



Roinn an Taoisigh
Department of the Taoiseach

Department of the Taoiseach

Annual Report 2020



Message from the Taoiseach

I welcome the publication of this report which sets out the main activities of the Taoiseach's Department during 2020.

Since my appointment in June 2020 as Taoiseach, I have been privileged to work alongside my colleagues in Government and with staff from the Department and across the wider Civil and Public Service. 2020 was a year of monumental change and challenges for Ireland with a significant focus on managing the whole of government response to COVID-19. The Department's work has ensured a cohesive national social and economic response to manage the many challenges it presented and to help chart a pathway to recovery for our people and the country as a whole. The potential impact of BREXIT and the urgency for climate action remained ever present during 2020 and required continued action from my Department. I am pleased to have launched the series of Shared Island dialogues in 2020 marking the establishment of the new Shared Island Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach. This work reflects my commitment to work closely and respectfully with all communities, in the context of the Good Friday Agreement, towards a consensus on a shared island

The importance of clear and timely public information and effective communication by Government to people and business was never more important and the efforts of the Government Information Service and communication teams across departments and agencies should be recognised for this important work. I also thank staff from my own office, the policy units and the wider support services in my Department for the high standard of service provided during 2020, with many staff working remotely while others attended the office by necessity.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the collaborative approach adopted among the partners in Government and particularly with the Tánaiste and the Leader of the Green Party, Minister Ryan. I thank the Ministers of State who served in the Department during 2020 including under the previous Government and to those currently serving - Jack Chambers TD and Thomas Byrne TD, for their commitment and work since their appointments.

Micheál Martin
Taoiseach

Introduction by the Secretary General

Throughout 2020 the Department continued to support the Taoiseach and Government through a year of unprecedented challenges and uncertainty, in the midst of significant health risks and concerns, disruption and restrictions. At the start of the pandemic, in line with the public health advice, new arrangements for Government meetings were implemented to facilitate remote and distributed attendance which were applied to other essential meetings. The immediate shift to remote working required additional ICT and HR support and protocols put in place for meetings, office attendance with sanitising and cleaning arrangements in place to keep staff and visitors safe.

A new Government took office and the Department was restructured to take account of new functions and new support arrangements for the coalition Government, including the Office of the Tánaiste and the Office of the Green Party Leader. This transition was managed effectively in the midst of the extensive work linked to the pandemic and with BREXIT giving rise to a significant workload during 2020.

Through the Cabinet Committee process and supporting Senior Officials Groups, the Department contributed to the coordination of policy development and implementation across a wide range of issues. Most of these during 2020 were associated with COVID-19 which included the public health response and associated public information, societal and economic impacts and related business and income supports, ensuring continuity of essential and vital services, arrangements on travel, vaccine rollout and regular engagement with stakeholders and counterparts across the EU, UK and Northern Ireland on these and related matters.

The range of services provided by staff in this Department included providing policy advice, coordinating and implementing Government policy, organising notable events and inward official visits, Parliamentary Questions, and facilitating the enhanced relationship between the Government and the Oireachtas.

The Department supported the Taoiseach as he undertook an extensive programme of EU and international high-level political and diplomatic engagements throughout 2020, some of these in person and some by video. Extensive work on preparedness for the UK's departure from the EU continued during 2020 alongside continued work on Climate Action, Economic Planning, Social Dialogue, Policing Reform and North-South including Shared Island.

I would like to pay tribute to the staff in the Department for their unending hard work and commitment during a difficult year. I thank the support staff for keeping the building and those attending safe, ensuring connectivity and access for all staff whether on site or remotely working and for the response of staff who demonstrated agility and always delivered the business needs despite the challenges.

Martin Fraser
Secretary General

Our Mission

Our purpose is to help the Taoiseach and the Government to develop a sustainable economy and a successful society, to pursue Ireland's interests abroad, to implement the Government's Programme and to build a better future for Ireland and all her citizens.

Our Vision

Our work is guided by the Vision, Mission and Values of the Civil Service to provide a world-class service to the State and to the people of Ireland



Strategic Priorities

Following the dissolution of the 32nd Dáil on 14 January 2020 and the subsequent general election on 8 February, Micheál Martin T.D. was appointed Taoiseach on 27 June 2020 as part of the formation of a new Government. A new Statement of Strategy 2021-2023 was prepared for the Department and published at the start of 2021 setting out six strategic priorities for the Department in the coming period. The Statement of Strategy has been developed with particular reference to the immediate challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and BREXIT but the Department will continue to be responsive to new and emerging challenges in the future.

The following are the key priorities for the Department over the period 2021-2023.

