in public libraries, comprising €6 million from the Department of Rural and Community Development, supplemented by approximately €2 million from Local Authorities.
- The Department also provided €200,000 funding to the *Healthy Ireland at Your Library* initiative.

6 Rural Development and Regional Affairs Division

CLÁR

The CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) is a targeted capital investment programme for rural areas which have experienced significant levels of depopulation. The programme was originally launched in October 2001 but was closed for applications in 2010. The scheme was re-opened by Minister Ring in 2016 to support the development of designated rural areas through small-scale capital projects.

In 2018 CLÁR provided over €11 million to 389 projects which enhanced safety in the vicinity of schools and community amenities, provided play areas in communities and provided equipment to voluntary first responders. CLÁR also supported the purchase of vehicles to provide transport services, free of charge, to persons requiring wheelchair accessible vehicles to access day care or other medical therapy or respite services and/or those requiring transport to/from hospitals for treatment under the National Cancer Care Programme.

The CLÁR programme has supported over 1,250 projects across Ireland since 2016.

A review of the CLÁR programme commenced in November 2018 to examine CLÁR areas by reference to the 2016 Census of Population data. The review is ongoing and it will also consider whether there are factors other than population decline that should be taken into account in designating areas for eligibility under CLÁR in the future.

OUTDOOR RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE SCHEME

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme is part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland, including numerous greenways, blueways, walks and other trails across the country.

Under the 2018 scheme, 224 projects were approved for funding of almost €21 million from applications received by the Department from Local Development Companies, Local Authorities and State Agencies.



Trail funded by The Walks Scheme

LOCAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEME (LIS)

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 is a lifeline for people living in many rural areas because it directly improves their access to and from their homes and farms.

Investing in the improvement of these roads makes a positive impact on people's quality of life in rural areas. The Department provided €20.8 million in funding for LIS roads in 2018.

TIDYTOWNS AND RELATED COMPETITIONS

The TidyTowns Competition has been running since 1958. It was originally launched by Bord Fáilte (now Fáilte Ireland) and is now under the remit of the Department. SuperValu are the title sponsor of the competition and 2018 was their 27th year of sponsorship.

TidyTowns has become Ireland's most well-known and popular local environmental initiative. The overall winner of the 2018 competition was Listowel in Co Kerry.



60th Anniversary of SuperValu TidyTowns Competition

In 2018, Minister Ring announced a €1.4 million grant scheme to mark the 60th anniversary of the SuperValu TidyTowns competition. This scheme allowed each local committee to apply for a grant of between €1,000 and €4,000 to support the work they do.

On 19 May 2018, President Michael D Higgins unveiled a plaque in Birdhill, Co. Tipperary to celebrate the achievement of that town in winning the 2017 competition.

Birdhill was also entered into the 2018 Communities in Bloom which is an international competition for national winners. It is held in Canada each year.

Ireland's Best Kept is an all-island competition in which one nominee from each of the eight categories of the main TidyTowns competition is entered. In June 2018, the awards ceremony was hosted by the Northern Ireland Amenity Council in Belfast and the winner was Randalstown, Co. Antrim. Geashill, Co Offaly won the Best Kept Village category. Ballina, Co Mayo won the Best Kept Large Town category and Banbridge, Co. Down won the Best Kept Large Urban Centre category.

Entente Floral is a European competition in which two high achievers are nominated from the entrants to national competitions. Ireland's 2018 entries from the SuperValu TidyTowns Competition were Dungarvan in Co. Waterford and Inistoige in Co. Kilkenny, achieving Silver and Gold respectively. The jury also awarded the special Jury's Chair award for the Mitigation of Climate Change 2018 to Dungarvan for the Waterford Greenway.

TOWN AND VILLAGE RENEWAL SCHEME

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme was introduced in the second half of 2016 and, to date, almost €53 million has been approved for more than 670 projects across the country.

In 2018, funding of €21.3 million was approved for 224 projects under the 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme. These projects cover a range of activities, from improving the public realm to make towns and villages more attractive for locals and visitors alike, to job-creation initiatives such as the development of enterprise hubs and digital hubs.

