An Roinn Comhshaoil,
Aeráide agus Cumarsáide
Department of the Environment,
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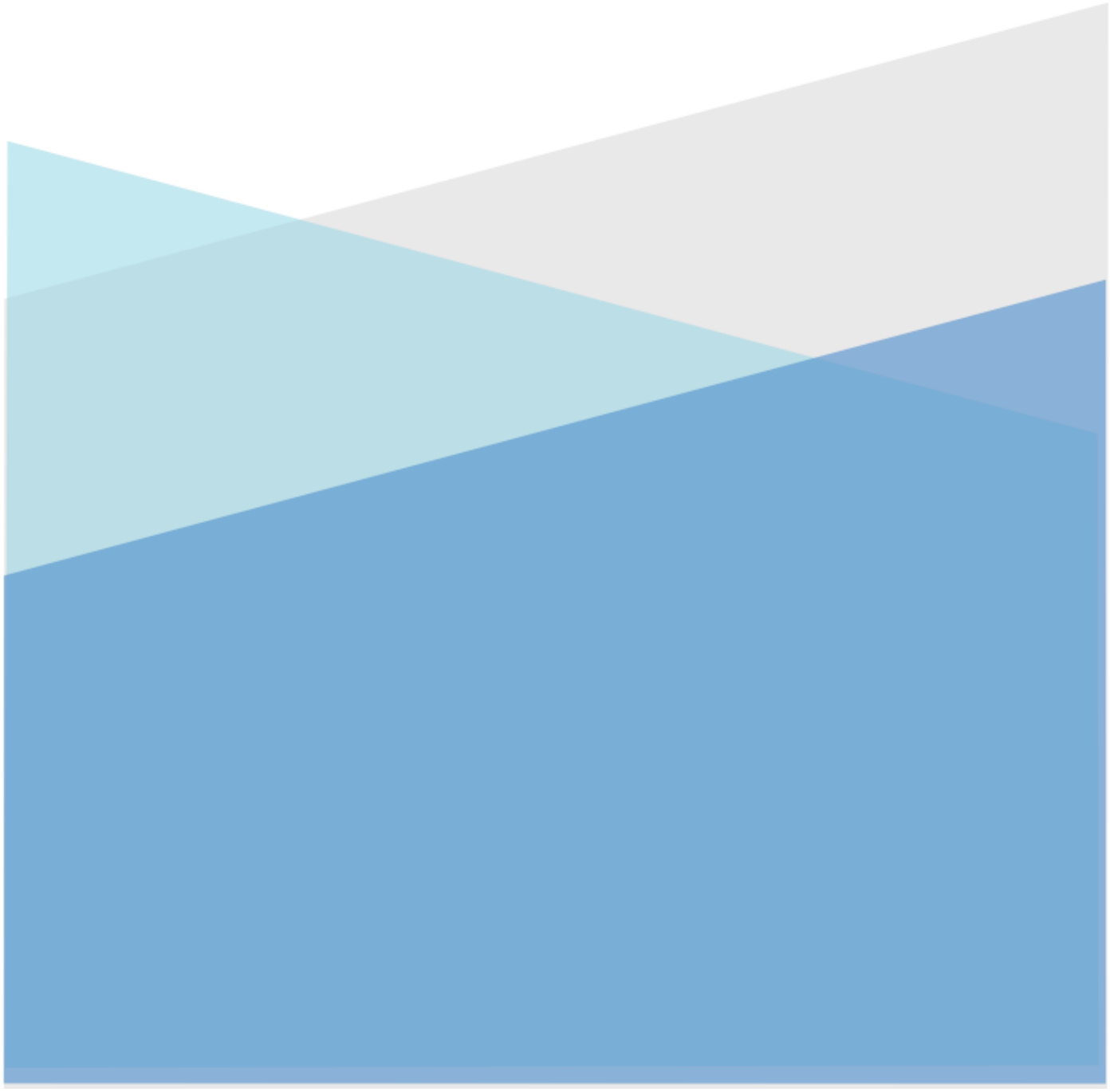


Contents

1. Introduction 1
2. Background 2
3. Consultation 6
3.1 Interdepartmental Group 6
3.2 Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy 7
4. Post Office Network 8
4.1 An Post Strategy 9
5. Conclusions and recommendations 15

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Ireland's DESI ranking 2
Figure 2: Ireland's eGovernment Ranking 3
Figure 3: Ireland Comparative performance on Digital Public Administration 3
Figure 4: Public facing services 5
Figure 5: Diversification of revenue among USPs, 2017 11
Figure 6: Existing Post Office Services 12
Figure 7: Potential Future Post Office Services 13

1. Introduction

Technological innovation and the drive for digital transformation has accelerated the delivery of online Government services in recent years. As digital service delivery has evolved, there have been ongoing calls from the political system[1], An Post and the Irish Postmasters Union[2] for a greater range of Government services to be provided through the post office retail network. It is often argued that such an approach would help maintain 'offline' access for those unable or not proficient accessing online tools or services.

An interdepartmental Group was established in October 2018 to consider options around the provision of 'offline' Government services. The Group provided a report which was due to be submitted to the Government meeting of 17 December 2019, but was not taken, with the general election then called in January 2020. The findings of the report noted that different parts of Government are at different stages in the adoption of digital services and the availability and management of offline channels. The Report notes that the increase in digital service provision will see a corresponding reduction in footfall to offline services. Rather than offline provision becoming increasingly fragmented or piecemeal, the recommendation is that an 'offline agent network' could be considered centrally as a possible delivery model for services. The Group considered that a collective and coherent approach to the delivery of offline services whether through 'assisted digital' or offline channels should be considered. The Report also notes some of the challenges to this approach which require further consideration.