- A. Supporting the Taoiseach and Government**
- B. Securing our Future - Tackling COVID-19, Brexit and Climate Action**
- C. Restoring the Economy**
- D. Building A Better Society**
- E. Strengthening Ireland's place in Europe and the World**
- F. Building Consensus on a Shared Island – North South and East West**

The Core Functions of the Department in 2020

- Delivering the Executive functions of the Taoiseach and the Government
- Providing the Government Secretariat
- Supporting the Taoiseach in carrying out his duties as Head of Government, including in relation to the Oireachtas, Constitutional issues, Protocol, the European Council, the North South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council
- Working with the Office of the President and with the Oireachtas
- Engaging with the formulation and implementation of government policy, mainly through the system of Cabinet Committees, Senior Officials' Groups and the Parliamentary Liaison Unit
- The Office of the Taoiseach
- The Office of the Tánaiste
- The Office of the Green Party Leader
- The Office of the Government Chief Whip (who also has responsibility for the Central Statistics Office)
- Support for the Minister of State for European Affairs
- The Government Information Service
- Providing briefing and advice for the Taoiseach and Government on the full range of domestic policy issues and on international affairs (including through the work of the National Economic and Social Council)
- Supporting the Taoiseach and Government in the formulation and implementation of Ireland's EU, Northern Ireland and international policies, including the work of the Shared Island Unit and coordination across the whole of Government
- Coordination roles in various cross-Government initiatives including COVID-19, Brexit, Climate Action, the National Risk Assessment, Well-being Framework, Social Dialogue, Policing Reform and Community Safety, National Security Analysis Centre and the Dublin North East Inner City Initiative
- Providing support for independent work by the Future of Media Commission and the Citizens' Assembly
- Providing collective leadership of the Civil Service Renewal programme through the Civil Service Management Board in collaboration with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
- Delivering support services through Corporate Affairs Division (HR, Finance, ICT and other services)

Highlights

During 2020, the 231 staff of the Department of the Taoiseach dealt with:



893

Memos to Government



82

Government Meetings



56

Cabinet Committee Meetings



108

Speeches



46,208

Items of correspondence



535

Parliamentary Questions



10

Bilateral meetings with the UK Prime Minister



15

European Council informal summits and EU high-level engagements



11

General Affairs Councils



343

Freedom of Information requests



504

Files transferred to the National Archives

An Overview of 2020

2020 was an unprecedented year for Ireland in which COVID-19 impacted on society, the economy and the individual lives of everyone. This required a comprehensive and sustained whole-of-government response throughout the year, set against a backdrop of a severe pandemic with significant public health implications. As a result, most of the Department's work during 2020, including its staffing was focused directly or indirectly to support the Taoiseach and the Government in this unprecedented national collective effort. The information presented in this report, therefore, is a chronological step through the year of the significant events and associated activities.

January to February – the period before COVID-19

The ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement removed the threat of a disorderly exit by the UK from the EU on 31 January providing for a transition period to the end of 2020 and the opening of negotiations on the Future EU-UK Relationship. During January the Taoiseach held meetings in Government Buildings with the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen and the EU Chief Negotiator on Brexit, Michel Barnier.

In affirming Ireland's commitment to strengthen bilateral relations with the UK, the Taoiseach met the UK Prime Minister in Stormont during January. Following the focused efforts of the Irish and British Governments with the Northern Ireland parties, the New Decade New Approach deal was reached in January 2020 which restored the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. The Britain and Northern Ireland Division continued to support the Taoiseach as the two Governments worked closely together during 2020, and in support of the Executive, with a focus on the delivery of existing agreements.

The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality held its first meeting on 25 January in Dublin Castle to begin the process of advancing gender equality. This work is led by an Independent Chair, Ms Catherine Day and supported by a Secretariat drawn from the Department.

The Cabinet was briefed on reports in relation to the outbreak of new Coronavirus in China monitored by the WHO and the European Centre for Disease Control. The National Public Health Emergency Team for COVID-19 was established on 27 January 2020 in the Department of Health, chaired by the Chief Medical Officer to oversee and provide national direction, guidance, support and expert advice on the development and implementation of a strategy to contain COVID-19 in Ireland.

Following the general election on 14 February, the Department provided support for meetings between a range of parties involved in Government formation talks. Government meetings continued to take place and the Taoiseach held a video-conference with the President of the European Council in advance of the EU Council meeting in Brussels which he attended.

The Cabinet continued to be briefed on COVID-19 including latest work by the NPHE and HSE in relation to preparedness, public communication and public health advice and guidance for Irish settings. The Taoiseach and Minister for Health held a conference call with counterparts in Northern Ireland to promote continued cooperation in relation to COVID-19.

March to June – Interim Government and COVID-19

Government established a Cabinet Committee on 3 March 2020 to assess the social and economic impacts of the potential spread of COVID-19 and oversee the cross-Government response. The Committee is supported by a Senior Officials Group on Coronavirus Response, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, supported by the Social Policy Division. In March, the Taoiseach chaired a special Stakeholder Forum to brief civil and public service leaders, private sector leaders, community and voluntary leaders, religious leaders, employers' organisations, trade unions on the State's response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The National Action Plan on COVID-19 published on 16 March was prepared following a comprehensive process involving all departments and key agencies led by the Department of the Taoiseach. The Plan included information on

- what we know about the COVID-19 virus
- what the public can do to reduce the threat
- the Public Health led approach being taken
- supports for businesses and those who have lost their jobs
- supports for vulnerable people in society
- measures to ensure continuity of essential services
- measures to protect vital supply chains

The plan was supported by a National Covid-19 Income Support Scheme put in place by Government to provide financial support to Irish workers and companies affected by the crisis, including the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme, the Pandemic Unemployment Payment, enhanced illness payment and enhanced protections for those with mortgages and in the rental sector.

