Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce
Annual Report

2022 - 2023

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1 Foreword by Minister Heather Humphreys

I welcome the publication of the 2022-2023 Mobile Phone & Broadband Taskforce Annual Report.The Taskforce was reconvened in 2021 to address a number of issues relating to mobile phone coverage, connectivity and broadband and we have agreed an ambitious work programme to address these issues. I am very pleased with the progress made to date.

I would like to thank all of the action holders, from government departments and local authorities, to state agencies and the telecoms industry, for the constructive role they have played in the Taskforce over the past year.

It is essential that we continue to drive equality of opportunity across all communities, both rural and urban and that we match the ambition of our people with real and concrete action.

I look forward to seeing even more progress made in the coming year.

2 Foreword by Minister of State Ossian Smyth

The publication of the first Annual Report of the newly established Mobile Phone & Broadband is an important milestone. Much of the progress achieved in the first year has been hard-fought and required sustained energy and commitment by all stakeholders.

It is important to report on progress made – both to celebrate achievements and to highlight areas where progress has been slower, and more focus is required.

The multi-stakeholder make-up of the Taskforce and collaborative nature of the work programme is what makes progress possible. It also enables professional relationships to develop and new work avenues to be explored.

The Annual Stakeholder Forum, which took place in February, provided the opportunity to share stories of how the work of the Taskforce is positively influencing quality of life particularly in more remote communities and with vulnerable groups – this was a particular

highlight for me as it showcased the commitment to inclusivity. I look forward to continuing to work with our Taskforce partners to further drive delivery over the coming years.

3 Introduction

The **Mobile Phone & Broadband Taskforce (the Taskforce)** comprises State actors and industry representatives and is tasked with identifying and overcoming barriers to improved connectivity.

The Taskforce was originally established in 2016, based on a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to identify immediate solutions to mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits, and to investigate how better services could be provided to consumers prior to full build and rollout of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention (NBP).

Throughout its work programme from 2017 to 2019, the Taskforce addressed more than 70-targeted actions, bringing lasting change around Ireland, and reducing the urban/rural digital divide so that all citizens can benefit from enhanced connectivity.

3.1 Re-establishing the Taskforce

In light of the current Programme for Government – Our Shared Future – recommitting to supporting the work of the Taskforce, the Taskforce was formally re-established on the 15th of December 2021. All key State stakeholders attended the meeting which was co-chaired by Minister for Rural and Community Development Heather Humphreys, TD and Minister of State for Communications and Circular Economy, Ossian Smyth, TD.

3.2 Priority Areas

Following the first meeting, senior officials in both the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) met with various stakeholders of the Taskforce, including ComReg and Industry to identify the following key priority areas for inclusion in a new work programme:

- Improving outdoor mobile phone coverage in both rural and urban areas.

- Ensuring the efficient use of infrastructure and assets to support the rollout of telecoms networks.

- Removing remaining barriers in permit granting, planning and licencing procedures

- Improving both the quality and availability of information to consumers regarding telecoms products and services on the market.

3.3 Approach

Each action agreed in the Taskforce Work Programme has a set timeline and a dedicated owner responsible for driving the action forward and reporting on progress.

The Taskforce, co-chaired by Minister Heather Humphreys and Minister of State Ossian Smyth, meets twice a year to allow members to report on progress against assigned actions. An Annual Report highlighting progress made is published each year.

4 2022-2025 Work Programme

The full Mobile Phone & Broadband Taskforce met on 27 April 2022 to finalise the new work programme of the re-constituted Taskforce, and to confirm each of the stakeholders' agreement to leading on the implementation of actions assigned to them and supporting on other actions as required. Timelines for delivery of the various actions were also agreed. Fifteen specific actions were identified under three overarching pillars for delivery in the short, medium and long-term:

1) Planning and Licensing;

2) Improving information and access to Assets and Infrastructure; and

3) Improving Consumer Information, Advice and Experience.