A pilot initiative to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages commenced in 2018. Under the pilot initiative, up to €100,000 is being made available in respect of six participating towns. This funding will be used by the Local Authorities to engage with communities and local businesses, and identify practical solutions to increase the number of people living in our rural towns.

LEADER

The LEADER Programme supports the design and delivery of Local Development Strategies covering every area of Ireland outside of the 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 the areas of enterprise development, job creation, social inclusion and the protection and improvement of the environment. The total expenditure on LEADER in 2018 was €23 million. The key LEADER developments in 2018 included:

- Funding approval of €38 million for 1,034 LEADER projects. This was more than double the amount (€16 million) approved in 2017. As a result, over 1,600 LEADER projects had been approved for funding of €55.3 million since the new programme commenced in 2016 to the end of 2018. A further 349 project applications, seeking funding of €21.7 million, were at various stages of the approvals process at the end of 2018.
- The Department made 589 payments to over 500 individual project promoters to the value of €12.5 million. This compared to project payments of approximately €660,000 in 2017.
- The creation of 180 (FTE) new jobs in LEADER supported enterprises, with a further 589 (FTE) existing jobs sustained across a variety of sectors.
- Completed works on tourist facilities that attracted in the region of 350,000 visitors.

- Participation of over 6,600 young people in completed rural youth projects.
- The joint launch of the LEADER Food Initiative, with a budget of €15 million, by the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in May 2018. The initiative will provide vital funding to support the development of artisan and small food and beverage producers. The first 15 projects under the initiative were approved by the end of December 2018, for funding of almost €700,000.

Continued engagement took place with LEADER stakeholders to enhance programme delivery, particularly through the second LEADER Ministerial Forum held in September 2018. This followed on from the successful 2017 Forum which had identified 31 Actions to improve the programme. The 2018 Forum also provided the first opportunity to consult on the direction of the next LEADER Programme. The Department also continued a programme of capacity building with Local Action Groups in 2018 which included workshops focusing on LEADER funding themes associated with the Environment, Social Inclusion and Broadband.

In 2018, as required by the EU Regulations governing the LEADER Programme 2014-2020, controls were undertaken on claims for LEADER grant aid submitted by 34 project beneficiaries. In addition, two other projects were subject to ex-post checks. In relation to the LEADER Programme 2007-2013, ex-post checks were undertaken on 84 LEADER funded project operations to check for compliance with the durability requirements set out in the EU Regulations. 16 controls were undertaken at Local Action Group level, including Implementing Partners, on claims for administration funding in 2018.

ACTION PLAN FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Realising our Rural Potential, the Irish Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, was launched in January 2017. The Action Plan contains a wide range of measures being delivered across Government, State agencies, and other bodies over the period 2017-2019 to support economic and social development in Ireland's rural areas. The measures in the Action Plan focus on supporting, empowering and building sustainable communities; growing jobs and enterprise; maximising tourism, culture and heritage assets; and improving connectivity in rural areas.

Progress on the implementation of the measures in the Action Plan is overseen by a Monitoring Committee which is chaired by Minister Michael Ring T.D. and includes senior representatives of relevant Government Departments and key rural stakeholder interests. In addition to monitoring progress on measures contained in the Action Plan, the Committee has examined a number of specific themes of particular relevance to rural Ireland, including mental well-being, job creation, the LEADER programme, the work of the Fisheries Local Area Action Groups, and the potential impact of Brexit on rural communities. Three meetings

of the Monitoring Committee took place during 2018, all of which were chaired by Minister Ring.

Progress Reports on the implementation of measures contained in the Action Plan for Rural Development are published twice-yearly. During 2018, two Progress Reports were published. A number of case studies also feature in the reports, which illustrate the positive impact the measures being delivered are having on rural communities.

The co-ordinated, whole-of-Government approach of the Action Plan is achieving benefits in terms of increased employment in the regions and increased investment in projects and communities across the country. Since 2015, there has been an increase of 146,400 in numbers employed in regions outside of Dublin, surpassing the Government's target of 135,000 by 2020.