Given the widespread impact of COVID-19 across every aspect of society, the Government Information Services moved quickly to mobilise a whole-of-government communications response to formulate and implement a coordinated response that ensures maximum clarity for citizens, communities and businesses. There were 35 COVID-19 public information campaigns undertaken in 2020 using a combination of National Press, Regional Press, Radio, Digital Display, Social Media, TV and Online Video. Campaigns included information on business and wellbeing supports, postponement of Leaving Cert 2020, School Reopening and the Jobs Stimulus Plan. Campaigns communicated changes in restrictions and encouraged the key behaviours necessary to control the virus, updates on the availability of business and income support measures and information on essential services.

The Taoiseach addressed the nation three times during March, on the 12th from Washington and on the 24th and 27th from Government Buildings, to update the public on the national response to the pandemic, including changes to restrictions and measures in light of public health guidance. New arrangements for the Government meetings were implemented to facilitate remote and social distanced attendance by Ministers as Cabinet continued to meet weekly to implement the whole of government response.

The Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 met three times during April with particular focus on long-term care facilities, testing and overseas travel, further business supports for SMEs, ICT funding for schools, measures to protect those in direct provision and finalisation of the Community Call to coordinate community assistance. There was ongoing discussion with health services, Church leaders and funeral

directors to prepare for possible worst-case scenarios in relation to high mortality levels. North South co-operation on the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic was further strengthened with formal agreement of a Memorandum of Understanding between the respective Departments of Health.

The Department facilitated regular briefings to Opposition Leaders in person and via video link from March and right through April by the CMO and other officials on key aspects of the Government response to COVID-19.

On 1 May Government published a Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business to ease the COVID-19 restrictions and reopen Ireland's economy and society in a phased manner over the summer. Phase 1 of the reopening was implemented during May which focused on the return of certain outdoor workers, essential retail and outdoor amenities. In tandem with this a National Protocol to protect the health and safety of workers was developed by Government including discussions led by the Economic Division in this Department with employers and trade unions under the aegis of the Labour Economic and Employment Forum (LEEF) with the assistance of the Health and Safety Authority and the HSE. The LEEF met on a number of occasions during 2020 for discussions on Labour Market issues, including on Government proposals for supports for workers and businesses affected by the crisis as well as continued updating of the Return to Work Protocol.

While all non-essential travel was not recommended, the EU and International Division in the Department assisted with the development of a system of self-isolation, including a mandatory passenger locator form, for international passengers arriving in Ireland which is underpinned by law.

The Government announced an acceleration of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, with phases 2 and 3 proceeding during June with the reopening of all retail stores resumption of the domestic tourism sector and some hospitality operators. Further announcements were made by Government on the extension of the Temporary Wage Subsidy scheme, supports for farmers and funding for the Arts and Culture and Sports sectors.

Supported by the Protocol Unit, the Taoiseach met with Church representatives to share thoughts on the reopening of places of worship over the course of the summer.

The EU and International Division supported the Taoiseach as he travelled to Washington in March for a series of engagements including a meeting with the US President. The Taoiseach attended several video conference meetings of the European Council and EU leaders in the period to discuss the immediate crisis and to chart a path towards economic and social recovery.

The Taoiseach participated in the EU-Western Balkans Summit and discussions with world leaders to discuss financial steps to support developing countries through the COVID-19 crisis and into recovery, ensuring the pandemic does not de-rail efforts to secure the world's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The Taoiseach joined world leaders at the virtual Global Vaccine Summit, hosted by the UK Government, where he pledged increased Irish support for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

July to December – New Government

On 27 June, the new Government, headed by Taoiseach Michéal Martin T.D., held its first Cabinet Meeting. Government approved the re-establishment of the Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 along with nine new Cabinet Committees to drive implementation of the new Programme for Government.

The formation of the new Government necessitated some structural changes to the Department with the establishment of an Office of the Tánaiste and an Office of the Leader of the Green Party. The new Programme for Government also signalled the establishment of a new Shared Island Unit and a Social Dialogue Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach.

The new Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and investment met three times during July supported by the Senior Officials Group to finalise details of the July Jobs Stimulus, a €7.4 billion package of measures designed to stimulate a jobs-led recovery and build economic confidence while continuing to manage the impact of COVID-19. In addition, Government approved over €375 million support package and published Roadmap to enable safe return of schools.

The first physical meeting of EU leaders since February was attend by the Taoiseach to agree a €1.8 trillion package to support Europe's economic recovery, and to drive the climate and digital transformation.

The Taoiseach hosted the twenty-fourth Plenary meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in Dublin Castle on 31 July, which was the first meeting of the cross-border co-operation body, established under the Good Friday Agreement, since November 2016.

Following postponement of previous meetings since March due to COVID-19, the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality switched to holding online meetings starting with an online seminar for citizens in July followed by online forum meetings held in October, November and December.

The Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 met during August to review the implementation of public health measures and restrictions in line with the prevailing plan. Government announced further changes to restrictions due to spread of the virus during August. Face coverings became mandatory in shops and shopping centres across the country from 10th August. Government agreed a €16m support package to help pubs, bars and nightclubs, recognising the economic impact of COVID-19 on their businesses and to assist planning and adaptation for their re-opening.

While the advice against non-essential international travel was maintained, whole-of-Government work continued during August on reviewing the list of overseas destinations on Ireland's Green List with regulations underpinning requirements for people arriving from overseas.