A number of the Taskforce actions included in the new work programme implement relevant EU Connectivity Toolbox[1] best practices. These are special measures, developed at European Union level, to facilitate the improvement of timelines and conditions for telecoms infrastructure deployment and to aid economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Best practices relevant to the Taskforce relate to the further streamlining of permitting and licensing procedures, and the improvement of access to information regarding the availability of assets.

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[1] Ireland's May 2022 update on EU Connectivity Toolbox implementation can be found here https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/connectivity-toolbox-member-states-implementation-reports

When implemented, these deliverables will ensure that where barriers to telecoms infrastructure rollout within the state's control are recognised, appropriate assessment and intervention measures are identified, and action is taken. This will support the roll out of the National Broadband Plan and the deployment of high-quality networks by other operators providing fixed and mobile data and telephony services, not least in rural areas, but right across the country. The full list of actions including action owner and progress made on each in year 1 of the re-established Taskforce is available in Appendix 1.

The Taskforce met on the 16th of November 2022 in Dublin to provide the first progress report to the Ministers on the agreed action plan. The first meeting of 2023 took place in Athlone on April 28th.

5 Annual Stakeholder Forum

The Annual Stakeholder Forum is an opportunity for all stakeholders - public sector, private sector, community, representative groups and others - to network, discuss sectoral developments and feed into the formation of the Taskforce Work Programme.

The first Annual Stakeholder Forum of the newly established Taskforce was held in 1 Windmill Lane, Dublin 2 on February 15th, 2023. It was the first Forum since the award of the NBP contract and the emergence of the latest mobile spectrum awards – both of these developments will see significant improvements in fixed broadband (NBP) and mobile coverage (spectrum awards) over the coming years.
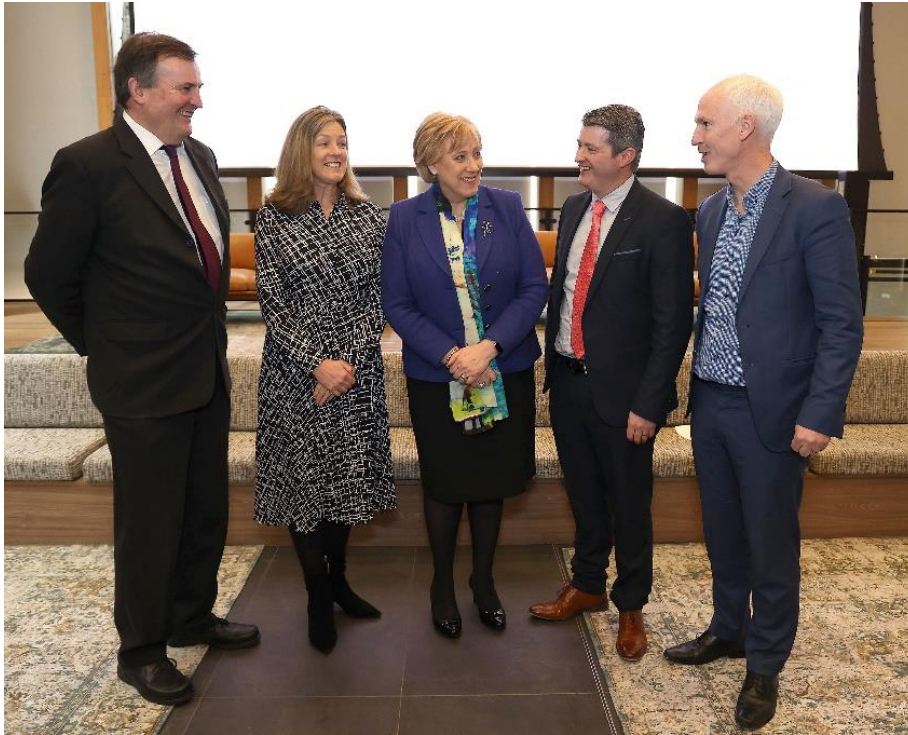
Minister Heather Humphreys at the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Annual Stakeholder Forum with panellists John Mulholland, Carol Gibbons, Fergal McCann and Fergal Mulligan

The 2023 Forum focused on two key themes:

1. **Connectivity as an Enabler for Balanced Regional Development.**
   This session highlighted the importance of connectivity in sustaining and developing rural communities and the partnerships and engagement required to build and gain buy-in for the necessary infrastructure to achieve this.