On March 3, 2021, Government noted the report and agreed to the establishment of a new sub-group to explore the potential of a One Stop Shop approach including the identification of suitable services, based on the recommendations of the Offline Services Report, with the Group's report to be submitted to Government by the end of July 2021[3].The sub-group's membership is comprised of Departments/Agencies which are more likely to have significant operational areas and is co-chaired by the Departments of the Environment, Climate and Communications and Public Expenditure and Reform. The report comes at a time of increasing flux in service provision. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the switch towards online delivery. At the same time, the Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy aims to ensure that 90% of applicable public services are available and consumed online and designed with the customer at the centre.

[1] https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/seanad/2021-04-26/15/

[2] http://communityandpostoffice.ie/2021/02/government-solution-for-post-offices-to-maintain-vital-services-for-communities/

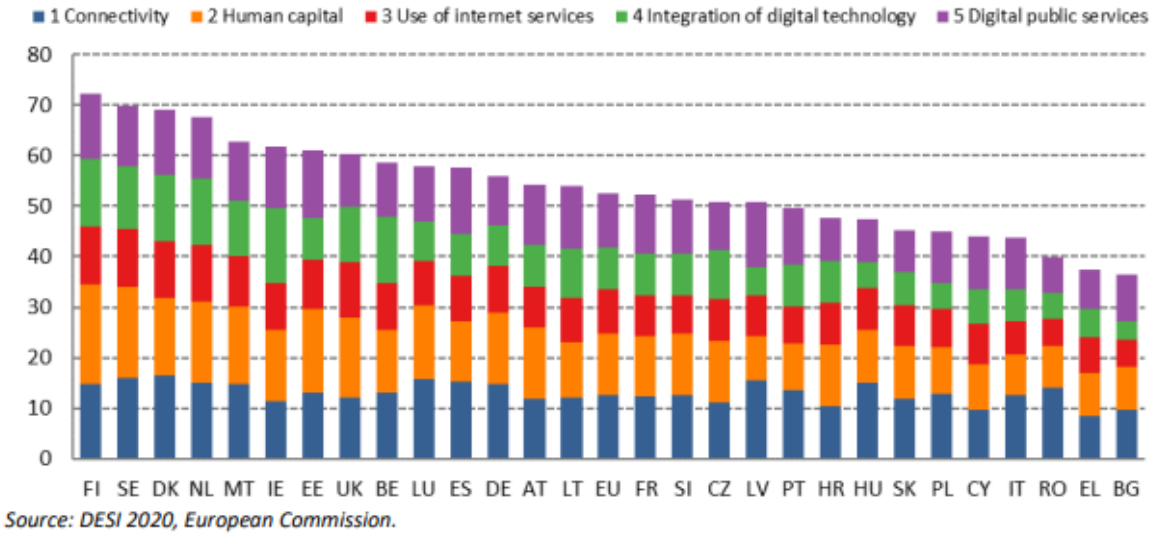
[3] S180/20/10/2189

2. Background

Digital transformation has fundamentally altered the provision of services to citizens. The greatest challenge for governments is to meet these new expectations[4]. “Changes in public service delivery are one of the main areas of citizens’ rising expectations of government... Citizens expect governments to offer public services that are designed with a user-driven perspective and adaptable to different user profiles”[5].

Europe’s Digital Single Market strategy aims to open up digital opportunities for people and business and enhance Europe's position as a world leader in the digital economy[6]. A measure of Ireland’s digital ranking is provided by the ‘Digital Economy and Society Index’ (DESI). This is a composite index that summarises relevant indicators on Europe’s digital performance and tracks the evolution of EU member states in digital competitiveness. Of the 28 countries covered, Ireland is ranked 6th, ahead of the UK and Germany.

Figure 1: Ireland’s DESI ranking



Source: https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/document.cfm?doc_id=67086

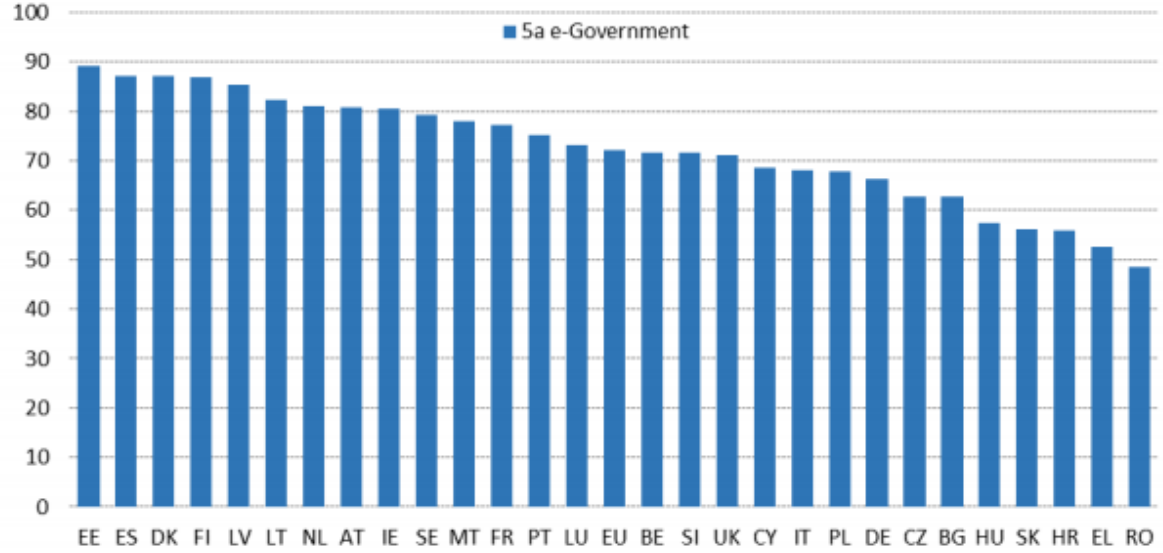
Of critical importance for public bodies is Ireland’s ranking in relation to eGovernment. By this measure, Ireland is ranked 9th (see figure 2, below).