The Action Plan for Rural Development runs to the end of 2019 and the focus of the Department is now turning to the next phase of rural development policy. A key deliverable for the Department during 2019 will be the development of a rural strategy/policy to follow on from the Action Plan for Rural Development on conclusion of its 2017-2019 timeframe.

As an initial input to the development of the new rural policy the Department co-hosted and co-funded a series of three rural development seminars – 'Rural Conversations' – in late 2018/early 2019, in conjunction with the Royal Irish Academy, focused on the themes of economic development, social cohesion, and sustainable rural communities. Further consultation by the Department will take place in 2019 to obtain views from stakeholders on the challenges and opportunities facing rural Ireland over the next five years and to identify policy measures required to respond to those challenges and opportunities.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

In July 2017, policy responsibility for social enterprise was assigned to the Department of Rural and Community Development. The Department has taken the lead in delivering on the Government commitment in the Action Plan for Rural Development to:

“Develop and publish a National Policy on Social Enterprise which will encompass the full range of activity in this sector.” (*APRD, Action 99*)

Significant progress was made during 2018 in developing the policy, which is underpinned by a research and consultation exercise conducted by the Department in partnership with the Social Finance Foundation. Social enterprises make a valuable contribution to the economic and social progress of Ireland through the creation of jobs and through the delivery of a range of services in areas such as homecare, employment activation, hospitality, catering, retail, environmental services, and social housing.

The National Policy on Social Enterprise will be published in 2019 and will complement the Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sectors in Ireland and the new National Volunteering Strategy, both of which are also being developed by the Department. Taken together, this suite of initiatives will support the full range of organisations that are providing services to communities or tackling social issues, whether through a social enterprise model or through more traditional community services delivery.

ATLANTIC ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

The Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce was established in March 2017 with the aim of maximising the strengths and assets of the economic hubs and communities along Ireland's western seaboard to attract investment, support job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life for those who live there. Minister of State Seán Canney chairs the Taskforce which includes senior representatives from the business sector, key Government Departments, other public bodies, and third-level institutions.

To date, work relating to the AEC has gone from strength to strength. The Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce has established three subgroups which continue to focus on delivering progress in the key strategic areas of Infrastructure, Enterprise Space, and Communications.

In addition, a network of AEC Officers in each of the 10 Local Authorities in the AEC region has now been established, co-funded by the Department. This network supports the work of the Taskforce and Subgroups. Funding of €474,783 was provided by the Department to the AEC initiative in 2018.

With the additional capacity of the AEC Officers in place, the subgroups are now engaged in mapping the available enterprise space resources in key towns in the AEC, developing an AEC-wide communications strategy and brand, publishing a monthly E-Zine, and identifying of beneficial infrastructure projects in the region.

The Department has also tasked the Western Development Commission (WDC) with acting as a co-ordinating body for the AEC programme. In addition, the WDC, at the Department's request, has initiated a project to identify and engage with all providers of 'Hub' services in the AEC region with the goal of developing a corridor-wide strategy to ensure the most effective use of these resources. This project is currently underway.

THE MOBILE PHONE & BROADBAND TASKFORCE

The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, chaired by Minister of State Seán Canney, published its 2018 review in February 2019. The Taskforce is composed of key stakeholders and focused on addressing a range of issues impacting the provision of broadband and mobile services. Of the 34 actions for delivery in 2018, contained within the review, 16 are fully completed with work well advanced on a further eight actions.

A number of the remaining actions have been carried forward into the 2019 Work Programme. The Taskforce's 2018 National Stakeholder Forum (an event attended by a wide range of stakeholders, such as telecommunications industry representatives, rural internet providers, several Government Departments, local authorities and others) held in October in Ballinasloe, led to the drafting of a work programme for 2019 that includes 35 new actions designed to improve connectivity across the country.

Among the actions delivered in 2018 was an outdoor mobile coverage map published by the Communications Regulator (ComReg) on their website. Combined with the results of ComReg's recent mobile handset testing initiative and their online price comparison tool, consumers are now in a better position to make informed choices when selecting a mobile phone and a service provider.