2. **Connectivity as an enabler of innovation.**
   This session provided first-hand evidence of how increased connectivity is facilitating the role out of a variety of innovative programmes across diverse cohorts of society including older people, families and second-level students in rural Gaeltacht communities. It also invited panellists and the audience to consider possible future opportunities and innovations afforded to us as mobile and broadband connectivity continues to grow across the country.
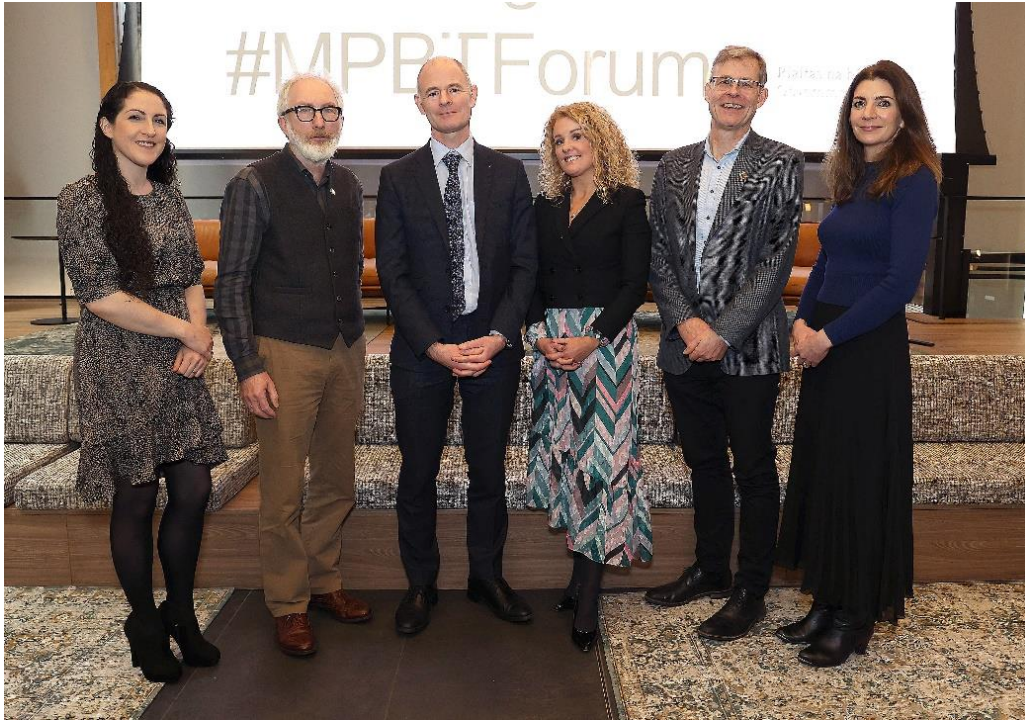
Minister of State Ossian Smyth at the Mobile Phone & Broadband Taskforce Annual Stakeholder Forum alongside panellists Lisa Nic Dhoinnléibhe, Jim Leahy, Liz Roche, Seán Moynihan and Louise Caldwell.

The 2023 Forum was well attended by a wide range of stakeholders. The agenda served to gather information and opinion, impart information and inspire creative and innovative uses of digital technologies.

6 Conclusion

Since its re-establishment in December 2021, the Mobile Phone & Broadband Taskforce has identified and commenced work to address a variety of connectivity issues faced by individuals and communities across the country.

Taskforce members have worked to find creative solutions to difficult issues around planning and licencing, infrastructure and consumer experience. The work programme will continue to be amended and refreshed as actions are completed in the coming years.