[4] https://www.oecd.org/going-digital/strengthening-digital-government.pdf

[5] https://www.oecd.org/going-digital/strengthening-digital-government.pdf

[6] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/

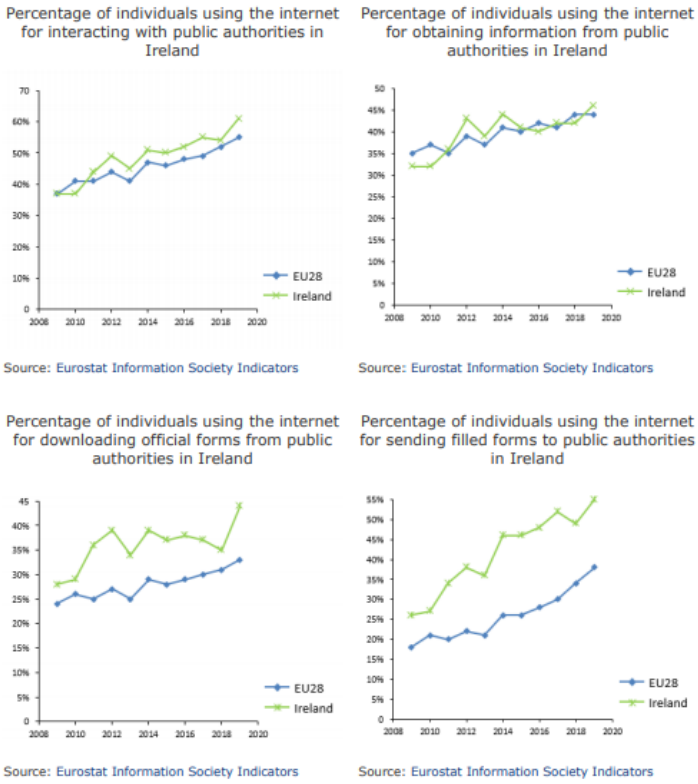
Figure 2: Ireland's eGovernment Ranking



Source: DESI 2020, European Commission.

The European Commission collects information on digital public administration. Across a range of indicators, Ireland scores more highly than the EU average[7] (see Figure 3, below).

Figure 3: Ireland Comparative performance on Digital Public Administration



[7] https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Digital_Public_Administration_Factsheets_Ireland_vFINAL.pdf

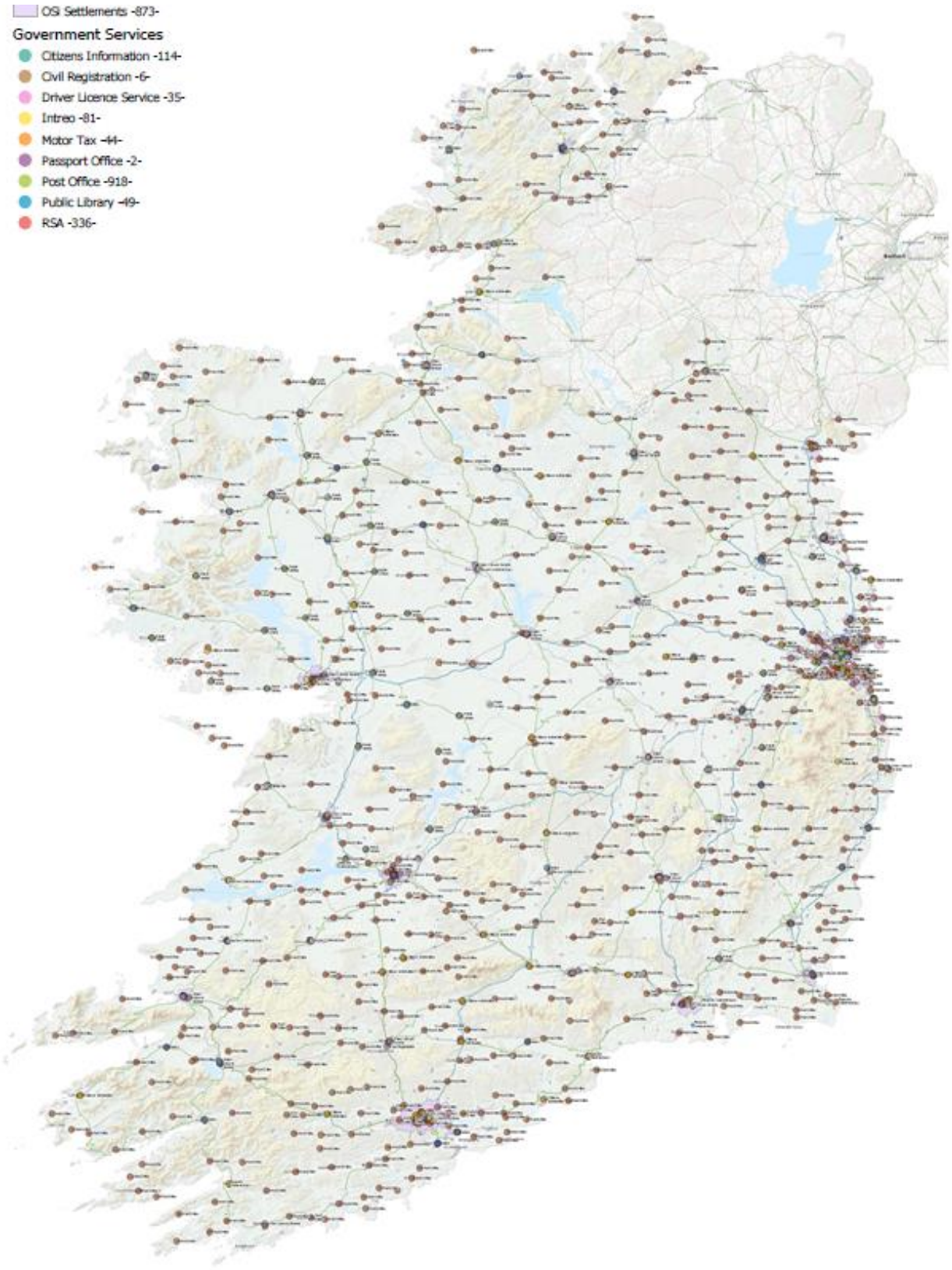
One of the leading exponents of digital delivery is Denmark. Denmark has the highest take-up of digital public services in the OECD – around 70%. This is not confined to specific cohorts and holds across all levels of education. [8]. The Danish model also demonstrates that digital adoption is not confined to young people: applications for state pension has an uptake rate of 95%. Other significant services enjoy high levels of digital delivery. Registration for primary and lower-secondary education has a take-up rate of 97%, while application for maternity benefits has a digital take-up rate of 100%. The Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy aims to ensure that 90% of applicable public services are available and consumed online and designed with the customer at the centre. However, the Strategy also recognises that a cohort of society will still prefer to engage in services offline and that Government will continue to support such requirements. In addition, the Strategy recommends a whole-of-government approach to digitalisation to ensure a more consistent end-to-end experience for the public.

Figure 4[9], below maps key services across the country. It illustrates the presence of parallel public provision which is likely to be increasingly inefficient as services move online.

[8] https://digitaldenmark.dk/digital-timeline/

[9] Map is illustrative not definitive: Compiled using post office and motor tax data and entering the following terms into address database: Civil Registration, Driver Licence Service, Intreo, RSA, Public Library, Citizen's information, Passport. The map is available in increased resolution at the following: https://dcenr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=90303bd23a4547f09cdfc86172a561c5

Figure 4: Public facing services



A recently published National Economic and Social Council (NESC) Report on Digital Inclusion highlights some key lessons that can be learned from research carried out on mechanisms used internationally to support digital inclusion. The report concludes that: 'a mechanism should be put in place to ensure more consistent online and offline provision of public services. For example, all public-sector organisations should offer the facility for both online and offline payments.'

3. Consultation

3.1 Interdepartmental Group

An Interdepartmental Group was established, comprising representatives from the following organisations:

- Department of Social Protection;
- Department of Transport;
- Revenue Commissioners;
- Road Safety Authority;
- Department of Foreign Affairs (Passport and Consular Services);
- Local Government Management Agency;
- Department of Rural and Community Development;
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; and
- Department of the Taoiseach.

The Group was co-chaired by the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Environment, Climate and Communications, with the latter Department providing secretariat to the Group.
An initial questionnaire was submitted to the members of the Group to elicit information in relation to current service provision across the respective Departments with a focus on the effect of the pandemic on service delivery and how some of these channels might resume post-pandemic. Departments were asked to provide detail on their front office services and indicative costs of providing these to allow potential synergies between them to be identified.

The interdepartmental Group also met with Terry Lee Williams to get the benefit of his experience as a former Deputy Secretary of Transport in New South Wales, Australia, in moving their transport service centres online and the establishment of government one stop shop centres.
A further questionnaire issued to members of the Group to help officials to interrogate the returns made and to seek more granular information on particular services.

There was an emphasis in returns on ensuring Government's capacity to deliver high quality public services at a consistent level without compromising confidentiality, complexity and security. Services offered in locations such as Intreo and RSA Centres often require detailed private on sensitive or personal matters and would not be appropriate to a public space. Of critical importance, Departments and agencies were unable to identify services which could be offered more effectively and efficiently elsewhere such as across the Post Office Network. Experience from the pandemic also points to changes in public expectation and demand for increased levels of automation and online service delivery. As labour-intensive services are being rationalised over time, a longer-term strategy, focussing on the delivery of future services was felt more appropriate.

It was recognised that the transformation to digital services needs to be service-led to meet the needs of citizens. This approach tends not differentiate between 'online' and 'offline' delivery. All envisaged greater reliance on digital channels in the future.

3.2 Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy

The work of the Group coincided with the publication of the Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy.[10] The 2030 Strategy seeks to:

- Build globally recognised digital services through co-creation with stakeholders and the public, ensuring that 90% of applicable services are consumed online;
- Build 24/7 services providing consistent, integrated and end-to-end digital solutions;
- Build a digitally skilled workforce enabling the Civil Service to realise a "Digital First" Culture;
- Foster public trust in the safety transparency and value of digital solutions.

Specifics of the Strategy had not been reflected in all Departments' plans; however, they are all consistent with the key commitment to 'Digital first and innovation'.
Gaps and opportunities are likely to arise as the 'Digital First' agenda is implemented. An Post, with its recent investment in digital infrastructure and skills and geographic spread, may be well placed to partner with departments and agencies in providing services in addressing these gaps and opportunities.

In addition to new digital opportunities, local post office services have a number of less tangible benefits which may be overlooked. The 2015 Post Office Network Business Development Group[11] recommended 'that the social and economic value to the local community and that the social and community services that local post offices already provide should be quantified and that a monetary

[10] https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/fd9c03-civil-service-renewal/

[11] PO-Network-Business-Development-Group-Final-Report.pdf (communityandpostoffice.ie)

value be placed on both the existing unpaid and any proposed new services.'[12] Grant Thornton applied a model used on the UK Post Office Network and estimated an annual social value of the Irish Post Office Network of €334-€776m.

Research undertaken by the Scottish Government highlights the important social role undertaken by post offices. They provide access to services to community members who are geographically isolated and an informal communication network. Postmasters and their staff were also seen as playing an important role in the provision of advice and support beyond customer counter duties[13].

4. Post Office Network

An Post is a commercial State body with a mandate to act commercially. It has statutory responsibility for the State's postal service and the post office network.

Pursuant to the Postal and Telecommunications Services Act 1983, An Post is obliged to provide counter services for the Company's own, and Government business. Under the 1983 Act, an object of the company is described as 'meeting the industrial, commercial, social and household needs of the State and satisfying all reasonable demands for such services throughout the State.' This is facilitated through the provision of a nationwide network of Post Offices.

The post office network is the largest retail chain in Ireland with 939 offices, as at December 2020, of which 45 are Company operated and 894 contractor operated. Postmasters are independent SMEs contracted by An Post to run post offices across Ireland. They are not State employees, nor are they employees of An Post and as such they are not paid a fixed salary. Their income is derived on a fee per transaction basis.

Over 60% of all Contractor owned post offices are now co-located with other businesses. This was a key pillar of An Post's Transformation strategy in 2018 with a target of 70% of the network to be co-located.

The Programme for Government states that: 'A modernised Post Office Network will provide a better range of financial services and e-commerce services for citizens and enterprise, as part of our commitment to a sustainable nationwide Post Office Network… This Government believes that An Post has untapped potential to do more and to make a further significant contribution across many areas of public, business and community life in Ireland. With an evolving mandate, An Post can emerge as a central hub for a wide variety of valuable community-focused services.'

[12] https://www.chg.gov.ie/app/uploads/2017/02/post-office-report-english-january-2016-hr.pdf

[13] http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2006/07/12103744/2

A long-term low interest loan of €30m was provided to An Post by the Minister for Finance in December 2017, of which €15m was to support and protect the renewal of the post office network. Government continues to provide significant business to An Post through the Department of Social Protection's Social Welfare contract and the National Treasury Management Agency business.

The Shareholder Letter of Expectation is the key oversight agreement between Departments/Ministers and commercial state bodies. The latest iteration between An Post and DECC states that, as an objective of Government policy, 'An Post should continue to deliver a dynamic and sustainable post office network which is a key piece of economic and social infrastructure for both urban and rural areas. In line with the objects of An Post set down in section 12(1)(b) and (d) of the Postal and Telecommunications Services Act 1983, of providing a viable nationwide post office network, An Post should actively explore opportunities to develop new or enhanced product lines for the network.'

Government's objectives for An Post include harnessing the opportunities presented by eCommerce and the digital economy, capturing and retaining market share in parcels and delivering a sustainable nationwide Post Office Network offering a range of eCommerce, financial and Government services. The company has been proactive in taking steps in recent years to diversify into new revenue streams through the provision of new services and sale of additional retail products. These initiatives include:

- An expansion of financial services products with the launch of the An Post Money brand and introduction of an An Post Current Account, Credit Cards and Loans, growing foreign exchange business and introducing card based Foreign Exchange services.
- Expansion of e-commerce services, with particular focus on the SME market, available across the counter in the Post Offices to facilitate the growth in the parcel business.
- Facilitated growth in existing retail lines – Gift Cards, Lottery, Billpay services, Money Transfer etc - through expansion of these lines and focused promotion in all offices.
- The introduction of new green based initiatives e.g. Green Hub home refurbishment.

4.1 An Post Strategy

An Post's strategy envisages a transformed Post Office Network delivering an 'omnichannel'. This approach seeks to provide a seamless experience, whether customers are online, at a desktop or mobile device or at a post office counter. To take an example, this model should allow a customer service representative, interacting with a customer at a counter to reference the customer's previous purchases and preferences as easily as a customer service representative on a webchat. Or the customer can use a desktop computer to check inventory by store on the company's website, buy the item later with a smartphone or tablet, and pick it up at a chosen location. An omnichannel approach improves customer service by providing multiple communication options. The back-end integration of channels also allows for more flexibility, as the customer can switch between channels throughout an interaction.

The strategy commits to maintaining a strong nationwide network in communities of 500+ with longer opening hours and an expansion of co-located post offices nationwide. The company's strategy is to grow the newer elements of its Financial Services business to mitigate the projected decline in core mail and traditional revenue streams.

In 2020, capital expenditure of up to €17.12m was approved for An Post to develop its digital Ecosystem project, a foundational component of the company's financial services strategy. The Ecosystem is an advanced technical platform which will deliver further innovative customer offerings across the An Post Retail and Mails and Parcels business divisions. An Post has also received an investment loan of €40m from the European Investment Bank to finance innovation and modernisation projects as part of its strategic plan. The ambition and scope for the Ecosystem programme is to deliver a unique and market leading digital platform that integrates current An Post products (Financial Services and other Retail and Mails and Parcels services), enables the integration of new products and services from An Post and Partners, as well as critically capturing data to enable insights and analytics, product up-sell and cross-sell.

Like An Post, other postal operators internationally have sought to adapt to the threats of increasing digitalisation and e-substitution by diversifying their service offering. The network and brand value of the universal service provider means that post offices are in a good position to provide services other than mail. This requires investment and Universal Postal Union research shows that 73% of designated operators have increased investment in digital services[14].

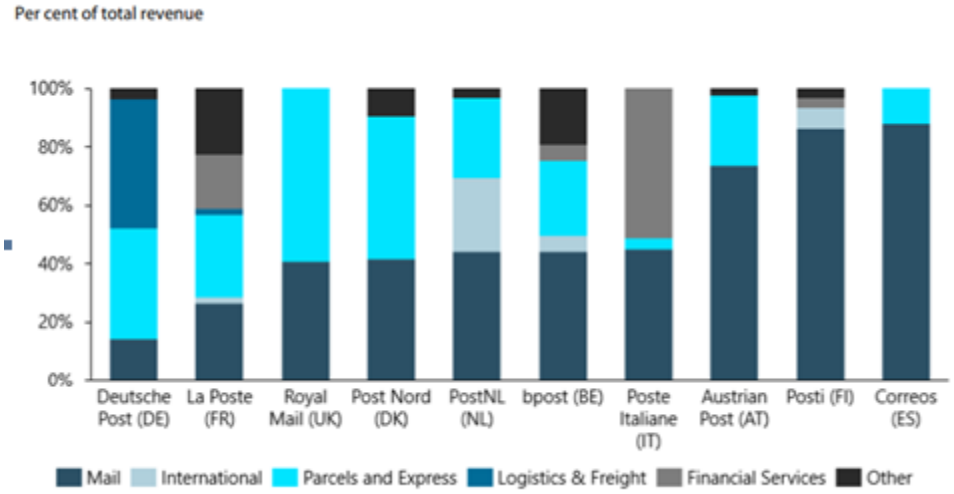
A study by Copenhagen Economics[15] for the European Commission illustrates that 'postal operators have been pursuing opportunities in in parcels and express, logistics and freight, postal financial services, postal retail, information services and telecommunications, which are the largest sources of global postal revenues after traditional letter post. The share of total revenues collected outside the letter segment varies from 84 per cent (Deutsche post) to 10 per cent (Poczta Polska). The average share of revenues coming from the letter business is around 54 per cent.
Financial services, including money transfers and other banking services, are also popular ways to diversify product services among Universal Service Providers (USP). Poste Italiane is an example of a USP that relies mainly on revenues from financial services, which represent almost 50 per cent of Poste Italiane Spa's total revenues.[16]

[14] UPU questionnaire on digital postal services for 2017.

[15] Copenhagen Economics, Main Developments in the Postal Sector 2013 – 2016

[16] https://www.copenhageneconomics.com/dyn/resources/Publication/publicationPDF/0/520/1579077202/copenhagen-economics_postal-services-in-the-eu_2019.pdf Page 30

Figure 5: Diversification of revenue among USPs, 2017



Data provided by An Post indicates that it serves 1.3 million customers every week through approximately 945 Post Offices. Some 99% of the population are within 10km of a Post Office, while 76 % of the population use the Retail network. This creates 108m electronic transactions valued at €14bn processed annually among which are over 45m government services transactions. The figure below illustrates many of the Services currently provided by the Post Office Network.
An Post already provides a range of government services including applications for various licences; the payment of various fines; processing of Passport applications, and the delivery of social welfare payments to recipients, demonstrating the suitability of the network to deliver services on a large scale. Nevertheless, the provision of many of these services through the post Office network is in decline.

An Post provides financial services under the 'An Post Money' brand, including NTMA State Savings, foreign exchange, Western Union and current accounts and it acts as an intermediary for credit cards and personal loans. The Company's Financial Services strategy is based on a distribution model, whereby An Post acts as an intermediary for products provided by partners. The associated revenue streams comprise risk-free fees and commission. An Post does not invest any risk capital and is not exposed to credit risk on the products sold.

Figure 6: Existing Post Office Services

Looking to the future, An Post has invested in a range of technologies to enhance its customer offering. These include:

- Secure Messaging
- Digital Signature pads
- Document Scanners
- PPSN Look Up for State Savings
- Physical and Digital Anti-Money Laundering Identity and Address verification

Technologies such as 'digital signature pads' could prove particularly beneficial as public services investigate accelerating the acceptance of their use (as an alternative to Adobe-type models). This investment allows the network to provide a gateway to government services for customers, both online and in person. This blend of face to face and digital service could provide for the following:

- Removing paper and admin, utilising post office counter technology
- Providing sophisticated data verification, photo capture and enrolment:
    - Passport & Motor Tax Office Front Office.
- An Post could be become an enabler and augment to the Public Service Card and MyGovID;
    - Digital Identity
    - Electoral Roll
    - National Broadband expression of interests

Digital Identity and Inclusion

An Post also aims to take a leading role in building a supportive digital identity solution. An Post Verified (APV) could be utilised by Government and citizens to:

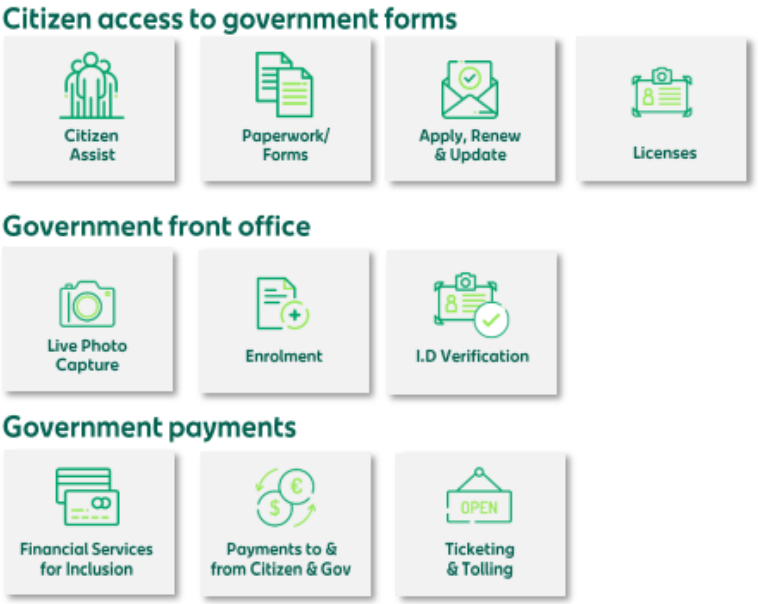
- Become an enabler and augment to the Public Service Card and MyGovID;
- Link APV and MyGovID to provide a secure Omnichannel depository for citizens to upload important Government documents; and
- Provide further services in relation to Passports, Garda Vetting, Electoral Roll.

In a similar vein, Australia Post introduced its own digital identity platform in 2016, called the Digital ID. It allows users to perform a one-time verification of their identity which can then be used to prove user identity wherever it is accepted. Ultimately, Australia Post hopes the Digital ID will be universally accepted allowing people to conveniently verify their identity anywhere.

In relation to access to public services, NESC notes reports from the Citizen's Information Board where services are being moved online in their entirety[17]. The pandemic has accelerated the move to digital provision and An Post's network could provide an offline gateway to support the digitisation of services, help citizens to access online services and by acting as conduit for data capture that can be transferred electronically to Government back-office systems. This would require further detailed discussions between An Post and relevant Departments.

The Post Office Network can also play an important role in relation to digital inclusion. A recent Universal Postal Union report on digital postal activities suggests that post offices are 'well positioned to digitalize government processes, which meets the growing interest of policymakers in using e-government to reduce the costs of providing services to citizens.' In addition, 'Posts are comparatively well positioned to provide e-government, e-commerce and e-finance services to populations that tend to be excluded, such as women, the poor, the less well educated and those in the informal economy.'[18]

Figure 7: Potential Future Post Office Services



[17] Digital Inclusion in Ireland: Connectivity, Devices and Skills, page 26

[18] The digital economy and digital postal activities – a global panorama

The Post Office Network is the largest retail chain in Ireland and offers significant potential with its national reach, local presence and digital capability. Technologies such as live photo capture, when combined with I.D. verification have the potential to deliver secure services which rely on the Public Service Card / MyGovID. Delivering these centrally has the potential to streamline parallel investment by different arms of Government. An Post is consistently named as one of Ireland's most reputable brands[19] and is equipped with necessary hardware devices (barcode readers, printers, POS card readers, scanners, and signature pads) to provide further Government services.
The An Post brand is trusted by the public with research carried out by RED C[20] in February 2020 finding that: 91% said their Post Office provided a valuable service to the local community, 86% support the Government providing financial support to keep their Post Office open and 86% want more State services available at their Post Office.

Given the capability and reach, the Group sees a role for a third-party channel such as An Post in the provision of Government services. A market-based solution has the potential to deliver flexibility to customers at least cost. On that basis, a potential model would be for Government to procure a service provider through a competition which gives regard to the economic, social and environmental well-being when awarding contracts.

Any procurement exercise would be influenced by the business case presented, detailing the scale and extent of services required. Crucially it would reflect departments' requirements to complement existing service delivery or be subsumed into a third party.

One potential model is that applied by Revenue, which uses post offices as a channel for local property tax along with a number of other payment service providers.

The consideration of an optimal model is contingent on Government preference regarding service delivery into the future. It would be premature to be to specify a precise procurement model at this juncture.

[19] https://www.irishtimes.com/business/an-post-has-highest-reputation-among-irish-companies-1.3072640

[20] http://communityandpostoffice.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/431320-Irish-Postmasters-Union-RED-Line-12022020.pdf

5. Conclusions and recommendations

1. Departments and agencies were unable to identify services that could be more efficiently or effectively delivered to customers by An Post.

While Government departments and agencies identified potential areas where An Post could have a role to play, none was in a position to offer services for delivery in the near term. The Department of Transport may be in a position to provide motor tax but further technical work is required to determine feasibility and timelines. The Department of Social Protection and Revenue have also committed to exploring the feasibility of providing additional services.
As labour-intensive services are being rationalised over time in line with Government policy for digital first and customer demand, a longer-term strategy, focussing on the delivery of future services is more appropriate. All envisage greater reliance on digital channels in the future.

2. Government policy and customer demand is for less services to be provided through offline channels.

The Programme for Government states that An Post "has untapped potential to do more" and "can emerge as a central hub for a wide variety of valuable community-focused services". The Programme also commits to the further "integration of digital services in Government and the creation of a single digital unit to drive more public services online". The interplay between these priorities in a modern and evolving context needs to be considered.

The Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy (CSR 2030) aims to ensure that 90% of applicable public services are available and consumed online and designed with the customer at the centre. This conflicts with the idea of providing offline services through new channels and Departments are pursuing a transformation in line with the CSR 2030 strategy.

Departments are reviewing services currently provided through offline line channels, including An Post, with a view to reducing reliance on offline channels. For example, the Department of Social Protection aims to build on the progress of electronic verification and payments while Revenue is reviewing the delivery model for public offices post pandemic.

Neither the departments and agencies represented, nor An Post, have expressed a strong interest in the One Stop Shop approach to delivering 'offline' services through the Post Office Network. Departments are not currently emphasising the delivery of offline services into the future. Departments don't see a significant role for the Post Office Network in terms of future delivery of offline services, with the possible use of Intreo offices seen potentially as a more appropriate model.

3. Transformation to digital first needs to be service-led

It is recognised that the transformation to digital services needs to be service-led to meet the needs of citizens. Departments and agencies are focussed on placing customers at the heart of their services. This approach tends not differentiate between 'online' and 'offline' delivery but rather on quality and service.

Technological innovation and the drive for digital transformation have accelerated the delivery of online Government services. Citizens expect governments to offer public services that are designed with a user-driven perspective and which are adaptable to different user profiles.
While the CSR 2030 recognises that there is a cohort of society which will still prefer to engage in services offline, it recommends a whole-of-Government approach to digitalisation to ensure a more consistent end-to-end experience for the public.

4. Consolidation of Government Offices may be required – One-Stop Shops should be a public body providing the full range of Government services e.g. An enhanced Intreo Office

Government will need to consider whether it intends to continue to provide front office services or whether such services should be rationalised in a manner similar to that found in the banking and retail sectors. A move in this direction would represent a considerable undertaking which would require careful consideration.

A strong view emerged from the Group that such offices need to be designed to meet the highest standards of customer service in order to enable people to conduct their business with the State in a discreet manner.
Concerns were raised in relation to confidentiality, complexity and security which might impede the outsourcing of services, particularly where post offices are co-located. It is unclear how the IT requirements needed to generate significant offline services through the Post Office Network would be funded. There could be a significant investment required for An Post to bring all premises up to standard and there is no guarantee that this would improve the experience for customers.

5. An Post strategy is not to be a provider of Off-line Government Services.

An Post's current Corporate Strategy envisages a transformed Post Office Network where it will continue to invest in the network and new omnichannel capability, delivering new products and services. This investment allows the network to provide a gateway to Government services for customers, both

online and in person. The Post Office Network could also play an important role in relation to digital inclusion.

An Post is not seeking to emphasise its role as a provider of ‘offline’ services. An Post wants to help drive Government transformation, to deliver whole of Government solutions, both online and offline and considers that it can do so for the long term. An Post considers that it can lead this transformation while at the same time giving the State a human presence. Given the capability and reach, the Group sees a potential role for a third-party channel such as An Post in the provision of Government services.

6. Digital Maturity

While Departments and agencies are pursuing a 'Digital First’ strategy, they are at different stages along that road. Organisations such as the Passport Office, DSP, Revenue, RSA, Motor Tax Online are particularly advanced in the field. Gaps and opportunities are likely to arise as the ‘Digital First’ agenda is implemented. Currently, Departments are focusing on implementing the agenda on an individual basis but acknowledge that there may be merit in providing services through a One-Stop-Shop.

Depending on the scale of any such proposal, An Post, with its recent investment in digital infrastructure and skills and geographic spread is well placed to partner with departments and agencies in providing services in addressing these gaps and opportunities.

Future work

As part of CSR 2030, the provision of existing Government services and buildings should be mapped across the country. This process would allow for the identification of crossover between agencies, infrastructure and the scope for synergies. Figure 4, above, provides an illustration of current overlap. Given the capability and reach of An Post, the Group sees a role for a third-party channel such as An Post as a potential complementary provider of certain Government services. A market-based solution has the potential to deliver flexibility to customers at least cost. On that basis, a potential model would be one which addresses public procurement regulations and provides for flexibility to give regard to economic, social and environmental well-being when awarding public services contracts.

Any procurement exercise would be influenced by the business case presented, detailing the scale and extent of services required. Crucially it would reflect departments’ requirements to complement existing service delivery or be subsumed into a third party. The consideration of specific models is contingent on Government preference regarding service delivery into the future.