Minister of State Seán Kyne at the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce National Stakeholder Forum, Ballinasloe

DIGITAL INNOVATION PROGRAMME

In 2018, the Department provided more than €800,000 in funding to 21 Local Authorities to support innovative digital projects. Funded projects included a tourism initiative in Kerry, life-saving thermal imaging cameras in Galway, SMART street furniture in Fingal, and mobile phone infrastructure in Donegal.

BROADBAND OFFICERS

The Department continues to support Local Authority Broadband Officers across the State. Broadband Officers act as a single point of contact between Local Authorities, telecoms operators and the public. Their work has been highlighted as one of the most important elements of the recently accelerated pace of telecoms development across the country. The Department allocated a total of €1,050,000 to support the salaries of Broadband Officers in 2018.

WIFI4EU

In 2018, the Department supported Local Authorities as they applied for vouchers under the European Commission's WiFi4EU programme. Irish Local Authorities were awarded 62 vouchers, worth €930,000, one of the highest success rates in Europe. The Department has committed to support the initiative with matched-funding up to €15,000 per voucher.

7 Corporate and Strategic Development

Entering its first full year 2018, the organisation wished to further enhance its new corporate function to enable the Department to effectively deliver its strategy – beginning work on its HR Strategy through engaging with staff, establishing its evaluation unit and strategic communications unit and ensuring staff had access to appropriate infrastructure to do their job. The combined efforts put into the setting up the new Department to deliver were acknowledged with a finalist placing in the Leading Civil Service Renewal category at the annual Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards in 2018.

Human Resources

Developing Our People and Our Organisation



Staff Numbers

Staff **190**

Male **43%**

Female **57%**



Locations

Dublin ---- Ballina

Other Regional Centres



Recruitment and Promotion 2018

Staff Recruited **27**

Internal Promotions **21**



Management Numbers

Managers **89**

Representing grades AO/HEO to PO

Male **51%**

Female **49%**



Training & Development

Training Days **580+**

3rd Level education funded **13**

Key to delivering the Department's Statement of Strategy, 2017-2020 is ***building and developing our organisation***. This encompasses objectives relating to staff development through:

- Investing in our people
- Staff engagement
- Learning and Development

INVESTING IN OUR PEOPLE

The Department recognises that our staff are our most important and valuable resource. During 2018, the Department hired 27 new staff members for key corporate and policy functions. Some 21 DRCD employees were promoted through internal, inter-departmental or open competition. Learning and development supports, peer supports and mentoring are available to staff to facilitate their transition to these new roles.

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

To deliver on its mission the Department is committed in its Statement of Strategy, 2017-2020 to ***enhanced engagement and better communication***. In 2018 a dedicated communication functions was established to work across the Department to improve internal and external communications. The Department is keenly aware of the importance of communicating its message, both externally to its clients, customers and stakeholders and internally among its staff and our agencies. DRCD ensures continued and ongoing consultations with staff on a wide range of topics. Participation in employee engagement initiatives such as staff conferences enables staff to contribute to organisational development, innovation and fosters organisational agility. Two full-day staff conferences were held in 2018 and the Department began work on its Human Resources Strategy.

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

The Learning & Development Unit develops, delivers and oversees high quality training and education. Our Learning & Development Unit works closely with staff to deliver on training and development needs, having realised in excess of **580** days of training in 2018. The Department embraces **One Learning** as the new shared model for delivering training and development in the civil service and delivered training in a range of areas such as:

- Customer Service and Communications
- Innovation and Change
- Leadership
- Health and Safety

This is important as the Department seeks to identify the critical workforce issues that need to be addressed over the coming years.

In addition, the Department's Refund of Fees scheme assisted and supported staff in the undertaking of third level part-time education to assist with their development. Full support of fees was provided to staff engaging in a wide range of learning, related to Departmental business needs. In the academic year commencing 2018, a number staff were approved for funding under the Refund of Fees Scheme. Training was undertaken in a wide number of areas such as the following:

- Policy Analysis
- Business and Management
- Accounting Technician
- Social Justice and Public Policy

SUCCESSFUL MIGRATION TO NATIONAL SHARED SERVICE OFFICE (NSSO)

The NSSO is directly responsible for delivering business shared services within the civil service. The NSSO consists of two operational Shared Services centres, namely HR Shared Services and Payroll Shared Services. In May 2018, the Department successfully managed its migration to the NSSO.