The Government approved a scheme to provide an emergency humanitarian contribution for damage caused by flooding due to severe weather conditions in Cork and Kerry and a package of support for Counties (Laois, Offaly and Kildare) adversely impacted by renewed COVID 19 restrictions.

Taoiseach Micheál Martin met with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson at Hillsborough Castle during August to discuss of a number of issues of mutual concern, including managing COVID-19 and Brexit.

Following work and agreement across Government, the Department published the Government's Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19 on 15 September to guide Ireland's response to saving lives and managing the pandemic over the following seven months. Further supports were announced targeting the Live Performance and Music Industry and business affected by restrictions implemented.

The Government Chief Whip published the Autumn legislative programme which contained 30 bills for publication and priority by Ministers in the autumn Oireachtas session including legislation relating to COVID-19 pandemic, enhancing our climate ambition, housing delivery and Brexit preparations.

The Taoiseach addressed the 75th annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly by video in advance of Ireland's membership of the UN Security Council from 2021.

The Brexit Readiness Action Plan published in September set out the necessary preparations for the substantial and enduring changes that will arise at the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020.

Government agreed the terms of reference and membership of the Future of Media Commission with the secretariat being provided by the Protocol and Civic Policy Division in the Department of the Taoiseach in liaison with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. The Commission is to report in 2021 with recommendations on the measures required to ensure a vibrant, independent public service media for the next generation and how this work can be sustainably funded. The Commission launched a public consultation in 2020.

Government published new climate legislation which set Ireland on course to become climate neutral by 2050. The Department through the Climate Change Unit continued through 2020 to drive implementation of the Climate Action Plan including through supporting the Climate Action Delivery Board, publishing Quarterly Progress Reports and coordinating Government communications on climate action.

As part of Budget 2021 the Taoiseach set out the overall focus for the Shared Island Fund with a planned €500m to be made available out to 2025 to foster new investment and development opportunities on a North/South basis aligned with the work of the new Shared island Unit established in the Department of the Taoiseach. In November, The Taoiseach opened the first in a series of Shared Island Dialogues to foster constructive and inclusive civic dialogue on all aspects of a shared future on the island. The series started with "New Generations and New Voices on the Good Friday Agreement" where over 80 young people from civic and community groups across the island joined online to discuss what a Shared Island means to them. The Taoiseach also attended the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies in Enniskillen.

The Government's Plan to implement the Report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland continues to be overseen by a dedicated Programme Office in the Department of the Taoiseach. The third phase of *A Policing Service for our Future* – the *Scaling* Phase – commenced in October 2020 to ensure continued momentum on the key reforms taking account of the additional challenges relating to COVID-19.

The Taoiseach spoke with President-elect Joe Biden following his election victory including working together across a range of international areas including EU-US relations, the UN - including the Security Council, and on the important global challenges of COVID-19, economic recovery and climate change.

Intensive work continued on managing the whole of Government response to COVID-19 with the Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 meeting four times during October with additional enforcement powers put in place for breaches and changes made to COVID-19 Support Schemes to further support economy and society.

In the context of developing a National Economic Plan, an online event was held inviting representatives from employer groups, unions, environment groups and non-governmental bodies to give their views on how Ireland's economy can recover and prosper post-COVID-19 and the Brexit transition.

Building on the work with Unions and Employers under the LEEF, the Work Safely Protocol was updated and published setting out the actions that need to be taken to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. November also saw the establishment and first meeting of the High-Level Task Force on COVID-19 Vaccination chaired by Professor Brian MacCraith. Its main focus was to develop a national COVID-19 vaccination strategy and implementation plan for the safe, effective and efficient procurement, distribution, delivery and recording of COVID-19 vaccines. Government signed off on the allocation strategy for COVID-19 vaccines on 8 December which prioritises those over the age of 65 living in long-term care facilities, frontline healthcare workers and those aged 70 and over.

During 2020 the Cabinet Committee on Social Affairs and Equality considered the delivery of mental health services in the Context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the draft White Paper on International Protection and the proposals to end the current system of Direct Provision and progress on a number of related issues including the Roadmap for Social Inclusion, implementation of *Sharing the Vision*, mental health policy and the Community Safety Policy under *A Policing Service for our Future*.

At the end of November, the Government agreed the approach for easing restrictions, with a number of exceptions in place for the Christmas. Although more interactions are permitted, the advice remained the same - to keep contacts as low as possible, and to prioritise a small number of key activities.

Following rapid increase in COVID-19 case numbers over preceding days and the advice by NPHET, Ireland reverted to Level 5 Restrictions of the Plan for Living with COVID-19 from 25 December. This step was in consideration of the nature of social interaction likely to take place over the Christmas period, with additional mixing between younger and older people, and the risk that this could lead to a wave of infection with a higher risk age profile.

The Taoiseach continued during 2020, to address the nation at each significant stage, setting out Government's decision and plans for tackling COVID-19 based on latest public health advice, supported by public information campaigns to ensure that the public is fully informed and setting out the latest measures being implemented.

During this period the Taoiseach attended a number of meetings in Brussels of the European Council on Europe's response to the pandemic, including the rollout of vaccines. A further meeting of the European Council was held in October to discuss Climate Action and the state of play in the EU/UK negotiations which was attended by the Taoiseach and the Minister for European Affairs. The Taoiseach also took the opportunity to meet bilaterally with the President of France, Emmanuel Macron.

