

Programme for a Partnership Government
Progress Report

December 2017

Table of Contents

Housing and Homelessness	2
Economy, Business and Jobs.....	6
Rural Development	10
Health	12
Mental Health / Disabilities.....	15
Children and Older People.....	17
Education and Training.....	19
Justice and Equality.....	21
Agriculture.....	23
Climate Change.....	25
Investing in Society	26
Ireland and the World	28
Making Partnership in Democracy Work and Constitutional Reform.....	32

Housing and Homelessness

Increasing Supply

- Arising from a Review of Rebuilding Ireland, a number of themed announcements on specific policy areas, such as homelessness, social housing construction and rental policy have been made and Budget 2018 committed €1.9bn for housing, an increase of €600m on 2017.
- Further proposals will also be brought forward on areas such as housing affordability and the delivery of apartment developments, particularly build-to-rent projects.
- One year into *Rebuilding Ireland*, housing activity reports show that all housing output indicators are trending positively.
- A new €750m entity, *Home Building Finance Ireland*, was announced in the Budget which will provide finance at commercial rates for developers with viable sites who are having difficulty accessing finance.
- Budget 2018 signalled a stamp duty refund scheme will be introduced for commercial land purchased for the development of housing and where development has commenced within 30 months of the land purchase.
- The timeline for qualifying for full relief from Capital Gains Tax will be reduced from 7 to 4 years for owners retaining qualifying assets purchased between end 2011 and end 2014. At the same time it allows those who wish to do so to retain their assets for the full seven years. This should reduce any impact the CGT relief may have on limiting the supply of development land available for sale.
- The current 3% vacant site levy which comes into effect from January 2019 will more than double to 7% from January 2020 onwards for land that remains vacant and undeveloped. An information session was held in November with all Local Authorities in relation to implementation of the Vacant Site Levy.
- To date, the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) has committed over €500m to invest in property including new housing through major financing platforms and projects. This includes investment in a pilot Private Rental Sector platform that includes clear social and affordable housing objectives.
- ISIF has announced that it is to provide a debt facility of €50m to a property development platform to fund the construction of essential enabling infrastructure such as roads, waste and utilities at the Cherrywood SDZ, enabling the planned development of the entire SDZ.

- 29 of 34 projects under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) have been given final approval and grant agreements have been signed. Construction on most of the infrastructure is expected to commence in 2018 and these new land banks will activate supply of approximately 17,500 housing units.
- A further call for proposals under LIHAF is likely early in 2018 and an additional €50m in Exchequer funding was announced in Budget 2018 which will be subject to matching funding at 25% by local authorities.
- As of the end of September 2017, NAMA had funded the construction of 5,566 homes with an additional 2,900 units under construction.
- The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2017 was passed in July and provides for a second extension to planning permissions which will assist developers in completing unfinished housing developments.
- A number of key actions have been announced to progress the delivery of vacant homes back into use as soon as possible including the establishment of a dedicated Empty Homes Unit, designated vacant homes officers, city action plans will be well advanced by year-end for the five main cities, and ensuring all local authorities maximise the quick turnaround of their vacant social housing stock.
- By end June, based on the first full three months of the Repair and Leasing Scheme, applications were received in respect of a total of 535 units.
- The Planning and Development (Strategic Housing Development) Regulations 2017 came into operation in July enabling planning applications for large-scale housing developments of 100+ units, and large student accommodation projects to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála.
- The National Student Accommodation Strategy was launched in July with key targets and actions to support the increased delivery of Purpose Built Student Accommodation and take-up of digs accommodation.
- The draft National Planning Framework, 'Ireland 2040: Our Plan' was published for its final round of public consultations in September. The Framework is on schedule for completion in the coming weeks to coincide with the new 10 year Capital Investment Plan, ensuring alignment between planning and investment.

Social Housing

- An additional €100m in funding was announced in December for housing and homelessness bringing total funding in 2017 to €1.4bn. €92m will be provided for the local authority capital programme and €8m to deliver homes under the National Regeneration Programme.

- The increased funding in 2018 for housing will be directed towards the delivery of over 5,900 social homes through construction and acquisitions, contributing to meeting the social housing needs of 25,500 households.
- A change in social house building policy will see a shift to direct build programmes for local authorities and housing bodies. As a result, the current target for 2018 of 3,000 newly built homes will increase by almost 30% to 3,800.
- An additional €500m has been secured for investment in social housing over the period 2019 – 2021 which will allow for a further 3,000 social housing homes to be delivered by local authorities and approved housing bodies, increasing the total from 47,000 to 50,000 homes.
- The Q3 2017 report on social housing construction contains information on the delivery of 12,300 new social homes, over 1,000 of which have already been delivered in 2016 and 2017, over 3,600 new homes were on site being constructed, with the remainder progressing through planning, design and tendering.
- Over €100,000 in funding has been approved for four Approved Housing Bodies to support the development of innovative financial models and to maximise the opportunity to leverage off-balance sheet funding opportunities to support the delivery of additional social housing.

Homelessness

- Funding for Homeless Services will be increased in 2018 by a further €18m to over €116m to ensure that emergency accommodation and support services are available.
- In the first six months of 2017 there were over 2,000 exits from homelessness. New funding of €350,000 has been announced to appoint Exit Co-Ordinators to support those exiting homeless services and help to prevent them from falling back into homelessness.
- There are currently 11 Family Hubs in operation catering for 288 families and a further seven hubs will become operational by year-end, bringing the total family capacity to 455. A further five Family Hubs are in development to come on-stream in 2018.
- The HAP Place Finder Service which is currently available in Dublin and Cork is being rolled out nationally to each of the 31 local authorities to target HAP supported rental properties for households in emergency accommodation.
- A Homeless Inter-Agency Group has been established to ensure homeless services are delivered in a coherent and joined-up way between the relevant departments and agencies.

- By October, 180 new Housing First tenancies were established in the Dublin City Council area. The scope of the initiative is being broadened to include people currently being accommodated in Supported Temporary Accommodation as well as entrenched rough sleepers.
- 200 additional permanent emergency beds and a further 50 temporary emergency beds have been announced for Dublin under the Cold Weather Initiative.
- An additional €1.5m has been allocated for 2017 improve access to mental health and primary care services to meet the health needs of homeless persons. The full year cost of €4m will bring the total funding being provided to €6m in 2018.

Rental Sector

- The report of the Working Group reviewing the tax and fiscal treatment of rental accommodation providers was published on Budget Day. In line with one of the options put forward, a new time-limited deduction for pre-letting expenses will be introduced to encourage owners of vacant residential property to bring that property into the rental market for a minimum of four years.
- An Expert Group will be established in the coming weeks to develop a clear vision for a viable and effective cost rental sector for Ireland. In parallel, pilot projects to develop and test the provision of cost based rental accommodation are being rolled out in the Dublin region by Approved Housing Bodies.
- Following a review of the Rent Predictability Measure and the wider Rebuilding Ireland review, the Residential Tenancies Board is to be given additional powers and resources to take on a regulatory responsibility in the rental sector over the next two years.
- In November, the Residential Tenancies Board published extensive guidelines on what constitutes “substantial change” in rented properties for the purposes of claiming exemptions from rent pressure zone measures.
- The Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017 came into force on 1 July with the combined aim of improving the quality and management of rental accommodation.