The Digital Connectivity Strategy published in December 2022 includes the Mobile Phone & Broadband Taskforce as a key strategic enabler of digital connectivity across the State and along with Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 will lead to more

balanced regional development. Moreover, the Digital Connectivity Strategy reiterates that Government will continue to engage with the public sector and industry stakeholders through the Taskforce to ensure expedited telecommunications infrastructure deployment and improved services to citizens.

Appendix 1 – 2022-2025 Work Programme Progress Report

Pillar 1: Planning and Licencing

Short Term: up to 1 year   **Medium Term:** 1 – 2 years   **Long term:** 2 – 3 years

Action No.	Action/Priority Area	Estimated Delivery	Action Owner	Supporting Bodies	Status and Anticipated Delivery
1.	Ensure appropriate enforcement of Article 8 of the Broadband Cost Reduction Directive ('BCRD'), by promoting the installation of ducting at new builds which specifically supports fibre broadband rollout, made accessible at all locations within the new build.	Short Term (Q2 2023)	D/HLGH	DECC	Delayed (Q3 2023)
	Progress: The draft regulations, and the accompanying technical guidance document, to transpose Article 8 of the BCRD have been submitted to the Minister of Housing, Local Government and Heritage for approval. The public consultation went live in May 2023 with implementation of the Regulations due in Q3 2023.				
2.	Update the Taskforce on the progress of the review of the Planning and Development Act with regard to issues relevant to telecommunications deployments, taking into account sectoral developments and the need to adapt to emerging technologies.	Medium Term (Q2 2024)	D/HLGH		In progress (On target)
	Progress: There are no specific substantive changes regarding telecoms in the draft Planning & Development Bill. However, the general changes regarding plan making, statutory timelines and non-material contravention of lower order with higher order plans should				

	enhance confidence and consistency with regards to the delivery of telecommunications infrastructure. Supporting regulations will be prepared to commence in tandem with the enacted provisions of the new Bill and it is currently envisaged that exemptions in relation to telecommunications will be maintained subject to Oireachtas scrutiny. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage has undertaken a significant pre-legislative scrutiny process on the draft Bill. The Minister expects to receive the JOC report shortly and will fully consider its recommendations, along with submissions on the Bill received from stakeholders, including DECC, when preparing the final Bill. The final Bill, when published, will be accompanied by an Explanatory Memorandum providing information on the provisions in the Bill and will highlight the rationale for any substantial changes made to the current Act. The Bill will then proceed before the Houses of the Oireachtas, subject to the Oireachtas schedule.				
3.	Update the Taskforce on measures to address the issues of ownership of ducting and chambers.	Long Term (Q2 2025)	D/HLGH D/Transport	CCMA	Under Review
	Progress: As neither planning nor building regulations have a role in ownership of ducting and chambers, DHLGH may not be best placed to lead on this action unless there is a specific issue. This action is under review. Stakeholders have been requested to provide case studies of specific issues regarding ownership of ducting and chambers to the D/ECC. Feedback will determine the most appropriate action and action lead to address the specific issue/s identified.				
4.	Review and update planning guidelines from a telecommunications policy perspective, taking into account sectoral developments and the need to adapt to emerging technologies.	Long Term (Q2 2025)	D/HLGH		In Progress (On target)

	Progress: Recognising that telecommunications is a policy matter under the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications DHLGH wrote to DECC in September 2022 requesting details of all policy updates which may be of relevance to the updating of the Telecommunications guidelines. In November 2022, DECC provided a draft scoping document to support the delivery of this Action. This document has been forwarded to the Planning advisors in Housing for initial comments. A preliminary review of the scoping document has been carried out by planning advisors - some aspects of which need to be clarified ahead of internal discussion by DHLGH. This will inform the next steps for the review at which time further engagement with DECC will likely be required. It should also be noted that the publication of any revised guidelines will need to await the introduction of the new Planning and Development Bill as the guidance will need to adhere to the requirements of any new legislation.				
5.	Bring all elements of the planning permission application and determination process fully online across all Local Authorities, via establishment and full implementation of the ePlanning system.	Medium Term (Q2 2024)	D/HLGH CCMA		In Progress (On target)
	Progress: There are now 18 LIVE sites for the ePlanning Project. Donegal, Offaly, Kildare, Roscommon, Kerry and Galway city next in line. The LGMA continue to work with APAS and ODYSSEY sites to integrate with them and their systems (in use in seven authorities) to assist in them coming on board.				
6.	Continue to refine and enhance the Broadband Officer (BBO) role across all Local Authorities in alignment with the implementation of the EU Connectivity Toolbox and development of EU Smart Community policies.	Medium Term (Q2 2024)	D/RCD		Complete (Q1 2023)