The end of December marked the end of the transition period for the UK's departure from the EU formally outside the EU's Single Market and Customs Union. The finalisation of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement before the deadline, together with the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, meant that Ireland's key objectives in the Brexit process were achieved. This included protection of the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the peace process, avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland, tariff and quota free trade with the UK and the protection of Ireland's place in the Single Market and the maintenance of the Common Travel Area.

Even with this deal, the UK's departure on 1 January brings significant changes and impacts for any business moving goods from, to or through Great Britain with a range of new customs procedures, sanitary and phytosanitary checks and other regulatory requirements now in operation. The Department working closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and other relevant departments and agencies coordinated further Government readiness and communication including advice lines and call centres to support businesses and citizens with Brexit-related queries over the new year and subsequent period when the threat of significant disruption was present.

Supporting Service Delivery

During 2020 the Department continued to provide a wide range of support services to the Taoiseach, the new Office of the Tánaiste and the Office of the Green Party Leader, the Ministers of State assigned to the Department, the Government and the public, as well as internal support services. This included work associated with 82 Government meetings, 56 Cabinet Committee meetings, 535 Parliamentary Questions, processing over 46,000 items of correspondence, 343 Freedom of Information requests, Internal Audit, organising events and responding to media queries. The Department also provided administrative support to two Commissions of Investigation, and the Citizens' Assembly.

The Department supported the Taoiseach and the Ministers of State as they represented and promoted Ireland at various meetings and engagements with a limited number of these taking place abroad but mainly by video link from March. The Minister of State for European Affairs attended 11 General Affairs Council meetings and had bilateral engagement with Portugal, Italy, United Kingdom, Germany, Greece and North Macedonia.

The Parliamentary Liaison Unit continued to facilitate the enhanced relationship between the Government and the Oireachtas. It provided support to Ministers and their Departments on Oireachtas matters, including assistance with Private Members' Business.

The Protocol Unit oversaw a smaller Easter Commemoration Ceremony held in the courtyard of the GPO and the coordination of the National Day of Commemoration in Collins Barracks later in the year.

The Department provided secretarial support to the Civil Service Management Board and continued to work with the Civil Service renewal programme management office in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in preparation of a new 10-year strategy. During 2020, the Department contributed to the central coordinated work to ensure a joined up and cohesive Civil Service response to COVID-19 to guide Departments and staff on matters relating to workplace attendance, COVID-19 sick leave, remote working, staff well-being, learning and development and temporary redeployment of staff to critical areas.

Developments in 2020 in relation to the North East Inner City initiative included launch of a new three year strategic plan, 500 students and 24 teachers participating in the Pathways to Technology Programme across 3 NEIC schools, 107 laptops and 204 Robotic kits provided to NEIC Secondary Schools to support coding and robotics experiential learning, 6 NEIC secondary schools funded to run an Afterschool Study Programme and 80 high quality homes delivered for 180 NEIC residents in St. Mary's Mansions.

The Department also supports the National Economic and Social Council (NES) in its role of providing strategic advice to the Taoiseach. During 2020, the NES continued to advise the Taoiseach on strategic policy issues relating to sustainable economic, social and environmental development in Ireland including the publications on the Social Welfare system, Housing and Employment Vulnerability as part of Just Transition.

The National Reform Programme, which is coordinated by the Economic Division in the Department of the Taoiseach with input from relevant Departments and agencies, was published in April and provided an overview of policy actions underway, including in response to Country Specific Recommendations given to Ireland as part of the preceding year's European Semester process.

Corporate Support

Following the Taoiseach's announcement of COVID-19 measures in March, the Department implemented a range of measures led by Corporate Services in cooperation with all staff to reduce the risks and ensure the continued delivery of business, including:

- remote working facilities rolled out to staff
- attendance on site restricted to essential workers
- all non-essential meetings cancelled
- full deployment of IT solution for video conferencing and online meetings
- new protocols for use of meeting rooms and revised cleaning regime
- regular circulation of updated public health guidance

In response to HSE request to rapidly implement a system of Contact Tracing as part of the national effort to tackle the spread of COVID-19, the Department in conjunction with the Office of the President deployed up to 20 staff from March who undertook this work for much of the remainder of 2020.

The Department continued to invest in its staff by actively supporting workplace learning through Civil Service OneLearning training and development courses, providing opportunities for all staff to undertake academic study in areas aligned with the business needs of the Department, and to attend relevant seminars and conferences. The Department continued its commitment to continuous strengthening of our leadership capability, via the Leadership Development Programme. Participants in the programme continued to explore the theme of 'Leaders Building Leaders' through the final masterclass-style group workshop of the current programme which took place in February 2020. Given the restrictions in place from March onwards, there was a significant switch to online learning and webinars.

The Department's HR Unit continued to provide HR services to employees and managers including a focus promoting workplace well-being activities. A significant effort was made to ensure regular communication with staff from line managers, senior management and HR. This included regular information updates on supports and resources, regular online information sessions hosted by the Department for staff, online social activities and engagement with remote workers to assess and provide any additional supports required. There was continued emphasis on performance management particularly through focused induction and probation processes. The Department's ePMDS compliance rate for 2020 was 98%.