Mortgages

- As announced in Budget 2018 a tapered extension of owner-occupier Mortgage Interest Relief will provide for the continuation of 75% of the existing relief into 2018, 50% in 2019 and 25% in 2020.

- The Central Bank has published a Consultation Paper proposing a range of enhanced measures to aid consumers who wish to switch their mortgage. Increased competition has become evident through recent reductions in standard variable rates.
- The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission published its Options for Ireland's Mortgage Market Report in June outlining a range of options to assist the development of a better-functioning, competitive and stable mortgage market.
- An additional €5m in funding has been allocated Mortgage to Rent scheme for 2018 to support its expansion.
- For the first time, there is an official arrangement between a lender and Approved Housing Body which will utilise the existing Mortgage to Rent scheme to complete a significant number of arrangements, allowing a significant number of borrowers to remain in their home as social housing tenants.

Economy, Business and Jobs

Economy

- Budget 2018 delivered the Government's long held objective of balancing our books in structural terms as per the Stability and Growth Pact requirements.
- The Government has announced its intention to repay early, and in full, the outstanding €5.5bn debt on IMF and EU partner loans, leading to potential interest savings of €150m over the lifetime of the loans.
- CSO data for Q2 shows real GDP rose by 1.4% relative to the previous quarter. The average annual growth in the first half of 2017 was 5.5%.
- NAMA generated €1.5bn cash in in H1 2017 and a further €0.4bn in cash in the period from end-June to end-October, bringing cumulative cash generated to just over €40bn since NAMA's inception.
- NAMA redeemed the final €500m of its €30.2bn senior debt on 25 October 2017, fully eliminating the State's contingent liability ahead of schedule. NAMA expects to redeem its subordinated debt of €1.6bn in March 2020.
- A Rainy Day Fund will be established in 2018 with €1.5bn transferred from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund and annual contributions of €500m to commence in 2019.
- In June 2017, an Initial Public Offering of the State's shareholding in AIB sold 25% of the bank's Ordinary Shares plus an overallotment option of 3.75% for stabilisation purposes. The total proceeds received from the IPO were approximately €3.4bn and the State retains a shareholding of c.71%.

- The Update on Ireland's International Tax Strategy published with Budget 2018 outlines the significant actions Ireland has taken towards implementing the OECD Base Erosion and Profit Shifting recommendations. The publication of the Coffey Review of Ireland's Corporation Tax Code provides a roadmap for further actions Ireland will take in implementing the OECD BEPS recommendations.
- Informed by the findings of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan published in September, the Government allocated an additional €4.3bn in capital funding over the period 2018-2021 in Budget 2018, in support of identified investment priorities. The Government is now investing €6.6bn more than originally provided for in the Capital Plan, including an extra €2.2bn for housing.
- The Government have approved the adoption of Building Information Modelling across the public capital programme to ensure better definition of projects from the outset, and greater efficiency and quality in delivery.
- A Major Capital Projects Tracker was published in September highlighting the scale of delivery of major projects across all sectors of state activity. The Tracker will be updated twice yearly.

Supporting Business

- A new Brexit Loan Scheme was announced in Budget 2018 with up to €300m available at a competitive rate to SMEs to help them with their short-term working capital needs.
- An additional €3m was announced to recruit a further 40 to 50 Brexit-related staff worldwide focussed on helping Irish exports grow their international sales, diversify their markets and secure new investments in Ireland.
- A Working Group is to be established with the European Commissioner for Competition to help Irish businesses deal with the challenges of Brexit.
- A suite of Brexit supports including a Lean for Micro Programme and a Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters grant have been made available to micro and small businesses through the 31 LEOs nationwide.
- A new fast-track Agile Innovation Fund has been launched by Enterprise Ireland to give companies rapid access to innovation funding to respond quicker to market opportunities and challenges, including those posed by Brexit.
- The European Investment Fund and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland have announced an additional €230m in finance for Irish SMEs under the COSME programme. From 2018, in total, an expected 10,000 companies across all sectors will have access to COSME support.

- In the first nine months of 2017, revenue from overseas trips to Ireland was up 5% from the same period in 2016, while overseas visitor numbers were up 6.2%.
- A new Key Employee Engagement Programme was announced in Budget 2018 which will allow SMEs to provide key employees with a share-option based financial incentive linked to the success of the company.
- The SME Credit Demand Survey for October 2016 – March 2017 shows 84% of SMEs reported increased trading or steady trading levels and 61% reported a profit.
- Microfinance Ireland's Q3 Report 2017 shows that since its inception Microfinance Ireland has provided €21m in loan approvals, which supported 3,336 jobs. There was a strong regional spread with loans granted in all 26 counties with 78% of the loans provided to microenterprises outside Dublin.
- In Q2 2017, the Credit Guarantee Scheme sanctioned facilities for 34 Irish SMEs with a total of €4m in funding that will create or maintain 223 Irish jobs.
- In May, Enterprise Ireland launched a new Eurozone Strategy to assist Irish exporters increase exports in Eurozone countries by 50% by 2020.
- Two out of three Enterprise Ireland client companies who are not currently exporting to the Eurozone (65%) plan to do so in the next 12 months.
- Enterprise Ireland's Competitive Start Fund worth €750,000 opened for applications to early stage companies in all sectors with a focus on agricultural, manufacturing, life sciences and renewable subsectors.
- In the 2017 European Innovation Scoreboard, Ireland remained the overall leader in product, process and marketing innovation. Ireland also maintained first place in economic success in terms of employment, revenue and exports.
- Four new SFI Research Centres were announced in September with €74m in funding to be provided over the next 6 years, with a further investment of €38m from industry. A fifth SFI Research Centre will be developed in 2018.
- Ireland ranks 6th in Europe for new business owners with 35,000 new business owners in 2016. Early stage entrepreneurship has now returned to the levels observed pre-recession.
- The Companies (Accounting) Act 2017 has been commenced which will reduce the financial reporting obligations on small businesses.
- The Knowledge Transfer Survey 2016 was published in June showing 1,243 collaborative agreements were signed in 2016 with 94% of SME agreements with Irish SMEs and 78% of the industry and research organisation agreements were based in Ireland.

- The Knowledge Development Box (Certification of Inventions) Act 2017 has been commenced. SMEs that invest in R&D will now be able to benefit from the lower rate of corporation tax if their Intellectual Property meets the criteria of being novel, non-obvious and useful.
- The Government has approved the General Scheme of a Rates Bill to modernise the legislative basis for commercial rates and to make the system more transparent and easily understood for ratepayers.
- An independent review of the Tender Advisory Service has been completed which will be presented to the SME Advisory Group in December for consultation on the recommendations.
- In July, the Office of Government Procurement published new guidelines and template tender documents to simplify rules and support SME access to contracts awarded by public bodies. A number of regional procurement briefings have also been held.