CULTURE & VALUES

We continue to work with staff to build a culture of awareness of the importance and benefits of employee wellbeing by promoting staff involvement in the workplace.

In 2018, this commitment to staff wellbeing and engagement gained momentum as the following programmes formed a key feature within our workplace: 'Lunch and Learn' sessions

- Wellbeing initiatives
- Staff conferences
- Staff social club

STRATEGIC HR

The Department recognises the importance of contributing to the wider civil service strategic HR agenda through participation in key interdepartmental and Civil Service HR working groups.

The Department is an active participant in the strategic HR project forming part of the Civil Service Renewal Plan, concerned with a comprehensive review of the Civil Service HR Operating Model.

A comprehensive Workforce Planning exercise was completed in 2018, identifying the staff capacity and capability required to achieve our future strategic goals and objectives.

In 2018 we began work with staff on our first HR Strategy, completed in 2019 which will benefit the Department by and will cover actions under three themes:

1. DRCD as an Employer of Choice
2. Build the Workforce of the Future
3. Leadership and People Management Capacity

Corporate Services

ACCOMMODATIONS / ICT

In 2018 the Department's Dublin office fully completed its move from its temporary accommodation in Clare Street to our new offices in Trinity Point, where 57 of its staff are based. The Department also made improvements to its shared offices in Ballina where 61 staff are based.

ENERGY AWARENESS: OPTIMISING ENERGY @ WORK

During 2018, the Department's Accommodations Unit engaged with the Office of Public Works to join the "Optimising Power @ Work" campaign. The core principal of this campaign is to work with staff to encourage behavioural change to reduce energy waste. This campaign will assist the Department to address the public service commitment to reduce energy consumption by 33%. The Department has also appointed an Energy Performance Officer who meets with representatives from bodies under our aegis to ensure that there is a concerted strategy to achieve our energy efficiency commitments. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) have conducted a preliminary analysis of the Department and its agencies for 2018, and are satisfied that we are in compliance with their energy performance guidelines.

RECYCLING

The Accommodations Unit have established recycling stations in Trinity Point. Utilising email and Posters, the team have encouraged and educated staff about recycling. This has seen our general waste drop more than 80%.

The Team have installed battery and fluorescent light recycling boxes in the offices which were supplied by WEE Ireland and also recycle all toners from printers and donate them to charity.

The Department also introduced a policy of encouraging staff to use re-usable water bottles in order to reduce plastic waste. All single use plastics have been eliminated from use in the Department.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

In 2018, the Department transitioned to using the IT systems and services of the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO). A Memorandum of Understanding between the Department and the OGCIO was signed in March 2018, which set out the relationship and governance arrangements for the IT Services. A new IT Acceptable Usage Policy was adopted by the Department.

The OGCIO's Build to Share Suite was rolled out to all staff in Ballina and Trinity Point. This included the computer network, email, office productivity suite, and Sharepoint. During the course of 2018, other core elements of the Build to Share Suite were also rolled out or upgraded, including Hive sites, ePQ and eCorrespondence. It is planned to roll out eFOI and eDocs early in 2019.

The Department also consulted with staff through the Staff Engagement Survey in order to identify the key areas for IT improvement in the future.

AUDIT COMMITTEE AND RISK MANAGEMENT

The Department is committed to the development and implementation of effective governance and control arrangements. As part of this framework, an Audit Committee was put in place shortly following the establishment of the Department in 2017. It is chaired by the former Secretary General of Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs with a majority of non-executive members. An Audit Committee Charter outlines the Committee's role, membership and function.

The Committee held five meetings during 2018. Documentation comprising the Charter, role, etc., as well as the Committee's Annual Report for 2018, is available on the Department's website.