The Department's response rate for the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey was 89% which compares favourably with the Civil Service overall rate of 65%. The overall Civil Service results published in May 2021 are very positive, showing improvement in 21 out of the 23 themes since 2015. The results for the Department show that it continues to score above the Civil Service average in the majority of themes.

The Management Services Unit oversaw the implementation of COVID-19 health and safety measures for the workplace, incorporating Return to Work Safely Protocol measures and the appointment of worker representatives. The Unit also oversaw the provision of the flu-vaccine to staff in 2020, completed a number of general maintenance projects during 2020 and dealt with 1,376 helpdesk calls.

The Finance Unit provided a range of financial services that contributed to the effective use of the Department's financial resources through the delivery of economy, efficiency, value for money and

promptness in all expenditure. A total of 2,038 supplier invoices were paid with a total value of €24.5m.

Regular ICT support continued to be provided to staff with 10,869 helpdesk tickets responded to with 73% of this support being provided remotely to staff who were similarly working remotely. A hardware replacement project was accelerated by IT staff to provide additional staff with appropriate equipment to facilitate them in working from home.

A video conferencing and collaboration platform was made available to all staff and has been additionally utilised to support a range of high-level meetings including Government Meetings. During 2020 staff across the Department hosted 3,496 virtual meetings which involved 29,706 participants. The ICT Unit worked also with the secretariat of the Citizens' Assembly to determine an approach to remote meetings of the Assembly and provided support to these meetings.

A significant upgrade and rollout of the eCabinet System which operates in all Government Departments was completed in late 2020 in partnership with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO). There was continued focus during 2020 on cyber security with further collaborative work undertaken with the OGCIO, the National Cyber Security Centre and other Departments.

Despite the significant challenges presented by COVID-19 restricting attendance in the workplace, the Department's Information & Records Management Unit successfully administered the transfer of 504 files or file parts in respect of the year 1990 to the National Archives in line with the National Archives Act and continued to provide services of Registry file management, subscriptions and stationery supplies to the Department.

The Department's Data Protection Officer continues to ensure that the Department's data protection policies, notices and procedures are in place and are regularly updated, including their application to protect personal data in remote working environments. The Department did not experience any data breaches during 2020.

The Department received no disclosures under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 from its employees or former employees in 2020. The Department continued to meet its commitment under the Official Languages Scheme and dealt with 154 items of correspondence through Irish during the year.

Public Sector Duty

In line with its statutory responsibilities under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, the Department commenced work in November 2020 on an assessment of human rights and equality issues relevant to the functions and purposes of the Department which was published on www.gov.ie. The assessment focuses on how the Public Sector Duty impacts on three main areas of activity: services provided to the public, my Department's role in policy development and how my Department treats its own staff. The document also contains a summary of potential gaps identified and the appropriate actions to be taken to address these. Monitoring of progress and continued compliance will be included in my Department's Corporate Governance Framework and Annual Reporting process.

The Government and Cabinet Committees

The Department provides the Secretariat to the Government and during 2020, there were 82 Government meetings which dealt with 893 Memoranda.

The Department also provides the secretariat for Cabinet Committees and chairs the supporting Senior Officials' Groups. There were 56 Cabinet Committee meetings in 2020.

In July, the Cabinet Committees were reorganised and are constituted as follows:

Cabinet Committee on COVID-19

Assess the social and economic impacts of the potential spread of COVID-19 and oversee the cross-Government response.

Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Investment

Oversees the implementation of Programme for Government commitments aimed at sustainable economic recovery, investment and job creation.

Cabinet Committee on Housing

Oversees implementation of Programme for Government commitments in relation to housing.

Cabinet Committee on Health

Oversees implementation of Programme for Government commitments in relation to health.

Cabinet Committee on Environment and Climate Change

Oversees implementation of Climate Action priorities identified in the Programme for Government.

Cabinet Committee on Social Affairs and Equality

Oversees implementation of Programme for Government commitments in the areas of social policy, equality and public services.

Cabinet Committee on Education

Oversees implementation of Programme for Government commitments in the area of education.

Cabinet Committee on Europe

Oversees implementation of Programme for Government commitments in relation to the European Union and related issues.

Cabinet Committee on Brexit and Northern Ireland

Oversees implementation of relevant Programme for Government commitments and ongoing developments and negotiations.

Cabinet Committee on Government Coordination

Reviews the activity of Cabinet Committees; the agenda for the cabinet meeting; discusses political priorities; and reviews implementation of a specified element of the Programme for Government.

These Cabinet Committees reflect the Government's national priorities, and the challenges Ireland faces in the coming years, including new areas of work linked to the new Shared Island Unit, the Future of Media Commission and developing Social Dialogue. The Department has been restructured to address these new challenges and new arrangements to support the operation of a three-party government.