Supporting Jobs

- The unemployment rate for November was 6.1%, down from 7.5% in November 2016, while the number of people on the Live Register has declined year-on-year by 14.6%.
- As announced in the Budget the entry point to the higher rate of income tax is to be increased by €750 per annum. The entry point for single earners will increase from €33,800 to €34,550.
- The 2.5% USC rate is to be reduced to 2%, and the ceiling of the 2% rate band increased from €18,772 to €19,372. There will also be a reduction in the 5% USC rate to 4.75%.
- A Working Group is also to be established to plan, over the coming year, the process of amalgamating USC and PRSI over the medium term.
- The Earned Income Credit was increased by €200 in Budget 2018 bringing it to €1,150 per year from 2018, benefiting over 151,000 self-employed individuals.
- From 1st December 2017, self-employed workers who pay PRSI at Class S will be able to access the Invalidity Pension scheme for the first time.
- The Action Plan on Jobless Households has been published and aims by 2020 to reduce the proportion of households that are jobless to 13% or less, and reduce the share of the 18-59 population resident in such households to less than 8%.
- Jobs Week 2017 took place in September with over 100 events across the country with c.16,000 attendees, providing job seekers and employers the opportunity to network and connect together.

- A new Youth Employment Support Scheme will be introduced in 2018 to support young jobseekers who are long-term unemployed, or who face barriers to employment, into the workplace.
- A new mentoring programme has been announced to support returning Irish emigrants who wish to set up businesses in Ireland. Funding of up to €100,000 will be allocated to the project in 2017.
- In line with the recommendation from the Low Pay Commission, the national minimum wage will be increased by 30 cent to €9.55 per hour from 1 January 2018.
- The Government has accepted a recommendation from the Low Pay Commission regarding the allowance provided for board and lodging, resulting in a change from a weekly/daily rate to an hourly figure. This will benefit those on minimum wage working part-time hours where board is provided by the employer.
- Budget 2018 provides for a €20 weekly increase in the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment and the Jobseekers' Transitional scheme, and a €10 weekly increase in the threshold for receipt of the Working Family Payment for families with up to three children, with effect from March 2018.
- The Back to Work Family Dividend which was due to close to new applications in March 2018 has been retained.

Rural Development

- In August, the first progress report on the Action Plan for Rural Development was published with progress across the five pillars. Particular highlights include the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the CLÁR Programme, a competitive Regional Enterprise Development Fund, the delivery of IDA advance buildings, and the launch of the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme.
- €21.6m in funding has been allocated to 281 rural towns and villages across the country under the 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme. The funding is more than double the €10m allocated under the Scheme last year.
- Employment has increased in seven of the eight regions in the year to Q2 2017. 80% of the new jobs added in the year to date were outside Dublin.
- 52% of all IDA client jobs created last year were located outside Dublin. Provisional results for 2017 are also positive with 54% of all job approvals for projects in the regions, up from 37% last year.

- A Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) of up to €60m is being rolled out over the next 4 years to support the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at county, regional and national level.
- The results of the first competitive call under the REDF were announced in December with 21 applicants across the country securing up to €30.5m for their projects. A second call is expected to be issued early in the New Year.
- An additional €2m was provided in 2017 to Údarás na Gaeltachta for enterprise supports in Gaeltacht areas.
- More than 500 LEADER projects have been approved for funding of over €15m towards enterprise development, job creation and the development of sustainable community infrastructure across rural Ireland.
- The procurement process to identify a bidder(s) to deliver the National Broadband Plan moved to the final stages in September with the submission of "Detailed Solutions" by two bidders. This is the last stage of the procurement process before receipt of final tenders and ultimate progression to the appointment of a preferred bidder(s).
- Progress Reports on the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce are being published outlining the progress made on actions aimed at accelerating the delivery of telecommunications infrastructure.
- An Annual Forum for all stakeholders to discuss issues impacting on the rollout of telecoms infrastructure was held in October and will help inform the forthcoming Annual Review on the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce.
- €768k was approved for community projects in 12 counties under CLÁR to support the renovation and upgrade of community infrastructure in disadvantaged rural areas.
- €5m was approved for schools and communities for safety measures and play-areas and just over €1m was approved to Community First Responders.
- To date, 219 projects with a value of €11.4m have been approved under the 2017 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme.
- An additional €350,000 has been announced for social farming initiatives in 2017, bringing the total funding to €720,000.
- Over €277,000 in funding announced for six agri-food tourism initiatives under the Rural Innovation and Development Fund.
- Over €4.2bn will be invested in roads over the period 2018-2021 with €1.8bn of this being invested in regional and local roads.

- The Local Improvement Scheme was re-launched in September. €17.4m has been allocated to Local Authorities for projects which they indicated could be completed by the end of the year.
- €1.9m has been allocated in 2017 in grants for capital projects to the airports in Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock, Waterford and Kerry under the 'Regional Airports Programme'.
- Following the mid-term review of the Capital Plan, an additional €17m has been secured for the regional airports covering the period 2019-2021.
- €30m in funding has been announced to support the renewal of the post office network and the continued fulfilment of a 5 day per week mails delivery service.
- An Post has launched a new An Post Smart Account at 539 post offices nationwide to enhance post office activity in financial services, with the remaining offices being trained before year end.
- A final review of the work of the Credit Union Restructuring Board was published in June and recommended the Board be wound down as it had completed its functions with positive results.
- The term of the current Credit Union Advisory Committee has been extend until September 2018 to further assist in implementation of the recommendations in their 2016 report – *Review of Implementation of the Recommendations in the Commission on Credit Unions Report*, and to assist in the transition to new members.

Health

- An additional €685m has been allocated for Health in the Budget bringing total funding to almost €15.3bn for 2018, almost a 5% increase. Specific funding has been provided to address acute hospital access, through increased targeted investment in waiting lists, home care and transitional care. Further targeted investment has been provided to continue the shift to Primary Care.
- An All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Health Care published its final report 'Sláintecare' in May. It contains proposals for a ten year strategy with a wide range of recommendations including an expansion of entitlements, a reconfiguration of health structures, measures to underpin integrated care and the established of implementation structures to deliver on the plan.
- As part of Budget 2018, funding was announced to establish a Programme office for Sláintecare and preparations are underway to recruit a lead executive.

- As recommended by Sláintecare, an independent group which is being chaired by Dr. Donal de Buitléir has been established to examine the impact of separating private practice from the public hospital system.
- Work is advanced on the Health Service Capacity Review, the findings of which will provide a basis for determining both the extent of capacity requirements over the next 15 years and the type of capacity that is needed at a national and regional level. The final report is due to be finalised before the end of the year.
- Funding has been provided in the Budget to recruit an additional 1,800 staff aimed at a range of frontline services across the acute, mental health, disability, primary and community care sectors.
- The Framework for Safe Nurse Staffing and Skill Mix is showing positive results in the retention of nurses, job satisfaction and the reduction of agency staff. The pilot nurse staffing project is being extended to a further 10 wards within the three current pilot hospitals.
- From 1 January 2018, prescription charges will be reduced for all medical card holders under 70 from €2.50 per item to €2, with a subsequent reduction in the monthly cap from €25 to €20.
- The monthly threshold for the Drugs Payment Scheme will also be reduced by €10 from €144 to €134.
- A report on the first ever national review of Primary Care Eye Services in Ireland was published in June. The report highlights the limitations of the current model of delivery and sets out the way forward for a significant amount of eye services to be delivered in a Primary Care setting.
- The Implementation Plan for the National Maternity Strategy was launched in October setting out a series of detailed actions with specific timeframes. Planning permission has been granted for the new National Maternity Hospital on the St Vincent's University Hospital campus at Elm Park.
- A National Steering Group and a National Working Group have been reconstituted to progress implementation of the Neuro Rehabilitation Strategy. An implementation plan is due to be published before the year end.
- The Government has approved the General Scheme and drafting of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill and associated research. The General Scheme was published in October and referred to the Joint Committee on Health for review.
- The Government has approved the drafting of the General Scheme of the Human Tissue Bill which will provide for an opt-out system of consent for organ donation and for an associated register.