The Department also established its Risk Management Committee in 2018, which approved the risk policies and procedures that will be followed in the Department.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FOI) & ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON THE ENVIRONMENT (AIE)

The Department processed a total of 58 Freedom of Information Requests in 2018. Of these, 26 were granted or part-granted and 15 were refused. A further five were withdrawn and 12 were handled outside of FOI. No AIE requests were received by the Department in 2018.

IRISH LANGUAGE

The Department of Rural and Community Development is committed to providing quality services in Irish and/or bilingually to its customers. The Department's first Irish Language Scheme, prepared in accordance with the Guidelines outlined under Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003, is scheduled to come into effect in early 2019.

CHILDREN FIRST

The Department prepared its first Children First Sectoral Implementation Plan in conjunction with the Department's Child Safeguarding Statement. Both have been prepared on the basis of an audit at unit level of the relevant services for children provided through the Department, and relevant services funded by the Department.

A Children First Oversight Group has been put in place in the Department. The Group consists of representatives from units of the Department with significant funding of children's services, and from the agencies funded by 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.

QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

The Department is committed to providing high quality, courteous and timely services to all its customers in accordance with the 12 Guiding Principles for Quality Customer Service. Work began on the Department's Customer Charter and Action Plan, which will be published in 2019.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The Department's Corporate Governance Framework was published in March 2018, in accordance with the Civil Service Renewal Programme. As a new Department, many of our corporate structures continued to develop in 2018, and a full review of the Framework is planned for early 2019.

PUBLIC SECTOR DUTY

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

STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

The Department's first Statement of Strategy was published in March 2018 and is available online.

CROSS-GOVERNMENT WORK

In addition to our coordinating role in relation to rural development policy, the Department continues to contribute to Government policy across a wide range of areas.

Notably in 2018, these included an increased focus on climate action and the step-up in preparations for the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

The Department inputted into the Government's Contingency Action Plan, which was published on 19 December 2018, and set out Ireland's approach to dealing with a no-deal Brexit.

The Department's preparations in advance of Brexit have been focused primarily on engagement and awareness in relation to our stakeholders in the rural and community development sectors. This has involved regular discussion of Brexit-related issues internally and externally among groups such as the monitoring committee of the Action Plan for Rural Development.

A key element of this Department's contingency planning is to ensure maximum flexibility in our programme of initiatives, to allow for responses to emerging needs and to continue to build resilience in communities. This will be considered as part of a wider strategic review of funding priorities in 2019.

On the issue of climate action, the Department set out the ways in which it can contribute to efforts towards a low carbon transition when it attended the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action in October 2018, and is ready to continue to assist the overall Government effort in 2019 and beyond.

SUPPORTING THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS

Parliamentary Questions 2018	
Questions Answered	1081
Representations and Invitations	
Minister Michael Ring	310
Minister of State Seán Kyne (1 January until 12 October 2018)	137
Minister of State Seán Canney (appointed 13 October 2018)	55

RURAL REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT FUND

As part of Project Ireland 2040, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund was launched in 2018 and aims to promote rural renewal in order to enable towns, villages and outlying rural areas to grow sustainably as vibrant places to live and work.



Minister Ring addresses a forum on Creating Stronger Rural Economies and Communities in Westport, Co Mayo

The first call for proposals under the Fund was launched on 4 July with a closing date of 27 September 2018. The Department undertook a series of regional information meetings to brief key stakeholders and stimulate awareness of and interest in the Fund. Some 280 applications were received by the September deadline.

In September 2018, the Department established a Project Advisory Board, made up of representatives from key Government Departments as well as independent experts, to oversee the assessment of applications for the Fund. The Board met five times in 2018 in order to formulate recommendations to the Minister on applications which were suitable for funding. A total of 84 projects were announced with support of €86m from the first call for applications to the Fund.

280

Applications were received for the First Call under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in 2018.

The Government has committed to providing an additional €1 billion for this new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund over the period 2019 to 2027. The Fund will provide

€24.4m

was announced for

18 projects under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in 2018.

investment to support rural renewal, strengthen and build resilience in rural communities and assist in the regeneration of towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas. Funding of €315 million is allocated to initiate the Fund over the period from 2019 to 2022. On 23 November 2018, in Sligo, Minister Ring announced the first set of 18 successful Category 1 projects, providing €24.4 million in funding for projects with an overall value of €34.6 million.