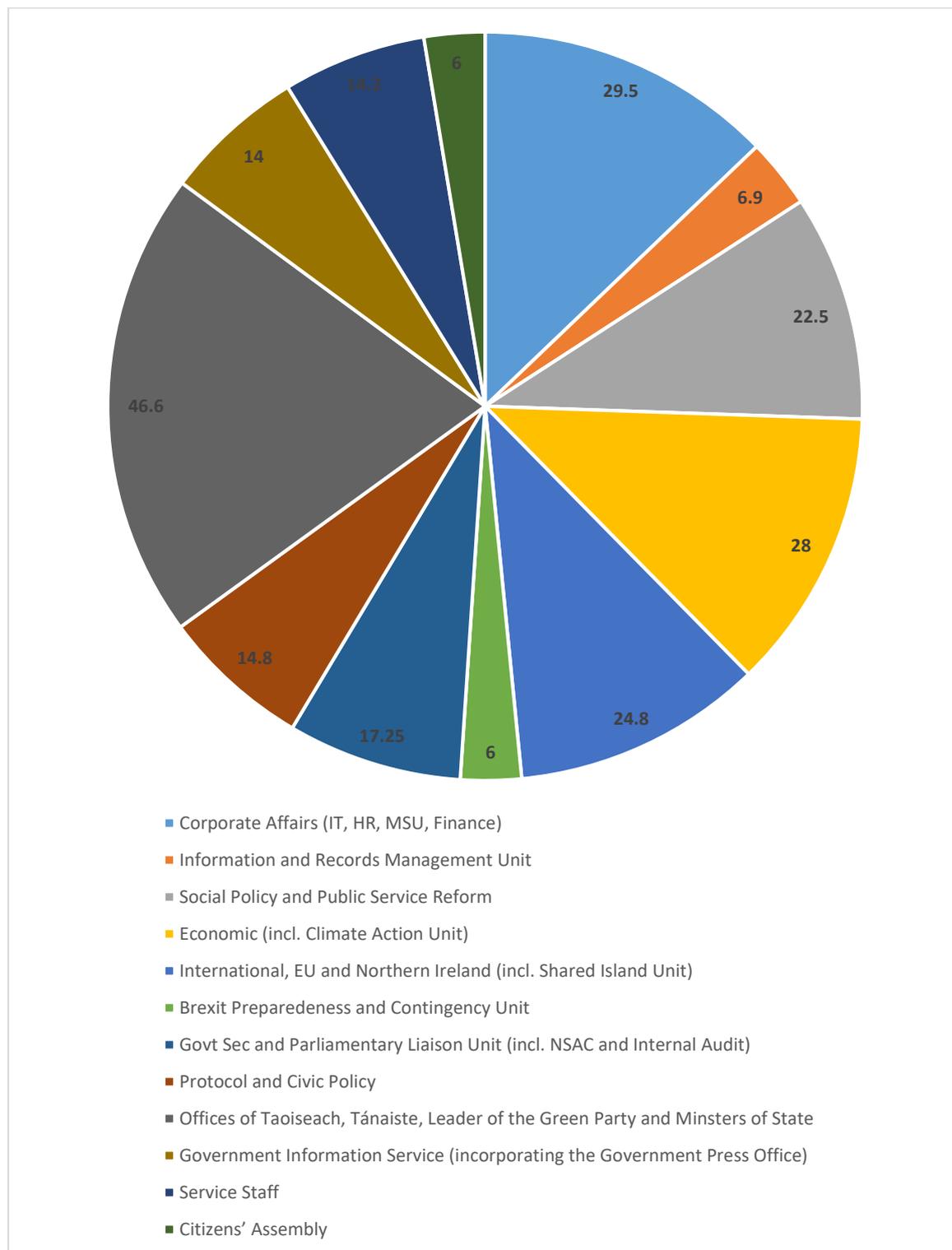
Expenditure for the Year 2020

	2020 Outturn
	€000
ADMINISTRATION	
Salaries, Wages and Allowances	15,667
Travel and Subsistence	216
Training and Development and Incidental Expenses	1,074
Postal and Telecommunications	289
Office Equipment and External IT Services	1,060
Offices Premises Expenses	641
Consultancy Services	0
Total Administration	18,948
OTHER SERVICES	
National Economic and Social Development Office (Grant-in-Aid)	1,761
Tribunals of Inquiry	1,422
Commissions of Investigation	3,044
Citizens' Assembly	732
COVID-19 Public Communications	16,901
Gross Total	42,808
Less Appropriations-in-Aid	(626)
Net Total	42,182

(Interest/compensation paid in 2020 because of late payments totalled €708.45)

Staffing

There were 231 whole-time equivalent staff working in the Department at end 2020.



Overview of energy use in 2020

Energy usage in the Government Buildings complex, which includes the Department of the Taoiseach, is administered by the Houses of the Oireachtas. Energy usage in the Department is incurred for lighting, heating, air-conditioning, hot water, office and IT equipment and catering equipment.

During 2020 the Department implanted actions from its Resource Efficiency Plan overseen by the Department's Green Team

- retro-fit of lighting to LED bulbs in Government Buildings
- sensor lighting installed in bathrooms
- Increasing staff awareness and promoting positive behaviours
- Elimination of single use plastics and single use drinking cups
- Sensor taps installed in main bathroom areas
- Brown waste bins and recycling stations installed

The Department is continually engaged with the Office of Public Works on various projects and ideas that will aim to achieve more energy efficiencies in line with Green Government guidelines.