- A National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 has been launched with the aim that survival rates will be among the top in Europe, by focusing on prevention, early diagnosis, treatment and quality of life.
- An Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Group has been established to develop and implement a strategy including defibrillation and Community First Responders as part of the emergency response.
- A new Emergency Department has been opened at University Hospital Limerick. The ED which is three times the size of the current department will provide safe, modern, fit for purpose facilities. The new Emergency Department for University Hospital Galway has progressed to design phase.
- Following the Winter Initiative 2016/2017 a Roadmap was developed which focussed on driving process improvement to reduce the number of patients waiting on trolleys and trolley wait times to the end of the year 2018.
- In preparation for Winter 2017/2018, integrated winter plans have been put in place. An additional €30m has been allocated to the HSE for winter and unscheduled care measures in 2017. This will increase to €40m in 2018.
- The Scoliosis Waiting List Action Plan for 2017 has been published and is progressing well. 2017 Waiting List Action Plans have also been implemented for In-patient/Day-cases, and Outpatient Services and their targets were achieved by the end of October 2017.
- A new National Treatment Purchase Fund initiative is being implemented providing diagnostic endoscopy procedures to an extra 700 patients who are waiting for scopes.
- An additional €10m is being provided in 2017 to fund further NTPF initiatives and HSE insourcing initiatives to reduce waiting times for hospital procedures this year.
- In 2018, in order to improve access to scheduled care, €55m is being allocated to the NTPF (an increase of €35m from Budget 2017) for patient treatment and a further €10m for other scheduled care measures, including for the treatment of scoliosis and paediatric orthopaedics.
- A tax on sugar-sweetened drinks was announced in the Budget and will come into effect from April 2018.
- New nutrition standards for the School Meals Programme have been launched. Only healthy food choices that meet the Standards will be funded for breakfast clubs, school lunches and snacks, etc.

- Funding of approx. €1.35m has been announced under the first strand of the Healthy Ireland Fund and includes a range of projects to support the National Physical Activity Plan, with a particular focus on children.
- “Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery – a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025” was published in July and aims to provide an integrated public health approach to drug and alcohol use, focused on promoting healthier lifestyles within society.
- Measures which will be advanced in 2018 include, a new programme to promote community awareness of alcohol-related harm; an increase in the number of drug-liaison midwives to support pregnant women with substance misuse problems; improving access to in-reach services in emergency and temporary accommodation; and the operation of the mobile health clinic on a five-day week basis.
- From 1 September, children leaving state care upon reaching the age of 18 will have the right to an aftercare plan to identify any future supports they may require.

Mental Health / Disabilities

- An additional €35m has been provided to develop mental health services in 2018 with €55m additional funding agreed for 2019.
- A new Joint Committee on the Future of Mental Health Care has been established aiming to achieve cross-party agreement on the implementation of a single, long-term vision and direction of mental health policy in Ireland.
- The Evidence Review of a Vision for Change was published in July and an Oversight Group appointed to oversee the next stages of the review.
- The National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health report was published in December and includes ten recommendation themes, each with specific actions aimed at improving youth mental health outcomes.
- €9m in grants have been announced for mental health services across Ireland under three streams: advancing recovery, employment and community based living.
- The new Wellbeing programme has commenced for first year students as part of the new Framework for Junior Cycle.
- Construction has commenced on the new National Forensic Mental Health Service complex at Portrane which will include a new 130-bed adult forensic hospital, a new 30-bed Intensive Care Rehabilitation Unit, and a 10-bed Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health unit.

- The National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 was launched in July to improve the lives of people with disabilities in a practical sense and create opportunities to fulfil their potential.
- A new programme 'Ability' has been launched to bring young people with disabilities who are not work-ready closer to the labour market.
- As announced in the Budget, all weekly benefits including disability allowance and carer's allowance will increase by €5 per week from March 2018. There will also be a €2 increase for each qualified dependent child, the first such increase since 2010.
- Additional funding has been announced to enable all carers in receipt of Carer's Allowance to qualify for a GP Visit Card from 2018.
- An additional €10m in funding has also been announced to provide respite care for persons with disabilities, including 12 dedicated respite houses around the country plus an additional three houses in the greater Dublin area.
- A €4.5m fund has been announced to support the reform of disability services to enable people living with disabilities to lead self-directed lives in the community.
- €12m in funding has been allocated under the Disabled Persons Grant Scheme to improve the housing conditions for those living with disabilities and address issues of overcrowding in existing social housing stock.
- By mid-October the Access and Inclusion Model had provided 2,661 targeted supports to 2,189 children in 1,212 pre-school settings for the 2017/18 ECCE year. A review of the first year of operation has commenced.
- New initiatives planned for 2018 for the Access and Inclusion Model include: the development of Universal Design Guidelines for Pre-School Settings; the development and roll-out of a suite of training courses to support the implementation of AIM; and distributing Resource Packs and Instruction Guides for pre-school settings.
- Funding of €2m is being allocated to initiate a pilot in-school speech and language therapy programme. The programme will commence in early 2018 with details to be announced shortly.

Children and Older People

Children

- Funding has been provided in the Budget to ensure that from September 2018 all children will be entitled to a full two years of free pre-school under the ECCE Programme. In addition, the capitation paid to providers is set to increase by 7% from September 2018 to assist with the delivery of a quality service.
- 89,000 children have registered for the free preschool for 2017/2018 and this number will increase further in January and April 2018.
- A contract was awarded in September to undertake an Independent Review of the Cost of Delivering Quality Childcare. The review is to be completed by June 2018.
- A further €3.5m was secured for non-contact time for childcare providers who signed up to More Affordable Childcare measures – this is in addition to the €14.5m secured in Budget 2017.
- €8.4m in capital funding has been allocated to 683 pre-school providers nationwide providing for 2,200 new childcare places as well as maintenance and building work and outdoor play areas.
- €4m in capital funding has been allocated to 488 individual projects to improve childcare services for school-age children and helping to create over 5,000 extra places.
- Preparations are being made for school age childcare to become part of the new Affordable Childcare Scheme.
- 64,000 children have been registered to access childcare benefits of up to €7,500 a year per child from September. This includes a universal payment to families with children from 6 months to when they enter free preschool.
- Guidelines for the use of school buildings out of hours were published in November to provide guidance to schools in relation to their current arrangements for the use of school buildings outside of school hours or for those schools who are considering putting such arrangements in place.
- The Home Carer credit has been increased in the Budget by €100 bringing the value of the credit up to €1,200 per year and assisting over 80,000 families.
- With effect from 1 October 2017, the duration of maternity leave and maternity benefits in the case of premature births was extended to the duration between the actual date of birth and the date when the statutory maternity leave and benefit would have commenced.