Key milestones

- Rural Regeneration and Development Fund established within the Department of Rural and Community Development.
- Regional Information sessions organised for key stakeholders.
- First Call for proposals under the Fund opened on 4 July 2018.
- Closing date for the receipt of applications was on 27 September 2018. A total of 280 applications were received.
- Project Advisory Board established to oversee the assessment process.
- 18 successful projects provided €24.4 million in funding announced in November 2018.

DORMANT ACCOUNTS FUND

The Dormant Accounts Act 2001, together with the Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003 and the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Acts 2005-2012, provide a framework for the administration of unclaimed accounts in credit institutions (i.e. banks, building societies and An Post) and unclaimed life assurance policies in insurance undertakings.

Dormant funds or unclaimed life assurance policies which have not been reclaimed by the original accounts/policy holder or their beneficiaries are transferred each year by the holding institution to the Dormant Accounts Fund managed by the NTMA.

The 2018 Dormant Accounts Action Plan was published in July 2018, and approved funding of up to €39.7 million for 45 different measures across 10 different Government Departments. In line with the provisions of the Dormant Accounts Acts, the measures identified in the Action Plan target social, economic and educational disadvantage; and people with a disability. The approved measures will support a wide range of projects and programmes relating to issues such as social inclusion, assisting migrants, support for

carers, speech and language therapy, support for dementia sufferers and sports measures. The majority of measures will commence in 2019, subject to voted expenditure being available within each relevant Department.

In 2018, good progress was made and spend from the fund across all Departments totalled €27.8 million in 2018. This is an increase of 78% on the 2017 spend of €15.6 million.

The Department of Rural and Community Development fully utilised its allocation - with €10.1 million spent from the fund in 2018. The main measures funded by the Dormant Accounts Fund within the Department in 2018 were the Social Innovation Fund Ireland (€4.8m), Senior Alerts Scheme (€2.6m), and Social Enterprise (€1.9m).

APPOINTMENTS TO STATE BOARDS

The Department of Rural and Community Development 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 2018:

Pobal

Six appointments were made to the Board of Pobal in 2018, three male and three female. This brought the overall ratio for directors on the board of Pobal to 10 females and seven males. One male subsequently resigned from the board, resulting in the ratio of directors on the board to be currently as follows; 10 females and six males.

WDC

There was one appointment to the Board of the WDC in 2018. The appointment was made on foot of the resignation of another Board member, therefore the overall number on the Board did not change. The new appointee was male. The person who resigned was also male. The gender balance statistics for the board of the WDC remain the same i.e. seven males, four females, meaning women currently hold 36.4% of positions on the Board. The WDC has a female chair.

Water Safety Ireland

There were no Board changes to Water Safety Ireland during 2018. There are eight male and five female members of the Board.

Charities Regulator

During 2018, there were three appointments (two female and one male) and four reappointments (one female and three male) to the Board of the CRA. There are now seven male members and five female members on the Board of the CRA.

8 Bodies under the Aegis of the Department

The Department has four bodies under its aegis, the below gives a brief outline of each.

Western Development Commission

www.wdc.ie

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 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. It also manages the WDC Investment Fund to provide loans and equity to businesses and local communities in the West.

Water Safety Ireland

www.iws.ie

Water Safety Ireland, formerly Irish Water Safety, 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 view of the prolonged period of exceptional warm weather conditions during the summer of 2018, which resulted in much greater numbers of people using our beaches, rivers and lakes for leisure swimming, the National Emergency Co-ordination Group recommended that the media campaign run by IWS be extended to run throughout the summer. The Department allocated an additional €200,000 to provide for this.

Charities Regulatory Authority

www.charitiesregulator.ie

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

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

The Chief Executive Officer of the Charities Regulator resigned in October 2018, and a process to appoint a new CEO commenced. The Chair and three Board members were reappointed in October 2018.