Progress: A new Role Profile has been agreed between DRCD and the CCMA that aligns the work of Broadband Officers with the EU Connectivity Toolbox, Smart Community policies and each Local Authority's Digital Strategy. The new Role Profile is in place now and will be reviewed as the need arises.	

Pillar 2: Improving Information and Access to Assets and Infrastructure

Short Term: up to 1 year   **Medium Term:** 1 – 2 years   **Long term:** 2 – 3 years

Action No.	Action/Priority Area	Estimated Delivery	Action Owner	Supporting Bodies	Status and Anticipated Delivery
7.	Support the local government sector to drive efficiencies in the planning and licencing of telecoms infrastructure	Medium Term (Q2 2024)	D/ECC		In Progress (On target)
	Progress: The Local Authority Funding Scheme (LAFS) has been set up, and funding for 2022 has been drawn down by all 31 local authorities and the Roads Management Office. The first Local Authority regional meetings for the Southern, North Western, and Eastern and Midlands regions took place at the end of 2022, with good levels of engagement from all stakeholders. Further meetings are due to take place across all regions throughout 2023.				

8.	Make fixed radio links information publicly available and in a downloadable format via the Siteviewer resource, to provide greater overall transparency to relevant stakeholders regarding services deployed in certain areas.	Short Term (Q2 2023)	ComReg		Delayed (Q3 2023)
	Progress: An IT solution is currently under development and a public consultation on this IT solution is scheduled for Q3 2023.				
9.	Develop a standard approach and associated guidance document in relation to ducting and chamber deployments to support a 'dig once' policy. **Progress:** Results of the trial carried out by Broadband Officers have been reviewed and drafting of guidance document on the required standards is underway. Initial discussions have been held with telecommunication companies.	Medium Term (Q2 2024)	CCMA D/Transport	D/RCD	In Progress (On target)

Pillar 3: Improving Consumer Information, Advice and Experience

Short Term: up to 1 year   **Medium Term:** 1 – 2 years   **Long term:** 2 – 3 years

Action No.	Action/Priority Area	Estimated Delivery	Owner	Support	Status
10.	Conduct a data analysis exercise to examine the main areas of telecoms advertising that generate consumer complaints, and provide guidance and / or directions to the sector to address any failings.	Short Term (Q2 2023)	ASAI	ComReg	Delayed (Q3 2023)

	Progress: Preliminary results of the analysis were presented to the MPBT at April 2023 meeting. On conclusion of the analysis, the ASAI will consider if any guidance/direction for the sector is required					
11.	ComReg will continue to enhance its national outdoor mobile coverage map, incorporating data updates on a regular basis and additionally the mapping of 5G outdoor mobile coverage, which will significantly enhance information available to consumers.	Short Term (Q2 2023)	ComReg			Extended (Q2 2024)
	Progress: ComReg continues to update its outdoor coverage map web application and App (iOS and Android) data and functionality at regular intervals. ComReg has published updated data from the mobile operators in Q4, 2022. There will be further updates to address 3G retirement and user experience improvements in 2023. https://coveragemap.comreg.ie/map. The next release of the map predictions is due in Q2 2023. ComReg will continue to update the map on a Quarterly basis.					
12.	Launch consumer information campaign aiming to improve awareness of the basics of new technologies available	Medium term (Q2 2024)	ComReg			In Progress (On Target)
	Progress: ComReg Public Communications Framework was finalised in Q1 2023. Process to appoint an agency for the development of a public information campaign is currently underway. The campaign strategy and approach will be finalised during Q2 2023.					
13.	Following the MBSA II Awards, ComReg will assist the State in subsequent steps taken to further improve geographic mobile coverage. Such initiatives may include, for example, procuring for additional coverage beyond market-driven levels, in respect of which ComReg may provide advice in advance of and during.	Long Term (Q2 2025)	ComReg	D/ECC D/RCD		In Progress (On Target)