- A Whole of Government Approach to Tackling Child Poverty has been published with a series of concrete and specific actions across a range of Departments which can impact on reducing levels of child poverty.
- Additional funding of €2.7m has been allocated to maintain the 13 Area-Based Childhood programmes in 2018. The final report of the national evaluation of the ABC Programme, is expected to be delivered in mid - 2018, and will help to inform the design of future community based early intervention programmes.
- €6.35m in capital funding was announced in 2017 for community based youth groups to help clubs buy equipment which will support their work with young people.
- Addition funding of €1.5m was announced as part of Budget 2018 to support the provision of youth services throughout the country, bringing overall investment to €58.9m.
- A new work experience initiative has been launched under the Garda Youth Diversion Project, to provide young people with the opportunity to gain important skills and develop as individuals.

Older People

- As announced in Budget 2018, the State pension is to increase by €5 per week from March 2018 and a new Telephone Support Allowance is to be introduced which will benefit over 124,000 people who receive the Living Alone Allowance and are at the same time eligible for the Fuel Allowance. This will be payable from June 2018.
- The Fuel Allowance is being extended to 27 weeks, into the first week of April 2018, benefitting 375,000 households. Householders can now also choose to have their fuel allowance paid in two lump sums if they wish from the commencement of fuel season in October 2017.
- An extra €37m has been allocated in Budget 2018 for Home Care packages and Transitional Care beds. In 2017 approximately 49,000 people will avail of 10.57 million Home Help Hours and over 19,500 Home Care Packages.
- To help inform the development of a new statutory scheme and system of regulation for Home Care Services, a public consultation was launched in July to seek views on current service as well as what the future scheme should look like.
- The application process for the Housing Adaptation Scheme has been reviewed and it is proposed to introduce a new streamlined application process making the process less onerous for applicants. Funding for the Scheme was increased by €5m to €53m in the Budget to enable up to 11,000 home adaptations to be undertaken in 2018.

- An additional €10m is to be invested in the Free Travel Scheme to encourage new operators into the scheme and to encourage broader coverage in more remote parts of rural Ireland.

Education and Training

Resources and Capital

- The 2018 budget for education was increased by €554m to over €10bn. Over 2,300 extra posts in schools are to be provided for September 2018 which will be met through 1,091 SNAs and 1,280 mainstream teaching posts including 100 resource teachers, 100 guidance counsellors, and 10 NEPS psychologists.
- The staffing schedule for primary schools was reduced in the Budget from 27:1 to 26:1.
- 2,730 additional teachers were recruited in 2017, a significant increase on the 2,400 posts provided for in Budget 2017. A report published in June focuses on developing a model for achieving a better balance between teacher supply and demand in the medium to long term.
- Additional capital funding of €332m will be available to the schools sector over 2018-2021. Over 350 large scale projects consisting of new schools, large extensions and major refurbishment works are planned to be advanced to tender and construction in this period. In 2018, 18,000 additional school places will be delivered.
- The STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026 and Implementation Plan 2017-2019 have been launched providing a roadmap to make Ireland a European leader in STEM education by 2026.
- New Junior Cycle specifications have been launched for Irish which will place a strong focus on the spoken language.
- A Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026 was launched in December setting out a roadmap to put Ireland in the top ten in Europe for the teaching and learning of foreign languages.
- The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 Action Plan 2017 was launched in June and is set to continue the rollout of a €210m capital investment programme.
- €30m in ICT grants have issued to schools for the 2016/17 school year with a further investment of €180m to be provided over the next four years.
- A new Digital Learning Framework was launched for primary and post-primary schools to improve their digital capability and to help manage the transformation of teaching and learning as a result of new digital technologies.

- The Review of the School Transport Appeals Board was published in July. In line with recommendations, a new simpler and user friendly online appeals process is being developed to manage appeals and allow for better communication.
- Since September, the allocation of resource teachers is now based on the profiled need of schools. This allows schools to allocate resources to pupils based on their individual learning needs as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of a particular disability.
- Work has commenced on a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme and will include proposals for a better model for providing care supports. The review is due to be completed in spring 2018.
- The School Excellence Fund was launched in November with €1.8m in funding for over 35 DEIS schools to explore new, innovative solutions to tackle educational disadvantage and improve learning outcomes over a 3 year period.

Higher and Further Education

- The National Training Fund levy will be increased in 2018 to provide €47.5m of additional investment in the Higher and Further Education Sectors next year. Investment in higher and further education in 2018 will be €100m higher than it was in 2016.
- €8m in capital funding was announced in July for equipment and enabling works to support the delivery of apprenticeship programmes in 10 Institutes of Technology.
- An allocation of €7.5m has been announced in the Budget for a new PhD and Research Masters Programme to meet enterprise skills needs. It will provide for 150 enrolments in 2018 in disciplines aligned to enterprise needs.
- Ireland is to join the European Southern Observatory in 2018, the benefits of which include the creation of advanced enterprise relevant skills in areas such as data analytics, software and photonics.
- Over 6,400 free upskilling and reskilling higher education opportunities in areas of identified skills need have been made available on 208 courses across Ireland as part of Springboard+ 2017.
- The National Skills Council held a stakeholders' forum in October. Findings from the forum will feed into the NSC's work programme.

- An independent review carried out by NUI Maynooth on access to higher education by lone parents was published in August. There is a strong focus on helping lone parents as part of the €16.5m announced on the same day to support over 2,000 students from disadvantaged groups to participate in third level education over the next three years.
- Higher Education Institutions provided 3,800 ICT summer camp places for second level students as well as 1,000 places for entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation.
- 15 participants successfully graduated in Limerick from the second round of the Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme programme. A further 16 participants commenced the programme in Gormanston in October.

Justice and Equality

Crime Prevention

- 203 trainee Gardaí entered the Garda College in August 2017 bringing the number to 600. A further intake of 200 in November will meet this year's target of 800. 181 trainee Garda attested in September and a further 200 are due to attest in December bringing the total number of new Gardaí this year to approximately 900 and total Garda numbers by the year to 13,500.
- As announced in the Budget, an additional 800 Gardaí will be recruited in 2018. 500 civilians are also to be recruited to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí to front-line duties.
- An additional €157m in capital funding has allocated in the Budget which will provide An Garda Síochána with modern accommodation, vehicles and technology to enable it to provide the standard of policing expected in the 21st century.
- New Garda HQ will be progressed in Sligo, Macroom and Clonmel as well as the completion in early 2018 of the new Garda HQ at Kevin Street and Galway.
- The Garda Commissioner has submitted the final report on the proposal to reopen six Garda Stations and has written to the Office of Public Works to progress the matter.
- A suite of measures have been announced aimed at enhancing corporate governance, increasing transparency and strengthening Ireland's response to white collar crime including piloting a Joint Agency Task Force which will address payment fraud.
- Under the 2017 Text Alert Rebate Scheme in the region of €100,000 is being made available to almost 1,000 local groups registered under the Garda Text Alert Scheme.
- An additional €100k was announced in the Budget for local crime prevention initiatives including the text alert scheme.