In November 2018, the Charities Regulator launched the Charities Governance Code. The Code applies minimum standards to the boards of registered charities in order to ensure effective management and control systems are in place in Irish charities.

A downloadable copy of the Code is available on the Charities Regulator's website.

Charity 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 2018.

Pobal

www.pobal.ie

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. It is a company limited by guarantee and without share capital; it is also a registered charity.

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 of Rural and Community Development and programme-specific service level agreements with individual Departments.

9 Looking ahead to 2019

In 2018, the Department of Rural and Community Development continued through its work on behalf of rural Ireland and communities to show the Government's commitment to rural and community development.

This report highlights a very successful year of delivery on the various schemes and programmes that come under the remit of the Department. In keeping with the Government's commitment to bring a greater coordination to all the work across Government that impacts on rural Ireland, the Department continues to develop a co-ordinated approach with regard to rural and community matters to ensure that tailored policy approaches will have a real and sustainable impact.

In this way, the Department ensures that the resources available to the Government are being channelled effectively to make a real difference to rural communities.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2019:

- The Department continues to work closely with other Government Departments that have a role in supporting the twin objectives of rural and community development to ensure cooperation and engagement across government.
- The Action Plan for Rural Development will come to the end of its three-year life span in 2019 and the Department is now looking ahead to developing the next phase of rural development policy from 2020. The next phase of rural policy will be forward-looking and will seek to strengthen and build resilience in rural economies and rural communities, particularly in light of emerging issues such as Brexit, climate adaptation and new technologies. Developing the policy will involve a number of workshops with external stakeholders in early 2019.
- The Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland sets out national priorities and a framework for a cross-government approach to improving engagement between national and local government and local communities in the planning, delivery and evaluation of policies and interventions that affect them. An implementation plan for the Framework Policy is in development. It is anticipated that the strategic plan will be completed in 2019.
- The €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will continue to provide investment to support the regeneration of rural towns and communities and their outlying areas. The second and final announcement of proposals successful in the first call under the Fund took place in early 2019. It is expected that a number of successful projects from the first call under the Fund will be completed in 2019. The second call for

proposals under the Fund is open from April 2019 and the successful proposals to the second call will be announced in late 2019.

- The Department continues to work towards publishing a National Policy on Social Enterprise and will announce the publication of a draft National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland for public consultation, seeking the views of stakeholders and the public to inform the policy. This is part of a suite of policy initiatives which will complement the Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sectors in Ireland.
- The Department launched a Call for Input Paper on Volunteering at the end of 2018 and will commence work in early 2019 on developing a national strategy on volunteering.
- The Department continues to develop a robust policy framework for rural and countryside recreation.
- The proposal for an Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) area along the western seaboard to attract private investment and enterprise and support the economic development of the region continues to gain momentum. At the Department's request, the Western Development Commission has initiated a project to identify and engage with all providers of 'Hub' services in the AEC with the goal of developing a corridor-wide strategy to ensure the most effective use of these resources.
- A review of the operation of the Community Services Programme following its amalgamation into the Department was undertaken in 2018 with a stakeholder consultation on the scope of the review. It is expected to be completed in late 2019.
- The Department continues to be committed to the process of ongoing Public Sector Reform, delivering required initiatives from the Civil Service Renewal Plan and the Public Sector Plan, Our Public Service 2020.
- A focus in 2019 shall be on strengthening the policy-making capacity in the Department including strategically evaluating the work of the Department. An Evaluation Sub-Group has been established to contribute to a greater level of evidence-based decision making through the development of an enhanced culture of monitoring and evaluation.
- As a Department, a priority in 2019 will be to build on the organisation's capacity through continuing to invest in our people and a HR strategy will be launched in mid-2019 to give effect to this.
- Communicating the Department's role and the importance of its mission externally and internally is key. The Department will seek to increase awareness of the importance of its work through a series of countrywide "Rural Opportunity" roadshows, Rural Development seminars and community initiatives such as the "Big Hello" weekend.
- "The Big Hello!" – the first National Community Weekend will take place on the May Bank Holiday Weekend 2019. It will support communities to host events in their local area in order to strengthen community ties and help tackle the problem of social isolation.