During 2020, the Department of the Taoiseach consumed a total of energy as follows:

- 942.1 MWH of Electricity
- 685.6 MWH of Gas
- 367.2 MWH of wood pellets (used in the complex's biomass boiler)

Green Public Procurement

Details of procurement contracts valued greater than €25,000, signed in the calendar year 2020, that include green criteria are set out below

<i>Reference year 2020</i>	<i>A. Total number of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector</i>	<i>B. Total value of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector</i>	<i>C. Total number of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector which have incorporated GPP</i>	<i>D. Total value of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector which have incorporated GPP</i>
Priority Sector				
Other Professional Services	1	€135,500	Nil	Nil
Totals	1	€135,500	Nil	Nil

State Board Appointments

The Taoiseach appoints members to two state boards – the NESC and the National Statistics Board. Appointments generally fall into three categories - independent members, members nominated by sectoral organisations and ex-officio members (including public servants). The Taoiseach has limited discretion on appointments depending on the category where the vacancy arises. All appointments to the NESC and to the National Statistics Board are made in line with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards and on the basis of the relevant legislative provisions.

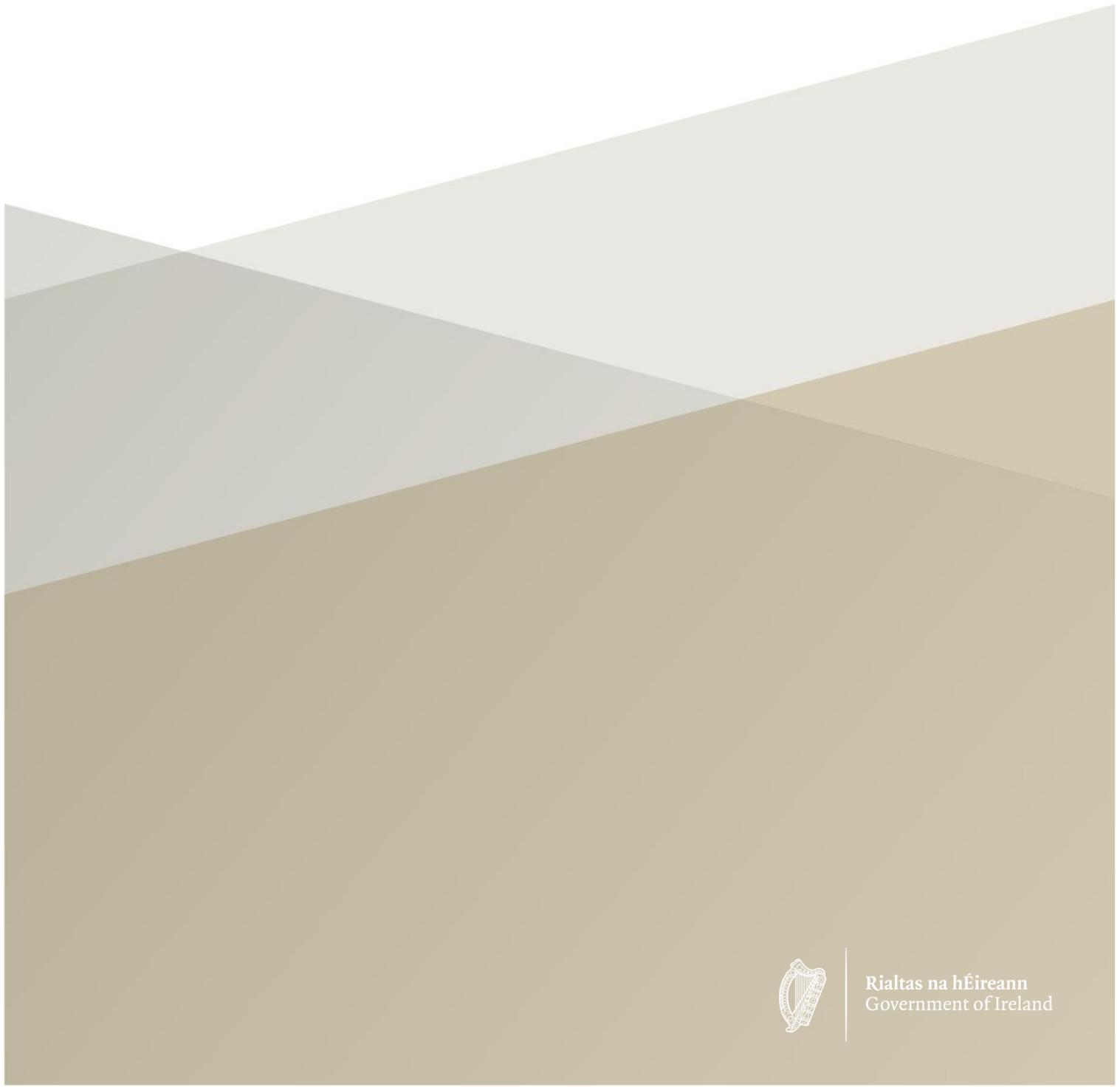
Membership (31 December 2020)

	Independent		Sectoral Nominees		Ex-officio		Total		% Female
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
National Economic and Social Council	4	3	9	6	4	2	17	11	39%
National Statistics Board	0	2	2	1	3	0	5	3	37.5%

Appointments in 2020

	Number of appointments in 2020	Gender	
		M	F
National Economic and Social Council	3	2	1
National Statistics Board	7	5	2

The Department of the Taoiseach will endeavour to improve gender balance on the NESC and the National Statistics Board by requesting nominating bodies and organisations to take account of gender balance when making nominations in future. The Department will also seek to ensure that the nomination of independent members continues to meet the Government's gender balance objectives.



Rialtas na hÉireann
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