- Ireland's first Bail Supervision Scheme for young offenders has been launched to offer an alternative to detention. The 2 year scheme will cater for up to 25 young people each year in the Dublin area.

Immigration and Refugees

- Under the EU Resettlement Programme Ireland has pledged to take 1,040 refugees and to date has admitted 785, with the remaining 255 due to arrive in early 2018. Ireland has pledged to admit a further 345 programme refugees in 2018 in addition to its existing commitments in relation to the relocation of asylum seekers from Greece.
- €2m in grants was allocated in 2017 to 15 projects to be delivered over the next three years under National Funding to Promote Integration of Migrants.
- Over €400k was announced in November to support the integration of female refugees into the labour market over the next year.
- Since August, the allowance paid to adults and children in Direct Provision has been increased benefitting over 3,000 adults and over 1,100 dependent children.
- A report of Consultations with Children in Direct Provision has been published, presenting the views of children and young people on what they like, dislike and would like to change or improve about the places they live.
- In 2018, all new contracts for State provided accommodation must provide either self-catering or shared catering based on the food hall concept.
- The Government have decided to opt into the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive which provides a framework that will enable International Protection applicants to access the work-force in circumstances where their application for international protection status has not received a first instance decision within the timeframe set by the Directive.

Equality

- A new Cycle of ACORNS has been launched offering a six month part time development programme for aspiring rural female entrepreneurs with 56 places available.
- Fifteen LEO-led events took place nationwide to celebrate National Women's Enterprise Day 2017 with a focus on facilitating and encouraging access to new markets by female entrepreneurs.
- Recent EUROSTAT figures show that, on average, women employees earned 13.9% less per hour than male employees. A public consultation was launched in August inviting views on the factors creating the gender pay gap, actions that need to be taken, and whether the proposers can contribute to implementing those actions.

- The new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021, launched in June, takes a whole-of-Government approach to improving the lives of Traveller and Roma communities. Work is now commencing on developing an implementation action plan.
- €9m was announced in June for the delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation in 2017, an increase from €5.5m in 2016. A further current allocation of €4.22m will also be paid to local authorities for specific accommodation-related supports. Additional funding of €3m was announced in the Budget for Traveller specific accommodation schemes in 2018 which will deliver 110 homes.
- An independent review of the funding and delivery of Traveller accommodation has been completed and membership of an Expert Group is being finalised to examine and make recommendations on issues regarding Traveller accommodation policy, strategy and implementation.

Agriculture

Agri-food

- €25m has been provided for in the Budget to develop further Brexit response loan schemes for the agri-food sector, supporting farmers, fishermen and food businesses in 2018. This will help continue the growth in food exports which grew by 13% in the first half of 2017.
- Given their unique exposure to the UK market, at least 40% of the funding available under the new €300m Brexit Loan Scheme will be available to food businesses.
- The value of goods exports to August 2017 was €80bn, an increase of €2.25bn (+3%) when compared with the first eight months of 2016.
- Steps to Success 2017 was launched in July with highlights including: new and re-opened markets secured for the beef sector; Irish beef sold in the US from Bord Bia approved plants can carry the USDA quality mark; and the creation of a 'one-stop-shop' to attract and inform individuals of the benefits of a career in the sector.
- Funding of €6.745m was announced in September for Bord Bia to undertake a programme of additional activities to support the food and drink sectors in addressing the market challenges relating to Brexit.
- An additional €4.5m was provided in Budget 2018 to assist Bord Bia in its promotional and developmental work overseas.

Supporting Farmers

- Payments worth some €1.1bn to 121,000 farmers have commenced under the 2017 Basic Payments Scheme.
- €626m has been allocated to the Rural Development Programme in the Budget for 2018 and will be invested in the rural economy, direct to farmers, through the RDP schemes.
- Payments worth €194m have issued to date to over 90,000 farmers under the 2017 Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme. Funding for the Scheme was increased by €25m in Budget 2018 providing direct financial support to farmers in the most marginal areas of the country. The options for the allocation of this funding are currently being examined.
- Funding for the Targeted Agricultural Measures Scheme was increased by €20m in the Budget. To date, over 15,000 applications have been received under the scheme, of which over 11,500 have been approved. Over €25m has been paid in respect of completed approved works.
- Total participation in GLAS exceeded the target of 50,000 set out in Ireland's RDP over a year ahead of schedule. Balancing payments have begun to issue to GLAS 1 and 2 participants bringing the total amount issued in respect of 2016 actions to over €148m.
- €16m has begun to issue to 20,000 eligible farmers under the new Sheep Welfare Scheme, providing a financial boost to the sheep sector and individual farmers.
- The National Farmed Animal Health Strategy 2017-22 was launched in July setting out a comprehensive set of actions for all stakeholders in the agri-food industry to achieve optimal animal health.
- The Farm Assist payment has been increased in the Budget by €5 per week and an additional 250 places provided for on the Rural Social Scheme, increasing the number to 3,350 in 2018.
- A revised 'Farm Safety Code of Practice' was published in June by the Health and Safety Authority. It provides farmers with a new risk assessment document that helps identify hazards, implement controls and protect farm safety, health and wellbeing.
- A new schedule for training on the revised 'Farm Safety Code of Practice' was launched in September with training to take place over the coming months on a nationwide basis.
- A targeted measure has been announced to provide farmers who were significantly affected by the recent flooding in Donegal with a financial contribution towards losses or damage sustained.

Fisheries Sector

- The 2016 Report on Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth shows significant growth in the 'blue economy' with a 10% increase in employment along with a 23% increase in turnover and 20% increase in gross value added.
- 66 grant awards totalling €7.8m were announced in 2017 under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme supporting investment of €19.2m in aquaculture, fisheries and seafood processing.
- An investment of €3.6m was announced for 153 projects under the EMFF Fisheries Local Area Action Group Strategy for Ireland's 7 coastal regions.

Climate Change

- The National Emergency Coordination Group was convened in response to the approach of storm Ophelia bringing together Government Departments, specialist agencies and the principal response agencies. The operation focussed on disseminating consistent public safety messaging and enabled continuous updating and provision of the latest information.
- Ireland's first statutory National Mitigation Plan was published in July 2017 with measures and actions to address the immediate challenge to 2020 and to prepare for the EU targets that Ireland will take on for 2030.
- A public consultation was held on Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework. The final Framework is due to be submitted to Government for approval by the end of the year.
- A National Dialogue on Climate Action Advisory Group was established in July and planning is underway for a first round of regional stakeholder events.
- A public consultation was published in September 2017 on the design of a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme to incentivise the introduction of sufficient renewable electricity generation to meet national and EU-wide renewable energy and decarbonisation targets out to 2030.
- €7m has been allocated in the Budget for the rollout of the Renewable Heat Incentive in 2018 which will support the replacement of fossil fuel heating systems with renewable energy.
- A public consultation was launched in July on the Bioeconomy which will inform a National Policy Statement to drive developments in the area.