	Progress: In January 2023, the MBSA2 auction was completed and MBSA2 licences issued. The MBSA2 licences include a suite of obligations for the 700 MHz band to expand mobile coverage over a period of 3 to 7 years and, among other things, will oblige existing licensees to expand their current networks to provide and maintain: • a 3 Mbit/s service to 99% of the population and 92% of the geographic area of Ireland; • a 30 Mbit/s service to 95% of the population, 90% of motorways, and 80% of primary roads; and • a 30 Mbit/s service to 345 specific locations, consisting of 40 business and technology parks (including "strategic sites"), 65 hospitals, 24 higher education campuses, 14 air and seaports, 160 train and bus stations, and 42 top visitor attraction information points. ComReg remains prepared to assist the State in any subsequent step it may wish to pursue by which to procure coverage outcomes beyond market-driven levels.				
14.	A dedicated point of contact(s) in telecoms companies will be established to provide up to date and accurate information to Broadband Officers and the Departments regarding the deployment, upgrading and availability of commercial services, and any related issues. This dedicated point of contact(s) in telecoms companies will liaise with Broadband Officers and the Departments on a regular basis (at least quarterly) regarding these issues, the first such meeting to occur during June 2022.	Medium Term (Q2 2024)	TII of IBEC ALTO	D/ECC D/RCD ComReg	In Progress (On Target)
	Progress: The list of dedicated industry points of contact was updated and expanded in March 2023. On 27 January 2023, a delegation of 9 Telecommunications industry Ireland member companies attended a national meeting				

	of Broadband Officers (Telecommunications Action Group) coordinated by the Department of Rural and Community Development in Galway. The delegation consisted of companies providing mobile phone services and fibre to the home and also companies building and operating mobile phone masts. Each company gave an overview of its relevant activities in series of presentations. This was followed by a question and answer session. Companies agreed to attend future meetings to discuss specific issues in greater detail. As a follow up on 31 March 2023 a delegation of companies building and operating mobile phone masts attended a Telecommunications Action Group meeting in Rathdowney for a detailed discussion with Broadband Officers. The feedback on both meetings has been very positive. Delegations drawn from the other sectors of the industry will attend future Telecommunications Action Group meetings.

On 3 March 2023 Telecommunications Industry Ireland hosted a meeting with Dublin City Council's Telecommunications Unit attended by 21 industry personnel. The objective of the meeting was to discuss how industry can work with the Unit so that telecommunications can help enhance Dublin's future connectivity and economic competitiveness. A series of common issues have been identified and a further meeting has been scheduled for 6 July 2023.

Industry also engages with the local authorities through the Joint Utility Local Authority User Group, which the local authorities and industry co-chair. This Group met on 2 February 2023 and has a particular focus on issues connected with road opening. | | | | |
| 15. | Industry will examine its processes regarding non-standard orders for a fibre broadband connection with a view to identifying and implementing actions it will take to provide | Medium Term (Q2 2024) | TII of IBEC ALTO | D/ECC | In Progress |

	information more effectively and consistently to customers who are currently unable to receive high speed broadband.				
	Progress: During Q1 2023 all wholesale service providers briefed their retail service providers regarding non-standard orders for fibre broadband connections at one of the regular bilateral meetings held with each provider. Processes regarding non-standard orders for fibre broadband connections and associated escalation process were outlined, and any questions answered. In their briefing sessions wholesalers addressed the themes raised by the cases studies provided by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications regarding non-standard orders for such connections and used these cases as an input in preparing for the briefing sessions. Non-standard orders for fibre broadband connections is a standing agenda item for future bilateral meetings between wholesale service providers and their retail service providers.				