- €82m will be invested in the Better Energy Programme in 2017 providing energy efficiency upgrades to over 25,000 buildings. An additional €35m was announced in the Budget for the expansion of energy efficiency programmes across the public, commercial and residential sectors, bringing the total investment for the sector to €117m for 2018.
- New forestry regulations have been commenced for a number of forestry activities including the licensing of felling, aerial fertilisation, afforestation and forest road construction.
- An afforestation marketing and promotion group has been established. Work carried out to date includes a promotion campaign, engagement with farmers at agriculture events, and a mail shot to over 1,000 applicants with technical approval to plant.
- An additional €5m has been allocated in the Budget to incentivise the use of electric vehicles, doubling the budget for 2017. A new grant will be available from 1 January to support the installation of home charge points and there will be an initial rate of 0% of benefit in kind for battery electric vehicles for one year.
- A €2m scheme has been announced to provide emergency humanitarian assistance for small businesses, sports clubs and community and voluntary organisations unable to secure flood insurance and affected by recent flooding in Donegal.
- The OPW is working with all the Local Authorities to identify houses that may be eligible under the Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme. Separately, a number of homeowners have directly expressed an interest for consideration under the scheme.

Investing in Society

Community

- A Cross-Sectoral Working Group has been established to assist in the development of the implementation plan for the Framework Policy to support the community and voluntary sector and local development sectors. It is expected that a draft implementation plan will be developed for Q1 2018.
- A new SICAP Programme 2018-2022 will come into effect from 1 January 2018. Under the new Programme, Local Community Development Committees will now identify their own emerging needs group to more efficiently target supports within their local area.
- A VAT compensation refund scheme was announced in Budget 2018 which will compensate charities for input VAT incurred. Charities may make a claim in 2019 for VAT costs arising in 2018 based on the level of non-public funding they receive.

- A proposal on reforming VAT rates is due to be published by the EU Commission in January 2018. Ireland wrote to the Commission seeking for defibrillators and other emergency-medical and rescue equipment to be applied at a zero or reduced rate going forward.
- €1.21m has been approved to a range of organisations, from small Community First Response groups, to mountain Rescue and Sub Aqua Rescue teams under the Emergency First Response measure of the CLÁR programme.
- A Steering Group has been established to oversee research to support the development of a national policy and roadmap for the social enterprise sector.
- Funding of €1.648m has been announced under the dormant accounts scheme for 42 social enterprise projects providing services or employment opportunities for disadvantaged people, particularly in rural areas.
- A re-cast €2m RAPID programme was roll-out in November and will fund projects that target relevant groups or issues in disadvantaged urban areas and provincial towns in order to address disadvantage and improve social cohesion at a local level.
- A Programme Implementation Board, supported by a Local Programme Office, has been established in the North East Inner City. The Board implemented a number of proposals in 2017 across the main priority headings of the Mulvey Report at a cost of €2.5m.
- Over 83,000 citizens have availed of the new online application service for adult passport renewals, since its launch last March.

Sport

- €56m has been allocated under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme, providing grants to over 1,700 different sporting projects. A further €4m will be allocated to national and regional projects before the end of the year.
- Development of Phase Two of the Sport Ireland National Indoor Arena has commenced which will provide permanent indoor facilities for rugby, soccer and gaelic games. These works are scheduled to be completed in 2019.

Transport

- The €368m LUAS cross-city line was completed on time and within budget. It commenced service on 9 December extending the Green Line through the city centre to Broombridge. The extension includes 13 new Luas stops and an interchange with the Red Line and is expected to add an extra 10m passenger journeys each year.

- The multi-annual capital investment for public transport has been increased by €2.7bn over the period 2018-2021.
- €750m has been allocated to the BusConnects programme which will finance new and expanded bus routes and greatly improve bus access through and around the capital, and also includes designated segregated cycle lanes.
- €685m will be invested in additional rail infrastructure which will provide additional Luas capacity and a new rail Central Traffic Control Centre, as well as progress preparation of the Metro North.
- Over €850m will be invested in maintenance and safety projects and €30m to improve accessibility; €28m is allocated to commence a transition to the next-generation of "on-account" ticketing provision; and in the region of €130m will be provided for traffic management, bus priority and other smarter travel projects in our cities.
- €35m will be used to back new ideas that will help decarbonise the transport sector, including pilot initiatives for low emission technologies.
- Over €110m has been allocated for a multi-annual urban Cycling and Walking Infrastructure package over the next four years.
- An additional €30m has been secured for investment in greenway infrastructure to 2021.

Environment

- In May, the initial allocation of €650,000 for local authorities to combat illegal dumping was doubled to €1.3m. These funds have been used to support 191 anti-dumping projects throughout the country. A further €1.3m will be made available in 2018 to build on this momentum.
- A more flexible framework for waste collection charges has been approved by Government allowing for a range of charging options.

Ireland and the World

Brexit and Northern Ireland

- The Government has worked hard, as part of the EU27, to ensure that sufficient progress could be made in the first phase of Brexit negotiations to allow the European Council to agree that negotiations can move to phase two.

- The Government has achieved its goals in this phase, which include maintenance of the Common Travel Area, protection of the Good Friday Agreement and North/South Cooperation, commitment to avoid any return to a hard border and protection of EU citizenship and other rights.
- Of particular significance regarding the border is the stated commitment by the UK to maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and Customs Union, which, now, or in the future, support North-South cooperation, the all-island economy and the protection of the Good Friday Agreement, in the absence of alternative agreed arrangements to avoid a hard border.
- The Government continues to engage with the British Government and the political parties in Northern Ireland to support the formation of a new power-sharing Executive for Northern Ireland.
- In September, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers considered the McKerr group of cases, which includes the case of the late Pat Finucane. A decision was adopted which stated that the CMDH would consider re-opening individual measures in the Finucane case once domestic proceedings have concluded. Ireland restated the Government's position that the commitment to hold a public inquiry should be fulfilled.
- The Independent Reporting Commission Act was enacted in July 2017 to establish the Independent Reporting Commission in this jurisdiction and work is ongoing preparing legislative proposals in respect of legacy issues.
- Over €990,000 was announced in June 2017 for grants under the Reconciliation Fund's first funding round of 2017 to support 55 organisations working on peace and reconciliation.
- €26.5m was awarded in July through the EU's INTERREG VA funding programme to support four large-scale cross border health and social care projects up to 2021.
- A further €18.8m in INTERREG VA funding awarded for projects involving natural habitats, improving drinking water quality, and renewable energy research.
- €35.3m was announced in November under the EU PEACE IV programme to support shared education. A further €14.9m was announced in October for 13 projects designed to help people live, learn and socialise with each other free from prejudice and hate.
- Waterways Ireland has secured €4.95m INTERREG funding to develop 22km of greenway along the route of the Ulster Canal.
- InterTrade Ireland has established a free Brexit Advisory Service to provide enterprises with practical advice, support and information on Brexit related issues.

- An Equipment Sharing Protocol has been signed between An Garda Síochána and the PSNI to provide policing equipment to support each other in response to complex or challenging policing operations.

Security and Defence

- The Mid Term Review of the implementation of the second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security was published in April. It acknowledged the considerable activity to deliver on actions and commitments as well as including a number of recommendations for strengthening implementation during the remainder of the Action Plan, and developing the next iteration.
- A Ministerial visit to Israel and Palestine took place in July, providing an opportunity to raise Ireland's concerns about the impact of the continuing occupation on both parties, and on the prospects for a comprehensive peace agreement.
- Ireland will for the first time serve as a member of the UN Commission on the Status of Women from 2017 to 2021, and was elected as Chair of the Commission for 2018-19.
- The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted in July. Ireland, as one of the core group which put forward the UN Resolution which led to the adoption of the Treaty, was among the first States to sign it in September.
- To date, 36 projects under the White Paper on Defence have been initiated with a second tranche of projects due to be initiated before the end of the year.

Trade

- The Government plans to double Ireland's Global Footprint by 2025. The key aims are to attract greater investment in Ireland, boost tourism and trade, build stronger links with our diaspora and increase cultural exchanges.
- Trade missions to Norway, the US, Mexico, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Australia have taken place, with a focus on trade development opportunities as well as promoting Ireland as a location for investment, trade and tourism.
- As part of the Trade Strategy, *Ireland Connected*, a Team Ireland Conference was held in November to enhance efforts to diversify into new markets and intensify growth in existing markets for Irish exports, inward investment, tourism and international education.
- Six new embassies/consulates are to be opened on a phased basis throughout 2018 and 2019. The new missions which will be in Wellington, Bogota, Santiago, Amman, Vancouver, and Mumbai are an integral part of the Government's response to Brexit and highlight the need for Ireland to be ambitious in seeking out trade opportunities in new markets.

International Development

- Over €707m was allocated to Overseas Development Aid in the Budget, an increase of some €26m on 2017, and the third consecutive year of increased budget allocations for the programme.
- €9m in funding was announced in August for the UN Central Emergency Response Fund in response to the unprecedented levels of humanitarian need globally.
- In November, €11m in humanitarian funding was announced for the Horn of Africa region to help with climate change, severe drought and massive population displacements.

Arts, Heritage and the Irish Language

- Ireland first ever Creative Ireland Forum held its inaugural meeting on 13 December to focus on and stimulate discussion around the policy choices being made to ensure everyone's creative potential is fully realised.
- The Creative Youth Plan was launched in December to enable the creative potential of every child and young person in Ireland. A range of measures were announced to ensure that every child in Ireland has practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music, drama, art and coding by 2022.
- Funding of €8.5m has been allocated through Budget 2018 to accelerate the Creative Ireland Programme. This includes €3m for the Arts Council, €1.5m for the Irish Film Board, €0.5m for Culture Ireland, and boosts in funding for all the National Cultural Institutions.
- In May, 31 Local Authority Culture and Creativity Plans were launched as part of the Creative Ireland Programme to encourage communities and citizens to engage, participate and enable their creative potential. Local authorities are currently preparing long-term Cultural Strategies which will be launched in the spring.
- Culture Ireland have announced €600,000 in funding which will allow 117 Irish artists and arts organisations to present their work worldwide in 2017 and 2018.
- A pilot scheme has been launched to make it easier for artists and writers to access social welfare supports.
- Almost €135k has been approved for 23 projects for local and regional museums around the country.

- To date, in 2017 funding of over €10m has been announced under the Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018 to a total of 122 arts organisations around the country. This included €745,000 in funding, as announced in August, for over 60 local arts organisations nationwide under the Scheme.
- A further round of the Arts and Culture Capital Scheme will be announced for early 2018.
- The budget to implement the Policy on Gaeltacht Education has been more than doubled from €1m in 2017 to €2.3m in 2018.
- Work is advanced on a new Digital Strategy for the Irish Language and is expected to be launched in early 2018.
- The language planning process is now underway in all 23 Gaeltacht areas and the first three language plans have recently been approved. An allocation of up to €100,000 will be provided over a 12 month period in respect of each area in order to begin implementing the plans.
- An additional €1.4m has been provided for under the Budget to support the Language Planning Process under the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish language. A further €687k has been allocated for language support schemes outside of the Gaeltacht.
- Funding of €450,000 was provided to Foras na Gaeilge in the Budget for Bliain na Gaeilge 2018.

[Making Partnership in Democracy Work and Constitutional Reform](#)

Reforming the Budgetary Process

- The National Economic Dialogue took place in June in preparation for Budget 2018. The Summer Economic Statement was also published giving an updated assessment of the fiscal space for next year, which is an estimated €1.2bn consistent with achieving the Medium Term Budgetary Objective of a structural deficit of 0.5% of GDP in 2018.
- The Mid-Year Expenditure Report for 2017 was published in July presenting the baseline for Departmental expenditure and the starting point for examination of budgetary priorities by the Oireachtas.
- A new Parliamentary Budget Office has been established in the Oireachtas which will be a key source of financial and budgetary intelligence for Oireachtas Members and in particular for the Committee on Budget Oversight. For Budget 2018, the new office published a pre-Budget Commentary for the Committee on Budgetary Oversight.

- The policy paper 'Equality Budgeting: Proposed Next Steps in Ireland' was published alongside Budget 2018. The paper sets out the pilot approach that will be adopted for gender budgeting in the Budget 2018 budgetary cycle anchored in the performance budgeting framework.
- The first round of a three-year Spending Review process took place with a number of papers published alongside the Mid-Year Expenditure Report in July. The aim of the review is to examine existing spending and identify areas where it may be possible to reprioritise or reallocate expenditure.
- The first Public Service Performance Report was published in April 2017 providing timely information on what was delivered with public funds the previous year, and creating an opportunity for meaningful dialogue between Ministers and the relevant sectoral Committees on Government performance.

Constitutional Reform and Other Reforms

- The Citizens' Assembly final report and recommendations on the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution was published in June and is currently being considered by a Special Oireachtas Committee.
- The Citizens' Assembly has also concluded its deliberations and submitted its report and recommendations on the Challenges and Opportunities of an Ageing Population. The Assembly has also concluded its deliberations on "How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling Climate Change" and it is expected that this Report will be submitted in early 2018.
- The Government have agreed an indicative timetable for a number of referendums for 2018/19: referendum on the Eighth amendment; Blasphemy; Woman's life within the home; Divorce, Extending the Franchise at Presidential Elections to Irish Citizens Resident outside the State, Reducing the voting age to 16; and a plebiscite on directly elected executive mayors.
- The Judicial Appointments Commission Bill and the Judicial Council Bill have been published providing for the replacement of the existing Judicial Appointments Advisory Board with a new Judicial Appointments Commission, and for the establishment of a Judicial Council.
- A new Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service was launched in June providing guidance on how to communicate with the public effectively, ensure all services are accessible and meet customer needs.
- The eGovernment Strategy 2017-2020 was launched in July with 10 key actions designed to continue the momentum in Ireland's drive for excellence in eGovernment.

- Two strategies have been launched, 'The People Strategy 2017-2020' and the 'Senior Public Service Leadership Development Strategy 2017-2020' which build on the achievements under the Civil Service Renewal Plan.
- Our Public Service 2020, a new framework for development and innovation in the public service was published in December and includes a strong focus on improving services for customers.
- The Public Service Pay Commission published its report in May on how the unwinding of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest legislation should proceed having regard to the evolution of pay trends, a comparison of pay rates, and the state of public finances.
- The Government has approved the proposed terms of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 which will be an extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Public Services Committee of ICTU endorsed the terms of the Agreement in September.
- The Public Service Pay and Pensions Bill 2017 has been published which will enact the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement.